

Russell Fung
11/13/2020

Interview With A Jewish Friend

Interview a person whose religion is different from yours. You will design 6-10 questions you would like to ask this person in order to better understand their commitment to their religion. Write an analysis of your interview using the responses from the 6-10 questions of the person you interviewed. Be sure to respond to each of your questions and then give a 1-2 paragraph analysis of your own.

Questions:

1) How would you describe your father's religion?

J: My Father's religion is my own. We're not too serious about it, but we do have Shabbat every Friday/Saturday. We do the prayers and whether we believe in God or the Bible as the absolute word is really an individual or personal thing. So it is never really discussed or pushed to know. We keep our heads covered in temple and go mostly to temple on the most important holidays. Namely Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It is a strange religion that uses a 5,000 year old language that has no verbs. All we know is 2 things. Treat others as you would want to be treated and make sure wherever you go, that you leave it a better place than when you got there.

R: That's very interesting. It sounds just like Confucianism, though that's not a religion but more of a Chinese philosophy. Hebrew is definitely an old language, and it's cool that there's a long line of people who still speak this and practice it.

2) Do you have memories and comments on how he practiced his religion?

J: No real memories on how he practiced it other than he was stricter when he was younger. Nowadays he just covers the basics. Prefers to live more than spend time asking God for whatever. Also thinks it's kinda rude to keep bothering him about things.

R: I couldn't agree more about that last part. I'm the same with Christian religion. The older I get, the more I prefer to live more than spend time asking for things. It just seems bothersome.

3) How would you describe your mother's religion?

J: My mother's religion was almost nonexistent. She was brought up Protestant. Went to church on Sundays, but was not really part of her life. She would treat Jesus like Santa Claus that might be real.

R: My mom is the same. She's protestant-ish. Doesn't really practice. The reason I asked this question was to get a sense of your upbringing when two parents practice and believe in different things.

4) Do you have memories and comments on how she practiced her religion?

J: I remember going to a church service once on Christmas because she wanted to go. I remember we just followed everyone else, but everything was in English. There was no mysticism. Not like in Judaism.

Everyone was given a candle at the end and when we got outside with our lighted candles it was like the hillside was covered in candlelight. My father said, "Son, we are pilgrims in an unholy land."

R: Hilarious! Wow, you had a taste of two religious worlds. It's almost like they cancel each other out, or they just add to what makes you "you."

5) How would you describe your commitment to your religion?

J: My commitment is pretty light, but I don't have to be committed. I spent 2 years living in Israel, home of my people for thousands of years. Most Jews in the US feel like they have to prove their (or they're) Jewish. After living there, that burden is no longer there. I can just be and know that I am what I am, and that is a Jew.

R: That's a similar feeling I had when I lived in Asia for a few weeks. Although, I understand I'm comparing race, not religion. I do know that feeling of just being what I am, without having to explain it or cater around non-Asian Americans.

6) What criticisms have you observed from people who aren't part of your religion?

J: It depends. Most of the time the criticism of Judaism is that we're just different. Are we a religion or a people. They have a hard time for some reason understanding we're both.

Also, Christianity and Islam especially treat us as if we're an outdated system, while Christianity is supposedly Judaism 2.0 and Islam is Judaism 3.0

It's not that way, but we always feel like a 56k modem in a WiFi world.

R: That's a great analogy. For sure, I do get confused about Judaism being both a religion and a race of people. Not sure "race" is the right word. But yes, I see how the culture and religion is tied to a lineage of people that dates back thousands of years.

7) Is there anything positive that you get out of your religion?

J: I can work on Sunday without an issue. Jewish guilt beats all guilt in the world, easily. But I have a community of people I can call upon at anytime, never having met them and they will help me sight unseen just because I'm one of them.

That's strangely comforting in ways I don't really have to think about.

R: Sounds like how it is in Hollywood. There are so many Jewish people working the ranks and there's a sense of unspoken support amongst strangers who happen to be of a similar background.

ANALYSIS

This week's lecture covered various religions as it pertains to education, schools, and influence on society. Judaism was very interesting to read about, but actually engaging with a person about Judaism made me more aware of how religion shapes a person and the society around them.

First a background about myself: I'm an Asian American male whose father is Chinese and Buddhist; and whose mother is Chinese-American and Christian. Two different religious beliefs were tied to ethnicity in a way, and also nationality. I found that my Chinese dad is just naturally Buddhist because he's from China, whereas my mom is just naturally Christian because she's from Utah. No, she's not Mormon.

So when I interviewed my Jewish friend, I found that we had similar experiences in the realm of religion. His dad is more traditional leaning towards the religion associated with his ethnic origin, like my dad with Buddhism. Also, his mom is more casual with Christianity just like my mom. Third, and finally, we found that the language of English also affected our experience with religion. Traveling outside of the United States to our fathers' country of origin does significantly bring us closer to an understanding of what makes our fathers tick. Ultimately, we identify closer to a mixed commitment to religion.

Anecdotally, my last job was helping Jewish kindergarten children attend their zoom classes. The private school Jewish kids had a Hebrew class, whereas the public school kids didn't. Those private school kids also had a meeting with a Rabbi once a week, as part of the curriculum. I sat in and observed these kids' Hebrew and Rabbi classes. They were very interesting to me, because I've never been exposed to this type of education. I didn't really think about the separation of church and state, because private schools are, well, private. They can teach whatever they want, as long as parents want to pay for them and for their kids to learn more about their culture/religion. Obviously, the public school kids have zero exposure to this, and instead study English.

Teaching English to people of different religions is in some way, shaping someone's way of practicing their religion. Even though the Holy Bible was originally written in Hebrew, most people in the United States read it in English. I think that exposure to English makes it easier to read the Bible than say, other religious texts, because they're written in foreign languages. According to the lecture, the United States leans heavily towards a Protestant practice of belief. When someone of a different religion is learning English, chances are that their teacher or peers have Protestant background or exposure. I would definitely keep this in mind when I teach English. Because of my exposure to Jewish kindergarten education, and my friendship with a Jewish person, I am mindful of the beauty of diversity in religion. I will be able to help other students learn English while giving them space to explore different beliefs that are not my own.