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Herbert Guenther

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Herbert Guenther : The Teachings of Padmasambhava (Brill's Indological Library) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Teachings of Padmasambhava (Brill's Indological Library):

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. At the pinnacle By kaioatey This.... is an AMAZING, breathtaking book - the last work by Herbert Guenther, the brilliant German-Canadian scholar about a revolutionary spiritual

teacher from the 8th century."Although the abiding and pervasive presence of Beings dynamic nothingness in the concrete reality of ours is not amenable to being reduced to some verbal realm, I speak of its energy, the quintessence of its mystery that is greater and deeper than any other mystery PadmasambhavaPadmasabhava was a 'disrupter', a brilliant man who upended Vajrayana and was in a significant way responsible for making it into what it is today. It is therefore interesting that Tibetans for centuries didn't know what to do with him. None of his works are quoted directly across the Tibetan history, not even by scholars or mystics who otherwise are full of praise of him. Perhaps because Ps insights are so radical, Tibetan kings hid his texts in vaults marked "strictly confidential" and "now is not the time to promulgate this work" :).They eventually kicked him out of the country (his demands to give him the king's wife in recompense for teachings may have had something to do with it) yet later (partly for political reasons) Tibetans mythologized the man, making him a dominant protector deity. Most scholars take for granted that Padmasambhava was an Indian (from the Swat region of today's Pakistan); Guenther - provocatively - proposes that he actually came from the Middle East and may have been a Christian from the Sassanid empire who had to flee during Arab conquests in 7-8th century AD. This would make him a Gnostic, neoplatonist and/or Manichean which is actually rather amazing. In any case, it is close to impossible to comprehend Guenther's work without a rudimentary understanding of gnosticism, Jung, Heidegger and preferably Hillman and David Bohm.Guenther's translations succeed in making Ps teachings vibrant and alive. They surely are light years away from the scholastic dryness of 8th century Mahayana texts with their nitpicky versions of "how many angels on a pin" arguments about Emptiness. Their importance is in showing us that Padmasambhava is asking questions that never lose relevance for our species: who are we, what have we lost, and what are we going to become?! The main topic of Ps texts (such as "sPros-bral-don-gsal") is human experience as a dynamic living process where the experiencer is at the same time the world that is being experienced. A world that cannot be captured by theorizing and scholasticism. A world that differs from classical Christian and Hindu universes in that Man is not created by the creator demiurge/god but rather EVOLVES out of his own potential. P provides incisive analyses of the Ego ('the five poisons') which prevents the 'soul' (or rather, Being) from realizing itself and is refreshingly critical of the intellect: "it is in an individual's intellect, not understanding (what is meant by wholeness) that wholeness is turned into some fault.....duality exists only in the dichotomizing intellect". In other words, the intellect makes us take a position opposite to reality, imposing on us the laws of rational consciousness that impoverish reality and make it conform to our own ignorance. Thus: "The enemy who harms and torments all sentient beings is the five poisons. This enemy's vein of life need not be cut (literally), it is cut when the notion of an I and a Self is eradicated."P is mainly interested in the creative force that is at our core, the sheer intensity that is at work before any name is given to it (Gnostic pleroma?). In contrast to the Christian dogma, Padmasambhava's universe is freed from soteriological notions inherent in Christianity the experiencer establishes a personal relationship with the forces that work in and through him and have shaped and are shaping him. There is no sin and there can be no savior spiritual life is first a downward movement through fragmentation and dispersion from a world of light followed by an upward movement of penetration into the mystery of wholeness, return home. What we have here is radical responsibility and complete uselessness of excuses, hopes and expectations: it is all up to us. How do we loosen-up ('grol') the world of phenomena to attain the radiant and pure dimensionality in which meanings are born? How can we unify the archetypal Father (yab) and archetypal Mother (yum) forces into total energetic/experiential union?There is much - so much more - in this brilliant analysis by one of the most prominent scholars of our time. In some ways, the complexity and sheer volume of never-ending insight reminds me of Almaas - what is clear is that this book could only be written by someone with an enormous wealth of personal experience and insight. The difference between Guenther's book and existing works about Padmasambhava is substantial - no one even comes close, as translators of Tibetan texts (most of them monks) tend to march in lockstep with scholastic blindfolds on. The parallels to neoplatonist beliefs, moreover, are compelling and surprising. I can not help but occasionally pinch myself, wondering whether Guenther is making all this up. Not being a scholar, I cannot attest to the credibility of the Gnostic (Valentinian, Barbelognostic) connection philosophers such as Basilides, Irenaeus, Plotinus to Nag Hammadi texts. But it makes sense to me. Helpfully, Guenther cites Tibetan originals, translates them word by word, and then interprets them - giving us the readers an opportunity to decide for ourselves. It, frankly, is almost too good to be true. :) It also has to be noted that some (e.g., Jean-Luc Achard) have argued that Guenther's translations overly rely on physics and phenomenology while "ignoring the Path that leads to the Ultimate state". I find this perspective difficult to understand (the Path is quite obvious in this book) but I am aware of my bias towards the phenomenological approach.Who will benefit from this book? Unfortunately, not the common man. Much of the treasures in it will go straight over the heads of us, busy mortal bees. No, this book is for the 0.1% of those rare aves who can merge their spiritual practice with academic/scholastic study, those who find joy in pondering and meditating upon a single verse over a day or two.18 of 18 people found the following review helpful. Guenther's brilliant workBy Georg FeuersteinAlthough Padmasambhava (eighth century A.D.) is revered as a second buddha, almost nothing reliable is known about him. His Tantric works also have been rarely mentioned by the Tibetans themselves, probably because they were deemed too subversive. The late Prof. Guenther, who had made a lifelong study of Padmasambhava and his Nyingma lineage, begins his monograph by reviewing the scant information about the "precious teacher" (guru

rimpoche) that is available, and then proceeds to delineate Padmasambhava's original, holistic, and visionary philosophy of liberation. As the author notes, "Padmasambhava has revealed himself as an 'exception' personage whose vision and evolutionary thinking were far ahead of his time and have remained unparalleled through the history of Buddhist thought" (p. 38). Utilizing a phenomenological-hermeneutical approach, as was his custom, Guenther page after page seeks to unravel Padmasambhava's Gnostic thought for the comprehension of Western readers, who are steeped in Aristotelian categories. As always, Guenther is not easy to follow, and sometimes his terminology gets in the way of comprehension. His insights about the teachings of the second buddha, however, are truly seminal. After a detailed examination of Padmasambhava's cosmology, as a tripartite system springing from mystical experiences, Guenther goes on to discuss--in a 54-page chapter--the adept's Gnostic involutory schema: the path home to Wholeness. This process consists in a deconstruction of the empirical, finite mind, whereupon the Whole lights up. In Padmasambhava's mystical language (and in Guenther's rendering): Through the dissipation (dissolution) of representational thinking's constructs, (the experiencer) immerses himself in immortality's elixir (that is the whole's) giving birth to thoughts/meanings; When the phenomenal dissipates (dissolves) into its legitimate dwelling, (the experiencer) immerses himself in immortality's elixir (that is the whole's) dimensionality of meaning; and When (the experiencer's) ontic foundation dissipates (dissolves) into its legitimate dwelling, (the experiencer) immerses himself in (the whole's) energy. Padmasambhava's writings are riddled with Gnostic metaphors, which demonstrates that he was undoubtedly influenced by Sethian and Valentinian Gnosticism, though equally unquestionably his philosophical edifice was very much his own original creation. In the concluding 75-page chapter, which is the most obscure, Guenther inquires into the symbolism of Padmasambhava's "luminous language of being." Central to this language is the concept of the "Little Man of Light" (khye'u-chung), the Anthropos, who is commissioned by his divine parents to retrieve the precious jewel of "real being," which then allows him to find his way back to his real home, the Whole. The consideration revolves around the originary Light (mkha') and the dharma-kaya (chos-sku), as well as the ecstatic leap into Wholeness, in the context of Padmasambhava's sweeping anthropocosmology. In his epilogue, Guenther brilliantly summarizes his findings. "As a visionary thinker of the highest order," writes the author, "he is one who knows and speaks from experience and, for this reason alone, he is a striking example of individuality" (p. 205). "In conclusion we may say that Padmasambhava's importance lies in the fact that he is first and foremost a process-oriented thinker, maybe even the first in recorded history." Copyright 2006 by Georg Feuerstein. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form requires prior permission from Traditional Yoga Studies at [...]

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Radical Vision of Padmasambhava By D.F. Shuo This is a profound, revolutionary work, destined to be ignored, misunderstood, and ridiculed. Guenther's Padmasambhava is not a Tantric Buddhist missionary par excellence, nor even a Buddhist, but a master, synthesizer, and poet of all the mystical traditions of his time and place, an eclectic genius whose sole concern is to inspire and guide us to transcend limitation and re-unite with the infinite, creative dynamics that is our core.

This study explores the ideas of the enigmatic and controversial visionary, known as Padmasambhava. It takes as its starting point a unique and hitherto untouched source: Padmasambhava's writings preserved in the rNying-ma rgyud-'bum that remain excluded from the standard editions of the Tibetan Tanjur collections to this day. The first chapter explains Padmasambhava's holistic background that reflects an anthropocosmic worldview. The second chapter deals with the problem of how this anthropocosmic whole becomes enworlded as samsara and of how the enworlded experiencer disentangles himself from it and regains his original wholeness. The third chapter assesses Padmasambhava's psychological insights and their hermeneutical interpretations. In this study, Herbert Guenther discloses the mind of one of the greatest spiritual geniuses in human history, Padamasambhava -- wanderer, mystic, and one of the original founders of Tibetan Buddhism. Here his teachings step out from obscurity to speak with a wonderful clarity. In them is found a surprisingly postmodern portrait of how process dynamics self-organize to construct and "light up" our worlds of experience.

About the Author Herbert Guenther, Ph.D. (Munich and Vienna), D.Litt., is Professor Emeritus of Far Eastern Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada. He has published extensively on Buddhist philosophy and psychology with special emphasis on their phenomenological and hermeneutical implications.