

Was Jesus a Buddhist? - James M. Hanson. *Buddhist-Christian Studies, Annual 2005* v25 p75(15)

Was Jesus a Buddhist? Certainly he was many things--Jew, prophet, healer, moralist, revolutionary, by his own admission the Messiah, and for most Christians the Son of God and redeemer of their sins. And there is convincing evidence that he was also a Buddhist. The evidence follows two independent lines--the first is historical, and the second is textual. Historical evidence indicates that Jesus was well acquainted with Buddhism. If Jesus did not go to India, then at least India went to Judea and Jesus. The real historical question is not if he studied Buddhism, but where and how much he studied Buddhism, especially during his so-called "lost years."

Historical accounts aside, many textual analyses indicate striking similarities between what was said by Jesus and by Buddha and between the prophetic legend of Jesus and ancient Buddhist texts. The conclusion is that, although not identifying himself as a Buddhist for good reasons, Jesus spoke like a Buddhist. The similarities are so striking that, even if no historical evidence existed, we can suspect that Jesus studied Buddhist teachings and that the prophecy and legend of Jesus was derived from Buddhist stories.

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF BUDDHISM IN JUDEA

Historical evidence indicates that Jesus knew about Buddhism, simply because both he and it were in Judea during the same time. Other evidence, while perhaps apocryphal, indicates that he spent most of his so-called lost years outside Judea, possibly in Kashmir to study Buddhism exclusively.

I owe thanks to the barbed but benign comments of my friend, Dale Bengtson.

Regarding Buddhism in Judea, Jesus did not live in a pastoral, ethnically isolated place and time. On the contrary, non-Jewish political and cultural influences permeated Judea, which was an important shipping center for trade between India and the West and the military gateway to invade Egypt via land. Both land and sea trade routes had run through Jerusalem for centuries. Overland routes extending to Persia and western India were especially active after Alexander's invasion of western India 360 years earlier; most of the routes, whether connecting to wealthy cities in Egypt or in Greece and Rome, came through Jerusalem, where goods for Greece and Rome were shipped via the Mediterranean Sea. Sea routes from Bombay and the mouth of the Indus River went through the Persian and Red Gulfs, the distance between the mouths of the Indus and Tigris and Euphrates rivers being only about three hundred miles; much of the trade came up the Gulf of Aquaba and overland up to Jerusalem (actually nearby Jappa) as the shipping point to the Mediterranean.

During Jesus' time, Judea was a Roman dominion and most of the trade was Roman. Being the wealthiest empire of the time, Rome sent tons of gold-minted sesterces eastward for goods from India and other places. Most of this trade came over the Mediterranean and through Judea, making Jerusalem a cosmopolitan shipping center. Because of trade alone, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism were well known to the people in Judea. News from other lands was naturally of great interest. Most traders provided detailed accounts of the events of cities and states along their routes, often in the form of eloquent verse. Easterners in Judea were as anxious to hear news as were Jews in Persia or western India.

In addition to trade, Zoroastrians and Buddhists settled in northern Arabia, including Judea, which was only two hundred miles from Mesopotamia. The story of Jesus' birth attracting the three Magi priests, if true, demonstrated close ties with Zoroastrians. Settlements occurred especially during Alexander's invasion of the East after 330 BCE. This included Jews who welcomed Alexander's overthrow of Egyptian rule and who joined Alexander's army. Many settled along the invasion route through Persia and what is now Afghanistan and Kashmir/Punjab, a practice encouraged by Alexander to maintain his empire. About 360 years later, Jesus dispatched Thomas, perhaps his closest and most loyal apostle, to practice Christianity in India. The descendants of these Jews continue today to reside in Kashmir or Punjab.

Were Buddhists really in Judea, as Jews were in India? In Jesus' time Buddhism was already five hundred years old and had spread from India, east to southeast Asia, north to central Asia, and west to the Middle East. The overland route westward was through what is now Afghanistan, northern Persia, and the area of Baghdad, then forked east to Palestine and Egypt or the northeast and lesser-traveled route through Syria, Turkey, and Greece. After Alexander's eastern conquests, the great India ruler Ashoka, according to Will Durant's account, "sent Buddhist missionaries to all parts of India and Ceylon, even to Syria, Egypt and Greece, where, perhaps, they helped prepare for the ethics of Christ." (1) Furthermore, Max Muller stated that missionaries also were sent more than thirty years prior to Ashoka's reign: "That remarkable missionary movement, beginning in 300 BCE, sent forth a succession of devoted men who spent their lives in spreading the faith of the Buddha over all parts of Asia." (2) Philo noted the presence of Buddhists in Alexandria, Egypt. (3)

The link between Buddhism and Jesus appears to be primarily the Essenes, perhaps also the Mandeans, Mithraites, and probably other sects generally known as Gnostics. While the members of these splinter groups were Jews, they rejected the worldly, rationalist, optimistic faith of Jewish mainline thinking in the Torah or Old Testament. Their beliefs were ascetic, millenarian, otherworldly, and about a god beyond reason and ordinary intelligence, as expressed by John the Baptist and partly by his protegee, Jesus. Malamed discusses these differences and concludes, "Numerous scholars long ago discovered Buddhistic elements in the Gospel of John and also recognized the Buddhistic background of Essenism, by which Jesus was greatly influenced. The conclusion is inescapable that Palestine, together with many other parts of Asia Minor, was inundated with Buddhistic propaganda for two centuries before Christ." (4) A similar historical account of that time is provided by Rosser: "Records from Alexander indicate a steady stream of Buddhist monks and philosophers who, living in that area, which was at the crossroads of commerce and ideas, influenced the philosophical currents of the time. There are strong similarities between Buddhist monastic teachings and Jewish ascetic sects, such as the Essenes, that were part of the spiritual environment of Palestine at the time of Christ's birth." (5)

Derrida provides a contemporary account of the radical break between Jesus and Jewish tradition, echoing the ancient themes stressed by the Gnostics in the apocrypha. First, Jesus bypassed traditional temple and doctrine by referring to the spirit as existing within the soul or conscience of the individual. Second, Jesus stressed virtue over justice and warned explicitly against the Old Testament admonishment of an eye for an eye and tooth for tooth (Matthew 5:38-39) and against striking back at one's enemies (Matthew 5:43-44). Third, Jesus stated that the giving of alms and performing other good deeds was to be done privately if not secretly to obtain the favor of God (Matthew 6:1-4). (6)

Historians know little about the origins of the Essenes. Philo, Pliny, and Josephus mentioned them to have existed about 150 years before Jesus, which is shortly after the time Ashoka's Buddhist emissaries arrived from India. The name "Essene" appears to have Indic origins. Serrano explains, "The word 'Essene' could have evolved from the foreign pronunciation of the Indian word 'Eeshani.' Eeshan is Shiva (the Hindu God) and Eeshani is one who adores Eeshan or Shiva." (7)

Mithraism is undoubtedly Indian in origin, Mithras being a deity in several Hindu Vedas. Mithras grew in importance in Persia, being associated with the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda, who was well known in Judea. Mithraism became the dominant religion of the Roman Empire during the second and third centuries and influenced many of the rewritings of Christian doctrines of the time.

Given all of these East-West trade and settlement patterns, Jesus certainly was exposed to Buddhism. Jesus would have known about Zoroastrianism and Buddhism as a teenager. The Bible refers to Jesus and his family visiting Jerusalem during annual Passover celebrations. Luke (2:47) has the twelve-year-old Jesus in a Jerusalem temple talking to a group of doctors: "All those who heard him were in amazement." Clearly, the young Jesus was engaged in the ideas and issues of his day, which would have included Buddhism.

The extent of Jesus' exposure to Buddhism depends on just where he was during his lost years. If Jesus lived his life only in Judea, then his exposure was minimal. If he traveled outside Judea, especially to Mesopotamia, then his exposure to Buddhist-influenced groups was increased. The Bible makes no mention of where the young Jesus lived. In Matthew (2:23) and Mark (1:23), Jesus is called a "Nazarene" and in other documents a "Nazoraean." But the town of Nazarene was not mentioned in the Bible-related texts until some four hundred years CE. Nazarene probably refers to another Jewish sect, also known as the "Nazirites," involving John the Baptist and Jesus' brother James. In Acts 24:5, Paul is referred to as "the leader of the sect of Nazarenes." (8)

Nonbiblical historical accounts indicate that Jesus traveled outside Judea. Old Muslim records refer to Jesus as the "traveling prophet" and as the "chief of travelers." Another states, "Jesus was named the 'Messiah,' because he wandered about, and because he did not stay in one place." (9) The more Jesus traveled about, the more he would have encountered Buddhist ideas.

The Bible provides no account of Jesus' lost years between ages thirteen and twenty-nine. If Jesus was lost, where was he? Luke 2:40 only generalizes: "And the child grew and waxed strong, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." In the last recorded account of Jesus as a twelve-year-old, Luke 2:51 says that Jesus left Jerusalem with his parents "and lived there in subjection to them ... and so Jesus advanced in wisdom with the years." But this does not square with Luke's own account of the twelve-year-old Jesus engaging the doctors of Jerusalem. Indeed, this account introduces contrary dimension, which is that even then Jesus had his calling clearly in mind regardless of his parents' concerns. Luke 2:49 quotes Jesus' curt reply to his mother, who was worried about his whereabouts for three days: "Could you not tell that I must be in a place [the temple] which belongs to my father?" This cannot be the same youth who supposedly lived "in subjection" to his parents and whiled his time away as a carpenter.

Jesus certainly studied and preached during his lost years. There is no reason for Jesus to have stopped preaching, especially when as a twelve-year-old he told his mother of his commitment. This almost certainly means that he traveled and evangelized elsewhere, as nonbiblical evidence indicates. Being one of the greatest moral prophets to ever bless humankind, he would not have spent his formative years contented to be a carpenter in his boyhood community, which would have nullified everything about his prophecy as the Messiah, his anointed birth, and his prodigious childhood. For Jesus, this had to be a period of intensive study and contemplation that was guided by some unusual teachers, and probably of evangelizing as well.

On the point of Jesus being away from Judea during his lost years, there is one suggestive incident in the Bible. When Jesus suddenly emerged from his lost years for his baptism as a twenty-nine-year-old by John the Baptist, the people were amazed to hear him speak. According to Mark 6:2-3 they asked, "How did he come by all this? What is the meaning of this wisdom that has been given him, and of all these wonderful works that are done by his hands? Is this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" This clearly indicates that they had never heard Jesus speak in this manner before. The last question could be interpreted to mean that they did not know how a mere carpenter could speak this way, which suggests he undertook intensive study, and/or that they simply did not recognize him because of a long absence.

HISTORIC EVIDENCE OF JESUS IN INDIA

Most accounts of Jesus in India derive from a book titled *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*, written by Nicholas Notovitch, a Russian doctor who claimed to visit the monastery of Himmis near Leh, Ladakh (Kashmir) in 1888. (10) Notovitch said that, in visiting the monastery, he reviewed written verses that described the presence there of Jesus known as "Issa." Other passages elaborate on Jesus' travels in India, his teachings, his acceptance of the Shudras and other untouchables, and his conflicts with the Brahmans and the Zoroastrian priests of Persia. Jesus supposedly arrived in India at the age of fourteen and returned to Judea at the age of twenty-nine. (11)

When appearing in 1894, Notovitch's account became immediately and widely controversial. Christian churches denounced it as a hoax. The British Church Mission in India employed a professor to find and bury the documents described by Notovitch. The Anglican Church commissioned the services of F. Max Muller, the great German scholar who taught at Oxford. Muller dismissed it, largely by challenging the two main sources, namely a book of fourteen chapters and another document titled Nath Namavali preserved by the Saddhus of Yoga Nath. Muller also cited an interview of the Himmis monastery's abbot who insisted that no documents about Jesus existed and that Notovitch never visited there. (12)

By the mid-nineteenth century, as the first translations of the Indian Vedas became published, Europeans took a great interest in the possible historic connections between Indic and European peoples, which was indicated by the movement of so-called Aryan populations beginning about 2000 bc and their occupation of northern India in 1500 BCE. Most European languages originated at least partly from Sanskrit, which the Aryans probably already found in India (due to the earlier Harappa or Saraswati civilization) and then developed and disseminated the language. A particular question was whether the Aryan populations included Semitic groups who later settled Judea and Egypt as the tribes of Israel.

Twenty-five years prior to Notovitch's expedition Muller had written, "Between the language of the Buddha and his disciples, and the language of Christ and his apostles, there are strange coincidences. Even some Buddhist legends and parables sound as if taken from the New Testament, though we know that many of them existed before the beginning of the Christian era." (13) Muller then was joined by other scholars. De Bunsen stated: "The most ancient of the Buddhistic records known to us contain statements about the life and the doctrines of Gautama Buddha which correspond in a remarkable manner, and impossibly by mere chance, with the traditions recorded in the Gospels about the life and doctrines of Jesus Christ." (14) Doane wrote, "The history of Jesus of Nazareth, as related in the books of the New Testament, is simply a copy of that of Buddha, with a mixture of mythology borrowed from other nations." (15)

Was Notovitch a fraud who took advantage of the current interest? Certainly he had a following of many frauds or fools. One was the Muslim Ahmadiyya movement founded by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who claimed that Jesus also escaped death on the cross and returned to India. Another was Levi Dowling, writer of *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, first published in 1911 and still read today by New Age Aquarians. Dowling derived his account of Jesus in India obviously from Notovitch, although he claimed to have derived his knowledge from the so-called "Akashic Records," which are the unwritten thoughts existing within the universe that can be accessed by psychics such as himself. (16)

Notovitch's most credible supporter probably is Fida Hassnain, a retired Buddhist scholar from University of Srinagar, director of state archeology, and past head of the Kashmir Library and Archives. In a book written with Dahan Levi titled *The Fifth Gospel*, Hassnain restates most of the information provided by Notovitch: Jesus left Judea when he was thirteen. Traveling most of the way with merchants, he made his way via Damascus, Babylon, and Kharax to Persia and eventually to Kashmir to study and lecture. Jesus remained in India for about sixteen years; he studied Buddhism, the Vedas, and other Indic writing mostly in Kashmir, but he also lectured and traveled throughout India. At the age of twenty-nine he left India and eventually reappeared in Judea to begin his ministry. His time in Kashmir coincides exactly with his "lost years" in the gospels.

Hassnain cites other Asian sources that mention Jesus being in India. These include the following.

1. A Chinese text preserved in Tibetan called the "Glass Mirror" mentions Yesu, who was "a teacher and founder of the religion who was born miraculously, proclaimed himself the Savior of the World," and who followed Buddhist principles.
2. Twenty-one Muslim historical chronicles in Arabic refer to Issa (known as Yuz Asaph or various derivatives of this name).
3. The Persian *Kamal u-Din* by Said-us-Saddiq mentions Jesus in the late ninth century.

4. The Kashmiri Hindu text "Bhavishya Maha Purana" speaks about king Shalivahana (circa ad 80) meeting a foreigner calling himself Ishvara Putaram (Son of God). (17)

Buddhist records usually refer to Jesus as Issa-Masih, and Muslims use the name Yusu-Masih or some variant. One record of Jesus' sermons in Kashmir is in Bhavishya- maha-purana, written by Sutta in 115 CE. (18) Another record of Jesus' sermons in Kashmir was Tarikh-I-Kashmir, written later by the Muslim Mulla Nadri, who identified Jesus as Yuz-Asaph. (19) A Muslim record was Al-Shaikh Al-Said-us-Sadiq; Ikmal-ud-Din. (20) Another was the history of Kashmir written by Kalhana circa 1148 CE, which referred to Jesus as Isana, "the great guru" who impressed the king, Samdhi-mati. (21) A Persian account of Jesus in India is written around 900 CE by Al Shaikh Said-us-Sidiz and titled Mamal-Ud-Din. (22) Finally, the Apocalypse of Peter refers to Jesus sitting at one of the ten pillars erected in India by Ashoka: "As the Savior was sitting in the temple in the three hundredth (year) of the covenant and the agreement of the tenth pillar." (23) A passage in Song of the Yogi sung by Natha Yogas reads: "My friend Ishai has gone towards Arabia." A verse in the Puranas reads: "Having found the sacred image of Eeshai [God] in my heart, my name will be established as on the earth as Eesah Mashi [the Messiah]." (24)

Beside Hassnain, another respected supporter of Notovitch's find is Nicholas Roerich, a world-renowned painter and choreographer and founder of the Roerich Pact, an international agreement that started in 1935 and continues today that preserves historical art. In his autobiographical account of his time in India during 1923-1928, Roerich cites numerous conversations about the legend of Issa with people in Kashmir and Tibet who knew nothing of Notovitch's claims. (25) He states, "Still many other legends and manuscripts related of Issa in Asia," but he cites no particular manuscripts.

After accounts by Roerich, another persuasive rebuttal was written by Edgar J. Goodspeed. (26) One problem is that several of the sources that put Jesus in Kashmir during his lost years also put him there after his attempted crucifixion. The best known is the so-called Gospel of Thomas, which was written by Leucius at the beginning of the second century supposedly based on letters written by the apostle Thomas, who was a missionary in Taxila in the Punjab, letters that state that Jesus was there at the age of forty-nine. This and similar accounts are presented in books by Hassnain and Levi, Ahmad, and Faber. (27) Jesus was thought to have escaped death on the cross, recuperated, and fled to Kashmir to continue his practice. To this day, pilgrims and tourists alike go to the Rozaball section of Srinagar, India to visit the tomb that claims to contain the remains of Yousa-Asaf, the Muslim name for Jesus Christ. (28)

This post-crucifixion argument differs from the "lost years" argument. It has Jesus surviving a Roman persecution, leaving India for no obvious reason, living for more than one hundred years, and so on, and it contradicts numerous sources and testimonies that Jesus did die on the cross. The argument that Jesus went to India as a young man encounters none of these difficulties and contradicts nothing except vague references, and it in fact explains the otherwise unexplained biblical silence about Jesus' lost years. The critics, of course, are happy to merge the two arguments and use the latter to discredit the former argument.

However, the main problem with Jesus being in India is that its chief source, Notovitch, probably was a fraud. As already stated, the abbot of the Himmis monastery, when later interviewed by J. Archibald Douglas, denied that Notovitch ever visited the monastery. Pali was never used in that area, although Notovitch says this was the language translated for him into French. Himmis had been visited previously by other Westerners who never heard mention of Issa. Jesus' presence in India is not mentioned in any of the established sutras. (29) And most importantly, the sources cited by Hassnain and other supporters are all dated well after Jesus' life. Almost certainly, Jesus traveled beyond Judea, but probably not to Kashmir.

TEXTUAL EVIDENCE OF JESUS IN KASHMIR

Setting aside the historical evidence, the textual evidence is convincing by itself alone. Most of what Jesus said, which, if even confined to the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, was said five hundred years earlier by Buddha. Much of what Jesus did was done five hundred years earlier by Buddha. So, schooled as a Buddhist, Jesus spoke and acted like a Buddhist. Jesus was the most important source for the biblical accounts of his life, which he gave to Peter and which Peter gave to Matthew and Luke.

Indeed, but for inevitable differences in translations, what Jesus said may have been identical with what he read and heard of Buddha and Veda texts. The languages of Pali (which Buddha spoke) or Sanskrit (found in most Buddhist documents) had to be translated first into Greek or Coptic, then into Jesus' native Hebrew or Aramaic. More translation is involved with the writing and rewriting of texts after Jesus, including the final English translation in the King James version of the Bible. Considering these discrepancies in translation, many of Jesus' statements could have been identical with their Buddhist sources.

The accounts commonly known about both Jesus and Buddha are numerous, as indicated below.

- * Born as an incarnate god.
- * Born from a virgin mother.
- * Birth claimed as a divine event and prophesied as the same.
- * Birth attended by singing angels.
- * Birth attended by wise men bearing gifts.
- * Prodigious childhood.
- * As a child astounded teachers with knowledge.
- * Fasted in the wilderness for forty days.
- * Tempted while alone by the devil.
- * Resisted the devil successfully.
- * After the devil left, supernatural events occurred.
- * Were vegetarians (fish excepted).
- * Began ministry at thirty years of age.
- * Attract large following mostly from lower classes.
- * Attracted disciples who traveled with him.
- * Attracted one disciple who was treacherous.
- * Changed disciples' names.
- * Encouraged celibacy for their disciples.
- * Consecrated in a holy river.
- * Itinerant ministry instead of at a fixed place.
- * Performed miracles such as curing blindness.
- * Renounced worldly riches and required the same of their disciples.
- * Ministered to outcasts.
- * Advocated universal love and peace.
- * Taught mostly through use of parables.
- * Triumphal entries (in Jerusalem and Rajagripa).
- * Gave major sermon from a mound.
- * Disregarded by the dominant religious elite (Pharisees and Brahmins).
- * Just before death dispatched disciples to preach in other areas.
- * Death accompanied by supernatural event.

Both Jesus and Buddha issued moral commandments that prohibited killing, stealing, adultery, false witness, and coveting. Both emphasized the same moral themes: advocate peace, not war; avoid the corruption of wealth; help the poor; abolish slavery and caste systems; abandon self and selfishness; and love your neighbor, even your enemy. Many statements by Jesus resembled those by Buddha, as presented below.

JESUS: "A foolish man, which built his house on sand."

BUDDHA: "Perishable is a city built on sand." (30)

JESUS: "Therefore confess your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed."

BUDDHA: "Confess before the world the sins you have committed." (31)

JESUS: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins."

BUDDHA: "Let all sins that were committed in this world fall on me, that the world may be delivered." (32)

JESUS: "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

BUDDHA: "Consider others as yourself." (33)

JESUS: "If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also."

BUDDHA: "If anyone should give you a blow with his hand, with a stick, or with a knife, you should abandon all desires and utter no evil words." (34)

JESUS: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

BUDDHA: "Hatreds do not cease in this world by hating, but by love: this is an eternal truth. Overcome anger by love, overcome evil by good." (35)

JESUS: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

BUDDHA: "Let your thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world." (36)

JESUS: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to cast a stone at her."

BUDDHA: "Do not look at the faults of others or what others have done or not done; observe what you yourself have done and have not done." (37)

JESUS: "You father in heaven makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous."

BUDDHA: "The light of the sun and the moon illuminates the whole world, both him who does well and him who does ill, both him who stands high and him who stands low." (38)

JESUS: "If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."

BUDDHA: "The avaricious do not go to heaven, the foolish do not extol charity. The wise one, however, rejoicing in charity, becomes thereby happy in the beyond." (39)

The Hebrew prophecy of the Messiah reflects ancient Indian legends. Jesus' second coming to abolish evil corresponds with the legend of Krishna, who will return and save the world from evil and the destructive acts of Shiva. According to Serrano, "Three hundred years before the birth of Christ the story of Krishna had already been compiled in India, and had begun to influence the Essenes in the Middle East." (40) He outlines the parallel Krishna/Messiah legends: "Christ may have evolved from Krishna, the Hindu God-Avatar of Vishnu. Like Krishna, Christ was born of a virgin, and the idea of Mary's virginity may have been adopted from the Oriental legend. Both Krishna and Christ were born under the tyrants Herod and Kansa who ordered the killing of all the children. Other similarities include each being born at midnight and common character traits. And when they died the heavens were full of signs of their passing." (41)

As Muller pointed out, the Hebrew name of "Messiah" appears to be etymologically derived from the Sanskrit word of "Maitreya," in having similar sounds and the same meaning of an anointed figure that is prophesied to appear on earth to save his people. (42) Just as Jews recognized the coming of a Messiah in Old Testament writings, Buddhists read the reappearance of Buddha as the Maitreya in many Sanskrit texts, often referred to him as the prophesied Bagwa Maitreya (white traveler). Both recognized Jesus to be the fulfillment of the Messiah/Maitreya prophecy. There is also the likely derivation of the Old Testament Hebrew name for Jesus as "Ruhullah" from the Buddhist name of "Rhaula" for a disciple of Buddha. (43) In addition, Ahmad notes that Jesus and Buddha were known through virtually identical titles:

Jesus calls himself the Light of his teachings, so Gautama has been named the Buddha, which in Sanskrit means Light. If Jesus had been called the Master in the Gospels, so the Buddha has been called Sasta or the Master; if Jesus has been called Blessed in the Gospels, so the Buddha has been named Sugt, i.e., the Blessed. If Jesus had been called Prince, so has the Buddha been called

Prince. Jesus has also been described by the Gospels as one who fulfills the object of his coming, so has the Buddha been called in Buddhist scriptures Siddhartha, i.e., one who fulfills the object of his coming. Jesus also has been called by the Gospels the Refuge of the Tired, so has the Buddha in Buddhist scriptures been called Asarn Sarn, i.e., the refuge of the refugeless. Jesus has also been called the Gospel's King, though interpreted it as King of the Kingdom of Heaven, so also Buddha has been called the King. (44)

Finally, most of rituals and monastic practices are the same, as observed of Lamaism (old term for Buddhism in northern India) by Christian missionaries as early as 1660: "Lamaism, with its shaven priests, its bells and rosaries, its images and holy water, its popes and bishops, its abbots and monks of many grades, its processions and feast days, its confessional and purgatory, and its worship of the double virgin, so strongly resembles Romanism that the first Catholic missionaries thought it must be an imitation by the devil of the religion of Christ." (45)

Clearly derived from the earlier Buddhist story was the story of the Seven Seals in Revelations, which was supposedly written by John the apostle shortly after Jesus' death but perhaps by someone else within seventy years of Jesus' death. The detail between the two stories is virtually identical. St. John weeps because he sees no one worthy to open the book and to break its seven seals, which can be done only by the Lamb slaughtered in sacrifice. In the Buddhist story The Perfection of Wisdom, a book also was sealed with seven seals and induced the ever-weeping Bodhisattva to sacrifice himself to become worthy. This parallel is remarkable not only for the similarities of the religious logic, but also for the fact that both books have seven seals. (46)

THE UNIVERSALIST EXPLANATION

The most accepted explanation for the textual similarities is the universalist, ecumenical, or humanist argument that the spiritual condition of humankind is basically the same. To wit, whether we follow Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tzu, or Zarathustra, we all have the same three-pound brain, body and senses, the same emotions and needs and the same basic experiences of suffering, caring for others, fearing death, and looking to a higher being. The psychoreligious sameness is manifest in Sigmund Freud's discontents of civilizations, Carl Jung's archetypes, Joseph Campbell's hero legend, and William James's varieties of religious experience, to name but a few of many such sources.

Therefore, moralists of the standing of Jesus and Buddha are simply expressing the same human conditions and eternal truths. Borg acknowledges: "The correlations of these ancient texts are almost eerie.... Jesus' and Buddha's later teachings are as alike as their early biographies. Whether speaking of love, material wealth, temptation or salvation, they were two masters with one message." (47) Borg dismisses cultural borrowing or Jesus learning from Buddha: "The similarities are not of the kind to suggest cultural borrowing. They are not at the level of specific images or language. They are structural." (48) Christians and Buddhists have been anxious to find common ground. From the Christian side, Thomas Merton is most notable, with works such as *Mystics and Zen Masters*. The Buddhist side has been led by the Dalai Lama, *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus*, and Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*.

There are two alternative treatments for these extraordinary textual parallels. The first is to deny that the parallelisms exist and/or claim they are coincidental. This is hard to maintain against the existence of so many parallel quotations and circumstances. The second explanation is the universalist argument that the ethics and laws of the human situation are the same; thus Jesus knew nothing of Buddhism but, like Buddha, understood the same universal truths and morals that are evident to all enlightened human beings. This can be secular or sacred. The secular version holds that human biological survival and/or psychological well-being depends on certain obvious laws and ethics regarding human rights and obligations. The sacred version is that both Buddha and Jesus were hearing the same God, either as sons of God or as unusually enlightened "students" of God.

Drawing on Jung's cultural archetypes, Serrano states, "All of these stories seem part of a universal

myth, and the legends of Osiris and Akhenaton, and those of the Christian Father and Son, and of Krishna and Adonis, have much in common.... The myth is always the same and revolves timelessly down through the ages." (49)

The problem with the universalist argument is that ethics and laws vary widely among cultures, at different times within given cultures, and by different spokespersons or subcultures within given cultures. Ethics and laws differ even within given Christian churches or denominations. Other than the belief that Jesus was the son of God, beliefs vary widely even within Christian churches and denominations, arguably more widely than between certain Christian denominations and Buddhism.

The parallelisms between the teachings of Jesus and Buddha are unique, not universalist. There are no such parallelisms between what Jesus taught and what was taught by Zoroaster, Tao, Confucius, or Plato and the ancient Greek philosophers.

BIBLICAL SILENCE

The biblical silence about Jesus' lost years is one of the strangest hiatuses in history. It is a total silence about one of the greatest moralists in human history, covering seventeen years of Jesus' life between the ages of twelve and twenty-nine. Indeed, except for his birth and a singular account of Jesus as a twelve-year old in Jerusalem, there is silence about all but the last three years of his life. Why? Why did not Jesus' twelve disciples and his thousands of followers not comment on his life for twenty-nine of his thirty-two years?

Surely they did comment. Hundreds, even thousands, of accounts were written in the form of prayers, sermons, letters, or what became disparaged as the "apocrypha." By the second century CE, the church of Christ was destroying every piece of evidence of the life of Christ that did not support its doctrines, and the church continued its purging with more or less fervor throughout the succeeding centuries. The activity continued at the turn of the twentieth century when the very question of Jesus' travels as a young man was raised first by Notovitch. Different church authorities destroyed documents at the Himmis Monastery and later documents at the Tun-huang caves in central Asia. (50)

At stake throughout the centuries was the critical church doctrine that Christ was a Jew who started his own religion as the Son of God. Any evidence not supporting this view was condemned as "apocrypha" and destroyed or rewritten. Even the four gospels were rewritten to provide the impression that Jesus never left Judea. An example is Luke's reference to Jesus during the lost years. The original edition probably read: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the desert, till the day of his showing in Judea." It now reads: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him."

The church's later concerns about Jesus' Jewishness and holiness would have prevailed during his life and ministry. Jesus' identity as a Jew, the Messiah, and Son of God was critical to his credibility as a leader and to the survival of his religious/political movement. The Jews who followed him exposed their lives and fortunes to the occupying Roman authorities that persecuted thousands and destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. To be followed, Jesus had to be seen as the Jewish Messiah prophesied in Jewish folklore, as Jesus himself emphasized repeatedly, not as some kind of Buddhist Maitreya. His travel and exposure to Buddhist ideas could not be acknowledged, nor could the records of Buddhist influence upon the Essenes and other sects in Judea before and during Jesus' time. Hence the inexplicable lost years.

CONCLUSION

Was Jesus really a Buddhist? The answer is not yes or no, but rather to what extent Jesus was or was not a Buddhist. The historic evidence shows that Buddhism had spread throughout the area, from Mesopotamia to Egypt, which included Jerusalem as a trading center between East and West. Contrary to Rudyard Kipling's colonialist belief that never the twain shall meet, East and West have

shared the same history at least since Aryan populations began settling west and central Asia four thousand years ago, which are the ancestral stock shared by Jews and Hindus alike. East /West wars have been documented since at least the Trojan War 3,200 years ago. Both Alexander and Ashoka brought East and West together in different ways, and the Silk Road was well established during the beginning of China's Han dynasty at least a century before Christ.

The historic evidence of Jesus being in India is doubtful--Notovitch probably was a fraud. But no answers are found to the question of where Jesus was during his lost years. Certainly, he was no hometown carpenter, and he probably traveled extensively throughout Asia Minor, which increased his exposure to Buddhism. His travel is indicated by the many records found in India and even China and the keen interest demonstrated by Buddhists and other Easterners.

The textual evidence shows that Buddhism not only had spread West through Silk Road travelers and contacts between East and West from the conquests of Alexander, but also had been deliberately propagated through emissaries sent from India during the third century BC. This influence is revealed both by the actions and statements of Jesus and by the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, a term probably derived from Sanskrit.

The identities and parallels between the legends of Buddha and Jesus and between their deeds and statements require explanation. They are too close and too specific to be explained by a presumed set of universalist truths and ethics. If these truths and ethics are so universal and evident, then why is human history dominated by violence and ignorance? Why are the same identities not evident between Jesus and Mohammad, Jesus and Zarathustra, or Jesus and Lao Tzu?

When nineteenth-century missionaries translated and read ancient Sanskrit and Pali documents in India, they began to call Buddhism the Christianity of the East. But Buddhism came first, five hundred years before Christ. The more accurate dubbing is to call Christianity the Buddhism of the West.

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