

MYANMAR MISSION 2006

I had the privilege of leading Health Teams International to Myanmar (Burma) for the third year. We had 2 MD's, 1 RN, 2 DDS's, 1 pharmacist, 1 person trained and equipped to fit glasses, 1 dental assistant and 2 helpers.

Myanmar (Burma) is a closed, 90% Buddhist, military dictatorship that expelled all foreign Christian Missionaries over 43 years ago. Myanmar also has been involved in a civil war for over 50 years with various non-Buddhist tribes, including some Christians who live in the mountainous borders of the country and want independence from the Buddhist dictatorship. The newspaper, USA Today, listed the dictator in Myanmar as the 3rd worst dictator in the world today.

How did Health Teams International get into a country like this? Our host, Rev. Dr. Robin Seia, has the respect, lives with, and knows the right people in the right government positions and for the usual expected donation of appreciation (bribery to us) we were allowed into the country to help the poor people and orphans with health care. We were watched and monitored very closely but never had any problems at all.

We treated 2500 patients (95% Buddhist); 1350 medical; gave out 3000 prescriptions; treated over 400 dental patients, extracting over a thousand abscessed teeth; and tested over 750 people's eyes and fit them with eyeglasses. We had the longest lines, greatest excitement and most immediate appreciation with our eyeglasses. The average wage for heavy manual construction labor is ten cents an hour. The masses of common people did not have glasses or would ever have the potential of getting them because they cost several months' wages. The huge smiles on their face when they put on a pair of glasses that put their world back into focus and they could actually see was a tremendous satisfying reward.

There was 400 to 500 Buddhists that became Christians. The dental clinic was the lease busy and we took the time, offered and shared the Good News with every patient. I had almost 100 patients that sat in my chair accept Jesus into their life. One hundred per cent of all my patients were given the opportunity to hear what Christians believe and 100% of them wanted to hear. The Holy Spirit convicted their hearts and allowed me to lead every

one of them to Christian salvation through Jesus Christ. It was a very exiting and rewarding time.

One of my privileges was to council and encourage our other Christian dentist, Dr. Larry Black who had never had the opportunity to lead someone to the Lord, especially people who had never heard of Jesus. One of Larry's first patients was an elderly man who asked to hear what Christians believed. While Larry shared Jesus with the man, tears streamed down the side of his face. After he prayed to accept Jesus into his heart and become a Christian, he told Larry, through his tears of joy, that he had been worried all his life what was going to happen to him after he died; now he had peace in his heart greater than he had ever experienced before in his life because now he could be sure where he was going after he died.

One morning a young, bright, intelligent, female college student asked to hear what Christians believed. I shared with her for about 30 minutes like I did with most of my patients. She asked a lot of questions. She very excitedly accepted Jesus and prayed to become a Christian. I challenged all my patients that if they want their family or friends to go to heaven they have the responsibility of telling them about Jesus. Early the next morning I had a young, female patient who did not have a dental problem but said that her sister, the college student that accepted Jesus the day before, had called her last night and told her that she had to come and see me and hear the Good News of Jesus. Even though she lived several hours away, she got up in the middle of the night, took several different busses, so she could get there early enough to be sure to get in line to see me so I could tell her about Jesus. I told her and she very happily prayed and became a Christian.

This same new Christian college student worked part time in sales in the vegetable market. She started telling her customers in the market they needed to come and see us. Several did come and all became Christians. These new Christians told us the college student in the market told them she had never been treated so kind by anyone in her entire life and we surely must be angels sent by God.

It was encouraging to see some of the fruits of our last 2 years of ministry. Myanmar is made up of several different cultural groups of people who live in certain areas and have their own language and customs. The Mon people are the most unreached people in Myanmar. Last year we visited the only Christian church in the Mon State that was started and built by our host Rev. Robin Seia. Robin had placed one of his Mon Bible School graduates and

his family there as pastor of this small church that would seat about 100 people. We spent 3 days there last year and returned there again this year. Last year they had about 30 people who came to church after several years of work. This year they had built on and enlarged the church because after we had been there last year there were so many more Christians, including the chief of police, that the church could not hold them all. Praise the Lord.

Last year there was a man who heard about our clinic. He traveled 2 hours to have a painful abscessed tooth removed. He was also introduced to Jesus and became a Christian. This year the man returned to our clinic and reported to our host that he had introduced his whole family and 2 neighboring families to Jesus. He begged Robin to bring our team for at least one day to his area 2 hours away and he would host us. After investigating the area, the facilities and getting government permission we went to his home. It was located right in the middle of a rubber plantation with rubber trees as far as you could see in all directions.

There was a shell of a building they called the community center that was adequate for us to set up our clinics. Our local host fed all 10 U.S. team members lunch and supper in his home as well as our 17 Burmese translators and helpers.

We treated many people physically and with eyeglasses. This was one of our biggest and busiest days. We saw seventy people become Christians. One young lady was carried in near death from advanced aids. Physically we gave her medicine to make her more comfortable but more important she and her family learned about, and accepted Jesus into their lives so that everyone knew where they were going after they died. All were happy.

Another older lady I introduced to Jesus, I challenged her to find some good Christian friends who would love her, help and teach her. Just then I saw our local Christian host walk by. I called him over and told my patient that this man was a Christian and he would be her friend. Our local host smiled and told me he had been telling her about Jesus for a long time but she always resisted but now when we come she finally accepts Jesus. They hugged and were both very happy, brothers and sisters in Jesus.

After ministering in the Mon State we returned to Yangon (Rangoon) Sunday for church, to rest, sightsee and repack because Monday we were headed on an 8 hour bus trip north on the road to Mandalay (the only main

road in the country) to a small church that Robin had started among the Koran people. Sunday afternoon we received a phone call from the pastor in the Koran church stating there had been several bombings in the city and things were in a panic and turmoil. He had checked with the chief of police and he said now was not a good time for us to come, that he could not guarantee our safety.

Some team members were disappointed but God work's everything for good for those who love Him. We did not know where the team was going the next day. Robin and his helpers got busy and we had a great clinic every day, including 2 extra days of clinic we would not have been able to have if we had traveled 8 hours each way to the Koran people. Maybe the next HTI team that follows us to Myanmar in a few weeks will be able to go north to the Koran people.

One area our team went to was in the greater suburbs of Yangon (Rangoon) that was 100% Buddhist, no church, no previous Christian witnesses except one Christian family Robin had lead to the Lord several years ago. This family invited us to come and have clinic in their home. Robin and helpers spent many hours checking with all the local government and police authorities before we went. The Christian widow lady moved all the furniture into one room or out of her house and we set up medical and dental in her house and optical in a side years partitioned off with tarps. The government is very paranoid about any groups gathering outside.

We had our busiest day at this house, saw more patients and introduced more people to Jesus than any other day. It was a day we had planned to spend 8 hours on the road. Proof again the Lord knows best.

I had one lady sit down in my chair and asked me to remove 2 aching, abscessed teeth. After numbing her teeth I started to talk to her, telling her we were Christians and loved her and had come all the way from America to help her. I asked her if she knew what a Christian believed. She looked straight at me and said you don't remember me do you, I said no. She said you took these 2 teeth from me last year, she pointed to an area without teeth in her mouth. I asked her if I told her about Jesus last year, she said yes, I became a Christian. I always challenge new Christians to tell their family and friends about Jesus, so I asked her if she had been able to tell anyone else about Jesus. She said she had, that she had found a Christian church and was in charge of the woman's fellowship and she is teaching many

women about Jesus every week. Praise the Lord! The seed that was planted a year ago landed on fertile ground.

I do not know how this lady found us. We did not know we were coming to this home until late the night before and it was over 1 hour away from any area we had been in last year but some how she found us. It also points out another principle, our dental treatment is temporary, people are always going to get more toothaches, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ is for eternity.

One lady came to the clinic very upset and depressed. She was 7 months pregnant, in midlife, with her youngest child 20 years old. Every since she got pregnant she said the demons had been giving her all types of problems. She asked the doctors to abort her baby. After 45 minutes of counseling she left as a Christian with Jesus in her heart and promising to love and care for her baby. It was pointed out to her that the devil tried to get rid of Jesus by getting King Herod to kill all the babies because the devil knew that Jesus would be so great. Maybe the devil was trying to get rid of her child also because he knew the child would be great among their people and win many people to Jesus. She left with both Jesus and great peace in her heart thanking God for the baby within her.

One afternoon a middle aged lady came to my dental chair for removal of an abscessed tooth and wanted to know what Christians believed. After 20 minutes or so I asked her if she would like to become a Christian. She said yes and started to cry and was so touched with emotion it took extra time for her to control her emotions so she could pray with us. I found out that this lady was our host Robin's sister-in-law that the whole family had been witnessing to and praying for for many years and finally the Holy Spirit had touched her and she accepted Jesus and became a Christian. The whole family rejoiced.

Late one afternoon a well-built strong middle age man who spoke with authority and was obviously respected by those around him, sat down in my chair with several abscessed teeth. While waiting for him to get numb he said he would like to know what Christians believed because he had no idea at all. I shared with him for about 30 minutes during which time he asked several questions. All the time I was sharing with him, even when the translator was talking to the man he continually stared straight into my eyes. It actually made me feel a little uncomfortable, but when it came time that I

asked him if he would like to become a Christian he very enthusiastically said yes and he repeated the sinner's prayer very loudly and boldly.

When I gave him our 30 page scripture booklet he hung his head and shook it no. My translator said he was sad because he could not read it because his eyes were bad. I immediately thought I will send him to the eye clinic and maybe they can fit him with glasses, but it was late in the day and the eye clinic waiting line was so long I knew he would never get seen. Using the one day of eye training I had received a couple of weeks earlier from Holland Kendall at his Kendall Optometry Ministry course I got the reading glasses chart with various size lettering on it. I pointed to the largest print but he said he could not see it very clear. So I went to our glasses supply and got a very strong pair of reading glasses as suggested by the eye chart.

I will always remember his expression when I put the glasses on him. His face lit up like a Christmas tree and he started smiling from ear to ear. He could read clearly the fine print on the bottom of the reading chart. He hugged me and thanked me over and over and would not stop shaking my hand. When he left he went outside to a window and while wearing his new glasses he waved and smiled at me every time I looked up for about 15 minutes. I am sure he was very happy but for me it was also a rewarding, memorable, life changing experience.

Our local pastor and translators were repeatedly astonished that everyone we saw wanted to become a Christian. They said to us how hard it was to convert a Buddhist to Christianity. The pastors said many times they will work a whole year and only get a handful of converts. After thinking and talking about it we came to these conclusions: Most of the team was old with white hair that is almost non-existent in their society and they greatly respected age and white hair. We were also white skinned foreigners from America that commanded great respect.

Their society does not have a cast system but the rich and educated almost never sit down and talk with the common people concerning anything. If a commoner got to a physician, they are not allowed to ask him questions. Although over 2% of the population was Buddhist Monks, they never sat down and talked to the common people. There were no church type services or scripture studying time or courses for the common people. There was no Buddhist literature for the common people to read.

Then all of a sudden a respected, older, white haired, white skinned, educated, American doctor would take the time to sit down and talk to a person one on one and ask him questions about his job and family, answer questions and show a genuine concern about his personal happiness and his future welfare, even after death, well this just blew their minds. No one had ever done this before or shown a sincere interest in them as an important individual person. The pastors said they respected us almost like we spoke with the authority of God.

At first we did not understand the success of our sharing the Gospel but when you put it into their cultural perspective we started to understand. What a great opportunity we have as old, white haired, educated, foreign, white professionals to present the Good News of Jesus Christ to these people who have never ever before heard the name of Jesus.

A few people we asked if they knew what Christians believed said they have a Christian friend or one said they go occasionally to a Catholic church but they all wanted to know more about what Christians believe. We took about 30 minutes to thoroughly share about God and Jesus and they all became Christians. What they said bothered me a little bit. They said why didn't my Christian friends explain about Jesus before. I could not help but think of the many friends I have here in the U.S. that know I am a Christian but I have never offered or taken the time to sit down and share with them who Jesus really is and what Christians really believe. How about you?

A lady sat down in my chair and requested to have a couple abscessed teeth removed. I noticed an area where two other teeth had been recently extracted. I asked her where she had those teeth removed. She said the other dentist took them out, she pointed to Dr. Black. He removed them a couple days earlier at a clinic several hours away. I asked her if she had become a Christian and she said she had but the main reason she came back was to hear more about Jesus.

Another lady came to our clinic with abscessed teeth, I shared about Jesus and she accepted Him into her heart. I noticed a yellow string around her neck. I asked what the string was and she told me she was apprehensive about coming to a Christian church to our clinic so she went to the head Buddhist Monk and he tied the string around her neck to protect her from evil spirits that the foreign Christians might curse her with. She said since she now has Jesus in her heart I could cut the string off, she did not need it

any more. By the end of the day we had a pile of different colored Buddhist evil spirit collar protectors that our new Christians were willing to give up.

Our last day of clinic we worked out of the dining hall of the Bible School Robin started and supervises. One young lady came to me with bleeding gums. During our discussion I found out she was a Christian and a student at the Bible School. When I asked her how she became a Christian she told me this story:

Last year when our team ministered in the Koran State her father had come to me with an abscessed tooth. I had the privilege of leading him to Christ. I had challenged him as I do all my new Christians to tell his family and friends about Jesus. This man, with the help of the 30 page key scripture booklet we gave him, led his whole family to Christ and has started sharing Jesus with his neighbors and friends. He sent his daughter to Robin's 4 year Bible School so she could learn how to more effectively evangelize their Koran people. When she finishes school she will return home to help her family introduce their people to Jesus.

One young man came to me and asked if he could become a Christian. I said yes and we led him to the Lord. When I asked him why he wanted to become a Christian he said he had been watching us for several days and saw that we were usually very happy people. He said he wanted to be happy, that there is nothing in Buddhism to be happy about.

We usually do not know how our actions, words and deeds may be influencing non-believers watching us. We had a wonderful mission team that was happy, got along great and worked very hard. I feel the Lord has blessed our efforts in Myanmar very well and am already looking forward to returning in the near future.

Dr Richard and Dora May Charlick