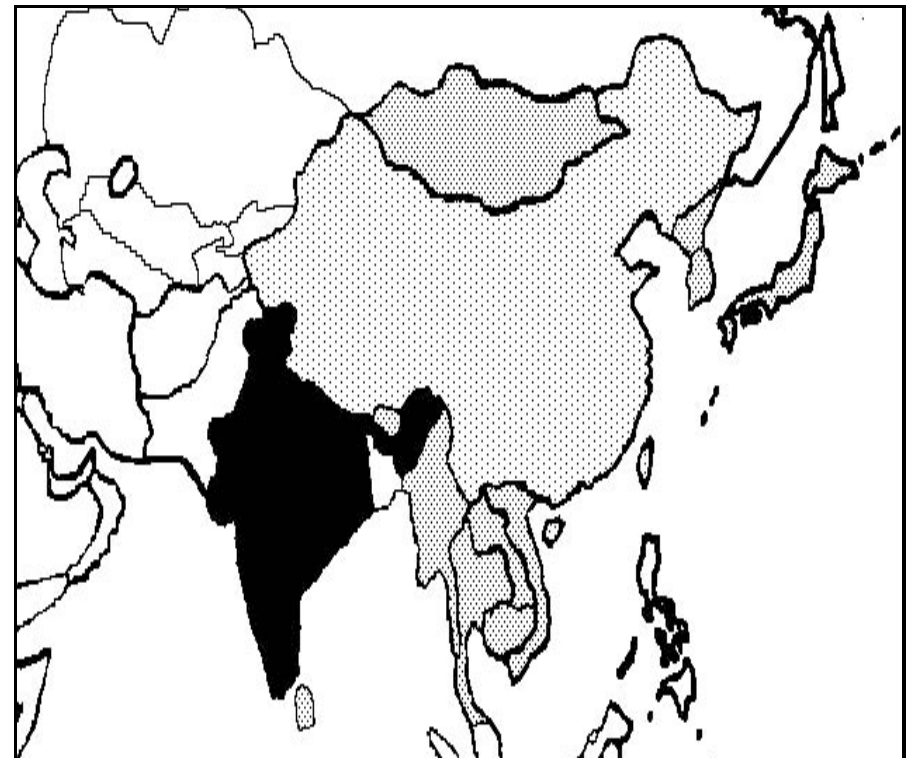


# *Evangelizing Hindus and Buddhists*



Hindus



Buddhists



**This booklet is part 10 of the Missionary Training Series**

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The Missionary Training Service focuses on training missionaries for the multiplication of churches among unreached peoples. It gives advice and help to missionary agencies, other training institutions and churches about organizing training programmes, and runs and distributes courses for missionary candidates.

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## **Introduction and Acknowledgements**

Hinduism and Buddhism are very different. However, they are treated together in this study because Buddhism arose within the context of Hinduism and shares some of its beliefs - notably "karma" (the total effect of one's actions - for good or bad - in this life and in the future).

The aim of this introductory guide is to give practical help in making disciples of people from Hindu and Buddhist backgrounds, especially in Asia.

We gratefully acknowledge help given by Dr. John Davis of Moorlands Bible College and Dr. David Burnett of All Nations Christian College in preparing this booklet.

May the one true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, illumine us and make us effective witnesses to Hindus and Buddhists.

# Hindus

The Hindu religion began in India, which today has almost 900,000,000 inhabitants (more than live in both North and South America together). Many also live in other countries. Some races in India are black; others are white. The great majority (more than 700,000,000 people) are Hindus. Christians, Buddhists and Muslims are a minority in India. Others are animists who worship the supposed spirits of plants, rivers, animals and clouds. Thousands of Hindus have been converted to Christ, especially in some tribes. However, 3,000 tribes and linguistic groups are still without a Christian church. Many have never even heard the Name of Jesus. Hinduism is so varied and vast that we can present only a small part in this study. See further reading on page 44 for more information. Hindus call their religion "the eternal teaching".

## Philosophical Arguments are of Little Worth

Let us show Hindus the love and power of the Lord Jesus Christ rather than concentrating on philosophical arguments.

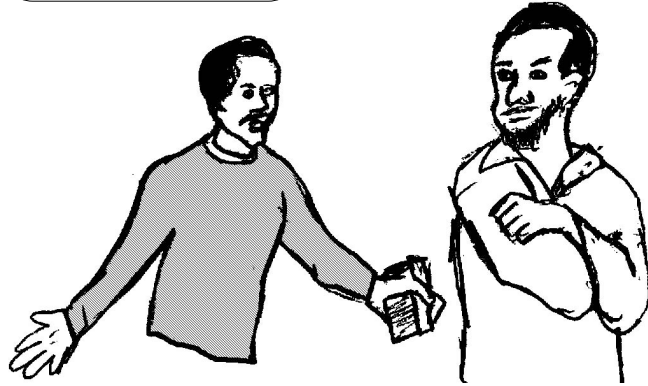
*You believe in thousands of gods. Only the Christian faith is the true religion.*

*You Christians are so dogmatic! Civilized people should be tolerant. With all respect for your beliefs, I can't argue with people who haven't got any culture.*



Wait! We can only find happiness in Jesus. Aren't you interested in spiritual things?

Of course I am. We're more religious than you are! You don't even bathe in the sacred rivers! You don't fast every week. And you don't deny the desires of the body like my caste does. That's what is most important for me.



Hindus try to make themselves perfect through good works (*karma*), devotion to a god or goddess (*bhakti*), meditation (*yoga*), and developing spiritual knowledge (*jnana*).

For the Hindu, it is more important to:

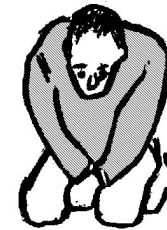
- argue about religious doctrines. ( )
- deny the desires of the body. ( )

Religious Hindus are more interested in denying their material and fleshly desires. Most of them are not interested in discussing doctrines. Their aim is to free themselves from the control of material things. Usually, Hindus do not become Christians through arguments. Faith is awakened in them only through a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Our transparent life full of peace and joy can sometimes speak louder than words.

The words of an intellectual argument do not normally penetrate their hearts. Argument is against their culture and ethics. When we evangelize them, it is good to remember that our Lord Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, is the only source of Life. Only He can change a Hindu's heart. There is no other way of saving anyone from Satan's power.

Hindus think that only a shameless person would say that someone else's religion was false. So as not to offend them, we do not flatly contradict what they say. Rather, we help them understand that Jesus Christ has opened a way of peace, purity and joy to God, and explain that we have experienced this ourselves.

*I can convince them only with the power and love of the Holy Spirit. They will see the power, purity and healing in Jesus Christ. Only He can free us from demons. They can't receive this from their gods. I'll stop forcing them to believe in Jesus by my arguments. They will respect the Word of God when they see it in action in my life.*



To convert Hindus, God uses more frequently:

- the love and power of Christ to transform lives and heal. ( )
- arguments about religion and the errors of Hinduism. ( )

The Holy Spirit convicts Hindus when we show the love and transforming power of Jesus, and when the Gospel is confirmed by healing and liberation from demons in His Name.

## The History of Christianity in India

The first Christian to arrive in India was probably the Apostle Thomas, about 50 A.D. He began to witness in the city of Cranganor on the coast. 17,000 people were baptized and became disciples of Christ. The churches that Thomas founded have persevered under persecution through almost two thousand years in the South of India. Today they are called the Church of Mar Toma.

During the first ten centuries, Christian missionaries planted hundreds of churches in India. However, in the 12th century, the Muslims killed most Christians. After the year 1500, the Portuguese established the Roman Catholic Church in the state of Goa on the West coast of India. This survives today. From 1700 onwards, evangelical missionaries have planted many churches in India, but only in certain areas. In 1857, Hindus, lead by the fanatical Nana Saheb, killed more than 1,500 Christians and missionaries. However, the evangelical church continued to grow. The Bible has been translated into 36 languages in India. Another 25 have only the New Testament. About 289 languages have neither Bible or New Testament.

The Church in India was started by:

- the Apostle Paul. ( )
- the Apostle Thomas. ( )

Many Christians in India follow Thomas' example. They evangelize their own people with boldness and sacrifice. However, there are hundreds of millions of people who have no church or any understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ. Soon India will overtake China in population.



The authorities of India do not usually grant visas to people coming in as "missionaries" from abroad to reside in the country. However we can plant churches if we work in another occupation. Some set up a business, go in as students in the universities, or work as sales people. A tourist visa lasts only for six months.

A missionary to India usually has to:

- dedicate himself just to preaching. ( )
- go in with a secular job. ( )

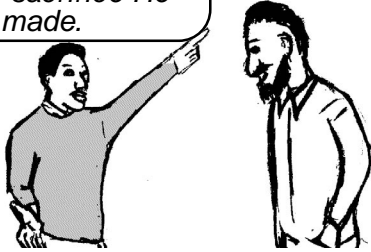
Only missionaries who work in an occupation that the government wants to introduce into the country (such as a business person or engineer) can reside in India.

*With all respect for your sincerity, I think that so much tolerance in your religion is dangerous. As we are now friends, please let me tell you why. We are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, and not through works as so many think. Jesus Christ bore the guilt of our sins on the cross when he died. Do you believe this?*



*Of course! Christ is one of the ascended masters. He was very holy. He discovered another good way to the Absolute God.*

*But there is only one way. Only Jesus has borne our sins. He cancelled them eternally by the sacrifice He made.*



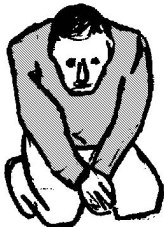
*It's a lovely story. But the guilt of one person cannot be transferred to another. It would be unjust. Each person will receive in his next reincarnation exactly what he deserves, according to his good works, religious observance, or his evil deeds.*

*Jesus is not just any another person. He is God - and as God He lovingly bore our sins on the cross. Don't you believe that God loves us?*



*Of course, but in my own way. I must go now to make a sacrifice to Ganesha the elephant god. I can't be so closed as you are. Please excuse me, my friend.*

*Oh God, help me. How can I communicate the value of Jesus' redeeming death and His resurrection giving us forgiveness and eternal life? I'll listen to the Hindu with even more patience, so he'll listen to me too. Oh Lord, help me to be patient and trust in your Holy Spirit.*



Hinduism:

- tolerates other religions. ( )
- prohibits other religions. ( ).

Some Hindus will easily accept Jesus as one god among others, but not as the **only** Saviour. Hindus tolerate other religions as long as they do not try to convert Hindus.

### **Have Patience When Witnessing**

We patiently cultivate a friendship with Hindus. They usually do not accept what we say the first day. We listen with interest when they talk of their holy rivers and mountains. We pray that the Holy Spirit will open their hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ. In time, some Hindus will see that Jesus Christ brings forgiveness, joy, holiness, healing, liberation from the evil one, and eternal life.

So as not to offend Hindus, some missionaries abstain from eating beef (cows are holy for them). They use Indian styles in their meetings. They also are careful not to have meetings for unmarried young men and women together.

Effective forms of witnessing include audio-visual aids, drama, poetry, discussions, and other Hindu forms.

It is best to witness to Hindus:

- hurriedly, forcing them to face reality. ( )
- slowly, having several long conversations. ( )

## If they do not follow the Lord, seek other people

As you talk, discern whether a Hindu has a sincere interest in righteousness and forgiveness. If he shows hunger for the most holy God, continue with patience. However, let us not waste time if he has any other motive.

We stop work with any Hindu who wants only to:

- obtain some material benefit from us
- talk about religion without any real spiritual interest,
- learn about another country just for curiosity, perhaps to be able to go abroad with our help

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, many Hindus sincerely seek God. We continue to evangelize these people.

## The One Almighty Personal God

Let us help Hindus to believe in the one almighty personal God.

The true God is a person who thinks, feels, loves, is angered by sin, and who makes choices. He created everything that there is. He exists apart from His creation. However, some Hindus have another idea of God:

*Everything is God and God is everything. God is a spark of divinity in every person and animal. He is the universal mind who flows in every part and in every being. I meditate to perfect my union with this divine force.*



This belief that everything is God, and God is everything, is called "pantheism". Some Hindus do not pray, as we do, speaking to their Heavenly Father, but direct their prayer within them. Many do not speak with another "person" when they pray, but rather meditate on the "cosmic power" that resides in each person, animal and everywhere. They meditate to perfect their union with this divine force. By abstaining from fulfilling material desires, Hindus try to put their minds in accord with this "universal energy".

Do Hindus generally practise what Christians call prayer?

- Yes. ( )
- No. ( )

In "praying", some Hindus meditate on nothing. They do not think about their "Absolute God" as if he were another person, but something inside them. They try to empty their mind of all desire, passion and all worry. They seek a pure emptiness. (Other Hindus do, however, speak in prayer to their gods.) When witnessing, we can carefully explain our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a living person - He exists apart from us, but He comes into our hearts with peace, forgiveness, love and purity. We help Hindus come to know the one most holy personal and almighty God. We can tell them stories from the Old Testament that explain what God is like:

- the story of creation
- the flood
- the works of faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
- the plagues and the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

## Words with Different Meanings

Be careful with religious words - they mean something else for Hindus. They understand something else by the words "God", "sin", "holiness", etc.. The Bible says that Satan has blinded unbelievers' eyes (II Cor.4:4).

### First Misunderstood Word: "God"

*God is not a person like us. He doesn't contaminate himself with a material body! Neither does he think, love or forgive as we weak men do.*



For many Hindus, God is an unending process that causes men to receive in their next life the punishment or reward that they deserve, according to their good or evil deeds in their present life. They think that, as far as their spiritual nature is concerned, they **are** God. However, at the same time, God also is far away from men and they cannot know Him.

The absolute "God" for many Hindus means:

- a person who makes choices, loves, and judges what is evil. ( )
- an impersonal process without emotions or will. ( )

Many Hindus think of the absolute God not as a person but as a universal process which everything follows. Men have to work out their own salvation. However, perhaps because of all people feel

the need for a true personal God, many Hindus still have an idea of God's mercy and ask God for help when in trouble.

*My protector is the elephant god Ganesha. He was the god of my father and grandfather. And to be more holy, I also worship other gods. They're spirits. I'm afraid of them. They're responsible for diseases, harvests, accidents and success. I give them offerings every day so that they don't get angry with me.*



Hindus worship many gods, following in the steps of their ancestors. They see these gods as manifestations of the Absolute God. This worship may be given to trees, animals, images, or holy men.

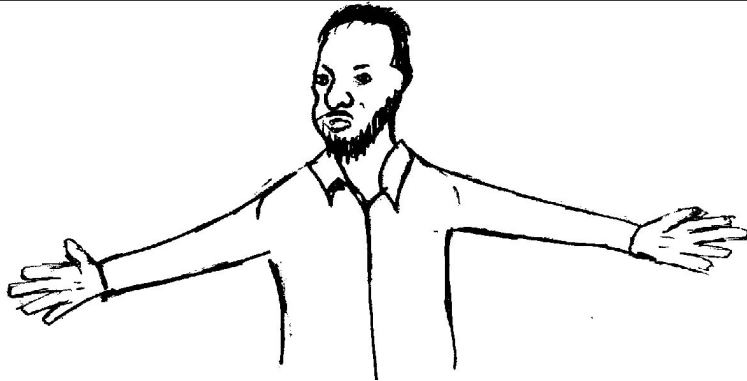
The inferior gods of the Hindus are a part of the "Absolute God". They make sacrifices to millions of gods. These inhabit animals, plants, rivers, woods and mountains. For some, the cow is a goddess worthy of worship. Its urine and milk (including butter) have a purifying power. They think that any form of worship is good, as long as it follows the way one's ancestors and one's caste worshipped. One's caste is the social and religious group to which one's family and ancestors belong. It cannot be changed. They say that every religion is good when it is practised by those who are born into it: Christianity would be the correct religion for those whose ancestors were Christians.

## Second Misunderstood Word: "Sin"

A correct understanding of sin is the key to our message. The Bible teaches that fallen man is by nature a sinner under the judgement of God, and has no potential to do good (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 3:9-20; Rom. 7:14-19; Eph. 2:1-2), while Hinduism teaches that man does have the potential to do good if he does the spiritual exercises it prescribes. In Hinduism each group of people (caste) has its own set of rules to obey - and sin is just failing to obey these rules. Hinduism teaches that good deeds will overcome bad ones. Christianity teaches that a man can do no good works because his very nature is corrupt. That is why a man must be "born again" - receive a new nature from God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: he cannot just rely on works.

## Third Misunderstood Word: "Life"

*Life is pain, suffering, sadness and evil. Everything material we see in the world is a deceitful illusion. The only thing that is good is what is not personal - that is what is spiritual. Poverty and riches are illusions. The best way of life is to renounce the world and become ascetic, leaving behind material goods and preoccupations.*





Classical Hinduism is extremely pessimistic. Life is not something one enjoys but something one escapes from.

Hindus think that the physical world is:

- good. ( )
- bad. ( )

Many Hindus think that everything physical is evil, and each day is getting worse. The material world is an illusion ("maya"). It will get worse, until it is totally destroyed. Man cannot do anything to make it better, not even temporarily. In contrast to this pessimism we bear witness to the joy that the Holy Spirit produces in us. We emphasize the promises of loving God, for a glorious future in heaven.

#### **Fourth Misunderstood Word: "Scriptures"**

*All truth is found in our ancient sacred books. They are called the Vedas. Every modern invention of any value is just a rediscovery of something that they already knew in ancient India.*



*Let me share with you the great hope that the Christian Scriptures offer of forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ, and a sure haven in heaven.*

## Fifth Misunderstood Word: "Holiness"

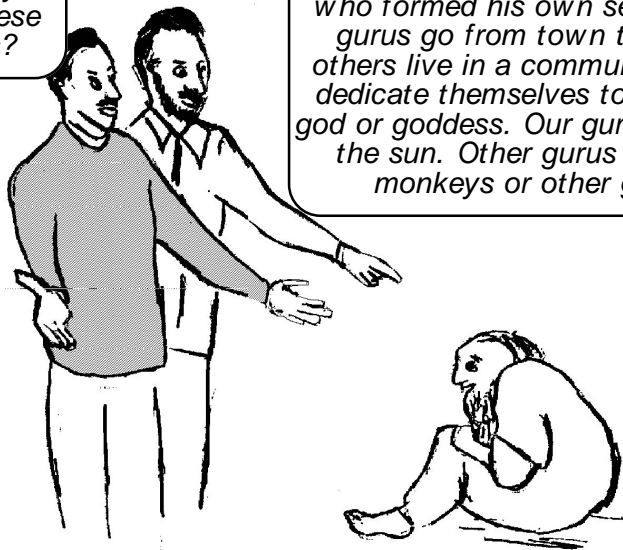
Hindus have a perverted idea of holiness. For them, spirituality is an emptiness: the absence of everything material and every human desire. What is spiritual is good, but the physical is evil. They hope to escape from what is physical, not through the sacrifice of Christ, but by good works and meditation.

As well as meditation, some inflict damage on their bodies. A few lie on beds of nails, walk barefoot on burning coals, fast and beat themselves. Their "holy men" (gurus) become famous through their drastic methods of escaping from the cage of the body. They abstain from normal marital sexual intercourse, not from moral motives, but to escape from the control of the physical body.

For the Hindus spirituality is:

- loving and obeying God , having the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit. ( )
- escaping from the body, all desire and emotion. ( )

*How did you learn these things?*



*I read the sacred Vedas. And I listen to my guru. He's a holy man who formed his own sect. Some gurus go from town to town; others live in a community. They dedicate themselves to a certain god or goddess. Our guru worships the sun. Other gurus worship monkeys or other gods.*

Spirituality for the Hindus is avoiding all that we feel or desire, whether that be "good" or "bad". They do not want to be controlled by what is material. They see it as an illusion.

The religious ministers of the Hindus are called:

- gurus. ( )
- pastors. ( )

Some gurus demand much from their followers to prove their devotion - even shameful things. They are sometimes worshipped as gods. Some walk about naked; many never bathe - for them this is holiness.

*Holiness and righteousness mean fulfilling the work that corresponds to my caste. Each caste has its own vocation and work. A Hindu does the work that corresponds to his caste, the same as his father and grandfather did before him. If he does good, he is born in the next life in a superior caste. If he follows carnal desires, he will be born in an inferior caste, or perhaps as a snake or even an insect. When he dies, his soul transfers to another physical body that corresponds to the spiritual development he has reached.*



The social groups that establish the moral norms of the Hindus are:

- neighbourhoods. ( )
- castes. ( )

Castes have their respective norms that govern every aspect of people's lives.

The "Brahmin" caste is the superior one. There are thousands of sub-castes but all correspond to one of the four large castes:

- "Brahmin" (the superior, priestly caste),
- "Kshatriya" (the second in holiness - warrior caste),
- "Vaisya" (the third, trader caste), and
- "Sudra" (the inferior, worker caste).

Holiness consists in different things for each caste. It is defined in different ways according to the caste to which one belongs.

*For the Brahmin caste, holiness consists in being a priest, separating oneself from the world and studying our scriptures, the Vedas. Other people win merit by serving the Brahmin caste. To harm them or disobey them is a grave sin. The Kshatriya caste finds holiness in being a noble soldier, being courageous, fighting enemies and being generous. For the Vaisya caste, being holy means producing goods and trading, in agriculture or business. The Sudra caste gains holiness by serving the other higher castes as common workers.*



Holiness for the Hindus:

- is the same for each Hindu. ( )
- varies according to one's caste. ( )

For Hindus, attaining holiness takes many forms according to one's family's caste. However, there do exist some general norms: religious Hindus obey their father and mother, marry the person chosen by their parents, and do not kill or harm their fellow men.

Hindus can come to know true holiness by the fruit of the Holy Spirit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, humility and self-control. They respect Christians who discipline themselves, denying their physical desires and appetites (for example, leaving a meal or undergoing some other hardship to take time to witness, pray, or serve the poor).

### **Sixth Misunderstood Word: "Man"**

For Hindus, man is not a being created in the image of God. He is a soul imprisoned in different bodies, one after another.

*The individual is worth nothing in comparison to the caste. Women are worth less than men. Sons are worth more than daughters. However, it's an honourable thing to be a mother, and we give the same honour to both our father and mother.*

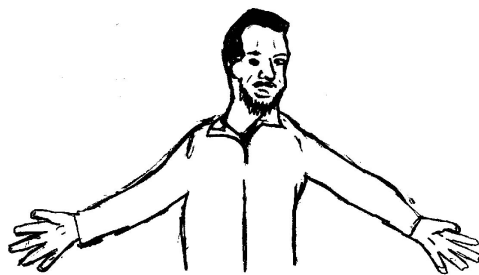
*Of course. A man's soul passes from one body to another. But the soul is not a person with a will, memory or purpose. It's a drop of God, a portion of the Absolute, the destiny of which depends on its actions in this world. These actions and their consequences form its "karma". This karma gets better with religious rites, good works and meditations that free us from the appetites of the body.*



"Karma" means a spiritual state that:

- is determined by one's caste and never changes. ( )
- changes according to one's errors or good works. ( )

The condition of "karma" varies. Its state when one dies determines the type of body that one receives by the transmigration of one's soul to the next body.



*Every religion is good.  
All doctrine is true if  
one believes it. Reality  
exists only in the  
mind. That's why we  
worship thousands of  
gods and their images.  
There are thousands  
of sects in our religion.*

Hinduism is:

- one faith with one denomination. ( )
- an innumerable array of sects each with different rites and beliefs. ( )

There are thousands of Hindu sects, each with its own customs, ceremonial washings and sacrifices. Some practise violent and bloody rites, strange ceremonies, magic, the use of amulets with the power of luck. They include a little of everything, except a personal relationship with the one true God.

## Seventh Misunderstood Word: "Salvation"

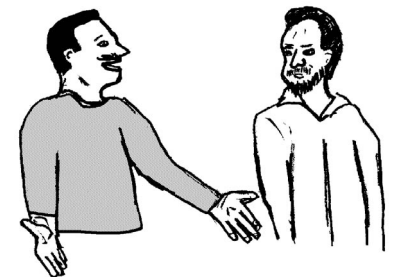
*Do you believe that there is an eternal heaven and an eternal hell?*



*In one sense. But not like Christians. Our gods come to the world to reward the righteous and punish the evil-doers. There may be a hell and a heaven, but people don't stay there for ever. They stay just for a time in which the soul is punished or rewarded according to its merits, before returning to earth to be born again in another body. What do Christians think of this?*

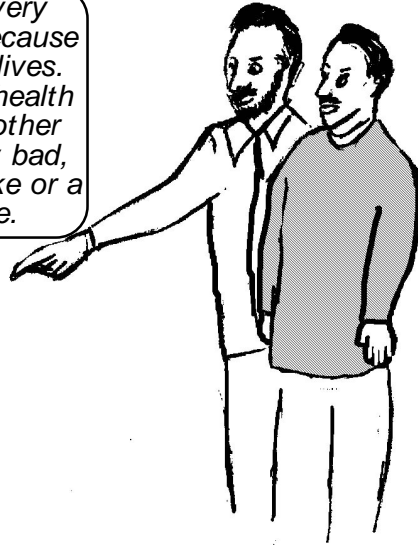
*I really think that Satan has blinded your eyes so you can't receive God's love. You don't receive salvation in Christ through the pure grace of God. You deny that the guilt of sin is cancelled by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Your sacred books, the Vedas, speak of sacrificial love, like that of a mother, but it's only so that you will gain more merits by your works. The Bible, however, really does offer true hope and good news for everyone. We believe that they are promises of God for every person.*

*I'll meditate on these things. Thanks for your patience with me.*

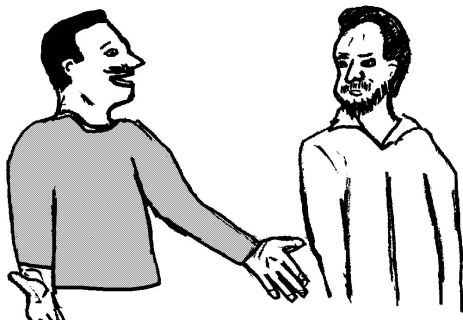


Hindus readily accept Galatians 6:7 that says that we harvest what we sow. They say that for every sin that one commits, one will suffer in the next life on this earth (not in the eternal judgement).

*According to my guru, every event in our lives occurs because of actions in our previous lives. Riches, caste, money and health depend on our actions in other lives. If we have been very bad, we are born again as a snake or a woman of inferior caste.*



*Why do you believe that we are reincarnated so many times in different bodies?*

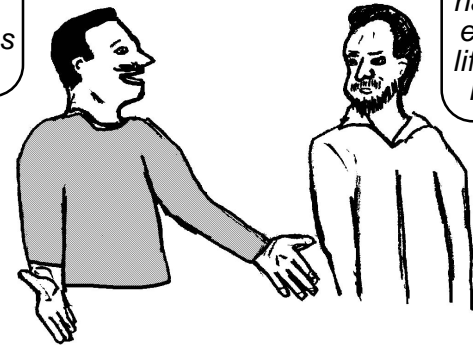


*Reincarnation in different bodies is a spiritual law for us. We reach salvation by ascending through thousands of lives to become pure spirit. And so we escape from the endless cycle of reincarnations.*



*But I already explained to you how Jesus suffered and died for us on the cross to forgive our sins for ever!*

*Then Jesus Christ must have been very evil in his past life to suffer so many things!*



*Oh no! Jesus Christ has always been God. Yes, He did suffer, but it was for us, not for His own "karma". He was perfect and never sinned. He died for our "karmas" to free us from their control. Look what 1 Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God..."*



Patiently, we explain the eternal forgiveness of sins and the redemption from the just judgement of God.

For Hindus, salvation means that:

- the soul is set free from its many "transmigrations" to other bodies. ( )
- God forgives our guilt for ever. ( )

Hindus believe that being saved is escaping from what is material. They believe that they can escape from the circle of the many lives lived successively in different bodies. If they practise their religion well, seeking what is spiritual, they are born in another reincarnation in a superior caste, until at last they escape completely, becoming pure spirit.

### **Eighth Misunderstood Words: "Born Again"**

The Hindus' aim is to escape from the cycle of reincarnations. They don't want to be born again: they want to stop being born altogether. It is better not to use the phrase "born again", but rather say something like "be forgiven and become a child of God". We could use Ezekiel 36:25-27 to describe what becoming a new person in Jesus means: we are washed clean from our sins (v.25); God gives us a new heart - we become a new person (v. 26); we are filled with the Holy Spirit who enables us to please God and keep His commandments (v.27). Another useful passage is Titus 3:4-7 which emphasizes the corrupt nature of man's heart and how we become a child of God.



*If I don't practise my religion properly, I'll be born again as an ant, a toad or a snake. I'd have to go on ascending again little by little, being born as a cat or a sheep. The monkeys and mice are the most sacred; we build temples for them. Dogs are inferior, worse than insects. I don't kill insects or eat meat - I could be killing my relatives. A butterfly or a chicken could be my grandmother.*

Be careful when using the word "salvation". For Hindus, it means to escape:

- from one's body and be absorbed in the Absolute. ( )
- from the just condemnation of God. ( )

Being saved, according to Hindus, means escaping from what is physical, to become pure spirit. Then one does not continue to be born thousands of times in different bodies. According to them, the soul is like a drop of water that falls in the sea: it unites with everything that is. It no longer has to undergo the transmigration to another body. If we speak about salvation in Christ, they think that He helps us, by our good works, to break the cycle of having to die and be "reincarnated" in another body. They need a lot of patient explanation.

### The Gospel Reaches his Heart

Having formed a friendship, we ask God to bind Satan and anything contrary to the Holy Spirit, and patiently explain the Gospel.



The Christian goes with his friend to his house to pray for his son...



Later, the Hindu comes to the Christian's house:



Many Hindus know little about their religion. All they believe is that they are here because of their actions in a previous life; and they practise the caste system. Tradition is very important for them: they believe that they must follow the religious practices of their ancestors.

We believe that Hinduism's idolatry is of the devil. Its many gods are linked with evil spirits that dominate the people who worship them. For them to truly receive Christ, evangelize with patience and love. We can pray, often with fasting, for God to break the power of the spirits. Only the one Almighty God can do this through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thousands of Hindus have been convinced and converted through the Holy Spirit. They know that Jesus is the only Son of God, and that He has more power than the evil spirits. After seeing the healing of a neighbour or relative through prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, many believe in Him, His redeeming death, and His resurrection that gives us eternal life.

### **More Suggestions for Evangelism\***

- \* Pray daily for your contacts and their families.
- \* Know and use the Bible in witnessing. Learn key verses.
- \* Form sincere friendships with people (of the same sex) and show real interest in their way of life. Accept hospitality and food. Return their hospitality - many Hindus prefer vegetarian

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\* See the booklet *How to Make Disciples in Other Cultures* for a more detailed treatment of cross-cultural evangelism principles (available from the Missionary Training Service - see page 2 for the address).

food - especially not beef. Learn to think as they think and feel as they feel. Through friendship, your Christ-like life of peace and joy in the Lord will shine through. Hindus especially appreciate humility, spirituality, simplicity and renunciation of worldly pleasures. Hindus appreciate those who have a deep sense of the mystery of God and life.

- \* Concentrate on the Lord Jesus Christ rather than "Christianity". "Christian" lands sadly have many evil things. We are to present the truth of the Gospel rather than defend traditional church practices or denominations.
- \* Hindus show respect for their holy books. If we put our Bibles on the floor or underline verses, they will think that we do not respect them as God's Word.
- \* Study Hinduism to see its wide range of beliefs and practices. The most popular Hindu scripture is called the Bhagavad-Gita. Listen carefully to each individual Hindu to understand where he stands. Knowing Hinduism will enable you to relate truth to the Hindu from his own tradition, and only then from the Bible. This was the apostle Paul's method in Acts 17. However, do not force Christian meanings onto Hindu texts. Some understanding of the Sanskrit language will also prove helpful.
- \* Useful scriptures:
  - \* The whole of John's Gospel. You could read it together or come together after your friend has read some.
  - \* John 1:18, 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:16 - the revelation of God through the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - \* 1 Peter 1:19: the purity of the life of Jesus.
  - \* John 14:6: Jesus is the only way to God
  - \* Romans 12:1: our lives as sacrifices to God - not gifts
  - \* Romans 3:23: people are basically sinful
  - \* Ephesians 2:8,9: accepted by grace not works
  - \* 1 Timothy 2:5: God and men are separate: not one

- \* 2 Timothy 3:16: the Bible breathed by God
- \* Hebrews 9:27: only one life on earth
- \* John 14:16,17: the Holy Spirit gives us the power to live as God demands: we do not have to struggle by ourselves.
- \* Share your personal experience of forgiveness and peace through the Lord Jesus Christ, answered prayers, and changed attitudes. Explain how your personal relationship to God is eternal: after death He received us in His presence: we do not merge like a drop in the ocean.
- \* Showing affection for your spouse in public is offensive to Hindus.
- \* Help new disciples from a Hindu background to work out their faith in their own context. Teach them what is commanded by the Lord Jesus but do not impose any church traditions. For example, if they feel happier worshipping without shoes, out of reverence for God, then this is fine. Do not encourage them to adopt Western practices.
- \* Do not separate new converts from their families. A Hindu should not have to leave his home and way of life to join the "Christian" way of life as regards diet and culture. Help new believers to maintain good relations with their family. Help them to constantly affirm to their family their support of all that is good in the Indian culture, and that following the Lord Jesus Christ does not nullify the Indian culture. Help them share with the family their coming to faith, step by step. In this way there is no sudden shock which could cause unnecessary pain and misunderstanding. It is not always a good idea to encourage converts to take on a "Christian" name, but to keep the name they were given.

# *Buddhists*

In the world today there are about 350,000,000 Buddhists, mainly in the countries of China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Bhutan, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tibet, and Mongolia.

There are many kinds of Buddhism with widely differing beliefs. They all, however, trace their roots back to the founder of Buddhism, Siddharta Gautama. Born about 560 B.C. in Nepal, to the north of India, he left his wife and child to roam seeking "enlightenment". After finding that fasting and harsh treatment of the body brought no help, he meditated one night. During that night he believed that he had achieved enlightenment through meditation. He became known as the "enlightened one" (which is the meaning of "Buddha"), and began to teach.

Siddharta believed that people - and all living things - are reborn thousands of times. As he looked at life, he considered that it was all full of suffering: animals, insects and human beings all suffer. One way of escaping from this cycle of birth, suffering and death, was to accumulate religious merit over thousands of lifetimes. As this was almost impossible because of people's desire for existence, he sought another way of escape. This was through meditation: to seek the realisation that the world and one's personal existence were just illusions. When one reached this realisation or "enlightenment" through meditation, one entered "nirvana" - one stopped "existing" as part of this world of suffering. Full liberation of the enlightened person came at the time of death when one entered nirvana completely and ceased to exist in this world. This was called "paranirvana".



Siddharta rejected all superstition and idolatry. He stressed the moral side of religion. Classical Buddhism is a way of intellectual and spiritual "illumination", not a way of forgiveness and salvation.

Buddhists maintain certain aspects of Hinduism:

- karma: one's actions in supposed previous lives influence one for good or evil now. The balance of merit (good deeds) or demerit (bad deeds) determine how a person will be reborn. A good person may be reborn as rich person or even a god, but a bad person may be reborn as a beggar or a hell-being.
- tolerance of other religions (but not as much as Hinduism).
- the idea that what is spiritual is what is real, and material things are like a dream (unreal and inferior).
- sin is slavery to the body, material things and worldly desires (not an offensive disobedience against a holy and personal God).
- the need of good works to win merits to free oneself from the slavery of the body and the interminable process of rebirth.
- a profound respect for life (including not killing people or animals).
- meditation as a method of gaining freedom from the flesh and this material world.
- a profound respect for older people and one's ancestors (they even pray to them).

However, Siddharta denied that man had a personal immortal soul. What was reborn was not the soul (as in Hinduism) but one's "skandas" or "life force". Personality was only an illusion. The only way to escape the cycle of rebirth, was to realize that personality was an illusion.

Siddharta explained four "Noble Truths":

1. Existence is suffering. To exist in this world means to suffer.
2. The origin of suffering is desire - the desire for independent personal existence, a personal attachment or love for people or things, and even the desire to stop existing. These desires imprison man in the cycle of rebirth and suffering. Desires can also lead to quarrels and striving which build up bad karma. The weight of karma, like the momentum of a heavy load, crashes into this world again expressing itself in a new body in rebirth.
3. Suffering is destroyed by eliminating desire. When a person desires nothing, and has no attachments to any person or thing, and then through meditation realizes that neither he or anything else has a soul, that person will cease to be reborn and will enter "nirvana" - the state of cessation of desire and freedom from the cycle of rebirth.
4. The way to the end of suffering (nirvana) is the Eightfold Path. Siddharta taught that people can achieve nirvana by following this path over many lifetimes. The eight parts of the path are set out below under the headings of wisdom, morality, and concentration.

**Wisdom:**

1. Right views: having an understanding of the basic principles of Buddhism - the impermanence, suffering and impersonality of everything.
2. Right intention: having pure motives.

**Morality:**

3. Right speech: speaking in a truthful, helpful and considerate manner.
4. Right action: obeying the five commandments of Buddhism:
  - a. Not killing any person, animal or insect
  - b. Not stealing
  - c. Not engaging in sexual immorality
  - d. Not lying
  - e. Not using alcohol or drugs.
5. Right livelihood: following a trade compatible with the above commands (for example by not being a butcher)

**Concentration:**

6. Right effort: making the effort to remove all evil from one's mind, and developing good qualities.
7. Right mindfulness: mind control.
8. Right concentration: a mystical state in which one realizes the emptiness of all things, and in which one develops psychic powers such as being able to assume any shape, or controlling natural laws according to one's own will.

Buddhism denies a personal, holy God who feels, loves, orders, proposes and punishes. Strict Buddhists do not pray as Christians do, in a personal relationship with God as Father. Their prayers are meditations: an intellectual process of adjusting their mind to what is pure spirit. At length, they attain the ability to think about nothing, and desire nothing, which they regard as happiness. When there are no desires, there are then no worries or pain.

Believing that sensual pleasure, social responsibilities and worries are obstacles to mental concentration, the first Buddhists followed Siddharta's example and become celibate monks and nuns. Monks are not allowed to work for a living or grow food: they must beg.

For those following the original (Theravada) Buddhism, salvation does not mean being rescued from sin, the devil, guilt, hell and death. Rather, it is an escape from the process of being reborn over and over again. They hope one day to enter "nirvana" - not heaven, but a state of non-existence. Some of those who realize that they are not capable of achieving nirvana hope to arrive in "sawan" - a type of heaven.

Most Buddhists see salvation as a slow process of freeing themselves from what is material. They achieve it through their own efforts, seeking what is spiritual through many methods. The most common method is deep meditation. They do not meditate on the Word of God, but try, in a mysterious sense, to stop existing. They try to empty their minds of every worry, feeling and purpose. The aim is to think of nothing. They remove from their mind all distraction, desire, affection, feeling, and all thought. They enter a trance. Sadly, demons may take advantage of the empty house to fill it. Cases of demonic possession are commonplace among Buddhists.

## **Buddhist Sects**

Buddhists have formed many sects with widely differing beliefs. Here are a few of the most common:

### **Theravada (also called Hinayana)**

For the first few centuries, anyone following Buddhism had to become a monk or a nun, leaving their home and family. The Theravada strain of Buddhism tries to follow Buddha's original teachings and only monks and nuns can fully participate in it. They believe that enlightenment comes through thousands of lifetimes following the Buddhist way. They believe that nirvana is attainable only by personal works - not by merit from anyone else.

Theravada Buddhism is practised mainly in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and Myanmar.

### **Mahayana**

Around the time of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, another school of Buddhism arose called Mahayana. The Mahayana version has made Buddhism more popular: it views Buddha as a saviour and has invented many other gods which they believe can help men on their way, and to whom they can pray. The Mahayana tradition believes that enlightenment can be achieved in one lifetime rather than thousands. Those achieving enlightenment can delay their entry into nirvana in order to help liberate other people. Those who did this were called *bodhisattvas*. This teaching is contrary to the doctrine of Siddharta who believed that salvation had to be achieved by one's own efforts. The Mahayana became very much more popular than the Theravada. It is practised in Japan and Korea, and also in China where it is mixed with Chinese religions.

### **Tibetan Buddhism**

Tibetan Buddhism is practised not only in Tibet, but in the surrounding lands of Mongolia, Bhutan, and by some Tibetan peoples of Southern Russia, Nepal, and Western China. Tibetan Buddhism arose between 700 and 1000 A.D. Like Theravada Buddhism, it teaches that man's basic problem is that he does not realize that the world is an illusion. Its way to escape from the illusion and achieve Buddhahood is through occult rituals and the use of magical words and diagrams. Its followers worship many gods. Some of its adherents are practically demon worshippers. Tibetan Buddhism derived many of its occult rituals from a movement called "tantrism" which also influenced Hinduism, especially in Nepal.

## **Zen Buddhism**

This movement developed in China and Japan. It has no special doctrines that its practitioners must believe. Rather it emphasizes techniques of concentrated meditation through which the devotees aim to achieve enlightenment. An important exercise is to meditate on riddles called koans which seem meaningless to those outside Buddhism.

Some Buddhists teach that one day an "exalted one" would come who would be a type of Buddha, but even more powerful. This "Exalted Buddha" would proclaim the truth. He would have more disciples than Buddha, and would be full of wisdom and goodness. He would come to restore mankind when the earth was full of evil, and when everyone had turned from the law. These prophecies appear in the "Mahavastu" and the "Lotus Sutra", which are Buddhist scriptures. This coming teacher is known as the "Maitreya" in India, as "Mi Lo-Fu" by Chinese, and "Miroku" in Japan, and many people are waiting for him. In Thailand and Cambodia, some missionaries have used these prophecies as a bridge for some Buddhists to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not to say that God inspired these prophecies. They may be inspired by ancient Nestorian Christian missionaries. They do, however, express hopes of a redeemer that can only be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.

## **Evangelizing Buddhists**

The following elements are important:

- Spiritual preparation through holy living and prayer (often with fasting) to bind the evil spirits and see breakthroughs. Repentance and Bible study keep us near to God. We put on the armour of God each day to overcome the subtle temptations to anger, depression and impurity (Eph. 6:10-18). In prayer, praise

God that our Lord Jesus won the victory over Satan and everything that would prevent people from receiving the Gospel (Col. 2:14,15). Pray for divine revelation so that Buddhists realize that their religion is false, and that they accept the truth about God and believe in the Lord Jesus (Eph. 1:17. 18). Because of the demonic element, those working among Buddhists must be careful to have repented from all sins, especially any previous occult practises (even those done in jest).

- A culturally sensitive lifestyle - including following local courtesies, kindness to animals, not talking to much or too loudly, respect for elders, handling Scriptures with care, reverential postures in prayer, a simple lifestyle, keeping emotions in check, etc.
- Learning the people's mother tongue. There will usually be a national language and the local language. You might be able to learn the national language before arriving. The local language is best learnt on the spot. (For help in this task, see the booklet *How to Learn Another Language* - Booklet 6 in this series, available from the Missionary Training Service - see page 2 for the address.) Knowing the heart language and Buddhist terminology will help you explain the Gospel accurately.
- Making friends, getting to know the people, their ways, ceremonies, and beliefs. As far as possible, adopt local ways, food and clothing. Try to think like the local people. Focus on one people group at a time and seek to begin a movement of the entire group towards the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Patient and persevering explanation of the truth of God to many people, but concentrate on whole families of those seeking the Truth. When they realize that **God is a Personal Being**, to whom they are morally accountable, they may turn from their idols and seek forgiveness of sins through the Lord Jesus Christ. Before they can appreciate the plan of salvation through the Lord Jesus, they must understand:

- \* that God is a loving, personal Being, Creator of all things, who is eternal, holy, and just (Buddhists will probably have none of these ideas about God: they may think that God does not exist, or believe in many gods, or think that the word refers to Buddha, his teachings and the body of monks).
- \* that men and women were made in His image to have a special relationship with Him
- \* that we have broken this relationship through our disobedience - sin is an act that offends a holy and loving God. (For Buddhists, sin affects nobody but the sinner - it has no connection with offending God - it is a bad act which accumulates more karma - good deeds bring merit (good karma) that is stored up like a treasure which will bring a better rebirth, and bad deeds bring demerit (bad karma) which will cause a worse rebirth. For some Buddhists their main idea of sin may be the killing of animals). We must pray that God brings true conviction of sin.
- \* that God's justice means a once for all eternal judgement on all men. The Lord Jesus often warned people of God's final judgement - many parables show that those who did not recognize Him or demonstrate their faith through obedience would be eternally condemned (Buddhists think that there is an endless round of deaths and rebirths of their impersonal life force).
- \* that love and compassion mean being involved in the needs of real people in the real world - like the "Good Samaritan" in Luke 10. (Buddhists may think of compassion as a mental attitude hoping to end others' suffering through meditation. They may think that God's love in giving Himself for us was a weakness.)
- \* that prayer is a spiritual communion between God our Father and His children (Buddhists may think of it as a



repetition of magic phrases that are difficult to understand).

- \* that the Lord Jesus Christ became a real person who really appeared in history (Buddhists might think that incarnation refers to the temporary apparition of a spirit).
- \* that salvation is the reconciliation between God and men and women through the Lord Jesus who died for us on the cross and who rose again from the dead. (Buddhists rely on their own efforts to achieve salvation.) His merit is transferred to those who believe in Him and follow Him.

We must always explain what our religious words mean. Otherwise Buddhists will completely misunderstand us.

- Use Bible stories to build up a true understanding of God and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Stories are usually more helpful than philosophical arguments to help Buddhists understand the truth.

For example:

- \* the creation,
- \* Adam's sin against God,
- \* the flood,
- \* the call of Abraham,
- \* the plagues,
- \* passover and escape from Egypt,
- \* receiving the law,
- \* Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Carmel.
- \* Your selection would also include some of the Lord Jesus's miracles, parables (many Buddhists love stories), His trial, death and resurrection.
- \* You might add other events such as: the Lord's birth, baptism, temptation, examples of His teaching, healing of the Gerasene demoniac, the parable of the prodigal son, the Lord's transfiguration, His ascension, the coming of

- the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the conversion and baptism of Saul.
- Concentrate on the positive benefits of the Gospel which many Buddhists will appreciate:
    - \* **forgiveness** of sins and freedom from the burdens of sin and guilt. He brings us into a relationship with himself that no karma can destroy - nothing can separate us from God's love. "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28).
    - \* **freedom** from the fear of demons and ancestral spirits.
    - \* **protection** from magic and evil spirits.
    - \* **healing** from sickness through prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (this has often brought significant breakthroughs). Always be willing to pray for the sick.
    - \* **hope and certainty** instead of fatalism and insecurity.
    - \* the only way to **avoid hell**.
    - \* in the new creation, animals will not harm each other (Isaiah 11:6-9).
    - \* strong and loving family relationships.
  - Use stories, music, drama, ethnic songs, and other forms familiar to the Buddhists of the region, to communicate the message.
  - Pray that new Christians will be filled with the Holy Spirit and with the love of God, be freed from all Satanic bondage in their minds, read God's Word with understanding, gather with other Christians to humbly share together, walk closely with God in repentance each day, be strong to resist temptations of dishonesty, impurity and idolatry, deny themselves, and witness boldly for the Lord.
  - If possible, include converts from Buddhism in evangelism. Help new converts to witness to their new-found faith in Christ. Have as little foreign involvement as possible.
  - Continue constantly with the twin tasks of witnessing and nurturing new believers. Never stop evangelism just because

there are converts: reach out through converts to their relatives and friends.

- Check people's level of understanding: as Buddhism is very different from Christianity, Buddhists find it difficult to understand the Gospel. When witnessing to them, ask them to tell you what they have understood. It may be that they have "heard" something quite different from what you intended.
- Remember that our message is the **Lord Jesus Christ**: not a religion. Do not lose track of the message by comparing religious practices and experiences in Christianity and Buddhism.

## Useful Books on Hindu and Buddhist Evangelism

### **Hindu Evangelism:**

- *Chapatis for Tea: Reaching your Hindu Neighbour: A Practical Guide*, by Margaret Wardell and Ram Gidoomal. 1994. Highland, Inter Publishing Service Ltd., 59 Woodbridge Road, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 4RF, United Kingdom.
- *Christian Witness to Hindus*, Lausanne Occasional Papers, No. 14, PO Box 1100, Wheaton, Illinois, 60187, USA.
- *Karma 'n' Chips: The New Age of Asian Spirituality*, by Ram Gidoomal and Mike Fearon. Wimbledon Publishing Company, 29 Hartfield Road, London SW19 3SG, United Kingdom. 1994
- *Sari 'n' Chips: Asian Culture and Western Culture*, by Ram Gidoomal with Mike Fearon. Monarch Publications, P.O. Box 163, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN3 ONZ, United Kingdom. 1993.
- *The Spirit of Hinduism*, by David Burnett, Monarch, Owl Lodge, Langton Road, Speldhurst Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN3 ONP, United Kingdom.

### **Buddhist Evangelism:**

- *International Journal of Frontier Missions* Vol. 10 No.3 July 1993. P.O. Box 27266, El Paso, Texas 79926, USA. This issue deals exclusively with evangelizing Buddhists.
- *The Path to Enlightenment: Introducing Buddhism*, by John R. Davis, Hodder and Stoughton, 338, Euston Road, London NW1 3BH, United Kingdom. A general introduction.
- *Poles Apart: Contextualizing the Gospel*, by John R. Davis, ATA Books, Kanok Bannasan (OMF Publishers), 1694/1 Prachanasongkhro Road, Huay Kwang, Bangkok 10400, Thailand. This deals with contextualizing the Gospel for Thai Buddhists.

- *Sharing Christ in the Tibetan Buddhist World*, by Marku Tsering, Second Edition, 1993, available from Interserve (agent for Tibet Press), PO Box 418, Upper Darby, PA 19082, USA.
- *Tearing Down Strongholds: Prayer for Buddhists*, by Elizabeth Wagner, Living Books for All, P.O. Box 98425 (TST), Kowloon, Hong Kong.
- *The Spirit of Buddhism: A Christian perspective on Buddhist thought*, by David Burnett. Monarch Publications, The Broadway, Crowborough, East Sussex, TN6 1HQ, United Kingdom, 1996.





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