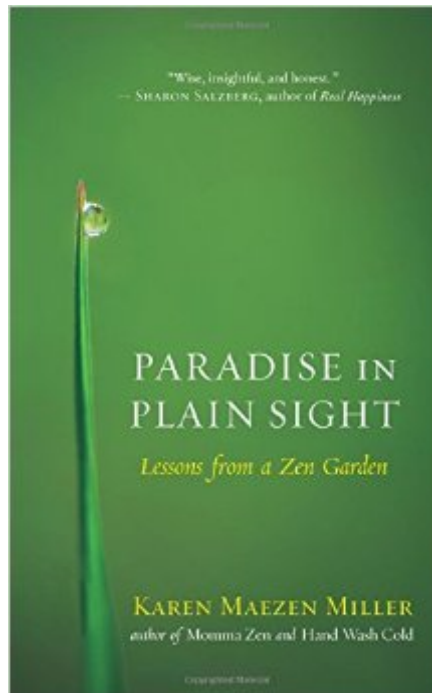


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Paradise In Plain Sight: Lessons From A Zen Garden



Synopsis

Come See the Garden That Is Your Life When Zen teacher Karen Maezen Miller and her family land in a house with a hundred-year-old Japanese garden, she uses the paradise in her backyard to glean the living wisdom of our natural world. Through her eyes, rocks convey faith, ponds preach stillness, flowers give love, and leaves express the effortless ease of letting go. The book welcomes readers into the garden for Zen lessons in fearlessness, forgiveness, presence, acceptance, and contentment. Miller gathers inspiration from the ground beneath her feet to remind us that paradise is always here and now.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I'm a big Karen Miller fan. Her writing is a skillful blend of personal narrative and insightful dharma teaching. She has unusual skill in expressing how Buddhist teachings can manifest in the midst of an ordinary life--whether we're parenting (her first book, "Momma Zen"), doing household chores ("Hand Wash Cold"), or caring for a garden, as in her newest book. Her prose is always fresh and potent. In "Paradise in Plain Sight" she writes about moving into a small home in Southern California that included an enormous one-hundred-year-old traditional Japanese garden complete with ponds, fish, and exotic trees and plants. She had little idea what she was getting into at the time. "The only thing I'd ever grown was mold on bread," she writes. The process of learning to care for this unusual and demanding garden leads her to a range of new insights and understandings. "I began to garden," writes Miller at the opening of her book, "I got scratched, tired, and dirty. I broke my

fingernails and ruined my shoes. I yanked out what I could have kept and put in more of what I didn't need. I pouted and wept.... Time after time I realized that everything I want or need--the living truth of life, love, beauty, purpose, and peace--is taught to me right here, no farther away than the ground beneath my feet. I am a pilgrim, as we are all pilgrims, making my way through a paradise hidden in plain sight."Karen Miller was a student of Japanese Zen master Taizan Maezumi Roshi, a major figure in the transmission of Zen to the West. "Don't discriminate between yourself and Buddha," he told his students. "Don't discriminate between your life and the intrinsically enlightened life.

Many earlier zen books in English such as Suzuki's "Zen Mind Beginner's Mind" or Maezumi's "Appreciate Your Life" were mostly edited transcripts of the talks of zen masters whose mother tongue was not English. While they conveyed the essence of zen simply and directly, they were not conceived and crafted as books. They were meaningful, inspirational, and authentic, but not poetic. Paradise in Plain Sight is different. It is a beautifully written book on the essence of zen. The book is well conceived and elegantly crafted (sometimes self-consciously so). Karen Miller's writing is simple and yet poetic. Using her decrepit zen garden as a metaphor, Karen Maezen Miller gently walks the reader through what it means to live in the now. I cannot do justice to her writing without mostly paraphrasing - should I say plagiarizing? - what she has to say about the spirit of zen. Paradise is not perfection we are going to achieve some day. We cannot get there. We cannot fill a hole that doesn't exist. Just as a crescent moon or a half moon isn't lacking anything because it is not a full moon, the ground we stand on isn't lacking anything because it is not the same as our imagined version of what should be. Paradise is the ground we stand on. Can we see it? We can stand on the curb, turn it into crossroads branching into several directions, every direction unappealing and dangerous. We fail to see a many-splendored world arrayed at our feet and we think this isn't it this isn't it this isn't it. We have come looking for paradise. Will we recognize it when we are staring it in the face? The path is not a road to somewhere but a way of living. The road seems merciless when the company we can keep nor avoid is our own.

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