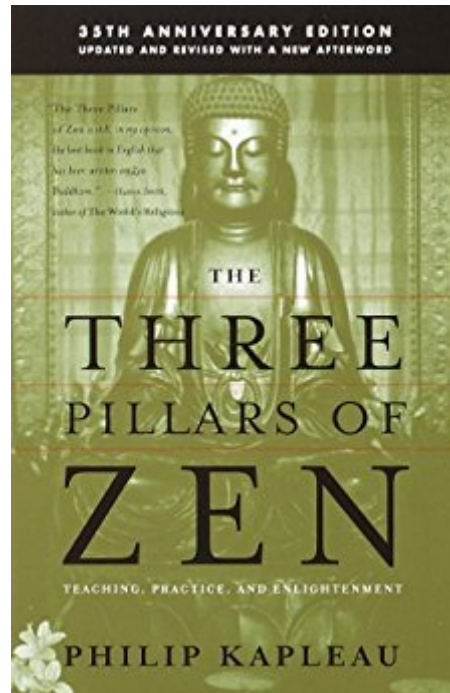




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The Three Pillars Of Zen



Synopsis

Through explorations of the three pillars of Zen--teaching, practice, and enlightenment--Roshi Philip Kapleau presents a comprehensive overview of the history and discipline of Zen Buddhism. An established classic, this 35th anniversary edition features new illustrations and photographs, as well as a new afterword by Sensei Bodhin Kjolhede, who has succeeded Philip Kapleau as spiritual director of the Rochester Zen Center, one of the oldest and most influential Zen centers in the United States.

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Customer Reviews

The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment by Philip Kapleau Now in a 35th Anniversary edition, The Three Pillars of Zen is generally regarded as the "classic" introduction to Zen Buddhism, and along with Shunryu Suzuki's Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, has probably helped more westerners begin Zen practice than any other book. The book is a collection of texts which describe Zen Buddhism as encountered by Philip Kapleau in Japan in the 1950's. Kapleau's transmission is Zen as it was taught in particular by Harada-Roshi and Yasutani-Roshi, a synthesis of both the Rinzai and Soto traditions. Harada's and Yasutani's school revitalized Zen in the

twentieth century, and their teaching is particularly relevant to Americans as many American Zen teachers today are of their lineage. The book is in three parts. Part One is titled "Teaching and Practice" and consists of Yasutani's Introductory Lectures on Zen Training (these alone are worth the price of the book), his Commentary (Teisho) on the Koan Mu, and records of his Private Encounters With Ten Westerners (in dokusan). These three sections provide the reader an idea of what Zen training is, how to begin, and hint at the flavor of the process as practiced in Yasutani's school. Part One concludes with a translation of a dharma talk and some letters by the 14th century Japanese master Bassui. Part Two is titled "Enlightenment" and consists of first-person descriptions of 20th century enlightenment (kensho) experiences. These descriptions are unique and fascinating, and bring the concept of enlightenment a personal relevance - it's not just something that was attained by ancient masters.

I have very mixed feelings about this book. It is the book which really brought me to spiritual practice; for that, I will always be grateful. It was, however, the same things about it which first drew me in, that I now find problematic. If you are at all open to practice it is hard not to find this book exciting. There is great drama in the stories of those struggling against all odds to achieve enlightenment. It is that sense of drama which I find problematic. There is a sense of striving encouraged by this book and practice at Rochester. Metaphors of climbing a mountain are used; we are encouraged to "push harder." But who is striving? There is an underlying sense of dualism in this flavor of practice. While that drama of achieving something is perhaps helpful for those difficult early stages of practice, it is ultimately a poison. Traditional Zen practice, such as that described here, pits you in a battle against your ego. Such warfare can, in the end, only be ego building. This is a modern Zen practice in that there is an explanation of the "theory" of practice. At one time you just sat, heard talks on Koans, and had very brief interviews with your teacher. Eventually, you would either get it or not (mostly not, I believe). Of course, in that more historically traditional practice you would have been a monk totally removed from the concerns of the day-to-day world. I think that the practice described by Kapleau Roshi is still too close to those traditional monastic roots. My experience at traditional Zen Centers is that they are beautiful and that meditation practice there has a sense of perceptible strength-it seems quite grounded. The trouble comes when people are off the cushions.

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