

Love And Wisdom In Some Major World Religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism And Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

Love and wisdom are important in all of the religious traditions we have observed, though they are interpreted differently. All people seek to live a good life, and the way that this can be known is through their religion's moral and intellectual goals. In the Western monotheistic traditions, the love that is shown towards other human beings is understood to be ultimately God's love, and the best thing that people can do for each other is to show and share that love. One loves for the sake of God, and because that love is the most important thing one can share. Love is not passive, but rather active, involved in charity and helping others.

Keywords: Love And Wisdom, World Religions

I. Introduction

There are many ways to analyze and compare world religions. A popular modern approach is to analyze religions for their unique and different ways of understanding persons and cultures. This means that we do not look for commonalities, instead we look for differences. This has the advantage of creating clear differentiations between the religions, so that we can tell where one begins and the other ends. However, it has the disadvantage of making them alien to each other, strangers who find it hard to create shared concerns and values. We can see how this approach has worked out in the social sphere, with increased schisms, interfaith fighting, theological divisions and rising fundamentalisms creating religious tensions around the world.

Thus, my approach in this paper will be a different one. I shall look at some commonalities among world religions- indeed, the common themes that I consider to be the most important ones, those of love and wisdom. All of the world religions listed value both love and wisdom. However, it is their interpretations of these concepts that differ. So, I shall discuss these concepts in each religion, and

describe some major ways that they are interpreted. Hermeneutics is a long and complicated study, so this paper shall touch only briefly on some major ideas from these traditions. The approach will be a linguistic one, as an important way to understand the implications of ideas is to look at the meanings of the relevant terms in sacred texts and theological discussion.

II. Discussion

JUDAISM

In Orthodox Judaism, there are three major terms for love, *ahava*, *chesed*, and *racham*. The Hebrew root of *ahava* is *hava*, which literally means “to offer” or “to give”. It also shares a root with the word, *ahav*, which means “to nurture”, or “to devote completely to another.” *Ahava* (love) is not simply an emotion, it is also an action. Love in its purest form is not considered to be a passive emotion or something that happens to people, it is a condition that is created when people choose to give of themselves and help others. Such understandings of love can best be found in the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew term for God is Adonai, or Lord, or YHVH. Most commonly, God is referred to as HaShem, ‘the Name’ or one whose name is sacred and too holy to be spoken. *Ahava* can be represented as God’s love for mankind, or mankind’s love for God. For instance, we can look at God’s actions as stated in in Hosea 11:4:

I guided them with human kindness, with loving reins. I acted toward them like one who removes a yoke from their neck; I bent down and fed them. (ISV)
Or in Jeremiah 31:3, God states,

The LORD appeared to Israel from far away and said, “I’ve loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I’ve drawn you with gracious love. (ISV)

This love continues through history, as God states:

Go and announce to Jerusalem, “This is what the LORD says:
“I remember the loyal devotion of your youth, your love as a bride.
You followed me in the desert, in a land that was not planted.” (Jeremiah 2.2, ISV)

Ahava encompasses many forms of love. Such love can describe everything from an intimate relationship, such as the love between a husband and wife, to the

love that is displayed in selfless service to others such as the love that a father and mother have for a dependent child or a close friend. As *ahava* is both a verb and a noun, it is an act of doing. *Ahava* is not just a feeling. True *ahava*, true love, is more concerned about giving than receiving. Simply being the center of someone's attention isn't love. *Ahava* is about giving devotion and time. Meaningful relationships have mutual giving. Love may focus on receiving, but *ahava* is all about giving. It is not something that happens "to you" but a condition that you create when you give. You don't "fall" in love - you give love,

The term *Chesed* or *hesed* is a Hebrew word that means 'kindness or love between people', specifically of the devotional love of people towards God as well as of love or mercy of God towards humanity. In Jewish theology it is also used for God's love for the Children of Israel, and in Jewish ethics it is used for love or charity between people. *Chesed* in this latter sense of 'charity' is considered a virtue on its own, and it is important as an action contributing to *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). This is the belief that it is mankind's responsibility to work together with God to fix the problems in the world and to make the world an ideal place.

We can find such love in actions like visiting and healing the sick, giving charity to the poor, offering hospitality to strangers, attending to the dead, bringing a bride to her marriage ceremony, and making peace between one person and another. A person who embodies *chesed* is known as a *chasid* or *hasid*, one who is faithful to the religious laws and who goes "above and beyond that which is normally required". Some groups throughout Jewish history which focused on going "above and beyond" have called themselves *chasidim*.

Another term for love in Judaism is *rakhum*, which is closest in meaning to the English word compassion. When used as a noun, it is "*rakhamim*." Both words are related to the Hebrew word "*rekhem*," which means womb in English. They are related to the understanding of the intensity of a mother's love for her child. Compassion in the Hebrew language is centered on a person's heart and conveys intense feelings. Sometimes, it is translated as "deeply moved."

But *rakhum* is not just an emotion. It also involves action. God's *rakhum* cares for his people and provides for their needs. It is emotion that is shared with God, a form of sympathy. As we may know what it's like to be hungry, alone, and in pain, and so we compassionately feel the hunger, and pain, and loneliness in others.

Such compassion is desired by God. As it is stated in Zechariah 7:9-10, "Thus has YHWH of hosts said, 'Dispense true justice and practice loving-kindness and compassion [*wa-r'khamim*] each to his brother; and do not oppress the widower, the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.'" It is also important for strangers, for to praise God meant to become merciful like unto Him (Shab. 133b; Ex. xv.). Strangers certainly came within the scope of the rabbinical ideas of compassion. Their dead were buried with the dead of Israel; their poor were assisted; their sick were visited. As the Torah said, "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." (Lev. 19:33-34).

In Isaiah 49, 13-15, such compassion brings happiness: "Shout for joy, your heavens! And rejoice, you earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, mountains! For **YHWH has comforted His people and will have compassion [*y-rakhem*]** on His afflicted."

There are other, more minor categories of love in Orthodox Jewish tradition. For instance, there is *chabad* which is to cherish, *yadad* which is loving friendship, *egab* which is a sexual love, *machamal* which is a love out of pity, *qashar* which is a love that forms a bond between two people and *me'ah* which is a love a mother feels for her unborn child while still in the womb. Then there is the word *hiybath*, which is related to the word *hovah* and literally means an obligation. Sometimes people love out of duty or moral obligation rather than spontaneous affection.

There are several ways that wisdom is understood in Orthodox Judaism. Wisdom may be understood as an abstract attribute or energy of God, it may be personified

as a female figure who was present at the creation of the universe, and it may be a human quality that should be nurtured and valued.

Divine wisdom is called in Hebrew *chokhmah*. God's wisdom is said to be in the skies, and he shows its secrets to a chosen few. As God asks rhetorically in Job 38.36-38, "Who sets wisdom within you, or imbues your mind with understanding? Who has the wisdom to be able to count the clouds, or to empty the water jars of heaven, when dust dries into a mass and then breaks apart into clods?" (ISV) In this understanding, wisdom is an ability or energy that God can use for creation. When God grants such wisdom to human beings, *chokhmah* gives the ability to look deeply at some aspect of reality and understand it in depth.

Divine Wisdom may also be personified as a woman, God's bride and beloved, and there are books known as Wisdom Literature which sometimes use this metaphor. The book of Proverbs personifies Divine Wisdom, who existed before the world was made, revealed God, and acted as God's agent in creation. Wisdom dwelt with God (Prov 8:22-31); and it was God who gave her to Israel. As she states (in the first person):

²² The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.

²³ Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water...

²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,

²⁸ when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,

²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command,

when he marked out the foundations of the earth,

³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,

³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men.

The book of Proverbs also notes that Divine Wisdom builds a palace and spreads a feast for those who will receive her instruction; she teaches in public and inspires her pupils; by her discipline simple people become wise, rulers rule wisely, and those seeking her are richly rewarded. This personification of Divine Wisdom as female has also become important in the Kabbalistic mystical tradition of Judaism, when Wisdom is called God's beloved Shekinah, who visits him at sacred times, and will be with him forever at the end of the world. Divine Wisdom here is the Bride of God, his light and presence.

There is also secular wisdom in Orthodox Judaism, which is both knowledge of worldly things, and knowledge of how to follow divine laws. The first mention of the word Wisdom when connected with the promises of Israel is found in Deuteronomy. Here we find Moses instructing the people of Israel to keep the precepts and the laws that God has given to them.

As Deuteronomy 4:6 states of the laws, "Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' Gaining wisdom is a major command for mankind, who must be virtuous and fear God. The Hebrew term for practical knowledge is *shakal*, referring to the ability to accomplish things in the world.

CHRISTIANITY

There are several terms for love used in the New Testament, but the most frequent are *agape* and *philia*. The term *agape* refers to divine love, which is contrasted with human love. *Agape* is unconditional, unchangeable, wholly independent of mood or circumstance, always self-sacrificing and always self-giving. *Agape* love is the highest and holiest type of love that any person can ever know. It is described in detail by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:

13 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; ⁵ it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. ¹³ So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (RSV)

This is the ideal of Christian religious love, with divine compassion acted out in the human community. This is demonstrated by Christ's helping the sick, the hungry, and the blind, as well as stories such as the waiting father filled with compassion when he sees his wayward son returning. The parable of the Good Samaritan is probably the most concrete example of compassion, presenting a model of how we should not only help someone in need, but also make an attempt to ensure a positive future.

Philia is friendship, or brotherly love. It is a Greek term as well, for the New Testament was originally written in Greek. The Christian writer St. Augustine understood this form of love to describe a love of equals who are united in a common purpose, pursuit, good, or end. Thus, *philia* refers to love based on mutual respect, shared devotion, joint interests, and common values. It is the love close friends have for one another. As an example, Paul states in Romans 12.10 "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."

We also see the concept of *storge*, a Greek word that is used in Christianity to mean family love, the bond among mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, sisters, and brothers. Love is for all people, as the New Testament states about the homeless and vulnerable, Jesus told his disciples, "Amen, I say to

you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matt. 25:40).

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:43), Jesus speaks of how to deal with enemies,

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers,^[1] what more are you doing than others?”

Thus, we see in Christianity, that love should not be limited, people should have infinite love as God does, for Jesus asks people to try to be perfect, as God is understood to be.

Wisdom in Christianity is a bit more complex. Certainly, it involves faith and obedience to the commandments. But the Christian savior, Jesus Christ, is also understood to be God’s Wisdom in human form. This idea derives from the Gospel of John, whose first words are: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” (RSV) We can see the similarity to the female Wisdom in Proverbs. However, here Wisdom is male, and rather than being God’s bride, he is instead part of a male Trinity. This came about through a complex of church teachings known as Logos theology, in which Christianity was influenced by Neo-Platonism.

As John further states, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the father.” Thus, Wisdom is not considered to be an abstraction, but rather a figure understood as historical, both divine and human. Paul compares speaks of a “wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began” (1 Cor 2:6-7). The “wisdom of men” was human understanding as compared with the “hidden wisdom of God,” which was a knowledge of God’s plan

of salvation through Jesus Christ which was foreordained before the world began. Thus, the ultimate manifestation of wisdom was Jesus Christ, the Word of God described by John's gospel.

The Greek term for Word, Logos, is also considered by Christian theology to be the source of the intellectual, moral and spiritual life of man. As John stated, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." He is the light as well as the life--the fountain of all the various forms of being and thought in and by whom all created things live, and from whom all obtain understanding. Just as Orthodox Judaism had viewed the Torah (the Law) as preexistent with God, so also the author of John viewed Jesus, but Jesus came to be regarded as the personified source of life and illumination of humankind. His gospel interprets the logos or Word as inseparable from the person of Jesus, not as the revelation that Jesus proclaims.

In later Christian mysticism, we also see the concept of spiritual wisdom or *gnosis*. *Gnosis* was a knowledge or insight into the infinite, divine and uncreated rather than knowledge of the finite, natural or material world. *Gnosis* is transcendental, a direct, spiritual, experiential knowledge and intuitive and mystical rather than rational. *Gnosis* itself is gained through inner experience or contemplation, especially involving union with Christ. There has been much debate over the role of *gnosis* in institutional forms of Christianity.

More generally, both divine wisdom and compassionate love are united in the person of Jesus Christ for most forms of Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant. Thus, being saved or 'born again' means realization of the importance of both love and wisdom.

ISLAM

According to Sunni Islam, love of God is the most important form of love, followed by love for Muhammad, and love for all other persons and things for the sake of God.

We have two words for love, *ishq* and *rahmah*. *Ishq* is an Arabic word meaning intense love or passion, from the root 'to cleave to.' True or divine love is based on spirituality, *ishq e haqiqi*, a deep appreciation for God as ultimate Truth

and Goodness. *Ishq-e-majazi* is false love which is based on materialism, an attraction based on desire or emotional attachment. There is sometimes an intermediate type, *Ishq e Rasul*, or love of the prophet Muhammad. This is believed to lead to love of God.

As the Qur'an states, "And those of faith are overflowing in their love for Allah." (Al-Baqarah-165, Ali) *Ishq* has been associated with Islamic mysticism, the intense desire to be close to God. From this more mystical perspective, Ibn Arabi notes that all love relates to God:

"Nothing other than God has been ever loved. It is God who has manifested Himself in whatever is beloved for the eyes of those who love. There is no being except that it loves. Thus, the whole universe loves and is loved and all these go back to Him just as nothing has ever been worshipped other than Him, since whatever a servant (of God) has ever worshipped has been because of wrong imagination of deity in it; otherwise, it would have never been worshipped. God, the Highest, says (in the Qur'an): "and your Lord has commanded not to worship but Him." (17:23) This is the case with love as well. No one has ever loved anything other than his Creator."

Another term used for love in Islam is *rahmah*. The Arabic term *rahmah* can be translated as love, mercy, compassion or forgiveness. The Prophet told his companions as narrated in the hadith al-Targhib (3/210): "You don't truly believe until you have *rahmah* for others." His companions responded, "We all have *rahmah*." The Prophet then told them, "Verily, you don't reach this level of faith by just having *rahmah* for those who are close to you, but you must have *rahmah* for everyone."

The term *rahmah* is related to two of the most important names of God in the Qur'an, al-Rahman and al-Raheem. All chapters of the Qur'an except one begin with the phrase "in the name of God" who is described as Al-Rahman (the Benevolent) and Al-Raheem (the Merciful). This verse is often translated as "in the Name of God, the Benevolent and Merciful." These qualities should be reflected in the ways that human beings act towards each other.

On the necessity of love for people, we see that the Qur'an praises those members of the Household of the Prophet who fasted three days and gave every day the only small amount of food that they had at home successively to a poor person, an orphan, and a captive: "And they give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive. [They tell them:] we only feed you for God's sake: we desire from you neither reward nor thanks." (al-Dahr, 76: 8 & 9). All people should love God "because He has done good to you and He has bestowed favors upon you." God's generosity should be reflected in compassion towards other human beings.

However, Islam does limit the range of love. According to some schools, the person must love what Allah loves, but also hate what he hates. One has to love for the sake of God and hate for the sake of God; this is called *al-wala' wa'l-bara'* (loyalty and friendship vs. disavowal and enmity). Certainly, Islam recommends that Muslims should love people and emphasizes the importance of compassionate behavior towards them. However, it is also believed that a person should be indifferent to evil and oppressive deeds. There has been much emphasis on the necessity of promoting brotherhood and friendship with the people of faith and the people of good will, and at the same time combating against evil, corruption and oppressors.

The Qur'an says that in Islam love is universal and the Prophet of Islam was not sent, "save as a mercy unto all beings" (21: 107). The proper degree of universal love has been a topic of much debate in Muslim history.

In Islam, wisdom is understood to come from God. According to the Qur'an, "They said, 'Glory be to You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise'". (al-Baqara: 32)

One word used for wisdom is *hikmah*. The term *Hikmah* literally means wisdom, philosophy; rationale, underlying reason, and it is a concept in Islamic philosophy and law. Various Islamic commentaries describe *hikmah* as "to know the best of things by way of the best of sciences ...", having experience, using "justice in judging", "knowledge of the reality of things", "that which prevents ignorance," putting "things in their proper places, assigning them to their proper

status”, etc. According to Ibn al-Qayyim, the highest and most exclusive of the three levels of *hikmah* are “reserved for the Companions over the rest of the Ummah, and it is the highest level that the [Islamic] scholars can reach.” It needs to be taken into account to properly interpret Islamic law through the process of *fiqh*, and to determine the law’s enforcement.

Another term used is *ilm*, which relates to practical knowledge. Knowledge in the Western world means information about something, divine or corporeal, while in Islam *'ilm* is an all-embracing term covering theory, action and education. It is not confined to the acquisition of knowledge, but also embraces socio-political and moral aspects. It requires insight and commitment to the goals of Islam for the believers to properly act upon their belief. It is reported in the hadith *Bihar ul Anwar* that "Knowledge is not extensive learning. Rather, it is a light that God casts in the heart of whomever He wills."

Knowledge is understood to be derived from two sources: “*Aql*” (reasoning) and “*Ilm huduri*” (understood as not mediated and direct knowledge, which occurs through mystical experiences). According to Allameh Muzaffar, Allah gives humans the faculty of reason and argument. Allah orders human to spend time thinking carefully on creation, while he refers to all creations as his signs of power and glory. These signs encompassed all of universe. There is also similarity between human world and the universe. The Qur’an emphasizes the importance of knowledge, and it refers to *'ilm* or its derivatives in 704 places in the text.

In Islam, knowledge and the seeking of knowledge are of such importance that the latter is sometimes understood to be an act of worship. The prophet Muhammad is often quoted as saying, “Acquire knowledge from cradle to grave.” The best life is the one that is devoted to the acquisition of knowledge, which may be regarded as a sacred religious duty.

As the Qur’an notes, ‘God gives wisdom to whomever He wills and he who has been given wisdom has been given great good. (al-Baqara: 269). Wisdom allows a deeper perception of meaning in the human soul, so people are able to appreciate the blessings of life. For this reason, people of wisdom can see the inner beauty of things which most people would regard as ordinary.

HINDUISM

There are many forms of Hinduism in India and around the world. Here we shall focus on bhakti or devotional Hinduism. This tradition contrasts two forms of love, *kama* and *prema*. *Kama* is selfish love, bring personal pleasure and fulfilling desire. *Kama* includes sexual attraction, love of wealth and food, and enjoyment of material objects. It refers to any sensory enjoyment, emotional attraction and aesthetic pleasure such as from arts, dance, music, painting, sculpture, and nature. The well-known *Kama Sutra* text describes ways to enjoy the physical world. It is considered by bhakti Hinduism to be an inferior form of love.

Prema is selfless love focused on God, though the term may also be used for idealistic and romantic love of another person. Happiness is focused on the Other, not on the self. *Prema* may be spontaneous, or it may be developed through practices or *sadhanas*. These include meditation of the virtues and actions of the god, singing hymns and chanting mantras and doing ritual worship. One should do charitable action in the world- feeding the hungry, helping the sick, serving others, being humble and respectful. *Prema* may be understood as love in separation from the God, or love in union. Here we have Mirabai's poem of love in separation.

Only he knows the bitterness of love
Who has deeply felt its pangs.
When you are in trouble
No one comes near you:
When fortune smiles.

All come to share the joy.
Love shows no external wound.
But the pain pervades every pore
Devotee Mira offers her body
As a sacrifice to Giridhara (Krishna or God)) forever.

There are five basic love relationship that a person can have with God in devotional Hinduism. These are called the five *bhavas*. God may be understood as the master, and the worshipper is his servant, who loves God with awe and humility. Or God may be the Beloved and the worshipper may be the lover, who

loves with passion and intensity. God can be a friend to the worshipper, who loves with the deep sharing of close friendship. God may be a divine child, and the worshipper loves him as a parent (especially a mother) loves her tiny infant. And the fifth type is the love of equals, in which the deity and the worshipper are understood as ultimately the same, both are aspects of infinity. In devotional Hinduism, this is understood as the least desirable, for it does not focus on intensity of emotion.

An example of *prema* can be found in this poem by Vidyapati, following the *bhava* of *madhurya* or passionate love in Krishna's beloved Radha:

Her tears carved a river
And she broods on its bank,
Hurt and confused.
You ask her one thing,
She speaks of another.
Her friends believe
That joy may come again.
At times they banish hope
And cease to care.

O Madhava (Krishna),
I have run to call you.
Radha each day
Grows thinner
Thinner than the crescent in the sky...

We also have love as compassion in Hinduism. Three common Sanskrit terms for compassion are *daya*, *karuṇā* and *anukampā*. These words are often used interchangeably among the schools of Hinduism to explain the concept of compassion, its sources, its consequences, and its nature. The virtue of compassion to all living beings has been discussed by Gandhi and others as a central concept in Hindu philosophy.

Daya is defined by the *Padma Purana* as the virtuous desire to mitigate the sorrow and difficulties of others by putting forth whatever effort necessary. The *Matsya Purana* describes *daya* as the value that treats all living beings (including human beings) as one's own self, wanting the welfare and good of the other living being. *Ekadashi Tattvam* explains that *daya* is treating a stranger, a relative, a friend, and a foe as one's own self; it argues that compassion is that state when one

sees all living beings as part of one's own self, and when everyone's suffering is seen as one's own suffering. Compassion to all living beings, including to those who are strangers and those who are foes, is seen as a noble virtue.

Karuna, another word for compassion in Hindu philosophy, means seeking to understand the best way to help alleviate the suffering of others through acts of *Karuna* (compassion). *Anukampa*, yet another word for compassion, refers to one's state after one has observed and understood the pain and suffering in others.

The poet Tulsidas contrasts *daya* (compassion) with *abhimana* (arrogance, contempt for others), claiming that compassion is the source of virtuous life, while arrogance is a source of sin. *Daya* (compassion) is better than *kripa* (pity) in Hinduism. This is because feeling sorry for the sufferer is marred with condescension while compassion is recognizing one's own and another's suffering in order to actively alleviate that suffering. Compassion is the basis for *ahimsa*, or non-violence, a core virtue in Hindu philosophy.

Wisdom in Hinduism also includes reason and analysis. One term for wisdom is the Sanskrit term *jnana*. In the religious realm it especially designates the sort of knowledge that is a total experience of its object, particularly the supreme being or reality. Its opposite, *ajnana* (also called *avidya*), is the false apprehension of reality that keeps the soul from attaining release; it is a form of mistaken knowledge.

The three principal means of knowledge are perception, inference, and revelation. Perception (*pratyaksha*) is of two kinds, direct sensory perception (*anubhava*) and such perception remembered (*smriti*). Inference (*anumana*) is based on perception but is able to conclude something that may not be open to perception. The revelation or word (*shabda*) may be based on the Vedas or other texts understood to be revealed by God. Some philosophers broaden the concept of *shabda* to include the statement of a reliable person (*apta-vakya*). Thus, wisdom may be based on the words of saints, philosophers, gurus, or avatars.

Jnana is used to denote right knowledge, true knowledge or higher knowledge. It is derived from the root word, "*jna*," meaning to know, learn or become acquainted with. The sense organs are main instruments to acquire the

knowledge of the world. Hence, they are known as *jnanendriyas*, the knowledge derived from them as *indriya jnana*. The knowledge of the sense-objects is known as *vishaya jnana* or the worldly knowledge.

In a spiritual sense, *jnana* is the sacred knowledge of the higher truths, derived from spiritual states (*atmanubhuti*), philosophical enquiry (*tarka vichara*), meditation (*dhyana*) or study of the scriptures (*svadhyaya*). Knowledge of the Self (*atma jnana*) is important in the yoga and Vedanta traditions, while knowledge of God as creator is important in devotional Hinduism. Some major areas of sacred knowledge include:

1. Knowledge of the Supreme Self or God (*daiva jnana* or *isvara jnana*)
2. Knowledge of Nature and the physical world (*tattva jnana*)
3. Knowledge of bondage, ignorance and delusion (*samsara jnana*)
4. Knowledge of scriptures (*pramana shastra jnana*)
5. Knowledge espoused by self-realized yogis. (*rishi jnana*)
6. Knowledge of self-purification and liberation (*moksha jnana*)

All of these are understandings of wisdom, also called *vidya*. *Vidya* is a Sanskrit word that means “knowledge,” “clarity” or “higher learning.” The term is used to describe both intellectual knowledge obtained through study (*apara vidya*) and spiritual or higher knowledge (*para vidya*) that leads to enlightenment, which is the goal of yoga. Its opposite is *avidya* or ignorance, where the person is bound by *maya* or illusion. The highest knowledge is freedom.

BUDDHISM

While Theravada Buddhism emphasizes wisdom and liberation, Mahayana Buddhism emphasizes love and compassion. However, both types of Buddhism include both concepts. The historical Buddha taught that to realize enlightenment, a person must develop two qualities: wisdom and compassion. Wisdom and compassion are sometimes compared to two wings that work together to enable flying or two eyes that work together to see deeply. As the Dalai lama has written in *The Essence of the Heart Sutra*,

"According to Buddhism, compassion is an aspiration, a state of mind, wanting others to be free from suffering. It's not passive — it's not empathy alone — but rather an empathetic altruism that actively strives to free

others from suffering. Genuine compassion must have both wisdom and lovingkindness. That is to say, one must understand the nature of the suffering from which we wish to free others (this is wisdom), and one must experience deep intimacy and empathy with other sentient beings (this is lovingkindness)."

In Theravada Buddhism, the term *maitrī* (Sanskrit; Pali: *mettā*) means benevolence, loving-kindness, friendliness, good will, and active interest in others. It is the first of the four sublime states (*Brahmaviharas*). The cultivation of benevolence (*mettā bhāvanā*) is a popular form of Buddhist meditation. *Metta* as 'compassion meditation' is often practiced in Asia by public chanting, when monks chant for the laity. In Buddhist belief, *metta* leads to a meditative state by opposing ill-will. It removes clinging to negative state of mind, by cultivating kindness towards all beings. The "far enemy" of *metta* is hatred or ill-will, a mind-state in obvious opposition. The "near enemy" (a quality which superficially resembles *Metta* but is in fact more subtly in opposition to it), is attachment or greed, which is caring about others for a selfish reason.

Mettā meditation, or loving-kindness meditation, is the practice concerned with the cultivation of *mettā*, as benevolence, kindness, and friendship. The practice generally consists of silent repetitions of phrases such as "may you be happy" or "may you be free from suffering", for example directed at a person who, depending on tradition, may or may not be internally visualized. The practice gradually increases in difficulty with respect to the targets that receive the practitioner's compassion or loving-kindness. At first the practitioner is targeting "oneself, then loved ones, neutral ones, difficult ones and finally all beings, with variations across traditions." The concept of *metta* is discussed in the *Metta Sutta* text. Here is a section:

May all beings be happy and secure, may they be happy-minded. Whatever living beings there are - feeble or strong, long, stout or medium, short, small or large, seen or unseen (ghosts, gods and hell-beings), those dwelling far or near, those who are born or those who await rebirth may all beings, without exception be happy-minded. Let none deceive another nor despise any person whatever in any place; in anger or ill-will let them not wish any suffering to each other. Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Let her thoughts of boundless lovingkindness pervade the whole world:

above, below and across, without obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity...

— *Metta Sutta, Khp 8-9, Translated by Peter Harvey*

We also see the importance of compassion in Mahayana Buddhism, which also uses the term '*karuna*' for compassion. The ideal Mahayana figure is the bodhisattva, who sacrifices his own happiness and liberation for the sake of others. The *Bodhisattvacaryavatara* (Chapter 8) presents the following meditation on compassion:

Strive at first to meditate upon the sameness of yourself and others. In joy and sorrow all are equal; Thus be guardian of all, as of yourself. The hand and other limbs are many and distinct, But all are one--the body to kept and guarded. Likewise, different beings, in their joys and sorrows, are, like me, all one in wanting happiness. This pain of mine does not afflict or cause discomfort to another's body, and yet this pain is hard for me to bear because I cling and take it for my own. And other beings' pain I do not feel, and yet, because I take them for myself, their suffering is mine and therefore hard to bear. And therefore, I'll dispel the pain of others, for it is simply pain, just like my own. And others I will aid and benefit, for they are living beings, like my body. Since I and other beings both, in wanting happiness, are equal and alike, what difference is there to distinguish us, that I should strive to have my bliss alone?"

One Sanskrit word usually translated as "wisdom" in Buddhism is *prajna* (in Pali, *panna*), which can also be translated as "consciousness," "discernment," or "insight." Each of the many schools of Buddhism understands *prajna* somewhat differently, but generally, we can say that *prajna* is understanding or discernment of the Buddha's teaching. It is described in Buddhist texts as the understanding of the true nature of phenomena. In the context of Buddhist meditation, it is the ability to understand the three marks or characteristics of all things: impermanence, dissatisfaction or suffering, and non-self. Mahāyāna texts describe it as the understanding of *śūnyatā* ("emptiness").

In order to gain wisdom, the Theravada tradition stresses purifying the mind from defilements (*klesas*) and cultivating the mind through meditation (*bhavana*). This will help the person to develop discerning or penetrating insight into the Four Noble Truths. This is the path to wisdom, which may be gained through books, through reasoning, and through meditative experience.

In Mahayana Buddhism, *bodhicitta*, ("enlightenment-mind" or "the thought of spiritual awakening"), is the mind (*citta*) that is aimed at liberation or awakening (*bodhi*), with wisdom and compassion for the benefit of all sentient beings. *Bodhicitta* is the defining quality of the Mahayana *bodhisattva* and the act of giving rise to *bodhicitta* (*bodhicittotpāda*) is a major quality in a bodhisattva. Thus, both wisdom and compassion are united as goals of life.

In the Mahayana list of Six Perfections (*paramitas*), the sixth perfection is *prajna paramita* -- the perfection of wisdom. It is said of the perfection of wisdom that it contains all the other perfections, and without it no perfection is possible. The other five are giving, morality, patience, energy, and concentration or meditation. "Wisdom," in this case, is nothing other than the *realization of sunyata*. This realization is said to be the door to enlightenment.

So in both Buddhist traditions, the goal is the realization of emptiness, which eliminates suffering and unfulfilled desire. The nature of that emptiness differs in different schools, but compassion teaches people not to be attached to objects and suffer over their lack, but rather to realize that they are illusory, and concentrate on helping others to realize this.

III. CONCLUSIONS

In the Eastern religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, there are many interpretations of love, but it is also highly valued. More theistic schools emphasize divine teachings, while non-theistic schools find love in the teachings of non-attachment that limit suffering. Religions tell how to help others, and why this is important. The best thing to do is free people from pain, and to help them to know both this world and what is beyond it. There have been modern attempts to unite the world's religions. The Sufi leader Inayat Khan said that people should read each other's scriptures and pray each other's prayers. This was the basis of his new tradition of Universal Worship, where people could worship together following many paths. It first met in 1921, and according to E. A Mitchell:

The prayers themselves are the most comprehensive we have ever listened to. They lift the thoughts to things above and turn them on things beneath. They

speak of the greatness, the power, the beauty, the all-pervadingness of God, also of His Messengers, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, and 'those whose names are unknown.' . . . We hold our breath, realizing it to be a moment of profound significance. . . And when the little company disperses to pass into the London night, the thought in one's mind is that there has just been planted a tiny seed, which shall one day spring up into a great tree whose leaves shall be for the healing of the nations. (*History of the Universal Worship - Universal Worship*). This is a fine way to gain insight into the spiritual paths of others and limit the struggles between faith traditions. More love and wisdom are always better than less, and if religions would develop new ways to be together in peace, and see that others have similar values, they might communicate with greater clarity and caring.