**Looking For Meaning**

**Key concepts:**

**God =** Ultimate being (creator and sustainer of the world) Deity (a visible form of the power behind the world)

**Symbolism** = something that points to or explains something else. Religions have many symbolic actions and ideas

**Revelation** = something shown or explained that was previously hidden. Many religions have revealed truths, and these are important in the faith

**Awe** = completely overwhelmed by a sense of God’s presence. In many religious traditions experiencing God or his presence is sought through various ways

**Community =** a group of people with something in common, e.g. sharing the same faith, sharing in prayer and worship

**Afterlife =** The belief that there is some kind of life after the death of the body. Many religions have beliefs in a heaven or a place where souls or spirits go when the body dies

**Hindu key concepts:**

**Atman** – soul

**Avatar** – one who descends to earth to save the world in times of trouble

**Brahman** – Supreme Universal Spirit

**Deity** – god

**Murti** – image of god used as a focus of worship

**Ishta-dev** – chosen deity

**Moksha** – liberation of the soul – soul re-unites and is at one with Brahman **Trimurti** – the three deities of Brahma – creator Vishnu – preserver Shiva – destroyer

**Re-incarnation** – being born into another body – transmigration of the atman from one body to another

**Religious & specialist terms:**

**General:**

Afterlife, awe, creator, cremation, deity, God, interment, reincarnation, resurrection, transcendent, revelation, symbolism, vocation

**Christian:**

Committal, eternal life, omnipotent, omniscient, redemption, Requiem Mass, Trinity

**Hindu:**

Avatars, Brahman, Ishta-dev, moksha, murti, reincarnation, Trimurti

**Issues about God’s existence and nature**

**Key religious teachings: the existence of God**

**General:**

Most traditions believe that there is some form of divine reality or ultimate being, who exists in a different way to humans and the universe

**Christianity:**

* God exists and always has done
* The existence of the universe, the world and its inhabitants are proof of that
* Religious experience and revelation also point to the reality of God
* Jesus is the best way to know about God

**Hinduism:**

* There is one God an underlying spirit called **BRAHMAN.** He is in everything and everything is in him
* There are hundreds of deities who are all manifestations **(avatars)** of **BRAHMAN**
* Three most well known deities are Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu

**Key religious teachings: the nature of God and ideas about God:**

**General:**

Most traditions believe that the true God is not only a creator, but has done or will do things to ‘save’ the world and the people in it

**Christianity:**

* God is one, but is known and experienced through three distinct persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is known as the Trinity
* He is a God of love (like a father who cares) as well as judgement (who will reward and punish)
* He loves the world and all people in it, and sent his son Jesus to teach people about him, and to save people from their sins
* Creator and sustainer of the world
* Full of mercy and offers forgiveness to all willing to receive it
* Best known through Jesus

**Hinduism:**

* God is one and is known as Brahman
* He is in all things and all things are in him
* There are many manifestations of Brahman
* He is creator, destroyer as well as preserver of all
* Everything is in him

**Evaluation question on God’s existence & nature. There are four issues you should be able to evaluate, and are often asked in c) and e) type questions. Below are both religious and non-religious views you could include in your answers These are based on GCSE style answers**

**Why do some people believe in God? Why do some people not believe in God**

* It is difficult to prove God exists
* It is hard to believe when there is so much suffering
* I have confidence in God because of my experiences
* God is closer to me than anyone else

**What influences people’s understanding of God**

* I have been brought up to believe in God
* When you have a deep spiritual experience there is no further need of proof
* **Experience of a miracle**
* **Religion and belief in God was never part of my family life**
* **The religious community is like a family to me**

**Many religions include symbols that help believers understand and explain their faith. You need to be able to make reference to and explain these in your answers. Make sure you know the common symbols in the two religions you are studying and know what they mean.**

**RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS**

**Christianity**

Christian – The crucifix reminds Christians of the death of Jesus on the cross, which they believe was for all people and was the greatest act of love. His resurrection was the overcoming of sin and death, so the bringing of new life and hope to the world.

**The Cross**

Christians believe the best way to know about God is through Jesus. The empty cross reminds them of the resurrection of Jesus, and reminds them of belief in God and his character.

**Symbols to aid worship:**

Candles = Jesus Light of the World

Rosary Beads = focuses mind on prayer

Statues – remind them of qualities of person and their commitment to the religion

Stained glass windows – tells stories from the Bible – reminds them of their beliefs

**HINDUISM** The Aum symbol – The Aum sound is believed to be eternal and chanting it during meditation is believed to bring the worshipper closer to God and to ultimate reality

[](http://www.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://thmg.photobucket.com/albums/v629/Master_Becca/th_hindu_swastika.png&imgrefurl=http://photobucket.com/images/hindu%20swastika/&usg=__UpV00kODSwIOr8Hfkfbnuohdzic=&h=160&w=157&sz=10&hl=en&start=6&zoom=1&itbs=1&tbnid=rYd5uqMJhBLyJM:&tbnh=98&tbnw=96&prev=/search?q=Hindu+swastika&hl=en&safe=vss&sa=G&biw=1280&bih=827&gbv=2&sout=1&tbm=isch&ei=jsppTri9C8Oy8gPzscQ0)[](http://www.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://www.energy-healing-info.com/image-files/lotus-flower-symbol-meaning.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.energy-healing-info.com/lotus-flower-symbol.html&usg=__sM_4u7-bwq8bwZtefkor2ganqFI=&h=314&w=300&sz=17&hl=en&start=2&zoom=1&um=1&itbs=1&tbnid=I7BTGXeKJSMjAM:&tbnh=117&tbnw=112&prev=/search?q=symbolism+and+meaning+of+hindu+lotus+flower&um=1&hl=en&safe=vss&sa=N&biw=1280&bih=827&sout=1&tbm=isch&ei=mc9pTqoMyqvwA77ayTk)Swastika – important ancient Hindu symbol representing prosperity, good fortune, luck and well being.

Lotus flower in Hinduism symbolises beauty, prosperity, fertility and eternal youth. Many of the gods are depicted with lotus flowers



**Hindu –** Ganesha the elephant headed deity, who is Lord of all Beings. His elephant head is a sign of strength and he is the one to whom many Hindus pray for the removal of obstacles from their lives**.**

**EXAM TIP:** To gain full marks in the evaluation (e) questions you should include a range of moral and religious teachings in your arguments and include religious and specialist language.

**EXAM QUESTION:**

**‘Religion has no value in the modern world.’ Do you agree? Give reasons or evidence for your answer showing you have thought about more than one point of view. You must include references to religious beliefs in your answers**

**On the one hand:**

* Religion can explain purpose in life
* Religious inspiration has led to great works of art
* Religion can bind people together
* Religious faith can give people a sense of hope and purpose

**On the other hand**

* You don’t have to be religious to help others, or to have a sense of purpose
* Religion doesn’t give all the answers
* Science can answer questions about the beginning of the world
* There have been great musicians and artists who have had no faith at all

**Religious teachings on acts of worship and vocation:**

**General:**

* Most religions will refer to:
* Prayer: times for prayer, ways of praying, communal and prove prayer
* Preaching and teaching, helping believers to grow and develop in their faith, and as a witness to those outside of the community of faith
* Worship: daily or regular, private or communal, and involve different media
* Pilgrimages: these are seen as acts of worship, and have special significance. They can be individual or communal
* Service and commitment
* Retreat or study: ways that religious believers can get away from normal responsibilities and so devote themselves to prayer
* Vocation: the sense of ‘calling’ by God to do something, as a career or voluntary activity

**Christianity:**

* Most denominations observe Sunday as a holy day, and a time for communal worship. (Some observe Saturday, e.g. Seventh-day Adventists)
* Some denominations will have Eucharist, communion or breaking of bread every Sunday; others on set Sundays in the month
* Preaching or teaching (Ministry of the Word) is usually part of an act of worship in a church or chapel
* Private devotions – prayer, reading the Bible, meditation – are encouraged on a daily or regular basis

**Hinduism:**

Puja – daily act of worship that most Hindus will observe in their own homes

Temples (Mandir) – allow worship to be undertaken alone or communally

Offerings of fruit, flowers, and gifts are common in worship, as in the arti ceremony

**Evaluative questions on experiencing and responding to God.**

**There are four issues you should be able to evaluate. These are shown below and are often asked in (c) and (e) questions. There are both religious and non-religious views. These are based on GCSE style answers**

**How do people experience God?**

* Through God in worship and times of prayer
* Through the beauty of the world and of nature
* Through the way they are treated by others
* I know that God is talking to me through holy texts
* I think that God is an imagined ‘thing’ and experience
* Through miracles such as at Lourdes

**How do people respond to God through worship?**

* Taking part in personal prayer
* Taking part in communal prayer
* Trying to help others
* I make sure that I pray and worship regularly, to show I know God is there

**How do religious believers respond to God through vocation?**

* I owe everything to Christ, so I try to live my life for him, and in the way he asks – this is my calling as a Christian
* God is the centre of my life – after all he gave me all things to enjoy, and I serve others too – it is my duty
* God calls all believers to worship only him, and to look after his world. It is their duty
* I chose my job as a teacher so that I could help others
* I have renounced everything in the world and its pleasures, and live my life through service

**How important is worship?**

* For me teaching and preaching to others is my response to all that God has done for me
* To go on a pilgrimage is a wonderful experience, but it is also a response to what God has done for me
* I find worship is hard, but it is something that you learn how to do over time
* For some religions, worship is a duty
* Worship and prayer are the centre of my life
* You can worship on your own; you don’t have to do it with others.

**VOCATION: is not a word used every day but you need to UNDERSTAND it, and EXPLAIN what religious believers mean by it.**

For religious people, vocation is the way they do things in their everyday life, their sense of calling to live their lives in a certain way – and this is their response to God or the ‘faith’ they have. Sometimes that may also mean a calling to a particular job or career

**Exam Tip**

**To gain full marks in evaluation e) questions you should include a range of moral & religious teachings in your arguments support them with examples or quotes. Use key words**

**EXAM QUESTION:**

**“Worship is pointless” Do you agree? Give reasons or evidence for your answer showing you have thought about more than one point of view. You must refer to religious beliefs in your answer**

**On the one hand:**

Prayer & worship often inspire people to greater things. They become more aware of more than just themselves. Believers feel a responsibility to their God or faith

Worship brings people together as a community, provides sense of identity, helps support individuals in their lives & faith

Worship often enables believers to do things for the benefit of others – such as serving the community or those in need

**On the other hand:**

Worship is merely a ritual that people go through and has no benefit. Believers go through various actions – that’s all

Worshipping together in special places divides the community and separates people according to religion

Even when serving others – religious believers are really doing it because they hope to gain some merit through it

**Issues about death and the afterlife:**

**Religious teachings on death, the afterlife and funeral rites**

**General:**

* Most religious traditions believe there is some form of life after death, which needs to be prepared for during life
* All religious traditions have some form of rituals or ceremonies surrounding death

**Christianity:**

* There is eternal life after death which is received through faith
* Entry to heaven depends on a person’s response to Jesus and to those in need on earth
* Resurrection is expected because of the resurrection of Jesus
* There is a hell – the opposite of heaven – a place of separation from God

**Roman Catholic Christians:**

* The souls of very good believers will go directly to heaven
* Most other believers will go to purgatory, a place of cleansing that is between earth and heaven
* Prayers can be said for those in purgatory to shorten their stay there, and intercessions can be made through indulgences and penance

**Hindu teachings about death and the afterlife**

* Reincarnation – or rebirth of the atman into another body takes place after death
* Moksha – goal of all Hindus (salvation) is eventually reached, where the atman is reunited with Brahman

**Key religious teachings: funeral rites:**

**General**

Most traditions have ideas about:

* Showing respect to the body of the dead person
* Burying or cremating the body
* Celebrating the life of the person who has died
* Rehearsing beliefs in life after death, and in the future progress of the ‘soul’

**Christianity:**

* Interment (burial) is a choice for many. Christians with a cross or memorial stone, placed over the grave
* Many choose cremation, and the ashed are scattered, or sometimes buried in a special box
* A funeral service may include a Eucharist or a Mass
* Most funerals will include Bible readings, hymns, and a reference to the resurrection and new life

**Roman Catholic Christians:**

* Funerals often include a Requiem Mass
* Priests wear white robes, white is the colour for life after death and the resurrection
* Coffins are sprinkled with holy water at the door of the church

**E** ternal life received through faith

**T** iming of death in God’s hands

**E** ntry to heaven depends on response to Jesus and to people in need

**R** esurrection is the main theme of funeral services

**N** ew heaven and earth will be made after judgement day

**A** fter life is a spiritual experience

**L** ife choices very important: hell = separation from God by personal choice

**L** iving a life of love towards others is the way to eternal life

**I** interment (burial) chosen by some: cremation by others

**F** unerals may include a Eucharist or a Mass; hymns and Bible readings too

**E** nding is with words of committal: earth to earth, ashes to ashes

**Hinduism:**

* Cremation is always preferred as it helps release the atman (soul). Only Sadhus (holy men) and children may be buried
* Scriptures are read, symbolic offerings of water and rice cakes to ancestor’s takes place
* Ashes are scattered in running water (many go to the River Ganges in India for this)

**Exam Tip:**

**You will be expected to be able to explain the funeral rites and beliefs in the afterlife for the two traditions you have studied.**

**R** etirement or renunciation are stages in life to help prepare for death

**E** uthanasia not accepted – natural ending is best

**I** mmediate family carry out funeral rituals after death – water, tulsi leaf

**N** ext day funeral takes place – taken by priest or eldest son

**C** remation preferred – it releases atman – only sadhus and children buried

**A** shes scattered on running water – Ganges if possible

**R** ituals bring peace to departed soul – offerings of water, rice cakes made

**N** ear relatives gather for reading of scriptures

**A** nnual commemorations held

**T** ransmigration (reincarnation) is atman entering a new body

**E** scaping cycle of rebirth (Moksha) through pure life is hoped for

**Evaluation questions on death and the afterlife:**

**There are two issues you should be able to evaluate. These are often asked in the c) and e) questions. Below are both religious and non-religious views you could use. These are based on GCSE style answers**

**How important is a belief in the afterlife?**

Death is a certain fact of life, but my faith in God gives me confidence to know that there is an afterlife that is eternal and centred opn God and his goodness

It’s what I do on earth that is most important

Throughout my life I have tried to be honest and thoughtful of others there is no more I could have done

I am not afraid to die. I have had a good life and experienced many things, good and bad

Death is the end of life, and the only afterlife is the heritage we leave behind and the memories of those who knew us

I have no fear of death as I know that God has prepared an afterlife and will reward me for my faithfulness in this life

**How important are funeral rites?**

The way we treat the bodies of those who die shows our beliefs in the importance of faith and following God’s teachings in life

Funeral rites deal not only with the dead body, byt also help the relatives and friends of the person who has died: it helps to remember the person has gone to a better place

It is important to show respect to the body of someone who has died: it is a measure of the life we valued

When I die, I do not want to be cremated – I want to be buried because I believe in the resurrection of the dead

I think all bodies should be cremated. It is healthier, and after all, the body will eventually rot away anyway

**Exam Question:**

**“Explain the funeral rites from two religious traditions” (6 marks)**

**Answer**

Christians can choose to be buried or cremated. Most funeral services will include Bible readings, hymns, prayers with emphasis & reminders about the resurrection and new life. John 11 ‘Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection through eternal life’. A eulogy (talk) will be given usually by a family member or close friends (memories of the life of the deceased) Funerals now tend to be a celebration of life. Funerals give people the opportunity to say goodbye and bring closure to the family. Afterwards there may be a tea where friends & relatives can share memories and offer each other support. Sometimes there will be a cross or a memorial stone to mark the grave, or, if cremated, ashes may be scattered, buried in a special box or kept in a jar or urn.

Hindus will be cremated - Hindu funerals will take place usually within 24hrs. Funeral rites will be carried out by the eldest son or immediate family. A tulsi leaf will be placed in the mouth of the deceased with a drop of water. Ceremony led by priest & eldest son. Ashes scattered in running water and in River Ganges if possible. Deceased is usually commemorated every year. Only Sadhus and children may be buried.

**Why do some people use symbols?**

Religious faith gives people the motivation to live a good life

A purely secular society is one without hope and true value

Religion gives people a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives, and so is appropriate in any age or time

Religion has no place in secular society, it is from the past and we should be more up to date now

**What is the value of religion in a secular society?**