

Investigator briefing:

WORSHIP



This double page shares subject knowledge for teachers, some teaching and learning strategies and further information on the multidisciplinary pages of the book.

This book focuses on worship, what it looks like in practice and its importance for several religious worldviews. Worship is clearly an activity that is of importance to the majority of religious worldviews. It is not only something conducted by those with religious worldviews – some people would use the word ‘worship’ to describe their devotion to a partner (although the Church of England wedding service has changed the word ‘worship’ to ‘honour’) or even to a football team.

The word ‘worship’ is used in respect of the high value placed on ‘someone or something’ and the intention of the person toward the focus of worship.

Worship usually includes ritualistic activity such as meditation, silence, singing, chanting and reciting. It may be lengthy or brief, and may be repeated at intervals. It may involve particular body positions, such as closed eyes, standing or sitting or prostrating.

Through worship people express their beliefs, their love and their devotion, most often to God or a supreme being. One way of categorising worship is into public and private worship. Below is a brief summary of approaches to worship in six religious worldviews. Please note that there is great diversity in all of these worldviews, and what is said below is only a summary or starting point.

FACT FILE

BUDDHIST WORSHIP

Worship of and belief in a supreme deity does not form part of Buddhist doctrine or mainstream Buddhist thought. The Buddha is respected as a teacher and a guide but not worshipped as a god. ‘Puja’ is the name for ceremonies involving meditation, prayer, offerings or gifts and can happen in the *vihara* or at home.

Buddhist puja and devotion practices are rich in symbolism and aid meditation. Practices such as focusing on breathing or repeating certain words form part of meditation for many Buddhists.

These practices help Buddhists transform their minds and eventually escape the cycle of death and rebirth and gain enlightenment.

FACT FILE

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Most Christians would say they worship God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is done in different ways at different times, both in community groups – for example, in church but also in other places such as cafes and even online – and individually. The form of worship varies greatly both between and within different denominations, but is a response to God as revealed through Jesus Christ.

Some focus on Eucharist, sharing bread and wine to remember the body and blood of Jesus, while others focus more on the word of God in the Bible. Many denominations focus on both, but one may predominate.

Christians also use prayer, liturgy and music in worship, with some Christians using other artistic forms such as dance and art.

Many Christians also try to worship, pray and read the Bible regularly on their own.

FACT FILE

HINDU WORSHIP

For many Hindus worship in its broadest sense involves the whole of life. Hindus believe that the supreme being is present in all living things. The Hindu word for worship is ‘puja’.

Many Hindu people worship in their home, and many also worship in the *mandir*. Different Hindu people worship in different ways, at different times and for different lengths of time, usually pausing reverently, with hands together, for a few seconds or several hours a day in religious devotion. Most Hindus have a shrine in their house and are most likely to worship at the shrine in the morning. Prayers are often said again in the evening.

The shrine can be in any room and may occupy a whole room or, more often, consist of a shelf or cupboard.

In the *mandir* and also in the home, many Hindu people take part in the *aarti* ceremony. Alongside some other religious ceremonies, it involves worship with divas, prayers and bhajans (devotional songs).

FACT FILE

JEWISH WORSHIP

An important aspect of Jewish worship is an acknowledgement of the unity and authority of God as expressed in the words of the Shema: ‘Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.’ Obeying Commandments and loving God are also important forms of worship.

Home worship is significant in Judaism. Many Jewish festivals are often celebrated there and have specific prayers and rituals; for example, the Seder meal at the start of Pesach and prayers said when lighting the chanukiah at home during Chanukah. For many Jews family life is both regulated and punctuated by worship, such as going to synagogue for prayer services with the community or saying grace after meals with the family on a regular basis.

Jewish people worship together in the synagogue as a community for a range of purposes, including to show God praise and to say, ‘Thank you’. There are prayer services daily, but the worship services that are busiest are usually on festival days and on Shabbat.

Disciplinary perspectives on studying worship: introducing MULTIDISCIPLINARY RE

In this series there is a section in each book focusing on a multidisciplinary perspective. These will be written into some of the units for older pupils. We are also aware of the discourse on different kinds of knowledge in subjects and the use by Ofsted and others of terms such as ‘substantive knowledge’ and ‘disciplinary knowledge’. Substantive knowledge concerns the subject content being studied. Disciplinary knowledge (or ways of knowing) concerns the methods by which the substantive knowledge is reached. See online Resource 1.1 for the teaching and learning approach to multidisciplinary RE in this series.

The unit for 8–11s in this book looks at what can we learn from religious studies and psychology about prayer in different traditions, with a focus on Christianity, the Hindu Dharma and Islam. The unit involves pupils putting on two different disciplinary lenses as they become religious studies investigators and then psychology investigators. The notes below support teachers with this work. There are further investigator briefings that look at religious studies and psychology in more depth on p. 26 and online.

Other units in this book mainly use a religious studies lens to explore worship and prayer using photographs, information about worship at festivals and quotes from people who hold different religious and non-religious worldviews.

FACT FILE MUSLIM WORSHIP

Muslim worship is a response to the oneness of God, Tawhid. It provides a framework for the whole of life. For practising Muslims everything is worship, *ibadah*, whether asleep or awake, at work or at rest. Real worship is to follow the way set out by Allah.

Salah, prayer, is the second pillar of Islam. Many Sunni Muslims pray five times a day: at sunrise, at midday, in the afternoon, at sunset and at night. Many Shi'a Muslims also pray all five sets of prayers. However, they put some sets of prayers together. Another form of prayer is *du'a*, or personal prayers. This is when a Muslim asks Allah for particular guidance or help, or thanks Allah for his blessings.

FACT FILE SIKH WORSHIP

The main purpose of worship is to praise God, Waheguru. Sikhs believe God is the creator of everything.

Salvation is gained through worship, and that is by meditating on the attributes of Waheguru. However, worship is incomplete if it does not also include good deeds, truthful living and serving other people.

Public worship centres on the gurdwara, which in turn centres on the Guru Granth Sahib. The gurdwara is a place of worship, with worship taking place in the diwan hall, but it is also a community centre. This dual purpose is evidence of the Sikh belief of the interrelatedness of life and worship. Many aspects of service, such as serving in the langar and supporting the community, are organised through the gurdwara.

Private devotions, through meditation and prayer, are also important to many Sikhs.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

uses diverse methods to examine religion(s) and, increasingly, non-religion (see the investigator file on p. 26). It is open-minded in approach and methodologically agnostic, trying, as Denise Cush writes, ‘to see what the believer sees, without (at least initially) endorsing or rejecting the believer’s standpoint’ (2021, p. 55), but also offering critical evaluation. ‘Seeing what the believer sees’ is relevant in an exploration of worship, which is what we try to do in the lessons within this book.

PSYCHOLOGY

begins at a more basic level – that of the individual’s personal mental events. All the sacred writings of religious traditions had to proceed from these starting points, whether or not you believe that a divine being prompted these mental events. Psychology can explore the mental events of people today, whether they hold religious or non-religious worldviews. Empirical features of these mental events can therefore be studied objectively through replicable laboratory experiments. They can show the differences between individual experiences and the orthodox teachings and practices of religious traditions.

