

Introduction Blog

FEBRUARY 28, 2016 ~ LEAVE A COMMENT ~ EDIT

I figured I would start with an introduction and an overview of what I plan to post about and when. My name is Hollie Shapiro and I am a senior at Florida State University in the Civil Engineering program. Aside from the professional, I am a mother of two and married to a man who is Jewish. I would call myself as religiously indifferent. In that I don't see a need to be religious myself, but don't judge or condemn those who do. I grew up going to a variety of Christian Churches, including the longest stint at the Church of Latter Day Saints. However as I got older, I didn't understand the need to attend church. I felt, and still do, that I could be a good person and live a moral life, without the need of the judgement from the church. In knowing this in myself I found it interesting how people chose their religion. Specifically, if they grew up in one religion, how and why did they choose to practice in another? In my blog, I will discuss this, the how's why's people change their religions. I plan to post every Sunday and next Sunday I plan to post on how to convert to Judaism, and how the media portrays these conversions, and also on how the Jewish community sees the converted individuals. In my blog I hope to gain a greater understanding on how others view not only their own religion but how they viewed their religion that they converted from

Converting to Judaism

APRIL 4, 2016 ~ LEAVE A COMMENT ~ EDIT

When I married my Jewish husband the question of converting to Judaism came up a few times. I wouldn't really be converting from anything, I was raised with Christian holidays but was never really religious. So I considered myself sort of religion neutral. At first I thought, well no biggie sure I'll convert to Judaism. However, when I started looking into it I really saw how daunting it could be. My father in law once asked me if I was going to convert and I simply replied "I plan to". He then told me when I asked his and my husband's rabbi if I could convert he would tell me no three times.

This put me off immediately. I thought if they didn't want me then I didn't want them. I know, pretty childish. However through this class the topic was raised once again. This post will be about what I found when looking up more information on converting to Judaism.

The first thing I realized when researching conversion is that it is not easy. It's not as simple as just saying "OK now I'm Jewish because I feel Jewish". It involves a lot of time, reading, studying, worshiping, and interacting with the Jewish community. Some synagogues require you learn Hebrew, while others don't. Some require you to attend classes others require regular meetings with a rabbi. Whatever is required, the process takes quite a long time.

I found a lot of information on <http://www.reformjudaism.org>. There I found a video called "Conversion Conversations" detailing six people who converted to Judaism. All said that it took a long time, meetings with the rabbi were key, and involvement in the synagogue and Jewish community were extremely important. The most important thing that I took from these videos was a feeling from everyone that converting to Judaism was like coming home, in other words like they were meant to be Jewish all along. Another thing I learned that the rabbi tells you no three times not because they don't want you to convert but to make you reflect on the reasons why you want to join. This shows that they really take converting seriously and if you want to convert, you are not only joining a religion but joining a community and a family.

Leaving Judaism

APRIL 14, 2016 ~ LEAVE A COMMENT ~ EDIT

My last blog post I wrote about converting to Judaism, and I fully expected myself to write this time about converting to another religion. However, I came across a podcast called Beautiful Stories from Anonymous People hosted by Chris Gethard. In his podcast, Chris talks to anonymous people for one hour literally about anything. In one particular episode called "Passport, Exodus" a man who didn't want to give his name

started his story on obtaining a passport. However, the conversation quickly turned to his exit from his faith. His faith turned out to be Orthodox Judaism. I found it so fascinating how he grew up in such a strict faith where he never really interacted with anyone outside his faith, and as an adult decided to not only leave Judaism, but to not believe in God all together.

In Orthodox Judaism, Kosher laws are strictly adhered to. One of the most basic Kosher laws include not preparing dairy with meat. Through the podcast, the man explained on top of that that if any bug contaminated any food (maybe simply a fly landing on a lettuce leaf) the whole dish would have to be thrown away. There is also a special kind of wine specifically among the Orthodox Jews. It is called Mevushal wine and is boiled so that a gentile can serve it and it still remaining Kosher. Although popular among the Orthodox Jews, Mevushal wine has a reputation for not being very good and a lower quality than other Kosher wines.

When the man from the podcast left the Jewish faith, he also left all of these Kosher laws. He told of the first thing he ate that really showed what he was missing when he was obeying the Kosher laws was a cheeseburger from Five Guys Burger and Fries. After that he said he turned into a real food guy (whatever that means).

There were social aspects too when he left the faith. His parents were very upset when he left the faith. At the time of his departure, he was in college and his parents were not only paying for his education but every other aspect of his life. After he told them of his plans to leave and officially did leave, his parents stopped paying for everything except his schooling. Later he would go back and visit his older Orthodox Jewish relatives and other than the disappointment that came with him leaving the faith, they felt that any wine or food he touched would be tainted and therefore, unable to be consumed. They put the Mevushal wine out instead of the good wine so that he couldn't taint the good wine.

I started to research the topic of leaving Orthodox Judaism to see what other perspectives their could be. I found one article from the New Yorker published July 31, 2015 written by Talia Lavin. In the article Lavin explained that leaving Orthodox Judaism is not that common. She says that somewhere around 1% leave. She goes on to explain that "leaving ultra-Orthodoxy as immigrating to a country in which you're already a citizen", And that unlike the man from the podcasts family situation where even though his parents did not approve of his decision they still considered him family, Lavin explains that most "are estranged from their families".

It takes a lot of courage to not only leave your faith behind but to also leave your entire upbringing behind. Although there are many resources for people who leave, I can't help feeling how isolated and alone they must feel when they first leave. The only thing I hope is that these people can find the peace within themselves that they felt they didn't have in Orthodox Judaism.

Entering Scientology

APRIL 22, 2016 ~ LEAVE A COMMENT ~ EDIT

After exploring Judaism, it took me awhile to find inspiration on my next religion to explore. I found that I have a pretty good non-judgmental etiquette around religious people. Even though I don't believe in one specific religion, I won't criticize you for believing in yours. However, as I was going through my religion class, the last week dealt with New Religious Movements. One of which was Scientology. I found myself smirking to myself before reading about it and thinking "now these people are truly nuts, I don't even want to read this". The thought struck me, I hate being close minded. I really had no idea what Scientology is, only knew what the media fed to me (which is embarrassing by itself). In order to become more open minded, I decided to delve more into Scientology and see what it takes to join this fairly new religion.

What is Scientology? What I gathered from the media, before researching it, is a bunch of people who believe in aliens who worship a guy who writes science fiction

novels. Obviously this is pretty narrow minded. To better understand Scientology, I started with reading it from my textbook for my Introduction to World Religions class. What I learned is that Scientology resembles Buddhism more than any other religion. Like reincarnation in Buddhism, Scientologists believe in the soul (or thetan) to be “billions of years old” and “passing from one body to another at death” (A Concise Introduction to World Religions: Third Edition pg 601). Also like Buddhism with its view of Karma, Scientologists believe in mental blocks called engrams that can carry with the thetan through different lifetimes. To be clear of these engrams, Scientologists have to grow through clearing through an auditing process. There are seven stages of this clearing, and those that complete all seven levels are said to be called Operating Thetans.

So why has the media cast Scientologists in a bad light. One reason might be the seven levels mentioned above. Each level costs money, therefore, from an outsiders perspective could resemble a pyramid scheme. Also several criminal accusations have been cast on the founder, L. Ron Hubbard, and his wife.

So how do you join the Church of Scientology. I suspected it to be quite an ordeal. Like Judaism I feel like they would not make it an easy transition, just to be sure that Scientology is the right path. What I didn't anticipate is how hard it would be to find information online about it. However I did find a Wiki-How article on the subject of joining Scientology. The article spelled it out into twelve steps. The first few steps are fairly generic. They involve getting to know more about Scientology and what to expect from it. The next step is to start getting involved with the church by attending both a yearly conference and weekly meeting at a Church of Scientology. The next step is to get an audit from a member of the church complete with an E-meter (a device to measure the presence on engrams).

The next step to commit yourself to the church. According to the WikiHow article “If you're interested in Scientology, approaching it with an open mind and a full commitment to change your life for the better is necessary.” In other words, there is

no such thing a casual Scientologist. Included in this commitment, is ranking you emotions based on a scale from +40 to -40. Also included in this commitment is assessing the dynamics of your actions. Dynamic in Scientology are the eight “intersecting planes[...] beginning with the self, the family, and so on at the bottom and moving up to the spiritual universe (the seventh dynamic) and the Supreme being or Infinity (the eighth)” (A Concise Introduction to World Religion: Third Edition pg 601). The last step is to continue to get audits to make sure the clearing of engrams is successful.

After researching this new religion, I don't think my opinion on Scientology has changed. I have more insight on it. I had no idea how closely it mimicked Buddhism. However, when I started reading about the audits and the E-meter, I continued to have a negative view towards Scientology. I just don't understand how a machine, for example, could measure the level of grief or happiness or any other emotion that you might have. And if it actually could, that is a huge invasion of privacy in my opinion.

I have yet to come across any Scientologists, and when or if I do, I will at least have a little more knowledge in this new religion.

Link to articles used:

<http://www.wikihow.com/Join-Scientology>

Leaving Scientology

APRIL 22, 2016 ~ LEAVE A COMMENT ~ EDIT

My last blog post was about entering Scientology, but I was mostly interested in leaving Scientology. The topic of leaving Scientology has come up quite a bit in the media recently with celebrities such as Leah Remini and Katie Holmes leaving the religion. Leaving the church, from numerous accounts, can be quite difficult. So what

makes a person to leave a religion that they have either grown up in or have been a part of for a long time?

During Remini's interview with Oprah Winfrey's show "Where are they now" she says there was one pivotal moment that cemented her decision to leave the "organization as she called it. "I was on course one day. I was at one of these hotels in Florida, and I saw my daughter swimming for the first time, while I'm... reading this thing. A tear came down my face," Remini says. "I was like, 'What am I doing?' The moment hit me that I was now doing the same thing to my daughter that my mother [had conveyed] to me, that what she was doing was more important."

(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/18/leah-remini-scientology_n_7293434.html). She goes on to describe how it was very difficult to leave her religion after being brought up in it. Much like the man I described in a previous post about leaving Orthodox Judaism. When your family and community all in a particular religion, and you leave that religion, in a sense you have to leave your family and community. Fortunately for the man who left Judaism, he was still able to spend time with his family, however for Remini that wasn't the case. She says during the same interview how she saw her god daughter on the street and wanted to just run up and hug her. However her god daughters mother wouldn't allow it. Since coming out of Scientology a few years ago, Remini has written a book about being brought up in Scientology and has found a new life outside of it.

Another woman who left Scientology told her story to a journalist named Christa Martin for the Santa Cruz Good Times. The woman "Janet" was a high ranking member of the Santa Cruz chapter of Church of Scientology. She even worked directly with L. Ron Hubbard. However, it was in working with Hubbard that her feeling for the church began to shift. From what I could tell Hubbard sort of lost it. He started accusing people of being suppressive. "A suppressive person is, according to Scientology's own Web site, "... The suppressive person, also called an antisocial personality, works to upset, continuously undermine, spread bad news and denigrate other people and their activities ..." (Martin). Janet along with many other members were put in sort of a Scientology jail, and it was from that jail that Janet escaped. Her

journey didn't end there. The church continued to harass Janet for back payment for debt they said she owed them. She says that "We were totally harassed," she says. "They would park outside our house, watch us, follow us ... call us to come back in and handle our freeloader debt." (Martin). It was decades later when she finally got peace from the church after her sister, having been a member for 38 years, came to stay with her. (<http://www.lermanet.com/scientologynews/santa-cruz-good-times.htm>) There is still so much of Scientology that is not understood, and the only ones who are allowed to know the so called secrets are the ones who are on the inside.