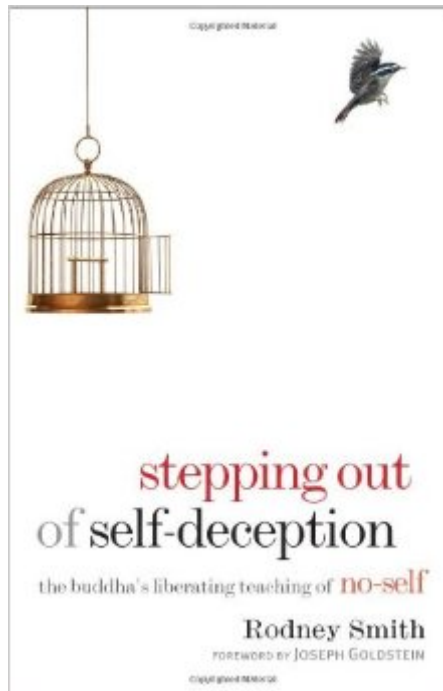


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Stepping Out Of Self-Deception: The Buddha's Liberating Teaching Of No-Self



Synopsis

Anatta is the Buddhist teaching on the nonexistence of a permanent, independent self. It's a notoriously puzzling and elusive concept, usually leading to such questions as, "Do I not have a self, who's reading this sentence?" • It's not that there's no self there, says Rodney Smith. It's just that the self that is reading this sentence is a configuration of elements that at one time did not exist and which at some point in the future will disperse. Even in its present existence, it's more a temporary arrangement of components rather than something solid. Anatta is a truth the Buddha considered to be absolutely essential to his teaching. Smith shows that understanding this truth can change the way you relate to the world, and that the perspective of selflessness is critically important for anyone involved in spiritual practice. Seeing it can be the key to getting past the idea that spirituality has something to do with self-improvement, and to accessing the joy of deep insight into reality.

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Customer Reviews

I borrowed this book from the library and have been reading it slowly and savoring it. I realize I will have to buy it so I can reread it, underline passages and take the insights deeply to heart-- it is that sort of book. True, as a previous reviewer mentioned, it is not easy reading, but I value this. Rodney Smith has made the effort to use language that actually corresponds to his experience, rather than relying on over-used Dharma cliches. For me, this brings a freshness and vitality to the book. Even insights I am familiar with come alive in a new way. Rodney Smith has taught Insight Meditation

for decades and has directed Hospice programs for many years. He studied with Ajahn Buddhadasa in Thailand but also cites dialogues with the Vedanta sage Shri Nisargadatta as having a great impact on him. This book should appeal not only to Buddhists but to readers having an interest in Advaita Vedanta and contemporary non-dualist teachers like Eckhart Tolle. The author is fearless in confronting the many ways spiritual practice ends up supporting the ego it supposedly is challenging. Consider this quote: "I have seen many practitioners overstay their efforts and arrest their understanding... They feel safe and unassailable, expertly following their breath for hours according to Buddha's instruction... But scratch beneath the surface and their hearts are dry... They have opted out of wonder for the mental fulfillment of precision." This book is targeted at lay Buddhist practitioners with a full engagement in the world. "The lay Buddhist does not have the luxury to pull back from the barrage of experiences coming forth throughout the day."

I was very eager to read this book because I admire Rodney Smith as a teacher. He brings a unique perspective to Buddhist practice, and is often very thought provoking. However, I do find many of his lines of thought to be very complex, and not readily understood. I would consider myself an average meditator with about average exposure to Buddhist ideas. I am not, as a rule, intimidated by complicated ideas or challenging books. Any reader of this book should be warned that they may find much of the discussion to be very challenging to understand. I often had a sense that I just wanted the author to state in more direct and easily understood language what he was trying to convey. Now, having said that, I did find some very useful concepts in this book. In particular, the notion that our practice may be working to build a sense of self that is contrary to what we are trying to achieve is very helpful, and not a message I have learned from other teachers. But overall I felt that author either had much, much more to convey than I was able to pick up from the lengthy discussion, or he uses far more words to explain his ideas than are necessary. Truthfully, I think he has much more to say that I can comprehend, but that just makes this book somewhat frustrating because I was ready to absorb his ideas, but simply could not truly understand many of them. As a final note, I suspect many readers will find this book light on how to integrate the concepts into daily practice. This is certainly not a "how to" book by any stretch of the imagination. Update to my initial review: I went back to this book and reread it; something I rarely do with books of any sort. I must say, after the second read my respect for this author's ideas as presented in the book have increased greatly.

The first time I met Rodney was in my first few years of practice. I had a deep experience of my

"True Self". When I went into see Rodney, I started crying and he told me it was because I knew what I was. He then took me to a place of infinite space and consciousness (the 5th and 6th Jhana). This spring I assisted him teaching and one night when he was answering questions I knew there was nothing more to do. I was free. I had already planned on a six week retreat and I was just present. I felt there is nothing to do. Rodney quotes Nisargaddatta Maharaj who he practiced with. Nisargaddatta would ask Rodney why are you meditating. You know who you are. I was at a meditation center and it didn't make sense to meditate any more. I rested in stillness, awareness. I re-read Rodney's book over and over on the retreat. It validated my understanding. Freedom is not a journey. It is here right now for all of us. That is one of the beautiful aspects of this book. He makes it clear that it is not a journey and that it is not about technique. Love, connection, the timelessness. It is all available to us now. It cannot be in any other moment. The very effort to achieve, to see creates a sense of separation. We simply have to form the intention to surrender to the moment. It isn't that he over simplifies. We have to work through all of the material that causes us to resist our experience. Rodney does a wonderful job explaining how to work through this material. He has better psychological training than most teachers and he integrates that understanding with his profound understanding of the Dharma. I teach and I have been practicing in the Zen and Theravada tradition for 20 years. This book is one of my favorites.

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