



Why Is the Dalai Lama Always Smiling? A Westerner's Introduction and Guide to Tibetan Buddhist Practice

Lama Tsomo

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From respected practitioner Lama Tsomo comes *Why Is the Dalai Lama Always Smiling?*—a thoughtful guide to engaging Buddhist practice, specifically via the Vajrayana school of the tradition. A sympathetic, personalized text and encouraging prose make for an appealing introduction to Buddhist ways of being.

Tsomo's proclaimed goal is to make Buddhism comprehensible to Western audiences, to whom Tibetan language often seems obscure or unfamiliar. The book is foreworded by the Dalai Lama himself, who repeats the notion that the tradition is not as easily digested by those in the West—though its processes of enlightenment stand to appeal to all. Tsomo eases audiences in by presenting the tradition as she encountered it—as an American raised in another tradition, Judaism, who yearned for a release from suffering at an early age and who worked for years toward inner peace.

This biographical presentation folds into others—a chapter about Tsomo's own lama, who was imprisoned for over a decade under Mao and endured by taking pity on his captors, and the Buddha himself, whose familiar life story is represented alongside colorful illustrations in a fully alluring way. The idea of interconnectedness builds into these presentations, as well as the concept of reincarnation; Tibetan Buddhist practice is shown to be a means of healing all of existence by centering oneself. Colorful and mystical suggestions—achieving full enlightenment and transcending into rainbow light, for example, or affecting the health and shape of water crystals with words of kindness—accompany lucid reiterations of familiar Buddhist principles such as the Eightfold Path.

The book approaches meditative practices last, once the whys of practice have already been covered in appealing detail. Lama Tsomo's suggestion that people can help to heal all of existence by letting go of their own attachments is both humane and seductive. Photos show newcomers how to hold particular poses, particularly the lotus pose, and offer alternatives for those who find the position difficult, increasing the idea that, no matter what roadblocks people imagine exist between them and practice, there's an in to enlightenment for all. The friendliness and cadence of the writing, coupled with beautiful, if not always well integrated, pictures throughout make for a soothing and instructive reading experience. Many metaphors, including the recurrent notion of getting caught up in one's fantasies as though they are a movie, seem both fresh and wholly comprehensible.

Beautiful packaging makes *Why is the Dalai Lama Always Smiling?* even more attractive, and Tsomo's decision to include meditation cards in the back of her book is a welcome final flourish. Its endorsements and approachability considered, this introduction to Buddhist practice stands to woo Western audiences with ease.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March 29, 2016)

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