

ESCAPING THE PIT

A self-made, worldly traveler wandered toward the pit of sin,
And blindly tripping at the brink, he tumbled headlong in.
He landed in a selfish muck of broken, rotting schemes,
And slipped about the walls all slimed with his own empty dreams.
He crawled and struggled upward until all his strength was sapped,
Then fell back in a muddy heap; he knew that he was trapped!
He screamed out loud for anyone who might be passing by,
In hope that they might rescue him, then someone heard his cry.

A Jewish rabbi, walking by, stepped up and said, "Hello!"
He looked the traveler over, then bent down and said, "You know,
The problem is, my friend, that you have sinned your life away.
Read God's commands and keep His law! You'd better start today!"

The rabbi left; the man fell back and landed with a thud.
He moaned and wept but all his tears just mixed into the mud.
A Hindu mystic heard the moans and came beside the hole,
And for some time he listened to the sighs of that sad soul.

"Excuse me," said the guru, "but if I may truly speak,
It comes from meditation, the tranquility you seek,
For it is just illusion, this dark pit in which you lie.
Relax, don't trust your senses; you are free the same as I."

The mystic soon was followed by a teacher of Islam
Who bowed five times toward Mecca, and when he had said a psalm,
He smiled, gazing downward, as he sat to take a rest.
He spoke with friendly gestures, "If you really try your best,
You'll learn by heart the Koran and recite it day by day.
You may survive till Ramadan, to fast as well as pray.
So, vow a trip to Mecca, but if you are stuck here still,
You might as well forget it then, it must be Allah's will."

A Buddhist monk was traveling by, a long time after that,
And sitting near the pit awhile, he spoke from where he sat,
“My friend, this pit is nothing; it’s *desire* that enslaves.
Your painful spirit suffers from the freedom that it craves.
Accept your plight and live within your limits with content.
You may achieve Nirvana when your last rebirth is spent.”

The sorry, hopeless sinner slumped in shame and in despair.
But as he wept Another came, and music filled the air.
He thought he heard an angel speak. Instead he saw a Man.
“Could you please help?” he begged him, and the Man replied, “I can.”
Dressed in a spotless robe of white, the Stranger did not care
But scurried down the slimy wall and stood beside him there.
With mighty hands of power he then pushed the captive up,
Then somehow climbed out also, and he handed him a cup.
He said, “You’re thirsty. Drink my cup of living water, friend.”
And as he swallowed deeply, he could feel his heart-wounds mend.
The Savior who had saved him turned, but did not walk away.
He said, “Come on and follow me, there’s work to do today.
I came because I love you. There are others caught by sin
Who also need deliverance from the pit that they are in.”

Now you may follow teachers, even prophets, or a view,
That claim to show salvation by the works that you must do.
But just like this poor traveler, we’ll be groping helplessly,
Unless the One who made us comes to set our spirits free.
We need more than a doctrine: sinners need a God who saves,
Who gives new life and power over all that which enslaves.
So, search among religions, none can match that One who came:
A Person to redeem us, Jesus Christ, that is his name. . . .

— *David L. Hatton, 1987*