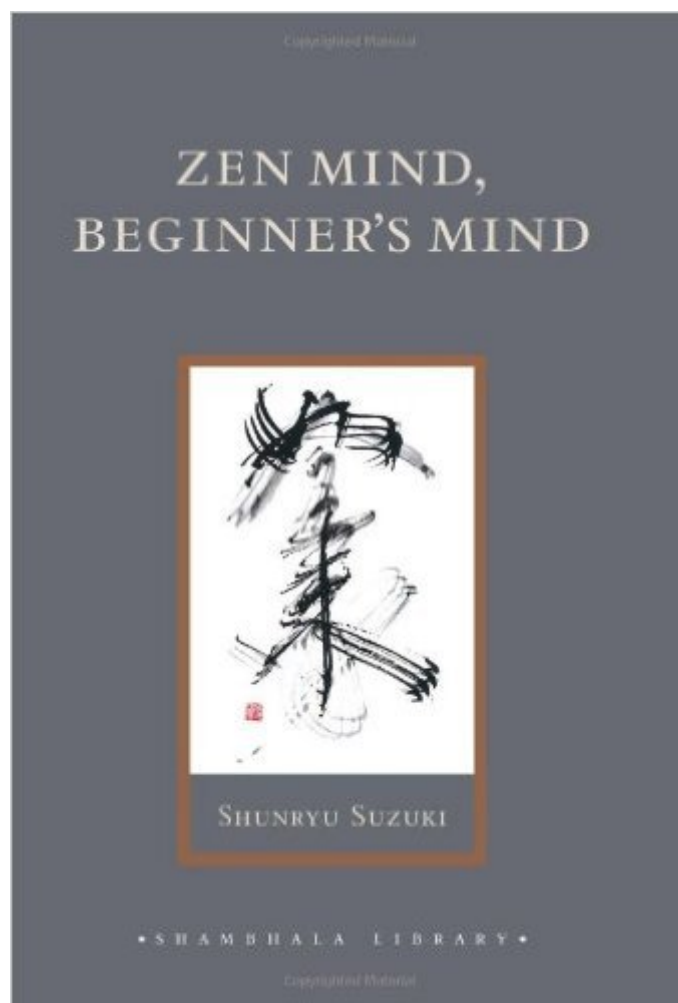


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Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind (Shambhala Library)



Synopsis

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few." So begins this most beloved of all American Zen books. Seldom has such a small handful of words provided a teaching as rich as has this famous opening line of Shunryu Suzuki's classic. In a single stroke, the simple sentence cuts through the pervasive tendency students have of getting so close to Zen as to completely miss what it's all about. An instant teaching on the first page. And that's just the beginning. In the thirty years since its original publication, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* has become one of the great modern Zen classics, much beloved, much re-read, and much recommended as the best first book to read on Zen. Suzuki Roshi presents the basics "from the details of posture and breathing in zazen to the perception of nonduality" in a way that is not only remarkably clear, but that also resonates with the joy of insight from the first to the last page. It's a book to come back to time and time again as an inspiration to practice.

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Customer Reviews

This is a collection of talks by one of the first Zen teachers in the U.S. If you're already practicing Zen, I highly recommend this book. If you're new to Zen, you might love this book or you might find it largely incomprehensible, or maybe both. Suzuki makes liberal use of the paradoxical language that is typical of Zen--e.g., "For us, complete perfection is not different from imperfection. The eternal exists because of non-eternal existence." If you'd prefer a more ordinary, explanatory style, I

recommend Charlotte Joko Beck's "Everyday Zen." If you're looking for practical instruction in Zen meditation, you'll find it in "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind," but you might prefer either Philip Kapleau's "The Three Pillars of Zen," which includes more detailed instructions and illustrations of sitting postures, or Cheri Huber's instructional video "The Secret Is There Are No Secrets." When I first read "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind," for a college class on Buddhism, I wasn't quite sure what to make of it, but I did end up practicing Zen, and maybe this book had something to do with that. For many years, even while living at a Zen monastery, I suspected that a lot of the enthusiasm for this book was an "emperor's new clothes" phenomenon: a few respected people said it was wonderful, so then everybody said it was wonderful. I figured its aura of profundity was due in large part to Suzuki's congruence with our archetype of mountaintop gurus--the short sentences and limited English vocabulary, and the paradoxical language that sounds deep even though nobody actually knows what the heck it means. More recently, I've come to think that the emperor really does have clothes and that the big issues of human life are hard to talk about without paradox, and this is now one of my favorite Zen books.

This book took me out of the maze of faith-based religion and for the first time I found a teacher and a philosophy with so much credibility I had the confidence to trust in the more esoteric aspects of a teaching that weren't initially obvious. Suzuki, and I assume Zen in general, has the wisdom and courage to acknowledge that there are things about our universe that we cannot comprehend and treat them as both beautiful and mysterious. This contrasts with faith-based religions which instruct us to accept notions of "gods" and elaborate tales for explanation and as such are a complete assault on and violation of the intellect. Zen outlook which does away with the largely western notions of right & wrong, past and future, and states of lack will put one squarely in the present tense from moment to moment. It is utterly refreshing and healthy to look at the universe through glasses which are not colored by human desire and ego. Read this book, gain an understanding of yourself, an appreciation for the universe as a whole and piece of mind. Namaste

I do not want to detract from this book's worth or wisdom in any way. No doubt the glowing reviews reflect the book's significance to the lives of those who have read and UNDERSTOOD it. My only caveat is that for complete novices--like myself--the title is misleading, and therefore the book's teachings were not very accessible to me. The term "beginner's mind," as used in this work, refers to the idea of maintaining an open, childlike mind, and never acting or feeling as though one has ACHIEVED enlightenment. Be always searching, always growing. "Beginner's mind" should NOT be

taken as an indication that this is a book for those like myself who are newcomers to the study of Zen (i.e. "beginners"). Maybe you're an "old soul," but new to Zen, in which case, you may get more out of this book than I currently do. As someone who instinctively feels that Zen has something BIG to offer me if only I can understand what the hell the books on Zen are talking about, this is NOT a good introduction. Zen terminology is thrown around as though I already know what the terms mean. The description of poses (without benefit of pictures) is confusing, and I must admit that I [shallowly?] found myself ticked off: if I couldn't figure out a stinking pose (or even get BEYOND the fact that I couldn't figure it out), how on earth was I "deep enough" to get my foot on the path to enlightenment? For anyone who, like myself, needs something a little more concrete to get me started, something I can sink my literal Western teeth into, this ain't the book! I believe I personally need something a little less esoteric to start with, a book that bridges the gap between my VERY literal-minded Western upbringing and the much LESS literal mindset required of adherents of eastern religion/philosophy. I also believe that if I am able to bridge that gap (using other resources), THEN I will be able to appreciate this book's teachings and will certainly come back to it.

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