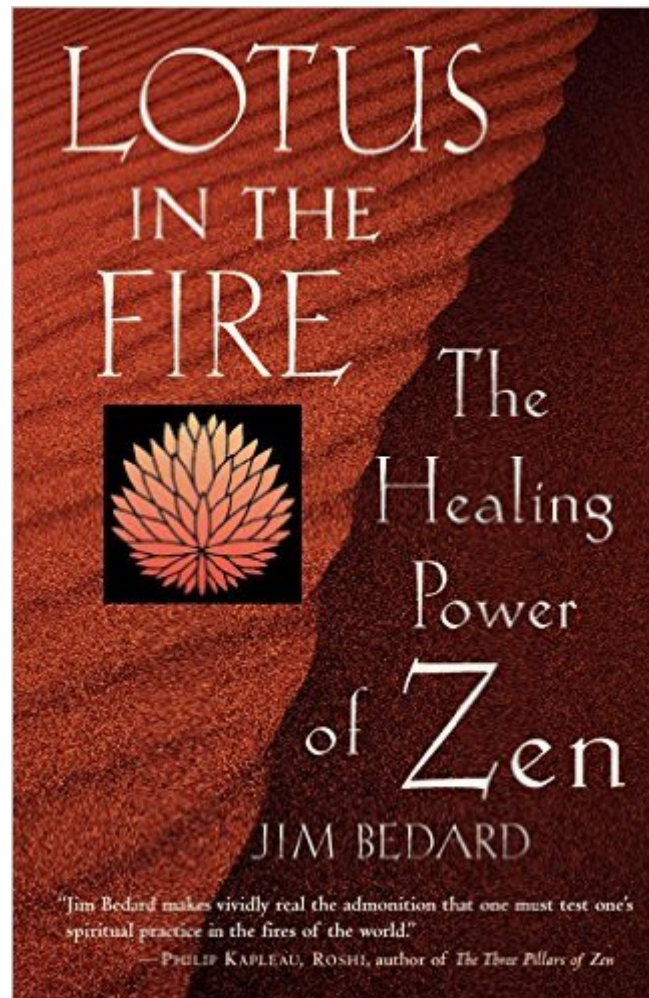


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Lotus In The Fire



Synopsis

In 1995, Jim Bedard, a martial artist and Zen student, was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia and given ten days to live. This is the story of how he used his spiritual strength to bring himself into full contact with a death sentence as well as with painful medical treatment, including chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant. It is also the inspiring story of how the faith of his family, Zen teacher, close friends, and the Buddhist community helped him. Bedard's story introduces us to Zen practices that can help us cope with emotional turmoil and physical pain. His words on compassion, on karma, on gratitude, on impermanence and the inevitability of death "all from a nonsmoking, meditating, aerobically fit vegetarian who became suddenly and "terminally" ill" are inspiring and sometimes funny. He explores, too, the fundamental question of suffering, its cause, and how the teachings of karma can help us accept illness, ultimately using it as an opportunity to deepen our spiritual lives.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I am a 15 year old homeschooled girl in Maryland. I have been researching buddhism for the past few months. I stumbled across this book in the library while doing a research project. I haven't stopped reading it since. This book touched me in a religious and emotional way. My entire family is suffering from a number of illnesses and operations of our family members. This book gave me a better idea of what it is like for my relatives in this rough time. Plus I learned a lot about Zen Buddhism and a little bit of medical info. I suggested this book to everyone in my house so that they

too can be more accepting of our families difficulties.

In "Lotus in the Fire," Jim Bedard tells the story of his battle with leukemia with the lightness, simplicity and humor of a gifted storyteller and with the depth and insight gained from long years of Zen practice. Running through this book are questions we all live with: How do we face difficult or painful times? When do we accept the situation at hand and make the best of it or when do we put our full effort into changing it? How do we use a dilemma or an illness as a tool to enable us to grow in strength, wisdom and compassion, and even to give love and wisdom to others? "Lotus in the Fire" follows Bedard's journey through illness in an open and unselfconscious manner. He meets his trials with flexibility, knowing only that he does not know what is going to happen the next day, the next moment. Returning again and again to his Zen practice, Bedard finds energy when he has no energy left and an ability to ride through disappointments with trust. Bedard expresses gratitude for his life and family and friends throughout the book. In "Lotus in the Fire," the reader walks with Bedard through the experience of having cancer. He holds nothing back, gives his all throughout the journey and throughout the book. A sense of responsibility and of giving full effort with awareness, love and humor shines through this book. It is a tale told with grace and wit, and with the easy lilt of an author who finds joy in this world.

This is an inspiring, moving and painful book. It is about the author's battle against Leukemia; at the beginning of the book he is given 10 days to live. Bedard's descriptions of his fight to live are hair-raising and sometimes painful to read, as when, without any anesthetic, a doctor hammers a thick needle through his back, his liver and into his gallbladder. Here is his description: "He placed a long, thick needle on the right of my abdomen about an inch or so below my ribs and began to hammer it through the liver. Several times I brought my legs and head up from the intense pain. Each time I moved he told me to lie still, my movements were making his work more difficult. But the contractions were uncontrollable...I was crying out in pain and no longer cared what anyone thought of my pleas to hasten the procedure and get it over with." Bedard had been a Zen student for 15 years, and used the "healing power of Zen" to survive his ordeal, during which he was several times told he only had a few hours to live. What kept him on the planet was the love he had for his wife and children, and the assistance he received from them, his family or origin and the sangha to which he belonged, as well as the encouragement of his teacher and his deep, sincere belief in Zen. His story is notable for his sheer grit and determination to survive regardless of the odds, as well as his courage to endure the unendurable. He narrates several eerie experiences which seem

inexplicable, and which give his story an air of magic and mystery. He does survive, and his teacher asks him to write this book as a way of "giving back" to the community. Bedard's primary thesis is that it was Zen practice that enabled him to overcome his disease. Despite this conviction, however, the book could have been written by someone of almost any faith. Christians, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs and many other believers could have undergone what he did and lived due to their powerful belief in their religion. Indeed, there are similar books from many traditions. In the final analysis, it was Bedard's stubborn faith, allied with his will to live, that fueled his recovery. From this perspective, the book seems a little parochial or naïve, in that Bedard attributes his survival to the healing power of Zen specifically. Nevertheless, the book is gripping if grisly reading. It is not for the squeamish, however.

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