

## G. Worship, Prayer & Ritual | Sample Answer

### **Examine how religious belief is reflected in the features of a place that is sacred to the members of one of the world religions listed above - Islam and Judaism (2013 Section G [a])**

Religious belief is often reflected in places of worship. Features such as statues, towers and arches often symbolise religious belief. The world religions I have studied are Islam and Judaism.

As Muslims pray five times daily, their place of worship is greatly important. Mosques can be very elaborate, large structures or very simple ones. However, most have these universal features which reflect their religious beliefs. The sahn is a courtyard surrounded by arcades called riwags. There are fountains of water inside the courtyard to symbolize purity and where worshippers can bathe before entering the mosque. The minaret is a tower from which the muezzin calls Muslims to prayer. The minaret looks down on the sahn. The mihrab is an empty arch which indicates the direction of Mecca. The minbar is a pulpit from which the imam (prayer leader) gives the sermon and leads prayers. Mosques are decorated with a special kind of art. Muslims do not believe in making images of Allah, worshipping images of Allah is forbidden in Islam as they believe that no artist's representation of Allah's creation would be able to show its true beauty. It is a way of honouring Allah. Instead, Islamic artists use geometric shapes and patterns to decorate the Mosques. Stars and crescents are also found on mosques and are symbols associated with Islam. The crescent comes from the fact that Islam has a lunar calendar. In the Koran, stars are often signs from Allah as well as the 5 points referring to the 5 pillars of Islam.

Jewish people worship in synagogues. A synagogue is a centre for Jewish life- not just worshipping, but education and community. Universally, all synagogues have these same symbolic features, the Holy Ark with one or more Torah scrolls, the Star of David, is often found, a reading table oor bimah, a special seat for the rabbi and a replica of the Ten Commandments. An eternal light is also found in front of the ark, which represents the light which led the Hebrew people through the Sinai and was in the original temple, this light is kept lit at all times.

There are no images of God in the synagogues as images are forbidden in the commandments. Synagogue services are led by a rabbi and usually a cantor, who sings traditional and contemporary melodies. There are prayers, songs and readings, as well as a sermon by the Rabbi. Some Jewish people go to the synagogue daily, some weekly on Shabbat, and some periodically on special holy days.

Israel itself is a very sacred place to Jewish people. Jews who do not live there try to visit at some point in their lives. In particular, Jerusalem is important because it is the ancient capital of Israel and the site of the original temple. The Western Wall of the ancient temple remains. Jewish people make pilgrimages to this wall. It is also called the Wailing Wall because people grieve the destruction of the temple and other persecution of the Jews.