

Building Bridges:

Ways to help welcome Hindu and Muslim background people to Christian community

Shashi Christian, 2018

Why?

Deuteronomy 10:19

Matthew 5:43-44

Matthew 25:40

Leviticus 19:34

Romans 13:8

Romans 13:10

Acts 10:34

Revelation 21:3

3 John 1:5

Luke 10:27

Hebrews 13:1

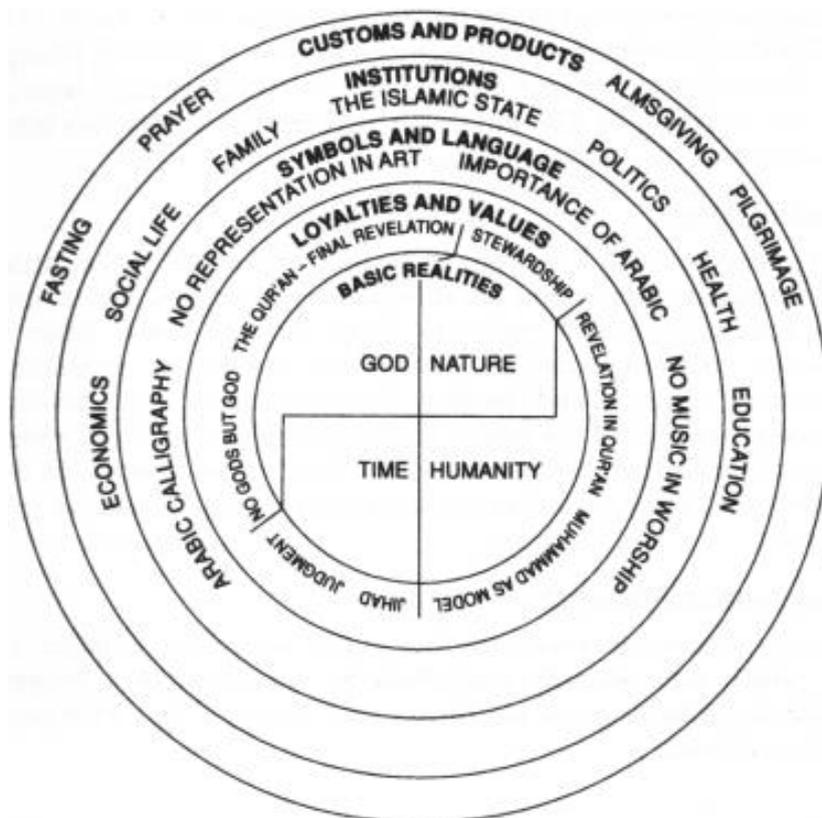
Colossians 3:11

Matthew 25:35

Romans 12:31

Who or What?

Islamic Worldview: Colin Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, pp. 33ff



Hindu worldview:

Hindu Cycle of Existence

1-A PERSON IS BORN and is expected to do their dharma:

“Dharma”

Your duty in life and the choices/actions that will earn Karma (good or bad).

(“Do your dharma and you get good karma!” or “Don’t, and you’ll get bad karma!”)

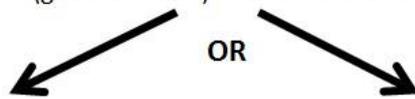


2-

“Karma”

All of the actions (good and bad) in this life that affect your next life.

OR

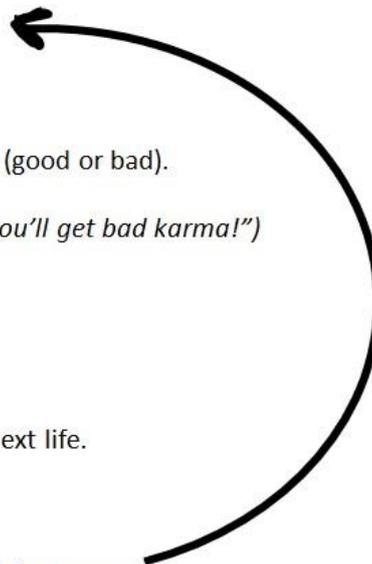


3a “Moksha” (Release from Reincarnation)

If you have enough good karma, you are released from samsara (no more suffering from living in this world!) Moksha then leads to the ultimate peace (*Shanti*).

3b “Samsara” (Reincarnation)

If you don’t have enough good karma you go back to #1 and try again! Being stuck in the cycle of death and rebirth is not seen as a good thing. Life is seen as full of suffering.



How?

Hospitality:

Explain:

Acts of kindness:

Relationships of trust:

Relating Meaningfully to a Hindu	Relating Meaningfully to a Muslim
<p>Greetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The traditional greeting for those who identify as Hindu is to press the palms of one’s hands together in front of the chest and say "Namaste", which means "I greet the god within you". This is accompanied with a nod of the head or a bow depending on the status of the person you are greeting. 	<p>Greetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greetings are generally formal for Muslims. The most common greeting among Muslims is “<i>As-Salamu-Alaykum</i>” (‘Peace be upon you’). Elders are greeted first out of respect.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is generally appropriate for men and women to shake hands; however, it is a good idea to wait for a woman to extend her hand first. Some Hindu men and women may not wish to touch a person of the opposite gender. • Avoid greeting someone with a hug or a kiss unless you know the person well. • Hindus expect people to greet the eldest or most senior person first. When greeting elders, some Hindus may reach down and touch the ground or their feet as a sign of respect. • Address someone with his or her title and last name until told that you may use their first name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-acquainted men may hug each other upon greeting. However, when greeting strangers, business associates or those of a very different status (i.e. an elder), one usually shakes hands and respectfully places the right hand over the heart afterwards. • Women may kiss each other on both cheeks if they know each other well. Strangers generally meet each other with a handshake. • In more traditional circumstances, men and women will share a verbal greeting but make no physical contact. Business introductions between men and women may involve a handshake if initiated by the women. Physical contact (e.g. hugs, handshakes and kisses) is only considered appropriate between men and women if they are family or close friends. • A Muslim may simply place their right hand over their heart and give a gentle nod in greeting if they perceive the other person is unaccustomed to being touched. • For informal greeting one could say “<i>Adab</i>” (‘Respect and politeness’) while lifting a hand to their forehead.
<p>Etiquette</p> <p>It is important to be aware of the diversity of traditions and practices regarding etiquette among Hindus. Given the varying social norms among regions and linguistic groups, each community has their own understanding of what constitutes respectful or normal behaviour. If unsure about how to be respectful, do not hesitate to ask your Hindu counterpart or at least observe the people around you for guidance.</p> <p>Basic Etiquette</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feet are thought to be the ‘dirtiest’ part of the body. The soles of one’s feet should never be pointed at another person. One should sit in a way that avoids this. • The top of the head is considered to be the most important part of the human body. To 	<p>Etiquette</p> <p>When initially meeting someone, it is necessary to ask about a person’s well-being and that of their family. Only move onto the matter at hand after these personal questions are asked. Forgetting to ask about a person's family signifies a lack of sensitivity and an opportunist mindset. However, it is best only to enquire about male family members. Conservative Muslim men may find it particularly dishonourable and disrespectful to enquire about their female family members, unless you know the family or person well.</p> <p>Basic Etiquette</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People tend to offer regular praise about others’ clothes, hair or personal items.

touch someone on the top of their head, especially a baby or child, is rude and insensitive.

- Objects are generally passed with one's right hand or both hands. The left hand is thought to be reserved for cleaning, and the left hand alone should never be used to pass an object.

Visiting

- Hindus are generally exceptionally hospitable and take great pride in this characteristic. Complementing the hospitality of your Hindu counterpart will be greatly appreciated.
- When visiting someone's home, strict punctuality is generally not observed. Arriving 15 to 30 minutes after the designated time is appropriate.
- Remove your shoes before entering someone's home. Shoes are also not allowed in religious places.
- While a gift for the host is not expected, it will be greatly appreciated. A small token gift, such as chocolates or a gift for the host's children, is adequate.
- Avoiding saying 'thank you' to the host at the end of a meal. The phrase is understood as a form of payment, and it is better to show gratitude through reciprocating, such as inviting your hosts to dinner.
- Hindus can sometimes be so generous that they accidentally embarrass their Kiwi guests or make them feel awkward. For example, there is often an expectation that the guest will accept what is offered. If you refuse something, it may be seen as a token protest made out of politeness. Thus, instead of accepting your refusal, a Hindu may insist that you receive what has been offered. This can lead to awkward situations in which a New Zealander can feel the offer is being forced upon them.

Eating

- There are various forms of eating etiquette relating to one's hands since using one's

- Wear clothes appropriate to specific occasions. Forgetting to do so is considered disrespectful.
- It is best to always dress modestly in a way that doesn't over-accentuate one's figure.
- Laughing loudly in public is considered rude.
- Stand to greet a person when they enter a room.
- It is considered rude to sit with one's legs outstretched.
- If a Muslim offers to pay for your food or shopping, do not immediately accept. They tend to make this offer out of politeness and it is expected that the other person insist on paying. Alternatively, if once you have refused their offer, they continue to ask to pay, you may politely accept.
- It is common for people to ask personal questions to ascertain a stranger's background and status. For example, an individual may be asked where they live or what their parents' occupations are.
- Generally, Muslims are not very punctual and are commonly tardy. However, there are exceptions to this. For example, military background families tend to be very punctual.

Visiting

- Hospitality is a strong aspect of Muslim culture. It is not uncommon to be invited to a Muslim's home without much prior acquaintance.
- If visiting a military family's house, arrival should be prompt. More generally, however, Muslims are not particularly strict with time. Arriving to an event substantially later than the start time is acceptable, though this depends upon the context of the event.
- With new acquaintances, it is not expected to offer to bring something for a meal. Hosts take pride in preparing everything themselves and may be taken aback by such a question.

hand to eat is a widespread practice among Hindus.

- Wash your hands before eating or serving food to a Hindu.
- If you are encouraged to eat with your hands, avoid using your left hand. The left hand is considered 'unclean' since it is the hand people generally use for washing themselves.
- A Hindu may fill your plate for you or they may expect you to serve yourself.
- Some Hindus may have dietary restrictions based on their religious faith with Hinduism. For example, for many Hindus, cows have sacred religious connotations and the consumption of beef will be avoided.
- It is common for many Hindus to abstain from drinking alcohol for reasons such as religion or their upbringing. Only serve or provide alcohol if you are certain that your Hindu counterpart drinks it.

Gift Giving

- Yellow, green and red are considered to be lucky colours and are often used to wrap gifts.
- A man offering a gift to a woman should say it is from both himself and his wife/mother/sister or some other female relative. This is to avoid the gift-giving act being interpreted as flirtatious.
- Flower etiquette within Hinduism can be complex, with different flowers having different connotations. Importantly, avoid giving frangipanis or white flowers. These are typically reserved for funerals and times of mourning.
- Some gifts will be inappropriate depending on one's religious affiliation. For example, gifts made from leather may offend someone who identifies as Hindu.

- It is polite to bring a small gift, such as chocolate, sweets or flowers to express gratitude for the invitation.
- Offer to remove your shoes at the entrance.
- It is important to praise the host's home. If it is a simple home, acknowledge their décor and contents.
- When visiting a home with children, make an effort to engage with them no matter how young they are. Not doing so displays disinterest in your host and is considered arrogant behaviour.
- At social events hosted by conservative families, men and women will socialise and eat separately. Children will generally play with each other; however, some may choose to stay with their mothers. Food is generally served in a common area as a buffet. Men and women will serve themselves separately – it is at the discretion of the host to dictate whether the men or women may serve themselves first. Elders will always be offered food first within their respective genders.
- In more intimate or smaller settings, the entire family will sit together with guests in the living room.
- Avoid discussing politics when initially invited into a household, unless initiated by the host.

Eating

- It's polite to graciously accept tea and refreshments served in social situations.
- People wait for elders to sit down and begin before eating.
- Muslims will often use their hands to eat rather than cutlery. However, it is considered bad etiquette to pass, serve or spoon food to one's mouth with the left hand. It should be used to hold the plate or assist the right hand in serving food.
- Muslims often offer their guests additional helpings of food. It is acceptable to refuse; however, expect the host to insist. It can be

	<p>easier and also more polite to graciously accept.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If offered food you don't like or perhaps a 'hookah', you may place your hand on your heart and bow your head to decline the offer. • If eating out, one person usually pays for everyone's meals. Paying individually on an outing is usually only done amongst close friends. Don't offer to pay someone back for a meal. Instead, reciprocate by purchasing a gift or paying next time. <p><i>Gifts giving</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gifts should be offered and received with two hands or the right hand alone. • If it is a Muslim household, do not bring alcohol, and ensure that all edible products are prepared to halal standards. • In more conservative settings, it is not appropriate for men to offer gifts to women. Therefore, they must convey that the gift is being offered on behalf of a female family member. For example, "my wife gave me this for you".
<p>Communication</p> <p><i>Verbal</i></p> <p>The communication style of Hindus tends to be polite. When speaking with those they are not close with, they may tell their counterparts what they want to hear to avoid conflict. Their communication style can come across as ambiguous and indirect. Hindus may discuss conversation topics dialectically, and opinions or viewpoints are often subject to negotiation rather than arguing that their perspective is definitively correct.</p> <p>'No' is understood to be harsh and open disagreement is likely to be interpreted as hostile or aggressive. Hindus tend to give evasive refusals and disagreement is expressed indirectly. Hindus may use phrases such as "maybe" or "I'll do my best" as a way to express 'no'. Moreover, 'yes' has various connotations that differ from the word's usage</p>	<p>Communication</p> <p><i>Verbal</i></p> <p>The Muslim communication style is generally indirect as they often seek to avoid confrontation or offence. Conversations are usually long and drawn out; people tend to speak in a roundabout way that reaches their point more delicately. This speech style is to be taken with patience, as there might be long pauses. The best way of reaching an understanding is to ask open-ended questions that allow them to reach their answer in their own time and give agreeable and accepting responses that do not directly disrupt the speaker's discussion. Avoid cross-questioning them as this might bring about an ambiguous response.</p> <p><i>Language Style:</i> Muslims generally have exaggerated speaking expressions. They often come across as strikingly earnest and sincere as</p>

in New Zealand culture. For example, a Hindu may say 'yes' to indicate that they are listening to the speaker, or as a way to avoid conflict but will indicate disagreement or refusal through their body language. When communicating with a Hindu, it is advisable to pay attention to what is not said, as the absence of agreement may, in fact, be an expression of disagreement. Direct communication is reserved for relationships with a high level of trust or for crucial situations.

Refusals: Regarding questions and requests that require a yes or no answer, an Hindu's preoccupation with saving face and being polite can automatically require them to answer 'yes' – whether they mean this or not. For a Hindu, a flat 'no' may indicate that you wish to end the relationship and can lead to the loss of face for the other person. One way of navigating around the intricacies of face is to check for clarification several times using open-ended questions.

Hierarchy: Norms of communication are in part dictated by the observed social hierarchy that underpins Hindu society. Respect and deference to authority figures in and outside the home is prevalent in various ways, such as being sensitive about how one refuses requests as well as avoiding disclosure of contrary opinions.

Language: Majority Hindus come from Indian subcontinent. Indian subcontinent has a vast linguistic diversity, with 26 major languages and hundreds of regional dialects. Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Nepali and Hindustani (mixture of Hindi & Urdu) are the most widely spoken languages of Indian subcontinent and English is considered to be a subsidiary official language, often reserved for national, political and commercial communication. It is important to be considerate of the linguistic diversity and history of Indian subcontinent since many Hindus understand their language, particularly their regional dialects, as a source of identity.

they tend to strongly assert what they mean through large statements.

Refusals: Giving a direct refusal is considered rude and may indicate that the person wishes to end a relationship. It is best to go about saying 'no' to requests in an indirect way, such as "I'll see what I can do". Often Muslims reply with "Inshallah" – meaning 'if God wills it' (i.e. perhaps, but if it doesn't happen, it is the fate of God).

Criticism: Criticism should always be approached sensitively. It can quite easily be mistaken for mild personal offence unless presented in an indirect way. Therefore, always offer any suggestion of improvement with praise at the same time. Direct comments should only be spoken to those you have a longstanding relationship with and in private.

Group Discussion: Muslims tend to prefer conversing in groups. One-on-one communication between two individuals may be approached with trepidation as the directness of it is usually reserved for those that they have a familiar relationship with.

Non-Verbal

Personal Space: Muslims are generally not concerned with personal space and will stand closer to their subjects than in Western culture. However, more distance is kept between those of opposite genders.

Physical Contact: It is more common for people to be physical with those of the same gender. Men may put their arms on each other's shoulders and quite comfortably touch each other. However, public displays of affection are considered to be very inappropriate. There is generally hardly any physical contact made between opposite genders in public.

Hands: There is a separation between the functions of the hands in Muslim culture. This custom is tied to Islamic principles that prescribe the left hand should be used for removal of dirt and for cleaning. It should not be used for functions such as waving, eating or

Non-Verbal

Physical Contact: Hindus prefer not to touch people when it can be avoided, but many touch someone's arm or hand when speaking so long as they are the same gender. Body contact between the genders is kept minimal among most of Hindu people. For example, hugging and kissing is not customary among Hindus.

Personal Space: Hindus generally respect each other's personal space and an arm's length of distance is common during interactions. This is usually a similar proximity to what New Zealanders are familiar with. They may stand farther away from those who are of the opposite gender.

Eye Contact: In general, sustained eye contact is not common and many Hindus will keep eye contact minimal or avert their eyes from the opposite gender. Some women may avoid eye contact altogether. Direct eye contact is generally appropriate so long as you divert your gaze every so often.

Whistling or Winking: Both these actions are considered sexually suggestive among Hindus.

Head Tilt: People may tilt their head to the side or shake it to both sides to indicate agreement and understanding.

Nodding: Hindus will often nod to acknowledge what is said. However, this does not always mean they understand or agree. It is more a gesture done out of politeness.

Gestures: There are many noteworthy gestures to bear in mind. Pointing the index finger towards someone is associated with accusation. A politer way to beckon or refer to someone is with your whole palm facing down. Another strong gesture is the placing of your hands on your hips, which suggests that you are angry or ready to argue.

Ears: Holding or pulling on one's own ears is a gesture that indicates sincerity or repentance.

Head: The head is considered to be the holiest part of one's body. Touching someone on the

offering items. Therefore, one should gesture, touch people or offer items using the right hand or both hands together.

Eye Contact: It is rude to look someone directly in the eye while talking to them. It signifies arrogance and, also can be perceived as seeking validation. Lowering one's gaze is respectful and shows that one is not yearning for attention.

Gestures: Pounding one's fist into a hand or stroking one's beard/moustache signals revenge. Tapping your hand on your head (as if frustrated) can be interpreted as meaning you feel disdain for the person you are talking to. The thumbs-up symbol and the symbol for 'Okay' (with the forefinger and the top of the thumb meeting to form a circle, with the other fingers stretched out) can both be considered lewd or rude; however, many Muslims have become familiar with their New Zealand meanings.

Ears: Holding onto one's ear can signal remorse or repentance when feeling guilty.

Beckoning: Beckoning should be performed with the palm of the hand facing the ground and using all fingers. To use a single forefinger is considered extremely rude.

Pointing: Pointing and gesturing at objects and people should use the whole hand or palm. A single finger is considered rude.

Winking: Winking has sexual connotations and should be avoided altogether.

Smiling: Muslims tend to have quite a serious front and may not smile at strangers often. Don't expect to receive many smiles until you have gotten to know them.

<p>top of the head is considerably insensitive and offensive.</p> <p><i>Feet:</i> Feet are thought to be the dirtiest part of the body, and displaying the soles of one's feet or touching people with one's feet is considered rude.</p>	
<p>Do's and Do Not's</p> <p>Do's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat Hindu elders with visible respect. For example, address them first and defer to their opinion. • Hindus tend to be generous in their compliments to others and reluctant to criticise. It is best to reciprocate this in order to give and avoid losing face for both yourself and your Hindu counterpart. • Many Hindus admire intellect and evidence of a higher education. Speaking with eloquence will be well received. • Show an interest in your Hindu counterpart's family and occupation. These matters are often welcomed topics of conversation. • Hindus appreciate humility and respect. Understanding the nature of hierarchy within a relationship is important as it helps your Hindu counterpart know what is appropriate in interactions. • Be sensitive and understanding as Hindus warm to those who exhibit sympathy where it is appropriate. • If you do offend a Hindu, take efforts to make amends. Neglecting to do so could lead to a loss of face and perhaps jeopardise your relationship with them. <p>Do not's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid crude humour or swearing. Hindus may take offence to this manner of speech quite easily. • Do not directly criticise Hinduism. This may not be well received and criticism from a non-Hindu may be interpreted as an insult. • Avoid negative comments or criticisms about a person's ability, appearance or 	<p>Do's and Do Not's</p> <p>Do's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect a Muslim to behave rather formally and seriously when meeting them for the first time. They will generally relax and become more open as you get to know them. • Make an effort to ask about a Muslim's well-being and their family when you see them. • Pay attention to smaller acts of hospitality and courtesy by consistently offering to put others before yourself. It is expected that you are considerate of other's needs without them having to articulate what those are. • Expect people to express mild discontent with the country's state of affairs. Politics, religion, terrorism and conflict are discussed quite frequently among Muslims. However, consider that these are personal topics and people may not want to have that conversation with you unless you are a close friend. • If presenting criticism, offer praise followed by suggestions on improvement that can apply to everyone present. Do not single out the person who made a mistake. Direct statements should only be spoken in private with those you know well. <p>Do not's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never insult a Muslim in public. This is highly disrespectful and considered a direct act of dishonour. • Do not criticise a person's preferred political party, their friends or their choices. All these denigrations can cause deep offence.

attributes. Such comments are often taken to heart and will give your Hindu counterpart the impression that you are insensitive.

- Don't assume that the work ethic of Hindus is more laid-back than that of New Zealanders. On the contrary, Hindus are very hard working and a significant portion of them is highly educated.
- Inquiring into what caste (in the sense of *varna*) someone belongs to is arguably inappropriate, but asking about one's occupation is generally welcomed.

- In more conservative settings, do not denounce or critique religion; only provide praise and appreciation. More broadly, a Westerner's interest in religion can be viewed with suspicion. Therefore, avoid being the one to bring up the topic.
- Avoid rushing or hurrying a Muslim.
- When expressed in English, sarcasm can risk being misunderstood and causing offence.

Shashi Christian

Point Person - Hindu Ministries
Personal Director - SIM NZ



12 B Picton Street, Howick 2014
PO Box 38588, Howick, 2145
AUCKLAND New Zealand

+64 9 538 0696
+64 211 541 827
shashi.christian@sim.org
nz.personnel@sim.org

SIM 125

FOR THE LOVE
OF CHRIST COMPELS US
2018