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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 800-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. In Don't Be a Jerk, Zen priest and best-selling 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 listeners worried that Dogen's teachings are too philosophically opaque, Don't Be a Jerk is hilarious, understandable, and wise.

Book Information

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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 like most of Brad's stuff, but have criticised one or two of his books before. But this is a great book. Like others that have reviewed it, I have tried to read Dogen before and given up. This book was a godsend. I'm glad it has sold well so Brad will be able to write the other 3 he plans on writing about Dogen's works. Now if he would do a translation like this of the Lankavatara Sutra...

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

I appreciate this book. It acts as a gateway to liking Dogen as a contemporary. I used to like him as a mystic poet and infathomable paradox, which he may not have even been. The historical Dogen seems much more pragmatic and sincere with his intent to educate us and help us grow than the mystical poet of my imagination. This book helps to do to Shobogenzo what Richard Feynman did

to physics; if you can't explain it in a way that a normal person can understand, then you probably don't really understand it. I think Warner has a well lived understanding of Dogen's ideas and the attitude of zen from his teacher(s) and it help to ground me in practice and understanding as well. Thanks to Brad and enjoy to those of you looking for a fresh way to practice reading Shobogenzo.

Brad breaks down a very old document for not only a western reader, but a generation. Not many authors have brought zen to generation X as well as Brad Warner. He's a Dogen fanboy, I'm a Brad Warner fanboy.

Coming from someone who doesn't know anything about Buddhism, Japan, meditation, and dare I say - doesn't have a single spiritual bone in her body, I loved this book!! I'm not sure why I started reading it - maybe because of the title, or the other reviews, or because I was promised a good laugh. I got all of that, and more! - The book is indeed hilarious. It's definitely not one of those annoying spiritual books that make you fall asleep within a couple of pages. - It explains Buddhism, Dogen, Zen, the art of meditation... well, it explains all these things in a way that a completely non-interested and non-spiritual person like me can get them. Even better, the book tells you about all these things but for information purposes only. It does not try to indoctrinate you, or make you feel guilty for not practicing, or condemn you to eternal damnation. It's more about, this is what Dogen said (paraphrased in a funny modern tone), this is what people teach, here is some additional background - now go live your life the way you want to. - Dogen's 800 year old writings sound very hard to study and even harder to translate. Warner has done an amazing job making his ideas accessible today. The added humor is a bonus! And makes Dogen's teachings accessible to a much wider audience

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.

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