

Owlcation

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The Many Similarities Between Jesus and Buddha

CATHERINE GIORDANO

Science, philosophy, politics, and religion are frequent topics for writer and public speaker Catherine Giordano.

The Second Coming of Buddha?

Was Jesus the Second Coming of Buddha?

Christians often say Jesus Christ was unique—the story of his life and his teachings were something totally new. This is not true. The story of Jesus, as told in The Holy Bible, appears to be strongly influenced by many different traditions--Jewish, pagan, and Eastern traditions--most notably Buddhism. There are many similarities between Buddha and Jesus Christ.

Before I go any further, I need to state that Jesus probably did not exist so when I speak of Jesus I am speaking of the stories about the fictional character of Jesus that are told in The Holy Bible.

See: [Did Jesus Exist or Is it All a Myth?](#)

I also need to state that while Gautama Buddha was probably an actual person (born about 600 years before the time of Jesus in the region of India now known as Nepal), there are many myths that have become attached to his story. However, Buddha, himself, did not proclaim himself a deity or make any claims of miracles.

See: [Understanding the Life and Teachings of Buddha](#)

Although Buddha and Jesus are separated by 600 years and by about 3000 miles their stories and teachings have many similarities. So I ask: Were Jesus and Buddha brothers by another mother? Could Jesus be the reincarnation of Buddha? Could Jesus be the second coming of Buddha?

[Note: I don't believe in miracles so I use the terms "second coming" and "reincarnation" as metaphors and not actual events.]

There are two possible explanations for the similarities.

- One is the great-minds-think-alike theory which states that the same story arises independently at different times and in different cultures.
- The other explanation is the there-is nothing-new-under-the-sun theory which states that early stories influence and/or become incorporated into newer stories. (This is known as syncretism.)

I subscribe to the latter theory.

Trans-Asia Trade Map--1st Century

Were the writers of The Holy Bible aware of Buddhism?

Although the distance between the homelands of Jesus and Buddha was great, there was plenty of contact between the two areas and 600 years for ideas to spread. Both trade and the wars of the ever-expanding Roman Empire facilitated contact.

There is also the possibility that ideas "met halfway." It did not require one person to traverse the 3000 miles. The ideas could have been passed along like the Olympic baton.

There is a lot of evidence of trade between the two regions. There are various overland routes stretching from China, Asia, Arabia, and Europe, some going back as far as 1500 BCE. These routes were known as The Silk Road (or Silk Route), the Incense Route, and the Spice Route. The transport of goods along these routes relied mainly upon pack animals (camels) and river boats. Goods were also transported by boats across the Indian Ocean.

There are cuneiform tablets dating to 2400 BCE describing shipments of cotton cloth, spices, oil, grains, (and even peacocks) which attest to this trade. Even the Holy Bible attests to this trade with the story of The Three Wise Men from the East traveling by camel with gifts of frankincense and myrrh.

You can be sure more than goods were being exchanged. Ideas also traveled these routes. The Buddhist ideas were undoubtedly among the ideas being spread, especially since Buddhist monks had a tradition of missionary zeal.

Buddhism does not reject other creeds and religions. Thus, Buddhist ideas could be easily blended with whatever local religious beliefs the monks encountered. Buddhist settled into many areas of the Roman Empire, including Judea. The historian/philosopher Philo, who lived during the time of Jesus, recorded the presence of Buddhists in Egypt.

It is quite likely that the authors of The Holy Bible were aware of both Buddha and Buddhist ideas.

How are the life stories of Buddha and Jesus similar?

There are many similarities between the mythical elements of Jesus and Buddha. Here are just a few of the most striking similarities.

- Conceived in a miraculous manner
- Similar names of mother (Maya for Buddha, Mary for Jesus)
- Was a bit of a child prodigy
- Underwent a long period of fasting while traveling alone
- Tempted by, but overcame, the devil
- Began an itinerant ministry around the age of 30
- Had disciples who traveled with him.
- Performed miracles, such as curing blindness and walking on water
- Renounced worldly riches and required his disciples to do so also
- Rebelled against the religious elite (Brahmans for Buddha and Pharisees for Jesus)
- Dispatched disciples, shortly before his death, to spread his message

Of course, there are many differences as well.

The Bible and The Dharma Wheel

How are the teachings of Buddha and Jesus similar?

The overall themes of the teachings of Buddha and Jesus are similar. Buddha organized his teachings into the Eightfold Path, while the teachings of Jesus are given sporadically in different books of The Holy Bible.

To learn more about the Eightfold Path, see: [The Buddhist Eightfold Path for Modern Times](#)

They both advocate what has come to be called "The Golden Rule"—treat others as you would wish to be treated. They both urge followers to live a life of peace and love, returning love for hate and anger. They both promote what Buddha called "right action"—do not kill, steal, slander, etc. they both stress the importance of helping others.

Here are a few examples

The Golden Rule

Buddha	Jesus
"Consider others as yourself." (Dhammapada 10:1)	"Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 6:31)

Love others

Buddha	Jesus
Let your thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world." (Sutta Nipata 149-150)	"This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

Love your enemies

Buddha	Jesus
Overcome anger by love, overcome evil by good. Overcome the miser by giving, overcome the liar by truth. (Dhammapada 1.5 & 17.3)	Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. (Luke 6.27-30)

Turn the other cheek

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

Help others

Buddha	Jesus
"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)	"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)

Do not judge others

Buddha	Jesus
"The fault of others is easily perceived, but that of oneself is difficult to perceive; a man winnows his neighbour's faults like chaff, but his own fault he hides." (Dhammapada 252.)	"Judge not, that you be not judged... And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:1-5)

Disdain wealth

Buddha	Jesus
"Let us live most happily, possessing nothing." (Dhammapada 15:4)	"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." (Luke 6:20)

Do not kill

Buddha	Jesus
"Abandoning the taking of life, the ascetic Gautama dwells refraining from taking life, without stick or sword." Digha Nikaya 1:1.8)	"Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take the sword will perish by the sword." (Matthew 26:52)

Spread the word

Buddha	Jesus
"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)	"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)

More Parallel Sayings

Are there any other theories about the similarities in the teachings of Buddha and Jesus?

Some say that the teachings of Jesus are similar to those of Buddha because Jesus traveled to India before beginning his ministry. This is very unlikely. First, it presumes that Jesus actually existed which I doubt. Also it would have been quite a long journey, round trip, for a poor carpenter. But even if Jesus had traveled to India where he learned about Buddhism, he still would have been only repeating the wisdom of Buddha, not saying anything new.

Another theory is that both Buddha and Jesus drew upon a more ancient source and their sayings are based upon the sayings of the Jewish king and sage, Solomon, who lived from 970 to 931 BCE, a few hundred years before Buddha. The Jewish sect, The Essences, would have been the source for both of them. There were Jewish settlements in India during the time of Buddha and Jesus could also have been in contact with the Essences in Judea during his time. However, again, this requires Jesus to have actually existed.

I'm going to stick with syncretism: Everything builds on what came before. Buddha himself recognized this eternal truth, saying that there were many Buddhas (the title means Enlightened One) before him and there will be many after him.

What do you think...

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Comments

Kyaw Minn Htunn on August 12, 2020:

Jesus had been influenced by Buddhism , but might believe in both Judaism and Buddhism.

I have to say Jesus believe Judasim more than Buddhism, but had made a new religion that's mixed by Judaism and Buddhism.

Albert on April 12, 2020:

Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came in human form to change the world - by touching the minds and hearts of all people to do what is good, follow what is right and believe in the truths of God and life.

Buddha is an enlightened human being who changed the world - by changing the minds and hearts of people to do good and avoid evil, follow the right paths and proclaim the truths of life.

So the main differentiator is their belief and concept of God. Their teachings promote love, compassion, trust, faith, hope, peace, and all other worthy virtues, values and moralities.

Combining the truths of Buddha with ones beliefs in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and His teachings will surely make any individual better.

Comparison is only for equals. Since everyone is unique as designed by God, then there is no point of comparing them.

Anything good, right and truthful about their teachings that can make us better people are what we should be looking for in them.

Mia on March 17, 2020:

It's so interesting reading all these comments as an agnostic myself.

I have a lot of respect for everyone so this was mind opening.

Akash Randeniya on February 09, 2020: