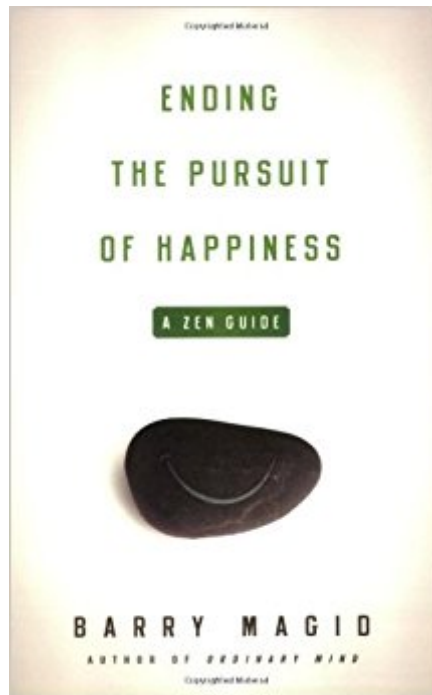




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Ending The Pursuit Of Happiness: A Zen Guide



Synopsis

We all have a right to the pursuit of happiness - but could we actually be happier if we gave that whole thing up? This surprising new book from Zen teacher, psychoanalyst, and critical favorite Barry Magid inspires us - in gentle and winking prose - to move on and make peace with the perfection of the way things actually are, including ourselves. Magid invites us to consider that our "pursuit of happiness" may actually be a source of our suffering. He takes an unusual look at our "secret practices" - what we're really doing when we say we're meditating-like trying to feel calmer, or more compassionate, or even "enlightened" (whatever we imagine that means!). He also uncovers our "curative fantasies" about spiritual practice - those ideas that we can somehow fix all the messy human things about ourselves that we imagine are bad or wrong or unacceptable. In doing so, he helps us look squarely at-and avoid-such pitfalls. Along the way, Magid lays out a rich roadmap of the new "psychological-minded Zen" - a Zen that includes our entire life, our entire personality - as pioneered by his teacher, bestselling author Charlotte Joko Beck.

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Customer Reviews

In the 15 or so years that I've been interested in Buddhism, I couldn't begin to tell you how many books I've read on the subject. I've come to believe that they all basically say the same thing, but that doesn't mean that some aren't better than others. Truth be told: there are plenty of books by Buddhist teachers that are a complete mess--not to mention a waste of time. Fortunately, this isn't one of them. There's something about Charlotte Joko Beck, who is Magid's teacher, that is quite

refreshing to me. I have found Joko Beck's two books, and the books of another of her students, Ezra Bayda, very useful. She has a non-sense style and an emphasis on the fact that Zen is not a means of escape (which is all I have ever really wanted from spiritual practice). Barry Magid takes this same theme and runs with it--presenting it with a new clarity and insight. Magid, a psychoanalyst and Zen teacher, presents a bull****-free version of practice that emphasizes real life experience--not the aspiration to a higher state of consciousness. Much of what we come to spiritual practice to find is imaginary, according to Magid---and I think this is something we can't hear enough: coming to practice might ultimately be transformative, but it won't change the "ordinariness" of our lives. I can think of no better book to guide us to this simple, yet quite profound truth. Ending the Pursuit of Happiness is a fabulous, direct, inspired, articulate, accessible work. For those interested in Buddhism, and Zen in particular, I can't recommend it highly enough.

Hsin-hsin Ming famously wrote, "the Great Way is not difficult for those not attached to preferences." All too often this has been interpreted in American Zen as requiring an emotional neutering with the student supposedly developing the ability to be unaffected by external events. Dr. Magid's great contribution to practice, and that of the Ordinary Mind School generally, is to point out that demands for particular emotional states are no different than demands for specific external conditions, and the Great Way is attached to neither. Or more particularly, through proper Zen practice the individual slowly and at times painfully develops the capacity to hold both external events and internal emotional states without being fully caught by either. Dr. Magid bravely goes against the current barrage of books promising happiness ever after and shows how suffering is inherent in that very pursuit. He does not promise happiness so this book will never be sold at the grocery store check-out counter. Rather he shows the path available to all of us to open to the joy of the very life we have. No candy here. All meat.

I said to my husband recently that living in a body is a pain. We had just learned that another friend is ill with a so-far-undiagnosed something or other. He joins a long list of those we love who are suffering various physical ailments. Then there is the daily demand to eat, I went on, and to have bowel movements. To say nothing of aging -- watching year by year your body's strengths diminish. Zen teacher and psychotherapist Magid puts it thus: "One way or another we come back to the physicality of existence. We're not going to find a way to transcend that, or escape it, or create a little oasis from it. It is the teacher's job not to collude with people's deep hatred of their bodies and their life." His message is to make peace with the perfection of the way everything is -- including

yourself. Our tendency is to live with what he calls "curative fantasies" -- a personal myth with which we explain what we think is wrong with us and what we imagine will make it better. An example is that we may believe that we are self-centered and must find an ideal practice to make us compassionate. Magid calls this a subtle form of self-hate and states plainly that we are not here to fix or improve ourselves. If you are a self-fixer like me that statement gets your attention. Magid's short answer to your question of "What then?" is this: "We can only be honest, pay attention, and let any change happen as it happens in its own time." He expands on what that means in different situations regarding the body, the emotions, the mind, relationships, and our mortality. He sees life-as-it-is as our only teacher, and his book supports learning from that teacher.

This is an exceptional practice-related book. Barry Magid clearly articulates his thoughts that our emotions and their underpinnings are not separate, or to be discarded, in our practice. He makes very clear the point that pursuits to be other than we are, even when these pursuits fit an ideal Zen or personal image, lead us away from the reality of who/how we are now. However, he is able to incorporate the purpose of action in a useful way. Certainly, other books revolve around the topic of 'be here, now, regardless of what comes up,' but none I've read comes close to making this topic more alive than Magid's book. Although I don't think my teacher has to be my analyst (he does not necessarily advocate this) or that I necessarily need an analyst at all (if he doesn't advocate this, it is because he does not know me), I am left with the impression that North Americans are more psychologically weighted down than the rest of the world. Maybe we should be given our projection of anger, guilt, violence, etc. around the world, but I am not quite convinced of this idea. I don't know if he believes this or if it is more the Ordinary Mind School's incorporation of psychology in seeking the best 'Zen fit' for those of us in the states. If Charolette Joko Beck's teachings struck a chord with you, so will this book. No doubt this is one of those books you can read and re-read and benefit at each sitting. This is one of the best practice books I have read.

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