

Some Pointers for Personal Evangelism Among Educated Hindus

Friendship evangelism is usually easy to initiate with Hindus. Most Hindus esteem religion in general and are free and open to speak about it. A sincere, nonjudgemental interest in all aspects of Indian Life will provide a good basis for friendship. Personal interaction with Hindus will lead to a more certain grasp of the essence of Hinduism than reading many books.

A consistently Christ-like life is the most important factor in sharing the gospel with Hindus. The suggestions that follow should help to break down misunderstandings, of which there are far too many, and help to build a positive witness for Christ. Yet learning and applying these points can never substitute for a transparent life of peace and joy in discipleship to Jesus Christ.

Do Not:

Criticize or condemn Hinduism. There is much that is good and much that is bad in the practice of both Christianity and Hinduism. Pointing out the worst aspects of Hinduism is hardly the way to win friends or show love. It is to the credit of Hindus that they rarely retaliate against Christians by pointing out all our shameful practices and failures. Criticizing Hinduism can make us feel we have won an argument; it will not win Hindus to Jesus Christ.

Do not argue or debate on points where we must disagree with our Hindu friends. Most Hindus sit lightly to their theology or philosophy. God is above our definitions and debates, and the man of God should stand above human disagreements. Often points are raised to deflect a conversation from Christ and his compelling demands; keep a focus on him and avoid debate. Never allow a suggestion that separation from family and/or culture is necessary in becoming a disciple of Christ. To insist or even subtly encourage a Hindu to leave his home and way of life to join the "Christian" way of life in terms of diet and culture, etc., is a denial of biblical teaching. (See 1 Cor. 7:17-24.)

Avoid all that even hints at triumphalism and pride. We are not the greatest people with the greatest religion, but some Hindus are taught that we think of ourselves in this way. We do not have all knowledge of all truth; in fact we know very little (1 Cor 8:1,2). We do not desire all India to become "Christian." (Think of what that means to a Hindu--India like America or Europe!) But we do desire all India to find peace and joy and true spirituality. Be careful in using testimonies of Hindus who have found Christ, since triumphalism is often communicated and offends Hindus. Testimonies must be given with evident humility, and with love and esteem for Hinduism.

Do not speak quickly on hell, or on the fact that Jesus is the only way for salvation. Hindus hear these things as triumphalism and are offended unnecessarily. Speak of hell only with tears of compassion. Point to Jesus so that it is obvious he is the only way, but leave the Hindu to see and conclude this for himself, rather than trying to force it on him.

Never hurry. Any pushing for a decision or conversion will do great harm. God must work, and the Holy Spirit should be given freedom to move at his own pace. Even after a profession of Christ is made, do not force quick changes regarding pictures of gods, charms, etc. Be patient and let a person come to full conviction in his own mind before taking action.

Do not force Christian ideas into passages of Hindu scripture. We must be scrupulously honest in interpreting the scriptures of all religions, and must diligently study the larger context of all quotations. There are abundant points of contact between Christian and Hindu scriptures on broad thematic issues; claiming references to Christ where none exist only hurts our credibility.

There must be no sectarian Christian appeal. Denominationalism is deadly, and pushing small doctrines will stunt growth and offend spiritual seekers.

There must be no pretense or pretending. The suggestions made here must be honestly applied and fully embraced from the heart. To take these ideas merely as a strategy in evangelism, but ignore them in the rest of our life and thinking, would be a sin against God and would lead to nothing good.

Do:

Work into your life the traditional Hindu (and biblical) values of simplicity, renunciation, spirituality, and humility, against which there is no law. A life reflecting the reality of "a still and quiet soul" (Psalm 131) will never be despised by Hindus.

Empathize with Hindus. Appreciate all that is good, and be truly sad about error and sin (as sad as you are about error and sin in Christianity). Learn to think as the Hindu thinks, and feel as he feels.

Know Hinduism, and each individual Hindu. It will take some study to get a broad grasp of Hinduism, and patient listening will be required to understand where in the spectrum each Hindu stands. Both philosophical and devotional Hinduism should be studied with the aim of understanding what appeals to the Hindu heart. Those who move seriously into Christian work among Hindus need to become more knowledgeable in Hinduism than Hindus themselves are. Some study of the Sanskrit language will prove invaluable.

Remember the biblical pattern from Acts 17 of introducing truth to the Hindu from his own tradition, and only secondarily from the Bible. For example, the biblical teaching on sin is repulsive to many modern Hindus, but their own scriptures give an abundance of similar testimony. Bridge from Hindu scripture to the Bible and Christ.

Be quick to acknowledge failure. Defending wrong practices in the church and Western Christianity only indicates we are more concerned for our religion than we are for truth. Center on Christ. He only can win the hearts of total loyalty to himself. In your life and speech so center on him that all see in your life that God alone is worth living for. Hinduism is often called "God-intoxicated," and the Hindu who lives at all in this frame of mind is put off by Christian emphases on so many details to the neglect of the "one thing that is needed" (Lk. 10:42).

Be quick to acknowledge mystery and lack of full understanding. The greatest of thinkers know almost nothing about God, and the Hindu appreciates those who have a deep sense of the mystery of God and life. Don't pretend you understand and can explain John 1:18, 1Timothy 1:17; 6:16, etc., but point a Hindu to these profound truths and to our need to bow before God and his word.

Share your testimony, describing your personal experience of lostness and God's gracious forgiveness and peace. Don't claim to know God in his majesty and fullness, but share what you know in your life and experience. This is the supreme approach in presenting Christ to the Hindu, but care must be taken that our sharing is appropriate. To shout on a street corner, or share at every seeming opportunity is offensive. What God does in our lives is holy and private, only to be shared in intimacy to those who will respect the things of God and his work in our lives.

Lead in prayer and worship together with your Hindu friend. Hinduism has a grand tradition of deep spirituality, and so it is only by deeply spiritual means that we can expect to bring Hindus to the feet of Jesus Christ. Worship in spirit and truth and communion with God in prayer will

open our Hindu friends to the riches of the spirituality available to the followers of Christ. This is the atmosphere most conducive to the Holy Spirit's work of bringing Hindus into discipleship to Jesus.

A Hindu who professes faith in Christ must be helped as far as possible to work out the meaning of that commitment in his own cultural context. Often a new follower of Christ is ready to adopt any and every practice of Western Christians, and needs to be taught what is essential and what is secondary in Christian life and worship. For example, it can be shown that the Eastern practice of removing shoes in a place of worship has strong biblical precedence despite the fact that shoes are worn in Western churches.

A new believer should be warned against making an abrupt announcement to his or her family, since that inflicts great pain and inevitable produces deep misunderstanding. Ideally, a Hindu will share each step of the pilgrimage to Christ with his or her family, so that there is no surprise at the end. An early stage of the communication, to be reaffirmed continually, would be the honest esteem for Indian/Hindu traditions in general that the disciple of Christ can and does maintain.

Approaching Hindus on these lines does not result in quick conversions and impressive statistics. But a hearing will be gained from some who have refused to listen to traditional Christian approaches. And new disciples of Christ can be taught to deal more sensitively with their contexts, allowing them to maintain an ongoing witness to their family and society. As the leaven of the gospel is allowed to work in Hindu minds and society, a harvest is sure to follow in God's own time.

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