



Zen Guitar

Philip Toshio Sudo

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Unleash the song of your soul with *Zen Guitar*, a contemplative handbook that draws on ancient Eastern wisdom and applies it to music and performance.

Each of us carries a song inside us, the song that makes us human. *Zen Guitar* provides the key to unlocking this song—a series of life lessons presented through the metaphor of music.

Philip Sudo offers his own experiences with music to enable us to rediscover the harmony in each of our lives and open ourselves to Zen awareness uniquely suited to the Western Mind. Through fifty-eight lessons that provide focus and a guide, the reader is led through to Zen awareness. This harmony is further illuminated through quotes from sources ranging from Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix to Miles Davis. From those who have never strummed a guitar to the more experienced, *Zen Guitar* shows how the path of music offers fulfillment in all aspects of life—a winning idea and an instant classic.

Zen Guitar Details

Date : Published March 24th 1998 by Simon Schuster (first published February 11th 1997)

ISBN : 9780684838779

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Format : Paperback 208 pages

Genre : Music, Nonfiction, Philosophy, Spirituality

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From Reader Review Zen Guitar for online ebook

Rachel says

i tried to meditate a while back, but i always hated the breathing part and also the sitting part, which seemed like the two main parts.

so i'm just gonna keep stumbling my way through zeppelin's "black dog" until i experience ego death. according to this guy, that kind of work counts for something

Tim Roettger says

Some choice quotations:

"[W]earing the white belt here means you have agreed to set aside all knowledge and preconceptions and open your mind to learning as though for the first time.

In zen circles, this attitude is called carrying an empty cup. [...]

From here on out, drink and keep an empty cup. The moment you think you know everything there is to know, you will have lost the way. The beginner's mind is the mind of wisdom." P. 26-7

"What matters on the path of Zen Guitar is not the obstacles we face but how we respond to them. Master your reaction to the unforeseen and unfortunate circumstance, and you will master the Way of Zen Guitar" P. 45

"Remember, even though trees do not grow to the sky, their roots continue to grow. You've been given all you need to know the Way of Zen Guitar without looking to anyone or anyplace else. Just keep digging where you are." P. 63

"Instead of learning how to do something and then doing it, do something and then learn from what you did. Rediscover the joy of beginning and your doubt will vanish." P. 74

"Yes, there is more than one path to the top of the mountain. But the only one that will get you there is your own. Do not look longingly at the paths of the others. Give yours your undivided attention and keep your focus. The farther you go on your own path, the more you will understand every other path.

At the end, they all converge." P. 93

"Do not analyze things to death. Sometimes the best strategy is, "Ready, fire, aim" DO it first, then make adjustments. The answer lies in action--not in words." P. 94 (entire Overthinking chapter)

"Develop your sense of perspective. When everything around you looks like weeds, remember: From the heavens, all is a garden.

Then get to weeding." P. 118

"[B]e wary of liking or disregarding someone's song simply because of who they are. Don't allow prejudgments to close your mind. Keep your ears open and listen. Even liars can speak the truth, even friends can lead us astray.

Hear the song, not the singer." P. 120

"Every rendition, every pass through, is a distinct moment in time never to be repeated in exactly the same way. This is what's meant by the saying, 'You never step into the same river twice.'

Feel this in your heart and related it to whatever you do in life. No matter how many times the song gets played, the black-belt Zen Guitarist knows each version is the first--and only--take.

Every note you play, everything you do: It's all one take." P. 152

"The first rule of mastery is this: Those who think themselves masters are not masters.

There can be no letup of your study, no matter how far you've come. Even the highest priests of zen say to themselves, *mi zai*: 'Not yet.' You have not yet learned all you can know. You have not yet given all you can give. YOU have not yet reached the summit.

Empty your cup and keep going. Same mountain, farther up." P. 155

"[L]et me make clear: Zen Guitar is not an exercise in navel-gazing. The Way is not to be found through self-consciousness, but unself-consciousness. 'If you seek,' the masters say, 'you will not find it.'" P. 160

"Music should go right through you, leave some of itself inside you, and take some of you with it when it leaves." - Henry Threadgill

"Poetic imperfection is the crooked twist in the stem of a flower, the asymmetrical line of the handcrafted bowl, the knot in the piece of wood, the mole at the corner of a lip, the moon partially obscured by clouds. Somehow, the presence of these 'imperfections' serves to heighten the beauty in nature, not detract from it." P. 164

"[T]he pursuit of harmony requires far more strength than hatred. You must have the strength to wage peace." P. 167

Tony Espy says

I highly recommend this book to anyone who plays, or even is thinking about learning to play the guitar.

It's an interesting mix of Eastern/Zen Buddhist philosophy as applied to the practice of playing guitar. Some chapters focus on a particular aspect of playing guitar, some discuss mistakes or approaches to avoid, but in the end, all can be applied to life itself.

One of my favorite things about this book is that each chapter starts with a quote from some the greatest

guitarists to walk the planet. Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jeff Beck, Frank Zappa, Keith Richards, Neil Young, Joan Baez, Tom Petty... the list goes on and on.

My copy is dog-eared and worn, and will be a source of inspiration as I continue my journey from white belt, to black belt, and back again to white.

As Frank Zappa once said... *Information is not knowledge. Knowledge is not wisdom. Wisdom is not truth. Truth is not beauty. Beauty is not love. Love is not music. Music is the best...*, so shut up 'n play yer guitar!

Juni says

my musical mastermind buddy, mark, lent me this to read.. and it came at a time of emotional upheaval and crazy roadtripping and ditching school to hop around the east coast and play and meet and think and shed some skin. one of those books you can pick up and get inspiration from at just about any time, whether you play guitar or not.

Tatiana Rodina says

The book I return to each 3-5 years.
It is not about playing, it is about the way of making art, communicating with yourself and others and, living.
A lot to apply in life, a lot to learn.

David McLaughlin says

Excellently simple and refreshing

Munir says

Great book for guitar players of all levels who view listening and playing music as a spiritual experience.

Paul says

This book doesn't teach any specific guitar playing technique. Rather, it looks at the spiritual side of making music; if you will, the zen of playing guitar.

Everyone carries a song inside themselves, it's what makes us human. This book offers a key to letting out

that song. Once you have picked up a guitar and properly tuned it, don't worry if you don't know any songs. Play just one note on one string and give it every bit of your heart and soul. Then repeat the process.

When you start regular practice, start with one new habit: Do one thing the right way one time. In the next moment, make the same commitment. On the other hand, there are potholes along the way that must be avoided at all costs. It's easy to skip practice "just once," a year later, the guitar is covered with dust and cobwebs.

Some feel that learning a certain technique is the most important thing in guitar playing. It's certainly important, but the more complicated the technique, the more brainpower that must be devoted to it. The aim is to play with the proper spirit, to play without having to consider technique. A person must have something to say, first.

To progress down the path of Zen Guitar, you need to love guitar playing and commit your heart to training. If it isn't fun for you, then there is a big problem. Don't be halfhearted about it. Overearnestness is just as bad. Some guitarists force themselves on an audience through excess volume or pyrotechnics. Learn self-control. A measure of mastery is through what you hold back, not what you show.

Another important part of guitar playing is responsibility. You must develop your talent to the fullest capacity, with no excuses. You must respect those who come to you with open ears and foster a feeling of community. Also, act as teacher to those who are seeking their own way along the path of Zen Guitar.

If there is a single rule to Zen Guitar, it might be this: Do what has to be done, when it has to be done, as well as it can be done, and do it that way every time.

This is a fine piece of writing. It certainly gives a new perspective to guitar playing, whether it's folk music or heavy metal. I'm sure much of this book could apply to any instrument. For musicians and music lovers, this is very much worth reading.

Pompom Sönnfors says

Zen Guitar is going to take a long time to read. After trying to rush through the entire book I started over and have been contemplating the very first instruction, "Wear the white belt" for a year. It could be time to move on but I don't really see the rush.

Phil says

One of the most important, enjoyable books I've ever had the good fortune to read. The concept of zen is familiar to many, and this book is certainly laden with familiar concepts, but it manages to relate those concepts incredibly well to the art of learning, practicing, and playing an instrument (not necessarily guitar; this book applies to any instrument... it is not an exercise book), all the while reminding you that those very same concepts seamlessly overlap into everyday life, and stretch far beyond the scope of playing an instrument. I really can't say enough good things about this book. If you play any instrument at all... or hell,

even if you don't... I highly recommend it.

Benji says

NO, i lost the review.

So here's the summary:

1) At the beginning, I thought it was gimmicky, but of the sort that "if you believe in it, you'll get the value out of it". So I gave it a chance, and the last third of the book really took me and engaged me. A lot of it you discover on your own through the years, or else you don't advance and give it up.

2)It helped to apply the mindset to different challenges other than guitar: singing, learning chinese characters, running. One major insight that I enjoyed was the idea of "everytime you pick up the guitar, try to see it for the first time". The idea of always being a white belt. I've found some of my best, most creative playing comes from the times after being away from a guitar for several weeks.

3) the best celebrity quote was the Bruce Springsteen quote about holding the contradictory ideas of 'this is the most important thing in the universe' and 'this is just rock and roll, try and have a good time'.

Charlie says

Stop worrying about what the audience wants, about whether your pedals are true bypass, about whether you can play as fast as the next guy. Just plug the damn thing in and ROCK your heart out.

Kim says

Even though this book is written for people who play guitar or are learning guitar...there is so much to learn from this book. Just replace the word guitar with whatever you are interested in and the same principles apply.

Samuel Lawson says

This book will either seem like an exercise in navel-gazing or it will be a valuable asset to the musician in pursuit of self-actualisation (just don't expect it to be your only asset). I really liked it; helped me find a sense of perspective when I was experiencing symptoms of burn-out many years ago. The book is applicable to guitarists of any genre. The world of classical guitar has certain unhealthy elements, not the least of which being elitism and over-emphasis on competition. This book suggests different ways of approaching the musical life. Zen Guitar provides a much-needed reminder to musicians that there are deeper issues with which any musician, professional, student, dilettante, or rank amateur, must grapple, and that music, speaking as an academic and a professional, is far too important to be left to the professionals and

academics!

Dylan says

"Paths cannot be taught, they can only be taken". So it is with Zen guitar.

My first guitar, as for so many, was a 3/4 size classical, nylon strings, cheap laquered plywood and 2-inch wide fretboard - bought by my mother after months of my 13 year old nagging. She didn't know. She wasn't to know that this guitar was fine if I wanted to learn flamenco, or pick out the notes of 'Greensleeves'...but not really effective if I wanted to become the next Springsteen.

"Anything you set out to make - music, love, a bookshelf, a meal - make as well as you can. To do otherwise is spiritless"

Nonetheless, I persevered, got chord books of Dylan, Bowie and Dire Straits songs and by the time I was 14 I had a pretty good rhythm technique going, knew my major from minors and the odd sus 7...and had the beginning of some lead playing. By then I wanted to make some noise. I wanted to go electric, Newport '65 style. I had a Saturday job (remember those?) in Woolworths (remember that?) and would go to this music shop in my lunch break and look at guitars I couldn't afford. But I saved up, and one day went in and proudly chose a black Les Paul copy (origin unknown, but probably Japan), took it home and just held it. And held it some more. It's curves and contour fitted me just like a lover, and I suddenly found chords so much easier to make on a fretboard at least half the width of my old classical. And the sound..well..it was at that point I realised that I need some amplification. It hadn't occurred to me at all that electric guitars didn't just make a sound on their own. I just didn't know.

"Once we understand our limits, we can begin to work around them"

So, I put in a few more Saturday shifts on the "record bar" at Woolies and saved up again, and got a little 15w Champ practice amp. Loved it. Now I was cooking. The guitar, in truth, was a hunk of factory made shit, known technically as a "right bastard" to keep in tune and only had one effective pickup. But with the Champ turned up to 11 and me banging out the power chords of "Summer of '69", none of that seemed to matter.

"In a hundred-mile march, ninety is about the halfway point"

I was playing in bands by the time I was 16, and had progressed to an authentic American Telecaster and a full on 120w Marshall amp. For over 30 years now I've been close to an instrument every day of my life, and I just have to play. My body doesn't feel right if I haven't held a guitar before I sleep.

Like any true act of creation it's an endless journey. Key moments along the path still resonate - someone showing me 12 bar blues and suddenly unlocking rock and roll..discovering open and alternative tunings..slide..double stops..half barres and bends..the wah pedal and I'm Hendrix..open G I'm Keith..open D I'm Ry Cooder..dropped D I'm Neil Young..or Richard Thompson..and on it goes..always something new to discover.

And that's the wonder and beauty of this book. This is not a "how to" guide. There isn't a single chord shape, tablature or scale in it. It is about the "why". Find the right soil to plant your seeds and the best nutrients to

help them grow. Think substance, not technique. Mojo in the dojo. True beauty comes from the inside out, not the outside in. A noble, holistic, human approach...a life guide.. to help the mind and spirit focus. Tune in, to the instrument, yourself, to others. This is about attitude, mental space, belief, internal chemistry connecting with external physics. Emptying one's cup to allow space for new experience. You can apply the ways of the zen to anything. Anything at all. Zen baking next, for me, I think.

"Learn a chord, then a second and a third. If you can play three chords with maximum spirit, you have all the elements you need to make real music. The guitar has shown us again and again: Three chords can rock the world."

It was hard work, learning; blistered fingers, aching wrists (though at the age of 14 I can't honestly say that would have all been down to the guitar playing). It's harder work to learn how to be in a band..how to listen to others..to feel what they're doing..to give space and freedom..to allow the ego to subsume..stagecraft..to lock in to a rhythm and energy that flows between you all. You know when you get there, because you're all smiling.

"When the right people get together, be it in music or sports or business or marriage or sex or whatever, a kind of spiritual fusion takes place".

This is also a beautiful book physically - a publishers dream..soft back and tactile, wonderfully illustrated, and balanced in the hand. Very Zen. Perfectly right.

"Do not trudge along your path. Your spirit shows in every step"

For anyone interested in the journey of discovery, learning, wisdom and grace.
