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# 1. 2015

## 1.1 November

### **Christian Baptism (2015-11-02 22:44)**

The formal entry into any religious community is a major milestone. Christianity is no exception, as many sects practice a ritual known as Baptism. While there are minor differences from sect to sect, the main idea remains the same. Baptism is considered a 'rite' that has origins that date back the first century AD. This ritual has vastly evolved over the last two thousand years, but it is still a common practice to this day. A Baptism can be performed a few different ways, the most notable ones are by sprinkling water on the head and the other is by submerging the person in a body of water. The act of 'washing' the person being baptized is an allusion to washing away the sins and past life. This signifies a new beginning to a life devoted to Christ. One important aspect of Baptism is that it is generally performed in front of the entire congregation of the church. This is important as it is a public announcement of their new faith and life. Some followers enter the religion by being 'saved', which can be performed in ones bedroom to themselves. Baptism is completely voluntary and is usually performed on adults or adolescents, especially here in the baptist-dominated south. People who have been baptized are formally initiated and are usually seen as devout members of the Christian community. Although Baptism is an important ritual to many Churches, reports have indicated that Baptism is being phased out of many Churches. There are some natural questions that are outside the scope of this post, but I'd be interested in hearing you guys' thoughts: Why is a staple initiation ritual on the decline? What core change of the Christian community caused this? How will new followers of Christ announce their faith?

<Image credit to Brown Memorial Baptist>

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Hindu Upanayanam | Cody's Blog (2015-12-05 03:53:34)  
[...] Christian Baptism [...]

### **Jewish Bar Mitzvah (2015-11-10 23:11)**

Judaism has a rich history that spans thousands of years and has been a great influence on many of the world religions. This deep history is rooted with rituals and ceremonies that carry specific meanings and events. As with most religions Jews perform sacred ceremonies that indicate rites of passage. There are two main rite-of-passage rituals in Judaism, the Bar Mitzvah and the Bat Mitzvah. These two ceremonies are nearly identical with the only difference being that the Bar Mitzvah (literally "son of commandment") is performed for the boys when they turn 13 and the Bat Mitzvah ("daughter of commandment") is performed for the girls at the age of 12.

For simplicity sake I will refer to it as Bar Mitzvah throughout this post. This is the main rite of passage for young men and women in the Jewish tradition. It marks their official entrance into the Jewish Synagogue, giving them the

ability to be called on to read from the sacred text of the Torah, own property, get married in Jewish law, and many other attributes that would be associated with adults. There is usually a great amount of pressure on the boy or girl as they are required to study and prepare beginning months in advance! The Bar Mitzvah begins during Synagogue when the boy or girl is called to read from the Torah, which is entirely in Hebrew. For most Hebrew is not their native language so they must learn it in order to do well during the ceremony and beyond. Many even seek tutors to help prepare as the scripture can be difficult even for native speakers. Sometimes the boy or girl may even lead a discussion on an issue in the Torah reading. Regardless of the performance the young man or woman is considered a Bar and Bat Mitzvah respectively. After the ceremony there is a great celebration to observe their official entrance into the community. The Bar Mitzvah is perhaps one of the most important rituals in the Jewish religion.

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References:

Chabad - The Bar Mitzvah Ceremony

Wikipedia - Bar and Bat Mitzvah

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### **Muslim Shahada (2015-11-14 22:22)**

Islam is one of the largest religions on the planet. According to npr the Islamic faith is the fastest growing as well. It is estimated that there are nearly 1.6 billion Muslims! This means that over one and a half billion people have been accepted into the Muslim community. Today I'm going to talk about one of the most important ceremonies in the Islamic faith, Shahada.

The main concepts of Islam are expressed in what they call The Five Pillars. These "Pillars" are general ideas and outlines that devout Muslims should follow. Although all five are key to being a successful Muslim, the first pillar will be our main focus as it is the entryway into Islam. This pillar states, "There is no god but God and that Muhammad is His messenger." (PBS). The sentence is recited repeatedly throughout the lives of Muslims. The phrase is extremely important as it asserts that God is one and that there is no other. It also describes Muhammad's relationship with God and the followers of the religion. The first pillar is called the Shahada, but this word is commonly used as the act of professing ones faith to God. Shahada is performed inside of the Mosque in front of at least two current Muslims. The person wishing to profess his or her faith must do so in front of those witnesses with full belief and understanding. Since the first pillar is so commonly used, one must give the recitation a sincere feeling of devotion to differentiate this ritual from simply saying the words. Once they have recited those words in front of the witnesses they have completed the ritual and have become Muslim. Often these ceremonies attract much more than the two required people and is followed with a party to welcome the new Muslim into the community. Although there are four other pillars in the Islamic religion, the first is the most important. Following two simple rules one can formally become a Muslim.

References:

PBS

Religion Facts

npr

Wikipedia

<Image credit to TripAdvisor>

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### **Hindu Upanayanam (2015-11-20 01:11)**

Today at work the topic of religion came up (taboo, I know) and I learned that my boss grew up as a Hindu. This was exciting news! I just so happens that I was planning on writing a post about the initiation process into the Hindu community. My boss, Priya, grew up in India where she was exposed to the rituals and traditions of Hinduism. She was able to provide insight into the ceremony known as Upanayanam or The Ceremony of the Sacred Threads.

It's interesting that she spoke of this since she claims that only boys undergo a formal initiation. After some research it seems that historically mostly only males were allowed to perform, but some sects have adapted to allow females as well. Boys nearing adolescence (in her particular case she said that they were 12) in the Hindu community participate in Upanayanam. It is called The Ceremony of the Sacred Threads because during the ritual, the boy is given three strands to wear around his neck. Each strand is symbolic and they are meant to be worn for the rest of his life. Although she failed to mention the exact symbolism she did vaguely mention celibacy and education. She said that this is similar to a Jewish Bar Mitzvah in that it marks not only his entry into formal Hinduism, but his entry into manhood as well. She also claimed that it is very similar to a Christian Baptism in the way that the boy would be cleansed of his past life and be born again. The cleansing is usually symbolized by the shaving of his head. Afterwards he asks his family for alms. She said she recalls her mother talking about how they used to perform fire sacrifices. This marks his official entry into the Hindu community. It was definitely a treat to have Priya provide some insight into this ancient Hindu tradition.

References:

Priya (my boss)

<Image Credit: BAPS>

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## 1.2 December

### **Buddhist Initiation (2015-12-02 02:32)**

This is the final religion I'm going to touch on in this series. Buddhism has played an import role in Eastern society. It is a religion that focuses on personal development and a deep level of enlightenment. According to BBC there are over 370 million followers of Buddhism today. While most modern Buddhists only seek to follow a more moderate Buddhist lifestyle, some still choose to become Buddhist Monks and Nuns.

Buddhist Monks have a rich history that dates back to Siddhartha in the 6th Century BC. These Monks spend their lives attempting to reach ultimate inner peace known as nirvana as their great teacher Buddha did long ago. Siddhartha is referred to as Lord Buddha who reached enlightenment while meditating and was able to rid himself completely of suffering. With such a commitment in the lives of those who have decided to pursue a life devoted to meditation and simplicity, there must be an initiation ceremony. Potential Monks and Nuns must first learn how to live without modern luxuries. They must also learn the Ten Precepts, known as the Rules of Behavior. These Precepts outline a life that will separate them from these luxuries and temptation of a traditional life. People ages eight and above attend the ceremony, providing an audience for the new members. The initiates heads are shaved which symbolizes their transformation into this new life, leaving behind worries of appearance. They are also given a ceremonial bath that will allow them to put on their new robes. These robes are exclusively worn by Monks and Nuns, which will be used to identify them in society. The new Monks and Nuns are then assigned new names. The name is symbolic for their new beginning and new life. Families celebrate this rite of passage with their loved one by gifting them with simple bowls and tools. This will be all that they need in their journey to enlightenment.

Reference:

<http://sacramentsofinitiation.weebly.com/buddhist-initiation.html>

<Image Credit: Chris and Chris Break Free>

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*gads*

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