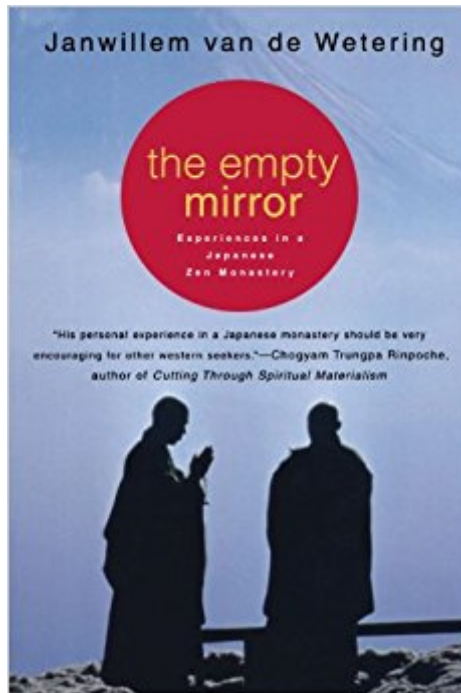


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The Empty Mirror: Experiences In A Japanese Zen Monastery



Synopsis

Seen by many as a contemporary classic, Janwillem van de Wetering's small and admirable memoir records the experiences of a young Dutch student who later a widely celebrated mystery writer who spent a year and a half as a novice monk in a Japanese Zen Buddhist monastery. As Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, author of Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism, has written, The Empty Mirror "should be very encouraging for other Western seekers." It is the first book in a trilogy that continues with A Glimpse of Nothingness and Afterzen.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In the summer of 1958 Janwillem van de Wetering showed up at the door of a Zen monastery in Kyoto Japan, knowing pretty much no one, not speaking the language, and without a really good idea what he was doing there. This book describes, with a certain amount of humor and what seems to be quite a bit of honesty, the months that followed (interlaced with Zen stories that he heard during those months, including some that I hadn't heard anywhere else before; I like Zen stories). There aren't many dates in the book (or I wasn't paying enough of that kind of attention to notice them), but I think he stayed at the monastery for more than six months and less than two years. His descriptions of the time are interesting, funny, warm, vivid, and all sorts of good words like that (and also rather dark, mordant and/or grouchy in tone, often frustrated, impatient, dissatisfied). He did not find the answers to life's problems, his knees hurt a lot, he misunderstood the head monk and Zen master frequently, and he (like the other residents of the monastery)

cheated and broke the rules with impressive frequency. The writing is spare and specific; this is the story of what one particular set of months in one particular monastery were like. Any broad conclusions about The Meaning Of Zen Training or anything else are left pretty much entirely to the reader. The author left feeling that the whole thing had perhaps been a failure; but the master said "now you are a little awake; so awake that you will never fall asleep again". Which altogether is more satisfying, I think, than perky converts describing how happy and fulfilled their new meme complex has made them.

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