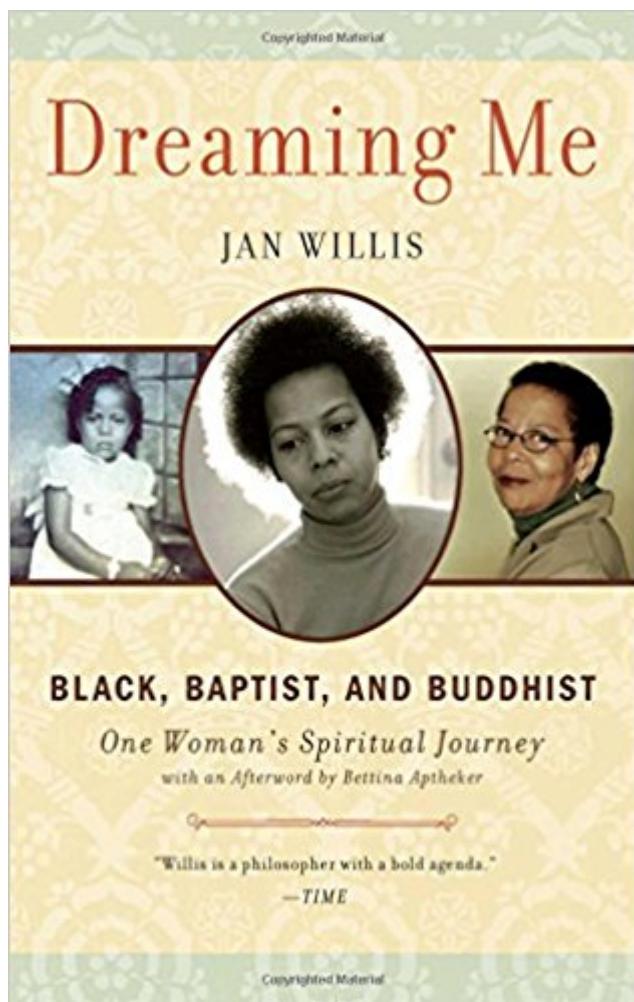


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# Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist, And Buddhist • One Woman's Spiritual Journey



## **Synopsis**

Jan Willis is not Baptist or Buddhist. She is simply both. *Dreaming Me* is the story of her life, as a child growing up in the Jim Crow South, dealing with racism in an Ivy League college, and becoming involved with the Black Panther Party. But it wasn't until meeting Lama Yeshe, a Tibetan Buddhist monk living in the mountains of Nepal, that she realized who the real Jan Willis was, and how to make the most of the life she was living.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"Jan Willis's book is a compelling, beautiful, and informative guide for anyone interested in transformation. She skillfully weaves together her personal story and the Buddha's teaching, evoking the reality of walking a path to liberation." (Sharon Salzberg, author of *Lovingkindness*) "A truly uplifting book of personal empowerment and the triumph of human heart. This remarkable book touches upon themes that every genuine pilgrim - especially those who seek to integrate their cultural and religious heritage with newfound personal spiritual path - must address at some point in their journey." (Thupten Jinpa, founder of the Institute of Tibetan Classics, and personal translator for the Dalai Lama.) "Willis delivers a gripping, intimate account of her spiritual journey that will move anyone who is compelled by the examined life." (Publishers Weekly) "Destined for the same shelf as Anne Lamott's *Traveling Mercies* and Kathleen Norris's *The Cloister Walk* and *Amazing Grace*, this is a powerful memoir of a "Baptist Buddhist" who writes with courage, compassion, and forgiveness. This searching memoir is recommended for all collections." (Library Journal) "Willis is a philosopher

with a bold agenda." (TIME)"Jan Willis's honest, lucid, mindful, and heartful account of her amazing life thus far, its struggles and woundings, its triumphs and joys, is certainly the roar of a lioness of truth-awakening, empowering, inspiring! Listen to it with pride and pleasure!" (Robert Thurman, author of *Inner Revolution*)"Willis writes frankly about family, race, spirituality, and finding grace among life's most difficult challenges. *Dreaming Me* is more honest and fascinating than anything I've read in a long time." (David Pesci, author of *Amistad*)"Intensely felt...highly personal...A moving story that aims to reconcile the experiences of faith and racism." (Kirkus Reviews)

Jan Willis is Professor Emerita of Religion at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. Born in Docena, Alabama, in 1948 and profoundly affected by the Civil Rights movement, she majored in philosophy at Cornell University and met Buddhism while traveling in Asia in the 1970s. She went on to earn her PhD in Buddhist Studies at Columbia University and has studied with Tibetan Buddhists in India, Nepal, Switzerland, and the U.S. for over four decades. The author of several books and numerous articles and essays on Buddhist philosophy and history, meditation, women and Buddhism and Buddhism and race, her memoir *Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist, and Buddhist* was first published in 2001. In December of 2000, Time named Willis one of six "spiritual innovators for the new millennium." In 2003, she was a recipient of Wesleyan University's Binswanger Prize for Excellence in Teaching. In September of 2005, Newsweek's "Spirituality in America" issue included a profile of her and, in its May 2007 edition, Ebony magazine named Willis one of its "Power 150" most influential African Americans.

Jan is an amazing woman. She shares her life and her journey with candor and humor. I can't begin describe her journey and the amazing unpredictable twists and turns her life takes, and do it justice. She writes with a smooth enjoyable prose and the book is engaging, I found myself being swept away. I agree with the reviewer who said this should be on Oprah's list, I'm surprised that it's not. *Dreaming Me* would be a fantastic book for students, there are so many layers to her life experience and how entwined it is with the Civil Rights movement and other events from the 1950's onward.

I read this for a book group and I couldn't put it down. It was wonderful!

Loved every word. Willis tells the story of her spiritual journey in a way that each person could relate to individually!

This is a wonderful book. Jan Willis was born in Alabama, and this is her journey from Alabama, during segregation, to becoming a Buddhist. She is a scholar and teacher. The tension in the book, around identity, is Dr. Willis' calling herself a "Baptist-Buddhist"--holding firm to her identity as a Southern African American who was baptized in the Baptist church and her practice as a Buddhist. This is a key text for understanding postmodern identity.

"Dreaming Me" Black, Baptist and Buddhist One Woman's Spiritual Journey is an autobiography written by Jan Willis. Born in Docena Alabama (near Birmingham) in 1948, the daughter of a Baptist Deacon and steel worker, she grew up amidst the turmoil of the civil rights movement in 50's and 60's. The Klu Klux Klan made regular visits to her neighborhood. Jan Willis along with her father, mother and sister marched with Martin Luther King in Birmingham, Alabama. A city Martin Luther King described as the most segregated city in the South. Later she went on to attend the Cornell University an Ivy League college as the war in Vietnam begins to draw protests from the student body. Confronted with her rage and anger she wondered at the Buddhist monks who set themselves on fire in protest of the war. Later she meets a Tibetan Lama who helps her on a spiritual and emotionally healing path. The fact that Jan Willis had affinity with the Great Tibetan Lama Yeshe does not belie the fact that a compassionate and skilled teacher in any number of Buddhist traditions could help one to uncover the truth. Something that is not always mentioned is that part and parcel of the process of finding this truth is that a healing takes place. That healing is a digesting of ones experiences. Because once you digest your experiences you let go of them and they no longer control you. Our thinking mind on the other hand holds on to all of its experiences revisiting them again and again. Or desperately attempts to hide them from ourselves so as not to cause pain with often the opposite results. Jan Willis as with most people who invest much time and energy on a spiritual path have some life experience with their essence, soul or true self (different labels that point to the same truth) that precipitates that journey. Not the least of which are her dreams which chronicles her spiritual insights. The title Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist and Buddhist, One Woman's Spiritual Journey, are names and forms that can help or hinder a quest for spiritual awakening. Jan Willis takes us through her soul searching transformations writing candidly and with grace. I recommend this book for all people.

Ms. Willis gives a moving account about her journey that transformed her from an angry, black militant to a compassionate, peace-filled Buddhist. Raised during the Jim Crow south, she had the

unique opportunity to venture into uncharted waters to meet a highly respected lama and Buddhist scholar, who changed her life forever. I don't want to be a plot spoiler, but you will have to read the book as to find out how she was able to embrace, if not blend, both her Baptist and Buddhist faiths. In recent years, I have been looking outside of traditional western religion to deal with the negative effects of racism and to cultivate inner peace and equanimity. There are many parts of this book that resonated with me. For those who are on a similar journey, I would suggest another excellent memoir by a Black American woman, who, also, came to embrace Buddhism, "Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace," by Angel Kyodo Williams.

This book is one that is profoundly moving and an amazing journey of one woman's life. It chronicles some of the most significant pieces of history of the United States--segregation, MLK, Jr, the civil rights movement. The chapters about travels to the East and meetings with Tibetan Buddhist Lamas (Lama Thubten Yeshe and Geshe Rabten) are poignant and fascinating. Here there is tenderness, humor, wisdom, and triumph. It's a wonderful, wonderful book and really is a must read.

This book is one of the most thought provoking reads! Just imagine the struggle Jan Willis must have gone through trying to "find her place" in this world. Her journey from the Jim Crow south to the top of the Buddhist cooperative spirit is one I will not soon forget. Hey Oprah, you'll love this!!!

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