

#1 NEW YORK TIMES—BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *SPARTACUS*

HOWARD FAST

**THE ART OF ZEN
MEDITATION**



#1 *NEW YORK TIMES*-BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *SPARTACUS*

HOWARD FAST

THE ART OF ZEN
MEDITATION





EARLY BIRD BOOKS
FRESH DEALS, DELIVERED DAILY

Love To Read? Love Great Sales?

Get fantastic deals on
bestselling ebooks delivered
to your inbox every day!

SIGN UP NOW
at EarlyBirdBooks.com



Love this book?

Choose another ebook on us from a selection of similar titles!

- or -



Not loving this book?

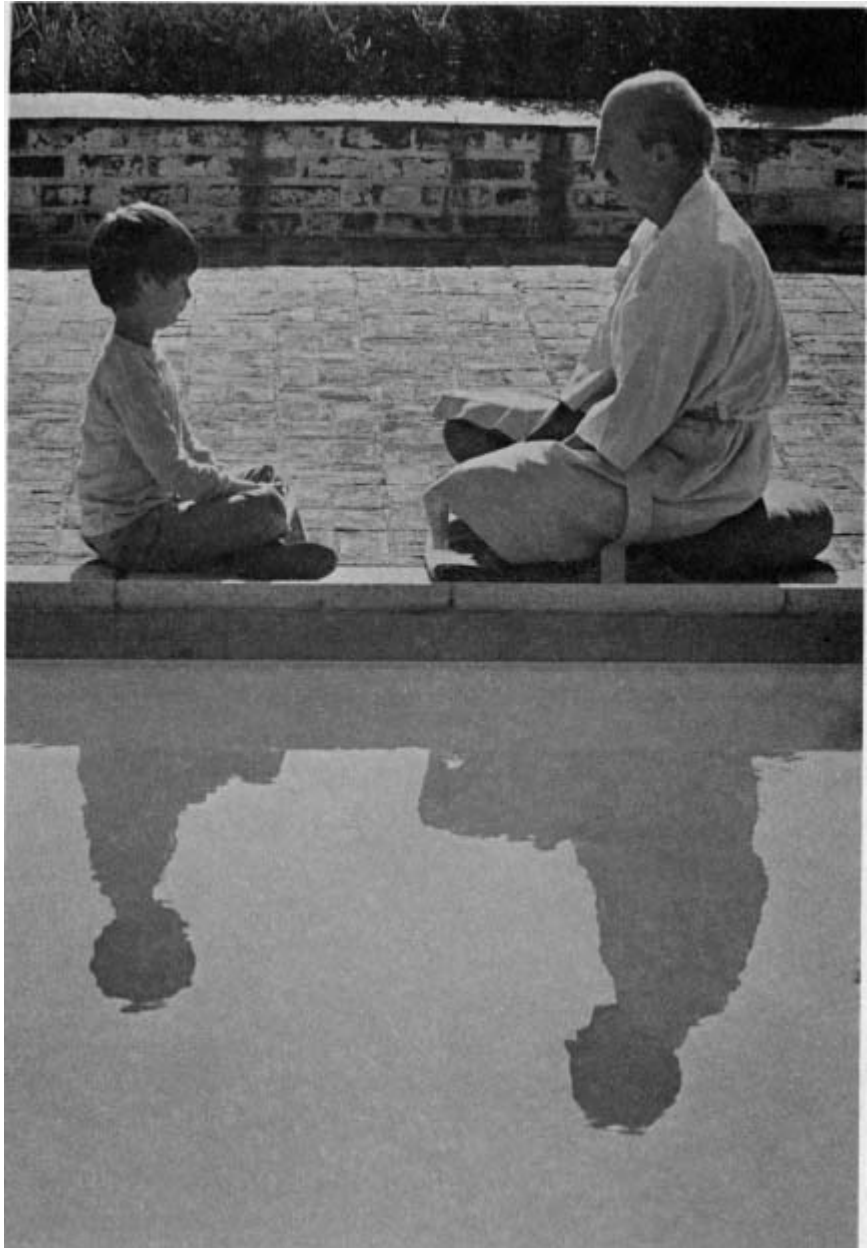
No worries - choose another ebook on us from a selection of alternate titles!

CLICK HERE

The Art of Zen Meditation

Howard Fast





This small book is intended as an introduction to the art of Zen meditation. Since Zen masters are fond of stating that Zen is the most direct and obvious thing in the world, a simple manual for the art of Zen is neither extraordinary nor presumptuous; but it must be presented with the additional reminder that while Zen meditation is very simple, very direct, very ordinary, it is also very difficult and very frustrating. There is no ladder of ascension; there are no points; there is no score; and as for the rewards, they are not to be spoken of, or calculated, or even expected, and if one demands to know what they are, a proper Zen answer would be a simple shrug of the shoulders.

Nevertheless, for those who undertake the process of Zen meditation and stay with it, the process becomes the most important and central fact in their lives. And if Zen meditation promises nothing, it very often achieves more than all the rest of living can grant a person. And while this is intended as an instruction in doing the process of meditation, I feel that a few words about Zen, as I understand it, are not inappropriate.

About five hundred years before our era, there lived in the north of India, a royal prince whose name was Siddhartha Guatama. Conscious of the suffering of people who lived beyond the walls of his palace, he gave up his sheltered, comfortable life and set out to find a way of being that would help mankind. He became a hermit, a wanderer, a part of the seething mass of mankind that he so loved and pitied. Meditation was known and practiced in India, and Guatama chose the way of meditation as a key to the problem of man's suffering.

For years, he meditated under a Bodhi tree, and during those years people came from all over India to listen to the discipline and the code of life he taught. Through his meditation, he came to a kind of ultimate knowing, or enlightenment, as the Buddhists call it, or Satori, as the Japanese Zen masters describe it.

He preached a doctrine of an everlasting universe of absolute being, of man as part of that absolute – but man held captive by illusion and suffering. The way out of the suffering was defined in eight simple strictures: right belief, right resolve, right living, right effort in the direction of what is good, right speech, right conduct, right contemplation and right ecstasy. Meditation was a path to self-knowledge, and self-knowledge a way to all the rest. He spoke of a thing called Karma, the indestructable moral kernal of any being, and of a thing called nirvana, an enlightenment that came of many generations of good Karma.

It is a gentle religion, woven out of compassion and love for all living things. It speaks of no God as we know God, but embraces an absolute that always was and always will be.



And Guatama, the man who preached this way of life, came to be known to his followers and then to all the world as the Buddha, the enlightened one. He was never a God-figure, never any more than a man but never less than a man, and among Zen Buddhists, the belief is held that this same Buddha nature, this same possibility for enlightenment or satori exists in all people.

About a thousand years after Buddha's time, an Indian monk whose name was Bodhidharma made his way to China to preach Buddhism. His name (which may have been given to him) consists of two Sanscrit words, Bodhi, which means enlightenment, and Dharma, which means truthful.



The Chinese both embraced and modified Buddhism. They added to a way of life, a strict discipline of meditation in search of self-knowledge, along with the conviction that enlightenment could come as an accretion of inner knowledge, a sort of breaking through to satori. This way of Buddhism was called Ch'an, which in Japan – to which Chinese monks brought it – was transliterated as Zen. The word ch'an simply means to sit.

Zen Buddhism divided itself into two schools. The Rinzai school developed the koan method of Zen, wherein the master gives the student a riddle whose solution transcends reason. The Soto school of Zen, introduced into Japan by the great Zen master, Dogen, allows for a way other than the Koan method and puts forward the practice of meditation somewhat as described in the following pages.

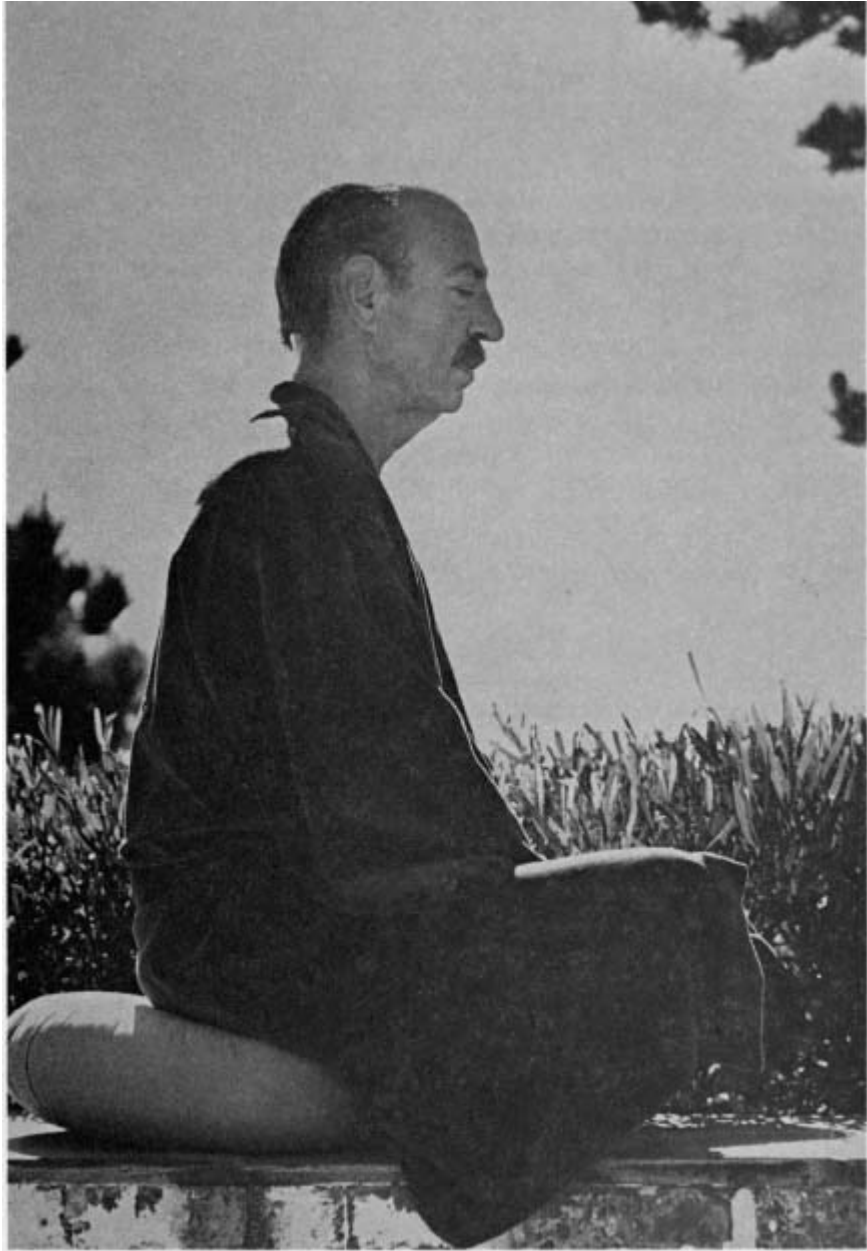
It must be emphasized, however, that Zen is never exclusive. It is the content of Zen meditation that matters, not the style, not the trappings. Most assuredly Zen is a religion, but it is a religion without scripture, without doctrine or dogma and without sin.



A wise man once said that when our sun has ceased to shine, when the earth is no longer even a memory, there will still be Zen, even as there was Zen before our earth was born.

In no way does this small book pretend to an exposition of Zen thinking. It is merely a beginning in the way of meditation, and even there the reader is immeasurably benefitted if he can find a teacher, for Zen practice is best when transmitted from teacher to student in person. But there are few teachers and many places in America where the only way to Zen meditation is through self-instruction. When the great Zen teacher, Daisetz Suzuki, was given his mission by his own master to bring Zen to the West, it was suggested to him that the United States would be the place of the next great flowering of Zen Buddhism. I would like to think that this is so, for it would bring to our country a beautiful and vital thing that could only help us and enrich us.

And finally, be assured that Zen asks nothing even as it promises nothing. One can be a Protestant Zen Buddhist, a Catholic Zen Buddhist or a Jewish Zen Buddhist. Zen is a quiet thing. It listens.



The hardest thing is to be here. The mind suddenly sees itself as a prisoner. It struggles, resents, tears loose to do what it has always done, to dream, to fancy, to race aimlessly like a squirrel in a cage, to hold conversations with itself – anything to avoid the reality of here. It becomes devious and cunning; it thinks and pretends to itself that it is not thinking. And suddenly it breaks out into a warm, satisfying fantasy, and the meditation is shattered. And then the mind sees itself and realizes that to simply sit and be here is perhaps the hardest thing in the world.

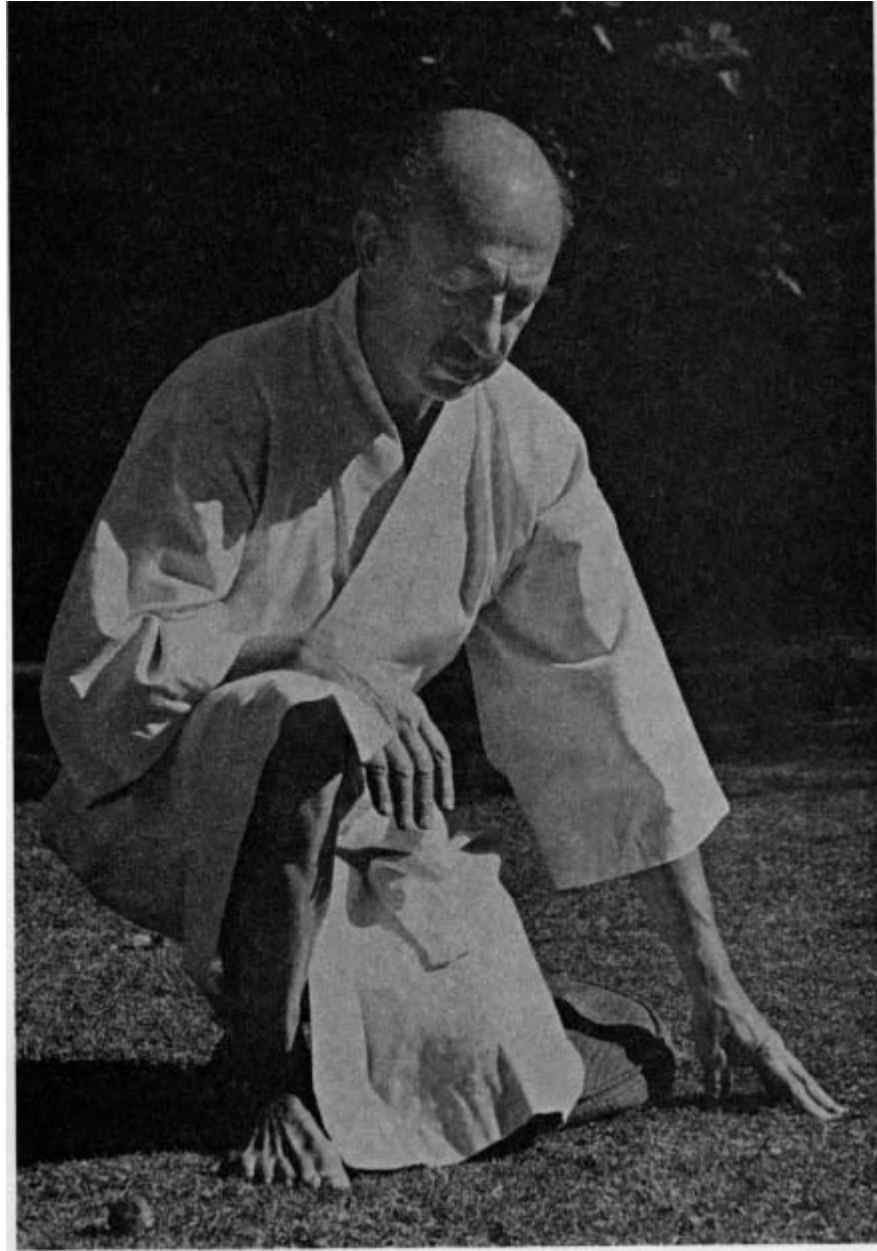
To be here is almost all of it, to be here and not anywhere else, to be present. Not to be in the past, with memories and regrets and things that might have been but never were – nor to be in the future, planning, dreaming and escaping, not to be elsewhere, in another city, in another country, or with another or in a fantasy or in a daydream or caught up in some invented inner conversation.

But simply to be here. Here where I am at this moment in time. I make no judgement as to whether I am content or discontented; I am simply present.

In the ancient times, they would call this place at this moment the holy place. Being there made it holy. Simply that and nothing else.

That is how the meditation begins.





When I first sit, when I prepare for za-zen, or the sitting meditation, I try to make myself comfortable and free from interruption. The early morning is best; but if that is impossible, another time of the day will do, and for some people the late evening is preferable. I will try to give myself half an hour a day at the least, if possible in a single

session. If I have the time and the inclination, I may sit again. If a half hour is impossible, I will sit for whatever time is available to me.

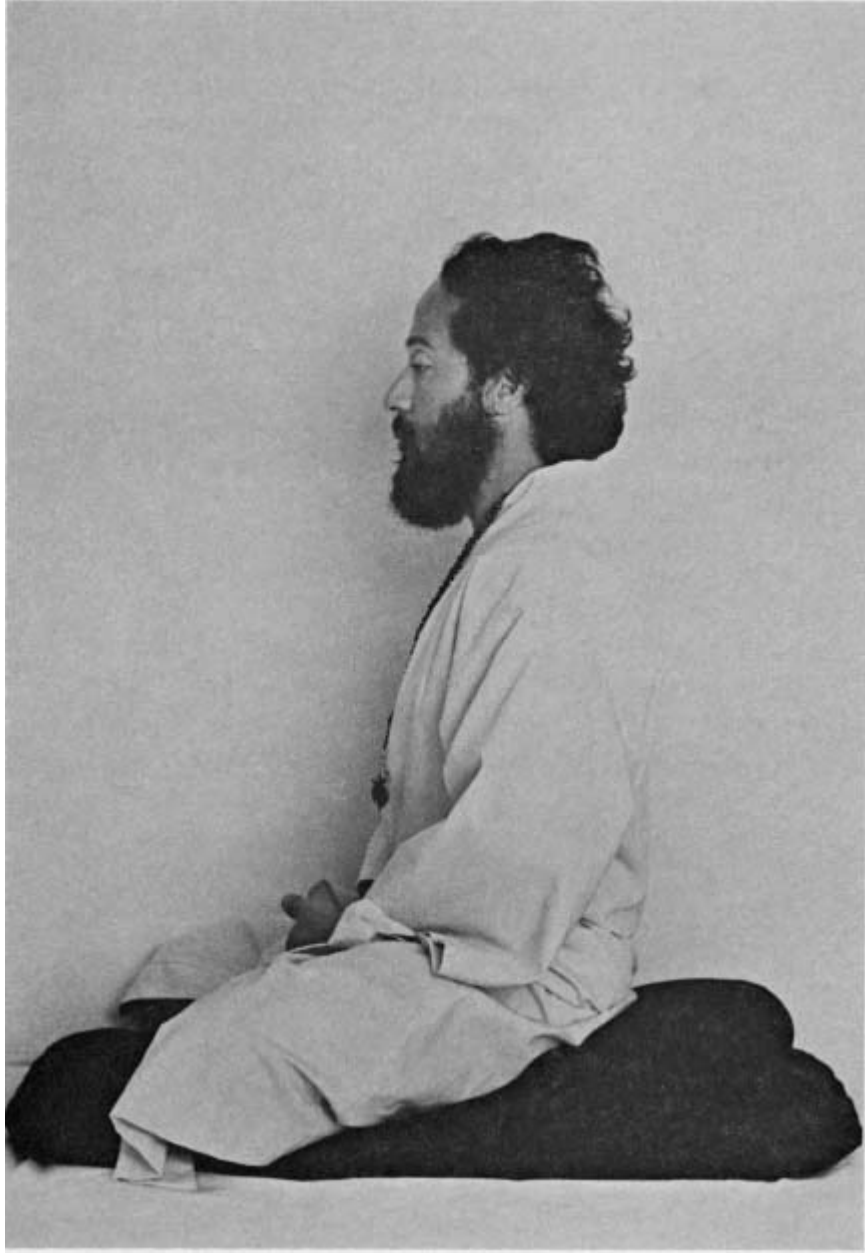
But to think that anything would be accomplished by sitting again and again through the day, but giving up other things to sit on the basis of the more the better – that is not the way of Zen and will accomplish nothing. We are not in a monastery; we are in life, and Zen must be a part of our lives, not a replacement for it.

Now I am in position. Traditionally, in Japan, Zen meditation is carried on in the lotus position; but that is difficult, sometimes impossible, and often painful for older people. Nor is it necessary.

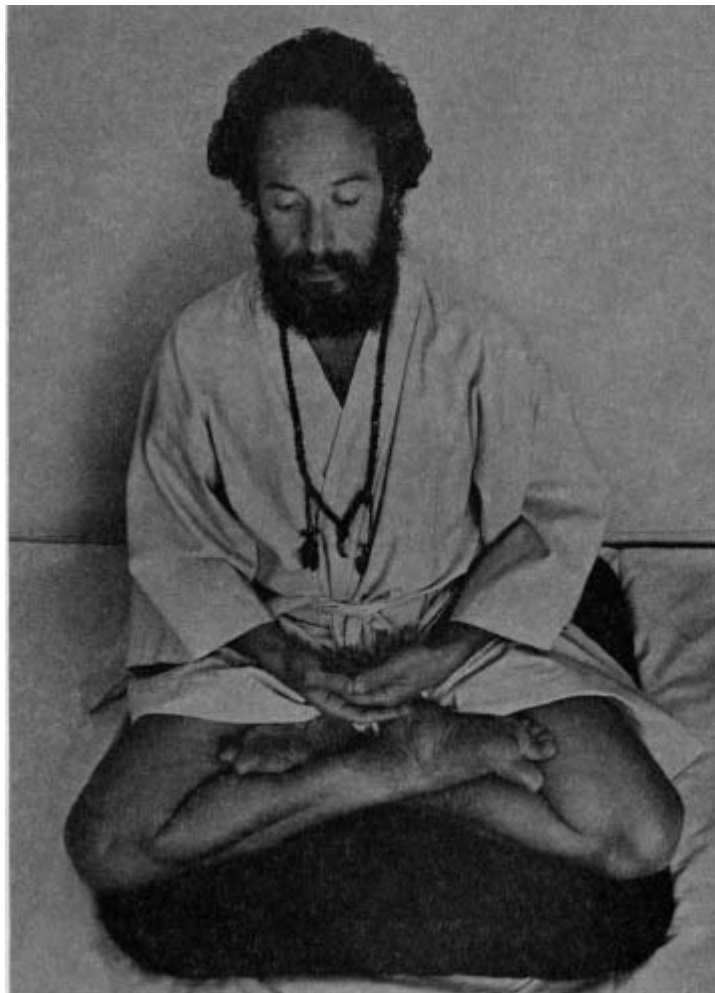
I find it best to sit in a simple cross-legged position, my seat a few inches off the floor, raised by a pillow, and my crossed ankles resting on some soft material, a mat or a carpet or a folded blanket. I sit on the edge of the pillow, with a slight impetus forward and downward. My hands are loosely in my lap the thumbs touching. My eyes are directed at the floor, to a point about three feet in front of me. I wear a loose robe that does not restrict any part of my body. My trunk is erect, my head squarely upon my spine.

At first, for some people, it may be impossible to sit crosslegged on a low pillow. Then the pillows should be of a height to make sitting more comfortable. Most people find, in time, that there is a gentle stretching of the ligaments and that the cross-legged position becomes easier.

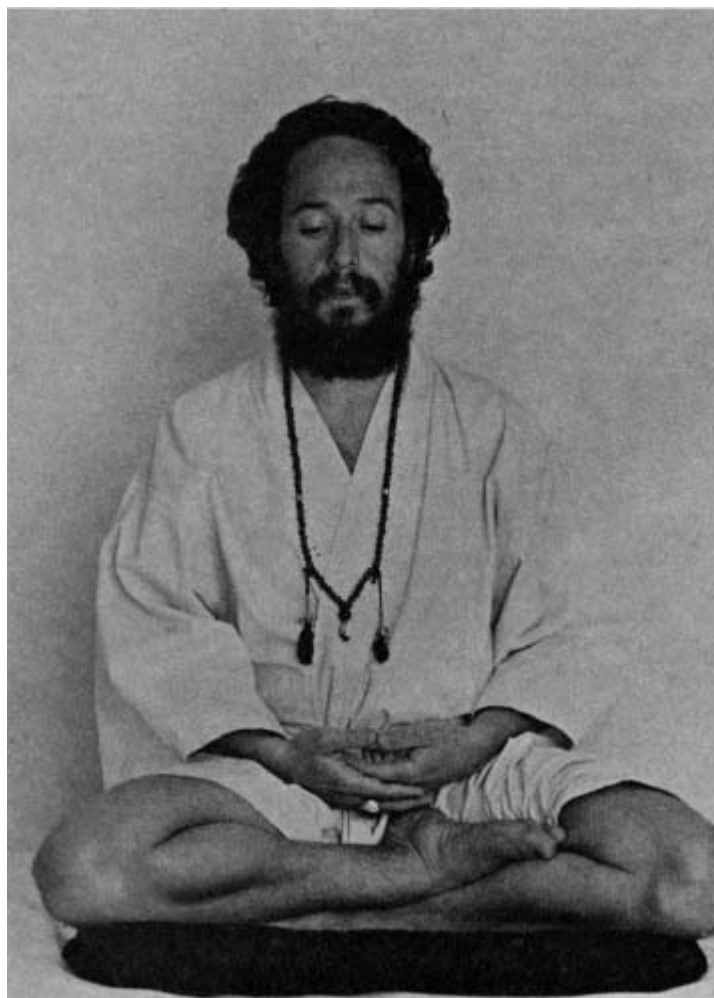
However, if sitting cross-legged is too painful, one may sit on a chair to carry on the meditation. But I must say that if possible, the cross-legged position is better.



On the left, we have the lotus position, and on the right the half-lotus position. If you are young and supple, you might wish to sit in this fashion, since it is a traditional position in Japan.

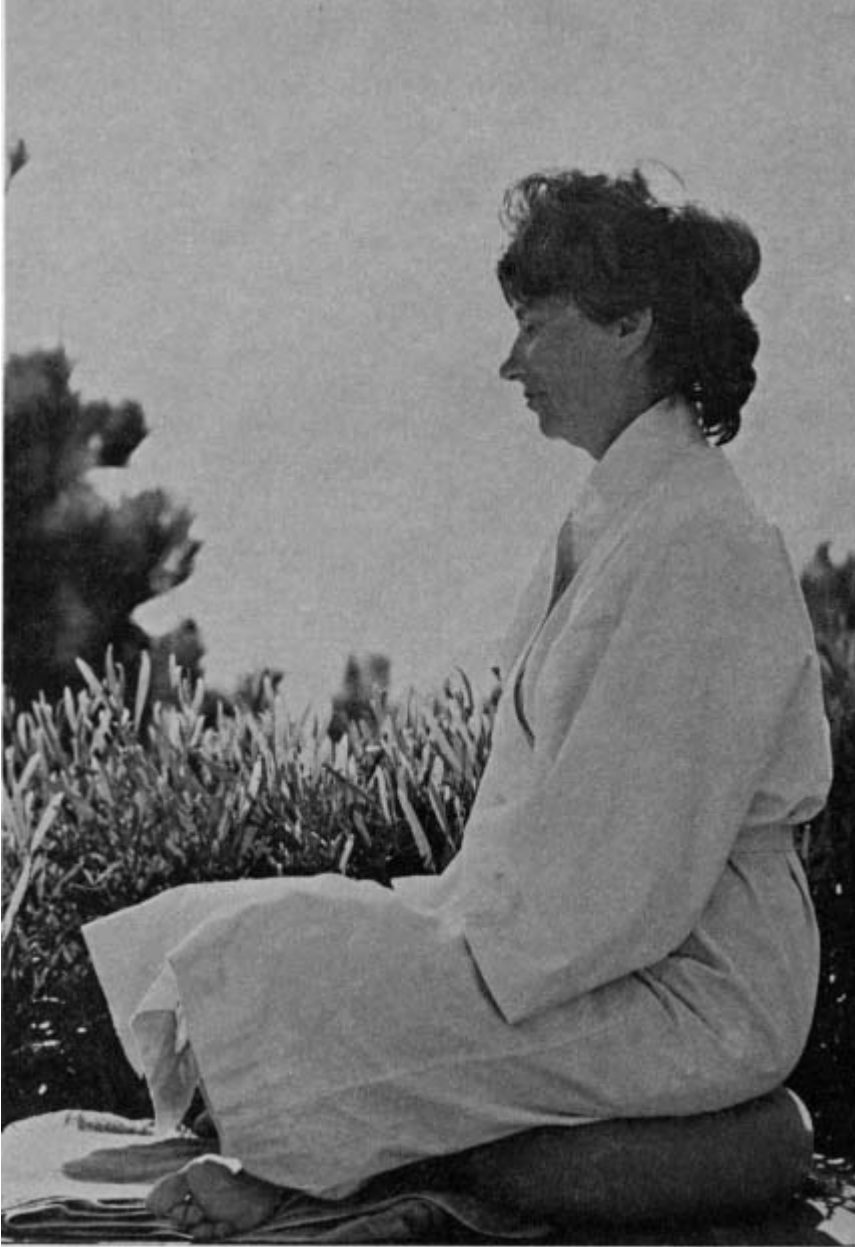


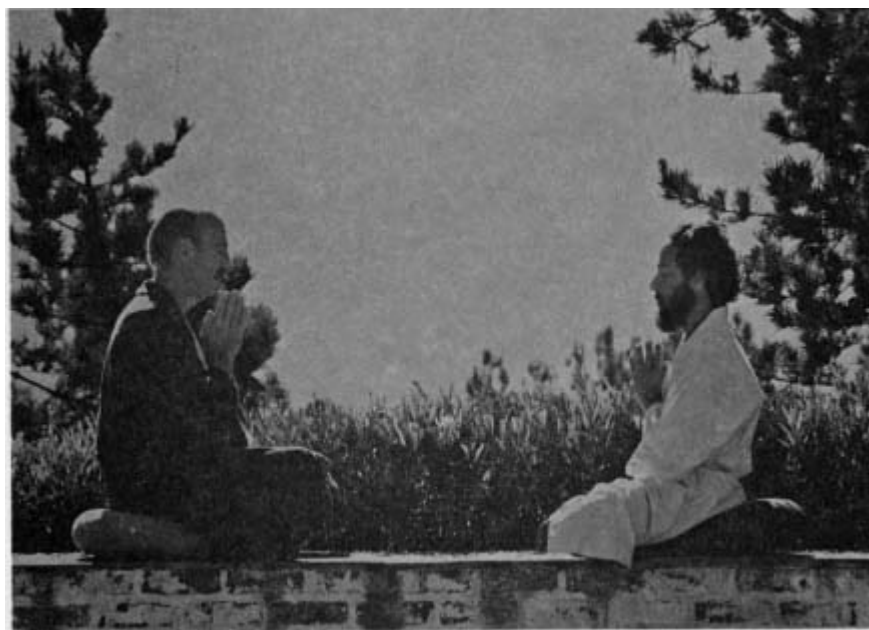
But if the position is painful, it will only interfere with meditation, and you are better off not to attempt it. I have found that while I can sit in the half-lotus position, my meditation is better simply sitting cross-legged.



Now the meditation begins. I am simply quiet at first, and I point my attention at my breath. I try not to influence my normal breathing, not to change it, but to follow it. I move my attention with the rise of breath into my nostrils, and I follow the slight movement of my lungs and diaphragm as the breath enters, and then that same point of attention travels with my breath as it falls from my nostrils.

I count ten breaths, normal breaths, no deeper than I would be breathing were my attention elsewhere. Attention is the crux of the meditation, and after I have finished counting, through the entire period of meditation, I try with all my will to maintain the sharp point of attention upon my breathing.





By now, having counted the ten breaths, I have fixed the focus of my attention – although to maintain it through the entire meditation will be difficult indeed.

Now I bring my body into the forefront of my consciousness. Think of it this way: the sharp focus of attention upon my breathing is like an arrow; the secondary focus of attention upon my body is like the bow that drives the arrow. I bring this secondary focus into being thus:

I begin with my toes, my feet, and then my shins. I feel them. I sense them. I feel my limbs. I feel the touch of my clothes and my robe upon my body. The feeling, the sensing is mental. I do not move, but rather I focus my senses to feel my body and all that touches it, to become aware of myself in every part of my body.

And still, the sharp focus of attention remains with the rise and fall of my breath.

I try to feel the tug of gravity – that which we always take for granted – pressing my seat down upon the pillow. I line up my backbone, making a mental image of it, straightening it, and I set my head erect upon my backbone. I feel my arms against my thighs and the touch of my hands against each other.

Now I am aware of my entire body, primarily aware of the rise and fall of my breath, but also aware of my entire body.

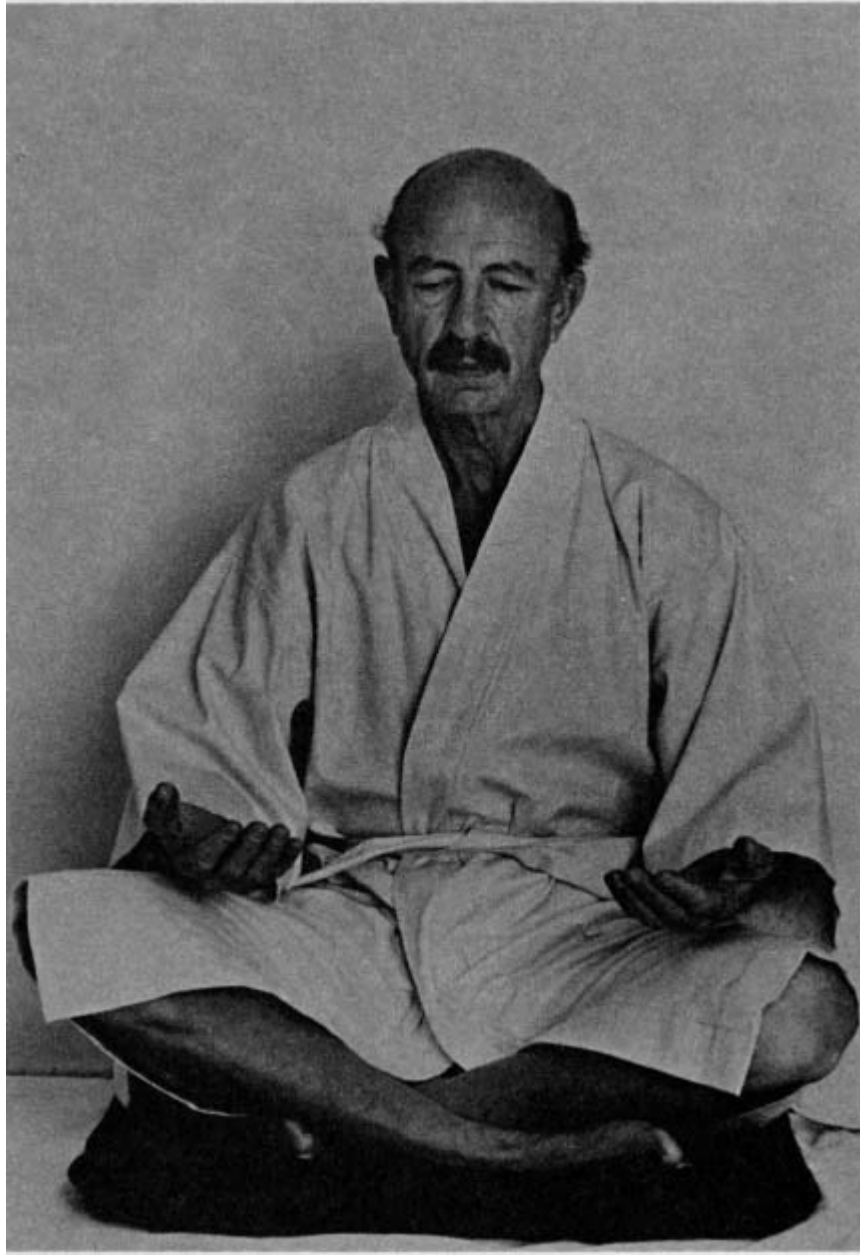
Now I rid myself of accumulated tension – tension that is a part of normal existence. The method is simple. Where I find tension in my body, I let go of it as my breath falls from my nostrils. This may appear to be rather strange and simplistic, but it works.

My head first. I let go of the tension in my cheeks, in my neck and my scalp. Then, wherever I feel there is tension in my body, I let go of it with the fall of my breath.

And always, I try to allow my body to breathe normally – the only difference being the sharp arrow-like point of my attention moving always with my breath.

And through all of these stages, which take up only a few minutes at the beginning of the meditation, I try to keep my mind clear and free of thought. This is indeed the most difficult part of meditation, to keep one's mind naked, open and free of memories, reflections, plans, daydreams, inner conversations. It is not to be accomplished in a day, or a month or a year; yet it can be done and one must not be discouraged by the difficulty.





I open my hands and hold them this way for perhaps a minute or two. It's a practice in sensation. I allow sensation to build in the palm of each hand, an awareness of myself, my hands, and the air in which I live and which sustains my life. By letting the sensation build and grow, I find that my hands become acutely sensitive, a spot of heat in the center of each palm.

Thoughts arise in my mind, but I let go of them. So long as my attention moves with my breath, I can let go of any thoughts that arise.

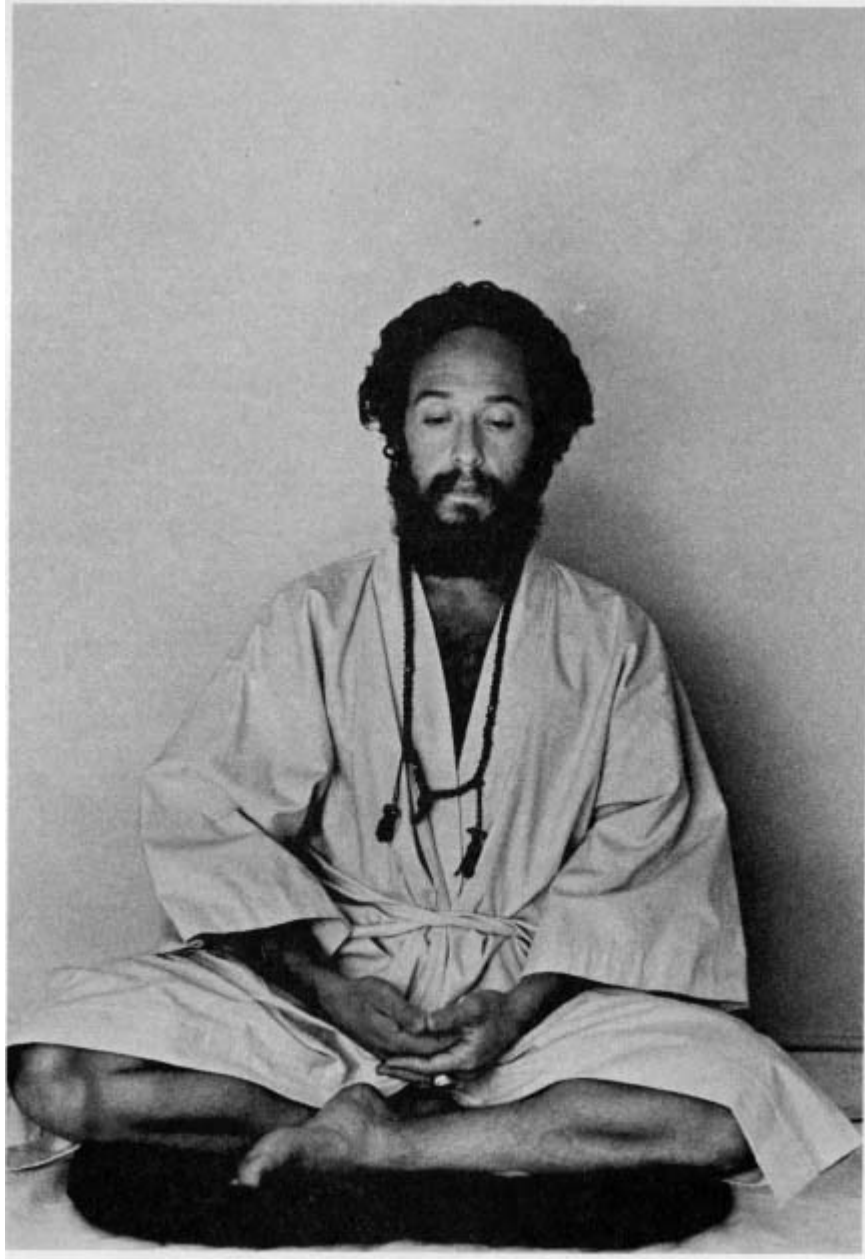
I fold my hands again, the thumbs touching. Now I am in the meditation, and I will try to hold myself within it for the remainder of the half-hour. I try to remain absolutely still, and with a little practice I find that this is entirely possible. I fight against the inclination to close my eyes. If my eyes close, it is all too easy to fall in a reverie, even to hallucinate – which negates the whole purpose of the meditation.

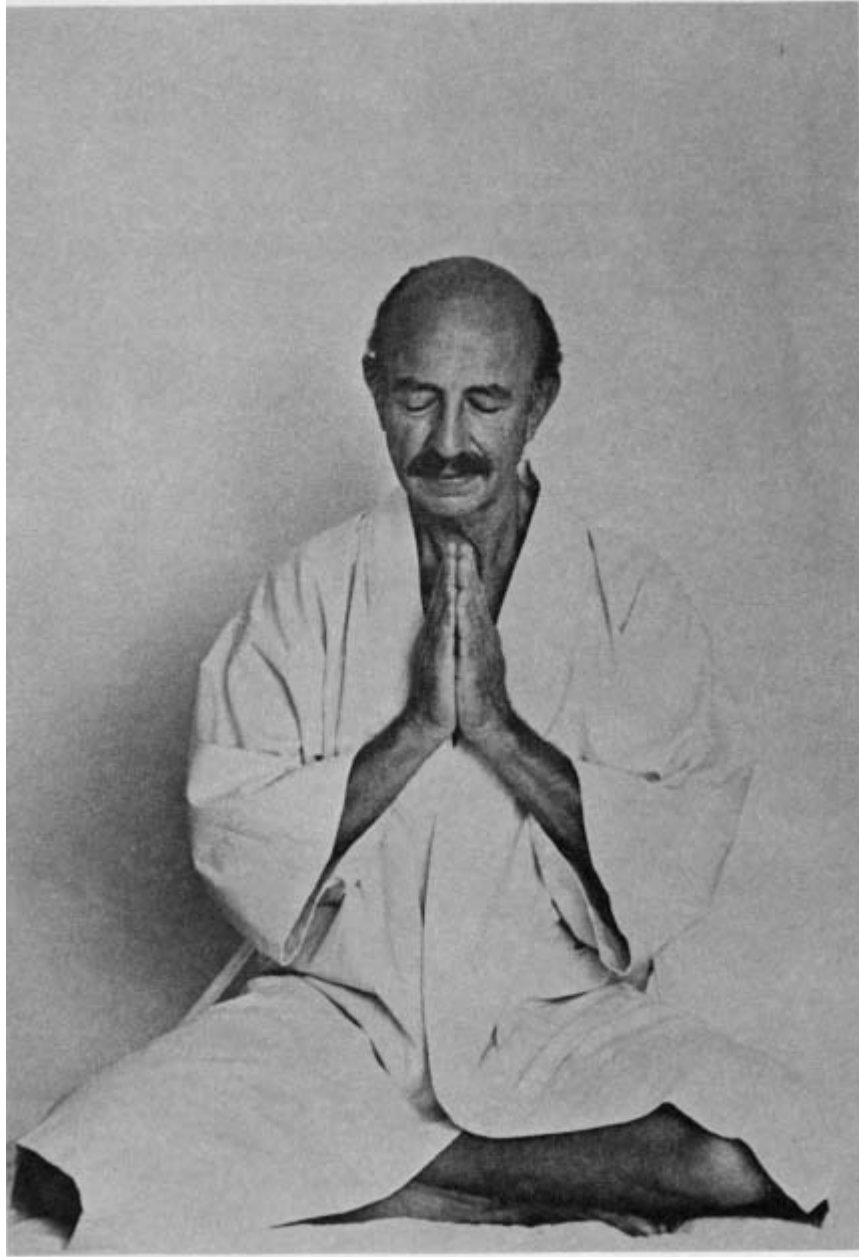
And, importantly, I begin to listen. I try to listen in a new way, to open not only my ears but my whole being to sound. There is no silence. If the place where I meditate is apparently silent, then I listen to the silence and presently I find that it becomes sound. I feel that I am reaching out, expanding my senses, enlarging myself. I hear sound that I was totally unaware of, but I do not think about the sound or analyze it; I simply listen.

To be quiet, completely quiet, to sit and to listen – this is the essence of Zen meditation. And it is perhaps one of the most difficult things for a person to accomplish.

If thoughts or worries overtake me, I once again bring my body into my consciousness, as before, and refocus my point of attention on my breath.

And, as the meditation continues, I drop this sharp point of attention to a point a few inches below my navel, finding that this center of my being also moves with my breathing. More and more, as I practice meditation, will I follow my breathing from that center below my navel.





A glance at the watch which I keep beside me tells me that the time is up – at least in the beginning. Eventually, I will know this without a clock.

I finish in a position of reverence, an acknowledgement of what I have done. For a little while at least, I have tried to be close to the center of things, to exist without hate or anger or fear or plans for the future or regrets for the past. If the essence of prayer is to be quiet and to listen, then I have spent a half hour in prayer, and I have made some kind of a connection, however brief.

To imagine that the meditation begins and ends with the sitting is not the way of Zen. The act of Za-Zen, or sitting cross-legged is only part of it. The meditation is to be aware, to be alive with knowledge, to see and to listen, to break out of the mechanism that controls us and turns us into machines.

The ways are without number. I wash my hands, and I am conscious that I wash my hands. I feel the water. I am aware of the act.



*I sit, and I am aware that I sit. I feel myself and I feel the chair.
The telephone rings. A moment before I pick it up to answer, I
become conscious of what I am doing.*

*Small things, but a pattern can begin. I look at things newly, as if I
had never seen them before. I look at forms and colors and shadows
as if I had never seen them before. But mostly, I look at people
newly, without past images, impressions, definitions.*

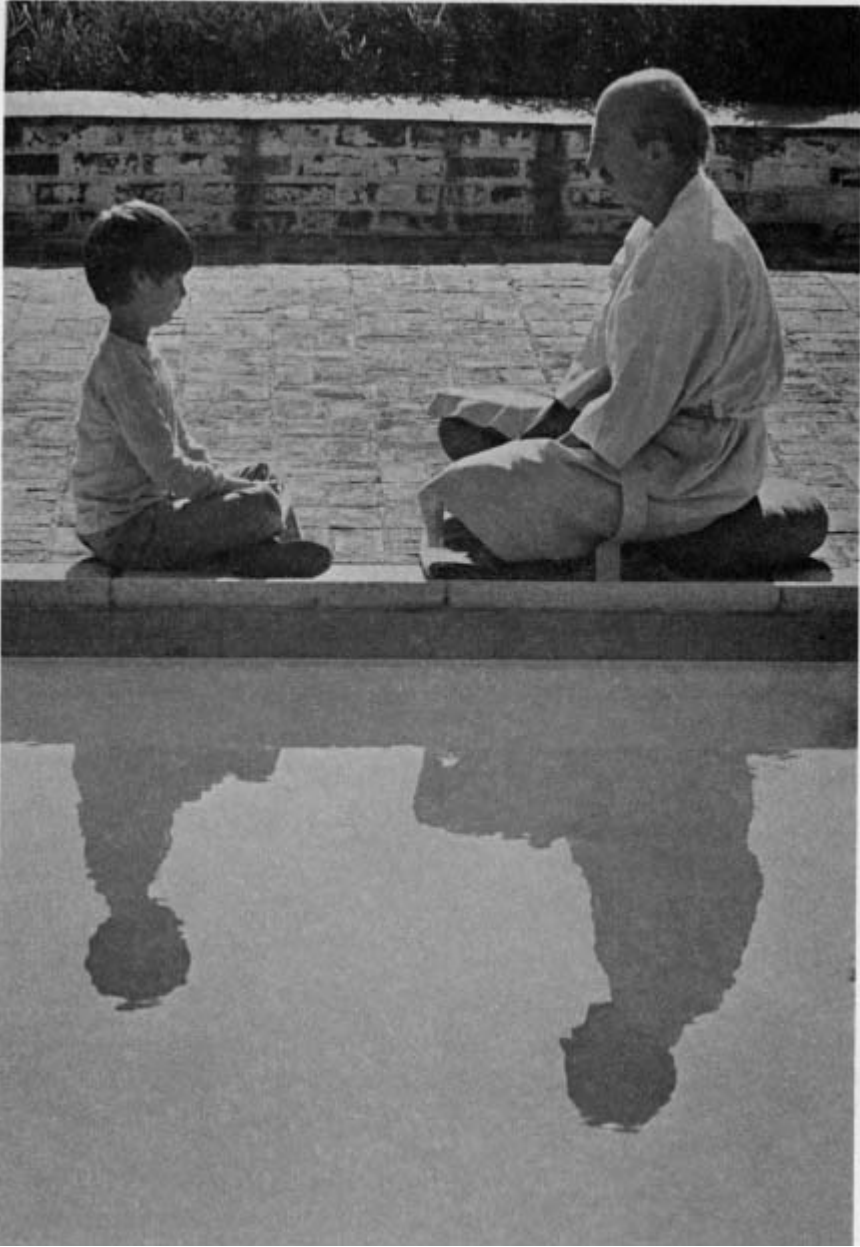




When two or three or four meditate together, something is added. Perhaps some sort of vibration or interchange occurs, but that is only a surmise. Yet after one has meditated alone, the difference when one meditates with another is always noticeable. If one is the teacher, he not only gives but takes, and some say that when you bring another up to where you are, you are fulfilling a necessity of meditation.

But never insist, never persuade, never cajole. This is not something that can be proselytized. The need as well as the doing must come from within.

The man and the child are half a century apart, but when they sit they are here and nothing separates them. There is no past and no future, no young and no old, simply here and the present. They are both part of the connection of all things, of a totality that is indivisible. This is knowledge.





The child who sees the mother sitting will usually accept it as a natural thing, not anything to be astonished at. If she should ask, the mother might well say,

“I sit to be quiet and to listen, because it’s good to be quiet and listen.”

I think the child will accept that. Don’t urge the child. If she wants to sit, she will sit, and if the child finds something of Zen, it will make her better for living. But let it come from the child and only from the child.

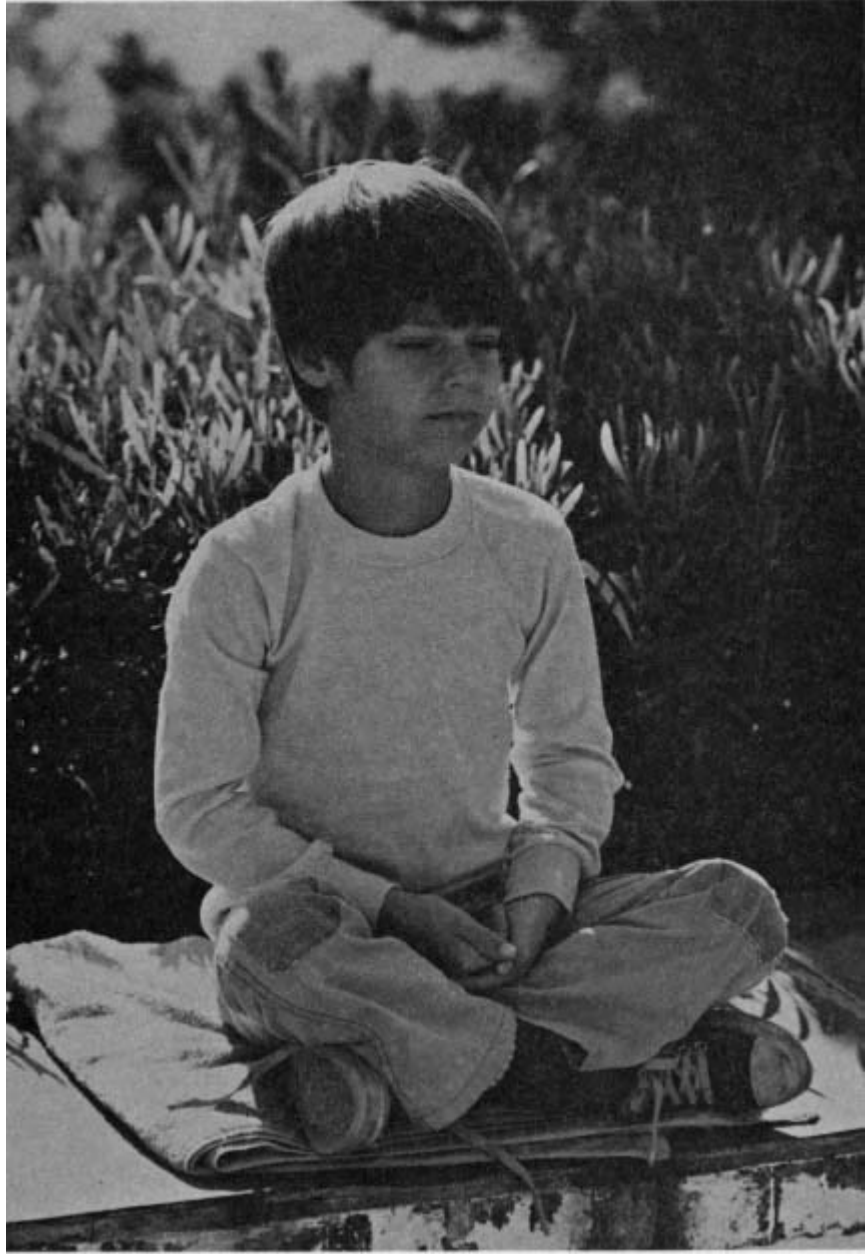
There is no time that is too old for Zen. Zen is not a thing of chronological age, not a thing which can be had at one age and not at another. A small child may have more of Zen than a doctor of philosophy, and even the very old can find the seed of truth in meditation.

A man, coming to the Zen Master, asked, "Tell me why I should learn Zen?"

The Master replied, "Because then you will not fear death."

The very old can be wise in the way of death, which is not so different from the way of life.





Zen is more than the practice of meditation; it is a way of life and a way of being. Dozens of books have been written about the philosophy which has grown out of the Zen way of thinking, and those of you who become deeply interested in Zen will no doubt read many of them.

If, however, I should be called upon to recommend one author who most clearly and wisely expounds the Zen way, my choice would be J.Krishnamurti. He will open doors into a way of life of which meditation is only a part.



Love this book?

Choose another ebook on us from a selection of similar titles!

- or -



Not loving this book?

No worries - choose another ebook on us from a selection of alternate titles!

CLICK HERE

A Biography of Howard Fast

Howard Fast (1914 – 2003), one of the most prolific American writers of the twentieth century, was a bestselling author of more than eighty works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and screenplays. Fast's commitment to championing social justice in his writing was rivaled only by his deftness as a storyteller and his lively cinematic style.

Born on November 11, 1914, in New York City, Fast was the son of two immigrants. His mother, Ida, came from a Jewish family in Britain, while his father, Barney, emigrated from the Ukraine, changing his last name to Fast on arrival at Ellis Island. Fast's mother passed away when he was only eight, and when his father lost steady work in the garment industry, Fast began to take odd jobs to help support the family. One such job was at the New York Public Library, where Fast, surrounded by books, was able to read widely. Among the books that made a mark on him was Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, containing prescient warnings against fascism that set his course both as a writer and as an advocate for human rights.

Fast began his writing career early, leaving high school to finish his first novel, *Two Valleys* (1933). His next novels, including *Conceived in Liberty* (1939) and *Citizen Tom Paine* (1943), explored the American Revolution and the progressive values that Fast saw as essential to the American experiment. In 1943 Fast joined the American Communist Party, an alliance that came to define—and often encumber—much of his career. His novels during this period advocated freedom against tyranny, bigotry, and oppression by exploring essential moments in American history, as in *The American* (1946). During this time Fast also started a family of his own. He married Bette Cohen in 1937 and the couple had two children.

Congressional action against the Communist Party began in 1948, and in 1950, Fast, an outspoken opponent of McCarthyism, was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Because he refused to provide the names of other members of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, Fast was issued a three-month prison sentence for contempt of Congress. While in prison, he

was inspired to write *Spartacus* (1951), his iconic retelling of a slave revolt during the Roman Empire, and did much of his research for the book during his incarceration. Fast's appearance before Congress also earned him a blacklisting by all major publishers, so he started his own press, Blue Heron, in order to release *Spartacus*. Other novels published by Blue Heron, including *Silas Timberman* (1954), directly addressed the persecution of Communists and others during the ongoing Red Scare. Fast continued to associate with the Communist Party until the horrors of Stalin's purges of dissidents and political enemies came to light in the mid-1950s. He left the Party in 1956.

Fast's career changed course in 1960, when he began publishing suspense-mysteries under the pseudonym E.V. Cunningham. He published nineteen books as Cunningham, including the seven-book Masao Masuto mystery series. Also, *Spartacus* was made into a major film in 1960, breaking the Hollywood blacklist once and for all. The success of *Spartacus* inspired large publishers to pay renewed attention to Fast's books, and in 1961 he published *April Morning*, a novel about the battle of Lexington and Concord during the American Revolution. The book became a national bestseller and remains a staple of many literature classes. From 1960 onward Fast produced books at an astonishing pace—almost one book per year—while also contributing to screen adaptations of many of his books. His later works included the autobiography *Being Red* (1990) and the *New York Times* bestseller *The Immigrants* (1977).

Fast died in 2003 at his home in Greenwich, Connecticut.

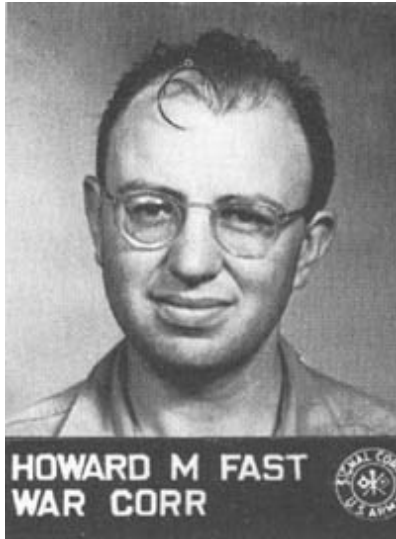


Fast on a farm in upstate New York during the summer of 1917. Growing up, Fast often spent the summers in the Catskill Mountains with his aunt and uncle from Hunter, New York. These vacations provided a much-needed escape from the poverty and squalor of the Lower East Side's Jewish ghetto, as well as the bigotry his family encountered after they eventually relocated to an Irish and Italian

neighborhood in upper Manhattan. However, the beauty and tranquility Fast encountered upstate were often marred by the hostility shown toward him by his aunt and uncle. “They treated us the way *Oliver Twist* was treated in the orphanage,” Fast later recalled. Nevertheless, he “fell in love with the area” and continued to go there until he was in his twenties.



Fast (left) with his older brother, Jerome, in 1935. In his memoir *Being Red*, Fast wrote that he and his brother “had no childhood.” As a result of their mother’s death in 1923 and their father’s absenteeism, both boys had to fend for themselves early on. At age eleven, alongside his thirteen-year-old brother, Fast began selling copies of a local newspaper called the *Bronx Home News*. Other odd jobs would follow to make ends meet in violent, Depression-era New York City. Although he resented the hardscrabble nature of his upbringing, Fast acknowledged that the experience helped form a lifelong attachment to his brother. “My brother was like a rock,” he wrote, “and without him I surely would have perished.”



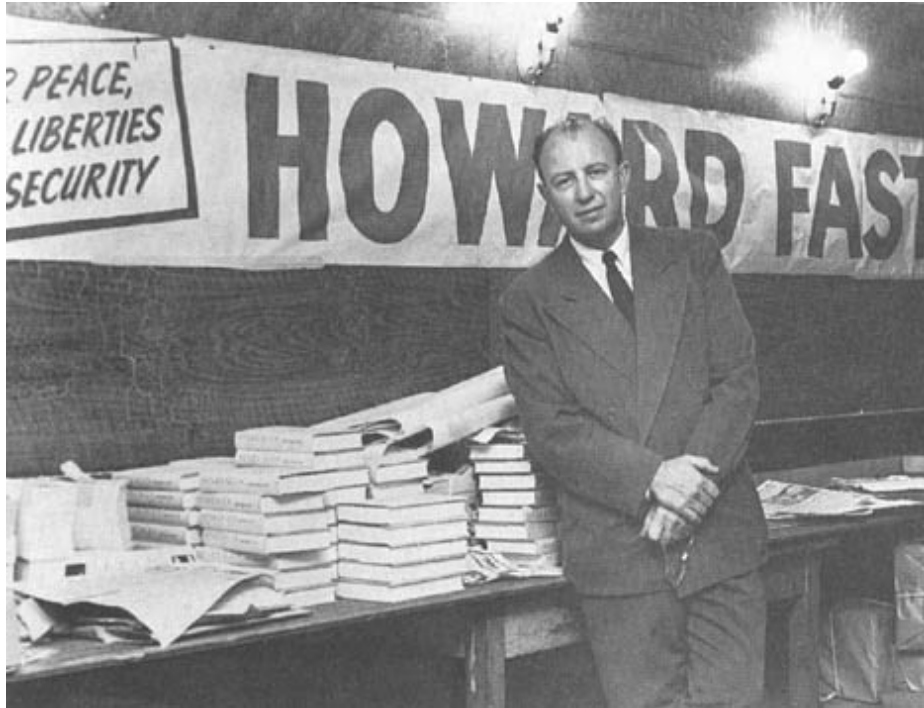
A copy of Fast's military identification from World War II. During the war Fast worked as a war correspondent in the China-Burma-India theater, writing articles for publications such as *PM*, *Esquire*, and *Coronet*. He also contributed scripts to *Voice of America*, a radio program developed by Elmer Davis that the United States broadcast throughout occupied Europe.



Here Fast poses for a picture with a fellow inmate at Mill Point prison, where he was sent in 1950 for his refusal to disclose information about other members of the Communist Party. Mill Point was a progressive federal institution made up of a series of army bunkhouses. “Everyone worked at the prison,” said Fast during a 1998 interview, “and while I hate prison, I hate the whole concept of prison, I must say this was the most intelligent and humane prison, probably that existed in America.” Indeed, Fast felt that his three-month stint there served him well as a writer: “I think a writer should see a little bit of prison and a little bit of war. Neither of these things can be properly invented. So that was my prison.”



Fast with his wife Bette and their two children, Jonathan and Rachel, in 1952. The family has a long history of literary achievement. Bette’s father founded the Hudson County News Company. Jonathan Fast would go on to become a successful popular novelist, as would his daughter, Molly, whose mother, Erica Jong, is the author of the groundbreaking feminist novel *Fear of Flying*. (Photo courtesy of Lotte Jacobi.)



Fast at a bookstand during his campaign for Congress in 1952. He ran on the American Labor Party ticket for the twenty-third congressional district in the Bronx. Although Fast remained a committed leftist his entire life, he looked back on his foray into national politics with a bit of amusement. “I got a disease, which is called ‘candidateitis,’” he told Donald Swaim in a 1990 radio interview. “And this disease takes hold of your mind, and it convinces you that your winning an election is important, very often the most important thing on earth. And it grips you to a point that you’re ready to kill to win that election.” He concluded: “I was *soundly* defeated, but it was a fascinating experience.”



In 1953, the Soviet Union awarded Fast the International Peace Prize. This photo from the ceremony shows the performer, publisher, and civil rights activist Paul Robeson delivering a speech before presenting Fast (seated, second from left) with the prestigious award. Robeson and Fast came to know each other through their participation in leftist political causes during the 1940s and were friends for many years. Like Fast, Robeson was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee during the McCarthy era and invoked his Fifth Amendment right not to answer questions. This led to Robeson's work being banned in the United States, a situation that Robeson, unlike Fast, never completely overcame. In a late interview Fast cited Robeson as one of the forgotten heroes of the twentieth century. "Paul," he said, "was an extraordinary man." Also shown (from left to right): Essie Robeson, Mrs. Mellisk, Dr.W.E.B. Du

Bois, Rachel Fast, and Bette Fast. (Photo courtesy of Julius Lazarus and the author.)



Howard and Bette Fast in California in 1976. The couple relocated to the West Coast after Fast grew disgruntled over the poor reception of his novel *The Hessian*. While in California, Fast temporarily gave up writing novels to work as a screenwriter, but, like many novelists before him, found the business disheartening. “In L.A. you work like hell because there is nothing else to do, unless you are cheating on your wife,” he told *People* after he had moved back East in the 1980s. Of course, Fast, an ardent nature-lover, did enjoy California’s scenic beauty and eventually set many of his novels—including *The Immigrant’s Daughter* and the bestselling Masao Masuto detective series—in the state.

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this ebook onscreen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of the publisher.

copyright © 1977 by Howard Fast

cover design by Jason Gabbert

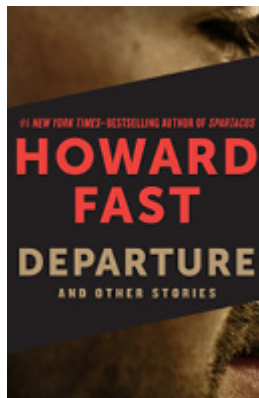
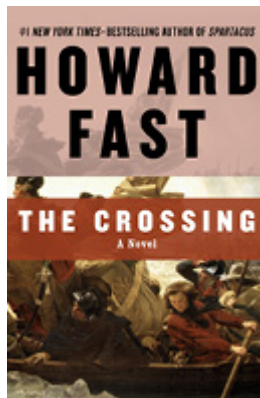
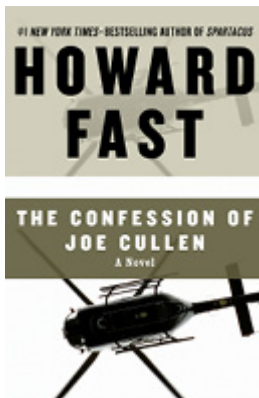
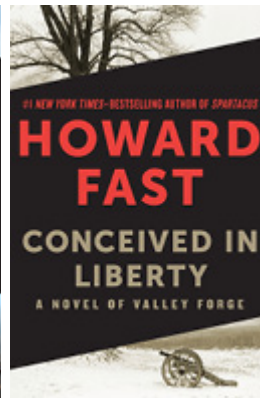
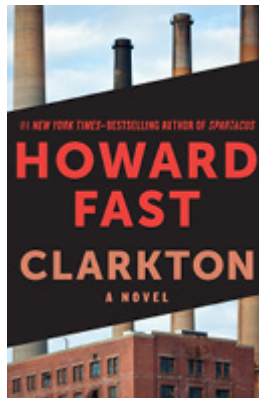
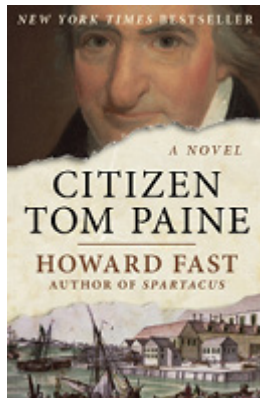
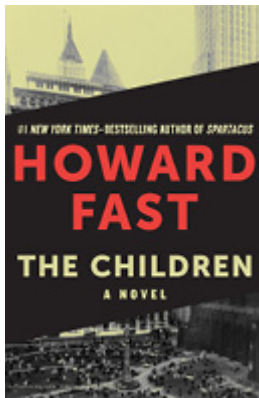
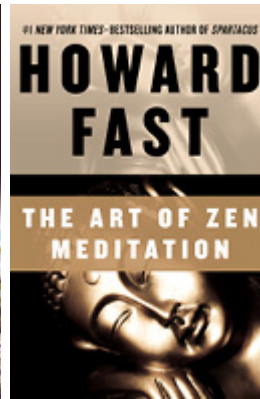
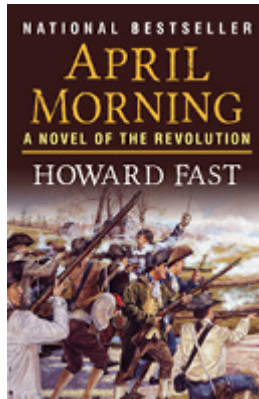
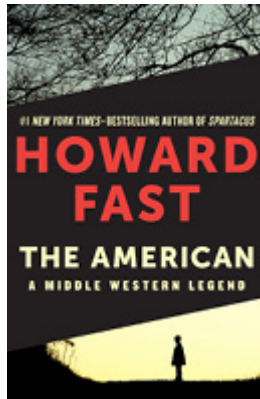
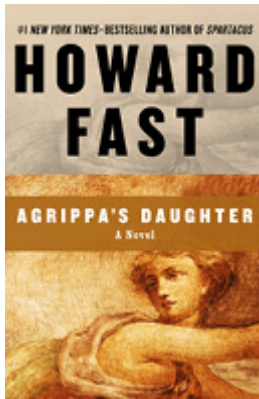
ISBN: 978-1-4532-4221-6

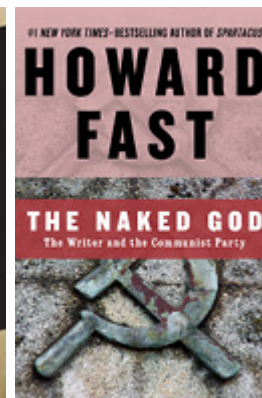
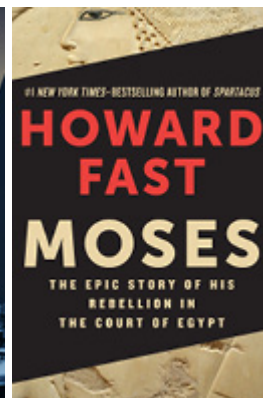
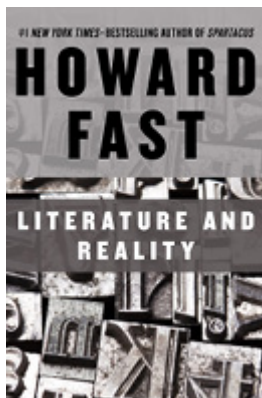
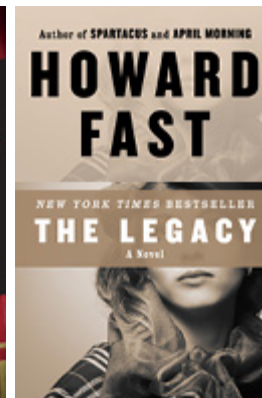
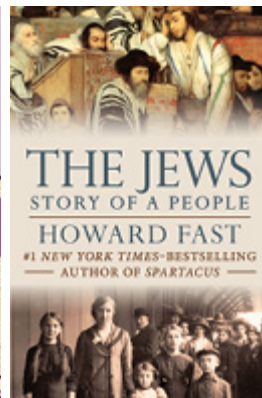
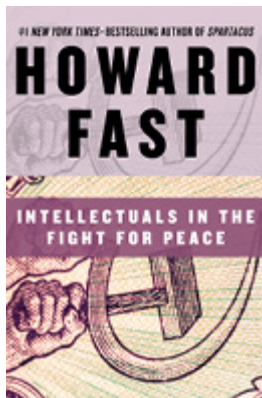
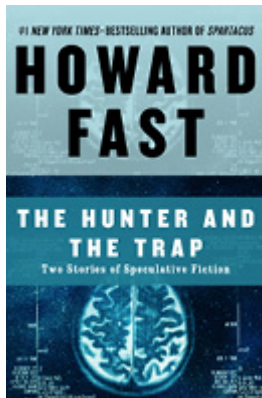
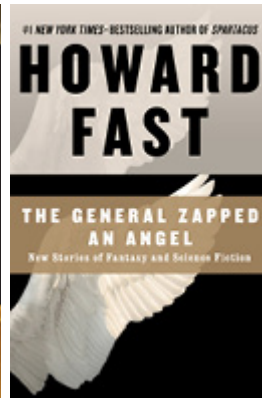
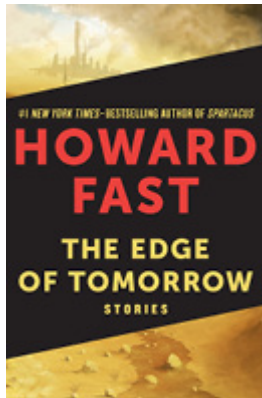
This edition published in 2011 by Open Road Integrated Media
180 Varick Street
New York, NY 10014
www.openroadmedia.com

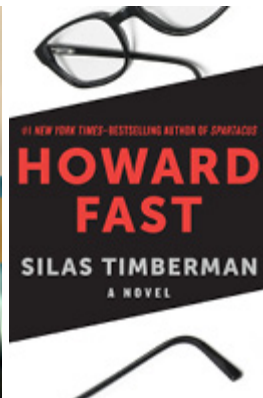
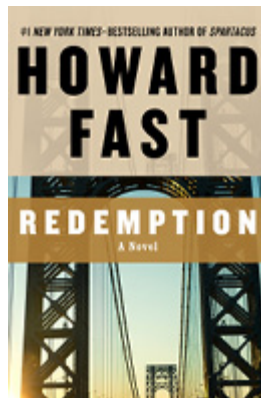
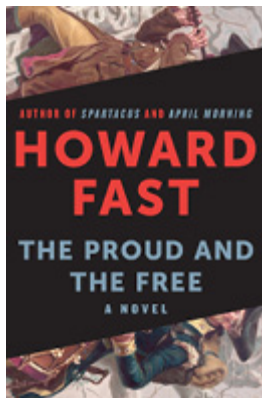
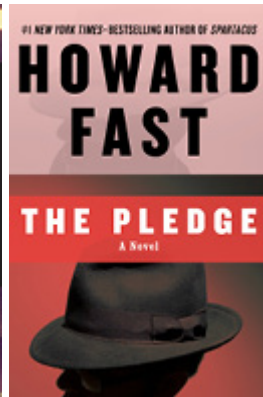
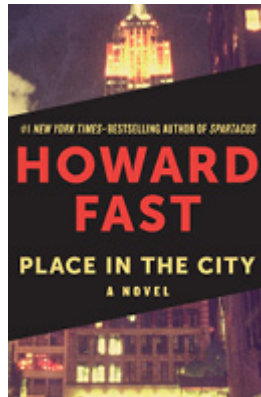
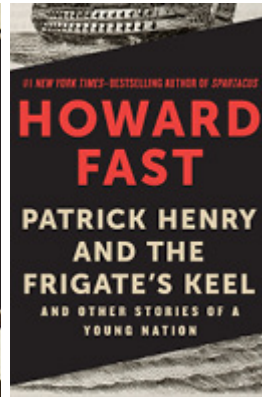
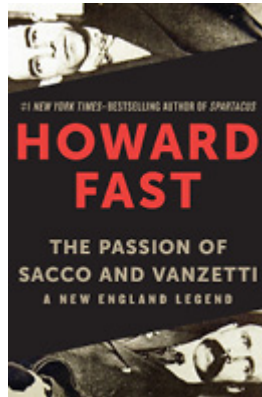
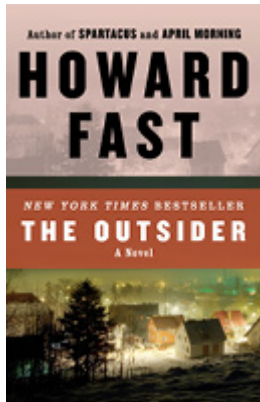


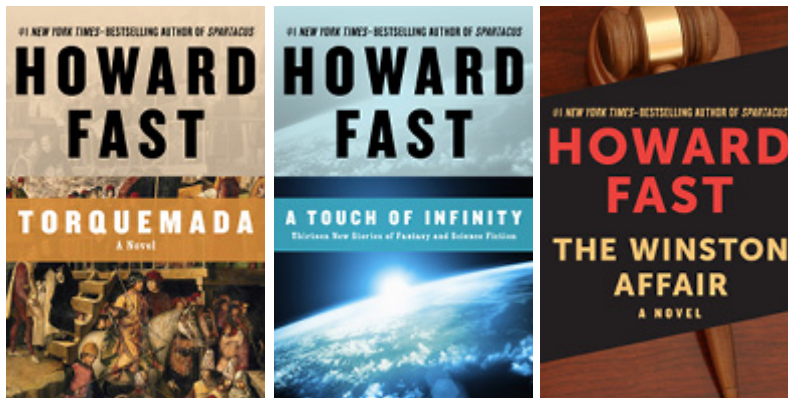
HOWARD FAST

FROM OPEN ROAD MEDIA









OPEN  ROAD
INTEGRATED MEDIA



Find a full list of our authors and titles at www.openroadmedia.com

FOLLOW US
@OpenRoadMedia

