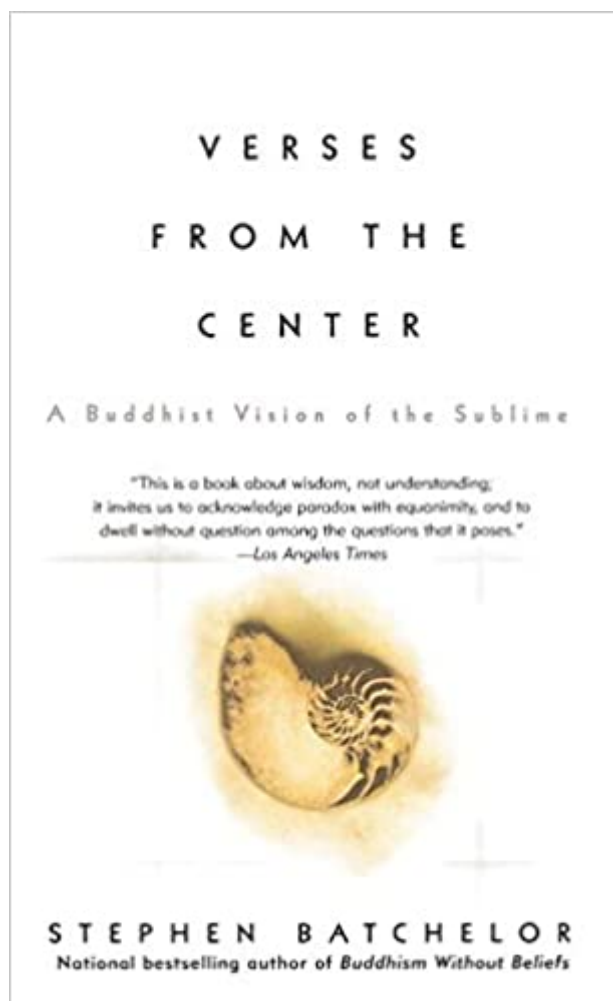


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# Verses From The Center: A Buddhist Vision Of The Sublime



## Synopsis

The understanding of the nature of reality is the insight upon which the Buddha was able to achieve his own enlightenment. This vision of the sublime is the source of all that is enigmatic and paradoxical about Buddhism. In *Verses from the Center*, Stephen Batchelor explores the history of this concept and provides readers with translations of the most important poems ever written on the subject, the poems of 2nd century philosopher Nagarjuna.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ex-monk Stephen Batchelor has stirred up controversy in the past by marrying Buddhism to secular agnosticism. Now he goes right to the greatest Buddhist sage after Sakyamuni, Nagarjuna, for corroboration. In this translation of Nagarjuna's seminal work, *Verses from the Center*, we see Nagarjuna turning a skeptical eye to all dogmatic beliefs. But Batchelor, through his emphasis on the poetics of the work, moves away from polemics to experience--experience of the emptiness that pervades existence and teaches deeper truths. *Verses from the Center* is an extended meditation on the implications of emptiness, and thanks to Batchelor's limpid rendering, it prompts a meditative reading. Batchelor's opening essay, half of the book, is one of the best introductions you'll find on Nagarjuna's notion of emptiness, emphasizing that emptiness ultimately brings us back to face the world. In a chapter called "Acts," Nagarjuna says: My acts are irrevocable Because they have no essence... Where are the doers of deeds Absent among their conditions? Imagine a magician

Who creates a creature Who creates other creatures. Acts I perform are creatures Who create others. --Brian Bruya --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Batchelor (Buddhism Without Beliefs) here translates and extensively comments upon Nagarjuna's 2nd-century masterpiece, *Verses from the Center*. Nagarjuna, the Indian philosopher-monk, is often revered for his deeds as a founder of the compassion-driven wing of Buddhism called Mahayana, but his writings have been unsung and largely untranslated (Batchelor's translation is the first nonacademic, idiomatic English version of the text). If Nagarjuna's teachings have been neglected, it may be because they are frustratingly difficult; Batchelor notes that while Nagarjuna was immersed in Indian traditions, elements of the *Verses* may be best understood as Zen koans. Indeed, Nagarjuna's dialectic poetry does contain the kind of maddeningly paradoxical statements that characterize classic koans. The *Verses* are preoccupied with the question of emptiness, which Nagarjuna sees not as an absence of meaning but as "a way to realize liberation of the mind." Emptiness, according to Nagarjuna, is the famed Middle Way of Buddhism and the closest vehicle to the sublime, though emptiness is slippery to attain. To illustrate the concept, Nagarjuna relies on a barrage of pairs of opposites, all the while expressing awareness that language and metaphors based on personal experience only inadequately reveal the true nature of emptiness. Although this bracing, abstruse text has been lovingly translated for accessibility, it remains a demanding philosophical treatise geared for the serious student of Buddhism, not the dilettante. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

good price quick service good book

Much more accessible than other translations/commentaries of the *Mulamadhyamikakarika*. Nagarjuna's text itself is over-rated from my personal perspective. But Stephen Batchelor's books are always refreshing to read. This one certainly helps in putting together the middleway philosophy puzzle.

Stephen Batchelor is intelligent, challenging, and deep. Great

Wonderful book

In some ways I agree with "Jim Williams" review, though I do not see this commentary as harshly as

he does -- and I see Batchelor as I always do, as a commentator, not a teacher. Not a good beginner's book on Nagarjuna's seminal work, but I am currently studying this in depth, and so appreciated Batchelor's work as I might enjoy sitting talking to another serious student, even when I saw his shortcomings. If you are beginning, read Nagarjuna as a translation and sit with him.

The author of "Verses from the Center" takes old texts and looks into the concept of "Emptiness" first mentioned by the Buddha, I think. He shows how different Buddhists have interpreted this, whether emptiness is full or truly empty. He makes a good case that finding "Emptiness" doesn't mean you are extinguished, but that the world as it is opens up because the ego has been overcome. He quotes the Buddha as saying, "In side Emptiness is a great personage." That, to me, seems to indicate the highest viewpoint possible to humans. The author interprets short poems and makes up some of his own to display the concept of Emptiness. I found this to be an interesting book. I had to read it slowly because these are deep waters. I don't know how mainstream or radical the book is, but it explains without rancor of being right, and brings in other ideas about Emptiness that have been upheld during the long age of Buddhism. A book worth having for seekers. It is not a polemic.

The introduction to this book contains the very best explanation of what is meant by the Buddhist term, emptiness. If you happen to be practicing Zen Buddhism, I would highly recommend that you read my it. I read it several years ago, and was a real breakthrough experience for me. I recently read it again, and and found myself enjoying it even more than the first time. If you are not acquainted with the author, Stephen Batchelor, I would highly recommend his other books on Buddhism, as well. Stephen takes a very pragmatic, existentialist approach to Buddhism, which is very apt for those who practice it in the west. Verses from the Center happens to be a jewel among all of Stephen's excellent books.

I find Stephen Batchelor's insights very helpful in my own journey. He has a refreshing honesty and realism about his approach to the path. While many will be put-off by his particular points of view, that alone is worth exploring. I don't necessarily recommend this book for the neophyte, but anyone who has spent time studiously working through multiple lines of inquiry into the Dharma will likely benefit by a close reading of his translation and interpretation of this seminal work ascribed to Nagarjuna. As an aside, if there is any translation that does not require interpretation, I've never seen one. It is impossible to translate from one cultural/linguistic milieu into another without

interpretation.

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