

Nemboi (Miriam Gangte)

(born in Manipur in 1946)

I lived in a town called Ukhagate but came often to Imphal [the capital of Manipur] to collect my husband's salary from the army. It wasn't much, but it was something. One day I came for it to Imphal and found the army's offices closed for the anniversary of Gandhi's death. I was badly disappointed. As I was feeling low, I thought of a church hymn:

O Lord, Your great blessing is seen
In everything I have.
Had I not been abundantly forgiven,
Nothing would be mine.

As I sang the hymn in my mind, I cried. In those days, we prayed to Jesus. Nobody was greater - and yet no crowds had come to weep for him when he died as they wept for Gandhi. That was the moment when I first began to think seriously about God. I started attending church services. One day on my way to a service, a melody came into my head. The words that came with it were my own:

When a great man dies, he has many mourners.
When the son of the King of heaven died, no one came.
He died all alone, he was alone in the grave
With no one to mourn him

I realized that I had been living without knowing God. And yet God loved me so much! If I went on like this, what would become of me? At the service, I cried uncontrollably. I prayed,

What church did you attend?

It was called The Synod. We met for worship at Old Lambulane, in Imphal. Though I wasn't "born again" yet, God was a lot on my mind in those days. I feared God. I realized His importance in my life. Life was difficult. It was hard to make ends meet. About this time, I made up another song on my way to a service:

Oh Lord, Your blessing is clear in all that I have.

Without You, my life and all I have would be nothing!

These words described my situation perfectly. "Lord, Father," I thought, "I have never searched for You, but You have been looking after me all this time. You have blessed me, You have given me a son. There would be nothing without Your kindness, not even my own life." I cried so hard that tears rolled down my cheeks in church.

What year would that have been in?

It would have been in 1968. I cried, "Father, Father I am a sinner." Not a sinner in the sense of having stolen something or murdered someone, but because I had not given enough thought to God. People in the church stared at me. They must have been wondering what horrible thing I had done. After that they began to keep their distance from me. But their stares didn't stop. I felt that my soul would die if I stayed in their congregation any longer. They didn't understand me. They were uncomfortable in my presence and I didn't feel at home with them. And so I left my parents and moved back to Imphal, to our old house in Tribal Colony, and joined the U.P.C., [United Pentecostal Church] where I felt free to be *hlim* [spiritually ecstatic] I thought it would be the best place to nurture my longing for spirituality. But I didn't find what I was looking for there, either. I still felt empty inside.

At the time, my elder sister, my niece Rami's mother, began to bleed all the time from her uterus. It wasn't a miscarriage. It was just bleeding that didn't stop. The doctors told us that without a transfusion she might die. A transfusion cost money, which we didn't have. There was nothing to do but hope for the best. At the mercy of fate, I took my sister into my home. She was losing strength and her speech had become incoherent. At times she seemed unconscious. The doctors couldn't stop the bleeding.

One day some *hlim* people arrived in the neighborhood. I don't remember where they came from. All I know was that they were members of the U.P.C. They set up a tent in a nearby playground and held a service with singing and drums. As it was going on, my sister got out of bed and said, "Let's join the *lenkhom* [revival meeting]." I was incredulous, "*He'U* [a term of endearment and respect for an elder sibling]," I asked, "do you really mean it?" "Yes" she said. We went to the *lenkhom* and stayed there all night, praying, singing, and dancing. The next morning, incredibly, the bleeding stopped. It stopped completely!

Sometime after that, my sister, her older daughters, her six-month-old son David, and my son John and I went to Churachandpur.

Why?

Because of the *hlim* people. We followed them there. We prayed, sang, and danced for three days and nights and didn't feel tired at all. I don't remember feeling tired even once. My sister was euphoric. She was immersed in the spiritual experience.

The next day, our older brother sent someone to bring us back to Ukhagate. He was furious at what he considered to be our irresponsible behavior and asked us what our husbands would say. Worse yet, a transportation strike was about to break out. When we reached the bus stop, the buses had already stopped running. We needed to get to Ukhagate. It was a hot day and the sun beat down more and more. We had no choice but to walk. As we were leaving Churachandpur, something amazing happened. A cloud came along and floated right above us, giving us shade. It even drizzled a bit to cool us off. The children not only walked the whole way, they played happily as they walked.

All the way to Ukhagate?

All the way to Ukhagate.

The cloud followed you all the way from Churachandpur to Ukhagate?

The cloud followed us all the way. I know nobody will believe such a story. It was amazing. Just as we reached Ukhagate and entered my parents' house, it started to rain buckets. And on the way, it hadn't rained at all except for the dew-like drizzle from that one cloud!

Churachandpur to Ukhagate is a long way by foot. How long did it take you?

It must be at least ten miles. I can't remember how long it took us. We started out about nine or ten in the morning. We had children with us and couldn't have walked very fast. My son John was still small, but I never once had to carry him. My sister carried her baby on her back all the way despite having lost all that blood and never grew tired. She said afterwards that being born again made her feel that her feet were hardly touching the ground. We felt light, weightless. Even though these things happened before we found Judaism, they showed that God answered you if you sought Him sincerely.