



# 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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