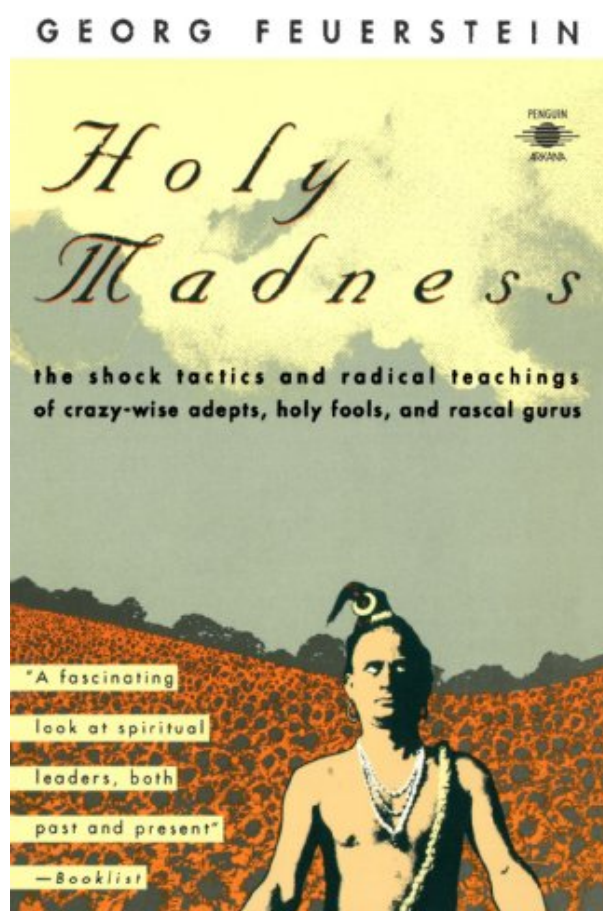


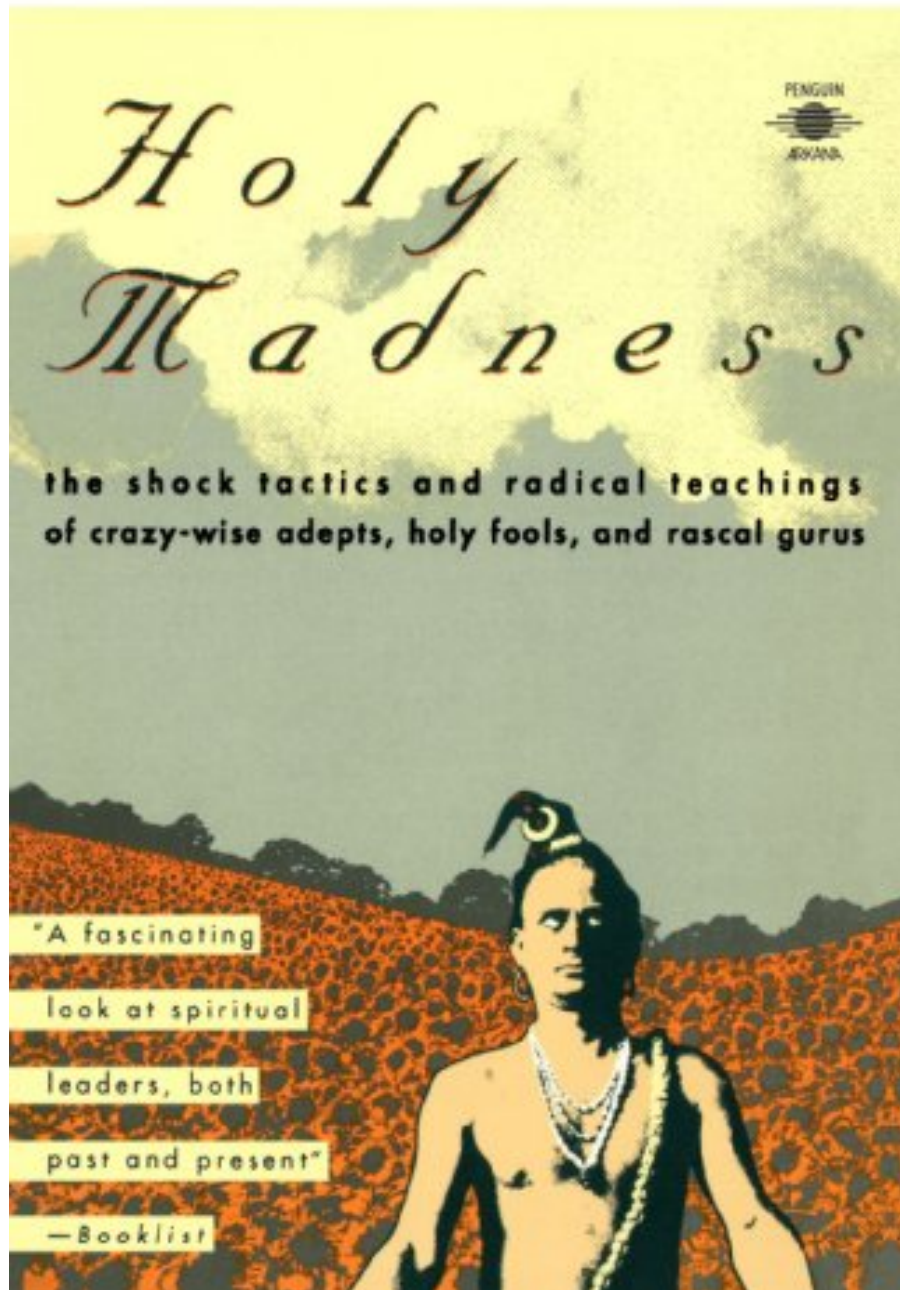
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From Publishers Weekly

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An exploration of the shock tactics and radical teachings of "crazy-wise adepts, holy fools and rascal gurus" - the cult religious leaders who challenge our commonsense views of reality and norms of conduct. This book explores this universal dimension of spirituality in a blend of history, philosophy, theology and first-person accounts. Here are Fools for Christ, sitting naked on garbage heaps, eccentric Zen masters baffling their students with beatings and belly laughs and enigmatic spritual clowns like Gurdjieff and Aleister Crowley.

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Most helpful customer reviews

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Important issues & info; misleading spiritual viewpoint.

By A Customer

This book talks about important issues but, to my mind, suffers from a terrible blindness to abuses both subtle and blatant. The author does recognize that many observers will condemn the antinomian "shock tactics" he thinks are so valuable. He himself seems ambivalent about the more blatant abuses, but mostly he excuses them as necessary in the holy war against "consensus trance", which seems to mean any state of consciousness which opposes cosmic or "oneness" consciousness. Feuerstein's attitude seems to be that the avowed purpose of rascal gurus -- to bestow "enlightenment" on the lazy-minded -- is of such transcendent value that merely mundane ethical values are expendable. This is another version of the end justifying the means. Cult leaders are expert manipulators and "shock tactics" are useful weapons in their arsenal. One might well question the spiritual attainments of gurus who are oblivious to the psychological reality of personal boundary violations. One might also question the motivation of self-appointed teachers who enjoy giving others "difficult lessons". Victor Frankl, the psychiatrist, learned some very difficult (and valuable) lessons from his enforced stay in the NAZI concentration camps. Are we to conclude, then, that his captors were his benefactors? It is useful to have a long recitation of the many abuses perpetrated by gurus over the years. Read them and weep, not least for the author's blindness. Let me give examples: One Zen Master gives his disciple a koan to solve. A koan is a verbal puzzle not solvable by rational thought. Its purpose in Zen ideology is to force the student to abandon reasoning, which is devalued by Zen, and snap into a state of awareness valued by Zen, namely "satori" or enlightenment. This particular koan was: "Stop the train from Tokyo." The disciple wrestled with the koan for weeks. Finally his frustration led to what I would guess was despair. In an ironic suicidal gesture, he obeyed literally the koan's injunction; he laid his body on the tracks and was killed by a train. Feuerstein's remarkable comment on this tragedy is the glimmer of hope that the poor fellow may have attained enlightenment in the seconds before the train smashed into him! No mention of the Zen Master's insensitivity to his disciple's state of mind, nor any thought that an overly brutal teaching method might be partly at fault. This is an example of valuing transcendence over worldliness, a cruel result of what Alice Miller has called "salvational ideology". It was particularly painful to read the account of a young husband whose wife was sexually seduced by the guru Adi Da, after the guru befuddled the husband

by getting him drunk. The husband has a vague sense that he has been wronged, but is focused on the lesser issue of his sobriety being violated. He is still asleep to the greater violation because he is still deluded by the guru's claim to perfection and holiness. Surely the selfless guru is teaching his disciple a valuable lesson in giving up attachment [attachment to his wife, no less!] Surely that has to be the explanation,doesn't it? Since Feuerstein pooh-poohs the idea of mind control, he is blind to the power relationship operating here, a kind of confidence game that can lead to spiritual slavery. The guru mind-rapes the husband in order to sexually use the wife. I pray for this man's deliverance from domination by his guru, but I pity the pain and rage that will likely accompany the dawning of the truth. To his credit, Feuerstein is at least trying to grapple with the troubling manifestations of religion's incestuous and confusing love affair with obedience and authority. I believe his worldview suffers from the hidden dualism so well explained by Kramer and Alstad in "The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power", which I recommend highly as a useful antidote to the present book.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

A FAMED EXPOSITOR OF YOGA AND HINDUISM ANALYZES VARIOUS POPULAR "CRAZY WISDOM" GURUS

By Steven H Propp

Georg Feuerstein (1947-2012) was a German Indologist specializing on Yoga. He wrote/edited many books, including *Humor Suddenly Returns: Essays on the Spiritual Teaching of Master Da Free John : A Scholarly Tribute*, *The Psychology of Yoga: Integrating Eastern and Western Approaches for Understanding the Mind*, *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, etc.

He wrote in the Preface to this 1990 book, "This book is the first attempt at a fuller explanation of holy madness, or crazy wisdom, as a religious category. I draw on my indological and anthropological background, as well as my reading in the psychological disciplines. In addition, my discussion is informed by my personal spiritual practice. For five years, I learned firsthand about discipleship, participation in a spiritual community, renunciation, service, meditation, and not least the predictably unpredictable behavior of a crazy-wise teacher. While this experiment came to an end several years ago, I continue to benefit from the lessons learned.... I look back on my own period of discipleship with gratitude. I learned much about gurucentric spirituality, coimmunity life, and not least about myself. Some lessons were delightful, many were painful, but all were useful and fitting. I have no regrets... This volume contains my reflections on the great issues of those forms of spirituality that endeavor to communicate an essentially incommunicable realization to those who can as yet barely hear the 'thunderous silence.' My focus is on holy madness, which affords the most penetrating glimpse into the very heart of the spiritual process." (Pg. xx, xxii)

He suggests a characteristic of such adepts, "a fondness for laughter, humor, joking, and comedy: the mad lamas' verbal and occasionally physical attacks on individuals and institutions that were bogged down in conventionality were always infused with a dose of good humor---the liberating laugh of an awakened being.. They did not take even their own criticism of conventional life too seriously." (Pg. 43)

He notes about Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, "In his Indian days, Rajneesh was a voracious reader, and he is known to have devoured all of Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's books. In fact, Gurdjieff seems to have served him as a kind of role model in his interaction with devotees. He periodically turned his own ashram into a labor camp with incessant demands for further effort and greater submission, leaving many devotees exhausted, sick, weary, and unable to make sound judgments. A disturbing number of them committed suicide. Numerous others were wondering just where it was all going." (Pg. 66)

Of Chögyam Trungpa, he says, "He gave his students a taste of the discipline that he had had to endure during his own pupilage. He was preparing his students for the higher teachings of Vajrayana. All the while,

his behavior remained completely unpredictable and incorrigible. He was regularly late, by an hour or more, for his lectures and often arrived inebriated. Even while lecturing, he would frequently down some beers. During meditation, he was occasionally seen to nod off, but on other occasions he would sneak up on unsuspecting meditators to squirt water at them with a toy pistol (a prank that Da Love-Ananda also acted out around the same time)." (Pg. 71-72)

Da Love-Ananda (more recently "Adi Da"), he states that "The [1986] 'death experience' had far-reaching repercussions in [his] spiritual community. As one community member described it to me: ... His demand for us to take responsibility for our own spiritual practice became almost overwhelming. He just wouldn't stand for a halfhearted response any longer. He started to criticize everyone and everything even more fiercely than usual. He tore into the community and the institution, bringing it to the brink of bankruptcy with his demands... It was almost as if he wanted all old forms and attitudes in the community to die as he had died, so that they could be reborn in a new way. In fact, things became so chaotic that I and many of my friends just fled." (Pg. 93-94)

He adds, "One of the casualties of Da Love-Ananda's iconoclasm in that year was the mandala of nine women who had composed the innermost circle of his devotees. Ruthlessly he began to dismantle this elite group, which had been inviolable until then. Five of these women devotees and longtime lovers---spiritual and sexual---were asked to leave his hermitage in Fiji. One of them was his former wife, who was also his very first devotee. From then on, he focused on working with the remaining four women renunciates, who are now reported to be in advanced spiritual states... For years, community representatives did their best to clean up Da Love-Ananda's talks before printing them, and in general they tried to tone down the crazy aspect of his behavior and teaching. Da Love-Ananda, on the other hand, constantly criticized them for presenting a distorted public image of him; he wanted to be portrayed as the wild man he is, despite the possible dangers resulting from such a public image." (Pg. 94-95)

This is a fascinating, controversial, yet stimulating portrait of some of the most popular spiritual teachers of the late 20th century; and whether one agrees with all of Feuerstein's portrayals or not, the book will provoke thought and discussion.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Crazy Wisdom teachers explained, as far as that is possible ...Gorgeous.

By Malcolm Chalmers

Beautiful.

This is not an apologia. It is a direct and honest telling which leaves the reader to decide if any judgements should or could be made.

For those who feel inclined to seek out teachers while they are still alive, it gives fair warning of the discernment required and the flavours of surprises one is likely to encounter. Encouraging in a mildly cautionary tone.

For those who are worried about a friend getting into strange alt spirituality, it gives an overview and some context to what their friend may be going through, and the potential value of crazy wisdom teaching for those who take to it.

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