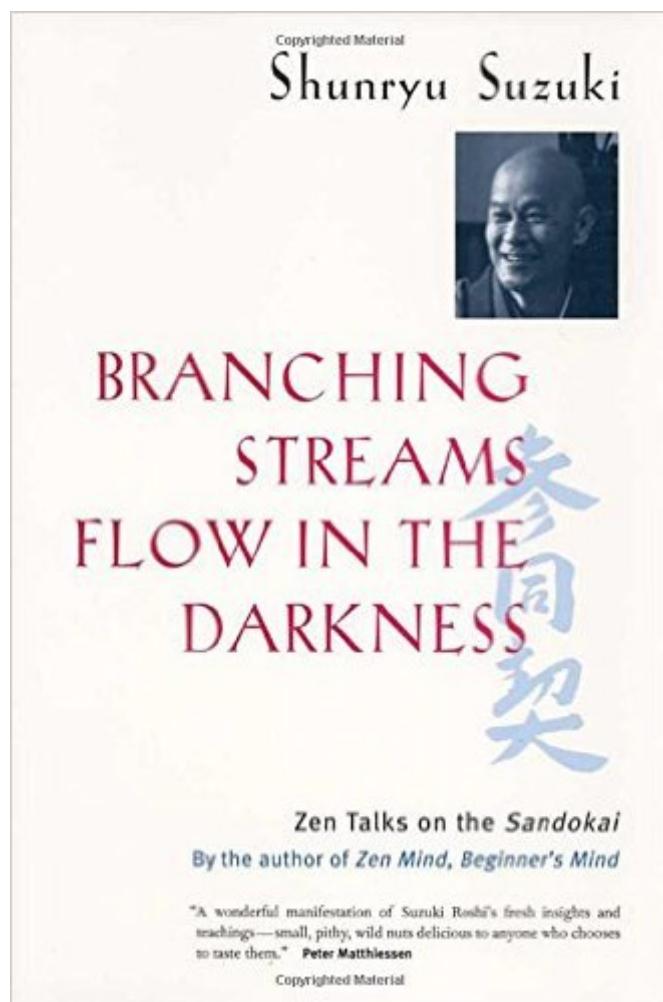


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Branching Streams Flow In The Darkness: Zen Talks On The Sandokai



Synopsis

When Shunryu Suzuki Roshi's Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind was published in 1972, it was enthusiastically embraced by Westerners eager for spiritual insight and knowledge of Zen. The book became the most successful treatise on Buddhism in English, selling more than one million copies to date. Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness is the first follow-up volume to Suzuki Roshi's important work. Like Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, it is a collection of lectures that reveal the insight, humor, and intimacy with Zen that made Suzuki Roshi so influential as a teacher. The Sandokai—a poem by the eighth-century Zen master Sekito Kisen (Ch. Shitou Xiqian)—is the subject of these lectures. Given in 1970 at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, the lectures are an example of a Zen teacher in his prime elucidating a venerated, ancient, and difficult work to his Western students. The poem addresses the question of how the oneness of things and the multiplicity of things coexist (or, as Suzuki Roshi expresses it, "things-as-it-is"). Included with the lectures are his students' questions and his direct answers to them, along with a meditation instruction. Suzuki Roshi's teachings are valuable not only for those with a general interest in Buddhism but also for students of Zen practice wanting an example of how a modern master in the Japanese Soto Zen tradition understands this core text today.

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Customer Reviews

This is Shunryu Suzuki's commentary on the Sandokai. The Sandokai is a poem by Zen master Sekito Kisen on the inseparability of the relative and the absolute. You will find this poem in many

Zen and Buddhism books. I checked out 10 or 11 books from the library, and this poem was in... I think it was 4 of them. So it wouldn't be very hard to compare the different translations of the poem if one wished. They differ quite a bit. Although the core meaning is always the same. This poem was written in response to the disagreement between the northern (more hinayana/gradual) and southern (more mahayana/instant) schools that started to distance themselves in the 7th century. Actually it started long before that and continues to this day. Also, the one school, by very nature contains the "other school." So while more and more people were sticking to one side or the other, the absolute teachings of Zen were suffering from this ignorance. That's where the illuminating rays of Sekito Kisen's wisdom--in the form of the Sandokai--illuminate and expose a dualistic view that so easily creeps into Zen practice and jeopardizes it. Sekito shines his wisdom upon not just the troubles of the northern and southern schools, but on the perils of sticking to dualistic views in and of themselves. While the actual poem is only a couple pages. It is powerful and very important to all of Buddhism. Suzuki gives a valuable commentary that takes the poem line for line. Each chapter takes 4, 5 or 6 lines of the poem. Suzuki explains and adds his own words of wisdom, experiences and views which brings out the profound nature of these verses that might otherwise be too deep for most people. You can read a line and think "yeah I see the meaning of that."

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