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Candidate session number			
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Examination session (May or November)	May	Year	2013

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: World Religion
(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: where do we come from? what are we? where are we going?

Candidate's declaration

This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a grade may not be issued.

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

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Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

Although [redacted] was very interested in the religions of both Christianity and Hinduism, she had very little prior knowledge. As a result, this essay required a large amount of reading and research - far more than is typically required for an extended essay. This also explains why I have spent 12 hours with her, discussing the progress of the essay.

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Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Achievement level

Criteria	Achievement level			
	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	2	1	2	
B introduction	2	1	2	
C investigation	4	2	4	
D knowledge and understanding	4	2	4	
E reasoned argument	4	2	4	
F analysis and evaluation	4	2	4	
G use of subject language	4	3	4	
H conclusion	2	1	2	
I formal presentation	4	3	4	
J abstract	2	2	2	
K holistic judgment	4	1	4	
Total out of 36		20		

Name:

Candidate Number:

Word Count: 3986

Submitted: January 9, 2013

Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?

*A Comparison of Christian and Hindu
Teachings on this World and the Next.*

World Religion Extended Essay

Abstract

The overarching purpose of this essay is to compare how two of the world's oldest, most influential world religions answer the three questions at the heart of the human condition, namely: where do we come from, what are we and where are we going.

Inspired by Gauguin's seminal masterpiece of the same name, this essay examines the teachings of two religions that, at first glance, appear to have contrasting worldviews and discovers that despite outward appearances, there are far more similarities between them than differences. Specifically, the essay is split into four main sections that compare and contrast Christian and Hindu teachings on the human condition, the nature of reality, the path to salvation and the afterlife.

Dividing the essay into four main sections allows for easier coverage of each topic and provides a clearer understanding of the actual theory and thoughts of the two religions. The essay highlights the deeper teachings, interpretations and understandings of both religions instead of the oversimplified generalities or stereotyped portrayal of religious practices that are often used to characterize them.

This is one of the reasons that Hinduism and Christianity are the two religions being compared as throughout time these two religions have been perceived as contrasting greatly from one another; almost as if there are no similarities between them. In fact, this essay will show that beneath the outward manifestations perceived by society, these two particular religions are actually very similar.

The research was done through reading books and articles. To first have a better understanding of the two religions themselves, a few general guides were read; this was done because the course is not offered in my school and, therefore, there was a lack of general knowledge for the religions. Once completed, further research and analysis was made through other sources.

Word Count: 300

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Introduction.....	4
The Human Condition	5
Religious World View.....	7
The Afterlife.....	8
The Road to Salvation.....	10
Conclusion.....	13
Works Cited.....	14

Introduction

Although Science has helped humanity acquire a better understanding of the world surrounding us, such as its principles, laws, and how things work, there are many things that it cannot answer. Despite the rapid pace of scientific development, the three questions at the heart of this essay remain a topic of much debate and many would argue that Science is no nearer answering the truly important existential questions than it was hundreds, if not thousands, of years ago.

Christianity and Hinduism have each developed various and complex explanations to life's big questions. For the purposes of this essay, it has been necessary to make some generalizations about each religion's teachings as there are far too many branches of both faiths to try and do justice to all of them. Despite this limitation, however, there is enough general agreement within each religion to allow a meaningful discussion.

The essay will not attempt to draw any conclusions regarding the extent to which either Christianity or Hinduism is either right or wrong but, instead, will attempt a comparison between the two popular beliefs. Their respective teachings on four essential questions will be answered and expanded on throughout the essay, namely: who are we, where are we, where are we going and how do we get there? The answers will then be compared and contrasted with one another.

The Human Condition

The first essential question to be addressed is where does humanity come from or, in other words, who are we? This question specifically focuses on each religion's understanding of the human condition for each individual. The key similarities and differences between Hinduism and Christianity will be discussed.

For Hinduism, the belief "in the existence of [an] eternal and indestructible soul or atman"¹ is posited. There is a saying that "it neither slays nor can it be slain"². Basically, for the Hindus, life is forever eternal and cannot and will not end. Hinduism believes in reincarnation and in the wheel of suffering – the wheel of suffering will be elaborated upon in another section. Another quote from the Bhagavidgita helps to clarify the timelessness that is a recurring motif in Hindu scripture when the soul is "never born, never dies and after coming into existence never ceases to be. It is niya (always), sasvatah (permanent) and purana (very ancient) (2.20)"³. Aside from the view that humans are the only consciously living creature, it has been stated that, "Hinduism holds the belief that all living beings including plants and animals possess souls"⁴. This means that animals and plants, too, go through cycles and are reborn as their inner Self never dies as it can never be destroyed. "It is impenetrable, incombustible, all pervading, stable and immobile (2.22)"⁵.

This belief had also stated that "the inner most Atman, the real Self, is the same as this Antaryamin, and identical to Brahman."⁶ Each individual is part of the spirit of the universe and not only knowing it will be enough to actually be able to achieve their final goal. We are part of the spirit of the universe, however, the body is merely a shell that contains our Atman.⁷

There is a quote that was found that goes as follows: "The problem is aggravated by the fact that the individual soul is beyond the objective experience of the mind and the body and cannot be comprehended other than through subjective experience of transcendental nature" It is also stated that there are restrictions to being human as it mentioned the "limitations of the human mind to record those experiences accurately".⁸ To be more specific, this limitation causes more difficulty for the individual soul to experience objectivity to detach from human desire and find their real Self.

¹ V, Jayaram. "Descriptions of Soul or Atman In The Bhagavadgita." *Hindu Website, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Self-Development and Spiritualism*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.hinduwebsite.com/soul.asp>>.

² V, Jayaram.

³ V, Jayaram.

⁴ V, Jayaram.

⁵ V, Jayaram.

⁶ V, Jayaram.

⁷ "Advaita Vedanta - Overview: Advaita Vedanta | Open-Site.org." *Open-Site | What are you interested in learning?*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2012. <http://open-site.org/Society/Philosophy/Religion/Advaita_Vedanta/>.

⁸ V, Jayaram.

Within the Christian tradition, the ideas of the Greek philosopher Plato are used to develop the idea that the soul and the body are separate from one another. "He held that humans were composed of bodies and souls but the soul was more important and immortal".⁹ He was one of the first people to argue that we live finitely and the soul continues living on infinitely. He is basically "credited with being the first human to attempt to set out any sort of a proof that humans had souls and that they survived the death of the body and that they were immortal".¹⁰ Christianity borrowed heavily from his worldview.

More recent explanations can be summarized with reference to the modern theologian, John Hick. "John Hick regards the human as a psychophysical person. This person shall be resurrected through a divine act of recreation. Humans will have a spiritual body."¹¹ Basically, Hick is also agreeing with Plato to the fact that there is an eternal soul within a human being and they have this spiritual side to them as they do a physical. To John Hick, humans have a physical body which is separate from their spiritual body that leaves when the physical body's finite life is over.

For Hick to demonstrate the possibility of his statements, he conducted a thought experiment. The experiment consisted of three steps or three major thought processes which consisted of a person disappearing, reappearing, dying, and reappearing and so on.¹² It was through Hick's thought experiment where he came to say that "heaven and hell exist as the other worlds in which the spiritual bodies exist".¹³

For Hinduism, there is one spirit separate from the body. It is a theory that is accepted by the majority of Hindus. Christianity, on the other hand, is more complex. There are people who disagree with one another's statements as to what is considered to be "true" and what is considered to be "false".

These differences in views also cause people to live differently depending on the beliefs of the human condition. As the practice of Hinduism is more concerned with losing the self's wants and detaching oneself from what is considered natural human instinct, Christianity is more about doing good deeds and learning to do everything in moderation.

Even with their differences in what constitutes the human condition and whether or not there is reincarnation or a final destination, both religions do believe in a soul that is invisible to the human eyes as well as eternal. Hinduism and Christianity believe in an outer shell that contains something greater and eternal.

⁹ Pecorino, Philip. "Survival of the Soul." *Queensborough Community College*. Philip A. Pecorino, Ph.D., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.
<http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/socialsciences/ppecorino/phil_of_religion_text/CHAPTER_7_SOULS/Survival_of_Soul.htm>.

¹⁰ Pecorino, Philip.

¹¹ Pecorino, Philip.

¹² Pecorino, Philip.

¹³ Pecorino, Philip.

One's religious worldview will change depending on the beliefs of an individual. The question of "where are we?" contains a scientific answer but also points us in the direction of the meaning of life.

"The Earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it".¹⁴ This statement comes from the Holy Bible and basically implies that we are owned by a deity that is greater than ourselves. Everything within Earth, whether it be living or dead, is the property of the "Lord"; and it is the Lord who is our greater deity. This is because of popular Christian belief that he is the one who created us all. Aside from that, "the Bible says clearly that we are in the world but we're not of this world".¹⁵

Not only are we in a place that is not necessarily our own, but we are in a place where we are constantly being judged for actions either happening or completed. Christianity believes that "God created the universe", "God keeps the universe going" and that "God intervenes in the universe".¹⁶ He is the all-seeing deity that rules everything we live within.

Hinduism believes that we are, in some sense, bound to a wheel of suffering called "samsara". As stated, "The embodied soul is caught in the snare of samsara or the causative world through desires and attachment, whereas the liberated soul is free from all entanglements and is forever free from the control of Prakriti".¹⁷ Although Hinduism has a pantheon of Gods and Goddesses, it stops short of positing a belief in a deity that is all-seeing, all-believing and all-powerful. However, they do believe in a spirit that is actually "one" with us all.

Hindus argue that we are trapped in life and this equates to the belief that "life in this world means suffering".¹⁸ There is also a belief "in the incarnation of individual souls, their delusion and bondage to the cycle of births and deaths because of their gunas or qualities and desire ridden actions".¹⁹ Hindus are constantly put under this test, just as Christians are, however, their test does not end after one judgment but, instead, is a constant cycle and opportunity to rid this natural desire humans are born with.

Hindus also believe that "human beings continue to be reborn because they continue to generate karma, and they continue to generate karma because they are ignorant".²⁰ This ignorance is the ignorance of acknowledging one's being with the spirit of the universe. One of the Hindu scriptures have also stated

¹⁴ "BBC - GCSE Bitesize: Christian belief about the environment." *BBC - Homepage*. BBC, n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/rs/environment/chstewardshiprev1.shtml>>.

¹⁵ "What is Christianity? | News24." *News24, South Africa's premier news source, provides breaking news on national, world, Africa, sport, entertainment, technology & more.* N.p., 15 Oct. 2012. Web. 10 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.news24.com/MyNews24/What-is-Christianity-20121015>>.

¹⁶ "BBC - Religions - Christianity: The basics of Christian beliefs." *BBC - Homepage*. BBC, 14 Aug. 2009. Web. 10 Nov. 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/beliefs/basics_1.shtml>.

¹⁷ V, Jayaram.

¹⁸ Zammit, Victor. "How Different religions view the Afterlife." *AFTERLIFE LAWYER PRESENTS THE EVIDENCE FOR LIFE AFTER DEATH AND WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.victorzammit.com/articles/religions3.html>>.

¹⁹ V, Jayaram.

²⁰ "Afterlife and Salvation." *Patheos | Hosting the Conversation on Faith*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.patheos.com/Library/Hinduism/Beliefs/Afterlife-and-Salvation.html>>.

that, "The one who tries to escape from the trials of life by committing suicide will suffer even more in the next life".²¹ This acts as an emphasis on the fact that people are trapped in samsara and there is no way to escape it except to rid ignorance and natural greed and wants.

Hinduism is more based on this sort of "cycle" of life. Christianity focuses on the happenings of the finite life to then define what happens with the infinite soul. Even with the difference of one being more based on a "cycle" rather than a definite judgment, there is a greater being that has actually brought them together and placed them into the world that society lives in. With both religions, there is this greater belief of a deity who created it all.

The Afterlife

Few topics generate as much conjecture and supposition within different religions as the question regarding what happens to us at death or what happens in the afterlife. The question that specifically targets this issue is where are we going? This question elaborates on the thought process of what happens to us after our finite lives. As stated previously, Christianity is leaning towards a distinction between heaven and hell. They are two worlds or places, if you rather, separate from earth that we go to after our judgment from the deity. Hinduism on the other hand, believes that this concept that has more to do with the unity of the spirit of the universe.

Within the Hindu belief system, there is something called moksha. Moksha is what Hindu believers strive for throughout their finite physical lives and is what will release them from samsara. Moksha is the traditional Sanskrit term for release or liberation from the endless chain of deaths and rebirths.²² There is a belief portrayed in the Upanishads that addresses how individuality is only an illusion of the mind. The "Upanishadic understanding is that the Atman is never separate from the Brahma; hence, individuality is illusory, and moksha is simply waking up from the dream of separateness".²³

Christianity is more difficult to understand than Hinduism because there isn't one answer to the question. For the most part, the question of where are we going is replied to with rather unequivocal answers. It is said that, the "Christian beliefs about the afterlife vary between denominations and individual Christians, but the vast majority of Christians believe in some kind of heaven, in which believers enjoy the presence of God and other believers and freedom from suffering and sin."²⁴ Christians generally believe on the afterlife and unity with God in heaven. However, there are other Christian believers that believe in the existence of hell. The amount of Christians that actually believe in hell is quite small. It was said that "a

²¹ "BBC - GCSE Bitesize: Hinduism and death." *BBC - Homepage*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/rs/death/hindubeliefrev2.shtml>>.

²² Zammit, Victor.

²³ Zammit, Victor.

²⁴ "Christian Beliefs about the Afterlife - ReligionFacts." *Religion, World Religions, Comparative Religion - Just the facts on the world's religions.*. ReligionFacts, n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/beliefs/afterlife.htm>>.

slightly lesser majority of Christians believe in the existence of hell, where unbelievers or sinners are punished. Views differ as to whether hell is eternal and whether its punishment is spiritual or physical. Some Christians reject the notion altogether."²⁵

Hinduism also has its own belief on a sort of hell; to them, hell is only a place for "exceptionally sinful souls" who were placed there to be punished.²⁶ Also, the length of time a person is to dwell in hell is not infinite for they are there to only suffer finitely. After their suffering and punishments, they are sent back into the cycle of reincarnation and life.²⁷ A quote that elaborates on this is, "Hindu hell worlds are not final dwelling places. They are more like purgatories in which sinful souls experience suffering for a limited term. After the term is over, even the most evil person is turned out of hell to once again participate in the cycle of reincarnation."²⁸

Some Christians believe that people who deserve to go to hell are punished there, which is similar to Hinduism. They also believe that hell is the complete separation from God. People who go to heaven "will live in the presence of God".²⁹ This is different as Hinduism's belief is not that heaven is infinite as it is finite. The length of time an individual is punished is only for a while before they are, once more, placed in the cycle of reincarnation.

In terms of salvation, Christians have a belief that salvation will come through Jesus Christ. As he is the savior of society. For Hinduism, however, moksha is their ultimate salvation. It is said that "the individual is absorbed in the ultimate, Brahman, in the same manner that a stream or a river (a metaphor for the individual atman) is absorbed into the ocean (Brahman). When one attains this state, rebirth stops. One is released, forever. The individual is one with Brahman".³⁰

Hinduism's way of thought is very individual and the goal of a Hindu throughout their entire life is to achieve this ultimate salvation of moksha. There was a famous passage about Nachiketas, a sage, and Yama, the god of death. It goes that "a sage named Nachiketas wins a boon from the god of death, Yama, and asks the god what happens to humans after they die. Yama at first refuses to answer, and then, after Nachiketas persists, tells the sage that if he wishes to know the answer to this question, he must study the nature of the self, and in the process he will be able to leave both joy and sorrow behind".³¹

²⁵ "Christian Beliefs about the Afterlife - ReligionFacts."

²⁶ Zammit, Victor.

²⁷ Zammit, Victor.

²⁸ Zammit, Victor.

²⁹ "Afterlife and Salvation." *Patheos | Hosting the Conversation on Faith*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.

<<http://www.patheos.com/Library/Christianity/Beliefs/Afterlife-and-Salvation.html>>.

³⁰ "Human Nature and the Purpose of Existence." *Patheos | Hosting the Conversation on Faith*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.

<<http://www.patheos.com/Library/Hinduism/Beliefs/Human-Nature-and-the-Purpose-of-Existence.html>>.

³¹ "Human Nature and the Purpose of Existence."

The ritual and practices that Hinduism and Christianity have are quite different. However, even though they don't believe in the same deity or really believe in the same type of judgments, there is this belief of the afterlife. Both religions do have some sort of heaven and hell that exists. There is a time when they will reunite with the greater deity that created everything.

The Road to Salvation

The final essential question of this essay asks about how we achieve spiritual liberation. For Christianity, there are two main different categories. As already stated previously, Christianity is not one concrete method nor statement that is considered as their "absolute" truth. There are two different views to the method of which we achieve salvation and reach eternal life with God; east and west. Overall, however, it is believed that "God will assess each individual's relationship to Christ; people risk a sentence of eternal punishment and spiritual death, forever separated from God".³² Exactly what the criteria is can vary from one tradition to another but is likely to include factors such as belief, loyalty, and the number and type of sins that have been committed. It is said that "Jesus' death on the cross is the greatest sacrifice for all, for it redressed the sins of all humankind for all time, restoring the loving relationship between God and humans."³³

Essentially, it is those who believe in the teachings of the Bible and the sacrifices and wrong doings redeemed, who will get to reside with God in the afterlife. There are methods in which people may be more certified to go to heaven and hell. Methods such as: following the Ten Commandments, believing in Christ and more. There is a quote that states, "Those who believed in Jesus' work and who expressed that faith in good works will be rewarded with heaven and will live in the presence of God; those who refused to believe in Jesus and lived wickedly will be punished in hell. Finally, Christianity also teaches that at the end of time, after divine judgment, those who have eternal life will also be physically resurrected, just as Jesus was".³⁴

From the west, there is a quote that talks about humankind and what has happened. It goes as follows: "Wanting to uphold the moral order, God could not ignore sin. Sin, in Anselm's view, cannot be forgiven without some kind of satisfaction, but the debt owed by humanity on its sinfulness was too great for humankind to pay. Only a redeemer able to pay the huge debt of humankind's sin could set humanity free. Such a redeemer must be both God and man, for the death of God incarnate would be of infinite value and would therefore pay for the sins of the entire human race".³⁵

³² "Afterlife and Salvation."

³³ "Afterlife and Salvation."

³⁴ "Afterlife and Salvation"

³⁵ "Afterlife and Salvation."

And from the east, the quote goes as follows: "Eastern Christianity emphasizes the victorious and triumphant King on the cross, glorious in the divine defeat of sin and death. This interpretation focuses on Jesus as the *Christus Victor*, the conqueror of all evil. Jesus' death accomplished God's final victory over the power of sin that had entered the world".³⁶

From the west, there is the belief that there was a debt that was too large for humankind to repay on their own, and therefore God must have done it himself. However, in the east, it is believed that Jesus' death was God's final conquest over sinfulness that had corrupted the divine world that God had created.

"According to the Upanishads, if one knows the true nature of the self—that it does not, in any ultimate sense, exist—then one will stop grasping. If one stops grasping, then one stops generating karma. And when there is no karma, there is no rebirth. One is released."³⁷

This means that in Hinduism, too, there is no one way of achieving salvation; there are three main methods of achieving moksha. "Hinduism articulates several different, overlapping paths, or *margas* for humans to follow": Karma marga, Jnana marga, and Bhakti marga. Each three are different paths; path of action, path of knowledge and path of devotion, respectively.³⁸

Karma marga was first introduced in the Vedas.³⁹ It is considered a path of action and is actually practiced through rituals. "One should do one's societal duty (which later becomes worked out as the caste system), bear children (especially sons), and, essentially, live a proper life. This is known as the karma marga, the path of action, particularly ritual action".⁴⁰ It is basically going through the same process over and over and doing actions religiously, almost like Christians going to mass every Sunday.

In the Upanishads, Jnana marga was introduced.⁴¹ This path to achieving moksha is known as the path of knowledge. Like karma marga, there is a specific practice done to then achieve moksha. For Jnana marga, it is done through self-meditation and analysis. "Specifically, the Upanishads hold that people must renounce the trappings of the world and embark on a life of asceticism".⁴² It is said that they should detach themselves from the cravings that is considered to be human nature. When we can be detached from that, it is believed that the person may then achieve moksha.

The final path is known as the path of devotion, Bhakti marga. This path was shown in the Bhagavadgita.⁴³ "The logic of the Bhagavad Gita's advocacy of the bhakti marga is complex, but essentially Krishna says

³⁶ "Afterlife and Salvation."

³⁷ "Afterlife and Salvation." *Patheos | Hosting the Conversation on Faith*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.

<<http://www.patheos.com/Library/Hinduism/Beliefs/Afterlife-and-Salvation?offset=1&max=1>>.

³⁸ "Human Nature and the Purpose of Existence."

³⁹ "Afterlife and Salvation."

⁴⁰ "Human Nature and the Purpose of Existence."

⁴¹ "Afterlife and Salvation."

⁴² "Human Nature and the Purpose of Existence."

⁴³ "Afterlife and Salvation."

that since he, Krishna, is the highest manifestation of Brahman, all beings, including all of the other gods, are contained within him."⁴⁴ In this path, as stated prior, the devotion is towards Krishna who is similar to Jesus Christ. Any sacrifice, worship, good and/or bad actions end up going to Krishna. "The highest form of action is selfless, loving devotion to Krishna, which is bhakti."⁴⁵

Both religions have very different beliefs as well as practices. However, they also have numerous similarities. Both believe in an infinite and a finite world. There is a similarity here as both religions believe in the afterlife and in being united eternally with a deity more powerful than that of humankind. Aside from that, even though they believe in different deities and even though their processes are different, there is this kind of connotation that what comes around goes around, a sense of karma. Both beliefs have an implication of doing good things will give good things in return.

⁴⁴ "Human Nature and the Purpose of Existence."

⁴⁵ "Human Nature and the Purpose of Existence."

Conclusion

Science has yet to find concrete answers to the life questions we have investigated throughout this essay. Not to say that our answers are right or wrong nor true or false, but, to create a deeper understanding of two contrasting religions.

Throughout the essay, we see that there are multiple similarities between the two different religions and that they have slight differences in some aspects in comparison to others. The way they approach to answer these questions are quite similar.

Hinduism and Christianity are not the same, however, they answer the important and essential questions of life in a similar manner. They both have slight differences when it comes to what they practice and believe in but there are many more similarities; such as the existence of the two stages of life, methods of achieving salvation, heaven and hell, as well as the cycle of life.

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