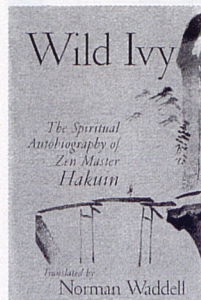


# Brief Reviews

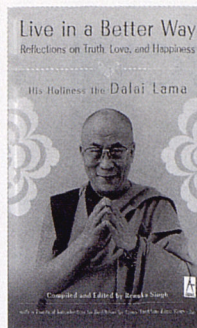
Judy Roitman JDPSN



*Wild Ivy: The Spiritual Autobiography of Zen Master Hakuin*, by Hakuin Ekaku Roshi, translated by Norman Waddell, Shambhala, 2001

Hakuin was one of the great figures not only of Japanese Zen but Japanese culture, who in his long life revitalized Rinzai Zen in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, wrote extensively in many genres, and was also a great painter

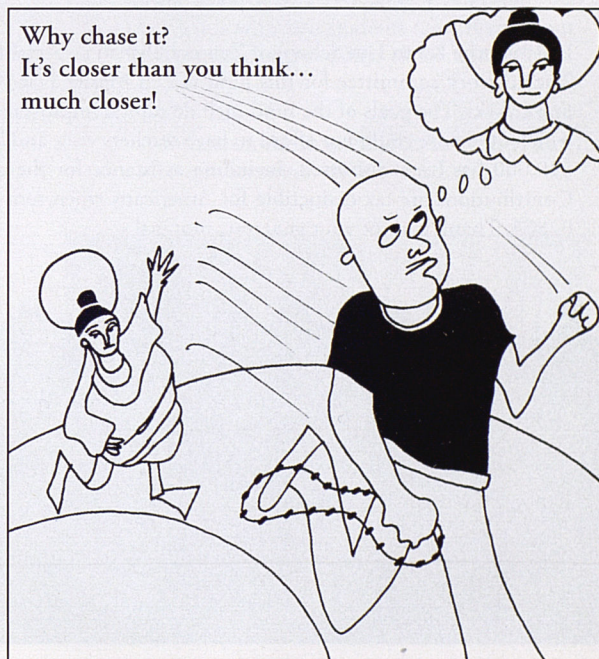
and calligrapher. This book is a memoir of his early years, until the age of thirty or so, interspersed with a number of stories about earlier Zen Masters and contemporary ghosts and demons. The extensive translator's introduction (Waddell is an important translator of Japanese Zen texts) gives us a complete biography of Hakuin in the context of his times. As a young boy, Hakuin became terrified hearing a Pure Land teacher preach about Buddhist hells, and became a monk in a desperate attempt to avoid them. *Wild Ivy* describes a life of hard practice, travel from teacher to teacher, incredible energy and persistence in practice, and attempts to reconcile often contradictory responsibilities to one or another mentor. Interspersed with the autobiography, in fact opening it, are attacks on Bankei's notion of the Unborn, a popular Zen teaching of the time which Hakuin reviled. (It's interesting to note that Waddell has also translated a book of Bankei's writings.) Sometime shortly after his first kensho, or awakening, experience, Hakuin came down with a serious illness—the Rinzai tradition has institutionalized this by calling it "Zen sickness" and expects many of its practitioners to come down with it—which has been diagnosed by modern commentators in various ways, most commonly as severe depression coupled with an anxiety disorder (but diseases such as tuberculosis are also sometimes mentioned). Hakuin was still able to function with this sickness, but he was desperate for a cure, and finally found one in a meditative practice which can be summarized as imagining butter melting down from the top of the head. Don't laugh—after three years of intensively following this practice, Hakuin was cured and his Zen practice deepened, and there is much to be learned from hearing a great teacher talk about his breakdown and subsequent return to health. The last chapter of his book is a description of his illness and cure, and in an appendix Waddell includes Hakuin's extensive description of this meditation practice, written at the request of his students.



*Live in a Better Way: Reflections on Truth, Love, and Happiness*, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Penguin Compass, 1999

A compilation of lectures given in New Delhi, this is a fairly standard book of the Dalai Lama's teachings, given a slightly exotic cast because it is directed at audiences in the homeland of the Buddha (so, for example, there is a question about a Ganesh statue that supposedly drank milk). Everyone wants to be happy, nobody wants to be unhappy, here's how to be happy and how to avoid unhappiness. Cultivate good thoughts, emotions and actions, avoid bad thoughts, emotions and actions. Bad stuff comes from ignorance, good stuff comes from... at this point the talks diverge markedly from each other. Some of them stay on the level of clear and at some points perhaps oversimplified (but the Dalai Lama knows his audience) exposition of basic Buddhist teaching, but others go into fairly technical discussions of subtle points of doctrine found in the sutras and in debates between various schools of Buddhism (e.g., "The prominent followers of the Madhyamika refute the presentation of the mind-only school saying that if you do not accept the existence of the external phenomena, you cannot accept the existence of the mind as well." p. 166-167). The question and answer sessions after the talks exhibit a wide range of styles of responses, from discursive lecturing to honest references to his own life to flashes of humor, e.g. (p. 86) "Q: If we are all human beings, what is the difference between you and me? A: I think there is a great difference. You are you and I am me!" A good example of expedient means in action. ☸

[23



by Tan Gong Sunim and Chris Morgan