



STATEMENT DB-565-2

**THE ARRIVAL OF THERAVADA:
Southeast Asians Bring Their School of Buddhism to America
(Part Two in a Four-Part Series on Buddhism in North America)**

by J. Isamu Yamamoto

Summary

Theravada Buddhism in North America is primarily associated with Southeast Asian Americans. It is a religious tradition with roots that go far back to the early days of Buddhism 25 centuries ago. Today the religious beliefs of Southeast Asian Americans are quite varied because this group includes peoples with diverse histories and cultures. While Vietnamese Americans are more inclined to Mahayana Buddhism, the other Southeast Asian peoples practice and believe in a religion that is a strange mixture of Theravada Buddhism and animism. Christians need to understand the cultural diversity of these peoples and comprehend the Buddhist strains that distinguish them.

Nobu Yamaguichi came to the United States with her husband in the early 1920s. She was a Japanese immigrant devoted to her Buddhist faith. Twelve years after they arrived in Watsonville, California, her husband passed away, and Nobu was left with a 10-year-old son to raise.

Jimmy Yamaguichi loved both his mother and his country. So when he graduated from high school, he was torn between joining the army, which he had always wanted to do, and remaining home to take care of his mother. With his mother's encouragement, he joined the army. To help her cope with loneliness, Jimmy got her a beagle puppy, which she named Bugle because she mispronounced what kind of dog he was.

After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and Japanese Americans were ordered to concentration camps, Nobu learned that Bugle could not go with her. For over a year Nobu and Bugle had been constant companions, and she loved him almost as much as she loved her son. Her heart ached, knowing that she would be separated from her dear friend. But of even greater concern to her was that Bugle might be destroyed if she couldn't find a new home for him.

One of her Caucasian neighbors, who was occasionally friendly to her, would always mention her Christian faith whenever they chatted. Since this woman had affirmed that Christianity is centered on compassion and forgiveness, Nobu thought she might give Bugle a new home. Although Nobu was naturally timid, her deep affection for Bugle compelled her to go to this neighbor and ask for help. Sadly the woman was so upset with the Japanese attack that she refused to even listen to Nobu's request. And so, Bugle had to be put to sleep just before Nobu was taken away to

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camp.

Two years later while still in camp, Nobu learned that her son had sacrificed his life along with hundreds of other Japanese Americans to save a Texas battalion somewhere in France. To this day whenever someone talks to her about the merits of Christianity, Nobu closes her ears and hardens her heart.

Today a new wave of Asian Buddhists has immigrated to North America. As Christians, can we learn from past mistakes and more effectively demonstrate our faith in Jesus Christ to these people?

THERAVADA: ORIGINAL BUDDHISM?

Having encountered so many forms of Buddhism, I have often wondered: What was the original form of Buddhism when Gautama, the Buddha, held sway over a community of monks and nuns in India 25 centuries ago? To look back into time and observe the daily life of a follower of the Buddha is, of course, impossible. Equally impossible would be to discover that contemporary school of Buddhism whose religious philosophy and practice is the identical twin of the Sangha (Buddhist community) of Gautama's day. Even if such a Buddhist school existed, how would we know that it is like Gautama's Sangha or, more importantly, how could we come to a consensus that it is?

Theravada Buddhism might be a key in understanding what Buddhism was like during its early days, since Theravada has tried to maintain the essence of the Buddha's teachings without indulging in further revelations. The simplicity and the fundamentalism of Theravada Buddhism might be the clearest image of a scene now long past.

Historical Background

After the Buddha died, schisms continually rocked early Buddhism and subdivided the Sangha (the Buddhist community) into numerous schools and sects. The wide variety of beliefs and practices among the many schools further facilitated the spread of Buddhism, but it also blunted its ability to compete successfully with Hinduism in India.

Since the words of the Buddha were not recorded during his lifetime, the transmission of the Dharma (the teachings of the Buddha) depended on the memory of his disciples and their understanding of what he meant. The traditional Theravada account is that in 477 B.C.,¹ Kashyapa, the leading monk at that time, assembled a council of the disciples of the deceased Buddha in Rajagriha. During the meeting Kashyapa questioned Ananda, the Buddha's closest disciple, concerning the Buddha's discourses. Ananda's answers constitute the Sutras (sermons of the Buddha). Also during that meeting, Upali, another close disciple of the Buddha, was questioned on the practical affairs of the Sangha. His answers constitute the Vinaya (the rules and regulations within the Buddhist order).

The Buddhist schools responded to and interpreted the Sutras and the Vinaya differently. Two major philosophies eventually emerged within Buddhism — Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. The adherents of Mahayana ("the Greater Vehicle") Buddhism later referred to those Buddhists who held strictly to the letter of the Buddhist doctrine as followers of Hinayana Buddhism, the Little or Lesser Vehicle.² The Hinayana branch comprised most of the earliest schools of Buddhism. One early Buddhist school that predominated and survived resented the Hinayana label because it denoted an inferior method of Buddhism. This school identified itself instead by the name Theravada Buddhism, "the doctrine of the Elders."

Similarities can be drawn between early Buddhism and early Christianity. Buddhism had to overcome the fierce hostility of its parent Hinduism, just as Christianity had to with its parent Judaism. Both Hinduism and Judaism, as

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the established religions, attempted to eradicate what they regarded as heretical sects. Furthermore, the ruling authorities in both parts of the world severely persecuted each faith respectively until a later emperor decreed it a state religion. The ruler who favored Buddhism was King Asoka (? – 238 B.C.). He was the third emperor of the Maurya dynasty in India, and he has been referred to as "the Constantine of Buddhism."

Early in his reign Asoka was an ambitious conqueror who extended his power over much of the Indian peninsula. This ambition caused him to set his sights on Kalinga, a region on the east coast of India which had tenaciously opposed Mauryan rule. In 260 B.C., he attacked and defeated the forces of Kalinga. After the fighting, however, he became deeply grieved over the carnage and bloodshed of the battle.

The gentleness and compassion of Buddhism gave Asoka solace for the guilt of his crimes. After he sought penitence in Buddhism, he studied the teachings of the Buddha and later instituted Buddhism as the state religion.

About 245 B.C., Asoka assembled the third Buddhist council, which finally established a definitive canon (the Pali texts — see below). He also commissioned Buddhist missionaries to spread the teachings of the Buddha into foreign lands, possibly as far as Syria, Egypt, and Greece. This evangelism was successful in South and Southeast Asia, particularly Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon). It was Mahinda, possibly a relative of Asoka, who introduced Theravada Buddhism to Sri Lanka, where it has flourished even until this day. Much credit, however, must go to Asoka for the diffusion of Buddhism because of his missionary vision and zeal.

During the Gupta dynasty in India (A.D. 300—650), Buddhism apparently enjoyed its greatest success in that country. Nevertheless, Hinduism had far from disappeared from the scene. In fact, a Brahmin revival had occurred in India about the second century B.C. From then on, the Brahmins commenced an aggressive campaign against Buddhism. In the following centuries, Buddhism experienced periods of growth and persecution in the land of its birth.

At the end of the Gupta dynasty, the Huns (a nomadic Mongolian people) invaded India and destroyed many Buddhist monasteries. In the eighth century, the reformation of Hinduism contributed to the progressive disappearance of Buddhism from Indian life. By the ninth century, Buddhism flourished only in those places where the state awarded it special privileges.

Finally, the Muslim invasion of India ended the career of Buddhism in India after fifteen centuries. This culminated in 1193 when Muhammad Bakhtyay razed Buddhist monasteries to the ground and massacred Buddhist monks. Today the number of Buddhists in India is small (less than one percent); most of them inhabit North Bengal, where Tibetan influence has preserved Buddhism. Nevertheless, by the time Buddhism had departed from most of India, it had entered and become an essential part of many other Asian cultures.

Theravada Buddhism can best be found in Burma (now called Myanmar), Cambodia, Laos, and particularly Sri Lanka. Yet even in Southeast Asia, Theravada Buddhism has experienced a history of ups and downs. It was highly popular during the immediate centuries following the birth of Buddhism. About the fifth century A.D., however, it began to decline and for 14 centuries it slowly withered.

The 19th century was the turning point for Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia. First, the faith of the Buddhists was revived in reaction to the challenge of Christian missionaries who introduced their religion. Second, profound thinkers emerged to defend the ancient religion. Third, the translation of the Pali texts into Western languages gave it strength to spread beyond its Asian borders.

At first Theravada Buddhism struggled weakly against the evangelism of the Christian faith in Southeast Asia during the nineteenth century. Four men, however, rose up to turn back the tide. Two were Easterners and two were

Westerners.

Mohotiwatte Gunananda was a Sri Lankan monk who studied both the Christian Scriptures and Western rationalist writings that were critical of Christianity. From his research, he formed arguments that he used to preach against the Christian faith. From 1866 to 1873, he publicly debated with Christian missionaries. These debates were published and distributed throughout Southeast Asia and the West.

Henry S. Olcott, an American, read these transcripts and was impressed with Gunananda's arguments. In 1875, Olcott and Madame Blavatsky organized the Theosophical Society, which has some of its roots in Olcott's understanding of Theravada Buddhism. In fact, five years later he established the Buddhist Theosophical Society, which has been responsible for building numerous Buddhist schools in Sri Lanka.

Needing an interpreter to communicate in Sri Lanka, Olcott enlisted the aid of Anagarika Dharmapala, one of the most dynamic thinkers of the Theravada tradition. It was Dharmapala who organized the Maha Bodhi Society in 1891, which has branches throughout the world. And it was Dharmapala who was primarily responsible for stimulating interest in Theravada Buddhism in the West through his speeches and writings in the early twentieth century.

The spread of Theravada Buddhism would not have gone very far, however, had it not been for T. W. Rhys Davids. Davids founded the Pali Text Society in 1881, resulting in the translation of much of the Pali Canon into English. The English translations, in turn, stimulated wide interest in Theravada Buddhism, starting in England and rippling out to all parts of Europe and North America.

Theravada Today

Today there are about 120 million adherents of Theravada Buddhism, principally in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, Theravada Buddhists who have immigrated to the United States primarily reside in San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Seattle, Miami, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., New York, Boston, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, New Orleans, and Salt Lake City.³

According to the United States 1990 Census Bureau, about a million people in the United States reported a Southeast Asian background, half of whom reside in California: Cambodians — 147,411; Laotian — 149,014; Thai — 91,275; Burmese — 6,177; Sri Lankan — 10,970; and Vietnamese — 614,547. These numbers, of course, do not reflect the vast number of illegal aliens in the United States. In either case, most of these people are either first or second generation Americans, and most of them are also Buddhists of some type.

DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIONS

The Buddha was primarily concerned with deliverance from samsara (death and rebirth — reincarnation) and the path that leads to nirvana (the extinction of the individual soul). He did not try to establish a new religion nor construct an elaborate philosophy. Instead, he taught his disciples a discipline that was based on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path (discussed in Part One of this series).

As a discipline, early Buddhism at once contained strength and weakness. On the one hand, it accommodated itself to most religious philosophies throughout Asia; this probably was the chief reason for the wide expansion of Buddhism in the East. On the other hand, it did not provide a refined, unified system of beliefs and practices; this was perhaps a major cause for the inevitable triumph of Hinduism over Buddhism in India.

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Theravada Buddhism is said to be the fundamentalist branch of Buddhism because it has preserved most of the original nature of Buddhism. By the first century B.C., Buddhist scriptures were collected and written in the Pali language, a vernacular descended from the Indian Sankrit language. These scriptures became known as the Pali Canon and serve as the foundation of Theravada beliefs and practices. The Theravadins believe that the Pali Canon is an accurate account of what the Buddha taught even though they acknowledge that a number of its discourses can be solely attributed to several of his disciples.

Theravada Buddhism contains major points of doctrine that generally differ from the beliefs of Mahayana schools. Most significantly, the Theravadins revere the Buddha as a great ethical teacher but do not consider him a god, as do many of the Mahayanists. Furthermore, their teachings are reserved for the Buddhist monastics and not for the common people, another departure from many of the Mahayana schools. Nirvana is also limited to those select few who practice the rigid disciplines that are taught in the Pali scriptures.

In Theravada Buddhism, believers are instructed to become *arhats*, Buddhist saints who have achieved their own deliverance from samsara. In Mahayana Buddhism, converts are taught to become bodhisattvas, great beings who are destined for Buddhahood but who delay this goal to help others achieve deliverance. The difference between these two Buddhist doctrines is that the arhat focuses on his own enlightenment while the bodhisattva seeks liberation from suffering for all creatures.

Unquestionably the foremost commentator of Theravada Buddhism is Buddhaghosa, a Brahmin born in the latter half of the fourth century A.D. The Buddhists of South and Southeast Asia regard him as the father of their religion. He converted to Buddhism and traveled to Sri Lanka, where he compiled an extensive encyclopedia of Pali Buddhist literature that retains its authority to this day.

PROFILE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN IMMIGRANTS

Southeast Asian Americans are a highly diverse population. Not only do they come from different countries, but also they include a wide range of people, representing different histories, languages, political beliefs, and even religions. They include the educated, families on welfare, affluent merchants, gang members, and respected community leaders. Nevertheless, they share common experiences, having been uprooted from their former homelands because of war and civil disorder and having suffered further hardships in order to arrive in their new homelands. Indeed, most have lost family members and everything they owned.

Almost all of the Southeast Asians in North America prior to 1970 were students or diplomats and their families. These people came of their own free will. Since 1970, however, over a million Southeast Asians have fled to the United States alone. Unlike most immigrants to the United States who came here in search of the American dream, Southeast Asian immigrants are actually refugees who were compelled to leave their homelands because of severe persecution.

In 1975, the first massive wave of Southeast Asians came to the United States because of the evacuation of American troops from Vietnam. Most of these immigrants were from South Vietnam, trying to escape from the Vietnamese communists. Many of them were educated professionals, business people, and Catholics. A high percentage of Southeast Asian immigrants sought asylum in the United States, whose government felt obligated to receive them.

Despite attempts by the U.S. government to assimilate these people into its society, Southeast Asians encountered severe difficulties adjusting to their new social climate. "American ways were confusing to most refugees," says William McGuire. "There was not enough understanding of such problems on the part of the social workers. As

sympathetic as the social workers were, their background in the culture of the different Southeast Asian peoples was often inadequate. The idea was to help people give up their customs and adopt 'American' ones. That policy went against the traditions of the Southeast Asians and caused even more worries."⁴

In time, however, most of the first wave of Southeast Asian immigrants successfully integrated into American society, both socially and economically. Meanwhile, they have maintained their cultural distinctions, remaining devoted to their dietary habits, family customs, and religious traditions.

In 1980, the second major wave of Southeast Asian immigrants entered the United States. Horrible violence had erupted in countries such as Laos and especially Cambodia. Most of these refugees were uneducated people, such as farmers, laborers, and fishermen. They were less likely to know English or even read or write their own language. To add to their difficulty, the U.S. government did not establish reception centers and other programs to assist their orientation into this country as it had with the first wave. In addition, federal and state funds were not plentiful to help them.

This second group of Southeast Asian immigrants also endured terrible hardships prior to their entry into America. First, the governments of their old homelands enacted harsh, and sometimes cruel, measures on people whom they deemed undesirable — whether they were the intellectuals and professionals in Cambodia or the ethnic Chinese and noncommunists in Vietnam. Second, after they escaped their homelands, they either suffered extreme atrocities at the hands of Thai guards in refugee camps in Thailand or became subject to the brutality of pirates on the seas as boat people. The psychological damage done to these people can hardly be overestimated.

Having arrived in the United States, these refugees from Southeast Asia encountered further problems, the most important being the language barrier. At first, the U.S. government tried to spread the Southeast immigrants throughout the country to facilitate their integration into U.S. society, but the people missed the companionship of their own kind and social intercourse in their own languages, compelling them to resettle close together in pockets of different communities. One of the largest settlements is called Little Saigon in Garden Grove, California.

Different Southeast Asian immigrants have their own distinct profiles. For example, many Cambodian refugees have suffered deep depression because of what they experienced and observed in their old homeland, where the brutal regime of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge massacred at least one million people in a country that had only six million people. This was known as "The Killing Fields." Unlike the Vietnamese, whose religious beliefs are more a strain of Mahayana Buddhism with a strong influence of Confucianism, most Cambodians — as well as Laotians, Thais, Burmese, and Sri Lankans — observe a religious mixture of Theravada Buddhism and animism (the belief that nature and natural objects possess conscious life).

Another group is the Hmong people from Laos. Since they had sided with the United States during the Vietnam War, many have had to flee from their homeland. Their adjustment to American society has been the most difficult of all because they came from a preliterate, tribal society. They have the highest percentage of people on welfare, and they cling to ancestral beliefs that cause them to worry about evil spirits, distrust modern medicine, and put their trust in shamans (medicine men).

The American public has negatively stereotyped Southeast Asians based on some facts. For example, some Southeast Asian youths have formed gangs and resorted to violence, patterning their activities after big-city gangs. Many Southeast Asians live below the poverty level and readily accept menial jobs at extremely low wages. This negative stereotype, however, cannot apply to the majority of Southeast Asian Americans, who have made significant contributions to American society. For instance, these people have done well financially, thus paying taxes that far exceed what the government pays in welfare to other Southeast Asian Americans. Another example of their contribution has occurred in San Jose, California, which has the third largest population of Southeast Asians. They

refurbished a rundown area in a shabby district of the city and transformed it into a thriving shopping center.

From their own perspective, there have also been pluses and minuses for their children. On the one hand, a high number of their children are honor students and are faring extremely well in the American education system. On the other hand, their children, as they absorb American culture, do not pay them the same kind of respect that children extend to their elders in the old countries.

The most important holiday of all Southeast Asians is their New Year,⁵ which is celebrated in late January or in February. Whether they are Buddhist, Confucian, or Catholic, they all participate in this three-day festival that occurs when the moon is full just prior to spring planting. During this time, they pray for the spirits of their ancestors and invite them to join the festivities. For Southeast Asian Americans, this annual event provides a way for them to link with their past life and history in their old homelands.

EVANGELISTIC SUGGESTIONS

Part One of this series on Buddhism in America offered an illustration of a peach — one that appeared sumptuous on the outside but was corrupt on the inside. An analogy was then drawn between this peach and Buddhism, a religion that is the spiritual sustenance for millions of people but ultimately will lead to their spiritual destruction.

Theravada Buddhism is one of the three major branches of Buddhism, and it exemplifies how a religion can appear to be full of life but actually contain the vestiges of death. For its central doctrines, including those tenets identical and different from the other forms of Buddhism, conflict with the basic teachings of Christ. In addition, the peoples of and from Southeast Asia, many of whom subscribe to Theravada Buddhism, have an animistic mindset, which further enslaves them into spiritual bondage.

It is strange that people can hold a Theravada world view and believe in animistic superstition. For example, the Buddha taught that speculation about spiritual beings hinders one from achieving spiritual enlightenment; yet animists are constantly concerned about appeasing spirits, particularly demonic spirits. It is at this point that Christians should understand that most Southeast Asian Americans who regard themselves as Buddhists are not learned students of their religion. Rather, they possess an elementary understanding of Buddhist doctrines and are more concerned with the religious rituals peculiar to their own cultural customs, which have been heavily influenced by ancient animistic beliefs.

Therefore, one should not regard the following evangelistic suggestions as foolproof formulas pertinent to every Southeast Asian American. Instead, while implementing these suggestions, one should also consider the cultural distinctives of the person with whom one is sharing his or her faith, the depth of that person's devotion to the Buddhist faith, and the intelligence of the person in so far as he or she can comprehend doctrinal and spiritual concepts.

Consider Language Difficulties

Many first-generation Southeast Asian Americans are still learning English. Naturally, one must converse with them as simply as possible. But even succeeding generations of these people — who are fluent in English — will not have been exposed to Christian doctrines enough to have a clue as to what words like atonement, sanctification, and resurrection mean. Thus, Christian concepts must be described to Southeast Asian Americans in terms appropriate to their experiences, intelligence, and education. More importantly, Christians should avoid theological abstractions, but instead illustrate their message with personal stories about sin, forgiveness, and God's love. Casting Jesus'

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parables into Southeast Asian American cultural experiences can be marvelously effective.

In addition, Christians need to be aware that certain religious terms or phrases that have one meaning in a Christian setting can have an entirely different meaning to people of a different religious heritage. Tissa Weersingha, a Christian scholar and pastor in Sri Lanka, illustrates this point extremely well: "If a Buddhist were to be asked, 'Do you want to be born again?' he might likely reply, 'Please, no! I do NOT want to be born again. I want to reach nirvana.' The Buddhist quest is for deliverance from the cycle of rebirths. If a Buddhist confuses 'new birth' with 'rebirth,' the Christian message will be completely distorted."⁶ Thus, avoid unexplained Christian cliches.

Distinguish Between Self-effort and God's Grace

A central theme of Theravada Buddhism is that enlightenment, nirvana, or self-perfection can be attained only through one's own efforts. Living a life of detachment from wrong desires and actions, practicing meditation, observing the required rituals, as well as performing any other duties demanded by their traditions are works devout Theravadins do either to achieve deliverance from earthly life or to be reborn as a better person.

Again, one must be careful with terminology. Grace is a Christian idea quite confusing to Buddhists, especially Southeast Asian Buddhists. In fact, even when they finally do understand the basic meaning of God's grace, they may regard the Christian teaching on salvation as simplistic and irrational. For example, how is it possible for an all-powerful God to allow Himself to be killed, or for that matter, executed in such a humiliating manner as on the cross? In most successful cases, it takes time for them to comprehend God's love and forgiveness, their sin nature and their inability to resist sin, and the other issues that pertain to grace.

Besides their initial mental abhorrence to the Christian concept of salvation through the death of Christ, they must also overcome their deep cultural belief that in order for something to be gained, it must be worked for diligently. According to this value system, the higher the goal, the harder they must work for it. Thus their barrier to receiving God's grace is not only intellectual but also cultural.

God's grace, therefore, must not appear to them to be a handout given frivolously, which it is not. Instead, they must understand that His great love for us reflects the value of this gift. In fact, God placed such a high value on obtaining salvation for us that it cost Him the death of His beloved Son. And God's mighty power raised Jesus from the dead so that His grace would have eternal value for us.

Distinguish Between Nirvana and Heaven

Sometime in each person's life he or she will ask the question, What will ultimately happen to me? The hope of Theravadins is that if they live a good enough life, they will be reborn to a more holy life than the one they presently live, and that finally, after a life as a Buddhist saint (arhat), they will experience nirvana — in which they will cease to exist altogether. Meanwhile, Christians have the assurance that they will be raised from the dead and enjoy eternal fellowship with Christ in His heavenly kingdom.

It might seem incredible that people would cling to the hope of nothingness while rejecting the promise of immortality with a loving God, but the fact is that many do. Attachment to family traditions, present earthly pursuits, and disbelief in such a God as Christ obscure how much better the Christian hope is.

It should be noted that most Southeast Asian Americans do not see a difference between biblical principles and the American lifestyle. For instance, it is difficult for them to understand the biblical view of God's heavenly kingdom

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when so many American Christians are heavily invested in living a prosperous life in this world. We need to make clear the distinction between that to which the Bible has called us and that for which too many of us have settled. In recognizing this disparity, we can admit that some of us have fallen short but declare that others are being true to God's calling.⁷

Be Prepared for Spiritual Warfare

Finally, we must recognize that when we share the gospel with Southeast Asian Americans, we become engaged in spiritual warfare. Of course, conflict with evil always exists, especially when we evangelize. But in evangelizing these people, spiritual warfare is particularly intense since they participate in idol worship, the veneration of the spirits of deceased ancestors, and ceremonial rituals for the purpose of appeasing evil spirits.

The Christian message is that we need not fear evil. Instead of appeasing these spirits, we can confidently resist them in Christ, who boldly cast them out during His earthly ministry. Christ's victory over evil spirits is frequently displayed in the Gospels, and the Christian should often point these passages out to Southeast Asian Americans to assure them of this truth.

"Dear friends," said the apostle John, "do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world...You, dear friends, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:1, 4). Thus the Christian should pray that God will bind these demons from their lives and show them that Christians have no need to fear evil spirits because the love of Christ is greater than any other force (Rom. 8:38-39).

FINAL THOUGHTS

After the Lord delivered the Hebrews out of Egyptian bondage and before they entered the Promised Land, God commanded them "to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt" (Deut. 10:19). God's command has not changed. As His people, we are to love those who are strangers in our midst. We — individually and as a church — are divinely called to provide for their needs, lobby for their rights, and share with them the greatest gift we can give them — the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And perhaps, like the Moabite woman Ruth, they will say, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

NOTES

¹ Buddhist scholars disagree on the date.

² *Yana* means vehicle or the path one progresses to attain nirvana; *Maha* means great; and *Hina* means little.

³ *Grolier Encyclopedia of Knowledge*, vol. 10 (Danbury, CT: Grolier Incorporated, 1991), 49.

⁴ William McGuire, *Southeast Asians* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1991), 34.

⁵ The Vietnamese call it "Tet."

⁶ Tissa Weerasingha, "Karma and Christ: Opening Our Eyes to the Buddhist World," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, July 1993, 103.

⁷ Two ministries are successfully bringing Christ to American Buddhists of Asian descent, but in different ways. One is the Sunrise Center for Buddhist Studies (Jim Stephens — [818] 797-9008, P.O. Box 4796, Panorama City, CA 91412), dedicated to informing and training Christians who are working to evangelize Buddhists. The other is Harbor House (Bill Squires — [510] 534-0165, 1811 11th Ave., Oakland, CA 94608), devoted to meeting the physical and spiritual

needs of Southeast Asians who are trying to integrate into U.S. society. In their own ways, both men are being true to God's calling to bring these people to Christ while living sacrificial lives for Christ.

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