

Seven Books To Read in 2009

**To help in your quest for a
Practical Spirituality.**

**Remember that we are Body, Mind and Spirit.
We exercise our body and develop our minds,
But what are we doing for our Spirit?**

**If you are looking for direction for your Spirit in
2009, here are seven books, plus a few extras,
that might assist, including nonfiction and fiction.**

**Recommended and Reviewed by
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***Author of Do It Yourself Guide to Spirituality: Seven Simple Steps
and The Lost Principles, a novel.
www.nottinstitute.org***

The Spontaneous Fulfillment of Desire: Harnessing the Infinite Power of Coincidence by Deepak Chopra

In this book, Chopra states, "When you live your life with an appreciation of coincidences and their meanings, you connect with the underlying field of infinite possibilities...This is *synchrodestiny*, in which it becomes possible to achieve the spontaneous fulfillment of our every desire" (21). To achieve his *synchrodensity*, we must go inward to tap the deep recesses of our spirit as well as outward to accept the coincidences of the physical world.

An understanding of three levels of existences of matter, mind and spirit is necessary for understanding the synchronicity in our lives. Matter is the physical domain, where the world is visible, rational and objective. Everything in this level has a beginning, middle and end. We are born and we die. This part of the world is predictable; scientists can measure it. We understand this domain.

The second level of existence, Mind, refers to energy and thoughts. We can't see either, but we know they exist. This domain is less clear than the physical one. Our thoughts aren't solid and we can't touch them. We do not see atoms and molecules and we cannot distinguish energy waves. "Everything at this level is insubstantial, meaning that it cannot be touched or perceived by any of the five senses" (36).

The third domain, Spirit, is more even confusing, yet Chopra provides some structure to this formless level of existence, which he describes as "virtual" or "nonlocal." Whereas the physical world has a specific place, this "nonlocality" has no boundaries.

In the 20th century, science found proof of the existence of this virtual domain. The world is made up of particles and waves. Particles are solid; waves, such as sound and light waves, are not. A wave-particle was discovered, and "until we measure either its location or its momentum, it is *both particle and wave simultaneously*" (48). "Without consciousness acting as an observer and interpreter, everything would exist only as pure potential" (51). This "pure potential" is the nonlocal domain.

Without our consciousness, or our thoughts, there is no physical existence. We, collectively, create our world. Our thoughts bridge the virtual reality and the physical world. This is a complicated concept, but the spirit domain is the source of the coincidences we find in our lives. Tapping into this domain, into this unlimited and undefined area, we observe the synchronicity in our lives. Then we can create, on the physical level, the lives we desire.

For a better understanding of how we create our lives, this is a must read. No short discussion can incorporate all that Chopra offers. The explanation of the three domains is only the beginning.

There is one other, among many, of Chopra's ideas that I wish to mention: power over our emotions. "Ask, don't demand...Don't give others power over your emotions" (229) is Chopra's advice. Think about that. When we demand something from others, we give them the power to conform or refuse. They are in control, not us. If we simply ask, we retain the power and don't have to be angry at any decision. We continue to create our world with positive emotions, even if we don't like others' actions.

Chopra, Deepak. *The Spontaneous Fulfillment of Desire: Harnessing the Infinite Power of Coincidence*. NY: Three Rivers Press, 2003.

The Mystic Path to Cosmic Power by Vernon Howard

Rereading this classic was connecting with an old friend. Many years ago, I wrote out *15 Ways To Gain New Strength* from this work, which I taped to my computer stand. When I replaced the book that had disappeared in one of my many moves, I was amazed to see that list as only one small part of the total. The volume itself is a treasure of many of the ideas I have read before but needed to hear again. Perhaps the same is true for you.

I strongly recommend this as a beginning primer into the metaphysical world, and I just as strongly recommend it as a refresher read. Before I ever thought of the idea of a practical spirituality, Vernon Howard was presenting many of the necessary components.

Howard's words explain his ideas simply and clearly. Refer back to Chopra's second level of existence, Mind, and his "nonlocal" dimension from the previous discussion when reading this quotation.

Man's task is to awaken to his true identity. The Kingdom of Heaven is within. Spiritual truths are discovered with an entirely new kind of thinking, quite distinct and vastly superior to the mind that builds bridges and sells merchandise. (86)

Howard suggests the need for a better definition of "success" than a financial one.

We demand a financial success, or a social gain, because we think it will fulfill us inwardly. It won't. It never will – as we have suspected all along. So-called success provides ego-excitement, but never self-fulfillment. It is just as impossible for an exterior result to provide inner happiness as it is for a new hat to give us a new mind. (145)

Think about this next quote. I believe the idea is relevant to many of us who find ourselves afraid of or intimidated by another:

Why are we afraid of others?

Because we want something from them. The desire can be almost anything -- companionship, approval, sex, security. The mistake is this: Not having found the true self which is free from compulsive desires, we seek gratification from people. This creates fear that we won't get what we want, or anxiety that the other person will make us pay dearly for it. (151)

Howard provides many other ideas, but I particularly like this one:

Try the following experiment for the next thirty minutes: Let life happen the way it wants, with no resistance and no objection. Go about as if you need not think about anything. Your first surprise will be that your usual duties go on very nicely as before. Secondly, you will catch a grand glimpse of the effortlessly flowing of Tao. You do not carry; you are carried. (133)

Then we might try this same experiment for the rest of our lives. Vernon Howard's ideas can help us do that.

Howard, Vernon. *The Mystic Path to Cosmic Power*. N.Y: Parker Publishing Company, 1967.

On God: An Uncommon Conversation by Norman Mailer with Michael Lennon

If you love the work of Norman Mailer, this is a must read. If you do not or are not familiar with him, his conversations will, at the least, make you think. One of my favorite authors, Mailer is a major American writer. **On God** was published shortly before his death in 2008. These comments are, in part, my way of honoring his memory. I am glad he shared his beliefs before he left.

As Mailer explains, he was lucky to have been able to make his living through writing. That provided him ample time for thinking. This work can attest to the depth of those thoughts. Mailer is not considered a spiritual writer, nor a spiritual figure. I am fascinated, however, with his views. While I don't agree with all of his ideas, he represents our visions in some way. That is what great writers do; they reflect the society in which they live.

The main idea about God that Mailer reiterates throughout his book, and the most significant point of the book, is that God is a Creator, but one that is still evolving. I like that. Mailer considers that we are developing with God and, because of this, He needs us as much as we need Him. Perhaps Mailer's view is egocentric, but he may be right. If we are still progressing, why wouldn't our Creator be doing the same? Why wouldn't we reflect all aspects of our Creator? That certainly is implied in **Step One: Everything is Connected** of my work **Do It Yourself Guide to Spirituality: Seven Simple Steps**.

I like Mailer's description of humans as "not finished," as if we were a story being written. He makes the concept of "Creator" real. Rather than some almighty force, God becomes a more understandable artist molding his creations as He Himself changes. Yes, that is what an artist does; why would God be different?

The point is that the purpose of life may be to find higher and better questions. Why? Because what I believe—this is wholly speculative but important to me—is that we are here as God's work, here to influence His future as well as ours. (75)

Mailer, Norman with Michael Lennon. *On God: An Uncommon Conversation*. New York: Random, 2007

Sage-ing While Age-ing by Shirley MacLaine

A few thoughts I particularly like in this book:

1) MacLaine discusses practical spirituality without using that term. Most of the ideas she mentions are ones many of us have read for years. She references the "...what one puts out will come back to the sender. It's the Law of the universe...the Law of One" (106). This is the same as **Step Two – Everything Happens for a Reason** in ***Do It Yourself Guide to Spirituality: Seven Simple Steps***.

2) She defines soul mate as the one person that is exactly like us. There is only one for each of us, but this person is often too intense to be around. Twin souls have been together before and find it easier to relate. Companion souls have not been together in many lifetimes but recognize one another immediately. How often do we meet a "soul mate" and find the relationship too hard? Perhaps her definition will help people understand that a "soul mate" may not be the right partner. Perhaps a "twin" or "companion" soul might be more compatible in this lifetime (244).

3) MacLaine claims the main lesson for many people is love versus fear (244). I agree. Too many of us let fear dominate our lives, a fear that runs from worry about relationships to money to global warming. We need to make good decisions that impact our lives. Fear interferes with those choices.

Another aspect of this fear, as explained by MacLaine, is that we decide "let's not talk of problems."

It's as though conditions in our world have deteriorated so completely that no one wants to engage in its alarming meaning for fear that they won't be able to erase it from their minds. (202)

MacLaine believes, as do many, that time is moving more rapidly, and we are or will begin feeling an increase in energy around us. With all of this, however, she is optimistic about our future. Yes, we need to make changes and be more aware in our lives. But she does not see an end of the world coming. We don't need to be frightened of the future, causing us to dismiss it from our minds. We can, in small ways, impact our lives, the world and the universe. That is how it works. We don't need to do big things; we just need to do small things with good intention. That is what will allow us to evolve to a better world.

See "Other Comments" on page 8 for MacLaine's view of extraterrestrials.

MacLaine, Shirley. *Sage-ing While Age-ing*. NY: Atria, 2007.

The Biology of Belief: Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter, and Miracles

by Bruce H. Lipton, Ph.D.

This is a significant book. Dr. Lipton claims that our environment, which includes nutrition, emotion and stress, influences our cells. We know that DNA passes on hereditary traits, but he cites research from a new study, epigenetics, that shows gene modification from the environment is also passed on.

The author explains the implications of his new information. The world is energy. We can use positive thinking to change. Cells are influenced by their surroundings. If we are healthy and at ease, we can create a better world. That is the message of this book, a message backed by science.

I found much in Dr. Lipton's work that relates to material in my ***Do It Yourself Guide to Spirituality: Seven Simple Steps***. He stresses that cells reflect **Step One – Everything is Connected**, or "As above, so below," showing that one cell mirrors all capabilities of the entire body.

Our cells are made up of proteins and other types of molecules. The protein molecules have a balanced electromagnetic charge. If the positive and negative charges are altered, the protein will adjust to the change. This is **Step Six – We Balance** and shows that even in a cell, there must be balance, showing not only **Step Six** but reinforcing **Step One**.

Dr. Lipton is an optimist who sees the repetitive pattern of life as an encouraging sign. He discusses fractal geometry, or the "repeating, ordered patterns" in nature and evolution. There is order to life. This is **Step Four – We Move**, showing that we move in repetitive designs.

There are important chapters on using alternative medicines and understanding our conscious and unconscious thoughts. Dr. Lipton's book is an example of science opening doors to spirituality.

Lipton, Bruce H. Ph.D. *The Biology of Belief: Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter, and Miracles*. CA: HayHouse, 2005.

Zen and The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values

by Robert Pirsig

This novel was popular in the 60 and 70s. I loved it then and I love it just as much now. Funny, but what we knew in our 20s was a surprising wisdom. Sure, we tend to be smarter as the years go on, but when it comes to knowing who we are and what is really important, we knew much in our 20s. That is not a good or bad thing, but too often we let life take us away from who we are and what we always wanted. Maybe it is time to remember. Reading this novel is a journey to reconnect to forgotten memories.

The narrator, traveling across the country on his motorcycle with his son, attempts to define "quality." What he finds is that we all know what quality is. There is no need to define it. The search is important, but the answer is within.

Our quest to define "spirituality" is similar. We know what spirituality is for each of us. There is no need to define it. The search is important, but the answer is within. We try to make it more complicated, and we don't have enough faith in ourselves, but we know.

Pirsig's character is us. He retraces the steps of his life to discover his identity. Maybe, like the character, we are not as crazy as we thought. We might benefit from a similar, if less complicated and extensive, pursuit.

As the narrator in this novel is discussing his search for the definition of the word "Quality," he thinks:

Ancient Greece. Strange that for them Quality should be everything while today it sounds odd to even say quality is real. What unseen changes could have taken place?" (135)

Again, I'm reminded that this same statement could be said today regarding spirituality. How strange that in ancient cultures, spirituality was part of everything and related to the way of life. Too often today, we don't acknowledge this aspect of our lives as real.

"What unseen changes could have taken place?" defines a search for our spirit. How far back in our lives must we go to uncover those changes? This motorcycle ride might jog your memory.

Pirsig, Robert. *Zen and The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. NY: William Morrow, 1974.

Steppenwolf by Hermann Hesse

As with *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, I am amazed how powerful this work is for me today, 30 years after I originally read it. *Steppenwolf* speaks to our duality, that part of us we call "human" and the part the novel describes as "wolf," or the shadow side we try to hide. But, as the book suggests, we are more than these two limitations.

First, the novel proposes that our plight as humans may be to learn to enjoy the daily and the mundane, to embrace life's pleasures and surrender ourselves to intimacy, while suffering the pangs of loneliness, isolation and abandon - the pangs of knowing there is something more we can't attain. Perhaps that attainment is locked into the daily routine. Perhaps it is hidden in the joys of sharing with others or within the human encounters when we let ourselves experience the moment and subdue the intellect. Perhaps it is all of these.

Second, perhaps there is a way to transcend our plight and get lost in *Steppenwolf's* world of blurred lines. Hesse wants us to learn to laugh. "Now, true humor begins when a man ceases to take himself seriously." While that is not the answer to everything, a modification of it seems to fit many scenarios. Laugh at the ambiguities and unfairness in life. Laugh at ourselves trying to understand them. Laugh, and maybe we can begin to live consciously and not just as a prelude to death.

Perhaps laughter teaches us what Harry, the main character, discovers. There is more to us than our personality. Life isn't just a duality of man and wolf. There is another level – the spiritual or mystical. Part of us lives there, too. To get there, we must let go, laugh and enter an unknown, sometimes scary world. Harry does. He reluctantly enters the "mystic union of joy" and escapes his personality, or the "prison where you lie." There is so much more to us than our personality.

We can transcend the two parts of us, the human part that is civilized and tamed, and the "wolf" or shadow side that is wild and instinctive. Our less-than-human side is not a part we can disown. We need to let go of one in order to not fear the other. Then we can rise above both and glimpse that other world of spirit.

This novel shows more than the importance of finding equilibrium between the human and the wolf. This is a chance to open the door, enter and get lost in a bizarre environment where you just may find another dimension of yourself.

Hesse, Hermann. *Steppenwolf*. NY: Bantam, 1979.

Additional Suggestions:

The Mayan Code: Time Acceleration and Awakening the World Mind

By Barbara Hand Clow

Clow states that humans were quarantined from the rest of the Universe after the flood of 9500 BCE.

Earth is an isolated planet in the midst of an evolving and highly organized interplanetary, intergalactic, and multidimensional universe...a member of a collective Universe that functions by universal law, and life was planted here and cultivated under the stewardship of more advanced societies. (180)

She believes the end date of The Mayan Calendar, which traditionally is 2012, is actually between 2008 and 2011. But Clow is not predicting a destructive end. Similar to MacLaine, discussed on page 4 of this booklet, she predicts a spiritual or evolutionary shift, a change of consciousness. Clow sees this event as the end of Earth's quarantine from the Universe and the decline of our aggressive and destructive ways. This new era will provide more opportunity for contact with beings from other star systems, such as the Pleiades.

Clow cites many references that help validate her work. She discusses "intelligent design" and her problems with Darwin's evolution that don't account for "gaps" in our advances. She suggests that time acceleration is occurring and that we have already begun to feel a quickening of the energy around us. She claims we have all been feeling that heightened awareness since 1998.

She encourages us to clear out the toxins from our past, so that we can move forward. She believes that "old junk" needs to be released, such as memories of catastrophic floods from our distant past. These memories are not yet conscious ones. We see future destruction because of our unacknowledged or unprocessed past. With time acceleration, the traumas and emotional blocks are coming to light, and the Iraq War is helping us remember. Our challenge is to listen to and then clear these old hurts.

Clow, Barbara Hand. *The Mayan Code: Time Acceleration and Awakening the World Mind*. Rochester: Bear & Company, 2007

Other Comments

Earth's "quarantine" by Universal forces, as described by Clow, is a glimpse into our past. Shirley MacLaine reinforces the idea that other beings are watching us. MacLaine has a strong belief in extraterrestrials who want to help us but need our acknowledgement and permission to do that.

Whether or not we agree with any of these writers' beliefs, perhaps it is time to ask questions of our own:

- Can we continue to ignore that extraterrestrials visit earth?
- Can we continue to insist that we are not alone in this universe, either physically or spiritually?

I find these fascinating, not frightening questions.

Many claim to believe in extraterrestrials. Some, however, question whether or not the extraterrestrials are friendly. To me, that answer is clear: we know from **Step One: Everything is Connected** of *Do It Yourself Guide to Spirituality: Seven Simple Steps* that things on earth reflect those above. Most of the beings are good, while some of them represent the same negativity we find here.

Our challenge is to trust ourselves to discern the difference. Recognize your inner knowing about such subjects. Remember, as many writers tell us, we may never actually see such beings, which doesn't mean they don't exist. Their reality on other dimensions may be known to us only when we begin to "look" and "listen" differently. We may be surprised at what we find.

A recent survey in *What is Enlightenment?* magazine (May-June 2008, p. 18) shows that last year, 35% of us believed in UFOs, up one percent from the previous year. While that is a relatively small number, take heart if you find yourself in that group. You are not alone.

Entering the Castle: An Inner Essential Path to God and Your Soul by Caroline Myss

Myss' book is strongly recommended for anyone wanting to look inward and assess. I have read the book twice, and each time I was forced to look at some aspect of my life I had been ignoring. No matter how many such books you have read, I believe you will find some benefit from following her guidance. She is a harsh teacher, at times, but probably we all need that, at times.

I want to only include one small section of her book here: **Five Wisdoms about Praise and Criticism**. These seem important at a time when we are facing a world of Season of hope and struggle. Our greatest strengths come from within. Myss' **Five Wisdoms about Praise and Criticism** provide some guidance for 2009 in interacting with ourselves and others:

- 1. Do not be judgmental.**
- 2. Never envy experiences of others. Envy is lack of humility.**
- 3. Everything good comes from God. Never take credit.**
- 4. Remain humble. Do not look for praise.**
- 5. Develop an appreciation of those that criticize you.**
What lesson is there for you?

No More Words: A Journal of My Mother, Anne Morrow Lindbergh

By Reeve Lindbergh

For the many of you with an aging parent who requires care, here is a book that a friend recommended to me. Reeve Lindbergh's style reminds me of her mother's, a soft, gentle use of words that is soothing, yet provocative. She shares the heart-warming, loving, and sad journey of gradually losing a parent.

My Mom used to read Anne Morrow Lindbergh's books, and she particularly liked *Gift from the Sea*, so I felt an instant connection to a story about the author by her daughter. This is the first book that describes my mother's condition from Alzheimer's. Reeve Lindbergh writes of her own mother's decline, not from the same disease but from a series of strokes. The cause is different, the effect was the same. My Mom also lost her speech; there have been "no more words" for the past two years. My mother, after four years in an Alzheimer's facility, is still very aware of what is going on around her. She knows all of the family and her dog. She reacts and responds to most questions. Even in her silence, she has a strong presence and a way to display appreciation and happiness by standing tall and smiling widely or displeasure by grimacing, gesturing and shaking her walker.

Reeve Lindbergh does a touching job of conveying the care of her well-known mother. She provides an emotional picture, which is what I have looked for, and not found, from other authors. Reeve describes the fact that what we may need most from our aging parents is the validation we felt we never received when we were younger. She does not sound, however, like a whining child who has forgotten to grow up; she simply mentions the feeling as a reality. Too often books on aging parents have an underlying and dominant self-serving sentiment, when what I want to hear is some uplifting inspiration for the family with a sympathetic understanding of the suffering. Reeve does that for me.

She is describing my Mom when she says:

Her gaze is direct, but I don't know what she's looking at.
What are you looking at Mother? What do you see? (81-82)

Her previous body-shyness has melted away, as she is
touched over and over by careful, caring hand all day long...
She has finally let herself go now, giving herself up with no
comment at all, falling lightly as feathers and softly as snow
into our waiting hands. (80)

Anne Morrow Lindbergh is part of my Mom's generation. I see the similar concerns of being proper and worrying about what others might think. The differences between these women have melted as the ravages of aging create a similarity. I find some comfort in that.

Reeve Lindbergh mentions a dream she had in which the mother she remembered came to her and said about this new frail, silent mother, "You just have to take care of her." That is what we need to do for our aging parents. While that might mean a different approach for each of us, it helps explain my current role. Thank you, Reeve Lindbergh, for reminding me that my job for my mother is simply "to care of her."

This is Practical Spirituality.
This is what we do to help the ones we love.

Lindbergh, Reeve. *No More Words: A Journal of My Mother, Anne Morrow Lindbergh*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 2001.

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