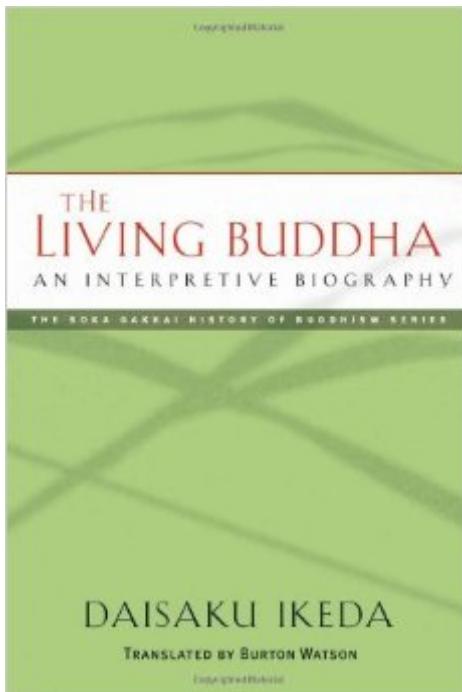


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The Living Buddha: An Interpretive Biography (Soka Gakkai History Of Buddhism)



Synopsis

An intimate portrayal of one of history's most important and obscure figures, the Buddha, this chronicle reveals him not as a mystic, but a warm and engaged human being that was very much the product of his turbulent times. This biographical account traces the path of Siddhartha Gautama as he walked away from the pleasure palace that had been his home and joined a growing force of wandering monks, ultimately making his way towards enlightenment beneath the bodhi tree, and spending the next 45 years sharing his insights along the banks of the Ganges. The Buddhist canon is expertly harvested to provide insight into the Buddha's inner life and to grant a better understanding of how he came to play his pivotal role as founder of one of the world's largest religions.

Book Information

Series: Soka Gakkai History of Buddhism

Paperback: 150 pages

Publisher: Middleway Press (October 1, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0977924521

ISBN-13: 978-0977924523

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.5 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (13 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #271,802 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #61 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism > History #76 in Books > History > World > Religious > Buddhism #1807 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Religious

Customer Reviews

Buddhism is one of the world's major religions. What is the secret of its vigor some three thousand years after the death of its founder, Shakyamuni? This book, "The Living Buddha, An Interpretive Biography" seeks to answer that question. Surely essential to a full understanding of the continuing impact of this teaching is a knowledge and appreciation of the life and personality of Shakyamuni himself. Unlike most major religions, Buddhism depends neither on divine revelation nor an incarnation of God for its authenticity. Shakyamuni, the Buddha or "Enlightened One" was a man who through his own efforts attained enlightenment as to the essential nature of life itself. And for

this very reason, his life story is meaningful to us today. "The Living Buddha" is a biography with a double focus. On the one hand, it is a vivid historical narrative based on what is known of Shakyamuni's life and times. On the other hand, it is the inspiring account of a heroic life dedicated to helping all people free themselves from suffering and futility and attain true peace of mind. In this book, exquisitely written by world-renowned author Daisaku Ikeda, Shakyamuni Buddha emerges as the amazing man he was. Yet, he was only a man; not some superhuman deity, just a man who attained a state of life that, according to his own teachings, is inherent in every one of us. Therein lies his true greatness. Through this book, we see that Shakyamuni Buddha lived in a turbulent period and was confronted with the same kinds of social conflicts and personal problems that we all face.

In Japanese, the title's "My View of Shakyamuni." Ikeda, leader of the lay organization Soka Gakkai that stresses outreach, emphasizes how flexible Buddhism can be for our age. He cites Karl Jaspers on how in its origins, it emerged during what scholars call the Axial Age, when Socrates, Confucius, and later Jesus preached. Like them, the Buddha's messages weren't written down until later; like them, his teachings emerged from the "middle of the world" to spread to millions. (See Karen Armstrong's "Buddha" biography in the Penguin Lives series for more social and cross-cultural context.) Sharing the dharma teaching's foremost; the intellectual understanding, Ikeda tells us, cannot replace action. He places the little factually that we know about the historical Shakyamuni, the sage of the Shakyas, within the legends and suppositions that, as with Socrates and Jesus, grew up around the teacher after his death. One key difference: the Eastern conception of emancipation comes not from an oppressive political system so much as a deceptive personal structure. (See Pankraj Mishra's "An End to Suffering" for more on this comparison and contrast within Western & Hindu intellectual history and philosophy.) Ikeda admits he searches the scanty information we can verify, while allowing the myths also to enter his study, for from both we, as with Jesus and Socrates, have built our perceptions of such men, far more imaginatively and powerfully than a few facts recited could sway so many millions in centuries since. This narrative takes time to look at those who as "voice hearers" (shravaka) listened to the teachings and found enlightenment. Here, a comparison with Stephen Batchelor's agnostic "Buddhism Without Beliefs" may be helpful.

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