

# Beyond Contextualization Ceremonialism: Ritual as a Pathway for Relationship

by *Elizabeth L. Walker*

*Editor's Note: This paper was originally presented at a gathering of the Rethinking Forum sponsored by Marg Network in Dallas on July 22–24, 2022.*

Ceremonies and rituals within another religious culture are often met with confusion, skepticism, or reluctance by cross-cultural workers. Many followers of Jesus spend years arduously learning language and new methods of gospel communication yet can neglect to learn the powerful symbolic communication that takes place through ritual and ceremony. My experiences of friendship with Hindu people over the past thirteen years would have been much shallower without mutual participation in ritual. I have learned that ritual, ceremony, tradition, and formality are some of the primary ways that my friends show their closeness to me—and I show my closeness to them.

I moved to India in the summer of 2009, one month after graduating college, just short of my twenty-second birthday. Before this move halfway across the world, I had exactly one South Asian friend. Arriving in India, I loved being immersed in another culture, learning and observing its norms, traditions, and ways of life. As an outsider, who grew up primarily in White American culture, almost everything about the way my new Indian friends lived their lives was different than mine.

Over time, I began to notice many rituals and routines. My Hindu friends had routines when waking in the morning, prescribed ways of leaving the home, prescribed ways of returning home, and traditions around mealtimes and worship. It seemed as if one day of my friends' lives included more ritual and tradition than an entire month of mine. Since this first arrival in India, my Hindu friends and I have walked through some of life's most sacred and special occasions together. We have each gotten married, had children, moved, gotten new jobs, and bought houses. These important moments in life have often been celebrated and commemorated through ritual and ceremony. Participating in the formality of these rituals has deepened my friendships immensely and brought unique opportunities to authentically share my faith in Jesus.

In this paper I want to address this ceremonial aspect of Hindu society—why it is important, how it is seen in the lives of Hindus, and how followers of Jesus may appropriately participate in it. I humbly admit that I write not as an academic, but as a friend of Hindus sharing my own lived ethnographic experiences.

---

*Elizabeth L. Walker has lived in close relationship in Hindu communities for thirteen years: six in India, seven in America. She and her husband enjoy mentoring and training other followers of Jesus how to respectfully and lovingly live in relationship with Hindu families.*

### Why is Ceremonialism Important?

When I use the term “ceremonialism,”<sup>1</sup> I am referring to the affinity my Hindu friends have for ritual, ceremony, tradition, and formality in their lives. While the daily life of most Hindus includes many rituals and traditions, the ceremonial nature of Hindu society is seen most clearly through the lens of family life, during what are known as “life cycle events.” Life cycle events are the iconic, significant moments that mark the passage of time through a person’s life, such as birth, coming-of-age ceremonies, marriage, and death.

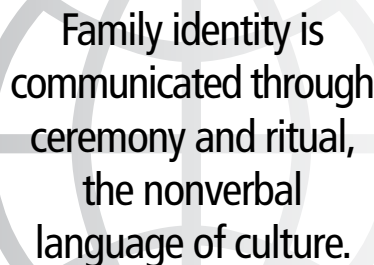
Ceremonialism in a culture is important for many reasons. First, ceremonializing life events creates meaning and highlights what is important to a group of people. To determine what life events are most significant within a culture, look first to its ceremonies. In every culture, people gather together, cook special food, wear special clothing, and give gifts for those events in life that they hold most sacred. Ceremonialism allows a culture to create meaning for its own participants as well as create a broader sense of identity for the community.

Second, ceremonializing life events can make an event feel “more real.”<sup>2</sup> While life events can occur without ceremonies, certain aspects of familiar rituals signify to our hearts and minds that an event is truly happening. Furthermore, when the rituals and traditions we associate with major life events are missing, it can feel as if the event never took place. The COVID-19 pandemic brought this experience to each of our lives. Holidays spent alone instead of with family, graduates who never walked to receive their diploma, and couples who married without friends and family present, all struggled to believe time had passed and life changes had occurred. On a mental and emotional level, ceremony brings reality to the life experiences taking place.

Third, ceremonializing life events communicates without words. In Indian contexts, each religious community, each caste, and even each family has its own way of performing certain rituals, and these rituals require the participation of specific family members in specific ways. A family demonstrates its cultural identity, religious beliefs, important relationships, and values through the way they conduct their rituals and ceremonies. These elements of family identity are communicated nonverbally, without the need for words, through the language of ceremony. Ritual then becomes the nonverbal language of culture.

Lastly, ceremonializing life events allows the community to participate in the life of the family. This point is especially salient in Hindu society. Attendance at important life cycle events communicates closeness in relationship and mutual

acceptance. In my relationships with Hindu friends, there is a seemingly clear unspoken rule that “if we are friends, we show up at each other’s events.” By attending and participating in ceremonies in prescribed ways, guests uphold cultural expectations and “bless” the family (quite literally the term my Hindu friends use). The blessing that is desired in these contexts is presence and well wishes, the former communicated by attendance and the latter communicated by participating in appropriate formalities such as bringing gifts, greeting family members, and touching the head (or sprinkling rice and/or flower petals upon the head) of the person(s) being celebrated at the event.



Family identity is communicated through ceremony and ritual, the nonverbal language of culture.

### What Does Ceremonialism Look Like?

As mentioned previously, ceremonialism in Hindu culture is most clearly seen through the life cycle of a Hindu family. Hindu tradition and ancient texts dictate sixteen *samskaras*, which are considered rites of passage in a Hindu person’s life. It is the duty of parents to conduct these rituals for their children. These ceremonies are both times of celebration and times of prayer for blessing upon a child or family.

Of the sixteen required *samskaras*, the first fourteen occur from conception through adolescence. The first three *samskaras* occur before birth (during the mother’s pregnancy), the next four occur in the first year of life, and the next three during childhood. Many of these infant and childhood ceremonies commemorate important “firsts” for the child—e.g., first outing, first bite of solid food, first haircut, and first time writing the alphabet. Four more rituals typically take place during adolescence, signifying the growth of knowledge, physical maturity, and spiritual awareness. Lastly, the final two *samskaras* are marriage rites and funeral rites.

Beyond the traditional sixteen *samskaras*, Hindu families often bring an element of ceremonialism to modern life. When a Hindu family moves into a new home, it is very common for the family to host a *griha pravesh*, a ceremony commemorating the family’s move and to pray for God’s blessings upon them in their new residence. Many families will also take part in specific rituals when making a large purchase (such as buying a car) or opening a new business, and first birthday parties have become one of the largest celebrations for many contemporary Hindu families.

How each ritual is performed and celebrated varies widely by community: (1) by region or language affiliation (e.g., Bengalis, Gujaratis, Tamils, etc.), and (2) by *jati*, i.e., the extended family clan. While all sixteen *samskaras* are honored

and recognized in Hindu families across India and the Indian diaspora abroad, different communities and families will consider some rituals more significant than others. Where the ritual is performed also varies by community and family as does the number of guests invited. Some rituals are celebrated at home or at a temple privately, and others are celebrated at a large rented venue with many guests present. For some rituals, the family may perform the prescribed traditions themselves, while for other rituals, the family may hire a priest to conduct the rites. Lastly, the specific name of each *samskara* varies by language group.

Describing how two different language communities may choose to celebrate a representative ceremony, the *anna prashana* (commonly referred to as the “rice ceremony,” a ritual commemorating a child’s first bite of solid food, which is typically boiled rice), can illustrate how significant these differences in ceremony can be. A Bengali family in Kolkata may rent a venue and have a large celebration for their child’s *mukhe bhaat* (the most common name for the rice ceremony in West Bengal), inviting many family members and friends, catering a meal for the guests, and hiring a priest to perform the rites. A Telugu family living in America may recognize their child’s first bite of food at home with close relatives and a small *pooja* (i.e., worship time to a specific god or goddess) performed by the parents. Though all Hindu communities will have some general notion of the rites that need to be performed for each *samskara*, answering the questions of where, when, how, and by whom will vary dramatically between communities, *jatis*, and families.

## To avoid participating in ceremonial activities is to greatly hinder our ability to build strong relationships with Hindu people.

My personal observation is that the ceremonies most likely to be celebrated on a large scale (and which guests outside of the family are invited to attend) are: the baby shower (often called *godh bharai*); a baby’s naming ceremony (often called *naamkaran*, or in some communities it is known as a “cradle ceremony”); and marriage rites (*shaadi* is the word most commonly used for “wedding”). Hindu weddings actually include many specific ceremonies such as *mehndi* (the henna party), *haldi* (the turmeric party), *sangeet* (the music and dances performed by the bride, groom, and family members), *baarat* (the groom’s arrival procession), *pheras* (the marriage vows in

which the bride and groom walk in circles around a sacred fire), and many others. Additionally, for some communities, a baby’s *anna prashana* (as described above), a child’s first haircut ceremony (often called *mundan*), or an adolescent’s “thread ceremony” (sometimes called an “investiture ceremony” or *upanayana*, a ritual in which forward-caste males receive a sacred thread which they wear throughout their lifetimes) are also occasions for larger celebrations. In my years of knowing Hindus, it seems that each region or language block has a special affinity for one or another of the *samskaras*.

It is important to note that rituals and ceremonies in Hindu culture are often holistic sensory experiences; they involve all five senses—sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch. There are bright colors, many decorations, and possibly images of gods or goddesses. There are unique smells from incense, flowers, and the food being prepared. There is always special food that is given to the family members and guests. There are many sounds, either music, religious chanting, or the loud chatter of family members in attendance. Lastly, there are physical ways the guests are involved in the ceremony, most likely by “blessing” the child or couple that is the focus of the ritual. As mentioned previously, this blessing is typically done by sprinkling rice and/or flower petals on the honoree’s head.

### *How Can Followers of Jesus Respond to Ceremonialism?*

As incarnational witnesses living in relationship with Hindu communities, there are two appropriate ways that followers of Jesus can respond to ceremonialism in our Hindu friends’ lives:

- We can attend and participate in our Hindu friends’ ceremonies.
- We can invite our Hindu friends to participate in our lives through ceremony.

A third option is that we avoid all rituals and ceremonies we are invited to attend by our Hindu friends. Although this is a common view among faithful Christians largely due to a fear of syncretism, I do not believe this is necessary or best. There may be a handful of specific instances where it is prudent to avoid certain invitations. But, generally speaking, to avoid participating in ceremonial activities with our Hindu friends is to greatly hinder our ability to build strong relationships with Hindu people. Hindering our ability to build relationships hinders our ability to demonstrate and articulate the good news of Jesus with Hindus. My life experience echoes what I first heard from Timothy Shultz, that Hindus receive truth through “webs of meaningful relationships.”<sup>3</sup> In the Hindu worldview, attending and participating in our friends’ life event rituals is a crucial step in developing a meaningful relationship of trust.

## Attendance and Participation in Our Hindu Friends' Ceremonies

As friendships between Hindus and Christians develop, there will inevitably come a time when a Hindu friend invites a Christian friend to attend a function (this is the generic term many Hindus use for special life event rituals) or pooja (this term can be used either specifically for a worship ceremony to a specific deity or generally to describe any ritual that has some religious significance). This invitation communicates relational closeness and acceptance from the Hindu friend, yet it often invokes fear in the heart of the Christian friend. We wonder,

**What will happen at this event? Will I be the only non-Hindu there? What will they ask me to do? Does it mean I am worshipping their god/goddess if I go? Will I compromise my witness by being there? Is there demonic activity involved?**

It is understandable to feel fear or uncertainty when we are asked to attend an event we have never witnessed before, from a culture other than our own, and led by friends with different religious beliefs. Years of Bible study and conversations with Hindus have led me to believe that attendance and measured degrees of participation can easily co-exist with my faith in Jesus and my witness for him among my Hindu friends.

In discussing this topic with many followers of Jesus who are friends of Hindus, I believe most of our concerns regarding attendance at Hindu ceremonies can be summarized in three main questions:

- Will I worship another god by attending?
- Will I give the appearance of worshipping another god by attending?
- What will happen at this event, and what will I be asked to participate in?

Regarding the first question, my personal, prayerful study of Scripture has led me to the conclusion that worship is an act of the heart, the bestowing of my praise, adoration, love, and obedience to a specific deity. I knowingly and mindfully worship the triune God—that is, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There can be a fear in attending ceremonies that we will “accidentally” worship another god; however, I humbly suggest that these fears are founded in an understanding of worship as a set of actions rather than a posture of the heart. If worship truly occurs on a heart level, I am confident I will give my praise, adoration, love, and obedience to none other than Jesus no matter what is going on around me. Worship is an act of the will, and mere attendance alone does not mean that I am worshipping another god.

If I believe I am not worshipping another god by attendance, then the next question to address is, “Will my attendance give the appearance to others that I am worshipping this other deity?” The best people to answer this question are actually the other Hin-

dus in attendance. Over the years, when attending ceremonial events, I have asked many of my Hindu friends, “What does it mean to you that I am here?” Invariably, the answer is always, “It means that you are my friend.” I know many other followers of Jesus who are friends of Hindus who ask this same question. Their friends answer the same way. In total, I could count dozens and dozens of answers that attendance means friendship. I have never once heard of a Hindu answering this question by saying, “It means you are worshipping this deity.”

Through these personal conversations with Hindus, I am convinced that attendance at Hindu functions and poojas does not mean I am worshipping another deity nor does it confuse my friends' understanding of my faith in Jesus. If I bring up the subject of devotion and worship at a ceremony, my friends say things like, “Yes, yes, Elizabeth, we know that you follow Jesus.” If I can be confident in what is communicated through attendance, the next question that arises is, “What will happen at this event, and what will I be asked to participate in?” I believe answers to questions of participation require a more nuanced and Spirit-led approach.

**This invitation to attend a Hindu function communicates relational closeness, yet we wonder, “Does it mean I am worshipping their god or goddess if I go?”**

I would like to briefly “peek behind the curtain,” and share what most likely happens at these types of events as well as how I and others I know typically handle issues of participation. While all ceremonies and rituals are different, and the context of each event and family is unique, some generic themes can be noted. Upon entering the home or venue, you will be asked to remove your shoes. Many guests will be dressed in traditional ethnic attire (especially, women and children). In my experience, men and women tend to congregate separately, although gender separation is not as rigid as in other cultures. You will notice many guests or family members laughing and talking. You may hear music being played or chanting. The person who is the focus of the event (often a child) will be dressed in special clothing.

For the ritual aspect of the ceremony, family members may perform a pooja that most likely involves a brass oil lamp (known as *diya*), incense (known as *agarbaati*), camphor tablets that are burned (known as *aarti*), fruit, flowers, and one or more idols or pictures of gods and/or goddesses. Either a family member or a hired priest will perform the pooja or rituals. Normally, this part of the ceremony involves the immediate

family members (parents and child) while other guests observe what is happening. The person performing the rituals may bring a plate with burning aarti around to guests and you will notice guests wave their hands over the fire and then touch their hair, eyes, or heart. The priest or family members may put a colored powder mark (known as a *tikka*) on the foreheads of those in attendance. The priest or family members may also distribute food (usually some form of sweets or fruit) from the worship plate to guests, called *prasad*.

All of these gestures are signs of hospitality from the family to you and are the family's way of blessing you as their guest. Acceptance or refusal of these gestures is an admittedly complex topic. There are spiritual elements to the aarti, *tikka*, and *prasad*; Hindu families vary widely on what they believe spiritually, what these elements mean to them, and why they offer them to you. You may accept these gestures, if you desire, or you may politely decline these gestures, if you desire, by pressing your two hands together (palms together, as in a praying or *namaste* greeting position), smiling, and saying "no thank you." I know followers of Jesus, whom I respect greatly, that both accept and decline these aspects of the ceremony. Personally, my response to each varies by the setting, occasion, family, and the Holy Spirit's leading in the moment.

There may also be a time during the ceremony when each guest blesses the honoree of the event by sprinkling rice and/or flower petals on his/her head (as mentioned previously). I would encourage any follower of Jesus to participate in this part of the ceremony. Another aspect of blessing that you may see is children touch the feet of elders, including you, and the appropriate response in these situations is to touch the head of the child with your right hand. Both of these formalities are the most tangible ways that you as a guest show your well-wishes, love, and respect for the family. For most modern Hindu families, these formalities have little to no "spiritual" significance but are meaningful rituals that communicate love and blessing. Lastly, these events always end with a meal.

One of your Hindu hosts' deepest concerns at any event is that you are comfortable. They will not knowingly push you to do things that make you uncomfortable, although they may unknowingly ask you to participate in ways you would rather avoid. You are always free to respectfully decline involvement, to sit toward the back of the group as an observer rather than a participant, or to ask your friends to guide you in appropriate participation. You can tell your Hindu friends, "You know that I am a follower of Jesus, and I have promised to

worship only him. Can you tell me what I should or should not do as his devotee?" You can heed the words of your Hindu friends while submitting most strongly to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

I would also like to note that these are my experiences as an outsider living in friendships with Hindu people. These are the levels of meaning and freedom that I have experienced. I recognize that the experiences of Hindu people who begin to follow Jesus may be different within their own context. Some families will accept a family member's devotion to Jesus and how they desire to participate in rituals as a follower of Jesus. Other families may pressure the family member to participate in ways in which he/she feels uncomfortable.

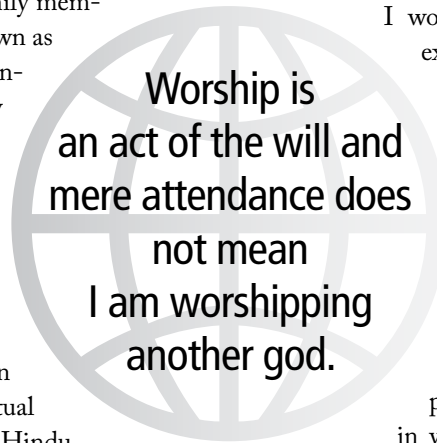
I have walked alongside Hindu friends believing in Jesus who have experienced both responses. The people most able to speak to appropriate levels of participation in Hindu ceremonies as insiders (as Hindus or members of the family) are followers of Jesus who are Hindus, not myself.

### Inviting Our Friends to Participate in Our Lives Through Ceremony

In addition to participating in our Hindu friends' lives through ritual, followers of Jesus must look for ways that we can share our lives with our Hindu friends through ceremony as well. My husband and I have lived in Hindu communities through our engagement, marriage, and the births of our children, and through these experiences we learned that we must create ceremony where it does not naturally exist to adequately and meaningfully share our lives with our Hindu friends. As we share our lives, we have the opportunity to share our faith, and, for us, our relationships and our witness for Jesus have grown stronger the more we have incorporated ceremony. A few stories will illustrate how sharing our lives through ceremony has happened for our family. Please know these stories are descriptive of a principle, not prescriptive in nature. Incorporating ceremony into your life will look different for each follower of Jesus who is a friend of Hindus.

#### *Engagement*

My husband and I met and became engaged while living in India. We are both Americans, and he proposed to me in the typical "American" way of getting down on one knee, asking me to marry him, and giving me an engagement ring. Shortly afterward, I began calling my Indian friends to tell them the exciting news. To my surprise, my friends were overall mostly offended by my announcement! The common response was, "Why didn't you call me?" (which I understood to mean,



“Why didn’t you invite me?”). I tried to explain that my fiancé had surprised me, that I did not know I was getting engaged, and that there was no way I could have invited them. These assurances did little to convince my friends of my innocence.

After a few of these conversations, I began to realize that my friends thought there had been a formal engagement ceremony, and I had not invited them. It dawned on me that, for my Hindu friends, an engagement is a formal public ceremony between two families. In an effort to share this part of my life with my Hindu friends, my fiancé (now husband) and I set about planning a Hindu-style engagement ceremony in which my friends could participate.

With the help of my closest Hindu friends, we spent weeks preparing for the event. We ordered special invitations and delivered them personally to guests. We bought new clothes and jewelry and hired decorators, caterers, and photographers. It was indeed a massive project.

We had over one hundred friends and neighbors join us for this engagement ceremony. It was a very special time for me to celebrate with my community and for them to celebrate with me. Multiple friends traveled hundreds of miles by bus or plane to be there. Many of my coworkers, friends, and neighbors came to share in the occasion, and we had guests ages one year old to eighty years old in attendance. As all good Indian parties do, our evening ended with dancing and a photo shoot. I was married a few months later and moved to another city. This event was a very meaningful opportunity for me to say goodbye to my friends. How different this engagement ceremony was from my American-style engagement! In one way, my friends could not participate; in the other, the whole community participated and was able to bless us.

**Without discussing it,  
these baby showers were traditional in  
Hindu customs and traditions but did  
not include the worship  
of any Hindu god or goddess.**

### *Baby Showers*

A few years later, my husband and I moved back from India to America. We lived in an apartment community full of many Hindu families. After living in the community for a few years, we became pregnant and were expecting our first child. Our friends were so happy! Our Hindu neighbors quickly began asking me when my baby shower would be. At first, I was

unsure how to respond because I had no baby shower planned. I explained that in my culture the couple does not host their own baby shower but that friends host the event for them. Eventually, my friends approached my husband and said:

Elizabeth said her friends host the baby shower. We are her friends. We will throw her a baby shower. We don’t know how to do it your way [meaning, according to American culture], so we are going to do it our way.

These friends, along with the help of my husband, hosted a surprise baby shower for me. The party included dressing me up in jewelry, each lady putting bangles on my wrist (because “babies love the sound of bangles”), my husband and each friend blessing me by putting a mixture of rice and flower petals on my head, my husband and friends feeding me special food that had been prepared for this occasion, and taking many pictures.

A few months later, we had another group of friends from our apartment community ask to host a baby shower for us, again, using their own cultural traditions. This baby shower included similar activities: dressing me up in a sari and jewelry, my husband and friends feeding me special food, my husband and friends blessing me by placing rice on my head, and a baby-themed photo shoot. All of the friends who hosted these baby showers for me are Hindus, and they also know that I am devoted to Jesus. Without even discussing it together, each of these baby showers appeared traditional in terms of Hindu customs and traditions but did not include the worship of any Hindu god or goddess. My friends desired to bless me with their customs while also honoring my spiritual beliefs. It is truly possible for both of us to live in friendship, participating respectfully in each other’s worldview.

### *First Food Ceremony*

My last story comes after the birth of our first child, a baby boy. My husband and I were still living in the apartment community, and as people would meet our son, they would ask us when his rituals and ceremonies would be. I would often sheepishly reply, “We don’t really have many ceremonies for a baby in our culture.” As this conversation happened repeatedly, I began to sense that our neighbors were getting offended that we had yet to invite them to some type of ceremony or event for our son. I could perceive that they wanted to bless our family and the way they knew how to do that was through ceremony. So, as previously, to fill this relational gap and share our lives with our friends, we went about planning a Hindu-style ceremony for our son.

Since we were living in America and our friends deeply desired to see our cultural traditions, we ultimately planned a ceremony that combined both an American-style baby dedication as one would see at a church and the anna prashana ceremony mentioned previously. We chose this ceremony because it typically

occurs around six months of age, which was the age of our son at the time. Over fifty families from our apartment community joined us for this special day, and it was truly a memory we will never forget!

Our event began with the American-style baby dedication. My father, who is an ordained minister, led the American component in which we dedicated our son to God and promised to raise him according to the teachings of Jesus. Next, my husband told the crowd, “We are followers of Jesus. We would like to worship him on this special day. Please join us if you would like.” Then, we sang Hindu-style worship songs about Jesus called *Yeshu bhajans*.<sup>4</sup>

## Although our ceremony centered on worship to Jesus, many friends told us this ceremony was *pakka* (perfect, accurate, and well-done).

After singing, we proceeded to the Hindu rituals of the *anna prashana*. First, my husband and I poured special rice from our hands while we made vows committing our son to God. Then came the highlight of our celebration—our son was fed his first bite of solid food (boiled rice with milk) by his maternal uncle while both sets of grandparents showered him with rose petals. The crowd cheered! Next, each of our family members ceremonially fed our son and blessed him by sprinkling rice and flower petals on his head.

We then played a traditional Indian game that is said to reflect what type of person a child will become in life. Many special items are placed in front of a baby (such as a book, calculator, paintbrush, pen, money, etc.), and whichever item the child crawls forward and grabs first represents his/her future career. Our son grabbed the money first, which thrilled the crowd! Our afternoon ended with guests coming up one by one to bless our son and everyone enjoying a meal together.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Many of my thoughts on this subject have been shaped by Pranam Collaborative Learning Services. I am grateful for the opportunity to lecture with them and learn from them. I highly recommend their programs to all who are friends of Hindus. More information can be found at <https://pranamcolearning.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> I first read about this idea through an article from Dr. Michael Barnes’ book that is part of the Pranam program. Michael H. Barnes, *In the Presence of Mystery: An Introduction to the Story of Human Religiousness* (Twenty-third Publications: Waterford, CT, 2003), 203.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Shultz, *Disciple Making Among Hindus: Making Authentic Relationships Grow* (William Carey Library: Denver, 2016), 58.

<sup>4</sup> Aradhna Music is a great resource for *Yeshu bhajans*. My family personally uses these songs in our worship with Hindu friends, both by playing the songs from a phone or computer and by learning and singing them ourselves. Songs can be accessed at <https://yeshusatsang-toronto.bandcamp.com/track/aradhana> or at <https://www.youtube.com/@aradhnmusic>.

### References

Barnes, Michael. *In the Presence of Mystery: An Introduction to the Story of Human Religiousness*. Bayard, 2003.

Shultz, Timothy. *Disciple Making Among Hindus: Making Authentic Relationships Grow*. William Carey Library, 2016.

The immediate response to this ceremony for our son was incredibly positive. Although our ceremony centered on worship to Jesus, many friends told us that we did this ceremony *pakka* (meaning “perfect, accurate, and well-done”). Some even told us we did the ceremony more traditionally and fully than they had performed it for their own children. There was a feeling of excitement, and our friends felt honored that we chose to incorporate their traditions into our special event for our son. I have a distinct memory of looking around the room and seeing smiles and so much joy on every face.

The impact of this ceremony has also been long-lasting. Some friends desired to learn more about Jesus and to join us in worshipping him after this event. One friend has shown videos of the ceremony and the worship time to hundreds of relatives across the US and India. Another friend told us that he felt peace as he rewatched videos of the worship time during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most importantly, relationships with friends in our community were deepened as our friends participated in the life of our family and blessed us in ways that were meaningful to both them and us. And as so often happens in Hindu community, as relationships deepen, so do opportunities to demonstrate and articulate the good news of Jesus.

### Conclusion

All those who walk in the way of Jesus try to build relationships, and many who seek to live incarnational lives build relationships cross-culturally. In the Hindu world, part of building relationships will always be ceremony. Learning to embrace the role and importance of ceremony in friendships with Hindu people opens the door for deeper relationships and presents truly authentic opportunities for followers of Jesus to best communicate their devotion. **IJFM**



So we can better serve you, please give us feedback in this short IJFM Survey.

Online, click here for the [IJFM Survey](#).