

# was-jesus-a-wizard-with-dr-shaily-patel

Tue, 3/30 12:22PM 50:12

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

jesus, christianity, texts, christian, magic, wizard, people, magician, ancient, world, religion, question, tradition, practices, religious traditions, thought, christians, deeply, new testament, megan

## SPEAKERS

Dr. Shaily Patel, Megan Goodwin, The King and I, Life of Brian, Simpsons, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, Detox



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:17

This is Keeping It 101: a killjoy's introduction to religion podcast. This season our work is made possible in part through a generous grant from the New England Humanities Consortium, and with additional support from the University of Vermont's Humanities Center. We are grateful to live, teach, and record on the ancestral and unseeded lands of the Abenaki, Wabenaki, and Aucocisco peoples and our guest is coming to us from the lands of the Tutelo/Monacan.



Megan Goodwin 00:42

What's up, nerds? Hi, hello, I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of American religions, race, and gender. And this episode arrives precisely when it means to.




Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:51


Hi, hello, I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst scholar of religion, Islam, race and racialization, and history and it's leviOHsa, not levioSAH.





Megan Goodwin 00:58


I like- I like this so much. Like, A) because just straight dork. Dork life, but also because you hate all of these movies. You don't hate the Harry Potter but you hated the Lord of the Rings so much. And so I really like- I deeply appreciate you leaning into the wizard jokes, just to annoy our guest the one, the only Doctor Shaily Patel.


 Dr. Shaily Patel 01:21  
Hi.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:23  
Hello, Dr. Patel. Before we get into it, would you prefer that we call you Shaily or Dr. Patel for our episode today?


 Dr. Shaily Patel 01:32  
Please call me Shaily.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:33  
You got it.

 Dr. Shaily Patel 01:35  
Thanks!

 Megan Goodwin 01:36  
Okay, we need to introduce you formally since as we've discussed, we are formal bitches.

 Dr. Shaily Patel 01:41  
We are so formal.

 Megan Goodwin 01:44  
Dr. Shaily Patel is Assistant Professor of Early Christianity in the department of religion and culture at Virginia Tech. And if you know anything about Virginia Tech, you know that is a very impressive department to be a member of. Dr. Patel's research explores the ways

in which magic was used to advance a number of theological ends and early Christian texts. Her first book, "Peter the Magician," already- like, I'm already reading that and I don't even care about the Bible, "Peter the Magician: Discourses of Magic in Early Petrine Traditions" is all about how magic was used- and not just how we think- by early Christian thinkers across texts. We have Dr. Patel on because she teaches courses in New Testament, Christian apocryphal texts, orthodoxy and heresy, and demonology and exorcism. And that all sounds deeply rad.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:26

So rad. So rad! Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 02:28

I'm so stoked.



Dr. Shaily Patel 02:28

It's pretty rad, no lie.



Megan Goodwin 02:30

No, for real. And it's super different from what we usually do out here in these academic streets.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:37

So we're- we're thrilled that she's here, that you're here, not just because she's a grad bud of both of us, but truly, because she's a scholar, theorist, fellow nerd, whose expertise really is beyond both of what Megan and I can- can get done. So I am excited to get my ass handed to me today. I- like, take me to school. Take me to wizard school.



Megan Goodwin 03:03

You're a wizard, Shaily.




Dr. Shaily Patel 03:04


Am I? Well, I'm just- I'm so happy to be here. Thank you all for having me. I really


appreciate being able to talk about my work with you.


 M Megan Goodwin 03:11  
Yay.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:15  
Let's jump in to the 101: ON TODAY. The segment where we do Professor-work.

 D Dr. Shaily Patel 03:23  
Yes!

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:26  
Alright, Shaily. So we're asking everyone this question this season, What is the most basic, most important takeaway that you would want our listeners to know about the work that you do? So I guess, what's the 101 about- about your research?

 D Dr. Shaily Patel 03:43  
I think the most important thing that I'd want people to know about magic is basically what you guys have been doing, um, all throughout the podcast, right? When you talk about religion, that is that, magic as a concept, it does work. And it does all sorts of work from delegitimizing other's traditions, to serving as a means of resisting Christian supremacy even. I think scholars sometimes focus on the this first kind of work that I mentioned, delegitimizing other's traditions as superstitious or backwards. Usually, when folks call a practice magical, they're saying it's not religious, and here religious almost always means a kind of Western Protestant Christianity, and we can get into that-

 M Megan Goodwin 04:28  
Wait! Wait, wait Shaily, sorry- I'm sorry to interrupt, but I'm excited. And-

 D Dr. Shaily Patel 04:31  
Okay.

M Megan Goodwin 04:32  
You've met me. Wait, does "magic" work like "cult" works? Where it's just, like, this is shit I don't like?

D Dr. Shaily Patel 04:37  
Sometimes it does, yeah, right? Like this is shit I don't like, or these are practices that-

M Megan Goodwin 04:41  
Or these are fake or like...

D Dr. Shaily Patel 04:43  
Yeah, these are practices that I don't like, or these are practices that are not "Christian" or, "religious," right? As you guys have been talking about, like, religion and Christianity, you know, people tend to use the two interchangeably with... Right... So magic can work in the same way, but magic can do other things, too. It's a means of harnessing ritual power, a way of embodying knowledge of the gods. It's a series of strategies for managing a crapsack world, so magic isn't just, like, what you call others practices when you don't like them. It's also about the practices themselves, and how those practices function. And of course, in all of this, like there are stakes, right, so we can talk about those.

M Megan Goodwin 05:33  
Yes, yes, it sounds like- So it sounds like a little bit it works like "cult" if you're doing it from the outside, but from the inside, it sounds like you're really arguing for us to take that- those practices seriously.

D Dr. Shaily Patel 05:45  
Yeah, a lot of my work is that, right? Like, let's take these practices seriously, right? Because we know that the delegitimizing function of magic is the thing that we've studied. And we know that when you call somebody else's practices "magical" you are, in fact, saying, "well, they're not religious," right? So I do work with this magic religion binary in the modern world, but a lot of my work is- is looking at the practices themselves and saying, you know, practices have functions too, right? Like, it's not just the concept of magic, or the charge of magic that does work, practices themselves do a kind of work. And so I'm really advocating for taking practices seriously and trying to lay out the stakes of what

those practices can do.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:31

It sounds like that what you're saying Shaily is both that magic can be religion, and that magic and religion is what people do.



Dr. Shaily Patel 06:40

That's right. Yes. See? Religion is what people do, and magic is also what people do, right? You can't reduce it to just the the charge of magic or the accusation of magic.



Megan Goodwin 06:53

Oh, oh, okay. I want to talk about that more, but it is time for GETTING TO KNOW YOU.



The King and I 06:58

Getting to know you, getting to know all about you.



Megan Goodwin 07:06

Please tell us, and also our nerds, what's at stake in your project? Why is it important beyond the work that you're doing?



Dr. Shaily Patel 07:13

So I think the stakes are about Christian exceptionalism, if I can call it that-



Megan Goodwin 07:19

Yes, please do!



Dr. Shaily Patel 07:20

Which sometimes leads to Christian supremacy, which is a whole nother kettle of fish-



Megan Goodwin 07:26

Can we- can we pause and do a 101 moment?

D Dr. Shaily Patel 07:29  
Yes, sure.

M Megan Goodwin 07:29  
Could you offer us working definitions of Christian exceptionalism and Christian supremacy?

D Detox 07:34  
It's our secret word of the day.

D Dr. Shaily Patel 07:37  
Sure. So what I mean when I say Christian exceptionalism is this idea that Christianity is somehow special, or elevated beyond other traditions that we would term religions, right? So there's something exceptional about Christianity. Something beyond let's say, you know, Hinduism or Buddhism, or what have you.

M Megan Goodwin 07:58  
So like, God picked Christians, and God likes Christians best, Christians are elect even? Which is why my religion and politics is called "Election" womp womp womp.

D Dr. Shaily Patel 07:59  
Oh, that's good, why didn't I think of that? That's fantastic.

M Megan Goodwin 08:13  
I know, it makes me giggle every time. Okay, so we talked about Christian exceptionalism. And you said sometimes it can lead to Christian supremacy.

D Dr. Shaily Patel 08:20  
Right. So the Christian exceptionalism, this notion that, you know, Christianity is somehow

special or elevated beyond other religious traditions, can lead to the idea that Christians should be special, should be elevated beyond other religious traditions, and should, in fact, work to ensure that they are the dominant religious tradition. And so that's what I tend to think of when I say something like Christian supremacy.

 M Megan Goodwin 08:51

Does that have consequences- thinking that your religion is more important and better and God likes you best?

 D Dr. Shaily Patel 08:56

I mean, yeah. Sorry, like, my mind just flashed back to pictures of the insurrection at the Capitol yesterday. And all of those "Jesus Saves" flags or like people erecting crosses on the Capitol grounds. And so yeah, Christian supremacy has huge consequences, right?

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:20

Yeah, yeah.

 D Dr. Shaily Patel 09:21

Massive consequences.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:22

Yeah, uh huh.

 M Megan Goodwin 09:24

That sounds like your work is super important then.

 D Dr. Shaily Patel 09:27

I mean, I would like to think so, yeah. You know, in my New Testament class, I always ask my students to talk or to prove why they think Jesus is God in a text like Mark's gospel, because, y'all, Jesus is not God and Mark's gospel.





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:45

I don't really- I don't actually know that- you are- Megan's fake gasping but I actually don't know that. Is that true?



Dr. Shaily Patel 09:51

That is true. Um, yeah, Jesus is not God in Mark's gospel. I mean, there- there are people who are going to disagree with me, obviously.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:59

Sure, but I believe you the most... So.



Dr. Shaily Patel 10:01

Yeah, if you believe me the most. I would say most critical scholars don't think that Jesus is God in Mark's Gospel.



Megan Goodwin 10:09

So when people read the Bible, they go back and decide what it means after it's been written and, like, impose meanings on it that maybe weren't intended in the text originally?



Dr. Shaily Patel 10:18

They do that I do sometimes think that they read texts together. And this is what it can and does, right? So like-



Megan Goodwin 10:25

Wait pause, sorry, what's a Canon?



Detox 10:28

It's our secret word of the day.



Dr. Shaily Patel 10:31

A canon is a set of authoritative texts for any given tradition, right? So the New Testament is the Christian canon. I think people read, you know, a Canon together, right? So they'll read something like the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus is not God, with something like the gospel of John, where in parts, Jesus does sound very much like he's claiming to be God. And then you sort of read John into Mark, if that makes sense.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:03

Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 11:03

Okay. I think it does. But I just want to clarify in case any of our listeners are not Christian, or Bible nerds. So- so we read the Bible like it's one book, but it's actually a bunch of books?



Dr. Shaily Patel 11:16

It is, in fact, 27 books, yeah.



Megan Goodwin 11:18

Whoa- So we've got a different perspectives on how God works instead of, like, one coherent narrative?



Dr. Shaily Patel 11:23

I would argue that you have 27 perspectives.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:29

I am learning so much, I have to say I- if you would have asked me how many books are in the New Testament, I would have said four.



Dr. Shaily Patel 11:38

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:39

Yeah, that's all I know. I'm a Jew who studies Muslims in South Asia, there's only so much one brain can have. I'm like, floored, because I feel like a dumb dumb, but I'm also really glad that you're here to school me like a wizard.



Dr. Shaily Patel 11:55

Like a wizard. All this time, we've just been waiting for our Hogwarts letters, we didn't know that they had already arrived.



Megan Goodwin 12:04

Aww, the Hogwarts letters were the friends we made along the way, you guys!



Dr. Shaily Patel 12:06

Oh my gosh!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:09

Okay, so there's 27 perspectives or narratives in the Biblical canon-



Dr. Shaily Patel 12:18

The Christian Canon.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:19

Christian canon.



Dr. Shaily Patel 12:19

There are 27 texts in the New Testament, there are fewer than 27th authors, right? Because we have authors who wrote multiple texts.



Megan Goodwin 12:28

Yeah, Paul is a chatty bitch.

- D** Dr. Shaily Patel 12:30  
He's- oh my gosh, I'm glad you said that and not me. He really was a chatty bitch. Yeah, and so- but I would argue that, you know, each of the texts gives you a sort of different perspective on the Christian narrative. And so one of the things that I do in my class is like, I try to get my students to sort of think through this and I'm like, 'okay, prove to me that Jesus is God in Mark's gospel,' and they're- one of the first things that they say inevitably is, 'well, he did miracles.' Well, okay. But so did so many other people in the ancient world, right? In fact, lots and lots of miracle stories, in the ancient world, so this doesn't necessarily make Jesus unique. And they're not always happy when I say that.
- M** Megan Goodwin 13:19  
Doesn't John the Baptist do miracles? Like it's been a minute since I looked at the Bible. I'm not gonna lie. But-
- D** Dr. Shaily Patel 13:23  
Does John the Baptist do miracles? I don't think so.
- M** Megan Goodwin 13:27  
Okay, I don't know.
- D** Dr. Shaily Patel 13:27  
But we know that [inaudible] does, right? We know that Paul does in the New Testament.
- M** Megan Goodwin 13:32  
I mean, Paul kind of thinks he's God.
- D** Dr. Shaily Patel 13:33  
Paul kinda- yeah. Whether or not Jesus and Paul preached the same tradition is a totally different podcast.
- M** Megan Goodwin 13:42  
Yes, ma'am. Okay, so let's- let's zoom out before I just keep dunking on the New

Testament. Which is hilarious because I have literally never taken a New Testament class with it though I definitely TA'd for them.

**D** Dr. Shaily Patel 13:54  
They're so fun!

**M** Megan Goodwin 13:54  
It's a lot, but Okay, so we're zooming out. So what I heard you say was what's at stake in your project, 1) is that the way we encounter the Bible, and particularly the New Testament, can lead to things like Christian exceptionalism, or Christian supremacy (and/or Christian supremacy) which has real world consequences- please hold. RU NO. STOP IT. SIT. Can we keep this in the final cut? Sure, sure, sure. This is this is embodied scholarship. Lest you think we are brains on sticks. I am currently managing a very excited one-year-old dog who's mad that we're not going for walks yet because we usually goes for walks right now, but he has to wait till 12:30 because that was the deal. Anyway, okay. So, this focus on Christianity as "special" can lead to thinking Christianity is the most important religion, that it should, I don't know, run countries, and that has real world consequences up to and including, like, maybe an attempted coup. And we treat (not "we" obviously, we would never do this, but THOSE people treat) the Bible like it's one story, when actually, if we're looking at the Christian Bible, we've got 27 different perspectives on how God works. And things are way more complicated than people make them out to be.

**D** Dr. Shaily Patel 15:36  
Things are always more complicated than people make them out to be, right? And so one of the- one of the things, if I could tie this sort of back to magic-

**M** Megan Goodwin 15:44  
Yeah!

**D** Dr. Shaily Patel 15:44  
One of the things that I try to get students to see by focusing in on you know, everybody was doing, you know, wonders in the ancient world is: Christianity is embedded in the cultural context from which it emerged, right? It's not something that transcends culture. It's- it was created in in this Roman cultural context, it is in fact, a Roman religion.

- M** Megan Goodwin 16:12  
Whaat!
- D** Dr. Shaily Patel 16:12  
Whaat- right? So, to me, this work grounds Christianity in a way and says, Hey, you know, Christianity cannot transcend culture or politics, right? It is, and it has always been embedded in- in culture and politics.
- M** Megan Goodwin 16:30  
So much is going on here. Whoa, okay, so Christianity is what Roman people did?
- D** Dr. Shaily Patel 16:36  
Yeah, Roman people did think Christianity. Yeah.
- M** Megan Goodwin 16:40  
Interesting. Okay, but I'm glad that you're bringing it back around to magic because I want to talk more about wizards if you don't mind. I'm-
- D** Dr. Shaily Patel 16:47  
Always.
- M** Megan Goodwin 16:49  
The wizard runner is my fault because wizard Jesus is hilarious and like makes me think about the Cookie Crisp wizard and also of Jack Chick's Eucharist as death cookie, because as a former Catholic, I find Chick Jack's jokes about Catholicism (except they're not joking. But I think it's funny)- I find those hilarious. But okay- but also, when I'm not being a dick, this is a serious question for early Jesus people, right? Like, can you help us make sense of how magic fits into your project? And also, can you- can you tell us, A) if Jesus is a wizard, and B) if Jesus is a wizard, which house he would be sorted into?
- D** Dr. Shaily Patel 17:24  
Oh, man, that's such a good question. I can't believe I haven't thought of an answer to

that. Okay. Um, let me answer your first question. And maybe we can-



Megan Goodwin 17:32

You can come back to it. We can like- we can think about it at the end of the podcast too, don't let me put pressure on you.



Dr. Shaily Patel 17:37

So this is a serious scholarly question. Candida Moss did a really great write up for The Daily Beast where she lays out some of the scholarly issues. And I'd recommend that for folks who are interested, and we'll- we can put that in the homework.



Megan Goodwin 17:51

I mean, didn't she interview you for that piece?



Dr. Shaily Patel 17:53

Yeah, it was in fact a call out for me.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:56

Well we will definitely put it in the show notes.



Dr. Shaily Patel 17:59

Into the show notes, yes! But to answer your question, like, Jesus was a magician, depending on who you ask. Now, I know that sounds like a cop out, but hear me out.



Megan Goodwin 17:59

Yeah we will! Okay.



Dr. Shaily Patel 18:13

Some of the latest (and I think the coolest) work in, you know, ancient history is about how categories and labels worked in the ancient world. How do we know someone is gnostic, for example, or a magician. And the thing with labels for ritual specialists, like magicians,

is that they're really fuzzy. And remember that our evidence is really fragmentary, right? So it's hard to tell a magician apart from let's say, a philosopher, and there's no real reason why someone can't be a magician and a philosopher.

- M** Megan Goodwin 18:48  
What? Okay, can we- can we pause for a minute, I'm just gonna keep asking, like- like, super basic questions, because I am, as you know, a basic bitch. Why do we not have a lot of evidence for how people thought about Jesus?
- D** Dr. Shaily Patel 19:03  
We have evidence for people- how people thought about Jesus and we have the New Testament, we have lots and lots of early Christian writings.
- M** Megan Goodwin 19:10  
Okay.
- D** Dr. Shaily Patel 19:10  
We have a pretty good bit of evidence for how people thought about Jesus.
- M** Megan Goodwin 19:14  
Okay. But you said that there was- the evidence was fragmentary.
- D** Dr. Shaily Patel 19:17  
Yeah.
- M** Megan Goodwin 19:17  
Can you talk to me about that?
- D** Dr. Shaily Patel 19:19  
Sure. So what I mean is we have a lot of literary evidence. And we also have a pool of material evidence. But what we're unsure of is how this literary evidence actually reflects



historical, you know, reality on the ground, right? Like, can we really, really reconstruct Jesus? Um, or-



Megan Goodwin 19:43

So it's not just like reporting, people aren't just, like, sitting down and saying, "This is exactly what Jesus said" they might have reasons for saying Jesus was one way or another?



Dr. Shaily Patel 19:51

Oh, do they have reasons... They have so many reasons. Yes. So yeah, right. So like when you have- let's say Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, right? Ilyse's canon- when you have Ilyse's canon-



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:07

I should not get a canon but I'll take it.



Dr. Shaily Patel 20:10

You have four different perspectives on who Jesus was and four different authors with four different agendas in terms of how they want Jesus to be portrayed, right? And so you have these texts that are sometimes contradictory, and you have authors with agendas, and then you're trying to figure out like okay so who was really the historical Jesus? The truth is there's just so little that we can historically substantiate about Jesus, and less that we can historically substantiate about not-Jesus, right? Like, because we have so many texts about Jesus so, you know, everyday Christians, like, there's not a lot we can substantiate.




Megan Goodwin 20:48


But like everyday early Christians are all the same, right? Like, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote different perspectives, but, like, all for the same people, right?





Dr. Shaily Patel 20:55

No. No.


 Megan Goodwin 20:57  
They had different audiences?

 Dr. Shaily Patel 20:59  
They- yeah we do think that they may have had different audiences. We think that there were, like, groups, and groups, and groups of Christians, right? So, like, you know we have groups that are not strictly monotheist, we have groups that would think that, you know, Jesus was just adopted by the Jewish God at the baptism so not-


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:26  
You know what-

 Megan Goodwin 21:26  
Awww. Is he an adoptorino like Ilyse?

 Dr. Shaily Patel 21:27  
He's adopted- right? And it's called adoptionism.

 Megan Goodwin 21:35  
I'm learning so much today.

 Dr. Shaily Patel 21:41  
So we do- I mean, Christianity is this hugely diverse phenomenon in the ancient world and actually, you know, when I teach early Christianity classes, I always talk to my students about Christianities in the plural, because we can't talk about one thing. Um, and so- I totally forgot where I was going with this.

 Megan Goodwin 22:02  
Magic! We were supposed to bring it back to wizards, I'm sorry I got- I got you all confused, but like- so why would people want to or not want to think about Jesus as a wizard?



Dr. Shaily Patel 22:11

Right- right. Okay, so, the label itself is already fuzzy, right? And it can already be conflated with other labels like philosopher or, you know, messiah, even. Right? And so there is, again in- in some of the latest scholarship, there- what we've learned is that the literati of the ancient world had a vested interest in, you know, protecting their own expertise and so what they do is they write against particular ritual specialists like magicians and so they talk that about magicians. And so now you have all of these authors in the ancient Greco-Roman world who are basically talking trash about these ritual specialists. Jesus figures into all of this because the activities that Jesus does correlate with what people expect from ancient magicians, right? So, like, he's doing things like exorcisms or healings, people expected magicians to be able to do exorcisms or healings. And so Christians actually have to defend Jesus from being called a magician from time to time and Christian writers also have an interest in insulating Jesus from the charge of magic, right, of being accused of being a magician. So some folks would have thought that Jesus was most certainly a magician, and Christian writers had to defend Jesus against that charge. And others would have wanted Jesus- or wanted to write Jesus in a way that insulates him from that charge of magic. So it's not as simple as Christians thought Jesus was a miracle-worker and non-Christians thought Jesus was a magician, in my opinion. I think it seems that Jesus was thought to have done a lot of things that magicians did, and because of this, Christian writers had to find ways of distinguishing him from your sort of run-of-the-mill magician. I want to be really clear about this, the only reason we think that you can't be a magician and a messiah at the same time is because we've decided that magic is incompatible with what a Christian messiah should be. So essentially what we're doing is, we're taking, like, our New Testament writers at their word, and I'm trying to ask, like, what happens if we stop doing that, right?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:39

So can I ask a follow up question? What I hear you saying then is so interesting and complex that there's this ancient Greco-Roman milieu that has understandings about magic and about- and categories like philosopher, magician, healer, messiah and then we've got Christianities plural, throughout history, so not just the ancient world, but like after that, right? So think any historical period, right? Like the Renaissance or modernity, or contemporarily. And-



Dr. Shaily Patel 24:42

Sure! Right Christianity is not one thing who knew?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 25:14

Exactly. So it's not one thing, but we've got these early Christian texts, which are what we have to figure out things like who Jesus was. But we also have contemporary ideas about what Jesus should be. And that those things together are shaping both how we see Jesus as a wizard or not a wizard, and what Christianity might or should be, might should be, to be a little Southern about it.



Dr. Shaily Patel 25:41

Yeah, I think that's absolutely right. And so sorry, I mean, I should- I should have been a little bit more clear about this. I think the two questions, right, whether or not Jesus was a magician, and what ancient magic was, and also what was early Christianity or how Christians defined themselves? The two answers- or the two questions have to be answered simultaneously.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:05

Yeah, that makes sense.



Megan Goodwin 26:06

Yeah. Also, I've given it some thought. And I'm thinking Hufflepuff.



Dr. Shaily Patel 26:09

That's what I was thinking too, as I was talking to you, right? Like, he's just going out and giving people, like, free shit.



Megan Goodwin 26:15

Which is but all the same.



Dr. Shaily Patel 26:17

Here's a feeling, let's hug.



Megan Goodwin 26:19

Mhm, mhm, mhm. Okay, I'm glad- I'm glad that we came to a scholarly consensus on that. Thank you for your expert opinion.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:34

Can I ask another question? I know this is a little bit off the the questions we gave you, but I'm curious, because it sounds like so much of what you're doing Shaily is this interesting, early, early stuff like ancient history manuscript text work. And then also, you're making connections to what's going on today, what's going on a couple 100 years ago, what's going on a couple 100 years after Jesus. So like, why the ancient world? Like, what is so important about the ancient world, either to you or to the work that you're doing? Like, why does that turn you on? Instead of saying, like, I want to study the Christians who stormed the Capitol last night? Like- I'm just-



Dr. Shaily Patel 27:18

No, um, well, I think part of it is just this sort of, you know, if I can say this, like part of it is- is really like, I have antiquarian interest, right. Like, I like the ancient world. It's fun. It's fascinating to me. I didn't really sort of get excited about studying Christianity until I took a class at Wake Forest, which, if any of you know anything about Wake Forest University used to be pretty strongly affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. So like, when I went to Wake Forest, there were still like, you know, like, remnants of Wake being affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. And one of those was-



Megan Goodwin 28:02

Hey, just a pause, because I know, but like Ilyse might not know- Ilyse actually does know, but some of our listeners might not know, Southern Baptist Convention, politically speaking, where- where are they at?



Dr. Shaily Patel 28:14

Um, I would characterize them- and yo- you would probably know better than I would Megan, I would characterize them pretty right.



Megan Goodwin 28:20

Yeah. Pretty- pretty conservative. Right?



Dr. Shaily Patel 28:22

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I shouldn't have said pretty, right. Right?



Megan Goodwin 28:28

Pretty alt-right. No, sorry. Sorry.



Dr. Shaily Patel 28:32

Anyway, so one of the- one of the sort of remnants of Wake being affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention was that, like, all the religion classes were Christianity. And then there was a Zen Buddhism class,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:47

Of course. Oh, yeah, totally, that is for sure spot on.



Dr. Shaily Patel 28:50

That was the curriculum, right?



Megan Goodwin 28:53

Oh no.



Dr. Shaily Patel 28:53

So I ended up taking a class on Jesus in the gospels, which taught Ilyse's canon, right, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Ilyse's canon now, forever.



Megan Goodwin 29:05

I love this so much.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 29:06

Oh no.



Dr. Shaily Patel 29:07

And so I- you know, I read the text. And this is the first time I've read the text. And I was like, Oh, these are actually pretty fun. And they're not saying the same thing. And so from then, you know, it just became this, Okay, so why do we think Christianity is this one monolith, when in fact, the text don't suggest that?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 29:29

Yeah.



Dr. Shaily Patel 29:30

It became like, why do we think Christianity is this sort of special transcendent tradition, when in fact, the texts seem quite indebted to the Greco-Roman world, and part of that is personal too, right? Like, I grew up in a Hindu household and you know, I'm not Christian, but I'm an immigrant. I lived in West Virginia, which is heavily Christian, heavily a particular kind of Christian. Um, and so I had always encountered Christianity as being thought of as this sort of transcendent religious tradition. And I always heard my own tradition being characterized as sort of backwards or superstitious, particularly in terms of being polytheistic, right? And Ilyse can tell you way more about that. You know, so part of it is personal, this idea that like, um- but as far as religious traditions are concerned, like, why are we treating this one tradition differently than we treat other traditions? Right, like it is, as politically, you know, embedded, culturally embedded as anything else that we study?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:40

Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 30:41

Oh, yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:43

Yeah, that's so helpful. Thank you. And I guess- I guess I've got one more question. Goodwin I'm just gonna- I'm gonna take it.



Megan Goodwin 30:50

Yeah, do it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:50

So when we chatted, Shaily, to set up this episode, we like begged you to come on, and said, "Please, please, please, we need someone who knows something about the Bible," because I clearly think I have my own canon now.



Dr. Shaily Patel 31:03

You do have your own canon.



Megan Goodwin 31:03

I love this so much, congratulations!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 31:07

Yeah, thanks. You're welcome. You said that Christianity doesn't exist in the texts that I work with, but magic does. And I have to say that line blew my little mind. Can you teach me how that's possible that Christianity is not in the text that you work with, but magic is there? What does that mean? Just like that blew my mind, I just want to hear you talk more about it. Cuz I obviously have a lot to learn.



Dr. Shaily Patel 31:34

Yeah, I think this is what's gonna get me in trouble when the book comes out. Saying stuff like this. Um, so I will say, you know, I didn't state it as strongly in the book. So what I'm- what I'm trying to say is that- so like, the texts that we're talking about, right, like Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, they are trying to figure out what Christianity is, right. So like, Christianity doesn't exist as such as a thing like we've been talking about- this monolithic, you know, stable, religious tradition. It doesn't exist in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, right. Like, this is why Matthew- or I'm sorry, this is why Mark's Jesus is not God. Right? And we're still trying to figure this out. And so- and frankly, these are Jewish writers, right? Like-





Megan Goodwin 32:23

Wait the people who- wait, wait, wait, the people who wrote the Gospels were not Christian?



Dr. Shaily Patel 32:28

I mean, they were Jewish. Right? Like- and the other thing I have to, like, tell my students, right like Jesus was Jewish.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 32:36

That one I know- that one I know. That's a good Jew knee-jerk response.



Dr. Shaily Patel 32:45

Yeah so this is one of the big questions that our writers are trying to answer, is how to be Christian. And one of the negotiations they have to make of course, is how do we relate to Judaism in the plural, right? So Christianity is not established by any means in the text that I study. And I think we do ourselves a great disservice when we take it for granted that there is such a thing as a Christianity and these texts, right? So I'm trying to- to- to see how these texts are starting the process of defining Christianity.



Megan Goodwin 33:26

And if I'm hearing you correctly, part of how they define Christianity is in relationship to this like Greco-Roman thinking about magic.



Dr. Shaily Patel 33:35

Yeah, I think so. Right? People have been calling other people magicians before Christianity showed up, right? Um, and you know, magic has this- this long history. And magic is not always negatively evaluated in the ancient world. So like, for example, we do have Greco-Roman authors who valorize this tradition of Persian magic, right? And this is where we get something like Matthew's magi. So we have this long tradition of magic, which is not always negative, which includes accusations of people being called magicians in a negative way, but also people willingly calling themselves magicians, and also practices that are thought of, stereotypically, as being magical and all of that predates Christianity. So now you have a protagonist, Jesus, in our Christian texts, who is doing the same sorts of things that these magicians did. And so part of defining

Christianity comes from defining Jesus vis a vis these other people who look a lot like Jesus in terms of things that they're doing.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:51

That's really interesting.



Megan Goodwin 34:53

And having long wizard beards, right?



Dr. Shaily Patel 34:55

And having what?



Megan Goodwin 34:56

Long wizard beards? No, sorry I'm just-



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:59

Megan, you're just being a jerk.



Dr. Shaily Patel 35:02

Long wizard beards- that's- that's confirmed.



Megan Goodwin 35:06

It's possible that my Christian upbringing is making me a little salty about historical Jesus, wizard beard or otherwise.



Dr. Shaily Patel 35:16

I'm salty about historical Jesus and I do this for a living, right? Like, yeah, I get it.



Megan Goodwin 35:24

Alright I'm sorry, I will try to keep it in my wizard robes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 35:36

When in doubt, go to the library of PRIMARY SOURCES.



Megan Goodwin 35:40

[singing] primary sources!



Dr. Shaily Patel 35:41

[singing] primary sources! It's a duet!



Megan Goodwin 35:46

I'm so happy! Oh, right. It's my turn! I just got so excited about the duet. As a way to focus in on primary sources, Shaily, can you tell us why religion? Why do you want to work on religion? Why do you want to work on this project, or these intersection of questions? Like not just why it's interesting, but like, where do you fit into your work?



Dr. Shaily Patel 36:12

Like I said, I think this is deeply personal for me on a number of fronts. One, is that just coming from a tradition, which is in the West, devalued, made me pay attention to the ways in which traditions are delegitimated, right? And so calling somebody a magician is, in fact, one of the ways that we do this. And the other thing is that I want to sort of focus on practices as- as a way of religious meaning-making, because we talk about theology and Christian texts all the time, right? Like, Megan will tell you, like, we have all these books on like Pauline theology, and I want to talk about like, okay, but what about the practices that are narrated in the text? Right, like, what do they tell us about how Christians are defining themselves? What- what do exorcisms tell us, and there's been some really good work done on this, and so what I'm trying to do really is basically put that work in conversation with work coming out of classics, right? And so, again, this is personal, right? Like Hinduism is, or at least the version of Hinduism that's practiced in my home is deeply embedded in ritual practice, right? Like, my mom does not care what I personally believe, and who I have accepted as my Lord and personal Savior, she really needs me to light my diwal or on certain times, because if I don't, she's gonna be mad. So there is this personal element, like, you know, to sort of say, hey, like, I know we try to think of Christianity as this vastly different tradition compared to other traditions, but in fact, it's not. And so that's- that's really where I fit in, in terms of why I do the work that I do and why I think it's important to me.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 38:04

I love that. I love that especially because any shout out of a mom here on Keeping It 101 is, like, right up our alley.



Dr. Shaily Patel 38:12

Hey, Tara, what's up?



Megan Goodwin 38:15

No, I'm just thinking like, obvi- obviously talk of Jesus has triggered me into being a total jerk. And making way too many wizard jokes. And that is- that is my truth. Honestly, like I have shared I think before once or twice that I did a lot of parochial school growing up. Uh, 13 years kindergarten through 12th, people talk about it like a prison sentence, like how long were you in for, um- yes true story. Uh, and I just- I am sitting with the moment where I realized that not all Christianity was Catholicism. And that moment was when I went to Bible camp kind of by accident? My- one of my closest friends in grade school was like, I guess now we would think of her as a charismatic Catholic, I don't know that I knew those words in like seventh and eighth grade, but she went to Bible camp every summer and she encouraged a bunch of us to go with her. And I showed up and I was like deeply into Jesus at this time. And I learned that A) there are different kinds of Christianities and B) a lot of those kinds of Christianities don't think that Catholicism is a kind of Christianity. That was like, really surprising, I got a lot of like, "Oh, so you worship Mary." And I was like, "I don't think that I do? This is news to me?"



Dr. Shaily Patel 39:38

Again, this blew my mind too when I first encountered it, I was like what do you mean Catholicism is not Christianity.



Megan Goodwin 39:43

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So there was that- And then there was like, Oh, wait, hold up. We got different Bibles. Your-



Dr. Shaily Patel 39:50

OH YES, yeah.



Megan Goodwin 39:51

Your 10 Commandments are in a different order than mine are and like mine have books that you don't have? Wha- So that was- that was something... but I did A) win the talent show because of course I did. B) learn a number of jaunty songs including why you can't get to heaven on rollerskates, the answer is because you roll right past those pearly gates.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:15

No....



Megan Goodwin 40:16

Oh yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:17

Your Christian camp upsets me so much. It upsets me as a camper.



Megan Goodwin 40:23

Yeah, it should.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:23

I am devastated.



Megan Goodwin 40:26

You also can't get to have it on the Frankfurt Ellen. Do you know why Ilyse?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:30

No.



Megan Goodwin 40:31

Because the Frankfurt El goes straight to Frankfurt.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:33

What? I don't get it.



Megan Goodwin 40:36

Cuz it's supposed to rhyme, right? Like you can't get to heaven on Frankfurt EI, it goes straight to Frankfurt- It's a joke.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:42

Sure, but like get it together.



Megan Goodwin 40:44

It's Christian humor. It's not funny.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:45

No- exactly.



Megan Goodwin 40:46

Anyway.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:47

Again, I'm offended in my Catskills. Keep that from me.




Megan Goodwin 40:50

That's fair. That's fair. That's fair. So A) learned about different Bibles, B) apparently I worshipped Mary the whole time, didn't know about it, C) bad jokes, and D) definitely learn to shoot a .22 so-





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:55


Oh no.


 Dr. Shaily Patel 41:02  
Wow.


 Megan Goodwin 41:02  
Yes. And so, Christianity is complicated.

 Dr. Shaily Patel 41:10  
It is complicated. Wow, guys, I'm realizing there's like three of us on this call. And two of us have accidentally- I don't know about Ilyse, but I too, have accidentally gone to Sunday School.

 Megan Goodwin 41:22  
Oh no.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 41:23  
What? No, why, how?

 Megan Goodwin 41:25  
What happened?

 Dr. Shaily Patel 41:26  
My parents, like- so I lived in North Carolina in Marion, North Carolina, which is a small town. And the local church basically wrote around and invited parents with children to send their children to Sunday School. Okay, my parents are immigrants and they were like, more math and science on Sunday. And they were like, sure, yeah, right? And then, like, after two or three weeks, I was telling them they were going to go to hell and they were like maybe Sunday School was a bad idea.

 Megan Goodwin 42:03  
This is a different understanding of school than I was led to believe.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:08

I am traumatized by the id- Like when you told that story, my brain was like the church had a van, it rounded up the brown children, and now I'm upset. Like. I am horrified.



Dr. Shaily Patel 42:21

It was- it was an experience. And you know, you're so young and impressionable at that age that like I really believed growing up that I was going to hell, right? Like-



Megan Goodwin 42:30

Oh girl same.



Dr. Shaily Patel 42:32

Megan did you like come out of that, like, really believing that, like, you worship Mary and this was hugely problematic, and-



Megan Goodwin 42:38

So that piece less so because I was older. But the piece where I think- no, I know- I know, actually that it was second grade, because we were doing communion and reconciliation as sacraments. And we did a whole like if you break any of the 10 Commandments, you're going to hell. And I'm, like, okay, like a deeply literal / again, probably on the spectrum, child. So I am taking this very literally, and we did not get til- we did not get to penance and reconciliation until Monday. So like Friday, you- like you break any commandment, you're going to hell, and like, I've talked a little bit about my relationship with my mother so I definitely broke at least one commandment. That happens Friday, I spend the entire weekend being like, "Uh, this is it for me. I'm done." Seven years old, and I'm done. And then Monday is like just kidding, because priests can make your sins go away. Um, and yet I stayed Catholic for like, another 10 years. Anyway- Yeah, it's a lot. Anyway, sometimes we make Jesus jokes because, pain.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 43:37

Oh, no, I can't follow any of that. I can't- I like, alright, I guess I have to go. My primary source is that I'm a Jewish person who was never ever hoodwinked into Sunday School or Jesus camp.





Megan Goodwin 43:52

Thank God.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 43:53

But I do remember being so mad, and this will shock none of you any, I remember being so mad because all the CCD kids had basketball leagues and like sports leagues, where you had to be a member of the church to go and I remember just being like, well, I guess I don't play basketball then because I don't dribble for Jesus. Like this is not- But I also- I also remember vividly like one of my favorite stories about- I'm going to tell a Kevin primary source, my husband Kevin,



Megan Goodwin 44:23

Yay!



Dr. Shaily Patel 44:23

Yay!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 44:24

Who was a big old nothing growing up, for all good reasons, both because his dad was like, a-



Megan Goodwin 44:30

A different kind of big old nothing.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 44:31

Well no, but a lifer in Catholic schools, and his mom is deaf, so like-



Dr. Shaily Patel 44:36

A lifer...



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 44:37

Didn't have access to church spaces. And so what they would do cuz Kevin and his brother are really good at sports, they would shop around for who is going to have like the best team and then like, go to that church for a couple days and then join that basketball team. So like one year they were the Methodists, one year they were like, the Baptists, one year they were the Catholics, and like- they were like, telling me this story of like all these different Jesus basketball teams, but it was really like who was going to be the good team that year? And I was like, you shopped your God based on who had the best ball skills, I don't know what's going on. Have another wine please. Like it was really like, the second time I'd met Kevin's family and I was deeply confused.



Megan Goodwin 45:18

Oh, Doglovich! Comma: guess who else dribbled for Jesus, Ilyse, guess who?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:23

Was it you?



Megan Goodwin 45:24

It was me.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:25

Of course it was, you're very tall.



Megan Goodwin 45:28

I was- I played for it. I was not good. But I was very tall.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:31

I wouldn't- I wouldn't- I wouldn't really call you the best at basketball.



Megan Goodwin 45:38

Okay, my hand-eye coordination is actually pretty good.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:41

I didn't say bad at sports, I said bad at basketball, I would not trust you to run and dribble a ball and shoot at a hoop at the same time



Megan Goodwin 45:47

No you should not.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:48

It is a specific sport critique.



Megan Goodwin 45:52

Too many things happening at one time. But I did- I did make one basket during my three year career.



Dr. Shaily Patel 45:58

YAY!



Megan Goodwin 45:58

Thanks! And that's primary sources.



Dr. Shaily Patel 46:03

We celebrate successes.



Megan Goodwin 46:04

Yeah, we do.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 46:05

Oh man, what a primary sources.



Megan Goodwin 46:07

I was gonna say Shaily will you join me and sing us out? 1..2..3... [singing] primary sources!



Dr. Shaily Patel 46:14

[singing] primary sources!



Megan Goodwin 46:16

Yes, this is amazing.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 46:18

Don't pick up yet, nerds. You've got HOMEWORK.



Simpsons 46:21

Homework, what homework?



Megan Goodwin 46:23

In the last episode, we assigned lots of things to prepare our beloved nerds for your classroom visit today, Dr. Patel, thank you so much for joining us. And following Dr. Judith Weisenfeld in Season Two, we thought we'd ask our guests what you've written or- or done, produced, created, that you're most proud of? What are- what are you proud of?




Dr. Shaily Patel 46:44


So you know, unfortunately, it's not out yet. But I am really proud of this book that I'm working on, about how magic and Christian self-definition sort of go hand in hand. Because we have talked about magic and early Christianity and whether or not Jesus could be considered a magician. And to me like, that's not the most interesting question. The most interesting question is like, how does magic work? Vis a vis Christianity, right? Because those are two concepts, right? Christianity is a concept. And right, oh my gosh. So I'm really proud of this book. And I'm really sort of proud of the way it's coming together. And I really can't wait until you guys get a chance to think about it.




Megan Goodwin 47:25


I'm so excited!


 Dr. Shaily Patel 47:26  
I know. I'm excited too.


 Megan Goodwin 47:29  
It's gonna be great.


 Dr. Shaily Patel 47:30  
I think so, I think it will be fun.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 47:32  
That's awesome.

 Megan Goodwin 47:32  
Anything else you want to recommend that folks check out?


 Dr. Shaily Patel 47:35  
So for understanding how magic as a concept works in the modern world, I really love Randall Styers' book "Making Magic," like it's- it's a classic, right? Like, you should read it. It's so good. And, you know, if you just want like a primer on magic, and how it's sort of been crafted, the Oxford Very Short Introduction series has "Magic, A Very Short Introduction" by Owen Davies. You know, I think that's a good way to sort of get introduced to the topic in the modern world, for Ancient World stuff, my favorite is an essay called "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic" by Richard Gordon. What I really like about this essay is that it does what, you know, I'm trying to do, which is complicate how we understand magic, right? It's not just an accusation that you levy against the practices of people you don't like, right? Like, it's also practices. It's also a way of, you know, marking people as foreign perhaps, it's also a way of marking yourself as a magician, and perhaps being, you know, resistant towards dominant cultures, right? So it sort of lays out all of the ways in which magic can function in the ancient world, so I would highly recommend it. It's so good.


 M Megan Goodwin 48:01  
Oh! Yay. Well, now I have homework.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 48:57  
Me too. A lot of it, apparently.

 D Dr. Shaily Patel 48:59  
It's fun homework, I promise.


 M Megan Goodwin 49:01  
Oh, totally!

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 49:01  
Oh, we love homework here.

 M Megan Goodwin 49:04  
We only do fun homework.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 49:06  
That's true.

 D Dr. Shaily Patel 49:07  
That's right. Yeah.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 49:08  
Well, Shaily thank you so much for joining us.

 D Dr. Shaily Patel 49:12

Oh thank you guys, it was so much fun!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 49:13

And for sharing all of your super smart knowledge, you could be a wizard.



Megan Goodwin 49:20

Mhm.



Dr. Shaily Patel 49:21

Yeah. One day.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 49:23

And only if you wanna be.



Dr. Shaily Patel 49:24

One day I'm gonna be a wizard. It's gonna be awesome. I'm just gonna walk around in robes.



Megan Goodwin 49:29

I mean-



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 49:30

That is basically what regalia is. So, do it.



Dr. Shaily Patel 49:34

Yeah, we should do it.



Megan Goodwin 49:35

Paid enough for it, Jesus Christ.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 49:39

Well, with that, peace out, nerds.



Megan Goodwin 49:42

And do your homework. It's on the syllabus.



Life of Brian 50:05

Now you listen here, he's not the Messiah! He's a very naughty boy! Now go away.