

Hinduism and Christianity in the Healthcare Setting

Almira Factora

Alliance University

NUR 301: Worldview Perspectives: The Christian Nurse

Dr. Elenice Lima

April 24, 2023

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Introduction

What is the purpose of life? What happens after death? Is there an all-powerful being watching over you? The answers to these questions vary from religion to religion and have a large influence on how someone might view their own life, other people's lives, and the world. These different belief systems serve as the foundation for guiding principles one might follow as they trek through life. All decisions in life are made based off a set of beliefs. This is especially evident in the healthcare setting where life and death are often taken into consideration. Practice and belief in different religions impact decisions made in health care. In this essay, I will describe the differences between two such religions, Hinduism and Christianity, and discuss how these two belief systems affect decision making in health care setting.

Hinduism is one the world's oldest and major religions, after Christianity and Islam. It originated in India, comprising varied systems of philosophy, belief, and ritual, to help people live a virtuous and disciplined life. In Hinduism, there is no one founder and no organizational hierarchy; rather, Hinduism incorporates a complex and diverse range of beliefs and practices. Hinduism practices monotheism (belief in on God) as well as polytheism (belief in many Gods). The main characteristic of Hinduism is its openness to new ideas. It allows complete freedom of belief and worship, and allows personal growth to develop on their own timing.

What is God?

In Hinduism, 333 million gods are recognized and it is described as monotheistic as well as polytheistic. Different Hindu communities worship different gods, however, many believe that Brahman is the Supreme being, ever-present and all-powerful, and the foundation of all existence. Many Hindus also believe and worship three Hindu gods. The Hindu trinity comprises

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Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The three gods are manifestations of Brahman, and each have their own role in the universe. Brahma is the god of creation, Vishnu is the god of sustenance, and Shiva is the god of destruction. Hinduism recognizes that God can be represented in different forms, therefore, there are different ways to reach God and earn salvation. In the Biblical worldview, there is only one true God, and He is the beginning and the end. God created heaven and earth and everything in it (Act 17: 24-25). The trinity in Christianity consists of three Persons in one God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are all equal and share the same attributes – God is never changing, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent, and God is faithful.

What is a person?

According to Hinduism, all humans are born with specific duties and obligations, and that each person is to fulfill their own duties. This is known as svadharma, which means “own dharma”, and translates to “own duty”. In order to flourish as a society, each individual must fulfill their own dharma, or duties, according to their class or caste and stage of life. The duties are specific and unique to an individual as a result of karma, the person’s actions in a previous life, right conduct, righteous living, and moral law. Hindus also believe in reincarnation, which is related to karma. For example, if a person lives an honest life, then they will have positive karma in their next life. In Christianity, God made man in His own image in the form of body, soul and spirit (Genesis 2:7). The human body was made out of the dust of the ground, the soul was created by the power of God’s word, and the spirit was given by God’s own life or breath. However, man by nature is sinful, and all humans have sinned. Salvation is received through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God has given man the free gift of eternal life. Through repentance and faith, the individual is saved from the penalty of separation from God (John 3:16).

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What is health or well-being; What is nurse or care?

The concept of health and well-being in Hinduism revolves around Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. Dharma is a sense of goodness, balance, and universal well-being. Artha is a sense of security and material prosperity. Kama is a sense of mental and physical happiness. Moksha is a sense of wholeness. These are four life goals that allow the individual to grow and evolve. In regards to the concept of nursing and care, during an illness, it is important to be aware that Hinduism seeks to restore the balance between the body, mind, and soul. A sick individual may seek healing through prayer, meditation, or traditional medicine or practices (Shukla, 2022). In the Biblical worldview, Jesus Christ cared for the sick and brought healing to every person asking for it. Jesus Christ's miraculous healings were revelations of God's power – those who believed received healing, while those who did not missed the full potential of God's power. Christians do not turn a blind eye to the reality of disease and suffering. Christians acknowledge the ups and downs of being well, and trust that God will heal, strengthen and never forsake them (Isaiah 41:10, Grundman, 2014).

How does each world view affect the patient's health and decision making?

As stated earlier, different religions impact decisions made in healthcare. Hinduism and Christianity can affect a patient's health and decision making; therefore, it is important for nurses and other health care providers to be aware of and respect the beliefs, norms and values of their patients. In Hinduism, the patient is not autonomous, that is, he or she do not have the right to make ethical decision on his or her own. Rather, because of the holistic approach in Hinduism, the family, culture, and environment play a strong influence in the patient's decision making, including informed consent (Coward, 2000). When providing care for these patients, it is

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important for nurses and providers to know the patient's preferences. Hindus rely on traditional forms of wellness and healing, such as Ayurveda and Siddha medicine. The purpose of Ayurveda is to practice a daily routine of diet and physical activity to maintain balance in the body and mind. Siddha medicine also aims to correct imbalances in the body and mind (Shukla, 2022). In the Biblical worldview, Christians seek God through daily prayer and scripture reading to help get through hardships and sickness. God wants those who are sick to depend on Him for healing and strength (Jeremiah 33:6). When it comes to ethical decision-making regarding health care, Christians are also called to believe in the wisdom and authority of God. Christians seek God's will and obey His commandments.

It is also important for nurses to know how to provide end of life care. This includes providing physical, emotional, social and spiritual support for the patient and their family. In Hinduism, the patient or the patient's caregiver may request for the patient to be rested on a certain position at the time of death. This is due to their belief that the deity of death provides a protective covering over the dead, and moves in the North-South direction. Thus, the dying person's head should face the North and the toes face the South (Chandratre & Soman, 2022). Nurses must be aware of the rituals and ceremonies during the dying phase and at the time of death, and ensure that the family has privacy during this time. In the Biblical worldview, just as Jesus accepted his death and because of the belief that there is eternal life in heaven, there is peace and confidence in the Christians' journey towards the end of life. Christians believe that whatever happens to their physical body, before or after death, nothing will affect their relationship with God (Choudry et al., 2018). Similar to Hinduism, nurses should also be sensitive to the spiritual needs of the Christian patients.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this paper discussed the two different worldviews of Hinduism and Christianity. The different beliefs, values, and traditions were explored for each religion and we see the unique characteristics that can influence a Hindu or a Christian's decision making in life or in healthcare. A nurse must always respect and be sensitive to the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of his or her patients.

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