

Major Foreshadowing: Pi's Beliefs

In *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel, Pi adopts various religious beliefs and a few ethical views about zoos; however, until chapter 49, these views have little importance in the plot. This isn't to say they won't have significant impacts; they have just been used to build up the plot to foreshadow larger events. Pi's views will be vital later, but the scope of this essay only covers the beginning of the novel to the start of the pinnacle issue. Thus, the main focus of Pi's beliefs is setting the scene for an action-packed climax.

The first of Pi's central beliefs introduced in the book is his stance on the ethics of zoos. Pi's stance on this controversial topic is undoubtedly influenced by his upbringing as the son of the Pondicherry Zoo's owner. Thinking the zoo "was paradise on earth" (Martel 14), Pi is pro-zoo. Despite admitting many downsides of zoos, he brings up some great points, like how free and wild animals live "lives of compulsion and necessity within an unforgiving social hierarchy in an environment where the supply of fear is high and the supply of food low and where territory must constantly be defended and parasites forever endured" (16). On the widespread view that zoos may be keeping animals confined in territories of inadequate size when compared to the wild, he points out that these territories "are large not as a matter of taste but for necessity" (17). As a result of the lower resources available, animals in the wild naturally require more room to find these means. In contrast, a zoo is packed with resources like food, water, and shelter that are provided to the animals. These beliefs, while prominent, disappear after their initial mention in chapter four. However, there are references to animals. For example, at the climax of the novel, Pi finds himself and many zoo animals on the sinking cargo ship *Tsimtsum*. In all the

confusion, he ends up on a 26-foot life raft with a 450-pound Royal Bengal Tiger, hyena, zebra, and orangutan. There, Pi concludes that “there couldn’t both be a hyena and tiger in such a small space” (110). This shows that thoughts related to animals, in general, did influence his actions on the lifeboat, but these can’t be called beliefs. They’re merely subjective thoughts that came into his mind on the lifeboat, influenced by past knowledge of animals. In other words, we’ve never been given any other mentions concerning these thoughts, so we can’t assume that they are as deep of faith as Pi’s stance on zoo ethics. Thoughts like the above frequently appear in the plot and will likely influence countless critical decisions later on the lifeboat. However, it’s unlikely that Pi’s beliefs about animals will play into the plot later in the book as it shifts to describing his survival out at sea.

The other main belief introduced in the book is Pi’s devotion to religion. While this topic has been prominently discussed, we still haven’t seen it past the introductions. Yann Martel portrays Pi as a “practicing Hindu, Christian, and Muslim” (64). It’s unusual to see someone practicing so many religions simultaneously, which sets Pi apart as unique and adds to his character. So far, we’ve only been shown short scenes when Pi introduces himself and discusses some impacts that religion had on his personal life. Mainly, Pi is told that ““he can’t be a Hindu, a Christian, *and* a Muslim”” (69). However, he stands firm on the belief that all religions are true. His parents aren’t very supportive of his views in chapter 26, constantly repeating that “[he] must be either one or the other” (72). While potential conflicts with his parents were apparent, Pi won his case and continued to practice his religion until the present day when “his house is a temple” (45). In this scene, Yann Martel number two describes Pi’s current house and explains how he has religious artifacts from all his religions present; thus, this proves that any potential significant conflicts with his parents in the introduction were averted. Besides, his parents passed

away when the Tsimtsum sank, subsequently removing their protests of Pi's beliefs. However, religion will certainly play a significant role later in the book. As the book starts, Yann Martel two describes meeting Mamaji in India, where Mamaji recounts Pi's story. Mamaji claims that the story "will make [Yann Martel two] believe in god" (x). This suggests that, in some way, god will appear in Pi's story with such potency that it could convince someone that god is real. This key feature of the story correlates strongly to Pi's devotion to three religions, which explains the lengthy introduction of this character aspect. Like Pi's animal philosophies, religion has only been introduced as an element of his character and has only had shallow implications. Unlike his animal philosophies, abundant evidence suggests that Pi's religious views will impact his survival later in the plot, making them a key element in the book.

Following the average story arc, it makes sense that we haven't yet seen Pi's beliefs applied to the main plot. We're only considering the first half of the novel, which Yann Martel uses to introduce characters and set the scene, so Pi hasn't gotten a chance to apply his beliefs as there wasn't anything he could apply them to; they've simply been introduced. However, these beliefs are not to be overlooked, as there are numerous clues that something giant is coming for Pi that directly relates to his beliefs.