

Conversations with god; hindu mythology and the absolute term paper examples

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



The oldest written Hindu scripture, the Rig Veda, dates from at least 1500 BC and perhaps even before the Aryan invaders from the north conquered the ancient Indus Valley civilization. Indeed, this civilization was perhaps many thousands of years older than any other known on earth and thought to be very advanced in science, technology, architecture, public works and metal working. According to some legends, it was even aware of flying machines, spacecraft, nuclear weapons and extraterrestrial civilizations. It also practiced the brahma vidya or supreme (God) science as revealed by a series of rishis, mystics and prophets, with the Buddha as one of the greatest among them (Easwaran 16-17). They found that there was an eternal, spiritual reality beyond the visible physical or material universe, and that each living creature (Atman) was part of this world soul or Brahma. For both Buddhism and Hinduism, the ultimate goal of life is to learn how to renounce the selfish and egotistical desires of the physical world and achieve reunification with God. Only this way can the soul escape the law of karma or consequence, which causes it to be reincarnated again and again in physical bodies and achieve the state of moksha—freedom from death and rebirth—through the practice of the disciplines of yoga, meditation and contemplation.

All of the Hindu Vedas were based on shruti or direct knowledge of God on the part of various rishis, and were eventually recorded in the Upanishads and later the Bhagavad Gita. The former are an “ecstatic slideshow—snapshots of towering peaks of consciousness taken at various times by different observers” while the latter was a more systematic guide for those unfamiliar with Hinduism (Easwaran 9). In addition to these, the

Dhammapada or traditional sayings of Buddha were also part of the sacred scriptures, and like the Gita were “ addressed to everyone of whatever background or status” (Easwaran 14). According to the Rig Veda, God may have had millions of names, including Krishna and Shiva as well as devas (gods of nature), but all these were manifestations of the same ultimate reality. God is unchanging, eternal Truth while matter and the physical universe were temporary and transitory, continually in the process of being created, destroyed and re-created. So it is with the human mind and personality, with all of its moods, memories, feelings and desires, while God was the indivisible, eternal reality underneath the natural order (Easwaran 24). Yet each living creature also had a soul or true Self that was part of Brahma and its ultimate goal was advaita or unification with God through various forms of meditation. Divine reality is the “ unity appearing as multiplicity”, and once this is understood then the artificial separation between God and the soul is abolished (Easwaran 28).

Over 200 Upanishads exist, but only twelve or thirteen are universally recognized as ancient scriptures, with the Isha, Kena, Katha and Mundaki forming part of the Rig Veda, for example and others included in the Yajur or Krishna Yajur Vedas. According to Western scholars, they alone are “ entitled to represent the true Indian spirit in the sphere of religion, philosophy and spirituality” and to be regarded on the same high level as ancient Greek thought (Pandit 5). None of them were arranged logically or systematically, however, compared to the later forms of Hinduism and Buddhism they inspired. Westerners also believe they were an “ expression of the vigorous revolt of the Kshatriya (warrior) class against the dominance of the Brahmin

(priests) in the Vedic Age”, such as the warrior Arjuna receiving direct revelations from God (Pandit 7). In the Indian tradition, though, even the parts that seem like ‘ primitive’ or ‘ superstitious’ rituals and liturgies refer back to higher moral and spiritual truths. Although many of the rishis and mystics will always remain unknown, among the most important was Prajapati Parameshtin in the Rig Veda, which represents the highest ideals of ancient civilization. For the rishis, the gods and the natural world were far less important than the One God they intuited behind all these manifestations.

According to the ancient Hindu Vedas, the universe began with the sacrifice of the god Purusa (Man) whose body created space, the stars, living things, and the four Hindu castes. He had 1, 000 heads, 1, 000 eyes and “ pervaded the earth on all sides and extended beyond it as far as ten fingers” (World Religions 12). Birds and animals were created from his body as were languages, music and poetry. From his mouth came the Brahmin or priestly caste, while the Warriors came from his arms, peasants from his thighs and slaves from his feet. Then his mind made the moon, the sun came from his eyes and space from his navel. Other Vedic poets speculated about what existed before the creation of the universe and the gods, and that originally there was neither nonexistence nor existencethere was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is beyond” (World Religions 21). Unlike the Jewish and Christian tradition, there was no Creator or God in this void, and no night or day existed or even the lower gods. This poem does refer to some kind of life force that had a thought or desire, which led to seeds, powers and impulses, although the writer conceded than no one really knew the answers

to these ultimate cosmological questions. The Vedas sometimes refer to this force as Reality that is “ beyond human understanding, ceaselessly creating and sustaining, encompassing all time, space, and causation” (Fisher 74). In the Vedas, the gods Surya, Agni and Indra were supreme in their own right, but in the Upanishads they “ occupy a subordinate position, the constant stress being on the Supreme One”, who was Everything, including the creator of nature and the less gods (Pandit 16). As the Rig Veda affirms “ all the gods with a single Mind, a common Intuition, more right in their divergent paths towards the One Will”, as should all human beings (Pandit 17).

In the Bhagavad Gita, the seer Vyasa recorded the dialogue between the warrior king Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna, who is of course a manifestation of God or the Lord of Life and Death. It took place on the battlefield of Kurushetra, where the fighting when on for eighteen days and left the majority of men dead on both sides. On one level, its true subject is “ the war within, the struggle for self-mastery that every human being must wage if he or she is to emerge from his life victorious” (Easwaran 15). Arjuna was an ordinal mortal, a soldier and man of action, rather than a philosopher or intellectual, while Krishna represents not just God but the divine spark or soul that exists within all living things. He instructs Arjuna in the middle of this terrible battle to look beyond the material world and the desires for wealth, power and status or the use of violence. Although there is terror, madness and death all around them, Krishna tells the soldier that he must be “ compassionate to friend and enemy alike, to see himself in every person, to suffer others’ sorrows as his own” (Easwaran 19). Therefore the highest

law of dharma or creation is a “ universal love for all living creatures” and only in this way can the soul be freed from reincarnation (Easwaran 32). Karma exists as an educational process which teaches each person to abide by this universal law of love, and the fully self-realized person will no longer have any karmic debt and at the time of death will rejoin God. In the Gita, the person who wishes to be saved has to learn to renounce the world, and “ those who are the same in pleasure and pain are truly wise and fit for immortality” (Easwaran 42). This can be achieved through the karmic yoga of selfless action and the raja yoga of the discipline of meditation, but all forms of yoga still the mind and ego, limit physical needs and desires, and renounce attachments to material things. In the 20th Century, Mahatma Gandhi argued that this idea of nonviolence and respect for all living things as part of the Godhead was the most important expression of Indian philosophy and civilization, and that all the great world religions had also arrived at this central insight. There were many paths to God, but all the genuine had similar principles.

This was also the philosophy and theology of Buddha, who developed a path to renunciation and material and physical desires in order to attain reunification with God, and this was perhaps the highest moral and spiritual expression of ancient Vedic thought. Buddha or the Enlightened One existed in many incarnations before his final lifetime as Siddhartha or Gautama Buddha, who was born in 563 BC in Nepal. He had already been a king in many of his previous lifetimes and he always “ descended on earth like a religious, social and cultural reformer” (Sharma 18). Almost all of Buddha’s life is “ legendary”, however, and based not on contemporary records but

stories written down 800 to 1, 000 years after his death (Lux and Michaels 4). His father was King Sudhodana of Sakya and his mother Queen Maya, had a dream that he was going to be born as a magnificent white elephant. According to legend, when his parents took him to the temple five days after his birth, all the other gods bowed down to him as the universal savior. Asita, the greatest ascetic of the age, also visited the infant and recognized his godhood when he rested his head against him. As a young prince, Siddhartha lived in a palace surrounded only by beauty, happiness and luxury, and his father arranged his marriage to princess Yasodhara, the most beautiful lady in the country. Yet Buddha was discontented with this artificial life, especially when he saw the suffering and misery of the common people outside of the palace, including hunger, poverty, disease and death. Determined to find the cause of all these evils and a way to escape from them, he left the palace at age sixteen and took up the life of an ascetic monk and beggar. He did not achieve true enlightenment after five or six years, but one day while sitting under the sacred Bodhi tree of wisdom, he vowed to remain there until he died to find the truth. After being tempted and attacked by armies of demons, he learned about his previous incarnations and the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Buddha then discovered the Four Noble Truths that suffering was universal, and that it was caused by suffering, but also that it could be overcome by the Noble Eightfold Path of right views, right intentions, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. He also learned that Buddha-hood existed in all living things and that “ anyone can potentially become a Buddha” (Schober x).

Human beings incarnated on earth exist on both the physical and spiritual levels, and according to Hindu and Buddhist thought, they keep returning to earth to live one life after another. Buddha was not a materialist, dualist or metaphysician, but emphasized living only in the present moment, and to develop character through repetition. Individuals are one with the universe before they were born, and only when they entered the physical world did they have thoughts, ideas, feelings and desires. These were all transitory and illusory, and emptying the mind of all of them as much as possible was the best method for finding the Buddha Nature, for “ everything comes out of emptiness” (Suzuki 94). Meditation, yoga and Zen are methods for overcoming physical desires, preconceived ideas, past knowledge and even concepts of good and bad in order to achieve Enlightenment and reunion with the God. Filling the mind is not the way, but rather emptying it in order to let the pure God Mind flow in and this type of meditation can be done during any type of ordinary, everyday activity. Ultimately, God Nature is a state which has overcome the physical world and its needs and desires, and indeed the cycles of reincarnation and the suffering and death that go along with them. Buddha attained this condition of Enlightenment relatively early in life and could have passed on directly to Nirvana, yet out of compassion he remained on earth for over forty years to assist others in finding the same path. This had not been simple or easy, of course, and it took the Buddha many lifetimes to reach this condition of being able to pass immediately into Nirvana after his physical death.

WORKS CITED

Easwaran, Ekanth. The Bhagavad Gita. Berkeley, CA: Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, 2007.

Fisher, Mary Pat. Living Religions: An Encyclopedia of the World's Faiths. London: I. B. Tauris, 1997.

Lux, U. and A. Michaels. Encountering Jesus and Buddha: Their Lives and Teachings. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.

Pandit, M. P. Upanishads: Gateways of Knowledge. Lotus Light Publications, 1988.

Sharma, S. K. Life Profile and Biography of Buddha. New Dehli: Diamond Pocket Books, 2002.

Schober, J. Sacred Biography of the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia. University of Hawaii Press, 1997.