

A Heart Blown Open: The Life & Practice of Zen Master Jun Po Denis Kelly Roshi

By Keith Martin-Smith

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Denis Kelly's life is part Hunter S. Thompson, part Timothy Leary, and part Eckhart Tolle. From his beginnings in an abusive and alcoholic home in Wisconsin to becoming a major force in the counterculture movement, and then from a life on the run and in prison to a life in a monastery and in service, it is as entertaining as it is inspirational.

A Heart Blown Open chronicles the life and teachings of Zen master Jun Po Denis Kelly Roshi as he worked to integrate hard-won wisdom into his dynamic life. Experience the successes and failures that brought him to found an entirely new form of Zen called Mondo Zen. Extraordinary for their playfulness, depravity, and liberating insight, Jun Po's life events swirl together to underscore and illuminate the environment from which one of the most controversial masters of the American Zen scene has emerged.
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FOREWORD REVIEW

"Kelly came back to the question again and again: what did it mean to be an American Zen Roshi nearing the twenty-first century?"

If Denis Kelly's life was made into a novel, no one would believe it, so the truth, told here as accurately as possible by author and fellow Zen Buddhist Keith Martin-Smith, must suffice: Kelly crossed every inner river, climbed every emotional mountain, slayed every psychological dragon, to arrive at a place of peacefulness.

Most of us imagine that a spiritual master would be a person of high moral integrity, likely celibate, and definitely vegetarian, someone who speaks in terse mysterious phrases and smiles a lot. Someone rather like the Dalai Lama, whom Kelly has met. Kelly had a habit, begun in grade school, of telling people in authority that what they said was "bull—" and he didn't spare the Dalai Lama that assessment. The assertion generally resulted in shock and expulsion, but not in the case of the Dalai Lama, who just smiled and told Kelly that his spiritual

insight wasn't deep enough yet. Oddly, it was his tendency to blow up at authority that led to Kelly's heart being blown open, and to his becoming a spiritual master himself.

Kelly grew up with an abusive alcoholic father who savagely beat his sons while his mother turned a blind eye. This gave the boy a hatred of men in authority and a mistrust of all women that took him years to overcome. The only saving grace in his youth was a memory from infancy, of finding solace in a "sense of pervasive peace … a silence out of which everything arose." Because of that fleeting but seemingly endless moment, despite all the self-ruining experiences Kelly had to go through, he was drawn to meditation and to Buddhism.

Along the way to becoming a Zen adept, he was a wealthy drug dealer, a founding member of the California "family" that in the 1970s manufactured a notably pure form of LSD known as Windowpane. Kelly believed that enlightenment, that sense of peace he had felt as a baby, could be achieved through LSD. He traveled to India and met some interesting gurus, but none who could disabuse him of the notion that satori, the goal of Buddhist meditation, was available through a chemical. He wound up in prison for that belief. Finally he agreed to bend himself to the discipline of Eido Roshi (who pronounced him to be "worth civilizing"), lived in a Buddhist monastery, and became Vise Abbot for a time.

Martin-Smith keeps Kelly's story rolling on a fast track, just as the man's life has been lived—the women, the violence, the good times, the regrets, the fear, and loathing, all are recounted. There is something in this book for everyone: spiritual seekers and unrepentant sinners alike will find Kelly's ride hilarious, frustrating, poignant, and thoroughly human. The result of the journey is a new unique form of spiritual practice that Kelly, now a cancer survivor in his seventies who leads international workshops, calls "Mondo Zen"—"the radical invention that brought Zen into the twenty-first century and fully into the West."

Barbara Bamberger Scott
August 6, 2012

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Editorial Review

Review
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ForeWord Review
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From the Back Cover

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"Written with extraordinary heart and skill, this book chronicles the making of an Integral Zen master. Jun Po's life has been as unpredictable as it has been astounding. Jun Po's dedication to exploring his own psychological shadows in light of his own awakening consciousness is *the* story of our times, and is an absolute must-read for anyone with even a passing interest in human evolution." **Ken Wilber**, author of *Integral Spirituality*

"This is a legendary story of an inspiring teacher that mirrors the journey of many contemporary Western seekers. A flash of white light from psychedelic theophanies leads to a lifetime's pursuit of enlightenment under the Buddha dharma prayer flag." **Alex Grey**, artist and author of *Transformations, Sacred Mirrors*, and *The Mission of Art*

"This book provides a provocative window into one of the more controversial Zen Masters of our generation,

and will not fail to touch and inspire those who read it. Jun Po Roshi has lived a life of amazing fullness. Few have risen to such heights of notoriety and wealth in their youth and given back so much wisdom and service later in life. His greatest gift is his continuing effort to discover the best way to transmit the ancient wisdom of Zen into the 21st Century."-- Zen Master **Dennis Genpo Merzel**, author of *Big Mind Big Heart: Finding Your Way*

"This is the real life saga of a true spiritual warrior. What is so fascinating about Jun Po Roshi's story is that it describes, at times with painful honesty, the challenges of warriorship in the strange new world of postmodernity. This biography is a time capsule colorfully and poignantly conveying the powerful emergence and evolution of a cultural revolution from the inside out."
-- **Andrew Cohen**, founder EnlightenNext, author of *Evolutionary Enlightenment*

About the Author

Keith Martin-Smith was raised in the closed and self-assured world of Catholicism, but by his early teens felt alienated by it and the suburban America that surrounded him. He started out his college career as a mechanical engineering major, but science only led to more questions and an even stronger sense of separation from the world. He ended up with a degree in English and minor in journalism, allowing him to work as a freelance writer not bound to a particular location.

A profound crisis of meaning sent him on an odyssey that spanned ten years and three cities: New York, Philadelphia, and Denver. He searched for answers through post-modern philosophy and bohemia as the esoteric disciplines of Northern Shaolin Kung Fu, Qi Gong, and Buddhism were reshaping his life.

In 2007, Keith met Jun Po Denis Kelly, and in 2010 was given the dharma name Kogen (Tiger Eye) and the title of sensei (teacher). Keith's first collection of short stories -- The Mysterious Divination of Tea Leaves, and Other Tales -- was published by O-Books in 2009.

In addition to his writing, Zen, and Kung Fu practices, he is also fond of sleeping in, drinking fine ales, and lying about. He lives in Boulder, Colorado.

You can read more about him, including new works and offerings, at KeithMartinSmith.com.

Jun Po Denis Kelly Roshi is founder of the internationally recognized Hollow Bones order of the American Rinzai Zen tradition and creator of Mondo Zen, a unique contribution to a 1,500-year-old wisdom lineage that unites emotional maturity and spiritual awareness, creating a powerful synthesis of Eastern contemplative wisdom and Western psychological insight. Jun Po received his Zen Master recognition in 1992. Interested in bringing his Zen lineage into American culture without the Japanese cultural bindings, Jun Po left the monastery and founded the lay Buddhist Hollow Bones order, of which he is abbot. Jun Po travels internationally offering Mondo Zen retreats.

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