

Victoria Paranagua

Rel1300

2/28/15

The Effects of Religious Tradition

Many religious traditions, such as the piercing of body parts to celebrate the devotion to a lord in Hinduism, and the wearing of sacred underclothing worn by Mormon's who celebrate their washing and anointing ordinance have been carried out by small communities around the world for hundreds of years. These relatively small religious practices in comparison to, for example, the millions of Christians who celebrate Easter by doing an egg hunt, still have significance even though others may view them as inessential. It is easy to forget the amount of religions and cultural communities there are in the world when you are in one place, however, it is important to remember and respect the ritualistic importance and uniqueness that religious traditions bring to each person.

Traditions and rituals are the actions that follow a devoted faith in a religious belief system. Therefore, traditions and rituals are a core element of one of strong faith. I believe there is a direct correlation between following religious traditions and feeling satisfaction and belongingness within a community. Because traditions are a part of every religious group, the amount of members practicing these traditions should not distinguish why some traditions are seen as more significant or more socially acceptable than others. The amount of people within each religious group will certainly affect the amount of exposure and knowledge about a religion's history and culture. There are about 2.1 billion Christians in the world today, so the widespread knowledge of what a

traditional Christmas celebration consists of will be very high. (Pewforum, page 1).
Meanwhile, a smaller in numbers religion like Yoruba will have much less knowledge
widespread.

Through research I have found various religious traditions varying from
Mormonism to Judaism and Islam that people in parts of the world that these religions
aren't heavily practiced have come to find "weird" or "strange". (IRFI, page 1). Some
Mormon's celebrate a ritual ceremony of washing and anointing ordinance by the
wearing of sacred underclothing worn by adult adherents. The underclothing is white and
covers up a lot of the body. People have found this to be a strange tradition because they
do not know the meaning of it. According to Mormon doctrine, there are marks on the
undergarments that are sacred symbols that date back to the creation of Mormonism.
Celebrating the creation of a religion makes a lot of sense, but since people don't know
what the purpose is, they find the idea of the tradition to be out of the ordinary. In
Judaism, Kapparot is an atonement ritual practiced on the eve of Yom Kippur, the first
day of the month according to the Hebrew calendar. Kapparot is done by grasping a
chicken and moving its head and shoulder blades around to transfer one's sins to the
chicken. All Jews don't do the ritual as you can guess; therefore people's knowledge of
this ritual is less than extensive. The reason for the ritual is to cleanse oneself at the
beginning of the New Year and feel as though it is a fresh start and clean slate. In Arab
countries that practice Muslim traditions a niqab is very commonly worn to cover the
face of women. This tradition is not frequently done in the United States because the
Muslim population isn't large here, however, this tradition doesn't seem as strange to
people here. That is because of the cultural influence and worldwide population of

Muslims is still large. The niqab is actually worn as part of a sartorial hijab. Most people here don't know the purpose of the niqab but they also don't find it weird or strange, meaning that population is definitely what affects people's familiarity and knowledge about religious traditions and rituals.

The size of each religious community has a direct influence on the widespread knowledge to the rest of the world. To call something "strange" or "weird" gives the reason to believe that we are not familiar or used to the information being given. The more we know about something, the more familiarity we will have with it. As time passes and technology keeps improving everyday, our knowledge about unfamiliar parts of the world become easier to access and important to know. These things that seem strange and unfamiliar are significant to the communities practicing them. Cultural diversity is directly influenced by religions. For us to be open minded and able to understand people of different cultures, we must look at religion as a key feature.

The open-mindedness of other religions aside from the ones that we are familiar with not only pays off if one wants to be culturally aware, but it is important in political aspects as well. Religion dominance shapes what kind of people we are, and that influences our jobs, our beliefs, our ethics, and what we do. An article written by researcher, James Dingley called *Sacred communities: religion and national identities* truly emphasized the importance of understanding religion and "it's importance in human affairs". (Page 1). The research done in the article looked at the correlation between religious elements and cultural identity between different nations. "Not only does religion take us into the multifaceted nature of national identity, such as socio-linguistics, social relations, morality and truth, but also concepts of identity take us back into a

reconsideration of the role, nature and function of religion and a recognition that is an important facet of our understanding of life and being, perhaps sadly overlooked today". (Dingley, Page 401). This showcases the importance of understand religion as more than just a belief, but as a dimension of nationalism, which shapes how the United States and other countries work with one another. Therefore, the population size of a religion is not what's most important, what is most important is the significance of religious traditions and understanding how these traditions are significant in shaping religious communities and furthermore, shaping the identity of a nation.

We must take advantage of the technological tools we have been given in this modern age to learn and appreciate the diversity of the religions practiced across the world so that we not only can gain appreciation for things we aren't familiar with and may not understand right away, but also to gain a perspective on why government's and leaders of nations do the things they do and value the things they value. The significance of traditions and rituals is there, we just have to do a little research and learn about why they are important and meaningful. This all begins with open mindedness and acceptance of the religions and religious traditions we see as we travel the world and experience it through social media and the Internet. Knowing and respecting why people of different cultures do and behave the way they do gives us more depth and reasoning for why countries interact with one another the way they do.

"10 "Weird" Religious Practices." *IRFI.org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Feb. 2016.

Dingley, James. "Off Campus Access." *Off-Campus Access*. Routledge, n.d. Web. 26 Feb. 2016.

"Global Christianity – A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population." *Pew Research Centers Religion Public Life Project RSS*. N.p., 18 Dec. 2011. Web. 27 Feb. 2016.