

The Superiority of Buddhism Over the Three Monotheistic Religions

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Human nullity in the background of the enormous event of world creation has bothered mankind ever since cognition developed to a level enabling such pondering. This nuisance accompanied by fears of death and the unknown have probably triggered efforts to provide some meaning to the dominance of Homo sapiens on Earth. At that stage of development, the pagan beliefs in various Gods seemed quite archaic raising the need for a more sophisticated spiritual belief and explanation of the status of humans in the creation. This spiritual requirement was first met by the Israelites, while escaping from slavery in Egypt (~3500 years ago; 1446 BCE), by establishing a new monotheistic religion (belief in an abstractive single super-being (God), creator of the world and life). Tenacity of the new religion required a written contract, which was first provided in the form of the 'Tablets of Covenants' brought by Moses when he stepped down from the Sinai mountain, and further by the Torah write-up and the entire Bible later in time. Notably, despite this religious innovation, formalized in a written form, no rational explanation has been provided as to why had God decided to create the visible world, nor was explained the creation of man-kind except probably for being a witness to God's greatness. Ever since, the belief in an abstractive single God beyond human grasp has been adopted worldwide also by the two following monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam, and is being considered a 'spiritual jump' compared to the preceding pagan beliefs. The new monotheistic religions did not satisfy only spiritual needs, but also intended to answer bothering issues and daily needs in a developing society. Noteworthy, most 'do and don't do' rules have appeared in other early cultures like that of the Babylonians (Hamurabi's 'law code'; 1782-1750 BCE). Still, the advantages of monotheism at the time were: (1) Description of the creation of the world and humanity and providing feelings of being part in this incredible event; (2) Emphasizing God's preference of the Israelites as his selected nation (no reasoning provided), thus raising a belief of superiority over other nations; (3) Delineation of a formal written set of social and ethical rules useful for a developing civilization (e.g., the 'Ten Commandments' and the 'Torah'); (4) Outlining an organized setup of ceremonial rules and rituals related to the relations between people and God; (5) Establishment of the highest authority to lean on through life and particularly during times of difficulties. However, while this spiritual development (ref. 1) might have satisfied cognitive or mental needs at the time, it also provided new opportunities for minorities (sanctified mediators; ref. 2), exploiting the public fears, to take control over the masses while improving their own status and wealth. Importantly, although the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) were accepted in the Mediterranean and Western regions of the globe as spiritual advancement placing humanity in the center of creation, they still were profoundly different from the spiritual needs of people in the Far East, who raised

approximately 4000 years ago, (~1500 BCE) a new religion - Hinduism. This new religion preceded the monotheistic religion of the Israelites, but could not be considered monotheistic as it composed a mixture of Indian faiths with some common themes, such as the cast system, theism, elaborate rituals, and superstitions, as well as a belief in several Gods (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and the Great Goddess). The main God, Brahma, was considered the creator of the world, or alternatively, the universe itself. Compared to Judaism and the later monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam, and their focusing on the relations between human beings and God, Hinduism was based on social prohibitions, enemies of human mind, such as exaggerated desires (kama), anger (krodha), greed (lobha), inflated ego (mada), attachment (moha), jealousy (matsarya), and laziness (alasya). Years later, increasing doubts in some Hinduistic principles led to the establishment of Buddhism (~400 BCE). The founder was Siddhartha Gautama (566-486 BCE), born in Nepal to a wealthy family. Siddhartha rejected his riches, while adopting a lifestyle of deep thinking, high spirituality, meditation and asceticism (extreme self-discipline). His lifestyle, aims, and probably convincing verbal abilities attracted many followers, whom he taught how to avoid immoral and unethical life, and how to reach a peaceful state of mind devoid of hatred, jealousy, and capitalistic desires (an important issue within an enormous poor population). His extraordinary appeal and personal standards paved a living model of purity and extreme spirituality and so he was named 'The Buddha' (the 'Enlightened One'). The Buddhistic desire to reach spiritual 'Enlightenment' and 'Nirvana' (completely liberated and peaceful state of mind), while improving the 'self' is quite pragmatic, and differs from the rituals and ceremonies typifying the services of the monotheistic religions. Moreover, the bloodshed and killing ensuing the spreading of the monotheistic religions (the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites; the millions exterminated by the Christians, particularly during the times of the Crusaders and Inquisition; and the Islamic Jihad that has intensified nowadays) demonstrate how the original aspirations of the founders changed with time. Although Buddhism is considered in the Western world a religion, it assumes that the universe has no ultimate beginning and therefore there is no need to believe in a creator (God). Instead, it encourages a 'way of life' that mimics that of the Buddha (focusing on constant attempts to raise the spiritual abilities and reach 'Enlightenment'). Not only that these spiritual desires are unrelated to a belief in God, even Buddha himself is not considered a God. The main beliefs of Buddhists concentrate on the practice and efforts to become positive members in the society, while improving the 'self' of each individual. The Buddhistic belief is that everything in life constantly changes including the soul and the 'self', and as a result it is recommended not to be materialistic. Several advices were taken from Hinduism like getting rid of evil and sins such as greed, attraction, hatred, and delusion that constitute the sources of all kinds of evil acts. Moreover, people should avoid from killing, stealing, sexual misconducts, lying, and intoxication. Since life is loaded with suffering, Buddhists wish to end the suffering cycle and the fears of death, hoping for a positive 'karma' (kind of life-profile) and a successful rebirth (in a heavenly realm and as far from hell). Such an incarnation motif appears also in Christianity and Islam, due probably to dissatisfaction of the relatively short life span of humans. Thus, Buddhism focuses mostly on the human state of mind and efforts of self-improvement, whereas the three monotheistic religions do not concentrate on the 'self' or state of mind, but focus on the relations with God and his glorification. Therefore, Buddhism may be considered a philosophical trend that seeks higher spiritual level and improved cognition. The blind obedience to an abstractive God, actually to his servants (Rabbis, Priests, Bishops, Kadis, Imams), which is the main practice

required by the monotheistic religions, reflects a total dependence and a strong need for instructions provided by the sanctified mediators (ref. 2). An additional peculiar issue is the attempt to draw analogy between Buddha and Jesus Christ with some similarities in the way both had chosen to achieve high spirituality and a purer personality. In 2001 the Dalai Lama even suggested that “Jesus Christ lived also a previous life”, and added that he probably reached a high spiritual state (‘Bodhisattva’ - ‘Enlightenment’).

Overall, although the establishment of the monotheistic religions is being considered a spiritual-jump in the development of man-kind, besides providing an abstractive God to humanity over previous primitive beliefs in a variety of sculptured Gods, the arising question ‘what was the actual contribution of monotheism to humanity’, seems legitimate. The new perception of God in these religions had in fact a limited effect on morality, ethics, and relations among people and nations, as it did not change much the basic evil characteristics of humans (aggression, hatred, competition over resources, cruelty, inconsideration; refs. 3,4), except for providing a new mechanism used by minorities to control the masses and improve their status in the society (ref. 2). An additional weakness in the monotheistic religions is the residual need for miraculous legends that do not add to the reliability of the religious belief except for a ludicrous perception, such as Jesus’s walking on water, or the arrival of Mohamed to Al Aqsa on a winged-horse and flying to heaven. Although Buddhism is not devoid of miraculous facts, it provided novel means to reach purity, morality, ethics, high cognitive abilities, and spiritual relaxation without the need of praising God, and may therefore be considered from a cognitive viewpoint more advanced in comparison to the monotheistic religions.

References

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