

Chapter 4 Introduction to Mizoram

In the fall of 1984 I flew back to Vancouver after a three week business trip, arriving about 5:00 pm. Marjorie met me at the airport and said, “We are going to eat down town and then go and listen to an East Indian choir.” After being away for three weeks that is certainly not what I had in mind! However she insisted and dragged me to Willingdon church, anything but happy

When the choir came out, the girls in such colourful dresses, and started to sing, I melted. They and the music were beautiful I still remember the first song, “I have Decided to Follow Jesus” this was followed by, “One Day at a Time”. These two songs have been my favorites ever since,

Then VanLalNghaka told the story of how Mizoram was the most Christian place on earth and this state, of almost one million people, had no homelessness, no starvation, no beggars and was close to 100% literate. I was amazed and said, “Someone should go there and produce a video on this remarkable place.” I never thought for a moment that someone might be me.

The choir was visiting Canada every other year and we met them, at least for lunch, every time they were in the area. I learned how Mizoram had tried to negotiate independence from India in the 1960s, The response was a war which lasted almost 25 years until a peace was finally brokered in the early nineties, Much of Mizoram had been napalmed,.most of the villages had been destroyed, forcing the villagers into larger centers, where it was easier to control the insurgency. The Mizos refer to this time as, “The time of the trouble”. No outsiders were allowed to visit Mizoram without special, hard to obtain, permits.

In the meantime, through a whole set of circumstances, I had become a video producer. Then in late 1995 I learned that Partners International, the sponsors of the Mizo choir, had been given the right to take a tour to Mizoram in February 1996. I immediately signed up.

Another amazing coincidence, which seems more than a coincidence. Shortly before the trip I went to buy a new Hi-8 camera and the salesman told me, “There is some brand new technology coming and I think the new cameras should arrive before you leave.” My flight was Sunday, my camera cleared customs on Friday afternoon and I picked it up just as the supplier was closing for the weekend. I believe God supplied me Canada’s first Digital 8 camera at the exact moment it was needed! His sense of timing always amazes me!

Just three weeks before leaving I was approached to video 1500 church leaders, on Shepherd’s Field’s in Israel, as they celebrated what many theologians believed would be Jesus’ 2000th birthday. I said, “I can’t, because that is the day I will be arriving in

Mizoram. However I am told Mizoram is hilly and I will find a hill, face Jerusalem and pray with you.”

The Partners International tour was mainly made up of Americans and us Canadians met the group in San Francisco. The next leg was from San Francisco to Singapore. Almost 12 hours after I left Vancouver I could see the lights of Vancouver through the plane window as we headed over the pole toward our first stop in Singapore. I had a conversation with the man sitting next to me. Little did I know that this was a divine appointment that would reap benefits later.

The man was an Indian engineer on the way home after working in Silicon Valley. He told me that he had really come to America to examine Christianity but only met shallow Christians and was returning to India disappointed. He had rejected Hinduism as myth that had one purpose. That was to make the rich even richer on the backs of the poor. He spent an hour explaining his concept of Hinduism. Only on the way home did I appreciate the significance of this conversation. This will be covered in the next chapter.

We arrived in Mizoram on Feb 6th and that evening I went to the top of a hill near our hotel and found a cairn there, with inscriptions in Mizo. I knelt down and prayed facing Jerusalem. The next morning VanLalNghaka took our group to this very spot and explained its significance.

On January 4th, 1894, the first two missionaries arrived in Northern Mizoram and settled in Aizawl. They labored for 12 years to convert 12 Mizos to Christianity, Then in 1906 the Welsh revival had spread to Assam, a three day walk north of Aizawl. One of the missionaries, with 6 of the new Christians, walked to Assam and spent several days there. They witnessed many manifestations of the Spirit and witnessed healings but nothing seemed to touch them personally. They walked back and pitched camp just out of Aizawl and told God they would stay there until the Holy Spirit fell on Mizoram, like they had seen in Assam. He did! Over the next three weeks over 1500 Mizos had accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. This cairn marked they spot where they prayed.

Christianity continued to spread throughout Mizoram and by 1979 it is said that every Mizo adult had been baptized. This is quite possibly the most successful mission project ever.

The tour was only in Mizoram from Tuesday to Friday, then left for Agra and the Taj Mahal . Three of us remained in Mizoram so I could finish shooting the video. During this trip I found Mizoram perfect and named the video I produced, “Mizoram, a Glimpse of Heaven”.

After the main group left we moved into the house of Denghnuna, who was the deputy minister of economics for Mizoram. On Saturday evening Dengeh and I had a long conversation. I told him that I had come to Mizoram to shoot a video mainly to promote it as a tourist destination for dedicated Christians. After experiencing the beautiful, simple Christianity of Mizoram I felt all the west had to offer was greed and corruption.

Dengh said, “The visitor restrictions are being eased and a new airport is being built. Tourists will come and I would rather they learned of Mizoram from someone who loves it, rather than from a cynical reporter digging for dirt” I had a hard time sleeping that night, worried that I was doing the wrong thing.

The next morning VanLal took me to several churches so I could video the colourful crowds. When we got back to Dengh’s his daughter told me a story. Three weeks before we came she had gone to a girl friend’s for breakfast and her friend’s mom started telling of a dream she had had the night before. Half way through the father interrupted her and finished telling the dream. He had had the same dream. The dream was a white man, with white hair, would video them going to church and that this was important. Aizawl is covered with churches and I had taken pictures of that couple as they entered their church. Dengh turned to me and said, “I believe God just told you to get off your ass and tell the story.” This remark changed my life forever and Mizoram became God’s calling on my life.