

Buddhists split on claiming Jobs as one of their own

by [Daniel Burke](#)

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(RNS) A few days after the death of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, a mini-debate erupted on the Facebook page of Buddhist Geeks.

The tech-savvy podcast and digital magazine had linked to a CNN article that explored the late entrepreneur's ties to Zen Buddhism.

One Buddhist Geeks fan said she had recognized Buddhism's influence on Jobs, and wished him a "very auspicious rebirth."

But another argued that Jobs should be held responsible for a spate of worker suicides last year at Foxconn, a Chinese factory that produces parts for iPhones.

Buddhist Geeks responded that it "certainly wasn't our intention to grab up Steve Jobs as a fellow Buddhist. As you and others have pointed out, there is plenty about Steve that we might not want to claim."

In addition to questions about Apple's business decisions, a new biography of Jobs portrays him as mean and egocentric.

Vincent Horn, the co-founder of Buddhist Geeks and a self-described "Apple fanboy," says the debate over Jobs touches on age-old arguments.

One camp argues that when a person practices Buddhism, he walks a linear path that should completely change his life and eradicate bad behavior. Horn calls this "Buzz Lightyear" school of enlightenment, after the "Toy Story" character's token phrase: "To infinity and beyond!"

Another camp argues that even celebrated Zen masters retain human foibles.

"I think the two camps are locked in a perennial argument about the nature of human beings and human ethics," Horn said. "It's so deep and so core and that's part of the reason this whole thing with Steve Jobs has brought up such emotion."

Adam Tebbe, founder and editor of the website Sweeping Zen, said the debate over Jobs is complicated by the fact that the Apple chief rarely spoke publicly about Buddhism.

"It does feel like we're dancing around the edges and not talking about what his real feelings were," Tebbe said.

The Rev. Danny Fisher, a professor and coordinator of the Buddhist chaplaincy program at University of the West, in Los Angeles, said American Buddhists have grown somewhat leery of discussing "celebrity Buddhists."

"At the same time, we could be avoiding the important conversations about Steve Jobs," Fisher said. "Because he is wearing this label of Buddhism, he could be a catalyst for discourse regarding these big questions about Buddhist practice and the market."

Barry Boyce, a senior editor and feature writer at Shambhala Sun, a Buddhist magazine, said he is wary of portrayals of Jobs as a committed Buddhist.

"To be quite honest, I never heard him saying or in any way indicating that he was looking deeply at the interconnected affects of what he was doing with his life and company," Boyce said.