

Life of pi essay sample



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Life of Pi opens with a fictional author's note, explaining the origins of the book. The author explains that while in India and floundering on the book he is trying to write, he travels to Pondicherry, where an elderly man, Mr. Adirubasamy, tells him he has a story for him that will make him believe in God. Adirubasamy tells the author about Pi, who the author manages to find in Canada, where Pi relates his story. That story begins in Chapter 1. Pi describes his education at the University of Toronto, his double major in religion and zoology, and why he is so fascinated by the sloth, an incredibly indolent creature. He says that his great suffering has made all subsequent pains both more unbearable and more trifling. He loves Canada, although he misses India deeply. In Chapter 2, the author intervenes as narrator, describing Pi telling his story. In Chapter 3 we learn Pi's full name, Piscine Molitor Patel, and how he got it: he was named for a great pool, called the Piscine Molitor, in which his father's business associate and close friend, Francis Adirubasamy, swam in while in Paris. Pi's father was a hotel manager, but left the business because he wanted to start a zoo, which he did in Pondicherry.

Pi defends the zoo and attacks the common understanding of animals in the wild as free, and animals in a zoo as "unfree", for freedom in the wild is a myth: animals are restricted by their survival needs and their instincts. When Piscine is 12, one of his classmates starts calling him "Pissing," so when Piscine graduates to Petit Seminaire, he shortens his name to Pi. At Petit Seminaire Pi has a biology teacher, Mr. Kumar, who comes to the zoo often and talks to Pi about his atheism. He becomes one of Pi's favorite teachers. Pi describes the danger man poses to the animals in a zoo- the bad things he

feeds them, the way he harms, tortures and kills them. One day Pi's father takes him and Ravi to the big cat house and makes them promise to never touch or in any way go near a tiger. To make sure they understand the full danger, he makes them watch as the tiger kills and eats a goat. This is just the first of many similar lessons he gives to his sons regarding the dangerous animals in the zoo. Pi explains that the key to the science of zookeeping is to get the animals used to the presence of humans by diminishing their flight distance—the minimum distance at which an animal wants to keep a perceived enemy.

Pi explains that, no matter what, there will always be animals who try to escape from zoos, even though generally animals do not wish for "freedom." The escape attempts are often because the offending animal's enclosure is unsuitable, or because something within its enclosure has frightened it. Animals are always escaping from something, never to. As an example, in 1933 a female black leopard who was being abused by her co-habiting leopard escaped from the Zurich Zoo and managed to evade capture and survive for ten weeks before she was shot. The opening section of *Life of Pi* introduces many of the major themes of the novel, while providing a frame for the core of the story. The importance of storytelling as a theme is immediately apparent, as the line between fiction and reality is blurred in the opening Author's Note, a semi-fictional, semi-true account of Yann Martel's writing of *Life of Pi*. The author's note also contains the claim that is at the heart of the novel—that this story will make you believe in God.

Whether or not the reader is, at the end, convinced of this, the characters are. The author/narrator, who never seems too skeptical, becomes a full-

fledged believer. Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba, who at first have little faith in Pi's tale, at the end accept it, and by extension, God. In the first section, however, the reader knows none of this, nor has any idea how the story to come will instill faith. Yet by presenting this as an option, and by focusing on the themes of storytelling and the connections between science and religion, the book's opening paves the way for the final leap of faith that the novel will ask of the reader. Foreshadowing is used extensively. The reader does not know much of the fantastic story to come, nor who Richard Parker is, but it becomes clear that animals, survival, and freedom will all be important in the tale. Pi argues against the belief that zoo animals are unhappy because they are not free, explaining that freedom in the wild, where one must always fight to survive, is a myth.

This assertion foreshadows Pi's own later loss of freedom while at sea, and the ways that the fight to survive diminish his humanity. The danger of wild animals is also previewed here: Richard Parker, yet to be introduced, will embody this danger, whether in a literal or a symbolic sense. If literal, the knowledge Pi and the reader gain regarding the brutality of tigers will make Pi's journey and survival all the more miraculous. If symbolic, this section foreshadows how dangerous Pi himself will become as he loses his humanity in his fight to remain alive. Finally, this section discusses rather extensively the connections between religion and science. Pi cannot keep his dual majors, religion and zoology, straight, although to the typical person they would seem fairly disparate. His favorite teacher, Mr. Kumar, sees the zoo as his temple. And Pi compares the misconceptions involved in zoos, and freedom, as similar to the misconceptions many have about religion. In this

way, Pi opens the reader to the idea that belief in anything can be belief in God. Part 1, Chapters 12-28

The author mentions that Pi sometimes gets agitated by his own story, and that the author is tortured by the spiciness of the food Pi makes for him. Pi explains that an animal will attack you for entering its enclosure only because you have threatened its territory, and that most hostile behavior is the expression of social insecurity. The socially inferior animals will make the greatest effort to befriend the alpha-human, be he the lion tamer or the zookeeper, because they have the most to gain from his friendship and his protection from the other animals. The author describes Pi's house, which is filled with religious symbols and idols and articles of devotion-but of many different religions, not just one. Pi describes the time when his Auntie Rohini takes him, as an infant, on his first trip to a temple, thereby beginning his religious life. Pi then describes what it is that makes him a Hindu, and why he has been a Hindu his whole life, but why that does not have to mean he is closed off from ideas outside of Hinduism, and why all religions are connected.

When he is fourteen, Pi and his family go on a trip to Munnar. While exploring the place, Pi comes upon a Christian church. He watches the priest, then returns to the church the next day and has tea with Father Martin. Father Martin explains the story of Christ and his death, but Pi finds the tale irritating: he cannot believe it. He meets with Father Martin for three days straight, continuing to ask questions. On his last day in Munnar, Pi tells Father Martin that he wants to be a Christian, and Father Martin tells him that he already is, for he has met Christ in good faith. When he is fifteen, Pi

comes upon the Muslim section of Pondicherry while exploring his neighborhood. He ends up in a small bakery, and while he is talking to the baker, the call to prayer comes and Pi watches the baker pray. He finds the physicality of it satisfying. Pi returns to see the baker and asks him about Islam, which he finds beautiful. The baker, named Satish Kumar, allows Pi to explore this faith, and Pi recounts two experiences during which he encounters God.

The author considers what Pi has said about religion in an aside, and then Pi imagines an atheist and an agnostic on their respective deathbeds, which for him exemplifies why he can respect the first but not the second—one has belief where the other only has doubt. Pi's parents find out that he is a practicing Hindu, Christian, and Muslim, when they run into his priest, imam and pandit at the same time. The three religious men, upon realizing that each has only a third of Pi, break into heated arguments over whose is the true religion. Pi says that he just wants to love God, which quiets the three of them effectively. Ravi then finds out about Pi's tri-piousness, and mocks him for it. Pi finds it harder to practice his religions as people react to his multiplicity of beliefs. Pi asks his father for a prayer rug and to be baptized. His father tries to convince him to pick one religion, and tells him to talk to his mother, who tries to convince him of the same thing. He is unswayed. Pi overhears his parents discussing his religious fervor. They decide to just accept it, and wait for it to pass: Pi gets his prayer rug and is baptized. This section deals primarily with one of Pi's central characteristics—his piousness. Pi here tells the story of how he became Hindu, Christian, and Muslim, and it

becomes clear to the reader that God is central to Pi, and was even in his early years.

That this kind of piousness is unique becomes equally evident when we see the three holy men in Pi's life fight with each other over whose religion is best. Even the men who have helped Pi to find God in so many different ways become divisive over details. This section also illuminates Pi's devotion to his religions, for we see him up against many obstacles. The holy men themselves do not want to share him with other religions, his parents would prefer he were as secular as they were, and his brother mocks him. Even the religious communities see him differently once they know that he is not solely devoted to any one of their respective creeds. Yet none of this dims Pi's dedication to his three religions, and to God. However, after this section, Pi's piousness is never again quite as central to the narrative, and during his suffering at sea, though he makes allusions to spirituality, his physical fight for survival dominates.

Thus, his dedication to God here, which requires overcoming obstacles, only serves to emphasize the overpowering nature of his fight for survival later, as that fight seems to diminish his devotion to God. This section also reiterates the theme of storytelling. In one chapter the author describes his own writing of the story, trying to remember Pi's exact words and the impression they left on him. The next chapter contains those words the author was trying to remember. He exists as a figure standing between the story and the reader; even if he remembers and tells it " perfectly", he is nonetheless controlling our perspective of it, and thus rendering the heretofore objective subjective. It also becomes clear here - in Chapter 21

specifically - that the author is already beginning to open up to Pi's story, to find faith in Pi's words. Storytelling and belief in God are inextricably linked; both require faith. Moreover, within a story, one may find God. Part 1, Chapters 29-36, and Part 2, Chapters 37-41

In February 1976, the Tamil Nadu government is brought down by Mrs. Gandhi's government, an event that deeply worries Pi's father. Eventually, the stress of trying to keep his zoo profitable during a time of bad governance leads him to decide to move his family to Canada. The author finds out for the first time that Pi is married, and meets his wife, Meena. He will also meet Pi's son, daughter, dog and cat, none of whom he at first knew existed. Back to Pi's story: Mr. Kumar the baker asks Pi to visit the zoo, and Pi shows him around. While there, they run into Mr. Kumar the teacher. Together they each feed a carrot to a zebra. Pi describes instances of animals becoming companions across species. The author describes Pi showing him photographs and memorabilia. There are very few pictures from Pi's life in India, and those he has were sent over by Mr. Adirubasamy, after the sinking of a ship called the Tsimtsum. The Patels sell the zoo and all its animals, but it takes a year to complete the process of moving the animals. On June 21st, 1977, the Patels board the Tsimtsum and leave India. Part 2 of Life of Pi begins with the sinking of the Tsimtsum.

Prior to this catastrophe, Pi has enjoyed the trip immensely, tracking the boat's daily progress with gleeful precision. Then, four days out into the Pacific, some noise, possibly an explosion, wakes Pi in the middle of the night. Pi goes out to explore what the noise was. Out on the main deck Pi finds there is a severe storm, but, as that is nothing unusual for the journey, <https://assignbuster.com/life-of-pi-essay-sample/>

he is only excited. It doesn't take long, however, for him to notice that the ship is listing severely. He goes back inside and tries to get back to his family, but he finds flooding in his way. It becomes clear the ship is sinking, and what's more, the animals have somehow gotten loose. Pi finds some crew members, who put a life jacket on him and throw him overboard. Pi lands in a partially lowered lifeboat. A zebra jumps in after him, which causes the boat to drop into the water. Pi sees Richard Parker, the tiger, and helps him. At the last minute he realizes it is very stupid to share a lifeboat with a tiger, but it's too late: Richard Parker has already gotten on. Pi jumps off and grabs the lifebuoy. Just then, he sees a shark coming. He uses an oar to create a projection, and hangs between the water and the boat, the tiger and the sharks.

Pi watches the Tsimtsum sink, but sees no other signs of life. Eventually he must get further back into the lifeboat, where he finds the zebra is still alive but suffering from a broken leg. Pi wonders why Richard Parker has not killed it. Then he sees a hyena on the boat too, which he believes means that Richard Parker must have fallen off. This section contains the turning point of the novel, when Pi's life goes from fairly normal to tragic. At the end of Part 1, Pi's family has just begun what appears to be an exciting journey to a new country. Instead, Pi soon becomes an orphan, with everyone and everything he has ever known sunk into the ocean. The end of Part 1 contains more clues for what will happen in Part 2. Pi helps his Muslim mentor and his favorite teacher - both named Mr. Kumar - feed a zebra together, who they view as a beautiful and noble creature.

Here, in the zoo, that may be true, but in the next section, after the sinking, the zebra will suffer agonizing pain – and in the ugliest manner. The scene with the zebra in the zoo can thus be interpreted as symbolizing the last moment of Pi’s innocence, before he too is made ugly by suffering. Toward the end of Part 1, the author offers clues hinting that the crossing of the Pacific will serve as a profound loss of innocence and fundamental change for Pi. The author is shown pictures from Pi’s life, but only ones after the crossing are clear; there are very few from before, and they tend not to show much. The final line of Part 1 is also significant: “ This story has a happy ending.” It is a powerful sentence, because the reader has not yet learned of any of Pi’s suffering; the need for such an ending is not as yet clear.

Ironically, this declaration of hope and optimism spells doom, foreshadowing the devastating trials and tribulations Pi must soon encounter. The beginning of Part 2 jumps around chronologically, but only within a small period of time. It in fact opens with Pi encouraging Richard Parker to enter the lifeboat. That, and not the ship’s sinking, is in effect posited as the representative turning point. If we read Richard Parker as a symbol for Pi’s survival instinct, it is interesting that Pi invites him to the lifeboat—it is an active choice, to survive, to become part beast. That he quickly regrets this decision, and realizes that it may imperil his spirit, is also significant.

Part 2, Chapters 42-56

Pi finally sees another sign of life—Orange Juice, the orangutan, floating on a net filled with bananas. She steps into the boat, and Pi pulls the net aboard. The hyena runs in circles around the boat all morning. Pi remains tense the whole time, but eventually the hyena stops, vomits, and lies down. There are

flies everywhere, and night falls. Pi hears all kinds of noises that terrify him, but he makes it to the next morning. As the sun rises again, Pi regains hope. Then he notices that the hyena has ripped off the zebra's broken leg, and is eating it. Pi also notices that Orange Juice is very sea-sick. In the afternoon, a sea turtle appears. As the sun starts to set again, Pi notices there are sharks circling. Orange Juice looks mournfully for her son, and the hyena attacks the zebra again, essentially eating her from the inside out. When the sun sets, Pi realizes that there is no longer any hope that his family is still alive. The next morning, the zebra is somehow still alive, but by noon it finally dies. Tension rises between the hyena and Orange Juice, and the hyena attacks.

Orange Juice defends herself impressively, but eventually the hyena kills her. When Pi prepares to fight the hyena to his own death, he sees that Richard Parker is still on the boat. Pi tells the story of how Richard Parker got his name. He was captured as a cub with his mother, and the hunter who caught him intended to name him Thirsty. The paperwork got mixed up, however, and somehow the hunter's name wound up listed as Thirsty, while the tiger was given the hunter's name—Richard Parker. Because Pi has now lost all hope, he paradoxically perks up—he has nothing left to lose. He realizes that he is dying of thirst, and, hoping to find fresh water on the boat, begins to explore. While investigating the boat, Pi finds fresh water, and after drinking two liters feels infinitely better. He then eats for the first time in three days. Pi considers his options, and realizes he has no chance of survival either staying in the boat with Richard Parker, or leaving the boat and trying to swim to safety. He decides, however, that he is not going to give up and

accept death. He builds a raft using oars, life jackets, and rope. Right as Pi is about to finish, Richard Parker emerges, and swiftly kills the hyena.

As the tiger then turns toward Pi, a rat suddenly appears and runs up Pi's body and to the top of his head. As Richard Parker hesitates to step onto the tarpaulin toward Pi, he throws the rat into his mouth and descends back under the tarpaulin, seemingly satisfied. Pi manages to finish the raft and throws it overboard; it floats, so he gets on it and, using a rope, keeps it about thirty feet from the boat. During Pi's first night on the raft, it rains from dusk to dawn. While he is kept awake by the downpour, Pi considers possible plans to rid the boat of Richard Parker. He realizes that his best chance of survival is simply to wait for Richard Parker to die of starvation or dehydration, as Pi's own supplies are likely to last much longer. In the morning the rain eventually clears and Pi gets some sleep. But upon waking he realizes how vast the sea is, how small his raft is, and it occurs to him that Richard Parker can both survive on saline water, and will likely swim to Pi's raft and kill him if he gets hungry enough. Stricken, Pi describes the utter power of fear.

This section will by the end of the novel emerge as thematically very important: it contains the portion of the story paralleled in Pi's second telling, yet to come. In this first telling, the events—the deaths of the zebra, Orange Juice, and the hyena—are clearly traumatic, but not devastating. In Pi's second go-around, however, the moments of narrative are imbued with the horror of a 227-day ordeal—the cruel murder of a sailor, cannibalism, a mother's brutal murder, and Pi's choice to kill another man in retaliation and for survival. The primary concern in this section is survival. From here until <https://assignbuster.com/life-of-pi-essay-sample/>

the end of the novel, survival will be Pi's, and the story's, driving force; here it is a new burden, and Pi learns for the first time how it will change him. It is not all bad—it allows Pi to be distracted from the tragic and awful loss of his whole family—but it is more all-consuming than he could have expected. The motif of naming comes up again in this section, too, when we learn the origin of Richard Parker's unusual name.

Throughout *Life of Pi*, Pi always refers to Richard Parker by name—he is never “the tiger.” That this name is meant for a human adds to the feeling that Pi has humanized Richard Parker. He manages to survive with him for so long, but does, in the end, pay for it emotionally, because he expects a human-like goodbye from the tiger – a good-bye he does not receive. This section also emphasizes Pi's profound isolation. The size of the ocean, the overwhelming power of nature as it rains down on him, make his odds of survival seem bleak, his situation dire. Pi does not accept this, however, and decides that he will survive. Yet, even in making this decision, he quickly realizes that the one plan he has come up with that seems at all plausible will not succeed. The power of nature is also emphasized in terms of emotional toll. Pi loses all hope, accepts his parents' and brother's deaths, and feels true, overpowering fear. Yet he also finds freedom in his hopelessness, and he discovers that he has an ultimate will to survive that cannot be squelched. Part 2, Chapters 57-72

Richard Parker watches Pi contentedly after finishing his hyena meal. He then makes a sound Pi has heard of but never heard—“prusten”, a puff through the nose used to express friendliness and harmless intentions. This leads Pi to realize that his only choice for survival is to tame Richard Parker.

This is a relief to him, because he had realized his chances of outliving the tiger were very low, and somehow Richard Parker's presence kept him from thinking too much about his family and his hopelessness. Pi begins the training from his raft. Pi reads over the boat's survival manual, then thinks over all the things he has to do with long-term survival in mind. He realizes that he can use the raft to change the orientation of the boat, leading it to rock more unpleasantly side to side. He also sees cockroaches, the last remnants of life on the boat besides Richard Parker, jump overboard.

Pi uses the solar still to make fresh water from the sea water, then spends the day improving his raft. When he is finished, he looks down and realizes the sea is teeming with life, which he watches until the sun sets. Pi wakes during the night, and realizes that his suffering is taking place in a grand setting, and accepts, temporarily, that it, and he, are insignificant in the grand scheme of things. He decides to fish. He cuts up his remaining shoe to use as bait, but loses all of it to the fish, who avoid the hook. Pi goes onto the lifeboat to search for something else to use as bait, and a school of flying fish go by, many landing in the boat. Pi gets one of these fish and takes it to the raft to use as bait, but he has a hard time killing it—he finally manages, but he weeps over it. It is successful as bait, however, and he manages to catch a three-foot dorado, which he has much less psychological trouble killing. He then gives it to Richard Parker. Pi starts to worry about the water situation, as Richard Parker is showing signs of thirst. He checks the solar stills without much hope, but finds that they have indeed created a fair amount of salt-free water. He pours the water into a bucket and gives it to Richard Parker.

Pi reports that, all told, he survived 227 days at sea. He describes his average day, and how he managed to keep busy. He describes the salt water boils that he would get after his clothes fully disintegrated. He tried to learn about navigation from his survival handbook, but it assumed a basic knowledge that he did not have, and he did not have the strength to alter the boat's course much anyway. Pi describes how his fishing ability improved as time passed. He started to use his cargo net as a lure, which attracted fish to his raft. He also realized it was easy to catch turtles, although not at all easy to haul them aboard. The underside of the raft became a small sea community, which Pi used for snacks and as something to watch to calm his nerves. After time, Pi gets used to the motion of the sea and the wind, but he still cannot ever sleep well because of his anxiety. He gives up completely on being rescued by a ship, and just hopes for land. The first time that Pi kills a sea turtle, it is because the survival manual recommends their blood for drinking.

Richard Parker has started to tolerate Pi on the tarpaulin when it is hot out, but Pi is tired of having to fear him, and decides it is time to impose himself and carve out his own territory. To do this, Pi intentionally provokes Richard Parker to step into Pi's territory, at which point he blows his whistle furiously and uses the raft to make the lifeboat go broadside - and thus rock uncomfortably for Richard Parker - so that the tiger will associate his nausea with the sound of the whistle. He allows Richard Parker to recover, then repeats the process until the whistle alone is enough to make the tiger retreat. This section paradoxically marks both the beginning of Pi's descent into more beast-like behavior, driven by survival needs to a greater degree

than Pi would have believed himself capable of, and the beginning of Pi's control over Richard Parker, who represents the truly wild and bestial. Pi, a lifelong vegetarian, is here driven both to eat meat, and to willfully take life for the first time in his life. He adjusts to this surprisingly quickly—the flying fish that he very reluctantly and very unhappily kills to use as bait catches him a dorado, which he almost gleefully beats to death.

He eventually is even driven to kill a sea turtle, which he finds to be wonderful and one of his favorite foods. As Pi grows more carnivorous, he comes to realize that he must tame Richard Parker. He begins the training that he has devised so that he can have his own territory on the lifeboat and feel relatively safe there. Although it is not easy and is highly dangerous, he eventually manages to mark out his own territory and exert a certain amount of dominance over Richard Parker. It is within this section also that time loses meaning. Before this, even at sea, there has been some feeling of chronology in Pi's story. Within this section, however, Pi declares that he was at sea for 227 days, and with that the chronology stops. Pi, who can no longer keep track of time - which proves something of a blessing. The danger of loneliness also rears its head. Pi's isolation is so extreme that he finds comfort in the sea-life communities that come to grow around his raft. Part of Pi's desire to train, rather than kill, Richard Parker comes from his deep loneliness—although Richard Parker is not much of a companion, he distracts Pi from his greater troubles, and in this takes on a great importance. Part 2, Chapters 73-85

Pi's training of Parker is only successful because Parker does not actually want to attack him: all animals know that the risks of physical violence are

great, so they avoid it when possible, Pi notes. Pi's greatest wish, above salvation, is for a book – but all he has is his survival manual and the diary he keeps for himself. He adapts his religious rituals to the circumstances, and does his best to fight the despair that so often comes. On what he estimates is his mother's birthday, Pi sings happy birthday to her. Pi notices that Richard Parker tries to hide his feces, which is a sign of deference to Pi, so he makes a show of collecting the feces as a psychological ploy. Pi's store of survival rations diminishes, and so he has to eat less and less. His mood grows more and more closely associated with how big a meal he has been able to have. One time he even goes so far as to try to eat Richard Parker's feces, but he can tell that there is nothing nutritious in it, so he spits it out. The sharks are always around, but never do anything that really threatens Pi, and so he grows to like them. One day he manages to pull a smaller shark into the boat, where it gets into a battle with Richard Parker.

After that Pi only goes for the baby sharks, which he kills by stabbing in the eye. One day, while a school of flying fish is jumping over the boat, Pi manages to catch a dorado, and faces off with Richard Parker over it. Richard Parker eventually backs down, and Pi feels that his mastery of the tiger is complete. It is not just Pi's use of seasickness that keeps Richard Parker from killing him, but the fact that Richard Parker is a zoo animal, and Pi was his source of fresh food and water most of the time. Pi explains that the scarcity of fresh water is the largest problem throughout his entire journey. He also has to give most of his food to Richard Parker, so he learns to eat more indiscriminately and quickly. One day comes a storm worse than any Pi has faced. Pi is forced to roll the tarpaulin down and get under it, and into

Richard Parker's territory, to avoid drowning. The storm lasts all day and into the night, and when it finally ends Pi realizes that his raft is gone except for a piece or two.

The boat also is damaged, and much of the food and supplies are lost. Luckily, one whistle remains. Pi describes the whales that he sees, which always lift his spirits. He and Parker are also visited fairly regularly by dolphins, and very rarely by birds, one of which Pi manages to kill. In this section, we see Pi's continued descent toward the bestial. As the food becomes scarcer, he notices that his own eating has come to resemble Richard Parker's—fast, savage, indiscriminate. He also becomes more courageous in his choice of prey, going after baby sharks, and at one time even an adult shark. This section also shows Pi achieving real dominance over Richard Parker. Richard Parker tries to hide his feces from Pi and backs down when Pi fights him for a dorado—all signs that, even as Pi is becoming more animal-like himself, he is dominating Richard Parker more fully. Thus, although it required intellect for Pi to tame Richard Parker, it seems the primal survival instinct in Pi – the animal in him – is more powerful and potentially more useful.

This section also stresses Pi's proximity to death. The storm is the primary example: Pi is saved by luck but left with only one whistle; that whistle in turn represents all that stands between life and death at the jaws of Richard Parker. That said, Martel does dwell here on the more peaceful side of the animal kingdom as well. The whales, dolphins, and even sharks come to provide a kind of companionship for Pi. His description of these animals, however, further emphasizes how much his struggle for survival has altered

him. Even when it comes to the peaceful dolphins and beautiful birds, Pi thinks of animals as, above all, possible food. This seems to foreshadow what will come with the introduction of the Frenchman, when Pi descends so far as to eat human flesh. Of his animal companions, only Richard Parker is still safe from becoming Pi's food, because Pi would be incapable of killing him. But as animals that Pi would never have considered killing and eating in his past life become possible meals, the line between friend and food grows blurred, making the possibility of eating human flesh later less extreme.

Part 2, Chapters 86-91

One day Pi sees an oil tanker coming toward him and Parker. All too quickly it is bearing down on them, and our hero only just misses getting crushed. Unfortunately, the tanker passes without ever seeing Pi, and his ordeal continues. Another day, Pi comes upon a large amount of floating garbage. He pulls an empty wine bottle from the refuse and places a message inside. When he needs escape, Pi covers his face with a wet cloth, which asphyxiates him just enough to put him into a dream-like state. Slowly, Pi and Richard Parker waste away as do all their supplies. They are losing weight and becoming more and more dehydrated. Excerpts from Pi's diary show more and more loss of hope, until he writes " I die" and his pen runs out of ink. After one three-day span of not having anything to eat, Pi notices that Richard Parker has gone blind. Then his own eyes start to itch, and soon he cannot see anything. He becomes sure that both he and Richard Parker will die. As he lays down and prepares for death, he hears a voice. He is sure it must be a hallucination, but he enters into conversation with it all the same. He and the voice discuss what they would eat if they could have

anything, and Pi realizes that he is talking to Richard Parker. He drifts out of consciousness, then hears a voice again, and returns to conversation.

He realizes now that the voice is that of another man, a Frenchman, also blind, also in a lifeboat rowing beside him, also starving. Pi and the Frenchman manage to draw up next to each other, and the stranger climbs into Pi's boat. He immediately dives on Pi and tries to kill him, with the intention of eating him, but the Frenchman is attacked and killed by Richard Parker. Pi explores the dead man's boat, and finds some food and water. As he manages to rehydrate, his vision slowly comes back. He finds the remains of the man still in the boat, and uses some of his flesh for fish bait. He goes so far as to eat some of it, but stops the minute he catches a fish again. This section represents a decisive turning point in Pi's narrative and arc. Here Pi truly loses his innocence, survival exacts the dearest cost, and his suffering becomes tangible. Ironically, this section also continues sparks of real hope. After all, Pi encounters not one but two boats – a miraculous stroke of good fortune that comes to naught. The dashing of these hopes comes almost as soon as Pi can appreciate them.

First, the oil tanker that could save him almost kills him, then continues on into the distance without ever seeing him. Second, and most horribly, Pi's first interaction with another human since the Tsimtsum sank brings not the companionship he is so excited for, but instead attempted murder and brutal death—and with it, profound guilt. Pi makes it clear that whether the first story is taken symbolically or literally, the Frenchman's death is in either way caused by Pi's own fight for survival. Thus he must forever accept that his survival came at the cost of another's life. Whether Richard Parker, or the

survival instinct that Richard Parker symbolizes, is the actual killer seems irrelevant to Pi, since the result is the same. The despair and suffering that follow the Frenchman's death are highlighted by the excitement that precedes it, though that excitement is tinged with surrealism.

Since Part 2 and Pi's loss of all human companionship, the novel has had little dialogue, understandably. So with the arrival of the Frenchman, who Pi and the reader both first assume to be some kind of hallucination, the novel's form suddenly changes course in dramatic fashion. This sudden proliferation of dialogue, combined with Pi's extremely weak state and blindness, and confused belief that he is speaking to Richard Parker, make this scene the least believable of Pi's tale. The scene's ending, however, makes it clear that this is also the scene that Pi would be least likely to make up—its horror would serve him no purpose. Here, then, we see one of the few instances in which Pi does not try to tell the better story: he cannot incorporate God into this awful memory. Part 2, Chapters 92-94

One day Pi sees trees, which turn out to be part of a low-lying island. He assumes the vision is a mirage, until he tests the island with his foot and smells the vegetation. The island is made largely of a kind of tubular seaweed, which Pi discovers is edible, and even delicious. He eats his fill and explores the island as much as he can (he is too weak to walk), but eventually Richard Parker ventures onto the island too, prompting Pi to return to the lifeboat to sleep, in case the new surroundings make Richard Parker dangerous again. After two days Pi regains the ability to walk. Once he is strong enough to explore beyond the edges of the island, he finds that it is full of meerkats. It is also covered with ponds that Pi discovers to be

freshwater, and from which the meerkats pull dead fish. It occurs to Pi that the algae somehow desalinates the water. Pi bathes himself and cleans out the lifeboat using the fresh water. Pi finds that the island possesses nothing but algae, trees, and meerkats; no other life whatsoever.

Both Pi and Richard Parker manage to revive themselves, Pi with the algae, Richard Parker with the meerkats, and both with the fresh water and exercise. Richard Parker starts to get more aggressive, so Pi goes back to training him. One night Pi finally decides to sleep out of the boat, and with his net makes a bed in one of the trees. While there, he sees all the meerkats suddenly desert their ponds and run to the forest, and all climb up into the trees. Pi enjoys sleeping with the meerkats, so he continues to do so, until the day he finds a tree at the center of the forest that appears to be the only tree to have fruit. When he tries to eat the fruit, he finds that each piece of fruit is actually layers and layers of leaves wrapped tightly around a human tooth; what's more, together the fruit form a full, perfect set of teeth. Pi's curiosity gets the best of him, and he tries to plant his feet on the island by night. The soil burns him terribly, however. It turns out that the island is carnivorous: it emits acid at night that dissolves anything on its surface. Pi must leave his semi-paradise, and is utterly weary as a result. He turns wholly to God. Some time later, Pi and Richard Parker come upon land in what turns out to be Mexico.

Richard Parker goes immediately off into the jungle without any kind of goodbye or acknowledgment to Pi. Soon Pi is found by humans, but he weeps over Richard Parker's desertion. The people who find him bathe him and feed him, and he is taken off to a hospital. He proclaims that this is the

end of his story. This section continues the pattern created in the previous one, of great hopes followed by great disillusionment. When Pi discovers his island, it seems too good to be true—it has plenty of food, fresh water, meerkats for companionship, and protection from the weather. It is even moving, so there exists the potential that Pi could meet a ship, or other, human-inhabited land. Pi regains his strength, and some degree of happiness. Yet while Pi seems to believe this island is a paradise, Martel's (and Pi the storyteller's) significant use of foreshadowing prevents the reader from ever truly believing it. Richard Parker's sore paws and refusal to stay on the island at night, the meerkats' panicked run to the trees, the disappearing fish, all foretell that something sinister is afoot. Pi does not give up his belief that this island is his perfect new home until he physically encounters the truth. Pi the storyteller transitions abruptly from this realization to his coming upon land in Mexico.

What happens in between - Pi's utter loss of all hope, his final turn to God - is told to us in one brief sentence. That is all. How and when Pi comes upon land is left unsaid; this again emphasizes the depth of Pi's loss of hope after learning the truth about the island. Pi, who normally cannot say enough about God and the rituals he uses to worship him, here says only that he turned fully to him. This section also marks the betrayal by Richard Parker, a betrayal Pi can never forgive—not the killing of the Frenchman, but the act of leaving Pi without any indication of a goodbye. The resulting feeling of loss and sadness, rather than any excitement or relief at having finally returned to land, is what Pi emphasizes at the end of his story. The reader is thereby reminded that, although Pi has survived, he has lost all his family and

everything he cared about, and now must face that loss within the human world. Pi's declaration that this is the end of his story is also significant. Much in fact happens after his recuperation in Mexico. Positing "the end" when he does is a choice; the author, after all, does not end the story there, but instead includes an additional five chapters. Storytelling thus implies the ability to choose one's own story. Part 3

The author explains that what follows are transcripts of a recorded conversation between Pi and two men, Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba, of the Maritime Department in the Japanese Ministry of Transport, after they come to see him in the hospital in Tomatlan, Mexico. Mr. Okamoto gives Pi a cookie, and asks if he would be willing to tell them everything that happened to him. Chapter 97 says simply, "The story." After the story Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba think Pi is fooling with them. They take a break, and Pi asks for another cookie. Mr. Okamoto tells Pi that they don't believe his story because bananas don't float. Pi says that they do, and insists that they test it. They do, and it becomes clear that bananas do float. They tell Pi that they also don't believe him about the island, or about Richard Parker. Pi tries to convince them, and they remain hard to persuade. They insist that they want the true story, which leads Pi to tell them a completely different story. In this new story, Pi (Richard Parker) ended up in the lifeboat with his mother (the orangutan), the cook (the hyena), and a sailor (the zebra). The cook was voracious, and ate things like flies and rats even when he still had plenty of rations left.

The sailor was young, and had broken his leg getting into the lifeboat. He only knew Chinese, and he suffered greatly. As the sailor's leg got infected,

the cook said they must amputate it to save the sailor's life. This they did, using only surprise as an anesthetic. The cook later let it slip that he had amputated the leg to use it as fishing bait, but it was too decayed and did not work effectively. The sailor died, and the cook butchered him. He claimed this too was for bait, but after a few days he started eating the flesh himself. Pi and his mother never ate any of it, but they did start to eat the fish and the turtles that the cook captured from the sea. One day Pi was too weak to pull in a turtle, and the cook hit him. His mother hit the cook back, and sent Pi to the raft. The cook killed the mother. Eventually Pi got back onto the boat with the cook. They shared a turtle, then Pi killed the cook with the knife the cook left out. Pi subsequently ate some of the cook's organs and flesh. Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba notice the parallels in the two stories. They continue to question Pi about how the boat actually sank. The final chapter contains Mr. Okamoto's report after the interrogation, in which he says that the cause of the Tsimtsum's sinking is impossible to determine, and references Pi's amazing feat of having survived 227 days at sea with an adult tiger.

Part 3 of *Life of Pi* revisits and reemphasizes themes raised earlier in the novel, as well as complicating and redefining them and the story itself. With the exceptions of the author's chapters scattered throughout the novel, Part 3 is the first significant portion of the text that departs from Pi's point of view to tell his story. This is especially significant, because Pi has claimed that his story is over; the author's choice to continue it is in a way a departure from Pi's presentation of, and thus control of, his story. This idea of narrative control is crucial. Pi tells Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba that everything in life is

inherently a story - even facts, because they are being perceived by someone, and thus can never be truly objective. Yet in the men's unwillingness to believe Pi's story, they weaken his control over it.

Even faced with evidence—the floating bananas, the meerkat bones—they stand firm in their disbelief. In response, Pi tells another story, one which should be more believable to them. In being forced to do so, he is in essence losing his control as storyteller - for the men's dislike of zoo animals being involved must define how he tells the story. Pi's second story is, seemingly, more realistic, as well as significantly more tragic and horrifying. In both stories, he survives a long and terrible ordeal, but in the second, he seems to contain both his own, rational self, and the ferocious, wild, and very dangerous Richard Parker. Even if this is not the "true" story, the possibility of such a division of Pi's personality is made clear by his doing so here—throughout his ordeal, we see his need to survive slowly overpowering his rational (vegetarian) self.

Survival at Sea

As is clear in *Life of Pi*, surviving for long periods of time at sea is extremely difficult, even without an adult tiger in the mix. Many experts consider survival at sea to be the most difficult survival situation. The three essentials of survival are protection from the elements, food, and water. Pi makes it clear that lack of abundant fresh water was his greatest stress at all times, and this is realistic: Pi was in a fairly hospitable climate and so faced little danger of freezing to death, and humans will die of dehydration long before they die from starvation. In fact, dehydration is such

a danger that in a situation without abundant fresh water, survival experts recommend eating nothing rather than eating protein, which requires water from the body's store to be digested. In situations like Pi's, where there is limited protection from the sun, experts recommend wetting skin and clothes with salt water, which helps prevent loss of body water through sweating. They also recommend being as still as possible during the heat of the day, and doing essential activities at dawn and dusk to minimize sweating. Although Pi finds that his seasickness is never as severe as Orange Juice's or Richard Parker's, seasickness can be dangerous in trying to survive at sea, for the vomiting it can cause will further dehydration and weakening.

Pi is also correct not to try to survive in the water in order to distance himself from Richard Parker—life expectancy in a survival at sea situation is much worse for those who do not have a boat or raft. Even in the warmest waters, life expectancy is only twelve hours, and it quickly drops the colder the water is. Drinking seawater and urine are both, Pi is correct to believe, dangerous, and hurry the process of death by dehydration. Even drinking seawater diluted with fresh water is dangerous and not helpful. Pi is also correct that turtle blood is a safe method of hydration, and there is also potable liquid in fish eyes and fish spinal fluid. Although some fish can be poisonous, generally fish that are available when you cannot see land are safe.

Solar stills are known to be theoretically helpful, but often do not work well in practice. The side-effects of dehydration can include headache, irritability, dizziness, faintness, rapid pulse, shallow breathing, pins and needles, and after that, hallucinations and delirium, preceding death. Blindness, however, is not a common side-effect. Yet while the second telling of the story may

cast doubt for the reader on the first story, it is not meant to do so for more than a moment. Even the highly skeptical Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba in the end choose to believe the first - the better story - because Pi tells them that they may. Neither story affects their investigation, so there is no reason not to take the less tragic and more "enjoyable" story as the true story. And this is how Pi finally defines his belief in God, and why Mr. Adirubasamy tells the author that this story will make him believe in God. Why not believe in a fundamentally benevolent universe?