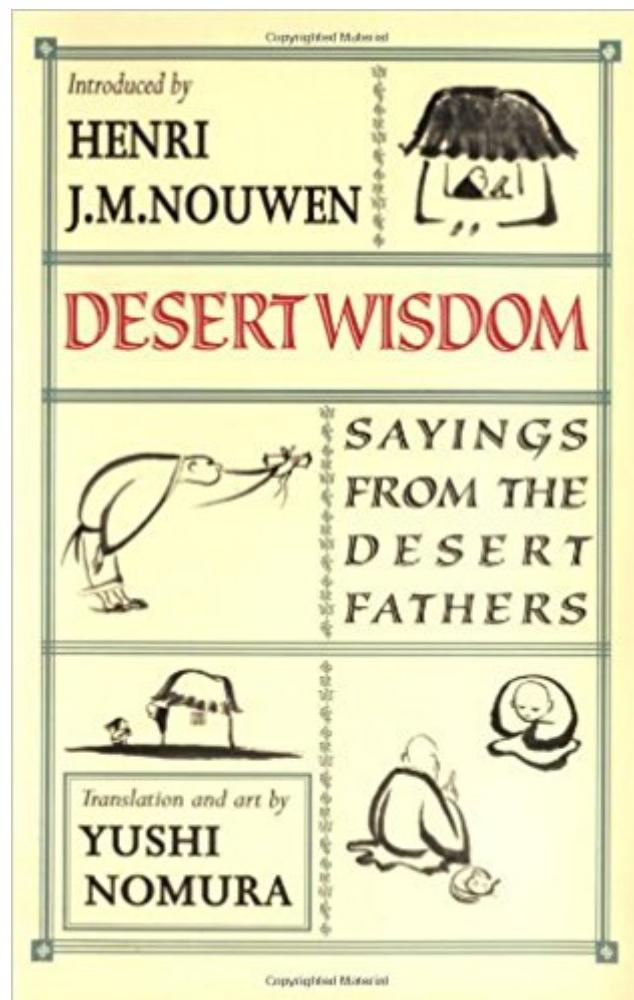


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# Desert Wisdom: Sayings From The Desert Fathers



## **Synopsis**

"As he was dying, Abba Benjamin taught his sons this: Do this, and you'll be saved: Rejoice always, pray constantly, and in all circumstances give thanks". Each Christian who seeks God through prayer is continuing a tradition that began with the desert fathers and mothers of the fourth and fifth century -- simple peasants whose spiritual progress was marked by inner peace, self-control, poverty, patience, humility, and hospitality. Desert Wisdom contains some hundred "sayings" of the desert fathers, each accompanied by playful illustrations by Japanese artist Yushi Nomura. Bridging East and West, the simple truths of Desert Wisdom remain as fresh and vital to Christians today as they were to the disciples who first heard and recorded them.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Yushi Nomura has put together a collection of roughly 100 sayings from the 4th and 5th century monks that we now collectively refer to as the Desert Fathers. In addition, each saying is illustrated with Japanese style brush drawings, which gives this collection a distinctive flavor when compared to either the collections by Thomas Merton or Helen Waddell. This is not a comprehensive collection of sayings. Rather it serves as a superb introduction to this body of Christian literature. The sayings of the Desert Fathers are characterized by their pithy and direct nature. You will not find abstract theologizing here; the desert was a place where the hard realities of living the Christian life - humility, hospitality, forgiveness, failure, mindfulness of everyday things - were confronted every day. Originally published in 1982, this new edition from Orbis includes a wonderful epilogue based

on Henri Nouwen's unpublished lecture notes for a course on "Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry" that he taught at Yale in the early 1980's. It was Nouwen's course that introduced Nomura to the literature of the desert and began the process that led to this book. Nomura's collection was my first introduction to the Desert Fathers back around 1984. The book has long held a special place in my heart, and I am overjoyed to see it reissued.

This book should convince most readers that reading the Desert Fathers (and Mothers) is enjoyable religious reading for the common spiritual seeker. The translations and the art accompanying them create a presentation that will appeal easily to those who enjoy the collections of Anthony de Mello, Idries Shah, various Jewish collections, Zen Buddhist stories ... The tales and sayings themselves are short and evocative. For example: "Abba John the Little said: We have abandoned a light burden, namely self-criticism, and taken up a heavy burden, namely self-justification." It is accompanied by a picture in Japanese style with two women carrying loads on their head (sticks and basket) and two men with Sumo wrestler builds with large, heavy loads. The picture is as effective as the story at drawing the reader into the story. After reading these stories, read Roberta Bondi's excellent theological introduction *To Love as God Loves* and the translations of additional tales by Merton, Ward and others.

Though the quotations could all be put in a book of thirty pages, the accompanying drawings are delightful! The insights it gives into the desert fathers and mothers makes you ponder your own life. A good book.

this was a gift to my husband many years ago - he loaned his original to a friend who was in particular need, and couldn't bear to ask for its return. We were delighted to find it on . Something to keep close by and meditate on.

This edition of sayings from the Desert Fathers is unique among many editions of the sayings, and wisdom, from the Desert Tradition. The sayings are short, well translated, but best of all, illustrated in a true Zen style. Nomura here realizes in print what not many scholars recognize, but which seems obvious to any Orthodox person of prayer who is Japanese, Chinese or Korean, or who has lived in Asia: namely, that the sayings of the great ascetics, both men and women, of the Christian Desert are very similar in manner and sometimes in content to the sayings (or Koan) of the Buddhist and Taoist ascetics. Certainly the style is the same, in which a student lives with the ascetic to learn

the way of silence and contemplation (in the Christian tradition, of prayer) and memorizes the sayings of the Elder in order to preserve them. This memorization also helps in the daily life of the student. After living in China for nearly a decade, with intentional dialogue with many Buddhist ascetics in several countries, I have found Nomura's edition of Sayings very helpful for persons who are seeking the Holy Orthodox Faith, or ancient Christianity, for the first time; and also in dialogue with Buddhists who do not know about this tradition within Christianity. I only wish that the book were available in America in hardback, especially after glimpsing (years ago) a beautifully-bound version in Japan. How wonderful it would be to have a hardbound printing in English, with tall, empty pages, the lovely illustrations surrounded by emptiness, and the small sayings underneath.

This is a gem of a book. Just opening it and letting my eyes move across the illustrations brings peace. The sayings cover the whole of human experience and prove that wisdom and a good sense of humor is not a modern phenomenon.

This book is perfectly delightful. Yushi Nomura's translations are unpretentiously lucid, and his illustrations most felicitous. The humor and humility of these old monks is something to cherish, indeed. This book boasts an introduction and an afterword by the much-beloved author Henri Nouwen. I recommend it highly. You will be bowled over by the wisdom of these early sages! An example: Amma Synclectica said: It is good not to get angry. But if it should happen, do not allow your day to go by affected by it. For it is said: Do not let the sun go down. Otherwise, the rest of your life may be affected by it. Why hate a person who hurts you, for it is not that person who is unjust, but the devil. Hate the sickness, but not the sick person. [p 84]

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