

Comparing Buddhist and Hindu Literature



ABOUT THE READING Buddhism was founded in India about 500 BC. and is based on the teachings of the philosopher Gautama Buddha. Hinduism is considered to be the world's oldest living religion. It originated in India approximately 4,000 years ago. About 80 percent of Indians are Hindus.

BUDDIST LITERATURE

The Dhammapada: Sayings of Buddha Translated by Thomas Cleary

The Dhammapada is a collection of Buddha's sayings that have been passed down by his followers. It teaches morality and encourages the development of self-mastery and strength of character.



As you read the passage below, pay attention to how good and bad are contrasted.

1. Everything has mind in the lead, has mind in the forefront, is made by mind. If one speaks or acts with a corrupt mind, misery will follow, as the wheel of a cart follows the foot of the ox.

2. Everything has mind in the lead, has mind in the forefront, is made by mind. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness will follow, like a shadow that never leaves.

15. One who does evil sorrows in this world and after death, sorrowful in both. Seeing the

VOCABULARY

candor forthrightness;
honesty in speech

disengagement free from
entanglements or
obligations

benevolent kind;
charitable

insolence disrespect

Circle the examples of similes in the first two verses.

Source: *The Dhammapada: Sayings of Buddha*, Thomas Cleary, trans.
New York: Bantam Books, 1995.

pollution of one's own actions, one is tormented by sorrow and grief.

16. One who does good is happy in this world and after death, happy in both. Seeing the purity of one's own actions, one is happy, most joyful.

HINDU LITERATURE

Bhagavad Gita

Translated by Stephen Mitchell

Bhagavad Gita means "*The Song of the Blessed One*." Although no one is certain of when the text was written, some scholars date it as early as the fifth century.



As you read the passage below, pay attention to how the statements express the Hindu philosophy of life.

THE BLESSED LORD SAID:

Fearlessness, purity of heart,
persistence in the yoga of knowledge,
generosity, self-control,
nonviolence, gentleness, **candor**,

integrity, **disengagement**,
joy in the study of the scriptures.
compassion for all beings, modesty,
patience, a tranquil mind,

dignity, kindness, courage,
a **benevolent**, loving heart—
these are the qualities of men
born with divine traits, Arjuna.

Hypocrisy, **insolence**, anger,
cruelty, ignorance, conceit—
these, Arjuna, are the qualities
of men with demonic traits.

The *yoga of knowledge* requires spiritual and physical discipline. In its original Hindu meaning, *yoga* refers to any technique that can join the seeker with the ultimate reality.

The *Gita* is part of an epic called *The Mahabharata*, which describes a war between two groups of a royal family. Arjuna is the virtuous hero.

Source: *Bhagavad Gita*, Stephen Mitchell, trans. New York: Harmony Books, 2000.

The divine traits lead to freedom;
the demonic, to suffering and bondage.
But do not be concerned, Arjuna:
the traits you have are divine.

ANALYZING LITERATURE

1. Main Idea What is the main topic of both of these passages?

2. Critical Thinking: Making Comparisons What similarities do you see in these two passages? What are the differences?

3. Activity Imagine that you are traveling in Ancient India. Design a postcard and then write at least five interesting sentences about your travels. You may describe the ancient structures you've seen, name some important people, and mention something about the culture.

Biography Candragupta Maurya

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Maurya was said to have ruled India much like Alexander the Great.
2. Indica described what life was like in India during this time. It may have included details about civilian lives, legal and state doctrines, and even Mauryan's practices.

ACTIVITY

Answers will vary.

Biography Kautilya

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. The Arthashastra was a guidebook that discussed politics, and how to lead. It also dealt with philosophy.
2. Kautilya's thoughts and opinions were probably applicable to life in the time in which he lived, however today things are very different. I do not think politicians would be able to follow the Arthashastra, as modern government is very different from what I have learned about history.

ACTIVITY

Answers will vary.

Biography Mahinda

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Mahinda spread Buddhism through India.
2. Mahinda was a monk who became enlightened, then traveled to Sri Lanka to convert the King to Buddhism. He then spread the teachings of Buddha. He died, and a memorial was erected where he was cremated.

ACTIVITY

Answers will vary.

Literature

CALL-OUT BOX

Similes (p. 12): misery will follow, as the wheel of a cart follows the foot of an ox; happiness will follow, like a shadow that never leaves.

ANALYZING LITERATURE

1. the consequences of good and evil
2. Both passages talk about the consequences of good and evil. The Buddhist passage uses comparisons and refers to happiness when one is good and sorrow when one is evil. The Hindu passage lists the traits of good and evil men. It refers to goodness leading to freedom and evil leading to suffering and bondage.

Primary Source The Story of Savitri from India's Mahabharata

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Possible answers: intelligence, loyalty, devotion, lack of concern for riches, determination, concern for family members, more concerned for others than for herself
2. Answers will vary. Possible answers: She cares more about making other people happy than about her own happiness. She wants to trick Yama into continuing to grant her favors. She wants Yama to admire her and feel sympathy for her.
3. Accept any reasonable response.