

I. “Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned...until there are no longer first class and second class citizens of any nation...until the color of a man’s skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes...Until that day, the dream of lasting peace and world citizenship will remain but a fleeting illusion to be pursued, but never attained.”

What you have just heard is an excerpt of a speech delivered to the newly formed United Nations by the King of Ethiopia, Emperor Haile Selassie. Haile Selassie, called the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah was born in 1892. His birth name was “Ras Tafari”. He was a descendant of the biblical Solomon and David, a lineage which according to the New Testament would bring forth the second coming of Christ.

Ras Tafari was coroneted in 1930 whereupon he was given the name Haile Selassie, which means power of the trinity of Christ. Many religious Jamaicans and other around the world saw this as the unfolding of biblical prophecy. Until then these Christians had been called Revivalists. Many of them emphasized racial equality, non-violence, and living in harmony with nature. Their beliefs became more centralized and they began to call themselves Rastafarians.

II. Rastafari, as a culture and a belief system originated in lower class Jamaica is a standard for enlightenment, righteousness and person growth. It is characterized by bold symbolism and unique beliefs and is able to transcend social and political barriers through its gospel, reggae music.

(I remember the first time I ever met a group of rastas. I was in fourth grade and they were in a reggae band which was getting ready to play that night near where

I lived. They had a female steel drum player and she sort of took me under her wing and let me hang out all day and help them set up. She encouraged me to play all of the instruments without worrying what I sounded like at first. She taught me to hold my head up high and to be bold and daring, for I was beautiful in every way. She was a fountain of knowledge for my endless questions. My dad let me stay up for their show and I danced and sang the night away. Later as dad tucked me in to bed, I felt fulfilled. A seed had been planted in my head. He smiled when, after kissing me goodnight his little 10 year old girl asked if she could grow dreadlocks.)

BODY

- I. Reggae music serves as gospel for Rastafarian beliefs and a source of expression for the oppressed.
 1. It started in the early 19 hundreds in Rasta drum ceremonies called “nyabinghis.”
 - A. Many nyabinghi chants are from the bible, usually the book of psalms. Others are rasta chants, usually about change and pride.
 2. Reggae music was brought to the rest of the world in the 70’s by Bob and Rita Marley. Bob was the son of a poor black woman and an absent white man who grew up in a shanty in the trench-towns of Kingston, Jamaica.
 - A. His positive, political music with a smooth, memorable beat was not the first of its kind, but gained world popularity. Because of this, in January of 2000, Time magazine gave Bob Marley the title of “most influential artist of the 20th century”, above Pablo Picasso, Marilyn Monroe and the Beatles.
 3. Reggae music has evolved with the times and maintained global popularity.

A. Bands from all over the world play reggae music which ranges from a light Christian-rock style to hip-hop like dancehall reggae.

B. These heartfelt melodies of the oppressed are not always the smiling, easy Bob Marley tunes that most people are used to, but they remain true to the core rasta beliefs.

II. As with most religions, there are some differences of beliefs among rastafarians, but there are a few ideas which are central.

1. The most significant belief of rastas, is the idea of “Jah”.

A. Jah, by definition simply means God. But it goes further than that. We tend to think of God as the omnipotent creator which resides in the sky above. Jah, however lives within and throughout. Jah is in everything. And as we are his sons and daughters, we too are gods of our own lives. We contain within ourselves all higher knowledge, and the path to enlightenment.

2. Rastas believe that Christ was not the only savior. Some believe that Jah places messiahs around the world wherever and whenever they are most needed, but all believe that Haile Selassie and his message of equality and integrity are to be followed and revered.

3. Rastas often refer to the march to Zion. The bible tells of Zion as heaven on earth. It is a place where man lives peacefully in harmony with nature, away from the evils of Babylon.

A. When a rasta refers to “Babylon,” they are speaking of the structure under which they feel oppressed. In the bible it is the city of sin, evil and confusion.

B. I believe that the biblical story of the march to Zion is written metaphorically of man's ability move beyond the hardships here on Earth, to find harmony and enlightenment within.

C. Most rastas eat what is called an "ital" diet, meaning they consume food which is natural and unprocessed, and if they eat meat at all it is limited to fish, and they consume no alcohol.

III Rastafari is also associated with many bold symbols. Given a limited amount of time today, I am just going to touch on a few of them.

1. The first and most obvious of them is dreadlocks. They are a sign for those on a spiritual path who wish to disassociate themselves from Babylon society.

Dreads will form on any head when hair is left to its own device, un-brushed.

(A) When left up to nature, hair comes together. Rasta believes that when judgment and greed, characteristics of Babylon, are absent, man too will come together.

(B) Some "dreads" wish to resemble the Lion, who is said to be fearless and faithful on the path to Zion. The lion is important in the rasta faith for many reasons. It is pictured in the center of the Ethiopian flag as a symbol of the imperial family. The book of Revelations declares: "Do not weep! See the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed."

2. Also, because of this, rastas use the six-pointed star of David more than the cross as a symbol for their faith.

3. Rastas have adopted red, gold and green, the colors of the Ethiopian flag and wear them proudly.

CONCLUSION

The rasta faith has grown in popularity. The message of “One Love” for all has become the mantra now for more than 400 thousand people worldwide. Folks of all colors and creeds are bobbing their heads to music which speaks out for brotherhood and against the lesser human qualities which hold us all back.

My own quest for knowledge...you could call it my march to Zion...has lead me to Rastafari. I have much yet to learn about myself and my world, and I do not believe that Rastafari is the only way to do so. It seems to me that all of the major religions differ only slightly, for they lead to the same lesson. Rastafari is simply one of the many ways to learn Good and Love.

Katie Kristine Pech died on March 8th, 2006. This document has been posted on her memorial site (<http://pechfamily.com/katie>) for posterity. All rights reserved.