

To Heal the Sickness of a Divided Humanity



Welcome people

We're going to take a walk together.

Our stepping stones will be several passages from the writings.

It's my hope that you will get something out of the particular route that I have chosen for us and that you will find some enjoyment in the new things you might see along the way.

Questions

Our Challenge



This cartoon underscores one of our challenges. People have come to mock religions and their followers largely because they have seen believers unable to engage each other peacefully. People don't have the experience of hearing believers discuss religion in a truly respectful, caring, and unifying manner. You have already heard talks yesterday that highlighted the importance of the commentary One Common Faith, published by the Universal House of Justice. And you know that that document calls upon us to undertake some important action...

Our Charge

“The task of ensuring that His message is engaged by people everywhere, is one that Bahá’u’lláh has laid primarily on the shoulders of those who have recognized him....

“If they are to respond to the need, Bahá’ís must draw on a deep understanding of the process by which humanity’s spiritual life evolves.”

(Universal House of Justice, *One Common Faith*, Foreword)

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Note that this refers to the "process by which **humanity's** spiritual life evolves."

We're talking about collective evolution rather than the individual.

We're referring to the historical evolution of religion and how the world's religions fit in to this single coherent process.

If we are to act effectively upon this guidance, we must be able to relate the new insights found in the Bahá'í Writings to believers of other faiths.

This can best be done by helping them to see our common spiritual heritage, which, in turn, can best be done when we can relate the teachings to what they know.

This is the first goal of my talk—to develop a framework for dialogue.

Outline

A Framework for Dialogue

Hinduism

Buddhism

You probably came to my talk to learn something about Hinduism and Buddhism. However, it's my hope to offer you something more broadly useful. I wish to offer you a framework for dialogue with your fellow believers of any faith. First, we'll develop that framework, then apply it to some examples. Then, once we have that in our mind and heart, examine the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism and understand them within that framework.

Framework for Dialogue

Understand that religious truth is relative

Understand scriptural metaphor

Seek unity

The Bahá'í Faith has a unique role to play.

We are the only religion that regards it to be in its own interest to demonstrate the truth of other religions.

Hence, we're engaged in a task never attempted before—this is new ground.

In order to develop our framework, we're going to develop three things:

1. An understanding that religious truth is relative and its implications
2. An understanding of scriptural metaphor (vs. simile)
3. A deeper understanding of what it means to seek unity, which means more than just being nice.

Now, I know you probably know something about these already, but I believe that I might offer a new angle on understanding these concepts.

So what do we mean that religious truth is relative?

Am I saying that us Bahá'ís don't believe in absolute truth? No.

Let's see how the Guardian explained this principle...

Religious Truth is Relative

“The Revelation, of which Bahá’u’lláh is the source and center, abrogates none of the religions that have preceded it, nor does it attempt, in the slightest degree, to distort their features or to belittle their value.... Its teachings revolve around the fundamental principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final.”

(Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 57)

The Blind Men and the Elephant



“Be eyes to the blind”

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXX, p. 285)

In Buddhist scripture we find a very powerful metaphor for understanding different perspectives of religious truth.

This is the popular story about the blind men and the elephant.

This story is also attributed to the Jain religion, so its true origin is unknown.

Trunk = snake Tusk = spear Ear = fan Leg = tree Side = wall Tail = rope

What I regard as the important point of this metaphorical story is that each one of the blind men experienced a different, yet truly valid, perspective of the same reality.

Yet they were unable to understand how any of their perspectives could be simultaneously valid.

It is only those who have been given the blessing of a higher vision that are able to see the unity inherent in their perspectives and bring this truth to them.

Different faiths bring 3-D perspective

Shoghi Effendi calls the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, (The Book of Certitude) an "outstanding contribution... to the world's religious literature, occupying... a position... of unsurpassed preeminence among the doctrinal... writings of" Bahá'u'lláh.

Why? One reason is because...

This book is the key to the understanding of scriptural metaphor, a topic not directly explained in any of the world's previous scriptures.

Understanding Scriptural Metaphor

“In fact, all the Scriptures and the mysteries thereof are condensed into this brief account. So much so, that were a person to ponder it a while in his heart, he would discover from all that hath been said the mysteries of the Words of God, and would apprehend the meaning of whatever hath been manifested by that ideal King.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* “*The Book of Certitude*”, ¶266, p. 237)

Of The Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh, Himself, states... <read>
This is a profound claim, and one which brings us to our main theme.
This book is our key to understanding all of the scriptures of the past.
In this book, referring to scriptural metaphor, Bahá'u'lláh tells us that "this symbolic language" is "more eloquent than any speech" (KI ¶86).

The Muhkamát and Mutashábihát

‘He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: “We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord:” and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding.’

(Qur’án 3:7)

The Qur’án describes the muhkamát and mutashábihát... <read>

Twofold Language

‘It is evident unto thee that the Birds of Heaven and Doves of Eternity speak a twofold language. One language, the outward language, is devoid of allusions, is unconcealed and unveiled; that it may be a guiding lamp and a beaconing light whereby wayfarers may attain the heights of holiness, and seekers may advance into the realm of eternal reunion....

Now let's look at how Bahá'u'lláh restates this idea in The Book of Certitude... <read>

...The other language is veiled and concealed, so that whatever lieth hidden in the heart of the malevolent may be made manifest and their innermost being be disclosed. Thus hath Sádiq, son of Muhammad, spoken: “God verily will test them and sift them.” This is the divine standard, this is the Touchstone of God, wherewith He proveth His servants. None apprehendeth the meaning of these utterances except them whose hearts are assured, whose souls have found favour with God, and whose minds are detached from all else but Him. In such utterances, the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended.’

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* “*The Book of Certitude*”, ¶283, p. 255)

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So, we see that the allegorical verses are seized upon by the malevolent, in whose hearts is perversity, seeking discord.

This is the essential element we must understand when seeking dialogue with anyone regarding religion.

As we just read, this is the Touchstone of God

touch·stone ('t&ch-"stOn) n

1 : a black siliceous stone related to flint and formerly used to test the purity of gold and silver by the streak left on the stone when rubbed by the metal

2 : a test or criterion for determining the quality or genuineness of a thing

This is not something we wish to find ourselves falling into.

Rather, Bahá'u'lláh cautions us to seek unity...

Divine Unity

“Beware, O believers in the Unity of God, lest ye be tempted to make any distinction between any of the Manifestations of His Cause, or to discriminate against the signs that have accompanied and proclaimed their Revelation. This indeed is the true meaning of Divine Unity, if ye be of them that apprehend and believe this truth.”

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXIV, p. 59)

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Seeking unity implies more than just mood.

It speaks to all of the implications of what Baha'u'llah calls Divine Unity.

This refers to an entire mindset that seeks unity in all realms.

The Essence of the Faith of God

“That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion.”

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXXII, p. 287)

In fact, it is the Essence of the Faith of God
<read>

Heal the Sickness of a Divided Humanity

“The Prophets of God should be regarded as physicians whose task is to foster the well-being of the world and its peoples, that, through the spirit of oneness, they may heal the sickness of a divided humanity.”

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXXIV, p. 80)

We, rather, are being sent out into the world as deputies of the Divine Physician that we "may heal the sickness of a divided humanity." (GWB 80)

Fourth Candle of Unity

“The fourth candle is unity in religion which is the corner-stone of the foundation itself, and which, by the power of God, will be revealed in all its splendor.”

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 39)

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And the only way unity of religion will be revealed is by the Bahá'ís sharing this new concept with the world.

And it was for the purpose of preparing us that the commentary One Common Faith was prepared.

<pause>

Now, we've talked a little bit about understanding perspective and metaphor, and about the spirit of our approach in seeking unity.

Now let's look at a couple of examples of spiritual metaphor in order to solidify this understanding so that we really believe it, because theoretical knowledge is not really enough; we must truly believe it and its power.

Archetypal Stories

ar·che·type ('är-ki-"tIp) *n* 1 : the original pattern or model of which all things of the same type are representations or copies : PROTOTYPE

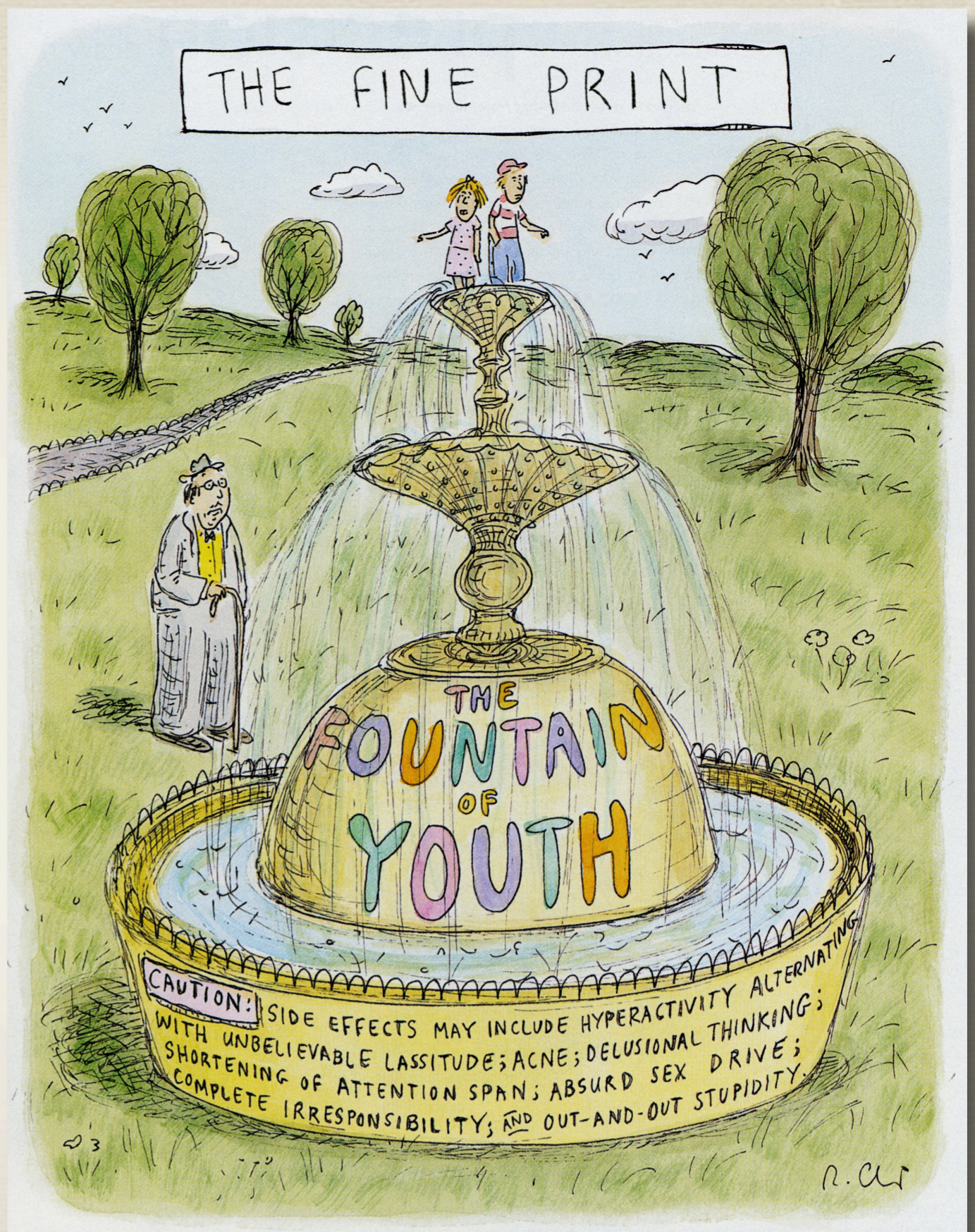
(Merriam-Webster)

Archetypal stories are stories that have no traceable source, yet exist in almost all cultures in similar forms.

The reason this is relevant to us is that the Manifestation of God will make reference to and acknowledge such stories, explaining that they are true in the spiritual sense, but not in the material sense in which they are commonly understood.

They reinterpret the stories for us to reveal the spiritual truths for which they are metaphors. Let's take a look at a three examples.

The Fountain of Youth



"CAUTION: Side effects may include hyperactivity alternating with unbelievable lassitude; acne; delusional thinking; shortening of attention span; absurd sex drive; complete irresponsibility; and out-and-out stupidity."

The Fountain (or Well) of Youth was a legendary story that excited Europeans, with written records dating back to at least the 12th century.

Ponce de Leon and other New World explorers driven by these stories, were excited to hear similar accounts from Native Americans of a youth-rendering spring.

Now it might seem surprising that such a story shows up almost identically on a continent that had been physically cut off from the rest of the world for 11,000 years.

The Samaritan Woman

So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?"....

It's clear that this legend goes back a long way, as we see it implicitly alluded to in the following passage of the New Testament of the Christian Bible: <read>

Jesus on the Fountain of Youth

“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

(John 4:13-14)

Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.”

(John 4:6-15)

Bahá'u'lláh on the Fountain of Youth

“Make my prayer, O my Lord, a fountain of living waters whereby I may live as long as Thy sovereignty endureth, and may make mention of Thee in every world of Thy worlds.”

(Long Obligatory Prayer)

In the Long Obligatory Prayer, we find that Bahá'u'lláh also alludes to and reinterprets this archetype... <read>

Alchemy

al·che·my (al-k&-mE) *n* **1** : a medieval chemical science and speculative philosophy aiming to achieve the transmutation of the base metals into gold, the discovery of a universal cure for disease, and the discovery of a means of indefinitely prolonging life
2 : a power or process of transforming something common into something special

(Merriam-Webster)

On a related note, we turn to the field of alchemy, which pursued the belief that certain magical compounds, known variously as the elixir of life or the philosopher's stone could indefinitely prolong life or transmute base elements into gold.

We find reference in the oldest and most sacred of the Hindu scriptures, the Vedas, hints of an association between gold and long life, and also the concept of changing base metals into gold in early Buddhist texts.

Bahá'u'lláh on Alchemy

“Is it within human power, O Hakím, to effect in the constituent elements of any of the minute and indivisible particles of matter so complete a transformation as to transmute it into purest gold? Perplexing and difficult as this may appear, the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish. The Force capable of such a transformation transcendeth the potency of the Elixir itself. The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change.”

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XCIX)

Bahá'u'lláh offers us a reinterpretation of this archetype... <read>

Reincarnation



Nicodemus

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”...

Let us turn again to a story from the New Testament, in which Nicodemus approaches Jesus.
<read>

Jesus on Reincarnation

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I say to you ‘You must be born again.’”

(John 3:1-7)

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’


The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

(John 3:1-7)

Bahá'u'lláh on Reincarnation

“Reflect how this verse also implieth that the people living in the days of Muhammad were the same people who in the days of the Prophets of old contended and fought in order to promote the Faith, and teach the Cause, of God.”

(Kitáb-i-Íqán “The Book of Certitude”, ¶159, p. 150)



Now let's turn to our second theme and try to apply these insights from the Bahá'í writings that we have examined.

For the Bahá'í seeking to introduce the general concept of the unity of religion and, in particular, their essential unity with the Bahá'í Faith, it can prove particularly challenging to demonstrate this principle with respect to the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism because the former is perceived by many to be polytheistic, whilst the latter is often claimed or perceived to be atheistic.

I will attempt to introduce some of the more prominent aspects of these faiths, but I will, of course, only be scratching the surface.

Families of Religions

Dharmic: Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism

Abrahamic: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Bahá'í Faith

Toaic: Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto

Hinduism and Buddhism belong to what has been called the Dharmic family of religions, together with Jainism and Sikhism. Some scholars have divided up the world's religion into three main branches.

Dharmic religions are so called because their theology and philosophy center on the concept of dharma (lit. "that which upholds or supports").

Dharma

“That which upholds or supports”

The underlying natural order in nature and life

Divine Will

Truth

Duty

Righteousness

Proper conduct

Dharma signifies the underlying order in nature and life.

The word is also used to mean truth, the right way of living, proper conduct, duty, righteousness—in other words conduct which is in proper accord with the underlying order of nature and life.

It is by living one's life in accordance with dharma that one can achieve nirvana ("eternal bliss").

Hinduism



Sanātana Dharma

“Eternal Truth”

Hinduism is the third largest religion in world.
It is also regarded as the oldest existing religion.
The earliest evidence of its existence dates back to between 5500–2600 B.C.
The name of the religion is a Persian derivation of the Sanskrit word Sindu(–ka) for the Indus River.
The religion does not really exist as a particular belief or practice, but rather exists as a conglomerate of varying beliefs and disciplines of practice (yogas).
Hindus generally use the term Sanātana Dharma to refer their belief, literally translating as "eternal truth".
What is commonly called Hinduism is actually a collection of diverse practices rooted in the philosophy of Sanātana Dharma which is described as a way of life.
Therefore, when I use the common term Hinduism, please understand that it represents a way of life expressed as many beliefs and practices.

Hinduism is not credited to a particular founder and its origins are lost in history.
From a Bahá'í perspective, which regards religion as founded upon revelation from God transmitted through the medium of the Manifestation of God, Bahá'ís typically identify this religion with Krishna who appeared somewhere in the neighborhood of 3200 B.C.
Though the figure of Krishna plays a prominent role in Hinduism, He is not regarded as the universal focus or center of attention within the religion.
In other words, there is not the same one-to-one correspondence between Krishna and Hinduism as exists for other revealed religions.

Brahma

Vishnu

Shiva



Probably due to its long history, many schools of philosophies have developed with Hinduism with sometimes very different basic teachings.

Universal beliefs among them are impossible to identify and no central definition of belief exists.

Hindu beliefs span the range of monotheism, polytheism, monism, and even atheism.

Therefore, what I describe will be merely general trends of belief.

monism – (1 a : a view that there is only one kind of ultimate substance b : the view that reality is one unitary organic whole with no independent parts)

God is understood to be imminent (pervades all things) and transcendent (exalted above all things). Most Hindus believe in an eternal soul (atman), and in one universal spirit, known as Brahman.

The monotheistic schools identify Brahman operating in the world via three aspects, or Ishvara:

- * Brahma (masculine nominative of neuter Brahman) – creator
- * Vishnu (lit. "All-Pervading One") – maintainer or preserver
- * Shiva – destroyer or transformer (cf. "Destroyer of the Worlds", from the Fire Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh)

Sometimes we find Brahman worshiped via the figures of

- * Ganesha – (elephant) lord of beginnings or obstacles
- * Shakti – feminine aspect of the Divine

Hindus believe that periodically avatars ("descent"), manifestations of the Divine Spirit, appear to mankind to reestablish dharma in the world. Krishna is regarded as an avatar of Vishnu.

It is common practice within Hinduism for an individual to select a deity (deva) of one's choosing to serve as a focal point for worship of God.

From a Bahá'í perspective, these deities serve as personifications of various divine attributes. These deities are not generally understood to actually possess powers in themselves.

Hindu Teachings on the Existence of the Soul

avidya – ignorance of true self

maya – illusion regarding true nature of the world

karma – universal law of “cause and effect”

samsāra – cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth

moksha – liberation from samsara

nirvana – eternal bliss

yoga – discipline or practice to attain liberation

yogi – one who teaches a yoga

I am going to try to describe for you the essence of Hindu belief about existence of the soul. In order to frame this, so that it sticks in your mind, I thought of a river as a metaphor. This river represents dharma—the natural order of the universe flowing onward.

The banks of the river represent the world.

We are leaves floating upon this river and carried along by it.

When an individual lives in ignorance of his or her true self (avidya), it leads to preoccupation with the self and the world.

This grounds one in desire and the pursuit of sensual pleasures because one does not understand one's proper role in the natural order.

This is the leaf being attracted to the bank of the river where the green grass grows and the pretty flowers bloom.

The leaf departs from the flow of the river toward the shallower waters of the bank.

The individual lives in a state of illusion (maya) about reality (dharma).

This is the leaf thinking that the beautiful firm riverbank must be very powerful, since it directs the flow of the river.

But this is an illusion, because it is the powerful flowing river that cut the hard earth and shaped the bank.

Due to the principle of "cause and effect" (karma), one suffers the consequence of their actions, both in their present life and through samsāra, the cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth, commonly known as reincarnation.

Because of one's attachment to this material reality, one is drawn back to it.

This is symbolized by the leaf getting caught up in the eddies at the edge of the river where the river swirls around and over the rocks.

The leaf swirls around and around.

The leaf stops progressing and is drawn back to the shore again and again.

Eventually, one tires of the perpetual cycle of samsāra and its associated suffering and instead desires to seek and attain moksha (liberation from samsāra), thus achieving eternal bliss (nirvana).

This is symbolized by the leaf eventually working its way far enough from the shore that it is

Bahá'u'lláh on *Dharma*

“The beginning of all things is the knowledge of God, and the end of all things is strict observance of whatsoever hath been sent down from the empyrean of the Divine Will that pervadeth all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth.”

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, II, p. 5)

The Guardian on *Avidya*

“The Bahá’ís seek to lead people back to a knowledge of their true selves and the purpose for which they were created, and thus to their greatest happiness and highest good.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 24, 1943; cited in *Lights of Guidance*, #383)

Bahá'u'lláh on *Maya*

‘Verily I say, the world is like the vapor in a desert, which the thirsty dreameth to be water and striveth after it with all his might, until when he cometh unto it, he findeth it to be mere illusion. It may, moreover, be likened unto the lifeless image of the beloved whom the lover hath sought and found, in the end, after long search and to his utmost regret, to be such as cannot “fatten nor appease his hunger.” ’

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLIII, pp. 328-9)

Bahá'u'lláh on *Karma*

“Ye shall, ere long, discover the consequences of that which ye shall have done in this vain life, and shall be repaid for them. This, verily, is the truth, the undoubted truth.”

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXV, p. 123)

What Bahá'u'lláh does is to clarify and elaborate these eternal truths, and correct any misunderstandings that may have crept into our understanding by confusing spiritual realities with material ones.

I refer here back to our earlier exploration of archetypal stories.

So, by learning just a little bit about the basic beliefs of our fellow believer in God, we can understand her perception of the truth and share with her Bahá'u'lláh's renewal of those teachings.

We can avoid being caught up in blind argument over the elephant by using the eye-opening vision brought to us by Bahá'u'lláh.

We can become the "Man of Two Visions" that Bahá'u'lláh calls upon in The Hidden Words.

Also:

dharma – ("Divine Will") *GWB II*, 61, 141

avidya – *GWB* p. 68, 178; *HWA* 13, 22 23; *HWP* 2, 29

samsara – *KI* p. 13, 15, 81, 88, 151, 207, 243; *GWB* 81, 269

moksha – *GWB* 34, 100, 108, 133, 139, 205, 241, 257, 314

Buddhism



Buddhism constitutes the fourth largest religion in the world. It was born within the cultural and religious milieu of Hinduism and its teachings are most easily understood from within this context that we have just examined.

Buddhism was founded in northern India around 530 B.C. by Siddhartha Guatama, (Siddhartha meaning "he who achieves his aim"), who was born to a king and queen. Shortly after His birth, several brahmin scholars were invited to read His future and all predicted that Siddhartha would become either a great king or a holy man. His father, preferring that Siddhartha become a great king, subsequently exposed Him to a luxurious life and shielded Him from religious teachings and human suffering.

The Great Departure



Siddhartha married at 16 and spent His first 29 years of life as a prince. Despite His father's efforts to meet Siddhartha's every need or want, Siddhartha felt that a life of wealth was not His aim in life. At age 29, He left His palace in order to meet His subjects. Though His father made a serious attempt to remove all traces of suffering from wherever his Son was to visit, Siddhartha subsequently encountered various people who were old, diseased, dead, and living an ascetic life. Deeply impressed or depressed by what He saw, Siddhartha decided to leave His palace and live a life as a mendicant (one who renounces possessions to devote themselves to God and live on whatever is provided to them by others' charity).

Enlightenment



Siddhartha practiced an ascetic life under various teachers, ultimately under such extreme deprivation that He nearly starved to death and collapsed in a river, nearly drowning. Siddhartha then reconsidered His path and chose the middle way—the path of moderation, avoiding the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification. After a time, He came to sit under a pipal tree, or Sacred Fig, and vowed to not arise until He had found the truth. After 49 days of meditation, He achieved "Enlightenment", or nirvana ("supreme liberation"). From then on, He became known as "The Buddha" ("Awakened One").

Curiously, because of the sacredness of the original tree, now known as the "Bodhi ("awakening") Tree", in 288 B.C. a branch of the actual original Bodhi Tree was propagated in Sri Lanka, where it still lives as the oldest living human-planted tree in the world with a known planting date.

The Buddha spent the remaining 45 years of His life traveling throughout northern India and southern Nepal teaching his doctrine. He quickly developed a strong following. Because of his success and resulting jealousies towards Him, He was also subject to attack from opposing religious groups, attempted murders and other injustices.

Buddhist Traditions

- **Theravāda** (Southern)
- **Mahayana** (Eastern)
 - **Vajrayāna / Tantric** (Northern)
 - **Tibetan**
 - **Zen**

Three months after the death of the Buddha, the first Buddhist Council was called by His immediate disciples to review and ensure the accuracy of the oral traditions. A second Council was called about one hundred years later.

Shortly thereafter, Buddhism suffered significant schism as it began to split into 18 schools due to differences of opinion in the meaning of various doctrines.

Except for the Theravada tradition, none of these other schools survived the late medieval period. Theravada continues today as the only surviving representative of the early schools, with significant variation.

The Mahayana tradition appeared shortly after the Second Council with the adoption of new sutras into the canon and the introduction of new philosophies.

Out of Mahayana, grew first the Vajrayana school, in the 4th century A.D., to which Tibetan Buddhism belongs, and secondly Zen, which began as an amalgam of Mahayana and Tao.

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Schools (regions)

Theravāda (Southern)

Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar

Mahayana (Eastern, Chinese)

China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Vietnam as well as within Chinese and Japanese communities within Indochina, Southeast Asia and the West.

o Zen

+ China, Japan, Vietnam, Korea

* Vajrayana /Tantric (Northern)

o Tibetan (Northern, Tibetan)

+ Tibet and the surrounding area of India, Bhutan, Mongolia, Nepal, China, and the Russian Federation

The Four Noble Truths

1. **The Nature of Suffering**

All life is suffering

2. **The Origin of Suffering**

Suffering is caused by desire for, or clinging to, impermanent things

3. **The Cessation of Suffering**

To eliminate suffering, eliminate desire

4. **The Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering**

To eliminate desire, follow the Eightfold Path

Upon His Enlightenment, the Buddha came to an understand of nature and cause of human suffering.

All life is suffering (e.g. birth, aging, sickness, loss, death), dissatisfaction, disappointment, etc.

The (Noble) Eightfold Path

Wisdom

Right view
Right intention

Ethical conduct

Right speech
Right action
Right livelihood

Mental discipline

Right effort
Right mindfulness
Right concentration



Dharma Wheel
Symbol of Eightfold Path

I have no doubt that right now you can think of dozens of passages from the Bahá'í writings that speak to each one of these values.

The Five Aggregates

Form (matter)
Sensation
Perception
Mental formations
Consciousness

Those things which constitute all individual experience
They are transitory, impermanent, in constant change.
Mental formations – mental habits, thoughts, ideas, opinions, compulsions, decisions
Consciousness – progression of mental states
The impermanence of the aggregates is one of the central Buddhist concepts and is inherently tied to the nature of suffering.

Other Buddhist Beliefs

Dependent Origination

Rebirth

<possible skip>

Dependent Origination

All phenomena arise in a complex web of cause and effect.

Everything depends upon everything else such that everything is mutually interdependent.

Many claim Buddhism to be atheistic.

The Buddha actually taught that despite all things being subject to the law of cause and effect, there is realm beyond, and not subject to, this universal law:

“There is, O monks, an Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed. Were there not, O monks, this Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed, there would be no escape from the world of the born, originated, created, formed.” (Udana 8:3)

Rebirth

All traditions accept some form of rebirth, but there is no unified view or coherent notion of what rebirth means, what is being reborn, or what ties together the separate existences of whatever it is that is reborn.

The basic notion is that form of rebirth is influenced via karma such that good thoughts and actions result in rebirths that are happier and the converse resulting in those that are less happy.

Some believe this rebirth is simply the rebirth of momentary states of consciousness, while others see it as the reappearance of some aspect of the consciousness in a new body.

The Four Noble Truths

1. **The Nature of Suffering**

All life is suffering

2. **The Origin of Suffering**

Suffering is caused by desire for, or clinging to, impermanent things

3. **The Cessation of Suffering**

To eliminate suffering, eliminate desire

4. **The Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering**

To eliminate desire, follow the Eightfold Path

Now I would like to return to expand a bit upon the Four Noble Truths.
I'll also include some parallel verses from the Bahá'í writings...

The Bahá'í Faith: The Nature of Suffering

“Such is this mortal abode:
a storehouse of afflictions and suffering.”

(Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, #170.1)

The Four Noble Truths

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In Buddhist philosophy this concept revolves around the Five Aggregates. Because of their inherent instability, suffering arises when one identifies with, or clings to, an aggregate. But isn't that what the Bahá'í writings tell us...

The Bahá'í Faith: The Origin of Suffering

“How sad if any man were, in this Day, to rest his heart on the transitory things of this world!”

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXIV, p. 238)

“If we suffer it is the outcome of material things, and all the trials and troubles come from this world of illusion.”

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, pp. 109)

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The term *atta* (Sanskrit *atman*) is often translated as "self" or "soul". The Buddha taught that the aggregates are not the true self—that they are "not-self" (*anatta*). Clinging to them as if they were part of our true self gives rise to suffering. It is clear that the Buddha rejected the current conceptions of the *atta*, as they were generally identified with impermanent aspects of the self. The Buddha frequently stated, with regards to the aggregates, that "this/these are not my soul". The Buddha focused upon eliminating misconceptions about the true self by discussing what it is not. Though never really denying the existence of a true self, the Buddha entirely avoided discussion of its nature. Thus, the concept of *anatta* (not-self) is central to Buddhism, while the concept of *atta* (true self) is not.

Consequently, within the Theravada tradition, the concept of "soul" (*atta*) is understood to refer to the subjective self, or ego and that belief in this false self leads to suffering—the existence of a soul, or true self (*atta*) is completely rejected. However, the Mahayana tradition generally identifies the true self, the *atta*, with an eternal and unchanging "Buddha nature" (*Buddha-dhatu* or *Tathagatagarbha*), which is believed to be present in all sentient beings.

When we consider the nature of the soul described in the Bahá'í scriptures (cf. *GWB LXXX*), we find that it more closely, though not completely, aligns with what the Mahayana tradition refers to as the true self. This is important to understand before discussing the concept of a soul with a Buddhist, because he will likely take it to mean something other than what you mean.

The Four Noble Truths

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When one becomes free of all attachments, of all clinging and desire for the aggregates, then one transcends the very causes of suffering.

This, of course, is simple to say, but much harder to do, as we all know, which is why the fourth Noble Truth leads to the Eightfold Path.

The bulk of the world's scriptures is devoted to this very theme—detachment, the letting go of attachments to worldly, or transient, things.

Once one has relinquished attachment to the aggregates, and thus to impermanence, one can enter into the realm of nibbana/nirvana (eternal bliss).

Nirvana is unchanging and eternal and, thus, the opposite of impermanence.

It is the only refuge from impermanence and suffering and thus the only state in which true and lasting happiness can be found.

The Bahá'í Faith: The Cessation of Suffering

“My sole purpose in revealing to thee these words is to sanctify thee from the transitory things of the earth, and aid thee to enter the realm of everlasting glory...”

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXIV, p. 238)

And on the topic of the cessation of suffering, that concludes my talk.

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