



The Spirit of Buddhist Meditation

Sarah Shaw

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Is it possible to capture the spirit of Buddhist meditation, which depends so much upon silence and unspoken wisdom? Can this spirit be found after two millennia? This wise and reassuring book reminds us that the Buddhist meditative tradition, geared to such concerns from its inception, has always been transmitted through texts. A great variety of early writings—poems, stories, extended practical guides, commentaries, and chants—were purposely designed to pass teachings on from one generation to the next.

Sarah Shaw, a longtime practitioner and teacher of Buddhism, investigates a wide and varied range of ancient and later Buddhist writings on meditation. Many of these texts are barely known in the West but, as the author shows, they can be helpful, moving, and often very funny. She begins with early texts of the Pali canon—those that describe and involve the Buddha and his followers teaching meditations—and moves on to “commentaries,” with their copious range of practical tips, anecdotes, and accounts of early meditators. The author then considers other early texts that were inspirational as Buddhist traditions spread through India and on to China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet. Centuries after being written, early Buddhist texts have lost none of their relevance, this authoritative book shows. In a tradition characterized by flexibility and mobility, these writings offer wisdom unchanged by time.

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