

STATE'S HUGHES **PRESIDES AT HINDU** **"FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS"** **CEREMONY**

(Under secretary of state opens "Diwali" at White House event) (600)

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Note from pastor Kevin Lea follows this article.

Washington -- Karen Hughes, under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs, inaugurated Diwali or the Hindu Festival of Lights at a special White House ceremony October 19.

On September 2005 President Bush placed Hughes, a former journalist and White House political adviser, in charge of U.S. international information programs and exchanges. In this capacity, she has made honoring different cultures and religions coexisting in America a hallmark of the U.S. government's effort to tell America's story abroad -- a story of pluralism, tolerance and understanding central to a nation of immigrants.

Diwali is a major Hindu celebration that symbolizes the victory of the power of light over darkness, good over evil. Also called Deepavali in the Tamil language, Diwali is celebrated for five days in the Hindu month of Ashwayuja, which usually falls in October/November.

As part of the Diwali ceremony lamps and fireworks are lit throughout India and other countries where South Asians have settled. It is estimated that at least 1.5 million Asian Indians now live in the United States.

In the modern era, Diwali has come to signify a celebration of life and is observed as a time to focus on family relationships and community ties.

Among the 150 guests attending the ceremony were Bhishma Agnihotri, who delivered the invocation, and several prominent representatives of the Indian/American community, like Dr. Parveen Chopra, a vice chairman and commissioner of the Nassau County, New York, Commission on Human Rights.

Hughes told her audience that Indian-Americans, who number between 1.5 and 3 million, make a great contribution to the economic and political well-being of the United States. And she highlighted the "humanity, compassion and prosperity," which all Americans share with them.

She said that "the themes of Diwali transcend" religion and ethnicity and the spirit of the holiday reminded her of a saying from her childhood: "The smile on your face is the light in the window that tells people you are at home."

As a State Department official, Hughes, who described her job in public diplomacy as "reaching out to the rest of the world in a spirit of respect and partnership," added, "I'm confident a bright future is ahead for U.S.-Indian relations."

President Bush sent a message to the gathering noting, "Every year during Diwali, Hindus remember their many blessings and celebrate their hope for a brighter future. The Festival of Lights demonstrates the rich history and traditions of the Hindu faith as friends and family come together in a spirit of love and joy. This celebration unites people around the world in goodwill and reminds us of the many cultures that enrich our nation."

Commenting on U.S.-Indian relations, Bush said during a March visit to that country, "India in the 21st century is a natural partner of the United States because we are brothers in the cause of human liberty."

Some 80,000 Indian students are studying in the U.S., more students than from any other nation. Since 1950, approximately 15,000 Indians and Americans studied, taught and conducted research in both India and the United States. They benefited from U.S. government-funded grants through the Fulbright and Humphrey programs. In India, the U.S. government carries out programs at six American centers and four American corners located at universities and libraries.

The White House Diwali ceremony featured an array of traditional Indian foods.

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Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: I am often asked if I think President Bush is a true Christian. Others ask, "How can I know that I am saved? Or, "How can I know that a professing believer in the church is saved?"

People must have been asking the same questions about themselves and others in the early church. Many think it is not for us to question someone's salvation, that only God knows and until we all die and are in heaven we should accept people as Christians if they say that they are. But the teachings of John the Apostle in his epistle of 1 John seem to indicate otherwise.

I Jn 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (NKJ)

I Jn 2:4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. 6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. (NKJ)

There are many other statements in John's epistle which describe the fruits of true conversion and how to discern false professions of faith.

President Bush has frequently stated that all religions have equal merit; that Islam and Christianity serve the same God and that Islam is a religion of peace. At the White House, he has hosted leaders from many false religions and then publicly praised the religions that these leaders represent.

When he visited Japan a few years ago, President Bush made it a point to include a visit to the Buddhist temple where he bowed in respect to the Buddha idol. The president of Japan had to wait in the car because he is forbidden by the Japanese constitution to go into the temple.

Now President Bush praises the virtues of the Hindu religion. How can he do this when Hinduism is based on doctrines of demons and in this world condemns hundreds of millions to a life of poverty and slavery? Even worse, it spiritually damns the souls of those who believe in the Hindu teaching that people experience thousands of lives through reincarnation until they ultimately become a god.

As John the apostle said, those who say they are Christians and yet embrace idolatry (violation of the second commandment) are liars and the truth is not in them.

But some respond that President Bush must do these things as President of the United States. If he failed to show respect to Buddha while in Japan, then there would be reduced Japanese support for our war on terror. Or, India is a rapidly growing economic and military power which must be respected, and what better way to show the Indian nation that we are with them than to praise their religion of idolatry?

I think Jesus dealt with this excuse when he said:

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (NKJ)

Matt 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. (NKJ)

PRESIDENT BUSH ATTENDS IFTAAR DINNER AT THE WHITE HOUSE

10/18/2006



President George W. Bush addresses the Iftaar Dinner with Ambassadors and Muslim leaders in the State Dining Room of the White House, Monday, Oct. 16, 2006. White House photo by Paul Morse

THE PRESIDENT: Please be seated. Good evening and "Ramadan Karim." Welcome to the White House. Laura and I are really glad you're here. This is the sixth year that we have been pleased to host an Iftaar at the White House. We're honored to be with you and once again we're honored to pay tribute to the month of Ramadan.

Islam is a religion that brings hope and comfort to more than a billion people around the world. It has transcended racial and ethnic divisions. It has given birth to a rich culture of learning and literature and science. And tonight we honor the traditions of a great faith by hosting the Iftaar here at the White House.

I'm so pleased our Secretary of State, Condi Rice, has joined us. Thank you, Madam Secretary. I'm pleased that Dr. Elias Zerhouni, who is the Director of the NIH, is with us. Good to see you, Elias. I thank Imam Eid, from the Islamic Institute of Boston, is with us. I welcome all the ambassadors and other members of the Diplomatic Corps.

Ramadan is the holiest month in the Muslim calendar. For Muslims in America and around the world, Ramadan is a special time of prayer and fasting, contemplation of God's greatness, and charity and service to those in need. And for people of all faiths, it is a good time to reflect on the values we hold in common, including love of family, gratitude to God, the importance of community, and a commitment to tolerance and religious freedom.

America is a land of many faiths, and we welcome and honor the Muslim faith in our nation. Our society is enriched by our Muslim citizens. Your commitment to your faith reminds us all of the precious gift of religious freedom in our country. America is a more hopeful nation because of the talents and generosity and compassion of our Muslim citizens.

Tonight we have with us a group of special guests -- American Muslims who are serving our country. We have with us New York City police officers and a EMT worker who risked their lives to save their fellow citizens on 9/11; a military doctor and a member of the Navy's Chaplain Corps; members of our Foreign Service; and military veterans who have served in Afghanistan and Iraq to protect our country and help those nations build free and democratic futures.

One of our guests is Farooq Muhammed. Farooq is the son of Pakistani immigrants, and was born and raised in Brooklyn. He spent the past decade with the New York City Fire Department, first as an emergency medical technician and now as a paramedic. Farooq was at the World Trade Center on 9/11, treating victims when the towers collapsed -- he narrowly escaped death himself. He also recently volunteered in the mountains of Kashmir, where he helped treat the victims of last

year's devastating South Asian earthquake. Farooq's courage and compassion represent the best of the American spirit.

Paramedic Muhammed is a proud Muslim; he is a patriotic American. And those are characteristics he shares with the other special American guests gathered in this room. All of you bring credit to your faith. You make America a better and stronger country, and we're honored by your presence tonight. (Applause.)

The United States also appreciates the many Muslim nations who stand with us in the war on terror -- some of whom are represented here tonight. You know that the majority of the victims of the terrorists have been innocent Muslims, and many of you have seen terrorist violence in your own cities and your streets. We welcome you here. We are proud to work with you to defeat the terrorists and extremists, and help bring a brighter future to millions of Muslim people throughout the world who yearn for moderation and peace.

On this special evening, we celebrate the millions of Muslims that we are proud to call American citizens. We honor the many Islamic nations that America is proud to call friends. And we renew the ties of friendship that should bind all who trace their faith back to God's call on Abraham.

Laura and I are grateful that you're here. Once again, I wish you a blessed Ramadan. And now Imam Eid will say the blessing.