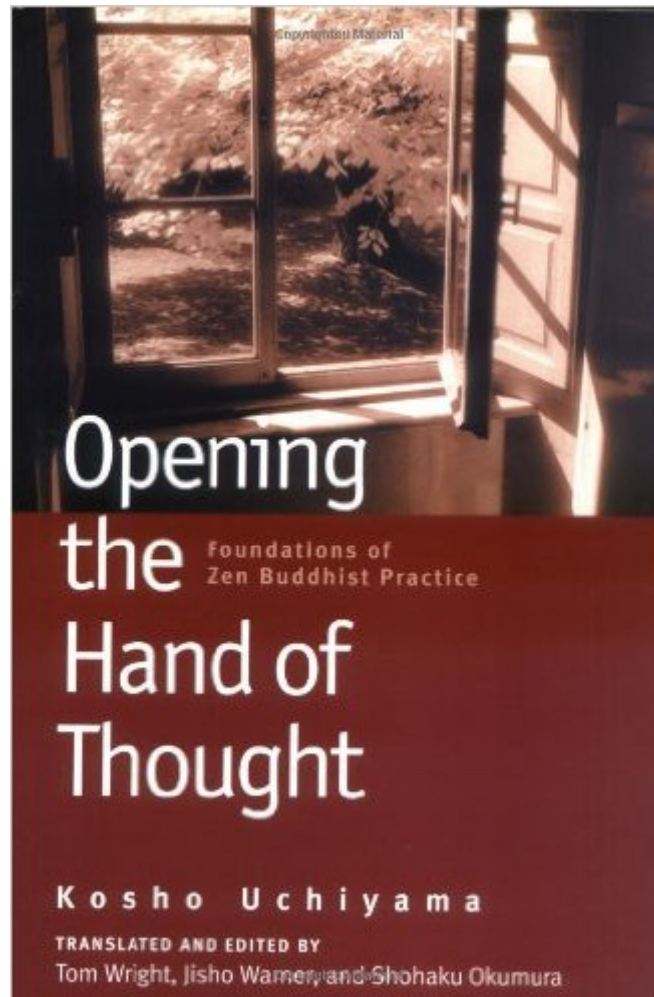


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Opening The Hand Of Thought: Foundations Of Zen Buddhist Practice



Synopsis

For over thirty years, *Opening the Hand of Thought* has offered an introduction to Zen Buddhism and meditation unmatched in clarity and power. This is the revised edition of Kosho Uchiyama's singularly incisive classic. This new edition contains even more useful material: new prefaces, an index, and extended endnotes, in addition to a revised glossary. As Jisho Warner writes in her preface, *Opening the Hand of Thought* "goes directly to the heart of Zen practice... showing how Zen Buddhism can be a deep and life-sustaining activity." She goes on to say, "Uchiyama looks at what a person is, what a self is, how to develop a true self not separate from all things, one that can settle in peace in the midst of life." By turns humorous, philosophical, and personal, *Opening the Hand of Thought* is above all a great book for the Buddhist practitioner. It's a perfect follow-up for the reader who has read *Zen Meditation in Plain English* and is especially useful for those who have not yet encountered a Zen teacher.

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Customer Reviews

Three Books by Kosho Uchiyama
February 21, 2000 and September 28, 2004
Reviewer: Eric Arbiter from Houston, TX
"Opening the Hand of Thought", "The Wholehearted Way", and From "Zen Kitchen to Enlightenment"
I am re-posting this review because "Opening the Hand of Thought" went out of print for several years. It has just been re-released with wonderful new introductory materials. Ten years ago I had determined to take up Zen practice and this book was a key ingredient in that process. I was truly saddened that it was not available to help others as a guiding inspiration for

doing zazen during the time it was out of print. I am so grateful to Wisdom Publications and the authors for taking the time to refine and make this seminal work available again for people sincerely seeking to undertake the practice of zazen (Zen seated meditation). Below is the original review, of these three books, with a few additional observations in parenthesis. I have re-read these books so many times that I think of them as different components of the same work, since the subjects interweave to produce a wonderful fabric of integrated Zen practice viewed from different perspectives. At first glance all of these books might seem "lightweight". I thought so at first because of their covers. Especially "Opening the Hand of Thought- Approach to Zen" (this is no longer the case with the new edition). It suggests a new-age type of quick fix book about Zen. Nothing could be further from the truth. This was just the book I needed, though I didn't yet know it. Having come to Zen meditation 2 years before reading this book, I was still unclear about meditation (zazen). (Ten years later I am still unclear about it- but I am still sitting!

This book is on Zen practice of course. Beautifully written, translated and edited, it covers just about every aspect of practice that a book like this could. This is a thorough examination of Zen/Zazen from many angles. After reading this I realize my attitude and knowledge of zen was shallow and very incomplete. That's not to say you can "pin it down" after reading this. That would be impossible. This book will however help you understand Zen as life, manifesting life itself (Uchiyama often speaks like this to show the "wholeness" of Zen life), it brilliantly illuminates the "life" of the way. I am very thankful to Uchiyama for this. In a time when words like "Zen" are used and abused as catchwords and such. It is very nice to have books like this, to help practitioners understand more clearly, the heart of these teachings. He does this very well. As far as Zazen goes, Kosho Uchiyama Explains, illuminates and clears up misapprehensions about "just sitting". He tells us how the very process of bringing our attention back to the reality of this moment and our posture is the profound wisdom of Zen in action (which is our most important teacher). That is Opening the Hand of Thought. Opening this "Hand" is what allows us to go beyond the small selfish ego and realize the universal self. The self of everyone and everything. Which is enlightenment, without the baggage of words or ideas like enlightenment (to "Open the Hand of Thought" means to let everything come and go without grasping). Someone said I believe in a review, that not even Dogen gives as clear and precise account of Zazen as Uchiyama. I completely agree. Uchiyama also give us a rich and detailed account of Zen as a religion, a daily practice, a way of life, and a way to a peaceful world.

Let's face it, even though Zen is often claimed to be based in utmost simplicity and directness, the

sad truth is that the majority of Zen books and teachers are (often deliberately) opaque, if not flat-out UNREADABLE: rife with academic abstractions, badly translated religious jargon and pious rhetoric, not to mention encumbered by massive cultural baggage and exoticism (=the slavish, obsessive fetishization of all things Japanese). Which is why books like Charlotte Joko Beck's "Everyday Zen" are so rare and so successful---ditto for the work of the marvelously concise, plain-spoken and unpretentious Pema Chodron, an American in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. This is particularly true when it comes to teachings on "shikantaza" which is the practice of "just sitting" or objectless meditation, known as "choiceless awareness" or "open presence" in other schools. John Daido Loori's compilation of writings on shikantaza, "The Art of Just Sitting," is mostly a catalogue of ancient Chan/Zen teachers taking a long time to say nothing, albeit in a very artful manner. So Uchiyama's book is a real gift: it is almost wholly devoid of the ritualized obfuscation all too common in the Zen tradition. This is the clearest book on seated meditation since Shunryu Suzuki's classic "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind" which is much denser and far less cohesive since it was cobbled together from months of his lectures.

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