

Unit 3 Religious Experience

Christianity & Islam

Key Concepts

Sacred

- Something so special it should be respected.
- Something particularly religious and quite different from other things.
- Set apart and dedicated to God.

Holy

- Something special and sacred.
- Deriving from God or religion.
- Something to be revered or respected above all things.

Pilgrimage

- A journey to a place that is especially meaningful spiritually or religiously.

Symbolism

- Meaning that is represented through symbols.
- A system of symbols to explain other things.
- Objects and/or actions that have special meanings.

Interfaith Dialogue

- Exploring common grounds between different faith groups.
- Sharing of views and ideas between members of different religions.
- Discussions between members of different religious groups.

How do people express their interest in something?

All people have different ways to show they are interested in something. It might be going to a special place or event; learning more about something; talking to people who share the same interests; or joining with other people in a project of some kind, etc.

For religious people, there are different ways they can express their faith. Below are a few examples:

- Worship
- Going to a religious building
- Going on a religious journey or pilgrimage
- Prayer
- Festivals and celebrations
- Clothes
- Food
- Sharing their faith with others (interfaith dialogue)
- Telling others about their faith (evangelism)

Worship

People express their faith through worship. This can take many forms, depending on which religion you belong to and which denomination.

For example, Roman Catholics are very traditional and use many statues and images especially of Jesus and Mary to help them pray. Anglicans (The Church of England) do not tend to have many statues, and they do not pray to Mary in the way Roman Catholics do. The Quakers (Society of Friends) have a very plain room, with maybe a cross in it. They tend to sit in a circle in silence and read independently from the bible.

Religious Buildings

There are many religious buildings around the world. They all differ, depending on the purpose of that building for worshippers.

Some religious buildings are purpose built and some are buildings that have been converted into places of worship.

For most religious people, as long as there is a place for the religious community to meet and pray together, it does not matter what the building looks like or whether it was purpose built, especially if the money saved not building a new purpose built place of worship could be used to help others in need.

Some worshippers however, do feel that a purpose built place of worship is very special. Purpose built, places of worship tend to have authority and reverence. They demand respect from worshippers, and they help people focus on prayer. E.g. through the furniture used and ambiance of the place.

The Church & Church features

Different Christian denominations have different places of worship.

The Church of England

- ❖ The church was traditionally built in the shape of the cross.
- ❖ The most important part is the **sanctuary** where the altar is found. In Britain, the altar is found near the eastern wall face the rising sun, a symbol of light overcoming darkness, goodness overcoming evil. It also symbolises Jesus' resurrection - Jesus being 'Light of the world'.
- ❖ The **altar** is where the bread and wine are consecrated (blessed) a symbol of the sacrifice Jesus made for the whole of humanity. The Eucharist is the most important part of worship.

- ❖ The **font** is found near the main door to the church (western wall). It is a symbol of new life and being welcomed into the Christian community- God's family, via baptism/christening.
- ❖ The **Lectern** is the stand where the bible is placed and where the reading takes place. It is often shaped as an eagle standing on the world with its wings out stretched, which symbolises the good news and 'Word of God' being carried around the world
- ❖ The **pulpit** is the raised platform which is used for sermons. This is where the priest will explain the reading to the congregation, and will talk about the message he wants to send out that week. It is raised to symbolise the importance of the sermon.
- ❖ **Stained** glass windows are used to help people remember different scenes from the bible, usually scenes from the life of Christ. They were traditionally used before the congregation could read from the bible.
- ❖ **Cross** is used to remind Christians of the death of Jesus and the sacrifice he made.

The Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church has all of the above features as well as a few extra:

- ❖ **Confessional**, where worshippers will confess their sins to the priest and ask for absolution. This is confidential.
- ❖ **Stoup**, a small bowl containing holy water, places in the entrance of the church. Worshippers will bless themselves by

dipping their finger into the stoup and marking the cross on their own head. This is done before and after the service.

- ❖ **Stations of the Cross.** These are different pictures or statues which show the journey Jesus made between his arrest and crucifixion.
- ❖ **Statues.** These are used to help people worship, but it is important to remember that Christians do not worship the statues. They only worship God. Many statues are of Jesus and Mary. Mary is very important for Roman Catholics, as they believe that without her, Jesus would not have existed.
- ❖ **Tabernacle** is a box where the bread and wine are kept. This is the most holy part of the Roman Catholic Church.

Rules in the Church

- Respect the sacredness of the place and purpose of those attending for worship.
- No talking during the sermon or the bible readings.
- No smoking
- Men to remove hats when inside
- Avoid eating in the sanctuary
- Make sure all mobile phones are off.
- Try to be modest in the way you dress

Type of activities in the Church

- Worship & prayer (morning and evening on Sunday and during some other days in the week)
- Sunday School for children
- Choir
- Cubs/brownies

- Social meetings
- Drama groups
- Baptisms
- Confirmations
- Weddings
- Funerals
- Private devotions.
- And many more..... Remember the church is there for the community to use.

The Mosque

The mosque is a central part of a Muslims life, it is mainly a place of worship, but it is many more things. Muslims do not have to pray at the mosque apart from Men on the Friday 'Jummah' prayer. At any other times Muslims can pray anywhere as long as it is clean. Also if more than one Muslim is praying in the same place, they must stand shoulder to shoulder and pray together which shows 'Ummah' - brotherhood.

The features

- ❖ The **minaret** - The tower of the Mosque, where the call to prayer is made.
- ❖ The **washroom** - the room where all Muslims perform 'wudu' (Ritual wash) before prayer to make sure they are physically and mentally (niyyah) ready for prayer. (Men and women have different rooms)
- ❖ The **prayer hall** - a large hall with very little furniture. The hall is large so that all Muslims can pray together showing 'ummah' and equality. Women will pray in a different area to men, called the 'women's gallery', so that their dignity is kept when

prostrating and so that all worshippers both men and women can full concentrate on Allah.

- ❖ **Qibla wall** - this is the wall in the prayer hall that all Muslims face when they pray. When facing the 'Qibla wall', all Muslims know that they are facing the Holy City Makkah, in Saudi Arabia.
- ❖ **Mirhab** is niche or alcove. This is always found in the Qibla wall, so that Muslims will recognise the wall.
- ❖ **Minbar** - the raised platform found in the mirhab (niche). This is where the imam will stand to speak to the worshippers, lead prayers and deliver his sermon. It is raised so that all can see and hear the imam. It is important to remember that when the rak'ahs take place (prayer positions) the imam, will face the Qibla wall with all other Muslims, and have his back to the other worshippers

Rules of behaviour

- To respect the sacredness of the place of worship and the purpose of those attending for worship.
- Take shoes off before entering the mosque
- Men and women to be separate in the prayer hall
- Women to cover up apart from hands, feet and face.
- Men to cover up from hips to the knees
- Perform wudu before prayer
- Treat others equally
- Face the Makkah when praying
- Sit on the floor.

Activities

The mosque is primarily a place of worship and prayer hall.

It is also:

A community meeting place.

A school (madrassah)

A place for weddings - (not the prayer hall).

A place for funerals.

Pilgrimage

All religions have places that are special to members of the faith because of their connections in some way with the founder or important leaders, or where some great happening or experience took place. Often believers make pilgrimages to such places, so show their devotion, or as a witness to their faith, or to grow spiritually through the experience. Some religions require or expect pilgrimage to be made at some time in one's life. Others have no requirement, but individual believers, or groups from faith communities, do undertake a pilgrimage as part of their spiritual life and experience.

Why is pilgrimage important for worshippers?

- To develop spiritually
- To see for yourself where religious actions happened
- To feel a sense of community or ummah
- To fulfil a religious duty
- To show devotion to God/Allah
- To share unity with others as they witness their faith.

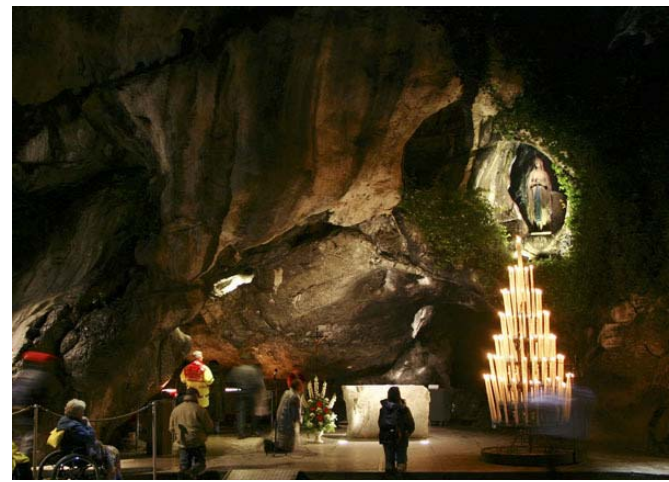
Christianity & Pilgrimage

There is no requirement for Christians to go on any pilgrimage, but many Christians wish to Visit the **Holy Land**, and specific sites within it, because of its connections with Jesus and his life.

The Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem, Golgotha (The place where Jesus was crucified), and the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem are the most popular sites.

Many pilgrims like to walk along the Via Dolorosa (the path Jesus walked from Pilate to Golgotha), and often will stop and meditate and pray, or listen to the readings of the New Testament about the events.

Another popular Christian Pilgrimage site is **Lourdes** in France, where St Bernadette is said to have had a number of visions from the Virgin Mary. There is a spring of water there that is claimed to have healing properties, and many pilgrims go because of illness or disease. Since 1873 there have been about 64 cases



declared as miracles, but many people have felt greatly helped by visiting the place because:

They have felt a real sense of God's presence.

They feel spiritually refreshed and encouraged.

They have a greater sense of community and identity through the experience.

Muslims and pilgrimage

The Hajj - the Pilgrimage to **Makkah**, (Saudi Arabia) is one of the Five Pillars of Islam on which the faith rests. The Hajj takes place annually and is the duty of every adult Muslim, male or female, who is physically or mentally fit, to make the pilgrimage once in a lifetime. The pilgrims must be able to afford the journey without causing hardship to their families back home.

Hajj is the greater pilgrimage and can only be taken during Dhul-Hihhah, the 12th month of the Muslim calendar . Muslims can however go on Pilgrimage at any time of the year, this is known as Umrah the lesser pilgrimage. (It is important to remember that this lesser pilgrimage does not count as Hajj).

Muslims who live near Saudi Arabia can make the journey often, with modern transport, it is much easier than in the past. Some people, however, live so far away or are so poor that it takes them a lifetime to save for this journey. Sometimes a family or a community collect enough money to send just one person. Borrowing the money is not permitted and, of course, it should not be gained dishonestly or by means which are unacceptable in Islam, such as gambling.

Islam is a compassionate religion and shows consideration to the poor. Muslims who are too sick to make the journey can give the Hajj savings to charity or they can pay for a substitute to go to Makkah in their place. The substitute must already have made the pilgrimage on their own behalf.

Those who cannot, for genuine reasons, make the journey have only to declare that it is their niyyah, their heartfelt sincere intention, to go on Hajj, and the duty is considered to have been fulfilled. This shows that the importance of Hajj does not rest merely in doing the physical journey.

The preparations for Hajj are very important for Pilgrims. Planning the journey may involve necessary practical matters such as obtaining a visa from the Saudi Arabian Embassy, booking tickets, accommodation and a guide.

Women who go on Hajj should have a close male relative as their wakil or mahram (guardian), to protect them. Sometimes groups are

organised so that single women may have the protection of an imam or other men from the local Muslim community.

The most important preparations however, are those which help the Muslim prepare mentally and spiritually for the pilgrimage. Many pilgrims attend special lessons to learn about the Hajj. The pilgrims must be doing hajj for the right reasons. It is for the glory of Allah not for the glory of the person making the journey. Pilgrims must set out wanting to seek God's forgiveness for things they have done wrong in the past and they must be determined, with God's help, to do right in the future.

The first rite of the pilgrimage is when a Muslim expresses the niyyah, intention, of going on Hajj and puts on the ihram. The irham is a white seamless garment similar to the clothes worn by Muhammad(PBUH) and the prophets before him. 'Putting on the irham' means to enter a state of ritual purity. This involves not only wearing plain white clothes but also avoiding various distractions which might divert the pilgrims from their intentions. Muslims who live in Makkah begin their pilgrimage when they put on the irham.

At certain places called miqat, which mark a boundary about ten miles outside the sacred city, the pilgrims travelling to Makkah change from their normal clothes to show that they are leaving ordinary life behind. Not even watches or wallets are carried by many pilgrims. This is not an occasion to concentrate on time or money. When they have put on the irham, Muslims say two rak'ahs of prayer and ask for Allah's help to perform Hajj. Usually the pilgrims will make ghusl (a ritual purifying shower) first. The men wear two sheets of unsewn white cloth, one around the waist and the other over the left shoulder. The women wear a long sleeved ankle length plain garment (usually white) and though they cover their heads their faces are to be left uncovered. This can be very strange for some women who usually cover their face except when they are indoors with their

family. Men's heads on Hajj are uncovered but they are allowed to carry an umbrella for shade. Women may also carry umbrellas.

The simplicity of the clothes is not only to guard against vanity but also to emphasise the equality of all the pilgrims. Allah creates everyone equal and treats everyone equally. A millionaire could be standing next to a humble peasant and nobody should be able to tell the difference. Both would be similar in clothing and would be barefoot or wearing plain sandals with toes and heels showing.

Spectacles and hearing aids are allowed and unintentional breaking of the restrictions are excused.

The prohibitions of ihram include:

- No perfume, not even in soap, nor in food.
- No jewellery, except women's wedding rings.
- No wearing of gloves, though hands may be wrapped in cloth.
- No deliberate cutting of hair or fingernails, so as not to interfere with nature.
- No uprooting of plants nor cutting down of trees on the journey.
- No hunting or bloodshed, except in dealing with bedbugs, fleas, snakes and scorpions.
- No carrying of weapons.
- No sexual relations, not even kissing, nor flirtatious thoughts.
- No engagements, nor taking part in weddings.

As servants of Allah, the pilgrims automatically put away everything that may lead to dishonesty, arrogance and aggression. They must also forget the worries and the pleasures of normal life. The pilgrims must be single-minded and not let anything distract them. They should not quarrel or lose their tempers or be irritable. They are to try to be at peace in their hearts and minds and to accept the hardships of the journey without complaint. During Hajj they are to think of Allah at all times. From the moment they change into ihram

the pilgrims recite the talbiyah, the words they will recite all through Hajj.

'Labbayka Allahumma Labbayka' - 'Here I am, O Allah, here I am'.

The Customs and Significance of Hajj

The Hajj is probably the largest most spectacular gathering of people at any one place on earth. It is no wonder why Muslims say that the only greater gathering will be at the Day of Judgement.

Muhammad (PBUH) performed the lesser pilgrimage several times, but he performed the Hajj only once in his lifetime, in 10 AH, 632 CE, shortly before his death. His example and instructions fixed the details of the route for this holy journey. For fourteen centuries, millions of Muslims from all over the world have made the pilgrimage to the birthplace of Islam.

The Hajj is performed between the 8th and 13th days of Dhul-Hijjah. The essential parts of Hajj are the four rites which are obligatory in the Qur'an:

- Putting on the ihram
- Doing tawaf (circling the Ka'bah)
- Going to Arafat
- Making the last tawaf after returning from Arafat.

Day 1 - 8th Dhul Hijjah

- Ihram is put on. From now on, the pilgrim must complete the Hajj.
- Pilgrims state their niyyah - intention to complete the hajj.



- Pilgrims will enter the central Mosque and walk around the Kabah 7 times anti-clockwise. (1st place of worship for Muslims)
- Pilgrims will then run/walk between two hills and drink from the Zamzam Well.
- They will set up camp in Mina.

Day 2 -9th Dhul Hijjah

- This is the most important day of the pilgrimage.
- Pilgrims will spend all day on the mount of Arafat, repenting of their sins and promising Allah that they will not sin again.
- That evening, Muslims will collect stones for the next day.



Day 3 -10th Dhul Hijjah

- Pilgrims will throw stones at three large pillars. This is called 'Stoning the Devil'. It is a symbol of rejecting sin and evil temptations.
- Muslims really enjoy this day, however it is very crowded and dangerous.



All of the above days must be done on Dhul Hijjah.

After these three days, there will then be a festival called Id ul Adha. It is the most popular Muslim festival and is celebrated worldwide, not just when on Hajj.

Males will shave their heads and females will cut a lock of hair. This is called unfurling and is a symbol of new life. A goat or sheep will be sacrificed and great feasts will be had by all.



Pilgrims will then take a few days to revisit the main sites.

Day 4 - or The Last Day (can be done either on 12th, 13th 14th Dhul Hijjah - pilgrim's choice)

- To complete the hajj, the pilgrim must return to the main mosque to circle the Ka'bah seven more times.
- They are now free to take off the irham and go home.
- (The irham robes are kept. Often Muslims will be buried in these robes when they die).

Mission and Evangelism

Within some religions, there is an expectation or an emphasis on making an effort to tell other people about the faith. This may take many forms, such as giving out pamphlets (often called 'tracts'), holding special 'evangelistic' services or missions, making door to door visits in a particular neighbourhood, or simply individuals telling their friends and neighbours about their beliefs, and inviting them to join them at events in their place of worship.

Mission

Mission is a word that means 'act of sending' or 'the duty on which the person is sent'. So in religion it referred to the act of going out to preach faith to others - because the person (or missionary) was sent.

Evangelism

'Evangel' is a word meaning 'good tidings' or 'the gospel'. So evangelism has come to mean the ways and means some religions take to spread their belief to others. A person in this sort of work would be called an 'evangelist'. (You may see these evangelists in busy shopping streets, preaching about their faith).

Conversion

This is the term meaning to change from one religion to another or from no religion to being a religious person.

Religious attitudes towards mission and evangelism vary greatly. Some feel it is their duty, others feel that people need to make up their own personal choices about what to believe.

There is always an emphasis on sharing religious beliefs, but some people feel that mission and evangelism can sometimes be too forceful.

Many people share their religious beliefs with others in order to promote a mutual understanding of how and why people worship in different ways. This way of sharing the faith is called **interfaith dialogue**. E.g. Corrymeela. (see short course notes).