

Hinduism and Buddhism

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Good morning. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds. This morning we begin a new series called, *Alternatives to Christianity*. Like many of you, I was raised in the church. I grew up loving Jesus. What I didn't know about the rest of the world was hurting me. I secretly wondered about other religions. What did they believe? What made them so wrong and Jesus so right?

In my early 20s, I began reading books on other religions to find answers. After a year, my heart was changed. Today, I can tell you why I am a Christian and not something else. I can tell you why the major religions of the world and the cults *just don't add up*. That was a study I needed then, and it is a study we need now. For the next five weeks we will learn about other faiths and see how they compare to Jesus and the message of the Bible. I am confident you will come to the same conclusion I did. When it comes to knowing God, the only thing that makes sense is the message of the Bible. Everything else *just doesn't add up*.

This morning we will look at two world religions that covers about 2 billion people on the planet. Buckle up as we travel around the globe to unravel the beliefs of Hinduism and Buddhism. Let's begin.

Hinduism¹

When Phil Robertson of Duck Dynasty went public in a GQ article that he was opposed to homosexuality for biblical reasons, he received national criticism and censure from the Duck Dynasty program. In those trying times he received some unexpected high-profile support. Some of that support came from the governor of Louisiana, Bobby Jindahl. Bobby is an outspoken Christian who calls himself an evangelical catholic. He is a brilliant Rhode scholar from Brown University. He is also a possible Republican candidate for president in 2016. What most people don't know is he grew up Hindu. Let's look at Hinduism and learn why Bobby left it.



What do Hindus believe?

Where do most Hindus live? — Today, there are more than 800 million Hindus but 80 percent of them live in one country, India. To be from India almost guarantees you will be Hindu. Only 3 percent of India is Christian. Hinduism is one of the oldest and most complex religions. Many westerners find their minds short circuiting even trying to understand it.

What do Hindus believe about God? — What makes Hinduism hard to understand is it is very fluid. Some strands of Hinduism worship 330 million gods, others only worship 3 million and still others worship a different god for each day of the year. While Hinduism has hundreds to millions of different gods, at the same time, they believe there is one essence of god behind everything

¹ <http://christiananswers.net/evangelism/beliefs/hinduism.html>

called the Brahman. It is a little like the force in Star Wars. Hindus also believe God is the universe and that the universe is God. They believe that the self, the atman, or what we would call the soul, is identical with the great universal god essence behind the universe (called the Brahman). The best way to know the ultimate truths about God and reality is deep meditation because you are part of God. Hinduism is polytheistic, monotheistic and pantheistic all at the same time. As you can see, things are very complex.

Hinduism is very old and eclectic. It has constantly picked up ideas and beliefs from different gurus throughout history like a dragnet scoops fish out of the ocean. This is why it is confusing and contradictory.

What are the Hindu books? — Just as we have a Bible, the Hindus have their books of truth. There are many. The *Vedas* are the oldest. They are four books that hold the teachings of gurus from the dates of 1500-100 B.C. Later in history, another set of books developed called the *Upanishads*. They begin around 1000 B.C., and some were composed as recently as the 20th century. Finally another set of books developed called the *Puranas*. Their composition dates from 500 B.C. to 1000 A.D. There are still more sacred writings. The most famous of which is called the *Bhagavad Gita*. All these books are collections of the teachings from different gurus throughout history. You have hundreds of truth sources. In my research, I found 47 different categories of books that have a dozen or more books within each category. The list of Hindu authoritative books keeps getting longer and longer.

How do Hindus worship? — Hindus worship everywhere because everything is God. While there are Hindu temples for worship, most Hindu worship takes place in the home where individual gods or family gods are placed on a shelf and appeased by prayers and offerings. In wealthy homes, the family gods have their own room. Hindus also worship trees. They occasionally make pilgrimages to sacred sites.



What do Hindus believe about life after death? — While the Bible tells us we live once and after death comes judgment, Hindus believe in the recycling of the soul. We call it reincarnation. They call it *samsara*, which means the reincarnation of our souls into either a higher or lower life form after death. They believe each of us has an *atman*, which roughly represents what we call a soul. This *atman* starts out in a lower life form, like a plant, and through what is an endless cycle of rebirths, it works its way into a higher life form that is the lowest caste of humans. Eventually the *samsara* cycle can result in humans being reborn into higher castes until *moksha* is achieved. *Moksha* is what we might call salvation. For a Hindu, salvation is a very different picture from what we are used to. *Moksha* means the *atman* (the soul) finally joins itself to the impersonal Brahman god and becomes nothing, like a drop of water lost in the ocean. That doesn't sound exciting to believe.

What is karma? — Another term you hear around Hinduism is karma. This is what traps you in the endless cycle of millions of rebirths. If you have good karma, when you die you will be reincarnated in a higher life form. If you

have bad karma, you will be reincarnated in a lower life form. If something bad happens to someone, such as getting cancer, that is because of karma. You deserve it. Suffering in this life and suffering in the next life is retribution for what we would call sin. This belief results in people living in an uncaring way toward those who are less fortunate in life.

What is the caste system? — Another term Hindus talk about is the caste system, which is their basis for social stratification. There are four castes. They are priests, warriors, merchants and workers. The idea is to die and reincarnate higher in the caste ladder. If you are born in the worker caste, you are a worker for the other castes until you die. There is no opportunity for improving yourself. This results in those born in the priest caste driving a Lexus while someone in a worker caste begs for bread on the side of the road because that is the position in life they deserve.

Where do Americans fall in the caste system? We are considered lower than the lowest class. You probably don't know why. We are called, "The beef eaters." Cows are sacred in Hinduism. We eat them. That is considered despicable. When witnessing to a Hindu, don't take them out for a hamburger. Get the chicken sandwich.

How does Hinduism compare to Christianity? — The goal of a Hindu is to have your *atman* (soul) reincarnate up the ladder to finally become one with the *Brahman* (impersonal god-essence of the universe). It takes literally millions of reincarnations to get there. How do you get up the social ladder? By working really, really hard. There are three paths up the *samsara* ladder in Hinduism.

1. **Way of works** — This is meticulous observation of the Hindu laws which involves thousands of pages of books taught by different gurus with competing truths. Choose one of the truth sources and work really hard to follow it and hope for the best.
2. **Way of knowledge** — Renounce all of life, your pleasures and pains, and try to identify with God.
3. **Way of devotion** — Commit yourself to total devotion toward particular gods or goddesses and hope they can help you reincarnate up the ladder.

After all this, no Hindu has any idea if he is going up or down the reincarnation ladder. Nobody remembers their past lives to see if they are improving or being demoted. Hinduism is all about working as hard as you can to improve yourself for your next life to ultimately get lost like a drop of water in the ocean. Truth is found in hundreds of books written by gurus throughout history that contradict one another. Anybody frustrated yet?

The Bible says reality is very different. There is one God. He loves you more than you can imagine. He sent his own son to die for your sin because you can't save yourself from your sin. When we die, we don't become nothing, we are freed from sin to be with God forever and be the object of his underserved love. It is a gift from God that we don't earn but receive by simply trusting him. We know for sure we are going to heaven because it isn't about what we do. It is about what God has done. The Hindus have no guarantee of any future because it is about what they do. It doesn't add up. Vague multiple contradicting truth sources and working really hard to save yourself to become nothing *or* one God

who loves you, died for you and promises to save you because he knows you can't save yourself. By the way, the truths of the Bible are historically verifiable and founded in history. The truths of Hinduism aren't. Which one adds up?

Why did Bobby Jindahl leave Hinduism?²

His conversion began in grade school when a friend gave him a Bible with his name embossed on it. He thought that was strange. He says, "Everyone knows you can get a Bible for free at a hotel. Why buy one?" He was frustrated he couldn't give it away because of that embossed name.

In his junior year of high school, he met a girl he thought was cute. She invited him to her youth group. He was skeptical but went anyway. He found himself intrigued. He started reading that Bible with his name on it. In the months that followed, the Word of God did the work of God and he committed his life to Jesus.

Let's leave Hinduism for a moment and move onto Buddhism. That means geographically shifting a little more northeast to China, Japan and Korea.

Buddhism³

His name is Mitsuo Fuchida. He was the captain of the Japanese navy that designed and carried out the Japanese attack against Pearl Harbor. He grew up a committed Buddhist but after the war left Buddhism to become a Christian, let's find out why.



² http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/bobby-jindal-raised-hindu-uses-christian-conversion-to-woo-gop-base-for-2016-run/2014/05/12/c446fa34-d989-11e3-8009-71de85b9c527_story.html

³ <http://christiananswers.net/evangelism/beliefs/buddhism.html>

Who began Buddhism?

Unlike Hinduism, Buddhism can point to a founder in 560 B.C. in what is now Nepal. Do you know his name? Siddhartha Gautama. He was born a prince, and his father shrouded him in comfort. The story is that he never saw suffering until he became a young adult. One day he saw elderly people and a corpse and he realized life was full of pain. Disillusioned, he left his life of luxury and became a wandering monk. After practicing Hinduism, he became frustrated with its vague multiple truth sources and contradictory beliefs. In desperation, he set himself to meditation under a fig tree. Some traditions say he meditated for seven days and nights, other traditions say he meditated 40 days and nights. He claimed that in that time of meditation he became the Buddha, which simply means, “the enlightened one.” He claimed his enlightenment revealed four noble truths about life.

1. **Suffering is universal.** (I don’t think it would have taken me 40 days to figure this out.) The very act of living brings about pain and suffering. If you are born, you will die. If you are healthy, you will get sick.
2. **Craving is the cause of suffering.** If you crave an Xbox 360 and don’t get it, you have suffering. If you have an Xbox 360, you might lose it and have suffering. If you are sick, you might crave health. That causes suffering. No matter what you do, you will suffer.
3. **To end suffering, you must bring an end to your craving.** The goal is detachment. You detach yourself from wants and from desires and just exist.

4. **Following the eight-fold path leads to the end of suffering.** The eight-fold path involves having a right view of life, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right occupation, right effort, right contemplation, and right meditation. Buddha taught that through all this work and effort one could eventually achieve final detachment from this world and the terrifying cycle of reincarnation, which leads to more suffering.

Just like Hinduism, there are many different strains of Buddhism, but the unifying factor that set it apart from Hinduism is that it clearly outlined the problem of mankind, which is craving that produces suffering. Buddhism also clearly lays out a plan to eliminate craving called the eight-fold path.

What do Buddhists believe about God? — Hinduism teaches we have a soul and the goal of life is to have our *atman* (individual soul) unite with the *Brahman* (universal soul), like a drop of water is lost in an ocean. Buddhism teaches we do not have a soul. Buddhism also teaches there is no God. Most Buddhist are atheists. The goal of a Buddhist's life is to stop the cycle of reincarnation, cease to exist and extinguish yourself like blowing out a candle. If we cease to exist, we will no longer be reincarnated and experience suffering.

Buddhism is sometimes called a religion for people who don't believe in God but want to worship themselves. Buddhism is about worshipping human potential since there is no God and there is no soul. What I find interesting is while Buddhists don't believe there is a God, they believe in reincarnation and karma. They believe the sufferings of this current life are punishment for the sins of a past life. If God doesn't exist, who made the law of karma? Who determines

if you are reincarnated as a king or an insect? Who knows if you are meditating hard enough to finally cease to exist in the first place? Life is not just full of suffering, it is also full of joy. If we were to finally cease to exist, we not only eliminate suffering but we also eliminate joy.

Buddhism is known for meditation. Siddhartha meditated under a tree to achieve enlightenment about life. Buddhists teach we need meditation to unlock our potential.

One hundred and fifty years ago, Buddhism was unheard of in the west. Today, Buddhism is growing. What is outpacing the growth of the Buddhist religion in the west is Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism is about self-actualization, which is very popular in American. Buddhism is about meditation to focus yourself and relieve stress. This is appealing to Americans. A simple search of Amazon shows how quickly Buddhist principles have woven themselves into every day life. Check out these books on Amazon: [Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance](#), which teaches the principles of Zen Buddhism and motorcycle repair, or [Zen and Creative Management](#) which teaches Zen Buddhist principles for business management.

How does Buddhism compare to the Bible?

While there are people who claim to be Christian Buddhists, I don't see how they can be held together. Buddhist teachings are very different from the Bible.

The Bible claims God exists, Buddhists claim he doesn't. — Buddhists think all that exists is our selves and the goal is to cease to exist. The Bible says God created everything and what matters is our relationship with him.

The Bible claims we die once. Buddhists claim reincarnation and karma.

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...
Hebrews 9:27 (ESV)

The reason people do not remember their past lives is because they didn't have past lives. What matters is not ceasing to exist and a second chance on life but the day we stand before Jesus.

The Bible says we have a soul. Buddhists deny the soul.

...then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. Genesis 2:7 (ESV)

The Bible says that at death none of us cease to exist. We either go to be with Christ because of our trust in what he did for us, which the Bible describes as better by far than earthly life, or we go to a place of torment, which is far worse than any earthly life. Buddhists teach we can snuff ourselves out of existence like the flame on a candle. The Bible says we have an eternal soul.

The Bible says the problem in the world is sin. Buddhism claims the problem is suffering.

The problem is we try to live independent of God. We try to put ourselves first instead of others. We are separated from God. We are in rebellion against him. Suffering is the result of sin.

Christianity is what God has done. Buddhism is what I must do.

For me, what crossed Buddhism off my list of alternatives to Jesus was the same thing that crossed Hinduism off my list. Buddhism is about what I do. It is thousands of hours of meditation, right views, right speech, right efforts. The eight-fold path is slavery. Even if you did everything right, which nobody can, you only cease to exist. That doesn't satisfy the longings of any heart.

The Bible tells me there is a God. My relationship with him is not about what I do. God loves me. He sent his son to live the perfect life I cannot live. His son died the death I deserve. Jesus loves me. He died for me. He did it all for me. I am no different than anyone. I mess everything up. If it was up to me, I wouldn't save myself because I couldn't save myself. My only hope and prayer is God doing it all for me. When I die, I won't cease to exist but when I close my eyes in this life, I open my eyes to see Jesus and the God who loved me.

Why did Mitsuo Fuchida, the man who bombed Pearl Harbor, leave his Buddhist faith and become a Christian?

After World War II, he was called on to testify in military court to some of the brutal treatment received by Americans in Japanese prisoner of war camps. He couldn't understand why torturing your enemy was wrong. During that time, he met Japanese who were in American prisoner of war camps. He was shocked to see they weren't tortured but they were well cared for. Some of them were cared for by a young woman named Peggy Covell. Her parents were missionaries to Japan that the Japanese killed. She took the Bible seriously about loving your enemies. Mitsuo couldn't understand how she could love and care for the people that killed her parents. Through a series of circumstances, in September of 1949, he decided to read the Bible for himself. The Word of God

did the work of God. He left Buddhism and became a Christian because of what he read in God's Word and what he experienced in the lives of God's people. After becoming a Christian, he traveled the United States telling how the love of Christ and the Word of God changed his life. He also wrote books, the most famous being his life story called From Pearl Harbor to Calvary.⁴

If there is any way to be saved, it has to come from God. It can't come from me. If it is up to me to save myself, I would lose it.

Conclusion

Two billion people, who matter to Jesus, are following these religions. It breaks my heart. I know it also breaks yours.

As I was thinking about a Bible passage that would put this in perspective, I ran across Luke 18 in my Bible study, which I think articulates the difference between trusting in yourself and trusting in God to save us.

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 18:9–14 (ESV)

This week, we took one week to look at two religions, next week we will take two weeks to look at one religion, Islam. You won't want to miss it. See you next week.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitsuo_Fuchida



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the EFCA. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com.

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