

Why Visit a Temple?

Biblical Rationale

By Cathy Douglass, author of Love Your Neighbor Evangelism Training

In Love Your Neighbor evangelism training, we encourage (not require) planning a field trip to a Hindu temple as part of the course. Sometimes this will be led by the trainer; other times, participants may do it on their own, in groups of two or more, under our careful instructions.

Some have asked, Why should a Christian visit such a place? Isn't it unholy, even demonic?

These are legitimate questions. Please allow me to present the positive and biblical reasons for a temple field trip.

The closest biblical precedent for it is found in Acts 17:16-34, Paul's visit to Athens. Luke tells us, "Paul was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols." As the first-century Greek writer Petronius famously quipped, "It is easier to find a god than a man in Athens." We can imagine Paul, alone as he waited for his companions to join him, walking down the avenues lined with shrines and temples, watching offerings being made, observing rituals openly in progress. Whether he entered a temple or not we don't know, but he tells the city leaders in the Areopagus that he "carefully observed" their objects of worship, to the point where he could read the inscription on an altar "To an unknown god."

The result of Paul getting so close to idols and altars was that his spirit was provoked or distressed SO he began reasoning in the synagogue with Jews and in the marketplace with Greeks (vs 16-17). While he was no stranger to idols and temples in other cities, and also preached, Luke makes the clear point of connection that the seeing, up close and in person, led to a stirring of the soul, which led to appropriate action.

So it is with our Love Your Neighbor temple field trip.

1. It helps us develop compassion as a motivation for going to our Hindu neighbors with the message of Jesus. As we observe what goes on in the temple, our hearts are touched and burdened that our neighbors do not know the living God (Matthew 9:35-38).
2. It helps fuel our passion and urgency. As Paul "closely observed" the objects of worship in Athens, his heart was "stirred up," leading to powerful proclamation of Jesus and the resurrection in the marketplace and among the city leaders (Acts 17:16-34).
3. A field trip is a form of hands-on learning more vivid than reading in a book or hearing a lecture. For Jesus, the whole three years of His ministry was one big field trip, as He took His disciples with Him everywhere He went (Mark 3:14).
4. We want to avoid the legalistic attitude that going near or touching anything associated with Hindus will make us unholy. Our Lord was perfectly holy though He ate with and touched the lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, and demonized and was known as a "friend of sinners" (Matthew 11:19).

5. We have the right to be in a temple if we go for the right reason (Psalm 24:1). We do not go to participate in any ritual or to give the impression of ecumenism (that all faiths are equally valid); rather, while in the temple we pray for the people we see around us.
6. We visit a temple in the power of the Spirit, without fear (2 Timothy 1:7). We are not unaware of the demonic element found in some temple activities and do not take it lightly, but we believe that Christians walking in the Spirit do not need to fear (1 John 4:4, Jeremiah 10:5). Our field trips are timed to take place usually during “off hours” when not much temple activity is occurring anyway.
7. We conduct ourselves politely while in the temple, so there is no cause for offense. We do not speak disrespectfully of idols (Acts 19:37), and we do not attempt to preach or witness at that time. However, often our trainers present the temple representative with a *JESUS* DVD and sometimes have been able to return at a later time and have meaningful gospel conversations.

If you have further doubts about the temple field trip, please do speak to your Love Your Neighbor trainer, or contact Cathy Douglass at nayajeevan@cru.org.