



Hinduism evolved). It appears that early country-  
 Buddhists were more egalitarian in their side.  
 is the remark- A more important reason  
 beliefs than most of their countrymen: able assimilative power of  
 Hinduism. His- torically, Hinduism has been  
 No brahman is such by birth. torically, Hinduism has been  
 the most ab- sorptive of the world's  
 No outcaste is such by birth. sorptive of the world's  
 religions; with time it has successfully assimilated  
 An outcaste is such by his deeds. has successfully assimilated  
 extremely heter- odox elements. Even the  
 A brahman is .such by his deeds. odox elements. Even the  
 ethnocentric Mus- lim conquerors found themselves  
 (Sutta Nipatct, 136) 1 in danger  
 They welcomed men and wome<J. of all of being assimilated  
 during the time of the Mughal empire (1526-c.  
 classes as disciples, a practice which aroused 1800). When the  
 the ire of orthodox brahmins. Like his con- Muslims invaded, Buddhism  
 and Hinduism had almost merged, and the  
 temporary MahavTra, the Buddha stressed Buddha was  
 the doctrine of ahirrsza (nonviolence : doing relegated to a place in  
 the Hindu pantheon as the ninth incarnation of  
 harm to no living thing), while animal Vi~i:iu.  
 sacrifice still lingered on from the Vedic age Still more important  
 is the fact that Bud- dhism suffered the fate of  
 of Brahmanism. almost every other  
 Due in part to a popular reaction against religion and split into  
 numerous sects. Early in its career Buddhism had  
 the social rigidity of Brahmanism, Buddhism split in two:  
 rapidly gained a wide following, spread ing Theravadct ( the way of  
 the elders) or Hr- nayana ( the lesser  
 throughout India and the Central Asian vehicle), and Mahayana  
 steppes. The great emperor A5oka ( c. 268- (the greater vehicle) .  
 Theravada retained to a greater extent the  
 233 B.C. ) was dramatically converted to original teachings of the  
 Buddhism after witnessing the carnage in an Buddha, while Mahayana  
 claimed to have access to esoteric  
 aggressive war of his own instigation. The teachings of the Buddha

Faith frequently enjoyed royal patronage and but his closest continued to grow until the fifth century cultural function Mahaya- A.D., when it still flourished among the much as medieval educated and noble classes. Eight hundred early Christianity. years later, however, following the Muslim regards the individual conquest of northern India, Buddhism had as a selfish ideal virtually disappeared from the land of its concept of the birth. Now Buddhists number only a tiny achieves en- fraction of the population of India. nirva?Ja so that he The reasons for the virtual disappearance on the path to of Buddhism from India are several. One is of Mahayana has the ferocity of the Muslim conquest. By and local animistic large, the invading Muslims of the twelfth incorporated foreign deities and thirteenth centuries left the indigenous heravada has sur- population to itself, but they were unre- changed in Ceylon and strained in their destruction of priests, tem- recently M ahayana ples, and monasteries. The Buddhists were Tibet, Central and East- most susceptible because they were orga- also in China nized. The monks tended to congregate in Ch'an (or Zen), a centralized monasteries, while the Hindu Taoism. chaplains were scattered throughout the of Buddhism are more numerous than those of any other

1. William D eBary et al, eds., Sources of Indian Tradition (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, single scholar 1958), I, 140.

that were denied to any disciples. In their na compares to Theravada Catholicism compares to The Mahayana school search for enlightenment and replaces it with the bodhisattva-the savior who lightenment but rejects might help the less fortunate salvation. The development been greatly influenced by cults, and it has into its pantheon, while T vived relatively less Southeast Asia. Until flourished chiefly in ern Asia, and Vietnam, and and Japan in the form of synthesis of Mahayana and The sacred scriptures religion-so extensive that no could hope to encompass them

in a lifetime.

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Among the most important Theravada texts much of our

Christian values upon which

are the Dhammapada and The Questions of have notably

culture is based, yet which

King Menander. The latter is in the form of goals. Eastern religions,

failed to achieve their

a Platonic dialogue between a Buddhist dis- individual salva-

so the rationale goes, offer

ciple and a Greek satrap left behind in

tion through

self-improvement and lack the

Bactria by Alexander the Great. The most that is found in the

emphasis on social values

important Mahayana text is the Saddharma-

Judea-Christian tradition.

The failure of the

Pt~idarTka or The Lottts of the Trne Law . system to bring about

Judea-Christian ethical

Mahayana is the form more familiar to justice and peace is

its ideal of lasting social

Westerners, since it has had the more success- in the system

regarded as being inherent

ful publicists, and it offers a great variety of

itself, whereas if the

Oriental fai ls to achieve

wondrous tales. This form has recently en- it is his fault

the goal of enlightenment,

joyed adoption by certain segments of Amer- ican society, especially in its Tibetan or people are embrac-

alone.

J apanese (Zen) forms. Anyone who has because these represent

Doubtless many young

read a little about Buddhism will recognize the spectrum

to them the opposite end of

the names of its foremost exponents and ex- which they were

from the ethica l system in

plainers to the West: D. T. Suzuki, the late real or on ly apparent?

raised. Is this polarity

Zen patriarch, and Alan Warts, the American and Eastern reli-

If real, then are Western

philosopher and student of comparative reli- ways does a new

gio ns reconcilable) In what

gion.

re ligious, the Baha'i Faith,

reconcile them ?

A study of the genea logy of religions

EASTERN RELIGIONS, particularly Buddhism,

shows that the so-called

Eastern and Wes tern

have long held a spell of fascination for the part developed Western world. From Voltaire through Christianity grew out Schopenhauer and Hermann Hesse, European literature is full of speculation about Babi religion, and the nature of Eastern thought. American Brahmanism. This in poets such as Emerson and Thoreau have above-mentioned dabbled in Oriental mysticism, and the Western world has produced a number of point out their first-class Oriental scholars. But it is only historical roots of recently that popular interest, especially the Western religion among young people, has been aroused. The Buddhism lie among trend has yet to gain the proportions of a not mean that the mass movement, but it is evident that Oriental philosophy is being adopted uncritically Faith claims universal by certain segments of our society. transcending the Why? Partly because Oriental philosophy and West. In order has a great deal to teach us. But some let us first determine psychologists see other reasons in the lure of between the Eastern the East, nor only among so-called hippies or real or apparent. beatniks, but also among serious scholars and seem rather Western theologians. The phenomenal popularity during the late Sixties of transcendental meditation and mysticism-and of individuals such This is especially as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Ravi Shankar

religions have for the most independently. Just as of Judaism, the Baha'i Shi'ih Islam through the Buddhism grew out of no way implies that the faiths are not independent religions; the intent is only to historical connections. The the Baha'i Faith lie among religions, just as those of the Eastern, but this does Baha'i Faith in itself is outlook. Indeed, the Baha'i universality, spanning or even traditional division of East to investigate this claim, whether the differences and Western religions are At first glance it might and Eastern religions have other than the obvious common to all religions. true in the realm of

metaphysics. The West-  
-is symptomatic of a rejection of the Judea-  
closely related, with  
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great mutual influence. The religions born  
nirvarta (the "blowing-out" of the  
in India and China, on the other hand, are  
Fundamental is the doctrine of the  
not only for the most part historically sepa-  
truths: 1) life is inevitably sor-  
rate from the Western religions but also  
is due to craving, 3)  
from each other. The distance between Con-  
stopped only by cessation of  
fucianism 2 and Buddhism is greater than  
this can be accomplished only  
that between Zoroastrianism and Christiani-  
conduct and meditation.  
ty. Moreover, the Western religions are scat-  
Soul has abiding personality;  
tered through the time dimension, whereas  
transient. The station of the Soul is  
the great Eastern religions were born mostly  
to its karma (accumulation  
between 600 and 500 B.C.  
deeds) and is eternal! y reborn  
Oswald Spengler wrote, "Buddhism, which  
befits its past lives. The cycle  
only a mere dabbler in religious research  
stopped only by attaining  
would compare with Christianity, is hard ly  
extinction. This is done first by  
reproducible in the words of the Western  
views about the nature of  
Languages." :: The statement contains some  
careful moral discipline,  
truth but is greatly exaggerated. There are  
prolonged meditation.  
significant similarities between Buddhism  
the total anihilation of the  
and Christianity. Buddhism, however, has  
not thought of in negative  
been judged by some scholars to be more a  
nirvarzct is a transcendent state  
system of psychology than a religion. Much  
comprehension in which the illusion

ern religions are rather

results in

self).

four noble

rowful, 2) sorrow

sorrow can be

desire, and 4)

by disciplined

Not even the

it too is

altered according

of good or bad

in a station that

of rebirth can be

11irvaftct or

adop ting right

existence, then by

and finally by

Nirvartrt is

Self, but it is

terms. Rather

beyond

of this argument is based on the fact that is apparent. This state is not there is no trace in the Buddha's teachings of different from the supreme a "God"-at least not a personal, transcendent god in the Christian sense. This argument can be reduced to a matter of semantics: the Buddha taught the existence of communicated-or, as Baha'u'llah said, dharmct (divine law) which governs all into which the pen will not creation. His teachings all point to an eternal reality, which, although it lacks the anthropomorphic aspects of Western theism, is a reality, postulate that funyata creative force that is easily identified with emptiness) is all that exists. God. is not negative in the sense of an absence of something, but rather it is BUDDHISM TEACHES that everything in the reality and being-it is one universe is in a constant state of flux. Craving and clinging to permanence is the inevitable cause of sorrow. Salvation is found by the gradual loss of self-concern, until it "suchness"). The Void is essentially identical with the emptiness that so troubles 2. Confucianism is the most "Western" of the Eastern religions. Indeed, some scholars think it is not a religion at all, but rather just a system of ethics. Although it lacks the metaphysical aspect of religion (at least in its initial stages), it fulfills the social function of a religion. Since it theoretically allows exception

of individuality fundamentally bliss described by or Christian ble, however; it never there are regions move. The later to describe (the Void or The Void, again, the only abiding with truth, The qualities of in existence are only as Western existentialist difference, of course, Buddhists look on the existentialists with One apparent

tions to its laws, and since it was born in  
is their relative em-  
China, I include it among the Eastern religions.

3. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*  
and metaphysics. Almost  
(New York: Modern Library, 1962), p. 184.  
Western religions place  
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the primary emphasis on ethics, i.e., the  
Eastern religions tend  
individual's relation to society, while meta-  
within the human  
physics, the individual's relationship to God  
or the Cosmos, is of secondary importance.  
definition, does the  
The essence of Judaism, for example, is  
Western or an  
found in the Ten Commandments; the es-  
it a meeting ground for  
sence of Christianity in the Golden Rule and  
historical roots lie  
the Sermon on the Mount. Metaphysics has  
religions, but this, in  
little place in the original teachings of either  
the question. Speaking  
Faith. Eastern religions, with the exception of  
truth, 'Abdu'l-Baha  
Confucianism, tend to place a higher value  
on metaphysics. It may be argued that the  
divine religions is separable  
Buddha Himself rejected metaphysical specu-  
One concerns the world  
lation; nevertheless, Buddhism-and espe-  
ethical training of  
cially Mahayana-abounds in it.

directed to the ad-  
A second difference lies in the degree of  
humanity in  
social control demanded by the religion.  
and inculcates the  
Western religions are notably more authori-  
makes possible the  
tarian than their Eastern counterparts, a fact  
verities of life. This is  
which has usually given rise to a greater  
teaching, the essential

and Western religions

phasis on ethics

without exception,

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"wholly other," while

to look for the Deity

Soul.

According to this

Baha'i Faith qualify as a

Eastern religion, or is

the two traditions? Its

among the Western

itself, does not answer

of unchanging religious

writes:

... each of the

into two divisions.

of morality and the

htman nature. It is

vancement of the world of

general,- it reveals

knowledge of God and man

discovery of the

ideal and spiritual

degree of tolerance among the latter. Al- religion and not subject though the Buddhist monk is subject to the transformation. . . . The discipline of his superior, the follower who or division comprises has attained nirvana; a is subject to no authority regulations applicable to other than internal authority. He is free of not the essential concern for transgression; not even the teaching of religion. It is subject to the teachings of the Buddha bind him any longer. In transformation according to medieval Roman Catholicism, on the other requirements of time hand, every Christian, saint or sinner, - was subject to the authority of the Pope. In compare 'Abdu'l-Baha's medieval Islam the faithful, no matter how following selection from a great their state of enlightenment, were still bound by the law of the Shari'ah. At their of the mind be greatest Sr. Francis and al-Ghazali were still is it necessary to listen lesser men than Christ or Muhammad. But upon religious teachings. there is nothing to stop a Buddhist saint from nature of the intellect be equaling or even surpassing the Buddha is it necessary to seek Himself. absolution of one's sins. Nor is absolution let us tentatively define a Western religion as one which emphasizes ethics above 5 metaphysics and allows no exceptions to its laws. A Western religion, moreover, usually share a belief in their doctrine. This conceives of God as remote, unapproachable, metempsychosis is one of the 4. Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha'i Publishing Trust,

quality of divine to change or second classification social laws and human conduct. This is spiritual quality of change and the exigencies and and place. 4 It is instructive to assertion with the Tibetan Buddhist text: If the empty nature realized, no longer to or to meditate If the unsulliable realized, no longer of Mental Quiescence. Buddhism and Hinduism reincarnation as part of doctrine of major stumbling blocks to relation with Western religions.

Regarding the  
1966), p. 274.  
'Abdu'l-Baha

doctrine of reincarnation,

5. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., Tibetan Yoga and  
Secret Doctrines (New York: Galaxy Books, writes:  
1967), p. 88.

Therefore reincarnation,

which is the re-

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peated appearance of the same spirit with transmigrating! " 8  
its former essence and condition in this (The Questions of King  
Menander)

same world of appearance, is impossible The apparent differences  
between Eastern and Western religions can be  
and unrealisable. 6 summed up by

Is reincarnation a basic doctrine of the two comparing the purported last  
instructions of the Buddha with one of the  
greatest Eastern religions-one on which Hidden Words

there can be no compromise? The Buddhist of Baha'u'llah :  
scholar, Alan Watts, thinks not :

Many Buddhists understand the Round of The  
birth-and-death quite literally as a process Buddha:

of reincarnation, wherein the karma which So, Ananda, you must  
be your own lamps,

shapes the individual does so again and be your own refuges. Take  
refuge in nothing

again in life after life until, through outside yourselves. Hold  
firm to the truth as

insight and awakening, it is laid to rest. a lamp and a refuge, and  
do not look for

refuge for anything besides yourselves. A continually looking on  
But in Zen, and in other schools of the monk becomes his own lamp and refuge by  
Mahayana, it is often taken in a more his body, feelings,

figurative way, as that the process of perceptions, moods, and ideas  
in such a man-

rebirth is from moment to moment, so ner that he conquers the  
cravings and depressions of ordinary men and

that one is being reborn so long as one is always strenu-

ous, self-possessed, and collected in mind.

identifies himself with a continuing ego

! However among my monks does this, either

which reincarnates itself afresh at each now or when I am dead, if  
 he is anxious to learn , will reach the  
 moment of time. Thus the validity and summit.D  
 interest of the doctrine does not require ( Digha  
 Nikaya)  
 acceptance of a special theory of survival. 7  
 Bahi'u'llah:  
 O SON OF SPIRIT! There is no peace for  
 This view is supported by the Theravada rhee save by renouncing  
 thyself and turning  
 scnprnes: un ro Me, for it  
 behoveth thee to glory in My  
 "Reverend Nagasena," said the King, name, not in rhine own; ro  
 put th y trust in  
 Me and nor in th yself, since I des ire to be  
 "is it true that nothing transmigrates, and  
 loved alone and above all that is.10  
 yet there is rebirth?"  
 "Yes, your Majesty."  
 "How can this be? . . . Give me an  
 illustration." Can these be reconciled?  
 Yes. The Buddha  
 "Suppose, your Majesty, a man lights direm his disciples to look  
 within for guid-  
 one lamp from another-does the one ance, while Baha'u'llah  
 counsels us to re-  
 lamp transmigrate to the other? " nounce ourselves and cling to  
 the Absolute.  
 "No, your Reverence." In reality their advice is the  
 same. Baha-  
 "So there is rebirth without anything 'u'll ah writes:  
 Thou art My stronghold; enter therein  
 that thott mayest abide in safety. My love  
 6. 'Abdu' l-Baha; Some Answered Questions is in thee, know it,  
 that thou mayest  
 (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha'i Publishing Trust,  
 1964),p. 326. find Me near unto thee  
 . . . Thou art My  
 7. Alan W. Wans, Th e Way of Z en (New York: lamp and My light is  
 in thee. Get thou  
 Vinrage, 195 7), p. 49. from it thy radiance  
 and seek none oth-  
 8. D eBary, p. 106.  
 9. Ibid., p. 110. er than Me. 11  
 10. Baha'i Wo rld Faith, pp. 156- 57. Thus we are to approach  
 the Absolute by

11. Baha'u'llah, The Hidden Words (Wilmette, Ill. : Baha'i Publishing Committee, 1954) , p. means of a paradox, renouncing the ego

6. ("the cravings and depressions of ordinary

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men") while obtaining our light from the different from other men; only quantitatively

lamp of Truth within us. Nirv@:ta, the ex- hence all men are

potentially divine. To the tinction of self which may occur in life, is Buddhist, the Buddha is not

the infallible incarnation of God's Truth, but rather only

••• that tho It mayest die in Me and I may the most illustrious of a long line of en-

eternally live in thee." 12 lightened men. In Islam, Judaism, and

Here we may dispose of one of the crucial Catholic Christianity, the individual con-

differences-the internal versus the external science must submit to the law of the proph-

Truth. The dichotomy is false; they are one. et or the will of the Church; in the Eastern

What about the difference in emphasis on religions the ultimate authority is internal.

ethics and metaphysics? Again, it is only a The only way to resolve this difference is

semantical difficulty. Only in theory do the to consider the society in which a religion is

Eastern religions assign ethics a lesser degree born. The societies which gave birth to

of importance. In reality, the saint or the Buddhism and Hinduism were extremely

enlightened man cannot help behaving with heterogeneous, even more so than they are

compassion toward his fellow creatures. His today . If a religion had arisen which de-

motivation is internal, but it is binding. manded submission to a single religious

Hence, the Buddhist scriptures stress the authority, it would almost certainly have

moral qualities that a monk must possess- failed . Hinduism, to be sure, demanded sub-

moral qualities which are usually more de- mission to the brahmin

caste, but mobility  
 manding than those required by the Western and heterodoxy were allowed  
 to a far greater  
 religions. Although enlightenment is of pri- extent in ancient India than  
 most people  
 mary importance, and ethics secondary, they suppose. The ancient Jews,  
 or the Arabs of  
 go hand in hand and are actually inseparable. the seventh century A.D. for  
 that matter,  
 The dichotomy between ethics and metaphys- were a far more homogeneous  
 society; there-  
 ics, then, is also false-they are one. We fore it was possible (and  
 indeed advanta-  
 must not conclude from this that those with geous) for them to submit to  
 a single  
 no interest in metaphysics cannot be ethical religious authority-Moses or  
 Mul:iammad.  
 -atheists, for instance. All ethical systems Societies were  
 relatively isolated from  
 are internally, therefore metaphysically, mo- each other in the ancient  
 world; hence some  
 tivated , whether or not one chooses to call could allow themselves the  
 luxury of having  
 the motivation God. no external religious  
 authority. Today our  
 One crucial difference remains-the ques- world is so tightly knit, however,  
 that the  
 tion of social control. This is a more difficult smallest social shock  
 reverberates throughout  
 question to resolve, and here the difference the globe. The need for  
 unity is urgent, and  
 between the Eastern outlook and the West- unity of Faith is not  
 possible without spiritual  
 ern appears to be more real than apparent. authority. The luxury of an  
 autonomous  
 As we have seen, in Western religions every conscience can no longer be  
 afforded.  
 believer, without exception, is subject to the  
 law of the prophet, but this is not true of AN ORIENTAL, then, can  
 accept the Baha'i  
 Eastern religions. The reason lies in the Faith without rejecting the  
 essential philoso-  
 Western view of the prophet as qualitatively phy behind his own religious  
 tradition.  
 different from the rest of mankind-a Being Baha'u'llah places more  
 emphasis on social  
 especially favored by God and hence unap- teachings than did the

Buddha, but there is  
 proachable, or, in Christianity, one with God no evidence of any  
 contradiction between the  
 Himself. But to the Oriental the prophet is essential teachings of the  
 Buddha and those  
 of Baha'u'llah. Western religions have not  
 12. Ibid., p. 5. been notably successful in  
 the East, since they

””””

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usually demand a rejection of tradition from His body is eighty  
 cubits high, and twenty  
 the convert. The Baha'i Faith, however, offers cubits broad. He will  
 have a retinue of  
 to the Oriental more freedom than the West- 84,000 persons, whom he  
 will instruct in  
 ern religions. Except for the few laws bind- the mantras ... For  
 60,000 years Maitreya,  
 ing upon all Baha'is, the Oriental is free, the best of men, will  
 preach the true  
 even encouraged, to revere his own culture Dharma, which is  
 compassionate towards  
 and follow his own customs. The validity of all living beings. And  
 when he has disci-  
 his former religion is not denied. In this plined in his true  
 Dharma hundreds and  
 sense the Baha'i Faith is neither a Western hundreds of millions of  
 living beings, then  
 nor an Eastern religion but rather a point of that leader will at last  
 enter Nirvana. And  
 convergence. after the great sage has  
 entered Nirvana,  
 Moreover, the Buddhist is able to turn to his true Dharma still  
 endures for another  
 the Baha'i Faith as the fulfillment of his ten thousand years. 1 3  
 beliefs. Buddhism, like many other religions, I have, however, found  
 one Buddhist tradi-  
 has an apocalyptic tradition and expects the tion that suggests that the  
 age in which we  
 return of its Founder, although there is evi- live will be the beginning  
 of a regeneration  
 dence that this concept arose much later than of the human spirit. The  
 Japanese Buddhist  
 the Buddha's lifetime and is not attributable monk Nichiren (1222-1282)  
 preached  
 to him. The Mahayana scriptures abound in apocalyptic ideas based on

historical cycles

references to the Maitreya, the Buddha of the Buddhism. According to Future, the Expected One. Some Mahayana sects regard this return as only of the spirit of death was followed, the Buddha, not the actual physical presence of Sakyamuni, the Historical Buddha, since he attained nirvana and is therefore lost to us. This makes it easier for many Buddhists. Historically this corresponds to accept the appearance of the Maitreya in Mahayana, which circumstances other than those which are approaching traditional. Buddhahood through the Buddha's images, Bahá'ís are familiar with the claims of Bahá'u'lláh to be the return of the spirit of "destruction of the law," Christ and Muhammad. But few Bahá'ís in the Western world understand in what sense Buddhism concerned Bahá'u'lláh may also be seen as the Maitreya. The Buddhist canon yields no specific predictions that might be interpreted as referring to Bahá'u'lláh, as do Biblical references or Muslim traditions. Some of the references to Maitreya are obviously allegorical, even fantastic. Witness the following scripture in which the Maitreya is expected some thirty thousand years after the death of the historical religion which is

drawn from Chinese Chinese chronology, the death of the Buddha occurred in 947 B.C. His death was followed, according to Nichiren, by the "true law." About the Christianity, the second "image" law began. sponds with the rise of places great emphasis on the bodhisattvas. According to last phase, the began about 1000 A.D. with Tantrism, the form of with magic and spells. This thousand years, and so a hand-an era characterized return to the "true law." era as a time when a holy the center of the world, religious symbol) will spirit. Nichiren's teachings of Soka Gokkai, a

cal Buddha: currently growing rapidly

in Japan. 1 4

Baha'u'llah, then, may be accepted as the

13. Edward Conze, Buddhist Scriptures (New York: Penguin, 1959), pp. 240-41. Maitreya awaited by the  
Buddhists, in that

He is the "Bringer of a New  
Law," "One who

14. Harry Thomsen, The New Religions of Japan

Brings Peace," and "One who Enlightens and

(Rutland, Vt.: Chas. E. Tuttle Co., 1963),

p. 92. Unites the World."

— Buddhism and the Bahá'í Faith (Used by permission of the curator)