

Reading as Dharma Practice
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I am a reader and I have been so since I was very young. What I consider to be a good book is one in which the author inspires me to question and investigate further in the laboratory of my own life experience. It may sound strange to some but I have never approached reading as being primarily a way of accumulating information. Worthwhile reading feels more like meeting with an interesting person – a collaboration of body/minds. Through this meeting, I am transformed in a multitude of unexpected ways. Reading can catalyse question and question, held in the space of contemplation, can transform our experience of the world. It can lead to an increased sense of beauty and understanding. When we are in a sensitive and aware space, a book can be a teacher inspiring new ways of thinking or triggering fresh lines of enquiry.

I often have a number of books on the go at any one time. Usually some 'dharma' text, which I'll tend to read in the quiet, early hours of the morning. This kind of reading can serve as a puja in that it raises pithy questions which then bubble along during the day. In addition to this I will have some scientific work which I usually find myself reading when I am feeling intellectually awake. In addition to dharma and science texts, I often have some work of fiction, biography, history or social comment, that I can pick up and put down. I will often read a bit of these topics before retiring. Having a number of books on the go at any one time, seems to deepen the appreciation of interconnectedness of all disciplines and all phenomena.

How do I came across these books? Some are gifts. Some have been recommended by friends. Many are simply serendipitous finds. I used to frequent second hand bookshops! Over the years, a habit I have developed is to read the acknowledgments, footnotes and bibliographies in books that I find particularly stimulating. I reason that if an author I have appreciated has found another author to be worthwhile and interesting, then I might also find that author's approach interesting.