

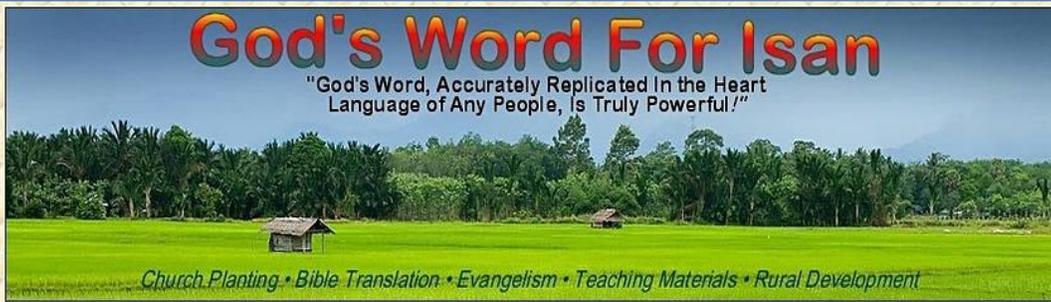
RON & CHERYL MYERS



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GOD'S WORD FOR ISAN NEWSLETTER

April, 2016

"IN WHAT OR WHOM DO YOU PLACE YOUR TRUST?"

Misplaced Faith – Part IV (Brahmanism)

By Ron Myers

Greetings in Jesus Name,

In my January communiqué, *Misplaced Faith-Part I (a wish for wealth)*, I wrote you about the mundane or worldly things the Thai place their hopes in, like becoming wealthy by winning a lottery jackpot. By this many would feel that they're being rewarded in response to the good deeds they have amassed in their present or past lives through *accumulated good works or merit*.

In my February communiqué, *Misplaced Faith-Part II (Animism)*, I wrote about how all of Thai society abides under core beliefs that control and guide every aspect of their lives, i.e., *spirit appeasement or Animism*. This is a belief in an unseen world where malevolent spirits dwell... entities they must live alongside, be in fear of, venerate, appease, and appeal to; evidenced by the various types of spirit shrines that dot the landscape. From the lowest pauper to the richest citizen, the whole of Thai society continually invokes these spirits for fortune, health, guidance and protection.

In my March communiqué, *Misplaced Faith-Part III (Religion)*, I wrote about Thailand's revered state-ordained religion; orthodox or *Theravada* Buddhism—the teachings of the elders. Prince Siddhattha Gautama—born circa 623BC on the borders of Northern India and Nepal—became known as "The Lord Buddha" or *Enlightened One* after a quest to learn the ultimate cause of suffering and sorrow, passions and desires, which it is said can be conquered through living according to the Lord Buddha's four precepts and eight-fold path.

Buddhism was introduced into Southeast Asia by the Indian Emperor, Ashoka the Great. Ashoka (or Asoke), was a cruel and treacherous ruler who reigned over India's *Mauryan* dynasty from ca. 273–232 B.C. He later turned to the solace of Buddhism to salve his bloodied conscience, becoming a strong proponent of spreading the benign and passive Buddhist faith through evangelizing eastward into Burma and beyond. Yet Thai Buddhism is not textbook pure, since it has become mixed with other assorted belief systems, namely Animism and Brahmanism.

Now, in my April communiqué, *Misplaced Faith IV*, I want to describe for you some historical aspects of the Syncretistic merging between Buddhism and Brahmanism. Brahmanism, the religious and social system of ancient orthodox *Hinduism*, was brought to Southeast Asia by India's highest sociocultural class or caste, the Brahmins. It is the religious belief of ancient India held by the Brahman class, who followed the sacred *Sanskrit* writings and later sacred texts known as *Upanishad*, which were filled with hints of *mysticism* and the *dark arts*.

This is where we see the mystical aspects of ancient *Upanishad* writings associated with Brahmanism reflected in, or blended with Animism and Thai-styled Buddhism, prominent throughout Thailand today. There are numerous aspects that have nothing to do with traditional Buddhism, yet are practically inseparable in the minds of the adherents. Some of the more astute Thai realize this triune belief system, which they refer to as *Put, Praham, Pii* (Buddhism, Brahmanism, Spirits).

Brahmanism first entered mainland Southeast Asia around the beginning of the first millennium through trading between Brahman-caste Indians and China. These seafaring Brahmins, instead of returning to India, established colonies in what is present-day Cambodia. There, we see ancient pre-Buddhist temples and other influences that reflect Indian Hindu architecture; the massive Angkor Wat complex being the grandest. Similar ruins can be found in Thailand's nearby Isan region, since all of present-day Thailand was a part of the former Khmer Kingdom previous to the 13th Century.

Some of the ways these ancient Brahmanistic beliefs and practices are reflected in Thai society today are: wearing "supernatural" charms, necklaces and bracelets, or tying on cotton strings. These are done to ward off evil or bring good fortune... often seen on infants and toddlers; also the practicing of magic spells; the choosing of auspicious days for special events or important occasions, like weddings or funerals. These practices are inseparably woven together with Thai-styled Buddhism and spirit- or ancestor-veneration... thus, into the hearts and lives of the society as a whole.

You may be wondering; *"Of what importance are these things to the missionary? Just preach Christ and let the rest fall by the wayside."* True, yet if we want to improve our effectiveness, we need to have a working knowledge of what motivates these people's thoughts and behavior. Otherwise, it's not unlike playing the blindfold game of *Pin The Tail On The Donkey*. We are in a spiritual engagement for men's and women's eternal souls. The strategy here is to *know the enemy*, who is not the people, but the blind and foreboding spiritual darkness under which they live, imposed on them by the *Prince of Darkness* or *God of this World*.

Today is Sunday, May 1st. Last evening at 5:00 PM, Pastor Pitak, his dear wife Sri, and I were able to finish the proofreading adjustments and typo corrections on the entire 550-page Isan New Testament... one of the many "last steps" entailed before going to print. Praise God for His people who gave to help make this all possible. Also, for the organization (Bearing Precious Seed Global) that took on the Lion's share of work of raising funds. A special thanks goes to the leaders of this task, Drs Stephen Zeinner and Steven Combs. They will soon be joining us here for a Dedication and Presentation Ceremony towards the end of May, to be held at Pastor Pitak's Church facility, just south of Nakhon Panom City.

Please continue to pray for good success as we go to print; because, *"Faith Comes By Hearing, and Hearing By the Word of God."* Romans 10:17

May You Enjoy a Wonderful Spring and Summer,

Ron & Cheryl Myers
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