

**“The Land of Smiles”
Gratitude, Delight, and Happiness – A Way of Life**

Today, one week after my experience in Thailand, I was visiting a medical building in downtown Vancouver and I noticed a phrase in a small frame on a wall. One word in particular was in bold. It read:

“One must always be **THANKFUL**
for the people in their life who bring
joy, care, and most importantly,
love and laughter
to their soul.”

I immediately thought of the special people in my life and the love I have that surrounds me. I took a deep breath and was quietly very thankful for my blessings. It made me think about my experience in Thailand, and I copied it down.

The one thing that really accents all my experiences of Thailand is the people, and how **THANKFUL** they are of everything and how, no matter what, they are always positive, helpful, and smiling. Their hearts are open and gentle, and their actions – always so thoughtful, and full of love and laughter. The Thai people are not wealthy people, yet they are rich in heart and literally radiate a sense of love for and delight in, life.



Much of this sense of delight and humble gratitude is found immediately all around. It is ingrained in their culture and way of being, and is even demonstrated in the official Thai greeting, called the ‘wai’: They do not shake hands upon meeting someone. Instead, these beautiful people put their hands



together with the tips of their fingers near their nose in a prayer-like gesture, look into your eyes, bow their head slightly, and say “Sawasdee” (the second ‘s’ is silent), or more specifically, ‘Sawasdee-ka’ (if you are a woman) or ‘Sawasdee-krup’ (if you are a man). This is the Thai’s word that means hi, hello, welcome, good day, goodbye, ciao . . . It is a wonderful way to connect, acknowledge and appreciate.



Wherever we went we were welcomed and appreciated. Adults, children, shopkeepers, and strangers would be smiling, waving, and greeting us. Families would stop their moto-bikes so they could all smile and greet us. It was lovely. There doesn't seem to be any discrimination at all among the Thai people, nor even towards the 'Farang' – the tourists. Everyone is appreciated and welcomed equally in Thailand, like nowhere else I had visited in the world. They love having their photograph

taken, as if it is a complement, and would become all giggly whenever I asked to take their photo.



I had read that Thais love their children, and this was immediately apparent. On the bus, or at a hotel, or at a market, I would watch the children playing with other children or even interacting with other adults they had never met before, completely 'void/irrelevant' of their wealth or social stature. At restaurants, once they finished, the kids would run around playing tag and other games and no one complained – they just smiled and laughed as the

children sprinted around tables, giggled, and dodged each other! The children are some of the most delightful, happiest, funnest people I have ever met. When I was out on walks, bike rides, or runs, they would beckon me and I would stop to play with them, toss a ball around, join in a pick-up game of soccer, or a game of 'Tak-graw' (using a net like volleyball, but you can't use your hands, 3 person-a-side, with a small hard bamboo ball, set up on a square cement surface). Sometimes it was a matter of stopping to just high five them, take their photo, and leave them laughing and smiling. Even when paddling down the Bankhok canals, these lovely children would come running out on the docks or make sure they stopped playing in the water to wave to us.



Thai people are very polite, take nothing for granted and are always grateful. It is highly disrespectful to raise your voice – whether it be at a child to get their attention, or even when you are frustrated or angry at another adult – in any circumstances, it is not appropriate nor accepted. Work is considered a privilege and the Thais are proud of their professions and jobs, no matter what the responsibilities or tasks may be. Everything the Thais do in their life is to



serve a greater good, and to complain does not seem part of their vocabulary or even to their ability or knowledge. To break any of these ingrained cultural practices in their life is unethical and disrespectful to their self, to their people, to their beliefs, and to the Lord Buddha. This beautiful, peaceful, happy, grateful faith is also accented and externally represented in the colourful Buddhist shrines – called ‘Spirit Houses’ - that are posted on the land outside almost all the homes, warding off evil spirits and energies from the families and their homes. Wherever we went, we saw these lovely miniature houses. They would be neatly decorated with candles, small offerings of food, candles, incense, and sometimes even small toys from the resident children. I found this to be a very heart-warming tradition and practice.

On our travels, we visited schools, temple-schools, and orphanages. All the children were just as delighted to see and greet us as we were to meet them. They would want to come up to me and take a moment to smile, laugh, greet, and touch me. It was beautifully inspiring. I was told later, that all children are Buddha’s children, and that no one ‘owns’ and is solely responsible for the children (in a larger sense of the meaning). I realized this is probably why all children and adults alike seem so free, so healthy - so happy - and so accepting of anyone and everything - certainly a Buddhist way of life.



The people of Thailand are not rich in the way we may define being rich in the money sense, yet they are some of the richest people in heart and soul, delight and happiness that I have ever met.



The experiences of the people in Thailand made me think of what is important in my life, and how we as fast-paced, North Americans may just want to take a few moments now and then to take a deep breath, relax, love and appreciate someone, smile at a stranger, think about what is truly important in our lives, and:

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for the people in our life who bring
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