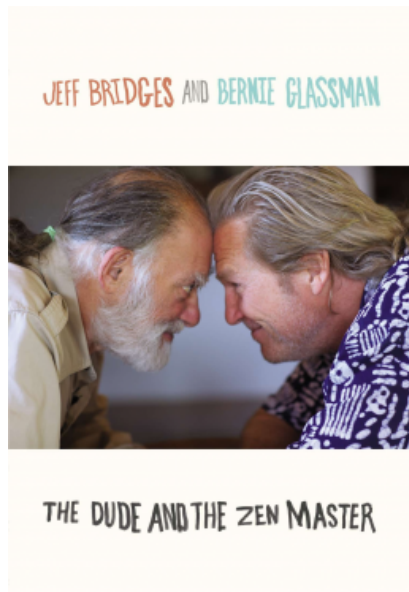


# Review: The Dude and the Zen Master | CultureMob

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## Review: The Dude and the Zen Master

by Gemma Alexander | 05/07/13 |



Zen is neither a religion in the usual sense, nor an academic philosophy; yet there are Zen temples filled with priests who teach Zen students. *The Dude and the Zen Master* is neither a Zen text, nor a celebrity memoir; yet the book does explore Zen teachings and the practice of both its famous authors.

The loosely structured book defies neat genre classifications, but it is not completely random. When one considers that pop culture characters have been used as metaphors to explain philosophic concepts since the publication of the *Tao of Pooh* in 1982 or even earlier; the movie *The Big Lebowski* has become a cult classic among both academics and cinephiles; coauthor Jeff Bridges, who played the character of *The Dude*, is a long-time student of coauthor Bernie Glassman, the well-known Zen master; and best-seller lists have recently become crowded with rambling celebrity memoirs, and *The Dude and the Zen Master* begins to look inevitable.

The idea for the book was sparked by Glassman's offhand claim that Bridges' character in *The Big Lebowski* embodies the characteristics of a Zen master. This resulted in Bridges joining his mentor and friend, Glassman, on what was essentially a private Zen retreat on Bridges' ranch in Montana. There they spent five days talking about Zen and exploring the ways that *The Big Lebowski* exemplifies Zen philosophy. Their meandering conversations were recorded and transcribed; those transcripts were organized and edited to create the book.

The result is a loose collection of personal stories, parables, deep thoughts, and movie references. It is quite enjoyable to read. Bridges and Glassman are both knowledgeable about their subject, but they speak "in the parlance of our time," and they are more interested in developing their own understanding than in explaining or convincing others. Far too free-form to evoke the Socratic method, the conversation

that forms *The Dude and the Zen Master* feels more like sitting with a glass of wine when the party has wound down, listening to your favorite professor and his best student discussing the text you haven't finished. You nod sagely in agreement as some of the references make sense; others go over your head. It's a relaxed and lighthearted way to bring new shit to light, man.