

Embracing the Everyday Through Ordinary Sacred Traditions

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Abstract: The problem this article addresses is that we neglect the ordinary and everyday aspects of our daily lives. This neglect is vital to note because the everyday is where meaning emerges in our lives. Unfortunately, we forget that the everyday is all around us. Connections between everydayness and sacred traditions also exist. That is, in Buddhist mindfulness, there is an awareness that lets us better understand ourselves and others in our daily lives. In the Jewish tradition, the Sabbath is closely connected to our everyday activities. In Christian contemplation, an awareness of ourselves and God arises in everyday living. This research aims to consider whether we can embrace the ordinary and everyday aspects of our daily lives. The fundamental objective of this research is to investigate the significance of everydayness in our daily lives, consider how we neglect the ordinary and the everyday, and explore ways to embrace the everydayness in our lives. This research hopes to show that we can better connect to the everyday through our ordinary yet sacred traditions — specifically, the Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian traditions. By being more aware of this connection, and from practicing this connection, we may find more enjoyment and meaning in our ordinary and daily living.

Keywords: Religion, Sacredness, Contemplation, Sabbath, Mindfulness, Everyday, Judaism, Christianity

1. Introduction

The problem this article addresses is that we neglect the ordinary and everyday aspects of our daily lives. This neglect is important to consider because the everyday is where meaning arises in our lives. We forget that the everyday is all around us. We do not realize that everywhere we go, everydayness is there, and everything we do is in everyday moments. Connections between everydayness and sacred traditions also exist. For example, in Buddhist mindfulness, there is an awareness that lets us better understand ourselves and others in our daily lives. In the Jewish tradition, the Sabbath is closely connected to everyday activities. In Christian contemplation, an awareness of ourselves and God arises in everyday living. Because it is so prevalent in everything we do, it is easy to presume that we are aware of the everyday throughout our daily lives. However, we often ignore everydayness. Even though much literature has been written about mindfulness, the Sabbath, and contemplation, we often disregard the connection of these to our daily lives. This article focuses on this connection and its importance in

our everyday world.

This research aims to consider whether we can embrace the ordinary and everyday aspects of our daily lives. However, the scope of our daily lives is broad. Hence, this paper reduces the scope by focusing on religious traditions in our ordinary living. Within this scope, the objectives of this research are the following:

- 1) Investigate the importance of the everyday in ancient cultures.
- 2) Examine the association between the everyday and religious traditions.
- 3) Identify the connection between the everyday and sacredness.
- 4) Investigate the significance of everydayness in our daily lives.
- 5) Consider how we neglect the ordinary and the everyday.
- 6) Finally, explore ways to embrace the everydayness of our daily lives.

The research considers literature in the context of the everyday and sacred traditions of mindfulness, the Sabbath, and Christian contemplation. Accordingly, it employs

literature regarding our everyday lives and those sacred traditions. This research hopes to show that we can better connect to the everyday through our ordinary yet sacred traditions. By being more aware of this connection, and from practicing this connection, we may find more enjoyment and meaning in our daily living.

2. Glimpsing the Everydayness of Ancient Cultures

Our modern world bombards us with mass media, product pitches, and political agendas. However, in a shift from the barrage, we have been moving slowly toward our everyday lives as a respite. Evidence of this move appears in contemporary poetry [9] and concepts of social theory and cultural studies [12]. In our shift, a fascinating account emerges. Our ancient mythologies, those archaic beliefs that seem to no longer apply to our world, were closely connected to our ordinary lives. Armstrong describes a connection between our mythologies and the everyday:

When people spoke of the divine, they were usually talking about an aspect of the mundane. The very existence of the gods was inseparable from that of a storm, a sea, a river, or from those powerful human emotions - love, rage or sexual passion - that seemed momentarily to lift men and women onto a different plane of existence so that they saw the world with new eyes. [1]

The connection may not be apparent to us today. Nevertheless, the link between beliefs and the everyday still exists in sacred ways. The sacred is distinct from our ordinary world. However, the sacred also connects to our ordinary lives and must do so to be understandable and pertinent to us [5]. An example of this connection is shown in the Aboriginal people of Australia. Their mythologies enable them to retain sacred connections to their everyday lives:

We are inclined to say that when the Arunta go hunting they mime the exploits of the first and archetypal hunter, but this distinguishes them from their archetype too sharply. It is better to say that they enter the mold of their archetype so completely that each becomes the First Hunter, no distinction remains. Similarly for other activities, from basket weaving to lovemaking. [36]

When the Arunta are in their archetype mode, they still connect to their own everyday lives, yet they do so more profoundly. In that mode, the Arunta take the form of the archetype, which shapes their everyday activities and experiences. The intriguing part is that the archetype provides an enhanced experience of the everyday world. In a sense, the Arunta's mythologies enable them to engage in a deeper experience of the daily existence we seek. Interestingly, the Arunta's archetypal mode of the everyday is connected to time, as Smith describes:

Only while they are conforming their actions to the model of some archetype hero do the Arunta feel that they are truly alive, for in those roles they are immortal. The occasions on which they slip from such molds are quite meaningless, for

time immediately devours those occasions and reduces them to nothingness. [36]

For the Arunta people, this aspect of time twines with the rhythms of their way of life. These rhythms also exist in our own modern world, highlighting the everydayness of our lives. From an ordinary view, our rhythms suggest how we can consider time and space in our ordinary day. In our repetition of social practices, rhythms arise that describe a sense of time-space in our social world [30]. A belonging also arises. A sense of connection develops with people and places through the rhythms we sustain. Habits such as waiting for a bus or standing in line at a cafe are examples. In this sense, we can view our daily lives as a web of rhythms that create a sense of belonging. From a social view, they bring people together who regularly share those times and places in a synchronization of rhythms in time-space [3].

3. Connecting the Everyday and Religion

Religious traditions also connect us with the everyday. Many people around the world observe religious traditions in an everyday context. These rituals occur throughout the day at meals, schools, and into the weekend [34].

In Judaism, everyday life reveals the significance of the Sabbath through ordinary tasks of preparing for the day. Chores of cleanliness and organization frame a readying for God and family [34]. Judaism is closely connected to everydayness, where the small things in life endure. For example, living with attention to everyday details is described in the Bible and highlights how we should live in our ordinary world [16].

Clifford Geertz discusses religion in our ordinary world. He distinguishes between a religious view and a common-sense view. Geertz suggests that our religious view is more important because it complements our everyday lives. That is, it enriches our lives and provides meaning. The tie between religion and our everyday life is interesting because it indicates that religion informs us about the daily things and events in our lives:

The religious perspective differs from the common-sensical in that, as already pointed out, it moves beyond the realities of everyday life to wider ones which correct and complete them, and its defining concern is not action upon those wider realities but acceptance of them, faith in them [13].

Here, we automatically accept the authority of the religious perspective. According to Geertz, this faith arises because of an unwavering belief. Interestingly, having faith gives us access to a greater understanding of reality. "The basic axiom underlying what we may perhaps call 'the religious perspective' is everywhere the same: he who would know must first believe [13]." For Geertz, to understand the religious answers we seek, we must first accept them as authoritative and believe them [2].

The religious view is an extension of the everyday. In other words, people connect to it in their daily lives because it provides meaning to the everyday. Accepting the religious perspective is essential because it enables us to connect to

something sacred when our everyday lives become confusing [5]. According to Karatheodoris, religion resolves the incongruity we experience daily and keeps us away from a world that appears meaningless [20].

For Geertz, religions provide a greater reality than what we receive from our everyday world. He indicates that we connect to religions because our common world is insufficient. Through the humanities of poems and stories, we see there is more to living than what we observe in our everyday existence. According to Geertz, those ethereal tales show that a world exists beyond the material aspects of our daily lives [13]. From the religious perspective, we reach out to a world that informs our everyday lives with explanations that cannot arise solely from living in the everyday. In this way, the religion that Geertz describes is an extension of meaning in our daily lives.

4. Connecting the Everyday and Sacredness

Our everyday lives flow around the ageless connection of the sacred. On occasion, we touch this connection though we may not notice it. Nevertheless, the sacred consistently shapes our lives. For Kucinskas, Wright, and Riepl, the connection of the everyday to the sacred is significant because our spiritual practices provide meaning in our lives [22]. Connecting to the sacred also provides wisdom and understanding in our daily thoughts and actions [33].

Although our connection to the sacred always exists for us, we can benefit better from this connection when we actively participate. According to Diana Eck, “spirituality is not a vague luminous glow, it is a very specific practice. It requires the daily discipline and attention that playing the piano requires: it requires practice [8].” Perfection never arrives when we try to fit our practice into perfect moments of sacredness. Instead of looking for perfection, we should learn to practice our connection to sacredness in the constraints of our daily lives [8].

Connecting the sacred to our everyday life works because the connection is not a lofty platform. Instead, it is an acknowledgment of a simple ordinary existence in an everyday life. As Eck suggests, “the goal of this ‘practice’ is not to get to some other place, some lofty dazzling experience, but truly to recognize the place where we already are [8].” The elevated place that Eck mentions is the fabrication of self-importance we raise ourselves upon. That falsehood hides our true selves, takes us further from our everyday existence, and turns us away from a genuine connection with the sacred. A similar path is described by the Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki. He says that we should not expect Zen practice to be exciting. Instead, it is a calm and ordinary approach that enables us to see the path of sacred teachings [41].

5. The Importance of the Everyday

The everydayness of our lives is more crucial than we may

think. It is greater than the activities of commuting and errands. Those daily activities are important because they enable us to get paid and put food on the table. However, the everyday is connected to our sacred traditions.

This connection is crucial because the sacred brings meaning to everyday activities [5]. Interestingly, another aspect of this connection is that it allows us to see the value in our daily lives by creating a place and time for contemplation [42].

Another connection exists with the everyday that we often take for granted. Because the everyday is pervasive in our daily existence, we may not even notice it. Pink describes the everyday as the “centre of human existence, the essence of who we are and our location in the world [28].” When we look deeper into our daily lives, we may see further meaningfulness in the context of everyday objects. For Saito, we can make better sense of the things in our world by looking closer at them — by seeing where they came from and how they were made [32].

The everyday is where the vital things in life exist: our homes, friends, and families. In his book, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Henri Lefebvre describes the vitality of the everyday:

Thus bit by bit there is a growing conviction that in one sense lavish institutions and grandiose ideas were façades — theatrical costumes. On the almost stagnant waters of everyday life there have been mirages, phosphorescent ripples. These illusions were not without results, since to achieve results was their very *raison d’être*. And yet, where is genuine reality to be found? Where do the genuine changes take place? In the unmysterious depths of everyday life! [24]

For Lefebvre, the everyday is where real life exists, and real change occurs. In addition, being in the everyday benefits our inner selves and how we approach the world around us. Attention to the everyday brings awareness and enables us to accept the present moment. This acceptance is important because the present is rich with the material of authentic living. It is where the possibilities of our human growth exist [26].

6. We Flourish in the Everyday

We become easily enchanted with the latest technologies and famous personalities in our modern world. These diversions take us away from the boredom in our everyday lives. They keep us from being immersed in a state of endless mundanity.

However, we may not realize that immersion into the ordinary is actually beneficial. In other words, our ordinary everyday life enables us to flourish as humans. According to Volf, flourishing “stands for the life that is lived well, the life that goes well, and the life that feels good—all three together, inextricably intertwined [42].” We may believe it takes a leap of faith to consider that we flourish in a life of the ordinary. Nevertheless, our everyday world is rich and deep.

The everyday is where we live and, more importantly, where we are human. Volf makes a connection between

religion and everyday activities such as cooking. He suggests that the art of cooking is successful not due to star chefs on popular shows but because ordinary families cook meals daily. This ordinary setting enables cooking to be a human activity, and the necessity of ordinary meals makes them human moments. In the same way, according to Volf, religions thrive because of their connections to our ordinary daily activities [42].

In addition to our daily lives at home, the workday is connected to flourishing. Our work often seems separate from our everyday lives. That is, our day-to-day flourishing appears to occur outside of work. However, Volf reminds us that work is an integral part of our lives and can be a space for flourishing. “We work in order to make flourishing possible, but things are at their best when we also flourish as we work [42].”

Creativity and reflection are also associated with flourishing. Avoiding road construction or cooking a meal without proper ingredients requires creativity. These everyday actions may seem tedious, yet they are an important aspect of our human living. We should remind ourselves that much of what we do daily occurs in these creative spaces [6]. Interestingly, flourishing and everyday creativity inform one another. Studies show that we thrive in our everyday creativity and are more creative in environments that enable our well-being [35]. In the context of reflection, flourishing connects to it through reflective practice, which checks that we are going in the right direction. For Stuerzenhofecker, such a reflective practice requires a space of self-care which also enables flourishing [39].

7. We Neglect the Everyday

We should remember that the everyday is more than ordinary cooking and driving to the grocery store. The everyday is where we work, play, and flourish. By neglecting the everyday, we disregard the space where flourishing arises.

Our culture compels us to lose focus on what is important. Addictions to work, hobbies, and purchases distance us from the everyday enjoyment of friends, family, and God [7]. This distance also keeps us from being aware of ourselves and the world around us. It keeps us from being aware of the everyday. As Kabat-Zinn explains, when we ignore the present moment, we dwell in the past or reach out to future possibilities, which are often fantasies [19]. Neglecting the present moment takes us away from understanding our current situation. Moreover, when our awareness of the everyday is diminished, we may find ourselves carried away by fear and insecurity. When we are unaware, we may not realize how our fear drives us toward poor choices and actions [19].

8. Embracing the Everyday

There are many ways to appreciate the everyday. Such an appreciation is vital because the everyday provides meaningfulness to our daily lives. This appreciation emerges through living with others and the world around us. The

following sections discuss several ways of appreciation that can help us better enjoy our world and the people in our lives.

8.1. *Embracing the Everyday Through the Ordinary*

On a day not long ago, people sat together and engaged in conversation while playing board games. Such a gathering seems quite ordinary, yet people treasured those moments as significant in their everyday lives. Today, those moments seem to exist no longer. Instead, they have become faint images from a bygone era, though not due to distant memories but because we have distanced ourselves from them. In other words, we have removed ourselves from the ordinariness in our lives [40].

Hinson suggests that the cascade of internet information has reduced our desire to focus on the ordinariness of our everyday world [18]. However, ordinariness still has meaning and remains essential in our everyday lives. We can see this importance in our self-reflection, which allows us to gauge our thoughts and feelings. While reflection regards thoughts and feelings, ordinariness links us to our everyday activities [11, 29]. This weaving of thoughts, feelings, reflection, and the ordinary enables us to consider our everyday lives where real living occurs.

After reading the descriptions above, we may still feel that the ordinary world is tedious.

Indeed, it is difficult to get excited about being stuck in traffic or waiting for an elevator. However, if we want to change our everyday lives, as Moran suggests, we should view our ordinary activities with thoughtfulness and respect [27].

8.2. *Embracing the Everyday Through the Sabbath*

As a day singled out among others in the week, it may seem surprising that the Sabbath is discussed in the context of the everyday. However, there are interesting connections between the Sabbath and everydayness. The Sabbath, as a day of rest, is a day of the mundane and ordinary [16]. Yet, as Abraham Heschel remarks, it is also a day of joyfulness:

The Sabbath comes like a caress, wiping away fear, sorrow and somber memories. It is already night when joy begins, when a beautifying surplus of soul visits our mortal bones and lingers on. [17]

Though it occurs only once a week, the Sabbath allows us to concentrate on each day beforehand as preparation and then afterward as the return to work. In this way, the Sabbath is a period of contemplation that allows us to be more aware of the everydayness in our lives. However, the Sabbath also highlights that each day brings us closer to the Sabbath, and each Sabbath celebrates time:

The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. [17]

The emphasis on the week is interesting because it extends the Sabbath toward a recurrent week of everydayness. As Smith-Gabai and Ludwig suggest, the Sabbath has become a weekly cycle of time in which the Jewish people have

synchronized their lives [37].

The Jewish tradition is closely connected to the everydayness of our daily lives. According to Epstein, the everyday can seem unchanging and lead us to forget that life is also renewal [10]. We see this forgetfulness in the emotional rise toward the Sabbath and the later tumble into days of toil. In this emotional sway, we should realize that God is always with us, even in times of challenging emotions [10]. As Robinson explains, in our busy days, it is easy to disregard the remarkable essence of the everyday [31]. However, in the Jewish tradition, each aspect of our everyday lives is associated with a blessing of its sacred nature.

8.3. *Embracing the Everyday Through Contemplation*

In a sense, our culture trains us to pay attention to the surrounding noise. For example, social media feeds are the consumable trends of the day. Unfortunately, consuming these feeds moves us further away from our inner selves and our connection to God [23].

A focus on our inner selves is essential because that is where we connect to the everyday. According to Thomas Merton, our spiritual experience arises and gains depth from our inner selves:

At the same time, however, every deeply spiritual experience, whether religious, moral, or even artistic, tends to have in it something of the presence of the interior self. Only from the inner self does any spiritual experience gain depth, reality, and a certain incommunicability. [25]

For Merton, the inner self in Christianity is a step toward an awareness of God within us [25]. Turning our awareness inward allows us to listen to ourselves [4]. For Diana Eck, spirituality has taken the meaning of an “inner dimension of religiousness [8].” In a short account of spirituality worldwide, she suggests that “all spirituality requires a journey inward [8].”

We often hear about awareness in the Buddhist tradition, yet we do not hear about it much in Christianity. However, according to Laird, both traditions use contemplation to cultivate an awareness that opens up from within us [23]. It is an awareness that is open to receiving from outside ourselves and letting go of the clutter within. We should realize that there is much information about awareness in Christianity that is wise and rich. For example, contemplation in our everyday lives leads to a simple awareness of just being [23]. This awareness removes us from the drama games we create in our minds and allows our lives to be simpler and more compassionate. Stratton describes a similar type of awareness [38]. Here, from contemplative prayer comes an adoring awareness toward the sacred. Such prayer can be extended to an awareness of the connection with others and God and is, in this sense, a loving awareness.

Merton provides further insights into the significance of contemplation and awareness:

The important thing in contemplation is not gratification and rest, but awareness, life, creativity, and freedom. In fact, contemplation is man’s highest and most essential spiritual activity. It is his most creative and dynamic affirmation of

his divine sonship. [25]

This synthesis of awareness, creativity, and freedom is vital because these components help us develop a change in our everyday lives.

8.4. *Embracing the Everyday Through Mindfulness*

Mindfulness is about being in the present moment. The Buddhist master Thich Nhat Hanh urges us to be aware of the present moment in our ordinary, everyday activities:

Washing the dishes is at the same time a means and an end – that is, not only do we do the dishes in order to have clean dishes, we also do the dishes just to do the dishes, to live fully in each moment while washing them. [15]

Our everyday lives, through mindfulness, are more than daily routines. In practicing mindfulness, the individual moments of our lives become creative and more interesting [15].

The attention we cultivate through mindfulness enables us to see the rhythms of our interactions with others. These rhythms show the greater scope of our social interactions [1]. As Hanh remarks, every one of our everyday actions is consequential:

Every action, every thought has an effect. Even if I just clap my hands, the effect is everywhere, even in faraway galaxies. Every sitting, every walking, every smile will have an effect on your own daily life, and the life of other people also, and practice must be based on that. [43]

Mindfulness is sustained attention and awareness. It reduces our elaborate thought processes and frees our cognitive resources to attend to the present moment [21]. To truly be in the present moment, we should pause long enough to know and understand it [19]. The concept of the present moment is not unique to the Buddhist tradition and is shared with the Sufi, Stoic, and Jewish traditions [15]. It also exists in the Christian tradition, where ordinary human experience provides all that is needed to encounter complete presence. For Christians, this complete presence is the Holy Spirit [8].

Being in the present can be challenging to do. However, we already have a tool that allows us to focus on the present: our breath. In the Buddhist tradition of mindfulness, our breath is an anchor that brings us back to the present moment when our mind starts to wander [19]. The breath is also valuable in the Christian tradition, allowing us to focus on the present. Because our breath is always with us, it is always available. In this way, according to Eck, the breath enables us to be in the presence of God in each moment of our everyday lives [8].

9. Conclusion

This article began with a discussion of the everyday in ancient cultures, how our mythologies were connected to the everyday, and how today, the web of rhythms in our everyday social world provides a sense of belonging. It described a connection between religion and the everyday and how religion extends our daily lives and provides meaning. It discussed how our everyday connection to the sacred is one of calmness and ordinariness. It explained how the everyday is

essential because that is where our real life occurs and where we thrive and flourish. Then it described how we neglect the everyday, which keeps us from understanding ourselves and the world around us.

Next, the article discussed how we could return to the everyday. It explained how paying attention to the ordinary things in our daily lives can help us appreciate the everyday. It discussed the Sabbath in the Jewish tradition and how the tradition is closely connected to the everydayness of living. It described Christian contemplation and how contemplation brings awareness of ourselves and God into our everyday lives. The article then discussed mindfulness, how it enables us to become more creative, and how our breath can help us be more present in our everyday lives.

Based on these findings, there are several paths we can take to pay attention to the ordinary and everyday aspects of our daily lives. The paths this article discussed include the Jewish tradition, Christian contemplation, and mindful attention. Hopefully, this article shows that these paths can help us embrace the everydayness in our daily lives and enable us to become more aware of ourselves and the world around us.

Further investigations could occur in two areas. The first is considering additional paths to connect to the everyday. Examples of these paths include gardening, taking a walk in the woods, and reading poetry that explores everydayness. These examples sound simple and ordinary, yet we should remember that extraordinary endeavors take us further away from the everyday and that the simple things in life bring us closer. A second investigation could consider how to prevent losing our connection to the everyday in the first place. In our modern world, this question may center around our use of technology. In this context, we may ask ourselves how we can use technology while maintaining a connection to everydayness.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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