

Spirituality in life of pi and the great gatsby



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Devoutness, Difficulty, and Determination

The novel, *Life of Pi*, shares affinities and discrepancies with the novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Yann Martel, the author of *Life of Pi*, bases its story off of a true story about how 16-year-old Pi Patel survives for 227 days in the Pacific Ocean. F. Scott Fitzgerald writes about how a man named Gatsby, strives to attain the American Dream. However, the difference between the two is that one lives in the end and one does not. Both of the mentioned novels share the presence of spirituality, mental/physical suffering and evident determination, which present themselves throughout the course of the novels.

The presence of spirituality is prevalent in the book *Life of Pi*, but *The Great Gatsby*, reveals the presence less explicitly compared to the *Life of Pi*. Pi Patel associates himself with various sorts of religions such as Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The amount of religions Pi's invests himself in surprises his parents, but they do not interfere. Whenever Pi refers to the all-mighty being, he refers to the being as God. In Hinduism, there are many gods and goddesses that symbolize their respective thing and in Islam, which makes the religion polytheistic. However, in Christianity and Islam, there is only one god, making it polytheistic. Unless Pi refers to a specific god/ goddess for a specific cause, he otherwise refers to God as a singular term. Throughout his struggles at the sea, Pi often prays to God to aid him in continuing his journey, " Yes. so long as God is with me, I will not die. Amen" (page 164). Pi's strong belief in religion is one of the key factors that help him stay alive for 227 days out at sea. Pi Patel views God as a ray of optimism. No matter how often Pi seems to lose hope, he still always

believes in God, which shows his devoutness. However, *The Great Gatsby* does not reveal the presence of religion so obvious. The advertisement board shows the presence of God, which shows the eyes of Doctor T. J Eckleburg, an oculist. The only characters that seem to acknowledge and mention the board are Nick Carraway and George Wilson. George Wilson thinks that the eyes of Doctor T. J Eckleburg are the eyes of God, as he mentions the reference to Myrtle, his wife, " God knows what you've been doing, everything you've been doing. You may fool me but you can't fool God!" (page 170). Out of all the characters in *The Great Gatsby* , Wilson shows the most devotion to religion. Wilson uses the " eyes of God" as a reason to say that people should be punished for their sins. Wilson feels that he should punish Gatsby for killing his wife, although he does not know that it was, in fact, Daisy who killed Myrtle. Wilson goes on to kill Gatsby then proceeds to kill himself. " God sees everything" (page 170), is a statement that Wilson strongly embraces in his head. Although the presence of religion is much more evident in the *Life of Pi* , *The Great Gatsby* does a fine job in incorporating the presence of God albeit without religion.

The characters in both novels suffer through physical and mental means. In the *Life of Pi* , Pi Patel endures immense physical and mental suffering. Since Pi Patel wanders at sea, he does not know when or even if anyone will find him. He ends up with a tiger who can kill him and is low on resources such as food and water. All Pi Patel ever sees is water, water and more water. Running low on food and resources, Pi slowly starts to lose his sanity. He begins to think he is talking with the tiger, Richard Parker, " I laughed. I knew it. I wasn't hearing voices. I hadn't gone mad. It was Richard Parker who was

speaking to me! (page 273). It is evident that tigers cannot speak English to humans, so when Pi begins to “talk” to Richard Parker, it is merely his insanity growing stronger. Since Pi is in extreme hunger, the first topic that he and Richard Parker talk about is food. Pi goes into specific details about the food he wants to eat, which shows the reader how hungry Pi is. Pi endures physical suffering via hunger and thirst. Around three weeks or so is the limit for how long one can go without food, but in the case of water, one can only last around a week. Pi reaches and exceeds these limitations and thus receives temporary blindness. He also loses almost all his energy and is essentially on the verge of death. Pi is not the only character to suffer, as the other animals on his boat suffer physically. The zebra, the orangutan and the hyena also die during the journey, with the tiger Richard Parker, being the only animal to survive the ordeal. Pi’s family also suffers a tragic death since they split apart from Pi when the ship *Tsimtsum*, sank. The suffering in *The Great Gatsby* is less tragic on the mental side as well as the physical side. Myrtle and Gatsby both endure literally physical suffering since they both die in the novel. The mental suffering is less explicit in the novel, but with an eager eye, the reader can see the existence of mental suffering. Daisy Buchanan is one of the characters to show mental suffering since she is aware of Tom’s affairs with other women. Daisy reveals to the reader that she is aware of how women receive treatment in society and how a woman’s beauty provides more value than their intelligence, “I’m glad it’s a girl. And I hope she’ll be a fool—that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool” (page 20). Daisy feels thwarted knowing about how women receive treatment like in society and thus, hopes that her daughter will be happy and ignorant to society’s treatment. Gatsby also suffers from

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the stain on his relationship with Daisy. Ever since reuniting with Daisy after five years, the relationship slowly spirals downwards. Signs of the downfall of the relationship reveal themselves when Nick notices that Gatsby is not enjoying the reunion as much as he hopes too, " As I went over to say goodbye I saw that the expression of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby's face, as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness."(page 103). Gatsby's obsession for Daisy causes him to have high expectations when Gatsby and Daisy reunite. However, he identifies that something does not feel the same and thus, he is not as happy as he wants to be. The disappointment that Gatsby endures can prove itself as mental suffering. While both novels share the common existence of suffering, the *Life of Pi* shows a higher magnitude of mental and physical suffering when in comparison with *The Great Gatsby* .

Determination is a trait, which shows itself present in the main characters Pi and Gatsby. Both characters have different reasons to possess determination, but only one perseveres through their hardships and struggles to meet their goals while the other one does not. Pi Patel's goal is a simple, yet difficult goal; to stay alive and find human civilization. Along with a strong belief in religion, Pi shows determination, which helps him tame the tiger, Richard Parker, " I had to tame him. It was at that moment that I realized this necessity. It was not a question of him or me, but of him and me." (page 181). The decision to tame Richard Parker was a crucial and pivotal moment in the book. If Pi had decided to tame Richard Parker, Richard would have surely killed Pi. Due to Pi's determination, he was able to tame the tiger. Pi's determination is also present when he manages to

survive for 227 days out at sea. To survive for two thirds of a year is remarkable and requires the utmost determination and willpower in order to do so. Pi is living proof of that feat. Gatsby's goal, simply put, was the American Dream, more specifically Daisy. Gatsby hopes to accumulate wealth and then attempt to woo Daisy and win her over. However, Gatsby does suspicious and illegal acts along the way in order to accumulate the wealth he needs. Gatsby put Daisy as the face of his American Dream. Gatsby came from a poor family and through determination, he managed to make his way up the social ranks. Even when the relationship between him and Daisy began to spiral downwards, he remains determined to win her over. Unfortunately, Gatsby does not reach his goal, as he receives a bullet to the heart by Wilson when he was floating in the swimming pool. Near the end of the novel, Nick Carraway sees what Gatsby was striving for, " Gatsby believed in the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter-tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther...And one fine morning-" (page 193). Nick Carraway recognizes Gatsby's dream and compares it to others, who also strive to attain the American Dream. Although both of the characters, Pi and Gatsby, possess determination, Gatsby suffers a dreadful demise while the Pi Patel accomplishes his goal.

While Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* is an adventure about a 16-year-old boy lost at sea and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is about a man who has one sole desire, both novels possess similar topics. The *Life of Pi* and *The Great Gatsby* shares resemblances as well as disparities surrounding the existence of spirituality, mental/physical suffering as well as evident determination,

which present themselves throughout the course of the novels. Grievously, Gatsby meets his demise while Pi Patel lives to tell his tale around the world. Both novels are fantastic works of literature and should be must read to any bibliophile.

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