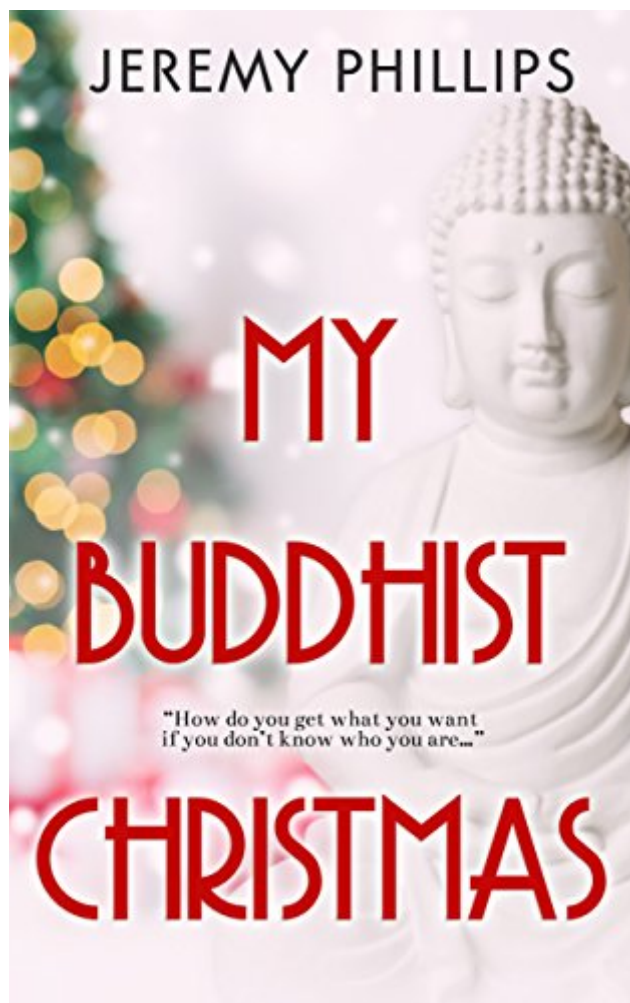


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My Buddhist Christmas



Synopsis

It's not surprising that sixteen year old Chris Jones has no idea where he fits in. After all, he's a Buddhist kid in America during the Christmas season. Add in the fact he plays guitar in a punk rock band called The Dharma Bhumz, and his life is one giant paradox. Caught between the principles of his religion and the influence of his hard-partying bandmates, Chris is in a constant struggle for balance. An upcoming talent show is his chance to shine or fail spectacularly. It's already hard enough preparing for the show, since his friends are more interested in getting high than practicing. And now Chris has to worry about impressing pretty Mary Simpson. To make matters even worse, Mary's parents are fundamentalist Christians, a few steps above his family on the social ladder, and they firmly believe Chris isn't good enough for their precious daughter. Conflicted about his friends, lying to his family, and still mourning a devastating loss, Chris wonders if being an American Buddhist guitar wizard wanna-be is worth it. Or does any of it even matter anymore?

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Customer Reviews

My Buddhist Christmas is narrated by sixteen year old Chris as he reflects on the Christmas season. He is no different than other American boys except that he uses the philosophy he learned as a congregant of a small Buddhist temple in conservative Spokane as the lens through which he understands his interactions with the world. Buddhist philosophy is also his means of coping with the challenges of being a teenager. When the story starts Christmas is only a few days away. Chris's rock band has signed up to perform for their high school's student body. Chris is surprised by his band members' refusal to practice. Instead, the boys he thought of as his friends get high before every practice session he schedules. Chris's problems grow more complicated when he becomes infatuated with a pretty girl he just met. She is drawn to the sound of gentle improvisations he was playing on his guitar. As Christmas approaches Chris makes a series of the kind of bad decisions teens are known for. One mistake leads to another until events force him to make a realistic assessment of his life. I realized as I read it that this book is only coincidentally about Buddhism. It is a story about the reality teenage boys live in, about how stressful their lives can become and specifically how this protagonist deals with it. Chris's occasional musings on Buddhism as it relates to his troubles showed me how he rationalizes his experiences. I gained some insight into what Buddhism, one of mankind's oldest ways of being in the world, looks like when viewed as part of the American experience, no longer an exotic alien influence. I found this book to be an easy read. The characters seemed real to me and the plot was often surprising; it moved quickly enough to draw me into the story, kept things interesting and presented an ending in keeping with the Christmas spirit. EDIT: This is my first book review. I should have added that I know the author but I believe I wrote a fair review. I know I wrote an honest one.

Absolutely marvelous slice of life growing up as a Buddhist in a culturally religist world as a teenager. How do you deal with loss, anger, and trying too hard to be part of something. A great coming of age story

Not what I anticipated, and it was great because most books I read have a lot of foreshadowing and are predictable and boring. This one had strong values and was relatively realistic to life. I passed it on to a random person in a doctor office after she noticed the title and we had a discussion about it.

This is not a totally unbiased review. I know the author and attend services at the same Buddhist Temple in Spokane, Washington. Nevertheless, I found this book entertaining from start to finish.

There is a constant undercurrent of good Buddhist teachings especially the one about being very careful who your friends are. I kept shaking my head about young Chris' repeated poor decisions. But then I reminded myself that he is a teenage boy growing up in a very ME centric American culture where the Dharma can be a hard sell. Fortunately he was able to learn some valuable lessons before it was too late. Karma was working in his favor. The book also has a smattering of information about Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. This is helpful because I find that even many fellow Buddhists can be unfamiliar with this particular tradition. All and all a very good read. Ken Mondal

I received a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review. My Buddhist Christmas by Jeremy Phillips was very enjoyable reading. It's not really a book preaching about Buddhism, it's more a story of a typical teenage American boy, and all the typical things teenagers get up to, the situations he finds himself in, and the ways he tries to deal with it all, eventually falling back onto his Buddhist teachings to help him be a better person. It was easy to like the leading character Chris, a 16 year old boy from a Buddhist family and who also partakes in the things that many teenage boys do (and getting into a bit of trouble as well) and trying to hide all of this from his family. I found myself shaking my head at some of the antics Chris and his friends got up to, and I could share in Chris' frustrations with his bandmates who seemed more interested in participating in harmful and illegal behaviour like underage drinking and taking drugs, rather than practicing for a school talent show. I kept wondering when Chris was going to wake up to himself and ditch these guys. Chris' character certainly grows during the story as he reflects on his attitudes and perceptions of people around him and the situations he finds himself in. He made some poor choices but by using his Buddhist teachings as a guide he finds his way, albeit the hard way. This book is wonderfully written from Chris' point of view. It's a fascinating story that will keep you turning the pages. Mr Phillips has expertly weaved in the principles of Buddhism within the storyline without it overwhelming the actual plot of the book. There was a beautiful heartfelt moment in the story when Chris' family gathers together around Christmas time which did bring a tear to my eye. I learned a little about Buddhist philosophies (which I've been inquisitive about for a long time) and I enjoyed the story of a modern teenage boy trying to fumble his way through life. I highly recommend My Buddhist Christmas to adults and teenagers alike, boys especially would like this story and be able to empathise with the main character probably more than I did. If you like contemporary YA books about teens finding their way in the world, or are just a tad curious about Buddhist teachings, or if you've ever experienced a Christmas where everything goes wrong, I am sure you will love this book.

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