

LAMA GOVINDA VISITS TASSAJARA

During the fall practice period of 1968 Lama Anagarika Govinda and his wife, Li Gotami, accompanied by Iru Price of the San Francisco Arya Maitreya Maṇḍala center, came to visit Tassajara.

The author of several well-known books* as well as many articles on Buddhism, Lama Govinda has achieved wide recognition as an highly articulate spokesman for the *Vajrayāna* as it was practiced in Tibet. An Austrian by birth, he was ordained as a Theravādin monk in Ceylon as a young man and, twelve years later, went to India and Tibet where he began a study of the *Vajrayāna* which led eventually to his ordination as a lama of the *Kargyūtpa* sect. He met Madam Govinda, Li Gotami, while teaching at Rabindrinath Tagore's College in Shrinigar. She has traveled extensively in Tibet with her husband, studying Buddhism there, and was initiated into the *Kargyūtpa* sect herself.

The Govindas now live in North India, at Almora, in the foothills of the Himalayas. Lama Govinda founded and is the spiritual leader of the Arya Maitreya Maṇḍala, a *Vajrayāna* group which has study centers in America and in Europe. He is presently at work on a number of new books, one of them a new approach to the interpretation of the *I Ching*, the Chinese oracular classic which has been of great importance in the cultural history of Tibet.

Lama Govinda and Li Gotami stayed at Zen Mountain Center for four days, resting quietly after several weeks of strenuous lecturing throughout the United States. Lama Govinda lectured once in the zendo. (This lecture, *Siddhas and Zen Buddhism*, follows.) He also led an open discussion in which students asked various questions about the *Vajrayāna*, Tibet, and the Lama's own life and experiences. He related more of the *Siddha* tales, illustrating them with his own drawings of the legendary figures, and often stressing the need for inspiration and joy coupled with dedication in spiritual practice. Most students had read at least one of his books, and the discussion was informed and lively.

Madam Govinda is an accomplished photographer and painter, as is Lama Govinda himself, and on the third day of their visit she organized an impromptu exhibition of their works in the guest dining room; excellent photographs, water-colors, and ink drawings of Tibetans, their monasteries, and their religious art. She stayed in the room all day, answering questions, relating endless fascinating anecdotes and stories (particularly about their adventures trekking through Tibet to trace the famous frescoes at Tsaparang), charming everyone with her incredible energy and good humor.

**Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, Ryder, 1959.

Maṇḍala, (poems, in German), Origo Verlag, 1961.

The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy, Ryder, 1961.

The Way of the White Clouds, Hutchinson, 1966.

The impression made by the Govindas' visit was powerful and lasting. Many students had opportunities to talk with Lama Govinda in his room and found the peace, deep quietude and friendly alertness of the man very moving and inspiring. Madam Govinda, too, was very happy to talk with students, and many, particularly the women, got a new and revitalized view of Buddhist practice-life from her.



Lama Anagarika Govinda.