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Playing With Voodoo Dolls

The Voodoo religion is one of the most, if not the most misconceived religion of our time. Often when Voodoo is mentioned, it is often related to evil, black magic, satanism, and harm. Voodoo is more than just dolls, feathers, and candles; its a way of life for many people that connects many different cultures.

In voodoo there is a supreme being who is not one who concerns themselves with the affairs of men and women (Martan). Lesser deities are helpful in connecting with the humans on earth, allowing the humans someone to talk to and to pray to (Martan). A Houngan, is a Voodoo Priest. Houngan is able to communicate with the multitude of spirits, or Loas, that reside in the unseen world. The Houngan is the highest ranking individual in the Voodoo tradition, and each community, or Hounfor, will have its own Houngan (Edwards). Houngan refers to males, while the female equivalent is a Mambo (Edwards). A Bokur is a essentially a black magician, or someone who casts curses, hexes, and other harmful spells. Loas are spiritual beings that intercede between God and man, and between the spiritual and physical worlds (Edwards). However, the existence of Loas is reflected in the religious literature of the world. For example, in the Bible there are many references to angels, or messengers, helping mankind.

Despite what many believe there is nothing contradictory between Christianity and

Voodoo (Edwards). Many Voodoo practitioners do identify as Christians. Similarly, Voodoo has been very comfortably embraced by Hindus. People of all spiritual paths and walks of life can benefit from Voodoo. Nothing in Voodoo requires people to transgress their own spiritual beliefs or convictions (Edwards). In his best-selling book *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, Wade Davis wrote: "As the Haitians say, the Catholic goes to church to speak about God, the vodounist dances in the hounfour to become God."

Voodoo dolls are usually associated with Voodoo. Most people think a voodoo doll is a doll made like the intended victim and is then stuck with pins and needles to inflict pain upon the victim. Those kind of Voodoo dolls are unheard of in the original Voodoo in Haiti, although some are used in New Orleans voodoo, mostly to amuse tourists (*Myths About Voodoo*). The real origin of the "Voodoo doll" is the "poppet," used in European witchcraft. Apparently, the term Voodoo doll was invented by an American writer who made up a story about Voodoo after hearing that it was witchcraft (*Myths About Voodoo*). Causing harm to another is against the moral code of Voodoo. The only dolls used in Voodoo are the ones found on altars and in graveyards, usually meant to represent the loa (*True Voodoo: 5 Voodoo Myths Busted!*). These dolls are supposed to act as lucky charms, not tools of vengeance, and are used to bless individuals. Voodoo objects in fact are used to solve anything that you need help with—from failed crops to failed romance (Acrie).

Many believe that Voodoo incorporated human sacrifice in its rituals. This myth was perpetuated by Sir Spenser St. John, in 1889 when he wrote the book *Hayti: Or the Black Republic*. This book had no evidence to back them up, but were nonetheless sensationalized and picked up by newspapers around the world (*Myths About Voodoo*). This myth is one of pure

fiction and was passed on only because of invention and the somewhat secret aspect of Voodooism which arose from people having to sneak around in order to practice it (*Myths About Voodoo*). Voodoo is based upon the principle idea of healing and strictly prohibits the harming of others (*True Voodoo: 5 Voodoo Myths Busted!*). People who practice Voodoo are highly devout. Their rituals form an incredibly important aspect of their religion (*Voodoo Rituals*). Rituals occur fairly regularly, with different spirits being honored at different times(*Voodoo Rituals*). In return for worship and sacrifices, the loa will be generous with the worshippers, resulting in plentiful rain, good crops, or something else of the like(*Voodoo Rituals*). This relationship is often described as a contract between humanity and the loa(*Voodoo Rituals*). Neglecting this contract may result in sickness, poor harvest or even death(*Voodoo Rituals*).

Voodoo is not a dark, cynical, or deadly religion, but one of the most misconceived religions of all time. Recently there has been a campaign to adopt the word “Vodou” as the official term for the Haitian religion with the aim to distance the religion from the negative connotations of the term “Voodoo”. More than anything, this movement shows just how badly the Western world has damaged the reputation of Voodoo.

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