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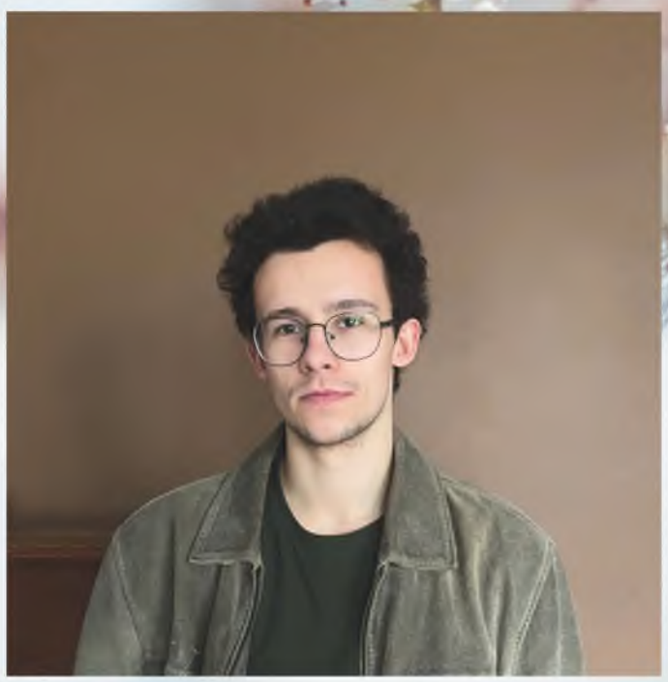
LETTER

Dear Readers,

Welcome to another issue of our magazine. Psychology, as you well know, is quite a wide field. But no matter how one looks at it, it always comes back to one question: *What is inside us*? Psychologists weren't the ones who first posed this question. Many others did. Philosophers, for example, have been exploring this question for thousands of years. While we still don't fully know (although we are a little closer to it, I hope) what lies within us, we do know this much: something has to be there. We feel, we want, and so on. But how can we determine what we truly want, what we are capable of, and what lies beyond our limits, if all we perceive are the feelings we are "supposed" to feel?

The questions won't end. They have popped up throughout history as far back as we can remember. Time and again, people search for answers that give them peace. In many cases, the answer is religion. Something to believe in, something that places a person in an unparalleled, unknown world. Something that gives this world meaning and sense. But then why are there so many of them? Why do many people become victims of cults and sects? Why do things that are intended to give meaning do something quite the opposite? Heatred. We try to explore this a bit from a psychological perspective. Remember that it is always a complex issue.

As Easter approaches, we would also like to take a moment to wish all our readers a joyful, peaceful, and reflective holiday season, one filled with hope, renewal, and meaningful moments.



Jan Jolicki

Editor-in-Chief

The Role of Faith in Building "Who I Am"

BY ALICJA CAPAŁA

Religion influences many aspects of our lives, particularly our perception, beliefs, and life choices. All these aspects are part of our identity. From a psychological perspective, identity is not something we are born with, but something we build over time. According to Erik Erikson, identity is shaped through a series of developmental crises, especially during adolescence, when a young person faces the conflict of "identity vs role confusion." Religion can be a strong framework for answering questions like: "Who am I?" and "What do I believe in?" It provides structure, meaning, and a sense of belonging.

Building on Erikson's theory, James Marcia described four identity statuses: identity foreclosure (accepting beliefs without questioning), identity moratorium (active exploration), identity diffusion, and identity achievement. Faith identity can develop through these same processes. For example, some people adopt their parents' faith without exploration, while others question, search, and eventually reconstruct their beliefs more independently.

In childhood, our faith is often shaped by our parents and later reinforced by the church and religious education, and along with this, we learn who we are. Young children typically internalise religion by identifying with their parents and authority figures. According to Albert Bandura's social learning theory, children learn not only from direct instruction but also by observing and imitating significant adults. When religious practices are modelled consistently and emotionally reinforced, they become part of the child's self-concept. Early religious experiences can help shape our morality; through them, we learn what is right and what is wrong. Kids are taught rules by examples and short stories, which are easier for them to comprehend and internalise.

As children enter adolescence, various new factors begin to influence their identity, including religion. During this stage, doubt often appears. What once seemed obvious may now be questioned. This shift is partly connected with cognitive development. Jean Piaget noted that adolescents enter the stage of formal operational thinking. This new stage enables abstract reasoning and critical reflection. Teenagers become capable of analysing belief systems, comparing religions, and considering alternatives. These alternatives may include other religions, sects, philosophies, or secular views. Questioning faith at this stage is not necessarily a sign of rejection. Rather, it is a natural part of exploring identity.

Many teenagers face mental health struggles, and faith-based resources are not always sufficient to help them overcome these challenges. Sometimes their problems are downplayed or interpreted only in spiritual categories, which can make them feel misunderstood. Psychological research shows that religion can function both as a protective and a risk factor for mental health. Positive religious coping, such as perceiving God as supportive and loving, is associated with greater well-being and resilience, whereas negative religious coping, like viewing suffering as punishment, can increase anxiety or guilt. When young people feel their faith is "too weak" compared to their parents' or religious authorities', this comparison can intensify identity confusion and feelings of inadequacy.

Conflict often arises when personal identity, such as sexual orientation or emerging personal values, does not align with religious teachings. In such cases, individuals may experience cognitive dissonance, a psychological discomfort described by Leon Festinger. To reduce this tension, some reinterpret religious doctrine, some distance themselves from the faith community, and others attempt to suppress parts of their identity that are not accepted. From the perspective of social identity theory developed by Henri Tajfel, belonging to a religious group strengthens self-esteem through group membership and shared values. However, this mechanism may also lead to the exclusion of those who are perceived as different. In response, some young people seek alternative communities, such as subcultures or fandoms, that provide acceptance and validation. Others choose to remain within the religious structure, even if it means denying or minimising aspects of their authentic self.

Religion also provides an existential meaning. According to Viktor Frankl, humans have a fundamental need to find meaning in life. Faith can provide answers to questions about suffering, death, and purpose. This strengthens resilience and gives coherence to one's life narrative. For many people, religion not only defines moral rules but also shapes their overall understanding of existence.

Faith and religion influence our work and social lives. People who strongly identify with their religious beliefs often view their professional lives through the lens of moral responsibility. They may strive to act ethically, treat their colleagues with respect, avoid dishonest practices, and be helpful to others.

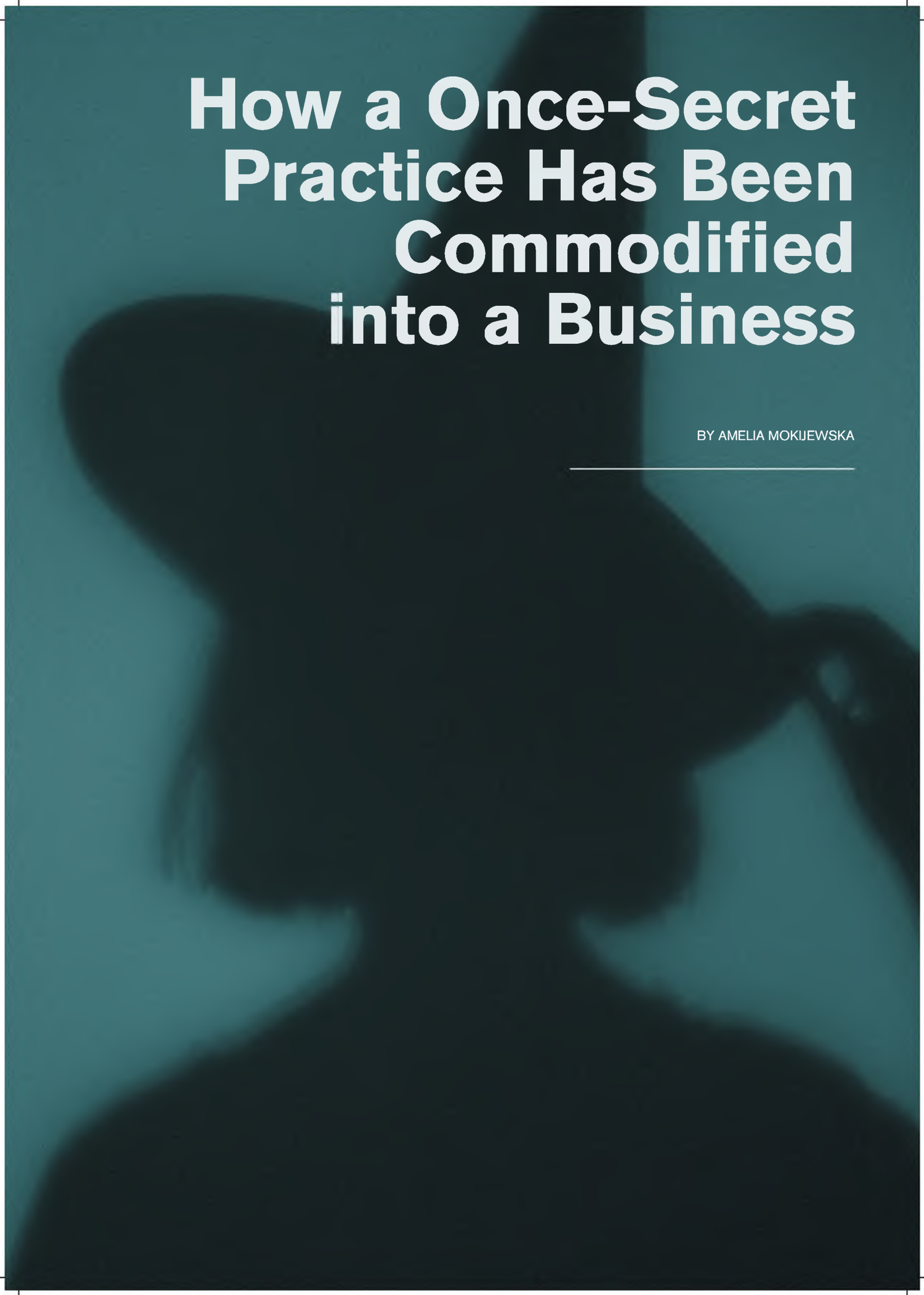
Religious identity can encourage prosocial behaviour, self-discipline, and a sense of calling. In theory, individuals who want to be "good human beings" according to their faith should reflect their values through integrity, fairness, empathy, and accountability at work and in society.

However, faith and practice do not always match in real life. In adulthood, various pressures, such as competition, ambition, financial stress, a desire for status, or conformity to workplace culture, may lead individuals to behave in ways that contradict their declared beliefs. This discrepancy can again create cognitive dissonance. For example, a person who values honesty may commit minor unethical acts to maintain their position, or someone who promotes compassion may show intolerance towards coworkers with different worldviews. Over time, repeated contradictions between belief and behaviour can weaken either the individual's religious commitment or their moral consistency. Some may compartmentalise their "religious self" and "professional self." Others may gradually reinterpret their faith to justify their actions.

At the same time, religious identity in adulthood can become more mature and integrated. Instead of being based solely on rules, it may become a reflective and personally chosen system of values. This integration reduces internal conflict and enables individuals to function coherently across different aspects of life: family, work, and society.

Glossary

cognitive dissonance – discomfort from conflicting beliefs or actions
compartmentalise – to separate something into parts and not allow those parts to mix together
conformity – behaviour that obeys the accepted rules
downplay – to make something seem less important
formal operational stage – the stage in Piaget's theory that involves thinking abstractly, reasoning hypothetically, and using deductive logic
internalise – to make a belief or value part of yourself
resilience – ability to recover quickly from difficulties
validation – showing that something or someone is true or correct



How a Once-Secret Practice Has Been Commodified into a Business

BY AMELIA MOKIJEWSKA

Which witch are you? Are you a green witch who specialises in nature magic, collecting and preparing herbs for various purposes? Maybe you are more of an oracle witch, someone who has an inner predisposition for predicting the future, and items such as tarot cards, bones, or pendulums interest you? Or maybe you feel connected to your ancestors and sense that they can guide you in your life, so perhaps you might consider yourself a hedge witch?

This way of dissecting magical practices and beliefs into easily digestible aesthetics has been happening for a good few years. Ancient traditions, often passed secretly, are boiled down to concepts meant to sound mystical and mysterious, so a person can identify with them long enough to become a consumer.

Throughout history, "witch" was a term used to accuse someone of practising dark magic. Someone casting curses, spreading diseases through rituals or thoughts alone, causing continuous bad luck, infertility and crop failure. In many cultures, by contrast, there were folk magicians capable of lifting curses and healing. Accusations of witchcraft emerged for a few probable reasons. The first would be the human need to explain difficult-to-accept events and phenomena that science couldn't explain. Acknowledging the harsh reality that has seemingly no reasonable cause might be difficult for many people, hence "witches" took the blame for many misfortunes. Another factor in such accusations was the religious definition of witchcraft. In ancient pagan Rome, there were laws protecting citizens from harmful magic, which suggests that Romans believed in the real negative effects of magic on people's lives. However, in the early Christian Middle Ages, penalties for witchcraft were considered either nonexistent or mild, depending on the country. The reasoning for the lack of laws condemning witchcraft can be seen in the decrees of the Council of Paderborn, which made idolatry punishable by law but also ordered the death penalty for self-appointed witch hunters, arguing that witchcraft does not exist. Some ecclesiastics claimed that spreading the idea that witchcraft exists is a heretical teaching in itself.

The second, more important reason for the accusation and persecution of "witches" was a change in Christian doctrine, which at the turn of the Middle Ages and Renaissance started to see witchcraft as heretical and to associate it with Satan. Trials condemning "devil-worshippers" were especially prevalent in the Holy Roman Empire (today's Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, Lorraine, Austria and Czechia), wherein between 1450 and 1750, there were approximately 50,000 trials held, which resulted in 25,000 to 30,000 executions.

Despite legal consequences and societal stigma, people never abandoned their interest in the supernatural and occultism. Hermeticism, a philosophy and religion that had a significant influence on many esoteric schools of thought, was brought back into favour in 1460. Its ancient roots sparked interest in scholars and aristocrats alike. Some teachings of Hermetic literature lay the groundwork for modern witchcraft practices. And yet, it is often knowledge unknown to modern practitioners of magic.

Where there used to be substance and philosophy, there are now millions of short-format videos titled "spell for…" and the person on the receiving end can obtain a "recipe" for a spell of any kind; for love, protection, knowledge, insight or whatever else they can think of. Without any credibility, the creators of such content are often taken as experts simply because they fit a certain image that viewers associate with witchcraft without any additional proof of knowledge on the subject.

If someone looks alternative in any way, be it a dark aesthetic or dreadlocks and earthy-coloured clothes, with enough confidence, they can sell themselves as wise witches, ready to teach others. For these people, there is no need to understand the roots of their beliefs – anyone can become a witch. Research is too time-consuming, and so is creating valuable materials for people to learn from; when you can just tell them to mix salt, lavender, and crystals in a jar for protection, they will comply happily. In a few weeks, you will be able to open your own small business, and companies selling crystals and candles will reach out to you.

If the video is too long and too complicated, only a few genuinely interested viewers will watch it to the end. However, a short and easy-to-digest format ensures that a broader audience will stick around. It doesn't require too much time, commitment, or deeper thought; there is no need to reevaluate one's own belief system or its cohesion with what is being consumed if there is no philosophy behind it. It is a simple recipe for a person in need, and who knows, it just might work, right?

Tearing out the roots of witchcraft has made it a marketable product. Suddenly, creators are advertising phone applications that do tarot readings for you, where you can also read horoscopes and listen to spiritual meditations. Sephora produces a "Witch's starter kit" that contains a tarot deck, rose quartz, a bundle of sage, and perfumes – selling a commercialised image of a witch that, in reality, is completely drained of any substance. Products "for witches" laugh in the faces of their dedicated clientele, and, ironically, many laugh along in blissful ignorance, throwing coins at business vultures.

Nothing is sacred under capitalism. A system that is meant to exploit will never acknowledge the nuances and richness of different cultures. Fast-paced production and marketability distort every deeply constructed idea as consumers continue to throw coins at business vultures.

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Glossary

credibility – the quality of being trusted and believed in
ecclesiastic – a Christian priest or official
esoteric – understood by few with special knowledge
hermeticism – a spiritual or mystical philosophy based on hidden knowledge
idolatry – the worship of idols (false gods)
infertility – inability to have children
lay the groundwork (for sth) – to prepare the basis (for sth)
occultism – the belief in and practice of magic, astrology, etc.

Religion As a Social Phenomenon

A human being belongs to two worlds. First is the natural world, which determines the functioning of the organism as a physical being and is subject to the laws of nature. Second is the social world – the world of culture, moral and aesthetic values, a world in which religion plays an extremely important, hard-to-overestimate role. The question of what religion is remains one of the main problems in the study of humans and society.

Among the thinkers who grappled with answering this question, Émile Durkheim occupies a prominent place. This brilliant intellectual did not hesitate to put forward views that, at first glance, might seem not only inconsistent with commonly accepted opinions but even strikingly absurd.

It's worth noting that this is often the case with great, groundbreaking systems in various fields of scientific knowledge. Let us cite just two examples from the natural sciences: Do we not see with our own eyes that it is the Sun, moving across the sky, that rises and sets? Did not the idea seem absurd that the Earth, spinning like a top on its axis, determines the cycle of day and night so essential to our everyday life? And yet, this is precisely the case – it was Copernicus who was right, not his opponents. The more they struggled to refute his system, the more astronomical observations confirmed it.

Another example: did not the brilliant Isaac Newton teach that time has the qualities of an absolute and independent entity, identical for all observers who measure it?

History has shown that even the greatest natural scientists of the pre-relativistic era did not have a monopoly on truth, and that their theories often describe the world adequately only under particular conditions (for example, in systems with relatively small masses and velocities), and even then only approximately. This was demonstrated by Albert Einstein, whose hypotheses have been confirmed by observations of the cosmos and empirical research (for instance, in experiments confirming the existence of gravitational waves, which were awarded the Nobel Prize in 2017).

One of the central superstitions of the Enlightenment, incidentally still treated as self-evident today, is the belief in a fundamental opposition between atheism and religion. This misconception was challenged by Durkheim. His famous definition of religion does not

invoke God or gods. It reads as follows: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them."

In the French thinker's conception, the foundation of religious beliefs is what is sacred, and the key to understanding what religion is lies in the concept of sacredness.

The domain of the sacred, according to Durkheim, is defined by its position within the collective consciousness of a given social group in radical opposition to what is secular, ordinary, and everyday. The sacred evokes among members of a community the highest respect and admiration, as well as humility and fear.

Beliefs and rituals are inseparable from the sacred. A community whose members share the same kind of ideas about the sacred world, its relationship to the profane world, and who practice the same rituals expressing these shared convictions – that, Durkheim says, is a Church.

There are no false religions. Each one is true in its own way because, though differently, it responds to specific conditions of human existence. It is not possible to force them into rigid hierarchical frameworks.

Thus, as the French sociologist wrote, there are atheistic religions. Durkheim often cited religions originating in ancient India, such as Buddhism and Jainism, as examples: "What makes Buddhism a religion is that, in the absence of gods, it accepts the existence of sacred things, namely, the Four Noble Truths and the practices that are derived from them."

An important element of Durkheim's sociology is the theory of social development, primarily outlined in his first, groundbreaking in the history of social thought, book, *The Division of Labour in Society*. In this work, the author introduces a distinction between two types of human communities. In the first, the community absolutely dominates the individual; in the second type, the autonomy of the individual prevails. Thus, we are dealing with collectives characterised by the dominance of mechanical solidarity and the dominance of organic solidarity.

According to Durkheim, the turning point is the Agricultural (Neolithic) Revolution, the emergence of the division of labour in society, and the shift to a sedentary way of life. It is then that the first rural and urban settlements emerge from the mists of history. Today, we live in a transitional period. Old forms of group integration are fading; new ones have not yet gained their full strength.

This can have a destructive effect on individual consciousness. The phenomenon of anomie appears (a value vacuum – people often experience a lack of clear moral guides). The concept of anomie is another fundamental term introduced by Durkheim into sociological reflection.

In a bold and highly condensed summary (entire libraries have been written on this topic): humanity's hope rests on the reinforcement of organic solidarity. What should be treated as sacred and respected above all is the humanity inherent in every individual. A person should always be an end in themselves, never a means to achieve any other purpose.

Here we can see inspiration from the ethical theory of Immanuel Kant, who in one of his major works stated: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me" (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*).

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Glossary

adhere – to stick to something
conviction – a strong belief or opinion
entity – a thing that exists as a separate and independent unit
evoke – to bring a feeling, memory, or image into the mind
humility – the quality of being modest and not proud
misconception – a belief or an idea that is not based on correct information
profane – related to ordinary life, not religion or sacred things
refute – to prove that something is wrong or false
sacred – according to S.Czarnowski, a representation of a power that is effective, dangerous, and at the same time beneficial, both pure and impure, which is guarded and protected against by prohibitions, and which is realised through the means established by society
sedentary – spending a lot of time sitting down

The Prohibition of Religion and Human Spiritual Needs

BY ALICJA CAPAŁA

This article examines how specific political systems affect individual religiosity, the psychological effects of enfor atheism, and the strategies people use in anti-religious environments. I draw on examples from totalitarian regimes such as the Soviet Union and North Korea to analyse enforced atheism, with additional attention to Albania and Poland under communism. The historical context will be addressed briefly. The main emphasis is on how people respond to religious bans, the marginalisation of faith, and the psychological mechanisms enabling individuals to sustain belief under repression.

To understand the repression of religion in such contexts, it's necessary to look at the ideological foundations of totalitarian systems. A totalitarian system is usually characterised by the concentration of political power in the hands of a single leader or ruling party that attempts to control not only political life but also the social, cultural, and ideological aspects of society. In these countries, people are expected to place their trust primarily in the authority of the leadership. In many such systems, leaders attempt to build a strong cult of personality. Such leaders often try to create a situation in which society perceives them as figures almost comparable to a "new god". Because of this, traditional religion can be seen as a potential threat to political authority. As a result, society is encouraged, or even forced, to adopt atheism as the only acceptable worldview. Restricting religious institutions and practices becomes helpful for maintaining ideological control, since it eliminates alternative sources of loyalty, meaning, and moral authority. Moreover, people in such systems are expected to place their hope for a better future in the political vision of the country's leader and to feel united primarily through ideological loyalty.

At this point, I would like to provide a brief explanation of enforced atheism. This concept refers to situations where the state actively suppresses religious institutions, discourages or prohibits religious practices, and promotes atheism as an official ideology.

This approach was present in several political systems of the twentieth century, particularly those inspired by certain interpretations of Marxist ideology. Religion was frequently described as harmful or irrational and was portrayed as an obstacle to social progress.

Psychologically, religion meets important human needs. It offers meaning, hope, and a sense of belonging. Religious belief helps people understand suffering and injustice. Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist, said that finding meaning in life is a fundamental human drive. Religion can fulfil this especially in times of hardship. Restricting religious expression can create tension between personal beliefs and state expectations.

In anti-religious regimes, faith often shifts to private or hidden domains rather than disappearing. People adopt psychological and social strategies to maintain their beliefs under repression. Privatising religion is common – practices like prayer or reading sacred texts take place in the home, beyond direct state scrutiny. Transmission of faith within families is vital. Parents and grandparents informally pass on traditions and values when public religious education is suppressed. This sustains religious identity despite pressure. In some cases, religion becomes a form of symbolic resistance, offering emotional support, solidarity, and moral encouragement. Participation in rituals serves not only spiritual needs, but also psychological and social ones, helping individuals retain dignity and inner freedom.

Another important example worth mentioning is the situation in Poland during the communist period, when the authorities attempted to limit the influence of religion, particularly the Catholic Church. The ruling communist party sought to reduce the social and cultural impact of religious institutions and to promote a more secular ideological framework. However, religion continued to play an important role in Polish society and often became closely connected with national identity and aspirations for political freedom. An important symbolic figure in this context was the Polish priest Jerzy Popiełuszko, associated with the social movement Solidarity. His sermons and religious services attracted many people who were seeking hope and moral support during this difficult political period. Through his messages, religion became not only a spiritual practice but also a source of psychological strength and social solidarity. His death in 1984, after being murdered by members of the state security apparatus, further strengthened the symbolic role of religion as a form of moral resistance against oppression. Another extremely important figure for Polish society was John Paul II. His visits to Poland, especially the first pilgrimage in 1979, had a profound psychological and social impact on the population. Large public gatherings during these visits demonstrated the strong presence of religious identity despite the communist system. For many people, such experiences could strengthen collective identity and reduce fear of the ruling authorities.

In addition to the Polish case, there are other historical and contemporary examples of political systems that attempted to eliminate or replace religion. One of the most radical was Albania, which in 1967 officially declared itself the first atheist state in the world. Religious institutions were closed, many churches and mosques were destroyed or repurposed, and religious practices as well as religious symbols were banned in public life. The state aimed to remove religion entirely from society and replace it with loyalty to socialist ideology. Another contemporary example can be observed in North Korea, where traditional religion has largely been replaced by a strong personality cult centred around political leaders such as Kim Il-Sung (Kim Ir Sen) and Kim Jong Il. In this system, loyalty to the ruling family and the state ideology takes on characteristics that resemble religious devotion. From sociological and psychological perspectives, this phenomenon can be described as a quasi-religious political cult, in which symbols, rituals, and narratives surrounding the leaders fulfil functions traditionally associated with religion.

Statues of Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong Il. Mansudae Grand Monument, Pyongyang. Photo: Bjørn Christian Tørrissen (Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0)

In conclusion, the relationship between political systems that promote atheism and human religiosity is complex. While certain governments have attempted to eliminate or marginalise religion, the psychological needs associated with faith, such as the search for meaning, hope, and community, often remain strong. As a result, individuals and communities develop various strategies to preserve their beliefs and maintain their spiritual identity even under oppressive conditions.

Glossary

devotion – strong love, loyalty, or care for someone or something
drive – strong internal motivation, impulse, or instinct
enforce – to make people obey a particular law or rule
gathering – a group of people, things, etc, that are gathered together
oppressive – cruel and controlling
profound – very deep, intense, or great
repurpose – to use something for a different purpose
religiosity – showing strong religious belief
repression – the use of force or violence to control people
retain – to keep or continue to have
restrict – to limit or keep within bounds
secular – not connected with religion or spiritual matters
suppress – to stop, control, or prevent something from happening
sustain – to keep something going or maintain it

The Psychology Behind Cult Recruitment

BY AGATA STUGIENT

Have you ever wondered how it is possible that people exactly like you, with families, friends, and good jobs, fall for dangerous organisations that are later discovered to be cults? Something that started innocently, portrayed as a part-time involvement with a group with great ideals, can become a lifelong commitment to people with questionable moral values, seemingly with no possibility of leaving. Right there, we can already see one of the manipulative tactics that cult leaders use in order to draw "new victims" in. More of these we're going to discuss in this article, so you know exactly what the red flags are and how you can protect yourself from potentially getting into one of those unsafe groups.

Cult in the past vs now

What is worth mentioning is the distinction between the word "cult" in its traditional meaning and the one that might mean something slightly different nowadays. The main difference between the two is that the former was a group inherently connected to some form of religious belief involving a spiritual being. Now, the focus has shifted to a certain goal, determined by a group's higher ideals or even just material goods. That might revolve around things like happiness, success or simply money. In this article, we're going to refer mainly to the current meaning of this word. The recruitment tactics and the real purpose behind a cult haven't changed; they still involve indoctrination, taking full control of members, and benefiting from them in one way or another (e.g., their devotion, time and energy, or money).

Cult recruitment: what manipulative tactics do they use?

How many of you have ever felt deceived by an advertisement that offers what sounds like a good deal, but in fact is just another selling technique? Or maybe you are interested in social psychology and already know a little bit about marketing strategies? If so, you might have insight into the manipulative tactics that cults use to recruit potential members. Let's break them down together.

Step-by-step "recruitment recipe"

From love bombing, feeding their members with fear and false hope, to gaslighting and isolating them from the outside world. What sounds like a supportive circle of good friends with the same values turns out to be a group with a non-negotiable and unquestionable set of rules, run by fear and eternal devotion.

That being said, we can already recognise one of the concerning behaviours often used at the beginning of the recruitment process. Once someone (often through family, friends, or acquaintances) offers you a meeting with no expectation that you will fully commit to this specific group, and you accept it, the process has already begun. What comes next is the love-bombing stage, where they create a space for you in which you feel you belong. People gathered there might express to you how glad they are that you came, show great interest in you, and surround you with a very welcoming atmosphere. All of that suggests that this indeed could be a wonderful place for you, if it weren't for the hidden costs of membership, which you are only going to be made aware of after you sign up.

Another thing that an unsuspecting visitor may experience is an inspiring talk from their charming leader. The goal here is to stir a desire in you for these great ideals or a belief that success can be easily achieved if only you become a member of this exclusive group. At this point, belonging to such a "supportive" group of like-minded people may sound like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

So, after such an encouraging speech, with no doubts left, you sign up for a membership. The responsibilities are not that big yet, a few meetings a month certainly wouldn't scare anyone who was committed to, for example, "becoming the best version of themselves". Still unaware, you start attending them.

Although it might seem harmless at first, over time, the manipulation and control begin to show. They ask you for more and more engagement, giving you tasks you didn't originally sign up for. More than that, any time you try to raise a concern, you're invalidated and convinced that all of this is necessary for some higher purpose (an example of gaslighting). On the other hand, if you bring up a worry that your family member expressed to you, the group might call them unsupportive and even encourage you to cut off any contact you have with them. As a result, you end up depending on your "friends" from the cult, without any real, close relationships in the outside world. Their goal is to isolate you as much as possible, so it is even harder for you to leave.

What's also worth mentioning is the conflicted feelings that arise when you're deep inside a cult. On the one hand, it is a source of hope, support (even if conditional), and a sense of belonging with the other members. A feeling that you desperately want to keep, so you do everything they ask you to do in order not to be cast out. This is a natural human reaction to the perceived possibility of rejection. On the other hand, it causes significant distress and a constant state of fear. Absolute control, indoctrination, and isolation do a good job of keeping you in, even if the group starts to bring more negative than positive outcomes. More than that, feelings of embarrassment and shame (even if experienced only subconsciously) can effectively prevent you from making any attempts to leave.

Why do they feel embarrassed, you might ask. It's the cult leaders that should be ashamed of their rather heinous attempts to fulfil their own selfish needs by harming others. However true that is, victims might blame themselves for falling for such lies and manipulation. The emotion is not unique to former cult members, but often happens to people who were abused and heavily gaslighted, which is a common occurrence in such organisations. More than that, issues in their relationships with people from the outside world and the rituals they were forced to perform can add to those feelings of shame. Simply admitting this could be too threatening for the psyche and cause deep internal conflicts (e.g., feeling ashamed while staying in that situation can lead to cognitive dissonance).

Cult's targets: vulnerable and lonely

So, who are the new recruits? As you may know, we are most likely to fall into a marketing trap when we have an unfulfilled need. Think of it this way: whenever we feel hungry while we're in town, we have two options. Either buy something relatively cheap from a nearby bakery, or go to a restaurant for a proper dinner. At that point, a simple flyer with an appetising picture of a meal and a promised discount could effectively convince us to go to that place, even if we would normally have ignored it.

So, having that example in mind (which is not perfect but serves to explain it better), we can already imagine who the recruiters look for. People in some kind of crisis, those who have moved to a new city looking for new friends, and young people who are trying to find their identity. All of these factors make a person more vulnerable to manipulation. A deep need for belonging, a supportive circle of friends, or simply a sense of structure after experiencing a life change are what draw people in. That's why it's so important to be aware whenever our close ones or we find ourselves in a vulnerable place.

Manipulation techniques

Cults often use carefully planned techniques to control people by exploiting their emotions and fostering dependency. Here are the most common techniques.

Charismatic leader – a person portrayed as a "know-it-all", a successful entrepreneur who promises that everybody can achieve whatever they want. Either that, or someone who appears to have some kind of greater knowledge and ideals that would forever change your life.

Scarcity principle – sharing a leader's success story can certainly inspire people, but it doesn't necessarily provide them with concrete steps they can take to achieve a similar level of success. It is said that you will only obtain that knowledge after you sign up for regular meetings. The idea of information available only to a selected, limited group makes it all the more desirable. More than that, the ideals or the goods this cult offers, all of a sudden, seem irresistible.

Love bombing – showering a person with affection, warmth and attention. This is used at the beginning of a recruitment process to draw a person in, lock them in and make sure they will agree to come to the next meeting. Because nothing can be too bad if it comes from such a kind-hearted individual who treats you so well, right? Turns out it can.

Rule of reciprocity – a social need to give back to the community or a person who seemingly did a lot for you. In a cult, it might be a sense of belonging, support, or simply the opportunity to be a member and have access to all the "exclusive" information.

Isolating – one of the most important, ongoing strategies that involves slowly separating you from your friends and family. The goal here is to make the group the only source of support and social contact. That way, they can continue to sell you a story with no one from the outside world questioning it. This discourages critical thinking and leads to a higher level of conformity.

The low-ball technique – the offer that at first looks like a pretty good deal (low commitment, few meetings), but over time evolves into a time-consuming, everyday effort. All of the requirements are hidden until you sign up and consider yourself "locked in".

Foot-in-the-door technique – similar to the one mentioned before, this strategy is about hiding from the person what the group really wants. In short, there are two requests, and only one of them is truly important to a cult leader. However, they don't reveal the one they actually want from you. First, they ask you to do something insignificant for them. It sounds bizarre, but this often makes a person more willing to agree to a bigger request if asked later on (one they would have denied if asked initially).

Sunk cost fallacy – the more time, energy or money you give to the group, the harder it is to leave it. This manipulation technique is about making people feel like they can't resign from the cult, after they've already put so much effort into it. Simply the thought of all the sacrifices they had to make adds to the perceived value of the group.

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Glossary

arise – to start to happen or come into existence
bizarre – very strange and unusual
cast out – to force someone to leave a place or group
conformity – behaving in the same way as most other people
eternal – lasting forever or for a very long time
foster – to develop over time
fallacy – a mistaken belief
gaslighting – the act of tricking or controlling someone through making them believe things that are not true, often by suggesting that their perceptions or memories are incorrect
heinous – extremely bad or cruel
reciprocity – behaviour in which two people or groups give each other help or advantages
stir – to cause something, especially a feeling or emotion

PSYCHLINGO

When the Sky Doesn't Crack: How Humans Rationalise Failed Predictions

BY MAJA ZAKURZEWSKA

IMAGE BY MYSTIC ART DESIGN FROM PIXABAY

Predictions about the end of the world have recurred throughout history and continue to surface in modern society. In 2025, some people believed the world would end. The story began when a pastor and self-proclaimed prophet from South Africa publicly claimed to have heard Jesus' voice announce that his return to Earth would take place on September 23 and 24. After the interview, news of the prophecy quickly spread among believers.

But then the day came. The sky did not crack. Life went on as usual.

Why do people believe in prophecies in the first place?

Early psychologists argued that prophetic experiences result from emotional intensity rather than abnormality. Highly aroused emotions can narrow consciousness, intensify focus, and produce vivid experiences that feel real. If someone expects apocalyptic events, confirmation bias may reinforce their interpretations.

Many individuals who report prophetic experiences appear to sincerely believe them, describing their visions not as deception but as truth. That sincerity can make their claims more compelling to others. For some, faith offers structure, meaning, and certainty in an unpredictable world, and it may endure even after disappointment or loss.

Believing in prophecies can give a person a sense of belonging and a sense of being part of something bigger. Those who place religion at the centre of their lives may take a prophet's words particularly seriously and wholeheartedly believe them. This does not signal mental instability. Rather, it reflects ordinary psychological needs for meaning, certainty, and connection.

Rapture anxiety

While many believers eagerly anticipate the Rapture, others experience significant fear and anxiety surrounding the event. Individuals experiencing such anxiety may also be reluctant to express their concerns, as fear can seem incompatible with faithful belief. These emotions can be particularly pronounced in children, especially those raised in environments where apocalyptic expectations are frequently discussed. Developmental psychologists observe that children often interpret religious teachings literally, which can only intensify fear of being taken away before having the opportunity to live out their lives, being separated from family members or left behind.

Rationalising failed predictions

Despite feeling disappointment and dissonance after a prophecy turns out to be wrong, people's faith does not waver. Psychologists describe this as belief perseverance, closely related to cognitive dissonance. When a strongly held belief is contradicted by reality, individuals experience psychological discomfort. Rather than abandoning the belief, people often reinterpret the evidence to restore consistency. Examples of explanations for failed prophecies include hidden meaning, miscalculations, or framing the event as a test of faith. Social pressure can make rationalisation even stronger: believers may explain away a failed prophecy to remain part of their community and protect relationships, thereby preserving their faith. In short, disconfirmation of a prophecy does not automatically weaken religious commitment. Belief systems are resilient, supported by rationalisation and social reinforcement. For example, despite the failed prediction of the September 2025 Rapture, many believers continued to discuss and reinterpret the prophecy online, demonstrating how faith can persist even when expectations are unmet.

Belief in prophecies, like the Rapture, is shaped by a combination of emotional intensity, social connection, and cognitive processes. Anticipation can inspire hope, but it can also provoke anxiety, especially when predictions seem imminent. Even when a prophecy fails, believers often rationalise the outcome, reinterpret the meaning, and draw support from their communities, allowing faith to endure.

From a psychological perspective, this resilience highlights that human belief systems are supported not only by evidence but also by emotional needs, social belonging, and cognitive processes that help maintain consistency and meaning.

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Glossary

compelling – very interesting or convincing
confirmation bias – noticing information that agrees with what you already believe
consistency – the quality of staying the same over time
disconfirmation – proof that shows something is wrong
endure – to keep going even when it's hard
imminent – about to happen soon
incompatible – so different in nature as to be incapable of coexisting
perseverance – keeping trying even when it's difficult
pronounced – easily noticeable
rationalise – to give a reason for something, even if it's not the real reason
recur – to happen again
reinforce – to make stronger
resilient – able to recover from problems
waver – to be unsure or hesitate

Manifesting

BY GABRIELA GAWŁOWSKA

What is manifesting?

"I am rich", "I am successful", "I have clear skin" – those are just some of the more popular affirmations heard during manifesting. Affirmations are only one of many tools available for manifesting. Others include creating visual boards, acting as if the thing we want is already true, and giving oneself positive self-talk.

Manifesting is a form of "magical thinking", where one's strong beliefs are powerful enough to turn one's desire and/or goal into reality.

This particular idea has been around since the 19th century, when the spiritual philosophy called "The New Thought" stated that the "right" thinking can shape reality, including your health and destiny.

In the context of religion and culture, views on manifesting differ across religions, cultures, and customs. For example, in Christianity, opinions about manifesting are divided. On the one hand, from a modernised point of view, it can be seen as aligning a person's will with God's will through prayer. In that case, a Christian, might treat a positive attitude and mental focus as a gift from God, rather than a person's own property and base their mindset on believing that they have already received what they asked for in prayer (Mark 11:24) and speaking with faith (Proverbs 18:21). Other Christians may be more skeptical, because manifesting relies on "universe" and a person's will instead of God's power, focuses on person's desire and materialistic goals instead of God's will and spiritual growth, uses visualisation and attraction rather than prayers and the Bible. While Christian faith is adamant about not touching on the subject of manifesting, in Eastern culture, it's a deeply rooted concept. Manifesting is tied to spiritual practices

that help to align one's spirit with the cosmic order. It's worth noting that manifesting in that context is not about selfishly wishing for whatever you want, but rather about practising mindfulness, cultivating karma, and nurturing the spiritual life and the inner aspect of a person. Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Zen are the best-known faiths in Eastern culture. But they are all based on the conviction that manifesting emphasises that you're not an individual being but a collaborator of the universe.

The next big boom of the phenomenon was thanks to the premiere of Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret* in 2006. It's a self-help book based on the fundamental belief that thoughts alone can shape the reality around you. The third and most recent resurrection and spike in popularity of manifesting emerged during COVID-19, with people locked in their homes and the widespread use of TikTok (especially witchtok) and other similar social media platforms related to coaching, self-help, and featuring techniques sprinkled with spiritual aspects.

How can psychology explain it?

Manifesting is a broad subject that dips its toes into many aspects of psychology. Here are some examples:

The first explanation of manifesting could be the phenomenon known in psychology as "self-fulfilling prophecy". It was first established by Robert Merton in 1948 in his book *Social Theory and Social Structure*, where, in short, the bank went bankrupt because its customers closed their accounts, believing early rumours of its bankruptcy. A self-fulfilling prophecy is a situation in which the initial belief influences a person's actions and behaviour in a way that makes the expectation true. When giving examples of such situations, it's often done through unfortunate circumstances. For example, it's the moment when a student feels like they will fail the exam because maybe they don't understand the subject, so their initial belief causes them to study less or not at all. And thus, the student's prophecy about failing the exam comes true, not because they believed it, but because they didn't try to prepare more for the exam. In the context of manifesting, it could be interpreted the other way. Instead of expecting the worst, a manifesting person is looking forward to positive things. The examples of affirmations given at the beginning of this article could influence someone to unknowingly improve their behaviour. "I am rich" may cause the person to start paying more attention to their spending, look forward to investing, or even try more risky approaches to multiplying their money (for example, investing in the stock market). This interpretation suggests that manifesting might come true, not because of our beliefs but because of our behaviour.

The second explanation is the placebo effect. It's considered a less broad psychological and psychophysical phenomenon than a self-fulfilling prophecy, because it's mostly applied to treatments and health. It's applied when a patient is given an inactive treatment and believes it's working because of their expectations, conditioning, and mind-body connections. The psychosomatic branch of psychology studies the connections between emotions, thoughts and other mental processes, and their effects on the body (soma). In this case, improved health could be explained by the brain producing neurotransmitters, such as dopamine and endorphins, which reduce stress and activate the parasympathetic nervous system. This, in turn, makes our mood better, not the treatment itself. Manifesting can create the same placebo effect, with a strong set of expectations that a person wants to manifest; the person's brain might start producing hormones related to feeling better, and thus making the expectation a reality (especially with the type of affirmations "I am healthy", "I trust my body's wisdom and health", "I am vibrant", etc.).

The third option proposed by psychology could be confirmation bias. This particular psychological mechanism stems from cognitive psychology. It was first discovered and named by the English psychologist Peter Wason in the 1960s. Wason's experiments revealed that people tend to search for information that confirms and favours their beliefs, then pay attention to the information that contradicts them. Why do we do that? The explanation might be because our minds don't like being wrong. Faced with opposed beliefs and values at the same time, it was proven by Leon Festinger that we feel genuine anxiety and discomfort. It's called cognitive dissonance. His theory suggests that to lower that tension (which our brain doesn't like feeling at all), a person might either change their beliefs or reinforce them to regain consistency (which our brain does like). So, confirmation bias focuses more on simply paying less attention to or ignoring information that is not favourable to our beliefs. This bias can be a cause that cements a person's belief that manifestation is working. When manifesting – for example, "I am making the right choices and I believe in my intuition" – nine out of ten times, a person could make the wrong decision due to their poor judgment. However, that one time they made the right choice and their manifestation "came true" will be the one instance they remember, rather than the other nine times it didn't.

The last proposed explanation is actually used in one branch of psychology focused on sports: mental imagery. Mental imagery is also part of the cognitive branch of psychology. It's an ability to create and experience sensory information, without external stimuli. So, the most popular experiment is to ask a person to imagine an apple. It has been proven that some people can imagine a vivid picture of an apple, maybe even a 3D model they can rotate and do all sorts of things with. However, others might not be able to imagine the fruit at all. They describe it as knowing what the apple looks like and understanding the concept of the fruit, yet they can't recreate it from their memory and imagination. There are

two extremes of the spectrum, but it's worth noting that there are people in between who can imagine an apple in 2D, as a vague shape or a contour. In sports, mental imagery is used to imagine playing techniques (for example, kicking the ball), imagining the play strategies, and boosting motivation and focus. It applies the same way in manifesting: imagining yourself successful, rich, healthy, and so on. You are performing a form of mental training that, in turn, motivates you, helps you plan better, and strengthens your self-efficacy.

What are some of the manifesting methods?

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, there are many ways of manifesting. Here are examples of some of them.

The most used and common method is affirmations. These are the simplest and easiest ways of manifesting because they require nothing but yourself, your focus, and a mirror you can look into while affirming. The whole process is about using positive self-talk, in the form of positive-coded sentences, often repeated to "program" the subconscious mind to align with the energy of the universe. It's recommended to use present tense sentences to help visualise what you desire and to show that it's already true, to bridge the gap between the reality you are in and the future you want to have. This technique is all about shifting the mindset to a positive focus (rather than a negative one). As much as some positive self-talk isn't a bad idea to boost your mood and ground yourself, it's easy to fall into the trap of toxic positivity (ignoring what a person is truly feeling) and the disappointment of it not coming true when a person doesn't pair the self-affirmation with certain actions and behavioural changes.

Visual boards are also really popular. This method focuses more on visualising and sight, relying on creating a collage from different images placed and glued onto a large piece of paper or a real board. It's another technique used in manifesting that reminds a person of their goals and desires, activates the subconscious mind, and is said to help a person get used to the idea of them coming true, thus aligning the desired reality with the person present. In psychology, especially in the sports branch, visualising in general is used to help raise motivation, since apparently imagining doing something activates the same brain regions that are active when we are performing it.

Another popularised method of manifestation is the "365" method. No, it has nothing to do with writing once a day every day (although it's probably recommended). The numbers stand for intervals and the number of times a person should write their manifested affirmations during the day. According to this method, you should write your affirmations: 3 times in the morning, 6 times in the afternoon and 5 times at nighttime. Apparently, it helps a person maintain focus on their goals, boosts motivation, and serves as constant repetition.

Other known manifesting methods include starting a gratitude journal, writing scripts from the perspective of your future self – where you write as if things have already happened – writing your manifestation and placing it under your pillow, and the "55x5" method, in which you write your affirmations fifty-five times a day, five days a week.

Every one of those actions can be interpreted as a magnet that pulls the right energies to bring your desired belief to life.

Summary

Manifesting is a belief that a person's thoughts, desires, and expectations can become reality because they think them into existence. Basing oneself solely on manifesting will probably lead to a disappointing discovery: that's just not the case. Does that mean that as psychologists we must immediately toss this belief in the trash can when our client admits that they believe and use that method? No. It's worth considering the client's situation, their current needs, and how manifestation helps fulfil them, as they may resist the opposing view and feel threatened by cognitive dissonance. However, for their own well-being, it's worth using psychoeducation and proposing scientifically proven methods, rather than relying solely on manifesting. For example, proposing to set goals that are achievable for our clients. It can help the client direct their focus and energy towards the goals and tasks they want to achieve most at that moment. Additionally, with acknowledged and clear goals in mind, it can help a person feel independent, more self-assured, and more motivated. What's important to understand about the phenomenon of manifesting is that it is a form of coping with reality, an escape from it, and a hope for quick-fix solutions to one's problems.

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Glossary
acknowledge – to recognise or admit the existence, truth, or reality of
adamant – unwilling to change an opinion or decision
affirmation – a positive statement you repeat to encourage yourself
assured – showing skill and confidence
contradict – to say the opposite of something or show that it is not true
dip your toes – to try something new slowly and carefully
ground oneself – to calm yourself down
inactive treatment – a treatment that has no real effect, like a placebo
karma – the idea that your actions (good or bad) will affect what happens to you in the future, according to the Hindu and Buddhist religions
mindfulness – paying full attention to the present moment to feel calm and improve your mental state
mindset – a way of thinking
nurture – to care for something and help it grow or develop
parasympathetic nervous system – the part of the body that helps you relax and rest
positive-coded – expressed or described in a positive way
psychoeducation – teaching people about mental health and how the mind works
rooted – strongly based on or connected to something
self-efficacy – belief in your ability to succeed in a task or handle a situation
spike – a sudden increase or rise
stem from – to come from or be caused by something
toss – to throw
vivid – very clear and detailed

Keeping Religious Beliefs Should Be Our Priority

BY KATARZYNA BRALCZYK

When you first read this title, you probably felt a range of emotions, whether positive or negative. Perhaps you thought I was crazy and old-fashioned, or perhaps you agreed with me. Whether we believe or not is a personal choice, and no one should tell us otherwise. However, looking at history realis- tically, we all have to admit that religions are powerful tools of control.

In the Middle Ages, religious beliefs were among the main reasons society continued to function. People were poor, hungry, sick, and dying young, so they wanted at least one hopeful thing to hold on to. The promise of Heaven, a world after death, gave them that hope. How could you convince the poor and sick to work if not by promising them that everything would be better after death? Life perhaps was not good, but the afterlife will be better. If that is not comforting, then I don't know what is.

In the Book of Job, we have an excellent example of a message that was fed to the poor. Job was a good man with strong religious beliefs, but God wanted to test him. He made him lose everything: his money, health, and family. Yet Job's faith never wavered, and he accepted that it was God's plan. He could not complain, because he was only a mere human, incapable of challenging an all-knowing deity. And of course, after the test ended, Job got everything back and more. The moral is that it does not matter how much you hurt; it's all God's plan, which you just cannot comprehend, so you have to accept it with your head down. After hearing that story, the poor believed that their suffering was all God's plan, so there was no need to rebel.

Churches were usually in control. Priests were regarded as godlike figures, and their words were treated as nearly sacred. Sometimes it was brutal and not fair; however, we have to agree that it also brought some benefits.

People can be cruel and do bad things, but if they believed they would be punished after death, they were less likely to do so. Religion has its dark sides, but if society believes in a good God, people may try to be more like Him. As a result, there will likely be fewer killers, thieves, and cheaters. It is a control tool, a powerful one at that, and when used rationally, it can make many things easier and better.

I have a friend who struggled with self-harm and held strong religious beliefs. Sometimes she was able to stop herself from harming herself because she believed that God would not want her to suffer. Often, when she felt at her lowest, she found hope within herself because, even if no one in her life was good to her, she believed that God cared for her and loved her unconditionally. As much as I don't agree with many of her beliefs, I find it beautiful that she had the strength to fight her depression, even if it wouldn't have worked for me.

I think we should protect religious beliefs, even if we don't believe in anything ourselves. Religion is a powerful tool whose influence and control can be used for good things. It can help society as a whole because, although religious beliefs often have harmful influences, without them, who knows where we would be today?

Glossary
afterlife – life that some people believe continues after death
deity – a god or goddess
hold on to – to keep something and not let it go or give it away
mere – nothing more than
unconditionally – without limits, conditions, or requirements
The Book of Job – a book in the Hebrew Bible, where it appears in the "Writings" section, and it is also the first poetic book in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible.

REVIEWS

BY JAN WOLICKI

The Two Popes

In 2019, Fernando Meirelles gave us something that was not expected: a film that wasn't the obvious choice. I tend to watch films that don't have a religious agenda, but this one was widely praised, and one should check what the fuss is about. And the fuss was about two men (who happened to be popes): one known to us as Benedict (portrayed by phenomenal Anthony Hopkins) and the other as Francis (played by equally phenomenal Jonathan Pryce), who spend much of the film discussing their approach to faith and belief.

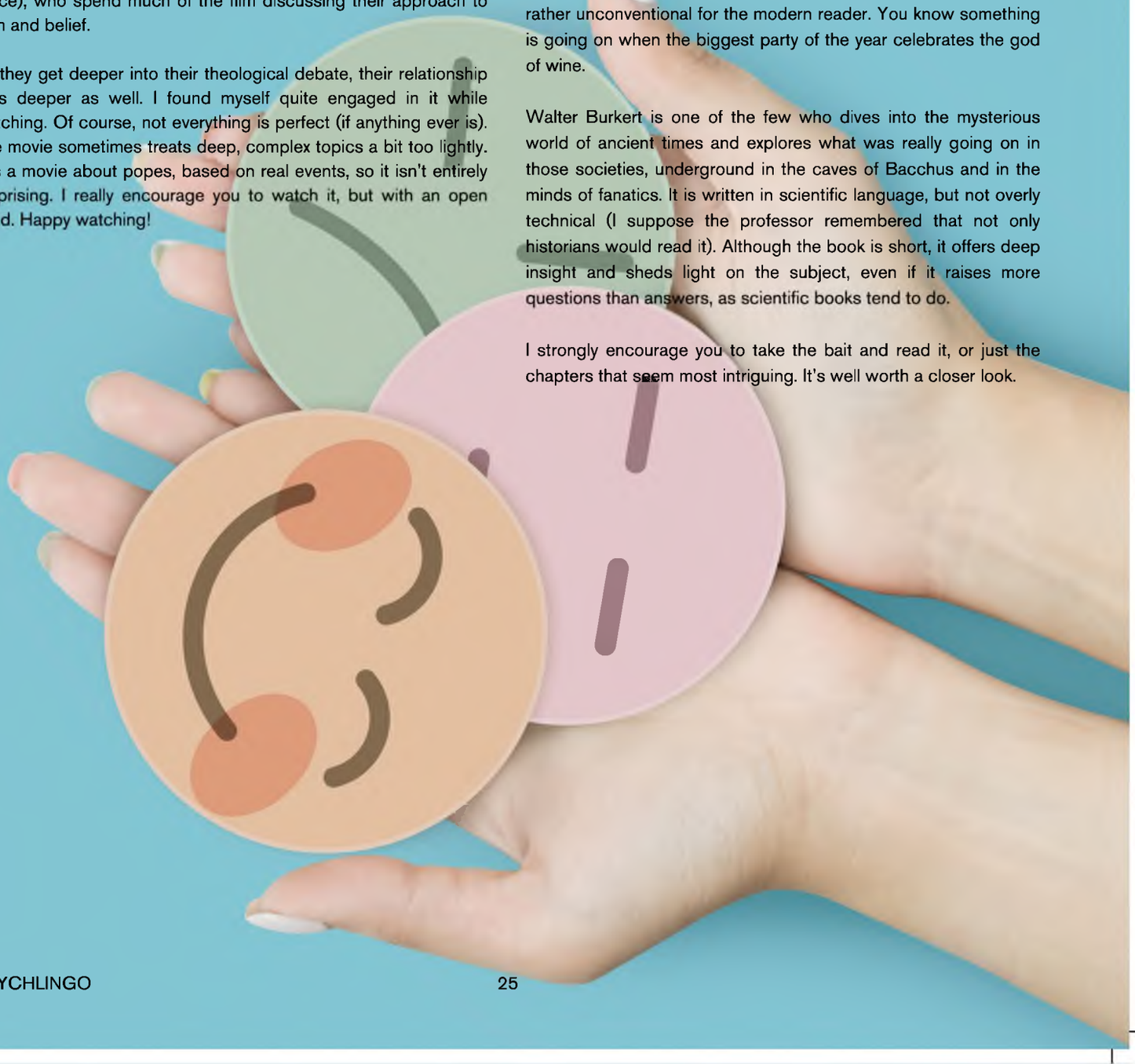
As they get deeper into their theological debate, their relationship gets deeper as well. I found myself quite engaged in it while watching. Of course, not everything is perfect (if anything ever is). The movie sometimes treats deep, complex topics a bit too lightly. It is a movie about popes, based on real events, so it isn't entirely surprising. I really encourage you to watch it, but with an open mind. Happy watching!

Ancient Mystery Cults

Everyone knows the myths of told Greeks and Romans. They are part of our culture as much as anything else. We learn about them from primary school through university, then watch movies about the heroes and gods they portray. But there was, or maybe still is, something more behind them. As we know, those were religions alive in ancient times, yet we often leave this out, especially in pop culture. Like any religion, they had rituals, which tended to be rather unconventional for the modern reader. You know something is going on when the biggest party of the year celebrates the god of wine.

Walter Burkert is one of the few who dives into the mysterious world of ancient times and explores what was really going on in those societies, underground in the caves of Bacchus and in the minds of fanatics. It is written in scientific language, but not overly technical (I suppose the professor remembered that not only historians would read it). Although the book is short, it offers deep insight and sheds light on the subject, even if it raises more questions than answers, as scientific books tend to do.

I strongly encourage you to take the bait and read it, or just the chapters that seem most intriguing. It's well worth a closer look.



WISE & WITTY

Proverbs

- *God works in mysterious ways*
Events are often beyond human comprehension.

- *Man plans, God laughs*
People can make plans, but eventually things may not turn out as expected.

- *The road to hell is paved with good intentions*
Well-meaning actions can have unfortunate results.

- *No one is a prophet in his own land*
People often fail to show respect to those familiar to them.

- *Trust in God, but tie your camel*
Combine faith with effort and precautions.

- *To err is human; to forgive, divine*
Making mistakes is normal, but forgiving others shows exceptional character.

- *A clear conscience fears no accusation*
When you know you've done nothing wrong, you have no reason to worry.

- *Pride goes before a fall*
Arrogance often leads to a setback or failure.

Idioms

- *Prodigal son*
A person who leaves home to lead a prodigal life but later comes back repentant.

- *Cast the first stone*
Be the first to accuse, blame, or punish someone, even though you are not perfect yourself.

- *Play devil's advocate*
Take an opposing view, even if you do not personally agree with it.

- *A doubting Thomas*
A skeptical person.

- *Turn the other cheek*
Choose not to retaliate.

Just to make you smile a little

A preacher fell into the ocean, and he couldn't swim. When a boat came by, the captain yelled, "Do you need help, sir?" The preacher calmly replied, "No, God will save me."

A little later, another boat came by, and a fisherman asked, "Hey, do you need help?" The preacher again said, "No, God will save me."

Eventually, the preacher drowned and went to heaven. He asked God, "Why didn't you save me?" God replied, "Fool, I sent you two boats!"

EXERCISES

Exercise 1.
Complete each sentence with the correct idiom or proverb.

1.
A: "Did you hear how everyone ignored Mary's work at her hometown exhibition?"
B: "Yes, it's so sad — _____."

2.
A: "The actor thought his career would last forever, but one bad movie changed everything."
B: "Well, _____."

3.
A: "I'm criticising his ideas because they are utterly ridiculous."
B: "Be careful — _____ unless you're perfect yourself."

4.
A: "Tom was so certain that he would win the championship."
B: "That's exactly why you should never get too confident."
_____.

5.
A: "I can't believe John insulted me in front of everyone."
B: "Don't let it get to you. It's better to _____."

6.
A: "Emma tried to paint the house herself, but everything went wrong."
B: "Exactly — _____."

7.
A: "I'm not sure I agree with this proposal."
B: "Go ahead and _____ — it helps us think of all the problems."

8.
A: "Everyone is talking about how Jack finally came back home after years abroad."
B: "He's like a _____, returning after squandering all his money."

Exercise 2.
For each sentence, decide which psychological or religious concept it illustrates. Choose the correct term from the list below. Two of the terms are redundant.

love bombing, *identity moratorium, enforced atheism*, *identity diffusion*, *confirmation bias*, *magical thinking*, *atheistic religion*, *identity foreclosure*, *self-fulfilling prophecy*

1. When the priest said that only the faithful would succeed, Frank started working extra hard, and things went well.
2. Theresa believed that if she wore an amber ring to church, God would make sure she passed all her exams.
3. When Molly joined the new church, everyone hugged her and complimented her constantly.
4. Ever since he was a kid, Simon went to church every Sunday because his parents told him to.
5. Every time Jim reads the scripture, he only remembers the parts that agree with his views and skips over the rest.
6. Paul spent a few years exploring different faiths before deciding what he truly believed in.
7. Kate tried yoga, Bible study, and even a little chanting, but didn't really feel connected to any of it

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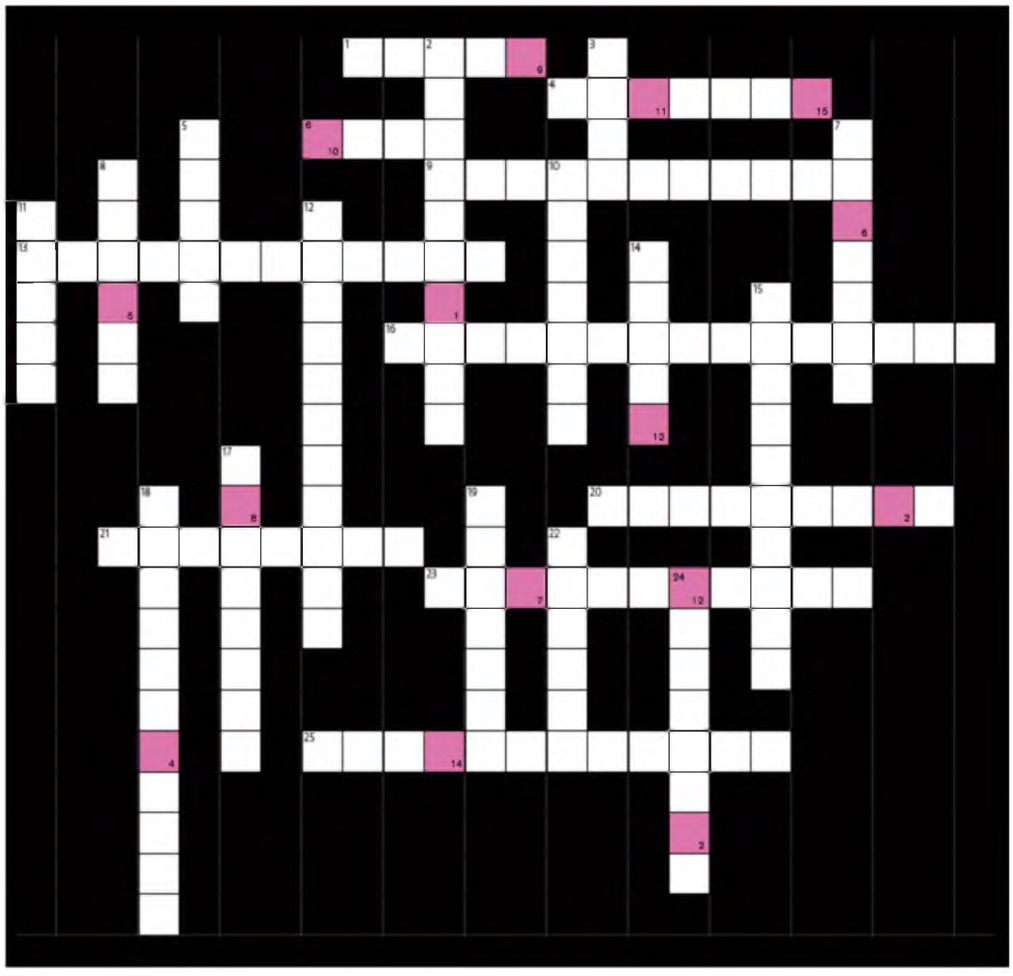
Key

Exercise 1
1. no one is a prophet in his own land
2. man plans, God laughs/God works in mysterious ways
3. cast the first stone
4. Pride goes before a fall
5. turn the other cheek
6. the road to hell is paved with good intentions
7. play devil's advocate
8. prodigal son

Exercise 2
1. self-fulfilling prophecy; 2. magical thinking; 3. love bombing;
4. identity foreclosure; 5. confirmation bias; 6. identity moratorium;
7. identity diffusion

Crossword Puzzle



HIDDEN SOLUTION

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15

DOWN

2. ability to recover quickly from difficulties
3. to cause something, especially a feeling or emotion
5. to be unsure or hesitate
7. not connected with religion or spiritual matters
8. a representation of a power that is effective, dangerous, and at the same time beneficial, both pure and impure, which is guarded and protected against by prohibitions, and which is realised through the means established by society
10. lasting forever or for a very long time
11. a god or goddess
12. to give a reason for something, even if it's not the real reason
14. a sudden increase or rise
15. behaving in the same way as most other people
17. the worship of false gods
18. showing strong religious belief
19. to care for something and help it grow or develop
22. to stick to something
24. about to happen soon

ACROSS

1. the idea that your actions (good or bad) will affect what happens to you in the future, according to the Hindu and Buddhist religions
4. disbelief in the existence of God or gods
6. to throw
9. make a belief or value part of yourself
13. a Christian priest or official
16. without limits, conditions, or requirements
20. a life that some people believe continues after death
21. strong love, loyalty, or care for someone or something
23. the quality of being trusted and believed in
25. keeping trying even when it's difficult

SOLUTION: enforced atheism

PODCAST

Why do many faith traditions practise fasting?

You will listen to a recording about why so many religions call for giving up food.

Exercise 1.
Decide if each statement is *True*, *False*, or *Not Mentioned* based only on the information in the recording.

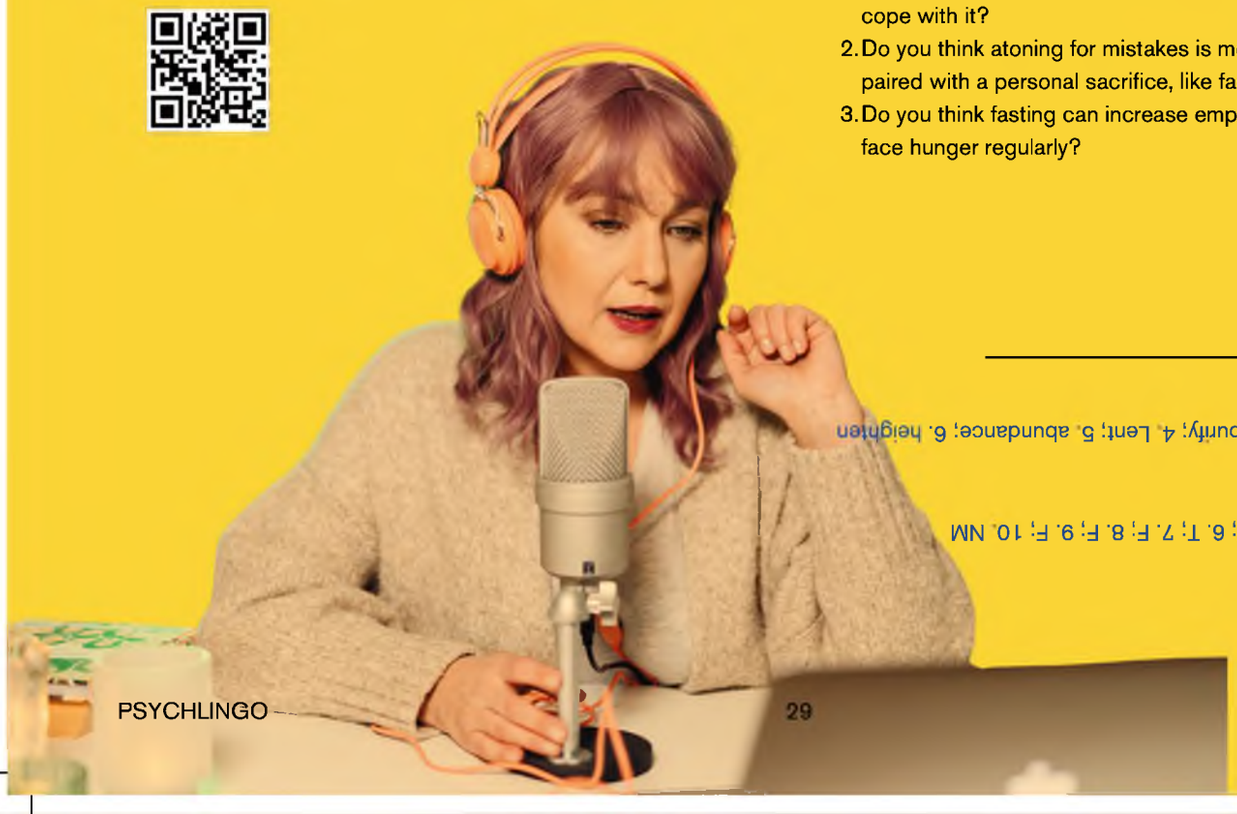
1. During Ramadan, Muslims are allowed to drink water during the day but cannot eat food.
2. Catherine Newell says that fasting exists only in Abrahamic religions.
3. Amber Malik believes fasting helps people better understand those who are hungry.
4. During Ramadan, Zikria Haqiqi decided to stop playing video games permanently.
5. According to Catherine Newell, fasting helps people interrupt their normal routines.
6. Jews fast during Yom Kippur as part of their religious tradition.
7. The main purpose of fasting in different religions is usually very different.
8. The reporter says fasting is mainly practiced for medical reasons today.
9. Jay Richards believes fasting has no value in modern society.
10. The transcript describes how children usually learn to fast for the first time.

Exercise 2.
Fill in the gaps using the words from the recording.
purify, *heighten*, *abundance*, *disrupt*, *Lent*, *atone*

1. Giving up food for part of the day really _____ your normal routine.
2. Some people fast to _____ for past mistakes or feel spiritually cleaner.
3. Many religions say fasting helps _____ both the body and the mind.
4. During _____, some Christians give up certain foods or habits to focus on their faith.
5. Living in _____, we often forget what it feels like to be truly hungry.
6. Fasting can _____ your sense of empathy for people who are hungry every day.

Self-Reflection
Think carefully about the questions below. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. If you have fasted, what was the hardest part, and how did you cope with it?
2. Do you think atoning for mistakes is more meaningful when paired with a personal sacrifice, like fasting? Why or why not?
3. Do you think fasting can increase empathy for people who face hunger regularly?



Key

Exercise 1
1. F; 2. F; 3. T; 4. F; 5. T; 6. T; 7. F; 8. F; 9. F; 10. NM

Exercise 2
1. disrupts; 2. atone; 3. purify; 4. Lent; 5. abundance; 6. heighten

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

IT'S TIME TO RECLAIM RELIGION
SHARON BROUS | TED

LINGUISTIC TIDBITS

Faith vs Belief

In English, the words **faith** and **belief** have different meanings.

Faith is usually uncountable and refers to a general sense of trust in a higher power, such as God:
Faith is a key part of religious life. / People often turn to faith in times of crisis.

When used as **a faith**, it can refer to a specific religion:
Buddhism is a faith practised worldwide. / Christianity and Islam are two different faiths.

In contrast, **belief** is usually countable and means a specific idea that a person accepts as true or real:
She has various beliefs about the afterlife.

Drinking the Kool-Aid

Drinking the Kool-Aid is a popular expression in the United States that refers to unquestioning, blind faith accepted without hesitation or critical reflection. The phrase originates from the tragic events of 1978, when members of the cult known as the People's Temple died in a mass suicide in Jonestown after consuming a cyanide-laced drink. (Kool-Aid is a well-known powdered soft drink in the U.S.).

The expression entered widespread usage in the 1990s and typically carries negative connotations:

I can't believe you're going to vote for him. You've drunk his Kool-Aid.

THE STARRY HEAVENS ABOVE ME AND THE MORAL LAW WITHIN ME

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