

ENGAGING WITH HINDUS

The following material appeared in the South Asian Forum (a forum of the Evangelical Alliance) newsletter (<http://saf.eauk.org/SouthAsianForum/saf-newsletter.cfm>), in connection with Robin Thomson's new book and is reproduced here with permission...

Engaging with Hindus: understanding their world, sharing good news

Hindus are the world's third largest religious community, with increasing influence on every aspect of life.

But what is Hinduism? You may know Hindus well, but still find it difficult to explain what Hinduism is. That's because it is so diverse. Scholars debate whether 'Hinduism' has any meaning. Is it an artificial term, constructed by Europeans? Or is there an underlying unity?

It is more helpful to think of Hinduism as a **way of life**, held together through the strength of the family and the wider social structure of the community.

So how do we engage with Hindus? This new book by Robin Thomson tries first to **understand their world**, with chapters such as *Who is a Hindu? What do Hindus believe and practise?* and *What do Hindus think of Christians and Christianity?*

The second part suggests practical ways in which we can engage with Hindus to **'share good news'**, both as individuals and as churches. There are chapters on the basic approach, understanding Hindu questions and preparing for discussion.

The basic approach is summarised as follows:

"The best thing we can do is become friends – genuine, unjudging friends – with Hindus".

In practice this means:

- **Love:** not a strategy or a means to an end. Love is the end. It includes hospitality, justice, working together with Hindus on common concerns.
- **Listen and learn:** remember the diversity of Hindus' beliefs and their perceptions of Christianity. Take time to find out, rather than jump in with what you want to say. Don't hesitate to ask questions (to learn, not to find fault).
- **Present Christ positively:** focus on Jesus, not Christianity or church structures. Don't push or hurry. Don't argue or criticise.
- **Pray:** only God can lead us to truth, so we need to pray – not just for individuals but for their families too.



How does a local church engage with Hindus?

"A local group of Christ's followers should be a welcoming, loving community of warm relationships, worshipping and learning together, and engaging with the community around them as they love and serve them and celebrate the good news of Jesus. But how do we inspire our church to be like that? Many of us have a long way to go."

Some suggestions:

1. Inclusion and belonging

It is important for a church to reach out to include Hindus in their activities. The church needs to be a community that genuinely "loves its neighbour as itself".

2. Experiencing spiritual reality

Welcome them to take part in the church's spiritual activities. These enable people to experience values of love and welcome, service and equal treatment of all, or prayer, joyful devotion, praise to Jesus and hearing God speak. For Hindus this may be what first attracts them to Jesus or challenges their perception that all paths are the same.

3. Finding the right group

For many churches, providing this in the larger group of the congregation is too big a challenge. It is often helpful—and in many cases essential—for someone exploring the Christian faith to be part of a smaller group in which they can relate to others from similar backgrounds.

4. The importance of family and community

Ask friends and visitors to your church about their family and look for ways to reach out and welcome the whole family rather than just the individual. Don't expect them to change their culture, eat different food, or dress differently.

5. Understand that this is a process

So don't push or be in a hurry.

ENGAGING WITH HINDUS is written by Robin Thomson, published by The Good Book Company, paperback 96 pages and also available on Kindle.