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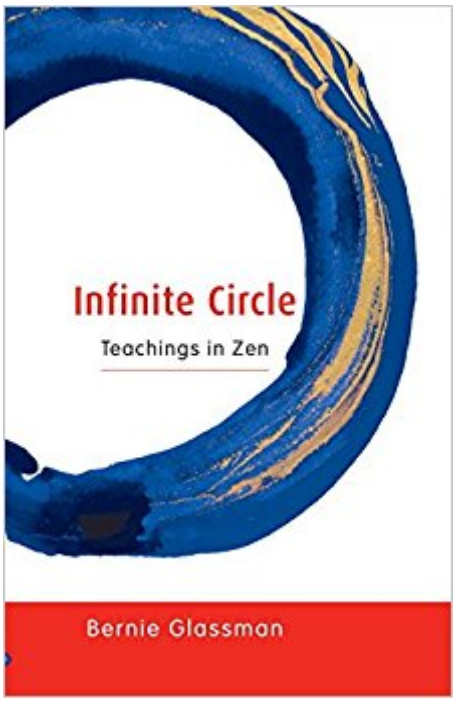
Infinite Circle: Teachings In Zen



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Synopsis

In Infinite Circle, one of America’s most distinctive Zen teachers takes a back-to-basics approach to Zen. Glassman illuminates three key teachings of Zen Buddhism, offering line-by-line commentary in clear, direct language: Â Â Â 1.Â The Heart Sutra: the Buddha’s essential discourse on emptiness, a central sutra of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. Â Â Â 2.Â "The Identity of Relative and Absolute": an eighth-century poem by Shih-t’ou His-ch’ien, a key text of the Soto Zen school. Â Â Â 3.Â The Zen precepts: the rules of conduct for laypeople and monks. His commentaries are based on workshops he gave as Abbot of the Zen Community of New York, and they contain within them the principles that became the foundation for the Greyston Mandala of community development organizations and the Zen Peacemaker Order.

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Customer Reviews

What is the relationship between doing Zen and doing good? According to Bernie Glassman’s Infinite Circle, they are inseparable. Glassman, a Zen teacher and social activist for three decades, uses the pages of Infinite Circle to explicate his philosophy, which unites diversity and oneness, or the relative and the absolute. For notions of the absolute Glassman turns to the Heart Sutra. For the relative, he explains the Bodhisattva Precepts. To reconcile these two realms, he tackles a brief but complex eighth-century treatise called The Identity of Relative and Absolute. Although the subject matter is challenging, the book is based on a series of lectures. Glassman, a former applied mathematician and aerospace engineer, keeps the tone conversational and works in examples from

science and everyday life. For Glassman, enlightenment does not follow from doing Zen; rather, to be enlightened is to do Zen, and vice versa. On the path to understanding this, Infinite Circle is infinitely engaging. --Brian Bruya --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Former abbot of the Zen Community of New York, Zen master Glassman (Instructions to the Cook) expounds upon three written works here. Though primarily for intermediate and advanced practitioners, some beginners may also find it helpful. The first half is devoted to the 24 lines of the Heart Sutra. So thorough is Glassman's explication that the title alone consumes 10 pages, many addressing the first word of the Sanskrit title, maha. Glassman was trained as a mathematician, a background that becomes evident when he uses the image of the circle: "If we are all within the same circle, then all of this is One Body; there is no outside. Since there is no outside, there is no inside either.... If there is no outside for the circle is infinite then not only is there no inside, there is also no circle anymore." The second section closely examines "The Identity of Relative and Absolute," a classic poem written by Chinese master Shih-t'ou Hsi-ch'ien exploring enlightenment, intimacy and the call to action. Action is of particular importance to Glassman, a cofounder of the international social activists' Zen Peacemaker Order. The third section examines the Bodhisattva precepts, with emphasis on "nonkilling." The author's style and thinking are like thick, polished glass: clear, compact and strong. Marrying metaphor, illustration and abstraction, he reaches to the heart of many essential concepts, reminding us firmly that, among other things, "we don't practice to become enlightened... we practice because we are enlightened." Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I missed the opportunity to practice in NYC with Roshi Glassman in the 80s. I had been learning tai chi with Da Liu for several years at St. John the Divine in the late 70s, then became a resident of the Left Coast. My fatther had been in India, Burma and China during WWII flying back and forth over the Tibetan hump doing stuff he's never talk about with the O.S.S. But I was fascinated with the best copies available at the time of Tao Te Ching and M.K. Gandhi's autobiography. That led to the tai chi and on the Left Coast to Zen and I have practiced Zen since on my own. It is always an enriching experience to find an authentic writer with concise diction, seamless and broad familiarity with the topic and the real world experience Glassman presents in this text. Having looked him up on the internet I learned he had a stroke this past January. My sincerest appreciation and gratitude for this text. It is simplistic and a classic at the same time. Thank you! Gassho!

A direct, cogent and insightful explanation of the core tenants of Zen Buddhism as rooted in the Maha Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra, The Identity of Relative & Absolute and The Precepts.Roshi Bernie’s direct and simple language concentrates seemingly difficult and complex ideas into easily understandable and pragmatic gestures.Clarifying and expounding these essential axioms of zen is a true treasure for not only zen practitioners but anyone interested in learning the rudiments of Mahayana / Soto zen Buddhist thought.Wonderful indeed!

This wonderful little book contains excellent, clear writings on the Heart Sutra, the Zen precepts, the relative and absolute, and the Peacemaker Order (engaged Buddhism) which Glassman founded.It doesn’t get any better than this. These topics are central to any understanding of Buddhism, especially zen: I found myself underlining almost everything. Bernie Glassman’s gift to us is a "desert island book": one of a few I would choose if marooned! It’s that good.

The two aspects of Bernie Glassman’s writing that I appreciate the most are the depth to which he takes his explanation of the Heart Sutra, and how directly he connects the teaching to everyday life. With him everything is about what do I do with Buddhism practically. I have taken very much away from reading "Infinite Circle".

Love Bernie

This is an excellent book, explaining difficult concepts in clear and compassionate language.

This book was assigned reading for the Zen Precept Study that I am participating in. The book is deep and would be difficult for beginners in buddism to conprehend. I find that I read several passages several times before I receive enlightenment, so it takes a commitment to the study. That said, it’s very good and the kind of book that you will go back to again and again.

Bernie Glassman is one of the greatest American Zen teachers. In this book, he goes deeply into some core teachings of Zen. He starts with the Heart Sutra (Prajnaparamita Hridaya Sutra). When I started attending a Zen temple, the nightly chanting of this sutra always confused me, but Glassman’s line-by-line analysis shows how this sutra contains great wisdom, and makes understanding clearer.His analysis of the precepts has been the most helpful to me. He explains the various ways of interpreting each precept, and demonstrates the need for balance. For instance,

one of the precepts is non-killing. Some sects of Buddhism extend this to not killing insects and micro-organisms. Glassman explains that to understand this precept, we need not follow it to this level, but we must be aware of it, and try to cause less damage. The precepts, on some level, are an admonition to try our best, and Glassman's discussion will help us to be peacemakers in each moment of our lives.

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