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Don't Be A Jerk: And Other Practical Advice From Dogen, Japan's Greatest Zen Master



Synopsis

A Radical but Reverent Paraphrasing of Dogen's Treasury of the True Dharma Eye; Even if the whole universe is nothing but a bunch of jerks doing all kinds of jerk-type things, there is still liberation in simply not being a jerk. • Eihei Dogen (1200-1253 CE) The Shobogenzo (The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye) is a revered eight-hundred-year-old Zen Buddhism classic written by the Japanese monk Eihei Dogen. Despite the timeless wisdom of his teachings, many consider the book difficult to understand and daunting to read. In Don't Be a Jerk, Zen priest and bestselling author Brad Warner, through accessible paraphrasing and incisive commentary, applies Dogen's teachings to modern times. While entertaining and sometimes irreverent, Warner is also an astute scholar who sees in Dogen very modern psychological concepts, as well as insights on such topics as feminism and reincarnation. Warner even shows that Dogen offered a Middle Way in the currently raging debate between science and religion. For curious readers worried that Dogen's teachings are too philosophically opaque, Don't Be a Jerk is hilarious, understandable, and wise.

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Customer Reviews

Have you ever tried to read any of Dogen's Shobogenzo? I have. A bunch of times, actually, and failed, and decided I was just hopelessly not the right person to be a zennie (though I practice in the Theravadan school, I try to keep up). But I follow Brad's blog, and even though I'm not exactly his target audience -- I was never into punk music, I don't really know much about Godzilla or care

much about Japan -- I like Brad's voice. So I've been reading Don't Be a Jerk, and I love it, and I feel like I actually understand Dogen a tiny little bit. Note Carefully: this is NOT a translation -- it's a retelling, or a paraphrasing, of Dogen's first 20 or so Shobogenzo chapters. But Brad includes lots of commentary, including the Japanese kanji and other people's translations of difficult passages. And he also makes it very very fun to read some really difficult teachings. So where Nishijima (Brad's teacher) translates the last line of Genjo Koan as "Because the nature of air is to be ever present, the behavior of Buddhists makes the Earth manifest itself as gold, and ripens the Milky Way into delicious cheese." I have no idea what that means. Brad quotes Nishijima almost exactly, and then adds, "And everybody likes cheese, right? Except vegans. And even most of them like it. They just don't like how it's produced. Which I respect." If this kind of thing makes you laugh out loud, this is your book. If it makes you rage and roll your eyes, save your money.

I am pretty impressed and tickled by the whole thing. This book is just a brilliant interpretation. As he says, it is not meant as a line by line rewriting, and more of a quick thumb nail glimpse with a good bit of humor and fairly free interpretation. Nonetheless, Brad manages to convey the heart and sense of each passage. Just wonderful, a takes a kind of genius to pull this off. I think what he has done is just a blast and really funny too, while still being poignant and amazing. I think it still helps that I am already pretty familiar with the standard English translations that he is playing off though, so It may still be a little hard to follow for folks not so familiar with Dogen pretty well (and hard to follow anyway even if you are because, well, Dogen is Dogen even when Bradicized). However, this book may still be one of the best first introductions to Dogen I can think of. I think the book is suited to anyone interested in Dogen, and easy reading overall, funny, insightful and amazing. He did his historical homework too and did a masterful job. Parts are hilarious, including how he took all of Dogen's classical style poetry and made em cheezy rhymes! Gassho, Jundo

Eihei Dogen, the founder of the Soto school of Zen Buddhism, was a guy who liked to have his fun with language. He wasn't above making puns that required people to be literate in Chinese and Japanese. And eight centuries later, this makes him rather tricky to translate. I once put together nine different translations of Genjo Koan, just for comparison, when we were studying it. And in this book, Brad Warner brings his characteristic bluntness to creating a rendering of the first part of Dogen's classic Shobogenzo that is comprehensible by native English speakers. The result has a great deal more clarity than the normal renderings, and Warner supplies copious references for people who want to follow up on his translation.

This book is fabulous. Warner's writing has clearly matured and he shows a respect (and understanding) for the material which in case you can't figure it out from the cover art is a kind of modern day paraphrasing, commentary and teaching on Dogen's Shobogenzo. It is a bit jarring however given the screw-the-rules punk ethos he displayed in his first book, Hardcore Zen and while not 'punk' in any way myself, I have been drawn to Brad Warner's writing these past few years precisely because his perspective is so different from my own but as I read this book I was continually thrown off by how polite and respectful his writing has become, which is a good thing...I think. This is an important book in the canon of Zen Buddhist literature precisely because it isn't what you would expect from a punk which I guess, is kinda punk when you think about it. Oh well, there are lots of nuggets of wisdom here maybe even in the spirit of Thoreau and Emerson perhaps and I recommend it highly and without reservation.

I highly doubt I would have been interesting in reading Shobogenzo if it wasn't for this book. The paraphrasing is very readable and funny at times without losing its meaning or overall seriousness. After each paraphrasing, Brad discusses the passages in more depth and even why he chose certain words/phrases to paraphrase. He also discusses what other various translations have used for a particular passage. I found this book fascinating and will definitely read again.

What can I say, Brad Warner is like a highschool friend, you know the one you run into every once in a while and its like you picked up right from where you left off. The man's dharma is strong, his truth emanates throughout each one of his pieces, no matter what the turning of the great wheel has had to offer him. Its rare to find a book thats filled with such an upfront, clear, and real writing style, each one of Brad's retains this attitude, an attitude of clarity, wit, and some punk rock for the whole family. Lol, take it for what it is my fellow readers, if your interested in Zen Culture and you appreciate Brad Warner's work, whether this is your first book on the subject of The Shobogenzo or your newest addition, this book is a must have, man I really hope this turns out to be a complete series because I am totally hooked!

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