

## ALTERNATIVES BEYOND PSYCHIATRY

BY PETER STASTNY AND PETER LEHMANN, EDITORS, PREFACE BY ROBERT WHITAKER  
Peter Lehmann Publishing, 2007, 431 pp., \$40, £19, ISBN 978-0-9788399-1-8, ISBN 978-0-9545428-1-8.

Reviewed by Ben Gray

No review, synopsis, or commentary can possibly do justice to the meaningful, often heartfelt, and profound accounts of (ex-) users and survivors of the psychiatric system, activists, and academics involved in their movement that are presented in the innovative and new book *Alternatives Beyond Psychiatry*.

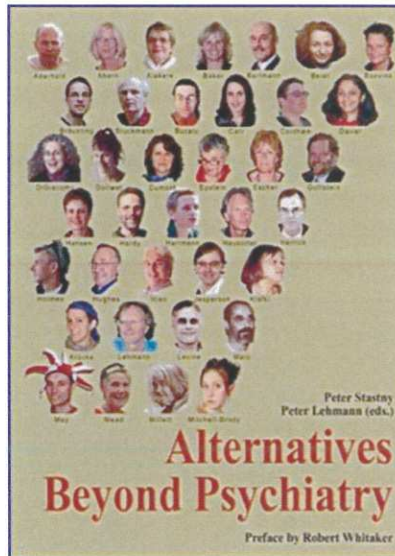
Certainly the book provides no unilateral and easy answers, but rather encourages diverse perspectives, interventions, dialogues, and methods for dealing with mental illness. It asks the questions, put simply:

*What helps me if I go mad? How can I find trustworthy help for a relative or a friend in need? How can I protect myself from coercive treatment? Where can I talk to like-minded people about my own experiences with psychiatry and about my life? What should I do if I can no longer bear to work in the mental health field? What are the alternatives to psychiatry?* (p. 15)

The book is a brave attempt to begin to tackle these difficult issues via a collection of reports from anti-psychiatric, radical-psychiatric, non-psychiatric, and post-psychiatric alternatives in different countries. The book highlights the pressing need for structural change in psychiatry and appraises the individual, organized alternatives and measures that need to be taken in order to effect this change and to

build strategies toward implementing humane treatment and provide freedom of choice.

Sixty-one authors (ex-users and survivors of psychiatry, therapists, psychiatrists, lawyers, relatives, care-givers, politicians, and social scientists) offer insights into new practices, therapeutic alternatives, and positive examples of democratic partnerships with those who have been diagnosed with mental health problems.



Above all, the book is full of personal (and therefore humanized) accounts of those who have been failed, trapped, forgotten, or even abused by the psychiatric system, with its over-reliance on powerful anti-psychotic medication and the sovereign ability to administer unfreedom and forced treatment.

The majority of articles are specialist chapters about alternatives and ways of realizing these alternatives and humane treatment, written by (ex-) users and survivors of psychiatry, by professionals or relatives, or in cooperation.

There is not even a shade of the typical split—we the “experts” (who own the objective truth), they the “ex-patients” (who made only subjective personal experiences)—in the book. The typical hierarchy is overcome, which is to the credit of Peter Lehmann, self-employed

publisher and international activist of the movement of (ex-) users and survivors of psychiatry, and his co-editor Peter Stastny. The latter is a founding member of the International Network toward Alternatives and Recovery (INTAR), an advocacy platform for the most important alternative approaches from around the world. For many years, he was Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx and conducted several publicly funded research projects in the area of vocational rehabilitation, social support, and self-help, in collaboration with individuals who had survived personal crises and psychiatric interventions.

The editors seem an ideal pair to enlighten the readership about a broad spectrum of alternatives and to provide a synthesis of interventions that protect against unwanted medical methods and advocacy for alternatives beyond psychiatry.

The book will be of great help and assistance to people with emotional distress and mental health issues, their caregivers, professionals seeking more holistic and democratic approaches of treatment, as well as academics and activists involved in the movement of (ex-) users and survivors of psychiatry. The book is set to become a classic and radical alternative in itself, and will influence alternatives beyond psychiatry now and in the future.

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## HONEN THE BUDDHIST SAINT: Essential Writings and Official Biography

EDITED BY JOSEPH A. FITZGERALD, INTRODUCTION BY ALFRED BLOOM, FOREWORD BY CLARK STRAND  
World Wisdom, 2006, \$20, 192 pp., ISBN 1933316136



Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

*Only repeat the name of Amida [Amitabha] with all your heart. Whether walking or standing, sitting or lying, never cease the practice of it even for a moment. This is the very work which unfailingly issues in salvation, for it is in accordance with the Original Vow of that Buddha.*

—Zendo (Shan-tao)

**H**onen the Buddhist Saint: *Essential Writings and Official Biography* is a remarkably accessible edition of the original volume that was first translated in 1925 by Reverend Harper Havelock Coates and Reverend Ryugaku Ishizuka entitled *Honen the Buddhist Saint: His Life and Teaching* (Chionin, 1925). This initial work was encyclopedic in scope consisting of five volumes offering the most detailed study of Honen available in the English language. The drawback of this monumental work was its inaccessibility, as it was daunting for Buddhist practitioners and lay readers to approach. However, this new abridged edition makes Honen available to scholars, practitioners, and lay readers alike providing what is most noteworthy in the life of this great medieval Japanese monk and in his teachings. The Introduction contains a comprehensive overview of Pure Land Buddhism written by Alfred Bloom, a foremost authority on Shin Buddhism, and there is also a Foreword by Clark Strand, a Buddhist teacher, practitioner, and writer.

Honen Shonin Genku (1133-1212) was a 12th century Buddhist priest and saint revered as the founder of the Jodo (Pure Land) school of Buddhism, and he had preeminent disciples such as Shinran (1173-1263). It is striking that although the practice of Pure Land Buddhism (Jodo-Shu) continues to increase, with an estimated twenty million living practitioners

in Japan alone, the spiritual legacy of Honen has for the most part not been recognized in the West. Honen understood the challenges of the socio-religious upheavals of the era in which he lived that led him to emphasize the significance of a spiritual method that could accommodate the diverse types of human individuals regardless of social status and even spiritual competency. Honen devoted his life to teaching and practicing *Nembutsu*—the repetition of *Namu Amida Butsu*—“Hail to Amitabha Buddha” or “the Name of Amida Buddha,” which he confirmed was a method available to all who practiced it with sincerity, especially for those living in an age marked by the “decline of the Dharma” (*mappo*):

*In the next place, if we look at it from the standpoint of difficulty and ease, the Nembutsu is easily practiced, while it is very hard to practice all the other disciplines. For the above reasons thus briefly stated, we may say that the Nembutsu, being so easily practiced, is of universal application.... If the Original Vow required the making of images and the building of pagodas, then the poor and destitute could have no hope of attaining it. But the fact is that the wealthy and noble are few in number, whereas the number of the poor and ignoble is extremely large. If the Original Vow required wisdom and great talent, there would be no hope of that birth for the foolish and ignorant at all; but the wise are few in number, while the foolish are very many.... We conclude therefore, that Amida Nyorai, when He was a priest by the name of Hozo [Dharma-kara] ages ago, in His compassion for all sentient beings alike, and in His effort for the salvation of all, did not vow to require the making of images or the building of pagodas conditions for birth into the Pure Land, but only the one act of calling upon His sacred name. (p. 66)*

It needs to be remembered that Honen did not invent the spiritual method of *Nembutsu*. This method was known and practiced under different names and forms—it is ancient and primordial—providing an integral approach to interfaith



dialogue that the current world urgently needs. The spiritual method of *Nembutsu* taught by Honen is the quintessence of Hindu (*sanatana dharma*) *japa-yoga* “He who thinks of Me constantly” (*Bhagavad Gita* 8:14), in the Zohar (*Book of Splendor*) of Jewish mysticism “The Holy One speaks His Name”, in Christianity known as the “Jesus Prayer” or “Prayer of the Heart” exemplified by St. Paul’s dictum “pray without ceasing” (I Thessians 5:17), in the dhikr of Sufism (*tasawwuf*), or the mystical dimensions of Islam “Remember Me and I will remember you” (Qur’an 2:152). This also extends to the Shamanic traditions, for they “know the One true God [Wankan-Tanka, the Great Spirit], and...pray to Him continually,” as Hehaka Sapa or Black Elk (1863-1950) confirmed. Honen reminds the modern world of a universal method by which the resuscitation of the central organ of all spiritual traditions, East and West, may be born anew and thus flourish once again.

*SAMUEL BENDECK SOTILLOS received an M.A. in Integrative Education from Norwich University and an M.A. in Transpersonal Psychology from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. He has had extensive training in transpersonal and humanistic psychology approaches, visited sacred sites throughout the world, and had contact with noted spiritual authorities. He currently works as a mental health clinician in California.*