

5 Easy Steps for Leading Book Discussions

Excerpted from Reading Group Choices
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1 Acknowledge your role as “facilitator”—not expert.

If it's your turn to lead the discussion, know that you are not expected to be an authority or expert on the chosen book. Your primary tasks are to open the discussion, keep it going, maintain a lively dialogue and end the discussion on time. A great book discussion is the result of the thoughts and perceptions of a variety of different people.

2 Note your own response as you read.

Make notes as you read the book, highlighting or marking passages. What are your reactions, questions or insights? Add the personal touch to your discussion. Share your thoughts during your discussion and invite others to comment.

3 Lay some ground rules.

After you've introduced yourself to the group, remind members of the ways they can contribute to the discussion:

- Avoid “crosstalk” or talking over others.
- Be respectful. Keep an open mind.
- Try not to repeat what others have said. Speak up with something new or add to the previous comment.
- Acknowledge that there is no right or wrong, just differences of opinion.
- Be open to learn from others.
- If you are outgoing, be careful to allow space for others to share their thoughts.

4 Call the question.

If you feel the group has begun to repeat itself, acknowledge your observation, ask for agreement if necessary, and pose a new topic.

5 Balance the discussion.

Invite quiet members to share their thoughts. Watch for introverts who have something to say but are having a hard time getting in a word.

Praise for *The Buddha Next Door*

“This book is like a warm blanket, my favorite music and a happy heart.”

—Kimberly Kirberger, author of the
Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul series

From the Preface of *The Buddha Next Door*

“What treasures will you find in the pages that follow? You'll read one story after another of challenge, setback, disaster and discouragement met head-on with the compassion, wisdom and courage generated from within by Nichiren Buddhist practice. Story after story of transforming poison into medicine; winter into spring. Story after story of victory over adversity and happiness sculpted from the clay of misery.”

Host a Reading Group

Reading group discussions—in your home, at a bookstore or in a library—are great opportunities to learn something new, see things in a new way, examine deeply held beliefs or simply enjoy the company of other book lovers. Middleway Press is happy to provide this discussion guide, which gives you everything you need to host a successful meeting: a descriptive summary, topics to consider, endorsements and hosting tips.

For more copies of this guide, or guides for other great Middleway Press books, contact us at:

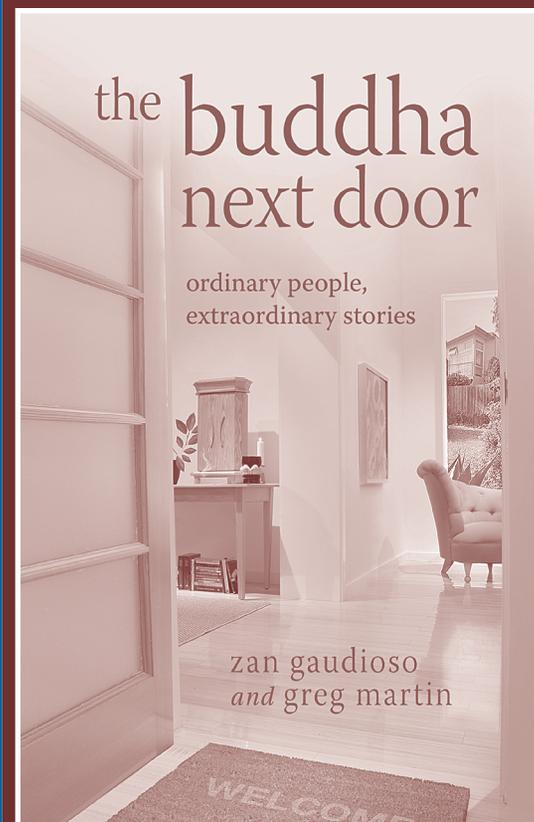
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DISCUSSION GUIDE



The Buddha Next Door ordinary people, extraordinary stories

By Zan Gaudioso and Greg Martin

MIDDLEWAY
P R E S S

About the Book

For those seeking a philosophy that can positively impact daily life.

Inspiration and insight from people of diverse ages, ethnicities, backgrounds and lifestyles overcoming a variety of challenges. Each story celebrates ordinary people's ability to triumph over suffering through the practice of Nichiren Buddhism.

Through dozens of personal experiences, this anthology illuminates how the practice of Nichiren Buddhism has changed people's lives for the better. These first-person narratives—representing folks from all across the country of various ages and ethnic backgrounds—examine the challenges of daily life associated with health, relationships, career and aging, and the ensuing experiences of hope, success, inspiration and personal enlightenment that come about as a result of living as Nichiren Buddhists.

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TOPICS TO CONSIDER

- 1 Did you find that the preface and glossary in this book were helpful in understanding the Buddhist rites practiced by the people portrayed in these stories? Did the book inspire you to seek more information about Nichiren Buddhism? (see pp. 1–5 and 301–04)
- 2 Each of the stories tells of an individual faced with personal problems which are overcome by the practice of the Buddhist faith. Which one of these stories resonated most with you and why?
- 3 Would you like to discover how the lives of the people in these stories have evolved since the publication of the book? What do you think the future holds for them?
- 4 Soka Gakkai International President Ikeda states that the mission of everyone in their life is “to climb the mountain in front of you” (p. 60). How do the people in this book set out to do this? How successful are they? Does this describe how you feel about your mission in life?
- 5 This book is entitled *The Buddha Next Door*. Were you surprised at how many people from different places and from different walks of life are practicing the Buddhist way of life? What does this say about people's search for meaning?
- 6 The book is divided into seven different chapters, each containing stories pertaining to a certain aspect of human life. Which of these seven appealed most to you and why?
- 7 The practicing Buddhists portrayed find the answers to their individual challenges within themselves. Daisaku Ikeda is quoted as saying “Who answers our prayers? We do through faith and effort. No one does it for us” (p. 111). Discuss if and how this thought differs from other religious beliefs.
- 8 Many of the stories tell of overcoming great challenges by using actions inspired by the strength and wisdom developed through chanting. Can you describe any triumphs over adversity gained through similar positive powers of thought, meditation and prayer in your life or the lives of people you know?
- 9 The Buddhist practice aims to bring people into harmony with the universe so that the individual can attain wisdom, courage, life force and compassion. Do these “ordinary people” manifest these attributes and are they successful in creating peace in their world? In your opinion, how can these attributes contribute on a larger scale to create peace and harmony in the world at large?