



Ron & Cheryl Myers

GOD'S WORD FOR ISAN NEWSLETTER

January 2015

"Thai Buddhist Principles, Practices and Thought – Part II"

By Ron Myers

Greetings Again In the Name Of the Lord Jesus Christ,

In my December 2014 Christmastime newsletter, I wrote that I would continue a three-part series on Buddhism as it is practiced in Thailand, along with its syncretistic anomalies. As Christians, we are all too often unaware of other belief systems, how they can hold people captive, and how best to approach hapless adherents with the claims of the Gospel message, so that they will truly listen and understand, become convicted of their need for Christ and believe.

As a matter of review, I had mentioned in my November 2014 newsletter that there are two main schools or traditions of Buddhism—Mahayana (the Greater Vehicle) and Theravada (the Lesser Vehicle). Theravada Buddhism, the more orthodox branch, is also referred to as "The Way of the Elders." The reason it is called the lesser vehicle is because it is practiced by fewer people—essentially the nations of mainland Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka—whereas the less-orthodox or more liberalized Mahayana tradition, along with its various sub-branches, is practiced by all the rest of Asia.

Ironically, Buddhism never really became vogue in India where it began circa 2,558 years ago (543 BC), through the teachings of Prince Gautama Siddhattha. The Prince discovered that life's sufferings and sorrows were caused by one's clinging to unbridled lusts and desires, as well as discovered the key to avoiding them in hopes of ultimately gaining Nirvana.

As a result of his quest for truth, Prince Gautama became "awakened" through meditation as to the root cause of sorrow and suffering. He also envisioned what is known as the "Middle Path" of thought and practice; as opposed to the two extremes of asceticism versus hedonism. It corresponds somewhat to the saying: "do all things in moderation." His discovery was the *Four Noble Truths* and the *Eightfold Middle Path*, which gained him the title of The Lord Buddha (meaning *The Enlightened One*).

The **Four Noble Truths** are: ¹⁾Suffering is universal; ²⁾The origin of suffering is attachment to the passions and things of this life; ³⁾Cessation of suffering is attainable; ⁴⁾The Path to the cessation of suffering and attaining Nirvana is detachment from the desires and passions of life. Generally speaking, the **Eightfold Middle Path** is: ¹⁾right understanding (*of the Four Noble Truths*), ²⁾right thought, ³⁾right speech, ⁴⁾right action, ⁵⁾right livelihood, ⁶⁾right effort, ⁷⁾right mindfulness, and ⁸⁾right contemplation.

The primary principle of Thai Buddhism is to acquire merit (righteousness) to one's account, and avoid committing un-merit (sin). Incidentally, the making of merit even has the power to cancel out un-merit. This is accomplished through maintaining good deeds and abstaining from the bad through practicing religion. The ultimate way to accumulate merit is to: ^{A)}enter the priesthood and pursue an austere lifestyle; ^{B)}feed and care for the priests; or ^{C)}give of one's time and resources to temple affairs. Men can enter the priesthood for a day or even a lifetime. Every mother's desire is that her son would become a priest to make merit on her behalf.

To make merit by feeding the priests, one must arise early in the morning and stand by a road where priests file by on their morning walk. This gives men, women, and their children an opportunity to give offerings of food and gifts, which are placed in the priest's large offering bowls. Priests are considered as being holy, even godlike, so one must remove one's shoes during this time.

The Thai say they believe that all religions are good, just as long as a person practices one, because "they all teach people to do good." Yet ultimately, for the Thai, the only religion is Buddhism. It goes unstated that Buddhism is older than Christianity by over 500 years, and older things always assume preeminence in Asian cultures. Furthermore, if any Thai forsakes their beloved State-ordained Buddhism and accept Christ, it's tantamount to abandoning their identity and heritage as being *Thai*, of which no Thai wants to be accused. Also, Thai wrongly assume that being a Christian is like being a Buddhist, making merit but in a lesser way. As a result, they never really listen to the Gospel when being presented in typical Western fashion. What's the answer? Since Christ is the Creator of all *Nature*, which they adore, one must first introduce Creation through *Intelligent Design*... then introduce Christ as Savior.

In closing, please pray for me as I return to Thailand in a few weeks, where Pastor Pitak and I will continue the final review process on the completed Isan New Testament. We have already reviewed through to Colossians Chapter 3, editing where needed. Finally, we thank you again for your faithful prayers and partnership in this, the most important endeavor, taking the Gospel to those still dwelling in spiritual darkness at the uttermost ends of the earth, as we await the return of our Savior for His Church.

By God's Grace and for His Glory,

Ron Myers

Ron and Cheryl Myers

www.IsanBible.org