

Challenging the Cults

12. Answering Buddhism



How should a Christian respond to Buddhism and the Buddhist? First Christians should understand Buddhism is an ethical system, with wrongs and rights. Before Christians see how they differ, they should look and see what they have in common with Buddhism.

Morality

Buddhism recognizes the need to live a "Good" moral life, refraining from actions called "sin" in Christianity. Buddhism teaches people to refrain from stealing, lying and committing adultery. Reflecting the standards of sin in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14-16).

The Physical World

Buddhism also recognizes the temporary (Illusion) view of this physical world. Although Christianity does not deny its physical elements, the Bible clearly teaches the temporary nature of this physical world (2 Peter 3:10,12, Isaiah 51:6, Hebrews 1:11,12,).

All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, And the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; All their host shall fall down As the leaf falls from the vine, And as fruit falling from a fig tree.
Isaiah 34:4

Buddhism, views this world as illusory and deceptive, causing attachment to this world, rather than to seeking truth.

Suffering

The recognition of suffering in the world is the first noble truth of Buddhism; Christianity also observes the suffering in the world. Buddhism sees suffering as the result of bad *karma*, not a fallen world. Christianity sees the suffering because of our fallen nature and sin. However, both Christianity and Buddhism see the suffering of humanity as a focal point of humanity's status. Buddhism's solution is to first recognize suffering, (*1st Noble truth*), then to know attachment to this physical world is cause of this suffering (*2nd Noble truth*). The Buddhist is then to separate themselves from attachment to the physical (*3rd Noble Truth*), and seek the teachings of Buddha (*4th Noble Truth*), as summarized in the *Noble Eightfold Path*. The goal being to escape this physical world into *Nirvana*¹, after a succession of lives filled with suffering. The hope of the Buddhist is one day reincarnating into the body of a male Buddhist monk², who will live a life worthy of escape from *Samsara*³.

Salvation

Christianity recognizes the suffering of Humanity, unlike Buddhism, salvation from suffering in this physical and temporary world only comes through having a "saving relationship" with Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins, to restore humanity. By His death, Jesus paid for our sins, he took our suffering upon himself, to purchase our redemption with His blood. By putting faith in Jesus Christ, our account of sin and suffering is transferred to His work on the cross.

Unlike Buddhism, which depends on the works of the individual for salvation, salvation in Christianity is dependent on the work of Christ alone, who died for our sins. Salvation is dependent on faith in Jesus Christ not human effort. (John 3:15-18, Romans 3:23-26,) Salvation is a gift from God to humanity, a person cannot work for their salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Reincarnation

An area, where Buddhism and Christianity differ is in understanding what happens after death. The Buddhist have a modified understanding of the Hinduism's doctrine of reincarnation. Buddhists believe following death, only the *karmic elements* of the soul are reincarnated not the personal soul.

This doctrine is completely contrary to the Christian concept of death, which can be summed up in Hebrews 9:27.

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, Hebrews 9:27

¹ Nirvana mean "Blown Out" where the flame is blown out and the person exits.

² This is the literal teaching of Buddha and Buddhism, the more liberal schools have changed this.

³ Samsara is the cycle of birth in rebirth in reincarnation of karmic elements of the person.

The Bible clearly teaches that each individual only has one life on this earth, following our life, we are eternally judged, with no second chances of living another life. Those who have accepted Jesus Christ as savior are ushered into His presence as a soul without a body (Phil. 1:21-25), until the resurrection. While those who die without Christ, die in their sins. At the end of this age, both saved and lost receive their eternal bodies (resurrection), the saved are with Jesus Christ in eternity (I Thes. 4:13-17) while the lost dwell in the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Reaching Buddhists

To reach Buddhists, the Christian should first understand the difference between Western Buddhist and Asian Buddhists. Most Asian Buddhist are from a Buddhist culture, Buddhism is not only a theology for them, but part of their culture and link to their community. To leave Buddhism for Christianity, for Asian Buddhists may mean leaving their cultural identity. With Asian Buddhists, Christians should also be sensitive to communication gaps between cultures. Tissa Weerasingha, a Christian pastor from Sri Lanka writes,

If a Buddhist were to be asked, "Do you want to be born again?," he might likely reply, "Please, no! I do NOT want to be born again. I want to reach nirvana." The Buddhist quest is for deliverance from the cycle of rebirths. If a Buddhist confuses "new birth" with "rebirth," the Christian message will be completely distorted ⁴

Its important to define terms, so the important concepts are not lost in translation.

Reaching Western Buddhist, who are from a Christian or post-Christian culture, is another task. Most have taken bits and pieces of Buddhism, which are most appealing to them. Many of these have no clue to the words and meanings of the prayers they recite. For many being "A Buddhist" is act of rebellion against a western Christian culture, they have grown to reject.

A suggested procedure to reaching Buddhist could be the following.

- First start by trying to find out just how familiar the person is with Buddhism, not all Buddhists know what Buddhism is.
- Second, try to build a relationship of mutual understanding sharing beliefs and communicating ideas.
- Third try to establish the Buddhist view of Nirvana, the ultimate destination. Buddhist have varying views of the final destination.
- Fourth, point to philosophical errors and shortcomings of Buddhism as compared to Christianity.

Christian missionary, James Stephens, a former Buddhist who founded the Sonrise⁵ Center for Buddhist Studies suggest Christians ask Buddhist about their concept of Nirvana, most followers of Buddhism will have no clear explanation opening up the door for the following analogy.⁶

"Subscribing to a religious system that gives no tangible idea of one's future destiny is like someone going to airport and simply asking for a ticket. When asked for a destination, the same person responds by saying, the same person responds by saying, I don't know just give me a ticket. When I get there, I'll know where it is"

The Christian could then show the Buddhist, prophecies about Christ, such as Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, which foretell the coming of the Messiah, and his death after he came. He suffered for our sins.

1 Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.

3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him **Isaiah 53:1-3**

16 For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; 17 I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me.

18 They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots. **Psalm 22:16-18**

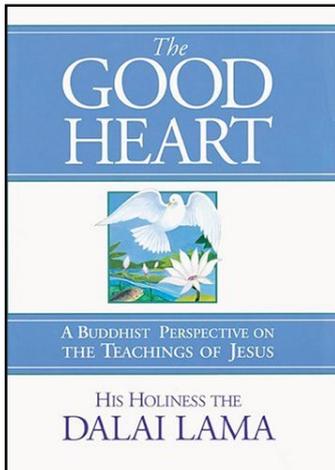
⁴ Tissa Weerasingha, "Karma and Christ: Opening Our Eyes to the Buddhist World," International Journal of Frontier Missions 10:3 (July 1993):103

⁵ <http://www.sonrisecenter.org/>

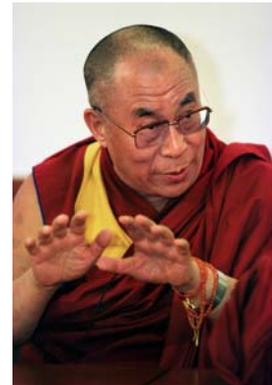
⁶ Kingdom of the Cults, Walter Martin, Hank Hanegraaff, Editor, 1997 Bethany House Publishers, pg. 318

Jesus and Buddha

As Buddhism comes into contact with Christianity, a comparison is often made between Jesus and Buddha (*Siddhartha Gautama*). In fact, the leader of Tibetan Buddhism⁷, the Dalai Lama was recently interviewed by James A. Beverly⁸ for Christianity Today, who asked how Jesus could be "Enlightened" and teach falsehood according to Buddhist teaching.



I reminded him of his belief that Jesus is "a fully enlightened being" and asked, "If Jesus is fully enlightened, wouldn't he be teaching the truth about himself? Therefore, if he is teaching the truth, then he is the Son of God, and there is a God, and Jesus is the Savior. If he is fully enlightened, he should teach the truth. If he is not teaching the truth, he is not that enlightened.".....As the Dalai Lama felt the momentum of the question, he laughed more than at any other time in the interview. He obviously understood the argument, borrowed from C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*....."This is a very good question," he said. "This is very, very important, very important." Even in Buddha's case, he said, a distinction must



always be made between teachings that "always remain valid" and others that "we have the liberty to reject.".....He argued that the Buddha knew people were not always ready for the higher truth because it "wouldn't suit, wouldn't help." Therefore, lesser truths are sometimes taught because of the person's ignorance or condition. This is known in Buddhist *dharma* as the doctrine of *uppayah*, or skillful means. The Dalai Lama then applied this to the question about Jesus....."Jesus Christ also lived previous lives," he said. "So, you see, he reached a high state, either as a *Bodhisattva*, or an enlightened person, through Buddhist practice or something like that. Then, at a certain period, certain era, he appeared as a new master, and then because of circumstances, he taught certain views different from Buddhism, but he also taught the same religious values as I mentioned earlier: Be patient, tolerant, compassionate. This is, you see, the real message in order to become a better human being." He said that there was absolutely no lying involved since Jesus' motivation was to help people.⁹

In this interview, the Dalai Lama was forced to either say Jesus was a liar, lord or lunatic. While saying there was "Absolutely no lying", the Dalai Lama called Jesus a liar, who taught false hood, according to Buddhism. According to the Dalai Lama, Jesus was enlightened but knowing told lies, Himself being the Son of God and God being personal, both which contradict Buddhist teaching. So either Jesus lied, or was a lunatic. In the last line of the quote, the Dalai Lama basically says the lying was justified because the "motivation was to help people". Trying to fit Jesus into Buddhist doctrines does not work, because Buddhism and Christianity are not compatible.

Today, many are trying to compare Buddha and Jesus as two similar spiritual beings with two similar messages. As we shall see, this is false. Jesus and Buddha have very little in common. Jesus in commenting on the teaching of Buddha and others who claimed the "Keys to salvation" apart from God's revelation in scripture said,

⁷ Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

⁸ "All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.

⁷ Tibetan Buddhism represents only about 6% of Buddhist Today, but is the most visible form in the west. Also known as Vajrayana Buddhism (The Diamond Way) was started in the 6th century A.D.

⁸ James A. Beverley is Professor of Theology and Ethics at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto

⁹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/008/15.64.html>

9 "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

10 "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. **John 10:7-10**

Jesus preached exclusive truth; there is only one way for salvation, through Christ alone, He called others who came before him thieves and robbers. Buddha, taught the way of escape (Salvation) was by following his teachings as revealed in the *Four Noble Truths* and the *Noble Eightfold path*. With Good works, resulting in good Karma, one might escape into Nirvana.

Jesus and Buddha an evaluation

When we compare Jesus and Buddha, what we are really asking is, who is the messenger of truth? Though both taught people how to live moral lives, both Jesus and Buddha claimed to know the answers to the questions most important to those alive on earth.

- Who am I?
- What happens after we die?
- Is there a heaven or hell?
- Is there something I can do, while I am alive, to determine my destiny?

The teachings of Buddha and Jesus both address these questions for humanity, but can they both cannot be right. The answers given by Jesus and Buddha both have contradictory claims so they both cannot teachers of ultimate truth. For example, Jesus taught He alone was the way to Heaven, and there is only one life. Buddha taught, salvation is attained through self-effort, after living many lives, you attain nirvana. Both Jesus and Buddha cannot be right. They may both be wrong, but they cannot both be right, because their claims contradict each other.

So how can we know if Buddha or Jesus was right? Is there a way to evaluate, whether Jesus or Buddha has the truth, or do we just have to wait until we die to find out?

One place to start is to examine and compare the teaching of Buddhism and Christianity. This ultimately leads us to the history behind each person. What is the basis on their teachings? Did they just appear and say accept me, I have the truth? Is there a basis to their claims?

The basis of Jesus Christ	The basis of Buddha
<p>The Old Testament: Jesus Christ claimed to be the Messiah (Christ), the redeemer of humanity promised at the fall of man. From four hundred to over a thousand-year, before Jesus, God spoke through prophets, who foretold the events surrounding the coming of Messiah¹⁰. For example, in Micah 5:3, were told he would be born in Bethlehem. 2 Samuel 7:12 tells us he would be a descendent of King David. Daniel 9:24-27, tells us the exact time when Messiah will be killed and what happens after his death. Isaiah 53, talks about his rejection by his people the Jews, and how his death would pay for the sins of the world.</p> <p>All this and more was revealed in the scriptures before</p>	<p>Hinduism: Buddha's basis is Hinduism. Most of the doctrines and teachings of Buddha are steeped in Hinduism. The concepts of <i>Karma</i>, <i>Reincarnation</i>, <i>Samsara</i> and <i>Illusion</i> comes from the Vedic (Wisdom) teachings of the Aryan tribes which migrated into India. Buddha, himself claims to be one in a succession of Buddha's. According to Buddhism, another Buddha is coming, <i>Maitreya</i>. The concept of incarnations of into the realm of the living is also a Hindu concept. In Hinduism, <i>Vishnu</i> would incarnate himself as an avatar, Buddha is believed to be the 9th incarnation of Vishnu after</p>

¹⁰ Messiah, is a Hebrew word, meaning anointed (chosen), The Hebrew prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah who would redeem fallen man. <http://www.truthnet.org/apologetics>

<p>Jesus came, to prove the identity of the Messiah and his work on the cross. The Old Testament identified the Messiah as God himself who would dwell in flesh. (Isaiah 9:6-7)</p>	<p><i>Ram and Krishna.</i></p> <p>So in essence, Buddhism is a sect of Hinduism, without the <i>Caste System</i>¹¹ and some other aspects. So the question needs to be asked, Is Hinduism inspired? Are the Aryan Vedas inspired? Is there any evidence?</p>
<p>Evidence: The evidence for the Jesus and the Bible is substantial. Archeological and Historical Evidence demonstrate the accuracy of the Bible from a historical perspective. Super-natural evidence demonstrates the Bible as having a supernatural source (The God of the Bible).</p> <p>The Bible reveals the person of Jesus Christ before he came. Giving us details which could only be fulfilled by the Jesus of Nazareth. The seventy weeks of Daniel gives the exact month, day and year Jesus would be cut off, 539 years before his birth.</p> <p>The Bible also reveals events in the future, events happening today regarding Israel, Jerusalem and the Jewish people as evidence the God of the Bible is only God, there is no other.</p>	<p>Evidence: The evidence of Buddha being a historical figure is not denied by anyone, nor is the fact that he started Buddhism. The question is was his revelation <i>super-natural</i>. Again, we have to understand, Buddha preached a reformed Hinduism. What he taught was not unlike the teachers of Jainism or Hinduism. His teaching modified some of Hindu doctrines, but in essence Buddhism is Hinduism, without the caste system, and without a focus on Brahman¹²</p>
<p>Texts: The text of the Bible both Old and New Testaments are preserved through manuscripts. The oldest existing Hebrew Manuscripts (The Dead Sea Scrolls) prove the integrity of manuscript transmission. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) also affirm the transmission of the Old Testament.</p> <p>The New Testament manuscripts we have are dated as early as 50 years (John Rylands) to 150 years from its authorship.</p>	<p>Texts: Pali Canon Tripiṭaka (Three Baskets):</p> <p>The Pali Canon is one the earliest existing scripture collections of the Buddhist tradition. These scriptures were recited orally from the time of the Buddha and were put into writing in Sri Lanka around 30 BC. So for 500 years, after Buddha, what he said was not even written down.</p> <p>The other texts of Mahayana and Vajrayana branches of Buddhism are even less reliable than the Pali Canon and number in the thousands.</p>

¹¹ The Caste System was designed by the conquering Aryans to divide the conquered. They were separated by Priests, Warriors, Merchants, Servants and Outcasts each group was kept apart.

¹² Brahman is the main god of Hinduism, with the goal of the soul (atman) to unite with Brahm through the process of reincarnation.

	Jesus/Christianity	Buddha/Buddhism
Salvation	Jesus died for our sins, being crucified on the Cross. By our faith in Christ we are given the gift of grace by God. (John 3:16-18, Ephesians 2:1-10, Romans 3:23-26) Salvation is available to all who accept Jesus (Biblical Jesus) and call on his name for salvation.	Buddha according to Buddhist teaching attained Nirvana, exiting into annihilation. The salvation for the Buddhist is to escape into annihilation and end the cycle of reincarnations and suffering. (Samsara). According to orthodox Buddhism, to attain Nirvana you must be a male Buddhist monk.
Truth	Jesus claims to be "Truth". The only way of salvation. Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. John 14:6	Buddha taught there is no reality in this physical world, all is an illusion. The way out of this illusion is to follow the Buddha's <i>4 Noble Truths</i> and the <i>8 fold path</i> . This will then take the karmic elements toward the point of annihilation.
Person	Every person is a unique individual soul, who will live for eternity, with memory of their life on earth. Each person lives one life, after our life on earth is judgment. (Hebrews 9:27, Luke 16:20-31,) The Lord God created the soul of the person at conception. (Zechariah 12:1)	Each person now living has lived past lives; In Buddhism there is no soul, only Karmic elements that are preserved from reincarnation to reincarnation.
Death	After death, the soul of the individual goes to Heaven or Hell. There is only one life for each person. In this life we need to make our decision where we will spend eternity. According to the Bible there are no second chances after death.	According to Buddhism if a human does not obtain nirvana or enlightenment, as it is known, <i>the person</i> cannot escape the cycle of death and rebirth and are inevitably be reborn into the 6 possible states beyond this our present life, these being in order from the highest to lowest; 1. Heaven 2. Human life, 3. Asura 4. Hungry Ghost 5. Animals 6. Hell (See attached Table)
God	There is one God who created the heavens and the earth, who has revealed Himself in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ was the incarnation of God, who came to die for our sins on the cross.	Though most Western Buddhist deny the existence of God in Buddhism, this is not so clear cut. As Buddha himself in most ways held Hindu beliefs. According to the <i>Pali Canon</i> , Brahma the creator-god of Hinduism appeared to Buddha after his enlightenment. In some parts of the world Buddha or his disciples are worshipped as gods. <i>Pure Land Buddhism</i> is example where Buddha is worshipped as god and savior. In Buddhism...there are many gods...because Buddhism for the most part is polytheistic Hinduism without and emphasis on Brahman.
Heaven	Heaven as understood by most is the presence of God. When the saved Christian dies, he enters Heaven to be with Christ. (John 14:1-6, Phil. 1:23)	After death, there are according to some Buddhist traditions up to 37 levels of heaven. And you rest there until your karma runs out.
Hell	According to Jesus, Hell is a real place where un-saved souls go after death. (Luke 16:20-31).	Naraka or Neraka, in Buddhism and Hinduism, is the underworld and Hell. In Hinduism, there are many hells, and Yama, Lord of Justice, sends human beings after death for appropriate punishment. Such punishment can be in boiling oil, etc. However, Naraka in Hinduism is not equivalent to Hell in Christian ideology. Naraka is only a purgatory where the soul gets purified of sin by sufferings.
Morality	God is objective truth, God established what is right and wrong. When we violate God's will this is known as sin. In Christianity there is an objective right and wrong. (Exodus 20:1-17)	Buddhism has no objective right or wrong according to Buddhist. They have right or wrong thinking and actions, which lead to good or bad karma.

Buddhism and Its relationship to Hinduism and Jainism

	Buddhism	Hinduism	Jainism
History	Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha following the earlier formations of Hinduism and Jainism. (563 to 483 B.C.) Buddhist writing in fact prove the Jainist influence on Buddhism.	Many of the principles of Buddhism are clearly derived from Hinduism.	Vardhaman Mahavira (599–527 BCE) , or Lord Mahavira founded Jainism before Buddha was even born. The similarity of Buddhism and Jainism begs the question did Buddha copy Jainism concepts.
Nirvana: Sanskrit: Extinction, or Blowing Out this concept is present in both Hinduism and Buddhism	Siddhartha Guatama (Buddha) redefined this term which is common in both Hinduism and Jainism.	Nirvana is the stopping of Samsara, the cycle of birth and rebirth. The Atman(Soul) is united with Bhraman. Buddha however choose to not clearly define the end.	In Jainism the In Jainism, Moksha and Nirvana are the same. When a soul (atman) achieves Nirvana, it is released from the cycle of births and deaths, and achieves its pure self. It then becomes a Siddha (literally one who has accomplished his ultimate objective), and hence a god, worthy of worship
Dharma: sanskrit, roughly law or way) is the way of the higher Truths	This term is used for both Hinduism and Jainism to describe their system of the "Way"	Same	Same
Yogi: from the Sanskrit root yuj ("to yoke") meaning to yoke with the divine.	Buddha, became a Yogi, after he left the palace and according to Jainism was under the influence of Jain Yogis. Demonstrating Buddhism is a Hindu sect.	Hinduism see Buddha as a Hindu Yogi.	Jainism founder was a Hindu Yogi, showing Jainism like Buddhism is actually Hinduism. Buddhist scriptures record philosophical dialogues between the wandering seeker <i>Buddha</i> and <i>Udaka Ramaputta</i> , who appears to have been a Jain teacher (having taught a doctrine of eight types of karma).
Samsara: , "to flow together," to go or pass through states, to wander	This term is used in Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism to describe the cycle of birth and rebirth, prior to Nirvana.	Hinduism is the basis of this term. Both Buddhism and Jainism demonstrate their total dependence on Hindu teachings.	Jainism also has this doctrine.
Karma: Sanskrit: कर्म from the root kri, "to do", meaning deed)	This a purely Hindu doctrine which Buddha based his understanding of attaining the right amount of "Good" Karma. In Buddhism, only intentional actions are karmic "acts of will". The 'Law of Karma' refers to "cause and effect",	Pali kamma in Indian philosophy, the influence of an individual's past actions on his future lives, or reincarnations. The doctrine of karma reflects the Hindu conviction that this life is but one in a chain of lives (samsāra)	This is also a foundational doctrine of Jainism.
Reincarnation:	Buddhism there is no reincarnation of the soul, just the Karmic elements. Tibetan Buddhists do believe that a new-born child may	The idea that the soul reincarnates is intricately linked to karma, whose first explication was also seen in the	In Jainism, gods reincarnate after they die. A Jainist, who accumulates enough good karma, may

	be the reincarnation of someone departed, like the Dalai Lama .	Hindu books of the Upanishads. The idea is that individual souls, <i>jiva-atmas</i> pass from one plane of existence and carry with them <i>samskaras</i> (impressions) from former states of being.	become a god; but, this is generally seen as undesirable since gods eventually die and one might then come back as a lesser being.
Maya: Sanskrit: <i>ma</i> : not, <i>ya</i> : this, translated illusion. The view world we live in is an illusion.	Buddha, borrowed this concept from Hinduism, and Jainism.	is the illusion of a limited, purely physical and mental reality in which our everyday consciousness has become entangled, a veiling of the true, unitary Self, also known as Brahman.	Same
Relationship between avidya , or ignorance, of one's true self, karma and reincarnation . And the state of illusion, Maya .	The Same as Hinduism, except reincarnation involves only the Karmic elements and only transfers to humans and not animals.	In Hinduism, it is avidya , or ignorance, of one's true self, that leads to ego-consciousness of the body and the phenomenal world. This grounds one in desire and the perpetual chain of karma and reincarnation . The state of illusion is known as Maya .	Same
The Creator God	Though Buddhist claim Buddhism is an atheistic religion that does not have a creator-god, their scripture contradicts this claim. In fact after his enlightenment, two Hindu gods appeared to Buddha. One of these gods was Brahma Sahampati, who is the creator-god, according to the Pali Canon. <i>Samyutta Nikaya</i> VI.1	The Hindus have a pantheon of gods and goddess. The main god is Brahman, the supreme god. The senior god of the Hindu trinity Brahma , Vishnu and Shiva. Brahma was the creator god who appeared to Buddha, according to Buddhist scripture.	The founder of Jainism renounced Brahman. But later his disciples worshipped him as god.

6 Realms

In the Buddhist viewpoint, there are 6 different realms we can be reborn into. And beings in each of these states has different degrees of happiness and suffering. These realms are namely:

The Upper Realms	The Lower Realms
Gods Humans Demi-Gods (Asuras)	Hungry Ghosts Animals Hell Beings

These Realms represents 6 different states of existence. Though some cannot be readily seen, they can be experienced. These 6 realms also represent 6 different states of mind a person might continually go through.

Gods

It is important to note that in Buddhism, gods are not beings that control or intervene in our daily lives. Rather, they are beings who experience a great deal of happiness as life goes on smoothly for a long time with absence of general suffering. However, this state is only temporal. We all, at one time or other, have had such an experience. When "everything" goes our way, as we wish, we are experiencing a state very similar to the gods.

Demi-Gods (Asuras)

These are beings who are constantly in an aggressive or competitive state of mind. They have great wealth, yet they are always reaching out, striving for more. In our modern world many of us are not unlike them. We live a generally high standard of life. Yet, we are constantly seeking and reaching out for more endlessly.

Human Beings

In this state we experience a mix of happiness and suffering. It is also in this state that we are able to attain Buddhahood. Thus a Buddhist would strive not to be born as a god but as a human, as it is as a human that we are most able to best practice the Dharma.



Animals

The most powerful force acting on animals is ignorance. They are guided mainly by instincts where the preoccupying thoughts are food, sex and material comfort. Many of us have had experiences when craving for food or sex is so strong that we do things that we might regret later. A person who is too preoccupied by these thoughts is thus somewhat bestial or animal in nature.

Hungry Ghosts

In the ghost realm, beings are in a state of neurotic desire, and not having them fulfilled. They are always filled with great hunger or thirst. We have often seen people in less fortunate nations in great hunger due to drought or war. Their living is not unlike beings in the ghost realm. Closer to home, many people experience neurotic craving for relationships and cause great pain to both parties.

Hell Beings

These beings, of all the realms, are the ones suffering from the most pain. These beings suffer from constant acute physical and mental pain. These descriptions fit the details of the ways in which many prisoners-of-war have been tortured.