

Radwa Kahn

The purpose of my research for this class project was to further my understanding of faith and religion, and how I could apply aspects of what I learn to apply to my own journey in faith and discovering my beliefs. The first person I interviewed to discuss the topic of faith was Radwa Khan. She is a phlebotomist and has been one of my closest friends since the early days of grade school, where we met. I felt she was a qualified candidate for this research project as she is a Muslim who has extensive knowledge about her faith and religion, and she is an introspective person who has had many life experiences that shaped her beliefs and values.

Radwa is a Muslim, or a follower of Islam. Islam's fundamental beliefs come from their Holy Book, the Quran, and the teachings of the prophet Muhammad. Radwa was born into her faith, with her parents providing her with education of Islam and its teachings. She, however, hasn't always followed the religion - at the age of 16, she was raped and this traumatic event shifted her worldview completely, and came to believe in no God. "I became an atheist out of the thought process of why horrible things happen to good people. How could God allow that? Why didn't God protect me?" Her father was also a negative impact on her faith - a verbally and emotionally abusive parent, Radwa knew her father as the man who preached religion but chose not to practice it. He didn't provide a healthy, nurturing environment that should have been bountiful with the fruits of God, and it contributed to her becoming an atheist. "I didn't want to believe in anything my dad believed in because I began to think if I believed in what he believed in, I would become him." As time passed, she began searching for faith again, and chose Islam. She has since then followed the teachings and beliefs of the religion, practicing it in her daily life and using it to form a unique perspective on the world and life itself.

Radwa's faith in God and belief in Islam are significant in her understanding of the world. "It brought a kind of discipline that even inpatient and outpatient programs couldn't in certain areas of my individuality. For starters, strengthening my relationship with God ultimately gave me a sense of fear and love for a higher power." Radwa then continues to speak about her experiences with outpatient and rehab programs, and mentions how having fear in a higher power helped her with abstinence, and explains that this abstinence can be applied to anything in life. I asked her how else her religion helped her with sobriety - "My discipline and faith in God is what kept me in check, helped me maintain my sobriety thus far, and the result of meditation humbled my character and calmed my personality."

It seemed to me that most religions shared the same basic principles - love thy neighbor, display respect to others, help those in need, etc. - but I wanted to know more about how the principles of religion affected Radwa. What were her most sacred ideals? She spoke about how today's society undervalues intimacy and promotes hookup culture. "Through my faith and through personal experience, you realize at a point of maturity that you are exchanging precious, sacred energies. Because of this, I strictly believe in a form of commitment as my faith has taught me. There's a beauty in being selective. And I believe that is a beautiful mentality for anyone and everyone to have." In Islam, it is forbidden to drink alcohol, so I decided to ask her about that too. She maintained that sobriety is the purest form of existence, and today's society glamorizes partying and drinking as positive experiences. There are also a number of other

factors that alcohol can lead to, such as addiction, criminal activity, “and the abusive, impulsive, reckless behaviors that transpire from being under the influence.”

One of the things I wanted to discover was how faith can change a person, from their beliefs to their personalities and ways of thinking. Radwan was someone I wanted to personally ask about this question because she is a kind, thoughtful, introspective, reflective, and self-aware person. She offers great guidance and is the most forgiving person I know. When I relayed this question to her, she responded with “It has educated me, brought me awareness, broadened my mind in ways sitting in a classroom couldn’t/learning from my elders couldn’t. Due to faith, I can confidently say I have reached the most raw and purest state of peace all around.”

During this interview, I learned a significant amount of information about her religion and its impact on her life, but I also learned more about how she functions and how her beliefs propel her in life. The guidance that she gets from her God is the guidance that she gives to me, and it appears that who she is as a person is because of her faith in God and the teachings that her religion brings her. My understanding of faith has increased and I can see how applying certain values can improve my life and bring me direction and hope.

Nancy Gartner

For this class, we were instructed to interview three different people on a topic of our choice. I chose faith and religion as my subject, as I am interested in learning about other religions, faiths, and belief systems. I also chose faith as my research topic because I am currently going through the process of discovering spirituality myself. Throughout this research and interview process, I aim to become more educated on different religious perspectives and apply the newfound knowledge to my life. This interview was conducted with Nancy Gail Gartner, a 68-year-old homemaker who follows the teachings of the Mormon Church.

Nancy Gartner is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, informally known as the Mormon Church or the LDS Church. They believe that God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to save mankind from their sins. Their teachings were carried out by their prophet, Joseph Smith, who preached about the beliefs of the Church and about God’s will. Nancy found her faith at the age of 27, where she took missionary lessons in Peson, Arizona. She was originally raised in the Christian Science Church, but converted after a man installing her telephone invited her to church.

One of the things I want to know is why faith is important to people - what does it bring to them? Nancy’s response to the question was “It guides everything I do all the time. I follow my savior and his example and throughout my life I’ve seen blessings from following my faith and following my savior. I guess you could say I tested it, I tested my testimony; I’ve seen too many things to know where the blessings are coming from. I have no doubt.” I asked her to elaborate on what else faith had brought to her, and she believes all that she has been given has been given to her through God. Through tears, she mentioned her husband, the importance of family,

and the opportunity to be lifted up every day. "To know there is something more after this life, and that I want to live my life on earth so that I can be blessed forever with my family. It's a whole paradigm shift." I can relate to feeling blessed for having a great family, but I haven't subscribed to the concept of eternal life with your loved ones. It's an idea that a lot of religions have - life after death - and to people with faith in God, it seems as if they live their lives for the eternal life promised to them.

Throughout my life, I've heard stories and seen people change due to a shift in mindset, a newfound sense of direction and purpose, or having a new belief system. I wanted to know how faith had changed Nancy as a person - she is loving, warm, and welcoming, and she says part of who she is is because of her faith. "I remember one time my daughter Becky remembers one time seeing a change. So maybe I was kind of more loving - I don't know. I just know I like myself better, and I try." Tears were shed here, too. Faith brought out the best version of herself that she could be, and God is constantly inspiring her to do so.

The last thing I wanted to know about was how faith brought hope, direction, and purpose to a person's life. For Nancy, the promise of life after death is what drives her. "Because I know this life is not the end, because I know that there is life eternal, this is just - life on earth is just a trial; it's just a test, that I know it's my only and only change at this test so I want to do my best so I can be with my family in eternity. I can see that if I live the best I can here, the Savior makes up the difference, but it says in the Scripture, after all I can do - I need to make my best effort here so that I can enjoy being with them and my Savior in eternity."

Nancy Gartner provided me with information on the LDS Church, but the most valuable information came from her personal beliefs and perspective on faith. To see a strong woman cry when speaking about the impact God and the Church has left on her made me see that faith is an indescribable treasure that some people have. Her story has inspired me to continue my journey into faith and religion, and to see what the unknown holds.

Stacy Restani

Faith and religion has been a topic that has surrounded my life since I was a child. I attended a Catholic school from kindergarten through eighth grade, but lost my faith around fifth grade. I have identified as agnostic since then, but I still have a curiosity when it comes to faith, and I've been exploring the idea of having spiritual guidance and incorporating aspects of faith into my life. For this interview, I wanted to seek more information on faith and religion as a whole, and what it brings to a person's life.

To get a more intimate look and perspective on this topic, I chose to speak with my mother, Stacy Restani. She is a 54-year-old woman who works as an instructional aid at an elementary school. She has been a part of my journey and started it for me, as she was the one who enrolled me into a private Catholic school. She has had several religious perspectives - she attended Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic church services throughout her life. She now identifies as a Christian, but has her own beliefs and personal relationship with faith.

While my mom has been a part of religion for her whole life, it wasn't until she was older that it became a significant part of her life. I asked her what had changed - "As I got older, in my early twenties, I did a lot of soul searching and reading books." These, along with her journey, are what carried her through this life for the past 30+ years. I wanted to know what faith had brought into her life, as she has always mentioned that accepting God comes with gifts. "It gave me unexplainable joy and peace, life-changing experiences. God constantly keeps me on the right path." It seems that having faith brings a bounty of blessings that people may not be able to find themselves.

My mom mentioned to me that she didn't consider herself a part of any true organized religion, but I never asked her to elaborate until this interview. "Many of my beliefs are personal between myself, God, and Jesus. I strive to have a personal relationship with Jesus." She believes in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, but doesn't agree with all of the religious texts that focus on Christianity. One thing she strongly believes in is that Jesus died for our sins so that we may get into Heaven. "If you're a true Christian, you have to accept Jesus into your heart as your Savior in order to get into heaven. The true life we will live as believers of Christ will take place in Heaven - that is our reward."

Something that I always wondered about was how faith had changed my mom as a person. She had gone through many events in her life that affected her greatly, and some of the negative ones she experienced as a child shaped her into a colder human being. With her reignited faith, she changed into a loving, caring, and empathetic person. "My relationship with Jesus has brought me indescribable serenity and patience. I got a lot of patience as I delved more into my relationship with him. I'm a lot more joyful - the Holy Spirit has brought me joy that is unexplainable. I'm grateful."

This interview facilitated my understanding of faith and religion, and helped me to gain a deeper understanding of my mom as a person. A common theme among different religions is what one receives from believing in something and how it positively shapes one's life. Faith and religion do not only change one's beliefs and mindsets, but it shapes you into a different person blessed with gifts like peace, compassion, and the promise of a life greater than this one we experience on this Earth. Faith is important, and I believe everyone could use some aspects of it in their own lives - after all, this interview showed that there is more to gain than there is to lose.