Herby He

Why do people have faith

My grandma is the only person I know who believes in god. She believes in virtually everything, from Jesus in western culture, to Sakyamuni from Indian culture, and Bodhisattva in Chinese culture, anything that could somehow change your life, Once in a while I would go to her home, and I can feel how strongly she believes in the spiritual forces. She always wears many crystal necklace and jade on her wrist, saying that it keeps the bad luck away; her room is overwhelmed with status or hangings of different spiritual beliefs in different culture, such as Jesus and Virgin Mary, or Budda; she would go to the local temple every festival, praying to the god to bring luck to the whole family. When she watches TV and a poor guy is getting into trouble, she would say it’s god’s punishment. Every time this happens, I would jocosely say to her that God has nothing to do with this, then she would put on her serious-face and teaches me that God exists. Everything in my grandma’s life works around her faith: good things happen because of god’s bestowal, and bad things happen because someone upsets the god with their behaviors. In her words, “God is watching you, even if you don’t believe in it.”

Raised by my grandma, I’m also influenced by her faith. When I was in elementary school, I prayed before every test, prayed that I won’t be caught after breaking the rule, pray that there would be less homework. However, when I got older, I stopped believing in gods simply because praying never seems to work. I found that finding my own mistakes and start from there is more useful than praying for god’s help. I started to question why people still believe in God, even in this highly advanced society? People first created supernatural beliefs merely because they don’t have adequate knowledge to explain everything that happened, from storms to earthquakes. But why do people still believe in god when causes of an incident can be analyzed objectively? I tried to find the answer in my closest superstitious family member--my grandma.

Who appears to be a humorous and lovely person, my grandma had lived a tough life. She was born during wartime in one of the poorest areas in China and didn’t receive much education until forced to work at factories. During the well-known 3 years national starving period starting from the 1950s, my grandma and grandpa barely survived eating nothing but bark and grasses. My grandpa worked for a railway company, meaning he had to travel around. So when they had a baby, my grandma had to raise the child and worked at the factories at the same, while waiting for my grandpa to send checks back home. Not long after the first baby, my grandma had my dad and another baby. So she had to work 24/7 to keep everyone fed. Unfortunately, one time when she was working in the factory, a hammer slammed into her thumb, making her unable to work in factories anymore. Later, one of her children, the aunt that was never mentioned in my family, passed in an accident, crushing the family. But my grandma had nothing to do but move on... All these bad things that happened to my grandma makes me believe that faith is something people use to cover up trauma, turning bad things that happened more acceptable. Blaming some external force for disaster that happened makes someone feels that this is out of their control, thus there’s nothing he/she could change it even if he/she wants to. More importantly, believing in something means finding a way to redeem oneself from the mistake that happened. If someone bought stocks and lost a lot of money, he/she might pray harder to god so it won't happen again. Though things in the past cannot be changed, relying on faith seems to be a good way for people to move on. Because she has faith, my grandma thinks what happened to her is inevitable, determined, so now she’s not bothered by the past and can look forward to the future. I believe one of the reasons religion exists is to provide a place for people to leave their trauma behind, and that’s why many people still have faith in the present time. Most of the people in the middle-east warfare area are deeply religious because hanging on faith is the only way to escape from anarchy and their laborious lives. Maybe for some people, people who have faith are only avoiding the essential problem, like an ostrich sticking its head into the dirt; but for others, faith is like medication that cures people of terrible things that happened. And that’s what I think why some people still have in faith after being inspired by grandma.

Central idea: People have faith because faith is a remedy for traumas.

Form: Essay

Purpose: To explain how I came up with the question and my point of view of why people have faith.

Public audience: Peers, especially non-religious people.

Context: In a quiet place, coffee shop or classroom.

The main purpose of this essay is trying to analyze why people still have faith in the present time. I choose to write an essay because with an essay I can freely incorporate personal memories and experience to develop my arguments. Though a major portion of the essay is memories, I choose to write an essay instead of a memoir because a memoir stresses too much on emotional expression rather than establishing ideas. My central idea is that “faith helps people with trauma” since it corresponds to my purpose.

I choose the context to be in a quiet place because only in a quiet place can people reflect on their own experience, come up with their own opinion about faith, and understand my argument better. I choose my audience to be non-religious peers just like me so they can better understand why I think in this way since growing up in the same decades, they might have similar thoughts or questions. I want my audience to be non-religious simply because I wrote the essay from a non-religious point of view so my audience can resonate more.