

A Fragrance of Life and Death

by Timothy Paul

Saint Paul, the great apostle to the first-century Gentiles described his embattled mission on the Kingdom frontier as a fragrance—a fragrance of life and death. To some, the good news about the Jewish Messiah named Yeshua who had died but then had risen from the grave in glory and Lordship was infuriating or absurd. They would not enter the Kingdom that God had given to his Son Yeshua, so they were left outside of his reign—a fatal miscalculation. To others the gospel of the Kingdom was vital truth. It was the introduction to their Lord who brought them forgiveness, freedom and truth, culminating in eternal life.

It is the same today. Jesus Christ, the Hellenized Yeshua, is now the most controversial and compelling figure in the entire world. Experiencing his Lordship remains a life and death encounter. When Hindu people encounter the Lord Jesus, they often do so through the power of Anubhav, the experience of truth, which is self-certifying. Anubhav appears within one's life in much the same way as the Kingdom epic of Jesus did in the Gospels—by deliverance, healing, miraculous and loving provision, and the revelation of truth that rings true in daily life experience. When Hindu people encounter the Lord Jesus in this way, they often seem to respond in one of the following three ways. They may become fully alive in Christ. A full life happens when people are connected to the living and reigning Christ within. He lives through them, enabling them to reach their true potential in the Kingdom through Christ. Others seem to “touch” Jesus, but never really surrender to him; or they resist any further relationship with Christ.

Hindus become alive in Christ as they joyfully worship him. This is known as Bhakti, and it is God's call to worship that resounds in the Hindu heart. Bhakti is a powerful and passionate experience of Sharanam, or surrender. Bhaktas of Jesus gradually surrender their entire heart to him because as Jesus reveals himself to them in worship, He becomes to them both Satguru, or “true spiritual master,” and Muktinath, “the Lord of Salvation.” Or, as previously mentioned,

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Timothy Paul (pseudonym) has served as an evangelist within the global Gujarati Hindu community for 22 years. He and his wife Melanie have focused their ministry toward reproducing Christ Bhakta networks. They serve primarily in northern New Jersey, home to tens of thousands of Gujarati Hindu families.

they may reach out to Christ and seem to ‘touch’ him, but never become fully alive in him. They may love and respect him and be truly thankful for his grace in their lives, but they never escape a need to try and hold everything in their lives together in a syncretistic limbo. They may also experience Anubhav, but make no attempt to respond positively to Christ in Bhakti at all, perhaps capitulating to the various misconceptions that exist in the global Hindu community about Jesus. A ministry among Hindu families will experience all three responses, which the following examples illustrate.

The A. P. family is from Gujarat, and the story of their lives is a prototypical story of the global Gujarati experience. A. P. was born in India, but moved to Uganda as a young boy. When the Indian community was forced out of Uganda in 1973, many people went to England, but A. P.’s family went back to India where he met and married his wife. Soon after, they migrated to England, where God gave them two sons. They first experienced Jesus when two ladies prayed for their very ill son and he recovered. The family then moved again, this time to New Jersey where they owned and operated a small corner store. Life in the United States drew their son into a dangerous lifestyle, until he was given a Bible and discovered that Jesus could cleanse him and change him. He prayed to receive Christ, confessing his sin and turning to him as Lord. The son’s life was changing, so his parents, thrilled by these new developments, began to seek out Christ at a contextualized gathering of Hindus who follow Jesus (Satsang). They became Christ Bhaktas, or “devotees of Jesus.” This experience of transformation is what drew them. They started to become fully alive in Christ, and make their allegiance to Jesus very public. This public declaration of faith was about Jesus himself, and it was not connected to Western Christianity as a world view or cul-

ture. They remained cultural Hindus who devoted themselves to worshiping and learning about life from Jesus.

The B.P. family experienced Jesus very powerfully, but they never really became fully alive in Christ. B.P. had experienced a profound forgiveness from Jesus, and had seen his broken family deeply touched and restored. His wife’s large extended family lived close to their apartment, and over a period of about 18 months had all been deeply affected by the transformative power of Jesus within B. P.’s life and family. A neighbor, Mr. G. P.,



approached B. P. and asked him how his life had changed. G.P.’s wife wanted to bring her entire family to worship Jesus because her family was in trouble too. It seemed like many people were experiencing Anubhav and were being drawn to the Kingdom because of the transformation that happened to B. P. Yet, his life in Christ stalled, was stymied and eventually faded away because members of his caste eventually pressured him and convinced him to embrace Swaminarayan, a Krishna sect, as well as the Lord Jesus. B. P. had had a profound experience of Jesus, and influenced many other people positively toward Christ, but ultimately other concerns moved him completely away from Christ’s reign in his life. Also, no one whom he had influenced for Christ continued to have any interest at all. B. P. had been touched by Christ, as had many others through him, but none of them ever became fully alive in Christ.

H.M. had seen his father become a Christ Bhakta, or “devotee of Jesus” in his later years; his elder brother and younger sister had touched Christ but never become fully alive in him. Jesus had been powerfully, lovingly and patiently revealed to H.M. by a fellowship of believers from Hindu families, but he would not take a single step toward faith. In fact, he worked to discourage his family members from approaching Jesus. He is a very intelligent, highly educated person and doesn’t believe that people should follow any god in an exclusive manner. H.M. effectively blocked the Kingdom from any further entrance into his family.

What can we learn from these examples? We can adopt the Indian ideal of Seva, or noble selfless service done within human context but done for God. A ministry philosophy of Seva emphasizes loving relationships within and among Hindu families rather than evangelistic fervor. The “sevak” also values the Seva that Hindu people do for God, so we joyfully receive the benevolent acts of others into our life too. Along with this, a recovery of the ministry style of Jesus as revealed in the Gospel narrative will guide our way into a Hindu context. As much as we can, we should model his way of life; incarnating the life of God within daily life by praying for the needs of people and revealing to them the truth of the Kingdom. Also, when the opportunity presents itself, we should teach the gospel deeply, revealing God’s full plan for life in Christ. The gospel of Christ is not trivial. It is God’s plan for humanity. Finally, we should be able to grieve the lost opportunities, the strained relationships or the personal rejection we will feel as our friends push away from us because of Christ. Do not hold onto them, somehow being determined to convert them. Bless them in your private prayer, heal your heart with tears, and keep a cordial relationship with them. Grieving your losses will help you persevere.

There are more and more global opportunities for Hindu people to hear the gospel than ever before. It is difficult to incarnate Jesus among people sometimes, but not impossible. We may want to leave fine points of doctrinal dispute and controversy behind us as we seek to experience the clarifying power of Christ's Anubhav and Bhakti within our own lives and among Hindu families and communities. Christ may even choose to teach us to view life through the eyes of the families to whom we are trying to reveal Christ, and we may find that we receive as much from them as they do from us. Finally, the nature of our connected world means that ministry to Hindus anywhere can impact Hindu people everywhere. May it be so. **IJFM**

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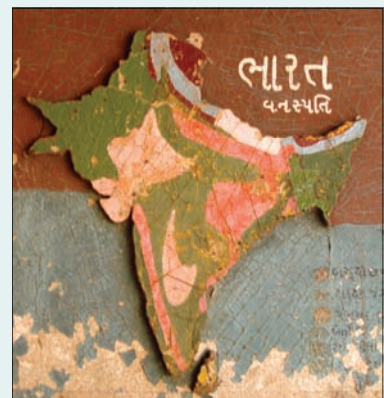
This conference is organized for church leaders, lay people, students, mission practitioners, agency leaders, campus workers and anyone who is now serving or has an interest in the Hindu world.

Workers with experience in India, with immigrants in the USA, and with Hindu students on college campuses will share from their studies and experiences.

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