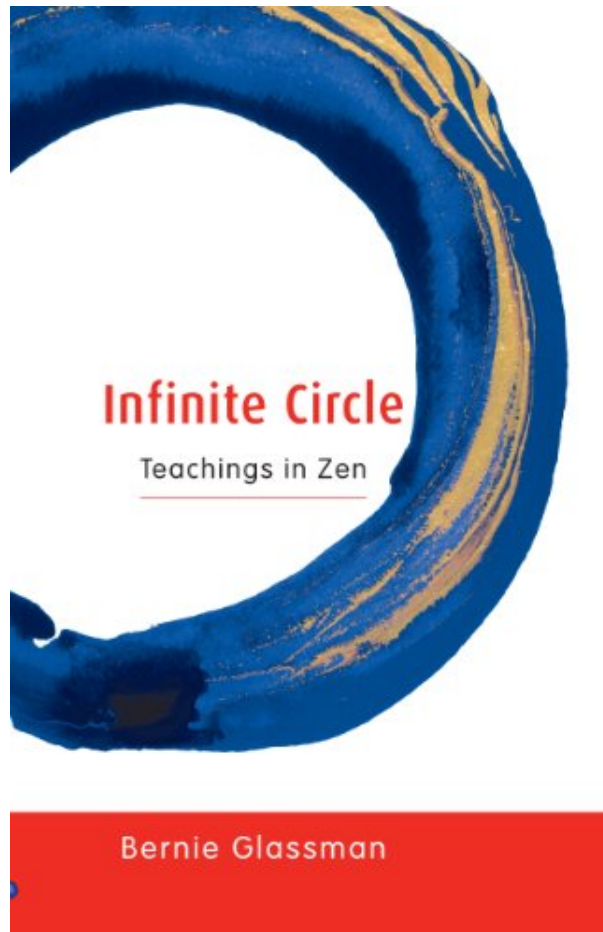
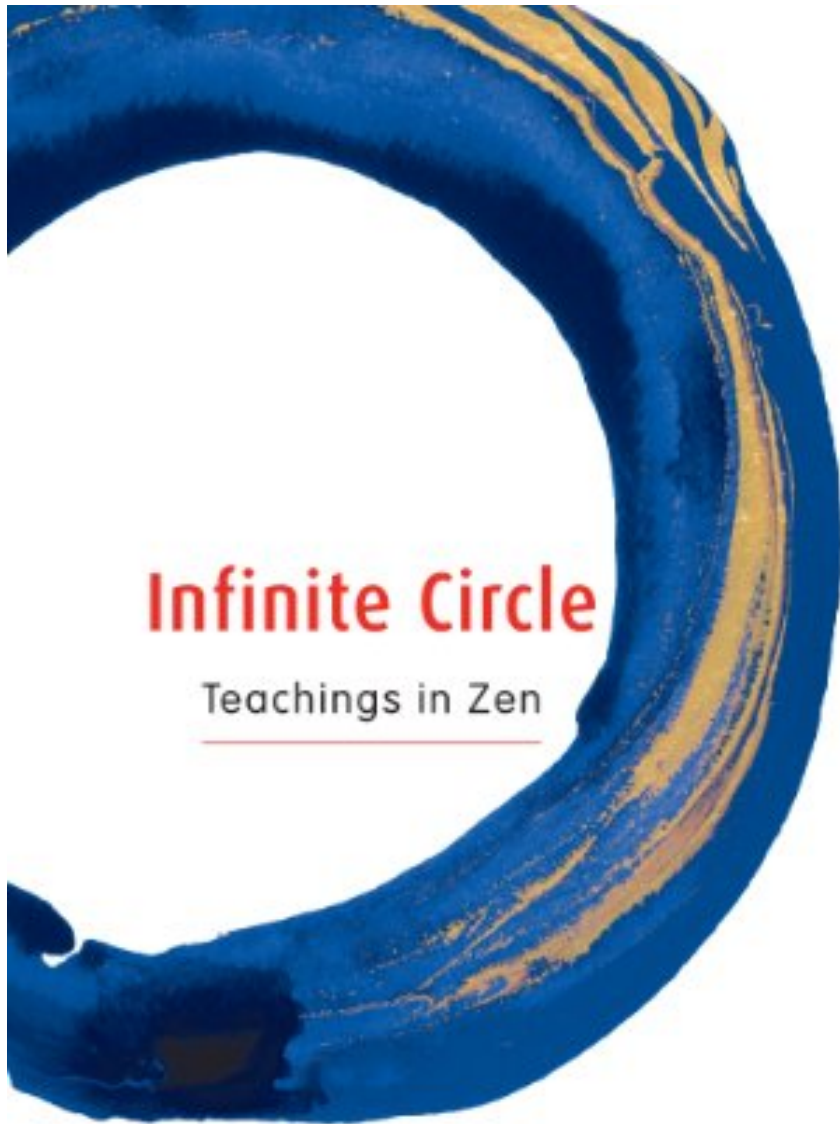


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Teachings in Zen

Bernie Glassman

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What is the relationship between doing Zen and doing good? According to Bernie Glassman's Infinite Circle, they are inseparable. Glassman, a Zen teacher and social activist for three decades, uses the pages of Infinite Circle to explicate his philosophy, which unites diversity and oneness, or the relative and the absolute. For notions of the absolute Glassman turns to the Heart Sutra. For the relative, he explains the Bodhisattva Precepts. To reconcile these two realms, he tackles a brief but complex eighth-century treatise called The Identity of Relative and Absolute. Although the subject matter is challenging, the book is based on a series of lectures. Glassman, a former applied mathematician and aerospace engineer, keeps the tone conversational and works in examples from science and everyday life. For Glassman, enlightenment does not follow from doing Zen; rather, to be enlightened is to do Zen, and vice versa. On the path to understanding this, Infinite Circle is infinitely engaging. --Brian Bruya

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Former abbot of the Zen Community of New York, Zen master Glassman (Instructions to the Cook) expounds upon three written works here. Though primarily for intermediate and advanced practitioners, some beginners may also find it helpful. The first half is devoted to the 24 lines of the Heart Sutra. So thorough is Glassman's explication that the title alone consumes 10 pages, many addressing the first word of the Sanskrit title, maha. Glassman was trained as a mathematician, a background that becomes evident when he uses the image of the circle: "If we are all within the same circle, then all of this is One Body; there is no outside. Since there is no outside, there is no inside either.... If there is no outside for the circle is infinite then not only is there no inside, there is also no circle anymore." The second section closely examines "The Identity of Relative and Absolute," a classic poem written by Chinese master Shih-t'ou Hsi-ch'ien exploring enlightenment, intimacy and the call to action. Action is of particular importance to Glassman, a cofounder of the international social activists' Zen Peacemaker Order. The third section examines the Bodhisattva precepts, with emphasis on "nonkilling." The author's style and thinking are like thick, polished glass: clear, compact and strong. Marrying metaphor, illustration and abstraction, he reaches to the heart of many essential concepts, reminding us firmly that, among other things, "we don't practice to become enlightened... we practice because we are enlightened."

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In *Infinite Circle*, one of America's most distinctive Zen teachers takes a back-to-basics approach to Zen. Glassman illuminates three key teachings of Zen Buddhism, offering line-by-line commentary in clear, direct language: . The Heart Sutra: the Buddha's essential discourse on emptiness, a central sutra of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. . "The Identity of Relative and Absolute": an eighth-century poem by Shih-t'ou Hsi-ch'ien, a key text of the Soto Zen school. The Zen precepts: the rules of conduct for laypeople and monks. His commentaries are based on workshops he gave as Abbot of the Zen Community of New York, and they contain within them the principles that became the foundation for the Greyston Mandala of community development organizations and the Zen Peacemaker Order.

- Sales Rank: #373259 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-06-18
- Released on: 2013-06-18
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Most helpful customer reviews

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

Each Reading A New Reward

By John D. Buksbazen

Infinite Circle: Teachings in Zen

by Bernie Glassman

This amazing little book is anything but little. It invites us into a world both familiar and inconceivable, and points to a practice which makes a difference in the world around us as well as within. Starting with the Heart Sutra, Roshi Bernie takes us into the relative realities we encounter moment by moment to the absolute oneness of life. Next, his commentary on The Identity of Relative and Absolute, presents the inseparability of the two seemingly opposite domains, and the implications of that . Finally, examining the Bodhisattva Precepts, he opens the aspects of the life of zazen in the everyday world. A wonderful wellspring to return to over and over again. Each reading a new reward.

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Tetsugen spells it all out

By Andrew

Bernie Glassman is one of the greatest American Zen teachers. In this book, he goes deeply into some core teachings of Zen. He starts with the Heart Sutra (Prajnaparamita Hridaya Sutra). When I started attending a Zen temple, the nightly chanting of this sutra always confused me, but Glassman's line-by-line analysis shows how this sutra contains great wisdom, and makes understanding clearer.

His analysis of the precepts has been the most helpful to me. He explains the various ways of interpreting each precept, and demonstrates the need for balance. For instance, one of the precepts is non-killing. Some sects of Buddhism extend this to not killing insects and micro-organisms. Glassman explains that to understand this precept, we need not follow it to this level, but we must be aware of it, and try to cause less damage. The precepts, on some level, are an admonition to try our best, and Glassman's discussion will help us to be peacemakers in each moment of our lives.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Heart sutra explained

By Shawn K. Smith

Any Zen student could benefit from reading Bernie's analysis of the heart sutra, which is the subject of the first half of this book. Bernie thoroughly analyzes the sutra sometimes going as far as to analyze every syllable of a word. This may seem like it could be very dull. 70 or so pages of analysis on a 24 line sutra might seem a bit excessive, but Bernie somehow keeps it interesting.

Considering the importance of the heart sutra in Zen practice it seems to me this book should probably be considered for required reading for all beginning Zen students. All of that notwithstanding there is still the second half of the book in which Bernie offers more of the same insights on the identity of relative and absolute and the bodhisattva precepts. This is good stuff and a pretty easy read so I'd highly recommend it.

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