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On December 28th, ex-Jain Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh announced, "I shall be called Bhagwan no longer." Instead, Rajneesh accepted the prophecy of Katzue Ishira, a lady Japanese Zen Buddhist who earlier declared Rajneesh to be the reincarnation of Gautama Buddha, the 6th century BCE founder of Buddhism. "From now onward, I am Gautama the Buddha," said Rajneesh. "With great love and respect, I accept Ishira's prophecy." Disciples at his Pune, India, ashram adjusted rapidly to the switch. "We are getting used to calling him Buddha, the awakened one," said Swami Chaitanya Keeryi, editor of the Rajneesh Times and spokesman for the ashram. Another resident expressed his great joy, "He is the living Buddha. He has come back again to bring peace to the world."

But only two days later, his international secretary, Ma Prem Hasya, then in Los Angeles, received a telex from Rajneesh: "This evening when I was taking my Jacuzzi, [Gautama the Buddha] became very...disturbed because the jacuzzi given to him was a luxury. I said, 'You have fulfilled your prophecy, that you will be coming back. Four days is enough. I say goodbye to you and now you need not wander around the earth. So now you disappear into the ultimate blue sky.' "

The Buddha's discomfort, according to the dubious tale, stemmed from wanting to continue his customary embodied ascetic practices. Buddha objected, for example, to Rajneesh's refusal to sleep only on the right side, with the hand for a pillow. "Everything was impossible," Rajneesh complained in the telex, "[Gautama the Buddha] is so accustomed to his way that [any other] way is not more relevant. So now I make a far greater historical statement, that I am just myself. You can continue to call me the Buddha, but it has nothing to do with Gautama the Buddha. I am Buddha in my own right."

Even that new title caused problems when a Sri Lankan official called it an insult to the historical Buddha. Acknowledging the problem, Hasya said, "He simply wants to

be known as Shree Rajneesh." The title "Bhagwan" is also out.

Though Rajneesh's popularity has dropped off in the USA since his unceremonious ouster in 1985, he is a big hit among Zen-oriented young Japanese yuppies who now flock to his India ashram.