# Rastafari

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| **General** | **Core Belief**  It must be noted that one of the key features within Rastafari belief is the lack of dogma and centralised authority, resulting in much diversity about what is believed and how it is expressed.  Rastafaris take their name from the pre-coronation name of **Emperor Haile Selassie 1 of Ethiopia** (Tafari Makonnen) with the term ‘Ras’ meaning ‘prince’ or ‘duke’. The movement, seen as being embodied in the life of **Halie Selaasie** was developed in 1930s Jamaica. Leonard Howell was one of the first to preach Rasta theology and saw **Haile Selassie** as the second coming of Jesus. Other strands of the faith do not believe that this is the case rather **Halie Selassie** embodies characteristics of Jesus.  Key Rastafari beliefs are seen as being anti-colonial and an alternative to western Christianity, as enhancing African identity and thought. In this manner Rastafari can be viewed as a faith of black empowerment seeing to reclaim black identity. God (**Jah**) is seen as being transcendent and also immanent and involved in people’s lives.  Rastafaris approach to eating and diet is based on the concept of **livity**. Rastafaris believe that Jah has filled all nature with his divine power, which means that there is strength through living in a natural way from the goodness found in food.  **Living as a Rastafari**  Rastafaris believe that **Jah** has filled all nature with his divine power or energy. Rastafaris gain strength through living in a natural way from the goodness found in food. The term **IandI** refers to the oneness of all people and **Jah** being within all people.  Daily reading of the Bible is considered important.  Rastafaris approach to eating and diet is based on the concept of **livity**. Rastafaris believe that **Jah** has filled all nature with his divine power, which means that there is strength through living in a natural way from the goodness found in food. Everything that Rastafaris eat becomes part of who they are. This has an impact on what Rastafaris eat; avoiding processed foods, foods that have been subject to chemicals or grown artificially. As such many Rastafaris will be vegetarian and others may go further to be vegan. Rastafaris call this an **ital** (vital) diet. It contains fresh and vital ingredients for good physical and spiritual health.  Other Rastafaris might avoid eating sugars and canned food as it is seen as being unnatural. Many other Rastafaris also follow laws outlined in the Hebrew scriptures, in the book called Leviticus. These scriptures are also common to Jews and Christians, and many Jewish people follow these laws as part of keeping Kosher. These laws forbid the eating of pork, fish without scales and not eating shellfish.  **Language**  In the 1940s Rastafari’s started to develop their own language known as **Dreadtalk** or **Iyaric**. It is seen as an expression of rejecting certain words because of their association and sounding like others for example, not using ‘HELLO’ because the root of the word is in the word ‘hell’. This in turn echoes the belief that words have power and the sounds and meanings of the words are seen as being very close.  In the **Iyaric** language certain features of words are replaced with ‘I’ to show the presence of the divine or **Jah** (God) within the universe and in what you do. It also provides a sense of inclusion and uniformity for all who use the language:  I - instead of me  I and I – showing the unity of the person with **Jah** (God)  Iman – the inner self  Irie – positive emotions  Irator – Creator  Iration – Creation  Overstand – understand - raising over your awareness  **Scripture**  The King James version of the Bible: Rastafaris believe that all versions of the Bible are corrupt, with the King James version being the least so. This narratives tells the story of a black race and their identity as the chosen people of **Jah**.  The Holy Piby: is a compilation made by Robert Athlyi Rogers published in 1924, seen as a text which established Rastafari ideas.  **Major Annual Events**  **Haile Sellasie I**’s Coronation (2nd November)  **Haile Sellasie I**’s birthday (23rd July)  **Haile Sellasie I**’s visit to Jamaica (21st April)  These will be marked by a larger grounding (Rastafari gathering) known as **Nyabinghi Issemblies**.  **Dress**  **Dreadlocks**: Most identifiable symbol that someone is Rastafari, although not all Rastafaris will wear dreadlocks. They symbolise the rejection of the established norms of well-groomed hair, which in turn are seen as being a rejection of African descent. Dreadlocks are also seen as being reflective of a lion’s mane, with the wearer showing boldness and confidence. This gives the ‘wearer’ the strength to stand up to oppression and injustice. They are also a symbol of **IandI** consciousness connecting a Rasta to **Jah**, as a promise to **Jah**.  Colours:  Black: Black is seen as representing ‘nothing’, but from everything has originated. It represents strength and endurance and power.  Red: representing the blood of Africans as the foundation of all humanity. Blood is seen as representing life and therefore Rastafari do not eat from loving things, many will be vegetarian if not vegan.  Gold: seen as representing the sun and a form of energy and purity  Green: representing the land and vegetation of Africa. Symbolising growth and renewal.  **Places of Worship**  Rastafaris congregate at **groundings** meetings which can take place at someone’s home or communal space. An elder male of the community will lead proceedings. **Nyabinghi** rhythm is drum music played at celebrations and Rastafari gatherings. Drumming is normally accompanied by chants based on Christian hymns or the Psalms.  There are many activities which take place as part of a grounding:  Reasoning: this involves the discussion of Rastafari principles and beliefs in the light of current events. A final ‘decision’ is never reached, as a deeper understanding or ‘overstanding’ is always sought.  Drumming: Nyabinghi drumming take place, drumming symbolises the heartbeat of the people.  Singing of hymns/poetry: Drumming is normally accompanied by chants based on Christian hymns or the Psalms.  Smoking of marijuana: This is viewed by some Rastafaris as important to encourage peace and love and for the individual’s quest to develop ‘IandI’ consciousness. It is considered as a sacrament.  **The Home**  See use of holy books, dress and diet | |
| **Classroom Practice** | **Good Practice** | **Things to avoid** |
| Explore the symbol of **dreadlocks** in the light of identity, rejecting the norms of Babylon.  For the teaching with older pupils.  The use of all herbs is seen as important in the Rasta diet as a source of natural energy which **Jah** has instilled in the natural world. For some Rastafaris marijuana is viewed as the ‘supreme herb’ outlined in the book of Genesis 1:29. It is viewed by some Rastafaris to encourage peace and love and an individual’s quest to develop **IandI** consciousness. It is considered as a sacrament.  It may be smoked, used in cooking or drunk in tea.  For older pupils to discuss Rastafari in the context of power, society and religion. Rastafari as an emancipatory belief system for the black community.  The reciprocal influence of music and identity between reggae and Rastafari belief. For example ‘Redemption Song’.  Explore the concept of **livity** way of life and the **ital** diet. This can be investigated in the light of living in an environmentally friendly manner or within the concept of healthy living.  Rastafari depictions of Jesus, challenging the notion of Jesus as a white man. Artistic thoughts and aims can be explored. | That all Rastafaris have **dreadlocks**. Although it is perhaps the most identifiable symbol of a Rastafari, not all Rastafaris wear them.  That all Rastafaris smoke marijuana, without explaining not all do or the spiritual nature of this practice. |

Holt, James, (2019), Beyond the Big Six Religions, University of Chester Press, Chester.

Afar, Yasus, (2007), Overstanding Rastafari, Senya-Cum, Jamaica.