

UNDERSTANDING AND INFLUENCING BUDDHISTS



SCRIPTURE FOCUS

“And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment.” Hebrews 9:27

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” John 14:6

“All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree.” Isaiah 34:4

QUOTES

“Would the story have been different if I had been specifically trained to reach Japanese Buddhists? And, will future missionaries have the benefit of that kind of training?” David J. Hesselgrave

“Inviting Buddhists to faith in Jesus Christ should be high on the mission agenda of the Church today. This challenge is not a new one. For more than 1300 years missionaries have sought to penetrate Buddhist barriers in and around China with little success.” Ralph R. Covell

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As a result of the reading, discussion, and activities of this session, the candidate should be able to:

- Understand the basic beliefs of Buddhism
- Get a glimpse of the deeper worldview and values of Buddhists in general.
- Be able to more effectively share the Good News about Jesus with a Buddhist.

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- Have some idea of key issues that need to be addressed in reaching Buddhists.
 - Increase one's sympathy for the plight of Buddhists and feel more of God's love for them.
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If you are going to be a witness to Buddhist people, it is important that you understand their worldview, beliefs, values, and practices so you can share the gospel in ways they can more clearly understand.

A daughter of Hinduism and deeply colored by it, Buddhism is a worldwide, missionary faith with influence over a billion people. Buddhists follow the teachings of Gautama, the Buddha, the Enlightened One. Its basic premises are: (1) life is suffering as a result of desire and the solution is to eliminate desire; (2) *karma*, one's action and the result of that action, inexorably determines one's fate in life and beyond; (3) *samsara* is the endless cycle of birth and death and rebirth, to which one is bound by his karma; (4) the only way out of this endless cycle is to follow the dharma, or the teachings of Buddha, which will lead, through right insight and right effort, to nirvana—not heaven, but the cessation of life, like a candle snuffed out.

A do-it-yourself religion, Buddhism has great appeal to the West. The Buddha did not offer help beyond showing the way. Gods are thought to be an illusion and Buddhists deny a Supreme Infinite Personal Being. It is reputed that Buddha attained enlightenment by self-effort and taught his followers to do the same.

Buddhist peoples are found in 94 countries around the world. In a paper presented to SEANET, Todd Johnson (editor, *World Christian Encyclopedia*) reports 1.38 billion individuals influenced or affiliated with Buddhism.

CASE STUDY: JESUS MUST BE REBORN

Seminar by Rev. Tongpan Prometta¹

The first thing I would like you to understand today is the absolute necessity to have **Jesus be reborn into the local culture**. Jesus as a central Thai, a northern Thai, a southern Thai, an eastern Thai, or an Isaan person.

Beloved, if Jesus were to be born here in Khon Kaen, what would he eat? (Sticky rice! answers the room). Wouldn't he eat bread? (NO!) That's right, Jesus would eat whatever the local people ate. What is the staple of life for Isaan people? Sticky rice! If a meal goes by and there isn't sticky rice, well... I think of when I went to America. I really missed our sticky rice. Their food is good there but deep down in my brain I still missed sticky rice. I just wanted to roll up rice, even just a little. Why? Because I've always eaten sticky rice! So, if Jesus was born here in Khon Kaen, I am convinced he would eat sticky rice.

And Jesus would sing *lom* (Isaan ballads) too! He would be the best *kaen* (bamboo instrument) player around! He would be totally incarnated into the culture. So, the first thing for us to understand is that Jesus needs to become one with the local culture. If we are in Khon Kaen, in Isaan, Jesus needs to be Isaan. Whatever culture we are in, Jesus needs to be reborn there. .

.. I hope you'll pardon me if I share about my earlier experience as a Christian. I'm not blaming the missionaries. They came from their farang (foreign) cities and they didn't understand. After I became a believer the missionary came to me and said, "Now that you are a Christian I have a suit and necktie for you. And here is a pair of shoes for you to wear." From the day I was born up until that day, I had never worn a pair of lace-up shoes before. So, I bathed and put on those shoes. I tied them on and tried to walk. Bam! I fell flat on my face. Why? I didn't know how to wear them. They didn't fit me either. They were big long farang boats. I don't blame the missionaries. They meant well. They wanted me to look good and wear shoes. But I didn't know how to wear shoes!

When we are sharing our faith with others, we don't want to do it in a way that people don't understand or that cause people to follow in ways that are foreign to them.

Lots of churches complain about how difficult it is for them to bring people to Christ. We don't have that problem because we don't do it. We don't take people to Christ – we bring Christ to people. We don't have a problem in our churches of people not wanting to come to Christ or not understanding Christ. Christ is being reborn in ways they can clearly understand him. Do you realize just how much of Christianity is farang-style now in Thailand? If you want to see what an American church looks like, it is not difficult. Put on a necktie and I will take you. You don't have to pay the plane fare. I went to America, saw their worship and thought, "This is just like our churches in the town of Udon." I'm not trying to say that the *farang* ways are not good. I just want to be able to clearly communicate the meaning to the local people.

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We need to turn the world upside down. We want people to understand. Therefore, Jesus must be reborn as an Isaan person. Not as a poor example either. If friends are drinking alcohol, we might feel we have to do the same – NO! If they worship spirits, we might feel we have to do as they do – NO! That is not what we're going to do.

(At this point some Isaan-style paintings of Noah were held up in front of the group). Take a look at this picture. What do you think of this? This is Noah, Isaan Noah. Noah is on his way to the rice fields. God called Noah. Noah went to tell his friends what God was planning to do. If he was born today he would be telling the young people, "When you go and ride the motorcycle be sure to wear your helmets!" If he was talking to older people, "When you drive around buckle your safety belts!" If he was talking to pastors of churches he would say, "It's good you don't drink or smoke but don't eat the raw meat like Isaan people do!" (since that is what Isaan people do and get liver flukes.)

I was invited to speak on the 17th of November at the World Heritage Exhibit in Udon to share the story of Noah. The monk of the temple there saw these paintings and asked me to come and tell the story of the origin of the world in his temple! So, I put the words to the music.

(At this point Tongpan began to chant in Isaan style, telling the story of Noah being called by God. Much applause and cheering. After this he did a sample of the same in the central Thai style which immediately had everyone clapping the beat.)

That is our task – let God’s power work. If we stop, what happens? We get lazy and the Word doesn’t go anywhere. Our job is to share the story. When you go out and work in the fields, do you meet people there? Tell them God’s story. When you go out looking for fish, are there people around? Tell them God’s story. When you collect grass for the buffalo, do you see people? Tell them God’s story.

Our role is to talk. Ask God this year, “How many people do you want me to tell?” You have to have a goal. Can you do it? That is the main goal of the servant of the Lord. Ask God to do it through you. I don’t want people to think, “That can’t happen.” When Jesus is reborn within us we have three inner changes. First of all, we have a new person we can depend upon. After this we have 2) new values and 3) new attitudes. If all three of these have taken place, then external changes will start to happen. All of the external changes will come from the internal ones.

Father Bua from Dat Hai Village, please stand. In the past, people in Father Bua’s village here used to call him Uncle “Whiskey Jug”. Thank you, please be seated. A real drinker, smoker, everything. I never once told him he should stop drinking. He became a believer. He received a new person to depend upon in Jesus Christ. He could ask what he needed from Him. You can ask Him to help you in your areas of need. Don’t start building up religion from the beginning. Start with believing in Jesus from the very first day.

In the past who did we look to for help? The spirits. You need to understand, Isaan people like to mix religions together. Buddhism, Brahmanism, animism, spirits of the city, spirits of mother and father, all mixed together. So here comes teaching about Jesus and they just add Him in there with all the others.

If we just teach externals (religious practice) then Jesus is just one more along with all the rest. If we teach internals – focus on values, attitudes – then the spirits are taken out and replaced with Jesus Christ.

Heart values are extremely important. What is our normal heart value? Self first. If we are a child of God we start to let God and others come first. Changes will happen. When values change from the inside, then outside behavior changes.

REFLECT #1

1. What are three or four things you learned from this case study?
2. What had the strongest impact on you personally? Why?
3. How have you made similar mistakes to the western missionaries in this study?
4. How have you shown Jesus reborn in your culture? In another culture?

INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM²

What is the origin of Buddhism?

Unlike Hinduism, Buddhism can point to an individual founder and look back to a date for its beginning—Siddhartha Gautama, a Hindu born about 560 B.C. at Lumbini near the border of India in what is now Nepal. His father, a raja or minor king of that area, tried to isolate him from the harsh realities of life, raising him in the luxurious surroundings of his palace, preparing him to rule. He was married and had a son but eventually, at age 29, he journeyed

outside the palace and saw a sick person, an aging man, and a corpse—impressing him deeply with the suffering of this life. At the same time, he saw a monk and became aware of the “wandering life”. He determined to solve the riddle of life and immediately left the palace, his wife, and son, seeking the truth to the human predicament.

Who is the Buddha?

Guatama began by becoming a wandering monk, wearing a yellow robe and shaving his head. He studied the Upanishads under the finest teachers, and then finally tried self-denial, starving himself until he was little more than a skeleton. At last, after sitting under a tree 40 days and nights, he claimed to have experienced the highest degree of God-consciousness—nirvana—literally, the “blowing out” of the flame of desire and the negation of suffering. From this experience, Gautama felt he had found “salvation” and from that time onward became known as the Buddha, or “the enlightened one.”

How does Buddhism compare to Hinduism?

A daughter of Hinduism, Buddhism came from Hinduism, but Buddha’s teachings were rejected as heresies by the dominant teachers of Hinduism, the Brahmin priests. He denied that the Vedas and the Upanishads were divine writings, saying they were of no use in finding nirvana. He denied that man had an atman (soul) and that this present world is maya (unreal). Buddha rejected the Brahmin priesthood and the entire Hindu sacrificial systems, instead emphasizing ethics over ritual. The caste system was rejected and he taught that anyone could reach enlightenment, not only Brahmin males.

Finally, he challenged all the indifferent Hindu gods and goddesses, saying they were essentially unimportant in the quest for enlightenment. But, Buddha accepted Hindu ideas of samsara—the endless cycles of birth, death, and rebirth to which one is bound by his karma—one’s action and the result of that action that inexorably determines one’s fate in life and beyond. The only way to escape this endless cycle was through the dharma, or the teaching of the Buddha which leads, through right insight and effort, to nirvana. He incorporated yoga and meditation into his teaching—skills that had been highly-developed in Hinduism.

What are the Four Noble Truths about man’s predicament?

Buddha taught that:

1. Life is suffering, dissatisfaction, illusion.
2. The cause of that suffering is man’s craving for wrong things, even for life itself.
3. Suffering can only be escaped through man’s own insight and effort
4. through the Noble Eight-fold Path.

What is the Noble Eight-fold Path?

The first two deal with understanding the problem and setting out:

1. Right views, understanding; and
2. Right attitude, purpose.

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The next three have to do with practical morality on the way so as not to interfere with the ultimate goal:

3. Right speech;
4. Right conduct; and
5. Right livelihood, occupation.

The last three deal with being serious about pursuing the goal with intensity and meditation:

6. Right endeavor, effort;
7. Right awareness, mindfulness; and
8. Right meditation.

REFLECT #2

1. Write your own description of the Buddha's life.
2. How does Buddhism differ from Hinduism? How is it the same?
3. What are the basic beliefs of Buddhism?
4. From this content what are some clues of how you might share the gospel with a Buddhist?

THE THREE MAJOR STREAMS OF BUDDHISM

Theravada Buddhism

Operating best in societies that are culturally Buddhist, laymen are engaged in earning merit and cultivating support around the Sangha (the brotherhood of monks studying the dharma and seeking nirvana). Theravadan societies often include spirit worship, astrology, mediums, and divination. Strong ties to family and society contrast with the other forms of Buddhism which emphasize self-works and denial, but this makes it hard for individuals to accept the gospel of the grace of God. Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia are the “heartlands” of this stream of Buddhism.

Mahayana Buddhism

This stream is considered the “Greater Vehicle” and is generally understood to be the easier, more seeker-friendly form of Buddhism, pointing outside the person to bodhisattvas for help (enlightened individuals who postpone nirvana to help the masses attain it). Some schools say that a person can attain nirvana in one lifetime through the Mahayana practices, promising “pure lands” reached by faith in these helpers where one can easily move on to nirvana. This stream began in India but matured in China and today is found in many countries influenced by it such as Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore.

Tantric or Tibetan Buddhism

In the thousand years between the death of Buddha and the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet in 640 AD, much incorporation of beliefs from other religions had taken place. The tantric Buddhist world of over 8 million, presided over by the Dalai Lama, is quite different still than these other two, though considered part of the Mahayana stream. A pantheon of deities, spirits, and demons, including additional “Buddhas” and multiple bodhisattvas were added as

well as complex esoteric practices meant to be a shortcut to nirvana. In tantric practices, the seeker submits himself to a lama who serves as a spirit guide through complex and powerful meditations and authorizes him to address a selected yi-dam (deity or holy being) and to use a secret mantra (chanted phrase) and to visualize the mandala (a sacred diagram of the yi-dam's world). Through these means, they aim to gain enlightenment. Mantras, mandalas, and dorji (magical thunderbolts) came to be employed because the intrinsic power of words and symbols came to be felt superior to that of good deeds for affecting a good rebirth.

The practice of yoga is an attempt through various mental and physical devices and positions to attain ecstatic union with the universal spirit. This form of Buddhism is particularly growing in the Western world through films such as *Little Buddha*, *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet* and others. Most tantric Buddhists live in the Autonomous Region of Tibet and neighboring regions such as Northern India, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, and several groups are found as well in Siberia.

REFLECT #3

1. What is the major difference between Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism?
2. How is Tantric Buddhism different from the rest of Mahayana Buddhism?
3. How have you seen Buddhist influence in your popular culture?
4. What examples and implications have you observed?

WHAT MAKES IT HARD FOR A BUDDHIST TO RECEIVE THE GOSPEL?

In Buddhism, there is no Infinite Personal Creator to whom they are responsible and who reaches out to them. The Buddhist believes that the ultimate origin of the chain of causes and effects that brings about the illusion of life is *avicca* (ignorance). So, if the Christian insists that God is the ultimate cause, then the Buddhist says, "He must be Ignorance." It is very hard to communicate the simple Christian phrase "God loves you" to a Buddhist. When a Christian uses the word God, he or she is thinking of the Lord God who created the world and everything in it. Buddha taught that there are no gods or supreme beings—everything is illusion.

Christians believe God loves humanity and took initiative to reach out in the form of Jesus—Buddhists believe that desire is the root of all suffering and that a person receives what he or she deserves, nothing more or less. The concept of sin to the Buddhist is *karma*— "Do good, receive good; do evil, receive evil." It is a religion of self-effort with no idea of how much effort is enough to satisfy the impersonal force of karma. Yet, there is no Personal Guarantor of that law—the God who judges sin as well as forgives it is not in their thinking. There is no clear basis for action, decision or growth because Buddhists believe that, although one must depend upon one's self for "salvation", yet self is *anatta* (non-self or illusion). There is no basis for all creation in God, no purpose in creation and no reflected "Image of God" to explain man. And their concept of salvation itself is almost diametrically opposed to the Christian view—to the Buddhist, the goal is emptiness and extinction of desire, if not of conscious life itself. To the Christian, the goal is fullness of life in the intimate presence of a loving Father.

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Buddhism provides cultural and often national identity for Buddhists. Anybody born into a Buddhist family is automatically a part of the Buddhist culture. All too often in the past, we have seen extraction evangelism of individuals. When an individual chooses to follow Christ alone, they are seen as a traitor to their family and cultural community which means they are both shunned by the community and the target of anger from the family and community.

Christians must try to reach Buddhists without removing them from their family and culture. The best way to do this is to follow Jesus' strategy in Matthew 10 and Luke 9 and 10 where he told his disciples to only stay where they found households that would receive them.

REFLECT #4

1. What are some of the key barriers to belief for a Buddhist?
2. How can we overcome such fundamental differences in worldview?
3. Is the emphasis on individual evangelism a Biblical emphasis or a cultural one?

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE³

How should a Christian respond to Buddhism and the Buddhist? First Christians should understand Buddhism is an ethical system, with wrongs and rights. Before Christians see how they differ, they should look and see what they have in common with Buddhism.

Morality

Buddhism recognizes the need to live a "Good" moral life, refraining from actions called "sin" in Christianity. Buddhism teaches people to refrain from stealing, lying and committing adultery. As we share, we should reflect the standards of sin in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14-16).

The Physical World

Buddhism also recognizes the temporary view of this physical world. Although Christianity does not deny its physical elements, the Bible clearly teaches the temporary nature of this physical world (2 Peter 3:10,12, Isaiah 51:6, Hebrews 1:11,2). Buddhism views this world as illusionary and deceptive, causing attachment to this world, rather than to seeking truth.

Suffering and escape for the Buddhist

The recognition of suffering in the world is the first Noble Truth of Buddhism. Christianity also observes the suffering in the world. Buddhism sees suffering as the result of bad *karma*, not a fallen world. Christianity sees the suffering because of our fallen nature and sin. However, both Christianity and Buddhism see the suffering of humanity as a focal point of humanity's status. Buddhism's solution is to first recognize suffering (*1st Noble Truth*), then to know attachment to this physical world is cause of this suffering (*2nd Noble Truth*). Buddhists are then to separate themselves from attachment to the physical (*3rd Noble Truth*), and seek the teachings of Buddha (*4th Noble Truth*), as summarized in the *Noble Eightfold Path*. The goal is to escape this physical world into *Nirvana*, after a succession of lives filled with suffering. The hope of the Buddhist is to one day reincarnate into the body of a male Buddhist monk, who will live a life worthy of escape from *Samsara*.

Salvation for the Follower of Christ

Christianity recognizes the suffering of humanity, but unlike Buddhism, salvation from

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suffering in this physical and temporary world only comes through having a “saving relationship” with Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins, to restore humanity. By His death, Jesus paid for our sins, taking our suffering upon Himself to purchase our redemption with His blood. By putting faith in Jesus Christ, our account of sin and suffering is transferred to His work on the cross.

Unlike Buddhism, which depends on the works of the individual for salvation, salvation in Christianity is dependent on the work of Christ alone, who died for our sins. Salvation is dependent on faith in Jesus Christ, not human effort (John 3:15-18, Romans 3:23-26). Salvation is a gift from God to humanity. A person cannot work to earn their salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Reincarnation

An area where Buddhism and Christianity differ is in understanding what happens after death. The Buddhist has a modified understanding of Hinduism’s doctrine of reincarnation. Buddhists believe following death, only the *karmic elements* of the soul are reincarnated, not the personal soul. This doctrine is completely contrary to the Christian concept of death, which can be summed up in Hebrews 9:27 NKJV. “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”

The Bible clearly teaches that each individual only has one life on this earth. Following our life, we are eternally judged, with no second chances of living another life. Those who have accepted Jesus Christ as savior are ushered into His presence as a soul without a body (Philippians 1:21-25), until the resurrection. Those who die without Christ, die in their sins. At the end of this age, both saved and lost receive their eternal bodies (resurrection), the saved are with Jesus Christ in eternity (I Thessalonians 4:13-17) while the lost dwell in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

REFLECT #5

1. What is the most striking example of contrast between the Buddhist belief system and a Biblical understanding?
2. How might a Buddhist react to Jesus’ offer to Nicodemus to be born again?
3. What is the difference between the Buddhist and Christian view of salvation?
4. How will this affect how you share the gospel?

EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW

Evangelizing China

Nestorian missionaries reached China in 635 CE, and they won converts among the upper classes. A few small Nestorian churches survived in China into the 14th century. Catholic monks sometimes stumbled upon these dying churches. Between 1200 and 1400 groups of Catholic monks traveled to China and tried to win Chinese leaders to Christ, but they had little success.

In 1580, Mateo Ricci, a Jesuit priest, entered China and quickly learned the language. He was a scholar who won converts from the educated upper class in Beijing. Other Jesuit missionaries continued Ricci’s work after his death in 1610. They planted a few churches and also limited their outreach efforts to Beijing’s educated elite. Disaster struck in 1644 when the Manchus

overthrew the existing regime. They associated China's Christians with the old regime, so they persecuted the Church. By 1645 there were no Christians left in China.

In 1807 Robert Morrison became the first of many Protestant missionaries to serve in China. At that time, all missionary activity was confined to China's coast. In 1854 Hudson Taylor became the first missionary to take the gospel to China's interior provinces. In 1865, he founded the China Inland Mission (CIM) to extend this vital work. Many other mission agencies followed the lead of CIM. These efforts established the Church in each of China's provinces. Between 1854 and 1949 many strong churches were founded in China despite the political unrest of the 1911 Nationalist Revolution and the chaos of the Japanese invasion of 1937.

In 1949, the communists took control of China and expelled all missionaries. Persecution forced China's one million Christians to go underground, but persecution fanned the flames of faith. Today there are 70-100 million Christians in China. But there are still hundreds of unreached people groups in that great nation. The Chinese Church now has the strength to reach them for Christ.

TESTIMONY OF TSERING SHERUP NORBU⁴

My name is Tsering Sherup Norbu. I was born in the remote village of Thinglup, which is a border village with Tibet. I was born under the Loba tribe even though we write ourselves Gurung, we are ethnic Tibetan people who migrated from Tibet long ago and settled here.

I was born and brought up in a very strong Buddhist family. From our childhood, whatever we learned through our parents and Lamas we learned about Buddha and incarnation Buddha

*IS THIS MY FATE OR BAD KARMA
LEADING ME IN THIS SITUATION?*

Dalai Lama. In our tradition, the second boy child has to be a monk and same as second girl child be the nun and stay in the monastery to learn more about Buddhism from Lamas. Being a first child of the parents, I got an opportunity to

go to primary school in the village as there were no high school by then and then I moved to lower Mustang for the high school and then to Pokhara for the higher studies.

I was taught to be a disciple of Buddha: we never tell a lie, never steal, and believe in Karma. We pray a prayer to receive the merit points and we need to do this as we will have a better life in the life to come. So, I tried to be a good person but always failed to meet the standard. The more I tried to please God, the more I began to suffer. Gradually I began getting away from these thoughts and hooked up with the friends who seemed very happy. I had completed my 12th grade in school and was searching for a job, which was very difficult.

As the time went by, my needs were getting higher and with the company of friends I learned some things that were not good that I should do, because that was only my option. As a result of this deed, I eventually ended up to be in prison for 6 years. From the prison in the east, I was moved to the prison in the west. My life was meaningless and I was abandoned by my family, due to this reason they were been treated badly.

Always I had this question: "Is this my fate or bad Karma leading me in this situation?" If there

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is God, why did this happen to me? Where are the merits that I earned and that my parents earned? When will they be transferred? These thoughts kept coming to my mind and day by day I began to be lifeless in the prison walls.

There were two other brothers in the prison whose brother was a Christian also. He used to come to meet them and talk to them and pray for them. I closely watched that and saw that even after few weeks even though they were in the prison their lives were happier and I felt there something happening.

One day, this brother came along with another man and the jailor called me outside to meet them. It was in the afternoon; I was just sitting outside the room and passing the time with friends. As I met these brothers, they asked me how I am and how do I feel. In the meantime, I felt I had been loved and cared for so much; I felt closer to them. Later, they said they have a small booklet to translate. I looked at Jailor's face and by his signal in his eye, he gave me the permission to receive this book. As I receive this book and before translating, I read and sit for translation, but I felt to read again. This way I read this book many times and I felt comforted that I am suffering for my own deed but Jesus suffered for all of mankind.

I translated and gave it back to them and something inside me started changing. Later on, the same brothers with other friends came back and gave me the printed copy of it. I felt shy to ask for the Bible. I was so thankful to them. To make the long story short, I began praying this GOD in my heart and one day the jailor told me that my name is in the list to be pardoned. That day came and I went back home to be with my family and now I worship Jesus as my personal savior and Lord. I witnessed my family and now they also worship Jesus. It is very difficult in our culture; the consequences could be very hard. I remained silent for many years, but I began to share my faith with my friends and gradually they came to know this.

Now I am employed and I am so much thankful to the LORD for changing my life and I am praying that same Jesus make me an instrument to reach other Loba people in the Lord. Now I am being mentored by the same brother who brought this tool that opened my eyes to lifesaving Lord Jesus. Please pray for my family, for their spiritual growth and for my relatives and extended family that they would also come to know Jesus Christ. There are 45,000 Lobas still who have not heard who Jesus is.

**Names and locations have been changed for security's sake.*

About the Loba

The Loba live in the Mustang District of northern Nepal, at altitudes of between 11,000 and 13,000 feet. Mustang, a semi-independent kingdom within Nepal, is a windy, arid, high altitude desert surrounded on three sides by Chinese-occupied Tibet. Until 1992, this area was closed to the outside world. The Loba remain one of the most isolated peoples in the world, both geographically and spiritually, and are virtually unevangelized. The Lord longs to set the Loba free from earthly and spiritual bondages, and to birth them into the Kingdom founded upon His Son, Jesus Christ.

Prayer Points for the Loba People

- **Light:** Pray that the Holy Spirit would cause the Loba to become dissatisfied with their traditional religions, and to make them hungry for the Bread of Life.

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- **Laborers:** Pray that the Lord would call people who are willing to go to Mustang, even Christian tourists and hikers, who will share the love of Jesus with the Loba to light the darkness with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- **Linguists:** Pray that God will raise up qualified linguists to translate the entire Bible into Lopa, the language of the Loba, since they currently have no scriptures in their language.
- **Local Church:** Pray that the Lord would raise up a strong local church among the Loba to bear faithful witness of His love and care.
- **Leaders:** Pray that God will open the hearts of the governmental leaders in Nepal as well as the local leaders of Mustang to the Truth.

MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME IN MONGOLIA⁵

In 1271, Kublai Khan, the great Mongol leader sent an official request to the Pope saying, “Send 100 teachers of the Christian faith to clearly show that the law of Christ is best. If persuaded, I and all under my rule will become his followers.” This opportunity to share Christ’s love and forgiveness was lost because of political fighting in Europe. There was a 10-year delay in sending missionaries. In the meantime, Kublai Khan also invited Lamas from Tibet to evangelize Mongolia. They responded, and Buddhism prevailed.

Today, 15 years after the collapse of communism and its anti-religious movement, there are thousands of Christians and hundreds of churches, yet few trained church leaders in Mongolia. Christianity is young in Mongolia, but its population is young too. Children and youth make up 70% of the population, and the average age is 21.

Khalka Mongolian Believers Reaching to “neighboring Buryat “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16.9). The Apostle Paul answered that call and thus began the spread of the gospel into a new area—present-day Europe. God is still calling Christians to go to new places to tell unbelievers about Jesus. Mongolia is seeing this biblical pattern replicated over and over. Mongolian believers from the dominant Khalka Mongolians heard the call to share Christ with a minority tribe, the Buryats in northeastern Mongolia. Now evangelized, the Buryats want to reach their sister tribe across the border in Russia.

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TO GO TO NEW PLACES TO TELL
UNBELIEVERS ABOUT JESUS.*

Leading the effort to reach the Russian Buryats is a missionary team of all former Siberian convicts with murder convictions who had been saved in prison, released, and formed a ministry team together! They went to Mongolia’s annual mission conference to ask Mongolian Buryat

believers to help them. Other Mongolian missionaries are targeting the Dongxiang people of China, descendants of wounded soldiers Genghis Khan left behind after a fierce battle. Still another missionary is going to a Mongolian people group in Afghanistan, also descendants of soldiers left behind in a Mongol invasion.

Praise God for the explosion of the gospel in Mongolia, and pray for believers to go to every unreached Mongol group with the gospel. Pray that every impediment to the gospel will be removed, and that the gospel witness will take deep roots in formerly unreached Mongolia and beyond. —JS

MONGOLIA: GOD CREATED OUR MELODIES⁶

Mongolia's young church is praising God using authentic Mongolian music – thanks largely to two of its earliest members. Purevdorj and his wife Amartungalag have written 25 Christian songs, compiled three albums of contemporary Mongolian Christian music, and will soon release the third album of their own music. Purevdorj has also translated more than 120 praise songs into Mongolian from English and Korean. All over Mongolia, in small house churches and in large city churches, believers are singing their songs. “When people use our music to worship God, that is, of course, the greatest joy,” said Purevdorj.

But they especially want to compose songs that sound Mongolian. “We are Mongolians, so we have Mongolian melodies inside us. God created them, so he would like to hear them,” said Purevdorj.

Adds Amartungalag, “We want to write songs with a Mongolian harmonic.” Both of them hold music education degrees and are professors at Union Bible Training Centre in Ulaanbaatar. He teaches contextualized theology and biblical ministry, while she teaches worship and song leading. They started the Christian Songwriters Fellowship of Mongolia to encourage others working in worship ministries.

They also organize annual concerts of Mongolian Christian musicians and release compact discs of the performances. Last year, they focused much of their attention on writing songs for Sunday schools, and they are working on a Mongolian songbook. “Without becoming Christians, we wouldn't imagine our lives as happy,” Purevdorj said. See also a related story on how the two came to Christ.

Pray that more Mongolian praise songs will be created to help the people of Mongolia enjoy and praise God.

WHAT MUST WE DO TO BE OBEDIENT TO GOD'S CALL FOR REACHING
BUDDHISTS?

First, we must realize that our battle is not against the flesh and blood Buddhists but against the spiritual powers that enslave them. Pray God will break the power of these satanic forces and free Buddhist hearts to experience God's truth through the Holy Spirit. While we can strategize and improve our methods, only God can bring fruit that is eternal.

We need to also pray for a loosening of the societal and national forces that create the false understanding that a follower of Christ cannot be a good member of a Buddhist community and nation. One of the main ways to do this is to focus on the family unit as a recipient of the good news, rather than seeking to extract individuals.

Finally, we must incarnate the love and grace and truth of Christ to the Buddhist people. If we live near them already we must learn and listen to them and share a lifestyle and witness that is winsome. For those Buddhists who live beyond a presence with Christians, we must send cross-cultural apostles to spark a movement among them. With truth, we must show a better way than their philosophy. With power, we must show them that the spirits do not control them. With love, we must show them a God who seeks to adopt them into His family.

READ ABOUT

Wikipedia – Buddhism (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism>)

Budhanet.net (<http://www.buddhanet.net/>)

World Christian Resource Directory – Buddhism (http://www.missionaryresources.com/buddhism_outreach.html)

SELF-AWARENESS, SURVIVAL, AND SOLUTION

Keys to Sharing Christ with a Buddhist

- Begin by being a disciple or follower of Jesus. Make sure your faith is grounded in Scripture, is thoughtful and integrated into your own life under the lordship of Jesus. If you are truly living a conversational relationship with Jesus daily, it shows.
- Follow Jesus' priority of loving God first and loving others as yourself second. Put yourself in others' shoes and reach out with simple, practical acts of loving-kindness.
- Learn to listen to the Holy Spirit who will show you the keys to the heart of the one for whom you are praying and to whom you are ministering; it's not a project—it's a person made in God's image loved and precious in His sight.
- Respond to objections with gentle kindness— you do not have to have all the answers. It is okay to say you do not know but to pray for God to make Himself known to them in just the right way. We are not arguing in a debate, we are introducing our best Friend!
- Understand what God has to teach us about His purposes for suffering and in appropriate ways share as He opens their hearts.
- Most of all, bathe your entire effort in loving prayer. You cannot save anyone—only God can do that. Trust Him for the results.

How can we pray? We can pray for:

- Their spiritual enlightenment and salvation;
- Them to experience the fullest revelation of Creator God and his love for them in Christ;
- Their nations to prosper and to know genuine peace; for justice and truth to prevail in their societies, governments, institutions, and families;
- Freedom from every physical, social, psychological and spiritual oppression;
- Those who will go and actually cross frontiers: workers among all Buddhist peoples, initiating indigenous, holistic church planting movements;
- Renewal within churches, evidenced in spiritual, moral and ethical practices.

9 Principles for Being a Witness of Christ

1. Spiritual Powers

No strategy in reaching Theravada Buddhists can ignore the basic spiritual equipment spoken

of in the Scriptures. The conflict with unseen demonic forces calls for earnest and concerned prayer, as well as the informed use of God's Word and the proclamation of Christ's true gospel. Dependence on God is essential.

2. Personnel

How shall they hear without a preacher? First, the key to evangelism is the lay Christian's consistent witness to relatives, neighbors, and friends. Training and encouragement of Christians in this is essential. Regular spiritual nurture of Christians will encourage a resurgence of evangelism. We should seek opportunities to move Christian families into areas without a Christian witness to evangelize and plant churches. When Christian families move, they can start new churches and cells in the homes.

Secondly, new missionary ventures are needed to evangelize unreached Buddhists. Both home missions and foreign missions from the Third World and the West are urgently needed. The role of missionaries working within strong churches is not to be confused with that of pioneer apostles to unreached peoples, focusing on church planting primarily among Buddhist peoples.

3. Time for Diffusion

Patience is needed when working with Buddhist peoples. A time for diffusion of the Message is usually necessary. Gospel saturation finally helps break the barriers of ignorance. Few people in Asia know much about the true gospel, yet the evangelist often expects them to make an immediate decision for Christ. Rather, one should evaluate where each community is in relation to its degrees of awareness of the nature of the gospel; then decide what would be the most appropriate action to take next in leading them toward Christ and calling for decisions of families and individuals when they are ready. Baptism of an individual may be delayed so that the whole family can be won as the Word diffuses throughout the nuclear or extended family.

4. Family-focused Evangelism

Evangelism of whole families, rather than evangelism of individuals, is vital. Social solidarity demands that whole families and groups of families be won for Christ if viable churches are to be planted to make an adequate impact on the community. The individual should be used to win the family.

5. Clarity of Goal

The process of "How shall they hear" is preceded by the goal that they might believe in Christ. Evangelism must aim finally at "making disciples." Thus, the planting of local churches is fundamental. Effective evangelism should also be based in, and flow out of, local churches—both old and new ones. A good goal is a local church in each community and, thereby, the gospel to every person.

6. The Power Encounter Approach

Rather than confronting Buddhism directly, the evangelist should note the powers of the demonic fear controlling the people in animistic practices. The message of Christ's power to liberate from evil spirits or from spiritual bondage should be emphasized. An apologetic approach may be helpful among the minority of philosophical and intellectual Buddhists, but power encounter is suitable for the majority. The action of a new believer in destroying those things which formerly held him in spiritual fear and bondage is a testimony both to himself and the community.

Although a Theravada Buddhist expects to rely on no one else, he often resorts to gods and demons for help. As a result, a great fear of demons exists among Theravada Buddhists, and the whole country openly shows evidence of being under the powers of spirits. People are also afraid and suspicious of each other, often generating demonic influence against one another. People resort to indigenous practitioners, such as spirit doctors or mediums, either to do harm to others or to ward off spells made against them. So, the power of Jesus over the demons and the triumph of the cross over the power of darkness is *good news* for the Buddhists to hear. The gospel provides power for deliverance and relief in their lives. Christians should look for opportunities of power encounter, and encourage them to take place, to destroy the binding effects of demon beliefs upon the people. We should declare the supremacy of the risen Christ over demonic powers and, through the name of Jesus, demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit, affecting deliverance of those who are bound under demonic influence.

7. Social Concern

Buddhists see Jesus Christ as a good man who went about doing good and showing compassion on the sick, the demon-possessed, and the needy and sinful. Pondering Christ's sacrificial death upon the cross, a thinking Buddhist convert said, "Jesus is unparalleled in human history; no one has loved as he loved."

Social concern and social welfare need to be carried out along with our evangelistic activities—spontaneously, without any strings attached. Social welfare ought to be carried out in needy communities quite naturally, whether they are inquirers or not. It is hoped that the loving climate created will see some turn to Christ.

Gospel preaching, literature, and dramas should reflect Christian principles of justice, righteousness, human dignity, equality, and freedom. They should be scrupulously free of party politics. Missionaries of the past era, through many humanitarian actions, gave out much material aid. They freely helped people through hospitals, schools, and orphanages. This often produced many "rice Christians" with dependent attitudes. Today great care must be taken not to spoil new enquirers by unwittingly promoting financial dependence upon the church.

8. Reaching Buddhists in their Social Context

Theravada Buddhism provides cultural and national identity for Buddhists. Born into the system, they are automatically incorporated into Buddhism. Despite the joy of salvation, the result of believing in Christ is often traumatic. The problem is aggravated by the convert's joining the church, by which he often alienates himself from his family and friends, who look upon him as a traitor to the community.

The main results, therefore are:

- The Christian believer is socially ostracized.
- The antagonism of his family and community toward Christianity becomes a barrier to their evangelization.
- Joining the church is interpreted as joining an alien community.

Christians must try to reach Buddhists in their natural setting without uprooting them from their family and cultural ties. Christians must identify with the people among whom they live, and should develop an indigenous pattern of life and Christian worship in these communities. Some strategies toward this are:

- Establish and maintain rapport with the family of the enquirer early. Explain to them that the new believer remains a member of his family in the new community, even though he has transferred his faith to Jesus Christ. The change is inward and personal, not social or national.
- Encourage the new convert to continue identification with his community and be involved in normal social life, observing national laws and festivals except where they compromise biblical truth. For example, Christians should join in wedding activities but refrain from actions such as worship of spirits or images.
- Exhort the believer to be humble, loving, and responsible to the family.
- Aim to win whole families to Christ simultaneously. If necessary, delay baptism of an individual in order to gain the whole family.

9. Facilitating Attitude Change Among Buddhists

Christians must accept the unsavory fact that great fear of, and revulsion against, Christianity exists among Theravada Buddhists, partially due to incidents in past history—such as persecution of Buddhists under supposedly Christian European rulers. Since Christianity was introduced after Buddhism had been established, Theravada Buddhists consider it an alien threat. They fear that Christianity will erode the dominant hold Buddhism exercises over the people.

- Christians must, therefore, employ strategies which change this negative attitude of Buddhists toward the gospel. Possible strategies are:
- Build good relations with leading monks, since they are usually among the most influential men in the village.
- Develop a friendly relationship with families in the community over a period of time.
- Generally, avoid high-powered evangelistic programs and such direct confrontation until a receptive climate has been obtained. Often, much damage has resulted from premature attempts to convert those whose attitudes are negative and whose knowledge of the gospel is inadequate.
- Build the confidence of Buddhists toward Christians by the latter's exemplary living and active social service.
- Gradually introduce Christian concepts through sensitive means of communication— such as films, literature, storytelling, drama, and music appropriate to the community.

SO WHAT?

Imagine

Try to put yourself inside the mind and life of a Buddhist person. What do you think it would be like to believe the things they believe and live the life they live? Think deeply about what it would really be like. How would your life be different based on this worldview and values?

Lifestyle

Do you have any Buddhist friends? If not, ask God for opportunities. Share words and deeds of Christ with them. Pray for them with passion.

UNDERSTANDING AND INFLUENCING BUDDHISTS

Missional Formation

Continue to learn about Buddhism. Learn about the particular form of whatever subgroup you have encountered or may be encountering in the future.

Language and Customs

Learn some words in the language of whatever Buddhists you might befriend or live among. Learn as much as you can and practice using it. If you are called to work among Buddhists, find a language tutor who can help you begin to learn the language.

Stretch: Life on Life

Find others that are befriending and praying for Buddhists. Work and pray and play together with Buddhist friends. See this as life and not a project.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR *UNDERSTANDING AND INFLUENCING BUDDHISTS*

Zacharias, Ravi. *The Lotus and the Cross: Jesus Talks with Buddha*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2001.

Lim, David and Steve Spaulding, Eds. *Sharing Jesus in the Buddhist World, Sharing Jesus Holistically with the Buddhist World, Sharing Jesus Effectively in the Buddhist World*. William Carey Library, 2003-2005

Chanthavongsouk, Inta. *Buddha's Prophecy of the Messiah*. St. Petersburg: Lao Conference of Churches, 1999.

Hattaway, Paul. *Peoples of the Buddhist World: A Christian Prayer Guide*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2004.

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NOTES

¹Seminar given by Rev. Tongpan Prometta, Isaan Congress II, Khon Kaen, Thailand October 18, 2000, Translated by Paul H. DeNeui (<http://thaimissions.info/gsd/collect/thaimiss/index/assoc/HASHe9b1.dir/doc.pdf>)

²From "Tracking the spread of God's Good News amongst Buddhist Peoples Worldwide" 2005 *Buddhist Monitor*, Vol 1, No. 2, November 2005.

³Adapted from *Answering Buddhism* on www.truthnet.org (<http://www.truthnet.org/Christianity/Cults/Buddhism12/>)

⁴Excerpted from *AD 2025 Buddhist Monitor* Volume 1, No. 10 July 2006.

PANORAMA

⁵Excerpted from *AD 2025 Buddhist Monitor* Volume 1, No. 10 July 2006.

⁶Excerpted from SIM International <http://www.sim.org> Spring 2006 – in *AD 2025 Buddhist Monitor* Volume 1, No. 10 July 2006.

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