



Zen Action/Zen Person

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Paperback

Zen Action/Zen Person Details

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From Reader Review *Zen Action/Zen Person* for online ebook

Kian says

Among the most thorough and well-presented accounts of Zen in Japanese culture.

Kasulis begins by making an important distinction between what it means for a person to take up Zen in Japan and what it means to take up Zen in the West.

In the West, identity precedes context. You carry around your image of yourself into work, into the home environment, etc.

In Japan, you have no stable social identity. Context precedes who you see yourself as.

Therefore, taking up Zen in Japan means abandoning your identity entirely, as the only context in Japanese Zen is Mu, or nothingness.

Good accounts of Hakuin and Dogen's enlightenment and teachings.

Well written. Concise. Clear.

Fuad Fuad says

This book about Zen. Before I read this book, I read DT Suzuki works about Zen, but for me, DT Suzuki is difficult to understand, and he doesn't explain Zen with a positive way. I understand what it means, after I read all his books, this summary, Zen can not be explained with words. But this book from Mr Kasulis, more reasonable for me, even though, not detail explanation about Zen. He makes clear about Zen and philosophy behind Zen practices. He tries to explain background Zen, from Madhyamika about 'sunyata' philosophy and Yogacara philosophy. He tries to explain about Soto Zen and Rinzai. Books of Suzuki only explained Zen from Rinzai Sect perspective. I recommend this book for people that interest with Zen. Good introduction about Zen, and you must read for starting point.

Proficiency says

A very good introduction of Japanese Zen Buddhism from a Western perspective.

The purpose of this book: (on page 98) Even if Western philosophers continue to maintain that consciousness should always remain primarily rational and conceptually oriented, the capacity to respond prereflectively should still be nourished. Otherwise, we will lose, along with that capacity, the possibility of being truly compassionate, selfless, and spontaneously moral.

Interesting quotes:

Each life situation must first be confronted directly on its own terms, without coloration by reflection. Then, and only then, can one be truly responsive and, consequently, spontaneously moral. Only after the situation

has been clearly apprehended will it be clear whether, and in what way, reflection is necessary.

The Zen ideal is to act spontaneously in the situation without first objectifying it in order to define one's role. The Zen person is an operative part of the situation but is not defined by it.

Sarah Fisher says

The thought process and philosophy behind Zen is hardly easy to explain to someone, even moreso to the common American who knows little to nothing about Japanese culture. Yet this book somehow explains it clearly and precisely.

Perhaps the reason is that the author immediately addresses the source of the problem for romance language and English speakers. Zen is as much a product of Japanese culture and language as it is of Buddhism in general. The first chapter quickly goes over the philosophy behind the Japanese language and its lack of "I" preferring "us" or "we." When put in the context of the religions native language, and using simple and clear metaphors, everyone (even me!) can learn what Zen really is all about.

sanaz says

I have learned very intricate ideas and clarifications reading this book but I have to confess that it has sparked more questions than answers. I guess that's a good thing! All in all it should be a very curious task to understand something reflectively and intellectually which is free of them!

James says

An actual scholarly but accessible introduction to what Zen buddhism actually is without all the new age crap.

If you are curious about what all the one hand clapping stuff is actually about, this is your book.

David Calhoun says

Wow. What a great understandable introduction to what Zen Buddhism is all about.

This book is perfect for someone with a Western background, especially a background in Western philosophy. The comparisons with phenomenology, especially Heidegger, show why it's so hard to talk about Zen Buddhism, with really lovely analogies and descriptions to help. I feel like I got a huge head start on this book by studying Heidegger and being familiar with phenomenology. Struggling to understand Heidegger and understanding concepts like "letting things be", etc, really helped.

Particularly revealing is the important distinction between thinking/not thinking and without-thinking, the

latter of which is a sort of primordial "thinking" of just pure experience. That is, the present experience as it happens, without preconceptions or postconceptions to distort it. This is hard to grasp because our world has been built up with conceptions and judgments that distort our understanding. We are steeped in this world, and part of the task of Zen is seemingly not to try to unsteep ourselves, but to recognize it for what it is.

I need to reread this to digest it even further. I feel like I made a lot of progress in understanding not only Zen, but an admirable way of living in this world.

Devon says

One of the best books on zen by a "western" philosopher that i've encountered.

Ben says

Kasulis wrote a detailed and nuanced explication of prereflective Zen experience in the context of a Western mind grappling and acquiescing to Eastern beliefs and Zen thought. This book is potentially crucial in revealing present conceptual limits of any Westerner interested in Zen, but should not be looked at as a book about Zen to deepen ones' personal "faith". Rather, what does Zen mean to an individual as a person? What value does the prereflective and inconceivable / conceivable , being / nothingness state of without-thinking bring to a humanists' worldview?

Maria Tucker says

Accessible Zen for Westerners.

Tord Helsingeng says

+

Philosophically rigorous

A good explanation of Japanese culture and linguistic considerations (perhaps the best part)

Useful look at Nagarjuna and the Daoist roots to Zen

Very useful analysis of Dogen and the Soto school

A good critique of "scientism"

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Quite limited analysis of the Rinzai school

A bit dated - quite a bit has happened in the western Zen world since the 80's

I sometimes wondered how much practice the author has under his belt, especially when discussing kensho.

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A good read. Recommended for the philosophically inclined Zen meditator.

Meg says

An excellent analysis of Zen Buddhism that is thorough and easy to understand.

Letitia says

This book is not, as I erroneously assumed, a helpful spiritual guide for those seeking to understand Zen Buddhism and zazen. It is very academic, and has all the strengths and weaknesses of a textbook, with a few bright spots that I discovered while meditating on the material.

I was drawn to this book on my spouse's shelf because of a very basic principles: I can't shut my brain off. I recall telling my therapist several years ago that I simply wanted a vacation from "me." (Meaning my incessant analysis, evaluation, and contemplation of everything that crosses my path) The concept of without-thinking or no-mind (mu, as Kasulis translates it) was very appealing. For an insomniac and over-thinker, I hoped to find guidance in these pages. I did not accomplish that, but the journey was not completely useless. I found chapter 9, the title of which is the same as the book, the most helpful. And the conclusion is actually my favorite part because I feel like the author shed pretentious scholar-speak and fully engaged with what the material and the act of zen and the practice of zazen mean. This humanist perspective on Zen was ultimately the most readable part of a text that otherwise dipped into a lot of stereotypically western criticisms of Buddhism; overall it was far to obscure, the double-speak was infuriating, the koans indecipherable, and the whole point - which was for me THE PRACTICE - was obtusely described.

The section that struck the strongest cord was on page 148, where Morita's approach to therapy is explained (this concept will be familiar to those who have read "The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F**k:" "A hallmark of Morita therapy is its lack of attempting any cure. The goal is to have the patient accept the given without concern for what should be. If one cannot sleep, one does not exacerbate the situation by thinking one should be able to do so. Taking the insomnia as a given, one simply goes on with one's affairs. Similarly, one is advised to accept emotions as they arise; one is responsible for actions, not feelings. ... one does not analyze it for either causes in the past or anticipations of what the future will bring. One just acts."

Not long after this, however, the segment about Zen changing depending on cultural context, which Kasulis seems to believe is an original idea, is so eye-rollingly obvious to anyone who has studied religion or culture, that I once again reverted to skepticism that this book had any insight to offer.

As highly heady and academic read I can recommend it, but as a true spiritual guide (which, I confess I took it to be but it does not purport to be) it fails miserably.
