

SECTION

6

MAJOR BELIEFS
OF AFRICAN
INDIGENOUS
RELIGION (AIR)



RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, PRACTICES MORAL VALUES AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Major Beliefs of the Three Religion

Introduction

The focus of this section is to introduce you to the major beliefs of African Indigenous Religion (AIR) and how practitioners of this religion express their beliefs. The knowledge you will gain in this section will help you better understand the cultural heritage of the African indigenous people.

At the end of this section, you will be able to:

Identify the main beliefs of the three major religions.

Key Ideas

- The Supreme Being, also known as the “High God” or “Sky God,” is seen as the creator and sustainer of the universe. He may be distant but very active in human affairs. His functionaries are divinities mostly associated with natural phenomena (e.g., thunder, rivers, mountains). They are believed to have control over specific aspects of life (e.g., fertility, war, wisdom). Ancestors play an active role in the lives of their descendants by offering them guidance, protection, and wisdom. Spirits may be kind or unkind.
- These beliefs are mostly expressed in myths, songs, names, proverbs, artefacts, and worship life (e.g., prayers and sacrifice or ritual performance), among others. Interestingly, there is a close connection among the various elements of AIR beliefs. The Supreme Being is ranked the highest. The divinities and the ancestors are on par and are ranked second. They are at the service of the Supreme Being. Spirits and magic, medicine, witchcraft, and sorcery are equal in rank. They basically draw their power from the divinities. The spiritual and physical worlds are connected to each other.

THE MAJOR BELIEFS OF AIR

The term ‘belief’ refers to a firm conviction that something is real or true. African Indigenous Religion (AIR), like other religious faiths, has its own beliefs that makes it completely different from other religions. The main beliefs of practitioners of the religion are also known as elements of the religion. Summarised below are some of the beliefs or elements of AIR:

The belief in the Supreme Being:

In African Indigenous Religion, the Supreme Being is given different names depending on the culture of the practitioners for example, the Supreme Being is called *Winne* and *Yinne* in Nankare and Guruni, tribes in Upper East Region of Ghana respectively. The Akans (Ashanti, Fante, etc.) call Him, Nyame.

The practitioners of AIR believe that the Supreme Being is the most powerful and greatest being in the universe. The major characteristics or attributes of the Supreme Being are that they;

- Are the creator and controller of the universe.
- Are king and powerful over all creation
- Know everything (omniscient) and are above everything (transcendent).
- Are kind, fair and perfect.
- Are the source of wisdom and power.
- Are present everywhere (omnipotent).

Practitioners of AIR believe that at one time God was deeply involved in human affairs (was close to people). The Supreme Being withdrew because of humankind's acts of disobedience. Even though God moved away from human beings the Supreme Being is still interested in human affairs. As such, He protects and cares for his people. Practitioners of the religion therefore connect with the Supreme Being through the divinities and ancestors among others.

The belief in divinities:

The divinities stand next to the Supreme Being. They are believed to be powerful beings who work with God. Thus, they are the coworkers with the Supreme Being. They are perceived as the children of the Supreme Being who were not created but were brought into being. As such, they help Him to carry out special jobs. They have powers that come from God and each one has a specific task to be carried out on behalf of the Supreme Being. The practitioners see them as ministers of God with special tasks assigned to them.

The divinities are largely nature spirits, though some demonstrate divine attributes. Their primary role or main job is to act as intermediaries between God and humans. In this sense, the practitioners believe they help them to connect to God. Their temporary dwelling places are nature objects like rivers, lakes, lagoons, streams, trees, forests, groves, mountains, hills among others.

The belief in the ancestors:

The ancestors are the heroes and heroines of various tribes and families who are believed to have acquired extra-human powers in the afterlife. The ancestors use the powers they have acquired to intervene in the lives of the living members of the society, acting as intermediaries between God, divinities and men. They help God and

the divinities by watching over people and teaching them right from wrong. They can punish wrongdoers with sickness or bad luck such as but also reward good behavior with good health and success such as good harvest etc.

Practitioners of the religion honour their ancestors at special festivals and ask for their help to ensure procreation, peace and prosperity.

To become an ancestor

- one must live a good life,
- have children
- die naturally.
- impact positively on society.

It must be noted that a young person can be an ancestor/ancestress if their short life on earth was not questionable and if they died through what were perceived to be heroic acts. However, a person who dies suffering from any of the following ailments; leprosy, chicken pox, tuberculosis, madness, blindness, swine flu, bird flu, cerebrospinal meningitis (CSM) HIV/AIDS, COVID, or who dies by suicide, drowning or being mauled by a wild animal or woman who dies during pregnancy does not qualify to be an ancestor or ancestress.

The belief in other spirit beings:

AIR practitioners believe that there are other spirits besides God and the divinities. They uphold that some of the spirits are good while others are bad. The spirits live in natural bodies like trees, rivers, lagoons lakes, forests, animals and mountains among others. When they appear, they might look like the thing they live in. Most of these spirits are kind and helpful.

Belief in the practice of magic and medicine:

Magic is a religious attempt to control people and events using supernatural powers. Magical objects like charms, talismans and amulets are used as protection against evil forces like witchcraft and sorcery, and to achieve success in life (to ward off evil spirits). Some people also use some of these objects to harm others.

The African Indigenous Religious practitioners' understanding of medicine is that it is an art of healing and health. For them, the art of healing and health is directly linked to religion. It is believed that healing comes from the Supreme Being who acts through spiritual beings. Thus, the Divine Healer (God) grants healing through the divinities and other spirit beings who in turn make the knowledge available to priests, medicine men/women. Indigenous healers (herbalists/ traditional doctors or traditional healers) use natural remedies to effect healing and promote health and wellness because of their strong belief that the natural remedies contain supernatural powers. Herbalists use magical arts to find the causes of sicknesses believed to be caused mainly by magic, witchcraft or sorcery and to find out the person who is responsible. When the nature of the disease is diagnosed, the herbalists who have spiritual control over the herbs apply

the right natural remedy and provide means of preventing misfortune from occurring again. Thus, the patient is given both spiritual and physical treatment, which assures him or her that all is and will be well. The physical aspect of the medicine involves the use of herbal potions prepared from herbs, plants, powders, bones, roots, juices, liquids, minerals, charcoal, etc.

Medicine men and women get their vocation through dreams, visions, or inheritance. They must train formally in traditional medicine and focus on treating sickness, disease, and misfortune caused by magic or witchcraft. They use herbal potions and other natural ingredients to heal and prevent future misfortune.



Fig. 6.1: An image of a Female Indigenous Healer

Activity 6.1

Your teacher may invite a resource person who may be a traditional priest, an opinion leader who knows the beliefs of AIR to give a presentation on the major beliefs of AIR in your class.

Alternatively, you may look for a resource person with the help of your teacher or a guardian.

Compose questions that you will ask them.

Hint: The following may be helpful examples to guide you.

- Does AIR have any belief system?
- What is the relationship between the Supreme Being and the other spirit beings?
- How do indigenous Ghanaians relate to the use of magic and medicine?

Activity 6.2

Watch and Listen to Obrafour’s song “Kwame Nkrumah” on the link below.

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XUTaCE905w),

Identify the beliefs of AIR in the song.

Arrange the beliefs according to the hierarchy of their relevance in your community.

Activity 6.3

Identify some of your colleagues and come together to discuss the major beliefs in AIR. Present your findings to your class using a Power Point presentation for a general class discussion.

Hint:

- Identify 3-4 colleagues with diverse perspectives and skills to form a group.
- Brainstorm and note down main key points and ideas major beliefs in African Indigenous Religion (AIR)
- Categorise and organizes your findings into clear topics by identifying key themes and sub-themes.
- Create a PowerPoint presentation by assigning tasks to group members (e.g., design, content, research)
- Create a clear and concise PowerPoint presentation by including images, diagrams, and charts to support findings.
- Practice your presentation to ensure smooth delivery.
- Assign a presenter or take turns presenting.
- Present your findings to the class using PowerPoint.
- Encourage questions and comments from classmates.
- Facilitate a general class discussion on AIR beliefs by encouraging active listening and participation.
- Reflect and evaluate your work.

THE EXPRESSION OF THE MAJOR AIR BELIEFS IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

Having successfully gone through the major elements or beliefs of AIR, we will now look at the modes or ways in which the practitioners of the religion openly express their beliefs.

Expressing belief in the Supreme Being

The practitioners of the religion express their beliefs in the Supreme Being through;

Creation myths; these myths, also known as cosmogonic myths, reveal that God is the creator of the universe and everything in it. This means that He created the seen (physical world) and the unseen (spiritual world) universe. Songs, theophoric names, proverbs and artefacts, the nature of the Supreme Being as omnipotent, omniscient and all-loving is clearly and truly expressed.

Theophoric Names (names that embed the name of God or the gods into a human name) demonstrate an expression of the beliefs in the Supreme Being. For example, Nyamekye (Akan) / Esiawonam (Ewe) / Wumpini (Dagomba) / Awineborah (Nankare) (God's gift) echoes the peoples' belief that the Supreme Being is the Provider.

Proverbs (wise sayings that give moral lesson) is another way the practitioners of the religion express their deep faith in the supreme being. For example, "It is God who drives flies away for the tailless animal." This proverb expresses the caring nature of the Supreme Being to His weak creatures.

Symbols express AIR beliefs about the supremacy of God. Notable among them is the Gye Nyame (Except God) symbol. The symbol expresses God's authority or sovereignty.



Fig. 6.2: Gye Nyame (Except God) symbol

Worship life, e.g., prayers and sacrifice, show that God is worshipped both directly and indirectly through other deities and ancestors.

Expressing the belief in the other deities

According to creation stories, God had assistance from other gods in creating other animals. African Indigenous Religions frequently tell creation tales in which the Supreme Being collaborates with a number of deities to create the earth and its inhabitants. This demonstrates how these gods worked together to shape reality. Names, music, artefacts, and other things disclose their essence and purposes: Diverse cultural manifestations, such as music, art, and naming customs, shed light on the traits and functions of various deities.

Worship demonstrates that deities are in charge of some various aspects of nature: The worship of certain deities is frequently connected to elements of the natural world or natural events, suggesting their supervision and control. This highlights how they are a part of nature during worship.

Expressing the belief in the ancestors

Myths and death rites show that there is a spiritual principle in humans which survives death.

This point expresses the belief in ancestors by highlighting the process of transitioning from a physical being to a revered ancestral spirit. The rituals performed during these events signify the recognition of the deceased person's spirit as an ancestor, emphasising their continued importance and influence in the lives of their descendants.

Rituals performed during burial rites, festivals and family gatherings show that the spirits of some people are elevated to the status of ancestors after death. Rituals in funeral ceremonies acknowledge the deceased's spirit as an ancestor, demonstrating their importance in the community. They demonstrate respect, reverence, and continued involvement in the lives of their descendants. These rituals also emphasise the transition of the deceased's spirit to ancestor hood, community bonding, and seeking ancestral guidance.

Prayers and sacrifice reveal the role of the ancestors as moral guardians, protectors of their families and intercessors in Indigenous Ghanaian societies.

- **Moral guardians:** It is thought that moral beliefs and principles are upheld by ancestors, who help their offspring lead moral lives.
- **Protectors:** It is believed that ancestors guard the prosperity and well-being of their families.
- **Intercessors:** On behalf of their descendants, ancestors mediate disputes between the living and the divine.

Naming rites show that the ancestors reincarnate into the world. The concept of reincarnation refers to the idea that past lives can be revisited by their offspring.

Life continuation: Naming ceremonies stand for both the life that goes on and the relationship that exists between the living and the dead.

Reusing forebears' names highlights the ancestors' continued influence and presence in the lives of their descendants.

Expressing the belief in other spirits

- Worship life, especially prayers, reveals the belief in nameless and uncountable spirits. Worship shows belief in many unknown spirits that creates a sense of wonder and inspires the worshipper to be humble.
- The practice of magic, medicine, sorcery, etc., reveals that these spirits are associated with aspects of nature. Some are good, some are bad, and some are amoral. In this way, the practitioners express their beliefs in spirits as entities in the natural world that are capable of influencing human lives in various ways.
- The practice of magic, sorcery, medicine, etc., reveals that some humans such as magicians, medicine practitioners and sorcerers know how to use these spirit powers for either good or bad.

Expressing practices such as magic, sorcery, witchcraft, totemism, etc.

- Within the religion, misfortunes like accidents, impotence, infertility, intoxication, etc., are attributed to witchcraft. Myths and the wearing of amulets and charms, among other magico-religious artefacts, provide additional support for this theory. This component is also highlighted by the practice of medicine.
- The use of magic, sorcery, medicine, and other related disciplines shows that certain individuals, such as sorcerers, doctors, and magicians, are able to use these spirit talents for good or bad.

Activity 6.4

Your teacher may invite a resource person knowledgeable about the major beliefs of AIR and how they are expressed, such as a lecturer, traditional priest, or opinion leader, among others, to talk to you.

Compose three to five questions to ask the resource person, focusing on

- a. Major beliefs of AIR (e.g., supreme being, ancestor reverence, spirit world).
- b. Expression of these beliefs in religious life (e.g., worship practices, rituals, ceremonies).




Example;

- a. How do African Indigenous Religions (AIR) conceptualise the supreme being, and what role does this concept play in shaping worship practices and rituals?
- b. What is the significance of ancestor reverence in AIR, and how is this belief expressed in ceremonies affect the practitioners' daily lives?
- c. How do AIR beliefs about the spirit world influence religious practices, such as divination, healing, and initiation ceremonies?
- d. In what ways do AIR beliefs shape the moral and ethical values of adherents, and how are these values reflected in community life and social norms?

Activity 6.5

Use your digital device and log into any of the sites below to search for information on the expression of the major beliefs of AIR in religious life. Use the information you have gathered from the internet to model an activity that expresses AIR beliefs.

Table 6.1: Resources

Expression of belief through libation	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9wBlgwzHn4&t=35s	
Expression of belief through festivals	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8Z8fv9HsoE	
Expression of belief through mystical performances:	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltkAPi1TU90	

Activity 6.6

Visit and observe the performance of a traditional festival (including funerals) to learn first-hand the expression of AIR beliefs. Examples may include.

- Rituals/rites performed at festivals. B
- Traditional dances and performances during rites of passage (funerals, initiation rites)
- Enstoolment/en skinment of traditional leaders.

Observe and take notes of significant events during the visit that help to deepen your understanding of the expression of beliefs within AIR.

Extension task:

Analyse significant events and practices you have observed, exploring linkages of those practices to AIR beliefs.

THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF AIR

In the last lesson, you learnt about the beliefs of African Indigenous Religions (AIR) and how they are expressed by the practitioners of the religion. This lesson will help you understand the relationships among the main elements of the religion and how they work together in harmony.

The structure of AIR beliefs

The structure of AIR beliefs simply refers to the organisation and relationship between the various components of the belief system. The structure can be explained as follows:

1. The Supreme Being is the creator of everything in the world, including the rest of the main elements. The Supreme Being is considered the ultimate creator and source of all existence. This includes the creation of the world, universe, and all elements, such as spirits, ancestors, nature, and humans.
2. The deities are his agents in creation and the supervision of the world. Deities are believed to be subordinate to the Supreme Being and act as agents or messengers. They assist in the creation and supervision of the world, carrying out the Supreme Being's will.
3. They owe their existence and power to God. Deities derive their existence, power and authority from the Supreme Being. They are dependent on the Supreme Being for everything.
4. In worship, the deities and the ancestors, carry the messages of humans to God. Deities and ancestors act as intermediaries between humans and the Supreme Being. They convey human prayers, requests, and offerings to the Supreme Being.
5. The ancestors are the representatives of their families in the court of God. This implies that the ancestors and ancestresses are believed to continue playing a role in the lives of their descendants. They represent their families' interests and needs in the spiritual realm. On behalf of the descendants, the ancestors and ancestress appease the anger of the Supreme Being.
6. The ancestors and the gods intercede for humans. Ancestors and deities mediate on behalf of humans, advocating for their well-being. They offer guidance, protection, and support to humans.
7. The other spirits have been given to humans by God to be used to serve their needs. Humans are responsible or accountable to God for whatever we use them to do. Other spirits, such as nature spirits or ancestral spirits, are believed to be provided by the Supreme Being. Humans are entrusted with these spirits to utilise them for their benefit. However, humans are accountable to the Supreme Being for their actions and use of these spirits.

All the elements work under the singular control of the Supreme Being. One can argue that AIR is a monotheistic religion because the Supreme Being is the ultimate recipient of worship. But the prayers and sacrifices offered to the lesser deities and the ancestors are a means to communicate with the Supreme Being.



Fig. 6.1: Structure of elements of AIR belief

Activity 6.7

Look for colleagues from different religious backgrounds, where appropriate, and form groups of four or five

Your group will be assigned one of the following scenarios by your teacher:

- Pouring libation to the Supreme Being.
- Honoring ancestors during a family gathering.
- Seeking guidance from a deity.

Look for materials:

- Water or juice (representing libation).
- A cup or bowl.
- A small table or altar.

Share roles among group members to role-play their scenario, demonstrating the relationships among AIR elements:

- The Supreme Being (represented by the cup or bowl).
- Deities (represented by group members).
- Ancestors (represented by group members).
- Humans (represented by group members).

During the role-play:

- Group members should pour libation, offer prayers, and make requests.
- Demonstrate respect, reverence, and gratitude.

After the role-play:

- Discuss how elements of AIR beliefs interact and evaluate the success of the role play.

Activity 6.8

Listen to traditional music to learn about the relationship among elements of AIR. This link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_tZQCgk3C0 may be helpful. Your teacher may help you with other links and audio visuals for your listening pleasure.

- Pay attention to relevant parts of the song and use them to learn about the relationship among elements of AIR beliefs.
- Appreciate the respect given to the Supreme Being in the song.
- Identify the attributes that are given to the Supreme Being only.
- Analyse the lyrics of the song and arrange elements of AIR beliefs according to their level of importance.

Activity 6.9

Your teacher may assist you in visiting the Centre for National Culture or other cultural sites.

Take the opportunity to learn more about the relationship among elements of AIR beliefs. Take notes, pictures, or videos of your observations. Share what you have learnt with a colleague or classmates for discussion.

MISREPRESENTATION OF AIR

Earlier writers on African Indigenous Religion (AIR) were unable to understand the nature of the religion very well. As a result, some of the terminologies they used were inaccurate. The purpose of this lesson is to help you to better understand some of these terminologies and determine whether or not they are appropriate to describe the African Indigenous Religion.

Paganism

The term “paganism” originated from the Latin word *pagamus* which means “a village dweller” or “country man”. It might have also originated from the word *paganus* which literally refers to “the behaviour, attitude or anything pertaining to a village dweller”.

In a religious context, a pagan is someone who doesn’t follow a major world religion like Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, instead embraces nature and multiple deities. Early Christians first used the term in the 4th Century to describe non-Jewish religions. Anthropologists (people who study culture) initially applied it to encompass all aspects of African culture, including religion. In Ghana, some non-AIR followers use “paganism” to describe the religion, leading to AIR adherents being labeled as pagans.

Assessment of the term

- The word originally has no religious connotation. It was a term used for someone living in a rural area. Over time, the term took on a religious dimension, but its roots are secular.
- The behaviour of indigenous African practitioners is not uncivilized. The application of “paganism” to indigenous African practitioners is a false stereotype used to imply that they are uncivilized, rude, or inexperienced. This misconception ignores the rich cultural heritage, complex spiritual beliefs, and depth of African Indigenous Religions.
- All religions have some of their members living in villages, so the location of residence cannot be a criterion for determining a person’s religion. The fact that some adherents of various religions, including Christianity and Islam, reside in villages highlights that location cannot be a determining factor in categorizing a person’s religion.
- Those who use the word to describe AIR attempt to misrepresent it in this way so that it will look inferior. The use of “paganism” to describe African Indigenous Religions (AIR) is often a deliberate attempt to misrepresent and demean the indigenous faith. This label implies that AIR is inferior, uncivilized, or less sophisticated than other religions.
- Paganism, as used in the African context, is a disrespectful word used to describe AIR but without strong justification. It is, therefore, inappropriate to describe AIR as paganism.

Heathenism

The term “heathenism” has two distinct meanings: firstly, it describes ancient cultures and peoples of a specific region, and secondly, it refers to modern individuals who are reviving the traditional beliefs and practices of those areas. In the context of African religious practices, “heathenism” is often used to describe individuals who adhere to their community’s indigenous religions. The term is often used negatively to refer to the practitioners of the religion as uncivilized, not open to change (static), or unrefined.

In some circles, “heathenism” is considered a subset of paganism without negative connotations. In the African context, the term is often used in a derogatory manner to describe African Indigenous Religions (AIR).

Assessment of the term

- AIR is not heathen religion because its adherents are civilized men and women in our communities, such chiefs, family heads, opinion leaders, etc. who are valued for their wisdom.
- Westerners who labeled AIR as heathenism did so due to a lack of understanding of the beliefs and practices of the African indigenous people.
- The beliefs and practices of AIR are comparable to those of other religions, primarily from Western cultures, in terms of their complexity, depth, and significance. This comparability challenges the notion that AIR is inferior or uncivilized.

Fetishism

The word “fetish” is derived from the Portuguese word “fetico,” which originally meant “any work of art” or “man-made religious objects” that the Portuguese found on their travels, such as amulets, talismans, charms, and so on. Subsequently, the term was disparagingly used to refer to a generic idea of primitive religion, according to which objects outside of humans are animated by life. Additionally, it was used to characterise African traditional religion, implying that Africans worship amulets, talismans, and charms. Thus, human-made artefacts thought to possess supernatural powers that can be used to influence others were referred to as fetishes by anthropologists. As a result, those who are not followers of the faith are called AIR fetishism.

Assessment of the term

Every religion has artefacts created by humans that serve as symbols. For example, Christians and Muslims have rosaries, tasbeers and other objects they consider holy.

- AIR makes a distinction between human-made objects that are symbols representing either the deities or the ancestors, and charms and amulets used for protective purposes.
- There are some aspects of the religion, such as the belief and worship of the Supreme Being, which have no human-made representation.

Idolatry

The term “idolatry” originates from the Greek word “eidolon,” meaning a representation or likeness of a deity. It refers to the worship of images or objects believed to embody a false god. In religious contexts, idolatry is often associated with the worship of anything other than the one true God, as perceived by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. However, European missionaries misinterpreted African spiritual practices, assuming that the images and symbols used in worship were being worshipped as gods themselves. In reality, these objects served as mere representations or symbols of spiritual beings, not the focus of worship. The missionaries failed to understand the nuanced role of these cult objects in African spirituality.

Assessment of the term

- African Indigenous Religions (AIR) should not be considered idolatrous because the images and objects used in worship represent intermediaries between humans and the Supreme Being, rather than being the focus of worship themselves. The symbolic connection with these images should not be misunderstood as idolatry.
- In AIR, deities or divinities serve as agents or messengers of the Supreme Being, rather than replacing or rivaling the Supreme Being. Worship is ultimately directed towards the Supreme Being, with the images and objects acting as conduits or channels for this worship, and their associated divinities facilitating the connection.

Polytheism

Polytheism, or the belief in a collection of gods or spirits, is often mistakenly attributed to African Indigenous Religions (AIR). While it's true that AIR acknowledges multiple deities, it's incorrect to assume that Africans worship a multitude of gods without a unified supreme deity. In reality, AIR believes in a complex spiritual hierarchy where various divinities serve as intermediaries between humans and the ultimate Supreme Being. This nuanced understanding challenges the simplistic label of polytheism, which implies a disparate collection of gods without a central, unifying figure.

Assessment of the term

- African Indigenous Religions (AIR) recognise multiple deities, each with distinct roles and domains.
- Each indigenous community has a unique pantheon of deities, with one supreme deity serving as the head.
- This complex spiritual structure is often misinterpreted as polytheistic, implying the worship of multiple gods.
- However, in AIR, the Supreme Being is the creator and source of power for all deities, who serve as agents or intermediaries. Ultimately, worship is directed towards the Supreme Being, who is the unifying force and moral authority. This understanding refutes the notion of polytheism, as the Supreme Being is the central, cohesive power behind the diverse deities.

Ancestral worship

The term is associated with Herbert Spencer (an English sociologist and anthropologist). He claimed ancestor worship was the most primitive form of religion of the indigenous African. The fact that ancestors and ancestresses are an integral part of the AIR belief system the religion should be misrepresented as ancestral worship. The ancestors are not worshipped but venerated (respected) by the practitioners of AIR. It is not only practitioners of AIR that venerate the heroes and heroines of their communities.

Assessment of the term

- Indigenous Africans offer cultic acts such as prayers and sacrifices through the ancestors. In some communities, there are festivals in their honour. However, these cultic acts do not constitute worship because: they are regarded as humans and humans are not worshipped in AIR. The cultic acts reflect the respect indigenous Africans give to the elders of their community.
- They are regarded as humans, and humans are not worshipped in AIR. The cultic acts reflect the respect indigenous Africans give to the elders of their community.
- The rituals are done as a form of veneration for them, not worship.

Activity 6.10

Your teacher may invite a very knowledgeable person in the beliefs and practices of AIR. Alternatively, you may be tasked by your teacher to look for one, or you may take the personal initiative to look for one.

Prior to meeting with the resource person, prepare thoughtful questions to ask them to focus on:

- Common misconceptions about AIR
- Clarification on terms often conflated with AIR (e.g., paganism, heathenism, idolatry, polytheism)
- Accurate representations of AIR beliefs and practices

Example:

Table 6.2: Questionnaire

	Question	Response
1	Kindly share with me some common misconceptions about African Indigenous Religions (AIR) that you've encountered?	
2	How do misconceptions about AIR impact negatively on preservation of cultural values and heritage?	
3	How does AIR's use of images and objects differ from idolatry, and what is the significance of these symbols?	

Activity 6.11

Search for local Ghanaian/African movies from video libraries both online or offline and watch how Christian meta-narratives (principal narratives) have been used to describe AIR as idolatry, fetish, pagan and polytheistic etc.

Alternatively, use the internet and other sources to research images and writings that misrepresent AIR.

Reflect on what you have learnt from the above and correct the misrepresentations about AIR in a tabular form.

Example:

Table 6.3: Misrepresentations about AIR

	Misconception	Correction of Misconception
1	Polytheistic	AIR practitioners don't worship many gods; rather, they worship the Supreme Being through His intermediaries.
2	Fetish	
3	Pagan	
4	Idolatry	

Activity 6.12

Look for your colleagues with mixed religious beliefs and form two groups to debate on the motion

“AIR is not fetishism; it is just a case of misrepresentation coined by critics to make it look inferior”.

Give yourselves time to research the motion. Ballot to speak for or against the motion.

Assign roles within your group.

Principal Speaker: Presents the main argument

Supporting Speakers: Provide additional points and evidence

Moderator: Ensures a smooth debate and keeps speakers on track

Timekeeper: Monitors time allocations for each speaker

Cheer Group: Encourages and supports their team

Guidelines for the debate:

Respectful dialogue and open-mindedness

Present evidence-based arguments

Clear and concise language

Allowing everyone the time and space to contribute

Self-Assessment 6.1

1. Identify key elements of AIR belief.
2. Explain, with examples, key elements of AIR beliefs.
3. Distinguish among the key elements of AIR beliefs.

Self-Assessment 6.2

1. Identify two ways in which AIR beliefs in the Supreme Being, ancestors, divinities and other spirit beings are expressed.
2. Explain how AIR beliefs in the Supreme Being, ancestors, divinities and other spirit beings manifest in the practices of a traditional believer. Analyse the behaviour and practices of a traditional believer to determine AIR beliefs in the Supreme Being, ancestors, divinities and other spirit beings.

Self-Assessment 6.3

Answer at least one of the following questions to review your learning in this section.

1. List, in order of hierarchy, the structural elements of AIR beliefs.
2. Explain the relationship among the key elements of AIR beliefs.
3. Diagrammatically represent the relationship among the key elements of AIR beliefs

Self-Assessment 6.4

Answer at least one of the following questions to review your learning in this section.

1. Identify three terminologies that have been used to misrepresent AIR.
2. Explain why the three terminologies that have been used to misrepresent AIR are inaccurate.
3. Critique three terminologies that have been used to misrepresent AIR and provide appropriate interpretations

Review Questions

1. How does the relationship between the Supreme Being and His functionaries influence believers in AIR's behaviour in the community?
2. Analyse the concept of the Supreme Being in African Indigenous Religion, exploring its relationship with other spirit beings and the role of ancestors in mediating between the divine and human realms.
3. List and explain the order of relevance of elements of AIR beliefs
 - a. Diagrammatically represent the relationship among the key elements of AIR beliefs.
 - b. How relevant is the knowledge in (a) in promoting communal peace?
4. Identify and describe **three** misconceived concepts that have been used to inaccurately portray African Indigenous Religions (AIR).
5. Critique any **three** terms that have been misused to distort the understanding of African Indigenous Religions (AIR), examining their historical context, connotations and impact on your perception of AIR.

Answers to Review Questions

1. Recognising the Supreme Being's authority and role in society can foster
 - a. respect for elders, leaders, and tradition.
 - b. promote moral guidance,
 - c. community cohesion,
 - d. environmental stewardship,
 - e. accountability,
 - f. conflict resolution, and
 - g. social justice.
2.
 - a. The Supreme Being in AIR is the ultimate creator, sustainer, and governor of the universe, influencing practices and rituals.
 - b. It is often distant but actively involved in human affairs.
 - c. The Supreme Being delegates power to divinities, ancestors, and lesser spirits, who serve as intermediaries.
 - d. These spirits offer guidance, protection, and wisdom to their descendants.
 - e. The Supreme Being influences AIR practices like offerings, sacrifices, prayer, worship, and divination, maintaining balance and harmony in the community.
 - f. The Supreme Being in AIR is the ultimate creator, sustainer, and governor of the universe, influencing practices and rituals.
 - g. It is often distant but actively involved in human affairs.
 - h. The Supreme Being delegates power to divinities, ancestors, and lesser spirits, who serve as intermediaries.
 - i. These spirits offer guidance, protection, and wisdom to their descendants.
 - j. The Supreme Being influences AIR practices like offerings, sacrifices, prayer, worship, and divination, maintaining balance and harmony in the community.
3. Refer to the lesson, "the relationship among the main elements of air".
4. a. Refer to the lesson, "the relationship among the main elements of air".
 - b.
 - i. **Understanding:** Realising that all things are interconnected and that everyone in the community is dependent on everyone else promotes empathy and understanding.
 - ii. **Respect:** Respect for various beliefs and traditions is fostered by acknowledging the roles of deities, ancestors, and natural spirits. When this respect is applied to group life, peace is fostered.

- iii. **Harmony:** Peace with the natural world and other people is fostered by the beauty or harmony found in the Supreme Being's creation and supply.
- iv. **Conflict Resolution:** Using traditional methods to resolve disagreements can be made easier by comprehending the function of the ancestral representatives.
- v. **Inclusion:** Appreciating the connections between AIR components promotes inclusion, lessens prejudice, and fosters harmony throughout the community.

5. Refer to lesson on Misrepresentation on AIR for answer.

Fetishism

- *Historical context:* Coined by European colonizers to describe African religious practices, implying a primitive fixation on objects.
- *Connotations:* AIR practitioners are irrational, primitive, and superstitious.
- *Impact:* Reinforces stereotypes of AIR as simplistic and dismisses the symbolic significance of objects in African spirituality.

Paganism

- *Historical context:* Originated from Christian and Islamic perspectives to describe non-Abrahamic religions, implying a lack of divine revelation.
- *Connotations:* Heathen, unenlightened, and inferior.
- *Impact:* Perpetuates a false narrative of AIR as inferior to monotheistic religions and overlooks the complexity of African belief systems.

Idolatry

- *Historical context:* Derived from biblical and Quranic critiques of image-based worship, applied to African religions without understanding their context.
- *Connotations:* False worship, misguided devotion, and spiritual ignorance.
- *Impact:* Misrepresents African religious practices as focused on objects rather than the divine, neglecting the symbolic and spiritual significance of images in AIR,

Extended Reading

Major beliefs of AIR.

- “African Traditional Religion” by John S. Mbiti (pages 15-30)
- “African Indigenous Religions: A Reader” edited by Douglas E. Thomas (pages 1-20)
- “African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions” by Jacob K. Olupona (pages 20-40)
- “An Introduction to African Religion” by John S. Mbiti (pages 10-25)
- “The Encyclopedia of African Religion” edited by Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama (pages 1-20)
- “African Indigenous Religions and the Christian Faith” by David A. Shank (pages 20-40)
- African Traditional Religion” by John S. Mbiti: Heinemann Educational Books (1991)
- Pages: 45-60 (Rituals and Ceremonies), 75-90 (Ancestor Veneration)
- African Indigenous Religions: A Reader” edited by Douglas E. Thomas Publisher: Routledge (2018), Pages: 150-165 (Divination and Healing), 200-215 (Ancestor Veneration)

Expression of Major beliefs in AIR

- “African Traditional Religion” by John S. Mbiti, Publisher: Heinemann Educational Books (1991) Pages: 45-60 (Rituals and Ceremonies), 75-90 (Ancestor Veneration)
- “The African Religions of Brazil” by Roger Bastide, Johns Hopkins University Press (1978): Pages: 120-135 (Rituals and Initiation), 180-195 (Ancestor Worship)
- “African Indigenous Religions: A Reader” edited by Douglas E. Thomas; Routledge (2018): Pages: 150-165 (Divination and Healing), 200-215 (Ancestor Veneration)
- “African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions” by Jacob K. Olupona: Crossroad Publishing Company (2000) Pages: 80-95 (Rituals and Initiation), 120

Misrepresentation of AIR

- “African Indigenous Religions” (Encyclopedia Britannica) - discusses common misconceptions and misrepresentations
- “Fetishism” (World Encyclopedia) - examines the origins of the term and its misapplication to African Indigenous Religion
- How The Western World Lied About Traditional African Religions-<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Des09ZNvGK8&t=233s>

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Glossary

WORDS	MEANING
Ancestorhood:	The state or condition of being an ancestor, often associated with reverence, honor, and continued influence on descendants.
Ancestors:	(again, with a slightly different emphasis): Venerated deceased family members or community leaders, believed to offer guidance, protection, and wisdom to their descendants.
Ancestors:	Deceased family members or predecessors, often revered and honored in various cultures, believed to continue playing a role in the lives of their descendants.
Deities:	Beings with supernatural powers, often considered gods or goddesses, revered and worshiped in various religions.
Divinities:	Beings or entities considered divine, possessing supernatural powers or attributes, often worshiped or revered.
Medicine:	(in an African Indigenous Religions context): Refers to spiritual power, energy, or substances used for healing, protection, or divination.
Metanarrative:	An overarching account or interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people's beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences.
Moral Guardians:	Individuals or entities responsible for promoting and enforcing moral values, principles, and behavior within a community.
Supreme Being:	The ultimate, all-powerful, and all-knowing entity considered the creator and sustainer of the universe, often referred to as God.
Theophoric names:	Names that include a reference to a deity or divine being, often used to signify a connection or devotion to that deity.

Acknowledgements



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