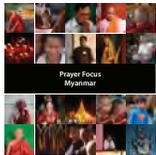






# Prayer Focus Myanmar



There is a dvd video that can be used in conjunction with this guide. If you don't already have the dvd and would like to receive it please write to us at [info@p4mm.com](mailto:info@p4mm.com). It is our hope that these resources will inform you so that you can better pray for the country of Myanmar and also that you can seek the Lord about what kind of role you can play in seeing Myanmar reached with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

# myanmarintroduction

September 2007 - Myanmar has grabbed the world media's attention - for the wrong reasons. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets in protest against a sharp rise in fuel prices, and to demand democracy. The authorities responded with repression and violence, beating up Buddhist monks and shooting into unarmed crowds.

What's behind the frustration of the Myanmar people, and how can we best pray for them? This booklet attempts to give more background information into this mysterious land and its charming people.

This prayer guide has seven topics. As the Lord leads you, it is our prayer that you would pray for one topic each day of the week.

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# BUDDHISM

## Four Noble Truths:

1. Life is Suffering
2. The origin of suffering is ignorance, and the main symptoms of that ignorance are attachment and craving to worldly desires
3. Attachment and craving can be ceased
4. Following the Noble Eightfold Path will lead to the cessation of attachment and craving, and therefore suffering

## The Noble Eightfold Path :

1. Right understanding
2. Right thought
3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right meditation

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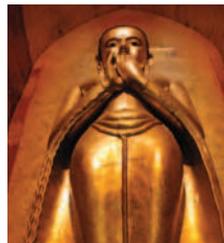
His name was Gautama Siddharta. Born into a royal family in Nepal, his life was to be easy and comfortable. His father built palaces for him and wanted to shelter him from everyday life. Yet he felt dissatisfied with the shallowness of worldly power and material possessions. One night, he left his family and home to seek for the true meaning of life, and joined a group of wandering ascetics. In the end, he managed to keep alive by eating just one bean a day. But the answers to his questions continued to be elusive until he found "The Middle Path", the practice of non-extremism and path to moderation. Gautama was now the Buddha, the Enlightened One.

He taught that suffering is an inherent part of life, and that the only way to end suffering is to reach Nirvana, a state of non-existence. This can only be reached after many cycles of reincarnation, where one's current life is determined by one's karma in the previous life, the balance of good and bad deeds. The better one's karma in this life, the higher and nearer Nirvana one will be in the next life. The Buddha's teaching does not include creation, sin and redemption. Deities exist, but they are just one form of being, and unimportant in the lives of people. The way to Nirvana is found within oneself, drawing on one's inner strength rather than relying on a higher force.

Guidelines to a good Buddhist life are given through the Buddha's teaching of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

Buddhism quickly spread through Southern Asia from the deserts of the Middle East to the lush lands of Indochina, but was later supplanted by resurgent Hinduism in India and Islam in the Middle East.

Today, about 500 million people call themselves Buddhists, mainly in China and South East Asia, but it's gaining in popularity in Western countries. At the same time Asian Buddhism is experiencing a crisis as in many traditional Buddhist countries people are confronted with the challenges of the modern world, and their religion is unable to respond to their problems.



## VICIOUS CIRCLE OF URBAN POVERTY

Hidden behind wealthier houses in Yangon are side-roads with much simpler bamboo shacks. Many of the families living here have come from the countryside. Back in the village they were rice-farmers, but in order to pay for fertilizer or seedlings they got into debt. They simply couldn't produce enough rice to survive and make even a small profit. No cushion. So they were forced to leave the village to go to the towns to look for work. They aren't return because of the debts they face.

Their simple house is the size of a table- tennis table top. Normally there would be around six people living, eating, and sleeping there. No sanitation, no electricity, no running water. Their possessions consist of a mosquito net, a cooking pot and maybe a couple of mats to sleep on. If they are fortunate they have clothes for the children- if not they run around naked. These people are so poor that first thing in the morning they have to pawn their mosquito net or cooking pot in order to buy some breakfast. Then they go out and look for work. If they can earn enough that day they can redeem their belongings again in the evening.

Many of these families are trying to survive on one income. Jobs are very hard to come by, especially permanent ones. They are relying on manual labour which is often seasonal. Construction sites, carrying bricks and loads of cement- this can be both men and women or older children. Loading ships at the dock. Or packing seasonal fruits.

Women will go from house to house looking for any washing they can do. Or they will manage to buy a few vegetables from a wholesaler and then walk the streets with a basket on their heads selling door to door. Another way to earn



money is to make some snacks and then sell them at the roadside. Outside the school -gate is a favourite place to wait!

All this is very precarious and seasonal. During the three months of monsoon rain and during the various Buddhist festivals many activities slow down, resulting in fewer jobs.



### Pray

•Pray for safe, home-based, industries for these families to protect them from physical harm, and disease, and to provide reliable income for the whole family.

•Pray for groups of Christians to be given access to needy urban areas. The authorities don't like to admit that poverty exists.

## EDUCATION AND HEALTH

### Pray

- Pray for a fairer and higher quality system of education.

- Pray for trained teachers to receive a fair wage and for more resources in schools. At the moment bright, intelligent children are being denied the education they deserve.

- Pray for those who seek to help families with health and social problems. Transformation happens when they are treated with dignity and helped to begin saving money through their own efforts.

- Pray for women in the churches to catch the vision for health and family ministry, and to get actively involved. Pray also for pastors to support such women and to value such ministry.

Prisca is a single mother with three children. Her oldest child has reached 9th grade and was facing important exams. The teacher was saying that she needed to attend tuition in six subjects at a cost of \$10 per subject per month. Prisca's wages are \$40 per month, an average wage here for better paid jobs. However if the daughter cannot complete 9th grade there is no chance of her completing her high school education. Prisca decided to pay for three subjects and try to survive as a family on the rest of her wages. Prisca is by no means alone in this kind of dilemma.

According to the Unicef, 38% of children aged 5-9 years old never enroll in school. Of those who do, less than 30% complete 4th grade. After primary level, two-thirds of the children leave school because their parents cannot afford to send them for higher levels. Children are seen as miniature adults and are expected to work to help with the family income. This is a fact of survival for the whole family. One mother said: "I reached 6th grade at school, and here I am doing washing for other people. What use is education to me or my children? They are better off searching for rubbish to recycle."

So the children become the most reliable money earners. They scour the streets looking for any rubbish which can be re-sold. Plastic bottles, glass jars, tin cans or anything metal. Young girls are especially vulnerable as they go down quieter, lonely back alleys looking through rubbish dumps as they are prey to un-scrupulous men ready to take advantage of their innocence.

Like the education system, the health system is also under pressure. The greatest health risks lie in poor hygiene, and contaminated water, coupled with malnutrition. Very often the mother is under-nourished and anemic in pregnancy. Diarrhea, hepatitis A and typhoid fever take their toll as well as dengue fever and malaria in certain areas. There is a high infant mortality rate due to AIDS.

Alcohol abuse is another problem affecting the health of young families. It often leads to physical violence towards the wife and children and they have no escape. Psychologically it severely affects the well-being of the children and they end up with very low self-esteem.



# CHRISTIANITY IN MYANMAR

In this proudly Buddhist country between 5 and 10% call themselves Christians. Christianity has been embraced by the ethnic minorities such as the Karen, Chin, Kachin etc. but there has been very little impact made on the main Buddhist people groups the Bamar, Shan, Rakhine and the Mon.

Large church buildings are a prominent feature of the largest cities like Yangon, Mandalay, Patheingyi, and Moulmein. The buildings are impressive but sadly the spiritual life within them is weak. There is a tradition here of Christian families of attending church, paying one's tithe, taking communion once a month. The outward forms are all there but the Spirit is often lacking.

Personal quiet time, reading the Bible for oneself and expecting a living God to answer prayer is largely unknown amongst the mainline churches- even amongst the keenest members. An 80 year old granny had faithfully attended church all her life. Four years ago she began reading her Bible for the first time. It has changed her life and that of some of her eight children, grand-children and even her great grand-children. Another lady said "God has kept me alive until the age of 50 to give me the opportunity to study the Old Testament." People are eager and keen to learn but they are not being taught how.

Denominational and ethnic pride, distrust, suspicion and lack of cooperation prevent unity and progress.

Large areas of the country are untouched by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Golden pagodas and brown-robed monks dot the landscape but there are no crosses, no church buildings and very few house churches.



Burmese people love singing and enjoy puppet and dance shows. The gospel can be presented through these art forms to communicate in a culturally appropriate way.



## Pray

•Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring repentance and revival to the church in Myanmar, for a love for the Word of God and to break down divisions of suspicion and rivalry.

•Pray for those who are trying to present the gospel in a culturally acceptable way. Light, Peace, Heaven and Hell are all part of the Buddhist mindset; but how to get across that Jesus is the only way to escape from the almost never-ending circle of reincarnation?

Pray for those keys to unlock the Gospel and make the Lord Jesus Christ relevant and meaningful.

•Pray for whole families to come to know Christ. Pray for believing families to model a sincere way of life.

## POVERTY IN THE RURAL COMMUNITY

### Pray

•Pray for conflict resolution in every aspect of life. Pray that differences between people groups would be seen as something enriching and not as a threat.

•Pray for aid agencies that are seeking to support rural families who are in danger of falling apart. Parents struggle so hard to survive that they have no extra energy or time in over-seeing the moral education of their children. Young people are then in danger of drug addiction, getting into crime, or getting trapped into the sex industry.

•Interpersonal conflict, mistrust and suspicion is the atmosphere all around Myanmar. Pray for all those involved in peace and reconciliation ministry.

By and large farmers have no legal rights to own the land on which they live and work. If someone comes who is bigger and stronger and takes it over they have no legal redress. Wide scale logging also causes farmers to lose their land. Often they simply get into debt because they cannot grow enough to make their fields viable. When they lose their land they lose their livelihood and the means of supporting their families. (The one crop which was profitable, opium, they are no longer allowed to grow, and it is hard to find suitable alternatives).

So they are forced to leave the area they grew up in and look for other means of income. The mines for gold, gems and jade become very attractive. But when people have moved away from their family and social support systems they lose the normal moral checks and restrictions. This then leads to a high-risk way of life.

All services are needed in the rural areas; health care, education, agricultural help, financial credit, HIV prevention, education, as well as counseling and advice for conflict management.

At the moment there is a trend for impoverished rural families to send their children to the cities to be raised in "orphanages" where they have a better chance of being fed and getting an education. Consequently the villages are in danger of losing their next generation.

Official permission is available for agencies to set up their own schools in outlying areas because government resources are over- stretched. The problem lies in lack of teachers who are willing to sacrifice themselves to teach in such needy areas.



# THE GOVERNMENT

Myanmar is ruled by a military junta which has been in power since the 1960s, first led by General Ne Win and now by General Than Shwe. These men have ruled the country with an iron fist, and have not allowed any other party to have a say in government affairs. Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for over ten years, and her party, the National League for Democracy, has never been allowed to rule, despite a landslide win in the 1990 elections.

From a once prosperous and hopeful country, which attracted merchants and students from the whole region, Myanmar has gradually slid into economic decline, with few opportunities for those with an entrepreneurial spirit or professional qualifications. A steady brain drain of the best people to neighbouring or Western countries has been the result.

Due to impossibly low salaries, civil servants are forced to take on additional jobs or expect and accept bribery money, making corruption an insidious cancer which stifles any national development.

Fuel rationing and electricity blackouts, bad roads and other shortcomings in the infrastructure are not encouraging for foreign investment, but - more seriously - sanctions from Western countries don't allow for any significant development in the country.

Nationwide demonstrations in 1988 and 2007 have been brutally repressed, leaving the civilian population with much anger and frustration towards the government.



## Pray

•Pray that justice and righteousness be re-established among the leaders of the country.

•Pray for General Than Shwe and senior minister Maung Aye. They are seriously ill, and will need to be replaced in the near future.

•Pray that the system of corruption is replaced by fair wages

•Pray for the international political community, to have wisdom to know how to deal with the country of Myanmar

•Pray for peace between the national government and the many ethnic minorities.

•Pray for the many Burmese people living abroad (there are over two million in Thailand alone). They tend to be more open to the gospel than people back home.

## RACIAL HARMONY

### Pray

•Pray for the predominantly Christian ethnic groups, the Karen, Kachin and Chin, that they would seek dialogue, peace and reconciliation rather than conflict.

•Pray for a fair society with equal opportunities for all people in Myanmar.

•Pray for the thousands of political and economic refugees in Thailand and beyond. These people are normally more responsive to the gospel than those left behind.

Over 150 ethnic groups live in Myanmar, all of them with their own distinct language, culture and worldview. The largest, the Bamar people number over 30 millions, while the smallest are barely in the tens of thousands.

These groups have been in conflict with each other for centuries, fighting for supremacy and control of the fertile plains. The Bamar have been the most successful at driving other groups into the hills, and are now dominant in the politics and culture of the country, as well as propagating their Buddhist religion.

The British colonialists adapted a divide and rule policy, thus deepening the already existing tensions. The Karen and other minority groups were favoured above the Bamar, thus deepening the rivalry. At the same time, an influx of Indian and Chinese people brought additional complexities to the racial mix.

Independence hero Aung San (father of current opposition leader Aung San Su Kyi) tried to bring racial harmony to the country, by determining that either the president or the prime minister should be from a tribal minority in the new Union of Burma. He also promised the minority groups that they could vote for independence after adhering to the Union for ten years. Sadly, he was assassinated just before independence was obtained in 1948, and these commitments have never been honoured by his successors. Since then, Bamar dominance has extended to all areas of public life. People from minority groups have not been able live up to their potential, with university places being limited for them, and with few career opportunities in the civil service and the armed forces.

As a result, armed ethnic conflicts have been flaring up ever since independence, especially in Shan State and Karen State, causing tens of thousands of people to be internally displaced, and many more seeking refuge in neighbouring Thailand and beyond.



