Hinduism,
Buddhism,
Confucianism
and
Christianity

A comparison of religions
Hinduism

The world’s third largest religion, Hinduism has no specific origin. It is polytheistic, characterized by wrathful gods, based around a caste system and primarily practiced in India. Hindus believe that the levels in this caste system are reflective of actions in previous lives, and that once a person reaches untouchable status they may then be able to attain a union with God.
Hindus centralize their system of beliefs around Yoga, the belief that there are many different paths to an ideal union with God; through knowledge, love, work and psychophysical exercises.

In this respect, Hinduism is very tolerant of other religions and assimilates their paths with the correct work as other paths to their ideal.

There are specific stages and stations of life that one must go through on their path to union as well as specific behaviors one must exhibit.

Karma is one of the more well known Hindu beliefs; that one must be accountable for their own actions, for every right action in this life will affect your caste placement in future lives.
Hinduism

❖ Aryans, and empires of Indian subcontinent
❖ Brahma-supreme force
  – Gods are manifestations of Brahma
    ◆ Vishnu-preserver
    ◆ Shiva-destroyer
❖ Reincarnation
  – Dharma: rules and obligations
  – Karma: fate based on how dharma was met
  – Moshka: highest state of being, release of soul
The Big Deal?

- Religion as well as social system
- Caste system, accept lot in life, next one will be better (if dharma met)
- Close relationship w/Indian culture, caste system have limited its spread
- Treatment of animals
- Hinduism spawns Buddhism
Buddhism was founded by a man formerly known as Siddhartha Guatama. Siddhartha was born into wealth as well as the Hindu religion. Seeing the sickness around his palace, and finding the caste system unfair, the future Buddha left on a spiritual journey to find his own way through meditation. Springing from the Hindu religion along with Siddhartha’s own beliefs came Buddhism. Now divided into Mahayana and Therevada Buddhism, The Buddha’s teachings emphasize the correct way to live through the eight-fold-path and meditation so that one might reach Nirvana.
Buddhism

- India, China, SE Asia
- Hindu prince, Siddartha Gautama
- Nepal 563-483 BCE
- Search for meaning of human suffering
- Buddha = enlightened one
- No supreme being
The first sermon ever given by this enlightened man was that of the Four Noble Truths, a central theme to Buddhist worship.

1- Dukkha, suffering
2- Tahna, desire for private fulfillment
3- the overcoming of Tahna
4- The Eightfold Path

The Eight Fold Path
[the correct way to live]

1- Right Knowledge, the knowledge of the four noble truths
2- Right Aspiration, decide what you really want, is it truly enlightenment?
3- Right Speech, truth.
4- Right Behavior, ethical behavior including ideals common to religions like Christianity; do not kill, do not steal, do not lie, do not be unchaste, do not take drugs or drink intoxicants.
5- Right Livelihood, one must put most or all of their ambitions into enlightenment.
6- Right Effort, moral exertion.
7- Right Mindfulness, ignorance is considered the prime adversary to enlightenment.
8- Right Absorption
The Middle Path or Moderate Way

• Avoid extremes—either an overt pursuit of passionate worldly desire or extreme asceticism

• Live a moderate lifestyle characterized by quiet contemplation, thoughtful reflection, and disciplined self-control
  – Reduces desire for material goods and other worldly attractions
  – Eventually results in detachment from the world itself
Buddhism’s Popularity in India

• Did not recognize social distinctions based on caste
  – Appealed strongly to members of lower castes
• Did not demand rigorous asceticism
• Popular with merchants who used Buddhist monasteries as inns
• Taught in vernacular language to reach a popular audience
• Holy sites and shrines facilitated pilgrimages
Buddhist Organization

- Organization proved efficient in spreading Buddhism and winning converts
  - Most highly motivated converts joined monastic communities
  - Pious lay supporters provided the monasteries with land, buildings, finances, and materials
  - The monks spent much of their time preaching
Monasteries

• Early Indian education was informal, mostly involving just a sage and his students
• Buddhists organized monasteries and began offering regular instruction and established educational institutions
• Most famous monastery was at Nalanda

Ruins of monastery at Nalanda
Appeal to the Wealthy

- Monasteries began to accept gifts from wealthy individuals and consider them acts of generosity that merited salvation.
- Now wealthy individuals could enjoy the comforts of the world and still ensure their salvation.
Establishment of Buddhism in China

• Buddhist merchants visited China as early as the 2nd Century B.C. but made little headway against Confucianism.

• With the demise of the Han Dynasty, Confucianism suffered a loss of credibility:
  – The purpose of Confucianism was to maintain public order and provide honest, effective government.
  – In the age of warlords and nomadic invasions, Confucianism appeared to have failed.
Establishment of Buddhism

- Originally Buddhism took root in the oases along the trade routes.
- By the 4th Century A.D., a sizeable Buddhist community had emerged at Dunhuang in western China.
  - At Dunhuang two branches of the Silk Road join together.
Buddhism in China

- Buddhism attracted Chinese because of its high standards of morality, its intellectual sophistication, and its promise of salvation.
- Buddhists' monasteries became important elements of the local economies:
  - Monasteries became sizeable estates due to contributions of wealthy converts.
  - Cultivated lands extensively and distributed a portion of the harvest in times of drought, famine, or other hardship.
Buddhism in China

• In some ways, Buddhism posed a challenge to Chinese cultural and social traditions
  – Buddhist morality encouraged serious Buddhists to follow a celibate, monastic lifestyle
  – Chinese morality centered on the family unit and obligations of filial piety
    • It strongly encouraged procreation so that new generations could venerate family ancestors
• Buddhism was also seen as economically harmful because the monasteries did not pay taxes and suspicious because of its foreign origin
Hostility

- Daoists resented Buddhism’s encroachment on their following
- Confucians objected to Buddhism’s exaltation of celibacy and condemned Buddhist monasteries as wasteful and unproductive burdens on society
- Tang emperors ordered the closure of monasteries but the measure was not thoroughly implemented
- Buddhism maintained its popularity

Buddha from the mid-Tang Dynasty (712-781)
The Big Deal?

- Did not recognize castes
- Appealed to lower classes (duh!)
- Not attached to social structure, spread rapidly to other cultures
- Ashoka adopted, thrived
- Eventually reabsorbed into Hinduism
- Thrived in China, Japan, SE Asia
- Force of cultural diffusion via trade, missionaries
Christianity

The world’s most popular religion, Christianity is monotheistic and has over time branched off into many different churches for different interpretations of its holy text; the Bible. Composed of the Old and New testament this singular God shows in turn wrathful anger and unconditional love. This religion is most well known for the gruesome Martyrdom of Jesus Christ [the son of God] in order to relieve man of sin. The “right” path in this religion is only one, directly addressed by the 10 commandments.
The Ten Commandments

1- The lord is your God, you shall have no other Gods besides me.
2- Thou shall not take the lord’s name in vain
3- Keep Holy the Sabbath
4- Honor thy father and thy mother
5- Thou shall not kill
6- Thou shall not commit adultery
7- Thou shall not steal
8- Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor
9- Thou shall not covet thy neighbor’s wife
10- Thou shall not covet anything belonging to thy neighbor.
Christianity

- A splinter group of Jews, quickly spread throughout the Roman Empire.
- Jesus, son of God, Messiah of Jewish prophecy.
- Devotion to God, love of fellow man.
- Jesus sent to redeem man from sin.
- Salvation by faith in divinity, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- Crucified by Jewish leaders and Roman government in 30 CE.
The Big Deal

- Emphasis on compassion, grace through faith, salvation, eternal life after death appealed to lower classes, women
- By 300 CE, most influential in Med. Region
- Spread north and west throughout Europe
- Combo of religion & empire = huge impact on political, social development of Europe
Confucianism

- Specifically Chinese (Kong Fu Tse) 400 BCE onward
- Political-social philosophy, not religion
- Moral, ethical, also practical
- How to restore political-social order?
- 5 key relationships: political, parental, spousal, sibling, friends
Confucianism

- Right relationships = right society
- Put aside personal ambition for good of state
- Ren - humanity, benevolence, kindness
- Li - propriety, courtesy, respect, deference
- Xiao - filial piety, family obligation, extended
- Lead by good example
- Women, 2nd status, honored by kids
The Big Deal?

- As a ethical, social, political belief system it was compatible with other religions, could practice Buddhism and Confucianism simultaneously
- Flexible
- Embraced by leaders as well, ordered society, tight families
- Exclusively Chinese, only in context of Chinese culture
**Comparison of Hinduism and Buddhism**

**Ways in which Buddhism differs from Hinduism:**

While Hinduism is a rather structured religion based around ritual, Buddhism does not use ritual, simply the teachings of Buddha, removing power from the Brahmins.

While in Hinduism, one must work their way through ranks to finally achieve union with God, Buddhism denounces the violence of a caste system and believes that any person can achieve Nirvana [or enlightenment] with dedication.

The eightfold path is implemented in Buddhism as a path to Nirvana, while in Hinduism Karma is earned through work and correct conduct upon the chosen path of knowledge, love, work or psychophysical exercises.

Buddhism rejects physical and worldly pleasures like wealth by means of the “middle way” while the ideal in Hinduism is becoming a part of such.

While in Hinduism, multiple Gods are worshipped, within the branches of Buddhism Mahayana Buddhists revere Buddha as a God-figure and Therevada Buddhists believe rather in no God, but respect Buddha as an enlightened man.

Buddhism lacks an established repercussion for “bad” behavior.
Common beliefs shared by Hinduism and Buddhism

Immediately Hinduism and Buddhism are obviously related as Buddhism evolved from Hinduism during a movement against the caste system imposed in Hindu.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism are more philosophical religions.

Both embrace reincarnation and share a sense of community over the self

Hinduism and Buddhism are also both very open religions that are accepting of other paths and religions.
Differences Between Hinduism and Christianity

The first, most obvious difference is that Hindus worship multiple deities while Christianity vehemently supports that there is ONE and only one true God.
Furthermore, while Hinduism is tolerant of other religions and believes that any path can lead to God, Christianity has set forth a specific “right” path.

Hindus believe that the soul begins as an animal and due to a “right” lifestyle one eventually works their way to a higher class throughout multiple lives, eventually reaching a union with God.

Christians however, believe that there is one life on earth, and an afterlife where one exists forever either in heaven or hell, eliminating the stages of proving oneself worthy, and rather giving one chance to decide your eternal resting point.
Common beliefs shared by Hinduism and Christianity

Were one to look at the Old Testament in the Christian bible, we see a more wrathful God that sends plagues upon the human race, and asks of Abraham to sacrifice his only son. Also, as the ultimate sacrifice, God sacrifices *his own* son to free man from sin. In this same way Hindus often make animal sacrifices to Gods to appease anger and relieve their own wrong-doings.

While Hindus believe that Karma will affect your future life, and Christians believe good deeds will affect your placement in heaven, both share the similar message that a person is accountable for their actions, and regardless of different paths, they believe that one must choose their actions righteously.
Comparison of Hinduism and Christianity

Common beliefs shared by Buddhism and Christianity;

Both religions regulate behavior whether through the Ten Commandments, or the Eightfold path.

Themes of love, justice and morality are central to both of their teachings, and are respective qualities of their founder.

Both religions are taught by a Messiah that does not claim to be God himself and were passed on by means of successors.
Differences between Buddhism and Christianity

First, and most obviously, Christianity believes that there is one God, while Buddhism either believes there are none, or that Buddha himself is such.

While Buddhism [and Hinduism] are very accepting about assimilating other religions, Christianity would rather wage a holy war than accept Buddhism as a path to God.

Buddhism, like Hinduism believes in reincarnation and although there is a common idea that life goes on through this, Buddhists continue through multiple lives on earth until they achieve Nirvana, Christians go to heaven or hell.

While Christianity endorses the value of prayer and tradition, Buddhism denounces both and rather enlightenment is attained through meditation.
Buddhism and Confucianism

• Song emperors did not persecute Buddhists, but they actively supported native Chinese cultural traditions in order to limit the influence of foreign religions
  – Contributed particularly to the Confucians

• Song Confucians found much to admire in Buddhism and became influenced by it
  – The result was called neo-Confucianism which rejected Buddhism as a faith but adapted Buddhist themes and reasoning to Confucian interests and values