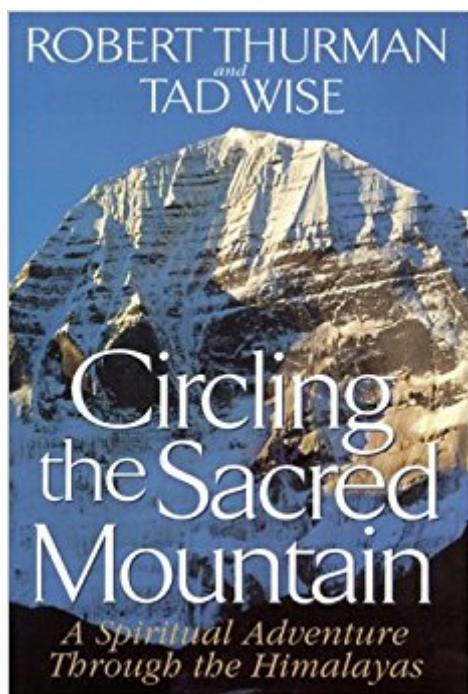


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# Circling The Sacred Mountain : A Spiritual Adventure Through The Himalayas



## Synopsis

To Tibetan Buddhists, Mount Kailash is the most magical place on earth, a place where one's prayers are answered instantly. The journey to the diamond-shaped peak is arduous, as it is located in the heart of the world's tallest mountains; yet it is well worth the effort. For according to tradition, one trip around the sacred mountain at 17,500 feet can wipe away the sins of a lifetime. It was this promise of transformation that inspired Robert Thurman, preeminent Buddhist scholar and teacher, to lead a group of eager pilgrims on the spiritual trek of a lifetime. Among the group was a former student and longtime friend, Tad Wise. Together, Thurman and Wise recount their experience circling the mountain, in chapters that counterpoint the most profound inner teachings of Tibetan Buddhism with a magnificent description of a land of awesome beauty and unexpected hardships. Thurman serves as the group's spiritual leader. Through the wisdom and insight gained from years of study in India with the Dalai Lama and other gurus, he offers his fellow companions a rich understanding of Tibetan Buddhism, including techniques of meditation, visualization, compassion, and selflessness. Meanwhile, Wise describes in vivid detail the soaring mountains and breathtaking vistas of this hidden land of snows. He also chronicles the difficulties he faces as he tries to incorporate Thurman's accelerated Buddhist teachings into his own life. Together they take us deep into Chinese-occupied Tibet to visit sites few Westerners have ever seen: sacred graveyards, meditation caves of ancient masters, and majestic monasteries. As they navigate perilous mountain passages, Thurman guides the travelers past the pitfalls of spiritual life to the realization of the Buddha's promise of liberation from human suffering. Chronicling the inner as well as the outer journey, confrontations both physical and metaphysical, Circling the Sacred Mountain serves as an inspiring metaphor for the challenging passage to enlightenment open to each of us.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In the harsh, forsaken landscape of Western Tibet, a holy mountain rises up, the legendary center of the world. Sacred to Hindus and Buddhists alike, Mount Kailash had been in professor and popular writer Robert Thurman's mind for some time when he finally decided to organize a group and go--across the Chinese border, where he has always been persona non grata. Writer Tad Wise decides to tag along and put the adventures on paper. While recording Thurman's dharma lectures, Wise comes face to face with the magic of the mountain, its myths and its people, and haltingly transforms from cynical skeptic to tear-streaked pilgrim. Wise's writing leans toward the quirky, pushing ordinary sentences to their lapidary limits, and Thurman, as usual, tosses off tantalizing Buddhsisms like "mind-body bubble" and "supreme orgasm of bliss-void-indivisible." For a book that's effectively about walking 32 miles over rubble around a remote peak, Circling the Sacred Mountain succeeds in drawing you into a mandala of swirling ideas and experiences, nudging you toward your own realizations. --Brian Bruya

Thurman (religion, Columbia Univ.), one of the country's leading scholars on Buddhism, and Wise, Thurman's former student and a writer, have produced a vivid account of a spiritual pilgrimage to Kailash, a mountain sacred to Tibetan Buddhists. Along the way, Thurman teaches the group of nine travelers the Blade Wheel of Mind Reform, a Tibetan Buddhist approach to enlightenment. The authors' descriptions of the exotic places they see, the persons they meet, and their reactions to it all are so well written that the reader feels like a fellow traveler. Thurman relates his deep knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism to each aspect of the journey and to the external and internal experience of each traveler. This intriguing account of a great physical and spiritual adventure keeps the reader engaged from beginning to end. The combination of travel and Buddhist teachings makes this a special book indeed. Recommended for any library whose travel and Buddhist collections could use a wonderful addition.-?David Bourquin, California State Univ., San BernardinoCopyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I was just days away from releasing my own book “Seven Sutras to Self Liberation” when I came across this quaint book “Circling the Sacred Mountain”. At first, I was very depressed, since I had already chosen Kailash as my cover, only to then find there was a contender for the throne • one written over a decade before. Nevertheless I decided to order it to see if it had any insights to share. This turned out to be one of my best decisions of the year. Because it goes into profound detail on the Blade Wheel of Mind Reform, from the great tenth century Buddha and Mystic Dharmarakshita. Tenzin (aka Robert Thurman) is well known for his very penetrating and insightful understandings of Buddhist Thought. And this book certainly did not disappoint. He teaches throughout it the illusory nature of the relative existence and the bliss, empowerment and freedom that comes from realization of the void. He also teaches very succinctly how our power derives from internalizing all suffering and taking full responsibility for the world we see. So this shift in responsibility is key to closing off the toxicity of projection and all notions of victimhood. Then there is Tad who is an absolute magician with words, one who makes each sentence into a work of art. I would like to rank him with Miller or Joyce, but in truth he is in a class of his own. A very sensitive soul who is not afraid to disclose his own true thoughts. He promotes intimacy and a powerful connection with each passing word. In the end, I came away wishing he had just wrote more books.

If Tantra is the union of opposites, this book works pretty well. Tad Wise seems likeable enough, except for the fact that he has 3 kids by 3 Moms, and leaves Mom #3 behind with a newborn to go off on this spiritual adventure. So I’m rooting for him to get it right this time and go home and help with the laundry. And Robert Thurman seems to use Tad as a whipping boy, teasing and taunting him, which doesn’t make Thurman exactly shine in my eyes either. The other members of the trek are more or less invisible, though they are mentioned from time to time. The mountain captures my attention starting from the picture on the cover. It looks extraordinary. I love Tibet, and this is deepest darkest Tibet for sure. The monasteries have all been trashed and recently rebuilt to attract tourists for China’s benefit. Young Tibetans are as likely to smoke and play pool as they are to chant mantras. So all the tragedy of Tibet are here to see. The dharma presented here is very Tibetan. Yamantaka, the fierce deity of death is invoked to stomp on and annihilate one’s self-obsession (the false self). The teaching is called the Blade Wheel of the Mind, and it is meant to work like a buzz-saw, turning all that is self-oriented into dust and all negative experiences into potential gold. To be there, exhausted and suffering from the high elevation, and to listen to these teachings, would probably be an extraordinary retreat experience. I don’t know that it is particularly effective in

absentia. Thurman does come off as a gas-bag. Maybe it was very unselfish of him, also worn out from trekking all day, to sit down and teach. Or maybe it was just pedantic of him. His close friendship with the Dalai Lama is name-dropped several times. I suppose it's relevant, but it also does not really endear him to me. Since I will in all likelihood never even get to Tibet, much less to this remote corner, I enjoyed the vicarious trek. But I'm just as glad I wasn't part of this particular group of trekkers.

This great book will take you on a wonderful spiritual adventure to the top of the world...a pilgrimage with Bob Thurman and his students as they make a trek around the most Holy mountain in Tibet, Mt Kailash. I highly recommend this book to the lovers of Buddhadharma and adventure.

This is an excellent introduction; and, more! SO inspired...off to Anapurna!

I would not classify the book as totally "boring". I was able to jot down several thought-provoking, enlightening comments from the read. Chad Wise offered an entertaining perspective and I would rate him as a good writer. However Thurman, while I respect his wealth of knowledge on Tibetan Buddhism, came across as demanding and overbearing. I just couldn't relate to him. I purchased the book because I am soon making a spiritual pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash, and hoped to read more about the spiritual experiences of the two writers than was offered. Maybe that is not translatable into words. The book did give me more knowledge on Tibetan Buddhism, and that I do appreciate.

Few of us will ever undertake this arduous spiritual journey to one of the world's most remote sites, but reading this book is the next best thing. The dialectic between intrepid students and wise dharma master is unique and often profound. Tad Wise's narrative of the journey and occasional skeptical asides blends well with Thurman's lessons on the essence of Tantric Buddhism. Especially poignant was Thurman's metaphor of motherly love as a device for linking us all together through an empathic heart. Recommended for all open-minded spiritual seekers.

Incredible physical and spiritual journey. Very quick reading at first, but very slow subsequently, because there is so much to reflect on

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