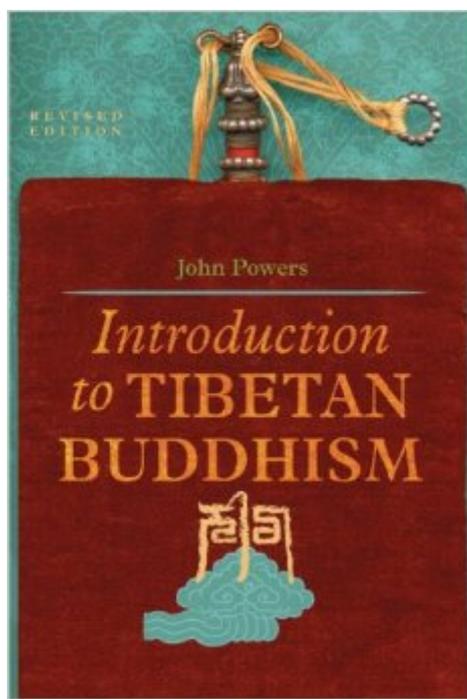


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Introduction To Tibetan Buddhism



Synopsis

This is the most comprehensive and authoritative introduction to Tibetan Buddhism available to date, covering a wide range of topics, including history, doctrines, meditation, practices, schools, religious festivals, and major figures. The revised edition contains expanded discussions of recent Tibetan history and tantra and incorporates important new publications in the field. Beginning with a summary of the Indian origins of Tibetan Buddhism and how it eventually was brought to Tibet, it explores Tibetan Mahayana philosophy and tantric methods for personal transformation. The four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as BÃ¶ddhi, are explored in depth from a nonsectarian point of view. This new and expanded edition is a systematic and wonderfully clear presentation of Tibetan Buddhist views and practices.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

John Powers's Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism meets a genuine need in providing nonspecialist students of religion or Asian studies with an overview of this distinctive form of Buddhist belief and practice. In clear and readable language, the book mostly achieves its stated goal of being "a systematic and wonderfully clear presentation of Tibetan Buddhist views and practices." Powers begins with a survey of Buddhist history and doctrine, with a focus on Mahayana philosophy. This whole opening section of the book is very useful, allowing as it does a reader new to Buddhism to pick up the work and be introduced to the tradition as a whole before moving on to consider its Tibetan manifestation. What follows is a brief but informative survey of Tibetan history and a look at some of the holy days, ceremonies, and architectural settings of Tibetan Buddhist practice. Part Three is, it seems to me, the heart of the book, as it engages the distinctive teachings and practices

of Tibetan Buddhism, both in the context of wider Mahayana and in contradistinction to it. Powers admirably clarifies the Tibetan understanding of the place of tantra in Buddhism and provides a very easily-understood description of the major forms of tantric practice. Chapter 10, "Death and Dying in Tibetan Buddhism," is admirable for the vividness with which it portrays the Tibetan Buddhist understanding of death in its metaphysical, ontological, and soteriological aspects. Part Four turns to the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Here I think the book gets a bit bogged down in a surfeit of detail.

This is the best single volume introduction I've seen to Tibetan Buddhism. I'm a Zen practitioner who has long been interested to learn more about Tibetan beliefs and philosophy, and this fits the bill perfectly. Powers does an excellent job of framing Tibetan Buddhist practice. He begins with a brief historical introduction to the Buddha and early histories of Buddhism in India and pre-Buddhist times in Tibet. He describes the basics of Mahayana teachings clearly and with emphasis on the key elements that show up in Tibetan systems. It then describes the basic commonalities of the Tibetan practices from both an historical point of view (e.g., Tibet's modern history) and philosophical point of view (e.g., Tantra). Finally, it details the four main Tibetan orders (Nyingma, Sakya, Geluk, and Kagyu) plus the Bon tradition. All of this is exactly the right material to provide a comprehensive overview, along with enough depth that one knows where to go to explore further. What doesn't it do? Well, first of all this is not a book about practicing Tibetan style. It describes many of the practices, explains them, and puts them in philosophical and historical context, but it is definitely not a guide to doing them. That is probably best sought with a teacher, or at least through a book with a different scope. Second, Powers does not take sides and does not attempt to sort through conflicting claims or to reconcile Tibetan beliefs to modern or scientific beliefs. He attempts to explain them as they are understood "from the inside", as it were, not to judge them. In particular, he doesn't try to convince you of any of them, and doesn't present any one of them as superior to the others.

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