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Listen to understand. Understanding is more powerful than knowledge.

Seeing Different Perspectives

Religion is at times a touchy subject to discuss, but I am so thankful to have had four incredible and open young adults to discuss theirs with me. Throughout these interviews, I have had my eyes open to religions such as Judaism, Islam and Hinduism, and it gave me a better understanding of each of them. I hope that as you all read them, you keep an open mind.

As you will be able to see through each interview, these religions are all fundamentally different, but the way they shape people's lives are very similar. Each one of these beliefs have given people direction and basic human values on how to live their life in a good way.

Although similar values can be seen in each religion, misconceptions and hostile attitudes toward other religions continues to be seen all around the world. I am strong in my Christian faith, but after talking with people of other beliefs, I was able to gain an appreciation for their values and traditions. Listening and making a point to understand others and their beliefs is important. Most conflicts come from misunderstandings and a lack of knowledge. The simplicity of seeing someone else's point of view does not mean you have to go against your own beliefs.

Overall, I really enjoyed the time I had with each person and I am grateful to have had the chance to learn more from my peers. As a society, we may not always agree, but my hope is that people learn the value of understanding.

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Hinduism with Natasha

Today, Natasha shed some light on what it is like to be a follower of the Hindu faith. Hinduism is followed by nearly one billion people around the world, but it has a strong following in India. In general, Hindus recognize a supreme being and put their focus on finding liberation. Through liberation, Hindus believe that they will be set free from karma and the pattern of birth and rebirth.



How has your religion shaped you as a person?

- Even though I was born in the US, my parents have still managed to influence me religiously. I think hinduism is a very broad religion in the sense that it lets you dive deeper into learning more about yourself and how to better yourself as a human being. It has also taught me a tolerance and acceptance towards other religions. Hinduism hasn't been forced on me, but it has helped me open up my opinions and views towards life in general and the people around me.

What is the most unique aspect of your religion?

- I think the festivals and holidays make hinduism unique. Hinduism is the oldest religion in the world, and if you want – there could be a holiday a day to celebrate. We are all about color, decorations, lights, food, and dressing up. The festivals define hinduism and the people of the religion, and India.

What do you want others to know about your religion?

- We don't worship cows. We just don't eat them out of respect because we believe a cow is more useful when it is alive than dead. For example, milk, yogurt, butter are all very valuable for Indians. It is a very vital source of nutrients. We also use cows for labor in the fields, which is how most of the people in indian make money (through farming). This is why we don't eat

beef, and no we don't get on our knees and worship cows.

What is your favorite religious tradition?

- Diwali, of course, is my favorite holiday. It's considered the biggest festival of the year. It is our new years and the festival of lights. It goes on for a few days and consist of putting lights all over the house, doing fireworks, and cooking a lot of food and sweets. The date changes every year based on the lunar calendar.



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Islam with Hanna

I absolutely loved getting to hear Hanna's perspective on her life as a Muslim. There are about 1.6 billion Muslims around the world and there are two major branches: Sunni and Shia. Islam is a monotheistic religion that places emphasis on the belief that Muhammad is the prophet sent by God to be a teacher of Islam.



How has your religion shaped you as a person?

- My religion has made me a lot more cultured and stronger as a person. Living in the United States, especially during these times, I witness a lot of discrimination against Islam. It's

difficult to watch because a lot of it stems from ignorance about the religion. For example, I had an internship last semester and I knew that my boss thought highly of me. One day, though, I overheard him talking about how all Muslims should be exiled from the US. Later on, I politely told him that I was Muslim and I explained to him that our religion's foundation is peace. It's moments like those though, that have made me a stronger person. My religion has taught me that no matter what a person says, I shouldn't stoop to their level, nor should I allow their comments affect my beliefs.

What is the most unique aspect of your religion?

- The most unique aspect of my religion is the fact that we don't believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

What do you want others to know about your religion?

- I want other people to know that Prophet Muhammad said that killing one innocent person is like slaughtering all of humanity. I want people to know that Prophet Muhammad's neighbor hated him, threw trash on his yard every day, and then one day it stopped, and after a few days of Prophet Muhammad not seeing trash on his lawn, he went over to his neighbor's house to see if he was okay. I want people to know that he said that we are forever indebted to our teachers. I want people to know that Islam is passionate, caring, loving and peaceful.

What is your favorite religious tradition?

- My favorite religious tradition is fasting for thirty days. During the thirty days of fasting we also, if we are able, have to donate to charity. While I was in DC this summer, instead of eating on my lunch break, I would buy a meal for a homeless person. While Ramadan is difficult, it teaches you a lot about appreciating the little things in life. It teaches you that just because someone is poor, it doesn't make them less of a person.

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Judaism with Jessica

Jessica talked to me today about her Jewish faith. Being that I am a Christian, it was fascinating to hear about her perspective on her religion.



How has your religion shaped you as a person?

- I believe that the people you are surrounded by determine who you are. When I was growing up, I went to Sunday school and Hebrew school. During those classes, I was surrounded by people who shared similar values. It taught me a lot about God and the importance of the Torah, family and honesty.

What do you think is the most unique aspect of your religion?

- Our holidays are unique and special because they are all centered around being thankful. It is never about us. During those celebrations we thank God for everything we have been given. We are thankful for our history, our freedom and God.

What makes you a believer?

- I have a lot of blessings in my life and listening to my Rabbi speak at temple gives me faith in my religion. Also, I would rather believe in something than nothing at all. I have seen how God has shaped my life and I want to live my life praising him for the life he has given me.

What is your favorite religious tradition?

- Definitely Passover. It is a holiday that happens during the spring and it is filled with rich tradition. My Grandma makes the most amazing homemade matzah. My grandpa still hides

the afikomen, which is a piece of matzah and it is in this special bag with money, even though it is traditionally for younger kids. You sit around a big table with your family and it is a really long meal with incredible food. It is meant for everyone to appreciate being there with each other. It is tradition to read from the Haggadah, which is a Jewish text, and it reminds us of what we are celebrating.



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Christianity with Cameron

Today I sat down with Cameron to discuss his views on his religion: Christianity. Christianity is one of the world's largest religions and it is composed of over 25,000 different denominational groups. It holds the belief that Jesus Christ is the son of God, and that he was sent to Earth to save the sins of the world.



How has your religion shaped you as a person?

- I grew up going to church, going to Sunday school and participating in the traditions of the Christian religion. But, it was not until recently, that I began to truly dig deeper into what I believe. I think that being a Christian has shaped the way that I view life and how I treat others. Jesus is a role model and following his word has taught me kindness, forgiveness and faith. I try to rely on God when things in life go wrong and having that kind of trust and faith in Him has truly molded the way I handle what life throws at me.

What do you think is the most unique aspect of your religion?

- Our belief that Jesus is the son of God. I love the story of Jesus' resurrection. It is an incredible event within the Christian religion and it is something that continues to strengthen my faith. The Christian religion also puts a large focus on having a relationship with God.

What makes you a believer?

- I have studied other religions and through that I have furthered my own understanding of Christianity. I believe that faith has a lot to do with it and there have been many times where I have witnessed the miracles of my prayers being answered.

What is your favorite religious tradition?

- Christmas because it celebrates the miracle birth of Jesus. On Christmas Eve, my family and I get dressed up and go to a church service at midnight. It is always a beautiful service and it gives me time to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas beyond the decorations, Christmas songs and gifts. This holiday has always brought my family together and it has shaped many memories that will stay with me forever. I hope to be able to continue the traditions that my family has given me when I have my own family one day.



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