

# The Rastafarian Religion

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The Rastafarian religion originated in Africa. It is often associated with the poorer black population of Jamaica. It is not just a religion, but also a way of life. Rastafarians speak out against; poverty, oppression and inequality...not just religious ideas but global problems. Rastafarians will use the Bible for guidance.

The prime basic belief of the Rastafarians is that Haile Selassie is the living God for the black race. Selassie, whose previous name was Ras Tafari, was the black Emperor of Ethiopia. Rastafarians say scriptures prophesized him as the one with "the hair of whose head was like wool (the matted hair of I black man), whose feet were like unto burning brass (I black skin)".

Selassie was not a Rastafarian himself. He was a devout Christian. In fact, no one is really sure what he thought of the whole Rastafarian movement. When a group of Rastas went to Ethiopia to honor him, an official of the palace told them to go away! This did not make the Rastas question their belief, it only made it stronger. God is not supposed to know he is God.

When Haile Selassie was reported dead, Rastas would not believe it. They believed that it was a trick of the media to try and bring their faith down. Rastafarians believe that Haile Selassie the first has trodden on to the perfect flesh, and sits on the highest point of Mount Zion where He and Empress Menen await the time of judgment.

The Rastafarian name for God is Jah. JAH

The Lion of Judah represents Haile Selassie, the Conqueror. It represents the King of Kings as a lion is the king of all beasts. Selassie wore a Lion of Judah ring that was given to Bob Marley at the time of Selassie's death.

Babylon is the Rastafarian term for the white political power structure that has been holding the black race down for centuries. In the past, Rasta sees that the shackles of slavery held down blacks physically. In the present, Rasta feel that blacks are still held down through poverty, illiteracy,

inequality, and trickery by the white man. The effort of Rasta is to try to remind blacks of their heritage and have them stand up against this Babylon.

Ethiopia, specifically, Africa in general, is considered the Rastas' heaven on earth. There is no afterlife or hell, as Christianity believes. Rasta's believe that Jah will send the signal and help the blacks exodus back to Ethiopian, their homeland. Any news from Ethiopia was taken very seriously as a warning to get ready to leave. The belief stems from Marcus Garvey's theme, "Back to Africa". Although Selassie's death came before this was possible, it did succeed in turning blacks desire to look towards Africa as their roots.

One of the more obvious symbols of the Rastafarians is color. These are red, gold, and green. These colors were taken from the Garvey movement. The color red stands for the Church Triumphant, which is the church of the Rastas. It also symbolizes the blood that martyrs have shed in the history of the Rastas. The yellow represents the wealth of the homeland. Green represents the beauty and vegetation of Ethiopia, the Promised Land. Sometimes black is used to represent the color of Africans, to whom 98% of the Jamaicans are descended

Ganja is used for religious purposes for Rastafarians. Its use is written in the Bible in Psalms 104:14, "He caused the grass for the cattle, and herb for the service of man". The use of this herb is very extensive among the Rastas not only for spiritual purposes as in their Nyabingi celebration, but also for medicinal purposes for colds and such. The following are a few of the many Biblical texts that Rasta embrace as reasons Jah, gave for the use of the herb:

" . . . thou shalt eat the herb of the field " (Genesis 3:18)

". . . eat every herb of the land " (Exodus 10:12)

"Better is a dinner of herb where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith" (Proverbs 15:17)

The true Rasta eats only I-tal food. This is special food never touches chemicals or is natural and not in cans. This food is cooked, but served in

the rawest form possible; without salts, preservatives, or condiments. Rastas are therefore vegetarians. Drinking preferences rest with anything that is herbal, such as tea. Liquor, milk, coffee, and soft drinks are viewed as unnatural. The term I-tal food is rapidly taking hold in the consumer industry in Jamaica.

The dreadlocks on a Rasta's head symbolize the Rastas roots, contrasting the straight, blond look of the white man and establishment. It not only shows their roots, but it is supported in the Bible: Leviticus 21:5, "They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in the flesh". The way the hair grows comes to represent the symbol of the Lion of Judah. This has also come to symbolize rebellion of the system and the "proper" way to wear hair.