The Existence Of God: The Difference Between Buddhists And Muslims

Buddhists and Muslims can both trace the origins of their beliefs to two extraordinary men Siddhartha Gautama and Muhammad. It is through the Enlightenment of Prince Siddharta Gautama, later known as the Buddha, that the Buddhist faith was founded. Likewise, Islam was established when the Prophet Muhammad was visited by Gabriel the archangel of God and received a Vision. Through their personal experiences, each man revealed to the world that they had the answer to the meaning of life and the afterlife. Their teachings inspired millions of people to follow their ways of thinking. Constantly, Buddha and Muhammad both questioned the world around them. Each man endeavored to understand the true meaning of man's reality and purpose. They explored solitude and used meditation as a means to search for the truth. Suffering and social injustice were the root evils in life that they had encountered, thus they both hoped to remedy this evil. One man looked within and declared that the purpose of life was to end all suffering and that each individual alone, not a god, was responsible for their own deeds and the outcome of those deeds (Karma) determined one's standing in the afterlife. He became the Teacher of Buddhism. The other man received a Revelation from God through the archangel Gabriel that instructed him to announce that there is only one true God, Allah. He became the Prophet of Allah and established Islam. While Buddism and Islam are connected in the aspect of their aspirations to discover the true meaning of life and death, the different paths to enlightenment/revelation surfaced distinct central operating truths for each religion.

One of the most distinct differences between Buddhism and Islam is how each religion deals with the concept of God and the presence of a soul. Buddhism places their belief in the non-existence of God. There is no God to deliver rewards or save one on judgment day. Buddhism is not based upon faith in an ultimate being and Buddha is not the savior who saves others. "The focus of Buddhism surrounds the individual and the nurturing of them into a spiritual being rather than on faith and devotion." (Strayer) Buddhists support the teachings of the Buddha not because they place Buddha as their God but rather because he is the ultimate teacher, the Enlightened One, who can help guide them down their own path to end suffering (dukkah) and achieve Nirvana. Buddha preached a faith that veered away from divine authority, "Be lamps unto yourselves. Those who, either now or after I am dead, shall rely upon themselves only and not look for assistance to anyone besides themselves, it is they who shall reach the topmost height", as represented through his teachings (Bentley). Buddhism places high prominence on self-determination, self-discipline, and individual striving. Practicing Buddhism does not encompass devoting oneself to God, rather they seek guidance and wisdom through the teachings of Buddha. In addition, Buddhism denies the existence of a permanent soul because Buddhism preaches that nothing in life is permanent, rather it is everchanging. The Buddha told the monks in one of his last addresses to them, "Behold, O monks, this is my last advice to you. All component things in the world are changeable. They are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation" (Bentley). "The Buddha taught that our egos, personalities and the sense that the "self" is something distinctive and permanent enclosed within our bodies, are just illusory effects of the skandhas" (Bentley). By understanding and abiding the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, individuals can strive to achieve Nirvana, which is the ultimate goal for Buddhists. The fundamentals of Buddhism surrounds the idea of individual struggle in an attempt to do good in order to be liberated from the sufferings of life, and this idea sparked from

Buddha’s journey to enlightenment. “One day, seated beneath the Bodhi tree (the tree of awakening) Siddhartha became deeply absorbed in meditation, and reflected on his experience of life, determined to penetrate its truth”. He reflected on all the suffering and pain he witnessed throughout his journey and realized that the only way to end the cycle was through attaining Enlightenment. After endless hours of self-reflection and meditation, Siddartha finally achieved Enlightenment and the ideals of Buddhism came to light.

In contrast, Islam is a monotheistic religion and their beliefs revolve around a God, Allah, the creator of everything, who has authority over everything and everybody. Muslims believe that Muhammad is the last messenger of Allah. The essence of Islam is, “there is no god but God.” The fundamentals of Islam are the truth in Allah and submission to his will. The Qur’an states about Allah, “Say, ‘He is Allah, the One; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begets not, and neither is He begotten, And there is nothing that can be compared to Him.” (Qur’an 112:1-4) Muslims attain a strong belief in the idea of an afterlife. They believe that each individual has one chance to abide by the will of Allah, and if they do not, then their actions will be judged by him. Islam places an emphasis on the belief that Allah is the ultimate creator and holder of knowledge. The Qur’an says this, “‘Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us: He is our protector’: and on Allah let the Believers put their trust” (9:51). Islam preaches that each individual has a permanent soul and that this soul will “survive the spiritual death” and be granted access to Paradise or Hell depending on their actions(Strayer). The goal of an individual is to achieve an afterlife in heaven, as described in the Qur’an. The Qur’an is thought-out to be the literal word of Allah that was delivered to the Prophet Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel, through a revelation. Islam does not preach that the actions of God will lead an individual to salvation but rather submitting to his words, following his teachings, and remembering God in every aspect of life is essential because God will judge each and every action and then determine their faith in the afterlife. Islam explains that each individual has complete responsibility over their actions and on judgment day they will account for all the good and bad they have done, and off of that basis will determine their place in the afterlife: “Every man’s actions have we hung around his neck, and on the last day shall be laid before him a wide-open book” (17.13). This fundamental belief that every individual has complete control over their actions parallels the same fundamental belief in Buddhism, however in Islam, one can still attain the ultimate goal by submitting to Allah. These foundational ideas were founded as a result of Muhammad’s path to enlightenment because unlike Buddha, Muhammed did not set out on a journey to find peace. Rather he was reached by God through a revelation by the archangel Gabriel, thus Islam is focused on the existence of God and that God is the ultimate source of power.

Buddism and Islam experience similar core beliefs where each individual is responsible for their actions and that there is a path to enlightenment. However, for Buddhists, the path to enlightenment is found solely by them and by using Buddha’s teachings they are able to guide themselves down the path to end suffering. For Muslims there is also a path to enlightenment however in Islam, by submitting to God’s will and words, one can attain enlightenment. These differences surfaced as a result of the different paths to Enlightenment that were taken by Buddha and Muhammed. Buddha set out with a goal to end all suffering and he found his answer through endless hours of meditation and self-reflection. Whereas Muhammed did not have a set goal on what he wanted to find, however when the archangel Gabriel came to him through a revelation, all of Muhammed’s questions to life were answered, Allah was the ultimate being. The distinct paths to enlightenment/revelation, carried out by Muhammed and Buddha, surfaced distinct central operating truths for each religion, therefore creating two of the

most influential and successful faiths in the world we know today.