

2 GOD AND MAN

That evening when I got home, I was confused, but deep inside I felt comforted by the encouragement and help from Uncle Wirachai. But what was bothering me was the story he told. If God really exists, why don't I know Him? Why do we have to **suffer**? Why can't we see Him? Talking about religion always makes my head hurt. I don't have time to study it. Just trying to survive is killing me already.

Before I went to sleep that night, one question popped up in my mind: "Does God really love me?" All of my life I had been taught that our goal in life is to try and extinguish all desire. That means if God loves people He is ignorant because He is still caught up in desire. But why does it make me feel so good to think about being loved by this God? While I was going over all this in my mind, this thought came to me: "God loves me and wants to help me." I fell asleep with that in my mind.

Normally I wake up late, but on that day I got up quite early and yet feeling fresh. I slept so soundly that I did not even remember my dreams. I got up from bed and looked outside the window. Uncle Wirachai was watering his plants while humming songs. What a happy person! I looked at my clock and saw that I still had 2 hours before I needed to leave to look for work. I was suddenly seized by the urge to go over and ask him for his blessing for good luck today.

When Uncle saw me he called out, "Good morning. How was your sleep?"

"Very good! It must have been your God. I slept well all night."

"Yes it must have been Him. Remember I told you that God loves you and wants to be in relationship with you. I was praying for you all day yesterday."

"Thank you for thinking of me. I felt very confused after talking with you, but the idea that there is a God who loves me comforted me. Do you have time for a little talk?"

"Sure. I'm always happy to talk with you. I always enjoy having the chance to tell people about the love of God and His power to free us

from karma and give us new life.”

When I first went up to Uncle I was just hoping for a blessing for good luck, but he was so welcoming it made me want to ask him some more questions. “Well, you know that common saying, ‘**All religions are equally good, they teach us to do good**’? If that is true why should I change my religion if it is just as good as any other? It is what I have learned and followed from my ancestors.”

Uncle was quiet for a moment and then he slowly said, “Well Ton, remember, I told you yesterday my faith in Jesus was not the same as ‘religion’ as you are thinking about. Let me try and illustrate it in this way. I do agree that religion in general is a very good thing; religion teaches us morality and ethics. You can compare the function of religion with what a mirror does for us. When we look into a mirror, it shows us the condition of our face. Suppose I have been out working all day and my face is really dirty. When I come into the house and look in the mirror, it shows me the condition of my face and where the dirt is. But the mirror itself does not clean my face for me. How do I clean my face?”

“With a handkerchief or wash with water.”

“Yes. Without doing that our faces stay dirty. In a similar way religions act as a mirror to reflect the state of our heart. You can choose the precepts of any religion and purpose in your heart to follow them, yet you will find that you cannot do it perfectly. Religion acts as a tool to show us the condition of our heart, but just like a mirror cannot wash our face, religion cannot wash us from our sins. But God doesn’t only give reflections. He is like a handkerchief and clean water that wash us clean. So that is why I say that knowing Jesus is not religion. It is a relationship with the one who made us and is able to forgive our sins and wash us clean.”

“Alright, I see your point. But what is a real obstacle for me is the whole idea of God. You know that we are taught that it is irrelevant whether there is God is not. The important thing is to work the eightfold path to free oneself. This whole idea of God seems so strange. I have just always heard people talk about God and thought it was the foreigner’s deity, just like we wear images around our neck.

“God is the creator of the universe and all humans. No one created God. He is not nature, or a power, or karma, or the **Dharma**. He is Spirit,

pure, just, and merciful. He is in every place, has all power, and knows everything. He sent His Son to earth to save humans He loves from their evil deeds. He promises us that we can live in His presence forever and not be punished for our sins.”

Uncle stopped for a minute and went over to dig around in the drawer of a small desk in the corner of the room. “I thought there was one in there” he said as he pulled out an envelope. As he slipped the card out he said, “Ton, you know how we always send New Year’s cards to people. You know what is written on the inside when they ask for a blessing right?”

“Of course, it asks all the **sacred things of the world and universe** to protect, help, and prosper us.”

“You see Ton, our people do believe in things that are sacred. Notice how it says ‘things’? This is almost correct, except that there is not a sacred thing, but a sacred Person. It is the most sacred Person who exists who can bring us blessing.”

“Alright, let’s assume for a minute that God does exist. What is the problem with sin? Everybody sins, and we all face suffering, but what does that have to do with God? You know how we are taught Uncle that we are born good and sin is just ignorance and false views. We don’t need God or anyone like that; we just need to see the truth of the four noble truths and practice the eightfold path.”

“That is a great question Ton. Sin is like a wall between God and us. Our disobedience of God’s commands means that our relationship with Him is shattered. We have been **evil in our actions, our speech, and our minds**. This broken relationship means that we are spiritually dead, even while we have physical life. These evil acts are the fruits that grow from us being sinful, not just doing wrong acts.”

He got up again and this time came back with a sheet of paper and a pen. He started drawing a tree. “It’s like this. Suppose I have a mango tree that produces sour fruit. But I want sweet mangos. So I work the soil and put in fertilizer and lots of water, but the next year the mangos are still sour. Why is that?”

“Because it’s the kind of mango, some are sweet and some are sour.”

“Precisely! I cannot change the fruit by changing its environment. If I want sweet mangos I will have to pull out the old tree from the roots and plant seeds for sweet mangos. So we humans have a sinful nature which

we are born with. It is like the sour mango seed, and its fruit is seen in evil actions, thoughts, and an evil mind. Only God can take out the seed of sin and change our heart. Somebody illustrated it like this to me. It's like the pig and the cat. The pig loves dirt. You can wash it off and it will go right back to the mud because that is its character and nature and the way it keeps cool. But the cat likes things clean. It is its character and nature to want to be clean. As sinners we will always turn towards evil things and away from God. We can try very hard, but we will always sin. But when God frees us from our karma, forgives our sins and give us new life, He also gives us a new nature. We live in a different way because we are different by His power."

Uncle laid down the paper and pen and continued. "When we rebel against God and are separated from Him, we can never be completely satisfied with life. It is like there is an empty space in our deepest inner person that longs for a relationship with God. People try to fill that void with hard work that consumes most of their time, or eating, drinking, partying, chasing women or anything that makes them feel good for a short time. But they still feel empty inside. Spiritual death then leads to physical death, to God's judgment on all our evil deeds, and to being cast out from His presence.

"But that is where I get confused. I have done some wrong things, but I have never hurt anyone. How does that involve God; why would He punish me for such small things?"

"Many people feel this way, but they miss the greatest sin of all. Think of it this way. You know how we are to respect and honor our parents. They have sacrificed for us, given us life, fed us, cared for us, and sent us to school. We can never repay our **debt of gratitude** to them. But suppose that your parents are now old, and wrinkled, and are not strong anymore. So you're walking down the street and see a handsome couple in the strength of life and you decide, 'Hey, I want to honor these people as my parents. They look wonderful, and healthy, and rich.' So you fall to the ground and bow to them and beg them to become your parents because you are sick of your own."

Uncle saw my eyes grow wide as he told this story. "So you would never do that right Ton?"

"Absolutely, it would be the height of **ingratitude** to dishonor my parents like that!"

“But that is precisely what all of us humans have done. God has given us life, but we have rejected Him, ignored Him, never given Him thanks, and have bowed and worshipped all kinds of things that human hands have made. We are like ungrateful children. That is the greatest sin.”

“That is a lot to think about Uncle.”

“We have had a long morning talk, did you have breakfast yet?”

“Actually I came over to ask for a blessing for luck today. I have to go out looking for a job again.”

“Oh dear, then let’s get you something to eat. Come over to my house, I have the meal ready. Besides, I can pray for you to be blessed today. What do you say?”

“Are you sure? Wouldn’t I be troubling you?”

“No, come on. The food is still hot.”

We sat down at the table and I saw the old man simply thank His God for his breakfast. Then he prayed very simply a blessing for me, “Dear God, may You be with Ton for his job application today. May Your mercy be with him. Please prepare the suitable job for him. Please bless him that he will lack no more. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

After breakfast I went out and spent my day looking for work. I didn’t get a job on that day, but something felt different. My body was tired but my mind was still fresh. Before I got home I stopped by the market near my house. I heard a voice behind me, “Hey Ton, did you find a job today?” It was Uncle Wirachai.

“Not yet.”

“But you look like you just got one.”

“Really? Not yet. But I feel good inside today, like I have a lot of energy and hope. Maybe it’s your prayer for me.”

“I’ve been praying for you all day, so Jesus is giving you strength. I know you are going to find something. Get some rest and start again tomorrow. I believe God is going to help you. Remember you can always ask Him anything.”

That night as I lay in my bed Uncle’s words again rang in my heart. I fell asleep saying, “God if You’re real, please help me find a job.”

To Help You Learn

Please answer the following questions in the space provided below or in your notebook.

1. What is your view of God? How is it different from the God that Uncle Wirachai describes?

2. What was the greatest sin that Uncle Wirachai describes?

3. What is the point of the illustration that Uncle Wirachai made about the mirror?

