

A Journey of Two Parts!

Some Reflections on Reaching Out to the Buddhist World

by Rory Mackenzie

Editor's Note: This autobiographical account was originally presented at the Ralph D. Winter Lectureship in February 2021, under the theme, "Buddhist-Christian Encounters: Today's Realities in Light of the Pioneering Work of Karl Ludvig Reichelt in China." Each of the four missiologists who presented was asked to share his pilgrimage and to receive responses from the others.

The First Part of the Journey

As I was growing up, I was privileged to hear missionaries speaking of their work and the far-flung places in which they served. Why, even my rather reserved Sunday school teacher had served as a senior nursing officer in a teaching hospital in China and had nursed none other than the great Olympic athlete and missionary, Eric Liddell in a Japanese internment camp. During my career as an officer in the Merchant Navy, I visited Bangkok on a number of occasions. The people and the place "drew me in." One night during a break from cargo operations in Bangkok harbour, I experienced a sense that one day I would return to this city as a Christian missionary.

In 1979, after a time with Operation Mobilisation and Bible college study I (or rather we, as I was now married) returned to Bangkok as a church planting missionary. After initial language learning, we found ourselves in a growing area of the city where there were around 100,000 people but no church. By and large, I think my evangelistic approach was direct, perhaps too direct at times. My goal was to engage those I met in conversations about Jesus and their need for "personal salvation." Distributing Christian literature, inviting people to Bible studies and outdoor evangelistic film shows, and even preaching in the open air were all part of a weekly routine. In addition, I regularly preached and carried out pastoral care in two of Bangkok's prisons—Klong Prem and Bang Kwang. Life in the concrete jungle was basic, we had no phone, TV, or air conditioning. For a considerable time, we had no running water and depended on weekly deliveries from a water truck. This was a challenge with three children under four in temperatures of around forty degrees Celsius!

The two churches we were involved in grew as the Lord added to our number, either through conversion or transfer. I thoroughly enjoyed the variety and freedom of pioneer church planting work. I engaged with people from all classes of society. I also carried out a whole range of practical activities such



*Rory Mackenzie has taught Buddhism and Practical Theology at the International Christian College, Glasgow. He lived and served in Thailand for 11 years and is presently involved with the Thai community in Edinburgh. His 2017 publication, *God, Self and Salvation in a Buddhist Context*, is informed by Karl Reichelt's contextualized approach, and advocates friendship with Buddhists while maintaining a clear witness to Christ. In 2007 he also wrote *New Buddhist Movements in Thailand: Towards an Understanding of Wat Phra Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke* (Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism).*

as helping fellow missionaries move house, conducting surveys for future church plants, field council meetings and, of course, the evangelism, relationship building, and teaching required in church planting work. A colleague once aptly remarked that all you needed to be a church planter was a toolbox and a concordance! It certainly summed up the “jack of all trades” mode in which we found ourselves operating. There were, however, opportunities to learn both from fellow missionaries and visiting missiologists. We also kept up to date with church planting methods, church growth theories and wider missiological issues.

There were difficulties. Often there was little response to our various outreaches. I found Thai language study challenging, especially reading and writing. Sometimes I looked with envy at the way ministers back home could preach and teach in their first language. The mission’s education policy was to send children to boarding school in Malaysia, and so our three daughters would be away from us for four-month terms.

A decline in my ageing father’s health acted as a trigger for our return to Scotland after twelve years involvement in church planting in Bangkok. Although it does me no credit, I would like to conclude the first part of the journey with a short story which summed up my attitude to Buddhism. It was a hot Saturday morning and I got off my Suzuki motor bike in a park near where we lived. There was a large group of Buddhist monks, nuns and lay people eating a vegetarian meal together. They were members of Santi Asoke, a new Buddhist movement, who were very critical of mainstream Thai Buddhism and were particularly strict in their own practice. Some of the Santi Asoke members saw me and called out in English “Come and eat with us—we will do you no harm.” I declined the invitation feeling that they were, in some way, the “opposition.”

Reichelt’s story gave me, a conservative evangelical, permission to understand Buddhism on its own terms, and to be involved in Buddhist communities.

The Second Part of the Journey

Now, back in Scotland, I was training to be a Presbyterian minister. My wife gained additional nursing qualifications and began work as a health visitor in the community. Our children attended local schools and adjusted to Scottish

culture. True, I now had the things that I had missed when I was a missionary—preaching in my own language and theological study. That said, I missed church planting in Bangkok. I remember pacing the streets of Edinburgh one winter’s evening trying to work out a return to Thailand and all that would involve, especially with children’s education, and I was struck by the obvious truth—you can’t have everything you want in life!

A consolation, however, was being involved with a group of Thai post graduate students in Edinburgh. One student, Dr. Suripon, became a very helpful informant on Thai Folk Buddhism. Another, Dr. Seree, introduced me to the teaching of Buddhadasa (1906–1993), the Thai scholar monk. Research into Buddhadasa’s hermeneutics, and his approach to finding common ground between Buddhism and Christianity became a fruitful topic for my MTh dissertation. In addition, it stood me in good stead for many conversations with those who took a more academic approach to Buddhism.

After completing a rigorous course of study at what is now known as the Edinburgh Theological Seminary, I became a licensed Presbyterian minister. Rather than go into parish ministry I enrolled on a master’s programme at the University of Edinburgh where I focused on Buddhist studies. I just want to mention two noteworthy aspects of what was to be a very stimulating year. First, as I was applying for the programme, I had a meeting with the founding director of the department, Professor Andrew Walls. As we discussed my application, he attached value to my missionary experience in Bangkok and encouraged me to join the programme. For the first time that I could recall, I felt that there was significance to my missionary experience. Second, I came across the work of Karl Reichelt (1877–1952), a Norwegian missionary to China. Writing of Reichelt’s experience while visiting a monastery in the mountains of Weishan, Sorik comments:¹

Sitting with the monks, desperately eager to tell them of the Gospel, he found that his words were not heard. They listened politely, but there was no echo. It was as if they lived in a different world; he could not speak to the framework of their thought. He realised that he was simply unprepared and from that time on he began to study Buddhism seriously.

I was fascinated by Reichelt’s contextualising of the Christian story and his befriending of Buddhist monks. I read everything I could lay my hands on about Reichelt and his ministry. It seemed, to me at least, that my own theologically conservative background and struggle to speak to the framework of Buddhist thought was mirrored in Reichelt’s story—a story which gave me, a conservative evangelical, permission to understand Buddhism on its own terms, and to be involved in Buddhist communities.

Changed Attitude—Changed Approach

In 2002, opportunities to put my new ideas to the test arose! Thai missionary monks (*Dhammadutta*) came to Edinburgh and established a Buddhist temple. I became friends with these monastic pioneers and visited them weekly in the remote farmhouse where they lived; indeed, they would come and visit us in our home. While it was not the intention, these friendships proved to be a way into the Thai community in Edinburgh, a community made up of students, restaurateurs and Thai women married to Scottish men. I helped the monks as best I could by translating letters and making contact on their behalf with various organisations and officials.

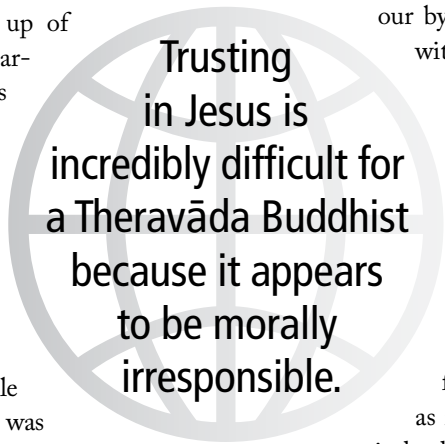
I remember one Saturday afternoon visiting the Thai temple to find lots of pairs of shoes outside the temple door! A retreat was taking place and the shrine room was packed. I sat next to the abbot and a couple of ladies sitting nearby wanted to know if I was a Buddhist. I explained to them that I was a student of Buddhism and a follower of Jesus. On hearing this, one of the ladies announced that she had just received a Bible from a neighbour. She began to ask questions about the Christian faith and I explained as best I could. I asked the abbot if I could send this lady some Christian literature. The abbot gave permission and leaning over said to the two ladies “Rory is a highly respected person at this temple and if he gives you something to read make sure you read it carefully.” He then went on to tell them to tie a string that they had just woven around my wrist as a mark of respect and to give me one to take home to my wife. I still remember that affirming experience as if it were yesterday!

Co-operating and Competing

On occasions, I was invited by the monks to be involved in the care of the sick and help arrange funerals. One example is a 35-year-old Thai medical researcher who rapidly deteriorated due to an aggressive form of leukaemia and sadly passed away. Leading medical researchers stood shoulder to shoulder with Thai restaurateurs at a packed Buddhist funeral service which I assisted in leading.

From time-to-time members of the interfaith community would visit the temple and I would be asked to explain Buddhist belief and practice to these visitors. Some would congratulate the abbot and me on our relationship telling us that it demonstrated that all religious paths lead to the same destination. To their surprise, the abbot and I would point out that actually we felt that there were significant differences between our traditions, although we remained the best of friends.

The American scholar of religions, Terry Muck, suggests that we can both co-operate *and* compete with those from other faiths.² Some issues that I have co-operated or collaborated on with Buddhist communities include education, caring for the sick, and helping those going through marital breakdown. Through addressing these issues together, we got to know each other at a deeper level. Back in 2006, this co-operation was recognised, and I was awarded a certificate of honour by the Royal Thai Embassy in conjunction with the Thai temple in London.



Trusting
in Jesus is
incredibly difficult for
a Theravāda Buddhist
because it appears
to be morally
irresponsible.

Meanwhile, competition (or differing) points to the fact that Buddhism and Christianity have different paths leading to what they believe to be salvation. My understanding is that “being right” with God comes about by trusting in Jesus to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. This belief is incredibly difficult for a Theravāda Buddhist to accept as it appears to be morally irresponsible and indeed impossible, as each person is responsible for achieving his/her enlightenment or liberation from suffering. On this very important issue, the one tradition contradicts the other, but by allowing the other person to hold to, and put forward his tradition’s unique position, the relationship between people of different faiths develops and deepens.

Some Christians who reach out to those from a different faith community may have strengths in developing and sustaining friendships and co-operating on areas of shared concern. Yet, the more we know people, the harder it can be to share our faith as we do not want to jeopardise our friendship. Then there are other Christians who are more at home operating on an evangelistic paradigm. Often these two groups of believers disapprove of each other’s approaches, even to the point of refusing to work together. If we set aside our differences, we can work together to good effect as the following example illustrates. I would often help the local Buddhist monks prepare for cultural celebrations and at one such event I met a married couple. The wife wanted to know whether I was a Buddhist or not. When I told her that I was a student of Buddhism and a follower of Jesus she indicated that she was a seeker but had been put-off at university by evangelicals who forced her to attend Christian meetings. We had a Christianity Explored course starting the next evening at our church and she and some other Thai joined it. After some time, the couple began to attend a weekly Thai Bible study led by a retired missionary to Thailand. The retired missionary, a conservative evangelical was suspicious of my involvement with the Buddhist community. In time, three Thai came to faith. The boldness of the retired missionary in pointing these

Buddhists to Jesus and his unique path and inviting them to take it reflected who she was, and clearly the Lord used her. Yet the Lord also used the fact that my wife and I had attended various Buddhist ceremonies. We can only share our faith as we can, not as we can't, and God uses different people in different ways. And, isn't it the case that evangelism is a *process* not just an *event* and people input in different ways along the way?

Obtain a translation of the text that is being chanted in the ceremony. This provides insight as to whether the Buddha is being worshipped or simply honoured as a great teacher.

Further Involvement in Buddhist Monastic Communities

On completing studies at the University of Edinburgh I took up a lecturing post at the International Christian College in Glasgow. As part of my work, I developed new courses in Buddhism, and Primal and New Religious Movements. This proved to be an exciting adventure in trying to understand people from a whole range of backgrounds. I would take students to visit various Buddhist temples and New Age style fairs. We welcomed a variety of guests, for example, those who practised Shamanism or non-Christian forms of healing. As well as offering hospitality and trying to understand our visitors on their own terms, we tried to work out ways of communicating the Christian faith with them in a respectful manner.

Labelling myself as a student of Buddhism and a follower of Jesus was an attempt to sum up my spiritual commitment—a Christian not a Buddhist, yet someone interested in Buddhism. This approach was based on my understanding of Karl Reichelt's approach of offering friendship and working hard to understand the religious beliefs and practices of Buddhists. I mentioned at the beginning that I sensed a call to reach out to Buddhists as Bangkok and its people "drew me in." I now felt that the story of Reichelt and his desire to reach out to Buddhists and Buddhist monks in particular "was drawing me in"—it seemed to beckon me. With trepidation, as I did not know where this path would take me and, more importantly, how it would change me, I registered for part-time doctoral studies in Buddhism.

Professor Peter Harvey, a Buddhist and internationally renowned scholar of Buddhism, supervised my work. My part-time research, covering six years, took me back to Thailand on a number of occasions. I analysed the two emerging Thai Buddhist movements of Santi Asoke and Wat Phra Dhammakāya and how they mentored their members.³ This involved visiting the huge Dhammakāya temple outside Bangkok as often as I could, as well as living at various Santi Asoke communities. On one occasion I returned from field work at one of these centres feeling compromised in terms of my Christian faith and practice. It seemed as if I had spent most of my time listening to Buddhist sermons and showing respect to Buddhist monks. I shared my feelings with a Thai Christian friend—an army colonel. He said "Now you stand in the shoes of Thai Christians." I found that to be a telling response. I had been a missionary for twelve years in Thailand, almost all of them working with him, but now, for the first time, I was experiencing what it was like to be the only Christian living and working in an environment where almost everyone else was a Buddhist.

The extent to which we participate in Buddhist ceremonies is a challenging issue and beyond the scope of this chapter. Buddhists are normally inclusive and readily invite participation in their ceremonies. True, we wish to be respectful of what our Buddhist friends hold in high regard. That said, we do not wish to compromise our allegiance to Jesus. We can certainly learn from Christians who have been Buddhists as to what they feel appropriate participation should be. Yet what is considered appropriate participation varies from person to person, so we need to be prayerful. Not only that, what we are comfortable with regarding involvement in ceremonies changes as we gain more experience and reflect on how we think and feel after the event. You may find it helpful to obtain a translation of the Pali (or other language) text that is being chanted in the ceremony. This can provide insight as to whether the Buddha is being worshipped or simply honoured as a great teacher.

Invitation to Lecture in Buddhism at a Buddhist University

During my library research at a prestigious university for Buddhist monks in Bangkok, I approached one of the librarians asking for advice regarding Pali language (the language used for the Theravādin Scriptures). He was unable to help, but looking up at an approaching monk, said "You are in luck; here comes our Pali language specialist. Let's see what he says." The Pali professor examined my document and said "You really do need some help with this! Where are you staying?" When I told him that I was staying at a guest house he said, "Save your money, come and stay with me at my temple, I have a spare room."

Some days later, I nervously phoned the scholar monk who had kindly invited me to stay with him at the large temple where he lived. He restated his invitation and I moved from the guest house to the spare room in the professor's *kuti*, or residence. I felt a bit like what I imagined Reichelt must have felt like as he stayed in temples experiencing both hospitality and a very different way of living. I certainly experienced a real sense of belonging as temple security guards would sometimes stop me going into the temple in the evening by saying, "Excuse me, the temple is closed to tourists come back tomorrow." I would reply, "I know but I live here, I stay with the professor in *kuti* 18." Some were a bit dubious and escorted me to where I claimed to be staying to make sure that I really did live there! The scholar monk was very helpful; not only with language but in providing me with a variety of contacts who were able to supply the information I needed for my research.

As I was completing my doctoral studies, the Buddhist professor who had been so hospitable said, "When you complete your research, why don't you become a visiting lecturer at my university?" I remember asking "Will that be OK, after all, I am a follower of Jesus and a student of Buddhism?" At that point he picked up my Bible and said, "That's all right, together we can search for the truth." I spent two very rewarding two-month blocks living at the temple and lecturing in the MA International Programme on research methodology and Mahāyāna Buddhism. This offered me the opportunity to get to know some monks and lay people quite well. Together, we created a community of learning as we shared our knowledge and experience and enjoyed a good number of field trips together.

A Thai PhD scholar often remarked that he experienced "God's power" as he spent time with Christians, sensing a flow of energy between them which he identified as the Holy Spirit.

Belonging before Believing

I had the pleasure of meeting up regularly for three years with a Thai PhD scholar, a researcher in the area of diagnostic X-ray technology. He often remarked that he experienced "God's power" as he spent time with Christians, sensing a flow of good energy between them. He identified this flow as the Holy Spirit and, as he opened up his life to the Spirit, he experienced help in his doctoral research. He

did occasionally attend church, but his main experience of Christian community was attending weekly English conversation classes and social events. My friend appreciated this space between his Buddhist informed culture and the church. A place where he could experience being part of a group of Christians and not-yet Christians as they explored new ideas together. We would do well to ask our Buddhist friends who are near the kingdom what they think such a space would look like for them, and whether this is something that could be created together.

A lot has been written about "belonging before believing" in the discussions surrounding emerging church or fresh expressions of church. Whether the context is post-Christian British or Buddhist Asians, people need to see the Christian message lived out and have the opportunity to observe, experience and evaluate kingdom living. The *deeds* we do, allow the *words* we say to be heard. Deeds authenticate our words, while words explain our deeds. Deeds without words may mean that we are perceived as just kind people, but we have actually been entrusted to share God's great news of reconciliation. Please see 2 Corinthians 5:17–21 and Colossians 1:19–20.

Ongoing Ministry in the Buddhist Community

There are nine different Buddhist groups meeting in Edinburgh, but my activities focus on the Thai community and Asian students. A lot of time is spent on meeting up with individuals. For example, I met a post graduate Singaporean student at the university chaplaincy centre. His first degree was in philosophy and he was very interested in Buddhism. As a result of his interest, he was directed to me and we spent a couple of hours each week for a year talking about Buddhism and Christianity. As the weeks went by, the conversations focused increasingly on the Christian path. We read the New Testament and ended each session with a time of meditation or prayer. He explored kingdom values and appreciated the experience, although he has not yet committed himself to Christ. He is now back in Asia, but the conversations continue.

The monks I mentioned earlier have disrobed but continue to live in the city as lay Buddhists. We go back almost twenty years with these men and continue to meet up, occasionally discussing the similarities and dissimilarities between Buddhism and Christianity but often just catching up on each other's news. Apart from the current Corona virus restrictions, there are always new people to meet at the temple as well as regulars to keep up with. I have always had a sense of accountability to those I write about, and this involves showing them what I have written and inviting their feedback.

In my conversations with Buddhists, I try to build bridges over which they can pass from a Buddhist understanding of reality to an understanding of the Christian path. The bridge, stepping-stone, redemptive analogy, or cultural connection, whichever term you use, is a place to begin a conversation rather than an ultimate truth. It is a starting point on a journey to a more biblical understanding of a particular truth. Furthermore, this approach demonstrates a humble stance and a non-confrontational posture. For example, rather than push back against the Buddhist belief in non-self (*anatta*), why not use it as an opportunity to speak of the lack of control we humans have over our emotions, desires and actions and speak of God as self (*atta*), indeed the Great Self (*Mahāatta*) because he is in complete control of himself. At the burning bush (Ex. 3), some 800 or 900 years before the birth of the Buddha, God discloses his name to Moses as “I am who I am” from which we get the name “Jehovah.” Of course, Moses is not interested in the sound of the name, or even the name itself; his question is whether the one who speaks from the burning bush has the power to do as he promised. Yes, “I am” (or God) can liberate the Jewish people. Despite the overwhelming odds, nothing is able to thwart his purposes. And so, this unfettered power is the nature of the one who may be referred to as the Great-Self (*Mahāatta*), whose existence is not predicated on any cause, and whose amazing power and boundlessness is the antithesis of the limitations of our ever-changing human existence (*anatta*).⁴

The Most Important Thing of All

Our words and deeds need to be motivated by genuine concern, even affection for others. People often develop a hunch as to why we do what we do, and can often sense if we genuinely care for them. I heard a missionary say after decades of service in Latin America “If Christ’s love is in our hearts, then the people we are called to will be in our hearts. If they are in our hearts, then we will be in their hearts.”

Endnotes

¹ A. Sorik, “The Cross and the Lotus: The Story of the Christian Mission to Buddhists and K. L. Reichelt” In *Areopagus* 9.4 (1997): 72–7, esp. 73.

² T. C. Muck, “Missiological Issues in the Encounter with Emerging Buddhism” in *Missiology* Vol. 28, No. 1 (2000): 35–46.

³ The research was published by Routledge (2007) under the title of *New Buddhist Movements in Thailand: Towards an Understanding of Wat Phra Dhammakāya and Santi Asoke*.

⁴ My book, *God, Self and Salvation in a Buddhist Context* (Wide Margin, 2016) offers a number of examples of doing theology in a Buddhist context and trying to make the Christian message more readily understood by a Buddhist audience.

A crucial question then becomes how in the busyness of life and discouragement of lack of “results” can we ensure God’s love is in our hearts and live out the challenge of 1 Corinthians 13?

**Our words and deeds need to
be motivated by genuine concern,
even affection for others. People often
develop a hunch as to why we do what
we do and can sense if we
genuinely care for them.**

Lastly

Serving in Asia was hard at times but being part of another culture, using another language, and working with a wide variety of people was a huge privilege. Since returning from Asia, my journey has changed in unexpected ways—researching new Buddhist movements, teaching Buddhist studies (as a Christian), and becoming involved in monastic communities were not on my radar screen. The journey was, and still is, an adventure, as I try to be a good neighbour to the Buddhists I have managed to get to know here in Edinburgh. Did I become someone else along the way? Perhaps, but maybe I just discovered who I really was.

You may want to think about Buddhists in your community—they may be Asian, or Western converts to Buddhism. What issues do they face and what needs might they have? Is there a temple they visit? What would be the next step for you if you felt you would like to reach out to them? My expectation is that as you do that, you will discover that God has gone before you! **IJFM**

Responses to Rory Mackenzie's, "A Journey of Two Parts! Some Reflections on Reaching Out to the Buddhist World"

Terry Muck: Response One

Thank you for sharing your story; it was really good. I had read it in your book, and it's a very moving story. It called to mind for me a struggle that I have had, and still at times have. That is the struggle between seeking answers to these deep spiritual questions, but at the same time recognizing that I will surely never find final answers to these deep spiritual questions. At various times in my life, probably depending on what I'm doing, I will emphasize one or another. Well, I've got to get this done, this is important, this is a spiritual question of import; but at other times, as a scholar, I just enjoy the journey, I enjoy finding out what I think and what others around me think and putting it into a paradigm. My wife will say, "Have you finished that paper yet?" And I'll say, "Well, why would I want to finish it? Why don't I just keep working at it?" I wonder if you recognize that, Rory, in your own life, and if so, how do you deal with that? How do you keep yourself open to maybe not having the final answers, but also realizing that searching for answers is part of the motivation that keeps us going?

How do you keep yourself open to not having the final answers, but realize that searching for answers is part of the motivation that keeps us going? (Muck)

Rory Mackenzie Replies

I guess it's about the journey and the people we meet on the journey and how the journey changes us, rather than being about the destination. It reminds me of the "stages of faith" concept. You have the self-absorbed person, and that person converts to being a conformist to his community, and some people stay in that stage all their lives. They don't ask questions; they don't want changes. But some people step out of that restriction and begin to ask questions, and are maybe very criti-

cal of people who aren't asking these questions. Some may stay in that, perhaps uncomfortable, position all their lives. But some people move on to a final stage where they are asking the questions, but they are not so sure that they are ever going to find answers. And actually, it doesn't really matter so much. Perhaps "stages of faith" help us understand ourselves in this area.

Terry Muck Replies

Thank you, that is helpful.

Notto Thelle: Response Two

Thank you very much for your presentation. It's very fascinating to follow a person's journey from here to there, and the journey continues. I want to follow up on one or two points. First is your emphasis on friendship and a generous opening up to other people. I said yesterday, or the day before, that friendship is a central Christian virtue, and I think we sometimes forget humility and generosity in the way we meet others. You touched on the issue of the Theravāda tradition, which is quite tough in many ways: self-power, to liberate yourself from suffering, hard work and so on. Of course, this is Theravāda and I know the Mahāyāna traditions better, which emphasize very strongly the Buddha's compassion and so on. I sometimes ask myself, is there grace in Buddhism? From what I experienced in Japan with Japanese Buddhists, the answer is yes. People who are very deep into Buddhism sometimes say that, of course, there is a lot of hard work and meditation, and so on, but basically deep down in Buddhism, there is some sort of grace. Because you may sit not only for hours and weeks and months, you may sit and meditate for years—very hard work. But the moment you break through to understanding and awakening, you discover that awakening or nirvana is not something you create, it's something which is given to you when you open up. I have a good friend, a Zen monk, a Zen priest in Kyoto or outside Kyoto. He showed me a book he had translated into English. It was a Japanese book, a rather humorous description of Zen novices and their practice, about the hard work and all the strange things these monks were doing. But towards the end of the book there was, to me, a very moving sketch of a monk who had his spiritual breakthrough, a sort of explosive expression of joy. In the picture was a monk who had been sitting for months and perhaps years before he finally had a spiritual breakthrough, an awakening. But what was so moving is that under the place where the monk was sitting, he was sitting on a big hand. I asked my friend, what was this hand upon which this monk was sitting? He immediately said, "Well, that hand is God."

He did not produce
his own enlightenment,
he did not produce
his awakening.
It was given.
(Thelle)

Of course, he did not believe in God in our sense, but I think his point was to say that he had been sitting on that hand all the time, but only when he had his spiritual breakthrough did he realize that he was sitting on the hand (hand of Buddha probably). To me that was a beautiful image of grace. He did not produce his own enlightenment, he did not produce his awakening; it was given. He had to do hard work before he came there, but once he arrived to that breakthrough, he discovered that he was sitting on a hand. To me that is a beautiful image of—well, a Buddhist would not use the word grace,

although in the Pure Land tradition they would speak about other power—but I think even in Zen, there is the awareness very deep down that once you are there, you discover it's given.

Rory Mackenzie Replies

That's a very helpful comment, and I suppose there is maybe not so much divine grace but help within the Theravāda tradition. A monk may go off on a solitary pilgrimage to his own enlightenment, but actually you can only do so through the help of the *sangha*, through the help of fellow monks, teachers in particular, and lay people coming to assist him in his quest for enlightenment. So, there is that dependency, even though the quest for enlightenment appears to be a very solitary journey. It's quite interesting also to notice the four immeasurable qualities that we have in Buddhism: loving kindness, compassion, evenhandedness, and empathetic joy at the success of others. These are central qualities that the good Buddhist will seek to emulate and recognize in others as well. So, as we dig behind what we see, as you've just done, we see the helping of others. That is a kind of grace. **IJFM**