



# Judaism, (inevitably Christianity), Hinduism – and Time

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## Current Time of Interreligious Dialogue between Judaism and Hinduism

The topic is gigantic, perhaps the most gigantic topic of all. While Christianity and Islam are clearly proselytic, Judaism and Hinduisms are rather reserved with regard to proselytic activities. The Jewish-Christian tradition interprets the relationship between the divine and the human as a personal relationship between a parent and a son. However, This approach is missing entirely from Vedanta and Yoga, the two major darshans of Hinduism. However, Hinduism as a whole, as Tommaso Bianchi claims, includes the aspect known to Judaism and Christianity – the effort to seek personal holiness in a man; the personal holiness that makes the man part of the divine holiness [1]. In this context, it can be said that the key dividing line, as the author of this paper believes, is the possibility of complete holiness in a man, specifically holiness of a guru as a religious teacher of Hinduism. Judaism on the other hand insists that the human being and the divine are entirely separate entities [2].

The current time of interreligious dialogue between Judaism and Hinduism, i.e. a dialogue between Jews and Indians (since Hinduism is traditionally bound geographically to the current India) is burdened with shadows, although in general it tends to emanate light. India sees and remembers that Christians visited India and lived there as sannyasins mainly with the aim to understand the spirit of the local people and convert them more effectively to the Christian faith. According to many Hindus, the interreligious dialogue crafted by Christianity is a sophisticated strategic trick, as Christians will never cease to pursue their missionary enthusiasm. However, if there is any true dialogue between Christianity and

Hinduism, it revolves around the concept of absoluteness – and around mysticism that reflects this absoluteness. Christians believe that any religion that is a true religion always turns to the absoluteness, to the Maker. However, neither Hinduism, nor Buddhism, which historically developed from Hinduism, defines any absolute omnipotent Maker.

The current interreligious dialogue between Judaism and Hinduism differs greatly from the traditional interreligious dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism, which is asymmetrical due to the proselytic character of Christianity. The inner characteristics of Judaism and Hinduism are in unison in the belief that the topic of absoluteness may be secondary, giving was to orthopraxy instead of orthodoxy. While Jews have lived in India for thousands of years, Hinduism seems to have discovered Judaism rather recently, because Judaism has so far been overshadowed by Christianity claiming to have reached the pinnacle of and surpassed Judaism. In America at the end of the 19th century, the Jewish diaspora met the Hindu diaspora and they started to learn how to coexist. The establishment of the state of Israel is a separate chapter, as Israel has political, economic, as well as military ties to India.

## Judaism, Hinduism – and Time

Judaism on the other hand has been studying Hinduism in great detail for centuries. It sees the fact that Hinduism emphasises knowledge over revelation as a key positive aspect. However, despite the mostly positive outlook on the religion, Sa'adiah Gaon in the 10th century defines Judaism as superior to Hinduism, i.e. to the faith of the Brahmans. While the true God belongs to the Brahmans, they still lack the prophetic energy according to Saadiah Gaon.

Strong criticism of the Brahmans appears in the work of Maimonides and Jehuda Halevi in particular, who dislikes the widespread cult of talismans and magic in Hinduism. It is hardly surprising: the white, blue and black restrained universalistic Judaism as the founding monotheism is difficult to compare against the colourful Hinduism, which encompasses so many traditions that it almost seems to be polytheist. In fact, Hinduism is polytheist when the nominal number of gods in this religion is considered. Naturally, Judaism also sees idolatry as a phenomenon posing a threat to Hinduism as a true religion according to the definition applied in Judaism. However, Menashe ben Israel and rabbi Matityahu Glazerson laid the foundation stones to the current mostly positive tone of the interreligious dialogue between Judaism and Hinduism [3].

David M. Knipe states the following in the context of Hinduism: "This holy and constantly developing religion is so difficult to define that many experts have given up their attempts to define Hindus, stating that Hindus are all that's left when Muslims, Jains, Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Parsees and the followers of tribal religions are taken away from the religious spectrum of South Asia [4]." It is important to note that many Indians currently see the traditional Hinduism in multiformity almost incomprehensible to Europeans – as a problem they strive to solve: Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Gandhi are modern traditionalist, who emphasise, among others, the philosophising Upanishads to transform Hinduism into a compact, modern global religion capable of dialogue with other global religions with regard to pressing global issues, such as environmental protection, global climate and the role of women in the modern society.

The western liberal world traditionally sets itself apart from India with its ratio, yet it seems to have been increasingly fascinated by India over the last few centuries. This is noticeable in architecture and the landscape of the proud Albion, and key principles of Hinduism are incorporated in global philosophical systems, as in the case of the environmentalist philosophical systems arising in the 1970s. Now on the topic of time: The differences in the perception of time between Judaism and Hinduism are perhaps the most striking. The biblical Hebrew restrained in cubic forms, essentially a highly economical language, is a set of windows looking into the great, perhaps even total drama starting from Adam and Eve through the death of Moses on Mount Nebo, crossing the river Jordan on the journey to the promised land – as well as numerous associated stories repeating the narratives from Torah at a new level – all the way to the prophetic activity reaching its peak before the destruction of the first holy temple and subsiding at the time some Jews return to Judea from the Babylonian captivity. Each special second of this unique drama set in a specific geographic location is the moral endlessness, in which the man opposes the Lord only to obey in the end. These instances of endlessness are stacked one after another, as the sense of being flows – towards redemption.

Time in Hinduism is endless, but lacks redemption. The option of stepping out of samsara, as described by Shankara in the monist Advaita Vedanta, is not redemption in the biblical sense, as it only fulfils an individual's destiny instead of changing the world. Time in Hinduism is associated with the cosmos and individual human life, as well as the life of entire generations, is minute. Time in Hinduism

is massively, gigantically and incommensurably endless. According to Hinduism, the cosmos is not a creation. Instead of being created, it is a large organism of a certain kind that originates from the existence of the highest reality simply as a natural consequence, rather than for a specific reason. The cosmos is subject to fixed cycles; the unimaginably massive timeframe of one cycle is called kalpa. One kalpa includes numerous other cycles called mahayugas, one mahayuga spanning 4,320,000 years and containing four yugas, which are similar to the golden, silver, bronze and iron Ages of Man.

In brief on Hinduism and time: the cosmos arises from itself and the existence of the world as the endless emanation from the being of Vishnu, the cosmos collapses in the end only to arise again towards another collapse in myriads of time units.

### Is there any greater contrast than in Judaism and Hinduism – and time?

Probably not. With two exceptions.

In what sense may time according to Judaism be cyclical? According to many wise thinkers in Judaism, each new day is a challenge comparable to the Exodus, the departure from Egypt, the land of slavery as described in Torah. The old story is repeated time and time again at a daily personal and moral level.

In what sense may time according to Hinduism be linear? Texts of the Brahmans date back to the middle era of the development of the religion of Vedas. The Brahmans focus on the topic of balance among cosmic forces, with sacrifice being the key to this balance. As Stephen Cross says: "Sacrifice in the religion of Vedas stem from the finding that the entire cosmos by its nature is an enormous and continuous sacrifice [5]." The world is a result of self-sacrifice by Purusha-Prajapati, the divine being, the Lord of all creatures, at least in the understanding of Vedas.

Perhaps in the end the externally polytheist Hinduism is in its deep core predominantly monotheist [6].

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### Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest

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