

A Comparison of Passages from the Bhagavad Gita and Tao Te Ching

Jeffrey Carlyle

October 15, 1997

In these two excerpts—one from the Bhagavad Gita and one from the Tao Te Ching—one finds that the ultimate goal of both Hinduism and Taoism are very much the same. The ultimate goal of both religions is freedom from desire; however, the two religions have very different and distinct ways to attain this freedom. Both Hinduism and Taoism seek freedom from desire; however, a Hindu is to work to attain this freedom and a Taoist is to do the opposite—refrain from working towards the goal.

In religion wise men are those who follow the teachings of the religion to attain its final goal. Both passages describe wise men—in the Tao Te Ching the sage and in the Bhagavad Gita the Yogi—with similar language. In Hinduism, “the Yogi works for purification of the soul: he throws off selfish attachment.” A wise Hindu seek purification by not being bound by wants. In Taoism, “the sage seeks freedom from desire.” A wise Taoist is to also seek freedom from want. Both the Yogi and the sage are to seek freedom from selfish desires.

The purpose of the goal of both religions is to assist nature. In Hinduism one is to “offer all thy works to God.” The Hindu God represents nature, and by seeking to glorify their God Hindu’s assist nature. The Taoist does not worship a God; however, they are to “[help] the ten thousand things to find their own nature.” The Tao represents nature, and the source of the ten thousand things is the Tao. By helping the ten

thousand things the Taoist is working the will of the Tao and glorifying the Tao, and is consequently very similar to Hindus glorifying their God.

The way of attaining the goal of freedom from selfish desire is very different in the two religions. The Yogi is required to work; "The man of harmony surrenders the reward of his work and thus attains final peace." And as mentioned previously, "The Yogi works for purification of the soul." In Hinduism, purification of the soul is a goal that one must work to attain; however, the Taoist "refrains from action." In the beginning of the passage from the Tao Te Ching it is stated that "he who grasps loses." Therefore one who grasps or works for freedom from desire will fail. The reason that the sage is to refrain from actions is that he must truly be free from desire and not work to convince himself that he is free.

As described in these passages Taoism and Hinduism have the same goal; however, a Hindu is to work towards the goal and the Taoist is not to work towards the goal. As described by the Bhagavad Gita and the Tao Te Ching, Hinduism and Taoism are vastly different religions; however, with respect to this passage both religions have similar goals.