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The Way Of The White Clouds



Synopsis

Lama Anagarika Govinda was one of the last foreigners to journey through Tibet before the Chinese invasion of 1950. A devoted Buddhist and a spokesman for Tibetan culture, Govinda's luminous and candid account is a spectacular and gloriously poetic story of exploration and discovery, and a sensitive and lucid interpretation of Tibetan traditions. Robert Thurman's perceptive new introduction to the volume places Govinda's writings in historical context and opens a new door on understanding Tibet, Buddhism, and the life of a remarkable man who, as Thurman remarks, is "undoubtedly one of the West's greatest minds of the twentieth century, a member of the pantheon that includes Einstein, Heisenberg, Wittgenstein, Solzhenitsyn, Gandhi, and the Dalai Lama."

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Customer Reviews

The classic narrative of a spiritual pilgrimage to Tibet, with a new introduction by Robert Thurman.

Lama Anagarika Govinda (1898 - 1985) was born Ernst Lothar Hoffman in Waldheim, Germany, the son of a German father and a Bolivian mother. In his twenties and thirties he became increasingly interested in Buddhism, first studying in Ceylon and then in India, making several visits to Tibet in the 1930s and 40s. He spent his final years living in the Bay Area of Northern California.

Lama Govinda was a seeker of wisdom. Born in Germany, growing up in Capri, living in then Ceylon and India, he converted to Buddhism--a practice which had greatly attracted him in his early years. This book though is about his travels into Tibet before China, in the 1930's and 40's. But it is not like

any ordinary travel book-it is a combination of travel, adventure, spiritual wisdom, philosophy and an explanation of very complex Tibetan Buddhist practices. So here is the thing--this is not a book to sit down with on a Sunday afternoon and relax--no, this is a heavy, complicated, difficult book but well worth the reading because for about twenty years he was inside Tibetan Buddhism. He had a guru, met many teachers, was himself a Lama, traveled extensively, had extraordinary experiences and brings the unique perspective of a scholar who has had and understands religious experiences. I don't profess to have any command of Buddhism but I must say that I certainly understood far more than I ever had before--now, I see (and admittedly through my limited lens) what the mandalas and religious art and meditational deities are about whereas before they just looked like so much elaboration. He goes inside, and I do mean inside, Buddhism. If you are a serious student of Buddhism or just very curious, I think it is well worth the reading--plan on about ten pages a day as you do want to think about what he is saying and I recommend not skimming or missing any of it. There really are gems of understanding here although the experiences he had will leave you thinking for quite awhile. He died in 1985 in the Bay Area of Northern California.

One of the most beautifully written and insightful books about Tibet and Buddhism ever, ever written. I found myself reaching for my pack of page-marker stickers over and over, and am re-reading the whole thing slowly and carefully. Rich, exquisite, heartfelt, funny, humane, the Lama lives on as a teacher in this wonderful work.

This book is a classic. Glad to see it back in print. Last time I looked for a copy I had to buy a used one from Britain. In the *Way of the White Clouds*, Govinda tells about the ordeal, the excitement, the wonder of traveling through Tibet in the 30s. He found his Guru, had extraordinary experiences, lived through the extremes of Tibetan weather. He also talks about *gtummo* and *lung-go-pa*. The former is the ability lamas develop to dry wet sheets thrown over their bodies in the midst of winter and out in the elements. The latter tells about runners covering vast distances barely touching the ground as they bounce over the countryside. I sent this book to a friend for a birthday present. I haven't read it recently. But, it would be a treat for explorers of the outer and inner worlds, especially Buddhist ones.

An amazing man. I enjoyed his thoughts and insights very much.

Anagarika Govinda's book *The Way of the White Clouds* is among the most beautiful travel books

ever written. It gives a lyrical picture of Tibet before the destruction of virtually everything by the Chinese. Somewhat melodramatic in its descriptive power, Lama Govinda (1898-1985) and his Persian wife, Li Gotami, wrote, drew, and photographed unknown (and often abandoned) temples, met amazing people, and generally coursed in a mystical reverie during their time there. The reader is magically transported with them back to a time when no one in the West knew much, if anything, about Tibet, Tibetans, or its religion. That he might have got some details wrong isn't the point. This is a seminal work in its field (together with Marco Pallis and Alexandra David-Neel). Govinda's writing, and photographs are better than theirs, however.

I really enjoyed reading this book. Lama Govinda was one of the first Westerners to undertake this kind of journey through this region, really more of a spiritual pilgrimage, and he writes from the point of view of a serious Buddhist practitioner, so it is much more than just a travelogue. It's a revealing and unique window into the vast and profound Buddhist culture - pre-Chinese invasion - of the Tibetan region, as well as a highly personal and poetic rendering of one man's deepening connection to his path. Wonderful.

Excellent read on pre-Chinese invasion of Tibet. A seeker and a studied dharma student writes of his journeys through Tibet when travel was by foot/horse and pack animals. His encounters with remarkable teachers and documentation of the monasteries are a thing of the past. This is a beautiful story written by a very gentle soul on the country/people and spirit of Tibet.

A wonderful read for anyone interested in Tibetan culture and way of life. It is especially good for setting a foundation for his previous book Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism. It brought life in Tibet alive for me.

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