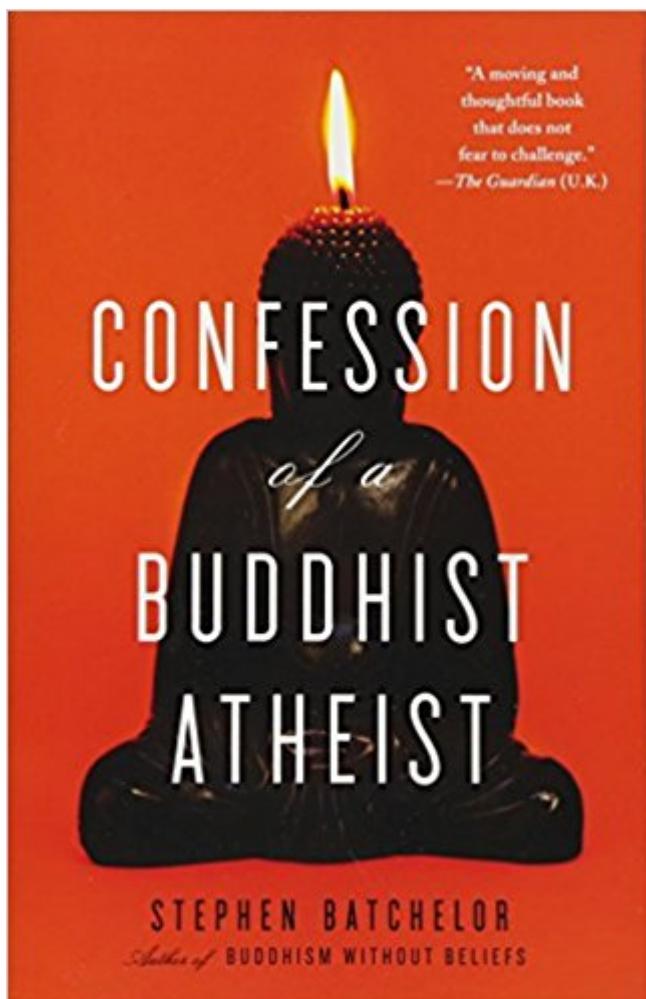


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# Confession Of A Buddhist Atheist



## Synopsis

Does Buddhism require faith? Can an atheist or agnostic follow the Buddha's teachings without believing in reincarnation or organized religion? This is one man's confession. In his classic *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, Stephen Batchelor offered a profound, secular approach to the teachings of the Buddha that struck an emotional chord with Western readers. Now, with the same brilliance and boldness of thought, he paints a groundbreaking portrait of the historical Buddha told from the author's unique perspective as a former Buddhist monk and modern seeker. Drawing from the original Pali Canon, the seminal collection of Buddhist discourses compiled after the Buddha's death by his followers, Batchelor shows us the Buddha as a flesh-and-blood man who looked at life in a radically new way. Batchelor also reveals the everyday challenges and doubts of his own devotional journey—from meeting the Dalai Lama in India, to training as a Zen monk in Korea, to finding his path as a lay teacher of Buddhism living in France. Both controversial and deeply personal, Stephen Batchelor's refreshingly doctrine-free, life-informed account is essential reading for anyone interested in Buddhism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Batchelor's *Buddhism Without Beliefs* (1997) described a secular approach to the Eastern philosophy stripped of doctrines such as karma and rebirth; how a young British monk ordained in the Tibetan tradition turned into a Buddhist atheist is revealed in this new book. On the dharma trail in India and Korea, and later as a lay resident at the nonsectarian Sharpham community in England, Batchelor was beset by doubts about traditional Buddhist teachings. Finally convinced that

present-day forms of Buddhism have moved far beyond what founder Gotama had intended, Batchelor embarked on a study of the Pali canon (very early Buddhist texts) to find out what the Buddha's original message might have been. Batchelor's own story of conversion is woven effortlessly with his analysis of Buddhist teachings and a 2003 pilgrimage to Indian sites important in the Buddha's life. He is candid about his disillusionments with institutionalized Buddhism without engaging in another new atheist broadside against religion. While Batchelor may exaggerate the novelty of his Buddhism without beliefs stance, this multifaceted account of one Buddhist's search for enlightenment is richly absorbing. (Mar. 2) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Former Tibetan and Zen monk Batchelor approaches Buddhism idiosyncratically. He sketches the historical Buddha to clear up numerous misconceptions, discover who the man Siddhattha Gotama was, and learn what is distinctive and original in his teachings, especially the Pali Canon attributed to him. But Batchelor also offers his own story: his decision to become a monk when he was still a teenaged London hippie during the countercultural 1960s, and his return to the secular world a decade later. Although the historical background is important and crucial to the book, the personal story really shines out, entraining the reader in Batchelor's often complicated life as a seeker who never stops searching, as he discusses his long fascination with Buddhism and his struggle to accept, or at least come to terms with, some doctrines, such as reincarnation, that were alien to his former belief system. He concludes with his reflections as a 56-year-old secular, nondenominational, lay Buddhist now living in rural France. --June Sawyers --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Very interesting read. This was actually recommended by James Altucher (on one of his podcasts) so I was curious to read it. It had a great deal of detail and historical facts that were well recounted. It was a very deep look at the journey of the author and in the end, I found his conclusion to be one that I aligned with as well. It was a great account of how he found his way into (and somewhat out of) Buddhism.

An interesting documentation on why a highly respected Buddhist monk became an atheist. The knowledge, reasoning and logic displayed through out the book is a joy to read. Stephen Batchelor provides convincing arguments that there is no need for adding supernatural beliefs and religious

propositions to the basic teaching of S. Gautama.

The book is excellent. Well written and thoughtful, a breath of fresh air. Yet, its centerpiece, Mr Batchelor himself is a bit of an enigma. Rather than a confession, this book is a rediscovery of the historical Buddha through the eyes of a Zen master. Yes, friendly reader, Mr. Batchelor is a Zen master and like all true Zen masters, he shies away from self-pronouncements of enlightenment. But clearly enlightened and enlightening he is. Don't let the formality of the "de-robing" fool you, or his marriage to an equally fascinating and enlightened mind named Martine. Mr. Batchelor has taken to heart the true teachings of the Buddha passed word of mouth from Ananda onward and never truly co-opted by Kassapa and his minions of religious dogmatists. In this lovely book we rediscover the Buddha's words, his teachings, his hopes and aspirations through Mr. Batchelor's filter. You will discover how the Buddha's life wove and interwove with the great noble families of his time. How the true message is a message of liberation, of transformation, and of positive action. By creating an original parallel between Mr. Batchelor's journey and the Buddha's own journey, we are open to new interpretations of the Dhamma. A Dhamma infused with the spiritual sensitivity of the East and the scientific wisdom of the West. Mr. Batchelor never turned his back on Europe (and all its pre-Hellenic forefathers), but embraced first a Tibetan flavor and then a Chino-Japanese flavor of Buddhism, followed by a renewed interest in the Theravada tradition. When he disrobed he was ready to amalgamize all his learning of the East and West using the focused power learned in Zen. We are fortunate to have him among us.

This book is good on many different levels: for Mr. Batchelor's honesty, truthfulness and sharing of experiences. I don't believe he's trying to make a statement with this book (as some might think), rather he's just sharing a point of view and how he arrived at it. That said, what I got most from the book is Mr. Batchelor's suggestion that the Buddha's life was not absent of conflict, confrontation and politics. Many Buddhists may have a god-like image of a Buddha free of any of the day-to-day stresses and problems we encounter in today's society. We imagine him as if floating on a cloud above all mundane concerns. On the contrary, it seems the Buddha dealt with enormous challenges coming from his own monks, kings, wars, benefactors and even his own family. It's inspiring to think the Buddha was able to communicate his message and practice even in the wake of so many outside forces. Throughout history, life has always been a challenge. But the Buddha is one of the best examples of how to deal with it in the face of conflict and adversity. Mr. Batchelor's book helps remind us of this in a humble and persuasive manner.

I think the author had a unique qualification to write a book detailing the story of Buddha and the evolution of Buddhism. He experienced the politics of the religion first hand and read widely to be able to make his own interpretation of what the Buddha taught. This book took me to an era that I know little about and takes the mysticism out of Buddhism. I did get confused by the contemporary Buddhist teachers and bored by their naivety.

This is one of the best recent books on the life of the Buddha and de-mystifies a lot of misconceptions about the Buddha's life as well as clearly stating who the Buddha was and who he was not. Batchelor has for decades researched the life and times of the Buddha, correlating many passages in various Pali Canon Suttas with chronological events and personages during the time of the Buddha's life. This has resulted in some original thinking and postulation about really what was happening socially, politically, and personally with the Buddha and his Sanghas at the time and with the rise of Buddhism in India. Batchelor also recounts his own journey through Tibetan and Korean Zen Buddhism as a monk and assistant to important teachers, and coincidentally, his more recent years with a practice rooted in vipassana meditation. He has always backed away from dogma and this is a wonderful companion piece to his earlier book; "Buddhism Without Beliefs". I would highly recommend it.

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