

Religious Practices Paper

Purpose:

- 1) To investigate some of the world's religious practices regarding the environment through drawing on personal experience;
- 2) To observe the effects of following specific spiritual practices on one's ideas or behaviors regarding the environment or nature;
- 3) To interpret and articulate the cumulative influence of investigating a range of spiritual practices regarding the environment.

Assignment:

- 1) For each of three weeks, you should choose ONE religious practice from a specific tradition which you will try to keep foremost in your attention during that week, especially as it affects your environmental attitudes and behaviors. These practices can be drawn from the readings, class discussion, guest speakers, personal knowledge, or suggestions from classmates. Each practice should be well-recognized within the source religious tradition from which it is drawn.

Some examples:	ahimsa (non-harming)	Hinduism
	walking meditation	Buddhism
	daily gratitude prayer 5x/day	Islam
	blessings before eating	Judaism
	seeing the ground as holy	Native American
	love thy (nonhuman) neighbor	Christianity
	vegetarianism	Jainism
	tai-chi	Taoism

Each of the three should be from different religious traditions, allowing you to compare and contrast some of their implications.

- 2) During each practice week, keep a notebook of personal observations, i.e. mini-stories or reflections on how the practice changed something you might ordinarily have done or perceived another way. For example, religious practices around food might cause you to eat more slowly, with more reverence or gratitude, or you might change what you decide to eat. Write your observations down, even in sketch form, so you will have "field notes" for writing up the paper.

- 3) At the end of your practice experiments, collect your notes and prepare an outline of your thoughts as a basis for a 6-7 page paper. The paper should follow this general outline:

1. Introduction
2. First Practice: (name)
 what I did, how I did it (i.e. the facts)
 my thoughts and observations on its influence on my attitudes
 towards the environment and/or nature
3. Second Practice
 same reflection process
4. Third Practice
 etc.
5. Discussion and Conclusion

For each practice, describe several key elements of how it affected you and offer specific examples from your experience to illustrate your points. Plan to write 1/2-2 pages per practice, depending on how deeply each affected you. Beware of superficiality! Write and edit your paper carefully to reveal the depth of your experience.

Notes from Student Papers, October 1999

yoga: "I felt a sense of stability and calmness rare to my bustling college life."

"A lot of time in my "Environmental classes" we talk of how to save the world. Save the endangered species. Stop pollution. Get people to recycle. What really needs to happen, contrary to popular belief in the power of law, is that *people need to wake up and see and feel the earth around them* "

"I'm in a time of my life when I'm just not sure what type of religious path I want to walk upon. I'm not in any hurry to choose. But tasting of different religious plates is an enlightening and exciting adventure. The one thing I *do* know is that the sacred Earth is the key part of my spiritual existence."

"For as long as I can remember in my life I have always been captivated by watching the sunset, and with a limited experience of catching the sunrise, by that as well. I am extremely fortunate to have been able to observe the sunrise and set from many parts of the Earth and in many differing situations! But in every situation, no matter where I was or what I was doing, I always took the time to stop what I was doing and stare in joy, bewilderment, amazement, and peacefulness, as the sun was rising and setting."

food: "I was able to appreciate the fact that when I finish a meal, I feel full, and that is not a common feeling for many people around the world. It also makes me conscious of the fact that I am fortunate to have such nutritious food, where there are millions of people in the world today, and every day, who don't have access to these benefits and blessings of the Earth."

"For me meditation is an altered state that is so wonderful because it is completely substance free. Meditation is like a check to remind yourself of your sense of place and your "aliveness".

"I realized quickly that the reason I had a tendency to forget to say my prayers was because I eat most of my meals on the run, or I am in such a hurry to eat that I barely even realize what I am doing."

five prayers: "I love feeling how I felt after a week of constant awareness. I have definitely changed for the better due to this religious tradition!"

"I felt as though I had not time for reflection and contemplation in my life... From the time I woke up to the time I went to bed was a nonstop rollercoaster ride of emotions, thoughts, and words. Words, words, words. Sloppy, unimportant, misguided words. It soon became clear that I needed a period of time in my day without the use of words."

Christian meal prayers and beyond: "By the end of the week, I felt a dramatic change in the way I felt about myself and the way people reacted to being around me. I felt a patience with people that I have not felt in a long time. I began to see all life as creation of God which was not meant to be judged, but rather to be accepted and cared for."

"The earth is a connected place, yet we are sometimes so disconnected and so unaware of just about everything. Things that we put into our body are so important to our survival, of all the things to be unaware of this does not seem like a wise choice."

veganism: "Never before had I realized just how much of our food is dependent on animals... In my new state of enhanced awareness I began to notice the wasteful wrapping and the surplus of preservatives that guaranteed the freshness of the foods. All of these realizations flashed in my brain like red hazard lights, alerting me to contemplate the many problematic environmental factors."

food: "I felt a certain grounding and control over my life and my body, which enabled me to be more diligent in other aspects of my life."

"I began each time by trying to center and calm myself. I then placed my hands above my plate or bowl, and tried to feel the energy of the food and of the plant or tree that it came from and thank the universe for nourishing me. I found that I felt more grounded not only while I was eating but also after I ate."

trees: "Whenever I took time "to be devoted" to a particular tree or group of trees, I noted that my ability to focus on certain tasks was greater than what it had previously been."

"For me, walking, leaving no signs, only a sparse trace of passing while being full of peace is a healing, therapeutic process."

"I'm a peaceful person and I try to have a high regard for people's feelings and so this week I tried to concentrate on treating everyone kindly even more than normally."

chora walking: "It was nice to have a reason to pause in the day and reflect on the nicer parts of life, something I so much need but rarely do, but I felt very solitary in my cause. I think a lot of the sanctity of many religious practices comes from the collective consciousness which arises from all who engage in the act. To some extent, a place becomes sacred in correlation with how many pilgrims make their route there. Though I returned day after day, I still did not feel that my chora route became personally sacred."

yoga: "Being grounded and aware of your body helps to be grounded and aware of your environment. Noticing subtle changes within myself helps me notice changes in my environment. Being healthier, happier, and more relaxed helps you prioritize what is important to you. Staying closely connected with my body helps to stay close to the mother earth... Understanding the connection between your body and the earth as a body makes you treat the earth with the respect you have for yourself."