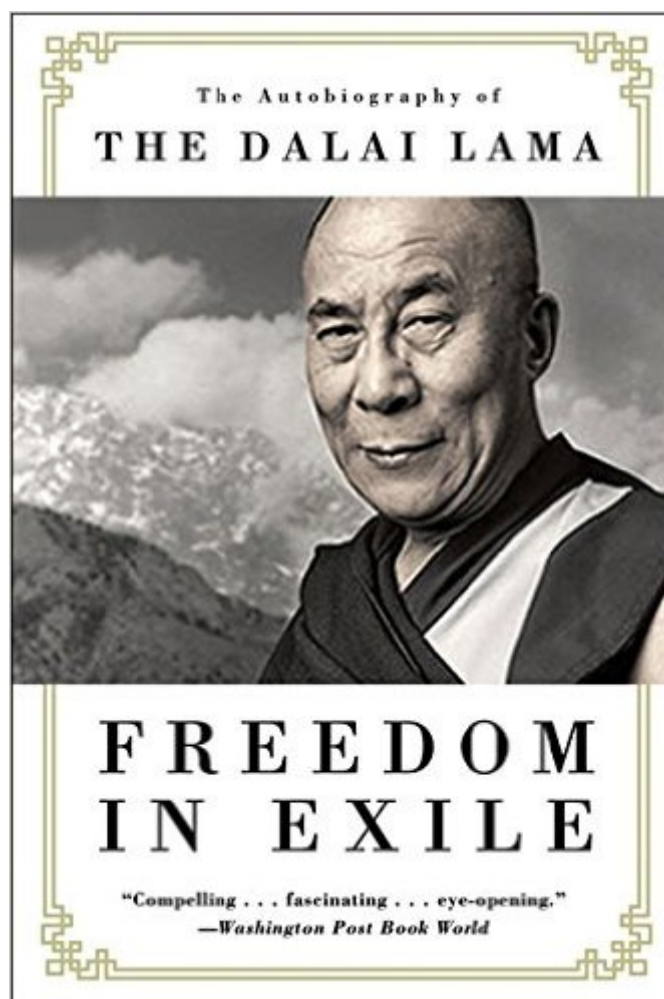


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Freedom In Exile: The Autobiography Of The Dalai Lama



Synopsis

In this astonishingly frank autobiography, the Dalai Lama reveals the remarkable inner strength that allowed him to master both the mysteries of Tibetan Buddhism and the brutal realities of Chinese Communism.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Right up front, the Dalai Lama claims that English is not his first language and he requests the reader bear with him. At times, the english is a little stilted but it never detracts from the story being told. His honest account of the young days having been found as the 14th Dalai Lama but still being a little boy is wonderful. He leads you through a chronological account of his life and spiritual work. The book was an education for me on the basics of Buddhism, the struggle of the Tibetans, the role of the Dalai Lama and glimpse of China's past and present. I'm motivated to read more on all these topics - in particular, Buddhism and the history of China (the notable Gang of four). If you're looking for information on the Tibetan struggle and the Dalai Lama, this book is it. The Dalai Lama is always honest and frank about his opinions on events and people. His strength and poise comes across clearly in his writings. The pain and trauma of the Tibetans has left a mark on my conscience. The Dalai Lama's non-violent opposition of the Chinese is admirable and to be an example for us all.

Knowing nothing at all about His Holiness The Dalai Lama or Tibet/China relations I was eager to

learn more. As a convert from Catholicism to Buddhism, I was pleased to read that the Dalai Lama considers himself to be just a regular human, who was chosen to fulfill a specific role. After reading this book, you get the sense that he would be a very pleasant person to talk with. On the downside, I was absolutely shocked to read about what the Chinese Government has done to Tibet and its people. Tibet is a peace loving country and to be in the army, was the lowest form of life. A 17 point 'agreement' was drawn up by the Chinese for Tibet. Members of the Tibetan delegation were forced under duress to sign the agreement and phony Tibetan state seals were used. Large Tibetan estates were confiscated and redistributed by the Chinese. After monks and nuns were arrested, they were forced, in public, to break their vows of celibacy with one another and even to kill people. The Tibetan Freedom Fighters were no match for the Chinese army. Besides using bombers to obliterate towns and villages, the Chinese army also crucified, disembowelled, beheaded and buried many Tibetans alive. In order to prevent Tibetans from giving praise to the Dalai Lama on their way to execution, the Chinese tore out their tongues with meat hooks. It was really disheartening to read about what happened to these people. I think this is a book that everyone at some point needs to read. It really opened my eyes.

This is by far one of the most moving and amazing books I have had the pleasure to read. The Dalai Lama has a very eloquent way of telling the story of his life. From his simple beginnings throughout the Chinese invasion of Tibet, he tells the story beautifully. His attention to detail and remembrance of people who he has met impressed me greatly. Sometimes words can fail to summarize the effect something has on you...for words lack the ability to describe the depth of compassion and sympathy I felt during and after reading this book.

I scarcely knew who the Dalai Lama was before I picked up this book. But after reading it, I am glad that I had something of a chance to hear what he had to say. He starts off talking of his boyhood, and how he was chosen at the age of 6, to be his country's newest religious leader. The stories of his early life in the monastery are very amusing, but one wonders whether it is really a good idea to take someone so young into a monastery before they have any idea of what they are getting into. Still, Llama Thondup seems to have done alright. He goes on to tell of how, at the age of 15, the Chinese invaded Tibet and took over his homeland, leaving this young adolescent as the sole leader, spiritual and political, of his entire country in a time of war. Eventually, the problems stemming from the red army's invasion of Tibet were so severe that a large portion of the population were forced to flee for their lives to India, where Jawarhalal Nehru, in an act unlike any

other by anyone else in history, allowed over one hundred thousand refugee Thibetans into an already densely populated country and made provisions for the propagation of the Thibetan culture in Sarnath, Dharamsala and other towns in northern India. What strikes me as so odd is that Thondup does not seem to have the slightest measure of hatred for the Chinese people and even manages to understand, or at least try to understand, what caused them to such brutal actions. To do so must require a substantial degree of self-mastery and understanding, and in a way, shows Thondup as not merely a puppet "leader" of his people, but as someone who takes his faith very seriously indeed. His struggles to preserve the culture of his homeland and the care which he has for his people are genuinely touching. He also briefly mentions his meeting with Trappist Thomas Merton, and tells of some of the things which they discussed in their short meeting before Merton's death in Bangkok in 1968. And also fairly briefly, he goes on to discuss Thibetan Buddhism in general, including the belief in oracles, gods and demons, astrology, reincarnation and so on. One might wish that he would take a stronger stand against the superstition and hypocrisy often found in Thibet's own peculiar type of Buddhism in addition to what he has already done for his people, but he may think that such ideas may be necessary elements in the preserving of Thibetan culture and may be the duty of a future incarnation of the Dalai Lama. Still, as he mentions in his conversation with Carl Sagan, he is not a blind believer in tradition, but has experienced doubts himself and is in favour of abandoning those aspects of the religion which can be shown to be erroneous (a welcome change from the stasis necessary in contemporary Christian or Muslim thought). A very moving and captivating biography of a very interesting man and one of the worst atrocities of our time.

This autobiography of one of the leading persons of Buddhism did not touch me because of deep thoughts on Buddhism - I have to read another book for that - but because this great man described in detail how difficult it was for him to live the life of a 'Holiness' when he was a normal little child e.g. struggling with his brother on the journey to Lhasa, being taken away from his beloved family, feeling lonely, sleeping in a cold palace covered with dust. He never got conceited, but felt the burden heavily of being a religious leader, serving his people in good and bad times. Besides being a Buddhist this man is a wonderful, intelligent, brave human being and I love the modesty and honesty of his autobiography.

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