

Stephanie Katz

Professor Crow

REL 1300

4 December 2015

Most people are fearful of what lies beyond one's life. For this reason, there is a large number of people who decide to change their beliefs to a different faith in order to be fulfilled with an eternal life after one dies. A religion's existence relies on its ability to persuade potential followers that believing in this religion will ensure a good afterlife, making the concept of life after death the most powerful conversion tool of a religion. Throughout the history of civilization, religion has been not only a fundamental, but an essential part of society, on an everyday basis for a magnitude of reasons. Arguably the most prominent of these reasons is that a credence in a divine power or being can add meaning and purpose to one's life and ultimately the afterlife. For many people, especially those experiencing death or suffering, a belief in an afterlife gives life significance. For a religion to flourish and stay alive today, it needs to have supportive followers with strong beliefs and ties toward their religion. To do this many religions try and convert people in order to gain new followers. Proselytism initially referred to Early Christianity, today refers to any effort to persuade someone to convert to one's faith and to alter a person's beliefs. Three of the world's most proselytizing religions include Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam.

The conversion of religions is acknowledging, implementing, and accepting new ideas and views exclusive to a religion. Most religions promise a superior and rewarding afterlife and for many religionists the question of whether a religion with a stronger view and assuring afterlife be more competitive with other religions is often asked. When a religion assures

someone with rewards after one dies by persuading its believers to commit more time to their religion, the religion will in fact be more sustainable and entice new and more followers (Tao and Yeh). Acting as a melting pot of the world, The United States has a more religious outlook on life than many Western nations. The majority of people believe in a Supreme being, attend a church, temples or Mosks, and believe in an afterlife, whether it be heaven, hell, or some other form of life. Religions are constantly competing with one another in order to meet spiritual needs. There are many theories that discuss the amount of people who convert because they worry about where life will lead them after death. When immigrants first come to America, the freedom for those people to experience and join a new religion is unlimited, especially for people coming from a place with one prominent religion (Greely and Hout).

The Conversion of people to Christianity greatly depends on the fundamental beliefs regarding the world around us and it is assumed that the belief in life after death works simultaneously with the Christian religion (MacMullen). Versus in the New Testament are attributed to Jesus concerning the life one lives after death. John 3:16 states, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." It is apparent in this line, that there is a life everlasting. Although Christian churches differ on the beliefs of what happens to the physical body, they all agree that Jesus promised a life after the body dies. Christians are more likely to believe in an afterlife than non Christians. (Greely and Hout). John 11:25-26 states, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." The belief that Jesus arose from the dead three days after his crucifixion gives the followers of Christianity hope that if they follow the teachings and accept Jesus as their savior, then a new life awaits them, as it did for Jesus.

Christian and Islamic religions proselytize people because the people believe this is what God wished for and those who do not convert, should anticipate a horrible destiny. For the Muslim people, they strive and live their life for a spot in heaven. One must believe in Allah to have a place in heaven to go. In the Quran, heaven is described as a garden close to Allah and satisfies everyone's needs. "Allah will say: This is a day in which the truthful will profit from their truth. Theirs are gardens, with rivers flowing beneath- their eternal Home. Allah is well-pleased with them, and they with Allah. That is the great salvation" (Quran 5:119). Those who reject Allah and don't follow his laws, are sent to hell. The Quran describes hell as dismal place where people are put to suffer. "Our lord! Surely, whom you admit to the fire, indeed you have disgraced him, and never will the wrongdoers find any helpers" (Quran 3:192). According to the Islamic doctrine, on the day of judgment, the people of the faith will be divided into those who go to paradise and those who go to hell. Until then, the souls of those who have passed remain dead waiting for their rebirth. During the time between death and resurrection, one will either be chastised or satisfied in the grave. One's span of life and existence is the preparation for what comes next.

Although not a major proselytizing religion, Hinduism does try and acquire new followers. Hinduism believes in reincarnation of the body. The Hindus believe that the atman is forever and will not change. The physical body of a person is what can change. Bhagavad Gita 2:22 states, "As a man casts off his worn-out clothes and takes on other new ones, so does the embodied soul cast off his worn-out bodies and enters other new." Their belief in the afterlife is a key concept that promotes people to join the Hindu religion.

In contrast to other religions, reward in the afterlife of a devotional Buddhist is only a better start to the next life. Buddhists teachings do not agree with the belief on an eternal soul

which is different from Christian, Hindu, and Muslim beliefs. However, its teachings agree with Hinduism's beliefs in karma and reincarnation. According to the doctrines of Buddhism, the death of a living being is not the end of itself. The living being will take on the same or another life form, which is determined by the way they are currently living life. In other words, the belief in karma is the driving force for the way of living in one's next life. "For a good cause, a good result; for an evil cause, and evil result" (Tao and Yeh). When Lord Buddha died, it provoked him to discover all worries and concerns in the world. He came to a revelation that death was preordained and unavoidable. Today dying is viewed as leaving the materialistic world and entering an awakening. (Religious Movements).

While Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist views all promote an afterlife and use it as a prime reason for conversion to their religion, other religions such as Judaism don't place such an emphasis on the afterlife. The Mishna states, "resurrection and the world to come," however this statement by no means puts the same emphasis on the afterlife as "life everlasting" does for the Christian people. The main distinction between Jews and Christians is that the Jewish people are skeptics of the afterlife. Depending on one's sect of Judaism, a person may have different beliefs. Most modern Jews don't believe in a life after death, however for Orthodox Jews, the beliefs that a person's actual body will be resurrected is strong. Some people of the Jewish faith may hold dual views. Many people question whether the belief in life after death causes one to distance themselves from the Jewish religion and traditions. For a person born and raised Jewish, their beliefs on the after life are affected when they come in contact with Christian and other groups. Jewish people who convert to Protestantism are much more likely to believe in life after death. Intermarriage and conversion to Christianity are important for the changing beliefs of

those who were born and raised Jewish and converted later in life. However, they do not explain the shift amongst the people who remained Jewish (Greely and Hout).

In conclusion, every human being is fearful of the unknown; were curious beings, its simply in our nature. All people, followers of all religions, wonder what is next after they are sent to their grave. For this reason, when people immigrate to America and are suffering from a loss of a close one, have become ill themselves, or just want to find a meaning and purpose in their life its an easy solution to their curiosity and fear to take the beliefs of a religion's afterlife into deep consideration, if not believe it to be true. Most people strive for an eternal life where one can be rewarded and satisfied. After all, proselytizing religions have their own way of living, through their followers, kept a live by our endless search for what lies beyond the unknown. No matter one's religious background, everyone finds themselves in the presence of death at one point in time. It is one of life's ultimate mysteries that people are still trying to gather answers to. One day we will know the answers to our most primal questions, but for now, for many, religion provides the answers.

Works Cited

Flynn, Charles P., and Suzanne R. Kunkel. "Deprivation, Compensation, and Conceptions of an Afterlife." *Sociological Analysis* 48.1 (1987): 58-72. *JSTOR*. Web. 02 Dec. 2015.

Greeley, Andrew M., and Michael Hout. "Americans' Increasing Belief in Life after Death: Religious Competition and Acculturation." *American Sociological Review* 64.6 (1999): 813-35. *JSTOR*. Web. 02 Dec. 2015.

Hertel, Bradley R. "Inconsistency of Beliefs in the Existence of Heaven and Afterlife." *Review of Religious Research* 21.2 (1980): 171-83. *JSTOR*. Web. 02 Dec. 2015.

Macmullen, Ramsay. "Two Types of Conversion to Early Christianity." *Vigiliae Christianae* 37.2 (1983): 174-92. *JSTOR*. Web. 02 Dec. 2015.

Tao, Hung-Lin, and Powen Yeh. "Religion as an Investment: Comparing the Contributions and Volunteer Frequency among Christians, Buddhists, and Folk Religionists." *JSTOR*. N.p., n.d. Web.

"Views on Death According to Different Religions." *Religious Movements*. N.p., n.d. Web.

"Why Do People Convert to Religion?" *Hub Pages*. N.p., 5 Oct. 2015. Web.

