

Where In the World is Bhutan? People Groups in Houston

By Jonathan Brooks

But I have never heard of Bhutan. Where in the world is Bhutan?

Those were the thoughts of Margie Randall, currently the UBA Prayer Coordinator, as she jumped out of bed in Thailand over two years ago after hearing God speak the word "Bhutan" to her heart. Randall notes that while she studying about prayer she had asked God what He wanted her to pray about during her quiet time. God asked her to pray for Bhutan.

"I took my *Operation World* book from the shelf and looked up Bhutan," said Randall. "To my amazement, Bhutan is a small country nestled in the Himalayan Mountains and is a country closed to civilization. I thought it amusing that God would be concerned with such a small country when it is surrounded by China and India where there are billions of lost people. But God's mind that morning was on Bhutan, the 'land of the thunder dragon' – a country that allows only 18,000 foreign visitors per year."



Randall, a missionary at the time (summer 2006), was still not sure what God meant by His request. She prayed and then went about her daily work among Chinese in Thailand. Later that night, while at dinner at a new restaurant, she noticed a big tourist bus pull up. Some young people descended on the restaurant. "Curious about what country they were from, I went up to them and noticed on their shirts the word 'Bhutan'. It was a Bhutanese soccer team. In 5 1/2 years in Thailand, they were the first and the last Bhutanese I ever saw."

Randall continued to pray for the Bhutanese even after her return to the United States. Recently, UBA Consultant Sally Hinzle wrote to Randall and asked Randall if she had been praying for Bhutan. Randall replied that she had. Hinzle proceeded to tell Randall about the Bhutanese refugees living in Houston.

"I could not believe it. I had hoped to save enough money to go with my church, Kingsland Baptist, in 2010, but here they were in my city. I will never forget meeting them that first Sunday and taking them to [the Asian American Church of Houston]. They had never been to a church. I wept as I thought, 'God you brought [these Bhutanese refugees] here to learn about you. There is no way this would happen in Bhutan.'"

While visiting with the Bhutanese here in Houston, Randall observed that some of them had adopted the mannerisms of the Indian culture. She noticed that this group of refugees eat Indian food and consider themselves to be Aryan – an ancient culture referring to persons of Indo-Iranian decent. Other Bhutanese are of Mongul decent. They are light-skinned and prefer Chinese food. "I have the best of both worlds – Indian-Bhutanese and Chinese-Bhutanese. Now I have a Bhutanese family. God, in His infinite mercy and love, sent the Bhutanese here and has completely prepared me to work with them."

Randall is working locally alongside Brad Smith, pastor of Asian American Church of Houston (AACH), and Jim Morisey, a local pastor/missionary, to help meet both the physical and spiritual needs of the Bhutanese refugees. Smith noted that anywhere from 5,000 to 15,000 Bhutanese refugees are coming to Houston. A total of 60,000 refugees are coming to

various U.S. cities. These refugees have a variety of needs which are being met by local Christians, Muslims, and Hindus.

According to Morisey, the forefathers of the Bhutanese refugees came from Nepal to Bhutan about 200 years ago. Their forefathers never converted to Buddhism. Because of this and their growing population, these refugees were told to leave Bhutan and return to Nepal. Nepal refused to recognize them as Nepalese, even though their forefathers are Nepalese. These people without a country have been in refugee camps for nearly two decades. "There has been much abuse to these people over the years: physical, verbal, psychological, and loss of jobs," said Morisey. "The young people went to school in the camps. The parents were mostly uneducated farmers who could not work much. They were caught between two countries who no longer wanted them. The U.S. government is allowing 60,000 of the some 200,000 plus refugees into our country. Thousands of others are going to other countries, such as England."

Around the end of August, Smith was told about the Bhutanese refugees in Houston by Deepak Uperti, a member of AACH. Through the UBA, Smith was connected to Randall and Morisey among others. Their goals are to help meet the immediate needs of the refugees, gauge their spiritual interest, teach them about God through chronological Bible stories, and start indigenous gatherings of Bhutanese believers.

"We told all of the refugees that we would not pressure them to immediately become Christians," noted Smith. "We told them that we would help them even if they never became Christians. We currently have 40 to 50 Bhutanese refugees who attend Bible study and about 15 to 20 of those attend worship at AACH. AACH is a small church of only about 50 people; Jim's [Morisey] church has only about 25 members. Our churches are examples of how smaller congregations can make a big difference."

For more information about ministering to the Bhutanese population of Houston, contact one of the following:
Margie Randall, UBA Prayer Ministry Coordinator, email margie.randall@gmail.com
Brad Smith, Pastor, Asian American Church of Houston, email bradley.smith@aach.org
Jim Morisey, Pastor, Fellowship Church Network, email jmorisey@yahoo.com