

C. World Religions | Sample Answer

Compare the role being part of a community plays in the lives of believers within the world religions that you have chosen above. (2019 Section C [b])

Community plays a very important role in the lives of believers within the world religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Each belief system differs in its definition, role and value of the concept of community.

A strong sense of community permeates the faith of Judaism. This bond is nurtured by the family and then reinforced by attendance at the synagogue and community celebrations of key events in the history of Judaism. Jews believe that they were chosen by God as a community, not as individuals, and this is the reason for the importance of community in Judaism. The family gathers every Sabbath and celebrates with a meal. There is an order and directions for how this meal is celebrated. The directions for celebrating a meal are known as a seder. Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday and ends when three stars are visible in the sky on Saturday evening. The first meal of the Sabbath is the most important.

Jews believe that no one should celebrate the Sabbath alone and members of a synagogue will often invite those who are alone to share the seder with them. Part of the seder is the blessing of wine and bread and sharing it. The Sabbath meal is never rushed, and people will often sit around the table discussing the Sabbath readings and singing songs concerned with the Sabbath and Jewish life. The sharing of food and discussing what is common to all at the Sabbath table helps to reinforce the sense of belonging to a community. The family is seen as practicing the concept of community.

Other areas in which the family celebrates community are when a male child enters into the Covenant. This takes place at home and is carried out by the father or by a man. All members of the family attend this celebration as it is at this point that the child becomes a member of the community. When Jews sit Shiva (are in mourning) this takes place in the home; prayers are said nightly and people come to share the grief with the family and show the cohesion and unity of the community.

A strong sense of community permeates the faith of Islam. The Umma (community of followers of Allah) was formed by the prophet Muhammad in Medina. The Umma was given the tasks of following the prophet's teaching and extending the rule of Allah to all peoples and tribes. Islam has no priesthood and no distinctions of status. During the Hajj to Mecca all pilgrims wear a white garment, emphasising this lack of distinction before Allah. Muslims are part of one family. The Qur'an (49:10) says that 'believers are naught wise but brothers'. The oneness of God is reflected in the oneness of community. All are equal before Allah.

Community life is ordered by Allah's command. What Allah has revealed as good will always be so, and what Allah has revealed as bad will always be bad. Thus, the Muslim community promotes virtue and detests vice. Justice is seen as the most important virtue. In the Hadith/sacred tradition, there is emphasis on speaking the word of justice to an unjust leader as one of the noblest acts of jihad / striving for God. The Umma cannot change God's law and must live by it. Islam has successfully instilled a sense of common religious identity among its followers and religious citizenship. This may be due to its uniformity of belief and common patterns of prayer and worship.

In conclusion, community is a very important concept in both Judaism and Islam, however, each religion has its own unique understanding and belief about the role of each member within the community.