

What Buddhism Is

Dear Brother,

Yes I could open the email card and it made me cry. I know the Footsteps in the Sand story. And yes, it would work if you substituted "the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas" (not just one, many) for "The Lord". I have felt the loving, protecting hand of the loving Universe (God, Buddhas - what does the name matter?) many times. In high school I was a passenger in a car. The new driver was on a highway, doing 50 mph, when he went off the road a little. He overreacted to that and he lost control of the car and it began to swerve wildly from side to side, crossing lanes, barely missing oncoming cars. We finally went off the road and headed from a 10 foot high solid earth embankment. At the speed that we were going we should have been pulverized. But, right before the moment of impact, I felt a giant, soft hand envelop the four of us in the car. We were cushioned and had only minor bruises. The car was totaled. I was climbing down a cliff in the mountains above Aiea. A tree stump that I had used before suddenly cracked and I was heading head first for the rocks below. A single vine grabbed one of my feet and kept me from falling to my death. I was on the side of the sheer Na Pali cliffs above Kaneohe (after making a very bad decision to descend those cliffs from their summit). I had to fling myself from tree to tree. One miss, and I would slide to my death. I had to stay on the side of the cliffs overnight, not being able to sleep because then I would slide to my death. In the morning I had one more vertical slope to descend to reach safety. I used my hands as pitons to dig a hold into the earth. I grabbed a bunch of grass on the cliff side and it gave way. In a sickening moment of realization I began to slide 700 hundred feet down the side of the mountain. As I slid threw a thicket of thorn bushes, I felt that cushioning hand again. A tree branch stopped my slide, and cut my forehead down to the skull bone - but I lived.

So I do know a little about God/Universe/Buddhas' protection. As I guess do you. I am deeply grateful for that protection. I give thanks everyday for it in my prayers before I meditate. I pray for you every day too. Prayer is a good thing.

My only problem is a semantic one. Use of "the lord" in the sense that the Christian God is the only "true lord". Buddhism is not technically a religion. The Buddha took no stance on the question of God and divinity. The Buddha is not a God. He was a man, who saw suffering all around him and strove to find a new way to enable humans to gain liberation from that suffering. His teachings are called the Middle Way. No gods involved - just humans clearing away mental confusion to see their inner nature as it really is. No heaven, just spiritual liberation that transcends suffering and takes a Buddhist on the path of a life centered on compassion and loving kindness. Buddhism is about here and now. About knowing the blissful, wondrous reality of life and living it in the moment.

With deep love and thanksgiving - your brother David