

The Sunrise of the East:

THE LIGHT THAT KNOWS MY NAME

By Nilus Stryker

I HAD been a Buddhist for ten years. I was ordained after studying for seven years with my teacher in a small family line of the Nyingma Lineage of Vajrayana (Tibetan) Buddhism. I had a Spiritual Master in that lineage whom I loved and still love. He was and continues to be an example of kindness in my life. It was through his instruction that I began to see the world with wider eyes and a bigger heart. I was ordained as a *Ngakpa* in the Nyingma Lineage. A *Ngakpa* ordination is a tantric priestly ordination. Though vows (*damtsig*) are taken, these vows are not based on celibacy or abstention from meat and alcohol. Our *sangha* (community of practitioners) was not renunciate but followed basic instruction in *tantra* and *dzogchen*,* both based on transformation rather than renunciation, and on sudden moments of insight that flicker in duration and intensity leading to *rigpa* (a state of mind and perception based on relaxing into the natural state of enlightenment). Those moments were engendered by the energetic intervention of our teacher or by our ability to “relax” into the fabric and texture of our experience of being and non-being—experience which had been brought

* *Tantra* is a set of teachings emphasizing the relationship of practitioners to their everyday life experiences. *Dzogchen* is the falling away of teaching forms based on sudden and spontaneous awakening.

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about by the practices we had been taught. Over the years those moments seemed to manifest in seeing the world more and more in kindness, gratitude and compassion. My teacher used to say that Buddhism was ninety-nine percent method and one percent truth. The practices in Buddhism are used to develop a clarity and sense of awareness which enable one to discern a reality not skewed by a neurotic mind and neurotic habits of response.

We were a non-liturgical lineage and had silent sitting, yogic song, mantra, and sets of psycho-spiritual, physical exercises as the core of our practice. I made pilgrimages to sacred sites in Nepal and attended retreats with my teacher and vajra brothers and sisters both in the United States and in Wales. Those retreats, both joint and individual, were very meaningful in my life. And I can definitely say that I had some “openings” of view, widenings of perspective and experience that I attribute to my teacher and the practices I was given.

One afternoon in late January of 1999 I went to my altar for my regular daily practice. Usually I began with yogic song and mantra and then did silent sitting. I lit the candles on my altar and after finishing my song and mantras began my silent practice. I can't say exactly how long I had been sitting when I heard my voice say in my own words aloud, “I miss Jesus.” I said this aloud. It seemed like it came through me rather than me saying it, but there were no external voices. Clearly I was saying it.

When I said, “I miss Jesus,” I was filled with longing. I don't know what else to call it. I ached. I hurt inside. I felt this absolute longing and I couldn't believe it. I tried to regroup my attention and awareness to continue my meditation. Often in meditation one experiences extraordinary perceptions, smells, visual illusions, sounds perhaps—psycho-spiritual anomalies that throw one off the track and distract one from the coming and going of thoughts which one is trained to let rise and fall without attachment.

Thoughts come and go, but the method I was using tried not to attach to any thought so that one would avoid following a thought

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into an internal narrative or story. So I tried to see this experience as a *nyam* (meditational experience) and not put much stock in it. I could not regroup or relax, so I got up. I thought, well that's early childhood stuff I'm projecting onto my meditation. It's mommy-daddy stuff about love that I wanted and didn't get, and must be about my early childhood Christianity. My parents were nominal Christians, and I had been raised as a Presbyterian mainly because that was the church close to our house. My parents certainly were not Bible-thumpers.

I ended my practice session and went to the kitchen and began doing dishes. I did my household chores and didn't think about the experience very much except for the continued sense of longing which did not seem to dissipate. I couldn't seem to shake it no matter how I tried. There was this terrible longing in me that I couldn't ignore or explain. I didn't mention it to my wife, yet I couldn't stop thinking about it or find relief from the ache and hurt. We had an ordinary evening, watched television for a while, chatted, and then I went into my studio to paint. I am an artist and my studio is attached to our cottage, and I sleep there most nights if I'm painting late. After a few restless attempts at working on a canvas I had started, I went to sleep.

That night, at three in the morning, I was awakened by a "presence" in my room. It was a Longing. I don't know what else to call it. I felt a "presence of Longing" in the room. I was worried that someone had broken into the house. I got out of bed and checked all the rooms. There was no one except my wife in the house, and she was still sound asleep. Since I was awake I decided to do some practice and went to my altar in my studio. I meditated for probably thirty to forty-five minutes and returned to sleep. The next morning I made sure all the doors were locked and looked around the house somewhat uneasily to see if I could find anything that would explain the "presence." We have no pets, and I asked Diane if she had gotten up during the night for any reason. She had slept soundly and asked if there was anything wrong. I told her I had gotten up and had not been able to sleep for a

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while. I hesitated to say anything about a sense of a “presence.” I didn’t want to scare her and I didn’t want her to think I was crazy.

The next night I was again “called” awake. I can’t say exactly what it felt like other than that this “presence” was in the room. No lights, no hallucinations, no sounds, no fanfare, yet most certainly a feeling that I was being called awake by a “presence.” I can only say it was a “presence of Longing.” I ached inside and hurt and longed for something I couldn’t express. I felt a million miles from home.

It should be said here that my life was pretty happy. My wife, of twenty-five years, and I loved each other. We are both artists and had a good business in that field. We had a small cottage and garden in a small coastal town near San Francisco which we loved. I had a wonderful spiritual teacher and I had taken vows and was committed to my Buddhist lineage and path. And I was pretty healthy for a fifty-some-year-old fat man. Everything was generally okay. No major crisis. Nothing that seemed to speak to the experiences that I was having nor to the incredible sense of longing that I was feeling. I felt like I was in love but I didn’t know with whom or what. I was like a teenage boy in love. I couldn’t stop feeling this ache and longing and confusion. It had all begun when I had said, “I miss Jesus,” yet I couldn’t believe that was really the source of this hurting. It had to be something else, but I didn’t know what. I had tried to sort it out rationally, making an inventory of possible sources, motives, events that would engender this longing. I was stuck. Nothing I listed seemed to be a reason for the experience of longing, and certainly not for the feeling of a presence in my room at night.

Every night for a week I was called awake at three o’clock. I was beginning to get a bit scared. I had no explanation of what was happening nor any idea how I should deal with it. I realized it was beyond anything I had ever experienced, and hoped my teacher could help me to both understand and cope with the experiences. If anyone would know what was happening it would be him. I finally contacted my teacher in Wales and explained the entire sequence of experiences. He

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gave me the name of a Tibetan “deity” to call upon and a mantra associated with that “Awareness Being” (our *sangha* used the term Awareness Being as opposed to the traditional term deity). He said that, if the experiences continued, I should do the practice and recite the mantra he had given me.

That night I was awakened again by the sense of a “presence.” I went to my altar and lit the candles. I sat in silent meditation for a while before using the mantra and calling on the Buddhist deity that I had been instructed to use. It was a powerful meditation. There was a deep quiet and I felt a calm and stillness that seemed to penetrate the room. I called out the name of the Awareness Being as instructed by Rinpoche (an honorific term for a Vajrayana teacher which literally means Precious Jewel). To my surprise I heard a voice say, “I am not that.” I can’t tell you where the voice came from. It sounded like my voice even though I have no recollection of actually speaking the words. I cannot tell you exactly if the voice was interior or exterior but it was a voice which clearly and distinctively said, “I am not that.”

I was completely shaken. I sat dumbfounded and in silence. I got up and went outside. It was probably 3:30 in the morning and there was a pale moon just visible over the ocean. I sat on our front steps and began to cry. The longing and ache inside had not lessened but seemed to have increased. I was at my wits’ end. I knew something was happening; I just didn’t know what. I cried my heart out. I sobbed. Finally I lifted my head and asked, “Who are you?”

When I said those words something incredible happened. Please understand that I have no sense of the appropriateness of this. I have no way to even explain how or why it happened. I am the stupidest one. I have no right to even attempt to explain what happened nor to say that I in any way comprehend or deserve what happened. But when I spoke those words, I was filled with a soft Light. It wasn’t visible in the ordinary sense. It was a luminosity that filled me. I cannot describe the Light nor describe how light could bring a “knowing.” But I knew that a Light had come inside me and knew me personally. I

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know that seems impossible, but it happened. The Light not only knew me, Miles, a quick-tempered curmudgeon, but loved me, actually loved me. Forgive my presumption, but it is what I felt. I have no way to tell you how I knew that, but I did. I didn't know what to call it. I felt awkward trying to say God or Christ, yet I felt it had something to do with God and the Christ/Logos. I couldn't bring myself to say that, however. It seemed too impossible and so loaded with everything I had rejected in Christianity (the Protestant Christianity of my childhood). It was impossible to say the words, though I felt like a piece of God had broken off in me and that it was Love. I felt Love. I felt a Divine Love. I felt a Love that came to me personally, like it had called my name as it came inside me. Yet it seemed to have been always inside me, although I had not known it. It came inside and burst forth at the same time. I know that is hard to even imagine and I have no other words that I can use to try to explain it. If there were any way for me to say this in a clearer way I would.

I got on my knees and prostrated myself on the ground. I can't tell how long I was there, but I eventually sat back up on the stairs and again cried. I have no way to explain what I felt. It may be wrong to say, but I felt words fall away as the Light entered and I felt a "knowing" in me that seemed to be born with Love. I knew that God loved me yet I couldn't say the word God. I knew that Christ called me though I couldn't say the word Christ. I had come to some realizations in my Buddhism, some small flickers of understanding the Big Picture through my teacher and my practice—but nothing like this. I was glowing inside with Love and a knowing of Light. It wasn't a real glow, visible or tangible, yet I felt like I was shining inside. I couldn't tell if God was longing for me or I was longing for God. It seemed almost like we met in the longing. For the first time the Longing seemed to be the experience of the presence of God and my relation to Him. In Buddhism we often talked about finding the presence of our awareness in a life circumstance. In tantra all that is experienced presents the possibility of experiencing enlightenment in that moment. Our practices

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were often based on finding the presence of awareness in the emotion or life situations we were experiencing. I seem to have found the presence of my awareness in the longing for God as Light and Love, and in His longing for me.

For the first time in my life there was Divine Love, a Love that knew my name. I don't know how long I sat on the steps. The sky seemed to lighten but I can't say when I went inside. I'm sure I eventually went to sleep but I don't remember exactly when that was, even though I woke up in bed with my clothes on.

The next morning, when I told my wife what had happened, I said that A Light That Is Not Light That Knows My Name had come inside me. I didn't know what else to call it. I described the experience but I still couldn't bring myself to say the word God, nor could I use the name Christ.

Of course my wife, being a good Californian, asked if I was "stoned." We both laughed. It had been a long time since that had been a possibility (no smoking of anything is allowed in our *sangha*), but she listened and I told her the details. I knew at that point that everything was different. Somehow Love had entered the picture, and life as I knew it had come crashing down. My teacher was an atheist, and the Buddhism that I had learned certainly did not present the idea of a creator God or of a Divinity that was a source of Love. We spoke of compassion and wisdom, kindness and awareness, but rarely was the word love ever mentioned, and certainly not within the context of a Divine Love. My wife was scared, I could tell. No matter how much we joked about it she felt that everything was up for grabs. She didn't know where it would lead me. I didn't know, either. Everything had become pretty stable in our lives. That night everything was shaken to the core and my wife sensed it.

When The Light That Was Not Light That Knows My Name infused me with itself, I knew things I could not explain. I experienced a personal Love from a Source that was beyond anything I had experienced before. It was wonderful and terrible at the same time.

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Why couldn't I use the word God or Christ? What held me back? It seemed too chilling to even think that this was God/Christ, yet for the first time it seemed possible. It was possible that this was God's Love. It was possible that this was an experience of The Christ. I guess in some ways that was too "uncool" to say. I certainly didn't want to be a Christian. I had castigated Christians as hypocrites and idiots for years. As a Buddhist I was a bit kinder in that regard but I still had no intention of being a Christian nor any desire to explore that path. I never really could get rid of a concept of a God even though Rinpoche said I had to deal with my idea of God in relationship to blame. I blamed God for a lot of stuff in my life and he said that in order to grow spiritually I had to let go of this blame. He was right.

One world was opening and another was falling away. The vows I had made in becoming a *Ngakpa* were taken as lifelong vows. The commitments I had made were seen as "lives-long" commitments both to my teacher and to my lineage. Now I faced the fact that there was a Creator of Love, a Source of Love and a Spirit of Love that was unexplainable in my Buddhism, and from my experience, a reality that could not be denied. I struggled with what to do. I had no context in which to sort out the experience. My teacher's atheism seemed to preclude the possibility of him understanding the reality that had just come alive in my life. I had had an experience that seemed to turn my Buddhism inside out. The structure of our practice and the instruction of my teacher seemed limited and, I had to admit, incomplete. I knew my teacher was wrong about God. What was I going to do?

Panteleimon David Walker is my acupuncturist and a member of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). We had discussed Buddhism and Christianity for months as he treated me. The next week I had an appointment with him. After we greeted each other he said, "I have a book for you I think you will enjoy." It was *Christ the Eternal Tao* by Hieromonk Damascene, a book that revealed Jesus Christ as the fullness of Grace and Truth, and Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the fulfillment of what people sought in Eastern religions and

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philosophy. That night I pored over the book. I have no idea when I went to sleep but I read it for days, and it gave me a foundation for sorting out the experiences that I had been having in relation to The Light That Is Not Light That Knows My Name.

I knew there was a Source of Love and an Energy of Love, yet I hesitated to call it The Holy Spirit. I had left my childhood Christianity far behind. The words still stuck in my throat.

David suggested I try to attend an Orthodox church and mentioned an OCA church in San Francisco. Yet that seemed too weird, too much of a commitment to a religion I had left. I wanted something that wasn't based on an institutional setting. The last thing I wanted to do was get involved in a church. After all, I was a Buddhist. Why was I being drawn into another religion, especially Christianity? I had made a commitment to my teacher and lineage. I shouldn't be exploring, at this late date, any other form of worship. But my Buddhism didn't address or acknowledge the experiences I had just had in relation to the Divine. I knew as certainly as I knew anything else that the experiences I had had of A Light That Is Not Light That Knows My Name were real and true. My teacher said there was no God, but I knew that I had experienced Divine Love personally.

I resisted the idea of a church, yet Orthodoxy had an ancient contemplative tradition and a way of working at deepening and widening a personal sense of transformation of self in relation to the Divine. Fr. Damascene's book opened me to the possibility of at least exploring a tradition in Christianity that was far beyond any Christian tradition I had ever heard of. I called the Holy Trinity Cathedral (the OCA church in San Francisco that David had suggested). A man answered the phone and I asked if the services were in English. He said in a thick Russian accent, "Broken." I cracked up laughing. I already liked his deadpan sense of humor. I got the times for Liturgy and thanked him.

One Sunday in February I woke and dressed and told my wife I was going to find a church. She was shocked. "What?" she shouted.

"I know. Don't ask. I'll be back in awhile."

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Holy Trinity Cathedral of the Orthodox Church in America, located on the corner of Green and Van Ness Streets, San Francisco, California.

Rain was pouring down and the streets were pretty empty. I drove into San Francisco and had a vague notion of a Russian church with blue domes downtown. The listing for Holy Trinity Cathedral was on Green Street, and I thought I was headed in that direction. I finally saw the dome and cross. There is never any parking around that area so as I approached I said to myself, "If there's parking I'll stop, if not I'll go to Burger King." The minute I said it a person pulled out of a space across from the church. "Okay, okay, I'll go." I walked into the church on February 7, 1999. I didn't know it at that time, but it was Prodigal Son Sunday.

In tantra all the sense fields are used in one's practice. The senses are not denied but used to both open and relax into the natural state of

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one's own enlightenment. When I walked into the church I felt a vast display of light and fragrance. I was met at the door and welcomed. When asked if I was Orthodox I responded quickly (and probably brusquely) that I wasn't a Christian, I was Buddhist. I stood in the rear and watched. As the Liturgy began the music and chant and readings seemed to fill the room as much as the light and fragrances. The whole service seemed to become an elaborate ritual of the senses. It was wonderful and it scared me to death. There was something that felt right. If only it didn't have to be so Christian. After services I was asked to join folks for lunch. I did. There was good conversation and even an interest in my Buddhism. I left feeling like I had found a new kind of Christianity. Definitely not the Christianity of my childhood. I returned the following Sunday.

I began to listen to the words in the Liturgy. Soon I began to come to some of the evening services and was amazed at what was being recited. I had never heard of a theology that was sung and chanted along with the readings. More and more I began to realize that there was a Christianity in Orthodoxy that was vaster and deeper than I knew. And I began to hear references to the Light, a Light which seemed to have a lot in common with my experience of A Light That Is Not Light That Knows My Name. There was even a theology that explained how, through this Light, we are called and loved by God the Father, the Logos and the Holy Spirit. I began to feel more comfortable with the words God and Christ. Of course my wife and friends felt very uncomfortable hearing me begin to use those dreaded words. Most folks became silent when they heard I was attending a Christian church, much less an Orthodox Christian church. I was still attending my Buddhist group and I knew that when my teacher arrived in March we would have to talk. I felt like I was sneaking around in a way by going to a Christian church, and I didn't want to do that. But I had to try to sort out my experiences, and I felt like the church offered some possibility for answers that neither my teacher nor my Buddhist lineage seemed able to give.



The iconostasis of Holy Trinity Cathedral.

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Fr. Damascene's book had been the catalyst for that exploration, and the unfolding of the Church in my life seemed an almost natural progression from that initial reading of his book. The more I attended the services the more I felt like this was a place in which I could be comfortable as a Christian. Though you must realize I never used that word. I still resisted. I still hung back. I lurked on the edges of Christianity, in the shadows of the candles as much as in the light. I resisted prostrating and crossing myself. That was just going too far. I was still a Buddhist. I was just visiting Christianity. That way I could still attend and explore but not make a commitment. One night Matushka Barbara (the priest's wife) came over and asked if I wanted to learn how to cross myself. When I said yes, I surprised myself.

I know it seems odd, but crossing myself made a difference in how I saw myself and in how I began to worship. It was the first sign I made publicly that showed I trusted Christianity and had begun to see myself within the Christian frame. It's such a simple act, but it became my first act of Christian acknowledgment, the first sign that I was "putting on Christ." I had been raised to hate "Papists." My father was raised German Lutheran and he hated the Catholic church. I still had that in me. But I crossed myself that night and other nights as I began to attend more and more services and look to Orthodoxy for answers and a new form of devotion.

In Vajrayana Buddhism one views one's teacher as an enlightened being who represents fully one's path toward enlightenment. One prostrates to one's teacher as a sign of complete respect and as a sign of dependence upon him for one's spiritual advancement and realization. I would prostrate to my teacher without any reservation. In the Orthodox Church one prostrates before the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as an act of worship, and before images of saints as an act of veneration and respect. I still would not do the prostrations. There was something in my stubbornness that didn't even make sense to me. I knew it was weird to be able to prostrate before a teacher and still not do it toward God. Somehow it seemed easier to trust a man than to

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trust the Divine. I would cross myself but I would not prostrate. Here I had been literally pulled from bed, called in a way that even I seemed to hear, and I had had an incredible experience of Light and Love in a personal way, and yet my pride and stubbornness still resisted a richer and fuller expression of devotion. I would not bend. I wouldn't bow down before God. Something was still strongly resisting the call of Christ and the Orthodox Church.

Great Lent is a time of intense spiritual evaluation. The whole Church collectively begins a journey toward Jerusalem with Christ. The entire forty days becomes a cosmic drama suspended in a kind of time I had not experienced in Buddhism. Time seems to drop away, almost in proportion to the lengthening of the services. Somehow time is being used to transcend time.

I had attended long rituals in Buddhism. I had on occasion felt that they had gone quicker than I had expected. But I had never experienced time in an "eternal" way. In the Orthodox Church, the increased length of the services and Liturgies actually seemed to collapse into a timelessness that I had never felt so intently. Every word of the hymn or service seemed to be directed at me. Every verse about being lost and confused and put upon by life's circumstances was read for me. I was found by Love but still lost. I left every evening feeling that everything that had been sung or chanted was what I would have said, if I could have said anything as beautiful and true. I let the choir sing my praises and the reader chant my love. As Lent deepened and became vaster and wider and (I must say) more sorrowful, I began to experience time in the church as I had nowhere else.

Even though as a Buddhist I had spent hours in meditation and weeks in solitary retreat, time had never become so still. The services of Great Lent began to change me. One night during one of the Lenten services, my knees bent. I felt myself kneeling before God and I felt so terrible about having held back. I felt like such a fool and prideful idiot. Everything in me had told me of Christ's Great Good Heart and I had refused His embrace. When my head touched the floor, God

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broke my heart. I sobbed. As Fr. Victor came to cense the icon near me, I knew he heard me crying. I couldn't stop. I was so embarrassed. I felt so exposed. Folks I had been with on a regular basis for weeks stood near me in the church. They had seen me arrogant in my Buddhism, they had seen me stand back. They had seen me cross myself and still hold back. And now they saw my knees bend and my head touch the wooden floor, and they saw me cry when God broke my heart.

He broke my heart right there. I can point to the spot. He had called me in the night. He had entered me as Light. He now broke my heart. I can't explain it any clearer. God broke my arrogance and my aloneness, and He made loneliness no longer possible. He held me suspended in time with His Love, and I was not worthy of one iota of it.

Now I was broken with Love. I was a beggar. I am a beggar.

The evening services became more frequent and intense. My wife was angry that I was away so much and we disagreed often. I wasn't getting a lot of personal support for continuing this move toward the Christian Path. My friends thought I was crazy. My Buddhist *sangha* members didn't even know of my parallel church attendance. The more I was drawn toward the Church, the greater the forces seemed to be that were pulling me back. The contradictions and hypocrisy of my own participation as a Buddhist in a Christian church were obvious even to me.

It wasn't until that night that I realized there was no turning back. I was in love and I had to get as close as I could to that Source of Love. I think I went a little bit crazy for a while. The longing didn't stop. It seemed to get deeper as Great Lent progressed. I cried at the drop of a hat. I'd walk down the street and see an old couple holding hands and I'd brim over with tears. I was lost at services and Liturgy. I'd hear the bells ring with the beginning of the recitation of the Creed and I'd have to turn away with tears. I began standing in the corner because I was so embarrassed. I missed being up front hearing the choir more fully, but

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I stood in my corner and felt like a beggar getting warmed by a hobo fire.

I wrote both to Fr. Damascene, who was in Alaska, and to the rector of Holy Trinity Cathedral, Fr. Victor Sokolov, to tell them of what was happening to me and my growing need to address the possibility of exploring Orthodoxy more seriously. Fr. Damascene responded with a wonderful letter and encouragement. I was very moved by his kindness. I asked to meet with Fr. Victor.

I knew that my teacher was soon to arrive, and I called and asked to schedule some time together. I had broken my vows to him, not because I was beginning to embrace Christianity but because I didn't trust him enough to understand the experience of The Light That Is Not Light That Knows My Name. I felt that, since he took an atheist position, he would not understand *a priori* the essence of the experience of the Light. That was actually when I broke my vows. I violated the teacher-student trust. But it was in that breach that I was able to open up to a fuller experience of the Holy Spirit, to open up a part of myself that I had been committed *not* to open because of my vows.

Those Buddhist vows were at one time the center of my identity and life. I tried to take the vows seriously. I loved Rinpoche. I still do. I felt an incredible responsibility to mystically continue a train of thought and method that helped people see the patterns which hold them back from relaxing into the natural goodness of being and non-being. I had made a commitment to that, and I still hope there is a part of that commitment toward goodness and liberation in me.

I met with Rinpoche and we began to talk. I asked if we could move from the living room into his private room for some privacy. I know he sensed an uneasiness. I told him what had happened, tried to explain fully the experience of The Light That Is Not Light. I think he saw in me that the experience was real. Maybe it was reflected in the tears. Again I was lost in these tears of joy and terror. I was afraid I had cut a cord that nourished me spiritually. I had asked to be taken out of the line of energy that moves through the cosmos like a river. I had

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been taken out of the stream. I was a former Buddhist. All my gods had been taken away: my images of consciousness, of the way the world was being reflected. The *Yidams* and Protectors* with which I shared a world were no longer there for me. It was a strange loss, but it was a powerful one.

Rather suddenly I asked to be released from my vows. It kind of exploded out of my mouth. I felt terrible. I heard my own words ask for me to be released from my vows, and I felt I had betrayed a man that I loved and who loved me dearly. He had been my Spiritual Father for almost eight years. I knew I was hurting him. I was hurting him because he loved me and I knew it, and because I had made a commitment to add to this stream of lineage until all beings had been liberated. It was more than a personal vow to him alone. I knew that. Those methods of viewing and identifying the vast scope of beings and worlds and energies were the central reference points of my life. There are streams of lineage in Buddhism that have specific cosmologies and ways of seeing the world. They all refer to the basis of the religion: compassion and awareness. It was more than a *sangha* that I was asking not to be a part of.

Everything was etched in sadness. Rinpoche said he would release me from my vows. He said that I could explore the Christian Path for a year, and that within that year I could return to my vows if I wished. He saw that I had gone through some transformation—but I have no idea what he saw. He as always opted for kindness and created the possibility of a spaciousness in a terrible moment. He could always turn a moment of flux in beingness upside down. That's why he was such a good teacher for me. He turned my patterns of reaction to the world inside out. But it was through the experience of God's Light that everything was overridden. I told him I wasn't going to hold back, that I was going to go into this as deeply as I could.

* *Yidams* are part of the Tibetan cosmology of "energetic beings" that Buddhists call upon. *Protectors* are guardians of Buddhist teaching.

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He said my only responsibility to him was to be a good Christian.

I think we cried together. That's the way I remember it. But it could have been just me. I left kind of in shock. I felt like someone had died. I felt a terrible feeling, like when there has been an accident and everything changes in a second. There is that tearing moment of certainty and dread where something is born and something fades into the last moment. Rinpoche had always tried to show us how to transform those moments into points of awareness.

I was driving home over the Bay Bridge when it suddenly struck me that beyond the sorrow was a sense of certainty that the decision was right. It was a strange, bittersweet memory of The Light That Is Not Light That Knows My Name. Even in all the distress, there it was. I began to remember and recall everything from the call in the night and looking for burglars. I forget God all the time. That's my problem. I forgot God for twenty years.

I had been called awake literally, taken to the gate and asked in. I tried to remember the first time I crossed myself and the place where God broke my heart.

Sometimes God has to hit us idiots over the head with a two-by-four before we get it. My stomach was in knots yet there was some sense that it was okay. There was a small point of calm, an eye in the storm. Doubt and sorrow were but the atmospheric conditions surrounding this small bead of the certainty of God's Love. It was a matter of remembering and remembering throughout the day, somehow, that it was there.

Finally there was a destination in this strange confluence of time, circumstance and Mysterion. There seemed to be, in this great drama and economy of being, a central Source of self-emptying Love, sweeping through all that is and calling everyone and everything back to Divine Love. That was as close as I could get to describing it.

I e-mailed Fr. Victor that I had been released from my Buddhist vows. I asked to meet with him so I could find out how to continue from there. I continued to attend services during Great Lent. By the

