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Tibetan Sacred Dance: A Journey into the Religious and Folk Traditions

Ellen Pearlman

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The first book to explore the significance and symbolism of the sacred and secular ritual dances of Tibetan Buddhism.

• Lavishly illustrated with color and rare historic photographs depicting the dances, costumes, and masks.

• Looks at both sacred *(cham)* and folk *(achi lhamo)* forms and their role in the development, practice, and culture of Tibetan Buddhism.

From the time Buddhism entered the mythical land of the snows, Tibetans have expressed their spiritual devotion and celebrated their culture with dance. Only since the diaspora of the Tibetan people have outsiders witnessed these performances, and when they do, no one explains why these dances exist and what they really mean. Ellen Pearlman, who studied with Lobsang Samten, the ritual dance master of the Dalai Lama's Namgyal monastery in India, set out to discover the meaning behind these practices. She found the story of the indigenous shamanistic Bon religion being superseded by Buddhism--a story full of dangerous and illicit liaisons, brilliant visions, secret teachings, betrayals, and unrevealed yogic practices.

Pearlman examines the four lineages that developed sacred *cham*--the secret ritual dances of Tibet's Buddhist monks--and *achi lhamo* storytelling folk dance and opera. She describes the mental and physical process of preparing for these dances, the meaning of the iconography of the costumes and masks, the spectrum of accompanying music, and the actual dance steps as recorded in a choreography book dating back to the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1647. Beautiful color photographs from the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts and Pearlman's own images of touring monastic troupes complement the rare historic black-and-white photos from the collections of Sir Charles Bell, chief of the British Mission in Tibet during the life of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.

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