

ASPECTS OF  
**Religion**

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**S**

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Front cover: Monks performing a  
Cham ceremony, Yulshul, Qinghai.

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# Contents

Introduction .....	v
1 Aboriginal Sprituality .....	1
2 Abraham .....	3
3 Agnosticism or Atheism .....	5
4 The Anglican Church.....	8
5 A Quiz .....	10
6 A Crossword .....	11
7 The Bible.....	12
8 Buddhism.....	16
9 Brahman and the Hindu Gods .....	22
10 B Quiz .....	24
11 B Crossword .....	25
12 The Catholic Church .....	26
13 Christianity .....	28
14 The Cross.....	34
15 C Quiz.....	35
16 C Crossword.....	36
17 The Dreaming .....	37
18 Denominations .....	42
19 The Decalogue.....	45
20 D Quiz .....	47
21 D Crossword.....	48
22 The Eightfold Path .....	49
23 Easter .....	53
24 Ethics and Morality .....	57
25 E Quiz .....	62
26 E Crossword .....	63
27 The Five Precepts of Buddhist Ethics .....	64
28 The Five Pillars of Islam .....	66
29 F Quiz .....	69
30 F Crossword.....	70
31 Gods of Ancient Religions – Central America.....	71
32 Gods of Ancient Religions – Celts.....	76
33 Gods of Ancient Religions – Norse.....	80
34 G Quiz.....	83
35 G Crossword.....	84
36 Hinduism.....	85
37 Hajj .....	91
38 H Quiz .....	93
39 H Crossword .....	94
40 Islam .....	95
41 Icons and Images .....	101
42 I Quiz .....	106
43 Judaism.....	107
44 Jesus.....	117
45 J Quiz .....	123
46 I, J Crossword .....	124
47 Kashrut .....	125

48	Karma .....	128
49	K Quiz.....	130
50	Love .....	131
51	Martin Luther .....	133
52	L Quiz .....	137
53	K, L Crossword.....	138
54	Mary .....	139
55	Muhammad .....	143
56	M Quiz.....	148
57	M Crossword .....	149
58	The New Testament.....	150
59	Natural Law .....	155
60	N Quiz .....	158
61	Orthodox Churches .....	159
62	N, O Quiz.....	163
63	N, O Crossword.....	164
64	Paul.....	165
65	Prophets and Prophecy.....	168
66	P Quiz .....	173
67	P Crossword .....	174
68	The Qur'an.....	175
69	Q Quiz .....	179
70	The Reformation .....	180
71	Reconciliation .....	183
72	R Quiz.....	186
73	Q, R Crossword.....	187
74	The Saints .....	188
75	Symbols.....	191
76	S Quiz .....	197
77	S Crossword.....	198
78	Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism.....	199
79	Temples and Places of Worship.....	204
80	T Quiz.....	207
81	T Crossword.....	208
82	The Uniting Church in Australia.....	209
83	Utilitarianism and Ethical Theories .....	214
84	U Quiz .....	220
85	Violence, War and Peace.....	221
86	The Vatican City .....	224
87	V Quiz .....	226
88	The Wesleys .....	227
89	W Quiz.....	230
90	U, V, W Crossword.....	231
91	X Factor of Creation .....	232
92	X Quiz.....	238
93	Yahweh and the Names of God .....	239
94	Y Quiz .....	241
95	Zoroastrianism.....	242
96	Z Quiz.....	244
97	X, Y, Z Crossword .....	245
	Suggested Answers.....	246
	Index .....	277

# Introduction

*Aspects of Religion* presents sets of information, guided questions, and activities on a number of diverse topics. Suggested answers are also provided.

*Aspects of Religion* is suitable for students from junior years through to Year 12 Studies of Religion and is designed to inspire students to extend their understanding, vocabulary and ideas beyond regular classroom lessons.

Questions require varied responses – ranging from concrete recall, comprehension, analysis and synthesis, to independent research. In this way, the learning capabilities of all students are extended. Activities – such as crosswords – act as an entry level to exercises or as revision.

*Aspects of Religion* has a number of uses:

- exercises for when the regular teacher is absent
- pre-testing or post-testing when particular topics are covered
- topic review and revision prior to examinations
- exercises to motivate the disinterested student
- individual extension/self-study exercises for the self-motivated.

*Aspects of Religion* explores topics such as:

- |                               |                              |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Aboriginal Spirituality     | • Karma                      |
| • Agnosticism or Atheism      | • Natural Law                |
| • The Bible                   | • Orthodox Churches          |
| • Buddhism                    | • The Qur'an                 |
| • The Dreaming                | • Reconciliation             |
| • The Eightfold Path          | • The Reformation            |
| • Ethics and Morality         | • Saints                     |
| • The Five Pillars (of Islam) | • Theravada                  |
| • Gods of Ancient Religions   | • Various Christian Churches |
| • Hinduism                    | • War and Peace              |
| • Islam                       |                              |
| • Judaism                     |                              |

and much more!



# 1 Aboriginal Spirituality

## Spirituality

Aboriginal Spirituality is a holistic view of life, encompassing the land and existence. It relates to a view of the past, present and the future. It includes Creation stories and a cosmology (study of the Universe and everything in it) which not only happened in the Dreaming past but is continuing today whenever the Dreaming stories are told and the beliefs remembered.

Many of these stories describe how the land and different aspects of the environment came to be. They describe the law which must be upheld and describe the relationships between groups or tribes and particular individuals within those tribes. They play the same role for Aborigines as the Creation stories from the Book of Genesis in the Bible play in Judaism and Christianity.

1. What do you understand by the following terms?

(a) holistic \_\_\_\_\_

(b) Creation \_\_\_\_\_

(c) cosmology \_\_\_\_\_

2. Use the website from the Australian Museum online site: [www.dreamtime.net.au/dreaming/storylist.htm](http://www.dreamtime.net.au/dreaming/storylist.htm) or search yourself for examples of Aboriginal Creation stories. Retell one of the stories in your own words.



These hills, part of the Flinders Range (SA), are the source of Dreaming stories for Aboriginal tribes of the region.

Aboriginal people have been and continue to be the custodians of both their culture and the land. Any attempt to understand Aboriginal Spirituality must commence with an acceptance of the integral nature of the land and how the community connects with the spirit world. This is partly because the land provides food and shelter and partly because the natural environment plays an immediate role in the nature of existence. An important aspect of the relationship to Aboriginal existence is the particular landform associated with the Creator Spirit. This may be a river, cliff face, cave or another natural feature which is the resting place of the Spirit.



## Aboriginal religious traditions

3. Suggest reasons why the land is an integral part of Aboriginal Spirituality. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Some aspects of Aboriginal religious traditions are passed on to the new generations of younger people only through initiation ceremonies and teachings. Some artworks therefore, paintings, dances and stories can only be viewed by certain groups within the larger society. This means some 'men's business' or 'women's business' cannot be generally talked about and sometimes the names of certain places or certain people (particularly those who have died) cannot be mentioned.

The particular part of Uluru (Ayers Rock) seen here is able to be published even though the whole of Uluru is sacred and the local indigenous people request that a small number of specific parts of the rock are not photographed. This is in case they are seen by people who are uninitiated.



Part of Uluru (NT) allowed to be seen.

4. (a) List any parts of your culture which are restricted to particular types of people or subgroups in your society. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) Explain why these restrictions occur. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Because Aboriginal Spirituality is so connected to the land, much time and effort has been expended by Aborigines to obtain land title over the traditional lands. A number of court cases in Australia have supported the concept of Native Title and government legislation in both federal and state parliaments have supported the rights of Aborigines to areas of land throughout the country. Recent high profile stories have included court decisions in important cases such as Mabo, Wik and Yarmirr (the sea rights case).

### Extension

The website [www.nntt.gov.au/metacard/files/TNT2/TNT Issue 2 2002.pdf](http://www.nntt.gov.au/metacard/files/TNT2/TNT%20Issue%202002.pdf) presents a recent issue of *Talking Native Title* with a summary of the progress from recognition of Native Title to the journal date of 2002.

5. (a) List the important conclusions from the Mabo, Wik and Yarmirr court cases.
- (b) Explain how the Mabo, Wik and Yarmirr cases have helped support Aboriginal Spirituality.
- (c) Describe the Federal Government responses to these High Court decisions.



# 2 Abraham

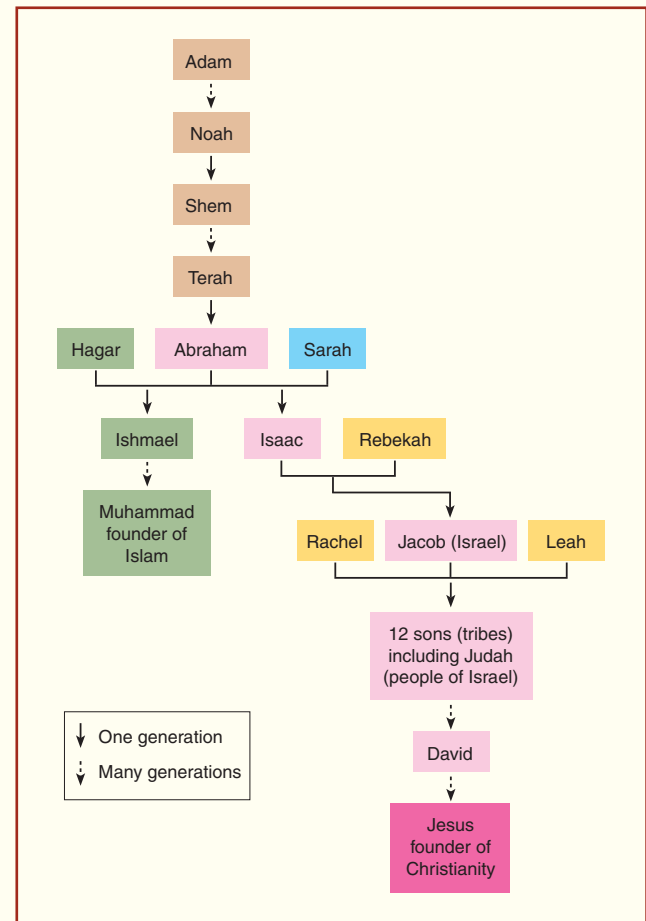
When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.' Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.'

Genesis 17:1-5

The quote above is from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible used by Christians. It is from the Book of Genesis which is also part of the Torah or Law used by Jews. The story of Abraham is one of the most pivotal in the history of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each of the three Semitic religions (called so because they are all descended from Shem, a son of Noah) is connected to the contract or covenant made between God and Abraham.

The contract promised Abraham and his descendants a long and fruitful life blessed by God. In response, Abraham and his descendants had to worship the one God and follow his instructions.

According to the holy writings of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, Jesus was a descendant of Abraham through Isaac and Muhammad was a descendant through Ishmael.



Genealogy of Abraham  
(dotted lines signify more than one generation).

1. Use the diagram to determine:

- (a) the two sons of Abraham \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) two ancestors of Jesus \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) two descendants of Hagar \_\_\_\_\_

2. (a) List two similarities between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. \_\_\_\_\_

(b) List two differences between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. \_\_\_\_\_

## Abraham's contract with God

Part of the requirement for Abraham was that all males be circumcised. Jews circumcise their male children in a special ceremony (Brit Milah – also spelled Bris Milah) on the eighth day after birth. A specially trained Mohel performs the circumcision and it is more than a simple medical procedure. Jewish people believe this is to fulfil part of the promise to God and therefore Brit Milah allows Jews to connect with the Divine.



Circumcision ceremony with three generations praying.

3. What do you understand by the following terms?

(a) Semitic \_\_\_\_\_

(b) covenant \_\_\_\_\_

4. (a) What process occurs at Brit Milah? \_\_\_\_\_

(b) Who performs the circumcision? \_\_\_\_\_

(c) Explain why the act is continued today. \_\_\_\_\_

According to the story in Genesis, which is Jewish and Christian tradition, Abraham was also asked to show his acceptance of God's instructions by sacrificing Isaac. At the last moment, God provided an animal sacrifice and Isaac lived. Isaac went on to be the father of Jacob (later called Israel) and therefore the Jewish people. It is claimed Jesus is a descendant of Isaac.

## Islamic tradition

The first of Abraham's sons was called Ishmael. Because his wife, Sarah, was thought to be too old to bear children, Abraham had fathered Ishmael with a servant girl (Hagar) as was the accepted practice of the time. According to Islamic tradition, Abraham married Hagar and Ishmael was the one almost sacrificed to Allah. God blessed Ishmael and promised that he would be the first of a great nation. Ishmael and Hagar then settled in Makkah (Mecca) and helped Abraham build the Ka'ba in Makkah. Muhammad is a descendant of Ishmael. Muslims also believe that the first shrine to Allah was built by Adam on the spot where the Ka'ba now stands.

5. Who were the following people?

(a) Hagar \_\_\_\_\_

(b) Abraham \_\_\_\_\_

(c) Sarah \_\_\_\_\_

(d) Ishmael \_\_\_\_\_

(e) Isaac \_\_\_\_\_

### Extension

6. Research to find out about Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac. Write out parts of the story in your own words.

# 3 Agnosticism or Atheism

Agnostics and atheists have different beliefs about God but many people cannot distinguish between the two terms or the beliefs associated with each. Useful definitions for agnostic and atheist are listed below.

## Agnostic

An **agnostic** is a person who believes that God's existence cannot be proved nor disproved.

The word **agnostic** comes from the Greek *a-gnostos* and it means 'without knowledge' so an agnostic **does not know** whether God exists or not.

Two useful sites to find out about agnosticism are:  
The Agnostic Church, <http://www.agnostic.org/> and  
Religious Tolerance, <http://www.religioustolerance.org/>

## Atheist

An **atheist** is a person who believes that no deity or God exists.

The word **atheist** comes from the Greek *a-theos* and it means 'without god' so an atheist **believes** God does not exist.

Two useful sites to find out about atheism are:  
The Atheist Foundation of Australia, <http://www.atheistfoundation.org.au/default.htm> and Religious  
Tolerance, <http://www.religioustolerance.org/>

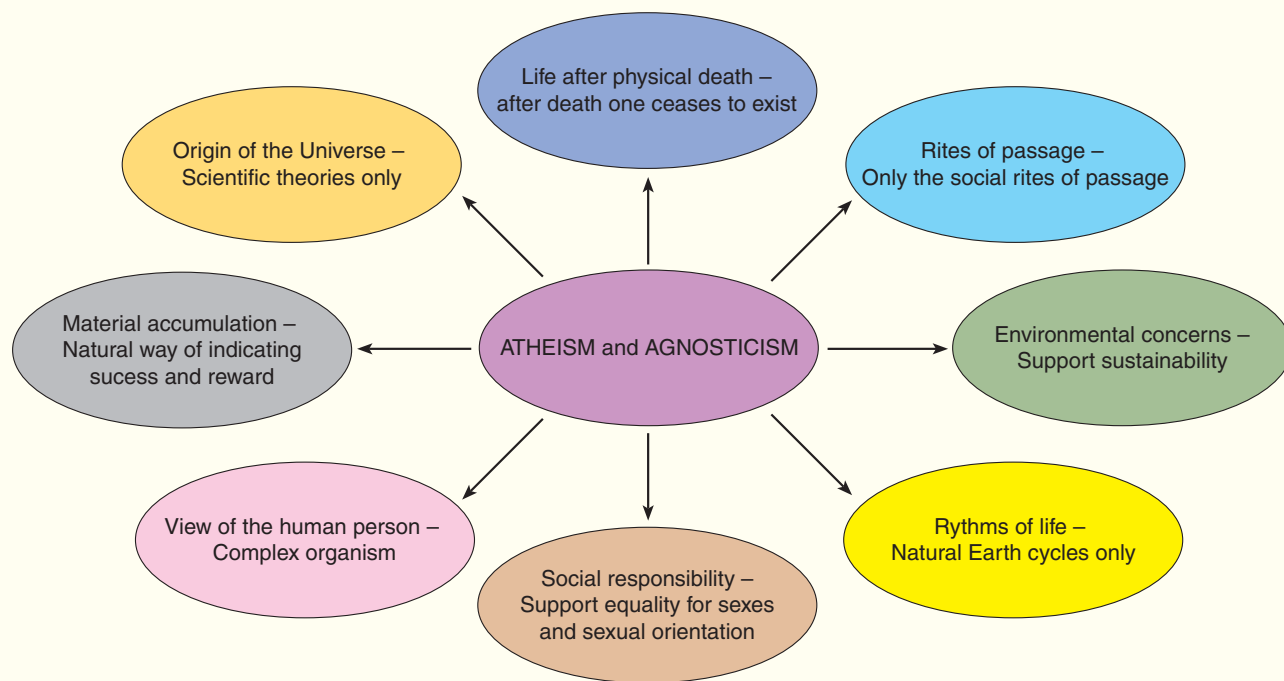
1. (a) What does an agnostic believe? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(b) What does an atheist believe? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(c) Would you class these as belief statements about God? Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Use the websites listed above (or any others) to complete the table showing the differences between agnosticism and atheism.

Concept	Agnosticism	Atheism

## Expressions of agnostic or atheistic belief

In many aspects of social behaviour and belief, agnostics and atheists hold similar views as shown by the diagram below.

3. For each of the concepts in the diagram decide whether you agree that agnostics and atheists would follow the description in the table and then explain why. Add your responses to the diagram and using text boxes and arrows, show how each description may relate to each other.



4. For each of the concepts in the table decide whether you agree that agnostics and atheists would follow the description in the table and then explain why.

Concept	Agnostic and atheist belief (in general)	Do you agree (yes or no)?	Explain
Origin of the Universe	Scientific theories not superseded by supernatural. No divine intervention.		
Life after physical death	After death one ceases to exist.		
View of the human person	Complex organism with structure, biochemistry, culture and sense of morality.		
Material accumulation and possessions	Natural way of indicating success and reward for hard work.		
Environmental concerns and sustainability	Support sustainability as they believe that killing the system kills ourselves.		
Social responsibility	Support equality for sexes and sexual orientation. Support individual protection laws.		
Community involvement and outreach	Only involved as an end to support individuality.		
Daily/weekly/monthly/yearly rhythms of life	Only the natural cycles of the Earth.		
Rites of passage	Only the social rites of passage, e.g. adulthood and birth/death.		

5. (a) Describe and explain what Christians would believe about three of the concepts from the table.

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### Extension

- (b) Describe and explain what any other major religious group would believe about one of the concepts.

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