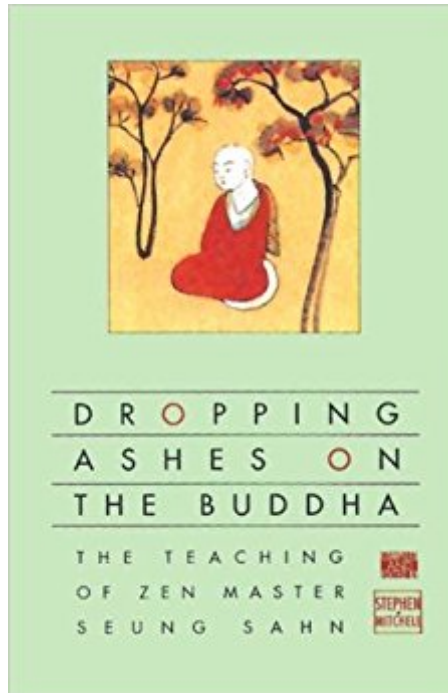


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Dropping Ashes On The Buddha: The Teachings Of Zen Master Seung Sahn



Synopsis

Somebody comes into the Zen center with a lighted cigarette, walks up to the Buddha statue, blows smoke in its face, and drops ashes on its lap. You are standing there. What can you do? This is a problem that Zen Master Seung Sahn is fond of posing to his American students who attend his Zen centers. Dropping Ashes on the Buddha is a delightful, irreverent, and often hilariously funny living record of the dialogue between Korean Zen Master Seung Sahn and his American students. Consisting of dialogues, stories, formal Zen interviews, Dharma speeches, and letters using the Zen Master's actual words in spontaneous, living interaction with his students, this book is a fresh presentation of the Zen teaching method of 'instant dialogue' between Master and student which, through the use of astonishment and paradox, leads to an understanding of ultimate reality.

Book Information

Paperback: 232 pages

Publisher: Grove Press; Reissue edition (February 18, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802130526

ISBN-13: 978-0802130525

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 5.5 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 63 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #38,535 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #43 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism > Zen > Spirituality #46 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism > Zen > Philosophy #7448 in Books > Religion & Spirituality

Customer Reviews

Consisting of dialogues, stories, formal Zen interviews, Dharma speeches, and letters using the Zen Master's actual words in spontaneous, living interaction with his students, Dropping Ashes on the Buddha is a fresh presentation of the Zen teaching method of 'instant dialogue' between Master and student that, through the use of astonishment and paradox, leads to an understanding of ultimate reality.

Echoing many other reviewers: this book is great. It's funny, it's serious. It's the voice of a Korean

Zen master who has just arrived in the US (written in 1977), just-learned English, who coins his own idioms to get things across. It does not at all read like a "spiritual" book, or like any other Zen book. It's as though the mind and spirit of Huck Finn were fused with a riddling chessmaster and used to present Zen. When I first read this - in 1979 - it was like: I've never seen anything remotely like this. I had read 2 or 3 Zen books previously - they seemed interesting but "normal" - whereas this was anything but normal. Only decades later - helped by Seung Sahn's later "Compass of Zen" and some about the Chinese and Korean antecedents - do I see how this fits. You can read this for the ideas, or the stories, or for the history (as a record of the arrival of a new religion from a very foreign shore). And for practise: his colorful English expressions (only go straight - don't know) are like "seeds" for meditation, aids to "cut off all thinking". So I found this useful as a meditation guide even though it does not give anything like formal instruction (the group's web site does, though). This is maybe more useful as a "second" book on eastern spirituality - after a "first" more conventional one. It also some tolerance for certain types of questions: when you see objects are they outside your mind or inside? (But these are meditation seeds, not philosophical treatises.). That's how I came to it - and found it fresh and compelling and unexpected.

Comprised of over a hundred personal letters, lectures, stories and anecdotes, this book is arranged in small chunks that make it easy to set aside, and then come back to later, or devour all at once. 'Dropping Ashes on the Buddha' gives an excellent description of Zen teaching, and the mindsets that come with different levels of understanding within the framework of Zen. It engages in active puzzle solving, using both ancient parables, humor and dharma speeches to convey how to use this puzzling to cut off thinking, and achieve a quieting of the mind. I give it five stars, because it gently explains, in plain English, some very subtle points of experience and understanding that have taken hundreds of masters many years to articulate. It is an enjoyable reading experience, despite the circular and repetitive nature of Zen teaching. I have read this book over and over, at different points in my life, and I have learned many things from it. I would recommend this book to beginners interested in Zen, and to people who have followed the path for a very long time. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in what Zen has to offer insofar as peace and the prospect of letting go are concerned.

Still reading it. I had heard through a podcast interview that this is one of the more accessible books on buddhism. It's good, with many toeholds that, if read carefully, can be picked out. I'm getting the feeling like this is one that will have to be read a few times to really allow the material to sink in. It's

a good book and I'm very happy with my purchase.

A good read that can get repetitive. Actually helped me meditate on my commute to and from work. Recommend to folks who are interested in a break from fiction or non-fiction.

Dropping was one of my favorite paperback books from a long time ago. I needed space but didn't want to give up the book. What to do? I found the kindle version and decided to give it a try. It's very good to have it in a way that is so portable and easy to access. What a boon: Buddhism+21st Century technology. I can actually not be attached to my Kindle, lose it and still find Master Seung Sahn 5 minutes later. I wonder if he'd whack me on the head for this review.

As with most books about Zen teaching, it often seems incomprehensible and puzzling. However, it deserves attention and contemplation.

This is a great book, I am really enjoying the teachings and humor in it. Very helpful to my practice.

This book is great! - and is that next step after you're done with "intro" booksI spent so much time reading "intro" books, and they've all been great - and I've been searching for that next level -- and I've either found books way to sophisticated for me - or that are transcripts of speeches/teachingsAgain, those are good - but I wanted a stepping stoneTHIS book is that stepping stone -- packed with stories, lessons, poems, letters and everything in between -- it's a great great book and not only teaches, but befriends --

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