

# Life of pi by yann martel: the importance of storytelling

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What is the importance of storytelling? What are stories for? In the novel *Life of Pi*, Yann Martel considers these questions as he writes about a boy who survived in a lifeboat with a Bengal Tiger. Martel elaborates on the theme of storytelling as a coping mechanism. " That's what fiction is about, isn't it, the selective transforming of reality? The twisting of it to bring out its essence? " Martel writes this within the first few pages of the *Life of Pi*, and this idea is carried throughout the novel.

He goes into vivid detail of an unbelievable story of Pi and Richard Parker stranded on a life boat together, however it is not until part three that the reader learns that the story they first think to be true is in fact a fictionalized version of an animal-less story. Pi twists the reality of the last 227 days to cope with what has happened to him since the sinking of *Tsimtsum*. It is a more efficient way for Yann Martel to bring out the essence of Pi's story through fiction.

Martel twists the reality of the humanistic story to bring about the animalistic essence of Pi in a better light, and in this better light Pi is able to deal with the tragedy and be able to move past it. Pi also finds himself through religion or rather, three religions; Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. He is guided by curiosity and through his fascination of God he learns many stories that guide his morals and actions throughout life. With this, Pi takes on many overwhelming issues and questions that he has to deal with.

These religions use many variations of one Story to show other life lessons, and although the details contradict each other, Pi chooses to believe in their similar essence. In doing this, he is coping with and responding to his

philosophical search. For example, when the three religious leaders meet, they begin to disagree. The Priest argues that Hinduism believes in multiple gods whereas his religion, Christianity, only believes in one, so therefore Hinduism should not be a religion Pi should practice. In response to the noisy quarrel in the street, Pi refutes, " All religions are true.

I just want to love God. " Earlier in the novel, when Pi is atop the hill with Father Martin and hears an unpleasant story, he explains, " I asked for another story, one that I might find more satisfying. Surely this religion had more than one story in its bag—religions abound with stories. " Pi found the first story displeasing and to cope with this, he asks for another one. In the end, Pi turns it around and now questions Mr. Chiba and Mr. Okamoto, " So tell me, since it makes no factual difference to you and you can't prove the questions either way, which story do you prefer?

Which is the better story, the story with animals or the story without animals? " and they both state that the story with the animals was the better story. Through the storytelling of the adventures of Pi and Richard Parker, Martel shows a tragedy in a more human light because it is easier for one to cope with the hurt of a different living creature than it's kin. Instead of sharing the horror of his mother's head flying into his arms, Pi tells the Japanese officials of Orange Juice dying in a fight, because his mother is more important to him than an orangutan.

Yann Martel uses symbolism in his novel within the prominent stories to convey the importance of storytelling. Martel wants to show that storytelling is a way of life for Pi, within his religions, and his tragedy. Pi is able to see

religion in a more abstract and meaningful light, which he does in his tragedy as well. He uses this as a coping mechanism, so he may be able to understand the essence behind the reality of what happened to him and, to some extent, the significance of life.

On a larger scale, Martel is saying that the importance of storytelling in general is to cope with the all encompassing question of the “ meaning of life”. The stories of religion and faith try to tackle this question through the twisting of reality. Zooming in on a microscopic level of life, Martel shows that stories can help one cope with tragedy because hearing a “ better” story can help one understand the more factual story. An altering of the truth can make the meaning of almost anything more understandable and bearable to explain or hear.