

The Zen Environment

The Impact of Zen Meditation

Marian Mountain

"Zen literature seems at times to divide into two groups of works: those that are *about* zen; and those that *are* zen itself, talking."

—ROBERT M. PIRSIG

from his foreword to
The Zen Environment

This book is zen itself, talking. *The Zen Environment* is, in some ways, a zen primer for the beginner, the non-practitioner. In other ways, it is the chronicle of one woman's zen journey, her tale of transformation. But, at all times, it is the sound of a zen voice, talking.

When Marian Mountain began her pilgrimage toward her new zen life, she was living in a comfortable suburban neighborhood. She had family, friends, health, income—and an undefined dissatisfaction with her life. Then, in 1964, she became a student of zen. From her zen education came the realization that she must leave her "old hometown," a term that described not just the place where she lived, but also her own limited, "egotistic description of reality." She gave away her home and her possessions and began her life as a homeless zen monk. A journey that had started in the suburbs of San Francisco eventually brought her to the wilderness of Big Sur.

Zen represents, for Marian Mountain, a way of life. In the mountains of Big Sur, she lives that life. She surveys the world around her with a keen eye and finds—in the flow of nature and of her own meditation—parables that provide

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understanding of the principles of zen. And what she has learned and observed emerges in her writing.

Sharing the gradual unfolding of her own experience and the lessons of her zen masters, she offers an introduction to zen that captures its elusive spirit by combining zen life, zen practice, and zen philosophy. And while she has directed *The Zen Environment* toward the beginning zen student, those knowledgeable in zen will find her insights into traditional zen teaching fresh, vital, and often provocative.

If, as Robert Pirsig suggests in his foreword, "zen accounts which stay close to personal circumstances are truer than those which generalize," then Marian Mountain's book will be numbered among the truest of zen accounts. In *The Zen Environment*, she speaks of a fully integrated zen experience, and she speaks of that experience with a zen voice.

Marian Mountain lives in the Ventana Wilderness of Big Sur, California, with her husband, Jack. *The Zen Environment* is her first book.

"A unique and absorbing account. This is craggy zen for sure—the *Dharma Bums* updated for the 1980s. But *The Zen Environment* is better grounded."

—HUSTON SMITH

author, *Religions of Man*

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