



PATHS TO LIBERATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NIRVANA IN BUDDHISM AND LIBERATION CONCEPTS IN MAJOR RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

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The purpose of the article is to conduct an in-depth investigation into the concept of nirvana in Buddhism, as well as the notions of liberation in Christianity and Hinduism, and study the idea of nirvana in depth. Through an in-depth analysis of Buddhist scriptures, texts from other religious traditions, and scholarly works, this research explores the similarities and differences in the understanding and attainment of liberation across these belief systems. This qualitative study analyzes various sources, including oral communications, written materials, and digital media, using Buddhist scriptures, the Pali Canon, and Bible, and gathers data from religious leaders and laypeople on liberation. The study examines the Buddhist concept of liberation, known as Nirvana, which emphasizes the cessation of suffering and the transcendence of worldly attachments and desires. It explores how this concept aligns with the liberation teachings found in other major religious traditions, such as Moksha in Hinduism, Salvation in Christianity, and Enlightenment in various forms within different branches of Eastern and Western philosophies. By comparing these concepts of liberation, the research aims to highlight the unique perspectives and approaches each tradition offers. The Buddhist path to liberation, known as nirvana, can be achieved within a lifetime through the practice of Buddha's teachings. Buddhism is considered an antitheological religion, whereas other religions, which are based on faith in God, believe that liberation can be achieved only after death. Furthermore, the study delves into the implications of these concepts of liberation for personal transformation, ethical living, and the search for ultimate truth or enlightenment. It examines the impact of these teachings on individuals and societies, exploring how they shape beliefs, values, and behaviours, and contribute to the overall well-being of practitioners. By undertaking this comprehensive investigation, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the concept of liberation across various religious traditions. The findings contribute to a broader dialogue on the similarities and differences in the paths to liberation, fostering interfaith dialogue and promoting mutual understanding among different religious communities.

Keywords: Buddhism, nirvana, other religious liberation, similarities and differences

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INTRODUCTION

The definition of "liberation" is the act of being set free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression. It refers to the process of achieving freedom or emancipation from constraints, whether physical, mental, or social (Minogue, K. , Dagger, . Richard , Girvetz, . Harry, 2024). Liberation can apply to various contexts, such as political, social, personal, or spiritual liberation. It is a central concept in many social and political movements, like the civil rights movement, feminist movement, or anti-colonial struggles. Ultimately, liberation is about achieving a state of freedom, self-governance, and emancipation from oppressive forces. This article primarily focuses on how to achieve the liberation of the soul, overcome suffering, and break free from the cycle of birth and rebirth—universal challenges faced by everyone. Furthermore, Lord Gautama Buddha has imparted profound teachings on attaining nirvana by eliminating all unwholesome qualities such as greed, hatred, and delusion. In addition, other religions such as Christianity and Hinduism, have leaders who have preached about attaining liberation. The purpose of the article is to conduct an in-depth investigation into the concept of nirvana in Buddhism, as well as the notions of liberation in Christianity and Hinduism, and also study the idea of nirvana in depth. Nirvana is the ultimate goal of Buddhism, representing the direct path to liberation (Somaratne, 2022). According to Buddhism, nirvana involves eradicating suffering and ending the cycle of birth and rebirth. Many problems arise due to birth; in fact, all problems stem from it. If we can eliminate the cycle of birth, we can attain nirvana. Therefore, this research attempts to offer direct solutions to the social problems faced by all human beings.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is a qualitative study involving content analysis of various sources, including oral communications such as conversations and dialogues, written materials such as articles, journals, published and unpublished research, and electronic and digital media like YouTube, social media, and the internet. For primary data collection, the researcher used Buddhist scriptures, the Pali Canon, the Bible, and other religious texts. Additionally, data were obtained from religious leaders and laypeople to understand their perspectives on liberation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The *Dasuttara Sutta*, preached by Venerable Sariputta Thero, is a significant discourse encompassing 550 factors essential for the attainment of Nirvana. This sutta includes various aspects such as factors for development, elimination, understanding the Dhamma, complete comprehension, helpful factors, directly known factors, and realized factors (Sujato, 2018). Nirvana is described as the ultimate cessation of all suffering. According to the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, the Buddha taught that Nirvana cannot be achieved through the six senses, as they are external factors tied to the external environment (Sujatho, 2018). Therefore, one should follow the path to Nirvana by transcending these external factors. The Buddha recommended the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*cattāro satipaṭṭhānā*) as the direct path to attaining Nirvana, stating, "*ekāyano ayaṃ maggo cattāro satipaṭṭhānā*." Buddhist teachings emphasize that liberation can be achieved before death. By practicing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, a person can attain Nirvana. Thus, Buddhism highlights a practical path to liberation that can be realized within one's lifetime, distinguishing it from other religious teachings on liberation. In Christianity, the idea of liberation is often framed in terms of being freed from the bondage of sin and achieving eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The Christian path to liberation involves repentance, acceptance of Christ's atonement, and the promise of eternal life in the afterlife. Hinduism has a multifaceted view of liberation, variously described as *moksha*, *mukti*, or *kaivalya*. This refers to



the release from the cycle of rebirth and the ultimate union with the divine or the Absolute (Brahman). Hinduism sees liberation as the realization of one's true self beyond the illusions of the material world. In Islam, the concept of liberation is linked to submission to the will of Allah and the attainment of spiritual freedom from the bondage of the self and worldly attachments. The Islamic path to liberation emphasizes obedience to God, purification of the soul, and the establishment of a just social order.

Now, in comparison, the Buddhist idea of nirvana is often described as the ultimate state of liberation. Nirvana represents the complete cessation of suffering, the end of the cycle of rebirth, and the realization of one's true nature as empty of a permanent self. It is not a union with a divine being, but rather the complete transcendence of the ego and the illusion of a separate self. The key difference is that while the Abrahamic faiths (Christianity and Islam) often frame liberation in terms of a personal relationship with the divine or obedience to God's will, Buddhism focuses more on the individual's own effort to let go of attachments, desires, and the delusion of a permanent self. The Buddhist path to nirvana emphasizes practices like meditation, ethical conduct, and the development of wisdom and compassion. Ultimately, while these religions have different approaches, they all share the common goal of enabling individuals to attain a state of profound freedom, transcendence, or liberation from the suffering and constraints of the human condition. There are some similarities between Buddhist Nirvana and other religious concepts of liberation. All religions generally focus on eliminating desire and craving, and eradicating sinful activities. They seek spiritual development through practices such as meditation, ethical conduct, and the cultivation of wisdom. As well as there are some differences between Buddhist nirvana and other religious liberation. They are Buddhism sees liberation in the form of nirvana, which is the cessation of all suffering and the transcendence of the self. Hinduism views liberation (moksha) as the realization of the true self (atman) and its union with the divine (Brahman). Abrahamic faiths like Christianity and Islam see liberation in terms of a personal relationship with a creator God and the promise of eternal life in the afterlife. Buddhism focuses on the development of wisdom, ethical conduct, and the cultivation of mindfulness and insight. Hinduism emphasizes practices like devotion, meditation, and righteous action. Abrahamic faiths highlight faith, obedience to God, and the acceptance of divine grace. In Hinduism, the concept of liberation is known as Moksha. Moksha signifies the ultimate state of being, in which the individual self (Atman) becomes reunited with the eternal, universal divine essence (Brahman). This unification is seen as the culmination of the soul's journey through successive incarnations, during which it gradually sheds the shackles of ignorance and desire. Within the Christian tradition, the ultimate state of liberation is often referred to as "salvation." This involves the individual's reconciliation with God, the forgiveness of sins, and the promise of eternal life in the afterlife. The path to salvation is centered on faith in Jesus Christ and the recognition of his role as the redeemer of humanity. While the specific terminologies and doctrinal formulations differ, the underlying themes of liberation or enlightenment share certain commonalities across these three major religious traditions. All three emphasize the transcendence of the individual self or ego, the cessation of suffering, and the attainment of a higher state of being.

However, the means by which this liberation is achieved, as well as the nature of the ultimate state, vary significantly. Buddhism emphasizes the importance of personal effort and the cultivation of wisdom and compassion, while Hinduism and Christianity place greater emphasis on the role of the divine and the individual's relationship with the sacred. The concepts of liberation in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity offer diverse and nuanced perspectives on the human condition and the ultimate purpose of existence. By engaging in a comparative analysis of these religious traditions, we gain a deeper understanding of the rich and complex tapestry of spiritual thought that has shaped the human experience across cultures and throughout history

CONCLUSIONS

Every religious leader has preached spiritual teachings aimed at the liberation of the soul. Therefore, no religion should be dismissed, as each possesses valuable spiritual insights. When comparing Buddhist Nirvana to other religious concepts of liberation, there are notable similarities and differences. Similarities include the focus on spreading loving-kindness, eliminating sinful activities, developing wholesome qualities, and practicing meditation, yoga, or ethical teachings to attain liberation. However,



significant differences exist between Buddhist Nirvana and the liberation concepts in religions like Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. These religions primarily focus on the concept of God and are theistic in nature. They generally teach that liberation or salvation is achieved after death. In contrast, Buddhism is non-theistic and does not subscribe to the concept of God. It emphasizes that Nirvana can be attained during one's lifetime. Therefore, while other religious teachings on liberation may be seen as uncertain or deferred until after death, the Buddhist concept of Nirvana is presented as a practical and attainable path. Practicing Buddhist teachings on Nirvana may contribute to resolving social problems faced by humanity.

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