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### **Buddism and orthodoxy**

# Through The Eastern Gate

*By Nilus Stryker*

I had been a Buddhist for ten years. I was ordained after seven years of study 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 heart. I was ordained as a Ngakpa in the Nyingma Lineage. A Ngakpa is a tantric (priest) ordination that, though there are vows (damsig), those vows are not based on celibacy nor abstention from meat and alcohol. Our sangha were not renunciates but followed basic instruction in tantra and dzogchen; both based on transformation rather than renunciation and 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 our ability to "relax" into the fabric and texture of our experience of being and non being brought about by the practices we were taught. Over the years those moments seem to manifest in seeing the world more and more in kindness, gratitude and compassion. My teacher used to say that Buddhism was ninety nine per cent method and one percent truth. The practices in Buddhism are used to develop a clarity and sense of awareness that enable you to discern a reality not skewed by neurotic mind and habits of response.

We were a non liturgical lineage and had silent sitting and 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 sisters and brothers 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 hear 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 filled with this 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 you 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 avoid following a thought 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, nor relax and got up. I thought, well that's early childhood stuff I'm projecting onto my mediation. It's mommy-daddy stuff about love I didn't get and wanted and must be about my early childhood Christianity. Though my parents were nominal Christians 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 it very much except for the continued sense of longing which did not seem to dissipate. I couldn't seem to shake the experience no matter how I tried. There was this terrible longing in me that I couldn't ignore nor explain. I didn't mention it to my wife yet I couldn't stop thinking about it nor find relief from the ache and hurt. We had an ordinary evening, watched television for awhile, 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 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 (other than my wife) in the house and she was still sound asleep. I decided since I was awake to do some practice and went to my altar in my studio. I mediated for probably thirty to forty five minutes and returned to sleep. The next morning I made sure all the doors were locked and kind of looked around the house 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 couldn't sleep for awhile. 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 cant tell you exactly what it felt like other than this "presence" was in the room. No lights, no hallucinations, no sounds, no fanfare, no schizo stuff (as far as I understand it), yet most certainly a feeling that I was being called awake by a presence. I can only say in 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.

You must understand 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 Northern California 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 ok. No major crisis. Nothing that seemed to speak to the experiences that I was having nor 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 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 not certainly 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 both to understand and cope with the experiences. If anyone knew what was happening it was him. I finally contacted my teacher in Wales and explained the entire sequence of experiences.. He 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 if the experiences continued 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 mediation for a while before using the mantra and calling on the Buddhist deity that I had been instructed to use. It was a powerful mediation. 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 three thirty 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 and 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 I have no sense of appropriateness about 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 try and say, I, in anyway, comprehend nor deserve what happened. But when I spoke those words, I filled with a soft Light. I know that is hard to understand but I filled with this 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 know that seems impossible but it happened. The Light not only knew me, Miles, a screw up and quick tempered crumudgen, 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 be always inside me but 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 and explain that. If there were any way for me to tell you 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, nor 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 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 of and by God as Light and Love.

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.

I called it a Light That Is Not Light That Knows My Name.

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 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 nor 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 Is 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.

Why couldn't I use the word God nor Christ? What held me back.? It seemed too chilling to even think that this was either, yet for the first time it seemed possible. It was possible that his 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 to grow spiritually I had to let go of the concept of 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 commitment I had made were seen as "lives long" commitments both to my teacher and 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 to help 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 must admit incomplete. I knew my teacher was wrong about God. What was I going to do?

Pantelemon David Walker is my acupuncturist and a member of the [Orthodox Church in America](#) . 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](#). That night I poured through the book. I have no idea when I went to sleep but I read for

days and it gave me a base 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 and 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 of A Light That Is Not Light That Knows My Name were real and true. My teacher said there was no God and 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 in 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 (without) commitment a tradition in Christianity that was far beyond any Christian tradition I had ever heard of. I called the **Holy Trinity Cathedral** (an OCA church in San Francisco.) 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 times for Liturgy and thanked him,

On Sunday February the seventh 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."

It was pouring down rain 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 pulls out of a space across from the church. "Ok, ok I'll go." I walked into the church on February the seventh, 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 one's own enlightenment. When I walked into the church I felt this vast display of light and fragrance. I was met at the door and welcomed. When asked if I was Orthodoxy I responded quickly ( and probably brusquely) I wasn't a Christian I was Buddhist. I stood in the rear and watched . As the Liturgy began the music and cant and readings seemed to fill the room as much as the light and fragrances. The whole service seemed to become this 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 canted along with the readings. More and more I began to realize that there was a Christianity in Orthodoxy that was vaster and deeper then 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 acknowledged the Light and used that Light as a description of how God, Logos, and The Holy Spirit call and love.. 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 still was

attending my Buddhist group and knew that when my teacher arrived in March that we had to talk. I felt like I was sneaking around in away going to a Christian church and I didn't want to do that. But I had to try and sort out my experiences and felt like the church offered some possibility for answers that neither my teacher nor my Buddhist lineage seemed to be able to explain..

Fr. Damascene's book had been the catalyst for that exploration and the unfolding of the church in my life seems 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 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 and 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 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 how I begin to worship. It was the first sign I would make publicly that acknowledged that I trusted Christianity and had begun to see myself within the Christian frame. It's hard to explain. It's such a simple act but in many ways it became my first act of Christian acknowledgement. It became the first sign that I was "putting on Christ.". I had been raised to hate Papist. My father was raised German Luthern 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 more and more attend services and look to Orthodoxy for answers and a new form of devotion.

In Vajrayana Buddhism you view your teacher as an enlightened being who represents fully your path toward that goal. One prostrates to their teacher as a sign of complete respect and as a sign of dependence upon them for your spiritual advancement and realization. I would prostrate to my teacher without any reservation (except for my fat and my knees). In the Orthodox church one prostrates before God, before, Christ, before the Holy Spirit. One Prostrates before images of saints as an act of

devotion 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 rather than the Divine. I would cross myself but I wouldn't prostrate. Here I was literally pulled from bed, called in a way that even I seemed to hear, and have this 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 Christ and the Orthodoxy church. Though I knew I couldn't turn back.

. 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 time I had rarely experienced in Buddhism. Time seems to drop away almost in relation to how the services lengthen. Somehow time was being used to destroy time.

I had attended long rituals in Buddhism. I had on occasion felt that they had going quicker than I had expected. But I had never experienced time in an "eternal" way. I know again how difficult that is to understand but 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 canted 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 cant my love. More and more as Lent deepened and became vaster and wider and, I must say, more sorrowful. I began to experience time in the church like no other time.

Even though spending 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 the Great Compline (I think). My knees bent. I felt myself kneeling before God and I felt so terrible about holding 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 broke my heart. I sobbed. As Fr. Victor came cense the Icon near me I knew he heard me crying. I couldn't stop. I was so embarrassed. I felt so exposed. There were folks I had been with on a regular bases for weeks who stood near me in the church. They had seem me arrogant in My Buddhism, They had seem stand back. They had seem me cross myself and still hold back. And now they saw my knees bend and my head touch the wooden floor and 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 heart and my arrogance and my aloneness and had made loneliness impossible. He held me suspended in time and 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 pulling me back. The contradictions and hypocrisy of my own participation as a Buddhist in a Christian church was 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 awhile . 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 have to turn away with tears. My nose running was bad enough. . I tried to tell Diane that I could bring a thousand editions of great books to back up each sentence of the Creed and they would collapse before a handful of tears. I begin standing in the corner because I was so embarrassed. I

missed being up front hearing the choir more fully but I stood in my corner and felt like this beggar getting warmed by a hobo fire.

I wrote to both 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 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 that teacher student trust. then not by asking to leave my vows. It was in that breach that I was actually able to open to the fuller expression of the Holy Spirit/ I had committed part of myself to not 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 this 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 The Light That Is Not Light experience fully . 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 been taken out of the stream. I was this former Buddhist. All my gods had been taken away; my images of consciousness, the way the world was becoming reflected. The Yidams and

Protectors that I shared a world with 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 to be released from my vows and I felt I had betrayed a man that I loved and who loved me dearly. He was 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 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 in the vast scope of beings and worlds and energies was the central reference points of my life. There are streams of liberation in Buddhism that have specific cosmologies and ways of seeing the world. They are all refer to the base of their religion on compassion and awareness. I was asking not to be apart of more than a sangha.

Everything was etched in sadness. Rinpoche said he would release me from my .vows. He said for me to explore the Christian Path for a year and within that year if I wished to return to my vows 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 always could 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 seemed to be over ridden I told him I wasn't going to hold back that I was going to go into this as deeply as I could.

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 this terrible feeling like there has been an accident and everything changes in a second. That terrible moment where the fifteen year old kid is holding a gun and touches the trigger. 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 over the Bay Bridge and it suddenly struck me that beyond the sorrow was a sense of certainty the decision was right. It was a strange bitter sweet memory of The Light That Is Not Light That Knows My Name. Even in all the distress there it was. I begin 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 and 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 2 X 4 before we get it. My stomach was in knots yet there was some sense of a point that was ok. There was this small point of calm. There was an eye in the storm. Doubt and sorrow were an atmosphere 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.

One time in the television show X Files Files, Scully ends the show by saying something like, "suppose He's calling all the time and no one is listening." Years ago I would have said it was a matter of frequency. Now I think it's a matter of Grace. Finally there was a destination in this strange confluence of time, circumstance and Mysterion. There seems to be in this great drama and economy of the being an emptiness a center Source of Love that become The Word (Logos) and Spirit to sweep through all that is and is not calling everyone and thing back to Divine Love. That's as close as I can get to it. But there seems to be a possibility that I am absolutely right. I e-mailed Fr. Victor that I had been released from my Buddhist vows. I asked to meet so I could find out how one continues from here. I continued to attend services during Great Lent. By the time Pascha arrived I was tired. In fact I was worn out. I was drained and empty except for this little Light that stood somewhere in the back. Everything had been turned upside down. At least I think this is the chronology. Yet the whole flow and confluence of circumstance seemed to ebb and flow a tad faster than I could follow. It all was turned inside out in a few months. "Busted in the Blinding Light," I think the song goes. .

I met with Fr. Victor and we talked. He suggested a few books and encouraged me to continue to attend services .

He reminded me that there was a study group every few weeks after Vespers. It was a very congenial meeting He didn't know when he said it But it was probably one of the most important pieces of advice anyone could give to a Buddhist who was looking toward Christ. He said it quickly and in kind of an off hand way. He stopped and turned and said. "Even if you have nothing , you offer nothing. It was at that moment God made the world seem abundant and Fr. Victor helped. I realized that I could offer God anything. I could give him my sadness and depression, my anger and distrust. In fact on a good day he could get some joy and a cluster of happiness. It was a very important thing for me to hear. Whether it is a paraphrase of someone else or not I don't care. At that moment those words were Fr. Victor's . and they have been with me ever since. Never has there been one moment since then that I didn't have something to offer to God.

The closer I moved to the church the more tense it became at home. Diane missed me and wasn't real subtle about letting me know it. Of course after twenty three years (at that time) she knew subtle didn't work with me. I'm too stupid. . The most difficult personal breaks were with dear friends in my Buddhist group. I asked my teacher's permission to tell my vajra sister and brother (my closest relations in the group) the entire tale so they would know exactly what happened. I'm afraid we didn't seem to share a base of experience nor language. No matter what I said had happened they saw that I had broken my vows. It was very hurtful and difficult for folks to hear. As I said more was at stake than just a small group of people. We were talking about the continuation of a Lineage and those vows were part of that commitment. Their anger was actually a sign of their devotion to Rinpoche. They felt betrayed and hurt and angry. I was breaking a spiritual bond between us . They were right. But I still had a very hard time trying to understand what seemed to me a lack of love. There has been a long silence.

On May twenty third of 1999 I was Baptized into the Orthodox Church in America. The following copy of a letter I sent my priest may convey some of what the Sacrament meant to me.

Dear Father Victor- Tonight please let me talk about

Mystery... Today was magic and somehow consummated four months of trying to accept the MYSTERY of God's Being and deep Longing for each of us. I know this is just the beginning. I know I am so new and young in this that there is a danger that the power of this joy will make me think I know things I do not. But today was wonderful- wonder filled- full of wonder.

The incredible gratitude I felt yesterday was incomplete, faint, stupid. I was not complete in gratitude-empty in gratitude. I am not now, nor ever will be able to fill myself with God's gratitude in the way that could be of any use to Him. I am a poor example of devotion but for me this day is a measure of brimming over-spilling on the floor-ruining the carpets with gratitude- filling the basement with gratitude-How can I possibly give back to God? What could I even conceive of that could be an offering? I can't imagine ever being able to express this springtime in me- these flowers in my veins- this garden that has worms and slugs and bird shit on the roses. But If I could it would be today. I would go to God and offer him this day as what I could give. I would empty my pockets with this day. I would turn myself inside out with this day and say, "Please, Lord it is the best I have. Please take this from me- This Day."

I am like a song leaping into the cold sea-salt tears and Grace run down my cheeks- My wife stands watching just a heartbeat away. I hear the choir. I catch her eye . I watch you move toward me. It's in slow motion- some film shot out of time. There is breath. There is your breath- there is God's breath -there is my breath -the church breathes with this light. I know it sounds like I'm talking magic here. Yes! God's magic- God's moment gift to me this day and mine to Him. Please cut my hair take what you think He'll like-I don't care what Fr. Schmemann might say about magic. Its not your magic, though you are part of it. Its not my magic, though I am part of it. But this wonderful day is God's ordinary magic. Each leaf-each day- each ten thousand ants that crawl in this day shimmer in magic. Because we are

blind and turn away we don't see it in God's magical way. But when you begin to see- it seems like Grace is everywhere. God's ordinary magic breaking through my blindness and shallowness and myopia.

I watch your cross in front of me-the gold and the diffuse sun-the white material of your vestment-the words calling me to ring like bells. I am only standing there. I am only this still person standing in this beautiful place. There is a fullness I have never known-a sense of being known by God deep inside me. I am sure in this. His music sends shivers through me- coral blue violins and cello, oboe and flute-good dark beer that tastes like wheat- Liturgy and sweat and inside me laughter mixing with reunion dance at an airport. My heart's deep crevices, those dark hidden sad places-those places that I have closed to Love for all my life seem touched by a Great Kindness. The snow is melting. I feel it inside me. The glaciers are turning into lakes. The bears move south and the birds fly inside me to the warm forest just over the last ridge. The doors are open and the wind is blowing the curtains. There is a patch of warm sunlight on the floor and specks of dust shine in the air, swirling as the patterns of a dancer's skirt brush the floor.

Dear Father Victor this is not a second chance it's a first chance. I am new to life. I really am. I am new to this world. I have never felt like this newness. I feel clean. I really do-I feel clean inside. I feel like menthol everywhere. I feel like I've never seen sunlight before. I am amazed by people's eyes. The small wrinkles around their mouths when they smile. The way the morning shines through them and not just on them. They look so wonderful- they still look wonderful.

The water washed me. Please believe me. I never thought I could understand this nor even say this.

The oil blessed me. Sealed me in the Body of a timeless Church. That is true.- It is timeless and has always existed in God (before words).

Please understand that this is real. This isn't some archetype-nor symbol- nor ritual trapped in a small church in San Francisco. It is real and it is Wonderous and it is from God to us all. Everything in me says that that is true. I remember Johann's hand on my arm helping me as I stepped into the Jordan River. I remember the sun and Christ through the Royal Doors. I remember Diane crying on the banks. I remember your voice and I remember how God spread the constellations through the night sky and held me under the water and took me up and washed me and lifted me up to show the world that a new child had been born.

As a friend of mine used to say "pulled kicking and screaming into Glory."

You lead me from the river, my clothes sticking to me, gripping your hand wrapped in vestments-the desert sand burning my feet-joy mesmerized in my heart-watching each step and the smiles and eyes of the church living in the morning. On the banks the people waited. My wife watched and those wonderful folks who have encouraged me since Prodigal Son Sunday to come back- always come back. That formula for repentance- to come back- to always come back-that course of freedom to return-that freeway that FREE WAY of return and repentance- when God broke my heart. I can show you the place where God broke my heart in your church- in our church. I can show you where I wiped the floor with my sleeve after prostrating finally to Him and called out to Him and answered Him. How could I go anywhere else? What place could be more home? I want to be in the place where God broke my heart.

When I approached the chalice I returned home. I am home.

I grew up taking communion but I have never really taken part in the Eucharist. Today I was given

through Grace the opportunity to eat of The Body and drink of the Blood of Christ. I never had experienced that before though I have often taken communion. There are no real words for that- That is a Mystery I can not even begin to speak of. I am dumb before this. I am only grateful beyond measure and blessed into silence.

And I am finally home. Can you believe these words? I am finally home. God loves me. Me! I think this is true. I know this is true. God, for some unknown reason- loves me. He loves me as me- with a name, my name. God knows my name! And He loves me! God knows my heart and brain and fat and muscle and He loves me. God knows my every thought and fear and pain and He still accepts me. That is the most incredible reality possible. Oh Father, Today was God's great gift to me and mine to Him. I am empty before this. I am poor and empty before this.

Yet in that emptiness of mine I am full of Him. Do you see that? My words are so limited. But today I was emptied and today I was filled. You held the cup for God. That is what He has given you to do. You breathed on me as a representative of the Body of Christ and washed and anointed me with His oil. That is what He has given you to do. You gave me drink and you gave me eat. That is what He has given you to do. But +He+ emptied me today and +He+ filled me today with His Grace.

That is the Mystery we shared today. You and I and the great goodhearts that make up The Body of The Church. It was my journey-mine- with a name ( in the emptiness and fullness of Grace) and ours as a Church.

I have been shaken awake by water and Grace and God's Love. I have been anointed with oil in this time and forever in God's Being. I have been renewed, found and called forth, forgiven and forgiven and forgiven. I have been infused with an understanding of a Mystery that is beyond my understanding. I am an idiot in Love. A beggar and fool and sinner. I have

been embraced in Holy Spirit and named before a Church that has existed forever. Today was wonderous and beyond measure. I am dumb before this- numb with gratitude and thanksgiving-tired and happy- and ready to rest in God's comfortable night.

Please know I offer today to God. You're part of that. Barbara and Johann and Ann and Anna and Elaine and everyone are part of That. My Beloved wife Diane is part of that . And me. I am part of that too. No words remain tonight, Father. Just Thankfulness and prayer and silence and sleep.- Goodnight, Love in Christ (that is also true isn't it? Isn't that absolutely incredible!)- Nilus

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### Life After Death

Photos - Elders - Hermits from Mount Athos

Father Cleopa: The Elder of Romanian Orthodoxy

The Life and Works of PROTOSINGELOS IOANICHIE

MOROI of Sihăstria Monastery

Glossologia (speaking in tongues) - Elder Cleopa

About Holy Scripture by Elder Cleopa of Romania

About Holy Tradition by Elder Cleopa of Romania

Magic and Occultism - by Elder Cleopa

On the Presuppositions of our Personal Salvation - by Elder Cleopa

The Second Coming of Christ - by Elder Cleopa

On the Thousand Year Reign (Chiliasm) - by Elder Cleopa

Movies for children - The Phenomenon Harry Potter - Resemblance to the occult activity

The mysteries of music - THE TRUTH ABOUT ROCK MUSIC

"CHRISTIAN" INTEREST IN UFO ( aliens )

Charismatic Revival As a Sign of the Times - by Fr. Seraphim Rose

About Evolutionism - SCIENCE AND RELIGION

How to Read the Holy Scriptures - Fr. Seraphim Rose

Orthodoxy in America - by Blessed Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose)

Signs of the Times - by Blessed Hieromonk Seraphim Rose  
THE FUTURE OF RUSSIA AND THE END OF THE WORLD -

by Blessed Hieromonk Seraphim Rose  
THE HOLY FATHERS SURE GUIDE TO TRUE CHRISTIANITY -  
by Fr. Seraphim Rose  
The Orthodox World-View - by Blessed Father Seraphim  
Rose  
Fr. Seraphim (Rose) Speaks - Excerpts from His Writings  
The Orthodox Revival in Russia AS AN INSPIRATION FOR  
AMERICAN ORTHODOXY - by Fr. Seraphim Rose  
Buddism and orthodoxy - Through The Eastern Gate - By  
Nilus Stryker  
Orthodox Catechism  
GREAT MIRACLE GIVEN BY GOD ONLY TO THE  
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About Holy Angels  
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About pornography, pollutions and monasticism - A reply  
for a stranger who could be just anyone of us  
THE FIRST LOVE  
Between Christ and Freud  
What I Intended to Understanding while Watching "The  
English Patient"  
About the movie "The Last Temptation of Christ" (From  
the Byzantine Icon to the TV Set)  
WHY DO THEY KILL THE LIGHTS IN DISCO CLUBS?  
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The scandalous commandment  
Fatigue and love  
The unborn people  
Zodiacs, horoscopes ...  
The holiday of undeification  
Among posters and stands  
Hierarchy or church dictatorship ?  
With a kiss closer to death  
Defeated people  
Postmodernism in frock  
SINGING UNDER WATER  
Why Is Flood a Gentle in Pain Scene  
About the contradictory opinions regarding the  
obedience

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Orthodox Advices