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# The Star Spangled Buddhist: Zen, Tibetan, and Soka Gakkai Buddhism and the Quest for Enlightenment in America

Jeffrey Ourvan

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"Ourvan offers a succinct but illuminating overview of Zen, Tibetan, and Soka Gakkai Buddhism." —*Publishers Weekly*

## The Star-Spangled BUDDHIST



Zen, Tibetan, and Soka Gakkai Buddhism  
and the Quest for Enlightenment  
in America



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**Jeffrey Ourvan : The Star Spangled Buddhist: Zen, Tibetan, and Soka Gakkai Buddhism and the Quest for Enlightenment in America** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Star Spangled Buddhist: Zen, Tibetan, and Soka Gakkai Buddhism and the Quest for Enlightenment in America:

24 of 25 people found the following review helpful. Enlightened read! Informative and thorough. Fantastic book! By Emerson Taylor I've read a lot of books on Buddhism but never one that I felt was this good at explaining Buddhism to a non-Buddhist. I feel this is the perfect Buddhist book that has been sorely lacking in our American literature and culture. Clearly the author seems to be a very well informed and deeply spiritual person but also practical and extremely engaged in trying to help the reader understand the differences in 3 popular sects of Buddhism in America. I really love that I can feel both the passion and compassion in this writing. I loved the introduction where the author really showed us his human side and let us get an inside view into his introduction into Buddhism. I think anyone who has a self-effacing attitude and can be real is always a gem - so kudos to the author for that! It was also very refreshing that the author, Jeff Ourvan, who practices Nichiren Buddhism seems able to impartially view the different practices and allow the reader to come to their own conclusions. He states his reasonings for practicing the Buddhism he has chosen but does so in a very informative and respectful manner. Again, what a satisfyingly refreshing and enlightened read. I really appreciated the explanation of the mentor disciple relationship in Buddhism as that has always confused me. The author's own explanation of his experience in selecting a mentor was helpful. I also am always very interested in what kind of person wrote this book, being a fledging writer myself, and I really like how he ended it by saying "I now live with my new wife, our three children, and, in my heart, my mentor on our mundane and exquisitely ordinary own little island of dharma." And then he goes on to say how he is able to strive for his own happiness daily through his Buddhist chanting. Very cool! The only other review on here was written by a Dave Balschum that is a very strange review of the book. It seems he got offended by the book, which is weird to me because I perceived the book to be very balanced. This reader, Dave, seems to have an agenda and it is unfortunate he, who is a Buddhist? maybe, has such harsh judgement, it seems personal? To me this seems to be the antithesis of Buddhism from what I understand of it. Also, this reader didn't really review the book. Enough on that but was worth mentioning since it is the only other review on here so far. All and all I would highly and enthusiastically recommend this book to anyone who is even remotely interested in understanding Buddhism in America. I have already ordered a couple to send as gifts. I would like to say "Kudos" to the publisher for publishing this type of book. And I commend the author for personal, insightful, informative and very human heart to heart writing.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Friendly But Forthright By A. C. Kerr Jeff Ourvan does a nice job of presenting a friendly but forthright picture of Buddhism in the US, in a kind of whirlwind view of three kinds of Buddhism that have taken hold here. The portrayal is sympathetic, but never shies away from scandals or controversies that some apologists have scanted. As a member of SGI I appreciated his in-depth look at Nichiren Buddhism, which sometimes gets short shrift in surveys of Buddhist America. As a former practitioner of Theravada/Vipassana, though, I was a little disappointed to see that part of the Buddhist-American picture given only a passing footnote. I was under the impression that it had also grown deep roots in America -- but that might be my skewed perspective. All-in-all, a good read for curious outsiders, Buddhist newbies, and old-timers alike.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Unique, Important and Entertaining Read. Enjoyed it so much! By Lorrie Gay Marlow It was the witty cover art that first got my attention. But it was the galvanizing read and the totally fair-minded and enlightening writing that kept me highlighting, writing in and dog-eared this book. Having practiced Nichiren Buddhism for decades, I had to admit I still had only the most cursory knowledge of how these three most familiar variations of Buddhism in America varied, making me less than able to answer questions. It was fascinating and very encouraging to see both the important differences and the many commonalities. The author has arranged the material really cleanly. A series of topics and then each of the three explained in terms of THAT topic alone. What I loved is that he NEVER pits them against each other, simply and entertainingly lays out the background and tenets of each so the reader can form their own views and - if they want - their own comparisons. JUST - SO - GOOOOOD!

Ourvan offers a succinct but illuminating overview of Zen, Tibetan, and Soka Gakkai Buddhism. "Publishers Weekly Approximately four million Americans claim to be Buddhist. Moreover, hundreds of thousands of Americans of various faiths read about Buddhism, are interested in its philosophical tenets, or fashionably view themselves as Buddhists. They're part of what's been described as the fastest-growing religious movement in America: a large group of people dissatisfied with traditional religious offerings and thirsty for an approach to spirituality grounded in logic and consistent with scientific knowledge. The Star-Spangled Buddhist is a provocative look at these American Buddhists through their three largest movements in the United States: the Soka Gakkai International, Tibetan/Vajrayana Buddhism, and Zen Buddhism. The practice of each of these American schools, unlike most traditional Asian Buddhist sects, is grounded in the notion that all people are capable of attaining enlightenment in this lifetime. But the differences are also profound: the spectrum of philosophical expression among these American Buddhist schools is as varied as that observed between Reformed, Orthodox, and Hasidic Judaism. The Star-Spangled Buddhist isn't written from the perspective of a monk or academic but rather from the view of author Jeff Ourvan, a lifelong-practicing lay Buddhist. As Ourvan explores the American Buddhist movement through its most popular schools, he arrives at a clearer understanding for himself and the reader about what it means to be and how one might choose to be a Buddhist in America.

Ourvan offers a succinct but illuminating overview of Zen, Tibetan, and Soka Gakkai Buddhism. . . . This highly informative book is especially suited to the reader who lacks a background in Buddhism, though it is also a satisfying refresher course for anyone with prior knowledge. Publishers Weekly "Attorney and literary agent Ourvan has written an endearing field guide to the major sects of Buddhism in this country: Zen, Tibetan, and Soka Gakkai International, in which he himself was a senior leader for a time. At once a slice of memoir and an informal but well-researched history of Buddhism's remarkable and growing success in the United States, Ourvan's brief account touches upon personalities, events, and doctrines. VERDICT: An accessible history of modern Buddhism in America, Ourvan's book fills a crucial gap, and deserves to attract many academic and nonacademic readers." Library Journal