**2020 HINDUISM SOCRATIC SEMINAR #1: Best Student Essay**

This essay received a 100% A+ and would also receive a perfect 7/7 on the IB Exam Paper #2

Possible Topic #1: How does Hinduism answer big question #1: What is the meaning of life?

“If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them...I should point to India,” quoted by Max Muller, a 19th century orientalist. Indeed if we point our attention to India, we see that one of the most central core to their life and culture is the way of life through Hinduism. Hinduism embodies a huge diversity of beliefs, but what unites them all is the idea that people’s soul, Brahman, is here on a journey. In Hinduism, Samsara, the wheel of life, portrays the 4 stages in human life. Reincarnating into this cycle of life, the ultimate goal is for the soul to find Dharma (truth) and reach Nirvana (infinite bliss). Hence, Hinduism sums up the goal of life through the balance of the four Purusharthas- artha (wealth), kama (desire), dharma (righteousness), and moksha (liberation). To Hindus, life is a quest for liberation from worldly desires, and the only place an individual can truly find Nirvana is inside the very individual because “Atman is Brahman and Brahman is Atman”; this is evident through the four main paths Raja Marga, Jnana Marga, Karma Marga, and Bhakti Marga.

First, Raja Marga is the path of self discipline through the practice of yoga and meditation. Raja Marga has been considered to be the most royal way of reaching Moksha. The most important guidance for this practice is the study of the 196 Sanskrit Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, through the eightfold path of Ashtanga. The eight steps: Yama the control of the self, Niyama the regulation of life, Asana the control of body postures, Pranayama the control of breath, Pratyahara the withdrawal of senses, Dharana the strength of concentration, dhyana the practice of meditation, and samadhi the absorption. One specific meditative posture is the lotus position, which promotes comfort and alertness of the body’s mental and physical conditions. The combined purification of moral, body, and mind, will hence lead to the eighth step: samadhi, the true awareness of Brahman. Therefore, self-liberation Raja yoga will bring about victory against Dukkha and hence reach Moksha.

Jnana Yoga, on the other hand, is known as the path of “knowledge” or “self-realization”. Through philosophical studies of sacred texts known as The Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita and the ancient Sanskrit language, this path sets forth for attaining jnana, enlightenment. According to theBhagavad Gita The Second Teaching (2.38-39),

*“understanding is defined in terms of philosophy;*

*now hear it in spiritual discipline (yoga).*

*Armed with this understanding,*

*Arjuna, you will escape the bondage of action (karma)”*

The mind has the power to discriminate between illusion and reality. Advaita, Monistic Hindus, believe that Brahman contains the ultimate reality: *“Gaining of knowledge, he soon finds perfect peace”* (Bhagavad Gita). The idea that the individual’s mind is the source of Atman is reinforced through the Upanishads’. Through Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita can be read symbolically. For instance:

*“Impartial to joy and suffering gain and loss,*

*victory and defeat,*

*arm yourself for the battle,*

*lest you fall into evil.”*

The teachings of the avatar Krishna can be interpreted literally as a demand for caste duty, but the Upanishads, on the other hand, reveals this as a call for action, using the universal power within oneself to overcome illusions. In addition, through studying Sanskrit, Jnanis deepens their ability to understand or reach salvation. For example, In Sanskrit, ‘Om’ ‘ॐ’ , the sacred symbol often seen in the Upanishads, is held as the most important mantra for worship. It reveals to the Jnanis that the absolute state of unity, Turiya, can be found on top of the maya, and the only thing that is obscuring the light of truth is the veil of maya. Hence, chanting ‘Om’ and experiencing its vibration clears away obstacles.

In a like manner, Karma Marga is practiced by Hindus through carrying out life activities with dharma. Dharam emphasizes on abiding to the cosmic law. Karma Yoga is the action of selfless service, detachment of ego, embodiment of a thankful spirit, and self-recognition as “God’s instrument”. Through *“relinquishing the fruit of action”* and *“resigning [them] to God”*, one can experience infinite bliss (Bhagavad Gita). A person without attachment for favor will be released from egotism, sufferings, and worldly yearns. Therefore, through acting as a mere instrument and detaching from self-conceit, Karma Marga is the abandonment of kama in order to step closer to nirvana.

Last but not least, Bhakti Marga is the practice of rituals and worship in devotion to a deity. Bhakti Marga has its basis in the Bhagavad Gita, similar to the other two margas. Hindus may be defined as dualist, through praying to gods, they call the energy from the outside. However, the Hindus believe that although there are many gods, they all point to the one divine reality. Different gods may represent different beliefs, but they all ultimately represent the unconditional love of the universe’s reality. For example, god Hanuman is the symbol of inner control, faith, and service to a cause. Either through the reciting of the Hanuman Chalisa or praying at the Bara Human temple, the devotee’s inner understanding will be brought closer to realizing Moksha. Thus, the Bhagavad Gita emphasizes the importance of Bhakti Marga as men *“Renounce all actions to [god], and worship [god]”*, God will *“rescue them from the ocean of death and rebirth”.* When the minds of the people are focused on a god, then they will *“dwell in [god] without doubt”* (Bhagavad Gita). The function of Bhakti marga will then act as a way to eliminate egotism, ignorance, and mundane desires. Devotees go for darshan to build love relationships with God. No matter the location at either a temple or a personal shrine, the image of a god is believed to be imbued with the divine presence. Bhakti Marga include individual pujas or collective festivals and pilgrimages. One common form of puja is arati, through the offering of light, fueled with ghee or camphor, and waved in a clockwise direction. At the end of arati, the participant will wave the flame to the forehead as a gesture of cleansing the inner-self. Another form of worship may be celebrating at a festival. For example, the festival of Durga Puja in Kolkata, India. At this festival, icons such as a multi-armed Durga, Ganesha and other deities, may be carried around for devotees to pour auspicious substance or pray to as a form of darshan before being immersed in the Ganges River.

In conclusion, Hinduism allows for a great examination of the different IB Ways of Knowing. Direct experience is used through Raja Yoga’s meditation practices and the eightfold Ashtanga. Logical reasoning is used by Jnana Marga through indulgence with sacred texts and intellectual insights. Finally, Karma and Bhakti Yoga through daily engagement and ritual worship that resembles the reliance on faith and emotions as a way of knowing. Regardless of the pathways/Marga, Hinduism’s meaning of life focuses on enlightening the mind to truly experience the liberation of nirvana.

**ANOTHER A+ SOCRATIC SEMINAR and IB 7/7 PAPER #2 Essay**

Honors Seminar: World Religions

02 October 2020

Seminar 1 Essay

Topic #1: How does Hinduism answer big question #1: What is the meaning of life?

In Hinduism, the ultimate goal for all humans is to reach what the Upanishads call moksha, or infinite bliss and liberation. One key Hindu belief is that atman is Brahman, the soul and the infinite are one, thus when the atman recognizes its true nature as Brahman moksha is obtained. However, the infinite is buried underneath worldly attachments and the ego and must be cleared away for moksha to be achieved. Hinduism provides multiple explanations and methods to reach moksha and destroy the ego. One explanation is through the cycle of death and life, or samsara. Another method is through jnana, karma, and bhakti marga.

Hindus believe that humans go through three stages of life, the cycle of samsara, before finally reaching moksha. These first three stages are pursuit of pleasure, pursuit of wealth and success, and community service. Hinduism encourages one to pursue these different desires as they become learning experiences. Moksha represents everything one could want in life. The cycle of samsara allows one to have a taste of this infinite bliss. One will eventually become bored of constantly chasing pleasure and move on to the next stage of life and pursue success. Eventually one will become bored of pursuing success and move on to pursuit of community service. The cycle will continue until one can successfully clear away these materialistic and fleeting desires and realize that the infinite was already inside them. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna utilizes war to represent the meaning of life. Humans are Arjuna and the war is our life. As a warrior, Arjuna is obligated to fulfill his caste duty and fight. Similarly, humans must fulfill our sacred duty to fight our inner battle against our ego to achieve moksha.

Hinduism also provides three margas, or paths, to reach moksha: jnana marga, karma marga, and bhakti marga. Jnana marga can be considered the more scientific path. It encompasses raja yoga and meditation, as well as philosophy and contemplating sacred texts such as the Vedas and Upanishads. The goal of yoga and meditation is to allow one to experience the union of one’s atman and Brahman. In fact, yoga means “union”. In Pantanjali’s yogasutras, he asserts that there yoga is eight fold with seven stages before attaining the last stage, moksha: yama (self-control and morality), niyama (self-purification), asanas (yoga postures), pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (control over senses), dharana (concentration), and dhyana (meditation). In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna implicitly mentions some of these stages to Arjuna. Krishna tells Arjuna that when one’s “thought ceases, checked by the exercise of discipline [one] is content within the self.” When one’s mind is “tranquil, perfect joy comes to the man… and he is without sin, being one with the infinite spirit.” Here, Krishna explains pratyahara and dharana. By following jnana marga and practicing yoga, one is able to quiet their mind and focus on the atman they leave behind fleeting thoughts and worldly, materialistic attachments in favor of the infinite. Furthermore, in yoga a common asana, or posture, is the lotus position. This position is significant because the lotus symbolizes purity, thus in yoga the lotus position represents how purity of the mind allows one to fully realize that atman is Brahman. Another common yoga and meditation practice is chanting the most holy Sanskrit word: “Om”. “Om” represents the vibrations of the supreme energy or Brahman. By creating the vibrations of this supreme energy, one can awaken the same energy within themselves and achieve moksha. As a result, many Vedic chants begin with “Om”.

Another path to moksha is through karma marga. Karma marga involves selfless action and service without thought of personal reward or praise. The first stage of karma marga is dharma. Dharma involves living a moral, ethical, and unselfish life and requires one to dissociate from the singular body and mind. Like Krishna tells Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, one must “[b]e intent on action, not on the fruits of action”. Our atman will go through many reincarnations and have many different bodies and dharma allows one to realize that their current body and mind are temporary. There is no reason to act selfishly and be self-serving when everything achieved in one lifetime will fade away. Karma marga thus allows one to disconnect from worldly desires and think about the rest of the world and its existence. A significant Hindu role model is Rama from the Ramayana. Rama is considered to be the epitome of dharma. When Rama’s father’s wife ordered him to banish Rama, he did not question the decree and when Bharata, his brother, went to find him and ask him to return and rule Rama refused to go against his father. When Rama’s wife Sita was kidnapped he did everything he could to bring her back safely. Often times, part of the daily routine at Hindu ashrams is a couple hours of karma yoga. This includes doing farm work, yard work, or cleaning the temple.

The third path to moksha is bhakti marga. Bhakti marga involves rituals and worship of gods and goddesses. There are two main ways to practice bhakti marga, individually and collectively. Individual bhakti marga includes puja and arati. Puja involves making offerings of flowers or fruit to an image of a god or goddess. Puja may also include ritual bathing and dressing of statues of deities. For example, worshipers of the goddess Saraswati will dress her with yellow clothing and flowers as yellow is her favorite color. They also offer sandalwood and saffron which represent purity. Another important aspect of worship is darshan. Hindus believe that in a place of worship any image or statue of a deity is the deity itself. Darshan represents the personal relationship between the worshipper and God; the worshipper and the God see each other. When darshan is performed the deity bestows blessings on everyone in its presence. Arati is also another way for individuals to worship. A lamp fueled with ghee or camphor is waved in front of a deity. Arati removes any evil influences from the place of worship. At the end of the ritual, the worshipper waves their hands over the flame and touches their forehead to bring the divine light into their being. Arati represents enlightenment. One of the ways it does this is through the lamp fuel. When ghee and camphor finish burning, they leave nothing behind. This represents how when one is enlightened by knowledge they are left with no trace of their ego. This enlightenment is akin to moksha.

Bhakti marga also includes collective worship. This includes festivals and pilgrimages. One such festival is Basant Panchami. Basant Panchami happens on the fifth day in the Hindu month of Magha and is the preparation of the arrival of spring. During this festival the goddess Saraswati is worshipped. As Saraswati is the goddess of knowledge and the arts, children learn to write for the first time or create music during Basant Panchami. Worshippers wear yellow clothing and accessories and eat yellow food. For example, saffron is added to rice to make it yellow for feasts. Bhakti marga allows one to understand the unconditional love and energy of Brahman. Each god and goddess represents a different path to understanding Brahman and reaching moksha. For example, Shiva the destroyer can destroy one’s ego that keeps the atman from uniting with Brahman. Saraswati is the embodiment of all knowledge, thus worshipping her allows one to come closer to obtaining knowledge of the infinite.

Hinduism ties in heavily with experience as the IB Way of Knowing. One experiences the momentary satisfaction but eventual boredom and dissatisfaction with worldly possessions as they move through the four stages of life. This leads to the pursuit of the infinite. The infinite can be obtained by practicing jnana, karma, and bhakti marga. By practicing yoga and meditation, one looks into their soul and quiets their mind to experience unity of atman and Brahman. Through selfless deeds and practicing dharma one can detach oneself from the ego and do good without expectation of personal satisfaction and praise. These good deeds allow one to experience the unconditional love that represents Brahman. Finally, through rituals, festivals, and pilgrimages, one can form a personal relationship with a god or goddess that will guide them towards understanding Brahman. Therefore, when one disciplines oneself through these methods and is finally able to clear away their worldly delusions and obsessions, they can leave the cycle of samsara and achieve unity of atman and Brahman and reach moksha.

2021 BEST ANSWER #1

Hinduism and the Meaning of Life

Hinduism, a religion that originated from the Indus valley, allows us to comprehend one of life’s biggest questions. What is the meaning of life? Hindus believe that the existence of our lives is to escape from the grasp of samsara and reach moksha; conversely, to reach moksha is to have the perfect balance within your karma. To attain Moksha one’s self must liberate themselves from all of their desires and cravings ultimately, breaking the indefinite cycles of repeated birth, death, and misery known as samsara. Unfortunately, there is no easy route to obtaining Moksha, every one of your reincarnations is dependent on your previous life’s karma. Fortunately, there are three found yogic paths that eventually lead to the emancipation of Samsara Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and lastly Jnana Yoga.

To achieve the ultimate goal of Moksha we have to first understand why it is necessary to eradicate Samsara. In the sacred texts of Upanishads, they explain Samsara as a wheel of continuous reincarnation caused by the effect of karma. That said, being a part of this continuous cycle of Samsara is frowned upon because it is believed that the natural essence of this cycle is dukkha. Dukkha is one of the three marks of existence and the first of the four noble truths. Dukkha refers to the unsatisfactoriness and suffering that you undergo while living. For example, in the verse 4.4.14 of the Upanishads they state that “Atman. If you’ve not known it, great is your destruction. Those who have known it become immortal. As for the rest - only suffering awaits them.”, in this sacred text they describe the term suffering with the word dukkha alluding to the idea that the constant cycle of Samsara is also a constant cycle of suffering.

As we begin to understand the importance of attaining moksha and liberating Samsara we are compelled to ask ourselves, how? How do we reach Moksha? The first out of three different ways to obtain Moksha is to practice Karma Yoga. Karma Yoga is a path that will lead to spiritual liberation through hard work, dedication, and self-discipline. The idea of Karma Yoga is to have the ability to control and release your ego, meaning that you act without an expectation of a reward. To practice Karma Yoga one’s self must be freed from their attachment to their desires and cravings. This is the path of selflessness and righteous action. Moreover, in Hinduism people are expected to work hard not for the benefits and rewards but, for the sake of doing god’s work. Likewise, most of our actions are influenced by the benefits and outcome of our work, and in Hinduism, it is believed that the constant anticipation of such rewards will inevitably lead to misery. Acting selflessly and generously is a common recurring theme in one of the famous sacred scriptures the Bhagavad-Gita. For example, in the Bhagavad-Gita, it states “Your work is your responsibility, not its result. Never let the fruits of your actions be your motive. Nor give in to inaction.” This passage in the Bhagavad Gita expresses the idea that you have to act without the motivation of the “fruits of your actions”. This is necessary because if you solely act for the results of your actions you are counteracting the idea of Dharma. Dharma is the means to act morally and ethically. A person cannot truly reach Moksha if they go against the beliefs of Dharma.

The second way to acquire Moksha is to exercise Bhakti Yoga. Bhakti Yoga is the path of devotion, this is the method of reaching God through the power of love. In Hinduism, people believe that the most formidable way to connect to God is through a personal connection. Regardless of whether or not you see God in the form of a parent, lover, friend, or even teacher as long as the emotion of love remains, that is all that matters. Bhakti Marga is one of the ways to achieve moksha through devotion to a singular god. One way people like to express their religious devotion is through chants and intone

mantras. One of the most commonly known traditions of bhakti-yoga is known as Kirtan or the devotional chanting of the name of the god. By continuously chanting the god's name you are showing devotion and expressing your love to him or her. Another common method is called Japa and is the repetition of a mantra. By practicing Bhakti yoga an individual will treat all of their thoughts and actions as an offering to God and are thus more likely to act selflessly and positively leading to Moksha.

Lastly, you can attempt to acquire the state of Moksha through Jnana Yoga - the path of knowledge. In Jnana Yoga, you have to cultivate the mind with knowledge and insight to distinguish the differences between your eternal self and your temporary body. Only then, will Atman be Brahman and Brahman be Atman. Essentially, through the path of knowledge, you begin to realize the unity between yourself and god. There are three basic steps to spiritual liberation by following Jnana yoga. The first being Shravana, the exercise of listening. In the first step, the practitioner must repeatedly listen to the words of a guru and read the scriptures carefully. Only then can they move on to the second step. The second step is called manana and is the stage of thought. In step two you must have deep contemplation. The practitioner must contemplate what they have learned and why they have learned such material. There has to be a deep understanding and living out of scriptural teachings which then leads us to the last step. The final step is called nididhyasana and is the step of meditation. During the final step, you are expected to experience the divine. After continuously reading and thinking about the divine it is now essential for the individual to dive deeper into their consciousness and experience God themselves. This method of practice really explains the concept of atman is brahman and brahman is atman because you are essentially looking for the god within yourself.

In conclusion, according to Hinduism the meaning of life is to work towards a balanced karma and repel the cycle of samsara, an endless cycle of reincarnation and suffering. This can only be attained by reaching a state of Moksha. In an attempt to reach the state of Moksha you are expressing the IB ways of knowledge. Throughout the course of following Bhakti Yoga, you are essentially conveying the idea of faith by continuously placid your trust and love towards god. Similarly, by practicing Jnana Yoga you are illustrating the concept of intuition by spending your time studying to see the god within yourself. You are having faith that you can find god within oneself. Therefore, by practicing Karma yoga, Bhakti yoga, and Jnana yoga you are creating a perfect balance within yourself and your karma ultimately reaching the state of Moksha.

2021 BEST ANSWER #2: HINDUISM VIEW OF GOD

Possible Topic #2: How does Hinduism answer big question #2: What is God? and How can you understand God?

Mahatma Gandhi once stated, “I love Christianity, Islam, and many other faiths – through Hinduism.” Such quotes reflect the fundamental ideology of Hinduism: the pursuit of truth in many forms. As such, Hinduism remains as one of the few religions that values other religions. Such normalization of diversity and paradox establishes the culture of inclusion in Hinduism. Perhaps, Gandhi’s emphasis on selfless service for everyone was directly inspired by Hinduism. After all, Gandhi did carry the Bhagavad Gita around everywhere he went (almost like his version of the Holy Bible).

There are a multitude of various ways for people to confirm their hypothesis of a higher being (IB Ways of Knowing). In Hinduism, yogis could specialize in different practices to understand one fundamental belief — Atman is Brahman. Your soul is God. The name for Brahman is ॐ (aum). Aum’s spelling symbolizes the Trimurti of Hinduism: A for Brahma the creator, U for Vishnu the preserver, and M for Shiva the destroyer. A major misconception of Hinduism is that it is polytheistic. Hinduism follows monotheism. Again, such statements about one’s soul being God may seem almost narcissistic to the populace who does not understand Hinduism. For Hinduism, understanding God may take lifetimes. It takes 4 stages of your soul in the universe to truly understand God. From the stages 1 to 3, you are in the cycle of Samsara: 1. pleasure, 2. success, 3. Selfless. Eventually, the fourth stage is where you connect with God in enlightenment called Moksha. Moksha allows you experience infinite Bliss and awareness. Yogis believe that yoga is the union between the mind, body, and spirit. Yoga is one of the best ways for a mortal to experience moksha and define God. The 3 primary ways for Hindus to know God is Karma marga, Jnana marga, and Bhakti marga.

Karma marga is the path of doing active and selfless service to those around you. One famous Karma yogi is Gandhi. For Karma yogis, the definition of God primarily is confirmed through experience (IB way of Knowing). Karma marga requires the yogis to lose his ego. This is a form of active mediation, where the yogi uses present movement to enact selfless acts. Such desire is the last stage of Samsara, which is the closest stage for you Atman to destine in the final moksha (Brahman). With each selfless act, your soul finds peace. Therefore, when you experience the joy after helping people helps you feel close to moksha, the way to know God. Karma Marga consists of 4 principles, which are duty, ego, attachment, and expectation of reward. Karma Yoga stresses about prioritizing your duties, perhaps even more so than other principles such as non-violence. This is evident in Bhagavat Gita, where Arjuna faces a dilemma between his own moral beliefs of non-injury and his social duty. His sense of desire is beyond success and pleasure, which caused him to lack incentives to join the war. Despite Hinduism’s emphasis on non-violence, Krishna (the eighth incarnation of Vishnu) still urges Arjuna to participate to his duty as a warrior caste. On last line of stanza 18, the all-knowing Krishna proclaims that “Arjuna [have to] fight the battle!” This is the emphasis of fulfilling your designated duty even beyond your own dilemma. However, such instance does not mean that people should prioritize violence over non-violence. In his case, his duty was to fight. However, in the modern case, your duty could be the opposite, like Gandhi’s non-violence.

For ego, yogis need recognize working hard and helping others is not for the sake of pity. For attachment, the practice of Karma Yoga means to do without your own opinions of whether you enjoy the activity or not. This is highlighted in Arjuna’s case as well. For expectation of reward, yogis must first recognize there are rewards and consequences for every decision. Yet, such recognition is used instead to understand that working your duties and spreading love is not for the sake of reward. Arjuna already recognized that he does not receive a reward. However, he failed to understand the purpose of fighting the war if he is not rewarded with desires that he enjoys (since he does not want either success or pleasure). Krishna acts a teacher that guides Arjuna to understand he should do his duty as Karma marga regardless of his own emotions. Krishna states “action is far inferior // to the discipline of understanding” on stanza 49 line 1-2. Therefore, if you are accomplishing your duty and performing selfless acts, regardless of your religion, you are on your way to understand God.

Jnana Marga is the most traditional perception of yoga. This is the path of physical yoga, meditation, and philosophy. Out of the three, Jnana Marga is the most literal perception of Atman being Brahman. Such method relies heavily on intuition (IB way of Knowing). However, according to Patanjali’s Yoga practice the physical yoga may only act as one of the 8 steps to moksha (and understand God). Patanjali or other known as the ‘Father of Yoga’ wrote 195 sutras (set of rules) that framework for the integration of yoga into the human lifestyle around 200BCE. The 8 steps are outlined by 1. Yama, 2. Niyama, 3. Asanas, 4. Prana-yama, 5. Pratyahara, 6. Dharana, 7. Dhyana, and 8. Samadhi. Fundamentally, the process states that looking within yourself could help you reach enlightenment because your soul is a part of God. You could clear your mind through many of the stages, such as meditation and yoga in the Asanas and Dharana or the cleansing of evil thoughts in Yama. Then, it would be easier for you to look through your Atman and understand Brahman.

The aforementioned non-violence is mentioned in Patanjali’s satras. As requirements for the first stage of Yama is non-injury (ahima), truthfulness, (satya), non-stealling (asteya), celibacy (brahmacharya), and non-hoarding of material objects (aparigraha). The Niyama are the rules of conduct relating to individual discipline with the 5 steps of purification of the body (shaucha), contentment (santosha), penance by practicing austerities (tapas), selfstudy of sacred texts (svadhyaya), and meditation on God (ishvara pranidhana). The third is Asanas of the physical exercises for good health of the limb, or the yoga most people understand. Jnana yogis treat their mattress with great respect like it is a holy area. There are multiple exercises to Asanas. Many of the exercises are linked with chakra and Ajna (third eye, usually marked with a bindi). For instance, the balasana presses your Anja against the mattress. Prana-yama emphasizes the retention of breath for a long time. Pratyahara is to total rhythmic control of the breath, free of influence of outside objects. Dharana is the focus of complete stillness of the mind. Dhyana is the attaining the ideal state of conscious and meditation or contemplation. This is where you develop a feel for your third eye. Samadhi is the final stage of ecstasy and transcendence.

Bhakti Marga is the path of ‘formal Hinduism rituals,’ which includes activities of holidays, temple visits, and prayers. This the most common perception of Hindu Gods, where Hindus go to temples and do rituals. Such method primary focuses on the aspect of emotion. In this case, God is depicted as different forms to help people visualize the all-encompassing nature of Brahman. The aspect of emotion that Bhakti Marga mostly touch is love (IB way of Knowing). One instance of the loving nature of God is the mercy from the courageous Rama. Rama is the avatar or incarnation of Vishnu. With his love, his battle against the rakshasa (demon) with ten heads and ten sets of arms allowed even the evil Ravana to face a death that is cleansed of evil. In his final words, Ravana, the main villain of the story, changes and states advice for people to learn from him, such as his advice to “always trust the minister or partner who criticizes you. Also, never consider your enemy weak or small, as [he] ha[s] done in Hanuman’s case.” This is to show the love from Rama could change even the most horrible beings. There is also other emotion such as fear (IB way of Knowing) depicted in Goddesses like Kali. The goddess mainly functions to scare you back in order. This is to break your false sense of self or Atman. Kali acts as a goddess to break the unfair social standards instilled upon women and cultural norms of female life. There is a picture of her standing on top of Shiva, overpowering her husband in the relationship. Her primary power of shakti is to state the female divine power within everyone that is independent and powerful enough to conqueror other forms of power. This empowers the females in the society. Other religions could have other gods to help you visualize the great power of the universe and God (Brahman).

Bhakti marga could also be examined through its sacred texts and ritual. The Yajurveda is a sacred text that outlines many rituals. One of the major purposes to help “the seeker[s] know the true nature of [their] soul // and identify [their]self with it completely.” This is the “resolve to dedicate our life // to the service of humankind, and uplift them to Divinity.” Such purpose focuses on the fact that the rituals are meant to be serving more beneficial to the practitioners than they are the deities themselves. This is because it is a chance for the yogis to elevate themselves and present their Atman a chance to experience or connect with God. Therefore, as long as any of the religions people are practicing is fulfilling the purpose of uplifting one’s moral views, they are in the process of knowing God according to Hinduism. Rituals to honor the Gods include celebrations at the vernal equinox, which is Hinduism’s most colorful holiday. Around late February to early March, there would a day commencing the full moon day of the period over 2 days. In the first night, bon fires are lit, and coconuts are offered as sacrifice. On the second day, Carnival celebration presents a day where social and gender hierarchies are temporarily inverted. A connection of the crowds of young and old spraying colored water and staining one another with brightly colored powders. They dance in joy, forgetting the sorrow and duties of the world. During this time, people have a chance to pray to the God and God’s many forms. Each community and family have a slightly different way of celebrating. Other forms of rituals for Bhakti marga include temple visiting such as the pilgrimage sites in Hindu India like Tirupati, where some people choose to prostrate every step until they reach the top to show humility and development of your Atman. Ultimately, these are not necessary, but act as a tool to amplify the emotion you feel when practicing Bhakti marga.

Hinduism offers different paths to know god align with different types of ways to know, which explains its popularity as the third largest religion. Perhaps, one of the reasons Hinduism as a religion lasted the longest was its appeal to different types of people. Some prefer using experience to understand, so the Karma marga suits them best. Some prefer employing intuition to understand, so Jnana marga helps them feel God. Some prefer understanding through emotion, so they use Bhakti marga. With all three methods, they have the same thesis: Atman is Brahman. Ultimately, one fundamental about Hinduism that doesn’t change even if people do not follow the traditional 3 methods to moksha, as long as they are improving themselves, they are working to the way of understanding God.