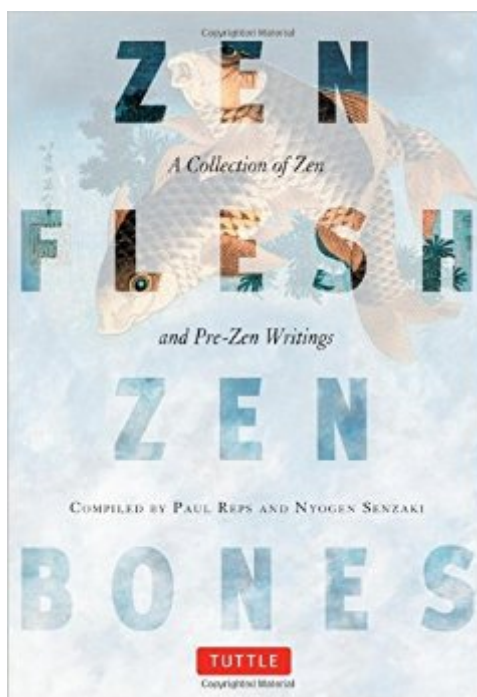


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# Zen Flesh Zen Bones: A Collection Of Zen And Pre-Zen Writings



## Synopsis

When *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* was published in 1957 it became an instant sensation with an entire generation of readers who were just beginning to experiment with Zen. Over the years it has inspired leading American Zen teachers, students, and practitioners. Its popularity is as strong today as ever. *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* is a book that offers a collection of accessible, primary Zen sources so that readers can struggle over the meaning of Zen for themselves. It includes 101 Zen Stories, a collection of tales that recount actual experiences of Chinese and Japanese Zen teachers over a period of more than five centuries; *The Gateless Gate*, the famous thirteenth century collection of Zen koans; *Ten Bulls*, a twelfth century commentary on the stages of awareness leading to enlightenment; and *Centering*, a 4,000 year-old teaching from India that some consider to be the roots of Zen.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Of all books about Zen, this is most unassuming I've seen. There is no theory or abridged version of zen philosophy. The stories are carefully chosen and gracefully translated. They leave the reader in a state of wonder, curiosity and puzzlement. What I liked in this book is that it is not trying to educate the reader by teaching him a doctrine. It seems to me that it is true to the zen spirit in this respect. A little literary gem.

This may be the most beloved of all Zen books in English. It is a little volume to treasure, to reread

and to ponder, to take delight in and to laugh at and laugh with. It is a compilation of four smaller books: First there are 101 Zen stories. These are the best and most classic of the stories, many of them so familiar that they are now part of American culture as well as Zen culture. The stories constitute lessons in life, insights into our nature and ways to enlightenment or how one has wandered off the path--or better yet, how there is no path and no wandering. Unlike many Zen tales, which can be deeply mystifying to non-initiates, most of the ones presented here are luminous. Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki, who are the transcribers, begin with the famous tale of Zen master Nan-in overflowing a visiting professor's tea cup to illustrate how filled the professor is with himself, so filled he cannot learn anything new. Included are two of my favorites, (1) that of Tanzan and Ekido, the former a monk who carried a pretty girl across a muddy road and his monastic friend who could not let go of her in his mind; and (2) the parable attributed to the Buddha about a man hanging over a cliff holding onto a vine being gnawed on by two mice (one black and one white--yin and yang, perhaps), with a tiger above and another below, and a luscious strawberry. How sweet it tasted indeed! By the way I have recently learned that a variant of this story comes from the Mahabharata as reported by Georg Feuerstein in *The Essence of Yoga* (1974). There the mice are rats (still black and white) and the man is hanging from a tree over a pit in which waits a giant serpent. He is drinking honey. Next there is a presentation of the Buddhist classic about koans, their answers, and a commentary called "The Gateless Gate" by the Chinese master Ekai (also known as Mu-mon, 1183-1260 c.e.). The spirit of "The Gateless Gate" is irreverent and mischievous. The central idea is that the truth lies somewhere beyond the thesis and the antithesis--or, that which can be said and that which cannot be said do not include the whole of it. Most of Mu-mon's comments are deliberately non-rational, but here is one in the form of a poem that expresses the essence of Zen in a nutshell: It is too clear and so it is hard to see. A dunce once searched for a fire with a lighted lantern. Had he known what fire was, He could have cooked his rice much sooner. The third book is the famous search for the bull from Taoism which ends in no bull, no search--all transcended, which is an allegory of life and a symbolic representation of learning to meditate. Zen has added here two extra frames which I will not comment on. The fourth book is something Reps calls "Centering" from an ancient Sanskrit manuscript. It is said to be four thousand years old and purports to be Shiva guiding Devi in enlightenment. There are 112 ways. Its yoga-becoming-Zen feel is really startling. Here are three examples: 8. Attention between eyebrows, let mind be before thought. Let form fill with breath-essence to the top of the head, and there .15. Intone a sound, as a-u-m, slowly. As sound enters soundfulness, .26. Unminding mind, keep in the middle--. The book title comes from a story about the first Zen patriarch, Bodhidharma, who rewarded a couple of his

disciples for their apperception by saying the one has his flesh and the other had his bones. A third monk won the "contest" by remaining silent. About him, Bodhidharma said, "you have my marrow." All four books are wonderful, and there is not a speck of dust on any page.--Dennis Littrell, author of "Yoga: Sacred and Profane (Beyond Hatha Yoga)"

I am sure the Zen masters of this book, would give me a whack on the side of my head, for writing a review, but here goes. The book brings together 4 original Zen sources. The first, 101 Zen stories, presents koans and parables. These can be confusing and amusing, such as the Sound of One Hand Clapping, and One-finger Zen. The Gateless Gate, by Mumonkan, further adds to the syncopation, by offering seemingly random arguments about some of the koans, and then concludes with a Zen students criticism of the rascal Mumonkan. So, the first two sections may be a multiple layered koan ... and one is left mildly uneasy about the use of words for teaching Zen. The 10 Bulls section and the Woodblock illustrations are beautiful poetry, more accessible, and metaphors for the stages of enlightenment. Finally, Centering, is a transcript of a pre-Zen document, 4000 years old from Kashmir. It is surprising Zen like, for example a favorite: "When in worldly activity, keep attentive between the two breaths, and so practicing, in a few days be born anew" . A great source book, without interpretation.

Zen Flesh, Zen Bones To a student of Zen, it is unnecessary to introduce this book. For those folks reading about Zen for the first time, this is a collection of Zen and Pre-Zen writings. For the greater part, it allows you to explore with your own mind these great insights without a lot of left-brain interference. Oh yes, you get clues but no answers, because these must come from the fusion of the neurons in your own brain. I will have to admit that I no longer lend this book to anyone. It never comes back. My copy is old and has notations on every page, thoughts that occurred to me. While I was reading it for the first time a few years back, I had a dream. In the dream, I entered an ancient house and walked down into the black basement. As I opened each of a series of doors in this darkness, I would reach for the light in the center of the room. Light after light popped on. I am sure I do not have to interpret this dream for you. That is exactly what happened to the darkness in my mind: light after light illuminated my world. I was so excited I could hardly breathe. It was the beginning of a long flight towards freedom. The greatest part of this is you do not have to learn to meditate. Each teaching brings you closer and closer to solving the problem of your mind, that is, relating conscious to preconscious awareness, into your every day living. It offers the flesh and bones of Zen. The marrow is your discovery of yourself.

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