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# **1. 2016**

## 1.1 March

## The concept of Dharma in Hinduism and the Significance of the Dharma wheel in Buddhism (2016-03-09 18:41)



Firstly it is important to discuss the reasons for discussing two separate religious traditions together. I found through reading that the Buddhist and Hindu Beliefs are similar in their interpretation of the Dharma although they do somewhat different paths. I want to begin with the discussion of the belief of Dharma before introducing the symbolic wheel of the Buddhist tradition.

The Dharma is a belief in a system that is both religious in nature and pertaining to this world. The Dharma is oriented toward the early text of the Veda of the Arya people, although it does not have one specific philosophical or religious source. The Dharma is a system which necessarily intertwines otherworldly salvation, with practices, rituals and rites observed in the material world. It emphasizes the importance of obedience to the elders and to those in positions of respect, the idea of mutual esteem between all humans, and includes elements on the importance of reverence- this is especially true for Buddhism.

It is also important to discuss the differences between the application this belief has in the Buddhist and Hindu religions. The Hindu belief state that the Dharma cannot be dictated by any God but rather is religious even before religion and that it is substantial in nature and not of tangible proportions. In other words Dharma exists even before it is practiced and it is not an experience that can be quantified. In Contrast the Buddhist belief in Dharma can be traced back to the teachings of the Buddha himself and the symbolic Dharma wheel was not only representative of a pious life, but of the Buddha himself. The Buddha wheel is said to signify what is known as circle of transmigration, the death and reincarnation process which can only be escaped through the teachings of the Buddha. The three turns of the wheel each represent the Buddha's discourses. The eight spokes of the wheel are said to represent the path set aside by the Buddha and thus the wisdom which is meant to replace the ignorance.

In the Buddhist culture pictures of the Buddha also incorporate the Dharma wheel as this symbol is representative of his teachings. The significance given to the Dharma wheel is in part symbolic of the importance of the Dharma throughout India.

Meher McArthur, Reading Buddhist Art: An Illustrated Guide to Buddhist Signs and Symbols (Thames & Hudson, 2004), 47.

HACKER, PAUL, and Donald R. Davis. "Dharma in Hinduism." Journal of Indian Philosophy 34.5 (2006): 479-96. Print.

## Redefining Judaism, the Star of David (2016-03-26 14:30)



The Star of David was made an international symbol during prewar Europe when it was used to identify European Jews. Greene and Peacock found that through this use of the Star of David as an identifier Judaism became a categorization that was ethnic and not only religious in connotation. Secular Jews who did not practice were still identified with the star and thus still carried its significance similarly the Jewish community across the Atlantic in the U.S. absorbed the meanings of the star. Having been to mark the persecution and oppression that had befallen the Jewish community it has become a symbol of hope and perseverance.

The star is composed of two intersecting triangles and the color ascribed to it are yellow and blue. Rabbi Silberberg describes the symbolism of the star being in part fundamentally based on the symbolism of the triangle. The triangle symbolized the connection of the Jewish soul to the creator through the study and observance of the Torah. The double triangle represents the duality of the human and Godly nature. The Torah is comprised of the laws (Talmud) and the essence (Kabbala), the external, and the internal respectively. The human soul is also composed of two parts that which is expressed and given life in the body and the essence which like the essence of the god transcends all things. The two triangles represent the connection between the external aspects of the Jewish soul and the external dimension of God and the internal aspects of the Jewish soul and the internal dimension of God.

The Star of David has changed many times throughout history both in the significance that was attached to it from the outside perspective and in the significance attached to it by the Jewish community themselves.

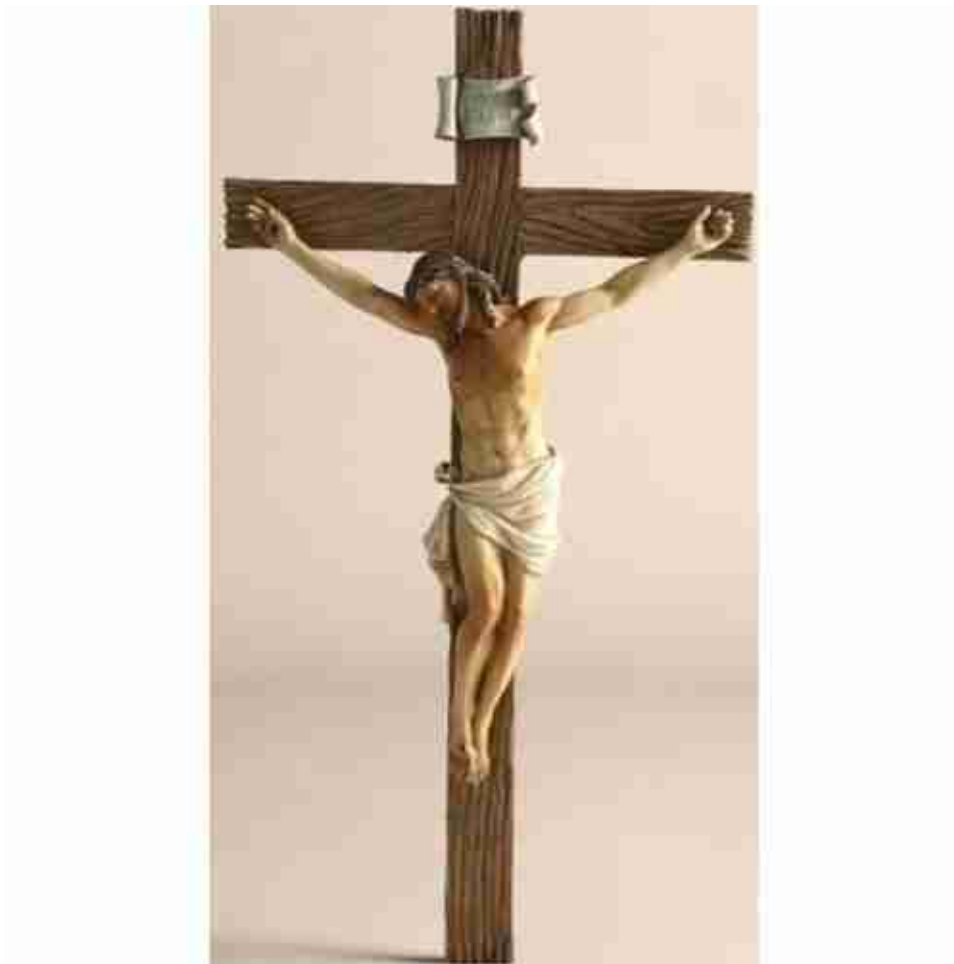
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Greene, Dana M., and James R. Peacock. "Judaism, Jewishness, and the Universal Symbols of Identity: Re-Sacralizing the Star of David and the Color Yellow." *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (1981-) 30 (2011): 80-98. Print.

Silberber, Naftali. What is the Mystical Significance of the Star of David. Chabad.org, 2008. Print.







There are many sect in Christianity and while there are some that do not condone the use of images, for those that do an image that is central is the cross. The cross is typically displayed over the altar where the rituals take place. For instance in a Roman Catholic Church one might find the cross displayed on the rear wall behind the altar where the priest and deacons sit to perform the mass. The cross can include the image of Jesus crucified on it although it doesn't necessarily. The lectures that surround the cross always deal with the God's sacrifice in sending his only son to sacrifice himself for the sins of the world. Considering these sermons it is easy to apply significance of hope and sorrow in the cross. The sorrow of a father who gave his son, and the hope of a people who by his death have been given the opportunity of heaven.

One must wonder what the structure of the cross represents, personally the author considers that similar to the structure of the Star of David in Judaism the four sides of the cross represent the connection between the person and the holy trinity, where Jesus, who is affixed atop the cross serves at the gateway to this connection. The idea that Jesus is the moderator of the connection between the person and God is reinforced by many parables found in the bible. The symbolism affixed in this post is a reflection of the author's personal experiences within the church as much as general information. This symbolism is in part what holds the faith together just as the symbolisms ascribed in all religions serve to emphasize and reinforce the characteristics of the faith embodied by its practitioners.

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## 1.2 April



Having just read about two smaller religions this week I considered it appropriate to write a two part comparison between the two religions and the traditions of Buddhism.

Jainism strictly denounces the use of all idols, this differs greatly from religions which have been previously studied looking specifically at Hinduism for this post. Jainism focuses on following a path of non-violence and creates an interdependence between the lay community and the ascetic that was not seen so readily in Hinduism. Because the central theme in the Jain tradition is one of non-violence a central symbol of this tradition is one that symbolizes this theme. A symbol of the Jaina tradition is the palm with a wheel and the word Ahimsa in the center. The wheel represents the dharmachakra. Although this wheel is also seen in Buddhism the path taken to achieve liberation, an ultimate goal of both religions, is different. While Buddhism follows an eightfold path Jainism has 5 central commands of which the central is Ahimsa, non-harm. Because the hands are usually seen as the vehicle of action and it is understood in the Jain Tradition that action leads to harm it is important that the symbol of the wheel is placed in the palm of the hand. The belief in samsara is similar to the belief that is found in Buddhism and Hinduism but the

path is differentiated by the central word Ahimsa. In contrast to the Dharma wheel of Hinduism the path is clearly delineated in the symbol for Jainism. It is stated in the symbol that the central path to liberation is non-violence. This differs from Hinduism because the wheel in Hinduism does not explicitly describe the path that should be taken, it is more of insider knowledge. The differences delineate the difference in the lengths and complexities of the paths of the two traditions.

Amore, Roy C., Willard G. Oxtoby, Amir Hussain, and Alan F. Segal. A Concise Introduction World Religions, 3rd ed. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford UP, 2015. Print. ISBN-13: 978- 0199008551.

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In comparison to Buddhist tradition Sikhism places a greater emphasis on the creation of a community of worship and dismantling the caste system as it stands. The Sikh tradition works hard toward creating a greater egalitarianism in their society. For instance in the Sikh community of the 22 manjis or seats of authority were women. Although the Buddhist tradition does not outright grant women lesser status than men it also does not specifically create an order for women. Shakyamuni of the Buddhist tradition believed that women were as capable as men to become saints and that regardless of gender the path to liberation was the same. Because no order was originally created for women they could follow the path to liberation as part of the lay community and not the ascetic community. In contrast it is not uncommon to have women leading worship in the Sikh community. Egalitarianism is further encouraged in the Sikh tradition because they lack the hierarchical classification of priest, instead they have a person assigned to reading the scripture and maintaining the temple. This is different from being given higher standing as priest because one is not entitled to provide their interpretation to the community.

The abolition of the Caste system in the Sikh tradition is particularly appealing because it ceases classification based solely on one's position in a static class. This is very clear in the community meal of the langar where regardless of class or caste members of the community sit side by side to share a meal prepared by everyone in the community. The symbol for Sikhism is representative of this equal right to worship. The double edged sword represents the Sikh history of martyrdom, which led to its separation from other denominations. The surrounding circle like in many other religions is representative of the nature of god. In this case it represents the infinite nature of god with no beginning or end and is a calling to the community to follow god's path always.

Amore, Roy C., Willard G. Oxtoby, Amir Hussain, and Alan F. Segal. A Concise Introduction to World Religions, 3rd ed. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford UP, 2015. Print. ISBN-13: 978-0199008551.

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