



Religion Today

Glastonbury: three religious perspectives

Henrietta Bess

Glastonbury, a small market town in Somerset, has drawn spiritual seekers for centuries. Believed to be the site of the first Christian church in Britain, it still hosts a weekend of pilgrimage every year.

But Glastonbury is also perceived as the epicentre of 'new age' in England, a communication point for aliens and the 'heart chakra' of planet earth.

A desire to find help, healing and salvation has created a thriving spiritual industry. People with very different beliefs are drawn to live and worship in Glastonbury because of its spiritual significance.

Patrick Riley

People come to Glastonbury thinking that spirituality is something you gain, you grasp hold of, you possess, or you even sell. So, I love the idea that we're serving a generous God who gives us so much that we can afford to give it away, open the doors, let people in, let them come and find this God.

Kathy Jones

The vast majority of people who are here in Glastonbury are here for a spiritual purpose, they come on a quest, they come searching for something else.

Jake Chapman

Glastonbury's a fantastic place, it's a really fabulous place, it's a great place for pilgrimage and people who've perhaps been monks and nuns in their previous lives and they unknowingly come to Glastonbury on a kind of spiritual journey.

Henrietta Bess

Patrick Riley has been an Anglican vicar for forty years. But he'll shortly be taking early retirement - quitting the clergy and leaving the town of Glastonbury.

Patrick Riley

I think you need a younger person here. I'm over 60 and it's time, you slow down, I feel very, very tired sometimes.

It is an exhausting job in one sense, you need to get away to find stillness and to find peace of mind. Otherwise, you're just charging round to no avail. I've asked myself this question of why, if this is all so fascinating, if my heart's desire to be here and all that, why am I wanting to back out? Forty years ago, when I was ordained from the Abbey House over the road, I would have said then I'm totally committed, I wanted to spend my whole life serving God, I had no idea what was involved.

Prayer is, for me, the very life-blood of being a Christian and it's the only thing which can keep you tuned in to being in Glastonbury, otherwise you'd end up with a load of frustrations and angers and irritations.

Henrietta Bess

Kathy Jones' belief centres on the Goddess, a world-wide spirituality, which she has played a key role in re-establishing in Glastonbury. Goddess worship honours the feminine in people, nature and the Earth by celebrating different Goddesses according to the season. It's open to both men and women.

Kathy Jones

The great freedom with loving the Goddess is that there is no dogma, there are no rules, there is no written text, there's nothing, so we are free to develop our experience of who Goddess is as we choose to do it. Once I kind of realised in myself that God was a woman it was a great relief and it was a great release really.

Henrietta Bess

Fed up with having to use temporary locations for their celebrations, the Goddesses are searching for a place of their own.

Kathy Jones

We've been holding three, four day goddess temples every six weeks around the eight festivals of the year, and that's made us really realise that we would like to have a permanent home somewhere in Glastonbury.

Henrietta Bess

Being on Glastonbury's High Street is key to cementing a spiritual and business presence in the town.

Kathy Jones

We're trying to grow something here and that takes finance and money to do that. And I think the same thing, probably in any form of spirituality, it's like you can't do it on fresh air. I can see myself as a spiritual entrepreneur, I like to do lots of spiritual things. I'm fortunate in that early in my life I made a decision that I would pursue my spiritual life no matter what.

Lady be in my voice and all my actions.

Jake Chapman

By the power of accumulating negative karma from beginningless time. Since -

Henrietta Bess

Jake Chapman has been a monk with the Archangel Michael's Soul Therapy Centre for three years. A religion amalgamating Tibetan Buddhism, Christianity and sacred geometry, it's led by an American who is perceived by some to be the re-incarnation of Buddha and Christ.

Jake Chapman

Buddha Maitreya's work is actually very much more from the future, it's a new science that bridges the gap between God and science so we'll scientifically understand the reasons that there's been faith. It's just kind of realignment of many of the spiritual practices people are involved in.

Henrietta Bess

After only a month in Glastonbury, running the Soul Therapy Centre single-handedly, Jake is expecting a rare visit from his leader. His Holiness the Buddha Maitreya is flying in from head office in the States to hold a teaching weekend.

Jake Chapman

I don't get the chance to physically meet him very often and that's not a problem, because it's not about devoting myself to an individual at all, it's much more about devoting myself to God, which brings a much higher relationship, because it's all inclusive, it's not to one person or to oneself.

The daily meditation is really our life. We actually are encouraged to have little thoughts and little desires, little emotions, just be very calm and natural so that the daily life is very ritualistic.

Andrew Strazalkowski

So this is where your store is?

Jake Chapman

That's right, that's right.

Jake Chapman

We spend a lot of the time in the Dharma Centre here, providing people the opportunity to actually come in and do meditation and receive healings and blessings. One of the things that we do offer to Glastonbury is the experience of getting in contact with their soul.

Henrietta Bess

The crystals are designed by Buddha Maitreya to transmit and receive healing energy with the aid of telepathy and magnetic fields. Each one sold provides an income for the church.

Andrew Strazalkowski

You just hold your hand right underneath it?

Jake Chapman

Yeah, yeah, in the principle of the meridian lines, or the lines that run more esoterically in your body, end up in your hand, so you are able to treat somebody by just holding it over the palm of their hand.

Andrew Strazalkowski

Of their own hand? Aha.

Jake Chapman

Yeah, so that when you do that, it actually can have an ability to heal any part of the body that has a problem.

Andrew Strazalkowski

I can just hold it myself.

Henrietta Bess

The crystal devices retail from £45 to £444.

Jake Chapman

You can hold it in the centre or you can actually hold them over yourself.

Andrew Strazalkowski

It spins.

Jake Chapman

They can spin, they can shake, it can wobble,

Henrietta Bess

Buddha Maitreya says that the income from all sales goes to a trust fund which supports Tibetan refugee projects. For a minimum donation of £20, anyone can experience a soul therapy session. This involves lying beneath a 'pyramid meditation system' and listening to a CD of music and blessings from Buddha Maitreya.

Jake Chapman

The thing to do is just relax as if you were in meditation, which is what it is.

Andrew Strazalkowski

Just with your eyelids slightly closed.

Jake Chapman

Yeah, just close your eyes and enjoy.

Jake Chapman

People have very wild and wonderful meditations, some people have very strong, powerful healings and it can be combinations of all those different things.

Henrietta Bess

His Holiness the Buddha Maitreya arrives discreetly, the night before he is due to give two workshops.

Jake Chapman

Being the founding father of Tibetan Buddhism, to have him in Glastonbury is amazingly auspicious, you know.

Buddha Maitreya

Most of the centres that I set up are well known ancient sites and Glastonbury is an ancient site, the first church of Christ, and since I also teach about Christianity, it's a real good place for helping people moving into new age and trying to develop their psychic energy.

Henrietta Bess

The Goddesses have heard that a local library may be moving premises. The location could be ideal as a temple, just off the High Street in a courtyard full of shops and cafes.

Goddess 1

Wow!

Goddess 2

It's really quite big.

Goddess 1

It's not huge but actually, right now, it's what we can really deal with well, isn't it? You know, to keep it open a lot and people would get to know that there's this beautiful quiet space they could just come and be in and totally receive good energy and healing. It'll just going to make such a difference in the middle of town.

Goddess 3

And just like that thing about in the temple, having marriages and naming ceremonies and death rites and, you know, providing an opportunity to reclaim those rituals.

Patrick Riley

Glastonbury had a tradition of what used to be called High Church, it was lots of visual aids to help people plug into worship and so that they see the incense and smell the incense and hear the glorious music and processions and all this sort of stuff. Plus, the early morning service, which was very discreet and Anglican and nobody spoke to one another and all that sort of bit, you know, the 8 o'clock traditionally. We've kept, guarded those congregations, made sure they feel comfortable where they are.

Henrietta Bess

But the numbers for Patrick's bells and smells were dwindling, so five years ago he introduced a new form of worship.

Patrick Riley

What happened was that a number of people came to a healing seminar. I was a bit nervous because they were talking about healing in New Testament terms, like we expect something to happen. And the church wardens came, one of whom is over 80, and said 'Vicar, we must have more of this' and on that basis, you see, the healing ministry developed.

If you just come into St John's and you see the, what we call the bells and smells bit in the morning, and the renewal ministry in the evening and people being prayed for and sometimes falling down under the pressure of the love of God, so to speak, you could say, 'oh, this is just trying to please a market.' On the other hand, if each of those groups is being encouraged to

find it's mainspring in loving, the clothes that it's dressed up in don't matter. It's the same experience at 8 o'clock, 9.30 or 6 o'clock, of the presence of God.

Henrietta Bess

In the beginning, Patrick's renewal service drew hundreds of people each week but now he's down to a handful of regulars every other Sunday.

Patrick Riley

Many people have not found what we do now enough, so they've gone off trying, finding new songs and new ways of praying and this sort of thing.

Kathy Jones

For me, I love the Goddess, I love her with all my heart, I feel her. It's like allowing divinity to be feminine, allowing her to be in me and in the women I know and in the world.

Goddess spirituality for me is a journey of exploration through song, music and dance and exploring individual creativity.

Goddess 1

All the horned creatures - the stag, the cow.

Goddess 2

The toad, the sow. Help us with our difficult emotions and feelings, Cerridwen.

All

Come home, Dana, come home. Come home, Briget, come home.

Goddess 1

Are you ready?

All

Yeah.

Goddess 1

And when I am nutting.

All

And when I am nutting. Moon and tide, tide and moon, dancing with the ocean's tune.

Henrietta Bess

Devotees of the Buddha Maitreya are arriving from as far away as Norway and Chicago in preparation for the Darshan, simply sitting in the presence of a teacher.

Buddha Maitreya

Just receiving the blessings to give them -

Henrietta Bess

Buddha Maitreya will teach, answer questions and pray with the 15 participants.

Buddha Maitreya

Every part of your body is the proportion of the Great Pyramid, strange enough, and if you study into the Great Pyramid, you'll find the proportion of the Great Pyramid is exactly the same mathematical equation to the distance around the earth, the distance from one end of the earth to the other side of the earth.

The basis of Buddhism itself is solar philosophy. So everything that I teach is based on solar philosophy, the relationship of the seven rays, colour and sound and geomancy, which is found in physics and platonic science and Pythagorean science. So, all of mine is actually based on concrete science.

The outcome is like in Tibet, we use certain geometric proportions when we apply, like, forms like this. And then we make hats, like this, yeah, and we make hats like this, yeah. And they're geometrically proportioned and with cones and spirals and inside of here's a stupa, you know. And all of these particular things that we place on our heads, in reality, the science of what you're doing placing a pyramid on your head. But they decorate it, you know, they try and make it look really nice, but in reality it all has this very specific effect to it, yeah.

So, quite often the Buddha would have a stupa sitting on his head. And 'stupa' in Tibet means 'pyramid.' So, Gautama Buddha, Maitreya Buddha, Manjushri Buddha, Avalokitesvara Buddha and Pralambapadasana Buddha, all of these Buddhas are known to have a stupa or an energy-like pyramid on the top of their head. So, with you having the opportunity to actually have one of these things stuck on your head, you're basically resonating with the relationship of the lineage of Tibetan Buddhism and why they put things like that, or Christianity or all the other ancient belief systems that have built all the churches.

Henrietta Bess

In July, Christians flock to Glastonbury for the annual Pilgrimage.

Patrick Riley

One of the reasons I came to Glastonbury was to serve on the Pilgrimage Committee and I relished the idea of developing links between the churches.

As years have gone by the pilgrimage has changed a bit, and especially with women being allowed to be ordained in the Church of England to become priests, and we support that fully here. But, unfortunately, the Pilgrimage Committee decided they didn't like women priests and thought this was not on, so we were gently asked to leave. And, in fact, what happened is that it slipped away. It's nothing to do with me now.

Henrietta Bess

With just a couple of months left before he retires, Patrick and his wife, Elizabeth, are gradually moving out of the vicarage to their retirement home in Shaftesbury.

Patrick Riley

The whole idea of living in Glastonbury is a non-starter. It must be a new start. You can't stay constant and equal and balanced all your life, there are going to be downs and ups. And if you see that as a pattern of little deaths and little resurrections, you get used to the idea, that's what we're made for.

On the basis of stripping down, letting go, I, in the future, will have to let go my health, my sight, everything. Everything will have to go in the end. So this is another part of letting go.

Jake Chapman

For the power of accumulating negative karma from living in endless time. Since -

Jake Chapman

I attended three darshans with Buddha Maitreya and after a little while I applied to become a monk, and His Holiness explained that it would take me some time. So, I slowly started to let go of the good friends and family that I had. And that took a little while and then, in that process, being accepted as an ordained monk was a great privilege and still is.

Henrietta Bess

Whilst Buddha Maitreya leads the teaching upstairs, Jake continues with his day-to-day tasks and doesn't attend the workshop.

Jake Chapman

The actual physical connection between myself and Buddha Maitreya is not a necessity at all. You know, it's quite a regular thing that the Abbot and the monk don't physically meet and it's not a necessity in any way. So, when Buddha Maitreya is here, the fact that I'm not sitting with him all the time kind of helps people to understand that it's not about the devotion to the individual or to oneself, it's much more the devotion to the much wider spectrum, to God.

Buddha Maitreya

I'm going to put this on your head, so bend over.

Jake Chapman

For myself is to witness the experience of people actually coming into contact with Buddha Maitreya, which is fabulous, you know, because they actually get a much greater understanding of the kind of work that he's doing.

Buddha Maitreya

I teach that we're all Buddhas or angels, which is what Buddha means, and that we need to awaken that through virtue, and as we do that we become more angelic or soulful.

I provide tools for people to learn to meditate, to calm themselves down, to stop being so harmful and take the time during their daily life, in their work, with their children or with their family, and change it.

I've developed the healing centres and providing tools and providing darshans rather than going out asking for funding from people and give them nothing.

It's such a business here. The entire town is based on this lineage of King Arthur and it's ancient spiritual relationship to the wizardry of that particular age. By putting that out in the storefront they have found it's a competitive relationship of trying to draw the people to your store. I do utilise that relationship in order to let people know that we exist as far as healing tools, as does the rest of Glastonbury, so that we can compete a little bit with that.

Kathy Jones

When you walk down the High Street and you see all the shops and you think, okay, these people are selling their spirituality, but the underlying reason that people come is for their spiritual quest. If you wanted to make money, you wouldn't come and live here, you'd be in a city, you just wouldn't do it, you know.

People struggle here, people have a really hard time just to live, and the fact that maybe there's a few shops out there, there's a few people, who are maybe making some money, it negates the fact that the vast majority of people are struggling.

Elizabeth Riley

It really will be odd when this is for the very last time. I mean, we've done the house clearance. Everything's all cleaned up and left.

Patrick Riley

Most are. You're always coming back. Taking stuff over, it always means you're coming back and getting other trips organised.

Elizabeth Riley

Yes.

Patrick Riley

As you say, the final one is a single ticket.

Elizabeth Riley

And each time we come over it's sort of letting go of a bit more of Glastonbury, isn't it?

There we are. (Sigh)

Patrick Riley

Oh, how good, how good, how good, how good. The campanula's are out.

Elizabeth Riley

Yeah.

Goddess

You're bursting it!

(Pop and cheers)

Henrietta Bess

Kathy and the Goddesses have at long last succeeded in their search for a temple.

Kathy Jones

We are going to have a Goddess temple.

(Cheering)

We're going to have this space and we're going to have the first Goddess temple for maybe a thousand years.

(Chinking glasses and toast)

Goddess 1

It's going to be full on, it's going to be so amazing. It's such a huge thing that's needed, isn't it? You can just feel it's going to be – oh, it's just going to fill this space, it's just yearning for something.

Goddess 2

I'm still sort of a bit not believing it.

Kathy Jones

Well, I know. Neither am I,.

Goddess 2

Can it be true?

GODDESS:

That's it.

Kathy Jones

We have the Goddess-up-yourself!

Goddess

Goddess-up-yourself. Absolutely!

Goddess-up-yourself space. Or, once you've Goddessed up yourself.

Goddess

Goddess up other people.

Kathy Jones

We're going to find out what it means to open a Goddess temple every day, to keep it open, to run it, to support it economically.

Also, the Goddess-up-yourself salon for making you feel absolutely wonderful, you know, where you go and you get your hair done and you get your nails done and you get massaged and you get taken of and you just, you know, all body, mind and spirit. There's no separation really.

Patrick Riley

Now, if I go early I'm actually choosing what I want to do and that, I think, is important to me. There's a secondary thing which I must confess comes into it. There's lots of other things I want to do.

I suppose that any Christian would say that every moment is a time of crisis because it's always a matter of choosing. Nobody has a sort of faith that goes on like a concrete block all through their lives, unchanging.

It's something which moves and develops and every single person will affect your reaction. But I do know, as someone who's been looking for a long time, I've never been happier.

Elizabeth Riley

We'll both enjoy the enormous freedom of putting down the keys and parish diary and being able to spend time together playing. Because, actually, playing and praying are very, very similar. They're both self-forgetting delight.

Patrick Riley

What I want to do is explore this relationship, this intimacy, with the very source of the power of love. It's like entering the very centre of the furnace. It's an awesome thing and everything else is secondary, including moving house, moving job, giving up, whatever - dying.

Kathy Jones

We're all pursuing the same quest, you know, the quest for the Holy Grail, the quest to find, you know, our souls, the quest to find the divine. We're just doing it in different ways and that's great.

Jake Chapman

People have an innate ability to be good and that's what Buddha Maitreya's work's about. It's about stimulating that to actually come to the forefront of their life. So that they're just good parents and they're good husbands and they're good wives and all those kind of things, they just become better people.

Patrick Riley

I'm going to have time to watch the cream climb up the jug. And there's going to be time to sit and wait for the water to become still so it can reflect the light.