

internationals on campus

WINTER 2008-09



reaching South Asians

Training Students to
Reach Hindus
Page 8

Bringing the Gospel
to our Muslim Friends
Page 12

Sharing Jesus with
Indian Students
Page 19

In international student ministry, we are always asking questions.

How do we, for example, do a better job of adjusting our attitudes and activities to reach the different groups of international students on our campuses? How do we discern authentic spiritual hunger? How do we partner with God and His people in describing and displaying the wonders of God's grace, cross-culturally? Our prayer is that many international students will have a genuine encounter with Jesus Christ during their sojourn in our midst.

One former Hindu asked, "Who was this Jesus who could break the bondage of karma, who said he had the power to forgive sins? I had to know." In his search, this Hindu delved seriously into the gospels, and in the end, he wrote: "For a while I tried to incorporate Jesus into the pantheon of deities arrayed on the altar." It soon dawned on him that Jesus did not belong there. Jesus was unique and utterly different. "One night, after meditating on the account of the death and resurrection of Jesus in John's gospel, I asked Jesus to forgive my sins, to set me free from the bondage of karma, and to become the Lord of my life." For a full account, read "Christ and Karma: A Hindu's Quest for the Holy" on page 179 of *Finding God at Harvard: Spiritual Journeys of Thinking Christians*, InterVarsity Press.

In this issue of *Internationals on Campus* we focus on how to relate with South Asian students. India, for three consecutive years, has been the number one country sending international students to the United States. Nepal is number 13. The articles give helpful and practical tips on crossing culture and sharing the gospel.



Lisa Espineli Chinn
National Director,
International Student Ministry
InterVarsity/USA

internationals WINTER 2008-09 on campus

contents

Reaching Indians Looks Different than Reaching Other Internationals.....	pg. 4
Training Students to Reach Hindus.....	pg. 8
Aradhna Concerts.....	pg. 11
Bringing the Gospel to our Muslim Friends.....	pg. 12
Keys to Ministering to Muslims.....	pg. 16
Thoughts on Sharing Jesus with Hindu or Indian Students.....	pg. 19
Idols.....	pg. 22

Internationals on Campus is an International Student Ministry (ISM) publication of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA®.

Publisher: Alec D. Hill

Executive Editor: Lisa Espineli Chinn

Editor: Brian Hart

Graphic Designer: Gary Nauman

Photos contributed by Lisa Espineli Chinn, Brian Hart, Kathy Petersen, and K. Schmidt are used by permission.

Names of people in the stories may have been changed to protect their identities.

© 2008 InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA®

InterVarsity ISM website: www.intervarsity.org/ism

Questions or Comments? ism@intervarsity.org

View *Internationals on Campus* online at:
www.intervarsity.org/ism/go/ioc/

Reaching Indians Looks Different than Reaching Other Internationals

by Matthew Agrafiotis

India, known for its diverse spiritual richness, is the number one sending country of international students to the USA. A majority of these students are Hindu, believing in many gods, and are therefore open to including the Lord Jesus in their life. Yet, few Christian student ministries see extensive Indian participation in their activities. Perhaps the main reason Indians and other South Asians do not attend ministry events is that they do not connect with the style of ministry that is so attractive to East Asians. No matter how diverse each international student ministry strives to be, it will attract particular cultures more than others. Ministry leaders need to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of a particular style of ministry. Though there are many important cultural issues that can create roadblocks for student ministries to reach Indians and other South Asians, there are three issues that must be addressed: community, focus on conversion, and approach to spirituality.

Community is the conduit of trust

Community has a strong influence on Indians. A decision to attend an event may be influenced more by what others say than by a



fancy flier or even the content of the activity. It is amazing how fast word of mouth travels in community. “Men and women take great pleasure in telling others what they know about and value most” (Sabbamma 152). Even a community back home will impact day-to-day decisions for students in North America. If Indians trust a friend, more than likely, their family members thousands of miles away will know that friend by name and other Indians on campus will know about that friend even before they meet. Rapport with individual Indians can be enhanced by building rapport within the community that influences them. Joining in festivals, visiting temples for special events, playing cricket, helping with basic needs, and enjoying a meal with students at their apartment are all ways to build trust with the Indian community.

Rethinking the conversion process

Since not all East Asians believe in God, many international student ministries first teach students to believe in God and then encourage them to have faith in Jesus Christ. If an atheist or agnostic comes to believe there is a God, ministry leaders get excited because that person is on the right track. However, most South Asian

Hindus already believe in many gods or one God that is manifested through many avatars, so they may easily accept the incarnation of God into Jesus. Thus, ministries focusing simply on belief that Jesus is God may not be fruitful.

A better approach would be to consider that the Hindu will have no problem believing in Jesus. My Hindu friends say a Hindu believes in “n + 1 gods.” So we should be ready to allow a Hindu to make Jesus of Nazareth the “+ 1” as they learn about Jesus. For the Hindu, the process of coming to faith in the Lord Jesus may first look more like syncretism (adding Jesus to their belief in many other gods) and later become singular devotion to Jesus as a “Yeshu Bhakt” (devotee). Ministries should focus on helping students experience what it means to be devoted followers of Jesus, rather than relying solely on intellectual or emotional appeals. Many Hindu students come with the preconception that Christians want them to convert, which they understand as leaving their family, disrespecting their culture, and aligning themselves with the Western culture that colonized them. Thus, they are very cautious about being a part of anything that is Christian. Insisting that they need to convert and leave idolatry, without giving them a place to experience devotion to the Lord Jesus, is unnecessary. As Hindus mature in their understanding of Jesus as Lord and experience faith in him, they may be ready to give up things that hinder them in their devotion to Jesus.

Thirsting for authentic devotion

Some East Asian students come from secular, atheist, or other backgrounds where public religious discussions are not common. They may arrive in North America with a lot of curiosity about the Bible and Christianity. Sometimes they may be very open to modern apologetic approaches to sharing the gospel. However, Indians have a very rich spiritual heritage. “Nominal Hindus” who uphold a fraction of their religious traditions find themselves much more devoted than most sincere Christians they encounter in North America. Fellowship meetings that are largely social entertainment may serve to solidify the idea that Christianity is a shallow and sterile faith. Indians enjoy good fun, but do not appreciate it as bait for religious activities. A more attractive approach would be devotion modeled by those following Jesus. Ideally this would happen regularly as part of daily life

and not just at a religious meeting. Hindus should be welcomed to join in devotional activities, but not always directly invited until they expressed their thirst for such devotion.

Marks of Hindu-friendly ministries

Scripture clearly records that humans are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). To reach out beyond our own culture, we must be students of the work that God has done in other cultures and build on that work as we share our faith. Too many times, culture has been lost as the collateral damage of sharing the gospel—this has been the case for many Indians who felt compelled to leave family and adopt Western culture to become Christians. “God loves people as they are culturally. As we see from the Bible, he is willing to work within everyone’s culture and language without requiring them to convert to another culture” (Kraft 391). Ministries that connect well with the Hindu culture are marked by authentic friendships, focus on people and relationships (rather than on Christian programs), and demonstrate faith lived out through devotion, prayer, and study of Scripture.

Kraft, Charles H. “Culture, Worldview and Contextualization.” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader, Third Edition*, Eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne. William Carey Library, 1999. 384-391.

Sabbamma, B.V. *New Patterns for Discipling Hindus*. William Carey Library, 1970.



Training Students to Reach Hindus

by Evelyn Stephens

I have found that the students who are most effective with Hindus are the ones who are teachable and willing to put themselves in uncomfortable situations for the sake of the gospel. When working among Hindus, one needs to be particularly aware of the cross-cultural dynamics. It is important to teach students to enter another culture with a learning posture and willingness to go the extra mile, so they can reach the heart of a person. This is especially important in reaching Hindus, since most are not interested in learning new cultures or becoming “Americanized.” They usually do not need as much help with English as some internationals and often have a strong group identity on a campus. This means it is crucial to enter into the Hindu student world, rather than trying to draw them out into programs and other communities.

Hindus sometimes see conversion as a change in community identity, rather than a belief distinction. Thus, invitations to “convert” to Christianity will likely not be accepted. Hinduism is complex because it is really a way of life and a family of religions, rather than one set of beliefs. Thus, even training students in basic Hindu theology is difficult, since the majority of Hindus on campus may not agree on one set of beliefs. Our aim is not the type of cultural conversion that the Hindu students fear. It is to share Jesus and allow him to draw people in and change them completely as they decide to make him the Lord of their life.

The best way to reach Hindus is to share Jesus and talk about personal faith and beliefs, asking about their personal beliefs rather than getting involved in theological debates. Often such debates center around issues that the Hindu does not even believe, but has been taught to defend, so it can be fruitless to argue against these ideas. The students who are most effective with Hindus are the ones who form authentic friendships, showing genuine love and care. These students are able to

Quick Guide to Meeting Indian Students on Campus

Events: Get involved in Indian student organizations and community activities such as playing cricket. Learn about and attend Indian cultural festivals.

Food: Eat Indian food, and ask students to show you how to cook it. Bring snacks to any gathering where you hope to have Indian students. Serve mostly vegetarian foods or chicken.

Bollywood Movies: After meeting people at cultural events, you could host a Bollywood film night or a dinner gathering at your home where you order or cook Indian food.

Gatherings: Start a get together that is focused on creating friendships that will also help them with their felt needs, like how to write a resume, get an interview, and obtain a driver’s license.

Friendships: Develop a few genuine friendships rather than many shallow friendships.

tell about their personal faith in Jesus and learn about the Hindu student’s beliefs as their friend. This often leads to fruitful conversations where the Christian can share who Jesus is, what he teaches about God and demonstrate what it means to give our lives to Jesus and receive life from him. This demonstration is more powerful to many Hindus than any well-constructed argument of doctrine.

As a student group, we encourage our members to be a part of the Hindu student club on campus. Together we go to their festivals and parties. We also attend important community functions like dance recitals and Diwali. In these ways, we connect to the culture and have a natural meeting place to develop friendships with Hindus. Once the friendships are formed, it is important to train students to go deeper in friendships and really get to know one another through giving to and receiving from our Hindu friends.

One of the most effective students I have seen in befriending Hindus takes a genuine interest in Hindu culture. She watches a lot of Bollywood films and takes dance lessons in traditional Hindu dance styles. She learned the basic stories of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. In this way, she connects with the culture and shows her respect for their way of life. She has a love for Indian food and clothing and also attends cultural festivals and frequently invites Indian students to her apartment. Indian students are impressed to meet someone who has a sincere interest in their life. Yet, because of her genuine friendship, she also is able to share about her personal belief in Jesus and to pray to Jesus on behalf of her friends. One of her friends recently confided that he is interested in Jesus and may want to read the Bible.

Prayer is a crucial component in getting started in Hindu ministry. We have to seek the Lord and ask him to lead us to the students who are cross-cultural and able to easily relate with Indian students. We also have to pray that the gatekeepers of the Hindu community will welcome us in with open arms. Once the key people in the community are welcoming and friends with us, it will be much easier to relate with the group at large. So, we must continually put everything into God's hands throughout the process of relating. Prayer keeps us in a solid relationship with Christ and allows us to acknowledge that God is the one at work through our relationships and that God is the only one capable of changing our friends hearts and minds.



Aradhna Concerts

by Robert Howe

InterVarsity's International Student Ministry at Virginia Tech sponsored a series of concerts by the Hindi-language music group Aradhna in order to reach out to the Indian community. Last spring around 200 people attended the Sunday night concert on campus, filling up all the seats and the floor in front of the stage. Lead vocalist and sitar player Chris Hale, who grew up in India and Nepal, amazed the crowd with his fluent Hindi as he joyfully sang and spoke of Jesus as his master and teacher.

The response from Indian students was positive, and they recognized Aradhna's genuine faith through the band's humble posture of adoration. The concert also drew many American students and community members, as well as other international students, who were enriched by seeing and hearing Christ worshiped in a non-Western cultural form.

Perhaps the greatest affect from Aradhna's concert has been on the organizers themselves. As the student leaders, volunteers, and InterVarsity staff gathered to pray for the concerts, they all worshiped God through bhajans (the devotional songs Aradhna sings). The bhajans' peaceful and meditative quality helped them to rest in the Lord in the midst of organizing concert logistics and publicity.

As a follow-up to the concerts, the organizers invited attendees to a series of "Bhajan Nights" in an Indian family's home, where they learned and sang together some of Aradhna's songs. The "Bhajan Nights" gave curious Hindu-background students a further opportunity to learn about Prabhu Yeshu, Lord Jesus, within a safe and welcoming community.

We are thankful for those who came to the "Bhajan Nights" seeking to worship God, as well as the many students who heard the gospel proclaimed through the concerts. Overall, the experience of hosting Aradhna was a blessing to us and our campus, and well worth the time, money, and energy involved.

بَلْ تَكُونُ لَهُ الْحَيَاةُ الْأَبَدِيَّةُ

John 3:16 In Arabic

Bringing the Gospel to our Muslim Friends

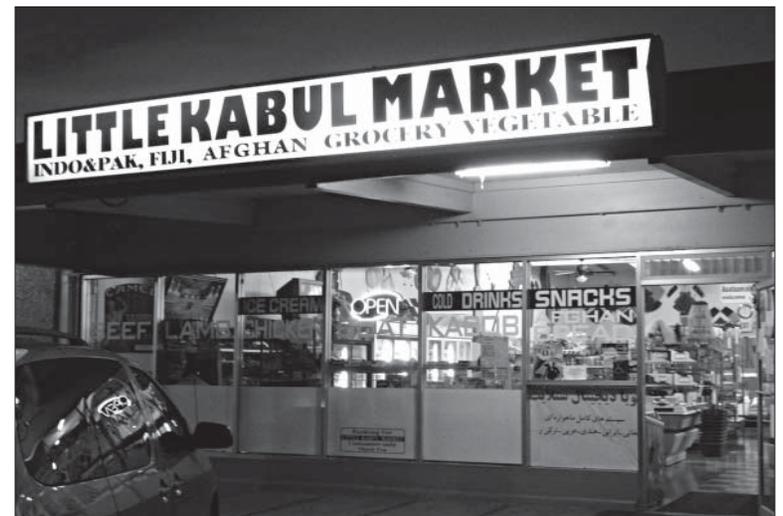
by K. Schmidt

The smell of freshly baked flat bread wafts through the open door. Inside, dried blackberries with walnuts are sold to men in flowing white pants with knee-length shirts. Farther up the street restaurants prepare mutton and curry, and the menu describes desserts from a far away land.

No, this isn't Kabul, but a small section of an American city. Forty years ago, when my mom graduated from high school here, there were few people of color. Now it's home to one of the largest Afghan populations in the USA, and residents call the area "Little Kabul." Next door is the local state university, where I minister to students.

The university has a large Muslim population, and as I spend time on campus I meet Afghan students, but also people from across South Asia, including India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Iran, to name a few. The majority of these nations adhere to Islam.

According to the Morgan Spurlock 30 Days documentary on Muslims in America, when the American on the street hears the word "Muslim" the first word that comes to mind is "terrorist."



And yet we would make a grave mistake if we were to think that every Muslim is a terrorist or that every terrorist is Muslim. In fact, one might be surprised by the variety of practices and beliefs that can be found among people who self-identify as Muslims. I've learned not to assume anything.

Sara

One of my friends, "Sara," is a Pakistani woman who is very open to Christianity. She had lived in other parts of the US, and everywhere she went, she met and had significant relationships with Christians. These experiences helped shape her opinion of Christianity. The first thing her sister-in-law said to me when she found out that I was a Christian was, "Oh, Sara has spent lot of time with Christians!" Already, Sara's openness was having an affect on her family members.

لَأَنَّهُ هَكَذَا أَحَبَّ اللَّهُ الْعَالَمَ حَتَّى بَدَّلَ ابْنَهُ الْوَحِيدَ، لِكَيْ لَا يَهْلِكَ كُلُّ مَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِهِ،

One day Sara asked me, “Do Christians believe in demons?” Talking about demons was not something that I grew up with in my non-denominational church, but I’ve since learned that many Muslims have strong encounters with the demonic world. I recounted gospel stories of Jesus’ authority to cast out demons and of their compliance.

Sara came to an evening service at my church, and afterward she and I went into a side room with my husband, the pastor, his wife, and a believer from our congregation with an Iranian Muslim background. We talked about Jesus’ authority over the supernatural, his power to free from Satan’s grasp, and that his death and resurrection was to free us from sin. We then prayed for her in Jesus’ name. When we asked her what she thought about Jesus and his message, she said that she was still “checking it out.” Sara and I had other occasions to pray together before she left to go back to her family’s home.

The other day, I got a call from her via the internet. She is still experiencing a lot of bizarre and fearful incidents. As we spoke, I encouraged her to read the Psalms, or the Zabur, of David, from the Bible I had given her the year before (provided by a generous donor). I also spoke of Jesus as the power over any evil, a name to be called on in moments of distress. At the end of our conversation, I prayed for her to be free of anything that is not of God, in Jesus’ name (I asked her first if I could). We are now trying to get her connected to Christians there.

Amina

“Amina,” an Afghan friend, considers herself a practicing Muslim, yet she was willing to meet with me to look at the biblical story of Moses. She is involved in the Muslim Student Association on our campus and knows that I minister there. But we have a friendship,

and she knows that I will not ridicule her for what she holds dear, as some Christians have done. However, this does not keep me from lifting up Jesus and the gospel message. She was shocked to find the biblical Moses to be far more sinful than Musa in the Qur’an. Yet, this was a perfect opportunity to point out that God is gracious, forgiving, and loves us enough to forgive us and give us a second chance. For which of us has not sinned? Let us not forget to share the most intriguing aspects of the gospel story!

Last year, God gave me an opportunity to explain the gospel to Amina during Ramadan (the Islamic holy month of fasting) at an iftar (fast-breaking meal). I was able to share with her the story from John 2. When asked for a sign, Jesus replied, “Destroy this temple, and I will rebuild it again in three days.” They thought he was referring to the physical temple “but the temple he had spoke of was his body” (v 21). I then explained about Jesus’ resurrection, to which my friend, shocked, exclaimed, “You believe Jesus rose from the dead?!” Even in the most unusual of places, such as an iftar, God’s story can be told.

Friendship Opportunities

Worldwide, there are currently fewer than three Christian missionaries for every one million Muslims. Are we reaching Muslims in the USA, in such a strategic place where there is freedom of speech and freedom of religion? Perhaps the lack of relationships is due to confusion over current political situations, thoughts of September 11, 2001, lack of knowledge about Islam, stereotypes, and the idea that Muslims already “have” a religion, so why should we introduce them to “ours”? However, Muslims are also in need of the Savior. Many are searching for spiritual truth, but they don’t know that the truth they’re looking for is Jesus. Muslims need friends who will speak about Jesus. They have come to our doorstep. Now let’s step outside.

Keys to Ministering to Muslims

by J. West

1 PRAYER

Prayer is the cornerstone of ministering to Muslims. If you have students or volunteers befriending and reaching out to Muslims, then the most important thing you can do is be consistently praying with them and for them. If you are reaching out to Muslims, find partners to pray with you and for you. In addition, do not be afraid to pray for visions and dreams for your Muslim friends to see Jesus! (Eph 1:17-19; 3:14-19, Isa 61:1-4, Rom 8:15, 1 Pet 2:6)

2 MEN to MEN or WOMEN to WOMEN

When witnessing to Muslims you should be building same gender relationships. Sometimes it is acceptable for a couple to minister to a single student or colleague, but the pursuit of the friendship should be done by the person of the same sex. While there may be rare exceptions to the rule, there are far more stories of heartache, struggles, and barriers raised toward the gospel due to cross-gender relationships. When a Christian of the opposite gender is the first contact with a Muslim, then he or she should find a Christian of the same gender to befriend the Muslim acquaintance and become the main contact.

3 GENUINE FRIENDSHIP

Muslims often come from areas of the world where community and relationships are important. We must remember that our Muslim friends are not a project. We must pursue them for who they are. Be careful about making assumptions. Ask questions, be genuine, and invite them into your life and model what you believe.

4 KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE

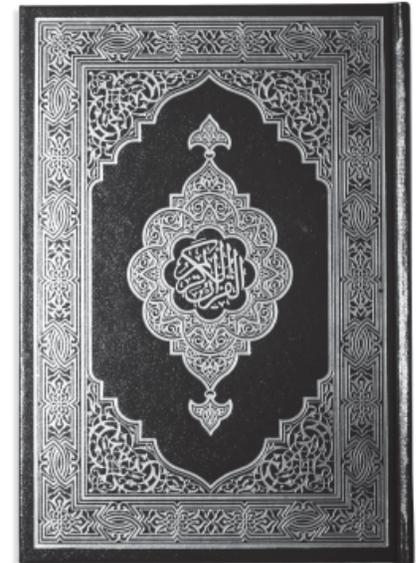
Often people feel that they need to be an expert in Islam in order to reach out to Muslims. This is not the case. Having a general understanding of Islam is helpful. However, you should be an expert in the gospel. State what you believe, clearly and without apology, but remember to do this with grace and love. (1 Pet 3:15)

5 DEFINE CHRISTIAN LINGO

Islam and Christianity have similar terms— sin, holy, prayer, fasting—but they have very different meanings. For example, in Islam praying is a rote prayer that is repeated at different times of day. It is not a conversation or personal dialogue as it is for Christians. When sharing what you believe, make sure to define your terms or give examples of what you are saying.

6 USE THE WORD OF GOD

Muslims respect the sacred books: the Law of Moses, the Psalms, the gospels (the Injil) and the Qur'an. Therefore, let the Word of God speak for itself. When sharing, show Scripture passages that support Christian teachings. Thus, you place the responsibility of doctrine where it belongs – on the Word of God. Also many Muslim cultures use stories when talking about their own faith; therefore, learn to use parables and stories from the Bible. (Isa 55:11)



7 TREAT WITH RESPECT

Try not to denigrate Muhammad or the Qur'an. This is as offensive to them as speaking disrespectfully about Christ or the Bible is to us (and in some cases even more so). We can disagree with the teachings, and so forth, but in a way that is done with

respect. For example, “Although I do not agree with what you just said, I can understand and respect your viewpoint.” Be careful about making broad negative statements about Islam.

8 AVOID BEING POLITICAL

As a witness, avoid politically sensitive subjects, praising Israel, or trying to defend American politics and foreign policy. In Islam there is no separation of religion and government, so often they see American foreign policy as representing Christian beliefs. We need to be careful not to refer to America as a “Christian Nation.” You first must build trust before entering into any type of political dialogues.

9 EMPHASIZE OUR RELATIONAL GOD

The greatest difference between Islam and Christianity is that we believe in a relational God – a God who loves us unconditionally, pursues us, and desires a personal relationship. In Islam, Allah (God) is distant and far off. Muslims have 99 names for God and not one of them is Love!

10 SHARE THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST

Share about Jesus’ birth, death, miracles, and ascension.

11 MOST MUSLIMS COME FROM HONOR/SHAME WORLDVIEWS

In honor/shame societies, people are motivated by relationship; to avoid shame in the eyes of others (to save their own and others’ face). When shame is exposed, the consequence is relational separation of some kind: death, banishment, emotional distancing. An act of shaming needs to be paid back. We need to keep this in mind both as we build a relationship and as we seek to communicate the gospel. Honor and shame are more significant than sin to many Muslims. In other words, being exposed or caught is more significant than the actual act.

12 LOVE AND PERSEVERE

Ultimately be yourself and love your Muslim friend as Christ loves us. All of us can remember the many “links” that God used to draw us to him. You may be the first link to Jesus in your Muslim friend’s life.

Thoughts on Sharing Jesus with Hindu or Indian Students

by Matthew Agrafiotis and Evelyn Stephens

Build authentic friendships. Individual and small group (family) friendships with Hindus are most helpful. Friendship should be pursued with the end goal of friendship, not evangelism. Drop by to visit unannounced after you have developed a friendship. This will show that you are interested in genuine friendship rather than casual acquaintanceship.

Give and take. Indian friends love to have reciprocal friendships and will give a lot for a friend. Ask your friend for help. They expect that you will give a lot in the friendship as well. Indians are often happy to receive second-hand items, especially after they price new items and convert the amount to Indian rupees. When visiting a home, it is customary for the host to offer a drink and sometimes a snack or even a meal. It is best to receive whatever is offered because not receiving can be interpreted as superiority. When hosting, it is best to physically offer something, rather than just verbally ask what they would like.

Avoid saying “no.” Hindus often do not say “no” directly, so doing so could hurt their feelings or insult them. Find ways to give a reason you can’t, rather than starting with a “no” answer. Try also to express concern and possible ways that you can help whenever you do have to say “no.”

Christianity is misunderstood. Indians tend to form tight communities based on ancestral lines that may include religious labels but not necessarily belief. Thus, an Indian who identifies

himself as a Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, or Buddhist may be agnostic or even an atheist. Many Indian “Christians” do not follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. In addition, most Indians see Christianity as a foreign (Western) religion. The average Indian sees an unvirtuous Christian neighbor or watches American movies, and they conclude that Christianity promotes drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, and other evils. Paradoxically, most Indians see Jesus Christ as a virtuous spiritual teacher. To avoid confusion do not use the term “Christian” but more explicit terms, such as devotee (or follower) of the Lord Jesus.

Conversion is negative. To many Indians, converting to Christianity is understood as leaving their families and communities and joining a Christian community. This viewpoint has prompted numerous anti-conversion laws in India. However, it is acceptable within Hindu communities to change the gods to which one is devoted. Hindus can acknowledge complete devotion to the Lord Jesus without leaving their families or communities.

Pray. Generally prayer is well received by most Hindus. Offer to pray, and tell them that you will pray to Jesus. You can make it a special time of prayer to Jesus where you go to their home and meet. Do not treat prayer too casually, so that they do not get the idea that you are not respectful of Jesus. Rituals are important to them.

Ask questions. Feel free to ask questions about their personal beliefs about God. Many Indians are used to having religious discussions, and it is likely that no two Hindus you meet will have the same set of beliefs.

Share testimonies with humility. Describe your personal experiences of lostness and God’s gracious forgiveness and peace. Talk about your own spiritual life and why you follow Jesus. Be genuine rather than formulaic. Share recent experiences of God’s love and ways that your relationship with Jesus changes who you are. Do not claim to know God in his majesty and fullness. Many Hindus think Christians see themselves as the greatest people with the greatest religion. Be careful using testimonies of Hindus who have found Christ, since triumphalism and pride may be what is communicated (1 Cor 8:1-2).

Read the Bible together. If they express a desire to learn about the Lord Jesus, then it is best to do that one-on-one or in a small group of other like-minded students in a neutral location. Rather than teaching a Bible study, it may be better to approach the Scripture as co-learners of the Great Teacher, Jesus.

Do not push invitations to Christian meetings. Build friendships before explicitly inviting Hindus to Christian meetings, but welcome them if they want to attend. If you do invite them to an event, be open and honest about all religious content. Events that are publicized to be only social need to be just that. Bring them to groups where they are valued and can safely be themselves, and avoid events where Hindus may be confronted to convert.

Do not criticize Hindu beliefs or culture. Pointing out the worst aspects of Hinduism or the caste system will not win Hindus to Jesus. Immediate criticism will also make them suspicious of the aims of your friendship. Once the friendship is developed, you can engage in meaningful conversations, ask about their experiences, and sensitively share your views.

Live out your devotion to Jesus. Exposing and living out our personal devotion to the Lord Jesus rather than preaching is the most effective way to share faith among Hindus. Work into your life the traditional Hindu (and biblical) values of simplicity, renunciation (fasting), spirituality, and humility.

Avoid apologetic arguments. Most Hindus do not have a developed theology, but they may argue points that they do not personally believe. Also, many Western arguments do not make sense to Hindus or may have unintended meanings.

Be patient in inviting a response. Our friends should set the pace of spiritual discussions. Do not press “Jesus is the only way” too soon in your relationship, since it may break trust and not allow you to tell more about Jesus. You can share that you personally follow Jesus and only him. Pray for the right time when you will be able to allow Jesus’ words to explain why he is the way to God, so that your Hindu friends wrestle with Jesus, rather than with you.

Idols

by Satyavan

Editor's Note: Cross-cultural ministry challenges us to discern and learn from the different biblical, cultural, and relational perspectives held by Christians. This story provides an approach the author took to a difficult situation.

Saraswati Puja

I was standing in the sanctuary of the campus church where our fellowship meets, and there was a picture of Saraswati (the Hindu goddess of wisdom and knowledge) pinned to the cross at the front. I wanted to go and tear it down but found myself unable to do so, knowing it would break relationships with the people we said could use the building.

It all started when I was handed the phone to determine whether or not to let a group of Indians use the building for their Saraswati Puja. (Puja means “ceremonial worship” I found out later.) Not knowing what either of those words meant, and after hearing them say “It is all cultural,” we (the people at the church that decide these things) let them use the building, hoping it would help us build bridges with the Indian community. I was at the church the night before, when the Indians were eating pepperoni pizza while setting up for the Puja. My interest was evoked, and I wondered what this ceremony was all about. I wondered why these college-age people were putting this event together if they did not even observe basic Hindu dietary rules.

While standing there looking at the cross being “desecrated” all kinds of thoughts began to swirl in my head. What does God think of this? How will Christians react? Are we opening up our sanctuary to evil spirits? This began my journey to understand idolatry and how it affects my life and ministry.

Idolatry

When reaching out to South Asians you will be confronted with idols. They are ubiquitous. Many students will have some kind of place of worship that will have an idol.

As one traces the concept of idols throughout Scripture, they are first found in the Old Testament as the familiar handmade figurines, statues, or pictures that people worship. As the idea develops into the New Testament, we find Paul talking of them as part of the sinful nature. He even makes this statement in Col 3:5 “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” That

passage certainly broadened my concept of idolatry. I wondered what I had pinned to the cross in place of Jesus.

I began to think about the relationships I was forming and how through me some of these people might come to put their faith in Christ. Later that day I was given the opportunity to speak for a few minutes in front of this group of people, and I encouraged them to pursue the true giver of knowledge and wisdom. Ps 111:10 states that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” and as they spent the day celebrating this goddess of education, why not consider Jesus and the Truth he is?

I came to this conclusion that day: just because their idols are visible does not make them any more offensive to God than my idols, so I should not respond in a way that communicates that I am spiritually superior to them when I am not.

Power

One of the most common reactions I get when telling this story is that we opened our building up to demonic or evil spirits by letting this go on. In 1 Cor 8:4 Paul says, “So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.” There is no god beside our God and He resides in the hearts of people, not in buildings. Paul also cautions us in 1 Cor 10:19-20 that other spiritual forces may be at work. These Hindus may have opened themselves up to evil influence as they worshipped falsely, though we do too with our idols. Certainly, Hindus must deal with idolatry in their lives, and as they come to Christ and submit to him as disciples, those idols will have to fall away. He is God of gods and demands that central place in their lives, my life, and yours.

As we step into relationships with Hindus, we can bring the light of Jesus into their lives and ours. We are also confronted with our false gods and challenged to give them up to be more like Christ “so that they [and we] may be saved.” (1 Cor 10:33) I have learned that I need to allow God to deal with my idols, and I need to release my need to remove sin from the lives of those that do not yet follow Jesus. Just as Paul did in Acts 17 with the Athenians, we must build bridges to encourage Hindus on their spiritual journey to see Jesus and follow him.



URBANA09

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TRACK

This track is for Christian international students & scholars and North Americans who minister among them. It will take place within the larger Urbana 09 missions conference. In multicultural community participants will deepen their faith in Jesus and grow to serve Him worldwide.

www.urbana09.org

ACMI 2009 CONFERENCE

ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIANS MINISTERING
AMONG INTERNATIONALS

MAY 29 - 31, 2009

AZUSA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY, CALIFORNIA



Theme: "New Bridges, New Highways:
Engaging the globally and
technologically connected
community among us."

Plenary sessions and workshops will include reaching Muslims, reaching Hindus and understanding technology.

Registration Information:
acmi2009@gmail.com or www.acmi-net.net