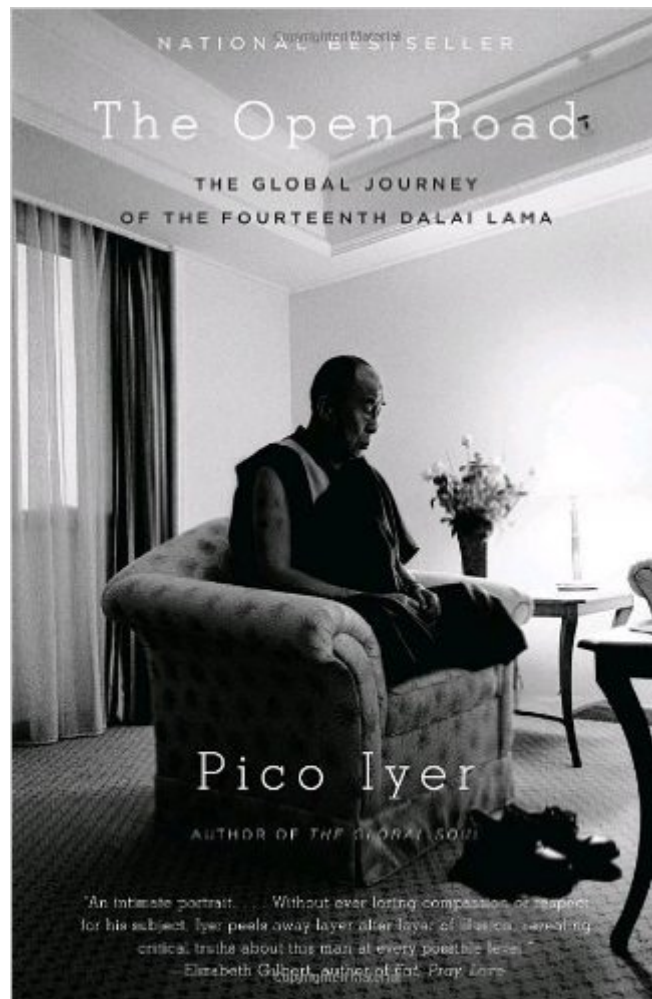


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The Open Road: The Global Journey Of The Fourteenth Dalai Lama (Vintage Departures)



Synopsis

For over three decades, Pico Iyer, one of our most cherished travel writers, has been a friend to the Dalai Lama. Over these years through intimate conversations, he has come to know him in a way that few can claim. Here he paints an unprecedented portrait of one of the most singular figures of our time, explaining the Dalai Lama's work and ideas about politics, science, technology, and religion. For Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike, *The Open Road* illuminates the hidden life and the daily challenges of this global icon.

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Customer Reviews

In our media- and soundbite-driven age, every public figure runs the risk of becoming submerged in celebrity status and losing integrity. After all, as author Pico Iyer points out, we live in the Age of the Image (p. 41)--he could just have well said the "Age of Hype"--and media images, unlike the realities they pretend to represent, are one-dimensionally, simplistic. Know this is enough to make any reasonable person a bit suspicious of the buzz surrounding any celebrity, and this is especially true with religious celebrities. How genuinely spiritual can someone who's constantly in the public eye be? I admit that at times I've asked this about the 14th Dalai Lama. But reading Pico Iyer's intriguing and informative book has set my mind at ease. If Iyer's account is at all accurate (and it should be; Iyer, whose father was a friend of the Dalai Lama's, has known him for many years), the Dalai Lama is a man with such a constant commitment to reality (p. 49) that there's little danger of him buying into the superstar the media insists on giving him. In keeping with his Buddhist tradition,

the Dalai Lama has spent a lifetime trying to puncture illusion, deception, interpretive filters, and ideological beliefs--including his own. The Buddha once insisted that he didn't teach "knowledge," because it's too easy for people of knowledge to get trapped inside their beliefs (p. 157). The Dalai Lama lives by these words. This immediately suggests a tension, which in fact is one of the central themes in Iyer's portrait of the public and personal life of the Dalai Lama. On the one hand, the Dalai Lama insists that the only truths there are must necessarily be universal, cross-cultural ones, and that putative truths which pertain only to specific cultures aren't truths at all (p. 15).

I heard an interview on NPR with Pico Iyer about this book. Iyer mentioned that the Dalai Lama was 72, which is my age as I write this. I was suddenly struck by the overwhelming thought that I had become this old with my spiritual values still unsettled. By all measures, Pico Iyer is your basic everyday genius, world traveler and visionary writer. He has written eight books plus hundreds of essays, columns, articles and book reviews for Time, New York Times, National Geographic, Harpers, The Financial Times and more. He also happens to have known the Dalai Lama for over thirty years. I had held Pico Iyer on my "authors-to-read" list for too long to miss this opportunity. Illustrated with many meetings and occasions over a period of decades, the author shows the enormous range of a seemingly simple man. The three sections of the book are titled: In Public, In Private, In Practice. Chapters are titled: The Conundrum, The Fairy Tale, The Icon, The Philosopher, The Mystery, The Monk, The Globalist, The Politician, The Future. The fourteenth Dalai Lama is "built like a middle linebacker" but is nonviolent. He is deeply religious--he rises at 3:30am and meditates and prays for four hours--but advises others to find their own way. "A religious teacher who is telling people not to get confused or distracted by religion." He is considered a living god but insists over and over that he is "just a man." He often says, "I don't know." At the end of a talk in Canada he says, "I will remain, to serve." He is famous for his laughter; he has a solid sense of humor but one suspects also he sees much silliness in the antics of those who ask him their profound questions or give him their worldly viewpoints.

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