

JESUS AND GOTAMA

Judaism and Hinduism: The Religious Environment of Christ and Buddha.

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THE mother religion of Buddhism is Hinduism; of Christianity, Judaism. These are the soils in which grew the "new" differentiations and developments. One of the great central ideas of Judaism was a priesthood, culminating in a High Priest, who performing certain religious rites, entered the Holy of Holies and renewed the covenant with Jahveh. This was a God adopted by the Hebrews in the wilderness, his symbol carried with them in a Sacred ark, and finally his worship set up at Jerusalem, and to whom sacrifices of animals were offered by a set of priests of the blood of Levi and his descendants.

Gradually the older form of religion was developed into a more ethical system, and the great and minor prophets arose, whose ethical idealism was adopted by the founder of Christianity. Instead of a tribal god that cared only for a chosen people, the conception of a God of the whole earth whose great characteristic was righteousness arose. But his early interpreters made him a jealous god who would not tolerate any other religions or gods; and his history has been stained with blood. The sacrifice idea in the life of the founder of Christianity has been sublimated. Being crucified on a cross, Jesus is thought of as being the sacrifice to the Eternal God for the sins of the world. While cultured, intellectual Christians have made this symbolic, millions of ordinary folks take the blood atonement as a necessary idea in their working theology. Popular hymns are filled with this old time concept.

Religious sects, the Pharisees and Sadducees flourished at the time of the birth of Jesus. The Pharisees were a zealous missionary

type with great loyalty to their Jehovah and they insisted on rites diverse and plentiful. The Scribes were often associated with the Pharisees as they were lawyers of that day. The other great sect, the Sadducees, were the aristocrats of the Priesthood who were given offices by Rome. They were agnostics in their attitude toward immortality. Jesus seemed to attack the Pharisees fiercely but how much of this was put in his mouth by his biographers is difficult to say, as modern scholarship has discovered that his followers often attributed to him subjects that they were interested in of later date. Probably Jesus came nearer to the Phariſaical type of Jew rather than the Sadducees.

He was not a trivial theologian and was called Rabbi only by courtesy. He was nationalistic, his custom being to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and expound the Jewish scripture. He knew the high points of the old testament literature,—the book of Moses and the Psalms from which there are many quotations in his recorded sermons. He was never out of his native land but received the best of Jewish culture. The trade routes of the Gentiles were near his home and it was likely that he mingled with foreigners. It may be said that he was unschooled, but he was educated in the religious heritage of Judaism.

Hinduism at its beginning as represented in the Rig Veda deals much with the rites to, and the worship of, the Gods. Sacrifices were offered for the magical results that must follow in the Yoga Veda. Gradually there grew up a ritual of minute detail which alone would be effective. This must be performed by experts and so arose the professional class. They had to do with the sacred literature and finally held the keys to the invisible. After the Vedic era came speculation and criticism, in which Karma and Transmigration cuts through the ritual and as in Judaism the rightness or ethics gradually transforms the theology and remains when the Theology passes. Much like present day America, there was fear of mixing the blood of the higher or ruling class with the dark skinned and thus was the caste system adopted, with the Brahmin at the head, the soldiers and nobles, the agriculturist and traders, and supporting and serving the other three castes, the poor Sudras who did not reveal this system. The Brahmin claimed more and more, he was a great Divinity, a human God as it were. But he was carefully trained for years under a teacher. While having the virtues and pride of the

Aryan stock he was not supposed to have the intellectual pride that would antagonize the Gods. The Gods at first were "good fellows" but not especially moral. "*They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, and he is heavenly, nobly winged Gautama. To what is one, sages give many a title: they call it Agni, Yama, Metarium.*" But the same law of development worked concerning India's Gods as in Judaism. The great God Indra had great Power and gave gifts, but gradually the God Varuna who insisted on morals and with Mitra saw all things, "He numbers the winking of the eyes of men," took an increasing part.

The acts condemned in Judaism and in Hinduism are much the same from an ethical standpoint: lying, stealing, adultery, witchcraft, disobedience to parents, the last of which Judaism felt the death penalty might be invoked. It is said that no single statement is true of Hinduism; this is not so much true of Judaism, yet a Jewish Rabbi when recently asked a question about Judaism, asked, "What Judaism?" The religion of India also is a great complex, a variety of actions and like a jungle, seems impenetrable to the traveller. But certainly the pessimistic attitude of which the geographical location and the climate may have much to do, stands out. The misery of life was fixed and dwelt upon with what seems an abnormal stress to our western minds. Like an avenging angel or fate there pursued Karma, the Deeds, which even reached into heaven. Nothing permanent of Beauty or stability was in this world, for the law of Change made the most beautiful women ugly and flowers however fair must fade. These are a few of the characteristics of the religious thought of the times into which Gautama and Jesus were born.

Legends Similarity

The legends concerning the Christ and the Buddha show similarities that are striking unless we recognize the law of cause and effect and that religion is in a certain sense the attempted continual adjustment of this world to the ideal. Mark has nothing of birth legends but Matthew and Luke tell of the annunciation, the singing of the angels at the birth, the worship by Luke (who was interested in the poor people) of poor shepherds who watched their flocks by night. Matthew who cared less for the poor, and more for the ecclesiastical organization has the miraculous child worshipped and

given gifts by the wise men of the East. The fourth Gospel coming in the second century begins with the Logos existing as divine or a "God" in Heaven and teaches the incarnation of the "Word" that was made flesh and dwelt among us.

Lalita Vistara, translated into Chinese 65 A. D. therefore not copied from the Christian Scripture, has the former life of Buddha in Heaven as does the Johannine tradition. Buddha appears first among the Gods, and announces his birth to take place on the earth. The parallel is found in the pre-existent Messiah Son of Man, which was probably attached to the record of Christ's teachings by some devoted follower as suggested by Dr. Case.

Queen Maya asks her husband to withdraw from wedded life that she might practice austerities. In a dream she saw a white elephant, etc. The king asking what this might portend was informed that a son would be born who would be a mighty ruler or a Buddha, a savior of the world. The dream of Joseph shows him an angel of the Lord who closes his revelation by saying "and she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins."

When the Buddha was born he cried out "I am the noblest, the best thing in the world, etc.," at this instant heavenly music was heard, etc., the Gods sang together. Luke records that at the birth of Christ heavenly angels were singing so that shepherds in the field heard them.

"Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth, peace among men
In whom he is well pleased."

In the Himalayas a great seer, Asita, knew from signs in the heavens that a prince was born to be Savior or king. He answered the king,—"No, I weep not for him but for myself because I am old and feeble, but this young Prince will be clothed with the perfect wisdom of a Buddha, and then for the salvation and joy of the world, as well as of the Gods will he teach the law whose beginning, middle and end is virtue. In the fullest, clearest sense will he set it in the light and when they have heard it from his mouth all creatures observing the laws of their development will be completely delivered from birth and old age, from desire and care, from mourning, from pain and suffering of all kinds." Simeon in the Christian legends recorded by Luke, the righteous and devout to whom it had been re-

vealed that he should not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ, when he saw the child he took him in his arms and said, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart, Lord according to thy word, in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples. A light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel."

The childhood legends of the Christ and the Buddha are similar. Jesus on the journey of the feast of the passover, left his parents who found him after three days search in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, hearing and asking questions, and the teachers were amazed at his understanding and answers. When Buddha was brought into school his knowledge of the sixty-four writings of Indian sacred literature amazed his teachers.

These striking similarities of legends before birth, at birth, and in the childhood period manifests the spirit that attempts to explain such inspiring and beautiful lives as Christ and Buddha by attributing supernatural powers and events to them.

Life Incidents Similar.

A noble virgin Kira Gotami (Birth stories translated by Rhys David) sings

"Blessed is the Mother,
Blessed is the Father,
Blessed is the Wife,
Who owns this Lord so glorious."

Luke records Chap. xi. 27 that a certain woman said "Blessed is the womb that bare thee and the paps which thou hast sucked." The evil ones, Mara and Satan, tempted the Christ and the Buddha, both of whom came out victorious confounding the sinful personalities. On the records of miracles the attitude of Christ was, that it was a wicked and adulterous generation that sought after a sign. Buddha forbade miracles. Here we can see that both these great teachers desired men to use reason rather than the spectacular. Yet their devotees made much of miracles. Buddha walked on water,—so did Christ. St. Peter walked for a little on the water and one of Buddha's disciples did the same. At a marriage feast Buddha helped out the lack of food by increasing it and at a marriage feast Christ helped out the lack of wine converting water into additional wine.

Christ went into the wilderness and fasted 40 days. Buddha in his asceticism "each day eating one hemp grain, his bodily form shrunken and attenuated, seeking how to cross the sea of birth and death exercising himself still deeper and advancing further. (Ashragoths *Life of Buddha*, verse 1007). Jesus' lack of asceticism was criticised for he did not continue the life of fasting. It was asked why his disciples did not fast as John's did,—in fact John's disciples asked him if he was the one who should come or should they look for another? Buddha's disciples were offended at him when he gave up the life of an ascetic. Thus both these great teachers rose above the ascetic John the Baptist kind of life, which they seemed to have tried and found wanting. Both were wonderful preachers whose words sung themselves into the hearts of their followers who wrote down their sermons. They did not depend on emotionalism, but were keenly intellectualistic, and sharp controversialists. They knew the hearts of men and loved the paradox. "By giving away we gain; by losing our soul we preserve it; by non-resistance we conquer (Buddha)," "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, running over—he that would lose his life shall gain it, if they smite you on one cheek turn unto them the other;" also were the sentiments of Christ's teaching. Their parables are strikingly similar in their subjects, the sower, the lost son, the rich fool, etc.,—and both attacked the official religious leaders with fierce intensity. Christ called the Pharisees "the blind who lead the blind." Buddha gave a similar compliment to the Brahmins.

Another similarity in their *modus operandi* was that both refused at times to answer questions. When Jesus was asked certain things by his enemies, he answered by asking questions. At another time when the question of giving tribute to Caesar was proposed he answered evasively. A wandering ascetic inquiring of Buddha for the sake of discussion received no answer. But he explains to his disciple that if he had answered the question either way, as formulated, it would have given a wrong impression. Both of these great teachers recognized that some questions should not be answered by yes or no. Both teachers felt the difficulty for the rich to be religious. Buddha said: "it is difficult for the rich and noble to be religious." Christ, Matthew xix.24, Mark x.25, Luke xviii.25, "and again I say unto you it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

Christ taught to love our enemies and to pray for those that despitefully use us and persecute us. Buddha says that "hatred does not cease by hatred, hatred ceases by love only." In Buddha birth stories, "the word of the glorious Buddha is sure and everlasting." Christ is recorded as saying in Matthew xxiv.35, "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away." Both complained of people's indifference and inconsistency. Christ says they were not satisfied with John's ascetic life nor his, who came eating and drinking. Buddha remarks "they blame the man of many words, they blame the patient and quiet man, they also blame the man who seeks the happy medium." Both stood against violence, although both were sharp controversialists in the intellectual and spiritual realms. They fought with intellect. Jesus was tempted by the devil who offered him the kingdom of the world. Mara the Prince of evil sought to stop Buddha on the night of the great resurrection and offered him the sovereignty of the world, continents and two thousand islands and mountains of gold.

Tradition tells how Buddha after eating a cake, in his alms bowl, it miraculously multiplied itself feeding five hundred in a monastery, the scrap eaters were filled and still there was some left. Christ blessed five barley loaves and two small fishes which were so multiplied that thousands were filled and food taken up afterwards in baskets. When Buddha died the earth did quake and the rocks were rent; Christ likewise.

Both Buddha and Christ had lived noble lives and endeavored to have the devotion of their followers to be practical. When Jesus dramatizes the last judgment he says "I was sick and ye visited me" meaning that as they visited the sick they visited him. Buddha gives the same idea in less striking form "Whoever would wait on me let him wait upon the sick."

Deeper Similarities and Dissimilarities

The foregoing similarities might be extended as they are striking and interesting and not so important as the philosophy and lack of theology of the two great religions of Buddha and Christ which will increasingly be foremost on the earth. Christianity may have one fourth, Buddhism one third of the world's population. Both of these were founded by individuals, not organizations or clans. But these individuals had wonderful personalities. Remarkable that while neither wrote a single treatise, their words as remembered in the

hearts of their devotees are pondered over by more people than study anything else. That is, both of these men spoke to the human souls,—their messages are fitting to be received and preserved by humanity. Why?

Because first, their gospel arose from experiences in their own lives. While both received the culture of their day and religion, they made their own experiences paramount, not the authority of sacred scriptures or systems. Jesus came from the poorer class of society whose wits were sharpened by poverty. Poverty works two ways with humanity; it may bless or curse as the individual reacts. So his Gospel was a practical affair. Without doubt as he helped in the large family at Nazareth he had worried or been anxious about the morrow. He found by experience that this did not pay. There were sufficient things to be anxious about, "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." How else but from experience could he say, "Be not over anxious concerning the morrow," or "take no thought" as the old version reads. His home, as a poor place in which peasants lived, had no window, little furniture and dirt floors,—a dark and gruesome place. No wonder he exalted the beauties of nature in the great out doors. It is customary for the natives in this region to spend part of the year in a nomadic life. Each man necessarily serves, does his part, and gives his best. Even on a camping trip in these civilized times everybody has something to do. Would not the great ideal of service so stressed in the teaching of Jesus and so mouthed over but so seldom followed by his followers come from the lessons taught a bright boy with the genius of a Jesus? Modern education insists on manual training; that is, ideas come more clearly as we work with the objects themselves. Our grandchildren will probably make up their own arithmetics and write their chemistries. When Jesus told the rich young ruler to give away his property to that lightened the load, he not only used these as foundations for future sermons, but it profoundly influenced the practicability of his thoughts.

He was thirsty, he was hungry, his clothes dropped off,—these figures he used to dramatize the last judgment. I have a millionaire friend who carries lollypops with him to give away, because he tells me he remembered how he hungered for candies when a child. When Jesus told the rich young ruler to give way his property to the poor, he really exalts material things, he put himself in the place of the poor and thought of the fun it would give the poor,—he really

exalts material things, wishing them to be shared by everybody. If Jesus thought things were bad, or a deceitful illusion he would not have based his practical teachings on the goodness of things. His economic status made him take a practical hurried view of the world.

Again the thought of the kingdom of God soon coming made him on fire to appeal to his fellow men to "repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." The iron heel of Rome crushed the Jewish pride by brute force. The thought largely prevailed among the devout that if the Jewish people would do their part, God would do his. Jesus refused to endorse a conflict between Jehovah King, and Caesar King,—he believed that it was a catastrophic coming but not that he was the "Son of Man," the heavenly man coming in the clouds. Modern scholars, as Dr. Case has shown, applied these terms to Jesus after his death. He knew who his parents were and did not lose his personality so much as to think he had been in the heavens. Likewise with the "Son of God" title. He thought all were the children of God, as God was the Heavenly Father and that brings us to his theology from which his sociology was produced. God was a loving father. Again if we look at his life we can see that this term came from his experience. When death comes to our loved ones we naturally forget their shortcomings and adore their virtues. Circumstantial evidence seems to prove, that Joseph the father of Jesus died, and in a poor family someone must fill in the vacant place.

It is interesting to speculate of the teaching of Jesus, if he would not have given the concept of Heavenly Mother provided, instead of learning his father's trade of carpenter, he would have assisted his mother in housekeeping, and she would have died. The influence of social environment might have worked in the same way. The sermon on the mount has its roots in the human experience of Jesus. He took the Judaism of his day especially emphasizing the ethical prophetic messages and appealed to the will of mankind. "But first he followed it himself." When asked by the Roman official "what is truth" no answer was ready, for it was a man versed in the Roman milieu who could ask such a question. The Jewish carpenter never questioned but that his world had concrete devils, a personal God, right and wrong sharply defined as the timbers and foundations he built into houses. Of course the common people heard him gladly. Their universe is of blocks, he speaks to their experiences and to their hearts.

Gotama

Buddha similarly reflects his environment, but his environment being different his gospel in its philosophy showed this influence. He was a son of a chieftain, not a king, who belonged to the caste of warriors next to the Brahmins. One thought which permeated the East was the transitoriness of all things. I knew of one rich lady who frankly remarked that it was a pity rich people had to die. She felt rich people had such enjoyment that it was a pity that it had to be given up. Tradition may well paint the psychological shock when Buddha discovered the first gray hair. But in one place he speaks of himself as a black haired boy leaving home, but anyhow the thought of change which brought decay moulded Buddhistic philosophy. Contemplation within a graveyard was a fit place to help the human spirit realize the transitoriness of all human things.

Wealth gives time for contemplation, not simply counting your blessings, but counting your miseries. The poverty stricken parents of a large family to be brought up have no time to contemplate their miseries, and the philosopher is a product of leisure. Jesus was in a large family. Buddha was in a small family, was rich and had one child. With his great intellect would he not philosophize, especially as contemplation was closely identified with the holy men of that place with whom he came in contact? Kant could be sure that we cannot know things in themselves, so the Philosopher of India was sure that he was not living at the depth of things, and as his ancestors had felt the sad change which caused them to be dissatisfied with wealth of cows or harems because that must all pass, so Buddha left his home, his wife, his little son to endeavor to find security or permanence in happiness.

Naturally he sought first the hermit type, but his intelligence soon found its shallow depth, and he passed on in his quest for happiness or security or permanence. To live a day at a time is not the thoughtful man's way or the philosopher's way of living. Emaciated, after long contemplation with his disciples, there came to him "illumination." He had hit the mark, reached the goal, arrived. Then he began his life work which was to teach others the way to reach happiness. He, the blessed one, had solved the problem. He knew men, he knew reality, he knew the ground of being,—he had attained, and while doubts sometimes assailed him whether he could preach and men could understand, he gave many years of his life

to missionary endeavor and like Christ sent out his disciples two by two to preach the glad tidings. For Buddhism to a Buddhist is a religion of joy, a gospel.

He accepted the great ideas of Hinduism (or atmosphere of Hinduism) as Christ built on Judaism, more stately mansions for the soul,—the Absolute, always the philosopher's God, when he has one, was not drastically changed by Buddha. Philosophy is an attempted universal explanation of things. If there is not a Universe, a "turning on one" in actual fact the philosopher or theologian type proceeds to make one. He begins by assuming certain things, ignoring others, and arrives at a definite goal. When permeated with scientific thought of things rather than principles he might get the concept as did James of a pluralistic universe, but it is a *Universe*. Now the real trouble with systems of philosophy is that they explain things not yet explainable. Buddha's intellect saw that when he refused to affirm or explain that there was a future life or not a future life, a heaven or not a heaven, a consciousness or not a consciousness. Was it not the standpoint of Kant who, in his critique of pure reason claimed you could not prove God or prove that there was no God; the soul or that there was no soul? That is he found a golden mean of living, not in asceticism or luxury, and he found the middle way. Buddha in some respects found the "stream of human consciousness," again something like the philosopher James; Buddhistic idea of the mind is like a monkey in a tree jumping here and there. Again does this religion not remind you of modern psychology? It is the philosophic religion par excellence, and this comes from long and hard contemplation, thinking from the philosophic standpoint.

Three out of the "Four noble truths" are philosophic, if not the fourth. The fourth finds the way out, not only in a natural way but in a thoughtful way, "Thoughtful Life." The middle path found in all writings of Buddhism, *right* belief, aims, speech, action, means of livelihood, endeavor, mindfulness, meditation,—Jesus would have told a story rather than to use an analysis and synthesis.

The morals of Gautama and Jesus' teaching are much the same. Gautama leans to asceticism more than Jesus. Moralities came from men finding a way to live together. And does this same way that things behave not account for Christ and Buddha? Each tries to find the way out. They taught from their own experiences. As a Christian one is naturally predisposed toward thinking Christ's way. This way will be used more than Buddha's in the future re-

ligion. Karma, which Buddha accepted, is not so easy to understand as the simple stories illustrative of Christ's concept of life. I. S. Sadhira in the *Open Court*, August, 1927, finds five reasons why Buddhism will be the World Religion. But the enthusiastic Buddhist acknowledges that Karma can only be understood by metaphysicians. Saunders in *Gautama Buddha* calls attention, p. 23, that Buddhists, even of the orthodox tradition of Burmah and Ceylon, are divided between these interpretations of Nirvana:

1. Complete extinction of being.
2. Extinction of the fire of Lust, anger and infatuation.
3. A haven of bliss.

But Nirvana has not been fully expressed (or experienced) although hid in embryo in illumination,—by many mortals. And it is the experimental, experienced things that are practical. Jesus' Beatitudes, "Happiness," he lived and illustrated so that human beings can understand easier. No wonder the eminent Hindu, Gandhi, considers Jesus the great teacher of all times. Buddha in a certain sense had Nirvana, but not so easy or earthly to understand as happinesses.

Gotama's love extends not only to human beings, but to animals. Jesus never seemed to pity the animals, sacrificed to Jehovah on Jerusalem's altar. This may come from the Indian doctrine of transmigration but nevertheless Buddhism is broader than Christianity in this respect. One could not think of Buddhists enjoying a bull fight, and the civilized world will follow and has been following India in a desire to protect animals. The followers of Buddha have never persecuted so fiendishly as have so often the followers of Christ. Why? Perhaps the cross and the vicarious atonement by the shedding of blood and the old testament as God's word have bought this about. He accepted the old testament, not knowingly discriminating, but practically he did. Both leaders are in harmony with the democratic ideals of the worth of the human soul. Both were nature's noblemen. Shall we ever look upon their like again?

One great defect in both religions and in the teachings of Jesus and Gautama is the relationship to women. Jesus never married and in Matthew xix.12 he exalts the abnormal life. Buddha leaves his wife and little child and seems to have the approval of his followers for this act. But humanity keeps on in the same old way of marriage and giving in marriage. The doctrines of the prophet and the sage were too far away from human living, and thus are practically ignored. This life is good, love is good, pleasure is good;

if otherwise how would civilization continue? Reality is more than its highest interpreters.

Jesus lived a short life and came to a tragic death. Gautama lived a long life and sank peacefully to sleep. The prophetic words of Jesus were full of dynamic thought, his ideas stung the religious leaders whom he antagonized. Buddha's sweet reasonableness and philosophic calm often won out. Buddha, surrounded by his followers, died confident that his doctrines would prevail. Christ died in terrible agony, surrounded by the militaristic Romans. He believed that God would rescue him, perhaps,—perhaps not. His cry, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me" (22 Psalm) may have been a call to a prophetic psalm. It may have expressed the agony of feeling alone. But the tragedy still holds men and grips their hearts. Something in all of us approves and honors the heroic. Human nature is naturally good. Why can we not believe that the world is made with this characteristic, or at least modified so that the good wins out? This suggests to me "a power not ourselves that makes for righteousness," is not a rationalization but a reality. This power is not confined to Jewish, Christian or Hindu manifestations. No revelation is complete. Practically today, does our Christian civilization not need some of the quiet contemplation, the self-sufficiency in the individual, found in Gotama's life and teachings? We, like merry-go-rounds, go around and around; but do we increase in ourselves accordingly? On the other hand, do not the civilizations dominated by Buddha accept too much things as they are? Perhaps Buddha's life would not teach this, he changed stress on the Vedas, or religious rites, on caste, on extreme asceticism. Like Jesus, he had new ideas perfected from the old to give the world. Without doubt, these two great Asiatic religious teachers have given much to the world. But these may be the beginning of a long line of torch bearers, each of which shall bring us nearer to the perfect day.

At the present time the irony of fate makes Buddha, who did not believe in one over-ruling God, worshipped by some of his followers as God; while Jesus who rebuked a rich young man for calling him good, saying that God alone is good, is also worshipped as God. But is this not a compliment to both? They lived so divinely they are thought to be God, our highest concept of Goodness.