



Appalachian Zen: Journeys in Search of True Home, from the American Heartland to the Buddha Dharma

Steve Kanji Ruhl

Monkfish Book Publishing (Nov 15, 2022)

Softcover \$21.99 (356pp)

978-1-948626-80-4

Steve Kanji Ruhl's *Appalachian Zen* is a memoir about a Buddhist awakening.

Ruhl grew up in a trailer park in Appalachia with a deep yearning to be somewhere else. He began to practice Zen Buddhism, viewing it as a welcome contrast to his harsh daily realities. And as he grew toward spiritual depth, finding his practice poignant during times of loss, he began to feel a deeper sense of presence and meaning: “a life of alert composure, of transparent presence in the here-and-now.” He became a Zen Buddhist minister and continued to seek a personal home—a place of inward and outward peace and forgiveness, even during difficult circumstances.

Moving from a backdrop of loss toward a mature, grounded adulthood of freedom, wholeness, and connection, this peaceful, honest, and earthy narrative is interwoven with reflections on nature, history, poetry, and culture. Travel is a powerful feature of Ruhl's story, too. Each place that he visits, from the Appalachian Mountains to Japan, is rendered with heartfelt beauty, though Ruhl is also careful to observe the pains that are evident in each place where he stops.

Ruhl's prose is open-minded and heartfelt, transitioning between approaches and time periods in a smooth, clear, and orienting manner. Deep healing and diligent practice are continually evident in its movements. Ruhl's story also leans into an introductory sense of Zen Buddhism itself, delving into how its practices have transformative power. Quotes from teachers and practitioners of Zen Buddhism increase its insights.

Appalachian Zen is a stirring religious memoir about finding a home and a spiritual resting place.

MELISSA WUSKE (November / December 2022)

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