

Truth and reason in the life of pi essay example

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



The novel *The Life of Pi* was told in the perspective of Pi, a young boy who found himself trapped in a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. After 227 days at sea, the two finally reached land where Richard Parker ran to the forest freely and was not seen again, while Pi was hospitalised because he was malnourished. When he was interviewed by the two Japanese officials from the Ministry of Transportation, Pi offered two different stories and asked the two officials which one they believed is true. Pi's question, in its simplicity, implies that like the two stories told by Pi, truth and reason is established based on one's own perspective. Pi telling the two officials that " Since it makes no factual difference to you and you can't prove the question either way" (p. 317), is saying that whatever truth they choose to believe is subjective and may not be the same with the choice of others.

Pi's own perspective of truth lies in the first story. He was traveling with his family before the unfortunate shipwreck and with his father being a zoo owner, they had some of their animals from the zoo traveling with them. The first story he told the ministry officials includes a hyena, a zebra, and a Bengal tiger all together with him in the lifeboat. In the end, the animals ate each other until it was only Pi and the tiger left in the boat. They stayed together the whole time until they reached shore, but the officials did not believe this story. At first, it was difficult for them to accept that a young boy would stay alive stranded on a boat with a tiger. However, this was what really happened according to Pi's memory. He survived the whole ordeal because of Richard Parker, saying " I wouldn't be alive today to tell you my story" (p. 207) if not for Richard Parker. No matter how unlikely the story

would be in the eyes of others, as Pi has learned after being doubted by the officials, this story is “ the plain truth” (p. 207).

Pi tells the two officials a second different story to determine if their perspective of truth also lies with their belief in God. There are only two things that interest Pi the most, and those are religion and zoology. He subscribes and practices three religions, and it was his faith that helped him survive the tragedy that almost took his life. He lost his family and he didn't have anyone to rely on for 277 days, yet he managed to triumph over the hardships. “ We must give things a meaningful shape” (p. 285), and this he did through his faith to God. After getting over the grief of losing his family, of the fear of getting eaten by the animals, of finding food for him to survive, and of taming the tiger for him not to be eaten, Pi felt the enormity of his isolation and lost all hope. Yet he managed to spring back from the slump by turning to God, and this is what he wanted to share with the two officials. For him to cope, he turned to his faith and created a story of fiction. He imagined talking to Richard Parker who in turn spoke with a French accent, and to a blind man who was also a castaway like him. All these came to him during his hopelessness but “ perked up and felt much better” after (p. 187).

Like Pi's understanding and acceptance of the three religions that he believed in: Hinduism, Christianity, and Muslim, he also understood the skepticism of the agnostics. The agnostics and their suspension of belief about God's existence is difficult for Pi to understand because they don't subscribe to a certain truth. For him, it is important to have a rich and dynamic life than be uncommitted. Like the atheists, they believe that God does not exist and this is the truth that they subscribe to in their religion. “

To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation” (p. 28). One can’t move on from being stuck if one does not believe and stand for what one perceives to be true. This defines how his faith influenced his reason and his idea of truth, that no matter how unlikely his story may seem to the two officials is of no consequence to him. He lived it, and for him that is all that mattered.

Throughout Pi’s ordeal, he gained a deeper understanding of God and his own strength. Although readers may question the reality of Pi’s experience at sea with a Bengal tiger, and the great feat he achieved for surviving it all after 277 days, Pi stands by his first story’s truth because he has his renewed faith to prove it. Like what Pi said before in a discussion of religion, “ people fail to realize that it is on the inside that God must be defended, not on the outside” (p. 71). Pi believes that defending God should be in the heart because that is where He resides. He only experienced the reality of his words when he was at sea and was losing hope. It was miraculous that he survived, and with that he resolved to “ turn miracle into routine,” promising to “ put in all the hard work necessary” and win over it all because for Pi, “ so long as God is with me, I will not die” (p. 186). It was this voice that he heard which gave him a renewed will to live and survive, and with it is the validation of his faith in God. Although he was not able to see God, his experience at sea proves the truth of his existence. This is the truth of his religion and belief, and he has his life to prove it.

He survived being at sea with a tiger, and that alone would be difficult to believe for anyone. It was also difficult to believe how he did not die of hunger when he was a vegetarian. However, Pi’s sense of reason was strong,

and his religious belief played an important role in his survival. He accepted his fate and worked on keeping himself alive, even if it meant having to kill animals for food and weeping over it at first. He accepts that he has sunk into acting a savage, eating animal meat and drinking their blood for his own survival, but also recognizes that he is doing it to survive and not to go against his belief and faith. “ A person can get used to anything, even killing” (p. 247), and he recognized the reality of these words. Even if it went against his belief and respect on sentient things, he also know that his reality was that he would die if he didn’t eat and drink. As he lay in the hospital in Mexico, he concluded to himself that believing in something that can’t be seen like God is a more important definition of one’s faith.

Having survived the whole tragic incident and being able to tell about it defined Pi’s journey. His struggles he attributed to his religion, claiming that he “ practiced religious rituals that I adapted to the circumstances ” (263). Pi’s version of truth may be hard to believe but like his idea of truth, one just has to believe what the other person says as whatever it is, it will still be subjective. The book offers an understanding of religion and faith based on Pi’s perspective, and with it he also offers a reason for believing in what he believes in. While he tells the story of his life at sea and how it has made him strengthen his faith, he does not enforce that people should also believe God the way he does. Instead, he emphasizes that everyone can choose what they feel is true and believe in it. He gives the two officials a new story that is more kind and less brutal, but they ended up believing his first story. This shows that truth varies according to what people choose to believe in based on their own perspective, and as such it will always be subjective.

Work Cited

Yann, Martel. *The Life of Pi: A Novel*. Orlando, Florida: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing, 2001. Print.