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Religious Perspectives on Self-Compassion in Positive Psychology: Insights from Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism

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ABSTRACT

Self-compassion, a concept increasingly popular in positive psychology, is often viewed from a secular perspective despite its deep roots in religious and philosophical traditions. This paper explores self-compassion within the theological, ethical, and spiritual frameworks of four major religions: Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Drawing on sacred texts, doctrinal teachings, and religious practices, the study demonstrates how these faiths not only reflect but also extend Kristin Neff's model of self-compassion, which includes self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Each religion offers unique insights—Islam emphasises divine mercy and repentance; Christianity concentrates on grace, forgiveness, and transformation; Buddhism integrates loving-kindness and the universality of suffering; and Hinduism grounds compassion in the sacred self and the principles of karma and non-violence. The findings suggest that religious teachings frame self-compassion not merely as a psychological concept, but as a moral and spiritual obligation. This integration enriches the understanding of self-compassion and offers practical implications for culturally and spiritually sensitive mental health practices.

Keywords: *Self-compassion, Positive Psychology, Religious Perspectives, Mental Health, Mindfulness*

INTRODUCTION

Self-love, my liege, is not as vile a sin as self-neglecting (Shakespeare, 1599/2015, Act 2.4:73,74). This quote challenges the misconception that self-compassion is merely indulgent, emphasising that it is an essential part of life. Despite its recent popularity in positive psychology, the idea of self-compassion has long been present in literature, religion, and philosophical thought (Neff, 2003).

According to Neff (2016), self-compassion is a multifaceted concept comprising six elements that maintain balance in the face of suffering: self-kindness versus self-judgement, a sense of shared humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification. In essence, it involves increasing self-kindness, recognising common humanity, and practising mindfulness, while reducing self-judgement, feelings of isolation, and over-identification.

Self-compassion can be expressed differently depending on one's goal: being gentle and nurturing when aiming to promote self-acceptance or alleviate negative emotions, or being proactive, assertive, and decisive when the goal is to protect oneself, meet basic needs, or drive change (Neff, 2021). Self-compassion exists on a bipolar continuum, ranging from uncompassionate self-responding (UCS) to compassionate self-responding (CS) during times

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of hardship (Neff, 2022).

Research on self-compassion indicates a strong association with well-being (Lee et al., 2021; Neff, 2022; Phillips & Hine, 2021; Shamsul Amri et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2022; Zessin et al., 2015). It also has a negative relationship with adverse mental states such as depression, anxiety, stress, psychological distress, and suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Helminen et al., 2023; Hughes et al., 2021; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Marsh et al., 2018; Suh & Jeong, 2021). Furthermore, studies have found that self-compassion is positively linked to happiness, life satisfaction, optimism, and adaptive coping (Bag et al., 2022; Ewert et al., 2021; Pastore et al., 2023).

Self-compassion in the context of positive psychology

Positive psychology emphasises human strengths, well-being, and flourishing rather than pathology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Within this framework, self-compassion is a key pathway to resilience and emotional stability. Neff's (2003) model aligns closely with the aims of positive psychology as it promotes adaptive responses to suffering through self-kindness, recognition of shared humanity, and mindfulness. Numerous empirical studies have shown that self-compassion enhances subjective well-being, life satisfaction, optimism, and coping skills while reducing anxiety, depression, and stress (Bag et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2021; Neff, 2022; Phillips & Hine, 2021). Therefore, self-compassion can be regarded as both a preventive and a restorative mechanism within positive psychology, fostering acceptance and motivation for personal growth.

By placing this concept within positive psychology, the present paper connects scientific and spiritual traditions, showing how religious worldviews can enhance our understanding of the role of self-compassion in human flourishing.

Although many religious teachings emphasise principles closely related to self-compassion, such as kindness, empathy, understanding, acceptance, patience, and forgiveness towards oneself (Gilbert & Irons, 2005; Koenig, 2012), research on self-compassion has long focused on a secular psychological perspective. Religion can significantly influence how individuals perceive suffering, derive meaning from adversity, and develop coping mechanisms consistent with their beliefs. Therefore, a deeper and broader understanding can be gained by examining self-compassion through a religious lens. This paper aims to bridge the gap by exploring how different religions, particularly the four major faiths, conceptualise and practise self-compassion from a religious standpoint. In doing so, it also seeks to assist professionals in working more effectively with adherents of these religious traditions.

Emerging insights on religious belief and self-compassion

Although research from a secular psychology perspective has largely dominated self-compassion literature, recent years have seen an increasing number of studies exploring how religious beliefs and practices may relate to self-compassion. These studies provide valuable insights into how religious individuals may differ in their experiences and practices of self-compassion compared to their non-religious counterparts. Several studies have identified a positive correlation between religiosity, spirituality, and self-compassion (Bodok-Mulderij et al., 2023; Ghorbani et al., 2017), and have shown that religious people tend to feel more connected when engaging with their religion (Brodar et al., 2015). Similarly, self-compassion among religious individuals correlates with the duration and frequency of their religious practices, such as prayer and meditation (de Souza et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, some studies suggest that how an individual interprets their faith or relationship with God plays a more significant role. For instance, Homan (2014) found that low self-compassion was associated with insecure attachment to God. As such, those who perceive God as compassionate, nurturing, and accepting are more likely to extend the same compassion towards themselves. In contrast, those who see God as dismissive or punitive may adopt the same attitude towards themselves. Religiosity is associated with emotional experiences and engagement with religion, as well as with perceptions of God and self-compassion (Brodar et al., 2015; Exline et al., 2000, 2015). This demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between religion and self-compassion, as an individual's religious interpretations and emotional perspective are just as important as their actual religiosity.

However, despite this progress, research on self-compassion still tends to neglect how different religions conceptualise and teach self-compassion through their sacred texts, theological doctrines and practices. Hence, the following section explores how the four main religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity approach the idea of self-compassion.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a qualitative, conceptual, literature-based approach. Instead of collecting empirical data, the study synthesises insights from religious scriptures, theological writings, and scholarly literature to explore how four major religions—Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism—conceptualise and practise self-compassion. The analysis adopted an interpretive comparison method guided by Neff's (2003, 2016) tripartite model of self-compassion, comprising self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Each religion's teachings, practices, and philosophical principles were mapped onto these three components to identify similarities, differences, and unique theological extensions. Primary sources such as the Qur'an, the Bible, the Dhammapada, and the Bhagavad Gita, as well as secondary sources such as peer-reviewed articles and doctrinal commentaries, were examined. This interpretative synthesis approach fosters an integrated understanding that links psychological and spiritual paradigms, ensuring analytical rigour and relevance across disciplines.

FINDINGS

Religious Perspectives

Islam

In Islam, the term 'self-compassion' is not explicitly mentioned in the religious scriptures, but the Qur'an and Hadith do reference its attributes. Concepts such as compassion, mercy, forgiveness, repentance, reliance on God, and mindfulness are deeply rooted in Islamic doctrine and the life of a Muslim. Of the 99 names of God in the Islamic belief system, Al-Rahman (The Most Compassionate) and Al-Rahim (The Most Merciful) are the ones mentioned at the beginning of all but one chapter (surah) in the Qur'an. In fact, *Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim*, which means "to begin in the name of Allah Who is Most Compassionate and Most Merciful," is recited by Muslims at the start of all endeavours. It highlights the central role of divine compassion and mercy in Islam, applying to all humankind and the self (Malik, 2024).

The Qur'an emphasises that humans are inherently imperfect and prone to mistakes, yet always deserving of God's mercy and forgiveness. This is illustrated in Surah An-Nisa, "And it is Allah's Will to lighten your burdens, for humankind was created weak" (4:28), and Surah

Az-Zumar, "Say, O Prophet, that Allah says, 'O My servants who have exceeded the limits against their souls! Do not lose hope in Allah's mercy, for Allah certainly forgives all sins. He is indeed the All-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (39:53). It encourages believers to show the same kindness that God grants them, to seek forgiveness, and to keep moving forward instead of dwelling on self-blame. Muslims are advised not to give up or fall into despair, as their personal faults do not diminish their value in God's eyes. This approach exceeds Neff's model by grounding self-kindness in divine mercy rather than in human reasoning or emotional control. By cultivating self-compassion through forgiveness, individuals create a psychological space for emotional recovery (Venkatesh, 2024).

Similarly, the concepts of *tawbah* (repentance) and *tawakkul* (reliance on God) in Islam also emphasise accountability without dwelling on excessive self-blame or condemnation. *Tawbah* is regarded in Islamic psychology as a therapeutic approach to overcoming guilt and promoting mental healing (Rasool et al., 2024). The Qur'an strongly emphasises that God is always willing to forgive (*maghfirah*) or pardon (*afw*) His people, alleviating the mental burden of guilt. By seeking repentance, Muslims find peace, emotional relief, and the confidence to move forward in life without the weight of past transgressions. Rather than being trapped in a cycle of self-blame and shame, it encourages self-improvement. Meanwhile, *tawakkul* involves relying on God while taking the necessary steps to achieve goals; it balances a degree of passivity with proactive effort (Bano et al., 2025), similar to the idea of self-compassion, which acknowledges and accepts suffering while actively working to alleviate it. These perspectives align with the psychological concept of self-compassion, which involves an accepting, non-judgmental, and supportive attitude towards oneself rather than harsh self-blame during difficult times.

Islamic teachings also embody the idea of shared humanity through the concept of ummah, the global Muslim community united as one body. The hadith reported by Al-Nu'man ibn Bashir stated that:

> *The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, 'The parable of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever.' (Sahih al-Bukhari, 6011; Sahih Muslim, 2586)*

It essentially explains the interconnectedness of believers and how pain is a shared, collective experience. Verses in the Qur'an that depict the universality of human suffering include Surah Al-Balad, "Indeed, we have created humankind in constant struggle" (90:4), and Surah Al-Baqarah, "We will certainly test you with a touch of fear and famine and loss of property, life, and crops. Give good news to those who patiently endure" (2:155). It emphasises that suffering is not personal and can also help to cultivate *sabr* (patience).

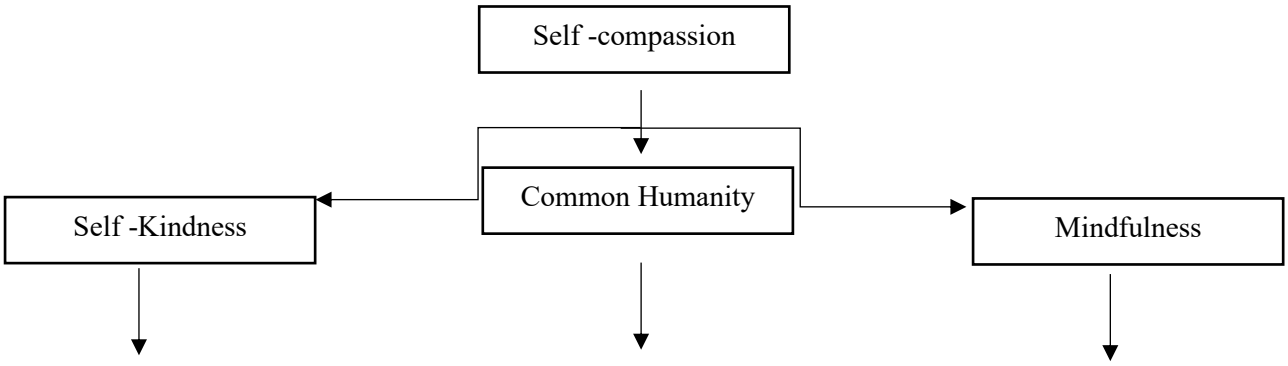
Moreover, mindfulness, a key component of self-compassion, has been practised by Muslims for centuries and can be regarded as a fundamental aspect of Islamic faith. The Islamic term for mindfulness is muraqabah, meaning "maintaining a constant awareness of Allah (SWT) throughout prayer and daily life." It involves paying close attention to one's thoughts, behaviours, and intentions, with a deep awareness of the consequences of one's actions (Aldbyani, 2025). Practices such as *zikr* (remembrance of God), du'a' (supplication), and salat (prayer) may serve to incorporate mindfulness into a Muslim's life. By regularly engaging in these practices, believers can find comfort, an opportunity to sit with their thoughts and feelings, acknowledge their difficulties, and build a gentler relationship with themselves.

Previous studies have shown that positive religious coping, such as prayer, correlates with higher levels of well-being among Muslims. In contrast, negative religious coping strategies, like feeling guilty, are linked to distress and psychological turmoil (Javaid et al., 2024). Faith can serve as a source of healing in Islam when viewed compassionately, promoting humility, acceptance, and personal growth, all rooted in divine mercy.

Islam underscores a distinct moral and religious imperative for self-compassion that extends beyond Neff's approach. Besides being emotionally harmful, it is also spiritually frowned upon to give up, harm oneself, or dwell in guilt. Therefore, self-compassion becomes an act of faith and enables one to imitate the qualities of a compassionate God.

See Figure 1 for an illustration of self-compassion and its three components across religious perspectives. The former discussion deliberates on Islam, whilst the subsequent paragraphs discuss other religions, including Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism

Figure 1: Conceptual diagram illustrating self-compassion and its three components across religious perspectives.



Islam	***Christianity***	***Buddhism***	***Hinduism***
Divine mercy & forgiveness (Rahmah, Tawbah)	Grace & forgiveness through redemption	Metta (loving-kindness) & Karuna (compassion)	Ahimsa (non-violence) and Atman (divine self)

Islam	***Christianity***	***Buddhism***	***Hinduism***
Ummah – collective unity & shared pain	Shared suffering of humanity through Christ	Dukkha – universality of suffering (Four Noble Truths)	Karma – moral cause and effect connecting all beings

Islam	***Christianity***	***Buddhism***	***Hinduism***
Muraqabah-mindfulness in daily life (Zikr, Du'a)	Contemplative prayer & meditation	Sati – mindfulness in Noble Eightfold Path	Samatva & Dhyana-balanced and mindful life

Christianity

Self-compassion is not explicitly mentioned in religious scriptures, but Christian values such as divine love, mercy, forgiveness, redemption, and transformation may be closely connected to it. Compassion has been a central theme in Christian theology, and compassion for others is linked to compassion for oneself. This is reflected in the scripture verse "Love your neighbour as yourself" (James 2:8; Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:31; Romans 13:9). According to Thomas Aquinas, one of the most influential theologians, we should show more compassion to our spiritual nature than to others to empathise and offer compassion (Barad, 2007). This centres around the idea that compassion for others may be difficult without a healthy psyche or soul. Barad supported this by stating that "How can one give what one does not have? To show compassion to another, a person must first love herself. In fact, our compassion for others is derived from our love and compassion for ourselves" (p.27). Therefore, within Christian thought, caring for oneself is fundamental to leading a compassionate life.

Moreover, Aquinas also used the word misericordia (mercy) as a synonym for compassion (Barad, 2007). Christian doctrine centres on God's grace and mercy toward humankind. The Bible clearly states that everyone sins and falls short of God's glory (Romans 3:23), separating us from Him, but it does not define the whole nature of a person's identity. The very next verse explains that God's grace, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, has made it possible for humankind to be declared righteous and sinless (Romans 3:24). Furthermore, the verse "but God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8) emphasises the idea that God loves humans as they are. It is not about deserving or earning love through one's efforts or actions. The concept here is that individuals should confront their shortcomings not with constant judgment but with the same grace, forgiveness, and kindness that God extends to them.

An example of an incident in the Bible that illustrates how God doesn't allow one to dwell in shame and guilt is the story of Peter. Peter, one of Jesus's disciples who boasted about his loyalty to Him (John 13:37), only to later deny knowing Him three times on the same night (John 18:15-18;25-27). Afterwards, Peter was said to have wept bitterly (Matthew 26:75). However, Jesus didn't leave Peter to wallow in his guilt and self-pity; instead, after His resurrection, Peter was given the chance to affirm his love three times (John 21:15-19), and he went on to preach the gospel. The story of the Prodigal Son in the Bible also demonstrates this (Luke 15:11-32). These narratives emphasise redemptive transformation.

The element of common humanity in self-compassion is also reflected in Christian doctrine through the life of Jesus Christ. Christians believe Jesus is both God and man, experiencing all the ordinary, non-sinful limitations of humanity (Colossians 2:9). The Bible describes him as having experienced hunger (Matthew 4:2), thirst (John 4:7; 19:28), tiredness (John 4:6), sorrow (Matthew 26:37), shedding tears (Hebrews 5:7; John 11:35), and dying brutally (Isaiah 53:3-12). In this sense, one is not alone in their suffering or trials and tribulations of life, as Jesus suffered too. These experiences also affirm his identification with human suffering. He can sympathise with people's suffering because he's gone through it all as well. The concept of common humanity is embedded in his life through shared suffering, solidarity, compassion, and unwavering presence with those who struggle, serving as a reminder to his followers.

Meanwhile, the idea of mindfulness also resonates within Christian spiritual practice. In Christianity, mindfulness is understood as "about making time to turn our whole attention

to God so that we can hear and abide in his voice above the chatter and stress of our lives" (Trammel & Trent, 2021, p. 17). Christians have practised mindfulness for centuries through meditation, prayer, and contemplation. Modern monastic traditions in Christianity, such as Contemplative Prayer and Lectio Divina, emphasise meditation, stillness, and silence (Trammel & Trent, 2021). Therefore, the practice of mindfulness in Christianity is closely connected to self-compassion.

In summary, although the explicit term 'self-compassion' does not appear in Christian scripture, it is reflected in Christian theological values and practices such as divine grace, mercy, and mindful attentiveness. Self-compassion in Christianity can be seen as an act of receiving grace, of allowing oneself to be seen, forgiven, and transformed by divine love. It broadens Neff's framework by including a covenantal relationship with God.

Buddhism

The idea of self-compassion originates from Buddhist philosophy, which emphasises compassion for others (Neff, 2003). In Buddhism, developing metta (loving-kindness) and karuna (compassion), directed both inwardly towards oneself and outwardly towards all beings, is closely linked to self-compassion (Trang, 2025). The Karaniya Metta Sutta also references self-compassion through the verse, "so one should cultivate this boundless love to all that live in the whole universe" (Sutta Nipata 1.8), which includes oneself.

The first of the Four Brahma Vihara meditation techniques that Buddha taught to foster positive emotions is called metta bhavana, followed by karuna (compassion), mudita (joyful appreciation), and uppekha (equanimity) (Feldman, 2017). Metta bhavana, also known as the meditation of loving-kindness, is a fundamental practice in Buddhism. It begins by cultivating warm, compassionate thoughts for oneself before gradually extending them to others. In this way, loving-kindness serves as the foundation for cultivating compassion. Moreover, research supports this, as loving-kindness meditation has been found to calm the inner critic, reduce self-criticism, and boost self-acceptance (Shahar et al., 2015). Some verses in the Dhammapada also reflect on the concept of self-compassion, such as "He should do himself as he would advise another (to do), being well-trained, he could surely train (another), for it is said the self is difficult to train" (V. 159), "For the self is the friend of self, for what other friend would there be? When the self is well-trained, one finds a friend that is hard to find" (V. 160), and "One should not neglect one's own good for another's, however great; knowing what is good for oneself one should be intent on that good" (V. 166).

Buddhist teachings also relate to self-compassion through the concept of dukkha (suffering). Dukkha is one of the Four Noble Truths taught by Buddha, which recognises that suffering is an inevitable aspect of life (Samyutta Nikaya 56.11). Buddhism encourages individuals to accept suffering with gentle awareness rather than denying or resisting it. Buddhism views suffering as a path that leads towards liberation. Since suffering is seen as universal, one can release feelings of isolation and embrace shared humanity.

Mindfulness (sati) is deeply rooted in Buddhism, as modern mindfulness originates from Buddhist philosophy. It is described in the Noble Eightfold Path, a set of practices in Buddhism aimed at achieving enlightenment. According to Van Gordon et al. (2015), mindfulness is the seventh element of the path and is part of the interconnected components that work together to achieve Buddhism's ultimate goal: the ending of suffering. Mindfulness is practised by carefully observing the body (kaya), feelings or sensations (vedana), mind or consciousness (citta), and mental objects or phenomena (dhamma). Therefore, the aspect of

self-compassion that involves maintaining balanced awareness of unpleasant feelings is closely linked to mindfulness in Buddhism.

One of Buddhism's notable teachings is the concept of anatta (non-self). They hold that there is no permanent soul or self that defines one's fundamental essence, since humans are bundles of psychophysical processes (kandhas) that are subject to constant change and impermanence (Segall & Kristeller, 2023; Williams, 2000). While Buddhism teaches that clinging to a fixed self is the source of suffering, Neff's approach still depends on a coherent sense of self to direct compassion. Therefore, self-compassion in Buddhism can be paradoxical.

Buddhism provides a broad framework for addressing personal difficulties through kindness, patience, and nonjudgmental awareness, rooted in its teachings on the universality of suffering, mindfulness of experience, and the intentional cultivation of loving-kindness. Self-compassion in this context differs from Neff's approach, as it has a more transcendental goal (nirvana), viewing it as a means to escape the cycles of suffering and rebirth rather than merely to enhance well-being.

Hinduism

Hinduism offers a nuanced and comprehensive view of the self that naturally encourages compassion. While the term self-compassion is not explicitly stated in Hindu scriptures, the concepts of kindness, acceptance, and inner peace remain central to their teachings. A solid framework for understanding self-compassion is presented by the concepts of atman (the true self), karma (action and consequence), ahimsa (nonviolence), and samatva (equanimity).

One of the primary philosophical schools of Hinduism, Advaita Vedanta, asserts that the individual self (Atman) is not separate from the ultimate reality (Brahman) (Vedanta Society, 2002). Brahman is another term for the concept of God, the Divine, or the Absolute. This non-dualistic philosophy is described as "That which is the finest essence—this whole world has that as its Self. That is Reality. That is Atman (Self). That art thou (Tat Tvam Asi), Śvetaketu" (Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7). From this perspective, all beings are ultimately manifestations of a single divine nature. This insight reinforces the belief that one is inherently deserving of compassion, regardless of external circumstances, and fosters a deep sense of inner dignity (Aithal & Ramanathan, 2024). Furthermore, the atman is described as eternal, pure, and unaffected by suffering (Bhagavad Gita 2:20). This viewpoint encourages individuals to look beyond their temporary setbacks and hardships and recognise their enduring worth. Consequently, people are encouraged to cultivate a kind, forgiving attitude towards themselves by connecting with the eternal self rather than transient worldly experiences. In Hinduism, self-compassion enables one to recognise the divine within.

The Hindu scripture also underscores the importance of self-care and mental growth. This is demonstrated in the verse, "One should elevate oneself by oneself self, One should not ever lower oneself, And surely self alone is one's friend, And self alone is one's enemy." (Bhagavad Gita 6:5). It highlights the idea that taking responsibility for oneself means becoming friends with oneself rather than feeling shame or punishment. This is followed by the verse, "For him who has won over his self, Who is eternally peaceful within himself Heat and cold are very much alike, And so are sorrows and happiness, And honour and dishonour and he would…" (Bhagavad Gita 6:7), which reflects the stability and acceptance central to self-compassion. In this context, individuals can respond to suffering without becoming

emotionally overwhelmed, and this response introduces a spiritual dimension by grounding steadiness in self-mastery.

Moreover, according to Hindu doctrine, suffering often results from past deeds through the principle of karma. However, it is not regarded as a punishment or a process of retributive judgment (Whitman, 2007), but rather as an opportunity for learning and growth. According to Whitman (2007), this belief encourages the acceptance of suffering as a natural part of life and the understanding that it is not arbitrary. They believe that suffering serves to repay the debt for past misdeeds and that the current situation is the appropriate one for their soul's past actions. Self-discipline (tapas) and self-inquiry (atma-vichara) are practices that help individuals accept responsibility for their acts without harsh self-criticism. This also reinforces the idea that suffering is not personal or something to be ashamed of; rather, it is a universal aspect of being human that should be met with understanding rather than isolation or self-judgment. Consequently, karma becomes a tool for growth and development rather than a source of guilt or shame, promoting a self-compassionate perspective that recognises mistakes as a necessary part of the spiritual journey.

Ahimsa (nonviolence), one of the fundamental teachings in Hinduism, extends beyond actions to encompass mental and emotional nonviolence toward others and oneself. Non-violence in one’s thoughts and intentions is called mental ahimsa, while managing and controlling one's emotions to avoid causing suffering or harm to oneself and others is known as emotional ahimsa (Aithal & Ramanathan, 2024). This involves avoiding harmful or destructive thoughts and cultivating positive emotions, such as love, compassion, and joy, toward oneself and others. Regarding self-compassion, an individual avoids harsh self-judgment or destructive self-talk and instead develops kindness towards their own mind and body.

Moreover, the mindfulness component of self-compassion aligns with equanimity (samatva), another principle articulated in the Bhagavad Gita. This is demonstrated in the verse where Krishna states, “perform your duty equipoised, O Arjuna, abandoning all attachment to success or failure” (Bhagavad Gita 2:48). Samatva calls for maintaining a state of balance regardless of circumstances. According to Pandey et al. (2024), samatva entails avoiding intense emotional outbursts, maintaining composure amid life's fluctuations, and fostering a balanced perspective on both positive and adverse events. This non-reactive approach enables individuals to observe their experiences without becoming entangled in their feelings or over-identifying with them.

Another essential aspect of Hinduism is the spiritual practices of meditation (dhyana) and yoga, which are closely related to modern mindfulness. According to Radhakrishnan (1989), yoga, derived from the word yog (to join), is an ancient Indian practice involving physical, mental, and spiritual discipline that helps individuals break free from a cycle of suffering. Yama (restraint), niyama (discipline), asana (posture), pranayama (breath control), pratayahara (withdrawal of the senses), dharana (attention), dhyana (meditation), and samadhi (deep absorption) are known as the eight angas (limbs) of yoga (Yoga Sutras 2:29). Meanwhile, the various types of meditation include the third eye meditation, Chakra meditation, mantra meditation, tratak meditation (fixing gaze on a particular object), Nada Yoga (sound meditation), Tantra, Sahaja Yoga, Raja Yoga, and Kundalini meditation (Gairola & Singh, 2023). These practices may aid in cultivating self-awareness, acceptance, and inner harmony. Furthermore, mindfulness here is more than merely being aware of the present moment; it is about recognising one's divine nature despite shifting emotional and mental tides.

In summary, Hinduism encourages self-compassion by recognising the divine self, the transformative power of karma, non-violence, and equanimity. It offers a timeless approach to cultivating a compassionate self by inspiring individuals to live mindfully, love themselves as divine beings, and overcome life's challenges.

DISCUSSION

This paper further breaks down self-compassion into its three sub-components: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, and analyses how each is reflected across the four religions.

- Self-Kindness: Islam emphasises divine mercy (*rahmah*) and forgiveness; Christianity reflects God's grace and redemption; Buddhism cultivates loving-kindness (*metta*) towards oneself; Hinduism promotes gentle self-acceptance through ahimsa (non-violence) and recognition of the divine self (atman).
- Common Humanity: Islam's ummah concept, Christianity's shared suffering through Christ, Buddhism's dukkha and universal interdependence, and Hinduism's karma illustrate collective connectedness in human experience.
- Mindfulness: Each faith fosters present-moment awareness, muraqabah (Islamic mindfulness), contemplative prayer in Christianity, sati in Buddhism, and meditative practices like dhyana in Hinduism, all grounding self-awareness in spirituality.

Examining the concept of self-compassion across the four major religions helped identify elements that extend beyond Neff's (2003) conceptualisation, namely, beyond the intrapersonal and cognitive domains. The four main religions discussed in this paper (Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism) were found to share common ground regarding Neff's three components of self-compassion: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Additionally, they also deepen and enrich our understanding of self-compassion by offering spiritual, theological, and moral insights.

Firstly, the root of self-compassion emphasises the differences across religions and Neff's theory. While self-compassion in Neff's model may be cultivated internally through mindfulness and cognitive reframing, the presence and nature of the Divine or transcendent reality play a more significant role across religious traditions. For example, in both Islam and Christianity, compassion for oneself can be understood through the belief that God loves, forgives, and accepts us. The concepts of divine grace, mercy, and unconditional love motivate individuals to treat themselves kindly after an unfortunate event or wrongdoing. In other words, if God can forgive us, why can't we forgive ourselves? Meanwhile, in Buddhism, self-compassion is regarded as part of compassion for all beings in the pursuit of enlightenment. In contrast, Hinduism supports self-compassion by viewing the self as sacred. Therefore, these religious teachings frame self-compassion more as a form of worship, obedience, devotion, or spiritual duty rather than merely a psychological strategy.

Next, the emphasis on moral and spiritual transformation in religious teachings is compared with Neff's model. It goes beyond viewing self-compassion as merely acceptance or healing, seeing it instead as a pathway to growth. While Neff highlights the acceptance of suffering without judgment, these religious doctrines also emphasise development and change. They encourage believers to be self-compassionate while also being accountable for their actions and fulfilling their moral duties. In the context of these religions, self-compassion is presented as a foundation for renewal: through the Islamic concept of *tawbah*, the Christian concepts of grace and redemption, the Hindu and Buddhist idea of karma, and the focus on

liberation. From this perspective, self-compassion entails recognising the potential for renewal and moral improvement.

Additionally, self-compassion from a religious perspective differs in that it not only focuses inward toward the self but also considers the social dimension. It is viewed as a prerequisite for developing compassion towards others and fulfilling one's duties. This is evident in the Christian teaching of 'loving your neighbour as yourself', which implies that compassion begins with oneself, and in Islam's emphasis on the capacity to make meaningful contributions to the ummah. Both Hinduism and Buddhism hold that self-compassion is essential to serving others, thereby making it a moral obligation.

Furthermore, these religions also address the spiritual dangers of despair or self-condemnation. Islam and Christianity both warn against losing hope in divine mercy or God's mercy, as it could be interpreted as a form of spiritual deviation. Conversely, excessive self-criticism could be viewed as a barrier to spiritual growth in Buddhism and Hinduism. In fact, all these religious teachings encourage self-reflection, but not in a self-deprecating manner. Instead, it should be rooted in hope, repentance, and trust.

Finally, all religions promote self-examination or introspection through spiritual practices such as prayer, confession, meditation, and mindfulness. For example, Islamic muraqabah, Buddhist mindfulness, and Hinduism atma-vichara guide individuals to realign the self with the divine will or spiritual purpose through gentle self-examination. They are not merely tools for awareness; they also add moral depth to self-compassion.

From a positive psychology perspective, these religious interpretations offer a broader view of self-compassion as a multidimensional strength. While positive psychology usually regards self-compassion as a personal emotional skill, religious traditions place it within a wider moral and spiritual framework that emphasises meaning, purpose, and transcendence, key areas of flourishing identified in the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011). Therefore, integrating religious wisdom into positive psychology not only anchors self-compassion in cultural and ethical contexts but also broadens its application beyond individual well-being to include communal and spiritual well-being. Examining self-compassion through religious teachings further deepens understanding and reveals how it may be interpreted and practised differently across religions. It also provides valuable insights for culturally sensitive mental health practices and highlights the importance of incorporating spirituality into the study and practice of self-compassion.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored self-compassion from the viewpoints of four major religions: Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Although all four religions incorporate Neff's components of self-compassion—namely self-kindness, shared humanity, and mindfulness—they also offer distinct theological, ethical, and spiritual perspectives that deepen the understanding of what it means to be compassionate towards oneself. It is regarded as a sacred duty grounded in divine love, moral responsibility, and spiritual development.

Notably, the purpose of this paper is not to compare these religious traditions but to emphasise how each religion presents distinct values and practices that extend beyond a secular psychological understanding of self-compassion rooted in Neff's model. This reflects a more holistic approach to self-compassion, recognising the significance of spirituality, moral development, and cultural context.

These insights also have implications for psychologists, educators, and mental health practitioners working in multicultural and faith-based settings, as they enhance their understanding of each religion and promote more culturally responsive, spiritually sensitive, and ethically grounded approaches. Future research should continue to investigate how religious worldviews can enrich positive psychology.

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