Buddhist Survival Khmer

A module for learning Buddhist (and animist) terms in the Khmer language

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*Note: This document was created using Pages on a Mac computer. Pages automatically creates the Table of Contents - replete with problems in capitalization that you will note below!*

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BACKGROUND

A colleague in Myanmar once related that those of us working in Cambodia were using the wrong terms. He had visited and urged us to call the place people wish to go after death knee-pee-un (nirvana) ូរ្មវត្ស្ដី instead of tahn sue-ah (heaven) ូរ្មគីរ្មាល. He related that tahn-sue-ah ូរ្មគីរ្មាល was just another level of existence, which still had temptations and pleasures like earth, whereas knee-pee-un (nirvana) ូរ្មវត្ស្ដី was the ultimate in the afterlife realm.

His insight and information challenged me to go to places I had not yet visited during my sojourn in Cambodia. I had lived in country for seven years, but had never darkened the doors of a wat (pagoda) វត្តូ! I had been busy learning survival terms, medical terms, Christian terms, etc., and had not yet gotten around to learning very many Buddhist terms. I never thought of speaking with a monk and did not know the appropriate vocabulary. But I also found that many of my young Khmer friends did not know the correct vocabulary either! So my husband and I ventured into the realm of an even higher, more difficult-to-understand vocabulary, with even more Pali and Sanskrit words. Initially, we found very few materials to aid us in our journey; and it seemed that many Khmer folks even disagreed on some of the terminology.
Ethnographic Research and Resources

The material for this module was gained mostly through ethnographic research, interviewing a number of Cambodian monks, abbots, nuns, and lay people. This research will surely continue as long as we live in Cambodia. Answers to our questions varied widely, but at least we began to gain the necessary vocabulary for communicating about Buddhist concepts. And that is our hope for you and for this resource - that it might spark genuine dialogue between you and those who believe deeply along Buddhist lines.

Along this journey, however, we did discover a few written resources. They are as follows:

*A Glossary of Pali and Buddhist Terms* by Access to Insight
http://www.accesstoinsight.org/glossary.html

*A Khmer Heritage Language Textbook for University Level* by Frank Smith
(Text for SEASSI - Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute at the University of Wisconsin)

*Brah Ling* by Ang Choulean

*Calling the Souls: A Cambodian Ritual Text* by Ashley Thompson

*Good Questions, Good Answers* by S. Dhammika and translated by Votano Sophan Seng

*History, Buddhism, and New Religious Movements in Cambodia* edited by John Marston and Elizabeth Guthrie

*Khmer Mythology: Secrets of Angkor* by Vittorio Roveda


*Talk in the Shade of the Bo Tree* by Wan Patchsongkram, translated by Frances E. Hudgins

Note: The Khmer vocabulary in this resource has been recorded and the full curriculum includes a CD of this audio portion.

We have made every effort to proof the contents of this curriculum - written and audio. If you find any errors and corrections that need to be made, please contact wthigpen@mailcentral.biz. In addition, any helpful suggestions on improving this resource will be happily entertained.
We shall begin with the beliefs the Khmer people hold regarding the afterlife, since this idea was the impetus for our search. Unfortunately, the “jury is still out” regarding THE defining way to reach the pinnacle of a sublime state according to Buddhists in Cambodia, and the views we heard were as wide-ranging as the number of people in the country. So, when you talk to a Cambodian about the afterlife, ask them what they believe. That will be your best place to start, rather than holding to a preconceived notion that everyone in the country believes the same. They definitely do not!

Our first day of interviews brought forth the most shocking road to nirvana we and our supervisors had ever heard. A group of us were granted entrance to speak with the highest monk in a local pagoda វត- (which shall remain nameless in order to protect the identity of the abbot). In the process of asking about the monkhood and the ceremony to become a monk, etc., the abbot was asked about the path to nirvana ន"#$។. First of all, the abbot shared about the two kinds of monks - the city monks and the forest monks - or the monks who pursue knowledge in a pagoda and those who choose to be hermits in the forest. Other monks shared similar knowledge with us - that there were indeed two paths a monk could choose on his quest for nirvana. He could be a pagoda monk and...
pursue knowledge and study Pali and Sanskrit. Or he could become an ascetic, living in the forest and absorbed in meditation. According to the abbot at this wat, the hermit would have to do four things: 1) go forth with his begging bag/bag for alms (die-uh brow-saht เพิ่ง[ฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏฏʊ), 2) live under a tree (bong koom m'lope die-um chuuh បង56ម8ប9./ម;), 3) wear old clothes that have been discarded (bahng t'gol ឯកន-បរមសNខ), and finally 4) drink black cow urine mixed with herbs and fruit juices (dhahm t'nahm dtuck nome go-oo poe-ah k'mowoo ឯកន-បរមសNខ). If the hermit monk did those things, he would certainly have much power. We asked the abbot where he learned the information about black cow urine and he responded that he had read it in a book.

Unfortunately, when I inquired further about this powerful concoction at Wat Mohamontray, the monks told me to forget about it - that this was just magic mixed with Buddhism. They told me that there were some monks who did mix magic with Buddhist practices, some who could heal and tell fortunes, etc., but that they were certainly not practicing the purest form of Buddhism.

(So much for getting to nirvana the easy way - but I have yet to see a black cow in Cambodia from which I could obtain the heavenly elixir!)

So, I began to ask some monks at Wat Mohamontray about “ordinary folks” and their afterlife. The monks were more than ready to tell me about heaven and hell and nirvana. I had heard from my colleague that Buddhists believe in a heaven of various levels and a hell of various levels. My new-found monk friends thought that there were levels in heaven and hell, but that the highest place and best place one could go after death would be nirvana nee-pee-un និដ្ឋ. In nirvana everything stops - no more suffering, no more reincarnation (if you believe in it). One monk explained to me that going to nirvana was the difference in being a seed and containing something that would perpetuate life versus being a ripe coconut, used for cooking oil. The oil could never again be replenished, just as the going to nirvana stopped the cycle forever. He shared that nirvana was equal to the eye koke borome-ah-sock ឯកន-បរមសNខ, the one and only heavenly place, and there was none other like it. (However, I

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Note that the word saht សត2 means “living creatures,” both animals and mankind.
have heard the term *borome-ah-sock* used many times for *heaven*. In addition, others I asked had never heard the term *eye koke*.

The monk shared that heaven (*tahn sue-ah* ប្រែរម៉ាស៊ី), on the other hand, had six levels and was only for angels (*day-voe-dah* ដែវ៉ា), not for human beings. People could not go to heaven, according to them. He was not certain how many levels were in hell, but shared about three different hells: 1) *tahn no-rue-uk* ប៉េរុក, 2) *tahn bright* ប្រែរមខ or *ah-buy-yah-poom* អាស្រីយធូ, and 3) *day-ray-chahn* ឈីរុពូជ. Of course, no one wanted to go to any of those places!

**Vocabulary**

- **nirvana**  និរវគ្គ  
- **heaven**  ប្រែរម៉ាស៊ី (this is the spelling used in most dictionaries)
- **s’tahn sue-ah**  ប្រែរម៉ាស៊ី (but you do not really hear the *s* sound; this is the spelling in the Bible)
- **s’tahn sue-ah-key-ah**  ប្រែរម៉ាស៊ី (word used mostly in singing)
- **tahn boe-rome-ah-sock**  ប្រែរម៉ាស៊ី (S. Dammika states that “heaven is impermanent and when one’s life span there is finished, one could well be reborn again as a human.” Thus, for Buddhists “in the know,” *knee-pee-un* is the ultimate place/state of being.)
- **hell**  ម៉ាស៊ី
  - **tahn no-rue-uk**  សុ្រក
  - **bung pleung**  ប៉ុងព្លួង
The latter word is the worst place - reserved for those who are EXTREMELY horrible, the place for beasts. In colloquial language, people use this phrase for those who are worse than animals, who behave in a beastly manner:

ah-crock do-it saht day-ray-chan

(S. Dammika also states that “hell, likewise, is not a place but a state of existence where one has a subtle body and where the mind experiences mainly anxiety and distress.”)

to die/to cross the river/to cross over to the afterlife (colloquial term)

doll t’rah-ee

to die (informal)

slahp

baht toe-oo howey

coe-ik

to die (more formal)

toe-two-all moe-row-nahk-pee-up

toe-two-all ah-nay-cha-kgahm

jike tahn baht toe howey
This banner contains the name of the deceased. It is believed that this entity must be judged before being given another life.

In answer to the question, “What decides where we will be reborn?” S. Dhammika responded, “The most important factor, but not the only one, influencing where we will be reborn and what sort of life we shall have, is karma....The gentle, loving type of person tends to be reborn in a heaven[ly] realm or as a human being who has a predominance of pleasant experiences. The anxious, worried or extremely cruel type of person tends to be reborn in a hell[ish] realm or as a human being who has a predominance of painful experiences. The person who develops obsessive craving, fierce longings, and burning ambitions that can never be satisfied tends to be reborn as a hungry ghost or as a human being frustrated by longing and wanting.”

He further wrote, as other monks shared, that in order to escape this cycle, one must hold to the eight-fold path. Relying on one’s own strength of will to break bad habits and resolving to meditate, they believe one can become a person of such character. “The whole of the Buddhist life is a training to purify and free the mind,” according to S. Dhammika.
Khmer Funerals:

The Khmer have many ceremonies for their deceased. The first is held three days after the death. Then seven days later (because the spirit may be trying to find his/her home and/or just in case the person may not really be dead) another ceremony of remembrance is held. The body is then cremated or buried. After 100 days there is another ceremony for the deceased, then another at the 3 year mark. It would be a good exercise to dialogue with your friends as to why these intervals are chosen - especially the 100 days.
The first time I went alone to the \textit{wat}, I decided that, as a woman, it might be best to stick to conversing with the nuns in order to do my research. But as I walked into Wat Mohamontray and asked where the nuns were, I found that a number of monks followed me out of curiosity and sat with us as I asked questions. The ladies greeted me, but the monks immediately took over to give answers and would even look right at me when I asked questions. They gladly took my pencil and notebook and wrote words in Khmer for me. I apologized for not knowing the correct and polite words, so they immediately began to teach me what to say to them. These young men were most approachable and most helpful. One even gave me his phone number.

(Note: But I may have an advantage in being grey-haired and nearly 50 years old! I also entered the \textit{wat} wearing a dark, ankle-length skirt and a white shirt with sleeves. I wanted to dress like the older Khmer ladies who visit the \textit{wat}. I did not wear a scarf across my shoulder, and I was told the scarf was worn only on holy days - \textit{t'ngie-ee sul} ខ្មែរ។)

Here’s what I learned. If a young man or boy wants to become a monk, he must first become a novice (\textit{sah-mah-nay} បារមិកា). The \textit{sah-mah-nay} are not required to keep the 227 rules of full-fledged monks. They must be at least 20/21 years of age (we received differing an-
swers to this question) in order to become a **loke sawng** ឃ្លាសិនូ  or a **pee-coke** មិនូ. During the ceremony to become a full-fledged monk, the **sah-mah-nay** ដៃម្រាមូ  is surrounded by a number of persons, one of whom is the **crew oh-bpah-chee-ah** ទេីក្នុងូ  or mentor who will give advice/chant the 227 rules (**p’doll ahwat** ប្រឹក្សាសម្រេចឱ្យឱ្យ  or **p’dahm knee-ut** ប្រឹក្សាសម្រេចឱ្យឱ្យ). During the ceremony, the **sah-mah-nay** ដៃម្រាមូ  will **boo-ah** ឃ្លាសិនូ or become a full-fledged monk. There can be up to 21 monks present at this ceremony, some who speak and some who are just witnesses. One or two teachers (**nyat** មិនូ) chant the precepts (**sote toe-ah** ប្រឹក្សាសម្រេចឱ្យឱ្យ). At one point during the ceremony, the **sah-mah-nay** becomes a **knee-ut**, or a naga នាង. The naga asks to be taught, **some sul** ឃ្លាសិនូ, which his mentor does.

**Vocabulary**

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<th>novice monk</th>
<th><strong>sah-mah-nay/sah-moe-nay</strong> ដៃម្រាមូ</th>
<th><strong>suh robah loke</strong> ជំប្រសួរឱ្យ</th>
<th><strong>loke nayn</strong> លៀនក្រស</th>
<th><strong>full-fledged monk</strong></th>
<th><strong>loke sawng</strong> លៀនសុខ</th>
<th><strong>pee-coke</strong> មិនូ</th>
<th><strong>pray-ah sawng</strong> ឃ្លាសិនូ</th>
<th><strong>the monkhood</strong></th>
<th><strong>pray-ah sawng</strong> ឃ្លាសិនូ</th>
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Khmer say that they depend on three things: the Buddha, the precepts/the law, and the monkhood:

1) **pray-ah put** ឃ្លាសិនូ

2) **pray-ah toe-ah** ប្រឹក្សាសម្រេចឱ្យឱ្យ

3) **pray-ah sawng** ឃ្លាសិនូ
The monks chant the saying in the Pali form as,

“Put tayak, toe-ah meyek, sawng kayek”

These three things are called The Triple Jewels/Gems:

pray-ah roe-at tah-nat try-ee

the process of becoming a monk/to become a monk/to be ordained into the monkhood:

boo-ah

sah-mah-nay boo-uh gee-ah pee-coke

twer pity nee-ik

bahm boo-ah nee-ik

hermit /forest monk tah-bah

the two roads of monkhood:

1) the pagoda or studious monk

gon-teyek too-reyek

2) the hermit monk wee-pah-so-nah too-reyek

intense meditation sah-mah-teek

ordained monk who practices religious austerities:

loke tah-dawng

mentor monk crew oh-lpah-chee-aye

teacher monk crew nyaht
Terms of Address to a Monk

I (non-monk to a monk)

\[ k'nyome \text{ go-row-nah} \]
\[ \text{ឃិនអាថ } \]
\[ \text{go-nah} \]
\[ ករ \]
\[ k'nyome \text{ gah-ro-nah} \]
\[ ឃិនអាថ \]

Yes (non-monk to a monk)

\[ \text{go-nah} \]
\[ ករ \]

In colloquial language when speaking to a monk, a person calls him/herself \[ k'nyome \text{ g'nah}. \]
And to say “yes,” he/she usually says \[ g'nah. \]

you (to monk - carries the connotation of venerable)

\[ \text{pray-ah die-cha-kgoon} \]
\[ បោះលេដអូតេក \]
\[ \text{die-cha-kgoon} \]
\[ លេដអូតេក \]
\[ \text{day-kgoon} \text{ (more colloquial way of saying the word above)} \]

you (to an older monk) \[ loke \text{ tah} \]
\[ ឡេកកោត \]

you (to a young monk, younger than yourself)

\[ \text{lokep'own} \]
\[ ឡេកអូរេ \]

Terms Used By a Monk

I (monk to non-monk) \[ aht-tah-mah \]
\[ អតតាលេរ៊ុំ \]

you (monk to non-monk) \[ n'yome \]
\[ នោយេម៉េរ៊ុំ \]

yes \[ poe \]
\[ រះ \]
Terms Used in Speaking to/about Monks

yes (the equivalent of *baht/jah បាល ស្មាត*):

- **go-nah**
- classifier for monks **awng**
- monk (third person) **loke**
- **loke sawng**
- to give **broe-gkain**
- to eat **chahn**
- food **jawng-hahn**
- to invite **knee-moon**

(This word is also used in place of *ahñ-juuhñ* in polite speech to monks.)

- to go **knee-moon toe-oo**
- to come **knee-moon moke**
- to walk **knee-moon**
- to beg/receive alms **die-uh brow-saht**

(Note that when the monks beg and people give alms, they are “healing all living creatures.”)
to speak  

*mee-un put-day-gah*  

*ភ្លេង*  

to be located at/to live  

*kgong*  

*នេ*  

to sit  

*kgong*  

*នេ*  

to go to the bathroom  

*dah-took-saht*  

*ដែលលក្ខង*  

to sleep  

*sung*  

*ប្រូ*  

to be born  

*guy-ut*  

*សំេង*  

to cease to be a monk  

*suck*  

*បេ*  

to die  

*sew-gkut*  

*ប្រូ*  

to preach  

*tay saw-nah*  

*ប្រូប*  

a monk’s robe  

*jee-poe / jee-voe*  

*ំឈុ*  

gifts for monks  

*s’lah dock*  

*ប្រូប*  

to give food to the monks  

*roe-ahp baht*  

*ប្រូប*  

to give to the monks  

*braw-kgain*  

*ប្រូប*  

house of the monks  

*codt*  

*ប្រូប*
The “Calling of the Soul” in the Buddhist Monk’s Ordination

An integral part of the ordination ceremony of a Buddhist monk is “the calling of the soul.” (See Chapter 8.) During the ceremony, the postulate is called a naga *neyek* គឺ, which is also a sacred name for the Buddha. This sacred serpent is often depicted with a human face. After the night-time calling of the soul, the *popil* is passed, and rice is prepared for the *neyek* គឺ to sleep upon. Once the postulate becomes a full-fledged monk after the ceremony, he is no longer called a *neyek* គឺ.
Precepts. There are the five, the eight, and the ten for regular folks, the laity. For full-fledged monks, there are 227 - not precepts, but rules or laws. Who keeps them? Who knows them? You might want to ask your friends! Hardly any lay persons we interviewed could tell us all the precepts or the eight-fold path. And the majority of monks we interviewed could not tell us all the precepts for the laity or the eight-fold path. We had to speak with the abbots to get a full story!

Who does keep the precepts? You have probably seen them - the ladies who look a bit masculine because their heads have been shaved. Some wear all white. Others wear white shirts and dark skirts or pants. These are the ones who follow the Buddhist precepts. If a woman decides to follow the five precepts, she does not have to shave her head. But those who wish to begin to follow the 8 precepts and the 10 precepts do shave their heads.

The 5 precepts are

1) Abstain from killing.
2) Abstain from stealing.
3) Do not behave improperly in the realm of sex.
4) Abstain from lying.
5) Abstain from using addictive drugs or intoxicants.
Those who hold to the 5 precepts are said to *gahn sul prahm* កាល់ឋ្យម.

For those more devoted, there are the 8 precepts. To the list above there is added the following:

6) Abstain from eating at unreasonable times (from 12 noon until dawn).

7) Abstain from entertainment (dancing, singing, music, movies, etc.) and decorating/beautifying the body (wearing garlands, perfumes, cosmetics, or fine clothes).

8) Abstain from sleeping on high or luxurious beds.

And precept number three is extended to abstaining from sex altogether.

Those who begin to follow the 8 precepts *t'wah-ee clue-un* តែអំពីកុំមី, shave their heads, and begin to wear white shirts and dark/black skirts/pants. The women who follow the 8 precepts (*gahn sul prahm-bay* កាល់ឋ្យម-បាត) are called *sey-ley-veyek* សែលេះកេសែលួយ ឬ or *doan-gee* ដើនជាកូស (The latter is preferred when referring to men who hold to the precepts, although the second phrase is used in more colloquial terms. The first is very formal. There are not really men who shave their heads and are *tah gee*. If they did so, they would be monks. The men who hold to the 8 precepts and serve the monks are called *tah ah-jah*.)

Those who wear all white and *gahn sul dop* កាល់ឋ្យម-បាត (hold to the 10 precepts) add the following precept: (And precept number seven is separated into two precepts, for a total of 10.)

10) Abstain from handling gold, silver, or money.

When I asked the monks at Wat Mohammontray how to get to nirvana, they told me we should hold to the precepts *gahn sul* កាល់ឋ្យម and to follow the eight-fold path in order to keep out the five desires. One of the monks could not tell me the eight-fold path, but another could tell me the points by chanting it.

**Vocabulary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Precepts</th>
<th><em>sul</em></th>
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To hold to the precepts *gahn* កាល់
to hold to the 5 precepts

\[ \text{gahn sul prahm} \]

to hold to the 8 precepts

\[ \text{gahn sul prahm-bay} \]

to hold to the 10 precepts

\[ \text{gahn sul dop} \]

the process of beginning to hold to the precepts/to offer one’s self

\[ \text{t’wah-ee clue-un} \]

(This process need not take place in a wat. A monk does not need to perform the ceremony. The devotee - usually a woman - has her head shaved, dons the clothing of a nun, and recites her vows to an image of the Buddha. She also recites her vows on each \[ \text{t’ngie-ee sul} \].)

monk’s rules (227) \[ \text{seh-kah-bot} \]

Four noble truths: \[ \text{ah-rey sike-jahk boo-un} \]

1) Suffering exists. Life is suffering.

\[ \text{កាមប៉ុនស្ថិតិប្រមូល} \]

2) Suffering is caused by desire/craving.

\[ \text{កាមប៉ុនស្ថិតិទៅប្រមូល} \]

3) Suffering can be stopped by removing the cause - desire (and happiness can be attained - some say this is nirvana).

\[ \text{កាមប៉ុនស្ថិតិទៅប្រមូល} \]

4) Suffering can be ended by proper behavior (following the eight-fold path).

\[ \text{កាមប៉ុនស្ថិតិទៅប្រមូល} \]
Noble eight-fold path:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Khmer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Perfect/right understanding</td>
<td>ការរីករាយល្អ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Perfect/right thought</td>
<td>ការត្រូវល្អ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Perfect/right speech</td>
<td>ការច្រៀងល្អ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Perfect/right action</td>
<td>ការធ្វើល្អ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Perfect/right livelihood</td>
<td>ការទិញប្រាកដល្អ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Perfect/right effort</td>
<td>ការមិត្តល្អ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Perfect/right mindfulness</td>
<td>ការគិតត្រៀមល្អ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Perfect/right concentration</td>
<td>ការអភិបាលឬការអាងល្អ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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CHAPTER FOUR:  THE WAT AND THE DEVOTEES

Nearly every Khmer person goes to a temple/wat at some time or other - especially at Khmer New Year and special holidays.

Vocabulary

- temple/pagoda compound
  - wat
    - វត
  - temple hall that houses a central Buddha image (It is usually tall and faces east.)
    - pray-ah vee-hee-ah
    - ប្រាហ័ណ្ឌ
  - monk’s eating hall
    - sah-lah chahn
    - សាលាកាល
  - monk’s dorm
    - kgot
    - កាល
  - ancient temple
    - brah-saht
    - ប្រាសាទ
  - stupa (Buddhist funeral monument)
    - jite-day
    - ស្វែងទៅ
  - classifier for stupas
    - awng
    - អង
  - naga
    - nee-ik
    - នាទ
place for travelers to stay at *wat*

*sala choe tee-un* សាលាអ@hotmail

to go to the wat (colloquial)

*toe-oo wat toe-oo vah* ត្រូវតែត្រូវតែ

people who go to the wat/the people who hold to Buddhism

*put-tah-sah-sah-nuck/*

*put-sah-sah-nuck* ព្រះសាច់សារ

female who goes to the wat

*oh-bah-sey-kah* ឃ្លាស់បោក

male who goes to the wat

*oh-bah-sok* ឃ្លាស់បោក

older man/former monk, experienced in Buddhist rituals

*ah-jah* មានហោ

Buddhist “nun”

*doan gee* ដូស់និង

*yay gee* យាពិនិង

*loke yay* លៅក់ខដ្ឋ

*suh-leh-veyek* សុវត្ថិការ

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(Usually an older female who holds to the 5/8/10 precepts. Those who follow the 10 precepts dress in all white and shave their heads. Those who follow the 5 precepts need not shave their heads. Women observing the 5 or 8 precepts can dress in a black skirt and white shirt. A hierarchy exists according to the number of precepts followed, seniority, and how many vo-sah វសំ or rainy season retreats the individual has “spent as a religious ascetic.” Wat Mangalavan/twah-ee bong-koom តើសំប្រួ in Phnom Penh has the largest number of nuns in residence.)

head monk/abbot  may sawng  មសង

Blessing: May you be reborn at the time of the Messiah prayah say-ah-may-tray may-tray.

some bon's'ron owey toe-un prayah say-ah-may-tray

ដែលបាននឹងលេចក្នុងពេលសម្របស់យើង
Buddhist Survival Khmer

CHAPTER FIVE: THE BUDDHA

Vocabulary

Buddha  
pray-ah put

(The word Buddha means “the enlightened one.”)

Siddhartha  
seh-toe-ah

Gautama  
goe-dahm

enlightenment  
trah-dung

bo/boddhi tree  
boe/boe-teek

the savior Buddha/Buddha to-come/messiah

pray-ah say-ah-may-tray

the Emerald Buddha  
pray-ah gow-oo moro-kot

the 10 perfections of the Buddha

bah-row-may

(In colloquial use, the word stands for spiritual power. Note that there are also kru bar-o-may who are mediums for spirits who are thus called because of the power they possess. Bertrand writes that there are more than 10,000 bar-o-may in Cambodia.)
CHAPTER SIX: THE BELIEFS

“Do good, get good. Do bad, get bad.” The ironclad rule in Buddhism is the rule of karma.

Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Khmer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>religion</td>
<td>sah-sah-nah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>philosophy</td>
<td>tay-ah-sah-nak veet-gee-uh/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>too-sah-nak veet-gee-uh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to hold to a religion</td>
<td>gahn sah-sah-nah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>pray-ah put-tah sah-sah-nah/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pray-ah put sah-sah-nah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahayana Buddhism</td>
<td>moe-hah-yee-un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mow-hah knee-kah-ee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theravada Buddhism</td>
<td>ហវីរវិទ្យាឧ្មជីវិត</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom-ah-yoot</td>
<td>សម្រាប់កោសុទ្ធនាគារ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pali language</td>
<td>ភាសាមេរះ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanskrit language</td>
<td>ភាសាក្ខែង</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merit</td>
<td>ប្រាការ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karma</td>
<td>ការារ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad karma</td>
<td>ប្រាការដែលមានបញ្ហា</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good karma</td>
<td>ប្រាការដែលមានសុខ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin</td>
<td>បោឆ្ន</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The desires of the flesh</td>
<td>សុខធម្មជាតិ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To desire fleshly pleasures</td>
<td>ចំពុងចូលឱ្យសុខធម្មជាតិ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering</td>
<td>កុង</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To suffer</td>
<td>កុងឱ្យប្រកួត</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took</td>
<td>ធ្វើ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Kinds of suffering: (These are written on funeral biers.)

- Physical suffering: roop pahng
- General suffering: took kahng
- Absurdity/uncertainty: ah-knee-jahng
- Soul-less/not self: ah-nah-tah
- To be reincarnated: jahp gee-i t' may
- To enter Nirvana: jole knee-pee-un
- Ritual sprinkling: s'rau-ik duuck
- Loving kindness/mercy: may-tah
- Truth (Buddhist): sah-jahk
  - sah-jahk toe-ah

(The word for righteous in Khmer - such-ah-rut ផ្កាយគ្មៈ comes from this word.)

- Have body/have suffering: mee-un roop mee-un took
- Impermanence/not permanent: mun tee-ung toe-aht

The 3 Gems/Refuges:

1) Buddha: prayah put
2) Dharma/Precepts: prayah toe-ah
3) Sangha/Monkhood: prayah sawng
Buddhist Proverbs
(From the Khmer Institute)

Bones scream, skin invites. or (blood screams, skin invites).

Interpretation: According to karmic principle, all evil deeds done in the past will be returned upon you in the present or future; thus, it is your past sins that cause your bones/blood to scream in pain and your skin to invite more suffering.

When your thoughts mature, you will then be mature in every way; when your fate matures, you will be lucky and beyond suffering.

"When your fate matures" refers to when all the merit you have accumulated returns to you. As opposed to the prior saying which refers to the result of wicked deeds, this one refers to the karmic benefits of doing good.

Those who go to sleep in anticipation of waking say that the night is long; those who complain while walking say that a yaoc is far; the ignorant/delinquent will eventually understand the Dharma, as the cycle of rebirth is a long way from nirvana.

yaoc = roughly 16 kilometers

One with a generous nature will not be poor for long.

Interpretation: Generosity enables you to accumulate merit so that in the future you will have good karma. Taken together with the prior saying, they advise a person to be generous but also do not squander money. Take the middle path between thrift and generosity. The proverb below further illuminates this concept.
Metal gives rise to rust, which will always eat the metal in return.

Reference to bad karma - i.e., an evil act will eventually return to harm the individual who instigated it.

Boulders are heavy in nature, but the divinely patient nature is heavier; listen to advice of the elderly for it is even heavier still. The teaching of the Buddha is especially heavy, beyond imagination, because it transcends the world and is immeasurable.

Wanting merit, you sin; lusting after wealth, you inevitably lose your riches.

Prison and keys are something to which thieves gave birth; medicinal remedies are born from germs; sleep is born from feelings of sleepiness; people in the world are born from karma.

Karma is a principle in Buddhism that posits your present action dictates your future. That is, accumulating merit though good deeds will bring good fortune, accumulating sin through evil deeds will bring misfortune. Hence, your birth as a human being and the condition you are born into, whether good or bad, are determined by your karma (the merit/sin you have accumulated from past lives).

Proverbs from OMF:

"Do bad, get bad; do good, get good"

The 'iron law' of karma: people who do bad deeds will receive bad in return, people who do good will receive good. This may be quick in coming, or may carry over to a future existence. (e.g. A parent to a child:}

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"Do not pile up too much bad merit". "In a future life someone will torture you like you're torturing that insect"

"Have a body, have suffering"
Suffering is bound up with us from birth to death: basic Buddhist doctrine.

"Make 100 ships' worth of merit, but just one sin can come in and wipe it all away"
Be careful not to transgress the karmic moral code as the seriousness of your wrong could undo a lot of the merit which you have built up.

"Meritmaking while steeped in sin"
Used when someone bad uncharacteristically does something good in an attempt to impress, to win favour or to make up e.g. a gift to a temple fund or a new hospital. It doesn't outweigh all that has gone before and all that will come after. A feeble attempt to redress the balance of bad karma, doomed to fail.

"Destined for the depths of hell"
Used of someone extremely bad, if not evil. Their place in hell will be on the 100th level down.

"You can be as white as the bottom of a bowl, but without character you are like a dog under a house"
You can try to appear good to others but without the moral fibre to back it up you will be discovered – like the grubby and lazy dog under the house. This can be used for women (esp. sex workers) who make themselves up to be pretty but do not have the corresponding beauty of spirit or morals.
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE FESTIVALS/HOLY DAYS

The Buddhist holy days revolve around the lunar months and lunar new year, as well as the rice planting/harvesting cycle.

However, there are a number of festivals celebrated in Cambodia that cannot be found in neighboring Buddhist countries. These celebrations have more Hindu/Brahministic roots.

Vocabulary

to have a ceremony/make merit

twer bon តំប្របរ

twer bon tee-un តំប្របរកដើម

jahp p ah-ie-ee ជាមួយបូជាសត្វ

jahp koe-sol ជាមួយគុសសត្វ

jahp meyek pol ជាមួយមោលសត្វ

(follow the 8-fold path)

to give an offering dahk tee-un សុក្រសេរ
ceremony for parents (living or dead)

\[ \text{bon pah-jie-ee boo-un} \]

(Parents are given 4 things at this ceremony - clothing, etc.)

ceremony for building \( \text{wat} \)

\[ \text{bon p'kah} \]

(This ceremony is performed by the \( \text{wat} \).)

happy ceremony for giving to monks

\[ \text{bon got-tun-ak-tee-un} \]

(A family gathers together to perform this ceremony. It is also called

\[ \text{bon kaw-tun} \]

\[ \text{bon kaw-tun-ah -tee-un} \]

Usually in November, this festival serves in the making of merit by supplying new robes and other materials to the monks and pagodas.

holy day

\[ \text{tingie-ee sul} \]

Technically there are four \( \text{tingie-ee sul} \) in each lunar month:

(However, the majority of Khmer sellers at Olympic Market told us they observe only two days per month and those of Chinese descent observe four days per month.)

1) the eighth day of the waxing moon
2) the 15th day of the waxing moon
3) the 8th day of the waning moon
4) the 15th day of the waning moon

The first day of the waxing moon is called \( \text{tingie-ee muy guy-ut} \). The full moon is on the day of the 15th \( \text{guy-ut} \) and is also called \( \text{tingie-ee payn baw-rah-may} \)
The waning of the moon is roe-ik and the 15th is t'ngie-ee kie dike.

Khmer New Year jole ch'nahm t'may

Celebration of Buddha’s Enlightenment/Birth, etc. (Vesak Day)

bon vee-sack boe gee-uh

Buddhist Lent/rainy season retreat for the monks

bon jole voe-sah

During this time - the eighth lunar month and at the height of the rainy season - the monks seclude themselves and do not leave the temple (usually June-July). Very tall orange candles are sold in the markets during this time. They are sold in pairs for displaying in the temple and are quite costly. Those who wish to make merit may purchase and donate them to a wat. During Buddhist Lent bon voe-sah, at 5 am and 5 pm each day someone rings a bell or beats a drum.

End of Buddhist Lent bon jayñ voe-sah

This is the end of the time of seclusion for the monks. This festival occurs during the eleventh lunar month (usually October-November).
Non-Buddhist Festivals

Royal Plowing Ceremony *bon j'roe-aht prayah nay-ang-coil*

Hungry Ghost Festival *bon p'joom bun*

During this time (usually September/October), the spirits of the departed are in search of food and offerings. The festival lasts 15 days and devotees must go to seven pagodas. On the last day, the bright/brate  (demons) visit earth.

Water Festival *bon ohm dook*

Huge festival that takes place in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, known mainly for the boat races. The spirit of the water is venerated at this time. During this time, a festival also takes place in the home:

*bon awk ahm-boke*
CHAPTER EIGHT: THE UNSEEN/SPIRITUAL REALM (BELIEFS IN THE ANIMISTIC REALM)

If you would like to see these aspects at work, peruse Wat Phnom and the numerous fortune tellers at their stalls.

Vocabulary

the tempter  

monster (not a spirit)

string tied around the wrist for protection (white)

string tied around the waist for protection

string around the neck for protection
k’sigh-ee gaw sahck-sut

necklace worn for protection

bon-tawng

amulet

wat-two sahck-sut

grung row-bee-un

magical words/incantations

mone

magic

mone-ah-koom

written incantations/designs

yoe-ahan

These can be imprinted on cloth, tattooed on the body, or displayed above a doorway. Most are in Pali or Sanskrit.

incantation inscribed on cloth and wrapped around waist or neck

k’sigh gah-tah

(In Khmer, the word g’iah means word.)

spirit venerated on the road to Kampong Som

yay mao

spirit venerated at spirit houses in each village/ancestor spirit (male)

teyek tah
idol of a venerated spirit

roop neyck tah

ghost/corpse k’mow-ik

demon/family spirit/territorial spirit

ah-reyek

demon ah-sow-ik

Satan ah-reyek sah-tahng may bay-sike

evil spirit that seeks blood bay-sike

spirit of woman who died in childbirth pree-aye

female ghost that has only a head and entrails and emits a bad odor ahp

fortune teller kru-tee-aye

one who practices rituals to appease spirits/specialist in herbal medical and ritual formulas kru k’my
medium possessed by evil spirits

may-mot  ដម្លឹម

medium possessed by evil spirits

roop ah-reyek  រំពឹង

medium possessed by ancestor spirits

kru bahr-roe-may  ប្រាត់ជាមួយ

witch (female)  t'imope  នូសពីនិមន់នោះ

to cast a spell  twuh ahm-puuh  ការបង្កួតសម្រាប់ស្រាប់

gay twuh  ម្រុញ

angel (good)  day-roo-dah  ស្មាតហ្វូន

to possess (as in demonic possession)

jole roop  លេខនារី

a sacred, magical cow  pray-ah go-oo  ក្តៅកែវ

Leper King  s'dike gom-long  លោកបន្តិច

(The Leper King statue is in the center of the inner courtyard of the National Museum. It is considered to be the center of the museum’s powers - នៅក្នុងប្រភពព្រឹត្តិការណ៍នំបអ៊ឺរ៉ាម៉ាយ៍)

Yay Deb (Siem Reap)  yay tape  យែអ៊ឺរ៉ាម៉ាយ៍
A statue identical to the Leper King and located northwest of the king’s residence. This spirit often receives offerings of “crucified chicken” - មុុតឃុំង. A replica of the shrine exists at the National Museum as well.

The Calling of the Souls

According to Thompson’s book *The Calling of the Souls*, the Khmer people believe that each of us has 19 “souls” ប្រែប្រែង. They often have a ceremony to “call the souls” ហើយ-អញ្ចឹង back to one who is in a state of ill health. There are a number of items associated with the ceremony, many of which are phallic in nature. One ritual object - a *popil* ពពែល - shaped like a fig leaf - is passed in the circle of those witnessing the ceremony of calling the soul back. It is always passed along with a candle. *Popil* ពពែល may be engraved with different images, mostly hermit monks, gods, spirits, such as យេីង heng, etc. At the end of the ceremony for calling the souls, the ah-jah blows the smoke of the candles towards the person for whom the ceremony was performed.

However, some of the Khmer people we interviewed stated that they have 12 souls. They have a phrase they use when someone is afraid, to call their 12 souls and make sure they are all present: ប្រែប្រែងតវច ប្រែប្រែងធំព;រដន-បាសពោសបាសមាន_ញញយអសមាន! Other Khmer people we talked to stated that the whole number of souls is 14 - បូុតឃុំងដន-បាសពោសបាស they say: បូុតឃុំងដន-បាសពោសបាស. We will continue our research on this subject.

You might find it a fun project to ask your neighbors and friends how many souls they have and see what you find out about their beliefs.

Entering the Shade

Young girls may have this ceremony as a rite of passage when they enter puberty. In Khmer the ceremony is called ចតឡាម្ព័ព័ ដើម្បីជាមួយ. It is believed that a spirit called the មាសែសូលធម្មតា is present during the ceremony. The spirit being is represented by a basked of unhusked rice and is spoken to as if it were a person.
Ceremony for the Prayah Poom

If a village has had many problems, the people will sometimes hold a bon បំណូល for the prayah poom ប្រារមាន. Ang Choulean calls this the “consecrating of the navel of the village.” The center of spiritual power in the village is referred to as the navel / p‘chit/ ព្រៃត.
We also interviewed various sellers in the markets, especially Olympic Market, about their offerings and altars. One day that we were doing research, was a 't'ngie-eelum, which the sellers shared that for the Khmer came twice a month and for the Chinese came four times per month. The colorful offerings of fruits, candies, tea/water, etc. at many shops were most often prepared by one of the children or workers or even the shop owner themselves. For practicality sake, many did not have spirit houses or altars because they did not want to start a fire in the marketplace. One owner shared that she had an altar at home, but often did not have time to tend to it, as she was busy with her work and family. Still others had huge altars, some down on the ground, some high up in the stall and kept from their wares. Many were dusty and old, but some were well-kept, cleaned and replenished often. No two were alike. The sellers shared that when the incense/candles had burned down, the food offered could be eaten by anyone.

At one corner of the market, we found an octagonal mirror-like plaque above a stall. The owners shared with us that this was an item used in feng shui hong soy ប៊ុកឱសសុយ and was to be placed at intersections for good luck. They shared that the octagonal plaques could be purchased at O’Russey Market. One had only to look for the images of angels devoda ដែជាការ being sold. The same lady who did not have any offerings or altar at her stall also shared that she did not believe in hong soy, but that other people did.
**Vocabulary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Khmer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>feng shui</td>
<td><em>hong soy</em></td>
<td>កាលគោលឯក</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>altar</td>
<td><em>ah-sah-nak</em></td>
<td>អាហារបាល ៍ឯក</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>altar of those who practice magic</td>
<td><em>bay-say</em></td>
<td>បាលឯក</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spirit house</td>
<td><em>k’ome neyek tah</em></td>
<td>ព្រះមហិរញ្ចុស្តី</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ree-un day-vo-dah</td>
<td></td>
<td>ព្រះរៀវូយ ហ្វូនបៀក</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>altar (small, usually on the floor of a store/stall):</td>
<td><em>joom nee-ung hahng/tope</em></td>
<td>នាងស្មែងគីរជាប់</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>altar (small, usually on the floor of a house):</td>
<td><em>joom nee-ung p’ayah</em></td>
<td>នាងស្មែងគីរ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joss sticks/incense</td>
<td><em>tube</em> (don’t pronounce the b sound)</td>
<td>ធូប</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ancestor</td>
<td><em>jee doan jee tah</em></td>
<td>ព្រះមហិរញ្ចុស្តី</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>jee loo-ut jee lee-ah</em></td>
<td>ព្រះមហិរញ្ចុស្តី</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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## CHAPTER TEN: BUDDHIST AND CHRISTIAN TERMS COMPARED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Khmer Buddhist Term</th>
<th>English Term</th>
<th>Khmer Christian Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>បន្ថែម្បែ៍</td>
<td>to pray</td>
<td>អធ្វើសាស្ត្រ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ឧទស្វើ</td>
<td>to dedicate</td>
<td>តែង</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ស្ពាន់សិ្រ</td>
<td>recite the Word/law</td>
<td>មកាយើសិ្រ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ដឹងោឈើន័យទឹលគឺ</td>
<td>to preach</td>
<td>សាលើបញ្ហាដឹងោឈើន័យទឹលគឺ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ប្រៀស</td>
<td>rule/commandment</td>
<td>កីឡាជំនួញឬ បុណ្យកីឡាជំនួញ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ស្រូប</td>
<td>make an offering</td>
<td>អាល់ប៉ះបបី បារាណឈើ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>សេវីយឈធឹេង</td>
<td>story/chapter</td>
<td>កីឡាជំនួញឬ បុណ្យកីឡាជំនួញ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>អាស្រីឈធឹេង</td>
<td>adherent</td>
<td>បុណ្យកីឡាជំនួញឬ បុណ្យកីឡាជំនួញ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>សុី</td>
<td>Amen</td>
<td>កាលបូរ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>សាគី</td>
<td>meditate</td>
<td>ស្ក្ួើការឈរ តូចនីតួគុល</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>សេវីធឹេង</td>
<td>the truth</td>
<td>សេវីធឹេង</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

Who are Buddhists and what do they believe? In talking with scores of Khmer people, one finds different strata of understanding of the Buddhist religion, just as one would expect to find in any predominant belief system in any country. There are those who fully understand and hold to the ideals of their religion. These devotees are few and far between. They are looked upon as examples to follow, but lay people seldom take up the same type of lifestyle or beliefs. The laity find that life much too difficult. On the other hand, there are those who have very little understanding, but say they are Buddhists; and these are the majority. Then there are those who know some, who have a bit of education in the religion, but do not really practice the precepts.

Those who actually practice the Buddhist precepts are very rare in Cambodia. Those who go to the wat at least once a year are in the majority. But if to be Buddhist means to hold to the precepts, then the majority of Cambodians are not truly Buddhist. (We would never refer to an American who goes to church once a year at Christmas as a Christian - and neither would he/she. So why do nearly all Cambodians call themselves Buddhists?) The majority do not practice even the five precepts nor know them. They do not know the eight-fold path and do not care to follow it until they are very old and have no other hope in life. Young people never t'wayee clue-un - that is something only old people do. Young men may become monks for a brief season - for the honor of their families - but as a general rule, they do not become long-term monks because of reasons of devotion.

This research and compilation was done in order to promote dialogue, to help in understanding what the Khmer people really believe - as individuals - and to assist those wanting to start the process of evangelism. There is no need to teach the Khmer people what Buddhists believe. Each person has his/her own belief system already. It is up to each of us to speak to that individual belief system and teach each one we meet the Truth in light of those beliefs. Hopefully, we can also use some of those beliefs as bridges to awaken hearts to their present hopelessness apart from a Savior.