

Comparison of the Sacred
WHGC (Fall 2012)
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Synthesis with other religions

Formally compare Buddhism with other religions covered in class. How are these religions similar, how are they dissimilar? Perhaps compare Eastern religions with Western? Perhaps try filling out the table in a Jeopardy format?

At this point in the semester we have studied some aspect of several religions: Islam, Christianity, Confucianism (Mencius), Daoism, and Buddhism. Taking time, however small, to make comparisons (and contrasts) of these religions provides innumerable opportunities for discussion. Doing so as part of class discussion will help students to recall, better organize and distinguish concepts that we have covered. A completed table may serve as a useful study aid for the cumulative final exam. As well, some students at this point in the semester may feel confused about ‘all the different stuff’ they have read and had presented to them. Finally, this course is at times the first and only exposure some students have had to some of these religions and it helps them to reflect upon what they have learned, consider how these new views may be relevant to them, and how to ‘keep them all straight.’ The extent to which you conduct comparisons and synthesis is up to you and depends upon what you may have already discussed (or not discussed).

You are provided here with two different formats of tables for ready comparison. I inherited these tables some years ago from an unknown source, and consider that all of the content may benefit from a thorough review by our religious experts. Regardless, you do have an electronic version (SacredComparisonTables.xlsx in Excel) available on Moodle that allows you to modify the tables for the knowledge and background that you have to lead a discussion and the level and type of discussion that you would like to have among students.

To further assist you in these comparisons, I provide several websites that you can visit:

1. An overview of the major Eastern philosophic traditions
http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Eastern_philosophy#Hinduism
2. The Major World Religions
<http://www.omsakthi.org/religions.html>
3. The Big Religion Chart
http://www.religionfacts.com/big_religion_chart.htm
4. Religions Summary - Compares Major Religions
<http://www.vaughns-1-pagers.com/religion/religions-summary.htm>
5. Comparing different religions & faith groups
<http://www.religioustolerance.org/relcomp.htm>
6. Seven major religions of the world
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/4802697/7-Major-Religions-Comparison-Chart>

CLASS ACTIVITY

“Buddha Ball”

This quiz show format gives a lot of energy to the class and gets students actively interacting with each other in the course material. You may prepare the questions yourself, or ask students to submit questions for use. (For example, ask students to email you three questions from the content, each student preparing 5, 10 and 15 point questions. Then collate all the questions together.) I encourage the development of more complex or harder questions, requiring group members to interact and challenge themselves. Perhaps it would be useful to let them look over their notes briefly before starting so they feel more ‘secure’ going into the game without their notes. Finally, this is an activity that lends itself to being outdoors as easily as being indoors.

1. Divide the class into groups, preferably counting off (1 through 4 for 4 groups) so new students interact. Fewer groups will take up less time in class.
2. The groups should sit grouped in a manner that teams cannot hear discussions of other teams.
3. Have each team give themselves a name and place scoring on the board with the team names.
4. *A round:*

A member of each team comes to the desk at the front of the room and stands with their hands behind their back, not leaning over the table. All students must participate (rotate) in this part. (Watch out for the teams that try to always send the tall guy with the long arms). A Buddha Ball is in the center of the desk, and after the question is read (followed by the word “go” so there is no misunderstanding as to when they can “go” for it), the students try to grab the ball (or bottle cap, rubber eraser, etc.) first. (Don’t use anything with sharp or pointy edges, or that can easily be torn apart. In fact, you may reconsider using a ball if you think your group will be pretty aggressive, or they will spend time chasing the ball rolling around the classroom after knocking it away from each other.) The team that grabs the Buddha Ball gets to offer their answer first, after conferring for a minute.

At this point, all teams have one minute to confer for an answer. I suggest not making it open notes, or answers will always be correct, and the game less suspenseful (and there is no advantage in being better prepared for class). At the end of the minute, if the first team misses, then the other teams can steal by returning to the desk, grabbing the ball, and giving an answer immediately (they too should have derived their answers in that earlier minute, so they receive no additional time to answer). Naturally, if a team doesn’t grab the ball, they can’t score, except possibly when stealing.

5. *Optional:*

In the event that one team tends to always be better at grabbing the ball, I offer a bonus round with questions of greater point value, and naturally with harder questions. Perhaps all groups have the opportunity to answer (writing down their answers before sharing) and all take the points if they are correct. Whoever ends up with the most points wins the game.

One of the funniest part of the game is when a group is given a question written by one of their own group members are unable to answer. The students write questions to stump their peers, not thinking ahead that they may end up stumping themselves! Try having a prize for the winning team! They love that, of course.

Point of Comparison	Christianity	Islam	Buddhism	Hinduism	Judaism
Primary Prophet	Jesus, Son of God	Muhammad, Messenger of God	The Buddha, The Enlightened One		Abraham, Moses
Life of Prophet	5 BCE-30 CE	570-632 CE Qur'an revealed to M. 610-632 CE	563-483 BCE	1500-600 BCE (Vedas composed)	1900-1800 BCE 1280-1250 BCE Exodus
Location of Prophet	Jerusalem (Israel)	Mecca (located in west- central Saudi Arabia)	Nepal, born as Prince of Shākya	India	Canaan, Egypt (Middle East)
Primary Text	Bible (Old & New Testaments)	Qur'an	Dhammapada and other writings	Rig Veda, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita	Hebrew Bible
Language of Primary Text	Hebrew, Greek	Arabic (Note the poetic importance to Muslims)	Sanskrit	Sanskrit	Hebrew
Nature of Text	Divinely revealed	Divinely revealed	Teachings of the Buddha; not divinely inspired	Divinely revealed (some believe)	Divinely revealed
Religious Paradigm	Confrontational	Confrontational	Interior	Interior	Confrontational
Primary Tenets	Salvation through faith	Five Pillars of Islam	Middle Way; Four Noble Truths: Eightfold Path	Escape samsara (cycle of life), achieve moksa (lib.)	10 Commandments
Key Terms	Gospel, Holy Spirit, Social Justice, God's love, "losers," sin/guilt, forgiveness	shahada, salat, zakat, Ramadan, hajj, jihad	The Dharma, Dukkha, Samudaya, Nirodha, Magga	samsara, karma, moksa, maya, dharma, atman, brahmin	covenant with Noah covenant with Abraham Land, Great Nation
God(s)	One God	One God, Allah	Hindu gods; not of central importance	Brahman, 330 gods	One God
Creation	Genesis: God created universe & people; Adam & Eve in G. Eden	God created people; Adam & Garden of Eden; Satan cast out of heaven			Genesis: God created universe & people; Adam & Eve G. Eden
Afterlife	Salvation through Jesus; faithful gain entrance to Heaven	Heaven for those who are true Muslims; Jahannam for the unfaithful	Nirvana is achieved during life on earth. Reincarnation	Liberation (moksa) achieved during life on earth. Reincarnation	
Stance on Other Religions	Convert unbelievers	Convert unbelievers	Tolerance		
History of Violence	Crusades: Holy Wars	Prophet-Companions era; militant jihad		with Muslims in India, Pakistan	with Arabs, Palestinians re: land & state of Israel