

The Beer Geeks: Enlightenment through beer

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Our recent trip to Seattle sparked in me an interesting thought: What if, like us, Buddha spent the Year in Beer?

Now, I know you're probably thinking that all this beer has drowned my sense of reality. But consider this: Buddha wandered the world in order to experience it and ultimately achieve enlightenment. So, what better spiritual quest would there be for beer geeks like my husband Chris and me, if it were not spending a year dedicated to beer? Surely those who seek enlightenment get thirsty along the way.

It had been about 10 years since we explored the Emerald City's beer scene, and a lot had changed. So, we called upon our friend, Seattle beer writer Chris Devlin, to guide us on our journey. It started with a visit to the south Seattle neighborhood of Georgetown, an old industrial area in the beginning stages of "rebirth." Walking to our first brewery, we passed a shop window with a T-shirt that read, "Georgetown — It's not just for hookers anymore." Was this really the path that would lead us to beer Nirvana? What I didn't realize was that we were going to meet some of the nicest people and drink some of the best beer of our trip.

Getting to the next brewery, I really had to remind myself that we were on a spiritual quest. We didn't get lost, per se, but we did take the bus too far and end up at a remote Park and Ride. We all lost faith for a bit, and thought our journey may have come to

an end. But another bus did, in fact, arrive and we managed to find our way to Laughing Buddha Brewing Company.

Laughing Buddha brought our beer world full circle. First off, we found it, which was quite a feat at that point. Second, we met a couple that had lived in Monterey for 40 years and only recently moved to Sacramento. We didn't even get their name, but that didn't seem to matter. And cool thing No. 3, Laughing Buddha's brewing equipment had been purchased from the now defunct San Andreas Brewing in Hollister.

San Andreas was one of our favorite breweries to visit from the early days of our travels. We once overheard a couple of field-worn ranchers debate the qualities of the latest computer technology. But it wasn't just the seemingly incongruent discussions that we liked — they also had great beer. San Andreas was one of the first breweries to make a fruit beer, which isn't an easy thing to do right. Using local fruit, San Andreas brewed an apricot ale that was very refreshing. They also brewed a woodruff ale. Woodruff is a medicinal herb that has been used since the Middle Ages.

As we reminisced, we were comforted to see that the brewing equipment had made its way into the karmic beer stream. It was being used once again to make great and unusual beer. Laughing Buddha brews Asian-inspired beers, including a brown ale made with pandan leaf, and a pale ale made with two types of ginger.

I can't say that we achieved Nirvana that day, but if the path to enlightenment is like this, I am definitely continuing the quest. I think Buddha would approve.

Merideth Canham-Nelson and her husband Chris Nelson have a beer travel Web site, thebeergeek.com.

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