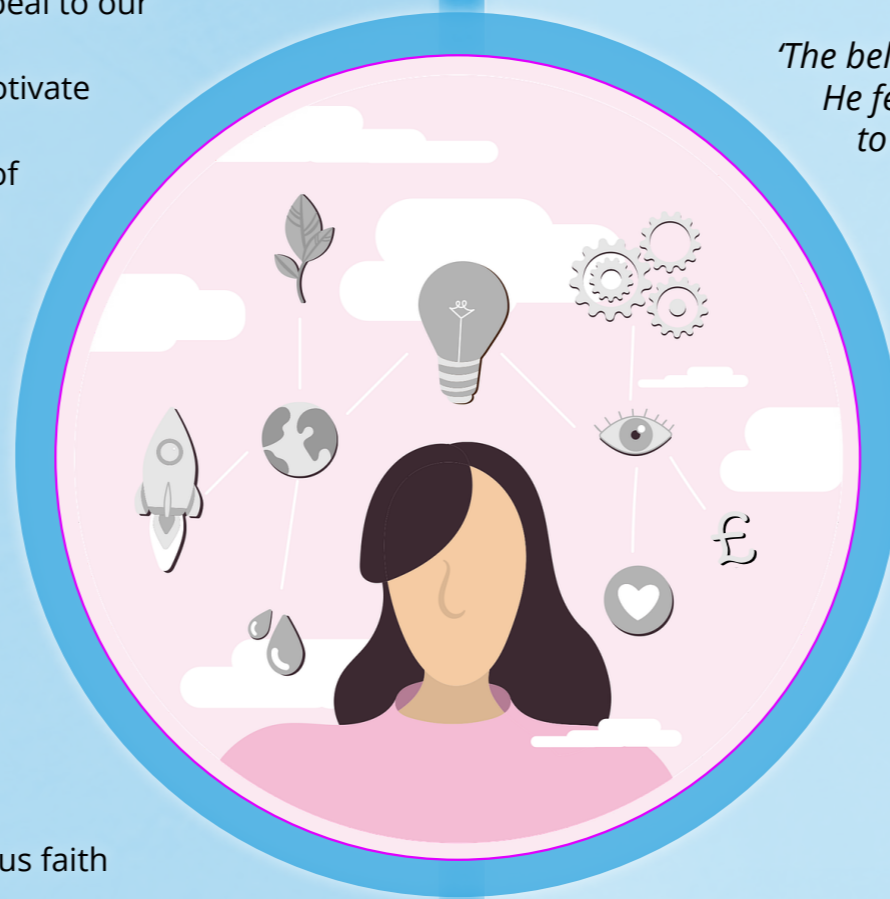


Key concepts

- Alister Hardy described religious experience as producing a conviction that the empirical world is not all there is, thus altering a person's behaviour.
- Religious **practice** includes actions such as rituals, festivals, and duties.
- Religious **faith** involves an act of will, trust and belief in a body of teachings.
- Religious experience can be the source of religious teachings. World faiths often have key figures whose teaching is based upon their religious experience.
- Or religious experience reinforces existing teachings about the divine e.g. if a religion teaches that God is loving, then religious experience will confirm this belief.
- Max Weber claimed religion is a fulfilment of our **ideal interests** (the need to make sense of life). Religious experience may answer or confirm messages that appeal to our deepest needs.
- Religious experiences can be used to promote a belief system, to motivate people to behave faithfully or as an example to aspire to.
- Moral and religious teachings can be inseparable from the account of a religious experience e.g. The revelation of the ten commandments to Moses, or the Qur'an to Muhammad.
- Emile Durkheim wrote that belief in the divine works as a social motivator for moral behaviour through religious practice.
- He also wrote that religion was vital for social cohesion (keeping the community together). It brings people together and enables cooperation.
- Corporate** (public) experiences offer a focus for **collective worship**.
- This creates a sense of unity through fellowship and establish common identity, purpose or faith.
- This can be achieved through corporate, **charismatic** experiences or through celebration of a past religious experience through pilgrimage or festivals.
- Religious experience can be said to restore a deeper sense of religious faith for the individual recipient.
- Martin Buber differentiated between an **I-It** (Factual/impersonal) relationship and an **I-Thou** (personal / emotional) relationship. Religious experience can be said to produce the unity of the I-Thou relationship with the divine.
- H.H. Price differentiated between **belief-in** and **belief-that**. Religious experience can enhance belief in the divine, providing the believer with belief in the divine rather than belief that something exists.
- E.g. participation in Hajj, Kumbh Mela or the Eucharist can help to rekindle faith and commitment within an individual.
- For an individual, a religious experience can restore faith in the face of opposition or persecution.
- According to William James, religious experience leads to the **fruits** or valuable qualities of genuine faith such as devotion, strength, and charity to help them deal with those who seek to oppose their religion.
- E.g. Disciples at **Pentecost** were ridiculed as drunkards, Guru Arjan was executed for upholding Sikhism.



- James speaks of the '**sick soul**' who needs to be born twice to achieve contentment and healthy mindedness. Initiation ceremonies symbolise the death of an old way of life and the beginning of the new.
- E.g. Baptism, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, wudu or Amrit all involve the dying of the old way of life and the start of the new.

Key quotes

'We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.' (Acts 4:20)

'The believer who has communicated with his god...is a man who is stronger. He feels within himself more force, either to endure the trials of existence, or to conquer them.' (Durkheim)

'The best fruits of the religious experience are the best things history has to offer... charity, devotion, trust, patience and bravery.' (James)

Key words

practice	faith	ideal interests	corporate
collective worship	charismatic	I-it	I-thou
belief-in	belief-that	fruits	Pentecost
sick soul			

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

- Whether it matters if religious experience is real or not real
- Whether religious believers need religious experience for their faith
- Whether a religious faith is stronger if it is based upon religious experience

Key questions

- Can a believer have a personal faith without any religious experience at all?
- Is it useful to strip the mythology of religious experience away from moral exhortation and commands?
- Are the fruits of religious experience, such as strength and devotion, always positive?