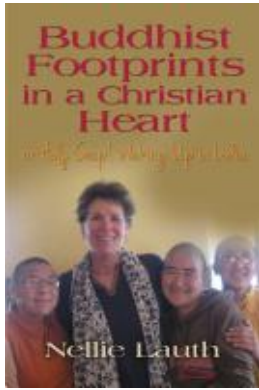


Buddhist Footprints in a Christian Heart

or Holy Crap! Waking Up in India



Nellie Lauth



Buddhist Footprints in a Christian Heart is a profound account of one seeker's persistent search to know what Jesus knew and to follow his footsteps as well as those of the Buddha. It describes the path of all mystics and is a compassionate guide for any spiritual pilgrim who longs to awaken. It is a voice that calls you, too, to join this courageous journey from the head to the heart.

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WHERE ARE WE GOING?

On Christmas Day, 2014, I was driving Margie to her daughter's house, who was hosting the family for the holiday. Her dementia was such that it took a while just to get her in the car and then, for about 20 minutes, she would repeat the same questions. "Where are we going?" "Why are we going to Nancy's?" "Why are you driving my car?" She was my first and most persistent spiritual mentor, and over the years had told me so many times that since I had been with her longer than with my own parents, I belonged to her. I loved that, I really did. With Margie's family, the Kellers, I had a second chance, as my own parents had died one after the other when I was in high school. I describe her as the one who turned me onto this path of searching and of Buddhism in particular. That Christmas, I was working a job that was a terrible fit for me and wanted only to write this book. I wanted to finally live and teach what I believe, and wondered if I was too old and if it was too late for me to start all over, again.

So there we were, on I-95, heading to Boynton Beach from Miami when she turned to me and said, "The trouble with you, Nellie, is this: You're too smart to work for someone else anymore and you need to do your own thing." I looked at her and was stunned. She was very lucid and clear. This was the old Margie who used to sit with me on the beach with a bottle of wine at Haulover Pier having deep conversations about life, death and spirituality. Although a dyed-in-the-wool Catholic initially, she began to explore esoteric traditions and Buddhism in the 1960's before anyone else I knew. We'd cover many

topics about the soul and the meaning of life, and venture into consideration about reincarnation and what resurrection really means. The old Margie was back, sitting in the passenger seat, and she wasn't confused or sad. She had given me the authorization to go for it. I looked over at her and asked, "Do you think it's too late?" And she answered with great confidence, "No. It will just happen."

For the next 30 miles, Margie began to speak of her own life, her childhood, and her family, including her children and grandchildren whom she adores; and she was so clear. I did not know then that she was giving me a eulogy—her own. Three days later, she passed away with her family beside her, including me.

This book is for her as much as for me, for she wanted to write her own book and always said she would. Margie believed she could teach and write better than anyone else, and had a terrible time surrendering to a teacher for this reason. She might have been right, for she was wicked smart despite only completing the sixth grade. She died with a library of books she treasured and with deep pride that her five children had graduate degrees and had accomplished what she could not.

In Buddhism we have a dedication prayer we say at the end of our practices. It is a great way to remember not to be attached to anything, for any reason, even what is considered an accomplishment. We dedicate the merit of our practice for the benefit of others, for all beings, without exception.

Nellie Lauth, MSW

I ask that this book benefit Margie for all that she did for me. I hope that it brings her merit, along with many others, all of you who have supported me with unending generosity and kindness. May you be happy and may you be free from sorrow.

Blessings to you all, always,

And in all ways.

December 2015, Santa Fe, New Mexico

INTRODUCTION

...Till by turning, turning, we come 'round right.

Shaker Hymn

It was a Tibetan Buddhist monk who taught me how the teachings of Jesus could be relevant today. How radical they both were, Jesus and the Buddha. Love one another and love your enemies as yourself. Develop the practice of compassion so that you can alleviate the sufferings of others. What a gospel and what a commandment! I used to tell Jesus in meditations and in prayer that he was no poster boy in terms of recruiting followers. I mean, who really wants to go through what he went through? "If I become like you," I'd say, "I'll be crucified." Then I would remember we are already crucifying ourselves, believing ourselves to be abandoned and believing the unreal to be real. His path of forgiveness, along with the compassion and wisdom of Buddha, offer the way out of suffering. They both brought a teaching of resurrection and rebirth and a method for being in this world and not of it.

It was a Tibetan lama who exemplified what Christ taught. *Khenchen* helped me understand the nature of the crucifixion as the nature of suffering, and while walking this parallel path to Christian pilgrimages, I found increasing periods of great peace and understanding. A Tibetan monk exemplified humility and love for all beings. For a short while I had the privilege of being his driver, and I watched him, witnessing his Christ-like approach to all others he encountered. In a shop, during a teaching, sitting quietly in the car, he was consistent. He approached each and all individuals with kindness and an open heart. It may appear to be impossible that the most Christ-like individual I ever met

has a bald head and wears the orange and maroon robes of an Abbot in a Tibetan lineage, but there it is. How great is that?

This book is a poor offering for such a teacher as he and for Christ, but it is my offering to them for the audacity and courage they had in insisting that peace, forgiveness and kindness are the way in which we can live and have our being.

Their persistent compassion has been my companion on what can be a lonely path. How can I thank them? Their footsteps are in my heart and in my mind, and for this, I am eternally grateful.

I offer this book with love for the benefit of anyone who seeks to follow them. May we all find peace and happiness and be free from suffering.

Holy Crap! Waking up in India

Holy crap! If I were more profound, I would have used a better expletive, but there it was, slipping out of my mouth as I rose from my mattress on the floor of a monastery in India, fully awake. Well, my body was still asleep. I rose from the dead. The body was lying there between two mattresses and covered in blankets and layers of clothing as it was freezing, while the real me arose, out of a terrible and deep slumber and said, “Holy crap!” I know, that doesn’t sound so spiritual, but there it is. The moment I awoke and recognized the body lying below me, I also noticed the Christ-like figure (could it really have been Jesus?) sitting beside me. I was mortified, not only for the expletive, but for the realization of what I had been dreaming. Was there a thunderclap? Was there someone over me announcing the time to wake? Was that the sound of trumpet and drum and cymbal?

There was an inert body trying to keep warm, and “I” sat up and saw the world laid out in front of me in all its insanity. In that seeing, I finally understood that the suffering of the world arose in my mind. It was *in* me, not *out there* threatening me. The thoughts of suffering create the reality of suffering. They are just thoughts, and as such, they are not real in the sense we call reality, real. Jesus was beside me, my Beloved Teacher, Brother and Friend, just gazing at me as he often does, with a look of quiet compassion. He was the reason I was in a Buddhist monastery to begin with, aside from the fact, of course, that I had a Christ-like teacher in my Tibetan lama. He was patiently sitting beside me and he

was so still. I saw the world in all its terrible desperation and its history of war, genocide and death. It was just as the teachers and texts described in that I saw, at the same time, another Reality, of peace and love. In that instant there was a shattering of what I perceived as reality. Peace alone remained.

There was a deep stillness, a space of calm at the center of chaos.

I knew that all I perceived, believed and conceptualized was *in* me and I knew I alone was responsible for my projections of fear, arising from ignorance. At the same time, I was witnessing this phenomenon from a still, quiet place deep within my heart and mind. I knew this while also recognizing that Truth was within me and I was free.

In one instant, I woke up suddenly as if cold water were splashed on my face. I saw the reality of Love. I recognized that it cannot be threatened as it is indestructible. And I also felt compassion for myself and for all beings that are asleep, dreaming of anger, terror, destruction and death. It had taken me eons to come to this point, decades to get to India, and then this moment, within a month before leaving, an instant of realization. I sat there in a state of profound awareness and with a terrible pain in my chest, as if my heart were bursting from chains.

He asked me, “Do you know what this is?” pointing to these images, and I responded, “Yes. This is what I have made.”

He replied, “These are the creations of your mind.”

In that instant, liberation arose. In that instant, I was resurrected and knew I had a choice. The world that appeared so “real” I now knew to be no more than a creation of an insane mind. I simply knew it. The choice of crucifixion or resurrection is a choice I make, and the results were before me. The unreal had become Real, and how this occurred is a mystery.

Holy crap!

The good news is that we are hallucinating. That’s the good news, for it means that all these dreams of suffering are just that—dreams. It means that finally, after seeking, searching and sojourning these past 40 years, I find out I am nuts! In that instant, this realization liberates me. I laugh out loud. (Of course, anyone who knows me would say I do that all the time—but this new laughter arose from pure Joy). It is insane, this world of such random violence and unpredictable events that appear to shatter lives and throw bodies viciously into a pit of torment. The “reality” of passing phenomena cannot come from something Eternal. The world doesn’t make sense. How could it? I don’t have to try to figure it out. Just accept that the unreal isn’t real and that a dream cannot replace reality.

I woke up in one moment. How can suffering or imperfection arise from Perfection? “My God,” I thought. “They were right all along.” The teachers I had followed and the saints of so many traditions were giving us a map, encouraging us to follow them. Through surrender and humility, I saw that I was dreaming a dream and that this dream was not more powerful than Love or God. It came to this—an instant of sitting up and waking from a nightmare. In a Tibetan Buddhist nunnery halfway across the world with Jesus beside me, I experienced a resurrection that was not in opposition to the teachings of the Buddha, but rather embodied it!

I was very lucid. I asked, “How long have I been out?”

“An instant,” he replied.

All time and space arise from an instant in which a gap appears in the Wholeness. That appearance is a mirage. What cannot be born doesn’t die and is not subject to the decay and decline of bodies and of the world in which we have our limited being. In an instant, the Heart Sutra was no longer a theory; it became for me a map of space. It is a description of the path to liberation. “Go, go. Go beyond the perceptual. Go further and then, go beyond that. Be liberated!” it sings to us.

I experienced an infinite space and an infinite peace, and I struggle to return to that, day to day, moment to moment. I experienced an instant in which an eternal peace was offered in exchange for the destruction and

death I created. Compassion continues to offer this exchange, saying to each of us, “Give me your deluded mind and I will exchange it for my deep calm and abiding peace.”

For 40 years in the desert I had obsessively pursued one thing—to know the truth. I wanted to know how to love and to forgive through the teachings of Jesus, while rejecting an approach that suggested it is only for special people. My deal was this: I would exchange what I thought I needed, in terms of the comforts of the world, for the peace he offered. To be honest, I didn’t think he’d take the deal. He is a great poker player. Christ took the bet knowing that he was holding a full house; I had nothing.

In an instant did Lover and Beloved become One, there in that Buddhist nunnery.

I simply woke up, and no longer hallucinating, found everything I sought. What was I thinking? Apparently I had no idea of the power of my thoughts. It is not an accident that the awakening occurred in *Smartening*, a Buddhist nunnery. Buddhist teachings had captured my heart years before and explained to me so much of what I believed Christ was teaching. Buddha and the Christ—The Awakened One and The Anointed One. They are my brothers and they lifted me on their shoulders so that I could see over the fence of my limited thoughts.

In an instant I just woke up.

There in the middle of the trash, rubbish, dirt and filth of my own worst thoughts, mercy arose spontaneously. Mercy arose to take the place of images of terror and death. Against a screen of pure compassion, a huge sky-like screen of pure light, I have spewed out these thoughts and stories and dramas and scenes. With thoughts, I painted faces and distinctions, and comings and goings, and held them in my memory, calling it reality. When all the images and pictures dissolve, the background—that Luminous State—alone remains. It moves to the foreground. Background becomes ground. The sky-like and vast spaciousness that is the true nature of the mind emerges.

All of this understanding appeared instantaneously as if One Thought replaced the countless delusions I had made up. “In the beginning the Word was with God” became, “The real is always real—the One Reality.”

I have resisted writing about these experiences and my pilgrimage for I don’t want to seem crazy. Huh—too late. Either the world is nuts, or the great sages and teachers are. Without compassion, we are fish out of water. We respond to teachings of emptiness with guffaws. Usually great suffering and pain result in desperation. That desperation becomes the motivation to do whatever it takes to heal. It was true in my case, and for that I am truly grateful.

I have struggled sharing my story, knowing that others have written of this, and comparing myself to them, I have demurred. I write because I have to. For those who are drawn to this writing and to this story, I hope it can be used as a candle to highlight your own path. You are my sisters and brothers, and I offer this in peace and humility.

I am stunned that someone as ordinary as me and as flawed as I am, could have even a taste of this Reality. Here, in the second millennium after Christ, someone imperfect and in pain, could “give away everything you own, take up your cross, and follow me.” That’s what I did. I am in awe that this call for pilgrimage and for renunciation isn’t an ancient call to ancient peoples, but a constant Remembrance of a Truth that is always with us. However, it is one we ignore, believing it to be a path of sacrifice, not knowing it is a path of freedom.

Despite all the evidence the ego and body conjure up on a constant basis, the Truth of Love—everlasting, constant Love—it alone IS.

In that monastery, one mind finally gave up trying to attribute all kinds of explanations, and saw all of these stories and conditions for what they are—illusory and dreamlike. It was both shattering and freeing. The words, “holy crap”, might be the yin and yang of it all. I am both Perfect and imperfect, and in the midst of all my crap, there is still the Sacred. That thought is both humbling and healing.

When I returned from my second and shorter trip to India, I began this writing. I am finishing this now in a casita, a small and simple room that is not unlike the monastic digs of India, only I am in Santa Fe, New Mexico. From my window I have a view of a vast sky not unlike the vastness of space the Buddha describes, and not unlike the unlimited love offered through the teachings of Jesus.

It is overwhelming to the limited mind. When pure space is contemplated, temporal time and space are transcended. Love beholds love. It is not extraordinary, but very ordinary. "Oh, there you are. You are no longer hallucinating."

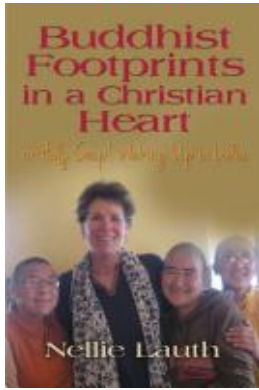
I am reminded of a time when I was in retreat with *Rinpoche*, my Tibetan lama, contemplating the primordial perfection of compassion. I experienced a leave taking of my senses. I was transported to an unimaginable space. It was beyond comprehension and conceptual thought, as if experiencing the spaciousness of compassion itself. It was a taste of enlightenment. I told him about it and I said, "I never thought that this would happen to me," to which he simply replied, "It had to happen sometime. Have some water."

These are not the ramblings or the insight of an Enlightened Being. This is the writing of an ordinary, modern seeker who has, I admit, an extraordinary desire and determination to know the Truth, if only to save me from my own prison of pain. I didn't set out to save the

world, but to save myself. I found out that to save one's self *is* to save the world.

India gave me the space and opportunity to wake up. That is her Grace. She is the Mother that called me home, the cradle of pilgrimage and pilgrims for ages. In an instant, in a Buddhist monastery, a Christian woman awakens to the truth that, indeed, all beings without exception are worthy of liberation, and if one individual liberates herself, she finds that all others are liberated with her. They are asleep as she was, but if she awakens, she can remember for them and hold them close to her heart.

This is the story of the trip to India that saved my life by crushing it. It is the story of the completion of a long pilgrimage that can be best described as the one from the head to the heart. May this bring you peace, inspiration, hope, laughter and joy. That is my wish.



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