Hinduism And Buddhism Essay, Research Paper

Hinduism and Buddhism

Introduction-

Hinduism and Buddhism are two of the five major religions in our world

today. They are widely practiced, and have survived for centuries. Both have

similarities and differences, as do all forms of religion. Hopefully, in this

paper I will show you the basic structure of each religion. I would also like to

show how they compare and contrast.

Hinduism: Foundation

No one is completely sure of where Hinduism was started and by whom.

Their oldest written documents, the Vedas, were written down in 1000 B.C. but

they had existed orally long before. The Vedas are where Hinduism originated.

Today, Hinduism is the world’s third largest religion. Many changes have come

upon Hinduism since they practiced it first. Hinduism includes many different

sects, or denominations, and beliefs that have arisen. Though, there are many

things in common with all of the Hindu sects. Their basic beliefs are what ties

them together.

Basic Beliefs-

The religion of Hinduism teaches us that each living body, including

animals, is filled with an eternal soul. Hindus say that the individual soul was

a part of the creator spirit, Brahma. It is each soul’s job and wish eventually

to return to Brahma. It is not possible though because by a soul’s sins, and

impurities from the world, they are no longer pure and holy to return. Instead,

a soul must become pure before returning to Brahma, who is absolutely pure.

The process of becoming pure is so hard that no soul can become pure in

only one lifetime. The soul is forced to live life after life until it is pure

enough to return to Brahma. The cycles of rebirths are called samsara, or the

Wheel of Life, by the Hindus. When a soul is finally cleansed enough to break

free of samsara it is called moksha. The soul returns to Brahma for an eternity

of contentment and ecstasy.

There is no one incorporating creed in Hinduism. A follower may choose

any god as their personal god, or may worship several of them. Though to be a

Hindu there are certain things that a follower must believe in and live by.

Their main beliefs are:

1. A belief in karma, the result of one’s good and bad deeds in a

lifetime.

2. A belief in dharma, Hindu traditions.

3. A belief in the three main gods: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

4. A belief in reincarnation after death.

5. Honor for the sacred Vedas.

6. A belief that, if lived a religious life, the Wheel of Life can end

and achieve moksha.

7. An honor for an ascetic religious life, to be an orthodox Hindu.

Hindus worship many gods, but they are truly monotheistic by believing

in a single god. The reason behind this is that everything comes from Brahman.

It does not matter who the worship is for because it is ultimately Brahman.

Brahman does not reward or punish those for their deeds in life. Every soul

creates their own rewards and punishments through karma. Karma rules what each

soul will be in its next life, and it is formed from a soul’s good and bad deeds

in each life. If a soul has had more good deeds than bad deeds, then they have

good karma. Or vice versa if they have had more bad deeds than good.

Dharma is the ultimate meritorious balance of all things living. It

belongs to everything, including the universe. Every soul is responsible for

balancing their dharma. The areas to balance in dharma are religious, social,

and within the family. They must keep promises, and remain faithful to religious

rituals, while also taking care of their family. If a soul loses this balance,

then it will affect their karma. Dharma has been called tradition, duty, and a

custom, but to a Hindu it is spiritually more than that. Hindus also follow a

caste system, resulted from dharma, which I will discuss later.

Gods-

There are three main gods in Hinduism. Many others exist in the religion,

but these are the most noteworthy. Brahma is the creator of life. Vishnu is

known as the preserver of life. You might pray to Vishnu if someone you knew was

going in for surgery so that they’ll come through it with no problems. Finally,

Siva, or Shiva is the destroyer of life. All three of these gods are portrayed

as female and male. Vishnu is more often a male, and Shiva is more often a

female.

The Caste System-

The society of Hinduism is strictly divided. The different levels,

called castes, do not mingle. The division is largely due to the practices of

dharma and karma. Both practices express the idea that if someone is born into a

specific lifestyle, they must stay there. It would be bad karma to attempt to

leave that lifestyle.

In the caste system, there are four levels along with two groups that

are apart from the castes. Every caste comes from Brahma, but each is from a

different body part. The highest level is the Brahmin. It means Brahman, but is

spelled in another way to resist confusion of Brahman, the creator spirit.

Brahmin comes from his head, and they are to be the voice of Brahma. They are

the priestly caste, but many are also teachers and keepers of the religion.

Today, many Brahmins are also involved in business and government.

The second level of castes is the Kshatriyas (warrior) caste. They were

the kings and soldiers, and come from Brahma’s arms. The third level is the

Vaisyas. They come from the thighs of Brahma, and occupy the jobs of merchants,

artisans, and farmers. The fourth and final caste is Sudras. These people are

the manual workers, represented by Brahma’s feet. It is considered a sin to

associate with people of a lower caste than you. So each caste is made up of a

different level of the society.

There are also two groups outside the caste system. One group is for

foreigners. They might be a nonbeliever or anyone who receives special treatment

from the Hindu society. The second “outcaste” group is the “Untouchables.” These

people are considered nonhuman and cannot participate in any Hindu practices.

They do the work no one wants to do and do not associate with anyone that is of

a higher caste.

Buddhism: Foundation-

Buddhism was founded by Siddartha Gautama, and he became the Buddha. His

intentions were not to form a new religion, only to modify an older one.

Brahmanism, or Hinduism, had become very orthodox. Siddartha was a minor king of

northern India. One day, he ventured outside the palace walls and saw how life

really was. Inspired, Siddartha left his home, and family to look for the

meaning of life. For years he listened to and studied with the Indian wise men;

then he turned to meditation. Discouraged from not finding the answer he wanted,

he sat under a fig tree. Siddartha determined that he sat there until he found

the answer, this lasted 49 days. It finally came to him, and he became Buddha.

Buddhism was founded.

Basic Beliefs-

Buddhism is a reformed version of Hinduism. Buddha discovered the Four

Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are the foundation for all forms of Buddhist

philosophy.

1. There is suffering.

2. Suffering is caused.

3. Eliminating the causes of suffering can extinguish suffering.

4. The way to extinguish the causes of suffering is to follow the Middle

Way stated in the Eightfold Path.

The Eightfold Path also comes from Buddha. It teaches to practice

moderation. It is the practical side of Buddhism. If followed, one may achieve

true enlightenment, or nirvana. Nirvana is reaching Brahma in one lifetime.

Buddha believed that you could live a perfect life and not have to continue in

the samsara. The basic way to this is the Eightfold Path, which says to practice

moderation in these areas:

1. Right views. You must have the right mind set.

2. Right intent (or right resolution) A person must want actively to

eliminate suffering.

3. Right speech. You must not lie, slander others, or insult. You’re not

to cause suffering with words.

4. Right conduct (or right action). To behave in a way that does not

cause suffering.

5. Right means of livelihood. Not to live in a way or hold a job that

causes suffering.

6. Right endeavor (or right effort) To prevent unclean states of mind

from happening.

7. Right mindfulness. To be aware of body activities, the senses,

perceptions, and thoughts.

8. Right meditation. The specific concentration to improve oneself.

Buddhists believe that if you follow this you will be enlightened. Many

Buddhist beliefs are almost the same as a Hindu’s. Buddhists do not practice the

caste system. One of the only ways to achieve nirvana in one lifetime is to be a

monk or a nun. If you break an area in the Eightfold Path, then you cannot

achieve nirvana. Also in order to follow the 4th part of The Eightfold Path, all

Buddhists are vegetarians. Killing of an animal is seen as causing suffering.

Like the Hindus, an animal has a soul.

Despite all the talk about suffering, Buddhism is really about the

absence of suffering. Buddhism is a way to develop the ability to love the

entire universe, simply because it is. It is understanding that the universe

exits inside a blade of grass, just as the blade of grass resides within the

universe. All things are inter-connected.

Comparisons Between Hinduism and Buddhism-

Both Hinduism and Buddhism accept and believe that there is one creator

spirit. Each of them recognizes Brahma or a version of Brahma as the creator

spirit. Though they also recognize other gods, Brahma is the ultimate god. All

praise goes to him, no matter which god you are praising. This is a significant

similarity between the two religions.

The two religions of Hinduism and Buddhism believe in the process of

reincarnation. Reincarnation is being reborn again with one soul. Inside this

belief, they also believe that your deeds, or activities, during your life will

determine where you will end up. If you have lived a good life, you will be

rewarded by another good life, or you might be allowed finally to rejoin with

Brahma. If you’ve led a bad life, you will remain on earth longer, and most

likely have a bad life when you are reborn.

Another similarity is that both Hinduism and Buddhism are very kind to

animals. They believe every living creature has a soul, and through

reincarnation, you might one day end up as one. Most Hindus and Buddhists that

strictly follow the religion are vegetarians of one sort or another. It’s

impossible to tell whether or not that hamburger you ate at Burger King was a

relative of yours. Eating them would bring you bad karma, and break one of the

Eightfold Paths.

Contrasts Between Hinduism and Buddhism-

In the religion of Hinduism there are castes, or social classes. They

decide what your lifestyle will be like in that lifetime. If you are born a

slave, you must stay a slave your whole life. Or, if you are born a wealthy man

or woman, that is what you must be all of your life. To the Hindus, it is a sin

to try to change what caste you belong to. As well as to associate with a person

from a caste that is lower than yours.

On the other hand, the teachings of the Buddha did away with the caste

system. A person is allowed to change their social class. They can go from a

slave to an emperor or a president, if that is their calling. If they follow the

Eightfold Path, then this is permissible. It is an honor to be a monk or a nun,

for they are the ones who can achieve nirvana. Buddhists also will mingle with

those of less importance then themselves.

Hinduism teaches that you must go through samsara in order to finally

reach moksha. They do not believe that a soul can totally cleanse itself of all

impurities in just one life. It is a gradual process involving dharma, balancing

one’s life, and karma, weighing the deeds of a lifetime.

Meanwhile, the Buddha again went and brought question to samsara. He

found that it is possible to cleanse oneself in one lifetime and return to

Brahma. He called it nirvana. In order to achieve nirvana, a Buddhist must

follow and accept The Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold

Path serves as an instructional guide as how to keep yourself on the right path

to nirvana.

Hinduism and Buddhism also have several smaller differences. The area of

greatest concentration for Hinduism is India. India is where Buddhism originated,

but Hinduism eventually was a more appealing religion and it died out. Buddhism

is found mostly in East Asia, inside China and Mongolia. These areas prefer

having many, many small gods, as opposed to the Hindus only having three major

ones and then smaller, less important gods. Buddhism was founded by Suddartha

Gautama, or the Buddha. Hinduism was started gradually; no one knows for sure

who founded it; most likely, it was many people. Both practice meditation, but

they practice it in different forms. A Hindu will meditate obtaining inner peace

through the charkras of the body. Once all of the centers, charkras, have been

balanced, a white light is said to be above the person’s head, and they are

enlightened. Buddhists meditate similarity, but have different variations of how

it is preformed. Their main goal is to end suffering.

Conclusion-

The two religions of Buddhism and Hinduism are very alike, and yet very

different. To accept their way of thinking, one must put aside their religion if

they aren’t Hindu or a Buddhist. They strive for an inner peace, and finally to

reach heaven through either moksha or nirvana. I being a Christian, have found

in some ways it hard to understand the process of reincarnation, and Brahma.

Though, I can see how that for people of another culture, these religions are

very supportive, and soothing. Culture plays a big part in determining your

beliefs. Obviously, they are very deep-rooted for surviving for longer than

Christianity’s been around. Through this paper, I learned a lot about accepting

different beliefs, and gained a sense of what it really means to be a Hindu or a

Buddhist. I admire their strong faith and their desire to become pure and

unblemished. Hinduism and Buddhism are two major religions, firmly planted in

their cultures, and I am sure that they will remain for a long time to come.