

Contemplating Spiritual Teachings

Always read stuff that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it.

— P. J. O'Rourke

Words are the threads from which the cloth of your experience is woven. Therefore, it is worth your while to study words, meanings, and ideas that will add beautiful colors to the tapestry of your soul's dance.

Studying spiritual teachings can bring many personal benefits to your journey, including the following:

- Spiritual teachings act as guideposts along your way, helping you to choose what is best to do or not do.
- Spiritual teachings help you to recognize the signs of spiritual progress, giving you greater understanding and appreciation for your journey.
- Spiritual teachings give you new words to use and expanded concepts to consider as you increase your understanding of life.
- Spiritual teachings nurture and bring forth your own ever-fresh spring of spiritual wisdom.
- Spiritual teachings help you realize that you aren't all the things people in this world may think you are — rather, you're a spiritual soul who is finding your way back to wholeness, self-recognition, and remembrance of your true nature.

Even if you don't understand or agree with every spiritual idea that comes your way, the teachings of most spiritual teachers are generally good company for your mind. (Find more tips for studying spiritual teachings and avoiding possible pitfalls in Chapter 5.)

Spiritual teachings can significantly expand your world of possibilities. For example, if you've never even imagined that a particular goal is possible, how can you know that it is what you would really want? Reading the words of great spiritual beings who have reached beyond usual societal complacencies can spark all kinds of new interests, goals, and possibilities in your life.

Don't Forget

Just studying spiritual teachings isn't enough. The important thing about learning higher truths is to transform objective understandings into subjective experience. Unintegrated knowledge is nearly as useless as ignorance!

Here are four steps to expand and incorporate your knowledge of spiritual truths through the stages of study, reflection, application, and integration:

- 1. Study by hearing or reading good spiritual teachings.**
- 2. Repeatedly reflect on and contemplate the deeper meanings behind the words.**
- 3. Apply the teachings to circumstances in your life.**
- 4. Awaken to a deeper, more personal understanding of spiritual truth.**

Spiritual teachings are like maps

Spiritual teachings are like maps. They can help guide you on which direction to go, but you still have to travel the way yourself. A map can tell you some of the terrain ahead — that after this river there is a mountain to avoid and then a forest. A map can also help spark your interest in going to visit a certain place. In the same way, spiritual teachings can spark your commitment to personal awakening and help guide you through the paths and obstacles of your spiritual journey.

Nevertheless, when studying spiritual teachings, remember that the map is not the territory!