

Hinduism, judaism, islam and christian religious practices and food



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Abstract

Religious practices are special activities observed in the religious faith of devotees, based on beliefs through certain special events, such as religious rituals to which, in a limited sense, they are sometimes called cults.

Likewise, the meaning of food is the expression of the language of culture through the production and consumption of food. The cultural elements of food and eating habits form related structures that are metaphorical in nature. For instance, in biblical writings, the language of metaphor is used to make a connection between physical and spiritual food. It is not stated directly but it is insinuated. Each of the religions, such as Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity, have dietary laws, unique foods that are encouraged, and are also prohibited. Nonetheless, the meaning of a religious fast can be a celebration of a specific event. Most religions have dietary restrictions and dietary rules. Some are stricter than others, but equally, all must be respected and observed in holiness. Food has always been a centerpiece in many religions, such as Jewish practices and festivities built around the Passover and Shabbat meals, and the requirement that food must be kosher. Islam rules require that food be allowed for consumption, and that devotees are prohibited from eating during the day during the month of Ramadan, and Hinduism dietary rules usually avoid food that they believe hinders spiritual development. Feasts or festivals are periods of time designated to commemorate or ritually celebrate events or observance seasons. These days or periods gave rise to religious celebrations or ritual commemorations that usually included sacred meals. Fasting, unlike a feast, has often been associated with religious rituals of purification and holiness, and are

associated with events and activities of holy days. In short, religious commemoration festivals are among the most important of the sacred times.

Introduction

The meaning of food in religion goes back to the beginnings of religion itself. Perhaps as a celebration or just symbolism, food has been an essential part of religious rituals. Religion and food have been intertwined in such a way that some beliefs and eating habits have their roots in religion. Also, it is an integral part of virtually every culture in the world and is an essential and basic human need. The role of food in the practice of a religion takes on various levels of significance, whether it details specific food that should or will not be consumed, or how individuals and families interact with each other and their designated deity. Frequently, these requirements have been passed down through many generations since the origination of the specific religion, with minimal or no modifications. This is important for a few reasons: First, the selection or exclusion of certain foods helps in defining the limits of the religious practice, as established by the founding members or its deity; Secondly, the acts of food preparation and consumption serve to bind followers of a particular faith together, imparting a sense of identity and uniqueness from other religions, and; Lastly, the connection between observed events in the religious faith and associated food menu items helps people understand the meaning and rationale of tenets of their faith, enabling the proliferation and continuation of the religion through successive generations. This essay will describe several of these connections among the certain religions, factors that influence the selection of diet and their observances of food rituals.

<https://assignbuster.com/hinduism-judaism-islam-and-christian-religious-practices-and-food/>

Meaning of food

The meaning of food is an expression of the language or culture through food. What is eaten, how it is obtained, who prepares it, who is seated at the table, and who eats first is a form of expression, rich in meaning. Beyond feeding the body, what people eat and with whom they eat can stimulate and strengthen the links between people, communities, and even countries (Stajcic, 2013, p. 78). Food can be considered a means of communication; it is the way of sharing non-verbal meanings with other parties. There is no closer relationship than with family, and food is an essential part of defining the roles, rules, and traditions of the family. It is the way to discover attitudes, practices and rituals surrounding food, and beliefs associated with religion. "The term "culture" refers to a set of values, knowledge, language, rituals, habits, lifestyles, attitudes, beliefs, folklore, rules, and customs that identify a particular group of people at a specific moment in time" (Stajcic, 2013, p. 78). The relationship between communication and culture are closely related. For example, sugar in the United States is so common that there is sugar in almost all American food and is so popular that there are even songs about it (Stajcic, 2013). However, in other cultures such as France, sugar is not as important. Food is even mentioned in Bible gospels and serves as a metaphor for the divine. Likewise, it is very common to use metaphors to describe one thing as if it were another, especially when it comes to food. It is the way to establish similarity to and description of the symbolic meaning of food; that is, food as nature, food as love, and food as culture (Stajcic, 2013, p. 79-80).

Dietary Religion Laws

<https://assignbuster.com/hinduism-judaism-islam-and-christian-religious-practices-and-food/>

According to Mary Douglas, writing about passages from the letter to Aristeeas (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013, p. 51), which stated that many people could not understand the restrictions of biblical foods, she mused that ideas about food were not always based on rules. The letter argued the fact that God's law regarding which animals could be consumed and others which could not even be touched might be too restrictive. From the religious point of view, dietary rules are not symbolic, but instead are ethical and disciplinary, based on the history of Judaism (Douglas, in Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013, p. 49-51). Previously, it was thought that these laws were based on the physiology, but then the medieval doctor of medicine called Maimonides discarded that symbolism. However, these laws have a common goal; holiness. In fact, the religious laws of abnegation have educational purposes, and one of them is a prohibition to eat the meat of some animals classified as dirty. This law is clearly stated in the gospels with the holiness approach (Douglas, in Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013, p. 50).

It's worth noting that although some food may be used, it can have different meanings among various religious groups such as Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Each of these religions has dietary laws, unique foods that are encouraged, as well as those that are prohibited. The laws and dietary customs of a religion are based on a sense of separation, and these are highlighted in Judaism, as explained in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy in the Torah (Encyclopedia Britannica). Some prohibited foods that cannot be eaten in any way are; all animals, and the products of animals, that do not chew the bolus (cud) and do not have hooves like horses or cows; for example, pigs, which have cloven feet. Jews were also

not to eat fish without fins and scales, such as shellfish (clams, oysters, shrimp, crabs), or the blood of any animal or birds listed in the Bible (vultures, hawks, owls, and herons). Therefore, all foods outside this category can be eaten (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). Another religion with food restrictions is Hinduism. Hindus usually reject foods that they think might delay spiritual development, such as garlic, onions, and other foods that awaken the senses. Although eating meat is not forbidden, many Hindus avoid eating it. It should be noted, that while cows are sacred to them as far as the meat is concerned, but milk and dairy products are acceptable and are considered spiritually pure (McCaffree, 2002). Although dietary practices vary according to religious laws and customs, kosher dietary laws define foods that are appropriate and permissible for Jewish people (Chabad, 2019). Jews are allowed to eat some species of animals as well as their eggs and milk. Among foods that are prohibited are pork and seafood. In fact, meat and milk shouldn't ever mix, which requires different utensils to be used for meat and milk, and a reasonable period of time must be observed between one meal of meat and another of dairy, in order for them to be "separated" in the body (Chabad, 2019). Equally important, the meat must come from animals slaughtered in a specific way known as "shechitah." Also, some parts of the animal, including blood, should be discarded, which means that the blood must be drained from the flesh through a special process of soaking and salting (Chabad, 2019). The liver, because of its high blood content, should go through a special roasting process before eating it. Fruits and grains must be free of insects, and the wine or grape juice must comply with the kosher law (Chabad, 2019). Similarly, the dietary laws of Catholics are very different from other religions. Christianity does not define dietetic

<https://assignbuster.com/hinduism-judaism-islam-and-christian-religious-practices-and-food/>

rules as robust as other religions. Perhaps this arose from the controversy between the Judaizing and Hellenizing branches of the church during the early years of Christianity, since they were not very sure whether to observe the food laws of the mosaics. At that time, the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law determined that meat offered to idols, blood, and strangled animals should be refrained from eating, thus releasing Christians from all other aspects of the strict observance of the Torah (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). Generally, Catholics can eat meat, so this prohibition is very different from the dietary laws of the Old Testament or other religions at present.

Fasting & Abstinence

Each religion has specific laws and rituals that usually tend to involve food. The law of fasting and abstinence is a religious practice that has remained for thousands of years in different cultures and religious beliefs. Even though the rules of Christianity in relation to food are not well-organized as clearly and consistently as in other religions, Christians have however used food as well as their practices in a wide variety of ways in order to form, strengthen, and spread the faith. Food and fasting are clearly stipulated in the Holy Scriptures (Albana, & Eden, 2011). It all began with the decision of Adam and Eve to eat a forbidden apple and extended even to the blood of the Passover lamb. Subsequently, the Jewish people recognized the fast before God on the eve of the Exodus, the 40-day fast of Jesus while wandering in the desert, the Last Supper, and the dinner in Emmaus (Albana, & Eden, 2011). Based on the tradition, Catholics were prohibited from eating meat every Friday of the year as an act of penance and a sign of reverence to God. Since then, fasting and penance were observed every Friday in memory of the crucifixion.
<https://assignbuster.com/hinduism-judaism-islam-and-christian-religious-practices-and-food/>

Fasting and abstinence are generally part of Catholics life, particularly during Lent, for a short time before receiving communion, as an act of spirituality, as discipline, and as preparation (Albana, & Eden, 2011). The fast during Lent marks a period of abstinence for Catholics. The observance of dietary laws, such as fasting and the deprivation of eating meat and meat products in Lent, particularly on Fridays from midnight prior to the Communion, were distinctive features of Catholicism (Duffy, 2005). page 4 paragraph 2.

Hinduism fasting practices are focused on oral preaching that will help reinforce spirituality to have a happy and harmonious life. The fasts of the Hindus are many and are adhered to in different ways by different religious groups and communities, known through the family traditions and institutional associations in each region (Sethi, 2007, p. 33). The Hindus have specific days during the year, which are considered sacred and are based on the lunar calendar, which divides the month into two fortnights according to the position, size, movement, and brightness of the moon (Sethi, 2007). For example, the fasting of ekadashi is considered the most important of all the other fasts because it has the power to erase all sins and evils, as long as it is in good faith (Sethi, 2007, p. 33). In fact, ekadashi fasts are meant to instill in people the habit of fasting frequently, that is, once or twice a week, biweekly, or monthly (page 38). If the ekadashi falls in the month of March, then for the Hindus, the month is considered good fortune and fasting with Vishnu puja brings universal happiness (Sethi, 2007, p. 38). Fasting ekadashi vrat can be observed by completely avoiding food and water or by partial fasting, in which it is permissible to eat certain foods at mealtimes. People who observe fasting have a regulated diet, without eating meat. All

vegetables that smell strong are not eaten (Sethi, 2007, p. 41). Fasting ends in a special way on certain days and at favorable times. The period that combines dwadashi in trayodashi or day 13 is considered the best day to break the partial fast, but if it is a complete fast, then it can break on day 12 (moon day). Usually, all fasts are ended with prayers and meals (Sethi, 2007, p. 41).

The purpose of fasting in Islam is to seek the grace of God. Fasting is one of the most important requirements for every Muslim, from puberty to those who are in good physical and mental condition. However, there are some considerations for those people who are sick or for those who travel during periods of fasting to make up for lost days. Fasting is the way to educate the believers, since through fasting, the religious learn discipline, self-purification, self-control, generosity, and compassion for the less fortunate (Sethi, 2007, p. 79). Fasting in Islam is considered a journey, because it is not only the act of depriving oneself of food, but of all kinds of evil through the journey of life. In general, Muslims fast during the holy month of Ramadan, which is in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. According to the laws of the Koran, Muslims observe fasts for 29 or 30 days or until the sighting of the new moon. These fasts are best known as rozas (Sethi, 2007, p. 80). Ramadan is a month long and falls in different seasons for different years, and according to the days of a specific month. It means that fasting can be extended for a long period of time. Nevertheless, the senior, the ill, and pregnant or breastfeeding women are free from fasting, as long as they give food to poor people in charity every day of fasting (Sethi, 2007, p. 80).

Feasts and rituals

Religious holidays are periods of celebration or commemorations of events observed at a certain time by the religion. A festivity can mean a series of arrangements and are accompanied by food as a form of celebration. In this case, fasting marks a period of abstinence, such as the fast of Lent for Christians or the fast of Ramadan for Muslims (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). Feasts in a religious sense are commonly considered a lavish meal, or a day of remembrance reserved for an important person, such as a saint. St. Patrick's Day parties, for example, tend to be long festivities. In these cases, religious rituals consist of attending the church and perhaps fasting (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). The terms of celebration, festival, and fasting are generally related; these are the beginnings of a major festival event that generally includes feasts. The food is usually presented in a formal sacred event. For example, the Roman Catholic mass consists of the sacrament of the Eucharist, that is, the ingestion of bread and wine that symbolize the body and blood of Christ (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). The ritual is perhaps formulated from the celebration of the Jewish Passover. This is celebrated with the sacred food known as the Seder, which is usually observed in the home. During the meal, the youngest child present asks four questions, the food on the table has a specific symbolic value, and the wine is drunk four times during the meal (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). The Seder of Easter is a religious, historical, and sacred festival. Individual fasting is often done to make known the love for a saint, or due to a cause such as when people go on hunger strikes, to protest certain situations. Feast and fasting are featured during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Muslims abstain from eating between dawn and dusk but break the fast each night

<https://assignbuster.com/hinduism-judaism-islam-and-christian-religious-practices-and-food/>

with a festive meal. Ramadan is a ritualized event, with a festive rhythm, fasts, and festivals, with interspersed fasting periods (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). The end of the Ramadan period is celebrated with the Eid festival. Eid is a celebration with a special meaning at the end of the sacred month of fasting and reflection. Commonly, with cultural commemorations, both feast and fasting have been an important practice of all religions around the world.

Summary

Historically, religions have deployed the power of their sacred stories to various aspects of life, including how to prepare and consume food. These eating behaviors have their roots in the food rules and laws that each culture and belief impose. Diet choices are regulated by a set of religious beliefs, prohibitions, and dietary laws regarding what is acceptable or not, based on sacred scriptures. Religions mostly regulate food standards, that is, what foods should be consumed at festivities to celebrate an event, how to prepare the food, and when fasting should be started and ended. Currently, all major religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism maintain traditions of fasting or abstinence, which play important roles in their cultural and societal lives.

Works Cited

- Albana, K., & Eden, T. (Eds.). (2011). *Food & Fasting*. Retrieved from <https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/practices-values/food-fasting>
- Counihan, C., & Van Esterik, P. (2013). *Food and Culture: A Reader* (Vol. 3rd ed). New York: Routledge. Retrieved from <http://search>.

<https://assignbuster.com/hinduism-judaism-islam-and-christian-religious-practices-and-food/>

ebsochost.com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=nlebk&AN=512370&site=ehost-live&scope=site

- Duffy, E. (2005). To fast again. *First Things*, (151), 4-6. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/docview/209957766?accountid=8289>
- Feasts, Festivals, And Fasts (2016). *Encyclopedia Britannica* . Retrieved May 5, 2019, from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/food/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/feasts-festivals-and-fasts>
- Harris, M. (1992). The cultural ecology of India's sacred cattle. *Current Anthropology*, 33 (1), 261-276. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2743946>
- McCaffree, J. (2002). Dietary restrictions of other religions. *Journal of the Academic of Nutrition and Dietetics* , 102 (7), 912. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0002-8223\(02\)90212-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0002-8223(02)90212-9)
- Rules and customs in world religions (2019) *Encyclopedia Britannica* . Retrieved May 3, 2019 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dietary-law/Rules-and-customs-in-world-religions>
- Sethi, M. (2007). *Fasting and feasting: Then and now* . Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>
- Stajcic, N. (2013). Understanding culture: Food as a means of communication. *Hemispheres*, (28), 77-86. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy2.apus.edu/docview/1539530315?accountid=8289>

- What Is Kosher? (2019). *Chabad. org*. Retrieved May 3, 2019 from https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/113425/jewish/What-Is-Kosher.htm