

# Buddhist Scholars Distressed by Recent Fiery Suicides

**By LOUIS CASSELL**  
**United From International**  
 Within the past two months, four monks and a nun have burned themselves to death in South Viet Nam to dramatize Buddhist grievances against the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem.

Their immolations have caused many newspaper readers in the West to associate Buddhism with fiery self-destruction.

This is an ironic turn of events, and very distressing to Buddhist scholars outside South Viet Nam.

These scholars say that nothing could be further from the true spirit of Buddhism than to take a life — even one's own life — in a political quarrel.

Buddhism traditionally has been a gentle and unworldly religion, disdainful of political concerns. One of its basic tenets is an extreme "reverence for life." Buddhist monks even strain the water they drink to make sure they do not accidentally ingest — and cause distress to — some small living thing.

Buddhist scholars say that suicide cannot be squared with the teachings of the faith even if it is prompted by noble and unselfish reasons.

**Ancient Faith**  
 Buddhism has no central authority which could rebuke Vietnamese monks for un-Buddhist tactics. A lack of formal organization is characteristic of this ancient faith. No one even knows for sure how many Buddhists there are in South Viet Nam. Estimates range from 20 to 80 per cent of the population, which totals 15 million.

Buddhism comes in almost as many varieties as Christianity — counting all of its sects and subdivisions, including the one called Zen which currently is enjoying a vogue among Western beatniks, there are about 150 million Buddhists in the world. The main centers of Buddhism today are Japan, Korea, China, Mongolia, Tibet, Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Viet Nam.

There are relatively few Buddhists in India, where the religion originated 2,500 years ago as an offshoot of Hinduism.

**Dressed in Rags**  
 Its founder was an enormously wealthy Indian prince, Siddhartha Guatama, who was born about 560 B.C. in a northern province about 100 miles from Benares. Legend says Guatama had three palaces and 40,000 dancing girls to amuse him. But he learned early in life that luxury did not lead to happiness. When he was about 29 years old, he abandoned his sumptuous life as a prince and went into the forest, dressed in rags, to seek enlightenment in the solitary life of a Hindu ascetic.

No one ever practiced mortification of the flesh with such

**New Law To Go Into Effect on Tuesday**  
 Salem — A new law making many social security recipients ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits will go into effect Tuesday. Employment Commissioner David H. Cameron reminded today.

The law, adopted by the 1963 legislature, provides that unemployed persons eligible to receive social security benefits shall be presumed to have withdrawn from the labor force and shall not be eligible for unemployment benefits, unless the individual can show he was not voluntarily withdrawn from the labor force and is a bona fide member of the labor market.

greater dedication than Guatama. He fasted, eating one bean a day, until his spine could be seen through his shrunken stomach. But he found no answers to his questions about life, and concluded that extreme asceticism was no better than luxury as a pathway to happiness.

After six years of futile searching, Guatama seated himself one evening beneath the shade of a fig tree near the village of Gaya in north-east India. He vowed that he would sit there until he saw the light.

**Poisoned Mushrooms**  
 According to Buddhist scriptures he remained for 49 days. He emerged from this experience as the Buddha, or "the enlightened one." For the next 45 years, he walked from one Indian village to another, sharing his new insights with all who would listen, and founding an order of monks to pass on his message. He died at the age of 80 after eating some poisoned mushrooms that had gotten into a dish by accident.

Buddha's original teachings constitute a philosophy of life rather than a religion. He taught that human life is characterized by suffering, and the basic cause of suffering is often translated as "desire" but which actually connotes selfish craving, the tendency in every person to seek his own private happiness.

To break free from slavery to "tanha," Buddha said men must follow "the eightfold path" of right knowledge, right aspiration, right speech, right behavior, right occupation, right effort, right thinking and right absorption.

Under each of these eight headings, he laid down rules for rigorous self-discipline. Buddhists were forbidden to lie, steal or kill any living creature, including animals and insects. They were allowed to eat only what they could beg, and then just enough to keep the body alive and functioning. Alcoholic beverages and sex relations were strictly forbidden.

**Ecstatic Union**  
 Buddha said this monastic way of life, if earnestly practiced, would eventually lead to "nirvana." Exactly what he meant by this much-abused term is hard to determine

**Educators Expected At November Event**  
 Salem — Educational leaders from every state in the union will visit Oregon in November when state superintendents of public instruction and members of their staffs arrive in Portland for the annual meeting of the Council of Chief State School Officers.

State Superintendent and Mrs. Leon P. Minear, members of the Oregon state board of education, and their wives will be the official hosts of the meeting, which will be held Nov. 17 through 21.

This will be the first time the Chief State School Officers have met in Oregon, according to Dr. Minear, who said members of the council accepted his invitation to hold the meeting in Portland in order to observe at first hand the Oregon program for improvement of education and significant changes which have been made in the role of the state department of education as a result of the program.

The Chief State School Officers will visit the state department of education in Salem Friday, Nov. 22. Approximately 150 people are expected for the meeting.

from his authenticated sayings. At times, he seems to think of nirvana as a state of nothingness, a final blotting out of human individuality and hence of the selfish cravings which cause suffering. At other points, he speaks of nirvana in terms comparable to those which a Christian mystic might use to describe ecstatic union with God.

It is sometimes said that Buddha was an atheist, because there are no direct references in his teaching to a personal God. But his silence on this subject seems to have derived mainly from a decision that he would avoid all theological "speculations" with which Hinduism was already rife and concentrate on teaching a way of life.

Dr. Huston Smith, professor of world religions at Harvard, points out in his authoritative book, "The Religions of Man" (Harper & Row) that all of the things which Buddha tried so hard to keep out of his movement—including metaphysics, creeds, rituals and

superstitions—came "tumbling in with a vengeance" after the founder's death in 480 B.C.

**Whole Pantheon**  
 Today the austere philosophy of Buddha is preserved primarily by the so-called "theravada" monks of Burma, Ceylon, Thailand and Cambodia. The popular Buddhism of other countries worships Guatama as a divine savior, and admits a whole pantheon of other gods.

Like Christianity, popular or "mahayana" Buddhism

places great emphasis on compassion and human brotherhood. Room has been made for prayer and ritual, and salvation is something man receives by divine grace, rather than something he must earn by rigorous self-denial. Laymen as well as monks can hope to reach nirvana, which in mahayana Buddhism sounds rather like a primitive Christian version of heaven.

**Real Truth**  
 Zen is a special case. It developed in China in the 6th century A. D., and by the

12th century had reached Japan, where it took root and still flowers. The heart of Zen is the conviction that real truth can never be expressed or understood in verbal formulae, but can only be directly experienced through a flash of intuition or enlightenment called "satori." To drive home the futility of reason as a road to truth, Zen masters require their disciples to spend endless hours working on "koans" or nonsense problems to which there is no rational solution.

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