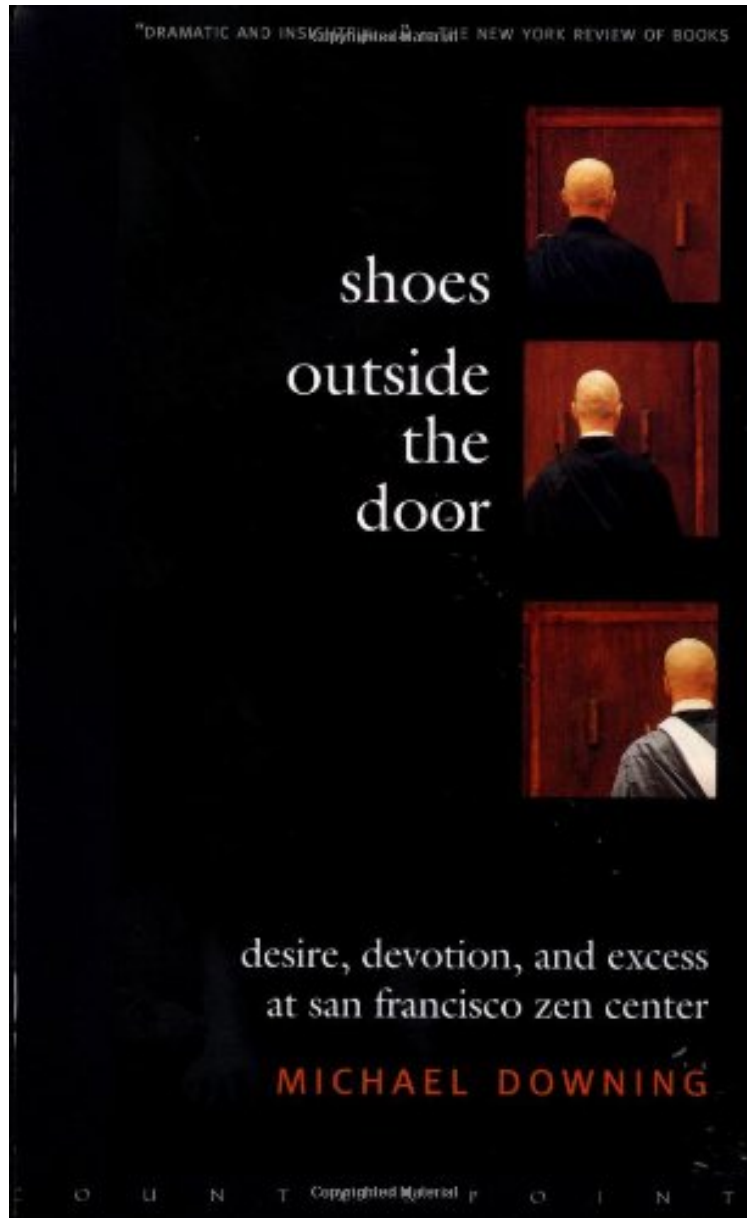


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## Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion, and Excess at San Francisco Zen Center

*Michael Downing*

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#760520 in Books Counterpoint 2002-09-03 2002-09-03Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.00 x 1.10 x 6.00l, 1.18 #File Name: 1582432546416 pages | File size: 74.Mb

**Michael Downing : Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion, and Excess at San Francisco Zen Center** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion, and Excess at San Francisco Zen Center:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Richard Baker and Werner Erhard...By C. HintzIn the pop-psych of the 60s and 70s who else was around for Richard Baker to RELATE to? Now, the BMW makes sense! In the wake of Clinton/Monica, even Richard Baker makes sense. He had his groupies and wanna-bes.San Francisco Zen Center survived. All three locations survived. We (almost) all survived. Amazing!This book is MORE than it appears to be on the surface. It is very painful to read until it is no longer painful. It becomes therapeutic after a fashion, dragging the shadow-makers out into the light and revealing them to be just like us - in our most delusional moments. Of course it was unfortunate that Zen Center started out as a Sole Corporation of Richard Baker. Except the Suzuki part managed to remain as Baker departed. There were a lot of errors made - by everyone who was there. The ship went adrift for years. This book allows that sense of shared responsibility, or lack thereof, to finally emerge and presses us with the question: "Why were the voices kept silent?"That is the rub. I disassociated - as a transient participant - in 1982. Therefore I missed 'the perfect storm.'If you are a Zen wanna-be, this is a MUST READ. It's amazing, 30 years on, how many of us keep the practice and stay to the path. Today, I again donate to ZC - it is worthy of that - but rarely attend. If you are in town, drop in for a visit.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Definitely recommend!By C. MoyerFor anyone interested in Zen, this is a mind-blowing book. As well-written as a good mystery and full of Zen gossip stretching from Suzuki-Roshi up through Richard Baker-Roshi and subsequent leaders of the San Francisco Zen Center, it contains everything you could possibly want to know about the goings-on at the retreat center, at Tassajara, and elsewhere. Riveting.5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Helpful for students of the WayBy S. MurrayWhile I visited Green Gulch once many years ago, I was not involved with the San Francisco Zen Center. I have been a practicing Lay Buddhist for over 30 years. I have seen problems in groups I have attended. While they were not as severe as those at the San Francisco center, they point to a huge question for Western Buddhists: Where is the line between blind trust in a teacher and opening your heart to the teaching? SHOES OUTSIDE THE DOOR shows what can happen when blind trust is given to one person. While it is easy to center all the blame on the teacher, the book does a good investigating many people involved in the mess. To their credit, some of those involved admit that they ignored large, bright red flags; others (including Mr Baker) seem to have learned very little. Some showed awareness that for a teacher to overstep his/her bounds, the student must understep his/her bounds. One lesson that became clear to me as I read about these problems was that many in the leadership of the San Francisco Zen Center ironically ignored a central teaching of their founder: Keep the beginner's mind, the mind of humility, the mind that says "I could be wrong." The one missing thing in this book may have been beyond the scope of the book: What about the consequences of being too wary of Zen teachers and not opening up the heart to the many teachers who have kept the beginner's mind?

Eastern tradition collides with Western individualism in this provocative and compulsively readable investigation of Buddhism, American-style. A genuine spiritual movement becomes strangely entangled with elitist aesthetics, the culture of celebrity, multi-million-dollar investment portfolios, sex scandals, and an unsolved crime.Told Rashomon-fashion by a singular mix of hippies, millionaires, intellectuals, and lost souls whose lives are almost unbelievably intertwined, Shoes Outside the Door is the first book to examine the inner workings of the profoundly influential San Francisco Zen Center. In exploring the history of the most important institution in American Buddhism, author Michael Downing provocatively captures the profound ambivalence of people who earnestly seek both inner peace and worldly satisfaction.

.com Why did the richest, most influential, highest flying Zen center in America crash and burn in 1983? Novelist Michael Downing wondered the same thing, and after three years of interviewing members and poring over documents, his Shoes Outside the Door tells the story. Womanizing, BMW-driving Richard Baker was the abbot and visionary behind the rapid growth of the San Francisco Zen Center, but in many ways he was the antithesis of his teacher and predecessor, the inimitable and revered Shunryu Suzuki, who would choose the bruised apples out of compassion. After the early death of Suzuki, a blind and driven cult formed around Baker, seemingly filling the void until this "Dick Nixon of Zen" finally slept with his best friend's wife and brought his world crashing to the ground. Working with direct quotations from students and workers of the Center and its many enterprises, Downing delivers a page-turning expos of a community that is as laudable as it is laughable. And as an outsider to both the community and Buddhism, he does it with wit and an even hand. --Brian BruyaFrom Publishers WeeklyThis intense investigation/indictment from novelist Downing (Breakfast with Scot, etc.) uncovers the alleged abuses of power of Richard Baker, former abbot of the nation's most influential Zen center. Downing devoted three years to exploring how and why Baker, the only Dharma heir of Shunryu Suzuki, the founder of San Francisco Zen Center (SFZC), was toppled from the abbacy of SFZC by popular demand in 1983. He interviewed more than 80 participants in Baker's rise and fall, not including the disgraced abbot himself, who sent Downing a letter explaining his position. Downing tells the story with a novelist's attention to character and detail, and what unfolds is a gripping account of how the bright and charismatic Baker helped Suzuki and Zen gain a foothold in the West; took over SFZC; expanded its activities dramatically (by, among other initiatives, creating the fabled Greens restaurant); grew increasingly alienated

from his followers while surrounding himself with celebrities and physical luxury; and finally stumbled by having an affair with the wife of one of SFZC's main backers. The problem with the book, and it's a serious one, is that Downing takes sides; for example, he refutes point by point the text of Baker's letter to him. What might have been a grand account of the making of a tragedy, then, is instead a mitigated tale of villainy. Yet because the debacle at SFZC holds lessons for anyone who cares about how religious structures, perforce hierarchical, can and should operate within a democratic society, this book deserves a wide reading, and not only by the many Buddhists who will buy it lickety-split. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal

The serene devotional activities normally associated with a Buddhist monastery are certainly placed on the back burner in this examination of the San Francisco Zen Center. Novelist Downing does a fine job of exploring the world of Richard Baker (a disciple of Japanese spiritual leader Suzukiroshi, who founded the center), Baker's extravagant lifestyle, the amazing array of business and personal dealings associated with the center, and the sex scandal that eventually transpired. Also impressive is the collection of stories featuring, among others, Edmund "Jerry" Brown, then-governor of California, who at one time lived at the Zen Center; Werner Erhardt, founder of est; and Gary Snyder, the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet. Novelist Downing (*Breakfast with Scot*) journeys from the utopian origins of the center as the first Buddhist monastery ever established outside of Asia, through the success of the upscale Greens restaurant and the Tassahara Bread Bakery, to the explosion of shady business dealings, sexual exploitation of female workers, cultlike activities, and seemingly hypocritical use of Zen philosophies. Downing is not judgmental, instead presenting facts in a narrative style that flows quickly through 20 years of Zen Center enterprises and tumult. Many of those who sought tranquility at the center were successful, but at what degree of cynicism and at what price? Recommended for public libraries. Kay Meredith Dusheck, Univ. of Iowa, Iowa City Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.