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READING ADVICE FROM ANNIE BESANT

In her book *Thought Power: Its Control and Culture*, Annie Besant offers some useful advice for developing the power of the mind. While many people are avid readers, she says merely reading a book from cover to cover does little to develop the mind. Reading the printed words on a page is one thing; thinking about what they mean is another. The process of thinking about what we have just read, she says, is what builds our cognitive powers. If we read quickly through a difficult book, what have we gained? How much of the author's thought have we really understood? Being able to repeat the author's words verbatim is a function of memory, not of understanding. If we truly understand the ideas put forth by an author, we should be able to convey them using our own words.

Besant offers a simple technique that anybody can apply to his or her daily reading session. Simply put, it amounts to reading less and thinking more, by a ratio of 2:1. Let's say that you are going to set aside an hour each day to read a book of substance. Many people assume they are making progress by reading as many pages as possible during a given period of time. Annie Besant likens this to filling the stomach with food, but without digesting it and assimilating its nutrients. Her suggestion is to read for five minutes, then pause and think for ten, and so on throughout the hour. After five minutes of reading, we might ask: What were the author's key points? Do I agree? What didn't I understand? If we follow this pattern, our 60-minute reading session will include 20 minutes of substantive reading and 40 minutes of strenuous thinking. This method may seem arduous at first, especially if a person is not accustomed to prolonged mental effort. But like anything else, it gets easier with practice. Naturally, we are talking about applying this method to books of substance, not books intended for light reading or mere entertainment.

If we adopt this simple discipline and use it on a regular basis, Annie Besant says we will notice such benefits as increased powers of concentration, clarity of thought, and depth of understanding.

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