

Review: Robin Thomson, *Engaging With Hindus: Understanding Their World, Sharing Good News*, The Good Book Company, 2014

Minimal Insights

The thesis of this book is relationship evangelism, catered for Hindus. The obvious problems is when the Christian has little time to share the gospel with a Hindu they come across, and the time investment needed before it can be raised.

There are some good insights into Hinduism and Hindu customs which will help in any witnessing scenario (obviously more in a longer-term one), however, the author's suggestions of visiting Hindu temples and praying with (not for) Hindus is spiritually dangerous.

Preface (pp. 7-8)

I) A Global Faith (pp. 11-18)

Hinduism has no founder and is the most varied and flexible religion in the world. Another name for it is *Sanatana Dharma* ("eternal religion").

'Hindu' was first used by the Persians to describe the peoples of the Indus River region; later Muslim invaders called the area Hindustan after the people of Hind or Sind.

Hindus hope to reach God through several lifetimes of effort.

II) What Do Hindus Think of Christians and Christianity? (pp. 19-26)

Hindus believe there is no single way; all religions are different leaves on the same tree and each is merely a different way to understand God.

Religious conversion is a great sin ("like changing your mother").

Asians equate Western culture with Christianity so they don't want it as it leads to immorality and family breakdown.

The gospel took root in India primarily among people of lower castes, and Hindus attributed this to their desire to escape poverty and social discrimination ("we would not like to join them").

III) Our Approach (p. 27-32)

The author advocates prayer with Hindus.

IV) Who Is a Hindu? (pp. 33-42)

Hindus value issues from family reputation making accomplishments and honour important, also avoiding wrongdoing, dishonour, and shame.

Extended family members care for each other from birth to grave.

Most homes have a shrine containing a small metal or marble image of a god or gods the family worships¹.

Women 'wake' the "god" early each day by lighting a lamp and singing mantras or chants. The most powerful is "Om". Then the gods have to be washed (in milk) and fed. The food offered to idols [devils] is called *prasad*.

Images are put to bed at six o'clock.

Hindu worship is *puja*.

Every Hindu home is a temple.

Evening and morning ceremonies are called *arti*.

Diwali is celebrated with lights, fireworks, sweets, presents, and feasting. It may extend to New Years where Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, is remembered.

The four Hindu stages of a man's life are:

1. Student (*bramacharya*).
2. Married householder (*gryhasta*).
3. Retirement (*vanaprastha*).
4. World renunciation (*sannyas*).

V) What Do Hindus Believe and Practise? (pp. 43-61)

God is the centre of life.

Suffering and justice is explained by *karma* and *sansara*.

The goal of life is to fulfil one's dharma ("duty") and attain union with the Absolute One, *Brahman*.

Brahman is the universe and vice versa, this is called *advaita* ("non-duality").

Vishnu and Siva are the supreme deities of worship, also the Mother Goddess (Devi).

Hindus protest there is only one Supreme Being, but they are allowed to choose their own deity for worship.

There is Indra god of the storm, Agni god of Fire, Surya god of the sun, Ganesh the elephant-headed son of Shiva and Parvati, and the monkey-god Hanuman.

Vishnu is said to have incarnated on the earth ten different times.

Moksha is the release from the reincarnation cycle, achieved via Knowledge (*jnana marg*), Devotion (*bhakti marg*), or Action (*karma marg*). Devotion is the most popular way as encouraged by Shiva in the Bhagavad Gita.

Due to all the confusion gurus are in high demand to provide a clear way.

Bhagwan Osho Rajneesh had 93 Rolls-Royces; he advised his followers to “kill the mind”.

Patanjali founded yoga c AD100 as physical and breathing exercises.

The Four Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Atharva) were written c1500-1000BC.

The Upanishads (c700-200BC), also called *Vedantas* (“End of the Vedas”) introduced the ideas of reincarnation and karma.

The Epics (c300BC-AD300) contain the Mahabharata (the longest poem in the world, also includes the Bhagavad Gita) and the Ramayana.

VI) Love (pp. 65-72)

VII) Listen and Learn (pp. 73-77)

Many Hindus fast on Mondays to Shiva.

The Life of Pi is a film channelling Hindu culture.

Hindus remove their shoes when entering a temple.

VII) Present Christ Positively (pp. 79-86)

One Hindu was surprised to hear that Jesus offers to take the full load of sin.

VIII) Pray (pp. 87-89)

IX) Preparing for Discussion (pp. 91-94)

XI) Understanding Hindu Questions (pp. 95-104)

XII) How Should a Church Engage With Hindus? (pp. 105-119)

Hindus partake in *satsang* (“truth gatherings”).

Jesus is *Isu* in Gujarati.

¹I.e., like the *lares* of the Ancient Rome.