**Towers of Babel**

Have you noticed how our religions are influenced by culture? Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism are all instantly attributed to specific global locations.

Where communities have been closed or shut off from others, traditions have generally stayed unchanged. However, follow the trade routes and look at the spaces where cultures meet and interact – the nature and form of religion changes. African Christianity and Islam have their own traits, differing to those in Europe and the Middle East respectively: in fact Islam changes as you cross the Sahara Desert: the north more closely aligned with the Middle East, while the south has incorporated aspects of traditional (often referred to as pagan) beliefs. A close look at Christianity will yield similar variations.



Being in a culture makes it less noticeable how a religion is influenced by the culture as the two are so engrained or entwined, but take a step outside, engage with another and see what you discover. A visit to a Gurdwara led my host to explain that Sikhism does not discriminate or differentiate, however on entering the building, I would have to 'go through a separate door – it's cultural.' Similarly, with Judaism and Islam – the denomination often being identified by the way the person dresses. In London and many other major 'western' centres, Christians can hardly be identified from the mass of the population – how many times have you raised an eyebrow when someone has professed (or let slip) that they attend church?

It's in social centres (including in places such as South Africa where some churches supported Apartheid) that religions have evolved with more liberal aims developing. Where people encounter the 'other' in business, education and sport, they begin to realise they have more in common than not. I wonder why it's taken us this long to get this far and how much longer it will take until we whittle way the cultural layers which currently define us – to get to the heart of our faith? No doubt this will allow new cultural mores to define us, giving future generations similar challenges as we build new towers of Babel.

It seems, as humans, we just can't live without a Tower of Babel of some sort. Having a common goal (articulated faith) is not enough: the challenge is defining the plan to achieve it and its subsequent implementation, without losing our sense of identity and self-worth – both of which are invariably grounded in our cultures.

Suggestions welcomed…



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