

Anthropology of Religion  
**Chapter 3 Lecture Notes**

## **Psychology of Religions**

Religions influences human psychology in various ways.

### **I. Intellectual Effects**

Explain things that people may have no current secular explanation for.

#### ***Explaining dreams, unconsciousness, and death.***

In many cultures, dreams have been explained as experiences of the spirit when it travels outside the body during sleep.

##### **Iroquois**

Since dreams were sent from the gods, they carried a mandate to carry out the obligations implied by the dreams. The Iroquois held regular ceremonies to divine meanings of dreams and help dreamers fulfill obligations laid on them by their dreams.

##### **Senoi of Malaysia**

Treated dreams as matters of great importance. Adults met regularly every morning to discuss and interpret dreams. Developed a skill to consciously influence the course of their dreams. Dreams played a part in cultural change.

### **II. Affective Effects**

Religion has affective effects in human life.

#### ***Religious experiences commonly bring peace of mind, especially concerning daily troubles.***

##### **Americans: Baptism and Mikvah**

In large-scale societies, people worry about their rights being violated by the immoral or illegal behavior of others. Muggings, burglary, etc. These societies have rituals of purification.

### **III. Attitude Effects**

Religion influences peoples attitudes about various things.

***Religion may influence our feelings about morality, piety, and politics.***

#### **IV. Mental Health Effects**

The various effects on human psychology have a stabilizing influence and helps people cope more effectively with distressful emotions. Thus, religion tends to be correlated with various measures of positive mental health.

***Traditional religious healing practices have many parallels to practices of western psychotherapy.***

##### **Ericksonian hypnotherapy**

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##### **Trance**

Common in religious ceremonies. Brings a sense of "numinous" or the subjective sense of being outside one's own body. Researchers have begun to explore the brain processes that occur during trance states.

##### **Near Death Experiences**

Eugene D'Aquili and Andrew Newberg have found that the area of the brain responsible for helping us distinguish between external and internal experiences undergo marked changes during such activities as intense prayer or particularly spiritual meditative states.