



BUDDHA CHRIST

ESSENTIALS OF FAITH

A brief study by
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BUDDHA AND CHRIST: ESSENTIALS OF FAITH

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The following article is a brief, cursory comparison of the essential teachings of Christ and Buddha as found in the Scriptures of Their respective Faiths. It is not a comparison of current trends and teachings among the body of believers, but rather attempts to return to the source of their belief.

SOME TERMINOLOGY

Each faith has its own terminology which seems perfectly natural to the believer, but which may strike others as strange or off-putting. The following are some essential terms used in the quotations and commentary of this article. The Hindu/Buddhist terms are from Sanskrit.

- Atman: (Hindu/Buddhist) The soul; the true Self; that part of us that is created in the likeness of God; “the spirit of God in man” (per Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*)
- Avatar: (Hindu/Buddhist) “One Who has descended” Title indicating One sent by God to instruct or lead mankind. An appearance of God or physical manifestation of God.
- Bhagavad Gita: (Hindu) “The Song of God” - A portion of the epic poem, *Mahabharata*, in which the teachings of Krishna are revealed to his first disciple, Arjuna.
- Brahman or Brahma: (Hindu/Buddhist) God; the Creator; the creative aspect of the Supreme Spirit.
- Buddha: (Hindu/Buddhist) “Enlightened One” - Title of Siddhartha Gautama indicating his station as the Teacher of mankind.
- Christ: (Christian) “The Anointed” - Title of Jesus Christ indicating his station as God’s anointed or elect.

- Dhamma or Dharma: (Hindu/Buddhist) The Truth, the Way, the Religion - the Essentials of Faith taught by all the Buddhas. The Word of God.
- Dhammapada: (Buddhist) - One of the books of Buddhist scripture.
- Gospels: (Christian) First four books of the New Testament which contain Christ's teachings as given to his disciples.
- Karma: (Hindu/Buddhist) - The Laws of God governing the creation of the Universe. Has come to be identified most specifically with the Divine Law of reciprocity, stated in Christian scripture as "As ye sow, even so shall ye reap" and in science as "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." (Newton's 3rd Law of Motion)
- Messiah: (Jewish/Christian) - Title indicating One who comes to rescue or save. In this case, the Messiah is a Figure in Jewish prophetic scripture.
- Nirvana: (Hindu/Buddhist) - That state in which a believer is in the Kingdom of God while on earth. Christian scriptures refer to a "peace that surpasses understanding."
- Tathagata: (Hindu/Buddhist) The "thus become." - Another title or station of the Buddha.
- Theophany: (Christian) from Latin, a title indicating an appearance or manifestation of God; a theological description of Christ.
- Torah: (Jewish): The Jewish Scriptures which contain the revelation of God through Moses. The original five books are called the Pentateuch. The *Torah*, along with the Prophets (Nevi'im) and Ketuvim (Writings), forms the *Tanakh* (sometimes referred to as the Jewish Bible)
- Upanishads: (Hindu) 108 brief books of Hindu compiled between the time of Krishna and Buddha.
- Vedas: The most ancient scriptures of the Hindu faith into which Buddha was born.

ESTABLISHING A CONTEXT

Buddhism, like Christianity, is a faith made up of myriad sectarian groups with varying beliefs. There are Zen, Mahayana, Theravedin, Tibetan and Nichiren as, in Christianity there are Catholics, Orthodox, and many shades of Protestants to

name but a few. Among Buddhists there are those who believe in a personal, loving God; those who believe in an impersonal God-force; and those who believe in no God at all. There are also shades of Buddhist belief, such as Tibetan Buddhism, in which deities have been adopted from the Hindu pantheon.

Since in either case only limited agreement can be found at the sectarian level, we will look to the recorded teachings of the Buddha and Christ rather than sectarian creeds.

An important facet of understanding any religion is context. Christ came as the Messiah of the Jewish Faith. If one takes Christ out of his context with Judaism, there is no basis for understanding the concept of the Messiah, for it arises from the Old Testament books (esp. Daniel and Isaiah).

We see the importance of this context in Christ's own teaching, for it is Moses he quotes when explaining to his audience what is the greatest commandment. If Christ had said nothing else about the nature of God, we would know what his concept of God was through his connection with the teachings of Moses.

Likewise, Buddhism must be viewed in context with the tradition in which it arose and with the revelations preceding it, for the teachings of Buddha are bound to those of the prior Avatars of the Vedic tradition in the same manner that Christ's are bound to those of Moses. Buddha was born into a Hindu culture. As Christ's discourses took up subjects from the *Torah*, so Buddha's discourses are often based upon the Vedic scriptures. Moreover, he directly connects Himself to the previous Avatars or Buddhas.

“The Buddhas who have been and who shall be: of these I am and what They did, I do.”

“In this auspicious eon, three leaders there have been. Kakasandha (Manu, the Father of Mankind), Konagamana (Rama), and Kassapa (Krishna, a member of the Kassapa tribe) too. I am now the perfect Buddha. And there will be Metteyye too, before this same auspicious eon runs to the end of its years.” *Anagata-Vamsa*, p.34

Christians are familiar with the words Christ speaks about the continuity between Himself and Moses:

“For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” John 5:46, 47

And in John 5:39,40, we read:

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are that which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.”

In either case, we must acknowledge that this Figure and his teachings do not stand isolated against the backdrop of history. he has a context in which he appears, a tradition from which he cannot be separated without losing significant meaning in the message he delivers to us. Worse, we impair our own understanding of that message.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While Jesus-ben-Joseph (Yehoshua-ben-Yosef) was to outward appearances the son of a carpenter of Nazareth, Siddhartha Gautama was, if not a prince, at least the scion of the powerful Sakyamuni tribe of Kapilavastu, India. he was born approximately 600 years before Jesus. Richly embroidered tales of his miraculous birth and childhood are found in the *Jitaka* tales. he married quite young and had a son named Rahula.

The India to which Siddhartha was born was in dire need of rebirth. Historian Jamshed Fozdar writes of this period of religious history: “The correct performance of rituals and ceremonies became all- important and was a constant source of contention and strife between different religious teachers, each claiming truth for his theory or practice and frequently embroiling the civil and political authorities of his region in military action against those in ‘error’. This was the broad picture for nearly two centuries prior to Buddha’s arrival on the scene.” (The God of Buddha p. vi:2,3)

This will, of course, sound familiar to anyone who has a working knowledge of the history of the Jewish and Christian faiths. Christ himself spoke out dynamically against the encroachment of meaningless ritual on the Faith of Moses; the bloodshed occasioned by differences of doctrinal thought in the history of Christianity is an eloquent reminder that even something humans claim to believe is sacred can be forged into a weapon.

Siddhartha’s father took great pains that he be exposed to no unpleasantness—the boy was so sensitive, his father feared what might happen to him if he realized that not everyone lived as he did.

The inevitable happened and Siddhartha escaped the walls of his father’s house, saw what was beyond and felt such agony at the pain of others that he began to ponder deeply the state of the world. One day while in meditation, a being of light appeared to him and said: “Thou art the Tathagata, the great master, for thou wilt fulfill all righteousness and be Dharmaraja — the King of Truth. Thou art Bhagavad (Blessed Lord—also a title of Krishna) for thou art called upon to

become the savior and redeemer of the world... Thou art to be the Buddha, our master and our lord; thou shalt enlighten the world and save mankind from perdition." The Gospel of Buddha 7:13

After this, Siddhartha left home and became an ascetic, gathering disciples who admired his humility and gentleness. When he realized that asceticism was not the solution, he began to preach this and lost his followers. It was then that he sat under the fig tree (*ficus religiosa*, also called the bo tree) for 40 days and received the light of revelation: He was no longer the Buddha-elect, he was the Buddha, the first to be reborn in that age; the only one who could lead others to rebirth. It is recorded that he had a visitation from Mara the Tempter, who offered him the riches of the world (which he'd already willingly given up) and other inducements to forgo teaching the Dharma to mankind. This is parallel to the tempting of Christ by Satan as recorded in the Gospels. As Christ rejected Satan, so Buddha rejected Mara.

THE COURSE OF BUDDHA'S FAITH

During Buddha's lifetime his faith spread to the Indo-Gangetic plain. His followers were organized, according to his wishes, into communities called Sanghas. There were both male and female monks who lived chaste, meditative lives. Many brought their children into the community with them as did Buddha's wife, Yashodara.

As Judas betrayed Christ, so a disciple of Buddha named Devadatta betrayed his Master, making attempts on his life by poison and by sending a rogue elephant

at him as he spoke to a gathering of disciples. The Buddha's gentle voice, it is written, soothed the elephant and so thwarted this attempt on his life.

It should be noted that there are numerous miracles attributed to the Buddha, as there are to Christ. His attitude toward them was similar: "Go and tell no one." His disciples are also said to have performed miracles.

Within 100 days of the Buddha's passing, a council was convened by his followers to collect all of his teachings. This was done, the collection filling three large baskets. Hence, the original Buddhist scripture was called the *Tripitaka* or *Three Baskets*. Volumes extracted or compiled from these original tenets include the *Dhammapada*, the *Digha-nikaya*, *Samyutta-nikaya* and various sutras or sermons.

Christians, of course, are familiar with the work of the Gospel authors in attempting to collect Christ's sayings and acts. The chief difference in the ways in which these teachings were gathered perhaps lies in the fact that while the Buddha founded a distinct community during a long lifetime of teaching, Christ's ministry lasted only three years, allowing little time for the compilation of scripture.

The disciples of Christ existed as a small group held together by the sheer strength of their belief and did not begin to gather the teachings of their Lord (many of which existed as fragmentary stories or letters) until some years had passed. The Buddha's teachings, having become the foundation for the education of entire communities, were more readily gathered by an organized following.

Within 100 years after this first Buddhist council, a second was held in an attempt to correct the observance of manmade additions and influences that had

begun to filter into the Faith. This resulted in the first great schism of Buddhism, and its division into two major sects: the Mahayana and Theravada.

The obvious parallel in Christianity, of course, is the division of Christ's Faith into the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches in which one of the chief points of schism was the authentication of canon.

THE TEACHINGS OF BUDDHA and CHRIST: ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS OF FAITH

What follows is a comparison between the teachings of Buddha and Christ in answer to essential questions that lie at the very heart of religious faith. These questions are:

1. Who/What is God?
2. How may we know God?
3. Who is the Buddha; who is the Christ?
4. What is the foundation of our relationship with God? That is, wherein does our salvation lie?
5. What is rebirth, salvation, Nirvana, the Kingdom of God?
6. What is living the life?

WHO/WHAT IS GOD?

The first of these questions considers the very nature of God Himself. Who is He revealed to be by Those who claim to be His Emissaries? Both Christ's and Buddha's teachings about the nature of God assume their audiences' familiarity with previous revelation. The Avatar or Buddha who appeared before Gautama Buddha was Krishna. His teaching about God is the essence of simplicity:

“God is pure and ever one.” *Bhagavad Gita* 5:19

“But beyond this creation, visible and invisible,” Krishna says, “there is an invisible, higher, Eternal; and when all things pass away this remains for ever and ever. This invisible is called the Everlasting and is the highest End supreme. Those who reach him never return. This is My supreme abode. This Spirit Supreme, Arjuna, is attained by an ever-living love. In Him all things have their life, and from Him all things have come.” *Bhagavad Gita* 8:20-22

Buddha continued the instruction thus:

“There is, O monks, an Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed. Were there not, O monks, this Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed, there would be no escape from the world of the born, originated formed.” *Udana* 80-81

“The Element (or Cause) is without beginning in time. It is the common foundation of all dharmas. Because it exists there also exist all places of rebirth and the full attainment of Nirvana.”
Ratnagotravibhaga pp. 72,73

The God of Buddha, then, is one; He is eternal and beyond creation and from Him all truth comes. He is the creator of the world (hence, His title Brahma or Brahman—the Creator). Because He exists, there is escape from this world and the possibility of rebirth. This God is reached by an ever-living love.

We have already established Christ’s link to the revelation of Moses. He underscores this connection when he is asked what is the greatest commandment.

He quotes Moses:

“The most important (commandment) is this: ‘Hear, O Israel the Lord our God is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ Mark 12:29,30

He further reveals the character of his God:

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he

who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!" Matt 7:7-11

The God of Christ, then, is also one; He responds to our love and is loving in return, caring for his children as can only the most perfect of parents.

HOW CAN WE KNOW GOD?

In the act of describing God to us, Christ and Buddha both assume a certain authority. They are, they tell us, authorized to speak to us of God, to reveal His nature, His purpose, His Word, His will. Both Christ and Buddha have occasion to claim this authority while undergoing questioning by the priests of the established religion—Judaism or Hinduism, respectively.

Here is Buddha's confrontation with Hindu Brahmins as recorded in the *Digha-nikaya* (9:35):

"We are told, Gautama, that the Sakyamuni (The Buddha) knows the path to a union with Brahman (God)." And the Blessed One said: "What do you think, O Brahmins, of a man born in and brought up in Manasakata? Would he be in doubt about the most direct way from this spot to Manasakata?" "Certainly not, Gautama," replied the Brahmins. "Thus," stated the Buddha, "the Tathagata knows the straight path that leads to a union with Brahman. he knows it as one who has entered the world of Brahman and been born in it. There can be no doubt in the Tathagata."

Here, for comparison, is Christ's confrontation with the Jews as recorded in the book of *John* (6:45-52):

“It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to Me. No one has seen the Father except the One who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life.... I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is My flesh, which I give for the life of the world.” The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

In another passage from the *Samyutta-nikaya*, Buddha states:

“Only those who do not believe call me Gautama, but you call me the Buddha, the Blessed One, the Teacher, and this is right, for I have in this life entered Nirvana, while the life of Gautama has been extinguished.”

Christ also depicts Himself as the One Teacher of mankind:

“Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ.” Matt 23:10

Both state unequivocally that only through God’s Anointed Teacher (the Christ, the Tathagata), can we know God. On this point they are in total agreement: The priests of the former dispensation no longer know the way to God’s door.

WHO IS THE BUDDHA, WHO IS THE CHRIST?

This brings us to the next question: Who is this Person that claims to reveal God and how, as the Jews put it, can he “give us his flesh to eat?” How can his words have such effect as to be the bread and water of everlasting life?

To put Buddha’s answer in context, we return to the Hindu scriptures and the words of Krishna:

“For I am the abode of Brahman, the never-failing fountain of everlasting life. The Law of Righteousness is my Law and My Joy is everlasting Joy.” *Bhagavad Gita* 14:27

Buddha says:

“Self has disappeared and the truth has taken its abode in me. This body of mine is Gautama’s and it will be dissolved in due time ... But the truth remains. The Buddha will not die; the Buddha will continue to live in the holy body of the Law.” (*Samyutta-nikaya*)

Like Krishna before Him, Buddha claims to be the dwelling place of God and of God's Truth—a fountain of everlasting life. He draws a distinction between the life of the man Gautama and the life of the Buddha, the Truth he reflects.

Compare Buddha’s words to these words of Christ:

“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. ...Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.”
John 14:6,9

Christ’s answer too, indicates that when we look at him we are not to see the man Jesus-ben-Joseph, but the Christ, the Way of God—even God Himself.

In both cases, a distinction is drawn between the Messenger (Christ or Buddha) and the Sender of the message:

“In case anyone says that the Tathagata attained ... Enlightenment, I tell you the truth ... that there is no dharma by which the Buddha attained it. ...The basis of the Tathagata’s attainment of ... Enlightenment is wholly beyond; it is neither Sat (reality) nor Asat (non-Reality).” Buddha, *Vajra-Sattva XVII*

In John 17:22-24 Christ speaks thusly to God:

“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”

And in John 14:24:

“He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.”

The foundation of his revelation, Buddha says, is wholly beyond attainment by thought or practice or teaching. And Christ tells us that what he shows us of glory and truth is from beyond himself—it is from the Father Who sent him.

We may find ourselves asking at this point: To what purpose do these revelators appear? What is the fruit of Their ministry?

Buddha states his purpose in these words:

“I was born into the world as the King of Truth for the salvation of the world. The subject upon which I meditate is Truth. ... For lo, myself hath become the Truth. Whosoever comprehendeth the Truth will see the Blessed One, for the Truth has been preached by the Blessed One.” *Digha-nikaya* 1:46

Christ’s words, spoken to Pilate during his mock trial, are eerily similar:

“Pilate therefore said unto him, ‘Art thou a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.’” *John* 18:37

Buddha and Christ each assert their Kingship, but more important, describes the realm of which they are Lord—Truth. Those who comprehend Truth, Buddha says, will see Him; those who are of Truth, Christ assures us, will hear Him.

Another interesting idea raised in the teachings of these two Figures is that God teaches according to the capacity of the audience.

Buddha says:

“And the Tathagata is the same to unto all beings, differing only in so far as all beings are different. The Tathagata, however, knows the law whose essence is salvation, and whose end is the peace of Nirvana. he is the same to all, and yet, knowing the requirements of every single being, he does not reveal Himself to all alike.” *Sanskrit Dharmapada*

This idea should not be foreign to Christians; Christ communicates it in several places in the Gospels. One notable instance is when he explains to the Jews why he is changing the Mosaic law of divorce.

“...For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? he saith unto them, *Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.*” *Matthew 19:5-8*

This theme arises again when Christ tells his disciples they are not capable of understanding everything he could tell them, but that at some future date, “another Counselor,” the Spirit of Truth will reveal to them the truth:

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. he will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. he will bring glory to Me by taking what is mine and making it known unto you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known unto you.” *John 16:12-15 NIV*

Both the Vedic and Judeo-Christian traditions, then, offer us a picture of the unfoldment of God's revelation from one Mediator to the next—from Krishna to Buddha, from Moses to Christ. Promises are made and kept; laws fulfilled or changed according to the state of the heart of man.

WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

Faith and Love

From the Christian viewpoint, the chief element in the believer's relationship with God is faith. Christ, as we have seen, cites the commandment to love God as being the greatest commandment. That these two things are related is inarguable, that they are not identical is obvious. One can certainly have faith in something or someone without loving them. Yet, the argument can be made that faith is a subset of love or is a result or by fruit of it. Love gives birth to faith.

Besides repeating the Greatest Commandment, Christ also has this to say about our relationship with God, bringing in the element of faith:

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." *John 5:24*

Further, the Gospel of John tells us:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life." *John 3:16 NIV*

Likewise, the Vedic tradition of which Buddha was a part offers the idea that our relationship with God is based on love. Scholarship, frugality, and prayerful

meditation while possibly noble responses to the love of God, are not the foundation of that essential relationship.

Speaking to his beloved disciple Arjuna, Krishna says:

“Not by the Vedas (Scriptures), or an austere life, or gifts to the poor, or ritual offerings can I be seen as thou hast seen Me. Only by love can men see Me, and know Me, and come unto Me. he who works for Me, who loves Me, whose end Supreme I am, free from attachment to all things, and with love for all creation, he in truth comes unto Me.” *Bhagavad Gita* 11:53, 54

Says Buddha:

“All good works whatever are not worth one-sixteenth part of Love which sets free the heart. Love which sets free the heart comprises them.” Suttampata Krishna speaks to Arjuna of faith: “...sacrifice, gift and penance, and any other action done without faith, is declared as Asat (non-existent). It is nought here or hereafter.” *Bhagavad Gita* 3:84

To this, Buddha adds:

“Faith is the wealth here best for man —by faith the flood is crossed.” *Suttampata* vv. 182-184

“By faith you shall be free and go beyond the realm of death.” *Suttampata* v. 1146

“He, Vasettha, whose faith in the Tathagata is settled, rooted, established, firm, a faith not to be shaken by a recluse, or Brahmin ... or by anyone in the world—he may say: ‘I am the Lord’s own son, born of his mouth, born of Dharma (Truth), formed by Dharma, heir to Dharma.’” *Digha-nikaya* 3:84

Buddha reveals Love and faith as essential elements of our relationship with God. What is most interesting about this passage is that the Buddha also speaks of rebirth—a rebirth resulting in the believer’s becoming a spiritual child of God.

Christians, of course, are familiar with a similar passage in the Gospel:

“But as many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” *John* 1:12,13

Action and Obedience

Another often-quoted verse is this one from the book of *James* 2:20-23:

“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?”

Christ speaks numerous times of the role obedience plays in salvation:

“I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death.” *John* 8:51

“If anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.” *John* 14:23

Underscoring this idea yet again, Christ asserts: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” *Matthew* 7:21

Buddha too, tells his disciples that salvation is not without some effort on the part of the believer. Seeing the Physician is not enough, he says, one must take the medicine offered in order to be cured.

“It is indeed a fact that salvation cannot come from the mere sight of Me. It demands strenuous efforts in the practice of Dharma. But if someone has understood this, My Dharma, then he is released from the net of suffering, even though he never cast eyes on Me. A man must take medicine to be cured; the mere sight of the Physician is not enough.” *Buddhacarita* XXV. 33,4

“This indeed is the Way—there is no other—for the purification of one's vision. Follow this Way. I have taught you the Way ... making the effort is your affair.” *Dhammapada* vs. 274-276

WHAT IS THE FRUIT OF SALVATION?

Buddha refers to the relationship between man and God as ‘Brahma-faring,’ indicating a journey taken with the love’s object:

“This itself is the whole of Brahma-faring—friendship, association and intimacy with the Lovely.” *Samyutta-nikaya* I:88

Speaking further of Brahma-faring, he says: “The Brahma-faring is lived for the plunge into Nirvana, for going beyond to Nirvana, for culmination in Nirvana.” *Samyutta-nikaya* III: 189

What is Nirvana and where? In Christian terms it may be seen as that state in which the believer inhabits the Kingdom of God even as he or she walks the earth.

Christ tells the Pharisees this in strong words:

“And when he was demanded of the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” *Luke* 17:20,21

Christ instructs: “If anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.” *John* 14:23 NIV

The Vedic tradition also speaks of this idea of the indwelling spirit or kingdom:

“God dwells in the heart of all beings, Arjuna, thy God dwells in thy heart. And His power of wonder moves all things... Go to Him for salvation with all thy soul.... By His grace thou shalt obtain the peace supreme, thy home of Eternity.” *Bhagavad Gita* 18:61,62

And: "I am the same to all beings and My love is ever the same; but those who worship me with devotion, they are in Me and I am in them." *Bhagavad Gita* 9:29

Says Buddha in the *Lankavatara Sutra* (2.XVIII): "...birth and death and Nirvana are not to separated one from the other..."

"That place is delightful where saints dwell, whether in the village or in the forest, in deep water or on dry land." *Dhammapada* v. 98

That "place" where saints dwell, would seem not to be a place at all—at least not one separated from life and death.

Christ emphasizes that this rebirth into the Kingdom of God is a spiritual reality not a physical one when he speaks to Nicodemus, who famously asked how he could return to the womb of his mother to be born again:

"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." John 3:5-7

Flesh, Christ says, cannot enter the Kingdom of God through this rebirth, but only the spirit—what Krishna and Buddha would call Atman. As noted previously, rebirth, a concept common to the teachings of Buddha, Christ, and Krishna, results in the believer becoming a child of God.

WHAT IS LIVING THE LIFE?

If we are reborn through the Word of God and exist in His Kingdom (Nirvana), what sort of lives will we lead? What will our behavior be, our attitudes, our concerns?

“Do not deceive, do not despise each other anywhere. Do not be angry, nor should ye secret resentment bear, for as a mother risks her life for her child, so boundless be your love to all, so tender, kind and mild.” Buddha, *Sutta-nipata* v. 148

“Hatred does not cease by hatred ... hatred ceases by love: This is an eternal law.” *Dhammapada* 1.5

Christ’s best-known words on the subject of Godly qualities are found in the verses commonly called The Sermon on the Mount:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 5:3-12

“All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” *Matthew* 7:12

TEACHING THE FAITH

Both Buddha and Christ raised up disciples and sent these self-sacrificing souls abroad to spread their respective messages. Buddha sent his ‘bhikkus’ into pre-Christian India with these words:

“Go now and wander for the gain of many, for the welfare of many, out of compassion for the world... Let no two of you go the same way. Preach the doctrine, which is glorious in the beginning, glorious in the middle, and glorious in the end, in the spirit and in the letter proclaim a consummate, perfect and pure life of holiness.”

Six hundred years later in Jerusalem, Christ sent his disciples out with a mandate to teach only the Jews. Matthew 10:5-7 tells us:

“These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Later, he indicated the message should (or would) be taken to the entire world:

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” *Matthew 24:14*

I should like to note, in closing, that both the Judeo-Christian and Vedic-Buddhist scriptures are replete with prophetic passages similar to the one above, referring to the “end of the age.” This is a subject for further study, certainly, but is beyond the purview of this article.

CONCLUSION

On these essential points, the utterances of Christ and Buddha (and Krishna) agree:

1. There is one God.
2. He is a loving God and the Creator of the Universe and desires that we know Him and love Him.
3. God is known through his Anointed Mediator.

4. That Mediator is the only one who knows the path to God. He is Teacher and Physician; the mirror of God's Truth.
5. Our relationship with God is founded upon love, faith and obedience to His will.
6. The fruits of that relationship are rebirth, salvation and receiving the Kingdom of God (Nirvana) a state in which God dwells within the heart of the believer.

