

Hinduism research paper

[Countries](#), [India](#)



Hinduism, the dominant religion of India and Nepal, consists of several different traditions. With teachings on daily morality and traditions referred to as Shaktism, Shaivism, and many others, the culture surrounding Hinduism is rich and vibrant. In order to understand it better, I sought to have a religious experience involving Hinduism. On March 19, 2014, I attended the Malibu Hidden Temple, located at 1600 Las Virgenes Canyon Road, Calabasas, California, 91302. It was my hope to have a religious experience that would enlighten me to the ways of the Hindu culture.

Upon first arriving at the Malibu Hidden Temple, I was in awe at its extravagance. The exterior design was very inspiring. The series of temples, walkways, and lavish tunnels are made of bleached stone. Everything looks pure. There are stone carvings of elephants and Hindu gods, as well as many ornate pillars and windows carved into the temples themselves. Gazing upon the Malibu Hidden Temple was a considerably spiritual experience unto itself. The interior space of the temple was equally breathtaking. Well lit, bathed in golden light, the interior spaces offered many of the same elaborate touches that the exterior space showed. Pillars of white stone stood in the middle of the entrance way and many carvings were etched directly into the walls. There were several statues of Hindu gods, as well. Furniture was relatively sparse, brightly colored, and seemingly overstuffed. Long, wide corridors of space were allotted for prayer and meditation, separated by lavish pillars made of sand-colored stone. The floors were polished, with simple photos of flowers embossed into their surface. Many people were not using any of the furniture, but instead using mats on the stone floor. The design of the interior and exterior space expressed a conflicting message to me. It was

decorated very lavishly, with gold statues of gods and ornamental, detailed carvings into stone. However the furniture was sparse and most people were sitting on mats on a hard floor. This suggested that perhaps the most elaborate sights grow from the simplest roots.

During my time at Malibu Hidden Temple, I was fortunate to witness traditional Hindu meditation. I know from Julius Lipner's book, "Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices" that this is a very important practice in the Hindu religion (54). At first, I will admit, that watching tens of people sit silently with their eyes closed was boring, as well as confusing. I knew, also from reading Lipner's book that meditation's purpose was to provide focus and awareness while instigating essential breathing techniques (57).

However, I was not prepared for when the individuals started chanting in unison. Seeing I was not familiar with the practice, one of the Hindu swamis of the temple took a few moments to explain that the chanting was referred to as mantra. Specifically, this class was using the Hare Krishna Mantra, or Maha Mantra, central to the Hare Krishna movement. This movement promotes pure love of god, which is what the participants were attempting to achieve. The swami was quick to point out that it would not be achieved this day, or any time soon for many, but that only years of dedication to the Hare Krishna movement would result in the desired effect.

Before entering the temple I was very nervous. I knew general information about Hinduism along with trivial facts I have gathered through my education, as well as independent readings. However, I do not know as much as somebody practicing, or seeking to practice Hinduism. The exterior of the temple, while beautiful and elaborate, was also daunting and unwelcoming. I

did not want to seem like a tourist; I noticed many people appeared to be uninterested in the religion, but very interested in the temple. Soon though, my nerves were soothed by how friendly everybody acted. Those who practiced at the temple did not treat anybody differently and I began to relax, hoping that it would be the same experience for me. Upon seeing the inside of the temple I was equally impressed but not as intimidated; I was greeted warmly and felt as though I was not being judged. Watching the meditation was a very fulfilling experience, but not as fulfilling as when I was asked to participate. I had no idea what the mantra was. Because of this, I initially declined. The swami said it did not matter; I could learn in time, or simply sit and let the mantras of others penetrate my mind because though they were all having their own singular experience, they were all also experiencing it collectively. Being surrounded by nearly thirty people, all chanting in unison, powerfully, focused on a single thing, was very moving. They came here with one primary goal and though they (we) may have all be feeling or experiencing different things, we were all a part of one shared process. I felt more connected during this experience than by any experience I have had on social networking sites, who advertise connection as a hook. My feelings after leaving were openness and relaxation. I have no other words for it other than I felt more human. I only wish I had visited at a special time of year for Hindu culture in order to see what a Hindu celebration consists of. I plan to return in order to understand the religion better in this context.

I attempted to enter the temple without any preconceptions, but after leaving I realized that I had carried one with me. I did not expect to come

away from the experience with anything. I recognize Hinduism as a religion and I understand that it suits others, but it was not until I left that I made up my mind before entering the temple that I was only there to observe instead of to participate or be open to the Hindu experience. I am not a Hindu, not am I converting, but my preconception was thinking that my chosen religion closed doors to truly experiencing the benefits of other religions. This was a folly of mine that I am glad to have corrected. Being a part of the Hare Krishna Mantra showed me that no matter whom I am, was, or will be, religiously or otherwise, there is always room to grow and change.

Remaining open to all of life's aspects helps keep up fresh and vibrant, as many of the practicing Hindus in the temple seemed to behave.

After reading in L. S. S. O'Malley's, " Popular Hinduism: The Religion of the Masses", I was prepared for the role of the religious leaders in the temple.

The swamis of the temple were responsible for leading religious ceremonies (102). One began the meditation practice I was a part of, citing when the mantra began, and when it ended. The swamis also lead other religious ceremonies such as reciting hymns, scriptures, and instigating religious offerings (105). According to O'Malley, only one swami is needed for a religious ritual but because there are several smaller temples on the Malibu Hidden Temples that need attending, additional swamis are needed (107). I assume additional swamis are also needed to answer questions or direct the ignorant, such as myself.

Through my readings as well as my education, I was able to learn of many values that the Hindu religion offers prior to my visit. Lipner states that Hindus tend to value simplicity, a love, and spirituality (95). It is a religion

based on universality, where a love for god is aspired to, but the primary goal is to appreciate the oneness that we all acquire by just being (100). Hindus value the evolution of the personality, as well as the evolution of the mind (101). These core values were evident in the meditation ceremony I witnessed. Though the mantra was focused on a love for god, the meditation itself was about achieving a higher sense of self while also experiencing something that was part of a greater collective whole. The practice was meant to help the individuals evolve internally while still promoting the universality that Hinduism was founded on. The bridge Hinduism has built between these two seemingly opposing theories is inspiring to watch take place.

The roles of men and women in the temple seemed no different when I first entered the center. The only core difference I noticed was that I did not see any female swamis. Otherwise, anybody of Hindu religion, regardless of sex, was acting similarly, as well as being treated similarly, as everybody else. Upon further research, O'Malley states that there are female saints and gurus, but no female swamis (87). Females in modern times are not always denied rights, as they were in ancient times, but the genders are not equal. Men can make more decisions, own more property, and still receive a dowry for “taking the burden of a woman” from a family through marriage (88). In sum, my time at the temple was well spent. Though I was intimidated when I first arrived it was easy to feel more comfortable after realizing that everybody was so accepting. It was even easier to relax once I remembered that acceptance is one of the primary building blocks of Hinduism. Because I stepped out of my typical comfort zone in order to explore something new, I

was able to experience something I never thought I would experience before. My preconceptions were eliminated with a 15 minute meditation session and the kindness of a local swami. The process of meditation is an enlightening practice that, though I am not Hindu, I may integrate into my everyday life. It was cleansing and cleared my mind. I may also begin to implement the foundational practices of Hinduism into my life; they exemplify who I would like to be as a person. After experiencing the power of Hindu practices firsthand I believe that integrating them into my life could help me be a happier person. Overall the experience was eye-opening and has lit a fire of curiosity within me that feels unquenchable.

References

Lipner, Julius. *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2012. Print.

O'Malley, L. S. S. *Popular Hinduism: The Religion of the Masses*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Print.