TIMOTHY SHULTZ



DISCIPLE MAKING AMONG HINDUS

मार्ग

MAKING AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS GROW



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Disciple Making among Hindus: Making Authentic Relationships Grow

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CHAPTER 1

LEARNING CURVE

WE WILL BEGIN by looking at some ways of understanding the gospel in terms that are already meaningful to Hindus. Instead of giving them a new language, we use the spiritual terms with which they are already familiar. These terms function as a bridge.

MERCY AND POWER

Whenever we dare—and dare we must—to consider personally addressing the need of humankind to hear and believe the gospel, we must always begin and end our soul-searching with a humble recognition of the benevolent power and incomparable mercy of God. In Sanskrit terms, we should practice this *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) of contemplation intentionally and carefully, because a wholesome understanding of how God acts in powerful mercy and merciful power does not come easily or naturally to us. Instead, we tend to automatically assume that God acts according to the pattern of the world in which we live. In this world, powerful people often exercise their authority with an agenda that corrupts any semblance of mercy. Living in an environment that functions this way can distort our

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vision of God's merciful power and powerful mercy. God's power and mercy are an extension of his goodness, so he does not act like powerful people in the world.

God's *karuna* (mercy) and *shakti* (power) were put on display when his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, *Guruji Muktidatta Abhishikta* (the Savior and Anointed One), took *samadhi* (choosing to leave the body) on a cruel Roman cross. Three days later, Jesus returned to life in the same perfected body because his *atma* (spirit) was pure and did not take another form. Now, he is the Lord of *karma,* and he is merciful. His mercy is incomparable precisely because he is so powerful. Because he is mercifully powerful, he doesn't give us what we deserve—and because he is powerfully merciful, he gives us what we don't. This reveals a lot about the nature of God and draws us to trust him.

God is also very generous by nature, so he frequently exerts his power in order to show mercy to vast numbers of people all over the world. This means that we must base any recognition of and response to the need for humankind to hear the gospel on the fact that God is perfectly willing to finally and fully bring justice and mercy to bear in human affairs. *We* serve the mission of *God*, not the other way around.

Often, when the gospel message is clearly and appropriately articulated to Hindus, it comes as the consummation or explanation of the *experience* of that unprecedented power and mercy. All this while they may have wondered, "Why is God providing for us or healing us or delivering us when we approach him in Jesus' name?" Or, "Why am I drawn to approach Jesus, which is the last thing I ever thought I would do?" When the gospel is presented to them in terms they understand, they realize that Jesus himself is the good news, and his story is the message of God's power and mercy.

HINDU SOCIETY AND HINDU COMMUNITY

The global Hindu population comprises over one billion people. Despite this large number, there is no one "Hindu nation" (although

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Nepal was officially a Hindu state until 2007). There have been or are Christian or Muslim nations, but there is no country in the world where everybody is Hindu. Even India, which is largely Hindu, is nowhere near to being a Hindu country; before too long it will claim some 200 million Muslims and between 35 and 50 million Christians, not to mention 25 million Sikhs and significant numbers of Buddhists, Jains, and other religious minorities. Therefore, we need to adjust our view if we are to undertake any sort of analysis of the global Hindu population.

One way we can do this is by categorizing these large numbers of people as Hindu *society* and Hindu *community*. For our purposes here, we will define a Hindu society as a more permanent structure, and a Hindu community as something more temporary or transient.

By far the world's largest Hindu societies are in that ancient and romantic part of the world now referred to as South Asia. India, which has always been the civilizational center of South Asia, is in fact the birthplace of Hindu civilization. It is outside the scope of this book to study the beginnings of Hinduism, but if we were to consider the history of only the twentieth century, we would see how Hinduism exists in the entire region.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, most of the Indian Subcontinent was part of the British Empire. When the British Raj ended in 1947, the Partition of India resulted in the formation of a new country—split into two territories, one to the east and one to the west— called Pakistan. Accordingly, although the modern-day nation of Pakistan is overwhelmingly Muslim, it also has pockets of Hindu societies. East and West Pakistan were divided by the civil war of 1971, out of which was forged the nation of Bangladesh, and there are permanent Bengali Hindu societies in Bangladesh as well. Nepal is majority Hindu, and Sri Lanka has a longstanding Tamil Hindu society. Bhutan, the small landlocked country between India and China, also has a significant percentage of Hindus. Thus, all of these South Asian nations have been a part of the evolution of global Hindu society due to their proximity to India.

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Over time, millions of Hindu people have created their own permanent societies in the most unexpected places across the globe, including the Caribbean Islands; Suriname and Guyana on the northern coast of South America; Singapore and Malaysia; Indonesia and Fiji; the UK and the Netherlands; and Mauritius, East Africa, and South Africa. There will soon be three million Hindus living in the US and Canada alone. More recently, permanent Hindu societies are being formed in Australia and New Zealand as well. The technological revolution has guaranteed a steady flow of Indian IT workers to the West, and there is no end in sight to this unprecedented movement of people.

These global Hindu societies tend to drift from a living relationship with "Mother India," but there is still a respect and nostalgic memory of their Indian roots. Ease of travel to and within modern India has now made it possible for Hindu people from global Hindu societies to spend time there, often for the first time.

In addition to Hindu societies, Hindu *communities* also exist in other parts of the world. These are contexts in which the Hindu population is relatively new and has not had the time to settle down, or where the local political situation does not allow a Hindu *society* to form. A Hindu community usually retains living connections to India because they are not yet established in a Hindu society outside of India.

Two examples can be readily cited. In the European Union, a Hindu community is now beginning to form. No doubt as the people settle in various EU countries they will create Hindu societies, but they are still a relatively new population in the region. In contrast, hundreds of thousands of Hindu people have been working in the Middle East for decades and living within their own communities, but the nature of life in the Gulf does not permit them to form a permanent Hindu society. As the world continues to shrink, Hindu societies and communities will undoubtedly proliferate into every corner of the globe, wherever opportunity presents itself.

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In many contexts outside of India, Hindu society and community exist together. This happens because there is a longstanding pattern of migration from India into a society of Hindus that has already been established in another country. The process happens something like this: When people and families first leave South Asia and settle in a Hindu society somewhere in the world, such as in the UK or Australia, they remain culturally and emotionally connected to India. They have not yet fused the world of their birthplace with the local world in which they now live. If many of these people migrate at the same time, Hindu communities that are still connected to South Asia will quickly form within the local Hindu society, which is already fused into the new culture. Gradually, these communities of India-centric people become part of the local Hindu society. They will update the existing Hindu culture according to more current trends in South Asia for people who have never lived there and whose Hindu culture may seem a bit dated. They will also themselves integrate into the fusion culture that has emerged locally, updating their own views to fit in. However, no matter how acculturated they might become, the majority of these new immigrants remain *Hindu* at their core.

OPPORTUNITY

I once saw a commercial for a telecom company. The advertising was obviously targeted to grow market share within the globalized Indian community because the commercial showed an Indian woman in New York talking to family members in London and Mumbai on the same day for inexpensive rates. I smiled, knowing that the business world seems to understand what we Christians struggle to see: *opportunity*.

India is and will always be the center of Hindu society and community. What is changing is that the rest of the world is entering into a new era of relationship with India. This global relationship is largely based on the rise of India as a modern economic

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