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excerpt

Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings

Are there universal truths? If we compare the sayings of Jesus and Buddha the answer is a heartfelt yes.

Buddhism and Christianity would appear to have little in common. One is non-theistic for instance, the other, theistic. But the sayings of Jesus and the Buddha, whose teachings gave rise to the two religions are another matter. They have much in common in the realms of ethical behavior, discipleship, compassion, materialism and the inner life. The following are some examples.

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Jesus: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." Luke 6:31

Buddha: "Consider others as yourself." Dhammapada 10:1

Jesus: "If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also." Luke 6:29

Buddha: "If anyone should give you a blow with his hand, with a stick, or with a knife, you should abandon any desires and utter no evil words." Majjhima Nikaya 21:6

Jesus: "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." Matthew 25:45

Buddha: "If you do not tend to one another, then who is there to tend you? Whoever would tend me, he should tend the sick." Vinaya, Mahavagga 8:26.3

Jesus: "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take the sword will perish by the sword." Matthew 26:52

Buddha: "Abandoning the taking of life, the ascetic Gautama dwells refraining from taking life, without stick or sword." Digha Nikaya 1:1.8

Jesus: "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it." Mark 8:35

Buddha: "With the relinquishing of all thought and egotism, the enlightened one is liberated through not clinging." Majjhima Nikaya 72:15

Jesus: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." Matthew 28:19-20

Buddha: "Teach the dharma which is lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely at the end. Explain with the spirit and the letter in the fashion of Brahma. In this way you will be completely fulfilled and wholly pure." Vinaya Mahavagga 1:11.1

Buddha and Christ

While Buddhism stands alone, irrespective of comparisons with other traditions, any reader familiar with the story of Jesus Christ, founder of Christianity, will have noticed the parallels between the legend of the life of the Buddha and the legend of Jesus Christ.

Both left their homes seeking the truth that exists beyond average human existence. Both were led into the wilderness, where they were tested by the devil with three temptations. Both gathered a group of disciples, one of whom became a betrayer. Both returned from their wilderness experience to preach a sermon summing up their teaching: Buddha delivered the Deer Park Discourse, Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount.

Both died at the hands of other men, forgiving them before the end. Even their final wisdom is similar:

The Buddha

Be ye lamps unto yourselves.
All compounds are transitory.
Work out your own salvation with diligence.

The Christ

Ye are the light of the world.
Ye are not of this world even as I am not.
(Through the apostle Paul) Work out your
own salvation with fear and trembling.

Such comparisons do not suggest that one religion is an imitation or copy of the other. It is obvious that the two rose independently of each other and stand as separate entities. There are many points of contrast between the two, especially in their teachings concerning the nature of God (many Buddhists do not believe in a personal deity), time (linear versus circular), and afterlife (heaven versus Nirvana).

But similarities also exist, pointing to a common human experience. Perhaps these similarities were best summed up in *Questions of Faith II: Who Is Jesus?* by Roy Sano, who was born into a Buddhist family but became a Methodist bishop: "When I converted to Christianity I wondered how I could still be a Buddhist. As time goes by I now wonder how I can be a Christian and not be a Buddhist!"

Sources:

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