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THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA

BY JERRY LAZARUS

GROWING UP IN INDIA as a Christian laid a foundation for my basic understanding of the life of Jesus. While I felt close to Jesus and his teachings, attending Sunday mass did not fulfill my spiritual longing. So I turned to a Yogi who was also an Ayurvedic physician; his clinic and ashram was just walking distance from my house. At the ashram I learned yogic practices—pranayama, hatha yoga, chanting AUM, meditation, and listened to talks given on Hindu scriptures. In my late 20s, I studied in-depth the primary scriptures of Hinduism and Buddhism. Inspired by the Buddha’s dedication to meditation, I took up the spiritual practices that I had learned during my teenage years, specifically meditation. As I deepened my meditation practice, I had a dream:

I was in a forest and saw the Buddha sitting in deep meditation, eyes closed. Crystal

clear water was running over his body, flowing from the top of his head down. It looked natural and he was unperturbed, still in silence. The land he was on was surrounded by water—like a moat. It was wide and deep that one could not get across easily. The dream ended with me standing there wondering how I could get across to approach the Buddha.

The dream was affirming and encouraging my meditation practice, confirming the potential of meditation as seen through the life of the Buddha. Water on the Buddha represents one who was full of Spirit and has approached the superconscious state cleansed by the Spirit. The moat represents the gulf that exists between the conscious, waking mind to the superconscious mind, the Holy of Holies. Effort is needed to get to that state by consistent meditation.

When Cayce gave readings, he obtained information from various sources, collec-

The Four Noble Truths are:

1. **Suffering (dukkha)**
Dukkha is a Sanskrit word that loosely translates to suffering, but it also means: imperfection, impermanence, emptiness, grief, or misery.
2. The cause of suffering
3. The cessation of suffering
4. The eightfold noble path that leads to the release from suffering

Dhammapada is a collection of 423 sayings of the Buddha, sometimes referred to as the *Buddhist Book of Proverbs*. The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path laid out in the *Dhammapada* are considered to be the central teachings of the Buddha.

“FOR NEVER DOES
HATRED CEASE
BY HATRED
HERE BELOW:
HATRED CEASES
BY LOVE; THIS IS
AN ETERNAL LAW.”



tively called the universal source or Christ Consciousness. Whenever needed he could draw from any religion, including “the spirit of Buddha, or Buddhism in its *crystallized* form.” (311-3) Cayce said that the Christ Spirit “associated with” the spirit of the Buddha in meditation. Hence, Christ “influenced either directly or indirectly all those forms of philosophy or religious thought that taught God was One.” (364-9) Here, Christ is to be viewed as “the Universal consciousness of love” whose “impelling spirit” is in all religions. (1376-1) And in meditation, we attune to or associate with the *universal consciousness of love* that existed before the worlds were. This is perhaps why Jesus said, “Before Abraham was I am.” (John 8:58) Therefore, all religions represent the one God. The idea of oneness is repeatedly emphasized in the readings, which quoted the biblical phrase: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4)

WHO WAS THE BUDDHA AND WHAT DID HE TEACH?

THE EARLY YEARS When we read the stories of saints and sages, we find that most grew up with economic woes, even to the point of poverty. Standing in sharp contrast is the story of Siddhartha Gautama, born in the 6th century BC to the King of Sakya—a tribe in ancient India. Reminiscent of the Holy Spirit’s revelation to Simeon of Jesus, the seer Asita saw in meditation gods rejoicing at the birth of Siddhartha, bringing understanding and welfare to the world. The sage traveled to meet Siddhartha, and holding the child, he prophesied that Siddhartha would become

a preeminent sage whose work will be of universal scope. Concerned that he might renounce the throne, Siddhartha’s father sheltered him from the miseries of the world and raised him in opulence with all the pleasures of the royal palace.

Siddhartha’s watershed moment came when, for the first time, he encountered persons who were old, sick, and dead, as well as an ascetic. These aroused in him a desire to know the meaning of life, the cause of suffering and death. Siddhartha claimed that this was the moment that all pride of his youth deserted him. What makes Siddhartha’s story most incredible is that he gave up all his riches, pleasures, power, and the kingdom that he was heir to for a life of asceticism—a practice prevalent among spiritual seekers of his time.

THE INNER JOURNEY At age 29, Siddhartha’s strong desire to discover truth set him on a journey at all costs, leaving his wife and newborn child behind. For six years, he wandered about the valley of Ganges, studying with various spiritual teachers. Among other spiritual practices of the day, he observed severe austerities including starvation. Through these extremes, he learned that moderation and balance were better; he called this path the Middle Way, a harmonious state between hedonism and asceticism.

After years of studying with various teachers and practicing many spiritual disciplines, he realized that though the teachers could attain to a higher state of consciousness, none had the greater concept of truth he was seeking. Hence, he abandoned all teachers and sought the truth, sitting alone

and still, deep in meditation in the forest.

While in meditation, all his past lives were revealed to him and he understood the purpose of life, reincarnation, suffering, and death. There are intimations in the Cayce readings, that we may know our past lives by the opening of our spiritual (glandular or *chakra*) centers in the body, through meditation. Thus we may claim Jesus’ promise: “I will bring to your remembrance all things, from the foundations of the world.” (281-32)

A man reported to Cayce that while he was reading *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James, “I felt every pulsation of my heart, of the nerves, of the blood—I became conscious of a vibratory force moving everything within my body—even the chair upon which I was sitting seemed to be in motion.” He wanted to know if it was “purely a case of the nerves” or a “religious experience.” Cayce assured him that it was the latter, much like what Swedenborg (as he studied), Socrates, Paul the Apostle, and the Buddha experienced when they meditated. “And as was by Buddha, in that position when meditation in the forest brought to the consciousness of the entity the At-Oneness of *all force* manifested through physical aspects, or physical, in a material world.” (900-187)

Throughout his life, and especially during his meditation periods, the Buddha faced temptations by *Mara*, the Tempter, personifying ego, evil, lust, and illusion—all aspects of himself. With steady faith and with the help of gods (*devas*) he triumphed over the temptations. Through a disciplined practice of meditation, at age 35, Siddhartha attained enlightenment (*Nirvana*)—a state

VERSES FROM THE DHAMMAPADA

The Buddha said that the Dharma is “lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely at the ending” and “the gift of the Law (Dharma) exceeds all gifts; the sweetness of the Law exceeds all sweetness, the delight in the Law exceeds all delights.” (*Dhammapada* 354) A comparison may be drawn to Psalm 1:2, “Delight in the law of the Lord; and in his law meditate day and night.”

Here are some examples of verses from the *Dhammapada* that are strikingly similar to teachings in other religions.

“Long is the night to him who is awake; long is a league to him who is tired; long is the round of rebirth to the foolish who do not know the true Law.”

“All men tremble at punishment, all men fear death; remembering that thou art like unto them, do not strike or slay.”

“The fool who knows his foolishness is wise at least so far. But a fool who thinks himself wise, he is called a fool indeed.”

“The fault of others is easily perceived, but that of one’s self is difficult to perceive; a man winnows his neighbors’ faults like chaff, but hides his own, even as a dishonest gambler hides a losing throw.”

“A man is not an elder because his head is grey; his age may be ripe, but he is called ‘Old-in-vain.’ He in whom there is truth, virtue, gentleness, self-control, moderation, he who is steadfast and free from impurity, is rightly called an elder.”



“The Buddha’s perception of the Dharma—as the central element of his faith-object and worldview—was such that we may properly include him in the category of those who taught that God is one.”

—RICHARD DRUMMOND, PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION, DUBUQUE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

of consciousness free from ignorance, selfishness, and suffering, and endowed with wisdom and compassion.

THE TEACHINGS People were so impressed by the Buddha, his countenance, and his teachings that they asked him, “Are you a god?” “No.” “An angel?” “No.” “A saint?” “No.” “Then what are you?”

Buddha answered, “I am awake.” The Buddha means the “Awakened one,” or the “Enlightened one.”

The heart of the Buddha’s teachings is the *Dharma* (Truth, spiritual laws), which the Buddha said was not confined to him, but has a larger, cosmic origin and significance. He told his followers that *Dharma* was to guide their thoughts and actions, and they must ground themselves in *Dharma*. The concept of *Dharma* and the emphasis on living the laws may be of interest to the students of the Cayce readings, for Cayce

also placed such an unequivocal emphasis on an identical concept he called “the Christ ideal”—a set of spiritual truths with a primary focus on the life and teachings of Jesus. Cayce emphasized that the ideal must guide every phase of one’s life. The Buddha told his followers that their primary objective should be studying and living the truths before teaching others, an objective that Cayce, too, placed over any other.

The Buddha’s ministry lasted 45 years; he taught all classes of men and women without distinction or discrimination—unlike the Brahmin teachers of his time. After his death at age 80, Buddhism spread mainly to other Asian countries. It was not until the 1800s that Buddhism was introduced to America. The 2010 estimate shows 488 million Buddhists in the world, representing 7 percent of the world’s population.

For me, the Cayce readings’ compelling

argument is that “The Christ Consciousness is a universal consciousness of the Father Spirit.” (5749-4) The Buddha and all beliefs that contain the spirit of Christ Consciousness “are as teachers or representatives” to be respected, whereas Jesus is the pattern for all to follow, whatever their religion. Cayce taught: “the Law of One [is] manifested in the man Jesus, as signified in the Christ Consciousness. (Please gain the difference of these!)” (1010-12) 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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