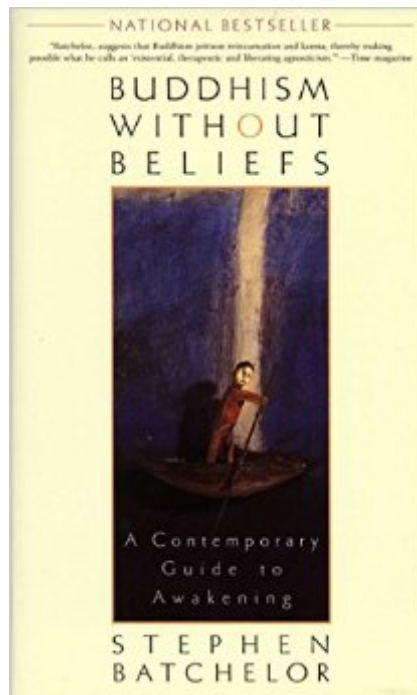


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# Buddhism Without Beliefs: A Contemporary Guide To Awakening



## Synopsis

A national bestseller and an acclaimed guide to Buddhism for beginners and practitioners alike. In this simple but important volume, Stephen Batchelor reminds us that the Buddha was not a mystic who claimed privileged, esoteric knowledge of the universe, but a man who challenged us to understand the nature of anguish, let go of its origins, and bring into being a way of life that is available to us all. The concepts and practices of Buddhism, says Batchelor, are not something to believe in but something to do—and as he explains clearly and compellingly, it is a practice that we can engage in, regardless of our background or beliefs, as we live every day on the path to spiritual enlightenment.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this wonderful, concise introduction, Batchelor has captured the essence of the Buddha's teachings. By going directly to the source and peeling away the accumulated dogma of various traditions, he makes Buddhism relevant for our time. He shows how, despite the Buddha's wishes, over time Buddhism became a religion and an institution unto itself. Of course, rigid doctrinaire thinkers like Bob Thurman will see red when they read Batchelor's simple wisdom, which eliminates the need for hocus-pocus and a priestly class. Batchelor even questions the need for belief in karma and reincarnation, long accepted as essential Buddhist beliefs. Batchelor presents his ideas in simple, but not simplistic, prose, with easy-to-grasp examples. His credentials as a Buddhist and a scholar are beyond reproach, and while others may disagree, no one can question his seriousness and authority. Unlike self-styled gurus and flim-flam artists like "Lama Surya Das" (Jeffrey Miller), Batchelor is not interested in self-aggrandizement; merely in conveying his ideas. He succeeds

admirably in this book. Highly recommended.

I ordered this book based on the review here by "Dr. of Buddhology and author of 6 books on Buddhism; Dr. S. A." His attack on it, and the reasons he gave for that, were more persuasive than any of the positive reviews in convincing me that I should read this book. Whenever anyone says, in effect, "Don't think for yourself--just follow Scripture," I've usually found it a good idea to do the opposite. And as usual, I'm very glad I did. Buddhism has taken on radically different forms in every culture in which it has taken root. Is Agnostic Buddhism one of the forms it will take in the West? I think it's likely. Many Westerners who are turning to Buddhism are agnostic, and stripped of the non-essentials (most of which were added long after the Buddha's death), Buddhism is a very appealing path. But so far, I have encountered little but New Age dilettantes and guru/student fundamentalists, two extremes that do not appeal to me at all. Here in Japan, I've met some very nice priests and monks, but practice has so far seemed quite ossified and hierarchical, something that really seems, well, very un-Buddhist to me. And then along comes Batchelor's book, a breath of fresh air. This is just what I've been looking for. EDIT 4 April 2012: I recently read Batchelor's *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture*, and I can strongly recommend that as well!

Mr. Batchelor's dual background - first as a Tibetan monk and translator then later as a Korean Zen monk - gives him two eyes to see Buddhism with. It gives him cross-cultural depth perception that allows him to see the essence of awakening separate from the cultures that encrust it. Perhaps that helps him write such a succinct, clear, and radiant book. It's odd that Batchelor is an unwitting lightning-rod for the Buddhist religious right. (Bet you didn't think that was even POSSIBLE, did you?! Surprise! Sadly, Buddhism isn't all that different from any other religion.) He doesn't attack their beliefs. He stays in the vast middle and says that he honestly doesn't know. When I saw him lecture, I saw a student of Thinley Norbu's stand up and beg him to believe in rebirth! It was like watching a fundamentalist Christian begging someone to accept Jesus as his personal savior, as though Buddhism was about embracing the right conceptual beliefs. It was the oddest and saddest thing! Why bother becoming a Buddhist if you're going to behave like that? He handled it with great patience and compassion, I thought. I asked him about it afterwards and apparently it happens to him all the time! Wonderful book.

It seems to me that many of the criticisms of this book here (and elsewhere) come from Buddhist

who are offended at Batchelor's "corruption" of their sacred teachings. However, I think this book targets people whose desire is to find out how the teachings of Buddhism could benefit their lives without necessarily being "Buddhists". That is to say that a non-Christian could, for example, find many of the teachings of Christ very enlightening and beneficial, without accepting all of the tenets of the Christian church. Batchelor provides this point of view regarding Buddhism. He provides the framework for the secular philosopher to incorporate much that is wonderful about Buddhism into their daily lives while not requiring faith or adherence to any specific religious dogma. But there is nothing in this book that would hinder the person so inclined from pursuing Buddhism from a religious standpoint. Again by analogy, I could envision a secular title promoting many of the teachings of Christ (such as turning the other cheek) while saying that it is possible to follow these teachings without buying into all the stuff about virgin birth and heaven and hell. Such a title might enrage a certain type of Christian, but would be a breath of fresh air to those of us who don't wish to "throw the baby out with the bath water" when it comes to a critical examination of Christianity. Batchelor's book does this for Buddhist teaching. I do have some criticisms of this book; Batchelor makes some points that I would have preferred he address differently. But I have strongly urged many friends and loved ones to read it. I can give a book no higher praise than that.

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