

# A Momentous Decision

After a quick excursion to Delhi to check for mail and to Lucknow to spend a couple days at my home way from home (the Stringhams), I headed back to Bodh Gaya. I once again “enjoyed” my 3<sup>rd</sup> class Indian Railways accommodations. I have a powerful image in my mind from this time, which highlights the vast distinctions in Indian society that existed 50 years ago (and still exist today). I arrived at the station early one morning to catch a train. The train platform was covered with poorer people sleeping on their blankets. A wealthy Indian lady arrived dressed in a gorgeous sari with accents of gold thread woven into the pattern. She gingerly made her way through the mass of humanity on the platform and into her first class carriage.



I got back quickly into the daily routine that I’ve described

in an earlier post. There was some excitement during the month of March. The advent of the full moon on March 11 was celebrated by oboes and 10 foot trumpets from the roof of the Tibetan temple. The following day, the Hindus celebrated Holi. It's the festival of colors, in which colored water is squirted on passersby, something none of us escaped entirely.

Something more profound was going on in my mind and heart. As much as I wanted to find an honest way of holding to both the Christian faith and the Eastern religious worldview, I was finding it more difficult. Two experiences led me to make a far-reaching decision to at least postpone my Eastern search in order to more fully investigate the form of Christianity that I had witnessed in Christians in India and was reading about in the Schaeffers' books.

One incident is permanently seared on my mind. One evening, our little group of Zen Buddhists had gone over to the Mahabodhi temple to meditate under the Bo tree (the ancestor of the tree under which Gautama Buddha gained Enlightenment). I still have two leaves from that tree. We had an especially long time of meditation seated in a circle. One of our group, a big dude, Danny, had played football in high school and college. As a result he had very bad knees, which made it difficult for him to sit cross-legged for long periods of time.

At one point in the meditation, Danny shifted his position ever so slightly to try to relieve the increasing pain. Zengo noticed and commanded, "Stop moving!" Another 10 or 15 minutes went by slowly. Once again Danny moved slightly. This time, Zengo shouted, "Stop moving! The pain is all in your mind!" I can still recreate the scene in my mind. A Tibetan Buddhist monk in his maroon robe is crossing behind our meditation

circle. Then Danny falls over backwards from the pain that was all in his mind, his legs still crossed.



The second incident was, in retrospect, of even greater significance. I've mentioned before that each member of our

group had a daily interview with Zengo, during which we could ask any question we wished to ask. One day I asked Zengo, "What do you think of Jesus Christ." Zengo took a moment to formulate an answer, then replied, "I think he was very enlightened man." Either that same day or the next, I was reading in the Bible I carried with me and "chanced" to read in John 14:6 this outrageous statement by Jesus. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Here was this highly enlightened man claiming to be the only way to God.

Gautama Buddha never declared himself the only way to God or encouraged any kind of veneration from his followers. There's a famous Zen koan (a paradoxical statement that is supposed to shove the mind toward enlightenment) that goes, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him!" The basic idea is that any conception of Buddha outside oneself needs to be put to death before being able to discover the Buddha nature within. Something like that. Whereas Jesus was pointing to Himself, the man standing before His disciples and proclaiming Himself as the only way to God, the only full embodiment of Truth and Life.

This shocking statement, more than any other single factor, led me to a pivotal decision. Our Zen group was about to leave for Nepal to escape the oppressive heat of an Indian summer. I decided to travel with them but then to part ways rather than continue to pursue Zen or any other Eastern practice. Instead, I purposed to travel back overland to Switzerland, to hopefully participate in the life and community of L'Abri. I wanted to fully examine the way of Jesus, knowing that I could always return to the Eastern way if the Jesus way proved to be a dead end.

From the end of March to the end of April, I was going to be once again on the road.