



## 1.3 Connections between the major religions

### Learning objectives

- ▶ To know the Seven Dimensions of Religion
- ▶ To understand what religions have in common
- ▶ To be able to give examples of what religions have in common

### ? Big question

What is religion all about?

It is very difficult to say what a religion is. For example:

- Do you have to believe in God to be religious?
- Do you have to worship regularly?
- Does believing in an afterlife make you religious?
- Should being religious affect the way you behave towards others?

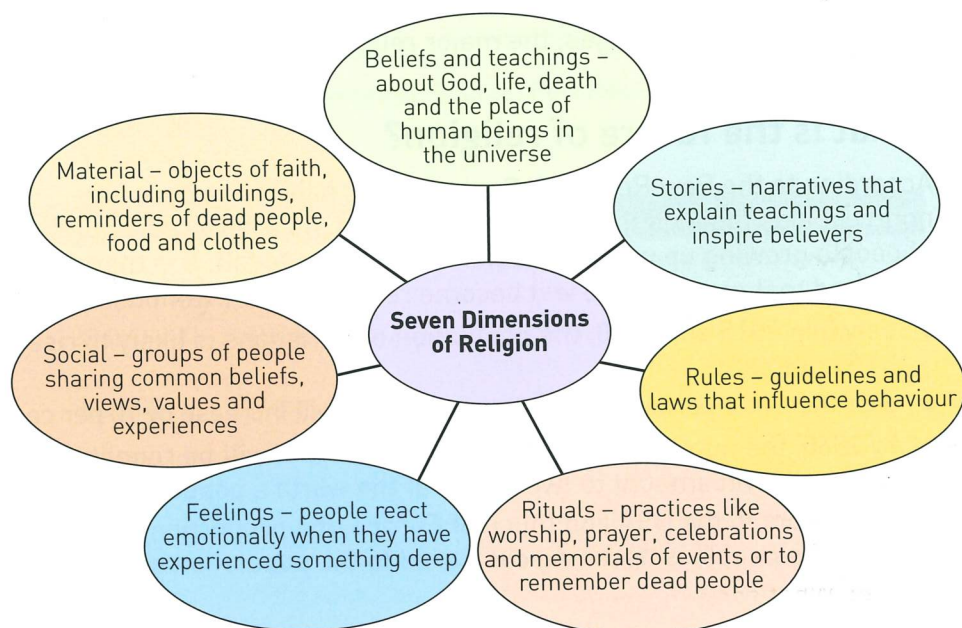
### Talk it out

What do you think religion is?

How would you answer the four bulleted questions?

In the twentieth century, a man called Ninian Smart thought that, rather than try to define religion, it would be more useful to look at the things religions have in common. He concluded that, actually, religions are examples of 'worldviews': ways of looking at the world – and we all have those.

Smart decided that there are seven parts to a worldview. He called them the **Seven Dimensions of Religion**.



### ▲ Seven Dimensions of Religion.

More specifically, the major religions share a number of important ideas, such as spirituality, empathy and a sense of ethics.

### Spirituality

Religious people believe that there is more than the physical world we see. They have:

- a sense of **transcendence**, when people feel a relationship with a power or powers that govern life
- **numinous** experiences, when people are moved by beauty, love or creativity
- belief that life has meaning and purpose
- belief that life does not end when the body dies.



▲ A numinous experience combines a sense of fear with fascination.



## Empathy

Religious people feel that individuals can share feelings with each other. They believe:

- that all beings are connected
- in the **sanctity of life**: life, especially human life, has infinite value
- in **compassion**: understanding other people's feelings and wanting to help them when they are suffering
- in helping others
- that serving others has a positive effect on their own lives.

## Ethics

Because life is **sacred** and all beings are connected, religions teach:

- about the importance of values, like love, justice, truth and peace
- the **Golden Rule**, that people should treat each other as they would like to be treated
- about **stewardship**, that human beings should look after the natural world around them.

## The Golden Rule

Don't hurt others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. (Buddhism)

Do to others what you want them to do to you. (Christianity)

Those acts that you consider good when done to you, do those to others. (Hinduism)

None of you [truly] believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself. (Islam)

What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: this is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation. (Judaism)

As you regard thyself, so regard others. (Sikhism)

## Activities

- Why are stories important in religions?
  - Give two examples of religious rituals.
  - What sorts of things do religious people have beliefs about?
  - Give two examples of material objects of faith.
- Come up with a real-life example of someone putting the Golden Rule into effect.
- Draw a table of two columns. Write the Seven Dimensions of Religion into separate cells in the first column. Then write the following into the correct rows. (You might need to look some of them up.)
  - Adam and Eve
  - Mosque
  - Passover
  - Human beings are reborn after death
  - The Ten Commandments
  - Joy
  - Roman Catholics
- Explain what the major religions have in common, using examples.
- 'Religions agree about more things than they disagree about.' Evaluate this statement. In your answer you should:
  - give reasoned arguments in support of this statement and to support a different point of view
  - refer to religious arguments and may also refer to non-religious arguments
  - ensure you reach a justified conclusion.





## 1.4 Symbolising the religions

### Learning objectives

- ▶ To know some religious symbols
- ▶ To understand the meanings of some religious symbols
- ▶ To evaluate the importance of symbolism in religions

### ? Big question

How do religions use symbols to present complex ideas?

Symbols are simple representations of complex ideas. Company logos are examples of this. A shape such as a tick or a pair of yellow arches makes us think of the name of the company, the products they sell, our feelings about them, our memories. Logos can even make us feel hungry!

Religions use symbolism as a powerful way of presenting their worldviews, confirming their identities and strengthening their communities.

### Beliefs

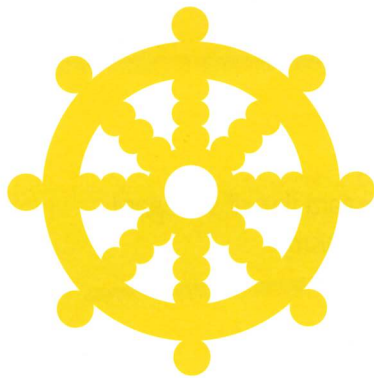
Most religions use symbols as reminders of their most important teachings. The Dharmachakra (or Dharma Wheel) is the symbol of Buddhism. The circle stands for the cycle of life, while the eight spokes represent the Noble Eightfold Path (page 152). Christians use the symbol of a cross as a reminder of their belief that Jesus gave up his life for human beings when he was crucified.

### Stories

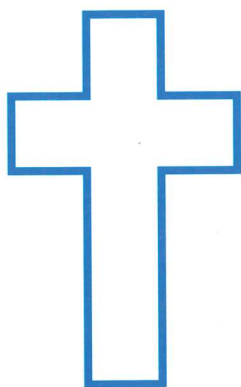
Religions use **myths** to convey important ideas. These are stories that may not be literally true but contain important messages about life. For example, the Hindu story of Rama and Sita is about loyalty, courage, integrity and the triumph of good over evil.

### Rules

Moral rules in religions are not themselves symbols, but the ways in which they are presented may be. For example, the Torah, the Jewish holy text, says that the Ten Commandments ('Ten Sayings', page 120) were written by God on tablets of stone. The heaviness of stone shows how 'weighty' they were. Jewish tradition says that the stones were blue gemstones, the colour of **heaven**.



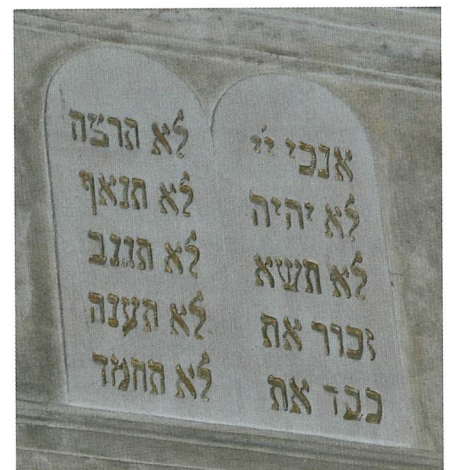
▲ Dharmachakra is the symbol of Buddhism.



▲ The Christian cross.



▲ The story of Rama and Sita teaches Hindus truths about life.

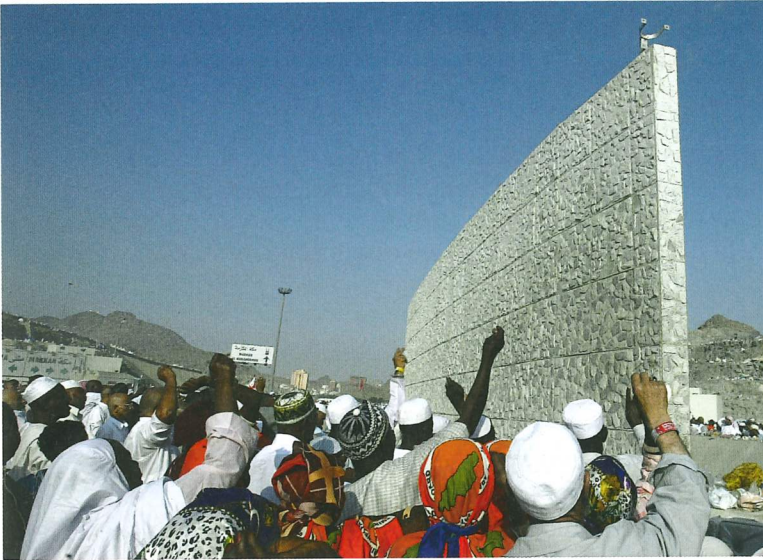


▲ The Ten Commandments (or Sayings) in a Jewish synagogue.



## Rituals

Rituals involve sequences of actions or activities, many of which have symbolic meaning. For example, when Muslims go on **pilgrimage** to Makkah – the **Hajj** – one ritual involves throwing stones at three pillars. The pillars represent the temptation to do evil, and throwing stones represents a refusal to give into this temptation.



▲ The pilgrimage Muslims go on to Makkah, known as Hajj.

## Feelings

Religions express feelings in symbolic ways, with people often using their bodies to convey this. For example, when they pray, Muslims kneel forward with their foreheads touching the floor. It indicates humility and complete acceptance of the will of God.

## Social

Religious people use symbols to indicate which groups they belong to or their status within a group. For example, Buddhist monks wear simple robes, but the colour of the robes is usually an indicator of which Buddhist tradition they belong to.

## Objects

A large number of religious objects have symbolic significance. They include statues and images, lamps, candles and candleholders, horns and bells, plants, beads, clothes and hats, food and water and a host of other items. For example, Sikhs wear five items called the **Five Ks** (page 203) and (for men) a turban to show their pride, their fearlessness, their strength and their faith in God. Many objects are handled with special care because of their particular importance. Some are thought to have special powers.

## Activities

- 1 a) What is the Dharmachakra?  
b) What is a myth?  
c) Which religion celebrates the story of Rama and Sita?  
d) Which religious people wear the Five Ks?
- 2 Why do religions use symbols?
- 3 Make a chart of religious symbols and what they represent.
- 4 How do symbols affect the ways in which religious people practise their faith?
- 5 'Symbolism doesn't do anything to help religious people achieve their aims.' Discuss this statement.  
In your answer, you should:
  - draw on your learning from this lesson and any further research you have undertaken
  - explain and evaluate the importance of different points of view.





## 1.5 What religions share 1 – teachings and authority

### Learning objectives

- ▶ To know and understand some religious teachings and sources of authority
- ▶ To compare some religious teachings and sources of authority
- ▶ To assess the authority of some religious teachings

### ? Big question

What teachings do the religions have in common?

Although teachings are unique to each religion, most religions have ideas about God and what happens after physical death.

#### Buddhism

Buddhism teaches that there is no evidence for the existence of God, and Buddhist ideas about life make sense without a God. God is not important in Buddhism. Life continues after death through rebirth into this world, in a repeated cycle.

#### Christianity

Christianity teaches that there is one God who exists in three ways at the same time: as a Father and creator; as a son, Jesus, made human on Earth; and as a spirit, an unseen presence working in the world. This idea is called the **Trinity**: three and one. Because of Jesus, human beings are able to live on with God after their body has died.

#### Hinduism

Hinduism teaches that God exists in thousands of different ways. Different Hindu traditions call God by different names. God is in everything, and everything is God. The aim of Hinduism is to understand that fully. Hindus believe that after the body has died, the **soul** is reborn into a new body or form (**reincarnation**).

#### Islam

Islam teaches that there is one God who has complete control over the universe. Nothing happens unless God wants it to. After death, a person is judged by God according to how they have lived. Wicked people will be punished and the good rewarded.

#### Judaism

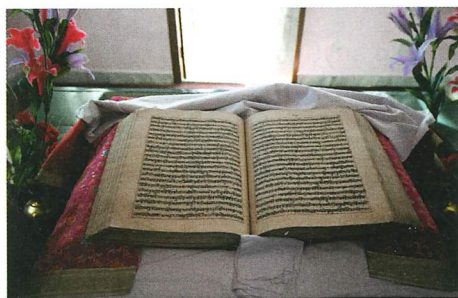
Judaism teaches that God created the universe and created human beings to rule over the Earth. God entered into a contract with the Jewish people that they should be an example to other human beings of how God wants them to live. Jewish people believe there is a life after death, though the form it takes is unclear.

#### Sikhism

Sikhism teaches that there is one God, the God of all religions. God created everything and lives both within his creation and beyond it. Sikhs believe that after death, human beings are born into a new body, like changing clothes.



▲ The Qur'an is the holy book of Islam.



▲ The Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of Sikhism.



## Authority

Religious people try to understand more about their religion by looking to sources of authority. Sources of authority provide accurate knowledge and guidance. Many religious people believe that their holy books contain the words of God, and that gives them their authority. They also trust religious leaders to understand their religion and give them guidance.

### Buddhism

The earliest Buddhist **scriptures** are known as the **Pali Canon**. They contain the Buddha's teachings and explanations of them. Some Buddhists accept the authority of later texts, called **sutras**. Buddhist monks are seen as authorities on Buddhism. They are called **bhikkhus**, **lamas** or sometimes **priests**, depending on where they come from.

### Christianity

The Christian Bible is made up of the Jewish Bible (the holy scripture Jesus was familiar with) and accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus and his followers. The Jewish section of the Bible is called the **Old Testament** and the second part is the **New Testament**. Leaders of the Christian Churches are seen as sources of authority. They may be **bishops** or priests, according to their rank. The leader of the largest Church (the Catholic Church) is called the **Pope**.

### Hinduism

The **Vedas** are a vast collection of ancient teachings. Hindus believe they contain everything that can be known about the universe. Secondary scriptures, called **Smriti**, contain human ideas about living a meaningful life. Those who lead worship in Hindu temples are called priests. Some Hindus have a personal teacher, called a **guru**.

### Islam

Islam teaches that Prophet Muhammad received messages from God that he remembered exactly. They were written down to make the Muslim holy book, the **Qur'an**, so, for Muslims, this contains the actual words of God. An **imam** is a Muslim teacher who has the authority to lead a community, which comes from the trust the community has in him.

### Judaism

The Jewish Bible – the **Tenakh** – consists of 24 books, divided into three sections. The most important is called the **Torah**. Judaism teaches that the Torah contains the words of God, including 613 commands on how to live. A Jewish teacher is called a **rabbi**. Ancient rabbis' discussions about the Torah are recorded in a book called the **Talmud**. The authority of the Talmud comes from the wisdom of the rabbis.

### Sikhism

For Sikhs, their holy book, the **Guru Granth Sahib**, is their teacher for the rest of time. It has the authority of all the gurus – wise teachers – who came before it, and whose words it contains. The gurus, therefore, are still authoritative leaders for Sikhs.

## Activities

- Are the following titles of books or people?
 

a) Talmud	d) Sutra
b) Guru	e) Lama
c) Imam	
- What is the difference between the Vedas and the Smriti?
  - What is the difference between a bishop and a priest?
  - What is the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament?
  - What is the difference between the Old Testament and the Tenakh?
- Draw a table to show beliefs about God, beliefs about the afterlife and sources of authority for each of the six major religions.
- Write a paragraph comparing ideas about the afterlife in Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism.
  - Write a paragraph comparing the holy books of Christianity, Islam and Judaism.
- 'None of the teachings of any religion has any authority.' Discuss this statement, showing that you have considered more than one point of view.





## 1.6 What religions share 2 – worship and morality

### Learning objectives

- ▶ To know what worship is
- ▶ To understand why worship is important in religions
- ▶ To understand the importance of morality for religious people

### ? Big question

How do religious people express their faith?

If you have someone special who means a lot to you, you show your feelings in different ways:

- You tell them that you appreciate what they do for you.
- You ask them for help when you need it.
- You ask them to make allowances for your shortcomings.
- You ask what they want from you.
- You tell them you love them.
- You let them know how great they are.

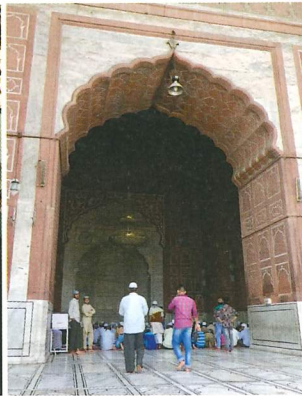
This is what worship is about. It is about showing what something means to you. As far as religions are concerned, worship is about making contact with the object of worship, for example God, and showing respect.

Worship can be a communal activity, or it can be conducted in private.

### Communal worship

All religions recognise that it is important for believers to worship together. This is because worshippers:

- build connections with other worshippers
- strengthen their faith when they share it with others
- may believe that they can feel God's presence more strongly when there are a number of people present
- may believe that their prayers are more powerful when conducted in unison
- feel their communication with God is stronger when it is expressed through organised rituals.



▲ Places of worship are laid out for communal worship. Can you tell which religions these places of worship belong to?

#### Christianity

**Churches** usually face east, the direction of Jerusalem where Jesus is believed to have died and risen back to life.

#### Islam

Worshippers in a **mosque** face towards **Makkah**, in the direction of the ka'aba, the House of God.

#### Sikhism

The focus of worship in a **gurdwara** is the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book that is the Sikh teacher for the rest of time.