

With every setting shift, a different Pi emerges. Discuss.

It is the experiences that we encounter and the lessons that we learn throughout our lives that mould us into our adult beings. Yann Martel's *'Life of Pi'* is the story of the development of protagonist Piscine Molitor Patel from a small, uneducated child into a fully-grown, resourceful, balanced character. The discovery of religion, the realization of the necessity of primitive instincts and the evolution of his name are all essential in shaping Piscine into the final product on display during his dialogues with the Japanese officials directly after his ordeal at sea, as well as with the fictitious author throughout the text. Each shift in backdrop provides an opportunity both for Pi's moral development and for the harnessing of certain skills learned by Pi in previous settings and circumstances.

As young child and teenager residing in politically uneasy India, Piscine craved education and sought out spiritual enlightenment. His entire childhood is spent receiving both religious and scientific lessons from various sources that he goes on to utilize throughout his ordeal at sea. Originally a Hindu, Piscine was so greatly influenced by the "peculiar psychology" behind Christianity and the physical worship methods associated with Islam, that he decided to adopt each of these as a practice. Piscine's desire to "love God" teaches him the value of searching for stories that represent his existence, no matter how absurd, and embracing them as the truth. Santosh Patel educates his sons in the "danger" that animals pose to humans, particularly when "starved" and intruded upon, lessons that aid Piscine significantly in his survival at sea. The information hungry, younger Piscine Patel is here educated in the necessary precautions that he must take in order to ensure his endurance on the Pacific Ocean.

As the isolated, castaway protagonist becomes prominent, the lessons learned during his time at Pondicherry are put into practice and a new, resourceful Pi Patel emerges. Whilst his familiarity in the field of zoology assists Pi in remaining alive whilst stranded aboard a lifeboat with several animals, it is his religious knowledge that maintains his moral standards. However, as he is forced to commit sub-human acts in order to survive, the necessity of a new primitive instinct as a part of his personality surfaces. Represented by the tiger Richard Parker, Pi's animalistic qualities are what allow him to commit such horrid deeds such as "rip(ping) the flesh off" of the French cook who dares to board his vessel and invade his territory. These traits do, however, remain dormant until needed suggesting that the separation of Pi's personality is, in-fact, purely circumstantial and implies that he can revert between the two depending on his surrounding environment. When faced with the most hazardous scenario he has ever experienced, a new Pi comes to formation as a combination of his timid, well-educated human side and his aggressive, primitive animal side.

It is upon his arrival on the mysterious algae island that Pi's animalistic traits begin to seize entire control over his being and make an attempt to eradicate his sense of morality. Whilst the resources located on the island aid Pi in "return(ing) to life" in the physical sense, the island itself sparks his extreme ethical demise to the point at which he is no longer killing out of necessity, but for enjoyment; "killing beyond his need". Pi's "pent-up hunting instinct" embodied by a ferocious Richard Parker embarks on a vicious rampage upon the discovery of a herd of meerkats. Despite only requiring a few of the small animals carcasses to provide himself with food, Richard Parker "devours one meerkat after another" suggesting that Pi's primitive traits are beginning to outweigh his passive qualities. This remains, however, unbeknownst to a trusting Pi who remains confident in his current state both internally and in his physical environment. The discovery of a "complete human set" of teeth within the fruit of a native tree inspire a moment of clarity in Pi's mind. He comes to the realization that the island is, in-fact, steadily devouring the principled side of his personality. Pi concludes that he must leave before he is consumed by primitive instincts and no trace of his moral side is left functioning.

Upon his arrival in Mexico and throughout his future life in Canada, Mr. Patel becomes the educator rather than the educated. Through the mastering of the techniques taught to him in India and practiced on the lifeboat, Mr. Patel evolves into a teacher in his own right, and is subsequently able to teach Japanese officials the value of accepting the better story as the truth. As a result of his experiences at sea, Mr. Patel becomes extremely appreciative of the value of food and water, evidenced when he begins to "(weep) like a child" at the sight of flowing water. Following Richard Parker's departure on the Mexican beach, Pi becomes distraught at the loss of the animalistic component of his being. In-fact, the adult Pi owns a small orange cat, implying that a minute element of his animalistic personality traits have remained with him and aided in his progression through life. The completely developed, fully-grown Mr. Patel is a representation of the most useful lessons learned and practiced by his younger self throughout the entire text.

Throughout his life, Piscine Molitor Patel had been termed several alternate names, ranging in meaning from a respectful address to a derogatory, childish nickname. Originally known by his birth name, Piscine's mind existed as a blank canvas, eager to be filled with knowledge. However, as he reached primary school age, his fellow classmates nicknamed him "Pissing Patel", a cruel, immature deed that resulting in years of ridicule. Determined to rid himself of the mockery he was forced to endure throughout his childhood, upon reaching high school age Pi decided to rename himself. In the middle of his first secondary class, Pi "got up from (his) desk... picked up a piece of chalk and said as (he) wrote; 'My name is Piscine Molitor Patel known to all as Pi'". This name was to follow him through until after his time at sea. Upon arrival in Mexico, Pi began to be referred to as "Mr. Patel" most notably by the Japanese travel officials and the fictitious author. This symbolizes his completed development into the final product of his lifetime experiences.

Life of Pi, Practice Essay

Whilst Pi's intellectual ability remains, unquestionably, consistently high his moral values and personality traits evolve with each change of scenery. Pi reaches the epitome of his being once he has been forced to utilize his various skills and push his moral boundaries far beyond his original understanding of right and wrong. The merging of the two sides of his personality, almost to the point of unbalance, allows the adult Pi to justify the events that occurred on the Pacific Ocean and put his actions behind him. The result of these proceedings is a "very thin, very tough, very bright" human being. This proves that, despite the brutality of certain circumstances, it is possible that a decent person can appear on the other side of the horrid scenario.