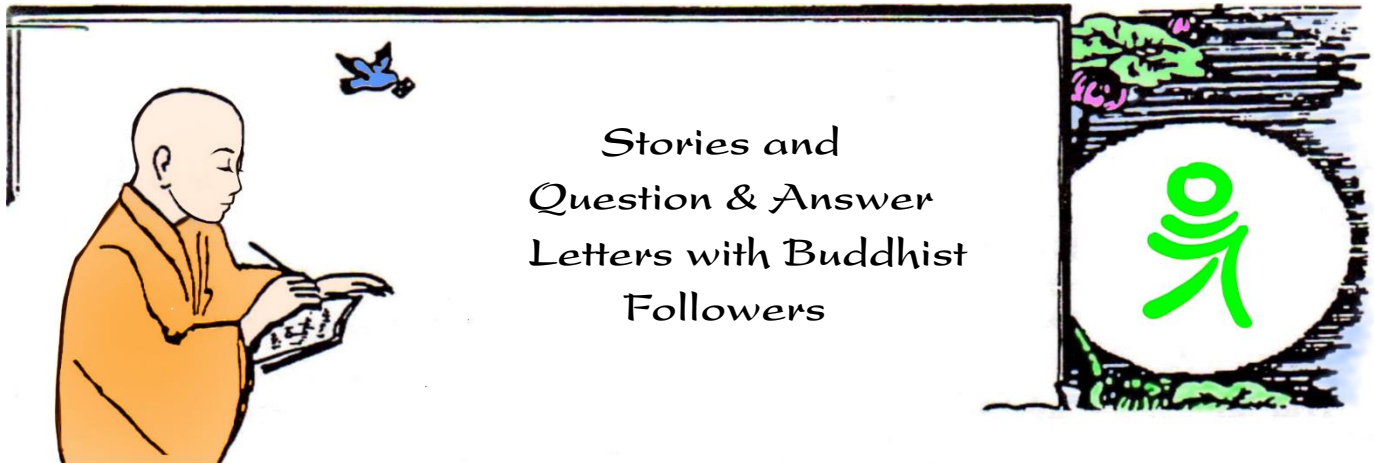




WHY I BECAME A BUDDHIST

By Ven. Thich An Hue
(Claude Ware, Ph.D)

Whenever longtime friends, close professional associates, persons whom I've met casually and even Buddhist colleagues I see often at our temples and Buddhist Ceremonies ask...

"Why did you become a Buddhist",

I feel the question is meaningful and deserves a concise and meaningful answer. I don't know how concise my answer are, but probably for every person who asks, I respond in a different way. This is a highly complex question, and as I attempt here to set down in writing some thoughts about the reason **"why ?"**, they seem to be in terms of explaining the process of becoming, not just in announcing, **"I am a Buddhist"**; this has taken a slow transition of movement for me.

This movement has been over period of four stages :

- First:** there was the Christian religion and church I grew up in through my late teens, which my parents forced me to attend (*and which I rebelled against*);
- Second:** Then, I choose another Christian sect in which I could express my musical talents and have closer contacts with young-adult friends;
- Thirdly,** for a great number of my adult years I gave up all religious and church associations – a belief that praying to God to help cure my emotional ills was not within my understanding at that point in my life. Human concern became unimportant, and there was no one for me to confide in. The crisis became more pronounced; I had lost all contact with my Higher Nature and had sunk to the depths of self-loathing. My parents were there, but I was blind to their caring and didn't want to burden them with my problems.

Within a period of three months, at age forty-five I suffered two heart attacks. The second one in February 1965 **"got my attention"** – my heart had stopped and I was near

death. During my ten days recovery in the hospital, I realized that if I wanted to live I must change my self-belief and begin the practice of a healing, healthful way.

-The four stage in my movement toward Buddhism began with a serious and regular practice of meditation in a way I had learned from studies in psychology – the only way I knew to eliminate stress and bring my mind to a peaceful, quiet place. I meditated daily, gave up the addictive practice which caused my suffering, changed my diet and began regular physical exercise.

Now, I could turn to a spiritual path, which was the only way I would survive in this life; it made all other things possible.

My decision to join a small group of American Zen meditators was reinforced by two events in my early life when the Bodhi-seed was planted. I didn't see Zen as an experience then, but my piano teacher for fourteen years had been teaching me the Zen principles of **"practive -makes- practice"** along with the articles of non-duality :

"To strive for perfection one practices blind – emptiness".

As an adult I gradually began to see her Zen-methods of teaching. I became exceedingly grateful ! Another earlier event which gave me a foundation for Buddhist understanding was when I met a Japanese Buddhist music teacher and concert artist.

At age thirteen my love for music, an intense interest in the Orient and a strong admiration for this man spurred my frantic grasp for knowledge of Buddhism.

My reading and personal exploration of this religion in America became my quest. I believed it kept the Buddha in my mind until my serious studies began forty years later.

An answer I might give the reader here to **"why I became a Buddhist"** is... ***"To fulfill a commitment of my Buddha-nature to continue living a happy, healthy, and serene life on this planet."***

What led me to this decision was not the result of years of dissatisfaction with other religions and painful suffering for the Truth, nor seeking a religion without the threats and fears from a punishing God;

I truly saw that Buddhism was the belief and philosophy of life I wanted to adopt.

An understanding of what was to be my life-long search for the Truth began when I found the teacher fifteen years ago who became my spiritual guide, mentor and friend. The most Venerable Thich Thien An, Buddhist Patriarch accepted me as his disciple. He gave me my Dharma name and guided my studies in preparation for Bhiksu precepts until his passing eleven years ago. The following year I completed An-Cu (*retreat*) training and took full ordination. The reason I became a Buddhist monk was to accept

the way – to satisfy the love and respect – shown me by this holy man, and in honor of all my teachers along the Path in living an honored Buddhist life.

I now find joy in assisting other monks in their temple services, giving Dharma talks at special ceremonies and helping Vietnamese families with family issues and personal adjustments to American culture.

I hold study groups and meditation training for all persons interested in Buddhism in my Bo Hyun Zen Mission and Great Action Dharma Center.

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