

*Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*

First published in 1960, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* was written by Lama Anagarika Govinda (Ernst Hoffman) to convey the “esoteric teachings of the Great Mantra OM MANI PADME HUM.” He begins with a discussion of the creative power of sound, especially when voiced with the force of the whole being, which he calls one’s “spiritual attitude.” “OM,” Govinda states, “is the quintessence, the seed-syllable of the universe” and “the experience of the infinite within us.”

Part two includes a detailed presentation of MANI, or Manas as the common ground that overlaps and links our lower empirical consciousness with the higher universal consciousness, asserting that “intuitive mind (manas) is one with Universal Mind.” Govinda further discusses the importance of the “turning-about” of the direction of our inner vision “from the manifold to the intuitive.” Interestingly, he asserts that “the process of becoming is...as the Pythagoreans put it, the progressive limitation of the unlimited” and thus he warns against it as a spiritual goal.

Part three addresses the third word of the mantra, PADMA, and utilizes the metaphor of a lotus blossom which “grows up from the darkness of the mud...opening its blossom only after it has raised itself beyond the surface...remaining unsullied from both earth and water, which nourished it.” Mani is described as the “jewel” that is hidden within the “lotus blossom” (padma). In this section, Govinda also explains polarity and introduces the five Dyani-Buddhas, the Five Wisdoms, and utilizes the Bardo Thodol (Tibetan Book of the Dead) as an “opportunity to make use of the great possibilities which offer themselves in the moment of relinquishing the body.”

HUM is the subject of the fourth part, wherein he states, “OM is the infinite, but HUM is the infinite in the finite, the eternal in the temporal, the timeless in the moment...” and equates it to “the Great Mirror which reflects the Void,” where it functions as the returning of the spiritualized essence from the OM back to the planes of manifestation. Govinda then embarks on a limited exposition of motion in time and space, the chakra centers, the raising of kundalini, and the intricate network of etheric pathways called “nadis” that comprise the subtle bodies of human beings.

The fifth part of the book provides complex but immensely useful instructions for the practical use of the unified mantra, OM MANI PADME HUM, as well as the “three bodies and the three planes of existence, stating that “every Buddha manifests himself on three planes of reality: the universal, the ideal and the individual.” During his discussion of maya, Govinda insightfully states that when we describe maya as illusion, we do so because of a “wrong interpretation of a partial aspect of reality.”

This abstruse book may present a challenge to students who have not already acquainted themselves with the terms and concepts that Govinda uses to describe the metaphysical worldview of Tibetan Buddhism. Students of the theosophy of Alice A. Bailey may perceive commonality with Govinda’s much-abbreviated presentation of the wisdom teachings, yet will encounter various dissimilarities as well. Govinda makes no mention, for instance, of the seven archetypal rays that are so important to AAB’s septenary metaphysical worldview, but this may be due to the constraints of placing a more detailed overview of Tibetan Buddhism into a single volume. Irrespective of these omissions or variations, this special book demands a place not only

in the library of every student, but also in their hearts and minds and in their meditations and prayers.

1. Anagarika Govinda, Lama. *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism: According to the Esoteric Teachings of the Great Mantra Om Mani Padma Hum*. N.Y., Dutton, 1960.

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