

Primary Teaching Idea 3.1

Namaste Greeting

The Namaste greeting provides wonderful opportunities for all types of constructive learning, and is especially useful in delivering both AT1 and AT2 simultaneously. Indeed, it is useful for a number of reasons:

- (1) Its kinaesthetic and experiential
- (2) The prayer symbol is common to all religions and helps promote inclusivity
- (3) It helps get across concepts and values central to Hinduism in an experiential and accessible manner (i.e. the atman, respect all others) – and values essential to spiritual development (the intrinsic equality of all).
- (4) It can be a central theme that branches out into so many other subjects (prayer, worship, service to others, body language, emotional literacy, , God in the heart (conscience), right and wrong, etc.
- (5) The topic of “how we say hello” is a most appropriate ‘way in’ to another culture , symbolising respect, welcoming, an invitation to dialogue/sharing, acceptance, etc

A few ideas are as follows:

- Discuss how we say hello in different cultures both through (1) vocal language and (2) body language (e.g. shaking hands, embracing, etc)
- Demonstrate how Hindus say hello. The word namaste is broken down as follows:
 - namas – “I offer my respects” or “I bow down”
 - te – “to you”
- The symbol of the hands together makes the speaker respectful. It also focusses attention on our own hearts, where reside both: (i) the soul (the real self)
 - (ii) the Superself, or God (the Lord within)
- Placing the hands together also makes it easy to bow the head slightly, so that our nose almost touches the fingertips. It is difficult to feel arrogant while adopting this position!
- So, namaste implies “I pay my respects to you the soul with in the heart”

And we might add even deeper meaning:

“I pay my respects to you, the soul with in the heart, and to the lord who is forever with us and guiding our actions”

- This exercise can be accommodated in numerous ways. For example, you might first discuss body language. What happens when we get angry (e.g. gritting teeth and clenching fists). We could also suggest that adopting the right posture helps change the mind and emotions (e.g. sitting up straight in class helps the mind to be alert). Then we could get children to adopt certain postures and ask them how they feel. Then ask them to sit down with crossed legs and adopt the prayer posture. Explore how they feel (be prepared; the first time I tried this, a boy volunteered ‘angry’!)
- This posture can be explored as part of a meditation exercise (sitting like this, the pupils could say a prayer from their own faith tradition or, if of no faith, could concentrate on their breathing.

Then explain the meaning of namaste and get pupils to turn to one another and say it (if they are uncomfortable, they could say something in English).

- Notions of respect and humility could be further explored. We could refer to the story of Rama and Sita, and show a picture of Hanuman (one where he is in the prayer posture before Rama and Sita). By discussing Hanuman, we could look at how Hindus (and members of many religions) see real humility as a sign of strength, not weakness. Remember that many post-modern heroes seem to portray ‘in your face’ audacity as if it were a virtue.

Note; this lesson, if explored during year 6, could be introduced with discussion of appropriate conduct; for example, how to say hello appropriately, and different greetings to different people, according to what is relevant to their status, their character and their interests and concerns. For example, if one meets a businessman one may say, “How’s business?” in preference to simply the standard “How are you?”.

There is a story of how sage Vishvamitra came to visit Rama’s father, King Dasharatha. The monarch greeted him accordingly, asking, “How is it going in your endeavour to cross over the ocean of birth and death”.