

Equality Between Men and Women

Buddha dharma is not a way of life that has historically promoted gender equality. For almost two thousand years in India and Sri Lanka, there were no ordained women nuns. Also, a large part of Theravada Buddhist texts are devoted to the depiction of women as disgusting creatures which are too repulsive to touch. Since sexual desires were considered a great hindrance in the striving for enlightenment, the monks believed the only way to eliminate their desire was to make the objects of their attachment less attractive in their minds. Mahayana Buddhism has however provided opportunities for women to participate in a more equal fashion to men.

Sikh dharma promotes complete gender equality between men and women and the idea of women as being inferior or repulsive is alien to Sikh thought.

Effort Versus Grace

Buddha dharma places emphasis on Right Effort as an ingredient for spiritual development. This includes the effort to avoid, to overcome, to develop, and to maintain.

Sikh dharma teaches people that effort is the initial step towards enlightenment, however it is only through Grace that Atma (soul) will become one with Paramatma (all-soul). The SGGJS says, *"If people could meet the Lord by their own efforts, why would they be crying out in the pain of separation? Meeting Him in the Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy, O Nanak, celestial bliss is enjoyed"*.

Effort is nevertheless an important component in spiritual progression and the SGGJS says, *"Through sincere efforts, the mind is made peaceful and calm. Walking on the Lord's Way, all pains are taken away. Chanting the Naam, the Name of the Lord, the mind becomes blissful"*.

Family Life and Celibacy

Buddha dharma views sex as a natural part of human life, but also something that is associated with craving. As the Buddhist path involves overcoming craving, this also means becoming less

oriented towards sex. In most Buddhist traditions full-time practitioners have been celibate monks and nuns, and in traditional societies this was the only alternative to family life.

Sikh dharma does not recommend celibacy and instead regards marriage and family life as the best way of life. It is hard for a monk not to touch money and to live without the comforts of this world. However, it is even harder to labour to earn a salary and then give 10% off the top to charity (Dasvandh), which all Sikhs are encouraged to do. It is difficult to live in silence and seclusion, but it is even more difficult to remain focused on God and one's highest ideals amidst the commotion and distractions of family life. This world is a place of challenge and attainment, and the greater the challenge, the greater will be the attainment. Finally, Sikh dharma is about spreading the light and reaching out to those in the community who are in need and not about a selfish pursuit of secluding oneself from the world to become enlightened. This is why Sikh dharma is known as the 'Religion of the Householder'.

Monks and Clergy

Buddha dharma has a formal set of monks and nuns who are collectively called the Sangha. Sikh dharma has no formal priestly class and instead every member of the faith is in effect a 'priest'.

Diversity within the Faith

There are many varieties of Buddhism, with the three main schools of thought known as:

- Southern Buddhism or Theravada
- Eastern Buddhism or Mahayana
- Northern (Tibetan) Buddhism or Vajrayana

The beliefs between the different Buddhist schools can vary considerably. However, Sikh dharma is a much newer way of life, which has had its entire scripture compiled by the founders of the faith and so there is a much greater agreement on philosophy between the different schools of Sikh thought.



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Sikh Dharma and Buddha Dharma A Comparative Study

Sikh Dharma

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Introduction

There are common principles and ideas in all religions of the world and this is also true for Sikh dharma and Buddha dharma.

Buddha dharma is also known as Buddhism which means the 'Teachings of the Awakened One'. In Buddha dharma, any person who has awakened from the 'Sleep of Ignorance' by directly realising the true nature of reality, without instruction, is called a Buddha. If a person achieves this with the teachings of a Buddha, then he is called an Arhant. The teachings of the Buddha are summarised in the four noble truths and the eightfold path.

Sikh dharma is also known as Sikhism and is commonly known as 'The Religion of the Householder'. The teachings of the Sikh Masters can be summarised as meditation on God, honest living and sharing with the needy.

Similarities

The Causes of Suffering

The four noble truths state that human desires lead to reincarnation and life on the physical plane will undoubtedly lead to suffering including birth, aging, illness, not getting what you want and death.

Sikh philosophy says that it is a combination of both desire and karma from previous births which cause people suffering, however God can take all this away in an instant. The SGGSJ says, *"The Holy Saint has given me the Medicine of the Naam (God realisation). My sins have been cut out, and I have become pure. I am filled with bliss, and all my pains have been taken away. All my suffering has been dispelled. One who has my Beloved on his side, is liberated from the world-ocean"*.

The Cessation of Suffering

The noble eightfold path is designed to remove suffering from our human experience. The three main divisions of the eightfold path are:

1. Sila which is morality and includes Right Speech, Right Actions and Right Livelihood
2. Samadhi which is developing mastery over one's own mind and includes Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration

3. Prajñā which is the wisdom which purifies the mind and includes Right Thoughts and Right Understanding

The important elements of the eightfold path are integrated into the Sikh way of life and include honest work, selfless service, early morning meditation, charity, maintaining the Sikh code of conduct and reading the Word of the Guru (Gurbani), which is the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (SGSSJ), the Sikh Holy Scripture. The SGGSJ says, *The Gurmukh is the happy and pure soul-bride forever. She keeps her Husband Lord enshrined within her heart. Her speech is sweet, and her way of life is humble. She enjoys the Bed of her Husband Lord"*, and also, *"There are so many entanglements for the soul. Only as Gurmukh (enlightened being) do we find the Gate of Liberation. Truth is higher than everything; but higher still is truthful living"*. (SGGSJ, p.62)

Teacher, Teachings and the Congregation

The first step in the eightfold path in Buddha dharma requires taking refuge in Buddhism's Three Jewels which include:

- The Buddha (Awakened One) which is a title for those who have attained Awakening similar to the Buddha and helped others to attain it
- The Dharma which is the teachings or law as expounded by the Buddha
- The Sangha which literally means the group or congregation

Similarly, in Sikh dharma, the Guru provides the teachings on how to live a meaningful life and achieve Nirvana. The SGGSJ says, *"The Guru is the Ladder, the Guru is the Boat, and the Guru is the Raft to take me to the Lord's Name. The Guru is the Boat to carry me across the world-ocean; the Guru is the Sacred Shrine of Pilgrimage, the Guru is the Holy River. If it pleases Him, I bathe in the Pool of Truth, and become radiant and pure"*.

In addition the Sadh Sangat (society of saints) is given the highest place among routes to salvation. The SGGSJ says, *"The dust of their feet brings emancipation; in the company of Sadh Sangat, the True Congregation, we are united with the Lord"*.

Maya (Illusion)

Buddha dharma supports the idea of Maya, which is the belief that everything which one sees in this world is illusion, a product of the individual's own failed interpretation and self-delusion.

Sikh dharma also talks about Maya as something which distracts human beings from becoming God-conscious. However Maya can be overcome by listening to the sermons of the Guru. The SGGSJ says, *"By Guru's Grace, I have found God. By His Grace, I have shed emotional attachment to Maya. Showering His Mercy, He has blended me into Himself"*.

Martial Arts

Buddhist warrior monks have developed some beautiful martial arts including Shaolin Kung Fu and Wing Chun Kung Fu, and they have used these to defend their monasteries whenever the need has arisen.

Sikh dharma also promotes the concept of Saint-Soldiers or Warrior-Saints and has developed and used one of the oldest fighting systems in the world called Shastaar Vidya.

Healing Technologies

The most common healing system from the Buddhist tradition is called Reiki which is healing through hands and symbols.

Sikh dharma also has a number of healing technologies which include Naam Therapy (curing disease through the Holy Word) and Satnaam Rasayan, which is healing a person through consciousness.

Transmigration of the Soul

Both Sikhs and Buddhists believe in Karma and Samsara, also known as transmigration of the soul.

Differences

God

Buddha dharma neither denies nor accepts the belief in an all powerful creator, whereas, experiencing oneness with God and God's creation is the most central component within Sikh dharma. The SGGSJ says, *"Serving the True Guru, one finds the Lord, the Treasure of Excellence. His Value cannot be estimated. The Lord God is my Friend and Companion. God shall be my Helper and Support in the end"*.