

Lecture 5—Introduction to Hinduism and Buddhism

What do these faiths teach?

Hinduism is a mixture of 4,000 years of religious traditions. It is a polytheistic mixture of up to 3 million gods. Our eternal soul longs to be united with the universal essence (Brahman) by fulfilling our personal duty according to caste and time of life and through observing worship celebrations. Today, most Hindus (1.1B) are of Indian descent.

Buddhism was founded around 550 BC as a reform to Hinduism. There is no personal God; the self is an illusion that brings suffering. We find peace by renouncing all desires, following the four noble truths and eightfold path to transcend reality itself. Today, most Buddhists (500M) live in SE Asia.

Key Vocab

- Samsara: Cycle of birth, death, and rebirth
- Reincarnation: Rebirth of a soul in a new body
- Liberation: Freedom from the cycle of rebirth
- Karma: Every action has consequences eventually
- Dharma: Personal duty; ethics
- Renunciation: Giving up worldly desires
- Non-violence: Principle of avoiding harm
- Meditation: Focused mental practice for tranquility

Why do people turn to Buddhism?

- How are Buddhism and Hinduism different?
- Are these faiths more compatible with Western sensibilities?
- Are Hinduism and Buddhism religiously tolerant?
- Do Hinduism and Buddhism offer transcendence?
- Does Buddhism answer the problem of evil?

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Lecture 6—Core Teachings

The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism

- Life is suffering
- Suffering is caused by craving
- Suffering can have an end
- There is a path that leads to the end of suffering.

The Noble Eight-Fold Path (Buddhism)

- Right View
- Right Resolve
- Right Speech
- Right Action
- Right Livelihood
- Right Effort
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Meditation

What are the holy books?

- Hinduism: The Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, & Ramayana.
- Buddhism: The Tripitaka (Pali Canon), Mahayana Sutras, Tibetan Book of the Dead, and others.

What is the appeal?

- Hinduism—a method for controlling divine powers for your benefit. “Don’t you want many friends?”
- Buddhism: A sense of inner calm. Transcendence. A framework for repudiating materialism and hedonism. A kind of provisional answer to the problem of evil.
- They give you the option of access to the divine without having to deal with the person of God.
- They allow you to be a practical atheist.
- They allow you to create a kind of spirituality or a kind of “religion” but put yourself at the center as God.