

A New Path To Belief: How Our Generation Is Rewriting Religion

Muskan Seth Jain¹

Introduction

For as long as humans have lived, they have been religious. If you look at the oldest artefacts ever found by archaeologists, they have some religious connotation or the other. Whether it is the Greeks believing in the mighty Zeus, Hindus believing in the powerful Vishnu or newer religions believing in the almighty God or Allah. Human identity has always been interconnected with faith and religion. Religion, in turn, has shaped our cultures and our societies and, to this date, still dictates our way of life. We use religious ceremonies to mark all the important events in our lives, from celebrating our weddings to honouring our dead. It not only provides us with a structure and framework but also encourages the following of some specific moral codes. However, as the world is changing at unbelievable speeds and with technology entering every part of our lives, many believe that these organised religions cannot help us navigate today's world.

Reserach Questions

I see this change in beliefs happening all around me. My friends and I, all of whom come from a variety of different backgrounds and some of whose families have been very religious, are moving away from identifying ourselves with a particular religion or even religion altogether. For us, religion was a huge part of our childhoods, whether it was Friday prayers at the mosque, celebrating Easter by eating chocolate eggs or fasting in Navratri. Religion was the foundation of our communities and provided us with a sense of belonging and comfort. However, as we got older and became more exposed to more of the world, we began asking questions like, " Do we truly believe what we are taught? Are these beliefs actually ours, or are they things we inherited without thinking about? For many of us, these inquiries rose from distaste of religious beliefs like discriminating against LGBTQ communities or emphasising the caste systems, while for others, it was more about exploring the world beyond their own. Rumi once remarked, "Don't be pleased with stories about how things went for others. Unfold your own myth" I believe our generation is on the path of discovering our own truths.

¹ Muskan Seth Jain holds a BA in Human Geography and Urban Planning from the University of Toronto and an MSc in Sustainable Buildings and Construction from University College London. Her interdisciplinary background informs her exploration of modern spirituality, societal change, and the evolving human experience.

Discussion

Today, different conversations about faith take place. During one of our late-night conversations, a friend shared with me, "I believe in something greater than myself, but I don't think it's something that cares about whether I pray or what I eat." There is a common thread amongst most young people of believing in something larger than oneself, whether it be a greater force, energy, or simply the world itself. The majority of them identify as atheists or still searching for or characterising their beliefs as spiritual because the idea of our lives being dictated by ancient texts written thousands of years ago is sceptical. We turn to each other and even science to investigate these unexplored ideas. To us, it is less about following strict rules and religious norms and more about discovering the meaning of life and looking for ways to preserve humanity in this ever-changing world. This change is not about throwing out everything that we have learned but instead about discovering and integrating values that fit well into who we are and the world that we live in. Following what Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "What lies within us is far more important than what lies behind or in front of us."

Generational Continuity

It would be naive to suggest that our generation is unique in its ability to challenge the status quo because every generation before has done the same. Young people have rebelled against tradition since the 1960s counterculture movement only to return to it. Many of our parents and grandparents may have imagined they were also rewriting the rules and discovering themselves like no one has before, only to live lives no different to those who came before them. Perhaps we are not so different, but it is hard to reject the idea that the newer generations, especially in the more developed nations, are turning to atheism or rejecting conforming to organised religion.² Maybe it's not just us, but the culmination of changes seeded by those before us, now coming to fruition.

The Role of the Internet

On this journey of self-discovery and evolution of faith, the internet has played an enormous role. While the internet comes with an array of asterisks, its role in connecting people around the world cannot be downplayed. The internet has provided a multitude of platforms like online meditations, and Reddit communities for young people to explore non-religious and spiritual paths. We are now able to curate our own beliefs and communities across the globe without conforming to the religion we grew up with.

² Wormald, B. (2015) *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/> (Accessed: 07 January 2025).

Challenges and Solutions

This shift in our beliefs, however, has not come without its challenges. Especially for those who are still figuring out their own beliefs and values systems since the lack of conventional framework and community within organised religion may make life feel daunting and isolated. That being said, there is something beautiful in this process. It is a chance to meet new people and form deeper connections while exchanging the best of our upbringing and what we can learn from each other. In our universal search for purpose and belonging, we can engage with one another regardless of our cultural background or religious affiliation.

Conclusion

Ultimately, our generation is not trying to abandon religion or our religious roots, instead trying to evolve and transform it. We are trying to move away from inherited ideas and values and toward views that better represent our values in the 21st century. In doing so, we are not rejecting the past but preparing ourselves for the future by listening to our hearts and following the path that speaks to our souls. It is not about following what is written in ancient texts because while those texts remain universal and static, humans and humanity are personal and dynamic.

