

Diwali: Festival of Lights



Prayer for Hindus

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them (Isa. 9:2, NASB).

Diwali:

FESTIVAL OF LIGHT, CIRCLE OF DARKNESS

More than 900 million people are lost in the hopeless darkness of Hinduism, worshipping 330 million gods and goddesses created by the imagination of men and women searching for a source of truth and strength. Most of these people live in the country of India. Many others are in neighboring lands such as Nepal, and some form minority populations in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and other countries of Asia. There also is a significant number of Hindus in the United States, as well as in other Western countries.

Hindus believe that all people are trapped in a vicious circle of birth, death and reincarnation, and that the only hope of escape is by achieving unity with the gods. They seek power and blessing through worship of gods and goddesses and the demonic powers that lay behind them.

Hindus celebrate many holy days. These festivals vary from place to place, depending upon which of the many gods and goddesses are particularly revered by the local people. Probably the most widely celebrated holiday is Diwali. It is celebrated for several days each fall. The festival begins this year on Nov. 3, and next year on Oct. 21.

Hindus find it difficult to come to Christ. Most cannot believe because they have not heard the truth of the Gospel. Also, most Hindus do not have a concept of sin or of personal responsibility, nor do they have a concept of a creator God. Yet, when the Gospel is clearly presented in a culturally relevant way, many do respond to Jesus.

We invite you to join us in praying specifically for several unreached Hindu people groups as they celebrate Diwali, the Festival of Lights. May the light of Jesus Christ break in upon the darkness which entraps these who worship gods which are not God.

Nov. 3, 1999

Day One

Oct. 21, 2000

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ ... cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God (Heb. 9:14, NIV).

DIVALI: FALSE LIGHT EQUALS DARKNESS

Walking the streets of India during Diwali is a sobering reminder of the power of darkness that lies over this land, where more than 800 million people—80 percent of the people—are Hindu.

Diwali is a major Hindu religious festival. It features the lighting of small lamps, which are placed in rows along the parapets of temples and houses or set adrift on rivers and streams. The lamps are said to commemorate the return and coronation of Rama, an incarnation of the god Vishnu, from 14 years of exile.

According to the Vikrama calendar, Diwali is the first day of the year, a time for new clothes, visiting friends and exchanging gifts.

Among the merchant class, worship during Diwali may focus on the goddess of wealth and good fortune, Lakshmi. Shops and homes are swept clean, fireworks are exploded to chase away evil spirits and Lakshmi is asked to grant a profitable year.



Diwali

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Intentional Prayer

1. Pray that Hindus who celebrate the festival of lights would become aware of the darkness in their hearts that no lamp can dispel.
2. Ask God to show Hindus that their worship of and prayers to the gods ultimately are futile.
3. Pray that Christians will have opportunity to explain why they do not participate in Diwali and to give bold testimony about Jesus, the Light of the world.

*Then you will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free
(John 8:32, NIV).*

BHOJPURI: A PEOPLE OF THE RIVER

The 70 million Bhojpuri are a rural people living on the floodplain of the Ganges River. Bhojpuri tenant farmers cultivate rice, wheat, millet, barley and sugarcane on small plots of this fertile land. During the monsoon season (July-October), many Bhojpuri live in fear that heavy rains will cause the Ganges, already swollen with the melting snows of the Himalayas, to flood. More than once, multitudes have lost homes, crops and livestock.

The Ganges is not only a source of fertile soil, irrigation water and floods for Hindus, it is a holy river and, for the Bhojpuri in particular, an object of worship. Bathing in its dull green water is thought to have power to wash away sins and to enable the worshiper to escape the cycle of endless reincarnation. The majority of Bhojpuri continue to seek salvation in the polluted waters of the Ganges, but a growing number have found that Jesus Christ is the only true River of Life.



Divali FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Intentional Prayer

1. Pray that God will continue to move among these lost people, preparing them to receive the good news of His love and provision for them through Jesus Christ.
2. Pray that Christians will risk persecution and even death in order to share the Gospel message with the Bhojpuri.
3. The New Testament has become available in the Bhojpuri dialect. Pray that it will be widely read.

*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth . . .
But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness . . .
(Matt. 6:19a, 33a, NASB).*

MUMBAI: A CITY OF CONTRASTS

Mumbai, formerly Bombay, is a cosmopolitan city that attracts people from a wide array of cultural backgrounds. The city is home to nearly 15 million people. A few live in beautiful high-rise condominiums but most live in slums. Two million live on the streets, where every day is a struggle to survive.

Mumbai is the commercial and financial capital of India, and it is the source of more than one-third of the nation's tax base. It also is the capital for underworld activities.

In spite of a pervading prejudice against the Christian West, Western ideology is gaining influence in the middle and upper classes, while materialism is spreading even to the slums.

Mumbai is a city of spiritual darkness. Eight out of every 10 people are Hindu, slaves bound by fear and tradition to false gods and goddesses, as well as to strict worship practices that are believed to ensure health and prosperity.



Divali FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Intentional Prayer

1. Pray that true Christians in Mumbai will live God-honoring lives and that their doing so will help change the negative perception in their city that Christianity is only something Western.
2. Ask God to send revival among Indian Christians.
3. Ask God to reveal Himself as personal savior to both the rich and poor in Mumbai.
4. Pray that Christians will share God's Word, in spite of inevitable persecution.

*He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness ...
(Isa. 61:1b, NIV).*

MARATHA: BOLD WARRIORS ARE LOST

During the 15th century a large number of low-caste peasants were recruited to fight the Islamic Mogul rulers of India. Their victories established the Maratha kingdom under the rule of Shivaji. The soldiers were rewarded for their service with grants of land and elevation in caste. The descendants of those soldiers live in Maharashtra state in India. Now high-caste Maratha, they continue to be influential leaders.

Most Maratha worship the Hindu god of destruction, Shiva, and his consort, Parvati. They also practice magic, fear evil spirits and offer animal sacrifices.

There are less than 200 known Christians among the nearly 60 million Maratha, making this people one of the largest unreached groups in the world. High-caste Maratha are forbidden by the laws of their caste to interact with people of lower castes, including most Christians, which is a barrier to their hearing about Christ.



Divali FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Intentional Prayer

1. Ask the Lord of the Harvest to raise up workers, especially from high-caste or high-social backgrounds, who will be acceptable communicators of the gospel to the Maratha.
2. Pray for the church in India to develop and implement effective strategies for reaching the Maratha.
3. Pray for the protection of Christians in Maharashtra. They recently have been targeted by overtly militant Hindu groups.

*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path
(Psalm 119:105, KJV).*

ORISSA: ONE LIGHT AND DARKNESS

In 1986, Christian leaders from one of the 62 tribal groups in Orissa, a state on India's eastern coast, were facing severe persecution. Their churches were burned and many leaders were beaten. After a study of key chapters in the book of Acts, many of these leaders asked for prayer—not to be safe but to be bold witnesses for Jesus Christ. During the past 12 years, their faithful witness has led to one of the fastest-growing Christian communities in India.

They are the exception, however. Among most of the tribes in Orissa, the gospel never has been heard. Most focus their worship on Jagannatha, centered around the Sri Jagannatha temple in the town of Puri. Each year tens of thousands of Oriyans vie for the honor of having a hand on the rope as gigantic wheeled platforms carrying huge Hindu images are dragged through the town. In this way, they declare their allegiance to the false god while their bondage deepens.



Divali FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Intentional Prayer

1. Ask the Lord to raise up witnesses willing to work in hard places to share the story of salvation with poor mountain tribal groups and low-land Hindus in Orissa.
2. Pray that people in Orissa who have responded to the Story of Redemption will share that story with family, friends and neighbors.
3. Praise the Lord that strong anti-conversion laws have failed to stop the growth of the church.

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8:12b, NIV).

CALCUTTA: A SPIRITUAL BATTLEFIELD

Namesake of Kali, the evil goddess of destruction, Calcutta is home to more than 13 million people. All day and far into the night, its streets and sidewalks are clogged with trucks, buses, taxis, rickshaws, motorcycles, bicycles, occasional private cars and people. In the early morning hours, the streets and sidewalks finally are left to the half-million street dwellers.

Calcutta was one of the first sites of early missionary efforts in India. Pioneer missionary William Carey arrived there in 1793. The pulpit from which he preached can be seen at the Carey Baptist Church.

Today it is estimated that there are only 10,000 born-again believers in Calcutta, less than 1 percent of the population. In spite of early missionary efforts and present ministries, Satan has retained his hold on Calcutta through Kali and other gods and goddesses of Hinduism. It is time for Christ's salvation to come to Calcutta.



Divali

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Intentional Prayer

1. Pray for revival and spiritual awakening among the 163 Christian congregations in Calcutta.
2. Ask God to thrust out willing laborers committed to living in Calcutta, a city sometimes referred to as one huge slum. May they share Christ through relationships, acts of mercy and proclamation of the Truth.
3. Pray that those in spiritual darkness will come to seek the true Light.

Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name (Psalm 86:11, NIV).

BANGALORE: MODERN/ANCIENT MIX

Bangalore, with its population nearing 5 million, is the fifth largest city in India and one of the fastest-growing cities of Asia. Western culture has influenced the city, which is home to some of the most high-tech industries in India: It has been called the "Silicon Valley of Asia."

In the midst of all that is modern, Hinduism affects every aspect of the life of residents of Bangalore. Each day, after a morning bath, a Hindu will worship at the altar in his own home, burning incense and offering fruit and flowers before a small shrine or picture of a god or goddess. Ancient prayers are chanted.

In times of special need—or during festivals—a Bangalore Hindu will visit a neighborhood shrine or temple, worshipping the god favored at that place as well as special plants and animals. Many Bangalore Hindus have a picture of Jesus in their home. To them, He is like a good-luck charm, or just another unknown god.



Divali

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Intentional Prayer

1. Please pray that the educated computer engineers who have many contacts with Christians will be open to the Truth.
2. Pray for the tens of thousands of people who live in the more than 400 slums of the city: May they find freedom in Jesus.
3. Pray that believers will demonstrate acceptable worship, leading their Hindu friends and neighbors to find Christ.

*And I will lead the blind by a way they do not know, ...
I will make darkness into light before them ...
(Isa. 42:16, NASB).*

LINGAYAT: BETTER WAY GOES ASTRAY

Basava, a 12th-century Brahmin, was outraged by the discrimination and class distinctions he saw in society. He left his home and moved to a nearby religious center devoted to the worship of Shiva. There, he began a period of study which would result in his developing the Hindu sect now known as Lingayat.

Lingayats hold a number of beliefs that stand in contrast to traditional Hinduism. They oppose idol worship, sacrificial rites, child marriage and the caste system. They reject Hindu belief in reincarnation, and, in contrast to the traditional Hindu belief in a pantheon of gods, Lingayats believe that Shiva alone is god.

A Lingayat can be identified by the *Linga*, an object inside a silver case that they hang from a thread around the neck. Lingayats view this *Linga* as a symbol of god. Each day, they place it on their left palm during ritual chanting. At their death, it is buried with the body.



Divali

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Intentional Prayer

1. Pray for the more than 11 million people held captive in the Lingayat belief system.
2. Several converted Lingayats now serve the Lord as Christian leaders. Pray that God would use them to reach their people despite the resistance and persecution they sometimes face.
3. Lingayats are the 12th largest people group in India. Please pray that more Christians will be called to take the gospel to them.

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only ...
(John 1:14a, NIV).*

NEPAL: KINGDOMS IN CONFLICT

Nepal is the only Hindu kingdom in the world. Ninety percent of the population is Hindu, and even the few ethnic groups who practice Buddhism, Islam or animism are influenced by Hinduism.

Daily life, as well as political life, centers around Hindu rituals. These rituals are performed out of duty, out of the hope of gaining favor and blessing, and out of the fear of arousing the anger of one of the numerous gods who are believed to have power over the lives of individuals and the nation.

Most Nepalese are subsistence farmers, barely able to survive. Hunger and disease are constant for more than 50 percent of the population, who live in absolute poverty. Often the few resources a family has are paid to Hindu priests for services.

Although a few Christian churches thrive, the vast majority of Nepal's 24 million people have never had the opportunity to hear about Jesus.



Divali

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Intentional Prayer

1. Hindu shrines and temples stand on virtually every corner and in almost every home in Nepal. Pray that the darkness and that the power of Satan will be broken.
2. Pray for increased religious freedom in Nepal, where persecution and imprisonment of Christian believers is all too common.
3. Pray that local Christians will be good citizens while remaining faithful and bold believers.

*He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,
and recovery of sight to the blind, ...
(Luke 4:18b, NASB).*

TAMANG: A PEOPLE IN BONDAGE

More than half of the mountain slopes of Nepal are inhabited by the Tamang, a people of Tibetan origin who have lived in Nepal longer than any other group. They have their own language, lifestyle and religious beliefs that blend Tibetan Buddhism, Hinduism and animism. Most Tamang are illiterate, subsistence farmers. Considered low caste, they often work for the higher-caste Pahari and Newar peoples.

Tamang history is marked by slavery. Many Tamang children are sold or sent away at early ages to work in tea shops or carpet factories. The majority of Nepali prostitutes are Tamang—young farm girls who were sold by their families.

Tamang in the western districts of Nepal have been exposed to Christianity, and many have accepted Christ, but this movement has not yet reached the eastern areas. There are no churches using the Eastern Tamang language.



Divali FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Intentional Prayer

1. Recent history has shown the Tamang to be open and ready to hear and receive the gospel. Ask the Father to send out laborers into the Tamang harvest.
2. Pray that the gospel will be presented in forms that the majority of Tamang, who are illiterate, can understand.
3. Pray that Christian groups can live among the Tamang and serve them in ways that demonstrate the love and power of Jesus.

*I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God
(Acts 26:17b,18a, NIV).*

BALINESE: A FATAL MISUNDERSTANDING

The small island of Bali is known for its beautiful art, its smiling people, its white sand beaches and its tropical beauty. Set in the midst of the Indonesian archipelago—and among 175 million Muslim Indonesians—the 2.5 million Balinese cling tightly to distinctive Hindu beliefs and traditions.

Black-and-white checkered cloth seen on Balinese altars and holy places is a symbol of Balinese belief that God and Satan are co-equal in strength. They believe that when the gods and demons are in conflict, chaos breaks out on earth in the form of illness, death or natural disaster. Mankind must stand in the breach to placate the gods and to appease the demons. This balancing act involves an elaborate system of offerings and rituals.

Only a few Balinese know the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Creator God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Most continue to live a life of fear, worshipping the gods of Hinduism.



Divali FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Intentional Prayer

1. Pray that the Lord will touch the minds, hearts and spirits of the Balinese people, enabling them to understand their true spiritual condition.
2. Pray that Christian materials that are being translated into the “everyday” language of the Balinese will powerfully and effectively communicate biblical truth to the Balinese.
3. Pray that the people who now walk in darkness will come to see the Light.

Nov 14, 1999

Day Twelve

Nov. 1, 2000

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? (Rom. 10:14a, NIV).

BANGLADESHI HINDUS: READY FOR HARVEST

Twenty years ago, Bivash declared to his family, “Kill me now if you’re going to because I’m not going back to Hinduism.” Despite pressure and rejection, Bivash has remained true to the Lord for these 20 years.

Bangladesh generally is known as a Muslim nation, but 12 percent of the population (15 million people) are Hindu. Most of these Hindus live in the southwest part of the country. Many are from tribal groups. The remainder are high-caste Brahmins, low-caste Nomo-shudras or out-castes. Bangla-deshi Hindus are very aware of their precarious position as a minority group. This is one factor that has made them more open to the gospel.

When Bivash took his stand 20 years ago, there were very few believers among the Hindus of Bangladesh, but Bangladeshi Hindus have become increasingly responsive to the gospel in recent years. This is especially true among certain tribal groups.



Divali

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Intentional Prayer

1. Ask the Lord to send out hundreds of laborers to take the gospel to every person in Bangladesh whose heart He has prepared to hear and receive Jesus Christ as Lord.
2. Please pray that new believers will be effectively disciplined so that their lives reflect the love and righteousness of Christ.
3. Pray for revival and renewal in the older congregations that still preach the Word in Bangladesh.

Divali

FESTIVAL OF LIGHT, CIRCLE OF DARKNESS

Your prayers for the peoples of the world continue to open avenues of access to the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Many people, including numerous Christian workers and increasing numbers of newborn believers in Christ, are eternally thankful for your ongoing efforts.

Some Hindu people groups have Christians ministering among them. Many others do not. If you and your church would like to “adopt” one of these unreached Hindu people groups for extended prayer and ministry that they might receive the Gospel, please call us at 1-888-462-7729. We will help you.

The International Prayer Strategy Office of the IMB, in an effort to continue to serve your ministry of prayer, is producing a series of prayer guides focusing on the major non-Christian peoples of the world. If you feel called to participate in any of these emphases, please order as many guides as you need.

Muslims:	Ramadan prayer guide
Hindus:	Divali—Festival of Lights
Jews:	Days of Awe
Buddhists:	Prayer Guide*

Call the IMB Resource Center
1-800-866-3621
e-mail: resource.center@imb.org

*Available Spring 2000



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