



The Old Dog and the Wat

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As a young boy, I sat in my Catholic catechism class, taught by an old, skinny nun with a faint mustache. She would patrol the aisles with a ruler, ready to crack the knuckles of anyone whose attention strayed. A girl in back of me had been softly crying all during class because her dog had just died. She asked the nun if dogs go to heaven. The nun retorted “absolutely not!” with a tone that implied it was a stupid question. The girl kept sobbing all through catechism. On that day, so long ago, I rejected religion. But six decades later I learned that some religions would have disagreed with my ruler-clenching nun.



I attended a Buddhist Lent ceremony at a very old, important Wat in Lamphun Province years ago. My father-in-law was still alive, but very old and in poor health. With great effort, he came to the ceremony. He was an important person in the community and a benefactor of the Wat. His attendance gave the ceremony added importance.

There was a phalanx of monks in attendance along with many people from the community. The Wat was adorned with flowers everywhere. An important occasion to be sure. As everyone kneeled and chanted, I notice an old dog wander into the Wat. This old dog was so mangy you could all but hear the fleas buzzing around him from 100 yards away. The old dog casually walked by the phalanx of chanting monks, past the worshippers (some of them quite important community members) and plopped down right in front of the alter! I waited for someone to shoo the dog out.

But no one gave the old dog the slightest attention. After all, as I found out later, the dog had as much right to be there as anyone else.

No, dogs don't find heaven. But they are way ahead of us in finding Nirvana.

Category

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