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AED 25



Insights into the Mind of a Zen Master

London's leading Zen teacher **Julian Daizan Skinner**, spent almost two decades in Zen Monasteries before returning from Japan to the UK in 2007. He is the first Englishman to become a Roshi or Zen Master in the Zendo Kyodan tradition. Here, he tells **Sarah Bladen** about the transformational power of Zen, his new book and his enlightening journey so far...

How can meditation potentially give someone deeper meaning to life?

Zen meditation will give you the perspective of non-separation. You know with every fibre of your being that the sense of being an isolated, alienated person is an optical illusion. This enables you to find a particular kind of happiness that comes from within and is independent of external circumstances.

You've taught thousands of students from all around the world. In your opinion, what is the most challenging aspect of meditation for people at the start of their journey?

Beginning the journey has a lot to do with your relationship with mental chatter.

People often think they have to silence the mind. That's not actually the case. The process is much more about dis-identifying with all these thoughts and feelings. And that's what we train people to do.

How can someone be more mindful in their everyday life?

I strongly recommend nibbling away at it. Pick one thing, one activity or job, and every day do it with as much awareness and presence as you can muster. Record your efforts in a diary. Once you're really enjoying your mindful activity, add in another one and then another and so on. If you build up bit by bit, the whole process tends to be much more fun, more sustainable and more effective.

You also train people to become yoga teachers...

I learned yoga in the Zen temples I lived in over the years, plus I did some training with Pattabhi Jois (the founder of Ashtanga Yoga) in India. I personally found it incredibly valuable on all levels. Zen places an emphasis on physical posture and alignment and this of course carries over into the yoga. The practice, as I was taught it, develops the system on an energetic level, which has profound effects on the emotions and states of consciousness. There was a strong emphasis on a very particular kind of in-the-moment presence or mindfulness, which has a very transformative power. I teach people to learn to trust the body. If you listen and allow it will reveal a road of union (yoga) and bliss. »



Which Zen Master has had the biggest influence on you and why?

Without question it would be my teacher Shinzan Miyamae. He has lived fearlessly and is extraordinarily generous on so many levels. In all the years I've spent with him, I've never yet witnessed him doing anything selfish. If you want to know more, a couple of years ago we put together a book about him called, *The Zen Character*.

Tell us about your most recent new book, *Practical Zen*...

Practical Zen gives you "the two wings of a bird," an ancient system of practices that liberate, ground and energise your system. I've been teaching this material in the west for a decade now and the results have been phenomenal. It's presented in the form of a powerful programme that is easily accessible to everyone and designed to integrate into your daily life.

Do you experience the odd 'un Zen' moment? If so, what usually triggers this?

Yes, I do. I get impatient in London traffic. That's a big one for me at the moment.

What's your take on the topic of love?

I think human beings are fundamentally

social animals and are mostly more healthy and happy when in a social matrix that includes deep and nurturing bonding.

You've not bothered with the convention of marriage and children; was this a conscious decision?

I was prepared to pay this price when I started on the journey. For the first fourteen years or so I lived in an environment of complete celibacy. However, the Japanese tradition is not celibate and the second Master I studied with was married. I guess it would have to be a pretty unusual woman who would be prepared to join my crazy life.

Tell us about your highlights of 2017...

The month of June was the 10th anniversary of the founding of Zenways - an organisation that promotes and encourages activities and practices to enhance human wellbeing, balance and awakening (satori or kensho - the enlightenment of Zen) in the modern world. Ten years ago, I arrived back to the UK from Japan having been named my teacher's successor. I had no money, no connections, no invitations. So, I went down to the south of the country and wearing my robes, carrying my bowl and relying on the food people donated along the way I walked up

to the north coast of Scotland and finished on the northern tip at Cape Wrath. Some of the people I met along the way became my first students. Since then the adventure has continued.

What has the rest of the year got in store for you?

I'll be over in Japan to see my teacher, Shinzan Roshi. He is getting frail and forgetful and I need to spend some time with him. I'm also leading an ongoing schedule of retreats for people who want to find this happiness from within, and courses for people who want to be yoga and meditation and mindfulness teachers. In November I'm bringing out a book of poems and images called *Rough Waking* in support of our work with homeless and incarcerated people.

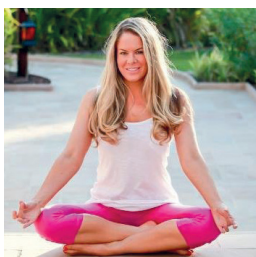
What do your future dreams involve?

A retreat house in Scotland on the shores of Loch Katrine, students who make me proud, at least a few more books and space for my own practice to develop further.

Lastly, what Zen proverb resonates most with you?

The lotus blooms in the middle of the fire.

www.zenways.org ❀

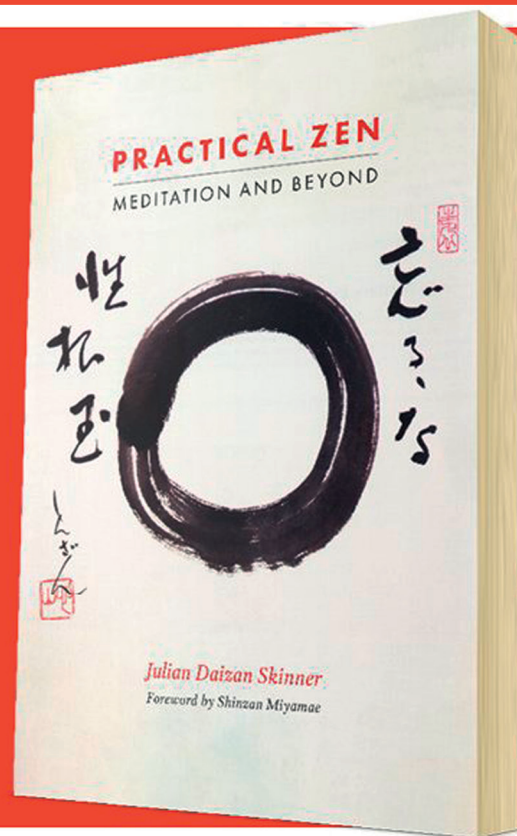


Sarah Bladen is a freelance writer, mindfulness coach, yoga/meditation teacher & tantric energy healer and is currently based in London. In this edition, she interviewed Zen Master Julian Daizan Skinner. Sarah is holding a retreat called *Lightness of Being* in December in Kerala, India. To find out more about Sarah visit oncloudzen.com

PRACTICAL ZEN

MEDITATION AND BEYOND

Julain Daizan Skinner



Book is now available for sale

Many books on Zen come across as intriguing but are almost impenetrable to the uninitiated. Practical Zen is both an intriguing and totally accessible introduction to the meditation and movement practices handed down from the great 17th century Rinzai Zen masters Hakuin and Bankei. Written in everyday language and liberally peppered with stories, personal accounts and experiences, London's leading Zen teacher, Daizan Julian Skinner Roshi shows us how these practices that have been refined over the centuries are as relevant now as they ever were.

Every piece of advertising we see sends us the message that we're not good enough or we're missing something. In the first sections of the book Daizan Roshi explains and guides us through several practices (including downloadable recorded meditations) to help us see through the illusion that we have an isolated, separate self that isn't good enough.

'Finding our fundamental adequacy' is a memorable chapter that shows how we can simply be, knowing that in this moment all is just fine. Our world is increasingly fast-paced, ungrounded and depleting. In the next few chapters, the author takes us through a variety of practices designed to cultivate our energy and develop physical and spiritual grounding.

The last part of Practical Zen contains some wonderfully heart-warming personal accounts from 21st century men and women whose lives have been transformed by these Zen practices.

A wonderful, practical, carry-in-your-pocket guide into insight, wellbeing and grounding, applying ancient Zen practices for the 21st century. Suitable for complete beginners and experienced practitioners.

Review by Mark Westmoquette