



What the Lotus Said: A Journey to Tibet and Back

Eric Swanson

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Yes, it's about Tibet, but not the mystical wonderland of Western imagination. There is magic, to be sure -- saints who pass invisibly among prison guards, ceremonies that stop torrential rain, and a ferocious landscape that inspires uneasy reverence. But the country described in these pages is incontestably real, harsh, and shocking.

What the Lotus Said is the story of Eric Swanson's journey through East Tibet in the company of a Tibetan lama and several other Americans. The ostensible purpose of the trip is humanitarian supporting fledgling schools and bringing medical aid to nomads—but Swanson, a self-confessed “spiritual shopper,” nurses private hopes of enjoying a peak experience in a cave once inhabited by the eighth-century mystic who transcribed the classic *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Through episodes alternately comic and harrowing, Swanson gradually discovers the liberating power of disenchantment, and in a startling turn of events, at last deciphers his lama's cryptic statement that Tibetan Buddhism offers Westerners a way to die.

Written in a fragmentary style evocative of the classic text that inspired Swanson's journey, *What the Lotus Said* introduces the reader to the irreducible complexities inherent in the search for spiritual solace.



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