
MYANMAR CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT ASSESSMENT

I. Bangladesh

A. Rohingya Muslims in extreme western Myanmar are subjected to persecution and death. Villages are being destroyed by Buddhist Burmese. In the midst of suffering the Rohingya Muslims have seen Rakhine Buddhist Background Believers (BBB) among the Burmese remove idols, display compassion toward Muslims, and share the Good News that there is a God who does not require idol worship or expensive merit making and who offers grace to everyone. One result of this has been the beginning of a movement to Christ among the Rohingya Muslims both in Myanmar and among Rohingya refugees who have fled from Myanmar to southeast Bangladesh.

B. Due to security issues, Smith was unable to personally visit the area. Therefore, a questionnaire was created and a trusted Bangladeshi MBB with no previous contact with the movement was dispatched to interview and train. He was debriefed by text message and by phone. He interviewed some top leaders, some second level leaders, and was able to visit only a few of the actual Rohingya MBB in their own situations. They live in local villages and also in displaced persons camps. His first hand report validated that there are experiences of deep personal conversion, worship of Isa, transformation of lives, entire families coming to faith, and the Good News spreading from family to family.



C. A long string of cell phone photos was sent from southeast Bangladesh. These recorded MBB baptisms, worship services in homes, Muslim friendly literature being used, visits by Yangon BBB

mature believers (some dressed in Muslim garb) and evidence of geographic spread of the Gospel. The gathering in this photo includes BBB and MBB who have used CAMEL method, Korbani plan of salvation, a new Muslamani Burmese gospel of Luke and new Rohingya Audio Bibles.

D. Workers supported by Pratt and the Yangon leadership provided detailed, location by location, reports of new believers, baptisms, names, and dates. Smith was able to meet NNK and MM, daughter of the Major who is pioneering this work. Although intense effort was made to have some of these



leaders visit Yangon while Smith was there, these were unsuccessful. It was not possible for Smith to visit those locations. We received reports of persecution, new believer breakthroughs, and the need for materials and training that are consistent with other MBB movements.



II.

Meiktila district of Central Myanmar

A. Located in an area about eight hours drive north of Yangon is a multiplying movement among Myanmar military and in local villages. The village movement has streams of multiplying BBBs and a stream of MBBs. In this district is major violence perpetrated by Buddhist military and religious leaders against Muslims, results in entire Muslim villages being burned, hundreds of deaths, and several thousand displaced families. In the midst of this turmoil more than twenty MBBs living in Muslim villages and dressed as Muslims have been killed. Myanmar military personnel from Buddhist backgrounds who are now Christ followers have been deployed to this area and gave testimonies of how God helped them to survive, as well as recounting how some of their military comrades were killed. Believers have dispensed significant amounts of humanitarian aid which has opened doors for evangelism and church planting and has provided access for trainers. We observed believers participating in the Lord's Supper, appointing elders, and washing the feet of local leaders. In a typical cultural way, the Gyeenze bell was rung before and after the service. The picture Bible and yellow books were being used. Believers came from scattered villages by motorcycle taxi in order to receive training.

B. Smith conducted training, using Acts 10 (conversion of Cornelius, a military officer) for both soldiers and villagers from both Buddhist and Muslim backgrounds. This joint training and interview event, in which members of all three streams of believers participated was, in itself, and evidence of the transformation taking place in the lives of new believers. The Lord's Supper was conducted by military personnel and there was eager



participation by BBBs, MBBs and current soldiers, which testifies to the transforming power of the Gospel in these lives. This all took place within a few kilometers of abandoned, burned out former Muslim villages.

C. Smith conducted in-depth, hour long interviews with pairs of believers on two different days. Shorter question and answer sessions were held between training times, during meals, and while traveling. There was consistent response indicating that everyone was baptized and groups were meeting for worship in barracks and homes. Almost everyone reported having seen dramatic answered prayer. Many of those interviewed have attended one or more

training sessions. Since this was a particularly poor area, I was struck by the comment of more than one person who said, “Since I became a follower of Jesus I and my children have had enough to eat every day” Although some people can read, many cannot. Picture Bibles and the short yellow brochure that bridges the gospel to Buddhist worldview



D. and the plan of salvation are widely used. One pair of interviewees had been impacted by the *Jesus* film, but most of those we talked to had never seen the film. One MBB had a copy of the Muslim friendly scripture. Those interviewed were asked what they call themselves, and what neighbors call them. Some of the answers were, “We are called ‘followers of Jesus God’” or “children of God.” Only a few answered, “We are Christians.” In this society, generally speaking, the word “Christian” refers to people who are part of the largely Christian ethnic minorities such as Karen, Chin, or Kachin.

E. Almost everyone interviewed could positively identify spiritual children and grandchildren. A few had prepared multiplication charts and some drew cascading charts in Smith's notebook. They understand multiplication. Even those who could not read had no difficulty drawing stick figures of generations of believers. Most had heard the Gospel several months before believing. Most were baptized as soon as they became believers. More than one person said that as soon as a Buddhist becomes a Jesus follower, they are encouraged to be baptized on the same day.



F.

G. Several lay believers reported having witnessed to Buddhist monks, some of whom were led to salvation. One house church leader who had been a Buddhist monk for 25 years was interviewed. The house church leader who had formerly been a Buddhist monk was

quite adamant about taking down Buddha images and other paraphernalia from his home. He admitted that some believing families in his network still have Buddha house altars. His explanation was that in many families some members, especially older parents and spouses, were not yet Jesus followers and therefore believers could not remove the images. He also said that becoming a Jesus follower did not create problems with other villagers, but if the Buddha images were removed then persecution followed. (Note: At the house in which these interviews were conducted there was a large Buddha image and other Buddhist worship paraphernalia)



H.

Random comments gleaned from these interviews:

- “Buddhists do not know how to pray. We teach to pray.”
- “Buddhist path cannot take to heaven. Only Jesus path can take to heaven.”
- “I watched prayer in Jesus’ name bring healing/deliverance. That never happened in Buddha’s name.”
- “In our house we discuss the Jesus story and pray for each other (sometimes nightly)”

- “Heaven is the place we will go where there is no suffering. Before I had no hope to ever escape suffering or go to heaven.”
- “Please pray for my unsaved spouse.”
- “What I receive in training sessions I take home and teach others.”
- “I know I have escaped from the cycle of suffering.”



III.

Sittwe, Rakhine State

- A. Numerous plans were made, changed, and made again, for meetings inside Rakhine State. Eventually all had to be cancelled because of security breaches. It was impossible for Smith to travel to Sittwe, Rakhine State to meet with believers who had agreed to be trained and interviewed. Persecution of new believers by the Buddhist government, radical Buddhist agitators, fundamentalists Muslims, neighbors and relatives is real.

- B. In the past Pratt and key trainers from Yangon have traveled, trained, operated humanitarian projects, evangelized, encouraged, and provided materials and accountability throughout the Rakhine State and Sittwe. In the future local believers may be able to travel to Rakhine and Sittwe, but it may or may not be possible for foreigners to go to the area.
- C. Smith was able to interview Yangon believers who travel to the area, as well as a few believers from Rakhine State who have now relocated to Yangon or other safer areas. Both Buddhists and Muslims are coming to faith. Neither stream of believers is building church buildings or doing most traditional things because to do so would invite persecution for themselves and their families. Some meet as family groups. Some do not meet. MBB streams and BBB streams are distinct since ethnic and religious violence is leading to gradual physical separation between the two communities. Among the BBB's there is powerful use of apologetic materials created by the Major.

Violence is endemic in the area.

- D. Humanitarian aid has provided good initial contacts, especially in schools. This includes relief supplies, new housing, and compassion from believers. Compassion from BBBs toward Muslims led to openness to the Gospel.
- E. The terrible economy, plus government persecution have forced people to flee to central Myanmar, Bangladesh, Malaysia, India and Thailand. This massive population flow and displacement has made it impossible to maintain contact with many believers.
- F. There are good reports of believers and baptisms, but often there is little or no contact after the initial meeting.
- G. In interviewing a stream composed primarily of fishermen, they indicated that all the believers were men who had yet to lead their wives to faith. In Sister NINI Irrawaddy Delta network there were

mostly women who were initially touched by humanitarian projects, but few husbands or complete families have believed yet.

- H. Work in the Rakhine State progressed well for several years prior to Cyclone Nargis, in which it is estimated that 150,000 died. After the typhoon, most workers were diverted to Cyclone relief. Several new streams of believers were initiated out of that, but unfortunately contact was lost with a very large number of isolated believers in Rakhine State until 2012. With such a mobile population it was very difficult to reestablish contact with believers.
- I. Powerful evangelism has been effective in Rakhine State. Many have come to faith. Of those few we were able to interview, their faith remains strong. However, for the majority of believers, especially in rural areas, there has been no contact for several years. It was impossible to document their location or current spiritual status. Efforts are being made to reestablish contact with Rakhine believers.
- J. In Yangon Smith interviewed Rakhine believers who, for economic survival, have moved to the large city. They continue to thrive, but have no financial ability or intention to return home to impoverished rural, violence prone, persecution area. Subsistence day laborers welcomed Smith into their house churches and warmly shared worship experiences. I heard testimonies of what God had done through them and neighbors years ago in Rakhine, and current testimonies of what God is doing through them among fellow day laborers in Yangon. Presumably, many others who believed in Rakhine State have moved throughout Myanmar and still faithful worship Jesus individually or in tiny house churches.



loudspeaker for the death of believers, and rejoiced over the village wide loudspeaker when one follower of Jesus died.

- L. One house church member testified that he had been unemployed and prayed to God for employment. His former employer tracked him down at his own house and offered him a job. He testified that he had never heard of an employer looking for a former employee in a society where there is massive unemployment and many people line up for every potential job.



- M. Trainers continue to travel. Apologetic material is being distributed

The Delta

- A. I interviewed several believers who came to faith in the Delta and who currently travel back and forth.
- B. K. K. is a village school principal who saw humanitarian help being delivered after Typhoon Nargis, was touched, and eventually believed.
- C. The humanitarian aid given had an impact and opened opportunities for evangelism and church planting. Compassionate relief and development aid, along with evangelism, has led many to faith
- D. One stream of church planting was created from humanitarian assistance given to women. 36 of 38 believing families are led by wives, and two led by husbands.
- E. We made plans to travel to the Delta area, but those plans had to be cancelled when father of chief contact discovered to have far advanced cancer.

- F. Sufficient testimonies were collected from those who had lived in the Delta to verify that, post Typhoon Nargis, a significant number of Buddhists had come to faith and churches continue to meet in the area.
- G. The Major's apologetic materials were cited by many of those who gave testimonies.
- H. Many related the suffering they endured in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis and their desire to escape current and eternal suffering. They stated that the compassion displayed by believers in Jesus and witnessing their answered prayers were primary reasons they came to faith.

Yangon

- A. Believers are moving from the Delta, Rakhine and elsewhere, flooding the city. A few establish contact with the leadership team.
- B. House churches are scattered around the city.



- C. I had one long interview with a market lady and her son. She works full time in the market. She said she has 82 house churches. She talked about evangelizing drunks and monks. Jesus Christ is alive. The god of Buddhism is dead. She gave details about new believers in a Karen village. Three key leaders guide believers in seventy families. Of the believing families, about 60% of wives are baptized and 20-30% of husbands are baptized. In the majority of

families only one or the other spouse is baptized. She said most people in the village she is describing cannot read or write. When asked to describe the ethnicity of new believers, she said in descending order are Karen, Bama, Muslim, and Hindu. A key message to them is that God will not forgive us unless we forgive others.

- D. Believers who have come to faith through this distinct movement have come in contact with traditional believers from among the Karen (predominantly Seventh Day Adventist), Roman Catholics, Baptists, and Anglicans. They have different translations of scripture. There is conflict over ethos and some core beliefs.

Description of Major's role

- A. This man creates effective Apologetics in use throughout all three Buddhist background networks.
- B. Practitioner: I saw him lead a husband to faith during a three day training in which the wife was already a believer.
- C. Several times the Major graciously walked me through his Buddhist sensitive materials and translations. Since I spent 14 years in Thailand, I can appreciate his deep understanding of Buddhism.
- D. He is a former philosophy teacher who had done a deep study of Buddhism and other religions. He has worked hard to make his apologetic and evangelism materials accessible to poorly educated people who can easily pass it on. His “yellow book” is easily transferable and effective among Buddhist monks.



- E. He is continually rewriting and updating his apologetic material, generally referred to by members as the “yellow book(s).”
- F. He is diligently working to produce a Buddhist Burmese friendly version of the New Testament. This is much needed. The historic Judson version of the Bible was translated with the help of tribal Karen people and, while effective for that audience, contains many phrases that are unintelligible to educated Burmese Buddhists. An appropriate comparison would be with the Muslim friendly Bangladesh Bible that was produced 15 years ago and which opened understanding to many Bengali Muslims who had been confused by the Hindu sensitive version previously in use. Checking, producing and distributing the Major’s Burmese Buddhist sensitive version will be a significant step forward. Essentially, to this point the work has been done by one man and his friends. To gain society wide as well as agency wide acceptance, a large multiagency effort to translate and check a new Bible will be required. This process could easily take a decade. In the interim, effort should be undertaken to get this helpful tool in as many hands as possible.

Interviews with key trainers: Yiyi, Mimi, Nini, Tet Tet, Dao U, Thin Tin, Soe Soe, Sergeant, market lady. From these 8-9 key trainers, I gained the following consensus impressions.

- A. They are high energy.
- B. All have a concern for lostness.
- C. All are familiar with the term “multiplication.”
- D. They have been exposed to the commands of Jesus.
- E. Frequent healings and dramatic answers to prayer were reported through all the streams.
- F. Most women are widows or their spouse is not a believer. Few have Christian households with both spouses believers. Therefore, it is difficult to model family house church.

- G. Most have full time jobs and are doing training in addition to home and work responsibilities.
- H. Some handle significant funding for training and humanitarian aid.
- I. All have been exposed to multiplication charts.
- J. All have been exposed to Person of Peace terminology, but my observation is that few of the trainers slow down long enough from going house to house to really train POPs to be leaders of strong house churches or win remaining family members.



Indians: Hindu, Raj Kumar

- A. There are around 500 believers in 72 churches in Myanmar.
- B. Raj and I first met at a Delhi IMB conference , so he had copies of IMB produced literature.
- C. This movement has spread among Indian immigrants throughout the country.
- D. Indian believers gave powerful testimonies and have deep passion for the lost.
- E. There is good cascading levels of leaders and good delegation.
- F. Raj Kumar's copy shop provides income and opportunity to produce evangelism and follow up literature.

Raj Kumar

James Khong

- A. Affirming interview was conducted with a highly respected, Fuller Seminary educated, mature leader of tribal churches.
- B. He approves of the movement DNA.
- C. He endorses a more user friendly Bible translation and the Major's translation efforts.
- D. His own sources confirm the movement of many Rakhine people to Christianity.

Key Result areas

A. **Churches**

1. MBB, HBB, and BBB churches are increasing rapidly. New churches are emerging among fisherman, farmers, military personnel, former Buddhist monks, former Islamic mosque leaders, former Hindu from several caste, refugees . slum dwellers, small business owners in markets. and day laborers. Generational church multiplication was traced possible in hand drawn charts and face to face interviews.
2. During training sessions and interviews, various trainers' revised estimates.
3. Many interviewees indicated that a significant number of those who believed and were baptized have either moved or are no longer in contact, or trainers have moved and are no longer in contact with "scattered, isolated believers."
4. New churches may number in the hundreds or in the thousands. Persecution, inability of outsiders to eyeball and verify, travel restrictions by the government, and the mobility of new believers make it impossible to physically count churches.

B. Believers

MBB baptism is now understood to be 24,000 in 2 years."

1. Large numbers make initial profession of faith and are baptized. There is some initial equipping, but it is such a mobile society, and there are very few experienced trainers, and much persecution. For these and other reasons it is impossible to maintain contact.
2. There is a solid basis for some of the reports of baptisms through interviews where we dug deep for personalities, names, and circumstances of BBBs. Undoubtedly, there were many new BBB both before and after Cyclone Nargis.

Rakhine State, TKOI Net Work (2012-2014)

Township	villages	HC	Baptizer	multiplication	Total	Remark	Key Leader Name
Sittoung	4HC in 12 quarters+ 5 HC in 15 villages	9	70	(2954+70)=3024	3024	Mg Htay Aung U Than Kyaw U Kyaw Zaw Aung	Mae Mee
Ponngyun	7HC in 7 quarters + 4HC in 25 villages	7	26	(2343+26)= 2369	2369	U Aung Than Mg Thwe Aung	Daw Oo
Pauktaw	3HC in 3 quarters+ 6HC in 26 villages	7	36	(3918+36)=3954	3954	Shwe Hla U Tun Win	Ma Phyu
Myoe Pone	4HC in 7 villages+ 8HC in 22 villages	12	35	(3282+12)=2840	2840	Kyaw Myint Ta Yoke Gyi Aung Myint	U Than Shwe
Kyauk Phyu	1HC in 2 villages	1	1	1+1=2	2	Daw Tin Kyi	
Faung Gup	2HC in 2 villages	2	2	2*2=22	22	Kyaw Nainng Khin Hnin Kyaw Bo Bo Aung	Kyaw Zaw Linn
Thandwe	1HC in 7 villages	1	1	20*1=21	21	Aung Aung Nainng Oo man)	Maryi Than
Milipya	3HC in 3 quarters+ 5HC in 20 villages	8	48	3160+48=3208	3208	Thain U Tun Chit Daw Ma Ni	Aye Aye Khin
Mrauk-U	6HC in 15quarters+ 6 HC in 20 villages	9	36	1886+36=1922	1922	U San Tha Hla Hla Mg Tha Kyaw Hla Phyu	Mg Htay Aung
Kyauk Taw	7HC in 7 quarters+ 13 HC in 10 villages	20	45	1999+45=2044	2044	Mg Thing Tun Nainng Nainng Maw	Mg Win Nainng
Rathe Daung	2HC in 4 villages+ 8HC in 16 villages	10	32	3918+32=3950	3950	Mg Hla Hla Pru San Myat Mon Aung Kyaw Moe U Kw	Mg Hla
Bithidang	5 HC in 5 quarters + 2 HC in 22 villages	17	52	2697+52=2749	2749	U Kw	
Kyauk Daw	3HC in 7 quarters + 7 HC in 20 villages	10	35	355+35=390	390	May ma Shay Kyaw Kyaw	Ko Khin Mg
		113	419	0	26495		

3. Among MBBs, the reports of 20,000 new believers over a period of ten years represents long periods of hard work by multiple teams. Several were interviewed and details of sub leaders was provided. Approximately 15,000 of these refuged

to Bangladesh and approximately 5,000 continue to reside in Myanmar.

4. Undoubtedly, many Muslims both in Rakhine State, including Sittwe, and in Bangladesh are coming to an initial faith. Most of them receive baptism. Due to the security situation it is impossible for foreigners to visit and verify. Burmese outsiders met several and a Bangladeshi outsider met several of the higher level MBB believers.
5. Individual interviews with evangelist and trainers revealed that one string of groups is probably seekers rather than believers. Interviews with all the others indicated that powerful and effective evangelism has resulted in verifiable movements of new believers in Jesus Christ.

C. Baptisms

1. This network keeps excellent records of those who have been baptized. I watched one man receive baptism the day after his profession of faith. Baptism is emphasized, taught, and practiced among both BBBs and MBBs. Many cell phone photos of both BBB and MBB baptisms have been forwarded
2. I interviewed one Buddhist monk who has decided to become a follower of Jesus and plans to be baptized the day he disrobes from the monkhood.
3. The symbolism of washing away sins is universally recognized. However, since a considerable number receive baptism by having water poured over their head, I am not as sure that the



symbolism of death, burial, and resurrection is universally understood.

4. Since most new believers are baptized almost immediately the number of Baptisms especially in the BBB streams parallels number of professions of faith.
5. I came across one instance when a group of rural new believers are awaiting baptism for the return of Yangon evangelist who led them to faith. The practice was roundly
6. criticized by the evangelist and other trainers.
7. The general practice is for ordinary believers to baptize anyone they lead to faith.

XI. Quality

- A. Strong faith is evidenced by miracles, testimonies of transformed lives, and continuous dependence on God. I frequently heard statements such as, “My children have not been hungry since I followed Jesus.” They pray daily, “Give us this day our daily bread.”
- B. There is a forceful evangelistic emphasis with a strong focus on lostness.
- C. There is the evidence of immediate baptism.
- D. There is deep understanding that following Buddhism cannot result in salvation or escape from suffering.
- E. Many respondents were able to give a good explanation of salvation through grace in the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.
- F. There are excellent materials to explain the differences in the way of salvation through Buddhism and through Christianity.
- G. There is good use of orality principles in Yangon to ensure that many teachings are passed from generation to generation among oral learners.
- H. I saw indigenous music being created, but am unsure as to how wide spread the songs are being used.

- I. Isolation is good in preserving the DNA of these movements. The longer ordinary believers are not challenged by traditional believers, the more secure they will be in their own multiplication DNA. Terminology and practice are different than that of the several hundred year old historic Christianity introduced by Judson.
- J. Among former Muslims and former Buddhist good contextualized tools are used to bring additional Muslims to faith.

XII. Challenges

- A. In most families only one spouse is a believer so it is hard to have strong house churches in such situations.
- B. With illiterate and semi-literate leaders, it is very difficult to pass training from generation to generation.
- C. In such a mobile society many believers relocate multiple times and it is impossible to maintain contact.
- D. Inevitably, new believers will meet and fellowship with older, more traditional believers who have different DNA, different Bible vocabulary, and as a result will question their own orthodoxy.
- E. Numerous believers expressed a desire to have larger gatherings for fellowship and celebration.
- F. There is a huge financial divide between day laborers for whom enough food to eat each day is cause for praise, and comparatively middle class trainers.
- G. Due to the nature of evangelism, especially related to relief projects, believers are scattered too far apart to have low cost fellowship and relationship with near-by believers. I heard repeated references to isolated, alone believers.
- H. Compared with movements in Bangladesh and China, the grass roots believers receive relatively little step by step, week by week, month by month cascading training. My rough estimate is that there are fewer than ten good trainers. Many of these have full time, or major responsibility in part time jobs.

- I. There is a desperate need to equip a larger number of trainers. These second/third tier trainers would have responsibility commensurate with their own ability to travel through a support process that allowed them to continue to be financially self-supporting.

Note: Good practitioners usually make good trainers. Those able to model what is being taught make good trainers. Those who can genuinely build capacity in the uneducated make good trainers. In this network, they would need to have deep understanding of the Major's apologetics, be able to model power evangelism, deprioritize evangelism in order to build strong mother and grandmother churches. Trainers must understand the principles that make strategy effective, and the methods that produce results. Since so many grass roots leaders barely read, trainers need to be able to function well using oral approaches.

- J. Currently there is rampant persecution for both ethnic and religious causes. (Note: More MBBs in the central part of the country have been killed by Buddhists because they thought these people were Muslims than because they were known to be Christians.)

K. The role of outside money

1. Currently coordination and training is supported with outside funds.
2. If foreign funds are withdrawn or cut off, there is **limited** ability to sustain training, humanitarian projects, literature production, or maintain relationships among far flung believers.
3. Grassroots contributions from local churches are almost nil.
4. At every site, one of the most frequently heard phrases was, "We are too poor to contribute." In reality, most believers are very poor. However, in this case poverty is a mindset that parallels the national mindset that they are poor and outside resources and foreign aid should be given. Smith has worked among many financially impoverished communities movements where a grass roots spirit of generosity abounds. That is not the case here.
5. It is extremely difficult to generate a spirit of sacrificial generosity when initial dna is foreign support.

XIII. Addendums

- K. A copy of the MBB interview form
- L. A copy of the BBB interview form
- M. Photo of trainees
- N. Jay's reports
- O. An English version of the Major's apologetic material with broader application throughout the Buddhist world.