Faith



Common Thread

Issue 1.5 - Faith and Belief

Our Why

We wanted to showcase the diverse beliefs in our community, from our smallest members all the way up to our adults. Faith is such an important part of many of our lives, but is sometimes invisible to those around us.

Our Thread

Staff writer Krystal's incredible essay about John Hick's theory of religious pluralism and her experiences here at UWC is used as a **thread** throughout this issue. You'll see it on each page in the thought bubbles.

What do PYP Students belleve in ?

We asked our PYP buddies what they believe in and then used AI to generate an image of their responses



K: On attending Diwali celebrations as a Christian - In that moment, the barriers that often fuel religious conflicts seemed surmountable, and I realized that by embracing each other's celebrations, we could contribute, in our own small way, to a world where minor religious differences do not morph into greater tragic conflicts.

The profound presence of God in my life:

I struggled with anxiety, low self-esteem, and self-hatred, searching for peace, but nothing worked. It was only when I experienced God's love that I found the peace I had so diligently searched for. Then, Myanmar faced a military coup, and I felt very lost. I didn't know where my future was going. I didn't know the purpose of life anymore. But then God spoke to me and promised me a prosperous future!!

Faith for me means believing and trusting in Jesus Christ for what he has done for me and what he has promised to do for the rest of my life! I was born as a "Christian" following my mom's side, I went to Sunday school and knew all the practices and traditions but there are things I never knew!

I never knew that God is not just some mighty, powerful being who sits up there judging my sins and making laws. I didn't know that God is a father who yearns personal relationship with me... that He wants to help me get through the trouble when I struggle (James 1:2-4), He cares for me when I am burdened (1 Peter 5:7), strengthens me when I'm weak (2 Corinthians 12:11), loves me even when I don't deserve to be loved (1 John 3:1), stands by me when I fear (Isaiah 41:10), forgives my wrongdoings by His mercy and grace (1 John 1:9), knows me by my name (Hebrews 12:11), and is faithful to his promises given to me (Psalm 145:13). And most importantly, I never knew that God loved the world so so much that he gave up his only son Jesus to die for our sins!!! John 3:16 For God Loved the world so much that he gave up his only begotten son so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have everlasting life. I wish everyone understood the depth of God's love!



Shalom, Grade 11, Myanmar

K: At first glance, embracing religious pluralism seemed to create an internal conflict within me, challenging my authenticity as a true believer. I wondered how two seemingly contradictory things could be true.

An Absence of Faith

1. What do you believe in? How would you describe your understanding of faith?

As an atheist, I simply don't believe in the existence of any god. For most things, such as the creation of the earth, I believe in their scientific explanations. Faith, to me, is broad. It is the belief and trust that someone has for somebody else–whether for another person (like it could be for me) or god if you are religious.

2. What does being an atheist mean to you personally?

Being an atheist to me is simply not believing in God. Nothing more, nothing less.

3. What are the principles or values you hold as central to how to live your life?

Life is short. When you don't believe in an afterlife, it's important to me to try as much as I can to be somebody who I won't regret being later–both in my morals and my actions. This doesn't necessarily mean visiting every country in the world or pursuing grand projects; it means being a good friend, applying to every interesting university, standing up for my ideals, and embracing opportunities.

4. How would you describe your purpose in life?

To me, the purpose of life is to find a purpose. I'm a bit of a nihilist in the sense that I don't think life is inherently meaningful. But I see this as freeing—you can create your own meaning. I haven't found my purpose yet, and that's okay.

5. What would you like people who are religious to understand about atheism?



I think there's a misunderstanding that atheists hate religion, which isn't true. I don't believe in God, but I admire the dedication of those who do. Faith can be beautiful. Atheists should not impose their beliefs, just as religious people should not impose theirs, even with the best intentions.

Angela, Grade 12

Muslim Affinity Group: The Call to Prayer

In the Muslim faith, the call to prayer represents a central part of the practice. This sound echoes five times a day inside the hearts of muslims across the globe. In our community, some associate it with home, peace and unity of all believers:

“Hearing the Athan is always pleasant to me --wherever it is -- it will always bring me comfort. The familiar words, the familiar sound and the sight of muslims gathering in one place for a shared faith but many of them are there for different reasons. I think to me, it's way easier to call a place "home" when I know I can hear the Athan sound whenever I need a place for comfort.” (Rabab G12)

“When I came here as a villa person I had not heard Azan before, till after one month. I remember when I was waiting for the Shuttle in front of the villa, I heard it! I felt goosebumps all over my body, I felt I was back home, it is something I was missing from my life and I found it again. “ (Shaden G11)

“I remember when I was on my exchange year in the U.S. last year, it was the only way I could survive Ramadan. I would remember breaking my fast with a date and the call to prayer playing in the background crying because I can't hear it in real life. I feel present and grounded when I hear it and remember that God is always there with me, always in my presence, it feels powerful at times.” (Afraa G11)

“For me, the call to prayer is a sign of our unity. It comforts my heart and gives me a sense of belonging to a strong community. The call to prayer makes me mindful and reminds me of the limited time that I have in this world. For me, that sound is more than just a call to prayer; it’s the call of hope, patience, and humbleness that makes me more self-aware.” (Raheel G11)

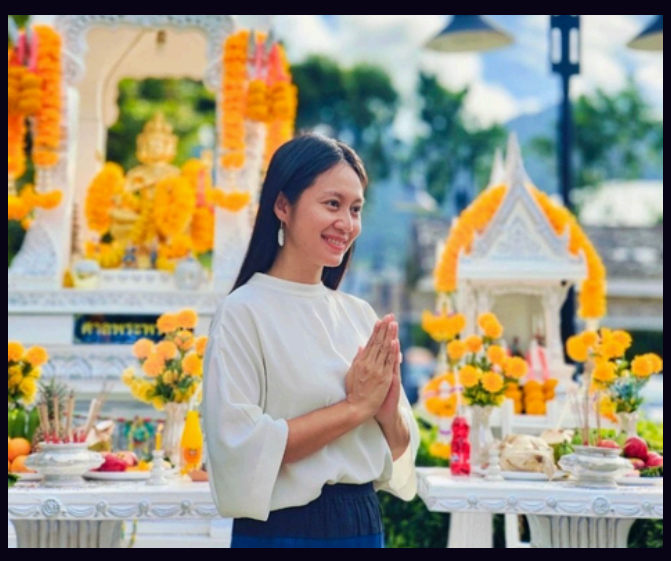
K: A deeper reflection, study, and analysis of Hick’s theory revealed to me that pluralism does not demand I worship every god. It just means that when my Muslim roommate says she needs the room silent and empty to pray, I respect it.

Kru Ploy's Story

Nara: What brought you into buddhism and what helps you keep the faith in it ?
Kru Ploy: **I just believe in it because my family told me to, but then when I asked for deeper answers no one was able to provide me any. Only until I experienced Dhamma practice in a temple and had to practice the five precepts which I still practice until now, that prompts me to keep proving Buddha's path.**
ครูพลอย: ครูเชื่อในศาสนาพุทธเพราะอยู่ในครอบครัวที่ปลูกฝังมาแบบนั้น แต่พอถามคำถามที่ลึกลงไปเกี่ยวกับศาสนาไม่มีใครสามารถให้คำตอบได้ จนกระทั่งครูมีโอกาสไปปฏิบัติธรรมและะถือศีล 5 ถึงจุดประกายให้ครูอยากพิสูจน์เส้นทางของพระพุทธเจ้าต่อไป

Nara: Can you tell us about Festival of Lights and its progression across the years that you've been at UWCT?
Kru Ploy: **"Festival of Lights" is a festival that celebrates the lights of different cultures and religions from Christianity like Christmas to Hinduism like Diwali. It's also a day when parents and students set up booths to sell things and the profits go to charity. In the past, there were no performances. There also used to be an event where people can donate to different religions directly to practitioners like monks.**
ครูพลอย: "Festival of Lights" เป็นเทศกาลเกี่ยวกับแสงที่รวมหลากหลายวัฒนธรรม ตั้งแต่ศาสนาคริสต์อย่างคริสมาส ศาสนาฮินดูอย่างดิวาลี นอกจากนี้จะเป็นวันที่รวมซุ้มขายของเยอะเลยจากนักเรียนและผู้ปกครองโดยที่ผลกำไรจะเอาไปบริจาค เมื่อก่อนไม่มีการแสดง และ เมื่อก่อนยังเคยมีพื้นที่ให้คนไปบริจาคให้กับศาสนาต่าง ๆ แก่ผู้เผยแพร่ศาสนานั้น ๆ โดยตรงอีกด้วย

Nara : Would you say religious beliefs or faith is something one can choose freely in Thailand ?
Kru Ploy: **According to the principles of Buddhism, the Buddha never forced anyone to follow his teachings. Therefore, in Thailand, there are no restrictions. This is evident in the diverse practices of worship, including deities, angels, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam.**
ครูพลอย: ตามหลักของศาสนาพุทธแล้ว พระพุทธเจ้าไม่เคยบังคับให้ใครปฏิบัติตาม ดังนั้นในประเทศไทยจึงไม่มีข้อจำกัด เราจะเห็นได้จากการที่มีการนับถือเทพ เทวดา, ศาสนาฮินดู, คริสต์, อิสลาม อย่างหลากหลาย



K: Each seemingly small act of tolerance and understanding among individuals of different beliefs can be compared to the flapping of the wings in the butterfly effect theory.

K: We, as a race, ought to come to terms with the certainty that there is not one universal truth

M's Story

Faith is not just a personal belief but a lifestyle. It is the dearest and most personal part of life—a choice and a determination. For me, faith is the priority. I believe God created all humankind solely for worshipping Him, so all interactions, actions, and thoughts should align with faith. I also know that the responsibilities placed on humans are never beyond their abilities, so I strive to follow God's guidance in the best way possible throughout my life.

I do not describe myself as someone who converted to another religion. I was raised in a family where religion plays a key role. My family is both Muslim and Christian, so as a child, I focused on studying the concept of religion and building a relationship with God. I used to identify myself as Christian because I thought the religious studies of my childhood were part of Christianity. However, as I grew up, I realized the beauty of the religion embraced by the other part of my family. Additionally, since my country's dominant religion is Islam, most of my friends are Muslims. This inspired me to study Islam in-depth, and all my friends supported me in this journey.

Learning the regulations and obligations of Islam required a shift in perspective for certain aspects of my routine. Yet, due to the environment of my culture, country, and home, I was already familiar with most religious practices, which made the transition feel natural.

Through a deeper understanding of Islam, I genuinely feel I have come to understand myself and the world around me. The Quran provides answers to all the questions I ever had, and I find deep peace and calmness in committing to religious practices. Moreover, I have learned to love and respect all people deeply, seeing them as creations of God. This understanding brings me closer to others and fills my heart with gratitude for the beauty of faith.

Image created by a student on Procreate

Read Krystal's Essay Here:

SCAN ME

One light, many paths, endless wonder

K: Pluralism can initiate a ripple effect of mutual respect and interconnectedness when multiplied across borders, territories, and generations, eventually ending tragic conflicts that arise due to religion, or at least presenting a more understanding and humane way of dealing with the conflict when it arises.