

Book Review

Don't Be a Jerk

By Brad Warner

New World Library, 2016

Review by Zen Master Hae Kwang

Brad Warner is a Soto Zen priest, founder of Dōgen Sangha Los Angeles, punk rocker, Japanese monster movie marketer, and author. The full title page of his sixth and latest book says it all: *Don't Be a Jerk: And Other Practical Advice from Dōgen, Japan's Greatest Zen Master*, and the reading line continues, "A Radical but Reverent Paraphrasing of Dōgen's Treasury of the True Dharma Eye." As the author himself tells us, all of his previous books are to a greater or lesser degree based on Dōgen's *Shobogenzo* (Treasury of the True Dharma Eye), the fundamental classic of Soto Zen, and a work to which Warner's teacher, Gudō Wafu Nishijima, devoted his life. Nishijima's multivolume translation (with Michael Chodo Cross) of the complete *Shobogenzo* appeared in 2006, the first of only three complete (or nearly complete) English translations. There are a number of partial translations as well. Warner often quotes from several different translations to clarify a difficult passage (and often takes us through bits of the original Japanese and Chinese). His own treatment of Dōgen's text is best characterized as an abbreviated, colloquial paraphrase rather than a complete, scholarly translation. And therein lies the considerable virtue of this book. Warner makes Dōgen (1200–1253) come immediately alive for the contemporary reader and practitioner in a way that a scholarly translation, even one that aims for sensitivity to the original's style and tone, simply cannot.

Here is a sample of how Warner works, from his chapter 16, which corresponds to chapter 9 in the *Shobogenzo*, the title of which provides the title of Warner's book. (Warner's text also includes the Chinese characters as well as the Japanese pronunciations given below.) After a few introductory paragraphs on Buddhist precepts, he explains:

The title of this chapter is four Chinese characters that break down as follows: *sho*, meaning "various," *aku*, meaning "bad" or "wrong" or "evil," *maku*, meaning "don't," and *sa*, meaning "do." So the phrase I'm translating in this chapter as "don't be a jerk" would probably be translated by a more philosophical type as "do not enact evil" or more generally as "don't do wrong things."

After a little more explanation of the title phrase



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Warner gives us his paraphrase (in a different typeface) of chapter 9 in the *Shobogenzo* in about six pages. Other translations average about 10 pages. Warner has been selective but seems here and in general to be true the promise he makes in the introduction, that he has given us at least an abbreviated account of every paragraph, if not every sentence, in the original. He then goes on to provide his own commentary:

My favorite line in this is "Even if the whole universe is nothing but a bunch of jerks doing all kinds of jerk-type things, there is still liberation in simply not being a jerk." When I posted this online, some people asked me what Dōgen "really said." Dōgen did not speak English. So asking what he really said is problematic. What he actually wrote was [*Dōgen's Japanese text is quoted here*]. Here are three translations: "Even if wrong upon wrong pervade the whole Universe, and even if wrongs have swallowed the whole Dharma again and again, there is still salvation and liberation in not committing" (Nishijima/Cross). "Even if unwholesome action fills worlds upon worlds, and swallows up all things, refrain from is emancipation" (Kazuaki Tanahashi). "Even if evils completely filled however many worlds or completely swallowed however many dharmas, there is

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Book Review

Myths and Legends of Buddhist Temples in Korea

By Gyeongchan Mok

Jogye Order Publishing, Seoul, 2014

Review by Zen Master Bon Hae

In 1970, in Bayside, Queens, New York, the Virgin Mary appeared to Virginia Leuken and commanded her to establish a shrine at St. Robert Bellermine Catholic Church. Thousands of pilgrims soon appeared, but shortly thereafter the Church declared the visions illegitimate. The pilgrims were sent elsewhere and there is currently no mention of Virginia Leuken or her visions on St. Bellermine's Web page.

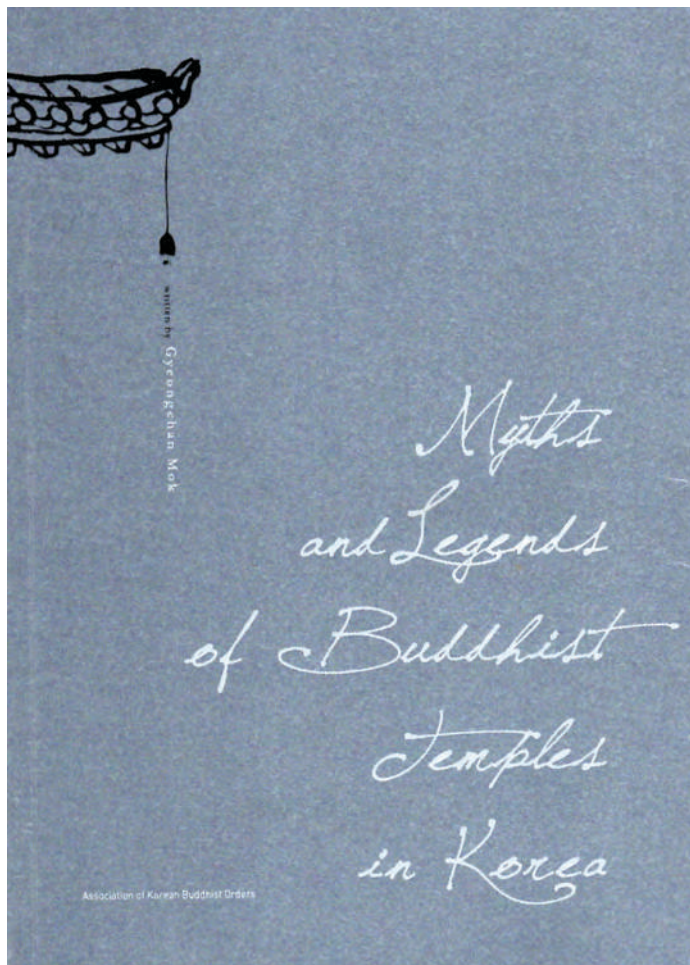
In Korea, this would have played out differently.

Myths and Legends of Buddhist Temples in Korea is a compilation of stories connected with Buddhist temples. Many of these are supernatural: a monk is reborn as a snake; a dharma hall is painted by a mysterious stranger who turns out to be a tiger; a temple fire is extinguished by a flick of rice water from a novice monk far away; ghost ships appear with Buddha statues; buddhas and bodhisattvas disguise themselves as human and suddenly disappear; and so on. In contrast to what did not happen at St. Bellermine's, many temples and hermitages are founded on visions and dreams.

These stories go back to the earliest days of Buddhism in Korea, but also forward to the late 20th century—for example, the statue of Amitabha Buddha in the main hall at Songgwang Sa Temple was soaked in sweat for nearly two weeks just before the Korean currency crisis of 1997.¹

Mok himself at times expresses mild skepticism: "Whether there is historical truth to these stories or not² . . ."; "Today such a story . . . would not be accepted."³ But historical truth is not the point. Mok is introducing the reader—one assumes this book is part of the Chogye Order's outreach to the West—to Korean culture, Korean history, Korean practice. And not just to the facts, but to the emotional heft.

For example, consider the Confucian repression of Buddhism that lasted for centuries. It is one thing to have heard about it, even to know some of the specific facts about it. It is another thing to feel the emotional weight communicated through stories in which temples are threatened with extinction and only a sort of miracle pulls them through. For another example,



even if we know about Korean suffering from the several Japanese invasions, the deep wound in the Korean psyche is made clear in the stories connected with these invasions, as is the patriotic attitude that pervades Korean Buddhist practice—one section is called *When Korean Temples Prosper, Imperial Japan Falls*.

An internal thread throughout the book is an excellent introduction to the attributes, functions and iconography of various buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other beings of the Mahayana pantheon. If you sometimes get confused by this it turns out that you're not alone. Several examples are given of major statues whose identity is not agreed upon—Shakyamuni or Baisajyaguru (Medicine Buddha)? Vairocana or Maitreya?

There is interesting material about temple design and building techniques, special practices at various

temples (for example, the salt pot ceremony to protect Haecinsa) and a wonderful chapter on Korean temple bells, which have several unique design elements.

Where can you buy this book? You can't. But it might be lying around your local Zen center. This book belongs to a class of books I think of as unobtainium: never meant for commercial release, sponsored by a generous donor, published by a temple or religious order, given out for free to lucky individuals and groups (your local Kwan Um Zen center or guiding teacher might or might not have been sent two copies by the Chogyo Order). This kind of publishing is common in Asia, in a tradition that goes back hundreds of years. In our school, *The Teachings of Zen Master Man Gong* (translated and edited by Zen Master Dae Kwang, Hye Tong Sunim JDPS and Kathy Park) was published in 2009 as a private edition by the Kwan Um School of Zen.⁴ Similarly, Su Bong Zen Monastery in Hong Kong published Zen Master Dae Kwan and Zen Master Dae Kwang's English translation of *The Platform Sutra*, distributed to Kwan Um School centers around

the world,⁵ and Myong An Sunim recently printed a Chinese edition (with simplified characters) of the *Platform Sutra* to be distributed in Malaysia.

If you are interested in the Korean heritage of our school, *Myths and Legends of Buddhist Temples in Korea* is an excellent place to start. I hope you're able to find it. ♦

Notes

1. Described in this book as the IMF crisis; the IMF report of March 1999 describes it as the Korean crisis, see <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/1999/wp9928.pdf>
2. p. 141.
3. p. 250 - 251.
4. Which is only semi-unobtainium—you can buy it at the Pagoda Gift Shop at Providence Zen Center.
5. And which the Sixth Patriarch's Temple in China liked so much that they distributed it in honor of the Sixth Patriarch's 1,300-year memorial ceremony.

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liberation in not doing" (Soto Zen Text Project). I think my version is pretty close.

Readers must decide for themselves whether it is close enough. For this reviewer any inaccuracies in the translation are more than compensated for by the liveliness of the style, an exception being Warner's penchant for rendering the occasional poem that appears in Dōgen's text into verse that rises little above doggerel. For all its potential, colloquial expression is sometimes better tempered with a dose of dignity. To Warner's credit, he confesses to be aware of his problem here.

In the remainder of this chapter—about another six pages—Warner goes on to discuss the problem of evil, the nature of cause and effect in Buddhism and modern physics, and Dōgen's view of Buddhist practice as real action in the here and now, referencing Dōgen's treatise *Instructions to the Cook*. Most of the book's 26 chapters follow this general outline: Warner's paraphrase of a chapter of the *Shobogenzo* preceded by some background material and followed by discussion of Dōgen's main points, all presented in an engaging style.

Some chapters are excursions, notably the informative history of the text in chapter 11, "Banned in Japan: The Twisted History of *Shobogenzo*." Also included are two chapters covering two classic essays by Dōgen that do not appear in the *Shobogenzo*. These are Dōgen's "Bendowa" ("Dōgen's Zen FAQ, *A Talk about Pursuing the Truth*") and his "Fukanzazengi" ("How to Sit

Down and Shut Up, *The Universal Guide to the Standard Method of Zazen*").

The bulk of *Don't Be a Jerk* covers the first 21 of Dōgen's 96 chapters and is projected to be the first of three volumes by Warner covering the entire *Shobogenzo*. Included in these first 21 chapters is Dōgen's famous *Genjo Koan*, which Warner justly calls the most important chapter in the entire work and Dōgen's most important philosophical piece, memorable for its dictum that to study the Buddha Way is to study the self, to study the self is to forget the self, to forget the self is to be actualized by the 10,000 things. Also included are: Dōgen's remarkable tract against religious sexism in 13th-century Japan (Warner's chapter 14, "Was Dōgen the First Buddhist Feminist?"); some of his most profound metaphysical pieces (Warner's chapter 17, "Pyschedelic Dōgen: *Being-Time*," and chapter 19, "The Beer and Doritos Sutra, *The Sutra of Mountains and Waters*"); and a broad selection of other topics ranging from, in Warner's translation, "Zen and the Art of Wiping Your Butt" and "Stop Trying to Grab my Mind" to "The Mystical Qualities of the Clothes You Wear."

Dōgen is one of the transcendent geniuses of Zen, a difficult and subtle author, a philosopher of enormous range, and a teacher original in thought while deeply rooted in tradition. Taking on all of this is both commendable and courageous, and Warner is off to an excellent start. ♦

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