

## **Identity and Rituals of South Asian Communities in Africa: A Missiological Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

There is a sizable Indian population throughout sub-Saharan Africa. A majority of the Indian population are practicing Hindus. For Hindus, ritual is a significant part of their faith tradition, often the most important. In Africa, where they are a minority, Indians often cling to these rituals to maintain their identity as both Indian and Hindu. To share Christ among Indians in Africa, a robust understanding of ritual is required. While many Africans have thought about ritual from their cultural backgrounds, Seventh-day Adventist Africans have yet to do as much reflection on the role of ritual and faith. Adventists in Africa must rethink their understanding of rituals from a biblical perspective to better relate to their Hindu neighbors and potentially understand God in new ways. Combining this with long-term, meaningful relationships with the Indians in their communities may lead to greater understanding between each other and a deeper understanding of who God is.

**Keywords:** Hindu; Ritual; Seventh-day Adventist; Africa

### **Introduction**

People of South Asian descent who identify as Hindu make up a sizable minority in a number of East African and Southern African nations. While other regions of Africa have less South Asian representation, they are nonetheless impacted by South Asian culture, especially through the widespread popularity of Indian movies coming from the Bollywood movie industry.

This article is focused on South Asians who identify as Hindu and live in Africa. More particularly the article covers issues of

South Asian identity as it relates to rituals and practices of faith and its implications for Adventist mission in Africa.

### Minority Identity Issues

When people find themselves living as a minority in a place, they tend to hold onto certain traditions and practices very tightly. Being a minority can create a sense of fear, and therefore the limited identifiers that the minority groups can control become “endangered” and thus must be maintained at all costs. South Asians in Africa are in just such a situation, whereby they are the minority and thus cling to certain identifiers very tightly.<sup>1</sup>

### How Identity is Formed

Christian Smith has done a lot of work in the area of human personhood and has established convincingly that personhood is emergent. In other words, people are constantly growing and changing while at the same time clinging to earlier developed foundations.<sup>2</sup> The half-Ghanaian and half-English philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah has also done much work on identity. He establishes that identity is a slippery concept that can be very difficult to define and yet most people can attest to the fact that they claim various identities as both individuals and as members of particular groups.<sup>3</sup> But amidst this emergent reality and slipperiness, humans also tend to live in worlds of habits that have been cultivated over time. These can range from

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<sup>1</sup> Nirmal Devi Gopal, Sultan Khan, and Shanta Balgobind Singh, “Indian and its Diaspora: Making Sense of Hindu Identity in South Africa,” *Diaspora Studies* 7, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Christian Smith, *What is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity* (New York: Liveright, 2018). See also the older publication Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds, *Identities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

the mundane habits associated with everyday life to the more complex relational habits of family and friendship networks.<sup>4</sup>

Many of these habits are influenced by other humans. Usually the strongest influences come from family members or those whom a person shares the most time with each day including friends or work colleagues. People observe one another and participate in life together in repeated manners that become normalized and unreflected upon realities of daily living, which then formulate the foundation of people's identities. Think of your life on a daily basis. How many of the activities you are involved in require careful critical thinking in order to be performed? Almost none of your daily life actually requires critical thinking. In fact, many cognitive scientists estimate that around 95% of our daily life is habitual behaviors that we do not reflect on.<sup>5</sup>

God is attempting to form identities, notice the plural here, that reflect His image in life giving ways. Therefore, it is not only society that is creating the "stuff" that our identities are made of but also the Spirit of God, often mediated through His Word which then impacts how our identity is formed. God typically works with the material "stuff" of this world which is rooted in His creation, and also the abstract consciousness that each human has the capacity to reason with. God does not desire all humanity to look and act in exactly the same manner, but He does desire that in diversity they root their identities in Him. Scripture tells us that God is Trinity, which portrays a perfect diversity in the Godhead itself, a diversity unified in purpose

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<sup>4</sup> James K. A. Smith refers to "thin" and "thick" habits, thin representing the more mundane habits of life while thick represents the more significant role shaping habits of a person's life. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 82.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 81. Smith is referencing the numerous cognitive studies that have affirmed this data.

and will.<sup>6</sup> This can then be reflected in multiple identities here on earth that are still rooted in the Trinitarian God.<sup>7</sup>

Seventh-day Adventists have an understanding that there is a cosmic conflict taking place around us and through us between God and Satan over His character of love. Therefore, human identities are often being formed in ways that contradict God by following evil temptations. This is true of individuals but it can also be true of societal trends and group identity formation. There are examples of this in Scripture through individuals such as King Saul or Judas and also in group identities such as in Sodom and Gomorrah to use an extreme example.

The reality that humanity is emerging within a cosmic conflict creates a situation in which people, throughout the world, find themselves forming and adding to their identities or changing and altering their identities from multiple points of pressure. These pressure points include, a person's genetic makeup, family and close relationships, as well as from the trends of society around us through media and other public spaces, as well as the power of God through His Spirit. As a result, any one person has an ongoing struggle of forming their identity while also forming normalized habits within these various pressures.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Cross-Tensions of Minority Identities**

South Asians in Africa find themselves as a small minority amongst the much larger majorities around them that identify in

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<sup>6</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> For more on this see Andrew Tompkins, "Constructing a Theology of Relational Life Through the Themes of Creation, Incarnation, and Re-Creation as an Alternative to Current Categories of Religions," (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Henning Wrogemann has provided a very good discussion of the cross-pressures that go into the formation of identity especially as it relates to group identities interfacing with individual identities, see *A Theology of Interreligious Relations* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 227-244.

ways that are very different.<sup>9</sup> For many South Asians they trace their heritage to a history of indentured labor and servanthood for the British colonial machine in Africa.<sup>10</sup> They came to Africa and occupied positions of marginality in the wider society. In countries, such as South Africa, they often found themselves in positions that were viewed as inferior by whites during apartheid but also found themselves on the margins of black Africa as well, because they were seen as different in beliefs and practices and also in physical appearance.<sup>11</sup>

The relationship between the average black African and the average South Asian in Africa has often been minimal and lacked depth.<sup>12</sup> While they often attend schools together, meet each other shopping and in other public places, their family lives are lived wholly apart from each other.<sup>13</sup> Rarely has intermarriage taken place and thus the ties that normally would bind people together in kinship are missing.<sup>14</sup> As a result the identity of South Asians in Africa is an interesting conundrum.

To add to this, most of the South Asians in Africa, with the exception of some business focused families who came from India in the last 50 years, have been in Africa for several generations and have limited ties to family or institutions in India. While they retain

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the struggles of South Asians as a minority in Africa see Diesel, "Hinduism in KwaZulu-Natal."

<sup>10</sup> Though dated still one of the best references on this history is Robert G. Gregory, *India and East Africa: A History of Race Relations with the British Empire 1890-1939* (New York: Clarendon, 1971). See also Judith M. Brown, *Global South Asians: Introducing the Modern Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 35-36, 37, 46-48.

<sup>11</sup> Periodically laws have even been enacted in various African countries which limited South Asians from owning certain types of property for example. See Brown, *Global South Asians*, 46.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, *Global South Asians*, 46.

<sup>13</sup> Pascale Herzig, *South Asians in Kenya: Gender, Generation and Changing Identities in Diaspora* (Münster, Germany: LIT, 2006), 111.

<sup>14</sup> Brown states the following concerning South Asian communities in Africa, "They also continued their tradition of marrying only within their own communities and they had little social contact with black Africans." *Global South Asians*, 46. For an excellent study on intermarriage in Kenya, that includes empirical data, see Herzig, *South Asians in Kenya*, 145-160.

a clear Indian identity, much of their daily life is radically removed from anything done or experienced in India.<sup>15</sup> They are born and raised in Africa and thus in many ways identify with the life of Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, etc.<sup>16</sup> Even their food has become a fusion of Indian tastes and spices, passed on from one generation to the next, mixed with items more typically found and eaten in East and Southern Africa; the “rolex” chapati wrap with egg and other ingredients, so popular in Uganda, being a prime example of such fusion.

Daily life in the home, however, has often remained staunchly tied to Indian traditions passed on from generation to the next. This includes the keeping of Hindu holidays with all the rituals, special food, and worship that go along with them. It has meant a retaining of Indian deities along with images and pictures of these deities for worship. These rituals are crucial for the South Asian population, especially Hindus in maintaining a clear separate identity in Africa. While the languages of India where they came from, such as Hindi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Telugu, and Tamil have remained identity markers, for the most part they are not used by the younger generations.

The loss of language, however, is a profound identity marker that draws the South Asians closer to their African neighbors than probably any other element. By sharing a common trade language and education tongue, the South Asians are inevitably influenced to be more like their African neighbors than they are different in many ways.<sup>17</sup> This is a bridge between African and South Asian people in Africa that creates tremendous possibilities for meaningful communication.<sup>18</sup>

All of the above, along with moments in African history, have helped shaped South Asian identities in East and Southern Africa.

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<sup>15</sup> Diesel, *KwaZulu-Natal*, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, *Global South Asians*. There are serious tensions between black Africans and South Asians, often propped up by stereotypes going both ways. For more on the stereotypes see Herzig, *South Asians in Kenya*, 126-131.

<sup>17</sup> Diesel, “Hinduism in KwaZulu-Natal,” 34.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the knowledge and use of Indian languages among South Asians in Africa see Herzig, *South Asians in Kenya*, 131-135. It appears that retention rates are better in Kenya than in South Africa.

There have been times of profound acceptance of South Asians in Africa and times of profound hate and violence towards South Asians in Africa.<sup>19</sup> Through all these cross-tensions many South Asians have remained strong in their self-identities as Indians, have been able to grow and maintain successful business operations, and contributed to the overall flow of life in East and Southern Africa. Because South Asians are a minority, they are more likely to hold onto some elements of their identity that ties them to India more strongly than majority groups hold onto certain identity markers. As a result, South Asians, while mixing freely with Africans in many ways, have made conscious decisions to marry primarily within their South Asian communities and retain a number of rituals related to their faith as key markers in their identity to keep them Indian and give them meaning and pride as a minority in Africa.

## **Rituals and Practices as Key Identity Formers for South Asians**

### *Rituals among Hindus in India*

There are hundreds of studies that have clearly demonstrated the importance of rituals and practices related to faith for Indians in India. Without going into the details here, it is safe to assume that for a majority of Indians who identify as Hindu, their ritual life is considered the most important aspect of their faith journey. While many Hindus share this common characteristic, the actual practice of rituals varies greatly throughout the subcontinent of India. It is best not to assume a full understanding of Hindu ritual practices until you interact directly with Hindus and learn from them in their given contexts what rituals they are performing and why.

While much of the Western world has put tremendous emphasis on sacred texts and viewed them as the ultimate expressions of faith, even projecting this on the rest of the world through religious studies and world religion textbooks, much of the world actually does not utilize or understand sacred texts as essential to their spirituality.

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<sup>19</sup> The most blatant example of hate took place in Uganda when Idi Amin forced out the Asian population in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Brown, *Global South Asians*, 47.

For many Hindus, the primary focus of their faith is concerned with doing rituals regularly and in a prescribed manner that should be followed carefully. They may go much or even all of their life having little or no interaction with “sacred” texts. While some may read shorter texts such as the Bhagavad Gita for inspiration and enlightenment, rarely will they venture beyond this to read other texts. Instead their faith is primarily built on rituals practiced in the home, at local temples, in trips to pilgrimage sites, and in other shrines or sacred places.

Home worship<sup>20</sup> is often practiced on a regular basis by many Hindus. Often it is the mother of the home who maintains the family shrine which is either located in a separate space or room in the home or in the kitchen if the family is not wealthy enough to afford to build a separate space. This often includes small images of a deity the family is devoted to along with small statues as well. Many families will have multiple deities they keep in the shrine, though most have a specific one that their family is devoted to and pass on from generation to generation. The worship of these deities often includes lighting incense, pouring out water before the deities, placing flowers and sweets or sugar before the deity, chanting quiet mantras to the deity and stating personal petitions when needed. At the end of the worship, usually the mother will dip her thumb in a small container of saffron powder and then place her thumb on her forehead between her eyes. This is the end of the worship ceremony.

Many people also visit local temples regularly, though there is no set time required. The temple worship includes many of the same elements as the home worship. Temples in India are often built for one deity and maybe their consort, whereas many temples built in the diaspora, due to space constraints, have multiple deities in them. The temple will often have the additional element of a priest who will say mantras on behalf of the worshipper. Many give gifts to the deity such as flowers and sweets and sometimes more elaborate gifts such as special clothing and gold or other valuable items. These

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<sup>20</sup> The term *puja* is a Sanskrit term used throughout India for worship, both at home and in temples.



visits are often undertaken in order for the devotee to request certain favors on their behalf.

Without going into further detail, it is important to note that there are prescribed portions of these rituals that should be followed carefully and there is also room for some innovation and development of a person's own ways to worship and do rituals as well. What is most important for this article is that these acts of rituals are of the utmost performance for many Hindus and is what keeps them connected to the transcendent. Without these, life would lose its overall flow and meaning would be greatly reduced. These acts are part of what it means to be a human being for these people and thus an essential part of their identity. It is not the only factor in their identity but it is a very significant part of their identity.<sup>21</sup>

### **Rituals among South Asians in Africa**

What research among diaspora Hindus has revealed is that the ritual aspects of Indians' lives becomes even more important to them when they are a minority community. They cling to these rituals as a key part of their identity which gives them meaning within a wider community that sees them as different. It has been the rituals that have kept them closest to their Indian heritage.<sup>22</sup> While few have retained or taken up reading of Hindu texts, they have nearly all learned and practiced various rituals related to certain deities.<sup>23</sup> This is a part of their identity that they are very reluctant to give up. In some cases, they no longer remember the myths or stories related to the rituals.<sup>24</sup> In other instances, they are unable to articulate the meaning of the rituals and yet they still refuse to give them up because they form

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<sup>21</sup> One of the more comprehensive books on Hindus and rituals from an anthropological perspective is C. J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Diesel, "Hinduism in KwaZulu-Natal," 35.

<sup>23</sup> Gopal, "India and its Diaspora," 34.

<sup>24</sup> Alleyn Diesel, "Hinduism in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa," in *Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora*, edited by Bhiku Parekh, Gurharpal Singh, and Steven Vertovec (New York: Routledge, 2003), 33.

such a crucial part of their daily life and identity formation.<sup>25</sup> Even in cases where the Indian languages have not been passed on, the rituals have. Granted, often the rituals have been slightly or even greatly altered over the decades so that they resemble rituals in India but do not replicate them exactly, but the point stands that for the Hindu communities in Africa these are essential parts of their lives that they feel should be kept and passed on even when other things are lost or forgotten.<sup>26</sup>

### **Rituals and Practices of Seventh-day Adventist Africans**

In general, Seventh-day Adventists have typically been very careful in their approach to rituals and practices. While there are a few key rituals or practices such as baptism and the communion services, there are not many other regularized rituals or practices that the Church as a whole has implemented and taken on. Adventists have typically focused more energy on the belief aspect of faith especially in generating rooted doctrines. This is not surprising considering the Protestant roots of the Adventist movement.

Adventists emerged after several centuries of Protestant development that had intentionally moved away from overly ritualized practices due to the abuses they had seen especially in Roman Catholic traditions. Therefore, it is no surprise that Adventists carried forward this suspicion of rituals and focused more on biblical beliefs in their articulation of the faith. This was a necessary development in many ways because rituals had been abused and often turned into means of grace or sources of personal gain in material goods and power by many Roman Catholic leaders in the previous centuries.

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<sup>25</sup> Diesel, "Hinduism in KwaZulu-Natal."

<sup>26</sup> Diesel concludes the following concerning Hindus in South Africa, "throughout their residence in South Africa, religion has certainly been the most stabilising force in the Hindu community. Evidence of this is the fact that wherever they settled, shrines and temples were soon constructed, and obviously played a major role in helping these early settlers to maintain awareness of their heritage and to re-construct their identity in the often inhospitable conditions of their adopted country." Diesel, "Hinduism in KwaZulu-Natal," 41.

But as with many reform movements in attempts to steer clear of the abuses, a robust biblical understanding of rituals and practices was neglected. As a result, the Adventist Church of today has produced limited material on the importance of rituals to the faith journey of followers of the God of the Bible. This has created a challenge from a few different angles. First, it has hampered the Church in parts of the world where rituals are so important to the daily life of people. Places such as India and most of sub-Saharan Africa contained and continue to contain life full of rituals that carry meaning. More importantly these rituals carry the identity of those involved. Unfortunately, in many places, Adventist missionaries, due to their Western biases, failed to grasp not only the significance of these rituals but also the potential value of exploring existing rituals in light of the biblical evidence for rituals. Secondly, a stigma is often attached to those who perform rituals. Adventists tend to label such people as being “too Roman Catholic” which is unfortunate given the vast amount of biblical evidence that God Himself has over and over instituted rituals to aid people in their following of Him. A cursory reading of the Torah quickly reveals that a huge portion of the passages relate to rituals. While some may argue that these specific rituals, such as the sacrificial system described in Leviticus, are no longer required, it still begs the question of why rituals at all? It appears that God created humanity with the need for tangible experiences to correspond with faith in order to fully live into a long-term relationship with Him. Rituals may be changed over time but the need for practices remain important. The New Testament demonstrates this in its emphasis on eating the Lord’s Supper together and through baptism.

### **Africa, Rituals, and Adventists**

Mission historian Andrew F. Walls has provided excellent studies on the history of Christianity in Africa. He has noted in various places the importance Africans attached to rituals and what this has meant

for mission.<sup>27</sup> This was true for many regions of Africa. And while the rituals may be different from place to place, the importance of rituals rang true for many Africans in their traditional practices and they were drawn to portions of Scripture which expound on rituals such as, Leviticus as they grew in their understanding of God.<sup>28</sup>

African Adventists, on the other hand, have been slower to grapple with the ritualistic aspect of faith.<sup>29</sup> However, in more recent times there has been some important dissertations, book chapters, and articles that have started to discuss the importance of rituals for Adventists in various settings in Africa. This discussion on possible ritualistic aspects of faith is often connected to issues of spiritual warfare,<sup>30</sup> healing,<sup>31</sup> death rites,<sup>32</sup> Church worship,<sup>33</sup> initiation rites,<sup>34</sup> and ancestor worship,<sup>35</sup> which are all prominent issues throughout the

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<sup>27</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), ch. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 131.

<sup>29</sup> In 1988, Zebron Masukume Ncube recognized in his DMin dissertation that in dealing with ancestral beliefs and practices, Adventists had struggled to openly discuss issues of rituals and practice leading to weak engagements with issues of ancestor belief in Africa. However, even Ncube spends most of the space in his dissertation dealing with the beliefs side and much less on the practices especially in his solutions to the issue. See “Ancestral Beliefs and Practices: A Program for Developing Christian Faith among Adventists in Zimbabwe,” (DMin dissertation, Andrews University, 1988).

<sup>30</sup> See Kwabena Donkor, ed., *The Church, Culture and Spirits: Adventism in Africa* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> See Sampson M. Nwaomah, “Anointing with Oil in African Christianity: An Evaluation of Contemporary Practices” in *The Church, Culture and Spirits: Adventism in Africa*.

<sup>32</sup> See Boubakar Sanou, “A Biblical and Missiological Framework for Cross-Cultural Mission: A Case Study of the Lobi Funeral Rites in Burkina Faso” (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> See Adelowo F. Adetunji and S. Didam Audu, “A Comparative Study of Music and Dance in African Traditional Religion and Christianity” in *Music and Worship in Africa: Adventists’ Dialogue from Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Sampson M. Nwaomah, Robert Osei-Bonsu, and Kelvin O. Onongha (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, Andrews University, 2014).

<sup>34</sup> See John Macharia Gichuri, “Biblical Principles to Guide in the Development of Functional Substitutes for Initiation Rites of Passage,” in *Biblical Principles for Missiological Issues in Africa*, ed. Bruce L. Bauer and Wagner Kuhn (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, Andrews University, 2015), 61-64.

<sup>35</sup> See Ncube, “Ancestral Beliefs,” 1988. Stephen Jacobs Masuku, “Ancestor-Worship,” (Unpublished Paper, 1994).

continent of Africa. While these works have not yet dealt with South Asians in Africa and their rituals, they demonstrate that a number of Adventist thought leaders are aware of the importance of rituals and have begun the important work of reflecting on how Adventists can biblically approach issues related to rituals and practices of faith as Adventists.<sup>36</sup>

### **Ritual Bridges to South Asians in Africa**

If South Asians cling to their rituals as a major part of their identity it will be nearly impossible to approach them with an alternative faith journey if they are required to abandon completely their ritual life. Africans should be able to relate to this in that they also can understand and appreciate the trauma of asking people to abandon their ways of life completely in favor of something totally new. Much good literature can be read that documents the horrific colonial style mission efforts which refused to take seriously African ways of life, including rituals, when Protestant Christianity was introduced in Africa. Thankfully there have been other types of missionaries and many Africans, including Adventists, who have actively engaged in creating African ways of following God, that incorporate biblical wisdom, rather than simply abandoning the rich heritage of African life and traditions.

If the Adventist Church is serious about sharing their faith with South Asians who identify as Hindus, they will need to very carefully reflect on rituals. This will require more contextual knowledge of the Hindu rituals which South Asians in Africa find most important. It is important to gain some knowledge of Indian practices in India but the most important learning procedure is to build meaningful relationships with South Asians in Africa to the point where they are comfortable sharing with you the rituals they practice and the rationale for their practice. While I have no doubt some Adventists

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<sup>36</sup> John Shumba wrote a DMin dissertation focused on reaching Indians in Zambia but focuses primarily on beliefs and has very little on rituals and practices. See “Reaching the Indian Communities in Zambia: A Biblical Model of Evangelism” (DMin Dissertation, Andrews University, 2008).

have built meaningful relationships with South Asians, I wonder how many have carefully learned and reflected on the ritual life of these Indians. I would tend to think, from discussions I have had with African friends from Southern Africa and East Africa, that many view Hindus as simply idol worshippers and as very strange in their ritual practice. This is an unhelpful understanding and approach in that it fails to see South Asian rituals as intimately tied to their identity and thus to their very humanity. Before making judgements time should be taken to learn what the rituals are, why they perform them, and how they understand deities or a deity's involvement in the world.

Adventists must interact with their South Asian neighbors in such a way that they are looking for the Spirit's work so that they can partner with the Spirit and more fruitfully build kingdom affirming relationships. This includes the realm of ritual and practice, for surely God would not leave such an essential part of the South Asian identity uncontested in the cosmic conflict. At the same time, we should be cautious and ask for God's guidance in discerning where the rituals and practices might be leading South Asians away from abundant life. Maybe the most difficult task is asking God for the humility to be open enough to learn from South Asians about life, for they may have insights on the importance of rituals, even if the rituals themselves are misguided. Therefore, it is urgently needed that we as Adventists more intentionally reflect on our rituals and practices or the lack of practices and imaginatively reinvigorate our faith through careful incorporation of biblical wisdom in relation to rituals and practices. When this has been done it will be easier to share our faith, through more than mere preaching and Bible study, but also through a lived reality of rituals and practice that is more readily understandable for South Asians.

### **Conclusion**

South Asians who identify as Hindus in Africa are a significant minority in the countries they reside in. As a result, they have clung to their faith rituals and practices as key identity markers. Africans have

a rich tradition of rituals and practices connected to faith as well, but Adventist Africans have been reluctant to fully grapple with rituals partly due to the Protestant heritage of the Adventist movement. In more recent times several African Adventist theologians and thought leaders have begun grappling with the importance of rituals though not as they relate to the South Asian contexts. For the sake of having better relationships with South Asians and sharing Christ, it is imperative that African Adventists intentionally do the hard work of building trusting and long-lasting relationships with South Asians who identify as Hindus. Through these relationships they can then learn what rituals these Hindus practice and why they are so important to their identity. It also will provide the opportunity for creatively implementing a more robust understanding and practice of rituals from a biblical perspective that will potentially help South Asians and Africans experience God in new and meaningful ways.

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