

# What makes a religion?

Experience, Meaning of Life



What makes a Religion? By: Ronnie L. Nida jr. Submitted to: Professor McGoran Religions 212 February 3, 2013 Strayer University To study religion one must first determine what the term religion actually involves. When asked, most people would probably suggest that religion is the belief in a higher power. However, in reality it is much more than that. Mary Pat Fisher said “ religion is such a complex and elusive topic that some contemporary scholars of religion are seriously questioning whether “ religion" or “ religions" can be studied at all" (Fisher 2011 page 2). Religion involves many ideas, the vast majority of which are man made, that attempt to give men a sense of purpose in our universe. Religion is mans way of answering the age-old question; why am I here? For the purpose of this assignment I will discuss if the inhabitants of the planet earth are religious or not. The criteria that I will use to define what religion looks like will include; does earth’s population seek to find their cause, nature and purpose in the universe? Do the people of the earth live by some moral code? Finally, do the inhabitants of earth participate in realistic practices designed to demonstrate their devotion to a particular being or belief. Lets take a little closer look whether or not the people of earth meet these criteria. And can be called a religious people. I believe if you were to ask anyone living on earth if they have ever asked themselves; why was I born? Why are we here? The large majority of responses would be yes. The desire to fit human life “ into a pattern of meaning is precisely the function religion". (Gillman 1997 p. 249). Christianity, for example fosters the belief that mans purpose is to conform to the image of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Through emulating the life the life of Christ, man can form a bond with God ultimately leading to an eternity

of paradise with God. The goal of a life without suffering seems to be a central desire of all religions whether that be in a supernatural world after death, as in Christianity, or in a reincarnate life here on earth as in Buddhism, mans purpose is fulfilled when a religion gives the as means to achieve this goal. Religion also gives man a sense of right and wrong. Although I do not believe that one has to participate in a religion to live a moral life, it is undoutbeably true, that if one chooses to participate in an organized religion there will be a moral standard to which they will be held. Though the moral code may very slightly from one religion to the next, the purpose of the code is the same in each. Buddhism for example shares many of the moral ideas of all religion such as: refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and drug and alcohol abuse. Each religion interprets these ideas a little differently but all religions believe it is their moral code that will lead them to their ultimate goal of a life without suffering. All religion on earth involves some sort of ritualistic practice. Religious ritual serves a medium between the human and the divine. It can be traced back as far as man. And can range from things as simple as attending a weekly worship service to more elaborate displays of devotion such as kavadi; practices by the Hindu community of Tamil, in which devotes will pierce there tongue or cheeks with a small spear during Thaipusem to constantly remind them of their Murugan. There is no doubt that ritualistic practices vary radically from one religion to the next, but there intention is the same, that is to show ones devotion to a higher power or belief. We have discussed three basic criteria to determine what religion is but what its purpose? I believe that based on what we have covered one could determine

that religion is mans way of explaining the unexplainable. This could come in the form of intellectual problems, emotional feelings or unexplained social oppression whatever the for of life's mysteries inherently searched for answers from a power greater than themselves for centuries religion has been the avenue used to be the man to find the meaning of life. " We may look to religions for understanding, for answers to our manly questions about life". (Fisher 2011, page 6). Man is continually looking for affirmation that there is something more than life we know that when we die, it is not the end. Religion give man a sense of purpose, otherwise their life may feel pointless. Some may interpret these findings slightly differently. Some believe that religion is nothing more than a means of keeping society under control. Religion is simply used to manipulate the masses " scientific materialists believe religions have been created or at least used to manipulate people" (Fisher 2011, page 3) the idea that man seeks to find more than what his life has to offer, and desires to appease a higher being, can be used to gain an advantage by those that seek personal gain whether it be a political power, financial benefit, or earthly prestige, some argue that religion is only a means of man to take advantage of another. Therefore, in my opinion the people of earth, for better or worse, are and will continue to be a religious people. There will always be questions for which cannot find the answers within ourselves. As long as these questions exist we will look for powers outside ourselves for those answers. REFERENCES Fisher, M., 2011 Living Religions, Pearson Learning Solutions, Upper Saddle River New Jersey Gillman N., 1997 The Death of Death: Resurrection and immortality of Jewish thought, Jewish Light Vermont