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## 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 *Romancing the Buddha*

“Seamlessly weaving familiar bumps in the marital road—child rearing, the work world—with the uphill climbs—his depressions, her multiple sclerosis—the slim volume demystified what may still seem to some like an exotic practice.”

—Dee Axlerod, *Bainbridge Island Review*

“A wise and moving account of the author’s adventuresome journey toward spiritual enlightenment and social awareness. It helps us to understand the intimate connection between resolving conflicts in one’s personal life and working effectively for peace on a global scale.”

—Richard E. Rubenstein, Ph.D., author  
*When Jesus Became God*  
and *Artstotle’s Children*



## *Romancing the Buddha* *Embracing Buddhism* *in My Daily Life* By Michael Lisagor



### 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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## About the Book

Thousands of people from around the world have enjoyed reading Michael Lisagor's warm and witty stories and advice on applying the principles of Nichiren Buddhism to daily life. This version of the book has been updated to make it even more accessible to non-Buddhists.

*Romancing the Buddha* reveals how Nichiren Buddhism – which offers teachings for personal and social transformation – helped Lisagor deal with depression, his wife's serious illness, relationships, raising two daughters, the death of a close friend, and finding happiness and hope in our turbulent society. Whether you're a newcomer or are already familiar with Buddhism, this book is both relevant and engaging.

Lisagor shares insights from his own path and offers new hope, help and humor for life's journey. An overview of Nichiren Buddhism and a glossary of Buddhist terms written in everyday language help clarify Buddhist concepts and beliefs.

Middleway Press, 2005

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\$14.00, 192 pp.

## About the Author

Michael Lisagor is a self-described “reformed class clown” and product of the 1960s. The president of CelerityWorks, a management consulting company, he has been writing humorous articles with a message for the *World Tribune* and *Living Buddhism* for more than fifteen years. He also writes a regular management column for *Federal Computer Week*. He is now happily married with two grown-up daughters.

## TOPICS TO CONSIDER

- 1 In the Prologue, Lisagor states, “This book . . . is an adventure-comedy story about my hunt for lost treasure in the jungles of urban America and the depths of my life.” How does this opening prepare you for what’s ahead in the book? Discuss his choice of words in this introductory sentence. (p. xi)
- 2 Lisagor uses personal stories to talk about faith, everyday life and happiness. How does this approach differ from other books you’ve read about these same topics? Were there particular stories that had special value to you?
- 3 Throughout the book, Lisagor refers to his wife, Trude, as “Most Beautiful One.” Discuss what you learned about their marriage from reading the book, how the relationship has changed over time and what has made this marriage last.
- 4 On page 25, Trude is quoted as saying about her injections for multiple sclerosis, “My minor weekly stab of pain has become a major shot of hope.” Lisagor discusses this change of reference again in the chapter “The Early Morning Blues” (pp. 27–30) about learning to get up early – and liking it. How does one develop the ability to reframe – or take a different view of – something that at first seems negative in our lives? How might familiarity with Buddhist teachings affect the ability to reframe any situation?
- 5 Lisagor ends the chapter on “Thoughts on Marriage” by claiming that, “It’s important to romance the Buddha not just in ourselves but in those around us.” What does this mean to you and how does it apply to your own life and your relationship with others? (p. 36)
- 6 In discussing young people in “Teenagers Are Aliens,” Lisagor suggests, “To be effective, a religion must not be so restrictive that it refuses to encourage a respect for diversity and openness in young people.” (p. 43) What dynamics are at work today in our culture that influence young people either directly or through role models? What trends do you see?
- 7 In the chapter “Getting to Know You,” Lisagor addresses the troubles and struggles of the world and suggests that chanting can lead to peace. (pp. 79–91) What is it about the nature of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that helps affect change? How can a single individual’s efforts affect the global community?
- 8 Lisagor states that for him, “The most meaningful benefit I can have in my life is the satisfaction that, yes, I am progressing as a human being.” (pg. 99) Can you relate? What brings you satisfaction about your own path? How are you cultivating your enlightened nature to the best of your ability? What efforts are you making in this direction right now?
- 9 Discuss your thoughts about the December holiday celebrations at the Lisagor household as described in the chapter “Holiday Identity Crisis.” (pp. 125–28) Have you faced a similar dilemma in your life?
- 10 In the chapter “The Elusive There,” Lisagor talks about his struggle to avoid relating to others in polar opposites (as being good or bad people). Do you identify with Lisagor’s struggle? How is it possible to break free from this trap? (pp. 130–31)
- 11 Discuss the “small ego” verses “large ego” story Lisagor tells on page 135. How does this help guide you in terms of how you treat others?
- 12 Lisagor chooses an essay on happiness as his last of the book. How does your vision of happiness match that of the author’s? How would you describe the feeling you’d like to have on your very last day in this lifetime? (pp. 137–40)