



Zen Buddhism

Christmas Humphreys

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What is Zen? If you asked a true Zen master he might tweak your nose, scowl fiercely, or roar with laughter, whichever he thought would stir your spirit awake—for that is the object of Zen. Humphreys, however, who has practiced both Zen & the law with equal success for more than thirty years, is kinder. He does give the reader an idea—a very good idea—of what it is all about. He describes, with some of the endlessly amusing stories that center on this vigorous school of Buddhism, its origin & influence in China & Japan, some of its techniques, & its English affinities. Anyone who recognizes the super-sense behind the non-sense of Edward Lear or Lewis Carroll is already halfway to Zen.

Zen Buddhism Details

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Author : Christmas Humphreys

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Deb says

My inclinations are more towards Taoism than Buddhism, but I found myself sinking into this book like sinking into a comfy chair. And when I was done, I thought, What was all that about? - which was somehow strangely fitting, in that the author is hoping to communicate on an intuitional rather than an intellectual level. And now I'm reading it again, and once again wallowing in the delight and comfort of it.

Kristin-Leigh says

If you're interested in reading a stereotypical bourgeoisie white European man's understanding of Zen Buddhism, this is the book for you. It's very much written from a Westernized perspective--Christian-centric is the only term I can think of that fits; Humphreys obviously thinks in absolutes, explains in absolutes, which poses a major problem when what one is trying to understand is a religious philosophy against the idea of absolutes.

Did I mention he's pretentious? The author's overly-pedantic writing style was enough to have me contemplating just dropping the course I read this for altogether. I ended up sticking it out, which was rewarding, as we moved on to more worthwhile analysis and explanation of Zen later in the course.

Mohammad Sadegh Jazayeri says

The subject of the book is twofold: Zen and Zen Buddhism. The author's treatment of Zen Buddhism, its origins, history, associated beliefs, and practices is comprehensive yet concise. The author's treatment of Zen, by his own admission, might have been a mistake simply by the very fact of trying. As the author is so keen on reminding us, time and again, Zen can be experienced but not described. His effort however is admirable and makes for some good reading material.

While the subject of the book is "spiritual" in essence, references to the "paranormal" aspects of [Zen] Buddhism such as karma and rebirth are few and far between, which allows even the most adamant materialists (such as myself) to enjoy reading it.

The writing style is pleasant, if at times somewhat convoluted. After finishing the book I found myself having read every paragraph at least twice, sometimes to understand what I had read, other times to savor it. The biggest difficulty was presented by words that were used in (a) an (now) uncommon sense. At times I had to refer to several dictionaries in order to make sense of a sentence. There is also the occasional quintessentially English humor spread throughout the book with deadpan delivery which I found to be quite enjoyable.

The author is well aware of the limits of his knowledge and experience and thus uses quotations extensively which vastly add to the richness of the book. The quotations are well used and embedded in the text. It was easy to not notice when the author's own words ended and those of the quotation began if I was not paying attention to quotation marks. Among the most exquisite of these quotations are sublime verses of poetry which convey the subject far better than would be possible using even volumes of prose.

Bob Cymber says

If anyone enjoys reading Alan Watts, they will really like reading this book. Mr. Humphreys attempts to explain Zen to western readers. There is a lot of wisdom in his words and his elaborations on practical Zen. I found it extremely insightful.

Johannes Bertus says

Convolutd writing style, but some interesting insights.

Don says

an excellent book on Zen as it was in the 40's
