
Faith as the Way of Coping with Tragedy in The Life of Pi

In the novel *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel, Pi Patel too uses his faith in God as a vital coping mechanism to survive in the vast Pacific Ocean. His faith in God proves to be a crucial part in Pi's survival as it guides him through his ordeal. Pi, a religious individual uses his knowledge of religion to cope being stranded alone on a lifeboat with no other sign of human life. Therefore, Pi uses his faith in God to obtain the strength and willpower to survive, for companionship and to seek important answers.

Pi Patel uses his special faith in God to obtain the necessary strength and willpower to survive independently in the vast Pacific Ocean. For example, when Pi is stranded alone in the limitless ocean without any significant help at hand, he turns to a being much more powerful and resourceful than himself in order to cope with the situation at hand. When Pi creates an orderly list of the things which are available to him for survival purposes such as the 12 solar stills, 1 survival manual and 1 signalling mirror, he includes "1 God" (Martel 145-146) into this list. Adding the term '1 God' into a list of survival essentials which are present with Pi throughout his journey clearly shows that Pi finds it a necessity to have God with him at all times in order to survive.

Like the other items on the list which keeps Pi alive throughout his ordeal, God also keeps Pi alive by giving the continuous supply of strength and willpower for Pi to carry on. Furthermore, Pi says, "Even when God seemed to have abandoned me, he was watching. Even when he seemed indifferent to my suffering, he was watching. And when I was beyond all hope of saving, he gave me rest. Then he gave me a sign to continue my journey" (Martel 184). This proves the fact that God was always present in Pi's heart and mind throughout his journey. Pi uses God's presence to gain physical and mental strength as well as the willpower to continue in his horrific journey. In Pi's mind, not only was God present with him, but God also saved his life by giving Pi inner peace and indications to continue his journey. When Pi was at his breaking point, God gave him the strength and willpower to continue towards his survival.

In addition, Pi says, "Mindful practice of religion slowly brought me back to life" (Martel 3). Pi explains how his constant but careful practice of religion slowly revived him during his time at sea. While at sea, Pi still carried out religious rituals which were essential to Pi's survival as he obtained the confidence and strength to continue. Pi also states that, "Religion will save us" (Martel 27). Pi emphasizes on the fact that religion will ultimately be the deciding factor between life and death. Without his staunch faith in God, Pi would not have gained the willpower required to prevent him from meeting his demise at sea. Research suggests that 43% of US citizens use prayer for health concerns (Wachholtz and Sambamoorthi 69). These people used the power of

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prayer to gain the strength and willpower to regain their health. Therefore, Pi's strong faith in God gave him strong will to survive as he prays during his ordeal to gain in strength because he believes that God is with him.

Secondly, Pi uses his belief in God as a form of companionship during his 227 days in the Pacific Ocean. When Pi is left surrounded with nothing but endless water, he seeks to find companionship in order to stay alive as companionship plays a significant role in human survival. When Pi talks about his experience with the Virgin Mary, he says, "The presence of God is the finest of rewards" (Martel 63). Pi is saying that the mere presence of God with him provides him with the companionship that he desperately needed during his ordeal. Pi also says, "I practised religious rituals that I adapted to the circumstances and they brought me comfort that was certain" (Martel 208). Pi practises and improvises religious rituals to adapt to his situation and pull God closer to himself so that God could be his much-needed companion. Because he practices three religions simultaneously, Pi is able to be in the companionship of more than one God. He says, "I feel at home in a Hindu temple" (Martel 48). This clearly explains the fact that Pi is at his highest level of comfort when he is in the presence of God - thus his lifeboat itself becomes a place of worship and thereby a place of comfort.

Lastly, Pi uses his faith in God to seek answers for important questions. When Pi is left alone in the middle of the ocean, he is left with many unanswered questions such as the whereabouts of his family. When Pi is talking to Mr. Kumar about the existence of God, he argues, "To choose doubt as a philosophy is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation" (Martel 28). Pi argues that religion gives the answers that a person seeks. He shows his frustration at agnostics who do not have a definite answer on whether God actually exists or not. This proves that Pi believes that his faith in God will give him the answers that he needs. Pi also says, "God, I give myself to you. I am your vessel. Whatever comes, I want to know. Show me" (Martel 285). Pi is surrendering himself to God to end his misery. Pi is seeking an answer to where God would take him hoping that he would be brought back to his family to end his misery in the ocean. Pi also asks Father Martin, "What kind of a god is that" (Martel 56). Pi seeks answers to the origins of Christianity and facts about Jesus. Pi is curious about the fact that a God is willing to sacrifice his own son for the sins of other people. With knowledge of Christianity at hand, Pi uses this knowledge to gain answers by asking God for help during his ordeal.

In conclusion, Pi Patel makes full use of his religious and spiritual beliefs to help him in many various ways throughout his 227 day ordeal in the ocean. Pi uses his beliefs to gain the raw strength and mental willpower to survive, to use God as his companion and guide.

Works Cited

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