

Buddhism Is Not What You Think: Finding Freedom Beyond Beliefs By Steve Hagen

Steve Hagen offers a valuable hands-on guidebook in which examples from everyday life are presented alongside stories from Buddhist teachers past and present to banish misconceptions and inspire the newcomer and the knowledgeable practitioner alike. Hagen gives clear descriptions of Buddhist thought and in a way that gives the reader a clear understanding of the fundamental concepts that are key to understanding the Buddha's message. Steve Hagen *Buddhism Is Not What You Think-Finding Freedom Beyond Beliefs* by Steve Hagen In his clear and conversational style.

Simple and free flowing book *Buddhism Is Not What You Think* written by Steve Hagen talks about what reality is as per Zen Buddhism. The author resonates one central point in the entire book and that is reality is about direct experience of the real time than mere feelings and thoughts which happen to be in constant flux in conscious and subconscious level in human mind. Very deftly he has been able to present the flaw of human mind that fabricates 'reality' by past thoughts or experiences in a way that we tend to accept them as actual reality which essentially is not the case. The book is interspersed with teachings of ancient Zen teachers some of them are Huang Po Shunryu Suzuki Suzuki Rosi Dogen Zenji Ju-ching Hakuin Linji (Rinzai) Foyan Kuei-shan Ts'ao-shan Nagarjuna Kanadeva Keinzan Jokin (the second of the great founders of Zen sect in Japan had compiled stories of ancient Zen ancestors) to name a few. I liked the way Hagen has spun his interpretation of Emily Dickinson's *This Will Never Come Again* and transactional interpretation of quantum mechanics in different sections under the third segment of the book. I picked up this book during 2013 after some personal struggles that left me feeling a lot of things both physical and emotional none of which were comfortable or pleasant or things that I wanted to be experiencing. Earlier that year I'd been to a training workshop on Acceptance and Commitment therapy and was inspired by it to learn more about this alternative way of thinking where thoughts do not have precedence over our behaviour but are seen as something that can be heard and left behind if that is what would be most helpful in that moment and in the long-term. Because when bad things happen and you're miserable and you have zero energy and you're in pain you don't want some douche bag telling you that life is 100 percent the choices you make and that you have the power to be who you want to be and achieve your wildest hopes and dreams. He told me that I am not separate from the world around me that the only certainty in life is change that even the very molecules in my body completely change technically making me something different and yet I remain the same. I guess that's the challenge right? Hagen writes in a clear and straightforward way illustrating major points of the religion with everyday examples to which the average Western reader can relate. That doesn't speak well for his writing - or does it? Steve Hagen I prefer quites over reviews:53 According to Bodhidharma (and to Zen) if we make enlightenment—or enlightened people—into something special and set them apart from others and from ourselves we abuse them. But can you say “No”? Who is it in the picture then? And if you say “That was me” how could you still be you if you're six times bigger and far more articulate? Indeed what does “you” refer to? And if you say “It's both me and not me” what can this mean? Have you ever seen anything that both is and isn't what it is? And if it's neither you nor not you what are we even talking about? If we really look carefully such simple everyday questions as these can set our minds spinning. If we think of God—or whatever overarching principle we might have in mind—as being “out there” we should realize that all we are doing is projecting our own attitude our own view our own small mind on the world and on others. The intention and will that we find surging within us which all too often govern our minds and justify our motivations for doing this or not doing that come about because we 're locked up in our petty egos because we forsake the Reality of the Whole. Kuei-shan said “Why interfere?” When we act out of see- ing we are no longer interfering with the world; instead we are operating the way the natural world operates—out of the Whole out of Totality. When we 're no longer acting out of a sense of self—out of our wants our fears our worries our obsessions—we're no longer being driven by the compulsion to arrange everything in a way that feels comfortable and satisfying. So why interfere? If we look carefully at what's going

on in each moment we'll see there's nothing we need to take hold of—indeed there 's nothing we can take hold of. Throughout most of our lives we're so caught up in this and that rushing through these wonderful distractions and stages that we don't (or can't) take the time to settle into the mellow light that's always there and to let freshness suffuse the frame. Ultimately we need to abandon any notion that taking hold of some particular thing—some particular idea belief ritual religion perspective form of dress or way of acting—is going to bring us to Truth. Those who won't even examine something are operating out of an agenda are shut down to actual experience and are so full of ideas that they can't see what's coming at them. After all if you make your teachers into gods how can you realize the Truth that you are fundamentally no different from them? In the end it comes down to this: authority which is yours already rests only with direct experience. " But when we understand what consciousness is and how it functions we realize that our sense of self and other of subject and object is an illusion created by consciousness itself. As the Buddha put it "Just as a man steps upon a serpent and shudders in fear but then looks down and notices that it's only a rope so it was that one day I realized that what I was calling 'I' cannot be found and all fear and anxiety vanished with my mistake. We know from physics for example that the book you're holding and the hand that holds it are reconstructed (that is reborn) moment after moment as a blur of rapidly moving molecules and atoms each exchanging electrons and energy with other molecules and atoms at enormous speed. Pirsig New York Times bestselling author of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance Buddhism is Not What You Think is a clear direct and engaging guide to the most essential elements of spiritual inquiry: attention intention honesty with oneself compassion and the desire to awaken. A renowned Zen teacher much as he did in Buddhism Plain and Simple Steven Hagen tackles what is a thorny issue for most people coming to Zen practice hoping to get enlightened feel blissed out by Nirvana or those who come to Zen practice hoping to get anything at all. Of course the idea that all beings are by nature Buddha is deceptively simple and enlightenment is so bandied about that few people understand at all what the Buddha meant when he said he was awake. He delves deeply into the practice of 'just seeing' what is literally one's face--namely every day Reality with patience and loving kindness of one who recognizes the possibilities of misunderstanding the difference between seeing and perceiving. He also encourages practitioners and those who would consider zen practice to take the Buddha's instructions to heart and to not accept what he his teacher Dainin Katagiri Roshi or any other spiritual teacher declares as Truth until they have examined it for themselves and found it to be beneficial. There are more seasoned readers whose zen literary forays take them into the deeper waters of the great teachings of the likes of Nagarjuna and perhaps Hagen's book might be considered redundant. Steve Hagen Stephen Tokan Steve Hagen Rōshi (born 1945) is the founder and head teacher of the Dharma Field Zen Center in Minneapolis Minnesota and a Dharma heir of Dainin Katagiri roshi, Buddhism Is Not What You Think: Finding Freedom Beyond Beliefs One of the best books you will find on Buddhism. Through various real life examples Hagen illustrates the point of perceiving awareness of the current instances that is taking place in the ever-changing present moment. The author tries to delve into ontological and epistemological dimensions by referring how masses or common people generally perceive reality, In the most articulate manner Hagen has been successful in bringing about the concept of understanding of emptiness impermanence and nonduality, My curiosity towards Zen Buddhism compelled me to buy this book and I find this book extremely helpful in ways of understanding the thought process of Zen Buddhists: I enjoyed it thoroughly recommended for those who want to take a dip into the thought ocean of Zen Buddhism. I'd also like to add some of the profound quotations that I came across while reading: "Nothing stands on its own. Each thing is inseparable from and inter-identical with all that it's not: ""Thus perception is an objectless Awareness since when we just see what is truly seen involves not objects but the Whole. ""We think there only has to be sound for there to be sound, We overlook that there must also be silence for there to be sound, Were there no sound how could there be silence?" "What makes human life--which is inseparable from this moment--so precious is its fleeting nature. And not that it doesn't last but that it never returns again. ""If it's Truth we're after we'll find that we cannot start with any

assumptions or concepts whatsoever, Instead we must approach the world with bare naked attention seeing it without any mental bias - without concepts beliefs preconceptions presumptions or expectations: This is how Steve Hagen ends this immensely comforting and insightful book: Learning the ability to be aware of thoughts emotions and body sensations for what they are: Instead of buying into our thoughts about them which is just the way our minds work: When I don't feel well or happy I like to look at books. This is what I was doing that day when I came across this book. It was sitting on my parents bookshelves and I just picked it up took it to my room and decided to read it: This is not a feel-good self-improvement book was the first thing I read. And God forbid that Rhonda Byrne comes along and tells you that you brought this all on yourself because you thought too negatively: It's saying you are in control and when you're life is out of control heavily dictated by circumstance or you feel blocked in with no where to turn, You want someone to say life is shit sometimes and that's okay because it's the the way life really is. He also told me that I am not my mind and that my mind is not me. That the future and the past do not exist except in our minds. And he told me many more things that were insightful and helpful and reflected what I already felt instinctively about life but had forgotten amid it all. He also told me a lot of things that I did not know and I am grateful to him for this: And then I came back to it and I was glad that I had because just reading this book made me feel better about life: Once the moments I was having were filled with a strange thing called happiness it made me feel that life that reality is wonderful, It made me feel that the very act of existing of being of this world of experiencing anything at all is a miracle: Steve Hagen I really like this book; in fact I reread it this fall. The concepts behind Buddhism are so elegantly simple yet I find them difficult to absorb and digest. I find him to be an inspiring and thought-provoking teacher and I would recommend this book as a good place to start if you are interested in Buddhism, Steve Hagen If there's one thing Hagen has taught me it's that you can only get so far by reading, Perhaps the best thing you'll get from his books is a sense that you've read enough that you've read it all before and it's time to just do it. Thus enlightenment becomes remote otherworldly mysterious and (seemingly) virtually impossible to realize. It's like trying to answer the question "Is that you in your baby picture?" What can you say? You may say "Yes that's me. There's nothing absolute about our objects ever even though we usually think there is, But where can we draw the line between the cup and everything else? If you pay very close attention you'll see that you can't, 68-69 The sound of the bell is inseparable from everything that came before and that will come after as well as from every- thing that appears now. It includes the air which pulses with varying waves of pressure in response to it. It includes the metallurgists past and present and those who learned to extract metal from ore and those who fashioned the bell. And it includes that ancient furnace that supernova obliterated long ago in which this metal formed, Remove any of these—indeed remove anything at all—and there can be no sound of the bell: The sound of the bell is thus not "the sound of the bell, 75-76 We can look deeper—to an awareness characterized by Thoreau's famous quote: "In wildness is the preservation of the world, Every- thing is put there for some purpose—for good or ill convenience or decoration. Nature doesn't try to do anything produce anything or accomplish anything: But nature produces things in a radically different way than human beings generally do. Most human actions come out of our intentions our desires our attempts to bring about certain situations and our yearning to prevent other situations from occurring: In contrast what nature produces is without purpose intention or will: This is because there is nothing outside of nature for it to act on or for or against, So I would modify Thoreau's words and say that in wild- ness is not only the preservation of the world but the revelation of the world, Often we imagine that there 's some particular thing or entity—God say—that made the world and that now runs it, With such a notion in place we soon start talking about this entity as if it had attributes like us—as if it had wants and de- sires, " Soon we're developing ideas of how people should comply with God's will. But if we look carefully at this we'll discover that this is just our putting our ideas of God—that is our will—onto un- willed nature onto Reality: We see ourselves separate and removed from the Whole—and from everything else "out there: " Thus we feel compelled to do something about our situation which only furthers our discontent: We feel we have to protect this well-loved thing we call

“me” or “I, We don’t recognize that our way out of such sorrow is simply to see—not to fix something “out there, ” 98Once this moment is seen for what it is there ’s no more believing in a universe consisting of a tiny isolated “you” that is distantly viewing everything “out there: ” There’s no more need to protect and defend yourself against “out there” or to get earn or coax good things from it: It’s the very opposite of resignation; it’s the dissolution of the desire to get everything you want or to do whatever you please. You don’t (and can’t) get this capacity from another—not from me from this book from Buddha or from anything or anyone else. How could you possibly get what you already have? No one can pin you down; no one can call you back: For the awakened what comes first is simply being awake—seeing what’s going on, And in seeing what’s going on in this moment appropriate—that is natural—action can occur, For the awakened the primary concern is simply to see what is taking place and to act in accord with it. This is how the awakened differ from those of us who are caught up in delusion. It’s a very subtle quiet and gentle point but its implications are total: Realizing this creates a complete transformation of heart and mind. Enlightenment is nothing more than this: to be fully present to see the grasping nature of our own minds and not to act out of that grasping, It’s to see ourselves not as separate not as lacking not as in charge not as weak and helpless, The truth is you’ll never succeed at getting things arranged just so: You’ll never please and protect yourself for more than a fleeting moment. In fact if you look for it you’ll never even put your finger on just what it is that you’re trying to please and protect, All of this doesn’t mean that we can’t or shouldn’t act. It doesn’t mean we can’t plan or think or believe or hold ideas, It does mean that we don’t have to be deceived by this or taken in by that, The motive now is simply to be awake from moment to moment and to deal with every fresh and new situation as it arises. We step into each situation not knowing but with our eyes open to what’s actually taking place: Seeing each new moment as it arises creates action that is in accord with how things are now, 153The French have a phrase *la chose bien faite*—the thing well made the thing well done or the life well lived: Zen practice goes to the heart of this same matter—doing and living well doing and living fully doing and living our best: Thus we miss this simple matter of just doing and living fully, Actor Peter O’Toole once told of receiving a coat he had sent to the cleaners: It came back with a note pinned to the inside that read “It distresses us to return work that is not perfect, Not that we must be perfect or that we can bring everything to perfection or completion but rather that it is our concern that we do so: This is precisely what Zen practice is about: doing our best, Whatever we ’re doing—whether it be humble or grand—we take care of it all in each moment from beginning to end. Though we want to share our experiences with others we actually can’t. To share a sunset with someone there’s no point in de- scribing the sunset (or debating about how best to describe it): Just stand next to the person and watch the sun go down with- out saying a word, The ultimate failing of a teacher is to believe that what they tell their students is Truth, When the student takes hold of that belief such a teacher will be incapable of taking it away and thus letting the student taste freedom. Finally we have to stop looking for something to save us something to stand under to identify with to improve us to make us whole, As we do we can come into this moment fully alive and awake: 172-173Don’t believe me because you see me as your teacher. And don’t believe anything because you’ve read it in a book either: Don’t put your faith in reports or tradition or hearsay or the authority of religious leaders or texts: Don’t rely on mere logic or inference or appearances or speculation. Know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome and wrong, And when you know for yourselves that cer- tain things are wholesome and good then accept them and follow them. Another way of looking at this is through the Buddha’s teach- ing of avoiding of extremes. Don’t be a hundred percent gullible; don’t be a hundred percent scornful and dismissive either. The Buddhadharma urges each of us to be good skeptics—in the classical Greek sense, A good skeptic is slightly gullible: willing to consider and examine any evidence or argument be- ing raised at least temporarily. They continuously observe it test it and engage it with interest curiosity and openness: To dismiss something as bunk before you examine it is the hallmark of a believer not a skeptic. For them the world is structured and fixed and they’re often caught up in their own form of bunk: an insistence on dismissing and devaluing certain propositions or attitudes, In order to cultivate a pure mind we need

to set aside our personal agendas, But this doesn't mean taking up the personal agenda of someone else—a teacher for example: No true Dharma teachers would ever direct you to follow their personal agenda, In fact they really don't have much of a personal agenda regarding you, (As my teacher used to say the final job of a teacher is to free the student of the teacher:) Many of us initially take up the religious life with a lot of high-minded ideas about what we 're going to accomplish: But that's only more ego more business as usual—religious ego- tism. If we truly want to live the religious life we simply have to drop our agendas—even our religious ones: Only then can we begin to cultivate a mind of true goodness and compassion which comes out of a concern for the Whole: As we live out of such a mind we become generous with no sense of giving or of making a sacrifice: We become patient with no sense of putting up with anything, And we become wise with no sense of having to straighten anyone out. 187-188One other point about authority: no human being or institution ever has more authority than that granted by other human beings: This means that you are the final authority in terms of whom you give credence to and how you live your life. Turning over this authority to anyone else is a kind of spiritual laziness: You'll be disinclined to pay careful and critical attention to what's actually going on and you'll be left wide open to being manipulated misled and scammed: For in- stance he told people not to make any images of him. Yet the more we glorify and deify the man we call the Buddha the more diffi- cult it is for us to wake up, 194-195The time came when my friend realized Tippy had to be euthanized, As he came into the room Tippy was too weak to lift her head though she tried, It is we with our complex thoughts who are confused we who whine about our condition. We do this because we imagine everything set apart from ourselves here and now. But what you or I or anyone thinks doesn't belong to now: It's not the Reality we actually live from moment to moment: Were we to awaken to this moment we 'd find nothing to complain about. They see that enlightenment is nothing more than not being deceived by the conceptual world each of us creates. Consciousness splits the world into this and that and the next thing: The most basic split of course is "here I am" and "out there is everything else: The enlightened person isn't taken in by such conceptual dualities. The illusion still appears but it's seen for what it is—an illusion, "The rope" is still "there"; "the foot" is still "there. We no longer have to get in there and manipulate or control, Neither do they suddenly forget how to eat a meal or drive a car or take care of their children: But they understand that they cannot hurt others without doing injury to themselves: In the end what is understood is that this is all of one fabric. 216-217Gradually however we can begin to appreciate what the experience of smelling a rose actually entails. It's of the nature of the mirror itself—that is that the source of all experience is Mind: As such the act of smelling—or seeing or hearing or touching or thinking—literally has no location: We naively think Mind conveys actual objects to us as though the objects themselves were Real, Although they may appear this way no separate objects are ever created and conveyed to us: As a result in no two instants is there the same book or hand: Early Buddhist teachers who did not have the benefit of modern physics nevertheless recognized this as total thorough- going impermanence, In each instant we find a different picture a changed universe. And why is the physical world this way? Because this is the only way it can be experienced. But I'm not talking about our common idea of mind like "your mind" or "my mind: " Your mind and my mind are just more examples of the mentally fabricated and labeled stuff such as "this book" "the rose" "the fragrance" and all the rest. These all exhibit a reality we cannot deny; yet if we think they are all there is to Reality we've got it all backward, The multitude of labeled things is not Reality but merely our interpretation—our concepts—of Reality: 241-242It's only in our mental construction of the universe—our conception of it—that we encounter something vast and enduring, In our actual experience however—that is what we actually perceive rather than conceive of—all we ever have is here and now: We literally cannot exist in the future or past only in the timeless moment of infinitely short duration that we call now, We only remember the past and imagine the future but both of these activities necessarily occur now: And where can you ever possibly be but here? Here we conceive of a "there" but you cannot actually go there: What we experience as duration and extension—time and space—results from the way Mind operates, Consciousness is the division of this otherwise seamless Whole which transcends space and time into

space and time—that is into here and there then and now: It's the various mental constructions that we hold and hold dear that appear as time and space extension and duration: These—and all of the material world—derive from consciousness which ladles out time and space from a timeless spaceless sea: To the awakened however what is Real is this seamless boundless spaceless timeless Whole, The enlightened person sees that this Whole doesn't have any dimension apart from Mind, Steve Hagen "[Hagan's] book will appeal to readers interested in what true Zen practice is supposed to be about beyond all the popular images and colorful stories, As he so simply states through 43 chapters there is no getting what all beings innately possess (Buddha nature) and no becoming what all beings already are (enlightened), Hence the problems most people have when coming to Zen practice from the mindset of attaining achieving or even letting go of their constructs of reality and self. However for a beginner or a beginner again this book presents the fundamentals of zen from as many perspectives as Hagen felt might be useful: However he uses the stories and tales of past spiritual masters so often associated with Zen like an experienced chef would use delicious seasonings in a plain and nourishing soup: A lot of practical sense and getting to grips with real Buddhism: I like Steve Hagen's books and have a couple of others—they're all worth reading: Steve Hagen This could have been interesting if he hadn't reiterated his only message on every single page: The message is in the title - don't bother reading the book: Steve Hagen One of the best ways to be introduced to the Dharma: Among them Buddhism Plain Simple is one of the top five bestselling Buddhism books in the United States. He has been a student of Buddhist thought and practice since 1967: In 1975 he became a student of Dainin Katagiri Roshi in Minneapolis and was ordained in 1979: Asia and Europe and in 1989 received Dharma transmission (endorsement to teach) from Katagiri Roshi: Stephen Tokan Steve Hagen Rōshi (born 1945) is the founder and head teacher of the Dharma Field Zen Center in Minneapolis Minnesota and a Dharma heir of Dainin Katagiri roshi, Among them Buddhism Plain Simple is one of the top five bestselling Buddhism books in the United States: He has been a student of Buddhist thought and practice since 1967, In 1975 he became a student of Dainin Katagiri Roshi in Minneapolis and was ordained in 1979, Asia and Europe and in 1989 received Dharma transmission (endorsement to teach) from Katagiri Roshi. Buddhism is Not What You Think—it is both more...and less. Highly recommended. Nothing has its own being. Nothing actually forms as an object; nothing stands apart. No matter where we look there's just this. And because of sound there is silence." Steve Hagen Whatever you hold to let it go. Step into this moment. Come back to just this. It takes some effort. But come back come back come back to just this. Just see what you've been ignoring for so long. A major component of ACT is learning mindfulness skills. Sitting with those feelings and really feeling them. They are comforting. I like the musky smell. They way the paper feels in my hand. I like looking at words on paper. Which is just what I needed. It's just not helpful. You don't want someone to say it's all your choice. That is reality. This is reality. This is what Steve Hagen told me. I am always changing from one moment to the next. He told me that every moment is a new moment. He told me that all we have is now. Somewhere along the way I stopped reading it. I think I was unwell and couldn't focus on it. So I left it for a while. It made me feel like life is okay. And once I got through it all. In the process we also abuse ourselves. Zen is about freeing ourselves from such deluded thinking. 57-58 Try to nail down what anything is. You can't." But obviously it is not. You're not a baby. We quietly assume a cup is a cup is a cup. This includes your eardrum which vibrates in response to it. It includes the stick that strikes the bell." It is the entire Universe." In the city for better or worse everything is planned. Nature on the other hand is unintentional. Nevertheless nature does produce a great deal. We talk of the "will of God." And we also want to please this I-creature. And so we find ourselves filled with longing and loathing. This is delusion. It's what most often characterizes our minds. This is liberation enlightenment freedom of mind. You already have the capacity to see Truth right now. Just as no one binds you no one blinds you. 114-115 To act or not act is not the real question. You'll never live happily ever after. For the awakened motivation has shifted. We act from there." This to me is what it means to be fully human. Thus we arrive at completion in each moment. 167 We live through experience not through description. We must abandon understanding and being understood.

Don't believe me because others do. And when you do then give them up. They neither swallow it whole nor reject it outright. This is not skepticism but cynicism. Their only concern for you is that you awaken. We become open with no sense of tolerance. We become compassionate with no sense of separation. The Buddha recognized this and warned against it. (And people didn't at first.) You need to realize that you are Buddha. Ultimately there is no other place for you to look. He went to get Tippy for the last time. But her tail started to wag. She was happy to see her friend and master. Even as she faced death she was serene. Unlike animals we fool ourselves about death. We think we know that we 're going to die. But death isn't something we can know as an idea. What we call "death" is only something we imagine. Real death—Real anything—is always right here right now. It's not lurking somewhere off in the future. It occurs—it can only occur—now. Animals are not confused about this matter. Birth and death occur right here right now. 206The awakened see Reality as it is. Still it isn't that the illusion goes away. And this seeing is utterly liberating." But what exactly has changed? In a sense nothing." But everything is seen as empty of self. Thus with seeing the sense of "I" drops away. Enlightened people don't suddenly disappear. This non- locality is the very essence of Mind. In fact such an arrangement is quite literally impossible. The whole picture reduces to energy and movement. Nothing whatsoever abides for a moment. It's a mental experience. Mind is the Source. Our experience is always in the present. No matter where you "go" you never leave here. Consciousness produces them. Indeed this is what consciousness is." —Robert M. Zen literature is replete with anecdotes and stories. Hagen's book does not depart from this tradition. Taste and See!! Steve Hagen Terrific book. Instead it was just incredibly boring.He is a published author of several books on Buddhism. He has studied with teachers in the U.S. He is currently head teacher at Dharma Field.He is a published author of several books on Buddhism. He has studied with teachers in the U.S. He is currently head teacher at Dharma Field. {site_link}

