

Slow reading and the Slow Book Group

The purpose of slow reading and the Slow Book Group is not about getting through as many books as possible, but to gain from them a deeper understanding of our walk with God and through that to deepen our prayer lives and relationships with God. *The Cloud of Unknowing* counsels a young student to seek the Divine through contemplation motivated by love rather than through knowledge or intellect.

So I have put together the following suggestions on how to read each book, taking it slowly so that it gradually sinks in. Many of these words come from the transcripts of the [Turning to the Mystics podcast](#) that James Finley has been recording for the Center for Action and Contemplation. Heartfelt thanks to him and to them.

First, you might like to read the book all through each month, and then return to the section(s) set for the month. Taking the monthly reading as a whole, or section by section, you might like to read and re-read a number of times.

Each time you read, you might sit in prayer and meditation with your reading, and then if you're so inclined, you might want to journal, and write out what came to you, and what questions it raises, or how does it reflect where you're at, or how does it bear upon your life? Then the next day, you'd read it again, and after you sit with it, you journal again. So, after a few days, you would have sat with a reading several times. If you choose to do this, you might find that your journal reflections change between the first one and the last one. Because you have been on a journey. There's this kind of deepening through sustained exposure where repetition is not redundancy.

Be very patient with yourself. You might not grasp the meaning of the whole chapter, but what might wink at you is the one-liners. So when you read, take just one thing that rings true, one saying or one word. Write it out long-hand, and keep it with you during the day. Or write it out in your journal, and ask yourself three questions:

1. How have I or how am I experiencing this?
2. If I were to say it, how would I say this?
3. What is this asking of me?

Your answers might be blank – “I don't know. I don't know how I would say that.” – whatever is true to you at that time.

It might be helpful to use a mind map, so the sentence goes in the middle of the page, and the questions and any answers radiate out around it. If it's a longer passage that strikes you, you might take it sentence by sentence.

Then the next day when you come back to the reading, you could start from the beginning or pick up where you left off. You would take another word, phrase or sentence. And gradually,

if you take time over it, you'll start to connect the dots between your sentences. Later material may explain earlier material. You'll start to soak in and absorb the text and internalize it in your life. You may start to find that a certain word or phrase will occur to you as you go through your day. Let it cross your mind and sit with it, stay present to it.

When we meet as the Slow Book Group, we don't have time to go into the section(s) in detail. There will usually be a time for more general sharing about the section(s) and the group's responses, and a time for taking deeper soundings on a short section of the reading.

During the week following the meeting, you might like to continue to sit with the section(s). Sharing your reflections in the group, as well as hearing what others have shared, might have clarified some of your responses or raised new questions for you. Take as much time as you need before turning to the next month's reading.

Good reading!