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Sacred Texts: The Books Above My
Altar

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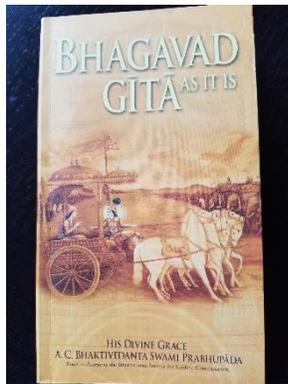
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Rachel Anderson
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Sacred Texts The Books Above My Altar

My sacred texts fill and overflow the shelf above my altar, looking pretty unorthodox with Paramhansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* sandwiched between the *New American Standard Bible* and Patrick Rothfuss' *The Slow Regard of Silent Things*. On a predominantly secular campus, I feel strange enough having an altar, let alone a shelf of sacred texts. I hope sharing about my sacred texts in a public forum will encourage others to do the same and foster a more open dialogue about what we as a community consider sacred both in text and beyond. This collection of writings that are sacred to me represents the winding path of my own spiritual exploration accumulated over years of reading, learning, and striving to leave the world brighter than it was before me. In this essay, my intention is not to demean, invalidate, or misrepresent any religious teaching or tradition, but instead express what makes a text sacred to me.

To me, a text is sacred when it speaks to the heart. Sometimes, my heart is moved by a single statement from a text, like the message of Psalm 23:4, "Even though I walk through the



valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me."¹

Sometimes it is the entire message of a text that moves me, as often is the case when I read *Old Turtle* through tear-blurred eyes. Like the sentient stone in this story, I also "sometimes feel her [God's] breath, as she blows by."² Krishna's wake-up call to Arjuna is often the same one I need when confronted with the death of a loved one; I need to remember

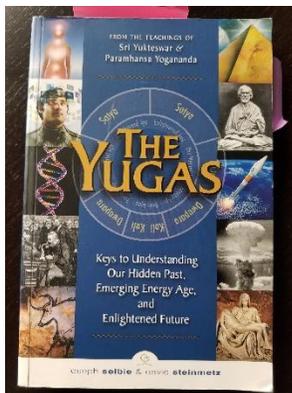
that the soul "is unbreakable and insoluble... everlasting, present everywhere, unchangeable,

¹ *New American Standard Bible* (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1997): 401.

² Douglas Wood. *Old Turtle* (New York: Scholastic Press, 1992).

immovable and eternally the same.”³ And when my heart is too heavy to draw sacred messages from sacred texts like the *Bible*, *Old Turtle*, and the *Bhagavad-Gita*, I can wrap myself in Auri’s story, seeking the proper place for things that are beautiful, broken, or both.⁴ By speaking to the heart, these texts remind me that the sacred is loving.

To me, a text is sacred when it presents a resonant explanation of the human experience. I recognize that this could encompass a *lot* of material—everything from Genesis to the Four Noble Truths to the Big Bang. In my textual collection, Neale Donald Walsch, Caroline Myss, and John Hulme and Michael Wexler present explanations of the human experience that have resonant aspects for me as they outline the structures beyond incarnation that prepare us for the human experience. Whether we have manifested on the planet to “Express and Experience Who We Really Are,”⁵ fulfill a Sacred Contract,⁶ or receive good dreams from the Department of Sleep in “The Seems,”⁷ I see more intentionality—and consequently more *agency*—factoring



into our everyday lives than sheer coincidence alone accounts for. I also find resonant insight in the cyclical framework of time and human-consciousness presented by Joseph Selbie and David Steinmetz through a modern interpretation of an ancient Vedic text. By providing a lens through which to see the world I interact with daily, these texts remind me that the sacred is practical.

³ A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada. *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is*. 2nd Ed. (Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1983): 88.

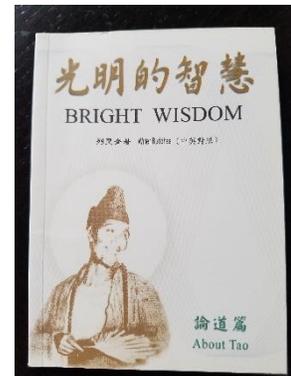
⁴ Patrick Rothfuss. *The Slow Regard of Silent Things* (New York: DAW Books, Inc., 2014): 59

⁵ Neale Donald Walsch. *The Little Soul and the Sun*. (Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Inc., 1998).

⁶ Caroline Myss. *Sacred Contracts: Awakening Your Divine Potential*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002).

⁷ John Hulme and Michael Wexler. *The Seems: The Glitch in Sleep*. (New York: Bloomsbury Children’s Books, 2007).

To me, a text is sacred when it is gifted to me with the sacred in mind. One of my spiritual mentors, Narada Agee, gave me three sacred texts before his death eight years ago—“*Mejda*”, *God Alone*, and *Revelations of Christ*—and challenged me to think critically for myself about the teachings within. In these texts I found messages of inspiration, motivation, and compassion while I sought to model my life after the wisdom of Sri Gyanamata, Paramhansa Yogananda, and Christ consciousness as manifested in many diverse ways. My copy of *The Book of Mormon* was given to me as a resource while I considered the sacred with the LDS group on campus and informed how I understand supportive communities. While studying abroad in Taiwan, I was gifted a text of Confucian interpretations titled “*發人深省的故事:合訂本*” and encouraged to consider what a gift making deep friendships across cultures truly was. Later in the same trip, I received the Dao from a group of Daoist nuns and was given the book “*光明的智慧*” to better understand what Dao is. For example, “The most profound characteristic of Dao is that Dao is unspeakable and silent”⁸ yet, I should also “show the vivid and lively aspects of [my]self. Being natural is Dao.”⁹ By reflecting the kindness, generosity, and consideration in the spirit in which they were given, these texts remind me that the sacred is caring.



To me, a text is sacred when it encourages positive action. The message of *The Wings of Change* took me further through the education system than anyone in my family before me. I feel no shame in quoting a snail who says, “As the world turns so do you. When you change for the

⁸ 列聖齊著(Buddhas). *光明的智慧 (Bright Wisdom): 論道篇 (About Tao)*. (Taichung: Guang Hui Corporation, 2011): 12.

⁹ 列聖齊著, *光明的智慧*, 13.

Annotated Bibliography:

1. 列聖齊著(Buddhas). *光明的智慧 (Bright Wisdom): 論道篇 (About Tao)*. Taichung: Guang Hui Corporation, 2011.

I don't think the group of Daoist students of Tunghai University (東海大學) expected me to volunteer my Saturday to help them present an emotional education program for elementary students, just as I didn't expect them to present me with this small book when we finished. That having been said, I was honored to receive it and enjoy considering the paradoxes that weave together to create a more beautiful Way within this sect of religious (as opposed to philosophical) Daoism. After all, according to this book, "there is no fixed way to preach Dao or encourage people" (36). This text is sacred to me both in how it came into my collection and the meaning it shares.

2. 陳蓉三(Chen, Rongsan). *發人深省的故事: 合訂本 (Food for Thought Stories: Volume 1)*. Tao Yuan Shi: 三達德, 2014.

This book is almost entirely in Chinese and a bit above my Chinese reading level, but I consider it sacred because it was a gift from a special friend in Taiwan who drew a lot of value from Confucian teachings. I admired his devotion to his recently-deceased mother and came to understand both through my friend and the book he gave me, that those who practice Confucianism regularly get far more out of it than Western Chinese history classes imply. I consider this text sacred because it came to me through a sacred friendship.

3. Coelho, Paulo. *The Alchemist*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993.

When I first read this book, I was inspired, enchanted, frustrated, and confused all at the same time. Which, I suppose could be the mark of a good sacred text. Given to me by my 12th-grade creative writing teacher, I was thrilled to read a story that combined a beautiful writing style, significant spiritual teachings, and a fantastic adventure into one mystical text. I will continue to draw wisdom from *The Alchemist* whenever I read it and consider that depthless well of meaning one of the key indicators of a sacred text.

4. Dr. Seuss. *Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are?*. New York: Random House, 1973.

I hadn't considered until recently how significant it was that I memorized the entirety of this book in 4th-grade, when any given week would feature a trip (or *trips*) to the ER for my dad or grandparents. I recognize that not everybody would feel uplifted by a barrage of fictional characters who are "muchly more, more, more unlucky than you," but I found it extremely helpful. To me, a sacred text should help you through the hard times and make you smile. And I dare you to say without smiling: "And, boy! If your old wamel-faddle gets loose, / I'm telling you, Duckie, you're gone like a goose."

5. Ghosh, Sananda Lal. *"Mejda": The Family and Early Life of Paramahansa Yogananda*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1980.

Sananda Lal Ghosh unwittingly answered my secret question: What would it be like to grow up with a spiritual master as your sibling? Apparently, there was never a dull moment. One of my favorite anecdotes features his sister's challenge to her brother's faith in the Divine Mother, and Mejda (later called Yogananda) casually manifesting two kites into his hands (40-42). Additionally, this book is not only sacred to me because of its content. As I mentioned in my essay, "*Mejda*" was one of three books given to me by my spiritual teacher, Narada Agee. Narada taught me how to fit this book with a plastic jacket-protector making it the first of over 300 books that I protected in such a way. Although my later work was of higher quality, I consider this book both a sacred text and a sacred artefact for the memories I associate with it.

6. Gibran, Kahlil. *The Prophet* [1923]. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1973.

I had been meaning to read *The Prophet* when my step-father left it on my desk. Gibran's poetry comments in a beautiful way on the nature of the world. With thought-provoking illustrations, and words that inspire the heart and mind, I can see why this work has drawn the attention of so many seekers over the years. Of course, the meaning of these many years is of less importance to someone who "knows that yesterday is but today's memory and tomorrow is today's dream" (62). I am glad to have this set of sacred poetry at my fingertips for inspiration.

7. Gyanamata. *God Alone: The Life and Letters of a Saint*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1984.

Funnily enough, Sri Gyanamata actually quotes *The Prophet* in one of her letters about the relationship between devotee and guru. Through these letters I have witnessed a passionate powerhouse of a woman, determined to achieve spiritual enlightenment and steadfast in her devotion. The second of the books Narada gave me, I treasure this text for both content and character as I consider the myriad ways to achieve spiritual fulfillment. Additionally, in a world where many of the saints and spiritual leaders are men, I think it especially sacred to hear a woman's voice guiding the way.

8. Hafiz. *The Subject Tonight Is Love*. Translated by Daniel Ladinsky. New York: The Penguin Group, 1996.

I can't tell if Hafiz is wise beyond words or crazy beyond words, but there are words on a page and I imagine I need to spend more time chewing on them before I understand what they mean. Fortunately, I don't need to *understand* a sacred text to see the value of it. I might not get what the poem "I Cherish Your Ears" is about, but can be deeply moved by the adjacent page's message, "The impermanence of the body / Should give us great clarity, / Deepening the wonder in our senses and eyes." (55) Into my collection from the Half-Price Books clearance shelves, I think \$2 is a very reasonable price to pay for hours of wild wisdom, wacky wit, and wonderful weirdness.

9. Hanh, Thich Nhat, and Rachel Neumann. *Being Peace*. Berkeley, Parallax Press, 2005.

I am not alone in my thought that Thich Nhat Hanh is a very wise person. I admire his ability to meet Western practitioners of Zen Buddhism where they're at and encourage them to

move forward, relinquish suffering, and live in a more peaceful world. Given to me by my mom when I was struggling to figure out my own path to peace, I believe I find this text as sacred as she has. Although I do not consider myself a Zen Buddhist, I see the sacred significance in walking the world more mindfully.

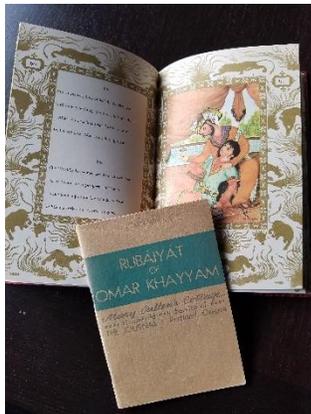
10. Hill, Franklin. *Wings of Change*. Bellevue: Illumination Arts Publishing Company, Inc., 2001.

I always hear this story in my dad's lyrical baritone, even two and a half years after his death. Not only did this picture book about embracing the power of positive change inform my childhood development, it encouraged me to step out of my comfortable cocoon and be the first in my family (both immediate and extended) to pursue a higher degree. It must be a pretty sacred caterpillar if it got me all the way to college.

11. Hulme, John, Michael Wexler. *The Seems: The Glitch in Sleep*. New York: Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2007.

In this book, Becker Drane, a normal kid from The World (that's where you and I exist), gets a job in the Seems as a Fixer, who uses creativity and crazy tools like Elbow Grease™ to address concerns like Glitches (crazy six-legged trouble-making monsters) wreaking havoc in the Department of Sleep, leaving everyone in The World without their individualized packages of sweet dreams. One of the cleverest and most ponderful books I've ever read, the entire concept of the Seems appeals to me as a spiritual concept as it interrogates questions of theodicy and meaning in a fun and fanciful setting. I was lucky enough to receive and read a pre-print edition from the authors themselves and feel like my praise for their work has only grown since they asked for my 5th-grade impressions.

12. Khayyam, Omar. *Rubaiyat*. Translated by Edward FitzGerald. New York: Random House, 1947.

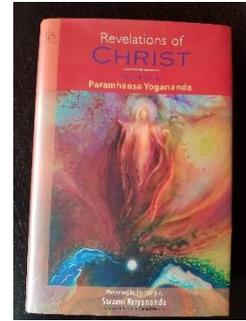


I think this book is beautiful. It is beautifully bound, beautifully illustrated, beautifully translated (in two different ways, I might note) and beautifully significant. I love the box it comes in and the pamphlet that accompanies it explaining how and why FitzGerald translated it the way he did. I love that Omar Khayyam's words can be both, "Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of Night / Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight:" (3) and "Wake! For the Sun, who scatter'd into flight / The Stars before him from the Field of Night." (53) The *Rubaiyat* was sacred before it was given to me and will be sacred long after I "turn down an empty Glass." (49)

13. Kriyananda. *Revelations of Christ: Proclaimed by Paramhansa Yogananda*. Nevada City: Crystal Clarity Publishers, 2007.

The third of the books Narada gave me, I love the artwork on the cover (originally painted by one of my favorite artists—Dana Lynn Andersen) even before digging into the

content. In this book, Kriyananda describes the teachings of his Master, Paramhansa Yogananda, as the Indian guru commented on Christ consciousness and addressed varying elements of the Christian New Testament. Although I do not agree with everything Kriyananda asserts, I appreciate his new and unique take on Christian teachings. For example, Kriyananda suggests that the teachings of Jesus Christ were a new take on *Sanaatan Dharma*, or a new *expression* of religion as opposed to a new religion in itself (190).



14. *New American Standard Bible*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1997.

I imagine no one will be surprised that I consider my copy of the *Bible* a sacred text as well. Not only do hundreds of millions of people around the world also find this text sacred, making me think there must be something in there of value, but it's also a core part of my heritage. Going as far back as Puritans on the Mayflower and as immediate in my world as my Baptist paternal grandmother and Methodist maternal great aunt, Christianity is in my genes and the Bible is at the heart of Christianity. Although I use the more academic edition of the New Revised Standard Bible for more of my work these days (not counted here because I purchased it as a textbook), I still consider my abridged version a sacred text in my life.

15. Myss, Caroline. *Sacred Contracts: Awakening Your Divine Potential*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002.

I'm not sure I follow Myss all the way through her development of the Houses within the Archetypal wheel, but the general concept of Sacred Contracts manifesting in life is one that I find resonant. I imagine part of my Sacred Contract with my mom was for her to give me the book *Sacred Contracts* when she was finished reading it and shift how I view my relationships with other people. In some ways, the base framework of this book has helped empower me in times of helplessness. Instead of helplessly flailing against the tides of time, I can consider how my Sacred Contract with the people around me might look in this life. This book provides me with an interesting framework to overlay onto my other spiritual considerations and see how it fits.

16. Popov, Linda Kavelin. *The Family Virtues Guide: Simple Ways to Bring Out the Best in Our Children and Ourselves*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.

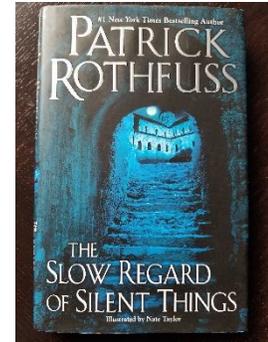
This book came with a set of cards (each with one of the 52 virtues) that I interacted with most weeks when I was younger. Apparently, the virtues had an impact because my grandma likes to tell the story of when four-year-old-me entreated a squirrel I was feeding to "Be patient, squirrel, be patient!" Now that I'm more aware of the intention behind the book, I can see that it also made a mark on how I view religion itself. Just like *The Family Virtues Guide* draws from a wide array of religious texts to inform what is virtuous, I also have drawn from a diverse pool of sacred texts to shape my own spirituality.

17. Prabhupada, A.C. Bhaktivedanta. *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is*. 2nd Ed. Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1983.

I had to return the first copy of the Bhagavad-Gita I ever read, and subsequently worked with a digital version when considering the teachings within. *This* version I first saw in the Humanities library in Thomas Hall. I loved that it included the original Sanskrit transliteration, an English translation, and an interpretation of each passage. I left the Humanities edition in the library for others to enjoy (I shudder to think how stealing the Bhagavad-Gita would impact my karma), and instead put it at the top of my Christmas list. I consider myself deeply blessed to have support from my family for my spiritual explorations.

18. Rothfuss, Patrick. *The Slow Regard of Silent Things*. New York: DAW Books, Inc., 2014.

If you haven't read *The Slow Regard of Silent Things*, I'm afraid you'll have a hard time understanding why it's an important spiritual text to me. It doesn't comment on religion or give deep insights into life or even tell a moralistic story. If I could put my finger on what is transcendent about it, I might say that it is so *human*. This written work entered my library through my interest in Rothfuss' epic fantasy novels and made its home among my spiritual books the moment I put it down.



19. *Songs of Spiritual Experience: Tibetan Buddhist Poems of Insight & Awakening*. Translated by Thupten Jinpa and Jas Elsner. Boston: Shambhala, 2000.

My step-father, an avid fan of Half-Price Books couldn't resist giving this one to me after one his many trips to the bookstore. I gave him the exasperated "I don't have a whole lot of time for free reading right now, I have seven papers to write!" look, but put it on my shelf anyways. Since then, I have pulled it down on a handful of occasions and been humbled and re-awakened to important messages of impermanence and the ever-present, non-attachment and devotion, and stillness and right-action in this collection of translated poems from the Tibetan tradition. As the Dalai Lama noted in the book's forward, "these songs are not merely eloquent verses, but, more importantly, they have the power to evoke profound spiritual inspiration in the heart of the devout practitioner" (xi).

20. Schulman, Sarah. *Conflict is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty of Repair*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016.

Although Sarah Schulman would probably not consider herself the author of a sacred text, her words challenge the status-quo and encourage positive action in much the same way that a religious saint or guru's might. I was honored to receive a copy of her book at the Brown-Bag discussion on campus and even more grateful that she inscribed it to me at the end of her fascinating lecture. I keep this text with other spiritual books to remind me that spiritual enlightenment does not only come through poetry and high-minded ideals (though there's nothing wrong with these), but also the practical application of taking responsible action.

21. Selbie, Joseph, David Steinmetz. *The Yugas: Keys to Understanding Our Hidden Past, Emerging Energy Age, and Enlightened Future*. Nevada City: Crystal Clarity Publishers, 2010.

Dean Segawa, and other attendees of the Humanities Palaver dinner in the Fall of 2016 can attest to the fact that I can talk for ages (pun intended) about the Yuga Cycle of Consciousness. This non-linear account of changing human consciousness revitalizes Vedic teachings and applies them to more recent history. I can think of a hundred different historical examples of things that are not explained to my satisfaction using a linear model of time, but make uncanny sense to me when considered in view of this model. You do not have to agree with my view, but I hope you respect my enthusiasm for explanations that address my curiosity and prompt me to dig deeper into the understanding of human consciousness and history.

22. Tauber, Ronald. *The Little Book of Jewish Celebrations*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2014.

Although I am not Jewish, either culturally or religiously, I hold deep respect for the core tenants of Judaism and the welcoming community of Jewish practitioners who allowed me to join them for Shabbat most weeks for almost two years. Although I probably wouldn't have purchased this book for myself, I am grateful that my mom chose this way to express her support for my exploration of other religions and decision to spend most of my Friday evenings with individuals who demonstrated integrity and devotion. This text is sacred to me because it reminds me of the sacred experiences I had with members of the Jewish community.

23. The Arbinger Institute. *The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2006.

I gave a presentation on this book in High School to my Directional Psychology class and have since considered it a useful tool for framing conflict resolution. Expanding on the messaging from the previous book *Leadership and Self-Deception*, I appreciated how this text encouraged non-violent communication strategies centered on listening and processing what the party in conflict is expressing. I found this text informative and helpful as I served as a Resident Community Coordinator for almost thirty students per year for two years. Through this book, I learned that the first step to resolving any conflict is to start with a heart at peace and from there focus attention on "helping things go right."

24. *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ; The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; The Pearl of Great Price*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981.

I was honored to be welcomed into the LDS group on campus for the few weeks I attended meetings regularly and very grateful to be gifted this *Book of Mormon* and *Doctrine and Covenants*. Although I don't ascribe to many of the professed Mormon beliefs and practices, I admire the close-knit nature of the LDS community and aspire to support those in my sphere of influence with as much compassion and consideration as LDS members support each other.

While the *Book of Mormon* may not be *my* sacred text, I acknowledge that it is very sacred to many and thus deserves a place among my other sacred texts.

25. Walsch, Neale Donald. *The Little Soul and the Sun*. Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Inc., 1998.

My earliest conception of what God looked like was through the oil paintings of glowing clouds in this sacred text. In this adaptation of Walsch's *Conversations With God* for children, I found myself captivated by the idea that I was a light in the world, and everyone else was a light in the world, and we coexist together to remind each other of the fullest expression of our love and our light. This is one of my formative childhood books that I intend to continue to derive insight from when I need it.

26. Wood, Douglas. *Old Turtle*. New York: Scholastic Press, 1992.

My mom always whispered when she said Old Turtle's voice was "as soft as butterfly kisses." Today, I can't listen to or read this book with dry eyes. I wish we could all act like the rock who sees God in the breeze or breeze who sees God in still mountains. This sacred text reflects how I hope to express and receive empathy in all that I do.

27. Yogananda, Paramahansa. *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1946.

I think this was the first sacred text I bought for myself. I believe it was eight dollars at the Ananda Temple Bothell Bookshop. I wanted to learn more about Yogananda's teachings and his life. What I walked away with was so much more. *Autobiography of a Yogi* fundamentally shaped how I view the world and practice spirituality in my daily life. It changed what I believe is possible on earth and challenged me to align my life practices with my values. This is a very powerful sacred text and I'm so happy to have it in my collection.

Wish List

1. Goswami, Amit. *God Is Not Dead: What Quantum Physics Tells Us About Our Origins and How We Should Live*. Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Inc., 2008.

I've met Professor Amit Goswami on three separate occasions and have been impressed with his scientific acuity and insight in every case. I'm embarrassed to have not acquired any of his works in all that time because I am a firm believer in the compatibility of science—in this case quantum physics—and religious or spiritual worldviews. The more I learn about the universe the more I realize how little is truly understood and how much is left to explore. I would love to explore more through Goswami's work.

2. Kriyananda. *Essence of the Bhagavad Gita: Explained by Paramhansa Yogananda, as remembered by his disciple Swami Kriyananda*. Nevada City: Crystal Clarity Publishers, 2006.

In some ways, this is the companion book and predecessor to *Revelations of Christ*, I have been meaning to read this since I was twelve but never actualized on my ability to purchase it. I trust Yogananda's translation and interpretation of the Bhagavad-Gita more than most as stems from his experience *in* the Hindu tradition and his work to communicate the core teachings to Westerners (like me). It doesn't hurt that, like *Revelations of Christ*, the cover-art is Dana Lynn Andersen's as well.

3. Laozi, et al. *Tao Te Ching: A New Translation*. Translated by Man-Ho Kwok, Martin Palmer, Jay Ramsay Shaftesbury: Element, 1993.

I first saw this text in my mom's library and fell in love. With beautiful illustrations that feature poetic English translations as well as the original Chinese text, I would love to expand my collection with this version of the Tao Te Ching (道德經).

4. Narayan, R. K., and Kampar. *The Ramayana: a shortened modern prose version of the Indian epic*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.

I am familiar with the story of the Ramayana, but have never read it in its entirety. As I practice devotional chanting to the divine aspects of Sita and Rama all the time and love to read, this seems like a moral travesty. This sacred text would help expand my knowledge of foundational Hindu values and help round-out my Western-heavy collection of texts. I think I could trust this modern source more than some that might express a strong bias or be bogged down in (as many sacred texts are) details of family lineage and less relevant cultural anecdotes.

5. Valiente, Doreen, and John Payne. *Charge of the Goddess*. Brighton: Hexagon Hoopix, 2000.

I was thinking about the diversity of religion represented on my shelf and realized I have little-to-no representation of pagan ideologies present. I could say that is sacrilegious, but I think that's rather the point. While I recognize that this text is not representative of all wiccan worldviews, I do know it has been influential in many wiccan communities. I would like to include a more expressly feminist worldview in my collection of sacred texts and investigate for myself how yet another tradition understands the sacred.