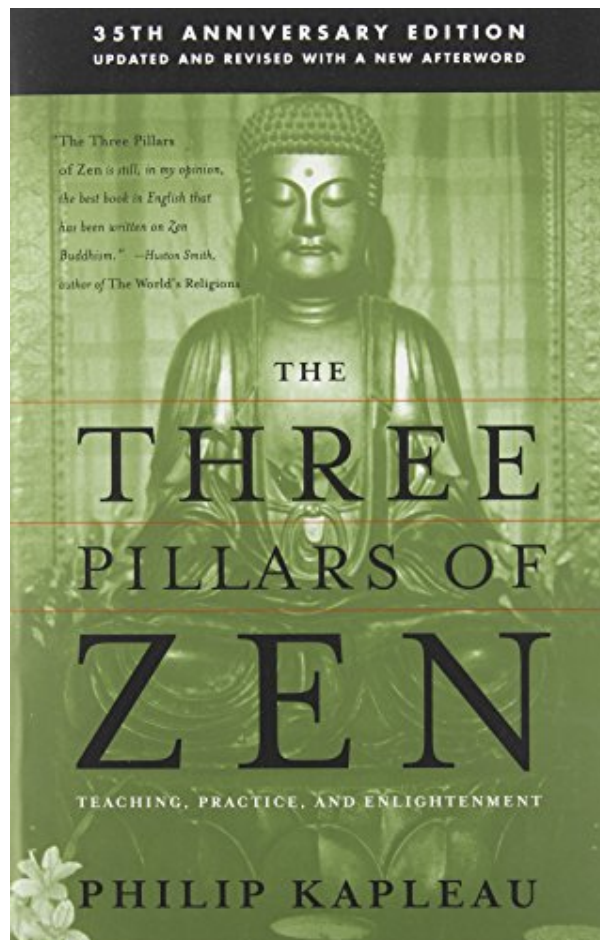


# THE THREE PILLARS OF ZEN, 25TH ANNIVERSARY UPDATED AND REVISED EDITION BY ROSHI PHILIP KAPLEAU



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**35TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION**  
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THE  
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TEACHING, PRACTICE, AND ENLIGHTENMENT

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## Review

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"The Three Pillars of Zen heralded the end of armchair Buddhism. With this practical guide to Zen meditation, Roshi Kapleau ushered in the first wave of American zazen practitioners. It was extraordinarily inspiring. It still is."--Helen Tworikov, founding editor of Tricycle: The Buddhist Review and author of Zen in America

"For over thirty years Roshi Kapleau's Three Pillars of Zen has been the wellspring of Zen teachings for practitioners in the West, remaining as vital and fresh today as it was when it was originally published. It truly ranks among the timeless classics of Zen Buddhism."--Roshi John Daido Looi, Abbot, Zen Mountain Monastery

"For anyone seriously interested in Zen--this book will be invaluable."--Times Literary Supplement (London)

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## Language Notes

Text: English, Japanese (translation)

## From the Publisher

Through his exploration of the three pillars of Zen -- teaching, practice, and enlightenment -- Roshi Kapleau presents a comprehensive overview of this ancient oriental discipline, making it useful to both initiates and long-time disciples.

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Through explorations of the three pillars of Zen--teaching, practice, and enlightenment--Roshi Philip Kapleau presents a comprehensive overview of the history and discipline of Zen Buddhism. An established classic, this 35th anniversary edition features new illustrations and photographs, as well as a new afterword by Sensei Bodhin Kjolhede, who has succeeded Philip Kapleau as spiritual director of the Rochester Zen Center, one of the oldest and most influential Zen centers in the United States.

- Sales Rank: #24768 in Books
- Brand: Kapleau, Philip (EDT)/ Kapleau, Roshi Philip
- Published on: 1989-02-27
- Released on: 1989-02-27
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.95" h x .92" w x 5.17" l, 1.01 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 399 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

353 of 362 people found the following review helpful.

Probably the only Zen book you'll ever need.

By F. Neunemann

I guess that most people getting interested in Zen without having a competent roshi within reach are facing the living hell of Zen books. At least that was the situation in my case. So, I was picking up all sorts of books on Zen from authors of unknown or doubtful competence. Some aren't really worth the paper they are printed on. This process turned out to be quite time and money consuming without getting closer to the results one is expecting.

Even after reading books from known authorities like D.T. Suzuki I found out that my own progress was still slow, because many of these kind of books are pretty academic, barely touching the most important practice and heart of Zen--the practice of Zazen.

"The Three Pillars of Zen" is the first book in a fairly long line of Zen books I read that approaches Zen in a practical way that enables Westerners to get started with Zen right away, without having a teacher. Roshi Kapleau wrote a well structured and personal book, reporting from his own development under various Zen masters in Japan back in the 1950s. In the chapters of "The Three Pillars of Zen" Kapleau lets his own teachers speak. This approach gives a unique insight into Zen practice in Japan, the traps and pitfalls and how to avoid them. It also explains what Zazen and dokusan are all about as well as the important role of the koan, its proper use (and misuse).

This book really sets back the majority of Zen books I read so far by at least 2 stars (Amazon.com rating). If I'd be forced to pick only one book about Zen, this would be the one.

373 of 409 people found the following review helpful.

The Drama of Practice

By Mike in the Middle

I have very mixed feelings about this book. It is the book which really brought me to spiritual practice; for that, I will always be grateful. It was, however, the same things about it which first drew me in, that I now find problematic.

If you are at all open to practice it is hard not to find this book exciting. There is great drama in the stories of those struggling against all odds to achieve enlightenment. It is that sense of drama which I find problematic. There is a sense of striving encouraged by this book and practice at Rochester. Metaphors of climbing a mountain are used; we are encouraged to "push harder." But who is striving? There is an underlying sense of dualism in this flavor of practice. While that drama of achieving something is perhaps helpful for those difficult early stages of practice, it is ultimately a poison. Traditional Zen practice, such as that described here, pits you in a battle against your ego. Such warfare can, in the end, only be ego building.

This is a modern Zen practice in that there is an explanation of the "theory" of practice. At one time you just sat, heard talks on Koans, and had very brief interviews with your teacher. Eventually, you would either get it or not (mostly not, I believe). Of course, in that more historically traditional practice you would have been a monk totally removed from the concerns of the day-to-day world. I think that the practice described by Kapleau Roshi is still too close to those traditional monastic roots.

My experience at traditional Zen Centers is that they are beautiful and that meditation practice there has a sense of perceptible strength-it seems quite grounded. The trouble comes when people are off the cushions. I can't say that I see a great deal of impact of practice on peoples lives. There is still plenty of confusion and

reactivity. There is still an attachment to personal drama. I had teachers tell me that the first step is for people to break through and see who they really were; later they would integrate. I am not sure that step two generally occurs.

What, ultimately, is the point of Zen practice? To have an enlightenment experience? Does that drive for kensho come from a need to experience the truth of our life or does it come from a need to fix ourselves? Most of us are driven by this latter need. To the extent that our motivations remain invisible, we can't truly metabolize our experience. We "own" rather than live our realization.

My bias is that practice serves life best when it takes on our whole life as a koan. 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.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

This book is an absolutely amazing introduction to Zen Buddhism as it is truly practiced

By Steven

This book is an absolutely amazing introduction to Zen Buddhism as it is truly practiced. It is extremely elaborate, well written, and informative. The book gives an excellent glimpse into monastic life, how to do zazen (the bread and butter meditation method of Zen) and even presents accounts of meetings between novices and their zen teacher. The book also contains concise backgrounds and historical accounts about Zen, and provides examples of modern day enlightenment experiences. I highly recommend this book to anyone who is SERIOUSLY interested in Zen Buddhism.

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