MOUNT VERNON on MISSION

Diwali Prayer Guide

Diwali, the "Festival of Lights," is possibly the most popular festival in India and Nepal. Diwali is the Hindu New Year, a five-day festival that celebrates the triumph of good over evil. During Diwali in South Asia, people hang lights around the city and light candles as a sign of that triumph. People stay up late into the night, playing music and lighting fireworks. In the Hindu religion, Diwali celebrates the return of Rama, a Hindu god, after his 14-year exile (when he was greeted at night with a beautiful display of lights) and the victory of the god Krishna over a demon. Diwali is not only a Hindu festival, though, as Jains, Sikhs and some Buddhists celebrate it too.

Much like Christmas in the Western world, Diwali is an opportunity for South Asians to buy gifts and candy for their friends, family and neighbors. In the US, it is often celebrated on one day. South Asians may decorate their homes with strings of lights similar to Christmas decorations.

This year Diwali is celebrated November 8; it changes every year because the dates depend on the progression of the moon. Christians in South Asia may participate in some activities with their Hindu friends and neighbors as they celebrate Diwali and look for opportunities to share about how Jesus is the true Light of the World!

Jesus said in John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life."
This Diwali, pray that your Hindu neighbors and coworkers would be introduced to the Light of the World, Jesus.

Pray

- John 6:44 tells us that no one comes to the Father unless the Father draws them. Pray that the Spirit of God would come in power this Diwali, turning the hearts of Hindus away from their false gods and unto the Father who loves them.
- Even during the Festival of Lights, spiritual darkness permeates South Asians. Pray that the power of the enemy over the hearts, minds and souls of Hindus would be broken and banished, and that Christ would reveal Himself to them as the King of kings and Lord of Lords.
- For many Hindus, the meaning behind the customs and traditions of festival season has been diluted or even entirely forgotten. Pray that they would become disillusioned and discontent with empty ritualism and instead turn to the powerful and saving faith found in Christ Jesus.
- Many Hindus hesitate to follow Jesus because they fear losing the love and fellowship of their families. Pray that the family of God would welcome Hindu background believers with open arms, and that God would replace everything they give up for Him with His infinite blessings.
- Pray that believers may be bold in engaging Hindus in spiritual conversations looking for opportunities to share the gospel and how the One True God gives victory over the power of evil.

How you can connect with Hindus during this Diwali season:

- Ask if they celebrate Diwali and have them explain what it means.
- Compliment any light or festive decorations they may have.
- Compliment their attire, usually it's new, specially bought or stitched for Diwali.
- Ask why it's called festival of lights.
- Look for similarities in their customs with Christmas and share why we celebrate Jesus' birth.

Hindu Beliefs

• POLYTHEISM

Most of the expressions of Hinduism are polytheistic, though some will recognize the thousands of different gods as mere apparitions or avatars of a smaller number of gods. Three gods tend to enjoy a more elevated place in public awareness and in the literature of Hinduism: Brahma (creator), Vishnu (sustainer), and Shiva (destroyer).

• REINCARNATION

Each person's atman (roughly comparable to soul) is connected to a wheel of time called the wheel of saṃsāra. Their atman progresses around the wheel, going through multiple iterations of birth, life, death, and rebirth.

• KARMA

As a person lives each life, his or her religious and social duties are determined by the status of the family he or she was born into. When a person lives according to these expectations, he or she accumulates positive karma, which increases the chances of being reincarnated into a higher status in the next life.

Barriers that hinder Hindus from receiving the gospel

• While three primary gods appear in many branches of Hinduism (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva), most Hindus are polytheists who actively perform rituals for many gods.

• Because Hindus are often polytheists with a vast pantheon of gods, they can often be excited to accept Jesus alongside their other gods. It is difficult to clearly convey the exclusivity of Christ.

• Hindus do not believe Jesus died as a substitutionary atonement for sin or that He rose from the dead.

• Most Hindus are not familiar with the Bible and do not regard it as authoritative. They have their own holy books, including the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita.

• Hindus believe in reincarnation in a prolonged cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. While the deeds done in life are part of the determining factor as to how individuals are reincarnated, the idea of a single, final judgment upon death is a foreign idea to them.

• Hindus do not understand the Christian concept of moral sin against God. For them, the issue is karma, which is determined by one's conduct in life. If one accumulates good karma, he or she will progress to a higher status. If bad, he or she will be reincarnated in a lower status.

• The ultimate goal for the Hindu is to get off the cycle of reincarnations and become one with the Brahman. This is accomplished by following the teaching of a guru who will lead them on a path or discipline involving meditation, keeping an ethical code determined by his or her status, and hoping for an extra measure of grace from the gods who determine one's reincarnated state.

• Hinduism is increasingly associated with Indian nationalism. Therefore, it could be difficult for Hindus to consider following Christ because that would mean giving up both their religion and their national identity.

Bridges to share the gospel

• Hindus are often very friendly people, and once you have been welcomed by a Hindu family, you are often welcomed into a more extended Hindu community.

• Though it may likely take a long time, your Hindu friends will benefit from thinking about whether it is more likely that one God created everything or if it was the work of a million gods who don't seem to get along.

• Explain the biblical concept of sin as opposed to karma. Go further by explaining the idea of being given one life and then the judgment.

• Give your Hindu friends a New Testament in their own language and ask them to read about Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. Ask for their opinions on what it says.

Reference – Barriers and Bridges in MVBC Evangelism Resources

