

Many Thais, even intellectuals & educated rich, believe as much in Spirits as the common poor, as spirituality hasn't been debunked here by science as in the West. When you rent a house it will very likely have one of these mini-temples around somewhere on a corner of the property outside. Just pray over it & leave it alone. You won't offend anyone by not putting flowers or food on it. Remember to pray over your houses & property when you first move into them & cast out any evil spirits including any that may be in the atmosphere around it or the ground beneath it!

Unlike those of the West, whose laws are basically founded on the Mosaic Law, many Thai morals & traditions are not. Thailand has had very little influence on its culture from either Islam, Judaism or Christianity so is rather dark spiritually. Most Thais are very respectful of other religions & believe "all religions are good" & that they should be open-minded. Winning souls is hence rather easy but winning disciples a bit harder.

#### THAI CHARACTER

Thais are a very friendly & rather peaceful people as much as can be expected of an unsaved people. They are very adaptable while also maintaining their own unique culture. Note their ability to get along with their radically communist & socialist neighbors without much trouble considering their great ideological differences! They are a very polite people who try hard not to offend but to please. They'll readily excuse you for not knowing their language or customs or

traditions but we shouldn't allow that to excuse us for crude, impolite, or inconsiderate behaviour. We should of course try to "Become One" & it won't happen unless you make a conscious effort to do so especially learning to speak the language well.

They are easily embarrassed by some western behaviour like frank statements, directness, open display of feelings or laying on of blame. This last point is very important as it is how a lot of foreign brethren have lost us many Thai disciples & frequently a source of offense. This is what we call "pride" & what they call "face" such as "saving face" or "losing face". It is very important to a Thai that they don't "lose face" in front of others or in other words, be publicly humiliated or "dealt with". While outwardly very humble looking they are only trying to be considerate of your feelings. Inwardly they are a very, very proud people, fiercely nationalistic & have very strong & definite ideas & opinions. But if you don't draw them out you'll never find this out. The key verse for understanding the Thai character is Proverbs 20:5 which says, "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out."

Some of their teachings are: to take the "middle path" which is Buddhist and means to avoid extremes of anything especially emotion, & to "strive to be pleasant, peaceful & in harmony with nature & others". So this is what has been drilled into them from birth & the reason it is hard for many Thais to decide to do things that will doubtless offend someone or a lot of someones, such as giving an opinion that others disagree with, speaking the truth when it hurts, or doing or saying something controversial.

In a nutshell they believe, "Blessed are ye when all men speak well of you." They evade, pacify or minimise rather than confront, rock the boat, or stir things up. This philosophy is very clearly seen in the very common & popular statement you'll hear often, "mai ben lai". Literally translated it means, "it is nothing (to get upset or offended at)" or in other words, don't worry about it, never mind, it's alright, don't mention it, forget it, let's think or talk about something else.

You won't get far hammering, battering, confronting or arguing. Success lies in low-key, gentle, persistent, persuasion. It works wonders. The scripture for this characteristic is, "The waters wear the stones." or in other words continual, gentle persuasion will even wear down a rock, eventually! Painless erosion. (Job 14:19) Let the Light in & the Darkness will flee of itself! Go slow! Have patience! Squeeze! Don't jerk!

#### CUSTOMS & TRADITIONS (or how Thais show love)

Thais are a very cleanliness-minded people who are also very, very sensitive about smells. They believe your head is the seat of the spirit & thus the most important part to be treated with the most respect. The feet, being the furthest from the head are therefore the most base. This principal greatly influences many of their customs especially how they "wai" which is the way they greet, show respect, show love, show humility, & in some cases even worship their gods.

Being very class & status conscious, there are many rules & variations on how to "wai" correctly. Thailand is a monarchy & almost feudal in some ways. There are

royalty & commoners. A "wai" basically consists of placing your hands together against your chest much like western church people do to pray. However, you are not praying to them so don't misunderstand its meaning. If it is a time of worship of a god it'll be obvious because there'll be an idol sitting right there in front of you! The head is slightly bowed. The height of the hands to your body & the depth of your bow depends on who the person is you are waiting to & their status compared to you. It is usually very obvious. Equals are waited to with the hands on the chest near the heart region & with almost no bow. As the person's social status rises above yours the hands are raised proportionately to higher & higher places on your body until reaching the limit of the forehead. The wai then evolves into lowering the bow eventually reaching a position of an hundred & thirty-five degree angle to the ground. This will take you to the most respectful wai used for non-royalty. With royalty you'd have to get on the ground so it would probably be best to revert to our own western ways of showing great respect for important people.

If you understand the basic rules of a wai then you will also be able to immediately know where others consider you on the social ladder & how they esteem you in relation to themselves! Wai simply & sincerely. Do not wai to animals. Wai to children only after they have waited to you. Wai to socially inferior people only after they have waited to you. Study the rules of waiting carefully & be sure to do it properly. If you learn to do it correctly it will be a very good