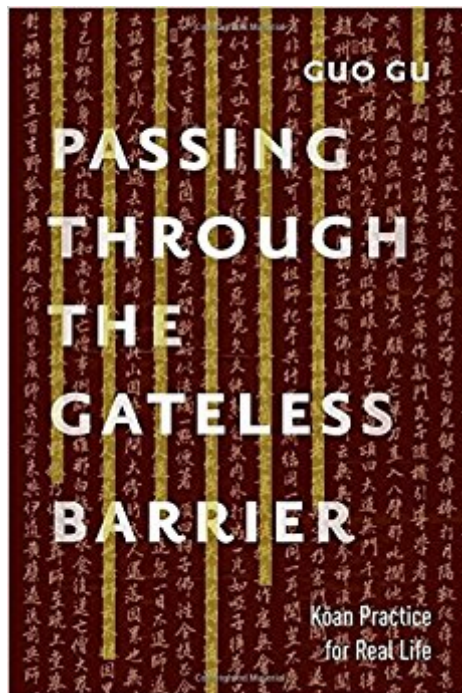


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Passing Through The Gateless Barrier: Koan Practice For Real Life



Synopsis

The classic thirteenth-century collection of Zen koans with one of the most accessible commentaries to date, from a Chinese Zen teacher. Gateways to awakening surround us at every moment of our lives. The whole purpose of kōan (gongxiàn 公案, in Chinese) practice is to keep us from missing these myriad opportunities by leading us to certain gates that have traditionally been effective for people to access that marvelous awakening. The forty-eight kōans of the Gateless Barrier (Chinese: Wumenguan; Japanese: Mumonkan) have been waking people up for well over eight hundred years. Chan teacher Guo Gu provides here a fresh translation of the classic text, along with the first English commentary by a teacher of the Chinese tradition from which it originated. He shows that the kōans in this text are not mere stories from a distant past, but are rather pointers to the places in our lives where we get stuck—and that each sticking point, when examined, can become a gateless barrier through which we can enter into profound wisdom.

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Customer Reviews

"A must-read book on a classic text. Zen is originally a Chinese tradition, and Guo Gu brings the ancient spirit of the old masters alive right now. There is an expansiveness, ease, and practicality that makes the ancient text encouraging, and it's imaginative and hip too. A pleasure to read." — John Tarrant, author of *Bring Me the Rhinoceros* Many translations of these ancient and profound teachings from a Japanese Zen perspective already exist. Why another one? We are

fortunate to have this first Chan translation directly from the Chinese. In addition, Guo Gu's beautifully written commentary includes insights from long ago that are of immense help as we reflect on how we actually live today. An invaluable guide for all meditators. "A very helpful guide to the investigation of the Zen kōan from a perspective not yet widely known in the West. Guo Gu is a worthy heir to the great Chan master Sheng Yen. He provides lucid comments on each of the cases in the classic kōan collection the Gateless Gate, inviting us into our own intimate encounter with Zen's ancestors and our own personal experience of the great matter of life and death. Anyone interested in understanding what a kōan really is, how it can be used, and how it uses us, will be informed and enriched by this book. I highly recommend it." —James Ishmael Ford, author of *If You're Lucky, Your Heart Will Break: Field Notes from a Zen Life*

Guo Gu's translation of *The Gateless Barrier* and his commentary reveal a fresh, eminently practical approach to the famous text. Reminding again and again that it is the reader's own spiritual affairs to which each kōan points, Guo Gu writes with both broad erudition and the profound insight of a Chan practitioner. In this way, he reveals himself to be a worthy inheritor of his late Master Sheng Yen's teachings. Zen students, called upon to give life to these kōans within their own practice, will find *Passing Through the Gateless Barrier* a precious resource. —Meido Moore, abbot of Korinji Zen monastery

GUO GU (Dr. Jimmy Yu) is one of the late Master Sheng Yen's senior and closest disciples. He assisted Master Sheng Yen (1930-2009) in leading intensive retreats throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia. Guo Gu also edited and translated a number of Master Sheng Yen's books from Chinese to English. Guo Gu first learned meditation at the age of four from Master Guangqin (1892-1986), one of the most respected Taiwanese meditation masters. In 1982, Guo Gu began meditation practice with Master Sheng Yen, and was eventually ordained a monk. He became Sheng Yen's first personal attendant and translator, traveling worldwide with him. In 1995, he received inka (the seal of approval) for his first Chan experience, and was given permission by Master Sheng Yen to teach Chan independently. In 2000, Guo Gu left monasticism and re-entered lay life. He received his PhD in Buddhist Studies from Princeton University and is now teaching Buddhism and East Asian religions academically as an assistant professor at Florida State University, Tallahassee. He founded the Tallahassee Chan Group (www.tallahasseechan.com) and is also the guiding teacher for the Western Dharma Teachers Training course at the Chan Meditation Center in New York and the Dharma Drum Lineage. He is the author of the eBook single

The Essence of Chan.

Feeling lost in a long list of Pali jargons and esoteric or academic direct translations? This is it for you. A long time ago, Chan (Zen) sounded like a bunch of riddles to me, but the Guo Gu's commentary brings the old text to life in today's language and helped me reflect and contemplate. If you are looking for fresh ways to look at your life, this is the book you need to read. A Must Read! Highly Recommends!

Guo Gu's clear, agile translation of and commentaries on this rich, ancient text not only places it squarely in its original Chan context, but breathes new life into the teachings, making them accessible and useful to contemporary Buddhist practitioners. Most western practitioners, like myself, have encountered these koans through the Japanese Zen lens. As a former decades-long Zen student who has more recently immersed myself in Chan teaching, I find Guo Gu's Gateless Barrier marks a distinct departure from prior versions in its ability to provide clear and pithy instruction. From the initial and perhaps most well-known "Zhaozhou's Dog" through all 48 of these case koans, Guo Gu cuts through the esoteric all while managing to retain the depth and beauty of these teachings. The integration of body and mind and the emphasis on moment-to-moment awareness (on and off the sitting cushion) as taught by Guo Gu and his teacher, Venerable Master Sheng Yen, are much in evidence in these koans and commentaries. In this presentation, they are truly helpful gateways to awakening. I strongly recommend this invaluable collection to practitioners of all levels.

Guo Gu's commentary on the classic Chan gong'an are an indispensable road map for anyone interested in determined study and practice of Chan (Zen in Japanese) Buddhism. Highly recommended.

This is fun stuff!

This book lets you know what Chan/Zen practice is about in clear everyday language.

A wonderful book based on a series of talks over a 4-year period. Guo Gu is the founder and leading Teacher of Tallahassee Chan Center in Tallahassee, Florida where I have been his student for the

past 7 years. My practice method (Huatou) comes from these talks specifically with the question "Who is the master". If you ever wanted to dig deeper into a distinctly Chan/Zen practice, this is the book for you. Guo Gu is a very thorough teacher and his guidance is very deep and penetrating. This is not a Buddhism 101 book or method. This is a book for serious practitioners. However, everyone can gain some level of personal insight even if you are new to the practice.

Here is a new entry into books on ancient practices, the koan (Zen, Japanese) or gongxiàn (Chan, Chinese), the study of short sayings from past masters that test and eventually dissolve the intellectual, and hopefully result in awakening and enlightenment. The competition is tough for offshoots from The Gateless Gate and the Blue Cliff Records, two very famous ancient texts. So what does this book on the Gateless Gate add? It has the advantage of covering the traditional explanation by Wumen and then adding a modern western teacher's advice, that of Guo Gu, who currently resides in Florida. The introduction is essential for those not familiar with the gongxiàn/koan. The history and development of the gongxiàn is briefly explained. More importantly the technique for working with it is discussed. It's clear that it may be a great academic exercise to read through the 48 cases included, but in the end one must be selected for special attention over a protracted period of time. At that point, according to the author, the guidance of a teacher is necessary. Reading through the 48 cases will seem daunting. The very first gongxiàn makes that clear: A monk asked Zhaozhou, "Does a dog have Buddha-nature or not?" Zhaozhou said, "Wu!" At first you might think an understanding of Buddhism might help and it may, but not much. The answer isn't in the teachings, nor will intellectual pondering bring it. Nor the help of Wumen's Comment, nor even modern Guo Go's Comment, but at least the comments will point you in the right direction. Still, it feels a little bit like pounding your head against the wall, and maybe that's it, that's the point. There is a caveat: Should those of us without a teacher or following a different tradition skip the book? I think not. Perhaps the gain will be less or less rapid, but the opportunity for a breakthrough is still there. Nevertheless, this may not be the best place for a beginning Buddhist, but then who is to even judge that?

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