

IS ANYONE OUT THERE?

A HINDU'S SEARCH FOR TRUTH

A S H K O T E C H A



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BACKGROUND

I grew up in a small country called Malawi, in East Africa (formerly called Nyasaland, a part of the British Empire), and went to a school where at least half of the teachers were English or Scottish. Life in my young days was fun and since I was good at my studies and sports too, there was never a time I didn't enjoy life. Back then in the 1960s, growing up in a Hindu family, we were regular attendees of the central temple. I can still remember the aroma of sweet incense as the priest made sacrifice of the foods donated to the gods which towered over us all, as some were six feet in height!

There was the usual 'satsang' (or worship time), when the men and women sang melodic songs to the accompaniment of 'tablas' which were small drums, the accordion and some tambourines. I was always eager for the singing to finish for then we could all eat the foods which had been offered to the gods. Rama and Krishna were the main gods in our

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temple, but there were others like Kali and Hanuman, the monkey god. We all had our favourites and each one could choose which god to follow. However we had to make sure we did not offend our god or he might turn against us, and so we made the necessary sacrifices to him.

My mother was a devout Hindu and we all respected her intensely. She worshipped the sun every morning, though I found it hard to believe that the sun was god, having learnt science at school. The one thing she could not accept was when the Americans landed on the moon. She had never been educated so she couldn't understand how man could reach the moon. My mother also worshipped the 'holy cow' making her 'Puja' when she was near one and she even worshipped some pretty stones we found one day. She was a simple but devout Hindu and we all respected her highly.

In the temple the priest would read a portion from the Bhagavad Gita (Hindu bible) - stories of Rama and Krishna which were exciting but had little relevance to daily life, and yet it was our religion. We believed strongly in reincarnation and tried to do good in this life to make sure we didn't come back in our next life as an animal, but hoped to come back as a human being. The trouble was, we were never quite sure how well we were doing! Then there was Diwali (the Festival of Lights) and other festival days, so there were many occasions to go to the temple. In fact, the temple was also a very central part of the community and a lot happened

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during temple visits. There was also the local cinema which was such fun (we didn't have TV, social media or mobile phones in those days). We had one phone which was used only for important calls, and making a long distance call would require a wait of several hours before you could speak to someone. How life has changed since 1960!

England

In secondary school some of my friends were going to the UK for further studies and I couldn't wait to go to England. Eventually I arrived at Heathrow airport in 1968 on a cold October day and was rather disappointed when I saw the drab houses all crowded together, row after row. Still, it was great to be away from the control of my parents and enjoy the freedom to go to parties and date English girls! Soon I was at university where I made some wrong choices. I chose to do engineering for which I had no particular aptitude and failed my second year exams. At the same time I was fooling around, partying and chasing girls, partly out of boredom and partly due to loneliness.

Out of body experience

Drink, drugs, music and gurus - it was quite a mixture. Long hair and flowers, 'make love and not war' was the slogan of the '60s. I was at one such party when I had a terrifying experience sitting around people smoking marijuana. I

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knew I shouldn't touch any of it but I didn't want to look foolish, so I thought I'd take one puff of the long cigarette which was being passed around the room and pretend I was 'high'. Bad mistake, for one puff of the highly charged cigarette caused me to leave my body, and I found myself on the ceiling. I looked down at myself sitting on the floor and yet I was up there on the ceiling. I didn't realise I had come out of my body, but boy was I scared! I had never experienced anything as fearful as this. How I came back into my body I don't know, but I held onto my doped up friend all night who thought it was all very funny. As I begged him not to let me go he told me I was just having a bad 'trip'. I promised myself never to touch drugs again! After this experience, I began my search for meaning in life.

My Search for Truth

I don't know when it started, but ever since I was young there seemed to be a void inside of me. I wanted to know what life was all about, who or where I came from and why or what we were created for? It was the beginning of my spiritual journey which began at a young age but came to fruition when I failed my second year exams, so I had a year out to seek some answers. I started at the university library and began to read books by various philosophers like Freud and Jung, and other leaders like Mahatma Gandhi. I didn't know what I was looking for, except I had to find meaning

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for my life. I was doing a course I didn't enjoy or have passion for, and never much good at making friends I found solace in spiritual things.

One day I met some Buddhist monks who were very nice, so I decided to become a Buddhist. I attended their classes to learn the art of emptying my mind, and I tried to focus on a flickering candle, but the more I tried to empty my mind, the more it filled up - it was hopeless! Moreover, all the people who were supposedly ahead of me spiritually were still in the pub drinking and partying. I gave up Buddhism when I found out Buddha had never written any books, and he himself had said that we were each to find our own way! Besides Buddha, no-one else had found 'Nirvana' or 'Enlightenment' and I thought to achieve this state sounded difficult and hopeless. Furthermore, I didn't want to end up in a temple with just an orange cloth around me and a shaved head! I tried the yoga class but that too looked impossible. The yoga master was able to twist his body and legs in such a way it looked like he was made of rubber. I tried other gurus too because in those days of the Beatles everyone was following some guru or other.

I returned to university to finish off my degree, only to find there were no jobs to be had in the days of IMF loans, and the country was in recession. I came to the conclusion that no-one knew the purpose of life for I had investigated and read extensively, and still found no

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answers. The gurus were all rich and greedy, yoga was too difficult, meditation was quite impossible so I gave up and decided that life had no meaning - so I might as well eat and drink for someday I would die. Yet the God who made heaven and earth heard my cry for understanding and He answered in such a wonderful way.

2.

BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

With a little help from my family, I managed to buy a small property in Harrow, Middlesex, and even when deciding which property to buy I knew this was the one for me. Sometimes certain decisions we make can alter the entire course of our life. Living on my own was no fun so I thought of letting the spare rooms out. Now we are talking about the days when the tenant had more legal rights than the landlord, and once the tenant occupied the property it was not always easy to get them out. So I thought a couple of nice nurses would do the trick, after all, nurses were dedicated people and they wouldn't cause me any grief. I chose a couple of bright girls who had come in answer to an advertisement I put in the local paper. Well, I must have been very fortunate, for they turned out to be very nice people. They kept the house clean, cooked for all of us and even helped to make curtains for the

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windows. They didn't complain as tenants tend to do, and paid their rent on time.

I had no complaints with them whatsoever, but I noticed they were never around on Sundays. Besides that, they seemed to be very cheerful people, unlike myself, as I was quite lonesome and unhappy. I really desired to be happy and I wanted what they had - a certain peace and joy! One day I asked the girls why they were so cheerful and what the secret to their peace and contentment was. They readily replied, saying that it was someone called Jesus who made them this way.

To be quite honest, I had never heard of this Jesus and I wondered if He was some guru I had not heard of. "How can I meet Him?" I inquired. "Well, He comes to our church, and you can meet Him there," they replied. I was shocked to discover these girls were religious and when I challenged them, they refuted this saying, "Oh no, we're not religious, but we do like going to church and you can come with us if you like."

I was very desperate to be happy and have this inner joy they reflected, so the following Sunday evening I went along to their church. I had never been to church in my life so I didn't know what to expect. Inside the church I heard lovely singing and music, and lots of friendly faces. They all radiated this same joy and peace I was searching for, and I wanted whatever they had.

BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

Right then, a man was speaking at the podium and he was saying that there was someone in the building who had not met Jesus, and if that person were to raise their hand, he would introduce Jesus to them. I was bewildered to say the least. How did he know I was there? Had my friends told him I was coming? Suddenly I felt my hand going up to indicate that it was me. Quickly, I put my hand down. What was happening to me? I felt a magnetic pull lifting up my hand, but I continued to resist this tugging. Dashing outside to smoke a cigarette, I thought about what was happening to me.

Born Again

Anyway, I kept going to church and eventually I heard about Jesus, the Son of God, who died for me and rose again from the grave. I was encouraged to surrender my life to Jesus, but my first thought was, "I am a Hindu. I was born a Hindu, and that is my Karma - I cannot just become a Christian. How is that possible?" Perhaps I needed to receive special permission from the Pope! Finally I prayed to Jesus, telling Him I was a Hindu, but if He could accept me, I wanted to follow Him. An amazing thing happened when I prayed to Jesus. A big weight came rolling off my shoulders and I felt so light and free. I had become a born-again Christian and yet I didn't understand things very much. All I knew was that Jesus had accepted me, and I was loved by Him.

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Straight away I was baptised in my own bathtub, calling upon Jesus to wash away all my sins, and for days after I felt so clean I didn't want anyone to touch me, so profound was my experience of forgiven sins. The strange thing was, I couldn't read or understand the Bible until they prayed for me to receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Again, I didn't know who this Holy Spirit was, but I simply accepted what my new friends were sharing with me, and suddenly I began to speak in a heavenly language called 'tongues'. It felt like scales coming off my eyes, and I understood the Bible for the first time. Now the scriptures seemed to make sense and they spoke directly to my heart.

It was sometime later I realised I'd come to this house and met all these amazing people because God in heaven had answered the cry of my heart. I had found God in Jesus and my heart was full. I had come home. I was lost, not knowing who or why I was on this planet, but now I had found God in Jesus and everything was alright. I didn't have all the answers, but I knew God had them all. I learnt to rest in Him. What a relief it was to have all my sins forgiven - no more fear of being born some creature in reincarnation and no more fear of the gods. I was loved by the almighty God and accepted by Him through Jesus His Son. Oh, life had become so wonderful and I was so very happy. I had found the secret to happiness and it was in the Person called Jesus.

BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

Family

I wanted to tell the whole world about this Jesus, and so I began by telling my family. Trouble was waiting for me round the corner. Little did I know how mad my family would be at me for turning from Hinduism to Christianity. All hell broke loose and they all turned against me, accusing me of forsaking our religion and instead, following the white man's religion. I felt so alone and misunderstood, especially when I declared that I could not marry a Hindu girl. That really got them mad, and so finally I decided to stay away from my family, and anyway I had a new family of Christian brothers and sisters at church.

It was a very difficult time for me as I was the only Hindu convert in my church and I couldn't find anyone who understood my dilemma. Sometimes I felt quite alone in my battle with my family and all the relatives, but I clung onto Jesus! I stayed well clear of my parents especially my mother who was a devout Hindu, and she was very upset with me. However, one day I heard my dad had become ill so I went to visit him at our family home. My mother met me at the door and as soon as she saw me at the doorstep she became livid with anger. "It's all your fault that your father is ill. You have brought a curse upon us since you are following Jesus and you've forsaken your Hindu gods," she berated me.

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My dad had suffered a slipped disc and had been bedfast for four weeks in much pain, surrounded by bottles of medicine. My mother challenged me right there and told me that since I had brought a curse upon the family I should ask Jesus to fix my dad, and she strode out of the bedroom.

First healing

Suddenly I heard a voice in my head saying, “pray for him.” Pray for my dad - how? I had no clue whatsoever. I had never prayed for anyone before and the only time I saw any prayer for the sick was one time in church, when the pastor prayed in tongues for someone but nothing appeared to happen, so he never did it again. I don’t think he believed that he had the faith to pray for someone who was sick. However the ‘voice’ insisted that I pray for him, so I did. I asked my dad if I could pray for him, and he said yes. I laid my hand on his head and prayed in tongues. I had no faith and I really did not know what I was doing.

After a few minutes I heard the voice again, saying, “tell him he is healed.” What! The voice in my head again was very insistent. “Tell him he is healed” so I did. “Dad, I think you are healed!” My dad who was lying down sat up in bed and began to move around to really see if the pain had gone. Suddenly he leaped out bed totally healed! Quickly, he started putting his clothes on and I was startled to say the least.

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I didn't know what to believe and yet he was rushing out of the house telling me that we had to go to my uncle's house because my nephew was very ill. We arrived there and my dad told everyone that I needed to pray for my nephew's healing, which I did and he began to feel better immediately. I was in quite a state of shock as all this happened so fast. I had never seen a healing before and yet God used me to heal my dad! From that day on I became quite a celebrity among my family and relatives. I prayed for them and they began to recover. Wow, no more persecution! My family began to accept Jesus and my relationship with them improved a lot.

3.

MINISTRY CALL

I must say I was totally bored working a job and making a living to pay the mortgage on the house. I wanted to tell the whole world about Jesus and that's all I ever wanted to do. So I took a bold step, sold my house and gave up my job.

There was a drama group in church that went around the country proclaiming the gospel, and I asked if I could join them. Soon I began to travel with the group, doing various dramas in schools, prisons and in churches. It was so much fun, but we had very little money and we were always hungry. However, we trusted God daily to supply our basic needs and we had a whale of a time telling people about Jesus through drama. The church elders were not always happy with us though, and eventually I thought it best to move to another church where I met my amazing wife Sharon.

MINISTRY CALL

Another healing

The phone rang, and it was my family telling me my sister-in-law had cancer in her jaw and was facing a major operation. They asked if we would come and pray for her. Sharon and I had never prayed for someone with cancer, but we went anyway. She was a Hindu woman but had heard how God was using us in healing, and so we laid hands on her and prayed in 'tongues'. Within a few minutes she announced that she was healed. We were shocked. "How do you know you are healed?" we asked. "The pain has gone," she replied. Shortly after, she underwent the operation to remove the cancer. Thankfully, the cancer was dead and the surgeons were able to remove it successfully with no further trace of the disease. Needless to say she also began to accept Jesus as her Lord and Saviour and started to follow him.

One by one, many of my family and relatives received a touch from Jesus and began to believe in Him. Despite seeing all the miracles Jesus was performing, my mum would not change. She told me that she had her gods and she was quite content. She had been a very devout Hindu for some fifty years and nothing could cause her to forsake her Hindu beliefs, until one day when she was dying she phoned me. "I am very afraid of dying," she said. "Would you help me?" I knew her time to find Jesus had arrived. I had to wait twenty years for her to come to Jesus.

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We prayed for her, the Lord healed her and she accepted Jesus as her Saviour. She and my dad are both in heaven now and they lived well into their late eighties. I still have two brothers who have not yet come to Jesus and I pray for them when I can, and I wait patiently for His light to shine in their hearts. I know God will make a way for them sooner or later, though at the time of writing both of them are very rich and successful businessmen and don't see a need for the Lord, but I am praying and the day will come for their salvation.

4.

CAN A HINDU CHANGE?

In my case, I was an unhappy person starved of love, and so when I met these Christians who showed me the love of God I was drawn to them. They loved me because they were filled with God's love. The Beatles sang a song called 'All you need is love,' but unfortunately human love is selfish — only God's love is perfect. Once you taste the love of God which is found in Jesus you are forever changed. This love is given to Christians by the Holy Spirit of God and without the Spirit all you have is dead religion. I was fortunate to meet Spirit-filled Christians, and I could see the love, joy and peace they possessed and I was hungry for that. The world is desperate for love, joy and peace but they don't know only Jesus can provide these.

Again, I was blessed in that I didn't believe much in anything, and didn't really know a lot about Hinduism except the fact that we were vegetarian and we were to respect the

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‘holy cow.’ We were taught to do good in this life so that we could return more fortunate in the next life. My mother always blamed her past life when things went wrong. She would say things like “I must have done some bad things in my previous life, so I am experiencing trouble in this life.” It’s called the law of Karma and it cannot be changed.

Most Hindus, though they may be devout, cannot tell you much about God, heaven or hell, and as there is no formal teaching in the temple, most Hindus are fairly ignorant of their own religion. Besides, Hinduism is a very ancient religion and very complex but at the same time, simple. There is no certainty of God’s love and no certainty of heaven after death. Sins committed have to be paid for in the next life, and after a million life cycles one may attain to be like God.

I understood about water baptism because I knew our sins could be washed away in the river Ganges in India, which was the sacred river coming out of the mouth of Brahma (God). The holy men in India live by the river Ganges because they want to be clean from their sins before they die, and today millions come to the Ganges to have their sins cleansed. I was so glad to learn that Jesus died in my place and took all my sins upon Himself, and I was water baptised, calling upon Him to wash them all away. How wonderful that God would send His Son to die for the sins of the world! The second thing I realised was that God wanted to hear

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us and help us in every way. In Hinduism it was just the opposite — rather we had to please the gods in case they turned against us, and we continually made sacrifices to them, and yet the God of the Bible sacrificed His Son Jesus for us and raised Him from the dead so we might live. So many people including my family have been healed and have come to know Jesus, because they have seen the reality of His presence in their lives. Sooner or later people fall sick and when doctors can't help, prayer can be made available and healing miracles will open the door to people's hearts.

The price is high

If you are a Hindu, the cost of following Jesus is high because your social life is closely associated with the gatherings at the temple or through weddings, dedications and funerals. All involve Hindu prayers and devotions to numerous gods, so for me, I could not participate in any of these meetings. I even had to turn down attending the weddings of my relations, so naturally I caused hurt and offense to my family and was misunderstood.

It became very difficult to turn down various invitations to functions, but I thought it better to stay away than to attend and stand aloof. At one particular funeral of a close relation I went because I had led her to Christ, but her funeral was conducted with all the Hindu traditions, and I stood apart as they were all called to prayer at a small

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shrine set up by the hired Hindu priest. It was quite embarrassing as everyone looks at you standing remote from the proceedings. However, we cannot follow Jesus and also participate in other religions no matter what the cost, even it means offending relatives.

One thing I did notice was that when any of my Hindu family was in trouble they would always ask for prayer, and that made it worthwhile to stand my ground. They knew I could get answers to my prayers and yet some of them still would not turn to Christ. What is encouraging is that many millions of Hindus are turning to Christ in India and all over the world, and that does help in times of loneliness with regards to one's family.

An evil presence

When I first became a Christian I was not ready for the attack from the dark forces of evil. One night I was alone in my house in Harrow and my Christian tenants were both away. Around midnight I heard a terrible noise in the house. Now I had been to a Bible study a few hours earlier and whilst driving back I felt something pulling at the steering wheel, and this force tried to make me crash my car. I held on tightly to the wheel and managed get home safely. Once at home, I discovered there was a whirring noise in the house. I switched on all the lights and looked everywhere to see where it was coming from.

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The noise was roaring in the house or was it in my head? I couldn't tell, except I knew that I was very afraid and there was a strong presence of evil. Then I remembered at church we were told to use the name of Jesus to ward off any evil spirits, so I spoke up loudly and told 'it' to go in Jesus' Name and suddenly all went quiet. I went to bed and fell asleep.

The next day I thought I had just had a bad dream, and tried to put it out of my mind, however later that day I felt the same evil force next to me in broad daylight. This time I asked for the leaders of the church to pray for me and after prayer I never had this experience again. Later on I was taught how Jesus would release people from spiritual darkness and heal them. I realised that God is light and in Him there is no darkness, but there are evil spirits in this world and they get an entrance into people's lives through drugs, or dabbling in the occult and things like that. It's best not to mess around with things we do not understand and stay close to Jesus always.

Conclusion

Perhaps you belong to another religion, or perhaps you have no faith at all and someone has given you this little booklet. I would like to encourage you in your spiritual journey to be open to God and what He wants to do in your life. You were born with a purpose and you have a destiny

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to fulfil, but it all starts with Jesus. If I could find God through Jesus, so can you! God is not far away, but very close and He wants to reveal Himself to you. Sometimes God will reveal Himself in a dramatic way and other times it is a very simple thing. What is important is to be sincere and to ask Jesus to show you the way, for He said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” Please pray the following prayer — the same prayer I prayed, and I know Jesus will answer your heartfelt cry to know the truth.

“Dear Lord Jesus, I am not a Christian but I am a seeker of truth. Please reveal Yourself to me and show me the way to know God. I confess I am a sinner and I ask you to forgive me of all my sins. I also forgive those who have sinned against me. I open my heart to you today and I ask you to come into my heart and into my life. Open my eyes and give me understanding of who I am and where I come from, and where I will be at the end of my life. I surrender to you today. Please forgive me and accept me today. I pray this prayer in your Name Lord Jesus. Amen.”

If you have prayed this prayer sincerely then your journey with Jesus has begun. I would encourage you to get hold of a New Testament and you will read of the life of Jesus in it. Secondly, if you know of a good church, try to go to it. Ask Jesus to guide you to the right church where you can meet

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Christians who can help you on your spiritual journey and answer any questions you may have.

God bless you!

TO CONTACT ASH, VISIT HIS WEBSITE AT:
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