



Re-enchantment: Tibetan Buddhism Comes to the West

By Jeffery Paine

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The colorful tale of the successful flowering of an obscure, ancient Eastern sect in the modern world.

In a single generation, Tibetan Buddhism developed from the faith of a remote mountain people, associated with bizarre, almost medieval, superstitions, to perhaps the most rapidly growing and celebrity-studded religion in the West. Disaffected with other religious traditions yet searching for meaning, huge numbers of Americans have found their way to the wisdom of Tibetan lamas in exile. Earthy, humorous, commonsensical, and eccentric, these flamboyant teachers?larger-than-life characters like Lama Yeshe and Chogyama Trungpa?proved to be charismatic and gifted ambassadors for their ancient religion. So did two Western women, born in Brooklyn and London's East End, whose homegrown religious intuitions turned out to be identical with the most sophisticated Tibetan teachings, revealing them to be reincarnated lamas. With great flair for both the sublime and the human, Jeffery Paine narrates in page-turning, richly informative fashion how Tibetan Buddhism?rarefied and sensual, mystical and commonsensical?became the ideal religion for a "post-religious" age. "By far the best of the recent popular books exploring the amazing impact of Tibetan Buddhism. Paine's witty, erudite, flowing prose creates a memorable album of many characters?saints, rascals, and ordinary folks. He glosses over nothing, is ruthlessly critical where it is deserved, but is also secure enough to appreciate the beauty and the power of the 'magic and mystery': the profound practical wisdom and compassion of Tibetan civilization gone global."?Robert Thurman, Jey Tsong Khapa Professor of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Studies, Columbia University "Riveting....Recounts elegantly, yet without fuss, stories of human transformation that consistently incite our capacity for wonder."?Askold Melnyczuk, *Boston Globe* "Memorable anecdotes, great storytelling and keen observations mark this cogent exploration of the explosive growth of Tibetan Buddhism in the West."?Publishers Weekly, starred review

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Memorable anecdotes, great storytelling and keen observations mark this cogent exploration of the explosive growth of Tibetan Buddhism in the West. Paine offers chapters on many famous Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama (who, refreshingly, doesn't appear until nearly the end of the book), the pioneering Lama Yeshe, who first taught Westerners, and the controversial rogue playboy Chogyam Trungpa, Yeshe's character foil. Other chapters profile Westerners who discovered Tibetan Buddhism, like Tenzin Palmo (formerly a Cockney London girl named Diane Perry), who meditated alone for 12 years in an Indian cave and American lama Jetsunma (Catherine Burroughs), a much-married "tough bird from Brooklyn" who was the first Western woman to be recognized as a tulku (reincarnated Buddhist figure). Of course, there's a chapter on Hollywood, but Paine eschews a superficial chronicle of Tibetan Buddhism's sudden popularity among the glitterati in favor of a compelling analysis of why a Buddhist concept of reality might make sense to people whose lives revolve around the creation of impermanent "realities" like films. Throughout, Paine explores how Tibetan Buddhism has changed the American religious landscape, but also how it has been changed by America: in Tibet, for example, meditation was traditionally a very advanced practice, but in practical-minded America, practitioners "dive straight into meditation immediately." A final chapter introduces the only Tibetan Buddhist on death row; in a fascinating observation, Paine notes that famed Tibetan saint Milarepa was in fact a reformed criminal.

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From [Booklist](#)

Forty years after Chinese Communists attempted to sweep Tibetan Buddhism off the planet, casting much of its monastic community and the Dalai Lama into exile, Paine asserts that Buddhism is enjoying record-breaking popularity, particularly in the West. Its attractiveness stems from principles that appeal to Americans disenchanted with what has turned out to be the myth of materialism and the politicization of organized religion. Tibetan Buddhism, he says, is universal, places accountability squarely in the hands of the individual, and offers the potential for heightened capacity. What's more, it relocates religion from church and Sunday to anywhere, anytime. In this guide-to-the-common-person narrative, Paine provides a brief history of Tibetan Buddhism, constructs an apology of its basic tenets, and relates the personal histories of several converts. His account of Frenchwoman Alexandra David-Neel's obsession with Tibetan Buddhism and the stories of converts, including an Ivy League professor, a death-row inmate, and a Hollywood movie star, illustrate the broad range of those to whom Buddhism has become a personal salvation. *Donna Chavez*
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Review

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