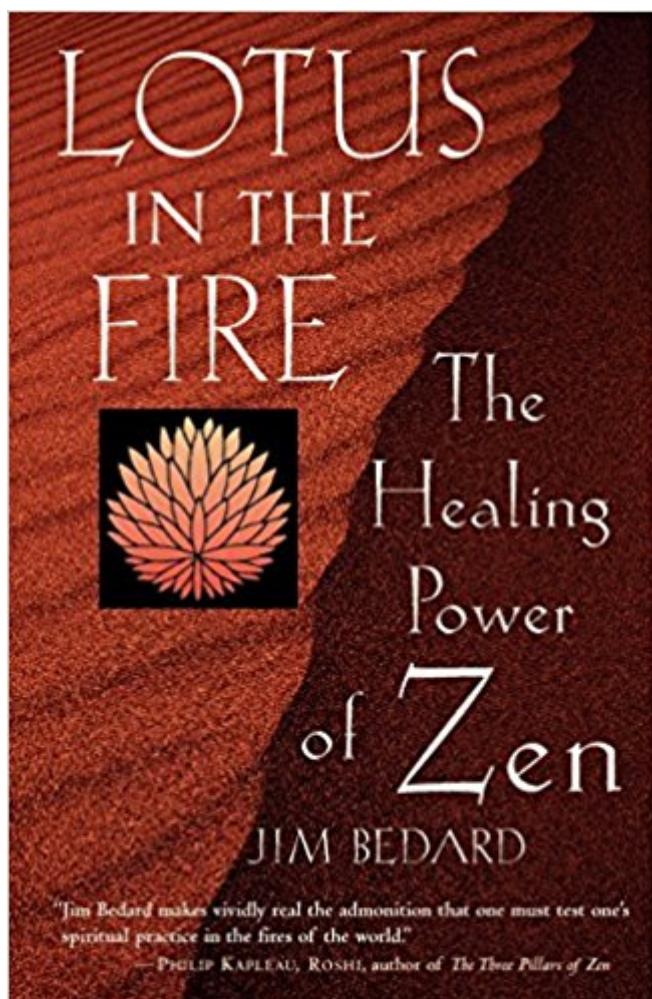


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Lotus In The Fire: The Healing Power Of Zen



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

In this remarkable document, Canadian writer Bedard tells how his Zen Buddhist faith helped him overcome terminal cancer. Diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia in 1995, and given just seven to 10 days to live, Bedard drew upon meditation, prayer, introspection and chanting during months of hospitalization that included devastating rounds of chemotherapy, gallbladder surgery, radiotherapy and a bone marrow transplant. For Bedard, an ex-Catholic turned Buddhist, a vegetarian and a former martial arts teacher who works at the Toronto Zen Center, illness became a spiritual crisis

that broke down walls of stubborn self-reliance, egoism, attachment and perfectionism. Now in complete remission, he describes his uncanny out-of-body experiences while in an ICU, as well as a near-death experience that he claims took him to otherworldly realms, confirming his belief that death is only a transition period before one's next rebirth. Through the prism of his harrowing ordeal, he illuminates Buddhist concepts of compassion, balance and mind/body unity. Bedard's conviction that karma from present and past lifetimes contributed to causing his disease is a diagnosis with which many will disagree, yet his riveting, taut and very moving survivor's story will appeal to readers of all faiths. A wake-up call to live life to the fullest, told with modest understatement and no New Age jargon, his book will inspire patients and their families coping with illness, as well as anyone coming to terms with death. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In late August 1995, a 42-year-old father of four listened in disbelief as his doctor pronounced a diagnosis of acute myeloid leukemia. He might have fewer than two weeks to live. In this intimate, sobering, sometimes frightening account, Canadian martial artist Bedard chronicles the precipitous deterioration of his health, life-threatening chemotherapy and radiation treatments, the excruciating pain caused by his damaged gallbladder, and several battles with imminent death. More than a celebration of his eventual victory over the disease, this book offers a real message of spiritual growth and hope. Throughout his year-long ordeal, he drew upon years of Zen practice, particularly his understanding of the law of karma, and the loving support of his family, his Zen teacher, and the Buddhist community. A powerful, personal testimony suitable for popular collections on death and dying. A James R. Kuhlman, Univ. of North Carolina at Asheville Lib. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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 naïf/Æ'Â ve, 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.

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.

1. It gives actual practice of actual Buddhism under extreme stress, showing how, why, and when to

do it.2. It opens the heart to compassion by reading it. Hard would he be of heart who doesn't weep reading this.3. It opens the mind to the supernatural realm of the bodhisattvas, an arena traditionally populated for Westerners by angels, and an extraordinary experience of reality in and of itself.4. It teaches the 4 Noble Truths through example and story, showing suffering and the way free of it without needing to teach.5. It teaches chanting, which has been a tremendous support for Buddhists through the ages, and gives the simplest, easiest, most direct and practical for application translations of the Prajna Paramita and the basic Vows of Buddhism. All in all, a remarkable experience of a book. I've read it twice and each time come away transformed. I practice the chants I first learnt in this book daily. It is a fine piece of work.

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