



STATEMENT DB-565-1

THE BUDDHA AND WHAT HE TAUGHT
(Part One in a Four-Part Series on Buddhism in North America)

by J. Isamu Yamamoto

Summary

In recent years Asian immigration to North America has risen dramatically, and with these people has come their Buddhist faith. At the same time many non-Asian North Americans have adopted Buddhism as their religion. In order to present the gospel effectively to both of these groups it is clear that Christians need to have a fundamental understanding of Buddhism. Siddhartha Gautama lived over twenty-five centuries ago, but as the Buddha his life and teachings still inspire the faith of millions of people throughout Asia. The Buddha rejected the religions of his day in India and taught a new approach to religion — a life not of luxury and pleasure nor of extreme asceticism, but the Middle Way. Even in the West many find Buddhism appealing because its principles seem sensible and compassionate.

I must confess: I love peaches. The juicy texture, the sweet fragrance, the luscious taste — I love everything about peaches. I always have. As a youngster I grew up in San Jose, California. During the fifties, San Jose was a small town nestled in the Santa Clara Valley. At that time it was a valley full of fruit orchards. Today it is known as "Silicon Valley," and most of the orchards are gone. Forty years ago I could wander through orchards and enjoy cherries, apricots, and, of course, peaches.

One day I was with my dad, who worked in the orchards as a field hand. It was a hot sunny afternoon, and I was famished. When I saw a tree laden with peaches, I scurried over to it. There was one peach that was within my reach. I quickly noticed the red blush on its orange skin, and I knew it was ripe for my enjoyment. I touched it, and it felt soft and round in my hand. I wanted it.

Just as I was about to bite into it, my dad grabbed it out of my hand. He looked at it closely, and then he broke it open. A slimy worm was crawling around the core.

OBSERVATIONS AT THE PARLIAMENT

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

At the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions, held at the Palmer Hotel last summer in Chicago, I recalled this early lesson about discernment. In fact, three incidents occurred during the opening plenary session of the first day of this convocation, which was the centennial celebration of the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, when many of the Eastern religions were first established in North America.

Since I live in the western suburbs of Chicago, I gave myself an hour and a half to drive into the city, park my car, obtain my press pass, and find a seat in the Grand Ballroom where the plenary session would occur. It was not enough time, however, for by the time I entered the Palmer Hotel, all seats in the ballroom were taken. Initially I kicked myself for not allowing more time, but then I realized that God had it planned for a crowd of people to jam me against the lower end of a railing on a stairway going downward. As I looked over the railing, Parliament staffers were coming up the opposite stairway, clearing the path for the procession of dignitaries — the religious leaders who represented the many world religious traditions and who were to parade into the ballroom to commence the proceedings.

Soon a high official of the Parliament directed one group after another into the ballroom. What was amazing to me was not so much that I was an arm's length away from these religious leaders, but the way in which this official commanded the movements of these people. Here were the leaders in the Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, and Jewish faiths. There were also Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Jains, and even Wiccan priestesses. In addition, Catholic priests and Protestant clerics participated in this procession. But no matter who they were they all submitted to the directions of that Parliament official, who ordered them about like a police officer directing traffic.

A moment of levity occurred during the middle of this proceeding when the Parliament official cried out, "Where are the Protestants? Go get them!" He was obviously irritated that they had not promptly presented themselves according to his game plan. One of the spectators shouted, "They're upstairs having a drink." Loud laughter then erupted just as the Protestants scurried in with meek smiles on their faces.

This was the first incident in which I said to myself, *"These people are like lambs led to the slaughter, but unlike lambs they have chosen to be compliant."*

After the entire procession had finally entered the ballroom, I hurried to the overflow room where televisions monitored the plenary session. One dignitary after another blessed the conference, such as Swami Ghahanananda of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Lady Olivia Robertson of the Fellowship of Isis, and Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of the Roman Catholic church. They spoke of harmony and peace, and how this Parliament was a gigantic step forward in achieving unity among the different faiths.

As long as they spoke into the microphone, we could hear them well, but if they didn't, we could only observe them on the television screens. Most of the speakers used the microphone correctly, but one of the Native American speakers neglected the microphone and we didn't hear anything he said. Strangely, however, as soon as he concluded his presentation, the people in the overflow room cheered and clapped enthusiastically.

Here was someone who could have said anything, and the people in the room would have demonstrated their highest approval. I was amazed at how easily swayed were the people who attended this Parliament. This was the second incident that reminded me of how alluring was that peach.

Toward the end of the plenary session, Rev. Gyomay Kubose of the Buddhist Council of the Midwest offered his blessing to the conference. Kubose spoke directly into the microphone, and his words were clear and easily understood. He too urged people to promote world peace and universal brotherhood. He said we must create harmony. He then read an ancient Buddhist poem, which said that there is one source, one law, and that "all life is one."

How wonderful for Kubose and all the other speakers to encourage peace and harmony among different peoples of different faiths! Their words sounded good. They were certainly appealing. Indeed, they were enchanting. But were they really saying what we thought we heard? Was what appeared on the *surface* of what they were saying at the *core* of their beliefs as well? Can there really be harmony among all the world religions?

Since I have been a Christian for over 25 years and have seriously studied Buddhism for nearly 20 years, I believe there cannot be this harmony. Kubose's words were a third indication to me that a very alluring, but also very corrupt peach was being presented at the Parliament of the World's Religions.

In this article and the three that will follow, I would like to demonstrate how there can be no harmony between the Buddhist doctrine and the Christian faith. I will also reveal how we as Christians can show this difference to Buddhists who are currently living in our society.

In the past 20 years the number of legal and illegal Asian immigrants into North America has increased dramatically. In fact, estimates of the number of illegal immigrants alone entering America each year range from 50,000 to 500,000. With these people has come their Buddhist faith. Most Americans of Asian descent still are professing Buddhists, which accounts for a sizable population. For example, according to the 1990 U.S. Census, over 800,000 Americans point to Japan as their nation of origin. At the same time thousands of non-Asian North Americans have adopted Buddhism as their religion. Not surprisingly, there are now over one thousand Buddhist temples, monasteries, and centers in the United States.

Of course, Buddhists belong to many religious traditions, and in many cases it seems that there is little similarity between the various schools of Buddhism. Nevertheless, all Buddhists point back to the Buddha as the founder of their religion and accept certain fundamental principles that he taught. Therefore it is important that we preface our examination of Buddhism in America with a look at the life and teachings of this historical figure.

THE BUDDHA

Over three thousand years ago the Aryans (a powerful group of Indo-European-speaking people) spread in several directions throughout Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia. After conquering the Indus valley, the Aryans instituted Brahmanism (today it has developed into Hinduism) and the caste system in the Indian culture, which enabled the invaders to maintain the purity of the Aryan race and establish themselves as spiritual and social masters over the native Indians. The Brahmin (or Brahman) priests further centralized their power over all the castes and soon set up a religious monopoly for a privileged few.

In the sixth century B.C., a number of important religious traditions were formed. One was Jainism, which was founded by Mahavira and has survived to this day. Another was the birth of Buddhism, which was to rival Hinduism as a major world religion. The founder of Buddhism was Siddhartha Gautama, revered by millions of people throughout the world today.

The biography of Siddhartha Gautama was not written during his lifetime.¹ The earliest available accounts of his life were collected some three hundred years after his death. Since then, both historical and legendary descriptions of his life have been included in the Pali Canon and Sanskrit accounts. Historians have debated where to draw the line between history and legend, but no one can know what are the facts. What follows is an account of the Buddha which most Buddhists accept but which almost certainly contains much myth. Nevertheless, whether the stories about Siddhartha Gautama be true or myth, his life has been and still is an inspiration and model for all Buddhists.

Siddhartha Gautama² probably was born in 563 B.C. and died about eighty years later.³ His father was King Suddhodana Gautama, a raja (or chieftain) of the Sakya clan, a family of the Kshatriya (warrior-nobility) caste of ancient Bharata. His father reigned over Kapilavastu, a small district on the Indian slope of the Himalayas in a region that borders between India and Nepal.

At birth Gautama (his family name) received the name of Siddhartha, meaning "he who has accomplished his objectives." He is also called Sakyamuni ("the wise sage of the Sakya clan"), Bhagavat ("blessed with happiness"), Tathagata ("the one who has gone thus"), Jina ("the victorious"), and, of course, the Buddha ("the Enlightened One").

During Siddhartha's infancy, the sage Asita⁴ visited King Suddhodana's court and prophesied that Siddhartha would become either a great ruler like his father if he remained within his father's palace or a Buddha if he went forth into the world. King Suddhodana believed that if his son observed human misery in the world, Siddhartha would leave his home to seek for truth. Naturally, the king wanted his son to ascend to his throne after his death. Therefore, he issued strict orders to his subjects that the young prince was not to see any form of evil or suffering.

As Siddhartha grew to manhood, he manifested extraordinary intelligence and strength. For example, at the age of sixteen Siddhartha won the hand of his cousin, Yashodara, by performing twelve marvelous feats in the art of archery.⁵ Siddhartha might have married other women, but if so, Yashodara was evidently his principal wife.

Meanwhile, despite the diligence of his father to sequester him from the sight of evil and suffering, Siddhartha decided to elude the royal attendants and drive his chariot four times through the city. During his excursions outside his father's palace, he observed an old man, a leper, a corpse, and an ascetic.⁶ He realized from his observations that life was full of sorrows and that happiness was an illusion. Thus Siddhartha became aware of human suffering.

On the same night in which Yashodara gave birth to their son Rahula, Siddhartha left his family and kingdom to seek for truth.⁷ Siddhartha certainly anguished over his decision to leave everything he loved, but now that his son, whose name means "hindrance," was born and could continue the royal line, he felt free to begin his spiritual quest. He took his faithful servant Channa and his devoted horse Kanthaka as far as the forest, where he shaved off his hair and changed his robes. He left them there and began a pilgrimage of inquiry and asceticism as a poor beggar monk.⁸

For six or seven years, Gautama sought communion with the supreme cosmic spirit, first through the teachings of two Brahmin hermits and then in the company of five monks. He practiced the traditional methods of asceticism such as fasting. Other physical austerities included sleeping on brambles to mortify the desires of his body and abstaining from sitting by crouching on his heels to develop his concentration. For long periods he ate nothing except a single grain of rice each day.

Despite all these efforts, Siddhartha did not succeed in attaining truth. Finally, in a moment of profound insight he realized that his life as an ascetic was of no greater value than his previous life as a prince. Self-torture was vain and fruitless; privation was no better than pleasure. He understood then the importance of what he called the Middle Way. Abandoning a life of extreme austerities, Siddhartha ate solid food. This act angered his fellow monks, who thought Siddhartha had weakened and succumbed to his physical needs. They promptly deserted him, thoroughly disgusted with his seeming worldliness.

On the wide bank of Meranjana at Gaya (a major city in northeast India) near the village of Urvula, Siddhartha sat at the foot of a fig tree (commemorated as the Bodhi tree). There Mara,⁹ the evil one, tried to thwart Siddhartha from becoming the Buddha, enticing him with worldly temptations during his meditations. Siddhartha withstood all the challenges and experienced the revelation of liberating awareness — the way that provides escape from the cruel causality of samsara (the cycle of rebirths). He discovered the Four Noble Truths, which became known as *Pativedhanana*, the wisdom of Realization. Siddhartha henceforth was the Buddha — the Enlightened One.

After his enlightenment, the Buddha was faced with a crucial decision. He could either renounce the world and withdraw with his knowledge as most monks did who thought they had attained spiritual truth, or he could remain with people and share the Four Noble Truths with those who also sought truth. Out of his compassion for others, the Buddha chose the latter. Thus the followers of the Buddha believe that Buddhism is built not only on truth, but also on compassion — both wisdom and compassion are equally important to the Buddhist faith.

In the Deer Park at "Isipatana" (near the Ganges River in northeast India) two months after he had experienced enlightenment, the Buddha gave his first sermon, setting in motion the Wheel of the Law, the symbol of the Buddhist faith and of the Buddha as well. There he approached the five monks who had deserted him. At first they ignored him, but finally they sensed that he had achieved some kind of realization of truth. So they sat and listened to his teachings and were soon converted. He received them into the *Sangha*, the mendicant order that has spread the *Dharma* (the doctrine of the Buddha) and the *Vinaya* (the disciplinary regulations concerning Buddhist conduct).

For more than 40 years the Buddha dedicated himself to his ministry. Although he did not proselytize among the masses, he was concerned for others and was fired with a zealous sense of mission. The Sangha quickly grew. Many people were attracted to this man who was calm, reasonable, gentle, and who possessed a sense of humor.

The Buddha was 80 when Cunda the blacksmith served him pig's flesh or, perhaps, mushrooms. He became extremely ill. Before he passed away, he sent a message to Cunda saying that he should not feel guilty for being the cause of his death, for it was destined to be. The Buddha died at Kusinara (modern Kasia) in the district of Gorakhpur. Just before his death, he exhorted his disciples not to grieve. His last recorded words were: "Decay is inherent in all component things! Work out your own salvation with diligence."¹⁰

The Buddha probably never believed he was a god but rather that he was an enlightened human being.

THE DHARMA

Dharma is an Indian term, which can mean either conformity to one's duty within society or the basic principles of one's existence within the universe. In its general sense it is simply understood as the law of life. Within Buddhism, the Dharma took on a more specific meaning, being understood as the teachings of the Buddha.

After the death of the Buddha, his disciples convened their first council at Rajagrhya, where they tried to organize his teachings within a system of doctrines on which they could agree. These teachings were then orally passed down to future generations of Buddhist monks within various Buddhist communities in India. About four centuries later, in about 80 B.C., Buddhist scribes finally compiled the teachings of the Buddha on paper, which became the Pali Canon. The written collection of the Buddha's teachings is also called the *Tripitaka* (the "three baskets") because they contain rules for conduct, methods for spiritual attainment, and the ethics taught by the Buddha.

Like many of his contemporaries, the Buddha protested against the aristocratic religion of his day, first because it was corrupt and tyrannical, and second because it was too refined and intellectual for the common people. His teachings were open to all who would listen, and they were taught incisively and clearly so that they could be understood and experienced.

The religious tyranny of the Brahmins in India was uncompromising. The Brahmins held that the opportunity for the union of the individual soul (*Atman*) with the Universal Soul (*Brahman*) was reserved for the sage caste and that only through numerous rebirths could lower castes enter into this caste. Since the spiritual hope of the Indian people was to someday become one with Brahman, this doctrine forced all other castes to submit to the rules of the Brahmin

priests in order to attain to higher castes through rebirths. Not only this, but also it created an atmosphere of awe and fear of Brahmin authority.

Contrary to the prevailing Brahmin doctrine, the Buddha recruited disciples from all castes. According to him, nirvana (deliverance from suffering) is extended to everyone who strictly obeys the laws of a monastic life, notwithstanding their caste prior to conversion. The Buddha, however, did not seek to abolish the caste system. Instead, he believed it was necessary for the framework of the temporal life. Since Buddhist monks were committed to the Dharma, only they were exempt from caste distinctions. Nevertheless, however much the Buddha accepted the caste system sociologically, his teachings on this issue were a gigantic step forward in reforming the religious corruption of his day in Indian culture.

In addition, the Buddha argued against the philosophical speculations of the Brahmin priests, who tried to join the concept of the soul's oneness with God (Brahman) and the concept of reincarnation into a coherent theological system. The Buddha rejected these speculations as futile because he believed they prevented spiritual seekers from achieving true enlightenment. He considered such speculations as vain and nonproductive.

Furthermore, the Buddha rejected subservience to a supreme God and denied belief in an eternal self. His concept of karma (the transcendental effect in a person's life of actions accomplished in that person's previous existences) has sometimes been misunderstood. Certainly he believed that karma determines the kind of rebirth a person experiences according to past merit. The Buddha, however, did not believe there is a self or soul that is reborn. Instead, he taught that at birth there is a rearrangement of the elements of a person's identity, which are called the "self" — much as a "chariot" is a name for a certain grouping of parts that can be rearranged to be something else while still comprising the same parts.

The Buddha also defined nirvana differently from the Brahmins. Whereas in Brahmanism, nirvana or *moksha* is attained when the individual soul becomes one with the Universal Soul, the Buddha held that nirvana is actually the termination of rebirths — that is, the identity of an individual is extinguished. One way to distinguish classical Hindu teaching from Buddhist teaching on this subject is to present the traditional metaphors taught in these two religions. In describing nirvana symbolically in classical Hinduism, the individual self is like the raindrop that falls into the ocean, becoming one with the Universal Soul. In describing nirvana symbolically in Buddhism, the identity of a person is like a candle flame that is blown out.

The Buddha taught that true nirvana is not immediately accessible — several lives are required to achieve it. He declared that if nirvana depended only on the suppression of all feeling and thought, then the deaf, the blind, and the insane could enter into it. Instead, he said the journey to nirvana is long and difficult, but the fruits of this spiritual quest are inner peace and harmony with all beings prior to nirvana and finally deliverance from suffering at nirvana.

The Buddha believed that suffering dominates the lives of all human beings, and he taught a practical way of deliverance from suffering. These teachings on suffering are the heart of the Dharma and are known as the Four Noble Truths: (1) the universality of suffering, (2) the origin of suffering, (3) the overcoming of suffering, and (4) the way leading to the suppression of suffering. The first Truth defines the nature of being; the second and third Truths develop various aspects of being; and the fourth Truth indicates a practical way to deliverance from suffering.

The first Noble Truth is known as *Duhkha*. The Buddha taught that all people discover that life is full of sorrow through the experience of birth, aging, and death. Contrary to the pantheism of Brahmanism which taught that a divine thread is woven in all beings, the Buddha spoke of the self as a temporal creation cursed with suffering until deliverance is achieved.

The second Noble Truth is *Tanha*. The Buddha taught that suffering is caused by the false desires of the senses that

have been deceived into clinging to the impermanent world. A hopeless quest for immortality further aggravates human pain, either because people are obsessed with survival or because they fear the failure of obtaining ultimate peace.

The third Noble Truth teaches how deliverance from suffering can be attained. If the false desires of a changeable and perishable self cause suffering, then the desires need to be suppressed, abandoned, or rejected in order to nullify their effects. Ignorance of the way of deliverance and the delusion that there is a permanent self are the primordial cause of suffering.

The fourth Noble Truth is the Buddhist ethic, which the Buddha taught as the Noble Eightfold Path. It is a sacred path with eight branches called: right views or understanding, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct or action, right livelihood, right effort or endeavor, right mind control or concentration, and right mindfulness. These eight branches are not stages that can be lived out in succession or isolation from one another. Rather they are different dimensions of a total way of life.

According to the Buddha, suffering is the result of selfish desires that chain people to the wheel of insubstantial impermanent things. Living according to the Dharma aims at eliminating these selfish desires in ways described in the fourth Noble Truth, thus guiding the individual to nirvana.

Although the Buddha did not deny the existence of gods, he taught that the worship of gods obstructed one's quest for nirvana. To him the gods inhabit the cosmos and are impermanent like all other living beings. Thus they too must escape rebirth through nirvana. Ironically many Buddhists revere the Buddha above the gods. What was important to the Buddha, however, was certainly not the worship of gods or himself but the following of his teachings.

THE SANGHA

After the Buddha addressed his first sermon to the five monks near Benares, he continued to preach the Dharma to his followers rather than to the masses. The five monks and those disciples who came later became the first Buddhist monastic order known as the Sangha, a society of Buddhist believers. During the Buddha's lifetime, these Buddhist monks were wandering beggars and not priests. They tried to exemplify the way of deliverance through the conduct of their lives. If a person wanted to learn the Dharma and become a part of the Sangha, he had to become a beggar-monk.

Those who did join the Sangha were usually at least 15 years old. After one was accepted as a novice, his head was shaven to symbolize his renunciation of the world. He was then given a new name and a new robe. Finally, he made the vows of a Buddhist monk. Later, after having completed his term as a novice and having been accepted into the order, he again was given a new name and a new robe. At any time, as a novice or a full monk, he could return to lay life either temporarily or permanently.

The Buddha taught the Middle Way to his followers. He wanted them to abstain from self-torture as well as self-indulgence. Therefore, these early Buddhists renounced the world and material comforts, but they also rejected severe self-mortification.

Heated debate currently rages in Buddhist circles over the Buddha's teaching concerning women in the Sangha. Certainly women had great difficulty being accepted into the Buddhist community. Some say the Buddha was deeply suspicious of women: since he taught against the physical temptations of the world, he must also have denounced the sensual attraction that women exercise on men. Therefore, the Buddha continually warned his disciples against the sinister guile of women.

For a long while, the Buddha apparently resisted having women in the Sangha, but finally he consented to their becoming a part of his wandering entourage of followers. Nevertheless, numerous restrictions were placed on the nuns. First and foremost, the nuns were subject to the authority of the monks in all circumstances. "A nun," the Buddha laid down, "though she be a hundred years old must reverence a monk, rise on meeting him, salute him with clasped hands and honor him with her respects, although he may have been received into the order only that day."¹¹

Some Buddhists continue to hold this kind of attitude toward women within their Buddhist community. But other Buddhists argue that the Buddha went against the male chauvinism in his culture by permitting women to serve in prominent roles within the Sangha. His remarks about women, they say, were made because he could only communicate on the level that his listeners could spiritually grasp at the time. Later Buddhists would come to realize that women have equal value to men, which the Buddha already knew. It is indeed interesting that today the teachings of the Buddha attract a strong following within the feminist movement in the West.

Meanwhile, the laity during the Buddha's lifetime were permitted to follow his teachings while they continued to live in the world. Although they could earn some benefits (such as material prosperity) for aiding the monks in the Sangha, the laity could not attain nirvana or receive any of the higher fruits of the Dharma (such as inner tranquillity). One significant benefit they could receive from their dedication to the Buddha and their generosity to the Sangha was that they could be reborn as a person who becomes a beggar-monk — for only total renunciation of the world leads to deliverance.

After the Buddha passed away, his followers continued to wander from village to village, spreading his doctrine of deliverance from suffering and receiving food, clothing, and sometimes shelter. As the Sangha grew, the Buddhist monks broke apart from one another, forming numerous groups with each interpreting the Dharma a little differently than the others.

During the rainy season, wealthy landowners would provide shelters for many of these groups of monks. In time one group after another would accept the patronage of a landowner. Thus monasteries were established throughout India, the Sangha eventually evolving from a society of wandering monks and nuns to a community of Buddhist monasteries.

Since a systematic Buddhist theology was apparently not put into written form until four centuries after the Buddha's death, schisms split the Sangha as Buddhists within different monasteries argued over the content of the Dharma. By the close of the third century B.C., the Buddhists were separated into no less than 18 schools. Three major branches of Buddhism eventually developed: Theravada ("the doctrine of the elders"), Mahayana ("the Great Wheel"), and Vajrayana ("the Diamond Vehicle"). How these branches of Buddhism reveal themselves in the West will be the subject of my next three articles on Buddhism. At this point it is enough to know that the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are known as the "Three Jewels" of Buddhism.

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS AT THE PARLIAMENT

As the various forms of Buddhism have arrived in the United States, there has been a general desire among these schools to achieve some type of unity. But just as the leaves of a maple have their source in the same tree, yet must inevitably fall and go their own way because of their individuality, so the individual Buddhist schools have divided and separated because of their difference in practice and doctrine, despite their common origin. Now the Eastern winds are blowing across the West and bringing with them foliage of a variety of shapes, colors, and designs, but all from the same tree.

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

How should we, as Christians, respond to the presence of these people who follow the teachings of the Buddha in our society? Should we demand that they get rid of their idols? Should we forbid that they teach their false doctrines in our Christian country? Should we tell them to go back to where they came from?

These questions came to my mind at the Parliament of the World's Religions during one of the Buddhist sessions. The speaker, Havanapola Ratanasara, a Sri Lankan and president of the American Buddhist Congress, was enraged. Evidently he had come across a handout that Christians were passing out at the conference. After bitterly commenting on the handout, he read a portion of its content, which stated that the reader would be blessed "if you obey the Bible and cursed if you don't....You may come here from another nation as an individual but you may not bring your gods, festivals, your temples and your priests, nor your statutory ways, because they violate the blessings of our country and bring on God's judgment."¹²

Needless to say, these words not only infuriated the speaker but also angered most of his listeners. At that moment the handout confirmed in their minds that Buddhism is a religion of tolerance and peace while Christianity is a religion of bigotry and ignorance.

In one sense, the teachings of Christ *are* intolerant. Jesus quite frankly said there is no way to the Father except through Himself. In another sense, this handout disturbed me as well. I don't mind being ridiculed by nonbelievers because I believe that only in Christ can we find salvation. I do mind, however, when my witness is linked with a provincial and condemning attitude.

At a time when many countries are closing their doors to Christian missionaries, I welcome the opportunity to share my faith with Buddhists who are coming to our shores. Indeed, we should see the immigration of Buddhists to North America as an opportunity to share the Gospel with these people rather than a reason for God to angrily punish the United States and Canada. For that reason I want to examine the beliefs of the three major types of Buddhists who live in our communities in the next three issues of the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL — not for the purpose of equipping Christians with information so they can clobber Buddhists with the truth, but for the purpose of enabling Christians to intelligibly convey to them with power and grace the wonderful news that Jesus has died for them.

I have one final observation to share regarding my experiences at the Parliament. I attended another Buddhist session, which was held in a small room. There were about 20 people squeezed in this room to hear Yoga Guru, an elderly holy man from India, talk about Nagarjuna (Nagarjuna is as important to Buddhism as Paul is to Christianity) and the philosophy of emptiness in Buddhism.

After this modest gentleman spoke for about 10 minutes about Nagarjuna's background, one of his listeners interrupted him. He, like most of the listeners, was a Caucasian Westerner who was not really interested in what Yoga Guru had to say. Instead, after briefly saying how wonderful are the teachings of the Buddha and Nagarjuna, he then encouraged all the people in the room to chant the sacred Hindu word OM. For the rest of the session, everyone — except myself — chanted this word.

From my 20 years of interacting with people of other faiths, I knew that these people were much like most Westerners who dabble in Eastern religions. They are far more interested in what they can mystically experience than what they can theologically understand. Using the metaphor of the peach once more, they would prefer to enjoy the consumption of the fruit rather than examine the quality of its content.

Clearly, how we present the Gospel to *these people* must be different than how we present it to *Asian Buddhists*. This is another subject that I would like to address in my upcoming articles on Buddhism.

The life and teachings of the Buddha can be quite enchanting with their emphasis on compassion and wisdom. The

call for peace and harmony among people of different faiths can also be alluring. But what is the fruit that is really being offered? What will it cost those who partake of it? As Christians, we will resist such a temptation. But we must also be like my dad. We must open the fruit in the sight of Buddhists of all backgrounds so they can see what is crawling inside of it.

NOTES

¹ My primary source for the biography of Siddhartha Gautama is *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History* by Edward J. Thomas (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

² Devout Buddhists avoid the use of his personal name and refer to him as the Buddha.

³ Theravadin tradition dates his birth at 623 B.C.

⁴ Other accounts say he was visited by eight Brahmin holy men.

⁵ Other texts give her such names as Yasohara, Bhaddakacca, and Bimba.

⁶ Other accounts say he merely envisioned these four states of humanity.

⁷ Other accounts say he was born seven days before; others say that his mother conceived him that night.

⁸ Some accounts say his horse died of a broken heart and was reborn a god.

⁹ The name *Mara* is found in Sanskrit accounts outside of Buddhist texts in the identity of death, but not as a character. In early Buddhist texts, Mara appears as a demonic figure who personifies at various times evil, transitory pleasure, and death.

¹⁰ Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism* (London: Penguin Books, 1951), 41.

¹¹ Henri Arvon, *Buddhism* (New York: Walker and Co., 1962), 55.

¹² This handout was produced by the Cumberland Missionary Society in Evensville, Tennessee.

GLOSSARY	
caste system	Social groups in India that rank in a hierarchic order and within which there is a minimum of social mobility.
Pali Canon	The most complete and generally regarded as the earliest collection of canonical literature in Buddhism.
Sanskrit	The sacred language of India, which the Indians consider "the language of the gods"; means "perfected" and "cultured."
Theravada (Theravadin tradition)	The oldest surviving Buddhist tradition, which flourishes in parts of Southeast Asia and is known as "the doctrine of the elders."