

Making friends with Japanese

by John Taylor and Hugh Trevor

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CONTENTS

Foreword – by Michael Griffiths

Part 1 – Getting to know the Japanese

Becoming a friend	4
Room for misunderstanding	9
A brief look at Japanese religions and Christianity	11

Part 2 – A deeper look into Japan

An outline of Japan's history	15
Japan's religious scene	17
Issues about faith sometimes raised by Japanese people	21
Aspects of Christianity that appeal to the Japanese	24
When your friend becomes a Christian	26

Resources

Further reading	28
Bibles, Bible studies and other Christian literature	28
Linking your friend with Japanese Christians	28

FOREWORD

Way back in the 16th century, Francis Xavier said that the Japanese are ‘the best people so far discovered’, and he was a Jesuit with high standards who had worked abroad both in India and the Malay Peninsula before reaching Japan. All those of us who have been privileged since that time to live and work in Japan would want to echo and underline what he said.

Friendship is a biblical concept, notably God’s willingness to be our friend, as he was with Abraham and Moses. Jesus was a highly social person, always surrounded by men and women, young and old. He was criticised for being the friend of tax collectors and sinners. He made friends of the Twelve and of Lazarus and his sisters.

I had always thought of Paul as a workaholic activist, and have only recently noticed the extent to which he speaks of friends in his letters. He refers to Timothy, Tychicus, Epaphras, Onesimus, Luke, Philemon, Epaphroditus, Ampliatus, Stachys and the woman Persis as friends. One of those close friends, Luke, tells us in Acts that, remarkably, Paul had friends among the ruling Asiarchs in Ephesus. Then there were other friends that the centurion Julius allowed him to visit in Sidon, and during his three-month stay after being shipwrecked on Malta he made friends with the governor Publius and his family. It is the capacity for friendship that made Paul so effective a worker. It’s something that we each should pray for. The danger of busy modern life is that it leaves too little room for the development of friendship. But in the Bible all the main characters have a capacity for friendship and we should pray for it also.

It was because we met Japanese studying in Britain that I was first stimulated to start reading everything about Japan and the Japanese that I could lay my hands on. It was the third Japanese I met who gave us the invitation to come to Japan in the first place, to engage in work with students.

For us, visiting Japan means reunions with long-standing friends. Japanese friends last forever. One friend I made in his student days, now a professor of education, came 400 miles to meet us and travel back on a bullet train with us from Osaka to Tokyo. Another busy Christian worker took the time to carve a beautiful map of Japan embossed in wood as a symbol of friendship. Another friend we made almost 40 years ago recently stayed with us here in England - his first ever visit outside of Japan. The daughter and her husband from a family who have been our friends for many years actually spent some of their honeymoon with us! My wife worked closely with the wives of Japanese businessmen in Singapore back in the 1970s, and whenever we travel in Japan we enjoy frequent reunions with them and are constantly embarrassed at our friends’ kindness.

I warmly commend this booklet and its excellent advice. Hopefully you will have things to add to it as a result of your experience of befriending Japanese people. Every year more than fifteen hundred Japanese return to Japan having professed conversion after studying or working overseas. Those who have been introduced to Japanese-speaking Christian fellowships while overseas seem to make the transition back fairly easily. Those who have been only in English-speaking churches can have a difficult time, or fail to make the transition, so the advice of this book is important.

Michael Griffiths

Part 1 – Getting to know the Japanese

Becoming a Friend

Most Japanese people want to be friends with those from other nations. As an island nation, Japan has been learning foreign ways and borrowing what it has thought to be helpful for centuries.

The Japanese have a natural curiosity about other parts of the world and are eager to learn from other cultures. This is even more true for those who venture overseas as international students, visiting scholars, or business people.

But this desire for friendship is not expressed in the way it would be in Western culture. Some Japanese living in the West would think it 'forward' or presumptuous to take an initiative in friendship. They feel like outsiders, especially in their first few months away from home. So be ready to make the first move - and keep at it! Social politeness often dictates one or two refusals before an offer is accepted. Don't give up too soon.

No-one can tell you how to make friends, but here are some practical tips that may help along the way.

- Plan something specific and let your friend know exactly what it is. In Japan, social contacts are usually highly structured, especially at the outset.
- Go on an outing. The Japanese have a genuine fascination with the world, and they love to travel. Day trips to local areas of interest are often a good idea.
- Introduce them to your own traditions - if you're Scottish, then explain what a Burns' Supper is and introduce them to haggis and neeps. If you're American, invite them to your Thanksgiving dinner. Take them blackberrying in the autumn or invite them to your bonfire party. Your friends will feel strange getting wrapped up to see fireworks in November, because in Japan fireworks are generally set off on warm summer evenings, as it gets dark at about 7 o'clock.
- Your friend may have some visual record of places he/she has visited. Ask to see them - slides, photographs, or videos - perhaps over a meal.
- If your friend likes sports, go to a sports or leisure centre together and arrange a friendly match of tennis, squash etc, a round of golf, a swim, or perhaps aerobics, badminton or netball for Japanese women.
- Invite Japanese friends into your home, including both of your families, if possible. Young children, especially boys, may be a little more boisterous than you are used to, so don't expect them to sit quietly! If you want them to come again, have something for them all to enjoy.
- Japanese women are interested in cultural activities unique to their host culture. Anything related to handmade crafts (eg quilt-making) is a particular favourite. Being taught to cook Western food is also appreciated. (They may well have been told Western food is not very nice.) In general they do not have a 'sweet tooth'.
- Flower arrangement is an art associated with Japanese culture, but they may like to learn how to do it Western-style.
- They may have something from their own culture (kimono, tea ceremony, etc.) that they would love to show you, if you are interested.
- They often take an interest in flowers and plants. A trip to a local conservatory or botanical garden could prove a popular outing.

- Music is international in its appeal. Invite Japanese friends to concerts, particularly of classical music.

Once you have made an initial contact with a Japanese wife, you could offer to teach English once a week, or practise Western and Japanese cooking together. Some churches run 'mother and toddler' groups to which a Japanese mother may be introduced. There are all kinds of things that Japanese women want to learn about your country and about you, but you'll have to take the initiative¹.

Giving and receiving gifts

Gifts are an important part of Japanese life. People moving into a new area will often introduce themselves to their new neighbours by bringing a small gift (soap, small towel, etc) to the door. So if a Japanese family moves in next door, or over the street, and you have an unexpected visit, make the most of the opportunity. You should express genuine thanks at the time you receive the gift, and then again when they leave.

If you are invited to a Japanese home, take a gift, however small, with you. Think of something which has personal value rather than monetary value. In Japanese society, a gift given is to be met with a gift in return. The Japanese often do not open a gift when they receive it, so don't be concerned if they don't open yours. If you want to open theirs, this is quite acceptable, but it is best to ask if you may open it.

Enjoying food together

The restaurant, rather than the home, is where entertaining is done in Japan, so coming into your home will be a new experience in more ways than one. Be careful about what food to serve. A Western dish is usually best, rather than something that fits your stereotype of Japanese food. Table conversation will also probably be a new experience, especially with the wives involved. It may take a while, but in time they will feel more relaxed.

If you hit a birthday for any member of the family, make or buy them a cake. Even the children will be able to sing 'Happy Birthday to you' in English.

Introductions to others

Do you know people studying the same subject or in the same line of business as your Japanese friend? Since the Japanese are typically hesitant to introduce themselves to others, and usually rely on go-betweens, an introduction to someone in the same field would be warmly appreciated.

¹ **Behind closed doors**

Christian women can have a special ministry. It is possible for some Japanese wives to stay in their flats or homes and not answer the telephone or doorbell for fear of not being able to communicate. You may therefore have to meet the family through the man of the household.

Helping with English

Show sensitivity in your use of the English language and your humour. Speak clearly, but not deliberately slowly as this may come across as condescending and thus offensive. We can mistakenly think that speaking loudly will remove difficulties in communication. This can in fact be interpreted as anger by your Japanese friend. When your friend doesn't understand and asks you to repeat what you said, do just that. Don't try to re-phrase it. That may only add to the confusion!

Eventually if there is no understanding, write it down. Your friend will have spent six to eight years studying written English, and may have a greater reading ability than speaking.

Give plenty of verbal and non-verbal affirmatives - frequent nods, saying 'yes' and maintaining eye contact - as you listen to your friend speak. People give much more feedback in Japanese conversations than we do here.

Monitor your use of idioms, and provide explanations when you do use one. For example if you say that it's raining cats and dogs, explain that this means it's raining very heavily. Most Japanese will appreciate learning the meanings of common expressions.

When you tell a joke in English, preface it by saying, 'Some people tell a joke about...' (or similar). Then explain what makes it funny to someone from your culture. Japanese humour often involves puns. If your friend is interested in learning English, you might want to tell some English puns.

Helping with everyday life

In the early weeks of your friend's stay, travel may be a problem. Offer to help with buying bus tickets and going into town.

Shopping is another concern. In Japan, housewives may shop each day for that evening's meal. Japanese women who want to do their own cooking will want to know where to shop for groceries. Offer to take them along when you go shopping. Comparing Japanese and Western methods of grocery shopping makes an excellent conversation topic.

Baby-sitting is not something they will have been used to in Japan, outside the immediate family. A husband's heavy work schedule may preclude a night out anyway. Don't stop when your first offer is turned down, though. In time it might become a most attractive idea.

Do your friends have children in school? The letters their children bring home from time to time may be quite puzzling. Be ready to offer to explain the contents, and what they need to do.

In times of crisis, such as an illness or a motor accident, your help will be most appreciated. If you can be there to help deal with 'officials' at the hospital or insurance company, then do!

Social pressures

It is helpful to understand the social pressures that your friend feels in relationships in general, with family back in Japan, and even in their friendship with you.

The average Japanese feels social pressures much more intensely than the average Westerner. By befriending a Japanese, you have placed the person in your debt and he will feel a need to reciprocate. The obligation to return favours is called *giri* in Japanese.

When you teach them English or cooking on a regular basis and they are unable to reciprocate, they may offer to pay you. Don't refuse out of hand, even though to you it is something given entirely out of friendship. The 'burden' you place them under may be so heavy that they stop coming. Let them pay a little

if they really insist - if you like, you can put this in a 'Charity Box' for your favourite good cause.

Even in Christian things, a 'response' to the gospel may actually be tied to this sense of obligation. Help your friend to see that you are not 'expecting' a response of commitment.

'Saving face' is an important aspect of Japanese relationships. This is not selfish pride, but a concern for both parties. So Japanese friends will be as keen to save *you* from embarrassment as they will be to keep their own dignity. It would be good for you to try to keep the same perspective. Always treat your friend with respect. Never joke in a sarcastic way, even if you are 'just kidding'. A Japanese person may not understand this.

Family ties

Family ties in Japan are much stronger than in the West. Making friends with a Japanese person may mean that you are beginning a friendship with the whole family too. If family members come over to visit from Japan, show as much hospitality to them as you can. You could also send a Christmas card or a New Year card to them in Japan. Learn all you can about them, and pray for them as well as for your friend.

Some Japanese people overseas have pressure from their families to steer clear of Christianity. This is especially likely with first-born sons, who have responsibility to continue the worship of ancestors. There may be times when your friend does not want to talk about spiritual matters any more, or becomes wary of Christians. Be patient and try to respect his spiritual 'comfort zone'. Be a genuine friend and pray for God to provide the right opportunities for you to talk.

Politeness and friendship

Japanese society is a 'vertical society'. This means people define their identity by those above or below them in social status. That status itself may be determined by age, wealth, education, occupation, and family connections.

The society is so stratified that this affects how Japanese people speak to each other in their own language. They constantly monitor their audience and change the pronoun forms and verb endings, depending on whether they are speaking to someone on the same level, or speaking 'up' to someone of higher status or 'down' to someone of lower status. So all relationships are vertically orientated, including friendships.

Here in the West, of course, we relate very differently. Neither partner in a friendship is concerned about status, and we relate on equal terms. These are some practical steps to developing a 'horizontal friendship'.

Learn how to pronounce your friend's name. Clarify which is the 'given' (first) name, and which is the surname. Don't be hesitant to check on pronunciation, and practise how to say it better. Japanese men usually prefer to be called by their surname; younger people and wives may prefer to be called by their given name. Ask how your friend would like to be addressed.

Always treat Japanese people with respect. A PhD or MD should be called 'Dr-' until you are asked to change to first-name basis. Don't be offended if they do not want you to use their first names. Sometimes in Japan, people are only addressed with the first name by their mothers. If your friend wants to be called by a nickname, use it, but do not make up a nickname for him/her.

From honeymoon to reality

Japanese students and business people typically go through a 'honeymoon period' at the outset of their stay in the West. During this time, they will focus on the positive aspects of British life: the less crowded cities, the sense of history, the relaxed atmosphere in classes, and the accessibility of the rest of Europe.

When you hear remarks along these lines, do not agree too quickly. Always respond that Japan has good points not found in the Western world: strong sense of family, commitment to study, good transport that runs on time, and so forth.

The 'honeymoon period' will be followed by a time of increasing disillusionment with Western culture. Listen to your friend's criticisms of life here without interrupting or defending your country. You can agree with just criticisms. Defence of your own country, even if motivated only by a desire to help your friend enjoy their stay, may reinforce negative attitudes.

Gradually, your Japanese friend will gain a more balanced perspective and be able to see both good and bad points of the Western way of life. This is when friendship can best develop.

ROOM FOR MISUNDERSTANDING

What did I do wrong?

1. You invited a Japanese friend to visit you any time, but he/she has never called. It may be better to give a specific invitation for a set time. Make sure the details are understood, perhaps giving a written note of time and place.
2. When Japanese friends visit, you put out a plate of biscuits and offer them one, but they just sit there. Maybe they're not hungry? It is more likely that, being polite in the traditional Japanese way, they are waiting for you to repeat the offer!
3. You went to your friend's home for lunch, expecting a light snack, but got a huge meal and didn't leave until four o'clock. Next time, make sure you know what you have been invited to - maybe explaining that you will have to go at two o'clock.
4. You sat, or leaned back, on a desk or table when you were talking or teaching, and your friend seemed to lose interest in what you were saying. He/she may be struggling with your dishonouring of the place of learning with a baser part of your anatomy! Sitting with your feet on a table is also likely to cause offence.
5. Did you notice the slippers by the door when you went into your friend's home? The Western habit of walking in dirty shoes on nice clean carpets can surprise the Japanese. Your friend was expecting you to leave your shoes at the door and wear the slippers.

Why did they do that?

1. Your friend bows when you meet. This is the normal way of greeting in Japan. Some may be more used to shaking hands than others.
2. He/she brought you a gift. This is usual in Japanese society. You never visit anyone without a gift. The next time you meet, a comment on the gift or the last visit may be appropriate.
3. He/she brought you a large gift. It could be a way of saying 'Thank you very much for all your help, but I'll not be seeing you any more.'
4. Japanese friends hesitate at the door when you invite them in as if they don't quite know what to do. They may have noticed that you are wearing slippers, and wonder if they should take off their shoes when coming into your house, as in Japan. You need to assure them that it is OK to walk on your carpet in outside shoes - after using the doormat!
5. When you are eating a meal, they pick up the soup bowl. Back home in Japan, soup bowls do not have a rim, and the bowl is picked up and soup drunk from the bowl as from a cup.
6. They slurp the soup! In many cultures, Japan included, slurping is a sign of enjoyment of the food. Noodles too are slurped with satisfaction.
7. Instead of using a handkerchief, your friend just keeps sniffing! That's because it is more polite to sniff than to use a handkerchief and blow the nose in public in Japan - the opposite of the West. Japanese people will excuse themselves and go elsewhere if they really need to use a handkerchief.
8. They seem to smile at inappropriate moments. Japanese smiles and laughter are often puzzling to outsiders, and may be regarded ambivalently. It can be a sign of friendliness, an expression of reserve, an open display of emotions, an indication of embarrassed self-consciousness, a smile that says 'I

understand' or 'I don't understand'. For women, embarrassment often causes smiles or giggles, and sad or even devastating news may bring a set smile that covers confusion or deep emotions.

Relationships with Japanese are very rewarding. They are an intelligent, artistic, fun-loving people with a zest for life. Friendships made with them often last a long time. Any time you spend cultivating a friendship will be well worth it, for this life, and for the age to come.

A BRIEF LOOK AT JAPANESE RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY

Japanese attitudes to religion

There is some difference between urban dwellers and rural dwellers and between younger and older people. In both cases the latter are more conservative.

In general, Japanese people are not opposed to religion, nor are they cynical about religion (or anything else). People do not attend Shinto or Buddhist meetings like Christians go to church. They simply follow the ceremonies and customs of the religions and do not study the beliefs. They occasionally pray when they visit temples or shrines (for good health, good luck or success in exams) but they do not generally think about the object (god, ancestor, etc) of their prayers.

They think religions are useful to undergird society and as a prop for weak individuals, but do not like to be thought of as needing a religion themselves. They are pluralistic and willing to follow several religions at the same time. They may be willing to consider a new religion as an extra belief in the sense of an extra insurance policy - something that might probably be useful and might work. The new religions of Japan encourage people to take part and experience the blessings without explaining what the person is meant to believe.

The Japanese often use the illustration of there being several paths up a mountain, all leading to the top. (With Mount Fuji there are five such paths.) So there may be different religions, but they all lead to the same end.

Positive Japanese attitudes to Christianity can be summed up as follows:

- They know that it is the religion of the West, and to the extent that they admire or dislike the West, they admire or dislike Christianity
- Christian weddings are popular among the young: 30% choose them
- When asked if they could pick a new religion and start again, 30% say they would choose Christianity
- Christian schools have a high reputation and give a good image to Christianity
- Christianity is seen as a good religion with a high moral code

However:

- Christianity is thought of as difficult to understand
- Morally it is 'too difficult' to keep up
- It is essentially 'Western' and therefore unsuitable for 'us Japanese'
- Its miracles are thought to contradict science
- It is thought of as war-like in contrast to Buddhism which is seen as peaceful

Ways of talking to Japanese about the Christian faith

Don't begin with Jesus Christ. To the non-Christian Japanese he is merely a person who lived a long time ago in another country. Start by talking about God, or about prayer, or the Bible. In talking about God, note that in Shinto, their national religion, the word 'god' is used of a huge variety of beings, so you need to qualify what Christians mean by 'God' - the one who made the world, sun, moon, stars and entire universe.

The Japanese have a great love of nature. We can easily explain that we believe the world we live in, with all its beauty, did not come about by chance. Japanese schools teach evolutionary theory, but try not to criticise evolution; that will at once raise a negative reaction and could block further communication. Instead emphasise that the universe was deliberately *created*.

Ask what they think about God, rather than whether they believe in him, as this is less threatening. The Japanese generally believe a person only 'enters a religion' if they have a problem they cannot cope with. To avoid being thought of as not coping, they will prefer not to say they believe in God. If you talk of prayer (which is a good way of introducing Christianity as they do pray) speak of prayer to God rather than to Jesus Christ.

If they are willing to listen to an explanation, the following outline may be helpful:

1. The universe was created by the One True God. God also created us; he cares for us and wants us to know him and to follow him so our lives will be happy and blessed.
2. We have a problem. We are sinners. We are selfish, greedy, proud, and jealous. These sins prevent us from knowing God and he will not listen to our prayers. You can explain sin as self-centred departure from God our Creator. Most Japanese do not think of themselves as sinners, but do recognise that self-centredness is wrong. They also feel shame (more so than guilt) for doing something wrong.
3. Through his death on the cross, Jesus Christ ('whom you may have heard about') made it possible for us to be forgiven so we could experience God's love and blessings. (Don't talk at this stage about who Jesus is, or about the resurrection.)
4. If we believe in Jesus, that barrier of sin is removed and we can experience God's blessings. Japanese society often works through mediators, sometimes called 'go-betweens'. So the biblical idea of Jesus as mediator makes sense to Japanese, once alienation from God has been accepted.

The first three points of Bible teaching the Japanese need to know are 'God, sin, and salvation'. A fourth area might be 'the ideal pattern for life', which appeals to them, because they are an idealistic people and want to do the right thing. It is best to keep most of your initial talking to one of these four areas.

Probably the most effective way of witnessing is to study the Bible together. Ask if they have read the Bible, or would like to study it with you. If they would, then try to get a bilingual New Testament for them, or an English one in a modern translation. (*The Good News Bible* is written especially for people whose first language is not English.)

Choose suitable passages which deal with the central four teachings, and as a principle read the whole passage and not just 'proof texts'. Some suggestions would be:

1. Matthew 4:4 (Man does not live by bread alone)
2. Luke 6:46-49 (the houses on the rock and sand)
3. Luke 10:38-42 (Martha and Mary)
4. Luke 12 (the story of the rich farmer)
5. Luke 15:11-31 (the parable of the lost son)
6. Luke 19:1-10 (the story of Zaccheaus)
7. Luke 22:7-38 (the Last Supper)

8. Luke 23:26-43 (the crucifixion and words of the dying thief)
9. Acts 17 (Paul's preaching at Athens)
10. Romans 5:1-11 (peace and joy through reconciliation)
11. 1 Corinthians 13 (Paul's teaching on love).

Other useful passages are:

12. Romans 1:18-20
13. Ephesians 2:1-10 (difficult, but a good commentary on what it means for the lost son to be 'found')
14. Philippians 4:11-13
15. 2 Timothy 3:1-6
16. Revelation 3:20.

Useful Old Testament passages are:

17. Genesis 1-3 and 35:1-14
18. Psalm 139
19. Micah 6:6-8.

When you have looked at the four central teachings, look at the life of Christ. Luke is the best gospel to use, though you could select passages from different gospels. Don't major on the miracles initially, as your friend may think Christianity is unscientific and therefore suspect. However, there's no need to avoid them entirely.

It may be helpful to write out questions in advance. As the Japanese are used to learning by rote, allow them to answer straight from the Bible without having to give explanation. Get them to write down their answers, and make suggestions if necessary.

Not all Japanese are similar or get on well with each other. Students may mix naturally whereas older people may not. If you are inviting them to study in a group, ask if they would like to join with others first.

It is always difficult to know whether to handle diversions that crop up, or to press ahead with written questions. If you are in a group, the less talkative will doubtless prefer the latter. It is generally best to stick to an order in your studies, but some freedom is fine. You will be the best judge. (See **Resources** for suggested Bible Study aids.)

Other points in introducing Christianity

Help them to obtain a Japanese Bible. If possible, give them good Christian literature in Japanese and try to link them up with a church back in Japan (see **Resources**).

The question of denominations is likely to arise, as is the question of Northern Ireland, which was reported as a religious problem in Japan. It is best to say that both Protestants and Catholics can be true Christians (in contrast with Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Moonies) in that they both believe the foundational truths of the Apostle's Creed, but that there are differences in what they believe.

Avoid complicated explanations about differences between Christian denominations. It may be worth saying that Christians recognise people in other parts of the Church as members of the same body (whereas Buddhists in different sections of the faith do not).

It is difficult to know when is the best time to introduce a Japanese person to a church service, whether in Japanese or English. Systematic Bible study either one-to-one or in a group may be more helpful at first. Choose a special event like Christmas, Harvest or Easter, or a church concert, to introduce them to church. If there is a Japanese service within travelling distance, that would be the best choice, as it will reflect what church life back in Japan will be like.

Japanese friends will probably accept what you say because you are the teacher and because they want to please you. So don't think they are ready to make a commitment to Christ at an early stage. There is a danger in pushing them too far. They may respond and wish they had not, and then the only way they know of backtracking is to drop out altogether.

Baptism is the real decision point to a Japanese, because it is a public statement of their faith. Try to get them to speak to a Japanese pastor or another Japanese Christian (even by phone - see **Resources**) before taking this step. Wives should talk things over with their husbands, and younger people should be encouraged to consider how their families would feel about such a step. Those getting baptised in a Western church may miss out on the baptismal preparation they would receive in a Japanese-speaking church.

Once they get home to Japan, busyness on a Sunday, family pressures, shyness, and the great differences in church style will all combine to make it hard for them to settle into a church. It is all the more important for us to do what we can. (See **Resources** for addresses of those who can give you details of churches in Japan and suggest Japanese Christian literature available here.)

PART 2 – A DEEPER LOOK INTO JAPAN

An outline of Japan's history

Like all nations, Japan's past deeply affects the identity of its people today. A few historical points will be helpful.

An Island Nation

Japan's history has led to a strongly defined national psyche. Ancient mythology describes the islands of Japan created by the *kami* (gods) as a sacred land to be ruled by a sacred emperor who was a descendant of the supreme *kami*, the sun goddess Amaterasu.

The ancestors of the Japanese people, as we know them, came from the islands of the south, and, more especially, Korea and China, largely driving out the aboriginal people, the Ainu. Some of the Ainu still live in a few areas of the northern island, Hokkaido.

In 1639 the Tokugawa family closed Japan off from the rest of the world. For two hundred years the Shogun² ruled the country, supposedly in the Emperor's name, maintaining a strong centralised feudal structure, and enforcing status distinctions between *samurai* (army officer or member of military caste), merchants, artisans and peasants. Christianity was all but eradicated, and contacts with the outside world, especially the West, were strictly controlled. The only official contact with the West was through one Dutch ship that was allowed to dock once a year on an island in the harbour of Nagasaki.

Japan reopened to the West in 1856, when Commodore Perry of the US Navy was allowed to anchor off the coast of Japan and enter the country. The resulting trade and international relations set in motion a chain of events that led to the end of the Shogunate and the restoring of the Emperor to a more dominant role. This change, which happened in 1868, was called the Meiji restoration (Meiji was the name of the new emperor). Since then Japan has made great efforts to catch up with the West.

One people

The Japanese are a homogenous people. With a few exceptions, they have a common ancestry, appearance, and culture throughout the four islands. They consider uniformity a good thing and view nonconformity as a threat to social harmony. This explains the common proverb in Japan: 'The nail that sticks up should be hammered down.'

Japanese attitudes toward foreigners

The Japanese people have been borrowing from other nations for centuries. Much of their language and culture has been borrowed from China. Buddhism, one of their major religions, came from India via China. The constitution was modelled on 19th century Europe. Succeeding waves of Portuguese, Dutch, and latterly North American influence have left their marks in language, foods and customs.

The Japanese people hold two attitudes simultaneously: a healthy curiosity in foreign things and a strong national pride. As you explain about the British way of doing things, show a genuine interest in the Japanese culture and your respect for it, and for its people.

Christianity is not new

Christianity has been in Japan for a long time. Francis Xavier (1506-1552) brought Roman Catholic

² Shogun

Shoguns were hereditary commanders-in-chief in feudal Japan between 1192-1867.

Christianity to Japan in 1549. For 65 years there was significant church growth, with feudal lords and their people converting to Christianity. Later, however, there was also severe persecution. During the Tokugawa shogunate, Christianity was forbidden, and its adherents persecuted. Missionaries were expelled, and around 3000 Christians were martyred. This persecution was occasioned by social and political factors as well as religious ones.

Once Japan opened up to the West in the late 19th century Christianity was no longer proscribed and its influence grew when the Emperor Meiji (1867-1911) encouraged people to adopt Western culture. Japanese were sent overseas to study and to return with the necessary skills to educate others. Several of Japan's intelligentsia of this period took a clear stand for Christ. There are fine examples of Japanese Christians who served their country well during this time.

Three whose names will be familiar to Japanese today are Jo Niijima who started Doshisha, a famous university in Kyoto; Inazo Nitobe, now pictured on the ¥5,000 bill, who was secretary General to the League of Nations; and Kanzo Uchimura, who was a leading journalist and writer.

What about the war?

During the Second World War, Christians were suspect as being spies from the West. Pressure was brought on them to honour the Emperor and support the war effort. Most did; some refused and were imprisoned. Since then, the Japanese have been educated with a strong anti-war ethos. This takes precedence over any thoughts of blame for the war, or for the atomic bombs that brought the war to an end.

Some practical points

Don't bring up the subject of the war yourself in conversation. And never refer to the Japanese people as 'Japs' or 'Nips' as this is taken as an ethnic slur with very negative connotations.

Help your Japanese friend to see that not all Westerners are Christian and it is wrong to assume that all Western countries are 'Christian nations'. It may be worth emphasising that the Bible was written out of Middle East cultures that have much more in common with Asia than with the West.

Japan's religious scene

How do ancestor worship and Emperor worship mix with Confucian ethics in Japan's modern, materialist society? Is my Japanese friend Shinto or Buddhist or what?

One official publication states:

'Statistically, Japan is a country of Buddhists. More than 85% of the population professes the Buddhist faith. Buddhism in Japan maintains some 75,000 temples with nearly 200,000 priests.'

At the same time, over 80% of the population also claim to be Shinto, the traditional Japanese religion of eight million gods. Very many homes have both a Shinto godshelf and a Buddhist family altar. Ceremonies to do with life and local festivals are normally Shinto; whereas over 90% of funerals are conducted according to elaborate Buddhist rites. However, hardly anyone either knows or believes the teachings of traditional Shinto or Buddhism, so it is no good asking them what they believe. Most people merely follow the customs of both religions. Those who belong to smaller sects or to the New Religions are much more definite in their beliefs.

Some sources say that many Japanese people have started to take a greater interest in religion in recent years as they begin to feel the emptiness that materialism produces. But others say there is no evidence of this.

It may help you in your discussions with your friend to know a little about these two main religions:

Shinto

Shinto is the one religion indigenous to Japan. It is an animistic religion that worships gods and goddesses in various aspects of nature. The myth of Japan's creation through the sun goddess Amaterasu is a part of Shinto. The religious rites broadcast worldwide on television during the accession of the Emperor in 1989 are Shinto - the Emperor cult is a part of the state Shinto religion.

Most festivals with excited crowds pushing, pulling or carrying portable shrines are Shinto. At New Year, crowds flock to their local Shinto shrine to pray for good luck in the coming year.

Family rites of passage, with the exception of funerals, will almost certainly have a Shinto element to them. A baby is dressed up in a kimono and has a photograph taken when it is 100 days old. In more traditional families, babies may still be taken along to the shrine for a blessing. When boys are three and five, and girls are three and seven, they wear traditional dress and are taken to the shrine, where prayers of gratitude are offered for their growth up to this time, and petitions made for their future health and success.

All weddings other than Christian ones are held according to Shinto rites, with the bride dressed in a traditional kimono, though at some stage in the reception she may also appear in a white wedding dress. However as many as 30% of *all* Japanese couples choose a 'white', that is, a Christian wedding, even if they are not Christians. Generally these weddings are held at - and arranged by - hotels that call in a pastor or a missionary to perform the service.

When a new house or factory is to be built, a ground-cutting ceremony is normally conducted by the Shinto priests, placating the spirits disturbed by the building activity. A talisman is placed in the roof beams for the protection of the builders and the future residents of the house from bad luck. The workmen on the house are usually insistent on such a ceremony being performed.

In many houses, high up on the wall of the living room, there will be a small Shinto god-shelf. Normally, it is just there, and no-one takes much notice of it, except on New Year's Eve, when it is carefully cleaned, and new offerings of rice cakes and perhaps a sprig of pine are placed on it for the New Year.

Buddhism

Buddhism first entered the country around 550 AD from Korea, and several prominent Buddhist Schools were introduced from China during the 7th and early 8th centuries. In the Nara period (710-794) Buddhism was promoted as the state religion, and official provincial monasteries were established in each province. Early in the 9th century the Tendai and Shingon sects were introduced, and in the early 12th century Zen Buddhism was introduced from China, and was favoured by the dominant military class. At about the same time the popular sects of Nichiren and Pure Land Buddhism emerged.

Under the Tokugawa government (1603-1867) Buddhism and its network of temples was used to eradicate Christianity, but Buddhism also came under the strict regulatory control of the government. After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the government sought to establish Shinto as the national religion, and many Buddhist temples were disestablished.

The roots of Buddhism in Japan are deep. Many people feel that to be Japanese is to be Buddhist. Buddhism is a sophisticated religion. There are as many varieties of it as there are Christian denominations in the West.

Although scholars may trace the ascetic influence of Zen Buddhism in the discipline of the tea ceremony, the simplicity of flower arrangement, and the stark beauty of the temple garden, most ordinary Japanese people do not feel the impact of Buddhism on their lives until there is a death in the family, and the local Buddhist priest is asked to conduct the ceremonies.

In a group-centred society, nowhere is family solidarity more apparent than in the activities surrounding the funeral, involving as many as five separate ceremonies and a number of priests. Mixed with the feeling of loss, and the desire to revere the spirit of the deceased, is the unspoken fear, especially where there has been a violent or unexpected death, that the spirit may return and bring bad luck on the family. Offerings of flowers, food and drink for the repose of the spirit of the deceased are made at the funeral, and on the family altar.

The Buddhist family altar is a large ornate cupboard normally kept in the home of the eldest son, containing a photograph of the deceased, together with a piece of wood inscribed with his new name, purchased from the temple. There is often a feeling that the spirits of the ancestors protect the family, and are involved in family affairs. Any major family events will be reported to the ancestors at the family altar.

Daily prayers may be said at the altar, and on monthly visits by the priest on the 'death-day', *Sutras*³ are recited. The annual offering of prayers on the anniversary of the death, particularly certain special anniversaries on the third, seventh etc up to the 33rd, or sometimes even 50th years, are often occasions for a family reunion over a meal.

Confucian ethics on respect for elders blend with Buddhist customs to make it very important that all the family is involved in the family worship. This is especially true for the eldest son, whose duty it will be to carry on the worship of the ancestors when he is head of the family.

Challenging Shinto and Buddhism

Few people in Japan know much about Buddhist and Shinto teachings (excepting those people who follow the New Religions). Japanese visiting the West are unlikely to defend these religions except when they want to protect themselves from Christianity. However, if your friend is interested in Buddhism, listen carefully to the way he/she describes it. Always try to understand before offering any answer or alternative to his beliefs. Resist the urge to dispute a point before understanding it (Proverbs 18:13).

³ Sutra

A Sutra is a narrative section of Buddhist literature.

There are some possible bridges between Buddhism and Christianity. Your friend may know something of the teachings of the tenth century Buddhist priest Kobo Daishi. This priest studied in China, and brought back a form of Buddhism that contained heaven, hell, and salvation through the merit of another. (There were Nestorian Christians in the Chinese city where he studied.) Pure Land Buddhism or Jodo Shinshu teaches that humanity cannot attain salvation with its own resources. In general, however, you do better just to present Christianity without reference to Buddhism. Only compare the two if people refer to Buddhist teaching first.

Confucianism

Confucianism is really an ethic, not a religion. Its main effect in Japan is the emphasis of loyalty and respect for elders. In general this is beneficial, but when mixed with Emperor worship it led to the militaristic excesses of the Second World War.

Ancestor worship

It may seem that your friend wants to believe in the Christian God, but something holds him/her back, and you don't know what. The answer often lies in the family practice of ancestor worship. Sometimes Japanese people intuitively know that, as a Christian, they would have to stop practising ancestor worship.

You may have talked with your friend about worshipping only the one true God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Exodus 20:3-6; Matthew 4:8-10; John 4:23). But all Japanese will face extreme pressure to continue the tradition of worshipping at the family altar on returning to Japan. Here we come back to the high value placed on conformity.

Ancestor worship is a firm barrier to belief in Christ, and not simply a cultural expression of being a good son.

There have been some great stories of how new Christians have made a clean break with family traditions, and we should take encouragement from them. One Japanese man, a first-born son, asked his father to transfer his rights in the inheritance to his brother, since he would not continue the family's worship of ancestors. In God's time, this man's father and brother also became Christians, and the man and his brother are now pastors in Japan. Getting a younger brother to take over the family Buddhist responsibilities is a way many older sons have freed themselves in a socially acceptable way to become Christians.

But they are not all success stories. Another man, studying in Britain, became friends with a Christian on his corridor in the hall of residence. At times he seemed very close to believing in Christ. But he refused to be baptised, because he knew that he would have to renounce his duties as first-born son to worship at the family godshelf. He could not make the break.

Spiritual warfare is especially intense with ancestor worship. Encourage your friend first of all to believe in Jesus, and then to trust the Holy Spirit to help in overcoming the obstacles. We cannot ignore the difficulties. We must face up to them, but not let them put him off making any decision at all. If a person makes a decision you should ask them what their family would think of this, and a wife who wants to be baptised should ask her husband's agreement first.

Pray that God would help your friend to understand the issue from Scripture, and, more, that God would grant the power to renounce ancestor worship and to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ.

Cults

There are many cults in Japan. The 'Christian' cults, which we know in the West, are there, such as Mormonism, Jehovah's Witness, and the Unification Church (Moonies). In the minds of many Japanese they are often indistinguishable from Christianity. But there are also cults unique to Japan. They often focus

on enthusiastic ecstatic worship and offer healing or other supernatural powers. The most popular of these is Sokka Gakkai, a lay group that has links with the Buddhist sect of Nichiren. They have a strong sense of community and caring for members, and are organised in local chapters with a definite structure and clear lines of accountability. It is the most militantly anti-Christian of the sects.

Most of the cults attract followers from all religions, and often have a charismatic leader. The proliferation of these cults reflects the spiritual hunger of a younger generation which feels dissatisfied with traditional expressions of religion. A reaction against this over-enthusiastic religious expression may cause many people to reject, or be wary of, all kinds of 'enthusiastic' religion, including evangelical Christianity.

Issues about Christian faith sometimes raised by Japanese people

Japanese people will face a range of issues as they think about becoming Christians. Westerners who do not know their language may not be able to help with them all. However the following questions will form a good basis for discussion.

‘Can I believe in Jesus and still follow other religions?’

The short answer is ‘no’. Belief in the God of the Bible is exclusive. ‘You shall have no other gods before me.’ (Exodus 20) ‘There is no other Name under heaven.’ (Acts 4:12) It is very important not to compromise. It is an insult to God to worship other gods (like a married person having an affair with another person). However, this doesn’t mean that Japanese Christians cannot attend family Buddhist ceremonies. You might want to refer your friend to a Japanese Christian to discuss this more fully.

‘Will my social and family relationships change?’

They will change to some extent. For example, Christian standards of honesty and truthfulness must take precedence over lies and deceit. A Christian is different from others; we gain by no longer being afraid of what other people think of us. There is sometimes misunderstanding in a company or in a family through a person becoming a Christian, but the family gains through increased love and consideration coming from the heart and not just out of duty.

Encouraging openness is important. Hence the advisability of a wife seeking her husband’s agreement if she wants to be baptised. When she trusts in Christ, encourage her to pray for her husband’s salvation (1 Peter 3:1-6).

Whether children tell their parents in Japan of their interest in Christianity has to be left up to them, but if that interest leads to baptism, they should be strongly encouraged.

If you can develop a relationship with parents (through Christmas cards, or by sending a photo of yourself with your friend) this will head off some difficulties and help dissipate suspicion. If the parents come over to visit, look after them well and let them get to know you, so they see you are not a member of a cult trying to ‘kidnap’ their offspring, but that you are a genuine friend to the whole family.

What about relationships at work?

Japanese men spend long hours on the job. Then they socialise together after work; this is all part of building team spirit in the office or factory. Many jobs in Japan, and in Japanese companies in the West, adversely affect a Christian’s home life. Try to get a feel for the kind of pressures Japanese families face in this way.

Some Japanese men will recognise that their commitment to Christ would affect how they conduct business, and may hinder advancement. Share with your friend Jesus’s claim that those who give up anything for him in this life will be reimbursed now and in the age to come (Mark 10:29-31). Introduce him to other Christians with similar professional interests. If there are none in your church, you could contact others through the UCCF Professional Groups⁴. Pray that God would help him see ways of living as a Christian in his job.

Help him to think through the issues of how he will be able to maintain his bonding to his colleagues in work, and at the same time recognise his family responsibilities and the value of developing wholesome, Christian friendships.

⁴ **UCCF Professional Groups:** 38 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GP / www.uccf.org.uk

Others may wonder if they will lose their jobs or rapport with colleagues if they take a stand for Christ. Show your friend the accounts in Daniel (1:8-16; 3:1-30; 6:1-28) that demonstrate how God honours his reputation and works on behalf of those who take a stand for him. Work through scriptures that will enable your friend to take the most appropriate stand. Try to be sympathetic and understanding about pressures that you will probably never have to face.

Will I lose my identity as a Japanese if I trust Jesus?

Certain traditions in Japan are strongly influenced by Buddhist or Shinto world views. So some Japanese will feel that their national identity will be lost if they follow Christ and discontinue past habits.

Again we see the importance of explaining that Christianity is not a Western religion, but that it arose in the Middle East. Take opportunities to show how the Christian faith diverges from common Western wisdom. Tell of the many Japanese who have been fine Christians e.g. Niitobe Inazo, Uchimura Kanzo, Kagawa Toyohito, and Mrs Miura Ayako. Say that a person is not giving up being Japanese, but only giving up Buddhism or Shinto. Meeting Christians from other cultures will help illustrate that God is the God of the whole world. We become *more truly human* when we find our identity in Christ: a Japanese person can become *more Japanese*. Show your friend Christ's command to take the gospel to every nation (Matthew 28:19).

Your friend may not realise what changes will need to be made upon returning to Japan. Let the Holy Spirit bring awareness of these issues. Where possible, introduce your friend to Japanese Christians here, although you may also be asked the questions as they arise. It's better to wait until your friend raises them with you.

'What about New Year traditions?'

Every New Year is preceded by parties called *bo-nen-kai*, or 'forget-the-year' parties, when people often drink heavily. Almost certainly a Christian will have to attend functions in the office, and will need to work out the appropriate manner of behaviour. Show how it is possible to celebrate New Year and other holidays in a Christian way. One church in Japan plans 'remember-the-year' parties; a Christian alternative to the drunken *bo-nen-kai*. People share in public how God has helped them in the year. They give thanks, and the tone of the party is one of celebration.

On New Year's Day and other times around the holiday, non-Christian families visit Shinto shrines and pray for the blessing of the gods for the coming year. A Christian would find it unhelpful to do this. Show your friend how we depend on God and pray to him for guidance and blessing when beginning a new year, or any new experience.

'My family will expect me to worship at the godshelf'

Ancestor worship is regarded as a duty in family life. Help your friend see that one can be a very loyal son or daughter without worshipping at the family godshelf. Invite him along when you go to place flowers on the grave of a loved one. Explain that your actions are a way of remembering the deceased person, but they do not involve the worship of that person's spirit.

In some families, it is a regular habit to pray and make offerings at the family godshelf. In other families, it is only times of crisis that trigger a response of what is almost placating the spirits who may be responsible for the crisis. Encourage your friend to talk with relatives about the Christian faith long before any crisis where he/she may be called upon to offer incense to the spirit of the deceased. Sharing good memories of the deceased person will always help the family, as will openness about how the Christian prays for other family members.

If your friend wishes to explain his family's approach to the spirits of the deceased, be a sensitive and willing listener. At some point you may want to read a passage together - like 1 John 4:1-4 which

differentiates among spirits. Or you may point out texts such as 2 Corinthians 2:14 and Colossians 1:15-20, which highlight the supremacy of Christ over the spiritual world.

Aspects of Christianity that appeal to the Japanese

In Western culture, the appeal to trust in Christ may be made in a variety of ways. We may appeal to truth, to fulfilment in this life, to the need for forgiveness, or to life with God in heaven. For a Japanese person who sees truth in terms of the harmony in existing relationships, this may be difficult to understand. The following appeals may be particularly effective with a Japanese.

God has the final claim on humanity

For someone from a non-Christian family, struggling with the idea of separation from unbelieving family members can make the decision to trust Christ difficult. Remind your friend that the Bible presents God as the Creator of the whole universe. Human beings are created by God, to serve him. Family and social relationships take second place in the light of this eternal relationship. It may be helpful to see how, in Jesus's parable, the rich man who was separated from God was anxious that his family would 'not also come to this place of torment'(Luke 16:28).

If this view of God seems strange to your friend, be patient. Keep pointing to texts in the Bible that show God to be the God of the whole world (e.g. Acts 17:24-31).

The family of God

The question of identity within a group is often of more concern for a Japanese than the question of ultimate truth, so cultivate a relationship that includes plenty of group activities with other Christians. If your friend is a student, you could introduce him/her to the Christian Union or a Bible study for international students.

As you engage in group activities, be sensitive to how Japanese friends feel around you and other Christian friends. Do you accept them as members of your group, or are you still looking on them as outsiders? How are others treated in your group? Even if you fully accept your Japanese friends, they may be offended if someone else is not treated well by group members.

If at all possible, take your friend to a Japanese church or fellowship group in your area. It is important that those who become Christians in the West meet other Japanese who worship Christ. This will give them a feel for what it might be like to be a Christian in Japan. (See **Resources**)

When your friend experiences misunderstandings from others or expresses concern about pressures from the family back in Japan, refer to texts such as Mark 3:31-35 or Luke 8:19-21. These describe Jesus's true family. If your own relationships within the family of God are a source of personal strength, your friend will be motivated to follow Christ and to be part of God's family. Always be willing to listen, and to help pray things through.

The real importance of ancestors

The focus for most Japanese is on the more immediate ancestors, who are included in the family circle through the Buddhist godshelf. You may be surprised to find the interest your friend shows in the genealogies in scripture that you prefer to skip! The genealogies in Matthew and Luke show where Jesus belongs in human history, and likewise those lists in Chronicles.

More than that, though, help your friend to see that our common ancestors are Adam and Eve. They rebelled against God, and so sin entered our experience.

You may want to look at Abraham as the ancestor of the Jewish race, and to see that the Jews thought very highly of their ancestors, but did not worship them. Scriptures consistently refer to the people

worshipping *the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*, and not the ancestors themselves. Remember that it is difficult in the Japanese language for your friend to clearly distinguish between the ideas of worship and reverence.

Romans 4:11 talks of Abraham as the father (ancestor) of all who believe. Help your friend to see that the emphasis here is on faith in God - following Abraham's example as he followed God. Think about the meaning of verses 16 and 17 of that same chapter, and how our ancestor, Abraham, points us to the Living God.

Sin and shame

Social mores in Japan are enforced by shame. For example, we sometimes hear of bribery scandals in Japanese politics. People are usually not concerned with the moral guilt they have incurred by their crimes, but they have a deep sense of shame for having marred the image of their political party or nation.

When you discuss the concept of sin with your friend be sure to show the shame that sin causes. You can show from Genesis 2:25-3:21 how shame came upon humanity with sin. (Genesis 2:25; 3:5-11 are especially important verses.) If your friend wishes to talk, be ready to listen to how he or she understands moral evil and also the social force we know as shame.

Describe how God in Christ has delivered and is delivering you from sin and the shame it brings in your own life. The Holy Spirit will convict your friend of sin and perhaps bring some sort of true shame for this sin (John 16:7-11).

Point to Romans 5:1-2; Romans 7:22-8:4 and Colossians 3:1-15. These texts show how the righteousness of God in Christ overcomes the problem of sin and the shame it brings. Heb 12:2 speaks of how Jesus endured the shame of the cross and was vindicated by God. We're repeatedly assured that we who put our trust in God will never be put to shame (Rom 10:11, 1 Pet 2:6). The only real shame is in rejecting God (e.g., Dt 32:5). The Bible's teachings about freedom from shame may not be grasped immediately. Be patient, showing how this truth works out in your own life.

If your friend comments on being ashamed of something, explain how Christ has solved sin's shame problem. This touches on something at the heart of Japanese life. It is often helpful to leave some Christian literature that explains these things.

When your friend becomes a Christian

God alone brings Christian growth (Philippians 1:6), but there are a few practical ways you can help your Japanese friends to grow and be established in their new-found faith.

Find a social network

Once a commitment to Christ has been made, it is crucial that your friend becomes part of a network of Christians in your area. At the same time, begin praying for integration into Christian fellowship back in Japan. (See **Resources**)

If your friend is single, pray that God would provide a Christian marriage partner. (Sometimes unbelieving family members put pressure on single Japanese Christians to marry non-Christians.) Explain how you are praying, and offer encouragement to ask God for his guidance in these areas. Marriage is the norm in Asia.

Find out where in Japan your friend will be living. Talk to somebody who knows the country. If you don't know anyone with connections in Japan, write to one of the agencies listed at the back of this booklet. Your friend is much more likely to plug into a church back home if you can provide an introduction.

Find a place to serve

One key to Japanese effectiveness at work is that people act as a team. This is taught from primary school days, and is true in most clubs and societies in Japan. The same is true in vibrant Japanese churches. Each member is given a particular role.

From the outset of your friend's commitment to Christ, he/she needs to have a vital part in the life of the Christian body. Think about what this could be. If a certain ministry doesn't seem to fit after a couple of weeks, try another one. Be sensitive to your friend's business responsibilities or academic load, but encourage him/her to give concrete expression to the new-found faith (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

Allow for Japanese expression of faith

As you draw Japanese friends into the life and community of a church, be aware that people throughout the world worship God differently. In the West we tend to focus on surface appearances. A church soloist who you think did an admirable job may actually appear to be a 'show-off' to a Japanese.

After spending a Sunday morning at your church, ask Japanese friends what they liked or disliked about the service. Resist the temptation to defend the style of worship in your church. Listen in order to understand how your friend approaches the Christian privilege of public worship.

Try to introduce your friend to other Japanese Christians born and raised in Japan. If there is a Japanese church in your area, encourage your friend to get involved. Help Japanese Christians to express their faith in ways most consistent with their backgrounds and temperaments. Take steps to help them mature in faith and prepare for the time when they will stand as believers in non-Christian Japanese society.

The most important activity in your friendship with a new Christian is prayer. Pray that God would reveal to your friend what it means to be 'in Christ' (Ephesians 1:3-14). Also pray together that God would guide both of you in your Christian lives (Philippians 1:3-6; 2:1-18). Pray that you would both grow in confidence as Christians and in your personal prayer lives, and become regular in Bible reading.

Back home in Japan

Returning to Japan and settling into a Japanese church having experienced Christianity in the West, may be difficult. There are a number of reasons for this.

First of all, with Sunday being the only free day for social, sports and family activities, there is a lot more competition for use of Sunday mornings (as we're seeing increasingly in the West). Then, at church, there will normally be only a small group of people; the average congregation numbers thirty. New Christians may be wary about joining such a small group - often mainly children and housewives - because they may feel that a large burden will fall on their shoulders, both in finance to support the pastor, and in time to serve on committees. They may also feel that they do not fit in.

There can also be an impression that Japanese pastors are much stricter about involvement in all aspects of church life, and this can seem to put extra pressures on your friend to conform. Some people feel embarrassed because work or study commitments mean that they cannot attend prayer meetings, so they stop going altogether.

A number of churches are aware of some of these problems, and are trying to make it easier for those who return from overseas to fit in. They may have an English worship service run by a foreigner that could be a bridge back into the Japanese church. For some, it is easier to fit into a church run by a foreign missionary, but in the end, we want to help our friends to fit into the normal Japanese church, contribute to the worship and witness of that local fellowship of believers, and to be effective Christian witnesses in the society they go back to.

RESOURCES

Further reading

One World, Two Minds by Denis Lane (OMF 1995)

On Giants' Shoulders by Patrick McElligott (WEC)

Encouraging New Christians by Michael Griffiths (IVP USA booklet)

The Golden Triangle & Japan: Church Mission in Buddhist Worlds by Glenn Myers (Briefings, 2005)

Overcoming Spiritual Barriers in Japan by Keith Webb (NextChurch Resources, 2010)

The Chrysanthemum and the Sword by Ruth Benedict (Meridian, USA. First published 1974)

Japanese Society by Chie Nakane (Penguin. First published 1970)

Silence by Shusaku Endo (Kodansha 1982)

Operation World compiled by Patrick Johnstone (Paternoster Press 2001)

(This is a tremendous resource with good current information on political and religious fronts.)

The Unseen Face of Japan by David Lewis (Monarch 1993)

Any books on Japan from your public library

Bibles, Bible studies and other Christian literature

Contact Japan Christian Link for a range of materials (see address below).

Beginners' Bible studies (bilingual Japanese/English) are also available from Hugh Trevor
(29a Fidra Road, North Berwick EH39 4NE / tel: 01620 894924 / email: htrevor@onetel.net.uk).

LINKING YOUR FRIEND WITH JAPANESE CHRISTIANS

Write to an address in your country to find out about churches near the town or city in Japan that your friend is from. We will also be able to tell you of a Japanese fellowship near you, if there is one.

UK and Republic of Ireland

Melanie Croom
OMF International (UK)
Station Approach
Borough Green
Sevenoaks
Kent TN15 8BG
Tel (switchboard): 01732 887299
Web: www.omf.org.uk
Email: omf@omf.org.uk

Friends International
The Rowan Centre
All Nations Christian College
Easneye, Ware
Hertfordshire,
SG12 8LX
Tel: 01920 460006
Web: www.friendsinternational.org.uk
Email: info@friendsinternational.org.uk

Japan Christian Link
PO Box 68
Sevenoaks
Kent
TN13 2ZY
United Kingdom
Tel: 01732 455453
Web: www.jclglobal.org
Email: info@jclglobal.org

Trevor Howard
Anglo-Japanese Christian Ministries
9 Beaminster Avenue
Stockport
Cheshire SK4 3HU
Tel: 0161 4084387
Web: www.ajcm.org.uk

Yoshie Yokoyama
International Strategy Coordinator
Japanese Diaspora Ministry
OMF International
Website: www.hfj.com/omf/news.html (Japanese only)
Email: yoshie.yokoyama@omfmail.com

Hiroyuki and Valerie Fujiwara
156 Florence Road
London
SW19 8TN
Tel: 020 8395 5939

Stephen Metcalfe
Flat 2, 207 Trinity Road
London SW17 7HW
Tel: 020 8767 4257

If your friend is a student, and returning to Japan for further study, you could link them with other Christians in their university through the KGK (Japanese UCCF). Contact:
IFES (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students)
5 Blue Boar Street
Oxford OX1 4EE
Tel: 01865 263777
Email: info@ifesworld.org
Web: www.ifesworld.org