

Ron & Cheryl Myers

GOD'S WORD FOR ISAN NEWSLETTER

July 2015

## "A NOTED SPIRITUAL LEADER HAS MOVED ON"

(The Story of an Old Sage Who Felt It Necessary to Change Locations)

By Ron Myers

Greetings Once Again In the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ,

**HEALTH UPDATE:** I recently began physical therapy at Sharp Grossmont Hospital's outpatient facility; to better manipulate my new left hip joint. I was a bit concerned as to who I would get as a therapist—some being better than others. Amazingly, my assigned therapist is Lisa, a 20-year career professional with her doctorate in the field, and who specializes in joint replacement therapy! She is also a committed Christian. The light exercises she has me doing have helped, and I can walk better already. Before long, I'll be able to return to Thailand to finish the final review process and publish the Isan New Testament!!

**A MENTORING SPIRITUAL LEADER HAS MOVED ON:** A while ago, during our third term among the Isan people in Northeast Thailand, I received word that a noted spiritual leader had decided to flee from nearby Communist Laos. He relocated in a small Isan village, just south of Nakhon Panom's provincial capital—nestled on the shores of the Mighty Mekong, bordering neighboring Laos with its rugged mountains. Nakhon Panom (*meaning City by the Mountains*) is where we lived and ministered while translating the Isan New Testament. I was told that the leader's move had become necessary due to the harsh living conditions imposed on the peace-loving Laotian people by the Communist regime that had come to power a few years earlier.

Word soon spread of the move and people came from near and far to pay their respects and inquire of this admired *Ajahn*, as he was called in the local vernacular... meaning "respected professor" or "mentoring spiritual leader." Devout followers brought him gifts of various sorts, usually flower arrangements and expensive liquors, all to show their deep respect for the highly-esteemed old sage. Some even pitched in and constructed a nice bamboo-pole fence around his property, decorating it with colorful ribbons, as is often done in the local culture.

Many, who held this spiritual leader or *Ajahn* in high esteem, also thought of him as a fortune teller, imploring the *wise one* to reveal the next government-sponsored lottery numbers to them. Surprisingly, the numbers given were sometimes right on. Of course, this news spread to the point where even more people came to inquire, showering him with even more gifts and offerings to show their sincerity and gratitude.

I suppose the unwanted fame imposed on this iconic figure over the months began to wear the old fellow down, to the point that he finally decided to move on to a better location where he could enjoy a little peace and quiet. Alas, followers were saddened to see him go. Meanwhile, others castigated them for being a nuisance... the very cause of his untimely departure.

I'd never actually seen the old sage, but I had seen his place a few times whenever I rode past his roadside home on my motorcycle while on my way to visit and teach Isan Christians living in villages south of town. It wasn't long before his abode declined into disrepair, the neat little fence fell down, and all the flowers and ribbons rotted away. Only a few locals remember this incident, and we chuckle if I bring it up.

"Now," as Paul Harvey said, "*for the rest of the story.*" You may be wondering what this esteemed one's home looked like. I had taken a few photos, but they were in a trunk that got stolen in transit back to the States. However, I found a photo on the Internet that looks a lot like the place, minus the fence, flowers, and colorful ribbons. That's right; it's just a small *Sugar Palm* tree, native to the area.

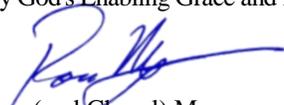
This sugar palm was special, though, in that it was slightly deformed, having a crest that branched off into seven separate clusters. According to local beliefs, if anyone is born, or if any plant grows up deformed, it denotes the presence of a spirit entity that possesses extraordinary powers. Wherever the idea that this innocent little sugar palm tree was inhabited by a mentoring spirit-being that had moved in from Communist Laos was certainly a stretch. And yet, otherwise sane people believed it, and flocked to the little tree to speak with the *Ajahn*, praying for many things, including winning lottery numbers.



How did the locals know the *Ajahn* had decided to move on? It's because the poor little sugar palm tree had shriveled up and died. Why so? Many onlookers said it was because of the countless bottles of cheap whiskey that had been poured out around its trunk as drink offerings to gain the favor of the spirit... killing its root system. This scenario is a part of Animism (*spirit veneration and appeasement*), which sees inanimate objects as being inhabited by entities from the spirit world. I expounded on this in earlier newsletters under the heading of Syncretism—meaning a mix of dissimilar beliefs, all meshed together and practiced as a single unit. In this instance, followers likely thought of the *Ajahn* spirit as being a wise old Buddhist Monk or *Saint*, who, having attained the rite of passage to *Nirvana*, decided rather to stay around to assist the *masses* with their ills and woes.

God has certainly blessed our ministry in this spiritually blind but highly religious land. Many have accepted the truth of the Gospel, and have received changed lives and true hope as a result. However, the greater majority continue on in the deep-dark abyss of their old beliefs and customs, as I have described above. Your faithful prayers will surely help open these blinded hearts and minds, and your sacrificial partnership is greatly appreciated—which means we will be able to continue to give these people the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who alone can save, setting them free from sin and eternal death.

By God's Enabling Grace and for His Eternal Glory,

  
Ron (and Cheryl) Myers  
www.IsanBible.org

**Urgent Prayer Request:** Our 13 year-old granddaughter, Annika (*Angela's daughter*), was bitten by a small rodent last evening, having stepped on its tail when she was running into their house. Angela treated the small wound and is planning on seeing a physician. However, rabies is not beyond the range of possibilities. Please pray that all will be well, and that nothing drastic will occur.