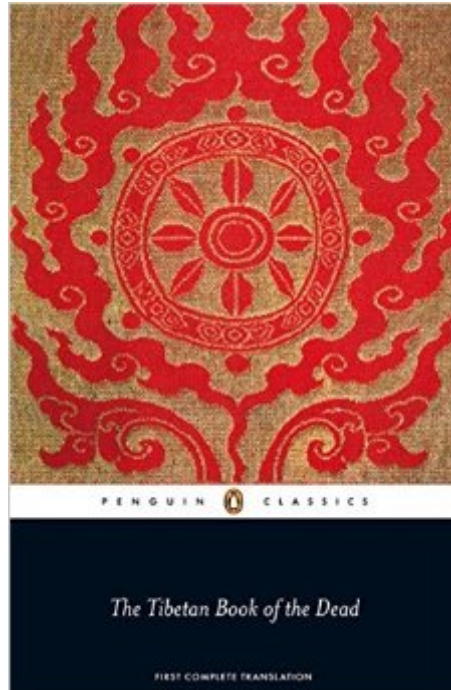


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The Penguin Classics Tibetan Book Of The Dead



Synopsis

The most graceful English translation of this masterpiece of world literature - prepared with the participation of the Dalai Lama and eminent contemporary masters of this tradition appointed by the Dalai Lama One of the greatest works created by any culture and one of the most influential of all Tibetan Buddhist texts in the West, The Tibetan Book of the Dead has had a number of distinguished translations, but strangely all of these have been partial abridgements. Now the entire text has not only been made available in English but in a translation of quite remarkable clarity and beauty. A comprehensive guide to living and dying, The Tibetan Book of the Dead contains exquisitely written guidance and practices related to transforming our experience in daily life, on the processes of dying and the after-death state, and on how to help those who are dying. As originally intended this is as much a work for the living, as it is for those who wish to think beyond a mere conventional lifetime to a vastly greater and grander cycle. 'Extraordinary ... this work will be a source of inspiration and support to many' His Holiness the Dalai Lama About the authors: Commentary by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Thupten Jinpa is the senior translator to the Dalai Lama and President of the Institute of Tibetan Classics. Graham Coleman is founder of the Orient Foundation for Arts and Culture, a major Tibetan cultural conservancy organization, and writer-director of the acclaimed feature documentary Tibet: A Buddhist Trilogy. Gyurme Dorje is a leading scholar of the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, from which the Tibetan Book of the Dead literature derives.

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Customer Reviews

The Tibetan Book of the Dead edited by Graham Coleman, Thupten Jinpa, translated by Gyurme Dorje (Viking) is by far the most popular example of indigenous Tibetan Buddhist treasure literature. An edition was issued in 1927 by Oxford University Press under the general editorship of W. Y. Evans-Wentz. The block-print copy, he used was an abridgment obtained in Nepal and translated by a Tibetan lama. Evans-Wentz was a scholarly Theosophist who imported certain Theosophical preconceptions into his commentary on the work. Carl Jung the prominent analytical psychologist even wrote a psychological commentary on the work prompted by Evans-Wentz. Since the 1970s, beginning with Francesca Fremantle and Chogyam Trungpa's edition of the text and more recently Robert Thurman's translation, corrected versions of the Tibetan Book of the Dead are well represented in English and other European languages. The mistakes and egregious errors of the pioneering edition have been corrected and Tibetan Buddhism now in America and Europe has been flourishing with many translations and commentaries on basic Buddhist practices as well as the indigenous literatures of Tibet. This new edition by Graham Coleman and Thupten Jinpa uses a fuller edition of the work for translating, adding new chapters and reflecting the interpretation of contemporary masters and lineage holders of this tradition. In many ways this is the first complete The Tibetan Book of the Dead. In many ways this book is both a guide for living as well as a how to consciously move on after death. The book has been extremely popular in Central Asia among Buddhists. The Tibetan Book of the Dead contains especially written guidance and practices related to transforming our experience of daily life, on how to address the process of dying in the after-death states, and on how to help those who are dying. Some of these teachings include: methods for investigating and cultivating our experience of the ultimate nature of mind in our daily practice, guidance on the recognition of the science of impending death and a detailed description of the mental and physical processes of dying, rituals for the avoidance of premature death, the now famous great liberation by hearing that is read to the dying and the dead, special prayers are read at the time of death, and allegorical masque play that lightheartedly dramatizes the journey through the intermediate state, and a translation of the sacred mantras that are attached to the body after death and are said to bring liberation by wearing. The editors have also included two additional texts are not usually included in the first chapter there is a preliminary meditation and practices related to the cycle of teachings, and in chapter 10, instructions on methods of transforming consciousness at the point of death into a enlightened state and are an essential aspect of the practices related to dying. The editors have gone out of their way to be sure to relate what the actual masters of these traditions mean by these practices. For that reason alone, makes this new edition of The Tibetan Book of the Dead authoritative in ways that previous editions have not been. Needless to say, this

book should capture the imagination not only of students of Buddhism, but psychologists, philosophers, spiritual directors, and chaplains as well as anyone who wishes to entertain profound teachings about the survival of consciousness after death as well as ways to encourage the meaning of our own life in the everyday world.

This handsome edition comes with many credits. The title page tells us that it was composed by Padmasambhava, revealed by Tertön Karma Lingpa, translated by Gyurme Dorje, edited by Graham Coleman with Thupten Jingpa, and has an introductory commentary by HH The Dalai Lama. This chain of transmission parallels the Tibetan Buddhist method of instruction: oral teachings, ideally, from master to student unbroken for millennia. "The Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate State" was revealed in the eighth century, but Padmasambhava foresaw its esoteric nature might be misconstrued and its power diminished, so he arranged to hide it as a "treasure text." It was found by Karma Lingpa in the fourteenth century, and W. Y. Evans-Wentz in the 1920s popularized it after what he understood as its Egyptian counterpart (one remembers the Tut craze then); the misleadingly evocative title has stuck. What the compendium shows, well over six hundred pages in its first comprehensive presentation, is much more than the twelfth book-- what Evans-Wentz, recently followed by Francesca Fremantle & Chogyam Trungpa, Robert Thurman, and Stephen Hodge with Martin Boord have separately translated as the TBoD. That chapter seen in context here falls into place as part of a broader set of pre- as well as post-mortem litanies, guidance, and rituals. Its editor-translators here capture its essence well when they refer to Jung's conception of the work as used in a "backwards" trajectory in reference to psychoanalysis. That is, we can interpret its teachings moving not only with us after death, but reversed towards our primordial life-force, "right back to a pure original cognitive event." (xxxii) Coleman sees chapter 1 as setting out a perspective to realize this shift in awareness, 2-6 building a framework for mental and spiritual realization, and chapter 7 as setting up a framework for modulating and refining our motivations and actions accordingly. Perhaps non-Buddhists can benefit from such visualizations? It's not easy, especially when confronted with a mass of terms in Tibetan that will challenge the uninitiated, but an 85-page, small-type, glossary with comprehensive definitions is provided, along with pithy contextual prefaces to each chapter. Endnotes are also given with more scholarly transliterations of phrases and cross-references to a bibliography. This apparatus should therefore satisfy academics as well as practitioners. Yet, it may well overwhelm the more casual inquirer; I'd start with the smaller versions of Chapter 12 published separately and read more about Buddhism first. Chapter 8 offers recognition of the signs of impending death, inner and outer; rituals to avoid

premature death follow in Chapter 9. A very advanced practice of "consciousness transference" comprises Chapter 10. The "TBoD" conventionally translated in the West takes up Chapter 11. Aspirational prayers make up Chapter 12 and Chapter 13 gives a "Masked Drama." The last section's a litany of a mantras amulet to be worn for "the liberation by wearing" by the dying person-- it reminds me of the scapular or miraculous medal in Catholicism. Two appendices list and catalogue the plethora of peaceful and wrathful deities enumerated in Chapter 11. In his rather elevated if concise commentary, the Dalai Lama quickly discusses the text within "Higher Yoga Tantra." He makes a vivid comparison between karma, the Buddhist laws of cause & effect, and the weather on pg. xv. Today's weather is linked to yesterday's and tomorrow's even as we view each manifestation as distinct. Our body's health ties past, present, and future together similarly. Likewise, in our consciousness according to Buddhism our past, present, and future tie together even as we perceive them as discrete phenomena. Unlike Thurman's translation-edition (reviewed by me as is Hodge & Boord's; see also my review of Fremantle's commentary on the TBoD, "Luminous Emptiness"), there's little attempt to make these contents fully accessible within an ecumenical or (post-?)modern setting. Coleman's references to Jung are about as far as it goes. Dorje sets the text in its literary history, and the Dalai Lama keeps to Buddhist concepts. The team, assisted by eminent Tibetan scholars also credited, strives rather to set the teachings within the lineage tradition of Nyingma, the oldest extant school of Buddhist knowledge from Tibet. So, newcomers may want to start with a simpler presentation such as Hodge & Boord's, moving into Thurman's snappier version, before tackling this comprehensive edition. The language is a bit more British and refined than Thurman's direct vernacular. For example, what the American scholar renders as the frequent Chapter 11 vocative "Hey you so-and-so," Coleman & Dorje mediate into "O Child of Buddha Nature, listen without distraction." There's lots of vivid examples here to show the depth of entry into the territory edging towards our mortal transformation, for a Westerner, to find in this in-depth look into one of the oldest and most formidable of death-ritual texts. Chapter 8 enumerates many visual indications of the signs of remote, impending, and actual death that may remind medical observers in our hospitals and hospices today how carefully, even obsessively, old-school Tibetans watched the body and the mind for predictions of its end. Perhaps, the filter of a thousand years removed, those who care for the dying today might find valuable testimony within admittedly daunting symptoms such as those metaphorically called "rupturing of the Wish-granting Tree from the Summit of Mount Sumeru" (171) or "ceasing of the monks' smoke in the cities of the earth element." (170) Certainly more memorable than Latin or Greek terms used by doctors today with detachment and bureaucratic efficiency. Speaking of efficiency, one editorial addition that I

would have added would be not only the chapter phrase headings atop each page under the title of the "book," but a number for the chapter, and also numerical references by paragraphs, to standardize references and to facilitate easy consultation. If this work is to be used by those needing an English translation, such "chapter-and-section" types of organization would have aided those looking up passages more rapidly. It slows the reader down when only the general chapter heading is given, although the last part of the book is a page-by-page topical index within each chapter, so this lack is somewhat balanced. The paper, also, I wish would have been more durable. I have the hardcover, but it seems flimsy and pulpy inside vs. the elegant binding and dustjacket. This may be a trade-off for what's an affordable edition, and the fact such a volume will stay in print as a mass-market trade paperback attests to the continuing relevance with what might well have languished as an obscure devotional tome if not for a surprising literary history. Also, this text has corrected earlier inconsistencies "inherited" in translation of faulty versions. A final thanks for the illustrations of the Hundred Peaceful & Wrathful Deities by the late Shawu Tsering, a scroll artist from Amdo in Tibet. These, commissioned for Dr. Dorje's collection, show a clarity and precision often missing from photographs of "thangkas" in book form. They beautifully help the reader see what the text tells.

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