# Theology  

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## A Determined Disabled Daughter

## SOUN Neang

The night's silence is broken by the sound of Gnar Gnar streaming from a wooden house. Gnar Gnar is the sound a child makes who has just opened her eyes to see the light of her parents' love, to receive warmth from her grandparents, and to welcome hot and cold from the sun and the moon. The sound of Gnar Gnar. means that she is hungry, afraid because from now she has to make a serious effort by herself. She needs to breathe and has to suck the mother's breast and swallow by herself.

All the people in the family are very happy because they have a new member. The grandparents love their grandchild very much and name her Siew Ly. Nobody is worried about what is going to happen to this family.

And now one year passes by.
One day, a commune hospital staff came to immunize the children against six illnesses. Siew Ly's mother invited him to inject her child immediately. The doctor asked, "Does your child have a fever?" She replied, "No, she has not." But after the injection, the mother remembered that the previous night she had given paracetamol to her child. She only briefly remembered, and then quickly forgot again because she needed to comfort her child and calm her crying.

That night Siew Ly developed a serious fever, and her arms and legs began to convulse. Siew Ly's mother gave paracetamol to her again as her doctor had instructed.

In the morning Siew Ly's mother's concern grew because the child's temperature had not come down, and her arms and legs could hardly move. Some of the neighbors suggested that she take Siew Ly to the hospital, while others counseled, "Never mind, this is usual for children after receiving the injection to protect against the six illnesses." In a week's time, Siew Ly's condition worsened, so her mother decided to bring her to the hospital. She stayed there for three weeks. Siew Ly's temperature improved, but her arms, legs, and body deteriored, making her mother very hopeless. The child's mouth became twisted, her right fingers clenched into a fist, while her left hand stretched out straight and hard. Her feet were twisted in and her toes turned down.

Sadness covered this family. The parents and grandparents frequently consulted the Krou Khmer, prayed to the spirits of the ancestors, and offered food to the spirits as the mediums instructed.

More time passed.
By the time she was six years old, Siew Ly could sit but not very stably; she could speak but the people outside her family could not understand her; and she could not walk. The parents were quite hopeless; they stopped consulting the Krou Khmer and praying to the ancestral spirits. They turned back to their business.

Even though Siew Ly could not walk, her body continued to grow as the years passed. Now she is twelve. She often shuffles to the stairs and asks others to carry her up or down and put her either into the hammock under the house or into the swing in front of the house. Because her arms and legs are uncooperative, she often falls from the hammock or swing. But this experience provides a secret opportunity for her to stand up by herself. By the time she is thirteen, she can stand up in misery by herself, but she still cannot step.

One day God blessed Siew Ly. An old lady who is a traditional medical practitioner saw Siew Ly and asked that her parents bring her in for treatment. The parents did not expect any results; but decided to try anyway. So they brought Siew Ly to the lady's house. She did not allow anybody to stay with Siew Ly. While her parents were returning
home, their tears dropped out of pity because their child had to live with an old lady in a small cottage.

The old lady tied a bamboo pole to a betel nut tree to serve as a tightrope. The old lady asked Siew Ly to do exercises. The exercises consisted of Siew Ly grabbing this tightrope pole to help her stand up. Even though Siew Ly fell many times the lady didn't care. Siew Ly had to try very hard to hang on and walk along the tightrope. In addition to this exercise, Siew Ly had to do housework such as throwing rice to the chickens, washing up, cooking rice, and pulling out weeds.

Because she lived far away for six months, Siew Ly missed her home, good food, the family camaraderie when they were all together, and the warmth and tender care from her parents and grandparents. She dreamed that she was home now-swinging, watching television, or listening to music. But she also enjoyed observing real nature at the old lady's house. She could see the cows and buffalos, and watch the farmers planting rice, because sometimes the old lady hitched her cow to a cart and took Siew Ly with her to the field. At Phnom Penh with her parents she enjoyed many nice, good things. But she never went out of the house gate, and when guests visited she hid herself in her room.

In her first month at the old lady's house, Siew Ly's parents went to see her every week. During the second month, relatives or grandparents visited her on two or three occasions. This change maybe took place because Siew Ly's family trusted this old lady. Or maybe they were very busy with their business; we don't know.

During the sixth month, Siew Ly significantly developed her movements. She could stand up more quickly than before, and could step four or five steps without hanging onto the tightrope. The old lady's treatment method was a great success. Everybody was very happy. They thought that God had given the light of life to Siew Ly.

Dear Reader, who among these people do you think was the most happy?

The family decided to bring Siew Ly back home. Now Siew Ly was like a student who had just graduated from university. She remembered the instruction of the old lady and her intensive training for six months. Now she is fourteen years old, and can help with a lot
of the housework. Everything she did, she did well. The plates and dishes that she washed were so bright you could see your face reflected from them as in a mirror. If she swept the house, even the ants could not escape.

Previously the older people in the family felt only pity for her because of her disabilities. But now they added a great heart of love and praise. Siew Ly had become a useful contributor to her family.

In 1998, God sent the Marist Mission of Australia to Cambodia. He charged this group to open a school for disabled children.

A golden opportunity for Siew Ly had arrived.
On 22 June 1998, the school opened. Among the forty-seven disabled students came Siew Ly. Her parents arrived with happy faces, and walked with Siew Ly to help her. She could not control her movements, and so could only walk with difficulty. She didn't wear shoes, not because her family lacked the money, but because she couldn't wear them. At that time Siew Ly was fourteen years old, and was neither particularly fat nor thin. During her first half year there, Siew Ly developed very quickly.

During the first two days of school, we did not study letters. We let the children play, talk about their families, and introduce themselves to one another. We explained about school policies, uniforms, and the reasons why this school was opened. Siew Ly was smiling the whole time.

Among the forty-seven students, five could hardly hold pen or chalk. Siew Ly was among those five. One student wrote with his leg. Another could not write in the notebook, so we got a big board for him. to write on with chalk. A few months later, these students could write in their notebooks by using extra large pens. Their letters were quite big and not so good, but we were very happy and we could read them.

As for Siew Ly, her letters were small and neatly written. Siew Ly was very diligent; she did all her homework carefully. Every day Siew Ly had to do exercises for one hour in order to stretch the ligaments of the arms, legs, and hips, and to help her try to walk a straight line. She always tried so hard to do it, and never complained or came late. At school Siew Ly was always happy, and one day she
expressed her feeling that, "I don't want the weekend to come; at home I miss the class so much."

One thing that made her very happy is the teacher taught her how to wear shoes. She chose sports shoes. First we taught her how to wear socks, and then we guided her to wear shoes, but just during class. The first week we taught and helped her, but the second week she put them on by herself. When she knew very well how to put them on, we allowed her to walk while wearing the shoes. Her classmates encouraged and motivated her in many ways when they saw her walking with shoes. She was a little bit shy at first because she had never walked with shoes for fourteen years, but she was extremely happy. This was another success in her life.

One day the teacher brought the students to the Praseth Mountain. After lunch most of the students sat and talked together under the tree. But Siew Ly was not among them; she had wandered off alone. The teacher began searching for her because she was afraid of losing Siew Ly, but Siew Ly said, "I'm very happy, teacher. I have never before walked as well as today. I'm sorry I made you worry about me." The teacher was not angry but very proud of her student. The teacher held Siew Ly and said, "I'm afraid that you are going to fall by yourself." Siew Ly replied, "Never mind, teacher. If I fall I can get up by myself."

The school at which Siew Ly studied is named "Lavala." She studied there for two years. She could read, write, and calculate. She is a very clever student, responsible, and never made any difficulties to her friends and teachers. When she was writing, she needed to spend a lot of time on it because her arms were always subject to spasms. Her struggle in writing and doing the exercises made her a very good example to those who didn't have to work as hard as she did.

In the year 2000, Siew Ly contracted typhoid fever and could not attend school. But when she recovered her family did not allow her to return, and we do not know why. The teacher went to visit, and found her thinner than before. She always sleeps on the mat, not eating, not speaking. Her grandmother said that she could not sleep at night.

When she met the teacher, she smiled with a sour face. She looked at the teacher for a while and turned away, and then she was crying. The teacher said nothing, just fondled the student's arms and said goodbye.

We have not seen Siew Ly for about two years. We miss her. Does she miss us or not?

May God bless and give hope to her!


Siew Ly and her former teacher Soun Neang

## Conclusion

Disabilities are very hard for those who have them. But we must not think that disabled people cannot be useful. We can see from Siew Ly's example that she could learn to study, write, walk, and work in the house as do people without disabilities. Usually the parents of disabled children always want them to walk or do things as well as others. Please look at the people who can walk and speak well but do not have the strength of character that Siew Ly has, because they neither had to struggle nor exert the serious effort the Siew Ly did to develop their abilities.

There are three conditions to help in ability development:
1- A brave heart that struggles to win over all difficulties.
2- A stubborn heart that rejects the old clichés that say, "Disabled persons are worthless," or "Disabled persons can do nothing."
3- Support and encouragement from friends, parents, and organizations.
Siew Ly's case has taught us that doing proper exercises is very useful in restoring body movement.

Siew Ly is not like the slogan that says, "Que será será."
God has opened the door for her and blessed her. She has received God's blessing and obeyed Him with all of her heart.

