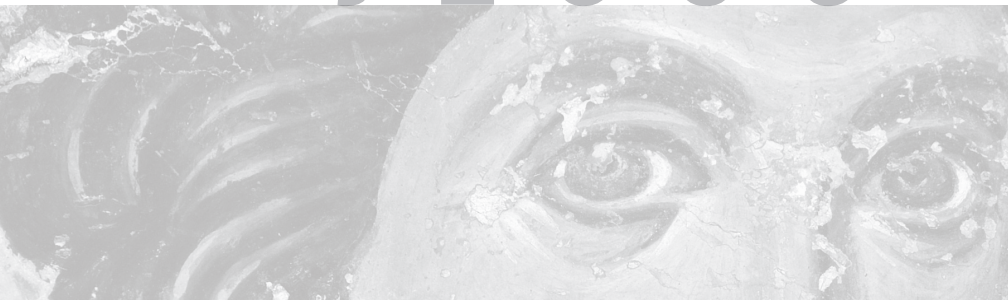


RESURRECTING

JESUS



Embodying
the Spirit of a
Revolutionary Mystic

ADYASHANTI



sounds true
BOULDER, COLORADO

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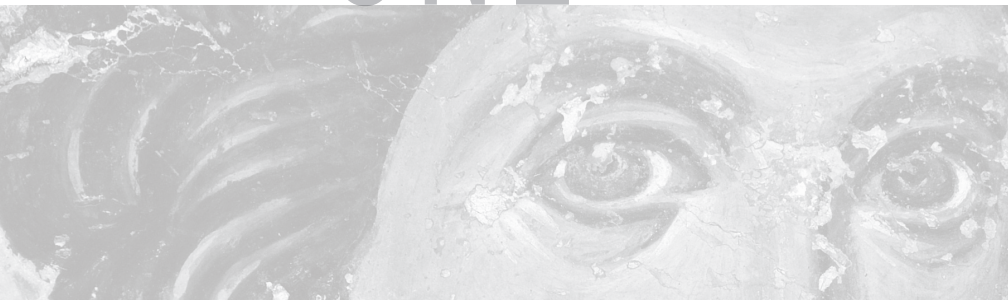
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PART

ONE



ENCOUNTERING JESUS

MY CONNECTION TO JESUS

1

I can nourish myself on nothing but truth.

ST. THERESE OF LISIEUX

So how does a spiritual teacher with a Zen Buddhist background get interested in the Jesus story? Well, from the time I can remember, I was fascinated with the Jesus story. As a kid I watched *The Ten Commandments* and all the other spiritual epics that were on TV and in the movies at that time.

When I was young we had sliding glass doors on our bathtub, and I'd sit in the bath and doodle crosses with circles around them in the steam on the glass. Any time I had a piece of paper I would doodle cross signs with big circles around them. I didn't even think about it as a Christian symbol, and I didn't consciously connect it to the Jesus story, but my notebooks from the time I was in grade school all the way through college are filled with crosses. When I look back on that, I think that the whole

story of Jesus and the image and symbol of the cross was lodged in a deep place in my unconscious; there was something really deep within me that was profoundly interested in this character.

Now, I didn't grow up in a particularly religious family, and I wasn't really interested in organized religion. When I was young, maybe eight or nine, my parents decided to take us kids to church for a while. Of course, I was put into Sunday school and my parents went off to what I called the "Big Room," to listen to the preacher. After two or three Sunday school experiences, I told my parents I didn't want to go anymore. The Sunday school teacher had us coloring pictures of Jesus in a book and singing songs, and I was more interested in what was happening in the Big Room, where the preacher and all the adults were. After a few weeks, we stopped going and that was that.

While my family wasn't particularly religious in the conventional sense, there was a lot of religious and spiritual conversation that went on in the family among my parents and my grandparents. I had two sets of grandparents that lived very close to me, as well as aunts and uncles and cousins, and we would all get together quite often. It was not unusual for the conversation to turn to various religious and spiritual subjects. Both sets of grandparents were churchgoers, and one of my grandfathers was what I'd call a "real Christian"; he embodied the Christian spirit of generosity and love in a way that I have rarely seen since. His friends called him "the deacon," because he spent so much time serving as deacon in his church.

These conversations had a deep influence on me. I just found them so mysterious and so engaging, these talks about God and spirit and Jesus, and as a child I would just sit there and listen with a kind of awe. I didn't understand it all, but it engendered in me a deep feeling of the mystery of life, of a transcendent presence that I could sense. Fortunately, the discussion was

always very open and expansive, not dogmatic. Nobody was trying to argue their point; it was more a kind of inquiry, of really looking deeply at these things.

From the time I was very young, I would have various types of what I'd now call spiritual experiences, and when I heard talk of religion or spirituality, I made a connection between those experiences and some of the subjects the adults were discussing. So, as I said, even though we weren't a religious family, religion and spirituality were a part of life from as far back as I can remember.

I was also always a lover of Christmas. Now, I suppose any kid is a lover of Christmas, with all the presents, the tree, the lights, and those holiday TV specials made for kids. I loved all that stuff too, but for me Christmas was also a sacred time. Each year starting in October, I would be overcome by a certain kind of *presence*—a transcendent, beautiful, rich, intimate presence. I associated it with the Jesus story, which is, of course, what Christmas is really all about.

This feeling of the sacred would overcome me for several months before Christmas. The closer I got to Christmas, the more this sense of the sacred would overtake me. It carried a sense of great meaning and profound intimacy. I was literally living in a state of grace for two or three months every year, and this added a sacred dimension to the whole Christmas celebration that went far beyond the packages and lights and glitter of Christmas. And so Christmas and the Christian message have always resonated with me on a deep level; the Jesus story has always been significant to me.

As I got older, sometime in my teens, I partook in communion at a Catholic mass. I didn't know that you weren't supposed to take communion if you weren't confirmed into the church. Looking back, I'm glad that I didn't know I wasn't supposed to

be doing that, because I did it innocently, and as I went through the ritual of taking communion and drinking the wine, I found this silent ritual to be extraordinarily profound. I didn't expect it to happen; I had gone to mass with another family, and I participated just to see what it was like. It also served to connect me, again, with the Jesus story.

FALLING IN LOVE WITH ST. THERESE

As I got into my late teens, I really started to get interested in a deeper form of spirituality. I wasn't thinking of Christianity at the time. I'd started to read some spiritual books, and in a book about Zen Buddhism I came across the word *enlightenment*. When I read the word *enlightenment*, I had a huge response to it, one that really changed my life's orientation. I just *had* to know the meaning of that word. I suppose you could say that was the moment I became a spiritual seeker; I was searching for the enlightenment I had read about in that Zen book.

I found a Zen teacher in a directory, one who actually happened to be only fifteen minutes from where I grew up, which was amazing because at the time there were very few Zen centers or temples in the United States. Her name was Arvis Justi, and she had gone through training with her own teachers for a long time. She actually taught out of her house. I was about twenty years old when I found her, and I studied and meditated with her for more than a decade. Eventually, when I was thirty-three, she asked me to teach.

Zen training is really focused on what you *do*—in other words, how you engage in a real practice that can open you up to the deeper dimensions, the deeper realities of the mystery of all of us. And so I was engaging in Zen and doing a lot of meditation. Sitting in silence was the primary practice, and it

was a profoundly meaningful experience for me; it was really the avenue through which I engaged my spiritual search.

But as the years went on, there was something in the practice of Zen that I couldn't find a connection with; it started to feel a bit dry. I didn't feel deeply engaged on an emotional level. And so, without being really conscious of what I was doing, but just following my interest and intuition, I started to reach out again, especially through my reading. One day I found myself in a tiny spiritual bookstore in Palo Alto, California, where I found the autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux. St. Therese was a nineteenth-century Catholic nun who died very young; during the last years of her life, her Mother Superior asked her to write down her life's story. Thumbing through her autobiography in the store, something about her saintly piety just intrigued me, so I bought the book and took it home.

As I read her life story, I was so taken by her; there was an innocence and a dedication to God that really touched something in me. Her relationship with God was very sincere and very simple, and something about the simplicity and sincerity of her approach touched something that was very sincere and simple in me. And much to my surprise, I found myself quite literally falling in love with this saint, who was long dead. And when I say I fell in love with her, I mean I *really* fell in love, like when you get a crush in high school, and you're completely preoccupied with someone. I read three or four different versions of her autobiography, I read commentaries on her life and her writings, and I was completely swept up with her for about two years in this love affair of the heart. I was caught so off guard by this experience, and it was so unexpected that I didn't really know what to do with it.

What was really happening was that my heart was being opened. There was something in the way she conveyed her real *love* of God that was deeply heart-centered, and it broke my

heart wide open. This was the beginning of discovering within myself what I think of as the transmission of Christianity and of the Jesus story, which is the transmission of the love of the sacred heart, of the deep, open, unguarded intimacy of love.

I continued my Zen Buddhist practice—seeing my teacher, doing my meditation—but with my heart blown wide open it was such a different experience than before. That love was the missing element, what I hadn't found in my Zen practice. And, of course, looking back, I see it *was* there; it just wasn't there in a way that I could connect with. That makes good sense, of course, because I didn't grow up in a Buddhist culture, so it wasn't easy for me to connect with their icons, images, and stories. They're a little alien to me. Zen for me was about engaging in spiritual practice as a serious in-depth investigation. But through the Jesus story and through St. Therese, I started to experience the heart of sacred love. She was the doorway through which I walked deeper into the truth at the core of Christianity.

“THIS IS HOW I LOVE YOU AND HOW YOU SHALL LOVE ALL THINGS”

Not long after my encounter with St. Therese, I had a profound experience while at a Zen retreat. Zen retreats are very strenuous, with as many as fifteen forty-minute periods of meditation each day, so it required *a lot* of silent sitting, a lot of being in quiet. I had been to Zen retreats before and had just begun to think I was getting good at it when I showed up at this seven-day retreat. I was really looking forward to being there, but as the retreat unfolded, something started to go haywire. It began to turn into a nightmare. I felt an intense sense of discomfort, and I had no idea why it was happening. I felt a feeling of profound confinement, like a caged animal, and I wanted to break out.

Now, by that time I knew how to sit in meditation through all sorts of different states of mind and emotions, and I had long since realized sometimes you just have to sit through these discomforts. But this really had me stumped; I was so profoundly emotionally uncomfortable, with intense anxiety and fight-or-flight symptoms going on inside me. At a certain point I literally couldn't take it any more. I just cracked. It was devastating for me; I felt humiliated in a very profound way. And so I wrote a little note to say that I was leaving, and when everybody else was meditating, I tacked it up onto the teacher's door. You weren't supposed to leave without seeing the teacher in person, but I was so humiliated that I just couldn't face him. I left the note and got in my car and drove home.

I was so devastated that I really thought that this was the end of my quest. I thought to myself: *Well, you gave it a good five or six years, you really put yourself all into it, but you failed. You're not cut out for this; throw in the towel.* I was twenty-five years old, and I was certain, absolutely certain, that that was the end of my spiritual search. So I drove home thinking it was all over, but when I pulled up at my house, a little voice in my head said, "Just go right through the front door and out the back, sit down in your meditation hut and meditate." I'd learned to trust that still small voice in my head over the years. It didn't make any sense to me because I was sure that this was the end of my spiritual search, that it was all over, but I just did what the voice said. I literally walked from the car, in the front door, straight through the house to the back door and into my meditation hut.

No sooner did I sit down than that spiritual heart—the heart of love I'd first experienced reading St. Therese—literally exploded. It wouldn't even be true to say it expanded; it was like an explosion in my chest. I went from a state of despondency, certain that my whole spiritual search was over and I had failed,

to this immensity of love, of a well-being beyond anything I had ever experienced. And then I heard these words in my mind, as if the God of the Bible was talking, and the voice said, "This is how I love you, and this is how you shall love all beings and all things." It literally felt like the voice of God, and that explosion of the heart changed everything.

That night the teacher from the Zen temple called me up, and asked, "So, what happened?" I said, "I don't know!" He asked, "Why don't you come back?" and I said, "Ok, I'll be back tomorrow!" That was the end of the conversation; it was literally that fast, because I didn't have any reservations about going back. I didn't necessarily feel that my spiritual life was back on track, but in this immensity of love that I'd experienced, I felt like a feather in the wind. Come back? Ok, I'll go back.

So I drove back to the temple, and as I was about to enter the meditation hall, I saw the retreat leader, the one who holds people to the rules. At the door of the hall, this monk looked me straight in the eyes and said, "You shouldn't have left, and you shouldn't have come back." And, you know, those were the best words he ever could have said, because I saw that, when he spoke, nothing in me budged—that love didn't shrink, didn't diminish, didn't move one iota. In fact, I just wanted to throw my arms around him and kiss him, because he showed me that nothing could budge what I was experiencing.

If I hadn't had that open heart and someone had said, "You shouldn't have left, and you shouldn't have come back," I would have been devastated. Instead, the effect that it had was simply to show me the immensity and the intensity of the love I was experiencing. I walked right back in that door, and I had a wonderful retreat.

And so what began with this Christian saint opening my heart in a totally unexpected way, really culminated in this

blasting open of the heart in a moment of great despair. Once again, the Jesus story—and this saint so intimately connected with the Jesus story—played a pivotal part in my life.

It was at this point that I began to read an immense amount on Christian mysticism—as many as two hundred books of the Christian mystics. I’ve told people since that I came to understand Zen through Christian mysticism, and in a way it’s true. It was through Christianity that I really started to get a deeper understanding of what Zen was all about. Conversely, my Zen Buddhist practice and all my time in meditation helped me realize what the Christian mystics were saying, so they really went together for me at that time.

Through my reading, I also got a deeper feeling for the story of Jesus, both who he was and what the Jesus story meant to different people. In reading the mystics, I realized that the truth and the love of Christ meant different things for different people. Different mystics had very different takes on the relationship between Jesus and God, on their relationship with God and on their relationship with Jesus. I felt as if I’d walked into a mysterious world. As a child I was always intrigued with the Jesus story in a very powerful way; my imagination was captured by it. But when I stepped into the world of these ancient Christian mystics, I started to look at the story of Jesus in a completely different light. They showed me that the Jesus story could actually tell you something really important about yourself—how you relate to life and how you relate to the fundamental mystery of *being*.

For each of us, our own existence is a very mysterious thing. Simply to be, to exist, is a great mystery. On the surface, we each have a personality, a persona, an ego structure—the way we present ourselves to the world. But inside of us is something quite different. Now, in my twenties I’d gone to college and