



# New Seeds of Contemplation

*Thomas Merton*

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## **New Seeds of Contemplation** Thomas Merton

A much-enlarged and revised version of *Seeds of Contemplation*--one of the late Father Merton's most widely-read and best-loved works--*New Seeds of Contemplation* seeks to awaken the dormant inner depths of the spirit so long neglected by Western man and to nurture a deeply contemplative and mystical dimension in our spiritual lives.

## **New Seeds of Contemplation Details**

Date : Published February 1st 1972 by New Directions Publishing (first published 1962)

ISBN : 9780811200998

Author : Thomas Merton

Format : Paperback 297 pages

Genre : Spirituality, Nonfiction, Religion, Theology, Christianity, Christian

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# From Reader Review New Seeds of Contemplation for online ebook

## Nancy Day says

I've been reading this book as part of my morning prayer through Advent and most of Epiphany. It's truly changed my spiritual life. I'm Episcopalian, not Roman Catholic, as Merton was, so a couple of the chapters didn't ring 100% on target for me, but even those I gained a greater appreciation for aspects of my prayer life. Merton is an amazingly precise and lyrical writer in dealing with this topic so difficult to articulate. His writing is very simple, but at the same time very dense. I'd extremely admirable.

While this book is directed toward Christians with an interest in meditative experience with God, anyone interested in metaphysical contemplation would find it useful, I think. It's not a "to-do" book on meditation, but includes some "tips" along with sort of a theoretical approach to the how, when, why, and what of contemplative meditation.

I started reading this book several years ago, and was put off by its density and the male point of view. Yes, the book was written by a monk, probably for other monks, decades ago before the feminist movement, but genderized language makes the content seem less accessible to me as a woman. However, I got over that, and am so glad I finished this book. I recommend reading it slowly, a little every day over a period of weeks.

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## Khenpo Gurudas says

Quite often, St. John of the Cross is cited as one of the greatest mystics in the Christian tradition, and I was inclined to agree for many years, until I began reading *Seeds of Contemplation*, when I was in my first year of spiritual formation in the seminary.

*Merton transcends the limitations of the medieval mystics' ability to make contemplative spirituality something grittier, more real and raw, especially for those new to the practice. Written when he was still relatively young, it should not be thought of as the work of a neophyte contemplative. New Seeds of Contemplation is an updated version of his earlier thoughts, which was born out of more than a decade of spiritual practice and experience. I read the former in 1983, and the latter sometime in the mid-90s.*

*Probably two of my favourite works on mysticism, (the second being John of the Cross' Dark Night of the Soul), Merton takes care to point out the inherent dangers of excessive emotionalism and egotism, which can become an obstacle to interior spiritual progress. Scoffing at words like "inspirational", his writing on the subject is nothing less.*

*Buddhists often criticise the mystical approach to spirituality, denying and ignoring the mystic underpinnings of many of the Muni's actual teachings. Merton, who embraced a syncretic spirituality that resonates wholly with my own, brings a beautiful balance of East and West to his observations.*

*If I had to find a defining passage from the book, to use as a recommendation for prospective readers, it would be this, which I think captures that remarkable melding of Buddhist thought, Advaita Vedanta and Mystical Christianity:*

*"As a magnifying glass concentrates the rays of the sun into a little burning ray of heat that can set fire to a*

*dry leaf or a piece of paper, so the mystery of Christ in the Gospel concentrates the rays of God's light and fire to a point that sets fire to the spirit of man...Through the glass of His Incarnation He concentrates the rays of His Divine Truth and Love upon us so that we feel the burn, and all mystical experience is communicated to men through the Man Christ."*

*Having spent 30-days in silent retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani, a community of ascetic monks belonging to the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (Trappists), where Merton lived for 27 years of his life, the entire abbey seemed to resonate with the words of this brilliant spiritual writer, who is among my most beloved of contemplative role-models.*

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### **Kathleen Basi says**

This is a book to put on your nightstand and read slowly, a few pages at a time. And then take a break to process it, and read again. So much of what Thomas Merton talks about in this book made my heart race, because I recognized it. I hope someday I am able to experience the parts I have not--yes, even the "deserts" and "darkness" he references routinely. His grasp of the human person and resistance to God makes so much clear about the world today, especially attitudes among both self-righteous religious and anti-religious.

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### **Sarah says**

Parts of it were insufferable. Parts of it were like the best thing I ever read. I think that's just how Catholicism works.

It borrows a lot from Cruz's *Dark Night of the Soul*, but it's not nearly as abnormal.

*1.If you write only for yourself you can read what you yourself have written and after ten minutes you will be so disgusted you will wish that you were dead.*

*2.Place no hope in assurance, in spiritual comfort. You may well have to get along without this. Place no hope in the inspirational preachers of Christian sunshine, who are able to pick you up and set you back on your feet and make you feel good for three or four days - until you fold up and collapse into despair.*

*3.Any joy that does not overflow from our souls and help other men to rejoice in God does not come to us from God.*

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### **Ruth says**

I am listening to the audiobook version.

This book is really an answer to my prayers! It brings such light.

One thing that he shows clearly, is how solitude is really much less lonely than to be lost in the crowd. He speaks very beautifully about love, how God is love, and how we must let love shine through us, become transparent. Yet it is not such a sweet soft book that hides darkness. On the contrary, Thomas Merton shows very clearly the distinction between loving acceptance and cowardly ignoring. And other bad things that we can mistake for love.

He shows me all my sins, not confining me to them, but showing the way out, into the freedom that I already have.

Thankfully he also writes much that I had already discovered myself, and thus affirms lots in which I felt really alone.

I keep falling asleep while listening to this, it gives me such rest. So I miss large parts of it and will start over immediately when I finish.

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UPDATE: Just finished listening to this great audiobook.

In the end he got to talk about things that I think you can only understand if you've experienced them yourself. Very beautiful, but hard to grasp for me and perhaps I've completely misunderstood.

All this talk about emptiness and darkness and no longer being aware of yourself as a distinct person used to frighten me, but I am beginning to see that it is a way of describing something eternal, perhaps outside of time, so that our words become meaningless.

I also liked what he said about play in the last chapter. Puts it in perspective.

I thought the book was narrated in a good way, quiet and carefully read, so that it was easy to follow. But I think I must buy the book also, in order to really read it, and ponder each sentence that strikes me.

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### **Lesla Engelthaler says**

I have a huge crush on Merton. He is the grace my Abba gave me in the silence. I weep when I read him and sigh, and say, I feel exactly the same way...over and over again. Read him, if you doubt, if you wonder, if you wander, if you think about your faith.

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### **David says**

Over the last few years, I have found it beneficial to include reading a bit from different spiritual masters each day. I've been reading a chapter of this book each morning, and it is absolutely fantastic. The first 2/3 of the book was a wealth of thought provoking spiritual depth. This book could easily be included in my top ten books of all time. The last 1/3 started to get away from me. I'm not sure how to explain it. Merton is writing on a different level of spiritual connection with the Divine, a level I am sure I've never experienced. I know Merton would not want his book to be read and forgotten, so I think I need to spend more time chewing on his words (and the words of scripture, and sitting in silence and other spiritual disciplines). In essence, you can't just read about contemplation without putting yourself in a place to experience it. I look forward to a time,

maybe when I'm around fifty, and I pick this one up again and hopefully, with a dose of grace, the whole book hits me the way the first 2/3 did this time.

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### **Stormie Steele says**

I began reading this book in 1996, completing it perhaps a year later. I was completely captivated! At a time in my life when my soul yearned for some sense of reason beyond my daily encounters - Thomas Merton's New Seeds of Contemplation struck a timely cord. The soul that seeks truth, no doubt will find it. To engage truth becomes one's life time endeavor. New Seeds of Contemplation is not a book that can be read without times of ardent reflection. When the soul is in a place of transitioning - that being, re-examining its core beliefs & principals for living - contemplation becomes the portal/pathway of revelation. An exceptional life altering read!!

New Seeds of Contemplation by Thomas Merton

My rating: 5 of 5 stars

I began reading this book in 1996, completing it perhaps a year later. I was completely captivated! At a time in my life when my soul yearned for some sense of reason beyond my daily encounters - Thomas Merton's New Seeds of Contemplation struck a timely cord. The soul that seeks truth, no doubt will find it. To engage truth becomes one's life time endeavor. An exceptional life altering read!!

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### **Lisa Lewton says**

Glad I read this book, and would pass it along to anyone wondering about prayers and meditation. There were a couple of chapters and some parts of the book I glossed over because I am reluctant to believe it is possible to arrive at perfection as a contemplative. And this book would be a challenge to someone who gets stuck on the male gender assigned to God, but I personally did not find that inhibiting. I consider Merton to be a sage of our time, encouraging us to find God and the will of God in the quiet stillness and in our daily work and interactions.

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### **Tamara says**

A 20th Century Christian mystic, Thomas Merton is far and away one of my favorite authors. Although I haven't read all his books yet, New Seeds of Contemplation is in my mind his greatest work. Without a doubt a modern spiritual classic.

The depth of Merton's spiritual understanding is difficult to grasp. His words are soothing as a pool of cool water. I want to swim in them for hours.

"Every moment and every event of every man's life on earth plants something in his soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of winged seeds, so each moment brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men. Most of these unnumbered seeds perish and are lost, because men are not prepared to receive them: for such seeds as these cannot spring up anywhere except in the soil of freedom, spontaneity and love." ~ Thomas Merton

In *New Seeds of Contemplation* Merton takes us to deeper levels in our spiritual walk, teaching us about faith and humility, thoughtfully helping us to find our true identity in Christ. If you are on a serious spiritual growth path, seeking a clearer understanding of your relationship to God, this is the book for you.

My feeble words fail when trying to describe the magnificence of Thomas Merton's writing. Poetic, transcending, life-changing, mesmerizing, core-cutting, astounding, incredibly perfect, a true gift from God. It leaves me almost breathless... Always wanting more.

The highest of recommendations from my bookshelf. **READ THIS BOOK!**

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## **Hundeschlitten says**

I acknowledge that Thomas Merton probably had a true connection to God, that he was a holy man who by all accounts walked the walk as well as talked the talk. I also acknowledge that "*New Seeds of Contemplation*" is an engaging explanation of some of Merton's core ideas, as well as a compelling argument for the spiritual value in leading what Merton terms a "contemplative" life (more exactly, a life in contemplation of God's will and your purpose within that will). However, nothing I've read in a long time has done as much to make me doubt components of my faith and even wonder whether I am really that much of a Christian.

In this series of short, interconnected essays, Merton takes on all comers, from over-earnest monks to the vagaries of the modern business world, and he is a compelling advocate for a life spent in earnest contemplation of God. But then come the particulars. For Merton, the beliefs of the Church, in this case the dictates and dogmas of the Roman Catholic church, are to be accepted without question, in part because we all need to follow the instructions of our spiritual leaders, even when we believe them to be wrong, and partly because God is the source of Christian dogma and tradition, thus these beliefs, at least generally speaking, must be right.

Worse, buried within this advocacy for a contemplative life lies a condescension that I found grating. According to Merton, anyone who loves the things of this world is deluded. The corporate world faces particular criticism, as do those in search of sensual pleasure. But I thought: What about the prostitutes and the tax collectors? Jesus seemed to prefer their company over all the sanctimonious priests. Why would he be on the priests' side now? And then my mind drifted towards Plutarch and his more nuanced understanding of our moral and spiritual failings. I contrasted Plutarch with other Christian thinkers, from Luther to Kierkegaard, and how almost all of them have this cocksure view of the world. Merton was just another in this long line.

I liked "*New Seeds of Contemplation*." It was engaging, at times vibrant and beautiful. But if it provides a map to the contemplative life, it is a narrow map, perhaps indicative of the narrowness of this vision. I found myself feeling a pagan's hunger, craving a more expansive view of life than the one Merton was offering. And I find that thought kind of scary.

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## Margaret says

I just can't seem to get enough of Thomas Merton, this is a book not to be rushed but savored slowly. Often I found I had to re-read a passage to get the meaning and once I "got it" the lightbulb shone brightly! I wouldn't recommend this book for the new believer because it delves heavily into the inner spiritual life. The concepts and spirituality he discusses might discourage or confuse a new believer in Christ. I am a forever fan of his and I have been slowly building my personal library of his books.

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## Andi says

For a few years, I fostered a very robust fascination with Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk who was a prolific writer. I can't remember how I found Merton, maybe some long ago professor of mine or a reference in someone else's book, but since I started reading him almost a decade ago, he has, more than any other writer, influenced my way of seeing the world. He was a pacifist and a political activist, at least in the sense that he spoke out boldly against things he found immoral or unethical - like the atomic bomb. He also believed wholeheartedly in the need for a writer to have space to think and be alone - what he called "silence and solitude."

In *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Merton introduces his readers to the idea of contemplation as a way of life. He urges us all to dip deeper into our thoughts and to slow down from our action, to turn away from that which distracts us and to open up to that which reminds us of true reality, true creation, and true life. If you have ever wanted a model for how to write about thought, this book is for you. Even more so, if you have ever wanted to think about how to slow down, catch your breath, and by doing so, live your life more fully, this book will capture your spirit and heart.

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## Galicius says

Just the way Merton explains what "contemplation" is and is not and the concept of our outer self and a new self which we need to awaken— notions he hinted at enough in "Seven Storey Mountain"—is enticing enough to make this spiritual manual hard to put down. The chapters are usually less than ten pages and short enough for a concerted uninterrupted focus.

I am willing to give it five stars if it wasn't such hard going through some chapters. He is maybe easier than Chesterton but difficult in other ways. Maybe it is because as he says numerous times he is dealing with a subject that cannot be easily written about. Merton does it in thirty-nine ways that is the number of the short chapters. TS Eliot's lines from "Dry Salvages" come to mind:

"These are only hints and guesses,  
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest  
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action."



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## **Michael VanZandt says**

Ok,so, let me say to begin that I think Thomas Merton is a brilliant mind. If there were a dozen more Mertons in the world, I'm convinced there would be peace on earth.

That being said, Brother Tom plunges into a book in which he attempts to lay the groundwork, or to set the vibe for one's odyssey into contemplation. Tricky thing is that you cannot really describe contemplation. Merton says so himself. The best we can do is to label it "the darkness" and say, well, it's not that, and it's not and it's not that ... you get the picture. Merton is not deterred. Bless his heart, he wants us all to become saints. Or maybe more accurately, he wants us all to want to become saints.

There are moments of poetry here. There are also moments when I sat, thinking I believe that this is nearly identical to what he said two chapters ago. Yet, Merton offers us two paths -- our glorious fundamental option of faith. So there is the shadowy mask of the ego, clinging to the carousel of idols, of created things, of the material, of mammon, and then there is nothingness and emptiness -- union with God's will. Do not get me wrong when Merton describes nothingness, it actually does not sound half bad. In fact, it riles me up like a good Naomi Klein anti-corporate activist rallying cry. I do not want to downplay this aspect of Merton's work: he sees the hollowness of the American system decades ago. Only when we lose our sense of self, in the eyes of society, whomever we attach to that broad group, do we find our true identity. It is a fascinating worldview, which Merton gives a justifiably nuanced treatment.

At times, beautiful and breathtaking. Other times, I felt like skipping some pages, but did not expecting an epiphany to leap from the page. It is not burdened with dense theological terminology, but helps to be a seasoned reader of theology.

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## **Elizabeth Rhea says**

In this seminal work, the semimodern sage explores the theme of contemplation while embracing the paradox that nothing definite can be said about contemplation. Sometimes essay, sometimes vignette, sometimes proverb, this deep collection of wisdom provides multiple jumping-off points for personal meditation and explorative understanding of the Divine.

I think I was a Merton fan before I ever read him. All throughout this first reading, I found myself asking, "Thomas, have you been reading my diary?" I wondered, through the first 20 pages or so, whether I was a fan or simply an egomaniac; he simply articulated my divine understandings better than I could. Finally, though, he said some things which tested my fan status-- things I didn't agree with-- and he passed; I still loved him. His view of God is truly humbling, putting man in his place of profound ignorance when it comes to 'knowing' God. It also undoes popular paradigms which make God into object. These things being understood, Merton shares the necessity of a life of detachment, and genuine exploration of one's own unique holy path within the context of church structures and historically tested disciplines. These are only inadequate and probably misleading summaries of a few of his abundant talking points, but they give a taste of some of his themes.

Still, Merton is mortal, and imperfect. For all his talk of humility, he often sounds a little too confident that

he has ascertained ultimate truth. I also wonder whether Merton, living so firmly in a male world at his monastery, ever imagined that his writings would reach such a wide and diverse readership-- and if he had, whether he would've used such dishearteningly exclusive gender language, not only about God, but about humanity. As a female theologian, I had to constantly suspend my awareness that I was not his intended audience in order to enjoy and benefit from the text, which might be a prohibitively frustrating task to the gender-sensitive.

Over all, I am incredibly thankful to have crossed paths with this text. It's prepared me to ask the right questions about God and my own spiritual life, and often punched me in the gut with its poignant quotes and passages. Here are a few:

"In such a world the true 'I' remains both inarticulate and invisible, because it has altogether too much to say-- not a word of which is about itself." (8)

"There is 'no such thing' as God because God is neither a 'what' nor a 'thing' but a pure 'Who.'" (13)

"So much depends on our idea of God! Yet no idea of Him, however pure and perfect, is adequate to express Him as He really is. Our idea of God tells us more about ourselves than about Him." (15)

"Hence a saint is capable of talking about the world without any explicit reference to God, in such a way that his statement gives greater glory to God and arouses greater love of God than the observations of someone less holy, who has to strain himself to make an arbitrary connection between creatures and God through the medium of hackneyed analogies and metaphors that are so feeble that they make you think there is something the matter with religion." (24)

"The saints are what they are, not because their sanctity makes them admirable to others, but because the gift of sainthood makes it possible for them to admire everybody else." (57)

"Do not be too quick to assume your enemy is a savage just because he is your enemy. Perhaps he is your enemy because he thinks you are a savage... and perhaps if he believed you were capable of loving him, he would no longer be your enemy." (177)

"If you have money, consider that perhaps the only reason God allowed it to fall into your hands was in order that you might find joy and perfection by giving it all away." (179)

"Before you can be a saint you have got to become human." (256)

Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York: New Directions Books, 2007.

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## **Ben says**

If I could rate this as higher than 5 stars, I would. This is probably the most impacting and thoughtful book I have read (aside from the Bible), and I keep coming back to it over and over again for fresh insight.

Thomas Merton was both a contemplative monastic as well as a radical activist. His life of solitude and contemplation did not cause him to turn inward, but called him to look out into the world. He was an advocate of civil rights, a critic of Vietnam and nuclear proliferation, and an author and literary critic. His

spiritual insight became the foundation of his public voice, knowing that only the truth found in God would be powerful enough to overcome the powers and structures of this world.

While other writings of Merton's are more outward oriented, this book contains many devotional reflections on the inward life, finding the hidden places of the Spirit where deep calls unto deep. He writes: "Every moment and every event of everyman's life on earth plants something in his soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of winged seeds, so each moment brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men." God is awakening us, bringing us into the light, and Merton, through his writings, encourages us to come alive in the Spirit.

An amazing book!

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### **Debra says**

This is quintessential Merton - illuminating and vexing. He was omniscient without realizing it. In what he wrote about the militarization of the U.S. in 1961, one could replace Russian with Korea and not tell the difference. His writing on peace, criticism of our government, and the failures of men to contain their desires never ring more true than today. He bemoans the influence of automation and technology on declining values in the country and again ditto for 2018.

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### **Amanda says**

I have some mixed feelings about this book.

It reads like one long prayer, which is lovely. Thomas Merton clearly has a very intimate, very passionate relationship with God. And of course, there were some things that were relevant to me, and some that were not. However, sometimes when I was reading, I just felt lost. Like I was missing something. Maybe some of it was just over my head, because I don't have that kind of relationship with God. I partly wish that Merton would have used simpler language in expressing his "seeds of contemplation."

On the other hand, as the title implies, this book absolutely does its job in provoking ideas for contemplation. I especially loved the chapter called "Sentences" which, unlike the other chapters, just contained short, proverb-like expressions instead of long paragraphs on a given subject. I found these very inspiring and excellent for meditation.

I would recommend this to someone who is working on deepening his/her prayer life. I don't think I'd recommend this to a new believer.

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### **Lydia says**

Merton wrote this book in 1939 at age 24, the year he was planning to become a Franciscan monk. There is a lot of wandering in the desert: this is not this and that is not this and that is not that. I wanted to count all the "not"s in the book. The book and the search is frankly above/beyond me, but it answered some questions. I found it interesting since the book went through many printings, and created a whole movement of men and

women flocking to monasteries in the mid-twentieth century. I discovered that selfishness is the Original sin, that faith is an intellectual assent, and that true solitude is a complex and dangerous thing. You can almost hear him struggling to find his path in this book. The main theme is to get away from all worldliness and self promotion and to figure out how to live for others as one humanity through God. This is not a useful book for anyone actually trying to answer philosophical questions. Merton wrote over 70 books in his short life.

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