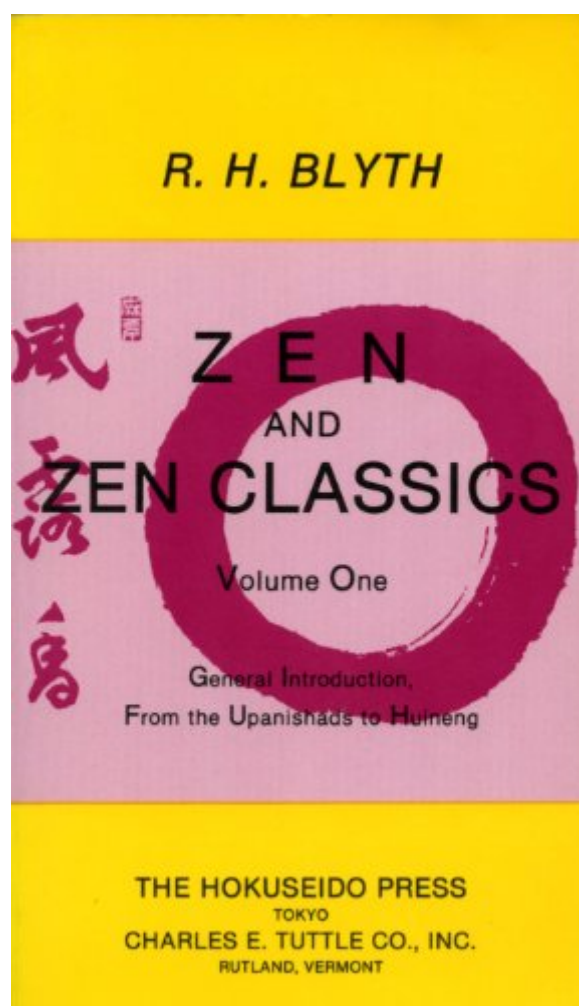


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Zen And Zen Classics Volume 1: From The Upanishads To Huineng (Zen & Zen Classics)



Synopsis

This is not a dry scholarly book on Zen. It is a fascinating introduction into a study of self-enlightenment and inner reason that has been a driving force of all Japanese culture. Written by Reginal Horace Blyth (1898-1964) this is a volume free of the dry pedantry that has hobbled so many well meaning French and English studies of Zen. It is free also of the breathless mystery-mongering that unfortunately has bloated American Zen. Blyth reads easily. The questions he poses; the views he offers....all lead to a sense of inner self and an awakening of an awareness of the surrounding universe and one's relationship to it. After discussing "What is Zen?" (and what isn't) Blyth sketches a history of Zen dating from 1000 B.C. to 715 A.D., the year of the death of the Sixth patriarch, Huineg. With a historical background thus established, Blyth next provides translations and commentary on some of the most important and basic Zen literature in existence. For the Zen initiate then, this book is an excellent beginning. For the practitioner, further meaningful revelations await.

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Customer Reviews

The other volumes of Blyth are very hard to get. The collection of writings and extracts does a good

job of condensing the essence of those volumes. The flavor of the writings is what I would call "Zen existentialism". I read the book from cover to cover with rapt attention about 25 years ago. What I got from the writings was about accepting myself and life as it is, meeting it directly, and cutting through every kind of theory to be with what really is. The gift of Zen is that, while emerging from the very heart of what Buddha taught, cuts through even the words of the Buddha to what he saw and even more important than what he saw is what we actually see, right here and right now.

Franck's "Zen and Zen Classics" is his editing of the writings of R. H. Blyth on Ch'an/Zen, which are otherwise out of print. It is a great book, specially since it contains the only in-print works of Blyth, who, Franck says, is the indispensable interpreter of Zen for the western mind, and that Blyth is the ever-open eye. This is a great book, and can lead to even greater ones by Blyth---if only they would print more.

This slim volume (123 pages) is the first of the five masterly volumes that R.H. Blyth wrote on the zen classics. It was published in 1960 by Hokuseido Press in Japan. Blyth first asks, What is Zen? Then proceeds with a discussion of zen history from 1000BC to 750AD. He follows this with discourses on The Hsinhsinming (Shinjinmei), The Chengtaoke and the Platform Sutra. Throughout the book Blyth approaches zen with a clear, uncluttered mind, his clarity and sense of humour shine throughout this lucidly written book. I would urge all of you who are interested in Oriental literature to write to Hokusiedo and ask them to republish this splendid series of books."The blind one found the jewel;The one without fingers picked it up;The one with no neck put it on;And the one with no voice praised it."

I had the pleasure to get my hands on the paper print text of this volume by Blyth. In a very approachable language, he freely cites authors from both the West and East, in realms of poetry, music, literature and theatre, to explain Zen classics such as HsinHsinMing. After very detailed interpretation of every line, Blyth translates the body of HsinHsinMing, by which time you already had a primary understanding of every verse. Every author carries his own identification with him in his words, and Blyth, as a Briton, carries the religion of the Christ. I do not have a deep understanding of Christianity, so every time he compares Christ to Buddha, I mentally skip the deep understanding of the Christ, but he gave me a better understanding of both religions nonetheless. (or, is it truly TWO religions after all?)

I first learned of RH Blythe through his translation's cameo appearance in the work of JD Salinger. The haiku that appeared had such grace and humor that I rarely find in haiku or their translations. I went out and got a book of haiku and realized the the same haiku in this other text had none of the joy and jump of Blythe's translation. I sought out this book and was surprised by what a humorous, thoughtful, incisive, graceful writer he was. The closest approximation I have for how incredible is RH Blythe in his scholarship on Zen and Zen literature is Tom Robbins (which feels odd even as I write it, but true.) There is never a false word and whenever he encounters falseness in literature, religion, philosophy he is very quick in exposing it. He avoids the lotusy perfume of Eastern exoticism, maintaining a firm understanding of Western philosophy, seamlessly melding it with its Eastern counterparts, as Zen itself is less an emanation from the East but a perfect joy in all things, regardless of its compass point. Blythe's truly a Zen master. Because his books were published by a relatively obscure English-language press in Japan, his books are quite rare. This anthology is the only inexpensive book you'll be able to find on this truly luminous writer.

Franck's "Zen and Zen Classics" is his editing of the writings of R. H. Blyth on Ch'an/Zen, which are otherwise out of print. It is a great book, specially since it contains the only in-print works of Blyth, who Franck says is the indispensable interpreter of Zen for the western mind, and that Blyth is the ever-open eye. This is a great book, and can lead to even greater ones by Blyth---if only they would print more.

This book truly changed my life.. it open my eyes to the things that were already there all along.. if you are looking for yourself, start here...

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