

Compare and contrast essay: hinduism and buddhism

[Religion](#), [Buddhism](#)



Both Hinduism and Buddhism originated in the Indian subcontinent and share a very long relationship, which in many ways is comparable to that of Judaism and Christianity. The Buddha was born in a Hindu family, just as Christ was born in a Jewish family. Some people still argue that Buddhism was an offshoot of Hinduism and the Buddha was a part of the Hindu pantheon, a view which is not acceptable to many Buddhists. It is however widely accepted that Buddhism gained popularity in India because it released the people from the oppression of tradition and orthodoxy. The teachings of the Buddha created hope and aspiration for those who had otherwise no hope of salvation and freedom of choice in a society that was dominated by caste system, predominance of ritual form of worship and the exclusive status of the privileged classes which the Vedic religion upheld as inviolable and indisputable. Long ago, over 1500 years ago, Hindu tradition accepted the Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu. However, strong rivalry existed between both traditions in the subcontinent for a very long time. The followers of Siva and the Buddha could hardly stand each other in the earlier times. There were instances of Buddhist persecution by Hindu rulers, though a great majority followed a policy of religious toleration. Sasank, a ruler from Bengal and contemporary of Harshavardhana vandalized Buddhist monuments and burnt the pipal tree under which the Buddha got enlightenment. Despite the differences between both the religions, Hinduism and Buddhism influenced each other in many ways. The Buddhist notion of non-injury and compassion toward all living beings took deep roots in the Indian soil, while Mahayana Buddhism took cue from the traditional Indian methods of devotional worship. Buddhism influenced the growth and

development of Indian art and architecture and contributed richly to the practice of breathing and meditation in attaining mindfulness and higher states of consciousness. The Hindu tantra influenced the origin and evolution of Vajrayana Buddhism. Hinduism and Buddhism share some of the following similarities. Both Hinduism and Buddhism emphasize the illusory nature of the world and the role of karma in keeping men bound to this world and the cycle of births and deaths. According to the Buddha, desire is the root cause of suffering and removal of desire results in the end of suffering. Some of the Hindu texts such as the Upanishads (Isa) and the Bhagavadgita consider doing actions prompted by desire and attachment would lead to bondage and suffering and that performing actions without desiring the fruit of action would result in liberation. Both religions believe in the concept of karma, transmigration of souls and the cycle of births and deaths for each soul. Both emphasize compassion and non-violence towards all living beings. Both believe in the existence of several hells and heavens or higher and lower worlds. Both believe in the existence of gods or deities on different planes. Both believe in certain spiritual practices like meditation, concentration, cultivation of certain bhavas or states of mind. Both believe in detachment, renunciation of worldly life as a precondition to enter to spiritual life. Both consider desire as the chief cause of suffering. The Advaita philosophy of Hinduism is closer to Buddhism in many respects. Buddhism and Hinduism have their own versions of Tantra. Both originated and evolved on the Indian soil. The founder of Buddhism was a Hindu who became the Buddha. Prior to his enlightenment, the Buddha was brought up in a traditional Hindu family. Before finding his own path, he went to Hindu gurus to find an answer to the

problem of suffering. He followed the meditation techniques and ascetic practices as prescribed by the Hindu scriptures and followed by the Hindu yogis of his time. It is said that after becoming the Buddha, he showed special consideration to the higher caste Hindus especially the Brahmins (priests) and Kshatriyas (warriors). He exhorted his disciples to treat especially Brahmins with respect and consideration because of their spiritual bent of mind and inner progress achieved during their previous births. It is said that certain categories of Brahmins had free access to the Buddha and that some of the Brahmin ascetics were admitted into the monastic discipline without being subjected to the rigors of probation which was otherwise compulsory for all classes of people. The Buddha converted many Brahmins to Buddhism and considered their involvement a sure sign of progress and popularity of his fledgling movement. Much later, we find a similar echo of sentiment in the inscriptions of King Ashoka where he exhorted the people of his empire to show due respect to the Brahmins. The following are some of the differences we can see in the principles and practice of these two religions. Hinduism is not founded by any particular prophet. Buddhism was founded by the Buddha. Hinduism believes in the efficacy and supremacy of the Vedas. The Buddhist does not believe in the Vedas or for that matter any Hindu scripture. Buddhism does not believe in the existence of souls as well in the first cause, whom we generally call God. Hinduism believes in the existence of Atman, that is the individual soul and Brahman, the Supreme Creator. Hinduism accepts the Buddha as an incarnation of Mahavishnu, one of the gods of Hindu trinity. The Buddhist does not accept any Hindu god either as equivalent or superior to the Buddha. The original Buddhism as

taught by the Buddha is known as Theravada Buddhism or Hinayana Buddhism. Followers of this do not worship images of the Buddha nor believe in the Bodhisattvas. The Mahayana sect considers the Buddha as the Supreme Soul or the Highest Being, akin to the Brahman of Hinduism and worships him in the form of images and icons. The Buddhists consider the world to be full of sorrow and regard ending the sorrow as the chief aim of human life. The Hindus consider that there are four chief aims (arthas) in life which every being should pursue. They are dharma (religious duty), artha (wealth or material possessions), kama (desires and passions) and moksha (salvation.) Hindus also believe in the four ashramas or stages in life. This is not followed in Buddhism. People can join the Order any time depending upon their spiritual preparedness. Buddhists organize themselves into a monastic Order (Sangha) and the monks live in groups. Hinduism is basically a religion of the individual. Buddhism believes in the concept of Bodhisattvas. Hinduism does not believe in it. Buddhism acknowledges the existence of some gods and goddesses of Hindu pantheon, but gives them a rather subordinate status. Refuge in the Buddha, the Sangha and Dhamma are the three cardinal requirements on the eightfold path. Hinduism offers many choices to its followers on the path of self-realization. Although both religions believe in karma and rebirth, they differ in the manner in which they operate and impact the existence of individual beings. Of the two religions, Hinduism is older perhaps by at least a millennium or two. Some Buddhist may argue that the Buddha that we know historically as born in the sixth century B. C. in the Indian subcontinent was but one in the line of many Buddha's that preceded him and would follow him. Such a belief may enjoy

some validation and approval in the metaphysical realm of enlightened monks, just as the Hindus believe in the existence and continuation of sanatana dharma, (popularly known as Hinduism) through endless cycles of creation and dissolution of worlds spanning across a time frame of millions of years. However available evidence does not confirm the theory that Buddhism existed as a religion prior to the birth of the Buddha. In case of Mahavira, the founder of Jainism we have evidence that he was the last in the long line of 24 Jain Thirthankaras, But in case of Buddhism we do not have such confirmation. Technically speaking, Hinduism is not a religion but a group of religious and sectarian movements that share some fundamental and in some respects identical beliefs, regional variations, history, tradition and practices peculiar to the land and the times in which they originated and evolved. In contrast, Buddhism is a well-established and organized religion having a set of beliefs and practices, commonly known as the Dhamma, based on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. We can safely conclude that in the first few centuries following the nirvana of the Buddha, Buddhism was an integral and significant part of the complex religious character of the subcontinent that was later came to be recognized as Hinduism by the outside world. However subsequently Buddhism crossed the boundaries of the Indian subcontinent and went on to play a much greater role in the whole of Asia. In the process it developed a very complex sectarian, theological and geographical diversity and tradition of its own to become one of the most significant and influential religions of the world. No wonder many people who are not familiar with the history of the Indian subcontinent fail to understand and notice the deep connection that existed

between Hinduism and Buddhism in the earlier days and the significant ways in which they enriched each other.