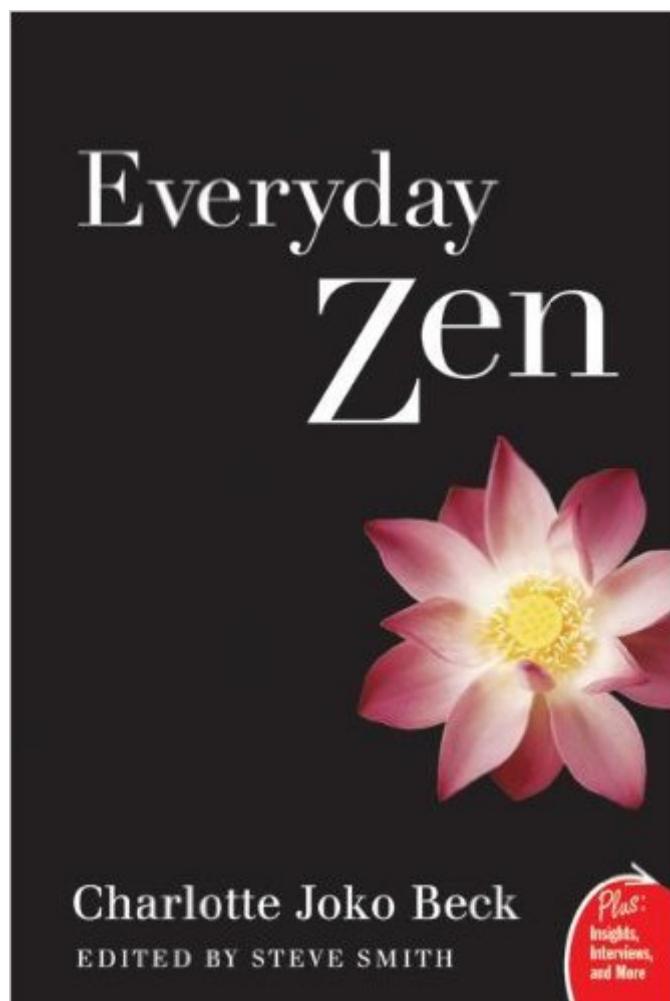


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Everyday Zen: Love And Work (Plus)



Synopsis

Charlotte Joko Beck offers a warm, engaging, uniquely American approach to using Zen to deal with the problems of daily living—“love, relationships, work, fear, ambition, and suffering. Everyday Zen shows us how to live each moment to the fullest. This Plus edition includes an interview with the author.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is one of my favorite books on Zen. Charlotte Joko Beck was the founder and resident Zen teacher of the Zen Center of San Diego, and "Everyday Zen" is a collection of her talks. Joko speaks about Zen in an ordinary, conversational, down-to-earth way--as opposed to the paradoxical, poetic, non-logical style often found in Zen--and she explicitly relates Zen to everyday life. For Joko, Zen is about being OK with everything, an OK-ness that does not imply fatalism, passivity, or an absence of feelings. She says: "For something to be OK, it doesn't mean that I don't scream or cry or protest or hate it. . . . What is the enlightened state? When there is no longer any separation between myself and the circumstances of my life, whatever they may be, that is it." While this book is a good one for newcomers to Zen--and for old-timers too--it does not include nitty-gritty beginning instruction in Zen meditation, so for that you'll need to look elsewhere. (I'd recommend the book "The Three Pillars of Zen," the video "The Secret Is There Are No Secrets," or a Zen center.) This is not the best Zen book for everyone. When you're in a swamp of existential angst,

desperately wanting to know that peace and joy can be found within this fleeting life so full of suffering--exactly the issues Zen addresses--Joko's "everyday" approach can be exasperating and can seem not to address those issues, and you might prefer "The Three Pillars of Zen" or "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind." I appreciate Joko's wariness of leading us astray with images of "enlightenment," which is so easily misunderstood as a thing we can achieve that will make our lives perfect at last, but sometimes I want more reminders than Joko offers that our life can be utterly transformed (while still being the same old, imperfect life).

Joko Beck's thesis is a simple one: That life, just as it is at any moment, is all that it can be and therefore is perfect. Pointing again and again to the troubles we cause ourselves by living life not in the moment, but out of a confused fog of fantasies and "what ifs," Beck challenges us to divest ourselves of our mental defense mechanisms and dare to be OK with life as it is. Yet she is a compassionate teacher, intimately familiar with human weaknesses and struggles, and she extends one hand of comfort even as the other hand pulls the rug out from under our feet. Perhaps the only shortcoming of this book is that it is much more clear about the "deconstructive" aspect of Zen practice than about exploring the ultimate manifestations and benefits of enlightenment. Knowing her aversion to "holding out cookies," however, this absence is understandable.

I purchased this book back in 1992, got half-way through it, couldn't understand it, and put it down to read other things and go on with my life of everyday living, thinking, worrying, etc. that we all do in our lives. Not until a crisis of sorts came up in my life did I pick it up again. This time, it all made sense. Living life in the present moment, right here, now. Working at being less judgemental. Not looking for 'happiness' and instead finding joy in everyday life. I know it sounds like a lot of BS, but something changed after the second reading of this book, and now mundane aspects of my job are just me doing my work. I haven't changed religions, haven't joined a cult, haven't even attended a 'zendo' or 'sesshin.' But something has changed since reading this book. It could be the thing that changes your life, too. I know I've got a long way to go, but what a start! The companion second book by Joko is also highly recommended.

I remember buying "Everyday Zen" in 1990 because of Robert Aitken's recommendation on the back cover. Still, I was pretty overloaded with Zen books; this one collected dust for a few months. When I finally did open it I was amazed; this was the first time I had encountered the radical suggestion: OUR LIFE IS OUR PRACTICE!!! It was a real eye opener. I reread it three or four times

in a row. My teachers in Rochester were pretty unimpressed; they thought that Joko was for people "who weren't ready for Zen." (One of them really did say that!) I thought otherwise; her work addressed the disconnect between a practice created for those in monasteries and the "self-centered dream" of our lives. It baffled me that people would be having "openings" in the Zendo and then treat their family like dirt after a retreat. She taught that working with our family "issues" was not something separate than our practice on the cushions in the meditation hall. No duality. I ended up working with Joko for about five years. She was (and is) every bit as remarkable in real life as she was in her book. There isn't a lot of drama in this practice. Our life becomes less of a soap opera and becomes more mundane. From that ordinariness emerge joy, compassion, love and all of the other aspects of our true nature. You might have fewer of the kind of lightening bolts of a traditional practice. Instead, you will have a grounded life which brings peace rather than pain into this world.

I've read quite a few books over the past few months in my search to "understand Zen" (yes, I *know* that's a contradiction in terms!). But "Everyday Zen" is really the first that helped me see how Zen can operate in the midst of my modern American life -- outside of a monastic environment, dealing with business and family and the other assorted miseries of the late 20th century. Her style is forthright and no-nonsense; excuse the sexism, but it's almost as if you had a plain-spoken old aunt who simply told you the truth about the birds and the bees when everyone else was hemming and hawing and quoting Robert Browning. I recommend this book HIGHLY to anyone new to Zen who struggles, as I do, with how to place it into a modern context

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