

Holy Envies

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This semester I've learned a lot about some of the various religions from around the world. I want to share some of the things that have made an impact on me from the different religions we learned about in class. Each religion is different in what it wants the practitioner to achieve, but I think we can incorporate some practices while not flat out stealing the practice from a different culture. This is called holy envy, where you "[honor the] beautiful elements in faith traditions other than [your] own." (Marks, 2021) It has also been said that "'holy envy' is realizing some deficiencies of one's own tradition." (Kaplan, 2005) Though I am a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) I think these traditions from the following beliefs I've learned about over the semester are something we can learn from, and even incorporate into our practice.

Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the oldest continual practices of a religious manner that we have a clear record of. Because of the Vedas and other holy texts we have a good understanding of how long this system of belief has been around. When most practitioners of the Abrahamic religions view this system, they see a world of idols and idol worship. In the Bible it is stated that Belshazzar, a king of Babylon, was written of on a temple wall, and part of the writing includes the following, that he "praised the gods of silver and gold, brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not nor hear nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, (Daniel 5:23 KJV)." Because of verses like these some people are apprehensive to even view a statue of a god of another religion, but I want to correct a misconception that is made when this concept is talked about.

Most view the prayer that is given by Hindus, and others who pray with a statue in practice, think they are praying to the statue itself. This is incorrect as the statue itself if used as a focus, and is viewed as an extension of the god it represents. "Unlike the Jewish tradition, which forbids approaching God through 'graven images,' Hinduism revels in images of the divine, which grace home shrines and city streets.... At the climax of a special ritual that transforms dead stone into a living divinity, a priest inserts

the eyes, and in that moment the god takes up residence in the image....When Hindus go to a temple, they go to look in those eyes and to see the god of their choosing look back at them.” (Prothero 2020) Many LDS homes have a picture or a statue of Jesus. The removal of praying in front of these is the only difference, as these images are there as a reminder of whom it is we worship. I think in the proper context that we could worship similarly, knowing that God is not the image itself, but by using the image as a focus, our prayers could be better directed.

Buddhism

The eight-fold path was probably the religion which is not my own that I was most familiar with prior to this course. It’s prevalence in pop-culture since the sixties as many people looked for something to find peace that was not found in their original religious dogma that they grew up in with their parents. This adoption of Buddhism by the young men and women of the baby boomer generation of the United States was seen by many of the generations prior as blasphemous. Yet in this religious belief there is much to admire.

The thing in Buddhism that I have admiration for is meditation. Now meditation, in most cases, was done by the priests and nuns of the temples. The practice has been something that is gaining traction with lay members of Buddhist congregations, as well as scientifically minded skeptics alike. There are three types of meditation in Buddhism, concentration, insight, and metta. Concentration is the first practice, to help with “reining in what Buddhists refer to as the ‘monkey mind.’” (Prothero, 2020) Insight meditation is to focus on a single thought to help the mind come up with an answer to an issue or to gain more knowledge of it. This is what Gautama did under the Bodhi tree, meditating on the pains of the world until he was able to gain nirvana and ascend above the suffering he saw, wanting to help others find that way. Metta meditation is also known as loving-kindness meditation. It focuses on “cultivating loving-kindness for oneself. It then moves on to cultivating loving-kindness for someone you love.”

(Prothero, 2020) We as LDS practitioners can learn from all these forms of meditation, I believe it would help us better cultivate our personal connection with God as well as ourselves.

Sikhism

Sikhism is a small religion, but it is full of devout followers. By following Guru Granth, keeping their belief on the god that gave them the writings and songs contained there-in, they believe they can obtain karmic release. Of the things that are taught in the Sikh religion is that of service, and loving everyone. This is shared by the LDS tradition, but the way that it is enacted by their followers is different.

This belief in Sikhism is called Seva, and it is one of the most important tenants of the faith. Whether it be by the Langar meal, the meal after worship, or by serving others in time and money, service to fellow individuals needs to be something each does more of to follow the Guru, and ultimately god. LDS leaders have called many times to include more service in our lives for the down trodden, and though much good has been done by members of the LDS church, there are many that I know, and have heard of in condemnations of the church, that too many do so out of a desire for attention, instead of pure charity. Sikhism teaches the need to recognize god in all, and the seva for nurturing the down trodden parts of the human family to get our hearts in tune with god.

Judaism

Judaism is one of the religious beliefs that most LDS members will hold a base understanding of, in part because we are taught to be thankful for the Holy Bible, and the Jewish faith from which it came. This is reflected in the Book of Mormon “Have ye obtained a Bible except by the Jews?” (2 Ne 29:6) In the verses leading up to this verse the treatment of Jews is also condemned, and though the chapter is mostly for stating why God may have another book of scripture set forth besides the Bible, the verses of 4-6 have always been used as a way to acknowledge the source of the Bible, and the reason for it. Now there is a tradition that the Jews use that I’d like to see more of in the LDS church, and that is arguing.

When I say this, I mean the arguing of religious dogma as seen in Jewish synagogues, a debate of passages, of what has been translated incorrectly, what should be changed and why. Too many members are too quick to simply say, "Follow the prophet, he knows the way." (Children's songbook, 1989) They only use what is official doctrine from the church, which itself has changed in some points over time, and I'd like to see more in the lay members as they take up the scriptures and study them intently, arguing for a view as they see it, not simply willing to follow a leader blindly. Although I believe a prophet speaks for the church as a whole, there is still much we must study out for ourselves, and receive our own revelation on.

Christianity

Because the LDS faith is already a Christian sect, I will not share much in the way of what Christianity is, but I do believe there is much to learn from other sects. In some of the evangelical sects there is devout worship via music, and it is not played as a drudge, nor is it seen as something to dread. Music is meant to be a prayer to the Lord, "Yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me," (Doctrine and Covenants 25:12) and if we're only doing so in somber drudging tunes, we're not giving our full heart to God. We're meant to give all our feelings to him and by showing all our feelings via music, singing with might and excitement, I feel like our meetings would be more engaging, and fruitful, as we remember that it is for God we sing, not for the praise of others around us in the meeting.

Islam

Islam is the largest religion in the world. It was started by the Prophet Muhammad, and has continued, mostly unaltered, for nearly 1,400 years. It is monotheistic, and it is another religion that is based on the teachings contained in a book, similar to its sister religion of Christianity. It is taught that there is not a need to be redeemed by Jesus, but rather to follow Allah, and you will be made one with him. To do so you must practice the five pillars of the religion as closely as you humanly can.

One of the five pillars is the way of prayer as laid out via Muhammad, towards the holy site of Mecca. This is the practice I feel like LDS members could learn from. Members of the Islamic faith are asked to pray five times a day toward Mecca, and though prayer is also mentioned in LDS faith as being necessary, it is that all members of Islam in a time zone pray at the same time, united in effort, this is the thing that I wish we had more of. There is a lot of power to the idea of knowing others, just like you are doing the same thing, at the same time. I feel encouraging certain times to pause life and pray, remembering God is above all, as the Islam members do with Allah, would bring us closer to Him and unify believers.

Atheism

Atheism is not something that needs much introduction, as it has been a growing non-belief for some time now. It is kind of funny to think that there is something to be learned by those who do not believe, yet there are components of Atheism that I think should be incorporated into the LDS way of life. There are two that I would posit here, the first being the ongoing learning of science and learning. If we cut off curiosity because it simply doesn't sit well with what we believe, as many lay members have done and continue to do, then we have cut off a chance for us to grow. In fact it is something commanded, yet very often not done, as seen in Doctrine and Covenants 88: 118, "Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith." Too many members again are too content to only follow the way things currently are, rather than to listen to this counsel from God.

The second thing that I believe should be incorporated is from Atheism 2.0 by Alain de Botton. He advocates that atheists should go through religions "saying, what here can we use?" (Botton, 2012) By going through each religion's view, we can see where we still need growth. This is reflected throughout this essay, but I wanted to hit it here as part of where my inspiration came from.

Conclusion

There is much that I would change about the LDS culture, if I were in charge of doing so in a monolithic way, but I'm not. These are just some of the things that I have learned that I will implement on my own, and share with those that will see them in me. I am imperfect, as is every religion mentioned in this essay, but I wish to continue to get better, bringing others with me who will listen. I know I cannot change the church, it is not my calling to do so, but I can change me as God shows me how.

Citations

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