

Making Authentic Relationships Grow



a relationally-based, appropriately contextualized approach to sharing Jesus with Hindus

...the result of thirty years of Spirit-led experience

by **Timothy Paul**

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Preface

I designed and wrote MARG because people frequently ask me how they can bring Jesus into the life of their friends who live within Hindu culture.

I am always encouraged when I hear that people are sharing the gospel, especially with Hindu people. What encourages me most though is what I hear “between the lines” when people want to discuss bringing Jesus to Hindus. I find that many Christians today are deeply committed to a value system that includes respecting people who are from other cultures even while they passionately follow Jesus within their own way of life. These Christians also deeply desire to bring Jesus to people in ways that speak to them at the deepest levels of their lives so Jesus is exalted, not a certain style of Christianity. I also “hear” that people want to be fruitful in their lives; they want to know that they have done as well as they can to translate the gospel to their Hindu friends. I am also greatly encouraged that these types of encounters with these types of people almost never involve counting numbers of converts in a retail manner of ministry. Out of this encouragement comes MARG.

As you read MARG, you may come across points of view that are a challenge to you; maybe they feel counter-intuitive or even dangerous. I can fully identify with that because everything I have written here I continue to experience as a journey of discovery that stretches me. There has been more than one day that I sincerely wondered if I had departed from the faith and compromised the truth. In fact, I have probably crossed the syncretism line before, but I found that God’s grace abounded there as I identified with people who were trying to find their way to Jesus outside of any Christian heritage or culture. I did not willingly choose compromise, which is foolish and presumptuous. I willingly chose an incarnational life for Jesus with Hindu families.

That choice sent me out of clear-cut Christian practice and local-church-centered Christian witness into the non-Christian world where the only clear things were the Lordship of Jesus and the authority of the Bible. I found Jesus was already there. In fact, He had drawn me there to reveal Himself to me more fully. He is so gracious.

MARG is not theoretical, nor is it a strategy of contextualization that I came up with in an office filled with books and white boards. It is not even an attempt to explain how we can be more successful in outreach. MARG is a testimony of the Kingdom growing in a non-Christian environment, but it is also an attempt to explain the patterns of what I was doing as Hindu people responded to Jesus.

~ Timothy Paul



The call to mission is usually given as a call for the Church to rise to the challenge of human need. It is right that some should speak and just that some should answer the call. It is critical, however, to follow the light of Christ into the darkness of human need. I believe that the best answer to the missionary call is *"Lead me, Father; help me to follow you into the opportunities that you create for me to bring the goodness and authority of your Kingdom to people because it is you that they need."* This implies a ministry philosophy that emphasizes relationship; the ministers who answer the call are connected to Jesus Christ in an intimate relationship of oneness, following Him into relationship with people. I further

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believe that in His mercy, God is calling people in the Western world to respond to the opportunities that He is creating to bring Jesus to upper caste Hindu families whom He is bringing here.

It is an unexpected and unique opportunity. It is unexpected because it connects two very different groups of people; the modernizing and pre-Christian upper caste Hindu culture from the ancient villages and burgeoning cities of India with the increasingly postmodern and post-Christendom culture of the urban and suburban West. It is a unique opportunity because more and more Western people who are bringing Jesus to these Hindu families are following Jesus out of traditional churches and adopting a more missional way of life that emphasizes simultaneous and balanced relationships with God, one another and with non-believers.

It is also a life-changing opportunity for both of these groups because each holds a part of the full revelation of Jesus and His Kingdom that the other still lacks. The believers in Jesus have been given fuller knowledge of the death and resurrection of Jesus and what that means for the world. Hindus need these believers to fully reveal this good news to them. The Hindus have been given fuller knowledge of worship and service. Believers in Jesus need Hindus to reveal this *bhakti* and *seva* to them. (1)

It seems that when the Holy Spirit draws these two groups of people together around the Lordship of Christ, a way of truth emerges that both are seeking. It is an ancient path of life that will lead all of them beyond the divisive traditions of Christendom and Hindu *Sanatan Dharma*. This path leads them to the *Muktesvara Rajya*, the Kingdom of the Salvation God, under the reign of none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. God is creating this opportunity for the disciples of *Satguru* Jesus to follow Him out of the darkness of this *Kali Yuga*, or Dark Age, into the Kingdom of Light.

Hindus in North America

There are approximately 120 million higher caste Hindu people living in India. There are over 3 million Hindus living in the United States and Canada as of 2010. Almost all of these people are from the higher castes, and many are still connected to India.

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This means that 2.5% of the higher caste population of India is relocating to North America. Furthermore, every higher caste Hindu person in North America comes from a large and very connected extended family to which s/he usually remains strongly committed. In fact, a typical higher caste married couple residing in the United States is connected to approximately 132 other people in their family (up to first cousin), many of whom still live in India.

This means that the growing higher caste Hindu community in North America is still connected to millions of people in India. If believers in Christ can enter into authentic, sustainable faith-sharing relationships with the higher caste Hindu families who live around them, they have the opportunity to enter into faith sharing relationships with a huge proportion of India's vast higher caste population. The reality of the early 21st century is that bringing Jesus to Hindus anywhere is potentially bringing Jesus to Hindus everywhere. He is "determining the

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times set for them and the exact places where they should live so that they may reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from any of them." (2)

Brian and Ashish (*not their real names*) became friends in a large northeastern city in the United States. Ashish is from a highly influential high caste family in north-west India. Brian had faithfully shared Christ with Ashish who is very open to discuss the gospel. When his father arranged his marriage in India, Brian accompanied Ashish to the wedding. During the two weeks that they spent in India, Brian met dozens of people from both the

bride's and groom's families. Today, Brian is in a living, faith sharing relationship with Ashish and his wife who live in the United States and he is in touch with many of the family members who live in India. This living relationship has allowed Brian to share Christ with several people from this family. This is an example of what is beginning to happen all over the Western world.

Caste and the Gospel

Any consideration of the gospel among the peoples of India must include caste, the high to low social structure that dominates Hindu culture. Although the rigidity and dehumanizing prejudice of caste discrimination is softening, caste still exerts huge influence over how Hindu India perceives itself in the modern world and how the gospel spreads within Hindu society. In terms of the Indian people groups who are referred to by caste as Tribals and Dalits, God is working powerfully through the Indian Church on behalf of these sections of Hindu society. The Indian Church is vigorously spreading the gospel to the tens of millions

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of Indian people who are from these groups. The zeal and commitment of the Church to serve the Lord and these dear people in some very difficult environments is among the very best examples of the apostolic missionary tradition, and God is blessing their labors as thousands of new churches emerge all over India.



The American Church should be humbled by the example of the Indian Church in this regard and seek to emulate their zeal and faith. The Indian Church is also beginning to initiate organized outreach to the next higher level of people groups within the caste system referred to as "lower caste", and there are some encouraging signs of blessing. In comparison to the organized and effective outreach to these other sections of Hindu society, the higher castes receive almost no gospel ministry at all within India. There are various reasons for this, and they are difficult for the Indian Church to manage, let alone solve, but they will work through them. God will soon bring the Christian community in India the understanding that they need, hopefully without any Western influence, because the issues that the Indian Church faces with regard

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to initiating focused outreach to upper caste communities are beyond the ability of Westerners

to understand, let alone solve. In the meantime, He is sending thousands and thousands of higher caste Hindus out of India into the Western world.

A Journey of Faith

Upper caste Hindu people usually do not quickly "get saved". They usually enter into a relationship with believers in Christ who walk with them on a path of spiritual discovery and gradual acceptance and surrender to a reality that the Hindu people would have never dreamed to be true; Jesus is indeed Lord, salvation is in His name, and we as a Hindu family can embrace Him as our Lord and Savior and follow Him according to our ancient culture. (3) Western Christians almost always underestimate how surprising, even shocking it is

for Hindus to discover this.

Upper caste Hindu people in the 21st century have "issues" with Jesus. Hindus almost always assign Jesus to Christian religion and Western culture which causes major misunderstanding and limitations among them about Jesus. In their understanding of Indian history, Christianity is a foreign way of life that was brought to India during the Colonial period when Westerners sought to exploit

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India. These same Colonialists were "Christians." That issues would remain about Jesus becomes rather obvious. To some Hindus, Jesus is still perceived to be a threat to India and Hindu culture. In another sense Jesus is simply "other," the God of the Christians, not of the Hindus.

This is a view that fails to see that Christianity has been living in what is now the nation of India much longer than it has lived in the nations of the colonial powers that are frequently "blamed" for the unwanted introduction of Christianity to India. Nevertheless, this prejudice is very deeply embedded in modern upper caste India.

Whether Hindus see Jesus as a foreign threat or an unknown stranger, they do not just embrace the Lordship of Christ without some struggle. These barriers are real, and they rise up within the minds of Hindu people when they encounter the gospel. The existence of these prejudices is the reason why Hindus are surprised to discover that

Jesus can be their Lord. Hindu people usually need to deal with these and other misunderstandings and misconceptions about Jesus as they travel this path of spiritual discovery with believers.

The believers in Christ also profit greatly from this journey. They may experience Jesus with a Hindu family in the context of life outside of the mainstream church and perhaps even apart from Christian tradition. This can be intimidating and counter-intuitive even for the highly relational and increasingly de-churched believers of the Western world, but experiencing Jesus outside of mainstream Christianity can also transform their lives. The Bible will come alive, and prayer for understanding will be more desperately real as the believers experience

the living Lord Jesus incarnated within Hindu tradition, but not outside of Biblical authority. In this way, both the Hindu family and the believers give Christ to one another and receive Christ from one another. **Giving and receiving the life of Christ to one another is the vital life breath of a true community of faith.**

Endnotes

(1) Bhakti means devotion and seva means service.

(2) Acts 17:25, 26.

(3) This does not imply that the gospel is not counter-cultural. It certainly is, but the major issues in gospel ministry within upper caste communities have often revolved around failure to appreciate the contextual nature of the gospel and the freedom that Christ gives Hindu families to live missionally within their Hindu world. In a word, we need balance.



marg

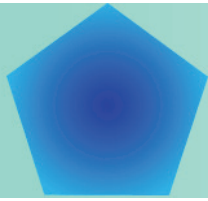
Path

This journey of spiritual discovery for believers and for Hindus is very similar to what Hindus refer to as a *marg*. *Marg* is a Sanskrit-based word that means path or spiritual journey. Hindus describe their unique concepts of salvation as walking a certain *marg* that leads them to salvation.

The importance of this is that Hindus almost always bring that thinking about salvation forward when they encounter Jesus Christ, so this contextualized approach to the gospel ministry is entitled **MARG: Making Authentic Relationships Grow.**

MARG is a five-part process of Hindus and Christ followers interacting with each other and Jesus as they journey toward the Lordship of Christ together. It seeks to integrate the way that higher caste Hindus seem to respond to the revelatory working of the Holy Spirit in their lives with a

process of experiencing Jesus with them over time. In this way, the believers contextualize their witness to the Hindu experience of the gospel, enabling the truth to penetrate deeply into the heart of a Hindu family who will naturally respond by beginning “to travel” toward Christ. This is the preferred method of ministry because it provides the best hope for deep transformation to take place within the life of the family, enabling the Hindus to truly become disciples of Jesus Christ. **MARG is, very simply, Hindus experiencing the truth of the gospel in the person of Jesus Christ, and then having that experience explained, clarified, and deepened for them from God’s Word, all in the context of authentic relationship with followers of Christ.** The first part of the journey is *sabandh*, or relationship. The second is *anubhav*, or experience. The third is *bhakti*, or devotion. The fourth is *baleedan*, or sacrifice, and the last is *sharanam*, or surrender.



Sabandh, or relationship, is the beginning: believers and Hindus develop an authentic and sustainable relationship that serves as the incarnational context for them to personally experience the benevolent reign of Jesus in their lives. An authentic relationship is a natural, unforced relationship; one which the Hindus and believers almost seem to expect to take place. Colleagues, neighbors, or classmates are examples of these kinds of relationships. This is a much, much better approach than a contrived friendship for the purpose of sharing the gospel. This does not mean that believers cannot intentionally seek for social or cultural bridges that connect their lives and the lives of Hindus. In fact, this frequently needs to be

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done. ⁽¹⁾ A relationship must be sustainable for the Hindu family and the believers. This is not easy to do because Westerners and Hindus do not usually have identical

concepts of successful relationship. The missional heart of the gospel teaches the believers to take initiative to adjust to the Hindu family. So, it is obviously very important for the believers to understand the nature of relationships in Hindu culture and how that culture adapts and changes to life here.

Balance

The major differences in relationship between

the two cultures are caused by the unequal ways that Hindus and Westerners balance community and individuality. Both cultures value community and individuality of course, but Westerners lean more toward a decentralized individuality and Hindus lean more toward centralized community. The most significant community within living Hindu culture is their family. The ideal Hindu family is a centralized and close-knit extended family of parents, grandparents, and other relatives. Westerners would see this type of family almost as a clan or even a small tribe. A successful, honorable life within the ideal of Hindu culture takes place within this sprawling extended family that can include one hundred people.

As such, children are brought up to pursue the prosperity and peace of the family and to see their own success as they grow into adults more in the context of the family. One cannot overemphasize the centrality of the family to the relational life of Hindu people.

This is obviously different than Western family life which is much more decentralized, but Hindu families that live in the Western world are also impacted by Western culture, and this ideal is sometimes barely realized as Hindu families become more decentralized. Some Hindu families remain very connected to India, but that is not sustainable in the long term because they no longer live there. Some stay totally connected to the Indian community that emerges in North America. This is the largest group, and it grows quickly and

continually. Some become totally connected to the predominant Western culture. Most Hindu families, however, are a dynamic blend of the above categories; living in a cultural continuum of Hindu and Western culture. To make things even more complex, they also experience Hindu culture as it is emerging in the West, and Western culture as it is emerging in India, the cultural fusion that is happening all over the world. (2) A relational ministry between believers in Christ and Hindus is built on three foundational principles that support one another: perception, deeds, and identity.

Perception, Deeds, and Identity

In Hindu culture, relationships are more formal than in Western culture. They are initiated and grow through the observance of social formalities that are based on the identity that exists between people or groups of people. This formal, relational life is most clearly followed in the family, but this basic relational concept extends outward to friendships and partnerships as well. For example, one Gujarati word for relationship is the same word for formalities. "Keeping the formalities" is an identical way of saying "having a relationship." Indian languages also use specific words that describe the identity of each relationship within the family. For example, there are different words for: my mother's brother,

my father's sister, my wife's brother, or my sister's husband. These words are a lot like titles within Western thinking because they give people status. Each status is accompanied by a set of behavioral expectations that are met through participating in a prescribed set of relational formalities. The formalities regulate the relationship. This is Hindu culture 101 so to speak, and has huge implications for a relational ministry with Hindu families. Ministry is directed toward a family rather than an individual. The family will relate to the believers in the same manner.

The Hindu family may assign the believer an identity that makes sense within their world and relate to him or her somewhat formally on the basis of that identity. The relational identity will be more or less formalized based on how the Hindu family incarnates its own Hindu-Western cultural continuum. The believers cannot control the identity that the Hindu family gives them, but they can control the perception upon which the identity is based. This is a wonderful opportunity to properly begin a relational ministry. The believers need to have an idea of how they want to be perceived by the Hindu family, and then do things that create the perception that they want the Hindu family to have. Establishing identity is how ministry within Hindu families begins. Ministry is what the believers do to create the perception upon which the Hindu families give them their identity.

Of course, these perceptions have to be real in the lives of the believers rather than a hypocritical way of life that does not really exist. The perception also needs to be contextualized toward Hindu

culture.⁽³⁾ For example, a young married man wants to be perceived by a Hindu family as a frugal, hard worker who is supporting his parents and children. He does not have time to hang out and “relate” all of the time, but he will make time to meet with people and help someone in need because he values relationships and service, or *seva*. A young married woman wants to be perceived as hospitable and welcoming, lovingly serving her children, her parents, and her husband’s parents. An unmarried young woman wants to be perceived as absolutely chaste and respectful of her father and mother. People with grown children want to be perceived as wise and temperate, spending more time in prayer and study. Young people in college want to be perceived as focused and serious in their studies, yet joyful and fun-loving. Of course no one is perfect, but we need to be aware of such perceptions and ask the Lord to lead us into a way of life that is characterized by fruitful work, respect, and service to others.

Relationship Development

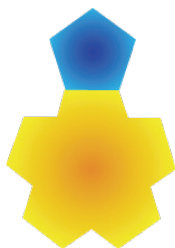
A relational ministry has a significant temptation that the believers must avoid. The temptation is to avoid any sort of witness about one’s relationship with Christ until after the relationship with the Hindu family is on firmer footing. Then, as the relationship grows toward what the Hindu family believes to be friendship, the believers slowly introduce the gospel, hoping that the affection that exists between them and the Hindu family will carry over into affection for Jesus. It sometimes does not

Service is the basis of an identity given to believers by Hindus: you are defined by what you do and how you do it. This opens doors!

happen though, and then the believers are faced with a difficult ethical problem. If they have contrived a friendship with a hidden agenda of sharing the gospel, but find that the Hindu

people are not interested in that, the believers have to either break the relationship and leave them or spend their time with people whom they may not really enjoy and who have no interest in the Lord. The believers have trapped themselves because they cannot end the relationship without hurting the feelings of the Hindu family whom, let us be frank, they have deceived. Even worse, this approach to relational ministry spoils the attitude of Hindu families toward Christ. There is a much better way.

Believers need to make the Hindu family aware as soon as possible that a relationship with them includes Jesus. A believer should not hesitate to naturally, winsomely include his or her devotion to Jesus within the atmosphere of the relationship as soon as possible; avoiding any attempt to point their faith toward the Hindu family. It should be done in a subtle way which the Hindu family will understand completely and appreciate. This is not an attempt to witness or share the gospel. It is a move toward authenticity, an indirect way of letting the Hindu family know that the believer is religious or spiritual. For example, Hindu people may welcome you to the neighborhood or the workplace, and



the believers may simply say something like “we thank the Lord Jesus for our new house” or “thanks, we prayed to our Lord Jesus for this new job and He provided for us.” The believers simply tell the Hindu family what happened as a story rather than a teaching, emphasizing what Jesus has done. A natural, experiential witness is part of how one starts an authentic, sustainable relationship. Do not wear people out with an endless narrative, but share poignant stories about your experience with Jesus. Hindu families who are conscious of God or

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in whom the Holy Spirit is already working will respond to this well. These are some simple ways to express your

spirituality. Open and sincere spirituality without any trace of coercion is a very desirable perception that the believers actually want the Hindu family to have because many Hindus respect people of faith who are genuinely conscious of God.

This is also the way to give Hindu people a chance to gently and respectfully move away from the relationship, if they have no interest in your life as a follower of Jesus. They will realize that they have been given an opportunity to keep the relationship rather surface and coolly polite. If that does happen, the believers must graciously allow the Hindu people to back away from a deepening relationship. It is much better for the Hindu family to back away than for the believers to break relationship with a family who are not open to Christ and with whom the believers have intimated friendship that is not sincere. The believers can

then pray for the family in their private prayers, stay in touch in a formal way, and perhaps meet some other people who are ready to hear the

gospel, all while preserving a cordial friendliness. The sovereign and mysterious timing of God may change the situation at a later time when He has done his secret work within the Hindu family and begins to draw them to Jesus.

include talk about Jesus naturally into everything you do, as a normal part of your life

An occupational therapist in the northeast has a patient who is a north Indian Hindu. This therapist is an enthusiastic and devoted follower of Christ. Throughout the interaction that she has with her Hindu patient, she naturally and winsomely mentions faith in God, the grace of God, and her dependence on Jesus to help her in her work. The Hindu man is very impressed with her spirituality, professionalism, and excellence in her practice. She is in an authentic relationship with her Hindu client that is sustainable whether or not the patient is open to enquire more about Jesus. The therapist often prays privately for her Hindu client to experience the love and grace of Jesus Christ. A believer who is in the legal profession has a deepening friendship with a woman from a high caste Hindu family from northern India. The believer’s faith in Christ has always been clear and a natural part of her conversation. The Hindu family appreciates her spirituality and respects her and her family greatly. These two women share a mutual love for arts and crafts, and often shop and work together. The relationship is so close that this

Hindu family gives the believers the keys to their house whenever they travel to India, which they do each year, so the believers can collect their mail and watch their property. They have also called upon this lady to give them counsel and pray for them during some times of family crisis.

Endnotes

(1) The chart below is a step by step way to enter a local Hindu community.

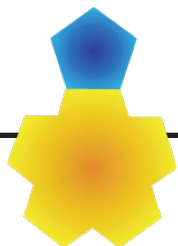
(2) They hate and fear the cultural confusion that enters their family as they live in the Western world and imbibe Western culture, especially in the lives of their children, but it is painfully unavoidable. When culture changes within a family, especially if the changes are

unwelcome and beyond one's ability to control or even understand, powerful emotions of grief or even rage can erupt into words and deeds that can undo a lifetime of love and trust. This cultural civil war exists to a greater or lesser extent in the vast majority of Hindu families that live here.

(3) Ideal life within Hindu culture has a certain pattern to it, a certain rhythm. This rhythm of life has four stages, called ashramas. Stage one is the celibate student. The student focuses on learning and developing his life. Stage two is the married householder who has children and is active in the world of business and work. Stage three is the retired stage when a man lives with his married son or sons. He gradually retires from active life and begins to contemplate God. The fourth stage is the ascetic stage of disconnection from the world to seek God. In the modern world most people do not strictly follow these stages, though they still significantly inform the Hindu world view.

Step-by-step into the local Hindu Community

1	2	3	4	5
Explore the local area and find an Indian grocery store. All of the news of the Hindu community will be available there.	Find out what, when, and where they do what they do. Discover what they do that you enjoy or can relate to.	Find a way to observe and eventually participate with them in what you enjoy.	You will be meeting people who do what you do, and enjoy what you enjoy; people who can relate to you and to whom you can relate.	In this way you are positioned to meet a person or a family who can bring you into their world.
6	7	8	9	10
Ask God to bring you a person of peace among these relationships. This person is a bridge between you and the larger Hindu community; s/he creates peace or openness between you and them.	The person of peace is someone who is experiencing <i>Sabandh</i> – Relationship with you and who has influence within the Hindu community.	A person of peace introduces you to people, invites you places; brings you further into the community.	You are now in position to incarnate yourself within the local Hindu community in an authentic, sustainable way.	The person of peace has brought you into a larger world. This is where MARG now begins.



Hindu people evaluate and certify religious truth by tradition or by experience. Tradition can be a remarkably powerful force within the Hindu civilization. Any deity or guru who is accepted as a part of the overall traditional tapestry of Hindu culture is theoretically available for a Hindu person or family to sincerely investigate or even begin to follow. Jesus and Christianity are not perceived as elements of upper caste Hindu tradition, so they do not see Jesus as a viable option for their family.

(1) In fact, a Hindu family will usually interpret the teaching of the gospel as the spread of Christian tradition, so they largely ignore it because they think it does not belong to them. They may even emotionally react if they feel that a tradition that is not their own is being forced on them. Coercion to change culture, religion, or traditions, which are all indivisible parts of Hindu dharma, has a very long and bloody history in India that continues to this day. (2)

However, the Holy Spirit continues to work within their hearts. If the Holy Spirit is touching their hearts and giving them a desire to know about Jesus, they will automatically begin to approach him according to their worldview. This will naturally inspire them to seek to experience the truth so they can begin to understand. This is their worldview, and Western believers should accept this and contextualize their ministry within those worldview parameters. (3) This experience is called *anubhav*, and it is the next stage in the MARG process. *Anubhav* can change their perception of Jesus and move the Hindu family beyond tradition toward an open-minded assessment of the gospel.

For the Hindu family, this *anubhav* is an introductory experience into the benevolent power of Jesus Christ who surprises them by revealing Himself to them in ways to which they can relate; He enters their world, demonstrating His love and grace. A lady in her sixties was attending an ESL class that prayed for people in Jesus' name and worshipped Jesus regularly. One evening at home,

she was doing *aarti*, a worship of the Hindu deities before small idols, waving a small flame burning within a stainless steel plate, and praying. She began to softly cry because she knew that life in a rough neighborhood in an American city was disintegrating her family in ways she did not fully

understand but could not fail to see. She raised her head and suddenly a person whom she immediately perceived to be Jesus appeared to her among the idols, assuring her of His love and care for her family. She was amazed but not afraid because the peace of Jesus flooded her soul. She simply received His word and worshipped, feeling no shame. This is a dramatic example of the willingness of Jesus to enter their world. *Anubhav* is an experience of Jesus Himself, rather than understanding a set of teachings about Him, no matter how true they may be.

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Anubhav may be dramatically powerful, though it is not strictly a power encounter or a signs-and-

wonders approach. The power of *anubhav* is that it speaks to the Hindu family in a way that awakens their hearts to the reality of Jesus. The experience could possibly be indiscernible to Western believers, but it may be life-changing for the Hindu family. This experience can be a flash of intuitive realization, a visible and dramatic answer to a prayer, a dream or a vision, an experience of worshipping Jesus in a Hindu manner, or simply a peace, (*shanti*), that in the heart of the Hindu family “surpasses understanding.”

Experience and Tradition

A ministry without this *anubhav* is frustrating. A Hindu family may believe everything that is said in the gospel, but they may do so in a syncretistic manner, believing that Jesus is nothing more than the all-pervading God revealed in a Christian point of view. Then, they may include him into their established belief system and assign him a place in their group of deities. They do this because they want to show respect to you and to your god. They also do this because they do not yet grasp that Jesus is actually alive. They see the gospel as another mythical story similar to many of their own, about the dying hero-god of the Christian tradition who may exist somehow, but who is not really active in the world and not part of their tradition. Actually experiencing the living Christ before learning about the death and resurrection of Christ for our sins helps the Hindu family to more easily personalize the gospel later on. The experience gives them first hand proof that He lives, which changes everything.

Western Christians sometimes struggle to understand or accept this because they completely underestimate how their Christian tradition impacts

their gospel-sharing ministry. A perfect example is when preachers who are culturally Western share the gospel with a Western audience and omit the resurrection. This happens a lot. Of course the preacher believes in the resurrection and knows how vital it is to the Christian story. His heartbeat is to preach the Biblical gospel and lead people to Christ. Why does he omit the resurrection so much? It is subconsciously assumed that the audience knows something about the traditional story of Jesus rising from the dead, but does not understand the true nature of Christ's atonement. The resurrection is assumed, assigned to our Christian tradition while the preacher deeply explains the death of Christ for our sins. This Christian tradition does not exist in Hindu families. If we explain our traditionalized gospel about the death of Jesus in detail before the experience stage, omitting the resurrection as is so often the case, the Hindu people may very well believe that Jesus is dead! The better way to bring the gospel to Hindu people who have no traditional understanding is by experiencing Jesus together with them rather than simply telling them about Him. Then, the believers may have the opportunity to explain why it is so amazing that Jesus is actually alive.

An Experiential Witness

A foundation is built for an ongoing experiential witness at the very beginning of the relationship when the believers let the Hindu family know that they are followers of Jesus and a relationship with them will include Jesus. The believers connected Jesus to their own way of life right away in natural, winsome stories of how Jesus is real to them. This laid a foundation for *anubhav*. In this stage, the believers and the Hindu family



bring Jesus into their relationship; they experience the living Christ together.

Anubhav often starts for Hindu people when they become convinced that the presence of Jesus is manifested in the lives of the believers. This develops trust which will lead them to be more transparent. Trust is absolutely essential because Hindu families are not usually open about the issues that trouble their family. In an authentic relationship in which the Hindu family has seen that Jesus is indeed alive and a part of the lives of the believers, they may share a concern that they have in their lives with the believers. The believers should quietly, respectfully listen, aware of the treasure that the family is entrusting to them. After everything is clear and the believers are sure that

anubhav often starts for Hindu people when they become convinced that the presence of Jesus is manifested in the lives of the believers

they understand, they may assure the family that they will pray to God in Jesus' name about this issue. It may be best to pray for the need privately, or perhaps even arranging a time when they meet with the Hindu family and have a prayer ceremony about the issue. It is best

not to push, to be gentle and allow the Holy Spirit to show you what is best. As the believers pray, the family is in a wonderful position to experience the benevolent power of Jesus. Jesus can provide jobs and places to live. He can guide people who are confused about their lives, restore broken families, and heal bodies and minds. When believers and Hindus who are living in authentic relationship share these types of experiences with Jesus, many barriers between them and Jesus can be broken down.

A Hindu man was living in an authentic sustainable relationship with a believing colleague at work. The Hindu man was facing some serious problems within his extended family, and shared those with his believing friend over lunch. The believer called another friend who accompanied him to the Hindu man's home that evening and together they prayed about these problems. That very week, God miraculously began to address these problems. Unlimited opportunity to explain about the power of Jesus followed these answers to prayer. A young Jain couple, which is an Indian religion that is like Hinduism in practice, but different in beliefs, immigrated to the U.S., and almost immediately they lost the wife's golden wedding bangles. They were devastated. They were friends with a neighbor who was a believer. Upon hearing about this bad news, the believer prayed with them in Jesus' name; they found the bangles the next day. Needless to say the couple loved their neighbor and received what he had to say about God.

Risk

These are examples of how *anubhav* opens doors. When it is a positive experience, we rejoice and feel like we can do anything! There is, however, another side to this ministry; the risk that God may not move as we ask. A young man was ill with bronchitis. His believer friends prayed with him to be made well. The next day the Hindu man said he was totally healed and had gone throughout his apartment building telling the other Hindu families that Jesus Christ heals people! A family called the believers who had prayed for the young man to come to their house and pray for the grandmother who had been ravaged by a stroke. The father said, "If Jesus heals her, we will all become Christians."

The believers were overwhelmed, wondering what God was going to do. They prayed for the grandmother who strained to rise from her wheel chair, but it soon became apparent that nothing had really happened, and in the following days, the leaders of the Hindu family began to persecute the believers, causing them much grief and spoiling many relationships, claiming that the believers were trying to change their religion.

A ministry of public, specific prayer like this is risky. Jesus is not a genie in a bottle who grants us all of our magic wishes. There will be times when our prayers are not answered for a family in the time or way that we seek. Our faith may be tested, our relationships strained. We may be mocked and

a ministry of
public, specific
prayer is risky
--but the risk is
worth the reward
of seeing Jesus
respond directly
to Hindu families

rejected. We learn through these experiences that our relationship with Jesus is what really matters. We must follow his full example as we seek to bring Him to Hindu families through the path of *anubhav*. Jesus remained in close union with His Father, joining Himself to what the Father

revealed to Him. Pray as Jesus prays through you and refrain when He is at rest. Take the risk to pray as Jesus prompts you, and take the risk to wait when He leads you. Give your ministry over to the Lordship of Jesus and follow Him.

Conclusion

We take no glory for ourselves when He acts with power, and we are not overwhelmed with regret and shame when He seems to fail to act. We surrender our egos and sense of place over to the

Lord. We are emotionally honest and free, giving ourselves permission to feel whatever we feel so we may be healed. If pain or need continues to linger within the Hindu family after the seemingly unanswered prayer, weep with them and seek the Lord together if possible. If a relationship is strained, be patient and forgiving. If the relationship is lost, honestly grieve the loss and the sting of rejection, but allow people to leave you, entrusting them to God. There will be times when the Lord works powerfully, and when He does, the Hindu family may be more open to Jesus. The Hindu family may begin to wonder if it is possible for them, as Hindus, to pray to Jesus more and worship Him, even though He is not a part of their tradition.

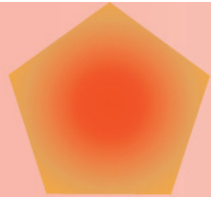
Endnotes

(1) Jesus and Christianity may soon become a part of the tradition of some Hindu groups in which large numbers of people have become Christians.

(2) Dharma is the center of Hinduism. It is very hard for Westerners to pin down and nearly impossible to translate because the translation lives within the whole of Hindu life. What English word can translate that? Attempts include duty, religion, and culture. Dharma is not as much about believing as it is about behaving. Dharma is the behavior that circumscribes belonging within Hindu community theory.

(3) **Christian world view is not at all a necessity for faith in Jesus.** Faith (trust, not assent to a list of beliefs) comes first, followed by a gradual understanding of biblical truth as the new believer applies it to his life in his culture. Major cultural shifts, such as the eradication of slavery or emancipation of women, may require generations of interaction with Scripture. This has been true in the West; why would we expect an instant transformation of all elements of a worldview upon "conversion"? And are we Western Christians certain that what we label as a "Christian worldview" is really one which is universal for all times and all cultures?





bhakti Worship

The next step in MARG is when Hindus and believers begin worshipping Jesus together in some way. Hindus refer to this as *bhakti*. *Bhakti* means devotion or worship of a specific deity and it is the heartbeat of how Hindus respond to God. It is the way Hindus naturally respond to a positive initiatory experience of Jesus.

The believers who are living in an authentic, sustainable relationship with Hindu people who are experiencing Jesus can ask the Hindu family if they want to worship Jesus in some way, perhaps thanking Jesus for what He has done. If the Hindu family agrees, ask them to help you arrange a way to worship and thank Jesus. It may be the better thing to ask them to come to church with you one week, especially if they are more Western in their culture and fluent in English. Regardless of how it is done, worship or *bhakti* naturally follows *anubhav*. It is another way to experience Jesus.

Often, the Hindu family will defer to the believers, asking them to take the lead in showing them how to worship. This is understandable because they may have never worshipped Jesus before. The believers should resist the temptation to solve the issue of how the Hindu family can

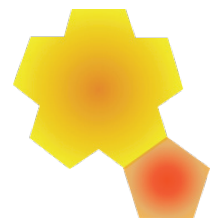
worship Jesus. The better way is to begin a dialogue with them about worship; draw Bhakti out of their heart. Ask them how worship is done in their world. Answer their questions in a straightforward way naturally using the Bible when necessary, but do

rather than
showing the
Hindu family **how**
to worship, it
may be better to
dialog about how
they express their
devotion in their
culture

not take over because
a wonderful thing is
happening. The Hindu
family is willingly trying
to align themselves with
Jesus in a meaningful
way. The absolute best
situation is when the

elders in the family are leading the dialogue and trying to use their own worship forms to worship Jesus. They may want to sing to Him, thank Him in some sort of ceremony, speak His name with reverence, or pray to Him again with love and faith. They may want to have a worship party where they implement the method of worship that has been discovered and then eat together. This is very common.

One unique element of *bhakti* is called *bhajan*, a style of music that characterizes much



of the Hindu worship tradition. It combines singing, saying the name of the deity in honor, or praying to him. Hindu people, who are still culturally

connected to India, may want to worship Jesus in a more Indian *bhajan* style, sitting on the floor, and using Indian musical instruments. They may need to either write their own *bhajans* or they can use *bhajan* styles that they know, but use the name of Jesus in the *bhajan*. It is perfectly fine to worship Jesus in a *bhajan* style.

The believers have to make a decision to trust the instincts of the Hindu family and accept their ways of worship.

The only issue for the believers would be if the worship being discussed included the worship of deities other than Jesus. At that point, the believers should gently inform the Hindu family that when that part happens, they will not participate. The believers will not leave, but they will simply not participate in the

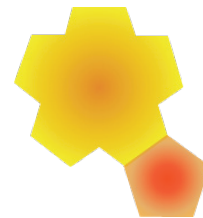


as long as the Name of Jesus alone is the focus of worship, it is very powerful for Hindu families to worship Him in a style that feels like it fits their culture

worship of any other gods or goddesses because the believers have an exclusive relationship with Jesus. The Hindu family will understand this type of relationship and will not

pressure you. They may enquire if they should only worship Jesus. The believers should not tell them what to do, but should explain what an exclusive relationship with Jesus is all about.

It is an extremely powerful witness for believers to be living in authentic, sustainable relationship with a Hindu family that is experiencing Jesus in answered prayer and *bhakti*. The believers now should begin to look for opportunities to bring the family the gospel message about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.



believers on the day of Pentecost had an experience with God before they heard or understood the meaning of Jesus' resurrection: seeing His power and being led to worship in His name



baleedan

Sacrifice - Gospel

The next aspect of MARG is called *baleedan*. *Baleedan* is a deeply meaningful word in Hindu culture. It means sacrifice, and is often used these days in connection with the sacrifices that dominated ancient Vedic Hinduism. Vedic sacrifice was powerful and central to Hindu practice for many centuries. Sacrifice is an ideal that still lives in Hindu world view, even though animal sacrifice is limited to only a few traditions in India. Hindus who are living in authentic relationship with believers and experiencing the reality of Jesus by answered prayer and worship, need to be introduced to the core truth of the gospel, namely the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and His glorious resurrection and Lordship.

The believers should explain the good news of the cross to the Hindu family in great detail. An informal explanation of Christ's death and resurrection and what that means to us done over coffee or on the phone often does not succeed in communicating the fullness of the good news. The gospel is God's plan for mankind, the cross and resurrection the final consummation of God's revelation to the human race. The believers will need to patiently explain the truth over time,

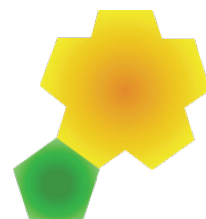
perhaps meeting together many times.

A contextualized approach to share the gospel in this manner is referred to as *satsang*, a planned meeting for religious discourse. In *satsang*, people gather together to sing about truth and discuss the truth they sing about. Believers could follow this pattern, especially if the Hindu family enjoys

plan to take plenty of time to patiently explain and discuss the truth of the gospel: God's wonderful plan for mankind

bhajans about Jesus, or they could limit it to a Bible study with a Hindu family who is experiencing Jesus. It really depends again, on how the family balances its Western and Hindu culture continuum.

It is certainly the believer's responsibility to clearly and accurately communicate the gospel, but the believer does not determine what a positive response to the gospel looks like or how it manifests itself in the lives of the Hindu family. Hindus need to remain free to follow Jesus as Hindus, so the cross of Christ can impact them at the deepest levels of their lives.



As the believers teach the gospel message over time, they adopt a responsive posture, continuing to live in authentic relationship with the family, but adding dialogue with the Hindus as they seek to discover how they can follow the slain yet living Christ. There will be two positive responses.

Some Hindu families may want to call themselves Christians as they receive Christ. That is just fine

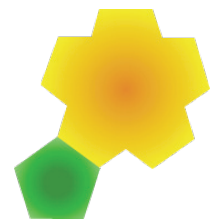
it is not compulsory for Hindus to become "Christians" so they can follow Jesus

if it is their desire, but it is not compulsory for Hindus to become Christians so they can follow Jesus. The heart response to the gospel

for everybody is always one of surrender, inner surrender of one's heart and life to become a Christ follower. For some people, that may lead them to become Christians. For others, surrender to Christ will lead them to become Christ Bhaktas: worshiping followers of Jesus.

Some Hindu families may want to call themselves Christians as they receive Christ. For others, surrender to Christ will lead them to become **Christ Bhaktas**: worshiping followers of Jesus.

Satsung: a type of religious meeting which can be used to discuss the gospel





sharanam

Surrender

Sharanam means surrender. It is used in a highly devotional context in Hindu culture, describing the person who is utterly abandoned to God, and it is the call of God to the Hindu heart, “surrender to Jesus.” Traveling with Hindus in authentic relationship through experience and Bhakti toward understanding and personalizing the gospel of sacrifice and finally arriving at surrender to Jesus, usually takes place within an atmosphere of inner struggle. The Hindu family can experience self doubt, identity crisis, family pressure, and even conflict. The believers and the Hindus need, therefore, to stay positive and patient, focusing on the person of Jesus alone without any other agenda as He leads them all on this perilous road to *sharanam* or surrender to Jesus.

Identity

Many times, well-meaning believers call Hindus to give up all of India’s gods and goddesses and believe in Jesus exclusively. It can be very hard in fact, not to do that, and the believers usually mean well. It is almost always a mistake to take the initiative and confront them with this choice. When Western believers tell a Hindu family to cease living

in some way as a Hindu in order to embrace Christ, the Hindu hears “Jesus will not really accept me if I’m Hindu. He only accepts Christians.” This may not be at all what the believers want to communicate, but that is often how the Hindus interpret this type of exhortation. This almost always offends them because it sounds condemning of their family and heritage, and uncritically exalting of the believer’s family and heritage. It also seems to them to place the believers in a judgmental position over the Hindus. Westerners assign a religious and spiritual connotation to Hindu or Christian, while Hindu people interpret them more like culture. So this advice to stop doing something to embrace Jesus sounds like a personal rejection.

new Hindu believers may understand Jesus as one god among many before they understand Him as exclusive Lord and Savior

This scenario is strikingly similar to the issues that the first century church grappled with as Gentiles began to join the Jews in the new Church. The problem was dealt with by God showing the Messianic believers that all truth is consummated in Jesus, so following Him from their deepest heart

through the power of the Holy Spirit is the way to serve God. It is obviously completely unnecessary to compel Gentiles to live like Jews to follow Christ, even though some of their Jewish culture was based on the Bible! The messianic believers were free to keep their Jewish way of life, but they were not free to demand that Gentiles embrace it. The same is true today. It is unnecessary for Western believers in Christ to compel Hindu families to become like them; to accept a Christian culture. They can certainly follow Christ as Hindus from their deepest heart through the power of the Holy Spirit, becoming Christ Bhaktas, or devotees of Christ.

Our challenge is to help them grow into an exclusive relationship with Jesus without condemning them along the way. It is much, much

our challenge is to help them grow into an exclusive relationship with Jesus without condemning them along the way better to speak positively about the fullness of Christ and subsequent surrender of our hearts to Him without even mentioning other deities. The Hindu

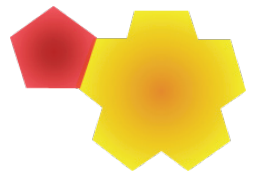
family understands the issue, and are fully capable of grappling with the exclusive implications of the gospel without us telling them. Western

Christ followers need to journey with them as they grapple with surrender to Jesus, supporting them and trying to help them find answers to their questions and problems.

A Journey of Surrender

Hindu people sometimes seem to surrender to Jesus in a series of stages that resemble the stages of MARG: surrendering to the power of His name (*anubhav* / experience), surrendering to His love (*bhakti* / devotion), and surrendering to His cross and resurrection (*baleedan* / sacrifice). What we have described as stages of ministry and response eventually begin to happen simultaneously within the Hindu family, becoming a way of life characterized by *anubhav*, *bhakti*, and *sharanam*. *Anubhav* and *bhakti* lead the Hindu family to deeper and deeper levels of *sharanam* as they live in an authentic sustainable *sabandh* with believers who continue to reveal the gospel of *baleedan* to them.

The Hindu family may begin to surrender by accepting Jesus as a god that they, as a higher caste Hindu family, can pray to, surrendering to the power

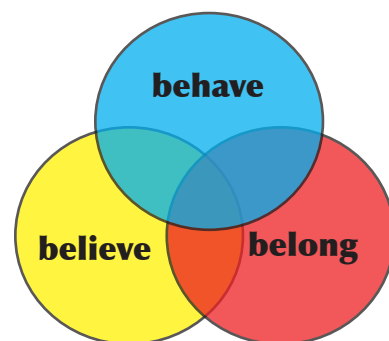
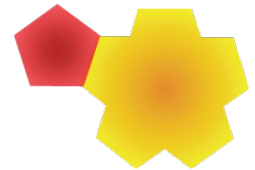


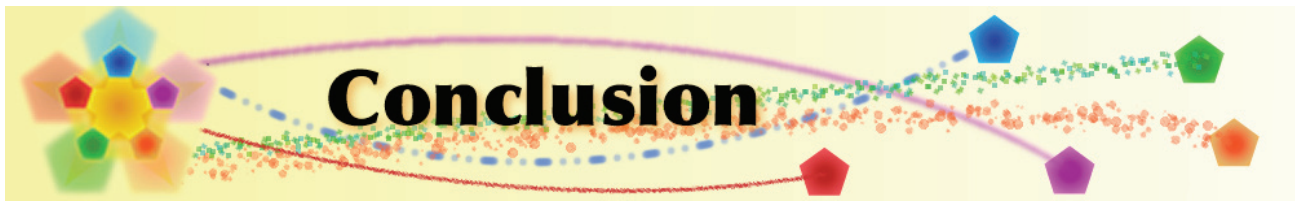
of His name. This often happens after they have an initiatory *anubhav*, or experience. They develop a love for Jesus whom they now begin to worship along with all of their other deities. Teaching the exclusive gospel will not lead them out of this syncretism. Worship of Jesus will speak to them, empowering them to consider His Lordship and motivating them to sincerely consider whether Jesus is more than they had always thought.

As they begin to experience Jesus in worship or *bhakti*, surrendering to His love, He gradually becomes the highest or primary deity that they pray to. *Bhakti* is a high form of experience, or *anubhav*, in Hindu culture. This experiential worship can show them the deep reality of the Lordship of Jesus because it is the natural way for them to respond to Him from their deepest heart which is the essence of faith. Hindu people also begin to realize that they could belong to Christ exclusively as they worship him because of their world view. Their world view places behavior before belonging, whereas classic Western world view places believing before belonging. The believers may lose relationship and any further ministry with the Hindu family if they insist that the Hindu family believe before they belong, in the sense of entering into an exclusive relationship of

faith in Jesus before they may worship Him. It is better to work within the world view at this stage rather than fighting against it. Hindus seem to grow to love Jesus before they come to know Him in an exclusive relationship, just the opposite of Western believers who accept Him as their Lord and Savior and then learn to love Him.

The next stage of surrender happens as Hindus plumb the depths of the death and resurrection of Christ, (*baleedan*). They may find that in light of the awesome love and power of Christ and the cross, they have no further desire for other deities in their lives, and they surrender to His sacrifice; Christ is all that they need. This stage is vital; it is the destination of a journey of surrender that leads to faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. One may say that *sharanam* is behaving-belonging-believing. Usually all three are necessary.





We must always remember that contextualization, power encounter, or Bible teaching have their place, but they are not the highest form of ministry. Love is the most excellent way; loving Hindu families is the highest form of ministry in the name of Jesus. If you fail at all else, but have not failed to love people, you will have given Jesus an open door to do His sovereign work. God bless you.

... and the
greatest
of these is
love

