

Jesus Incognito

By Alison Luterman

Don't tell anyone, but I love Jesus.
I love his big dark Jewish eyes, so full of suffering soul,
like an unemployed poet's, and his thick sensuous Jewish lips,
and his kinky curly hair, just like mine, uncontrollable despite conditioners,
and the way he always argues with everyone
and will go to hell for love.
He's just like that Buddhist god Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion,
except his name is easier to pronounce.
When you're in trouble it's hard to remember to yell for Avalokiteshvara,
but "Oh Jesus!" arises naturally
every time a crazy driver hot-dogs past me on the freeway.
I know I should say the Shema when I'm about to die,
but will I be able to remember Hebrew at a time like that?
I don't want to die saying "Oh shit!"
I'd like to leave my body consciously, like a Tibetan lama, sitting in full lotus
with my head turned toward where I'll reincarnate next.
But let's be realistic: I probably couldn't meditate enough to become enlightened
in the however-many years I have left.
Jesus seems easier. All you have to do is love everyone.
Well, *seems* is the key word here.
Sometimes the more you try
to love people, the more you hate them.
Maybe it would be better to try
not to love people, and then watch the love
force its way out of you like grass through cement.
Anything is better than organized religion.
I don't like the singing in churches — all those hymns in major keys.
I don't think religion should sound so triumphant.
It should be humble and aware of the basic incurable pathos of the human condition,
and in a minor key and sung in a mysterious ancient language, like Sanskrit or Hebrew.
Is it OK for me to love Jesus but not be Christian?
I could try to open my heart and give away all my possessions.
It's not that different from being Buddhist, after all, except for a history
of witch burnings, the Inquisition, the subjugation,
rape, and pillage of indigenous peoples all over the world,
not to mention twenty centuries of vicious antisemitism. That's a lot to overlook
to get back to a baby born among animals to a Jewish mother, Miryam.
And what about that other Mary, the sexy one? Jesus, I don't believe you died a virgin.
I think you needed to taste everything human, to inhabit the whole mess:
blood, shit, flies, regret, envy, why-me.
I owe you and all the other bodhisattvas and sages
and newborn babies a debt of thanks
for agreeing to come back and marry yourselves
to our painful predicament again and again —
and I do thank you, bowing to the infinite directions.