

Tomoyuki Hirahara: From Gurus to God

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Note: Excerpt from Debbie Salter Goodwin, Tomoyuki Hirahara: From Gurus to God

There was no God in Tomoyuki Hirahara's life when he was growing up in Japan 60 miles from Tokyo. His grandfather was a priest of Tenri-kyo, one of the Shinto cults. His sister believed in Communism. That influenced him at first, but the more Tomo learned about Communism the less it made sense to him. How could something that depersonalized the individual fulfill a search for truth?

Tomo turned to rock music almost as a distraction. He idolized Western rock stars and wanted to be like them. He even started a band in junior high school. What did he need with truth anyway? For a while, he just played his bass guitar and was happy.

As a university student, his search for truth took an intellectual turn. "Good people don't get what they deserve," he complained. Looking for fairness, he turned to Hinduism. His reading introduced him to the Hindu philosopher Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Tomo dreamed of sitting under his teaching one day.

In 1979 Tomo graduated from Hosei University as an electrical engineer. He accepted a job in Saudi Arabia, but when he found out that the Bhagwan was living in the United States in Texas, he used his saving for a plane ticket. He settled in Alabama to study English, but getting from there to Texas wasn't as easy as he expected. He had finished a degree in English and was working toward certification to teach English as a second language when he finally made it to Texas. But by then the Bhagwan was no longer there.

During his time in Alabama, Tomo boarded at the home of Willene Perkins, a professor at Gadsden Community College and a member of the Gadsden Church of the Nazarene. Willene held a Bible study in her home every Saturday, and Tomo attended out of intellectual curiosity. About the

same time, he met two Mormons who tried to convince him that Mormonism would end his search. One day in the Mormon temple, Tomo cried out to God, "If you are here, I am liking for the way to truth." He heard nothing in reply.

Then one night he attended an intercessory prayer meeting at the Nazarene church. Willene was aware of Tomo's struggle and knew that his future hung in the balance, but he had no idea that she had been praying for him. Again he cried, "God, if you exist, please reveal the way, I can know for sure who You are." Willene and others counseled him to confess his sin, believe on the name of Jesus, and turn his life over to God. Tomo did just that. At first, nothing happened. Then came a quiet exhilaration. And then came tears, tears that emptied him of his emptiness. Tomo tried to stop crying. After all, a Japanese man should not show tears in front of women. Then he looked around and saw that others also were crying. Suddenly he realized that his tears were not a show of shame but of joy. His long search was over.

One piece of unfinished business remained, however. While working in the Middle East, Tomo had visited Thailand and met a girl he hoped to marry. Now he wanted to share the gospel with her. After finishing his English studies in Alabama, he made his way to Thailand and found a job teaching Japanese. He also connected with Nazarene missionary Mike McCarty. Tomo witnessed to his girlfriend as often as possible, but she showed no interest in Christianity. Finally she told Tomo that if he mentioned the name of Jesus one more time, she would leave. Of course, he couldn't keep silent about his new faith. Tomo came to realize that his life with God would not include her.

But God had another plan for Tomo. Her name was Ceny, a Filipino working with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Thailand. Tomo met Ceny through her work as coordinator of a Christian singles ministry. In time their friendship turned to love, and Mike McCarty married them in Bangkok. Today the couple serves as missionaries to Thailand. Tomo teaches at Southeast Asia Nazarene Bible College and its coordinator for the JESUS film

in Southeast Asia. Ceny is compassionate ministries coordinator and Thailand mission treasurer.

Tomo's search for truth became a passion to share the Truth. With an engaging smile and wisdom gained at too many dead ends, he shares it with any who will listen.