Buddhism V. Hinduism Essay, Research Paper

Buddhism/Hinduism Comparison Report Hinduism is the oldest known religion and is very rich with literally hundreds of gods, symbolistic rituals and beliefs. It is believed to have been established around 1500 B.C. but no one person founded Hinduism as it evolved over a long period of time. Buddhism on the other hand has a definite founder, Siddhartha Gautama who is otherwise known as the Buddha or Enlightened One who lived from 565 to 483 B.C. Both these religions originated in India. Siddhartha Gautama was a Hindu who found Hindu theology lacking and after years of searching for truth created a religion now known as Buddhism. Because of these basic similarities, the two religions have much in common, but in the same light they differ immensely. The concept of a god or gods in Buddhism is almost void and therefore in the eyes of some not even a religion. Hindus have many gods governing different aspects of Hindu life. The three main gods in Hinduism are Vishnu who is the sustainer, Brahma is the creator and Shiva the destroyer. Collectively referred to as Trimuti. Most Hindu gods are associated with animals and therefore Hindus feel that being a vegetarian is vital. Cows are sacred in Hinduism and are worshipped as the divine mother, making eating beef taboo. Buddhism involves meditation and prayer. In Buddhism, one must understand the four noble truths and accordingly follow the Eightfold path which describes the ways in which one must live. Hindu scriptures advocate the pursuit of many goals in ones life including righteous living, wealth, prosperity, love and happiness. The ultimate goal is to achieve Nirvana. There are numerous rudimentary similarities and differences between Hinduism and Buddhism. In Buddhism the place of women is an inferior one which stems from traditional, cultural, and social values of Asia. Although females can accumulate good karma, they can rarely attain Nirvana and therefore must wait until they are born as men. In Hinduism the role of women is downgraded as well and no act is to be done according to her own will. A woman must always be cheerful and clever in the household business and keep the furniture well cleaned. She must always have a free hand. She must have only one husband, even if he dies. If a woman commits adultery, she must be burned to death and all property a couple may acquire belongs to the male. Buddhists preach compassion, charity and nonviolence and while Hindus profess pacifism and ahimsa which is the avoidance of harm to people and animals they still believe war is justifiable in certain cases. They see it as their duty to fight in a just war. Harming others is wrong but if refusing go to war will cause undue suffering to others, then violent acts are justifiable. “There is no greater good for a warrior than to fight in a righteous war” (Bhagavad Gita 2:31) Many Buddhist beliefs and goals are similar if not the same as Hindu beliefs and goals. The concept that life is suffering is common to both as well as the concepts of reincarnation, Dharma, Karma and Nirvana, although they have some slight differences. In Buddhism there is the concept of two extremes, one devoted to pleasure and lust and one devoted to mortification. Both are considered profitless and therefore one should take the middle path which leads to insight. Hindus believe that life has no ultimate significance and is but a small part in a vast unending, and essentially meaningless cycle of life and death, they believe everything has a soul or atman. Hindus believe in reincarnation and the transmigration of the soul and the concept of successive rebirths until one dwells in Brahman forever after the quest for the realization of truth. This will lead one to true happiness or salvation. Although pleasure in moderation is all right, a Hindu must remember that life is suffering as is taught in Buddhism. Hinduism had no real expansion over the years and basically remained stable where it originated despite the influence of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Hindus appreciated and were attracted by the stress on intricate worship which in turn turned others off from Hinduism. Buddhist expansion on the other hand was massive, making a significant foothold in India, hundreds of monasteries sprang up and from these centres, the message of Buddha was spread. Gautama was a great “campaign manager” as he avoided the elaborate ideals of the Upanishads. Many Hindus were converted easily. The acceptance by the great emperor in 3 B.C. helped to promote growth and spread Buddhism into Ceylon and parts of Southeast Asia, also making headway in Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. By the sixth century, it spread to Nepal, Tibet, Mongolia, China, Korea and Japan. Buddhism one could say “sprouted” out of Hinduism. Many Hindu traditions are practised in Buddhism. Although Buddhism had a whole new meaning without any god and with these new ideals, the backbone one could argue stems from its original “mother” Hinduism.

32f