

## Christian Leadership in a Multifaith World Curriculum Designed by Interfaith America & CCCU

### Module 2 – Religious Literacy Activity 4 – Observing Religion Through Practice

#### Overview

In this activity, students will explore practices and expressions of belief from varying religious traditions.

#### Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this activity will:

- Expand their *appreciative knowledge* of religious traditions outside of their own
- Engage a *narrative imagination* by seeking the admirable and the inspiring as opposed to the problematic or unrelatable
- Seek commonality in motivation and conviction for religious practices
- Engage in *reflective commitment* by considering their own motivation for practice

#### External Materials

Below is a selection of resources (varying in medium and length) that survey “Beliefs in Action” across varying religious traditions.

- **Modesty/Covering**
  - [Sikhism](#) (podcast; 27 minutes): Preach! Episode 10/4/2019. “Growing up Sikh in San Antonio”
  - [Judaism](#) (article): Hannah Tindle, CNN. Updated 6/17/2020. “Understanding the Dress Codes of Orthodox Jewish Women and their diverse interpretations.”
  - **Islam** (video; 2015; 60 minutes) *Between Allah and Me (and Everyone Else)*: This documentary explores four Muslim women’s challenges and thinking when they decide to start (or stop) covering their hair with a hijab.
  - [Islam](#) (article by Caitlin Killian on The Conversation; 2019): “Why do Muslim Women Wear a Hijab?”
  - [Islam](#) (TEDTalk, 2012; 3.5 minutes): Majede Najjar “Why I Wear a Hijab”
- **Prayer/Meditation/Pilgrimage**
  - **Islam** (video; 2003; 56 minutes): *Inside Mecca*. National Geographic follows three pilgrims as they travel to Mecca for the hajj.
  - [Buddhism](#) (video; 2010; 8 minutes): “The Buddha: Meditation.”
  - **Hinduism** (video): [Kumbh Mela](#) (Smithsonian Channel; 4 minutes), [Ganges](#) (CBS, 2010; 6 minutes); [Varanasi](#) (BBC; 2017; 4 minutes).
- **Scripture**
  - [Buddhism](#) (Wisdom Podcast) Charles Hallisley “Buddhist Scripture” (2019; 95 minutes).

- o [Islam](#) (video; 2013; HBO Documentary; 90 minutes) *Koran by Heart* depicts a global contest in which young Muslim children memorize and recite the Q'uran.
- o [Judaism](#) (article on reconstructingjudaism.org; 2016) Rabbi Jeremy Schwartz, "The Torah Process: How Jews Make Decisions."
- **Fasting**
  - o [Islam](#) (video; 2011; 90 minutes): *Fordson: Faith, Fasting, and Football* follows a high school football team in Dearborn, MI as it prepares for a major rivalry game during the last 10 days of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.
  - o [Judaism](#) (article; NPR, 2019): Yom Kippur Fast in Uganda.
  - o [Hinduism](#) (article from Civil Service Hindu Connection in UK): "Fasting in the Workplace."
- **Giving**
  - o [Sikhism](#) (video; 2011; 3.5 minutes): "The Practice of Langar."
  - o [Islam](#) (video; Quran Weekly, 2014; 6 minutes): Nouman Ali Khan, "Giving for Allah's Sake."
- **Forgiveness**
  - o [Buddhism](#) (Wisdom Podcast; 2019; 50 minutes): Koshin Paley Ellison on "How to Forgive."
  - o **Judaism** (book selection): Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*: Ch 1, "Why do the Righteous Suffer?" and Ch 8, "What Good, Then, is Religion?"
  - o [Islam](#) (audio; 2017; 9 minutes): Shaykh Hamza Yusuf "Showing Justice and Forgiving People."
- **Social Justice/Community Care**
  - o [Buddhism](#) (Wisdom Podcast; 2020; 61 minutes): Tara Brach on "*Radical Compassion*"
  - o [Islam](#) (video; 2015; 30 minutes): *The Noble Struggle of Amina Wadud* tells of this African American Muslim woman who's a women's rights advocate and scholar.
  - o [Islam](#) (video; 2013; 27 minutes): *An American Mosque* shows interfaith response to a hate crime (1994) in which an Islamic Center was burned to the ground in Yuba City, CA
  - o [Sikhism](#) (TEDTalk; 2013; 14 minutes): Balpreet Kaur, "The Power Behind Kindness."

## Activity Content

All great religious traditions combine individual practice and collective experience. Faith/belief is both a matter of the heart as well as a motivator for action. In taking the time to observe and consider the elements of religious practice that we can see, we are able to learn about what motivates and inspires others who are committed to a religious belief. This helps us to better understand the values at the center of religious adherence. Sometimes we see these at work in obvious locations like a place of worship or during a holiday. However, more subtle but just as meaningful is how religious values are expressed in an individual's place of work, their personal interests, or in their engagement with their local community.

Because many practices are rooted in a religion's early tradition, we begin to build our knowledge base of that religion's history when we observe religious others in contemporary life. We learn their backstory! We should pay attention to how religious practices look different based on the culture and geography of the place where the experience we are observing takes place. No expression of religious belief is monolithic. We are communities made up of individuals. Keeping this in mind, as we learn about other's practices we can challenge ourselves to examine how the Christian tradition has been shaped and changed by culture and geography.

In addition, we should consider how we would articulate the motivations for our own practices. What values do we hold? How might those be observable or even experienced by others who engage with us?

## Student Assignment Options

There are many common practices across faith traditions even though expression can look very different. Choose three of the preceding resources under the "Beliefs in Action" categories. Unless instructed otherwise, start with what is of the most interest to you.

1. As you read/watch/listen to your chosen resources, take casual but thoughtful notes on the following questions:

- How do the individuals represented describe the motivations for their actions?
- What words do they use?
- How does religious conviction motivate work or personal passion?
- Was the influence of culture or location something that could be observed?

2. Next, review your notes and compare your findings and observations across your three chosen categories. Using a pen or highlighter, identify commonalities in your notes. For example:

- Circle and connect similar language/descriptions, motivations, or specific forms of practice
- Highlight or shade anything that felt relatable or familiar
- Star something you found admirable or inspiring

3. Finally, consider the following questions and write a 1-2 paragraph reflection response:

- What did you identify as relatable or familiar? Why? What did you share in common?
- How does considering the values held by other religions inspire you to consider your own?
- What is the first Christian practice or expression of your faith that comes to mind when asked "What do you hold most dear?"

## Going Deeper: Additional Resources

- *Watch:* [Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet](#) (PBS; 2 hours) is an excellent documentary that combines the historical biography of the Prophet Muhammad and his meaning for today's followers. Muslim Americans from a variety of backgrounds and locations share the influence of the Prophet Muhammad in their personal and professional lives. Clips from the film work well to illustrate how Muslims look to Muhammad as a guide for how to approach career and family in 21st century America.
- *Read:* Lauren Winner's book *Mudhouse Sabbath* is a solid resource for exploring the relationship between Christian and Jewish practices. Winner explores what it would look

like to adapt practices from her early years as an Orthodox Jew to her life as a Christian adult.

- *Read (or watch): The Chosen* by Chaim Potok remains a classic, effective source for understanding differences within Jewish communities related especially to orthopraxy. If reading the novel is too daunting, the [1981 film](#) still resonates with contemporary audiences.