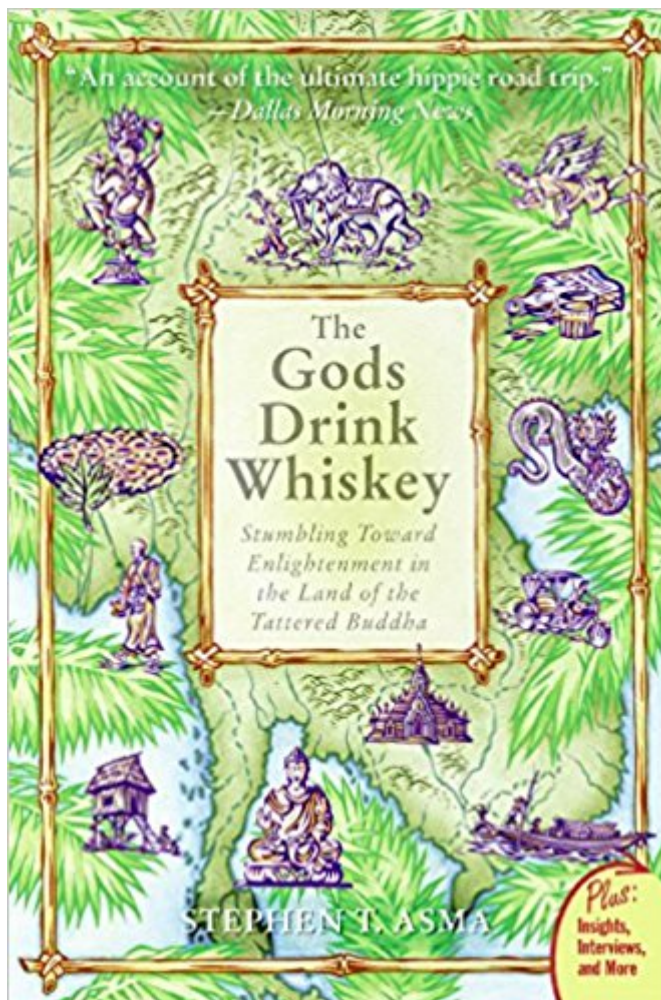


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The Gods Drink Whiskey: Stumbling Toward Enlightenment In The Land Of The Tattered Buddha



Synopsis

Buddhism, Booze, and the Four Noble Truths

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Asma opens this memoirish spiritual travel guide with a central purpose: by journeying to Cambodia to see the collective manifestations of Theravada Buddhism, the tradition closest to that avowed by the historical Buddha, he will disabuse Western readers of the widespread misconceptions so prevalent in a privatized, narcissistic and consumerist Buddhist mentality. Asma, professor of philosophy and a practicing Buddhist who taught Buddhism in Cambodia in 2003, dispels the basic falsehoods common to all schools of Buddhism, e.g., that nirvana is heavenly bliss, that austere detachment from one's deepest feelings is par for the course or that karmic merit can be acquired by magical or superstitious practices. Curiously, he scarcely discusses the most basic schism between Theravada and Mahayana (the other great school of Buddhism), namely, the consequential difference between an arhat and a bodhisattva. Nor does he, in the field of practice, explain how the magical shamanism pervading Cambodian Buddhism is different from Western practices that also use, for instance, fortune-telling or individualized mantras as magical panaceas. Nonetheless, Asma's descriptions are skillfully interwoven with firsthand encounters from his time in Cambodia. His forays into Southeast Asian politics, violence and globalizing trends, colorfully entertaining as travel writing, illuminate the ways in which Buddhism plays a primary role in the collective welfare of the region. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed

Asma, a professor of Buddhism at Columbia College in Chicago and the author of *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads* (2001), recounts his intense and revelatory Cambodian adventures while teaching at Phnom Penh's Buddhist Institute. In an electrifying and frank mix of hair-raising anecdotes and expert analysis, he explicates the vast difference between text-based Buddhist teachings and daily life in a poor and politically volatile Buddhist society. Amid tales of massage parlors, marijuana-spiced pizza, and bloodshed, he cogently explains how Theravada Buddhism, the form practiced throughout Southeast Asia, differs from the Buddhism Westerners are familiar with, and how entwined it is with animistic beliefs. This fusion of Buddhist rationalism with superstition is but one of many juxtapositions Asma relishes as he assesses the terrible scars left by the Khmer Rouge and the profound self-possession of the people he meets. His striking insights into Cambodian reality lead to a bracing critique of American pop culture and the manipulative tactics of Cambodia-based fundamentalist Protestant missionaries--and an incisive argument for learning about and respecting religions other than one's own. Donna Seaman

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This book provided me with some new insights into both Buddhism specifically, and religion in general. There are many Buddhisms and this book helped me to understand that here in the West we are mostly concerned with some of the more fringe elements of Buddhism. Here we see Zen and Tibetan Buddhism as being representative of mainstream Buddhism, when in fact they really are not. It is as if Christianity were to be represented by 7th Day Adventist. Nothing wrong with any of those faiths, but they differ radically from other ways of understanding their respective faith traditions. Also, it really drove home the point that every religion has its magical populist side which defies both reason and orthodoxy (according to scriptural sources and older traditions). Then, there is the very real issue of why a perfectly good religion, name one, fails to create a more ideal society as adherents give lip service to their faith, but in reality deny their faith in everyday action. In other words, Thailand is a Buddhist country that fails to live up to the Buddhist ideal, just as America fails to live up to the Judeo-Christian ideals that are often seen as a basis of our existence. More than anything this book helped me to realize that there are universal ideals in religion which are imperfectly translated to everyday life, it helped me realize that the debates and controversies in one religion are mirrored in other religions, and that there is not one true faith but the ultimate faith we all seek in this journey. Back to the book though. It does not fit into any standard category. It is a

different book, and well worth reading although there are some frustrating flaws. However, those flaws are indeed minor when compared to the overall merit of this work which provides us with much insight into the nature of ourselves, faith, and the world we live in. If you are stuck in a narrow minded interpretation of the Divine or of religion, then this is not the book for you. If you want to learn more about Buddhism, are interested in comparative religion, and would like a bit of a travelogue added on for good measure, you will probably like this effort. There is some history and philosophy thrown in too at no extra cost.

It's one thing to find your way to Buddhism after having been immersed in a judeo-christian culture for half a lifetime ... what if you'd been born in a part of the world in which Buddhism were the local equivalent of "Baptist"? What shape does the religion take for its practitioners in a country where this religion, rather than odd or transgressive, is part of the background culture? The author aims to find out, and does a right proper job of it.

Dr. Asma has done the worlds of anthropology, Buddhist studies, and nonfiction writing an amazing service with this book. Every page reveals a new discovery, and you actually feel that you're along with Asma as he investigates a world not covered in the media the way Tibet is. I read it in paperback, then bought it in hardcover because I needed it to have a place of honor on my bookshelf. It's that good.

Really interesting look at Cambodia. Asma's style ranges from professorial to guy next to you on a bar stool and the effect can be jarring but he is an acute observer and this book is well worth the read.

great book, great service from the sellers/

Stephen Asma is a great writer and does a wonderful job in this book profiling his trip to Cambodia and really captures the essence of the country and its incredible people.

IÃ Â»ve read it twice and suggested it to a friend who checked it out at the library. He read the first chapter and he was so impressed he had to buy a copy for himself, so I bought it for him as an early xmas present.

An incredible introduction to Theravada Buddhism in modern Cambodia told in a charming first person narrative.

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