



Journey of Awakening: A Meditator's Guidebook

Ram Dass

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Ram Dass is an American psychologist and spiritual teacher who has studied and practiced meditation for many years. Here he shares his understanding and explores the many paths of meditation--from mantra, prayer, singing, visualizations, and "just sitting" to movement meditations such as tai chi--and suggests how you can find methods suitable for you. He illuminates the stages and benefits of meditative practice, and provides wise and often humorous advice on overcoming difficulties along the way.

From the Paperback edition.

Journey of Awakening: A Meditator's Guidebook Details

Date : Published January 4th 2012 by Bantam (first published 1978)

ISBN :

Author : Ram Dass

Format : Kindle Edition 444 pages

Genre : Spirituality, Nonfiction, Religion, Buddhism

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Jennifer says

I suspect my first pass at Ram Dass' *Journey of Awakening* was like my first pass at meditation—fidgety, distracted, determined. Learning new things does not come easily for me, most especially things requiring me to sit still, but I found Dass' book to be interesting, encouraging, and supportive of my efforts to learn how to meditate. While some of the writing and anecdotes are a little dated, overall I thought this was an easy-to-read, easy-to-digest “meditator’s guidebook.” Its sense of humor adds to its likeability.

Heather says

A large portion of the book is a directory for meditation and yoga centers across North America (well, the States mostly). But the book is amazing and full of wonderful descriptions and stories and ideas.

Koosha says

Excellent guidebook for people who are starting to practice meditation. The book is very eloquent and encouraging. Thank you Ram Dass!

Jeffrey Palermo says

As a casual meditator who is taking his daily sitting much more seriously, Ram Dass' *Journey of Awakening* has proved to be a wonderful guide to the process. As someone who has made his way through the beginning phase of his journey years prior to writing this book, he's surprisingly down to earth in most of what he talks about. He's always ready to relate a humble anecdote of how he's always tested by the same stuff everyone is tested by: his ego and the lure of desire and comfort. I took a tremendous amount from this book and will return to it often. Below are some choice morsels:

*One caveat - the last 3rd of the book is an out of date (late 70's) guide to meditation centers in the US. For new Ram Dass readers, you may want to find a more up to date volume of his teachings.

"For your ego includes both the suffering and the desire to be free of the suffering. Sometimes we use cures halfheartedly, with the secret hope that the cures will not work. Then we can hold on to our suffering while protesting we want to get free."

"Positive experiences may well be followed shortly after by indifference. If you don't keep your experiences to yourself you may find yourself caught in a social situation in which you have created a monster of enthusiasm which you must pump up in a false way in order to be consistent."

"One can be a responsible citizen without allowing one's mind to be captured by the media and their need to

create news."

"When your faith is weak, you reinforce the weakness by trying to convince your friends to meditate also. Such efforts are only an attempt to reassure yourself. The fanaticism of large, popular movements often springs from this lack of faith on the part of its followers."

"All methods are traps. But for a method to work you must go deeply into it, deep enough to be entrapped. At the same time, trust that your yearning for spiritual self-realization and the nature of the method will ultimately free you from the method itself."

"When you feel that your life is committed to the spirit you can no longer avoid confronting these weaknesses. Your strategy changes, you seek to move faster, wishing to confront head-on the things that bring down your awareness. You can no longer let them have their way. So you ask for a hotter fire, a fiercer confrontation. Even though this is often painful rather than pleasurable, it's all right, for you are reaching toward that freedom which lies beyond pleasure and pain. When you want to burn away the grip of your ego on your awareness you'll endure whatever is needed to clean up your life."

Tamara Gantt says

Good tool for understanding and practicing meditation. Here's a good sample:

"To meditate upon thoughts is simply to be aware, as thoughts arise, that the mind is thinking, without getting involved in the content: not going off on a train of association, not analyzing the thought and why it came, but merely to be aware that at the particular moment "thinking" is happening. It is helpful to make a note of "thinking, thinking" every time a thought arises; observe the thought without judgment, without reaction to the content, without identifying with it, without taking the thought to be I, or self, or mine."

Anastasia Beaverhausen says

Changed my life for the better.

Dan Tasse says

A pretty good guide to all kinds of meditation. For example, Sufi walking meditation. I hadn't heard of that before. You might know Ram Dass as "that LSD guy" and he addresses psychedelic drugs too, from an older point of view, and slightly discourages them, because people get hung up on trying to recreate that particular experience. I was a little frustrated after reading this, but I think that's because most paths are fine and I should spend less time reading about meditating and more time meditating. Dass suggests this too.

Ariadne Deborah Fassel says

This is not a book to gallop through. It should be read thoughtfully and, well, meditatively, and more than

once. Extra points for clarity of style.

William Knox says

This really is an ideal book for many who are looking for some form of spiritual practice to give some more depth to their lives. Amongst its outstanding points are that it gives a brief overview of several methods, but does not stop there and looks at some of the pitfalls and misconceptions about meditation. Above all I would recommend this book for the enquirer because of the author's detached attitude where he repeatedly suggests that there is no one way to the liberation that he talks about. There are outlines of various paths, but each one of us who wants to go further needs to find our own path which could be one or more or a combination of some of the paths in this book or something else completely different that suits us best. In other words to grow we need to take the responsibility of looking and trying things out.

There isn't the space in this book of just over 200 pages to go into much detail about many of the methods but, having whetted our appetite, Ram Dass does spend a bit of time to introduce us to the basics of meditating on one's breath as well as ways of bringing one's attention back to the meditation when it wanders. This is all done in his very relaxed and detached style, emphasising the 'suck-it-and-see' ethos of the book which makes it so readable.

My only reservation is the time spent on Indian and Tibetan methods of spiritual discovery. I have a personal antipathy to involving oneself in something as personal as attempting to communicate with our deeper self, God, the Universe or whatever in a way that we're not culturally completely at home with. Maybe some of the further reading that Ram Dass suggests helps us bridge this gap. However I would have thought that a book like this is intended to appeal to English readers, most of whom will be living in a non-Hindu or non-Buddhist culture. So the book could have done better by placing more emphasis on traditional and modern Western methods of awakening so there was something more comfortable to slip into straight away.

Having said that I really can't think of a better overview of what's been tried and tested by millions wanting some more meaning in their lives. Suck it and see.

Michael Whitcombe says

This was the first book I had picked by Ram Dass/Richard Alpert after reading the Harvard Psychedelic Club and it changed my ability meditation by helping me find what worked for me. After reading many books on the practice this one was the only one that helped. I would recommend this to anyone looking at how to get started meditating.

Ani says

This is a pretty good book for moderate beginners in meditation. I think it might frighten away people who are just beginning. I nearly didn't finish it because he gets into a chapter where he discusses the notion that meditation will remove all passion, all romance from your life. But I think he was just waxing melodramatic and having a bad day during that chapter. He seems to have given up that idea in later books.

I don't know. It is an interesting book, but I doubt I'd recommend it to anyone really.

Denise says

I love Ram Dass. Great guide to familiarize the beginner with methods from which to choose. Great guidance on the myriad of possibilities one might expect on the journey. I was most interested in this part. Although I've been at it awhile I've never had a friend who has gone before me talk to me about things like not becoming entrapped in methods and how from our practices life and perspective naturally change. No need to push! When I read or listen to Ram Dass I feel as though an older, wiser and funnier friend is helping me.

Beale Stainton says

I have been reading this book on and off for a little over a month now. I read a lot and usually have multiple books on the go. A book like this is good to have to slow your mind down. I don't meditate in the conventional sense, but I do run long distances and this is a method of concentration and focus I enjoy for both mental and physical reasons. Reading this book is not the same as a normal read. There is no story to it. It should be read one verse at a time like any book of wisdom. It is full of quotes from a variety of religious teachers from Christianity to Zen. Each quote is a story and a meditation unto itself. To really understand literature like this requires a full day of devoted meditation into what it says. This is a book one should hold for a long time.

Brad Schonour says

Ram Dass is THE guy for so called "normies" who are just beginning to get into meditation and spiritual practices. Ram Dass writes with a kind heart and easy to follow language, something that can be difficult to find when it comes to the topic of meditation. He guides you slowly into the waters from the riverbank and teaches you how to swim through your mind like an expert and reach the other side of enlightenment. This is much easier said than done and I am still amazed at how he does it with the brevity of language he uses. One of the first books I picked up when I was getting into meditation, it is one I still like to go through occasionally now even years later. A must read if it is a topic you are interested in. Whether from an intellectual perspective or a heart full of faith willing to take a leap, you will be able to draw something out of this book that will be beneficial to your life.

SIDE BAR: Before reading this, I recommend at least a quick glimpse into Ram Dass' "Be Here Now". That book is a well written example of an extremely intelligent American mans journey into unknown waters. As he was a well known Harvard Psychology professor in the 1970's who actually traveled to give talks at other Ivy League colleges as well about psychology; he is someone who people with higher intelligences might be apt to actually give a listening ear to.

Jose Araguz says

A refreshing book that opened me up a bit more to meditation. I'm not a total skeptic. I have been believing

and working on chakras since I was nineteen. It's the getting into things that is hard. What Ram Dass does right is present ideas alongside his actual experience. It's a little dated, but I plan on keeping my copy around and rereading for encouragement. It's got funky cool quotes too from a variety of different places - Christian, Hindu, Sufi, etc. That's the other thing he does right: meditation as a table where all are welcome.
