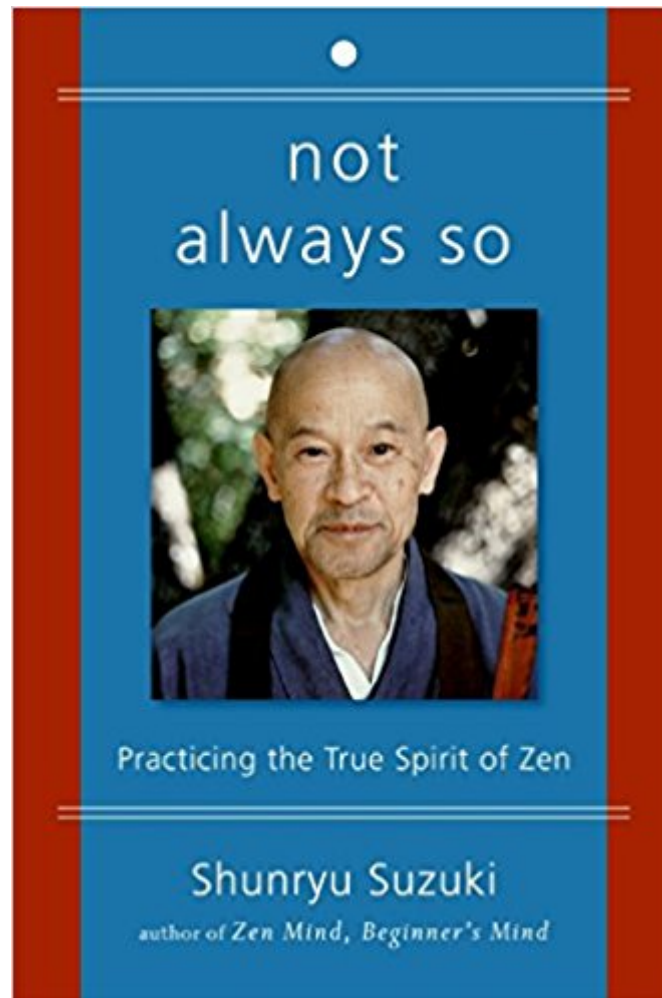




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Not Always So: Practicing The True Spirit Of Zen



Synopsis

Practising the true spirit of Zen. Not Always So is based on Shunryu Suzuki's lectures and is framed in his own inimitable, allusive, paradoxical style, rich with unexpected and offbeat "centre insights. Suzuki knew he was dying at the time of the lectures, which gives his thoughts an urgency and focus even sharper than in the earlier book. In Not Always So Suzuki once again voices Zen in everyday language with the vigour, sensitivity, and buoyancy of a true friend. Here is support and nourishment. Here is a mother and father lending a hand, but letting you find your own way. Here is guidance which empowers your freedom (or way of "seeking mind), rather than pinning you down to directions and techniques. Here is teaching which encourages you to touch and know your true heart and to express yourself fully, teaching which is not teaching from outside, but a voice arising in your own being.

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Customer Reviews

If you can imagine Zen Existentialism, Not Always So is it. Part instruction manual for Zen practice and part philosophical meditation, Shunryu Suzuki's teachings emphasize being-in-the-world. He does not point toward a singular enlightenment-event as a burst into higher consciousness. Rather, he suggests a more experiential enlightenment that finds meaning in a full awareness of the present. For example: "If you go to the rest room, there is a chance for enlightenment. When you cook, there is a chance for enlightenment. When you clean the floor, there is a chance to attain enlightenment." Shunryu Suzuki was an important emissary of Zen Buddhism to the United States.

Establishing a Zen center in San Francisco in the 1960s, he attracted many noted pupils, including this book's editor, Edward Espe Brown. In fact, *Not Always So* is Brown's collection of Suzuki's teachings during his last years, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. No doubt some readers will want to wrestle with the often paradoxical nature of Zen teachings. And those from the Western philosophical tradition may find vast differences between the Western system that takes its cue from Descartes' cogito and the Eastern one that emphasizes the destruction of the ego. Says Suzuki: "It is just your mind that says you are here and I am there, that's all. Originally we are one with everything." While the book does not wrestle with cultural-philosophical differences, it is nevertheless a good introduction to Zen. Suzuki's teachings tend to flow from simple stories, usually drawn from his own experiences. It's almost entirely free of the jargon that clutters many books on Buddhism, and the teachings are communicated with clarity and brevity. --Eric de Place --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Contrary to Zen's principle of "nothing special," Brown (*The Tassajara Bread Book*; *Tassajara Cooking*) has indeed produced something very special: an edited collection of talks by beloved Zen Master Shunryu Suzuki, who died in 1971. It is impossible to overestimate the sustained impact of Suzuki's 1970 classic, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, a world-renowned bestseller. Brown, ordained by Suzuki in 1971 after six years of study under him, has edited transcriptions that both read well on the page and capture the style, humor and solid grasp evident in the first volume. But this is no *Zen Mind* sequel, and will prove highly valuable to anyone, rank novice or zazen master. These 35 talks, delivered shortly before Suzuki's death from cancer, sparkle with simple freshness and familiarity: "Our tendency is to be interested in something that is growing in the garden, not in the bare soil itself. But if you want to have a good harvest, the most important thing is to make the soil rich and cultivate it well. The Buddha's teaching is not about the food itself but about how it is grown, and how to take care of it." Suzuki's messages are like deceptive pools of water, shimmering with surface possibilities that provoke stronger swimmers to aim for the depths. Suzuki, too, beckons us to the deeper reaches of learning, becoming "a wise, warm-hearted friend, [and] an unseen companion in the dark." Again we are blessed with more of his superb vision.- an unseen companion in the dark." Again we are blessed with more of his superb vision. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a wonderful, inspiring and touching book. Many have compared it to *Zen Mind, Beginner's*

Mind by Suzuki Roshi, which is also a deeply moving and inspiring book, but I think Ed Brown's selection of lectures by Suzuki Roshi is actually quite different in style and nuance from the first book. In Zen, it is always tricky to compare things, but in many ways I found this book more advanced than Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind...perhaps aimed at students who have been practicing for some time. I loved Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, so don't take my comment as a criticism of it; it is a genuinely life-changing book. So is "Not Always So"; but I think it's life-changing in a somewhat different way, a subtle but perceptible difference.

I first read this book 10 years ago when I began sitting. Indeed the book encouraged me to just start. Fast forward 10 years later and it is still a powerful companion. I've read other books, listened to other talks, even "hopped around" from place to place as I continued "seeking"....but no one gets to the heart of the matter the way Suzuki Roshi does. He is funny, gentle, direct, and compassionate. He makes it clear. And you can feel the spirit in it. In the book he talks about eventually sitting with great Zen masters. Sit with everything. Wow. It's not just talk. Master or student, get it and find out for yourself. It can change your life. It certainly changed mine...and continues to do so every moment.

I am very new to Zen and have read several books on the subject. I have practiced zazen for a little while, so I am, by no means, advanced on the subject of Zen and zazen meditation. This book is geared more for those who are more advanced into the world of Zen and Buddhism than I am as there are a lot of things written that I really don't understand (I know that's somewhat Zen in and of itself), but seriously there are better books for beginners. Hopefully in a few years I can pick this book back up and get more out of it. That being said, the essays are short and wonderful and even though I didn't "get" all of them, there were a lot of great little nuggets inside. For the price, this book is packed with great stuff, I'm just not sure it's for beginners.

Ed Brown definitely knows Master Suzuki's heart. And he presents the warm heart of his master in a logical and progressive ordering of a few of Suzuki's lectures. After 30 years of daily meditation (15 in the style of Monk Dogen) and always failing to reach calmness of mind in every session, a book like this gives a nugget of hope. For example: specifically, on page 6 of the Chapter on "Calmness of Mind," it offers: "Exhaling, you gradually fade into emptiness--empty, white paper." This is as clear as it gets; the essence of the connection between breath, body, mind and emptiness. Thank you very much. Other concepts are also explained nicely. For example: Suzuki explains the meaning of the

koan of "Jumping Off the 100-foot Pole," starting at page 16. (Myself, I've never really understood this one. I've always pictured myself reaching the top of the Pole and then trying to decide what to do next.) Suzuki explains that this is precisely where I make my big mistake--stopping at the top of the pole and thinking. He says that the secret is just to say "Yes!" and jump off from there--forget the top of the pole and extend your practice. One last example: In the Chapter "Stand Up by the Ground" (page 139) Suzuki explains "Immo," which can also mean a questioning, "What is this?" A very subtle point here. "What" or "It" is both something very definite ("What" is "it"? may refer to that specific table right over there, and at the same time something beyond description and comprehension, maybe this table has only one leg and functions more like a chair and is merely drawn by an artist to symbolize some basic human emotion.) Oh boy, my mind really runs wild with kind of "stuff." Maybe Ed Brown will write a new book, giving his own commentary on these concepts. Didn't Zen successors always write commentaries on scriptures? Well, maybe "not always so." Yet this book is like a Zen scripture. Thank you very much Mr Brown.

These teachings are what we have come to love about Suzuki. Clear, understandable, compassionate and sometimes humorous. One can hear his enjoyment of the teaching even through the written word. The closing of each 'talk' with the words "Thank you very much" convey so well the humility within which his wisdom is imparted. A beautiful set of talks for both beginner and experienced students of Buddhism.

The real deal. Short, simple, thought provoking. Doesn't tell you what to think or do, but simply opens the door and allows you to see in. Everyone should read it.

Suzuki Roshi always presented himself, though a priest, as a simple, common man. Reading his words, one realizes he was anything but common. He had a way of condensing the seemingly complex matters of life and spirituality down into brilliantly concise, eye-opening statements. He presented hundreds of short talks during his time in California, of which this and other of 'his' books are condensations. Not all of his words and ideas hold you perfectly entranced, but the gems are hiding in there, and well worth the searching. If you are looking for a guide back to infinite being - Suzuki Roshi is one of the few in which you can have absolute trust and confidence.

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