

Religious Education

Water in Faith

KS2
KS3



Everyone relies on water – whether they live in the bustling centre of a capital city, or a remote village on the edge of a desert. Across the world, we all use water for drinking, cooking, washing, farming and keeping our homes and environments clean.

Water also plays an important role in religion: from personal hygiene and cleanliness to rituals involving water; pilgrimages to visit holy rivers to stories about water from religious texts. **Water is considered sacred in all the major religions.**

Classroom activity ideas

- **Hot seating:** Students are given one of the religions on the resource sheet. They must read this through and remember as much as they can. They will then take it in turns to come up to the front of the class whilst the rest of the students ask them questions about the religion and its connection to water.
- **Just a minute:** Students are given one of the religions on the resource sheet. They must read this through and remember as much as they can. They must then come to the front and talk for one minute about the topic, without pausing, hesitating or getting any information wrong. The person that talks for the longest about their topic wins!
- **Classroom walkabout:** Print off each resource and stick it around the room on A3 paper. Students walk around the room and collect information from each resource in a table provided.

In this series, we explore just some of the **links that water has with the major faiths around the world** and how the religious beliefs, teachings and practices are intrinsically **linked to the provision of water, sanitation and hygiene.**

The resources are designed to support the **planning and teaching of Religious Education at KS3 and KS3.**

Clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene are basic human rights. They should be a normal part of daily life for everyone, everywhere – but they aren't. Around the world, **771 million people are living without clean water and 1.7 billion people without a decent toilet.**

That's why WaterAid works with local partners and communities in 28 countries, bringing clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene to communities around the world, and with it, giving people the power to change their own lives.



Water in Buddhism



Water is seen as a life giver in Buddhism. Water symbolises purity, clarity and calmness. Throughout 45 years of his ministry, the Buddha urged monks to respect the natural resources we all depend on, and to use water without wasting it.

Water and rituals

- Some **Thai Buddhists** have **ceremonial uses of water**. Water is purified by monks reciting specific chants. This **holy water** is used in blessings for birthdays, anniversaries and marriage ceremonies.
- To mark **new year in Cambodia**, Buddhist communities gather to **bathe elderly parents or grandparents** using water, soap, perfume and flowers. They perform this ritual to apologise for mistakes made in the previous year, receive blessings and to bless their elders with long life. It is believed the **clean water will wash the bad deeds away** and bring happiness and prosperity.
- In **Vajrayana Buddhism**, seven **bowls of water are offered** to Buddha and other holy figures **as a remedy for greed**. Water is chosen as a **symbol of purity**, and because in many places it is plentiful, and does not require hurting others to give it.

Word glossary

Vajrayana	A unique form of Buddhism practiced mainly by Tibetans
Four elements	Earth, water, air, fire



In KangKeab village, Cambodia, Horn Lim, 68, is given a holy bath for elders: a new year tradition believed to wash away the sins of the previous year and bring blessings for the year ahead.

Horn Lim, 68, said: **“I hope I have a holy bath prepared by my children every year. The tradition always reminds our children to love each other, help each other, and to respect their parents.”**

Water and funerals

- Buddhists believe that after dying, the body returns to the **four elements** – earth, water, air and fire, while the soul reincarnates.
- In the days preceding the funeral, a **ritual bathing ceremony** is performed by family and friends, who repeatedly pour water over the hands of the deceased from a special flask or water pot.
- In Buddhist funerals water is often poured into an overflowing cup or bowl.

Water in Christianity



For Christians around the world, water plays a vital role in maintaining health and holiness. Water is associated not only with creation but also eternal life.

Water in the Bible

- In the **Old Testament** water is often presented as a **gift from God**.
- Rainfall can be a sign for God's favour and goodness. Droughts can be a sign of God's anger.
- In the **New Testament** water becomes a **sign of rebirth** in Jesus' baptism.

Water and rituals

- **When water is blessed by a priest it becomes holy water.** It can be used for baptism, for blessing people, places or objects, or for repelling evil.
- Holy water is kept in a **font**, often near the entrance to a church.
- Catholic believers will often dip their fingers in holy water as they enter a church, as a **reminder of baptism**.
- In the Middle Ages, holy water was seen as so powerful that some fonts had **locked covers** to prevent theft.

Word glossary

Bible	A collection of religious texts, sacred in Christianity, Judaism and many other faiths
Church	A place of worship for Christian
Baptism	The ceremony where holy water is used to welcome someone into the Christian church
Font	Where holy water is often kept



WaterAid/ Amanda Dolly

"Emmeline was christened in a Roman Catholic church. In the Catholic faith the tradition should be performed as soon as possible. Emmeline was christened when she was 4 months old. Baptism is one of the seven sacraments, meant to absolve newborn babies of original sin. At the christening Emmeline was blessed by a priest and had holy water poured on her head with parents, godparents, and the wider family present." Marisa, 37, mum to Emmeline

Water and pilgrimage

- Every year, millions of Christian pilgrims (particularly Roman Catholics) visit **Lourdes** in southwestern France.
- It is believed that spring water from the grotto **can heal people** if they are sick.
- Millions of visitors come to Lourdes each year in the hope of being cured.



Water in Hinduism



Water has special significance for Hindus for its life-sustaining properties, its use in rituals, and because cleanliness is believed to be very important.

Water and cleanliness

- Taking a bath is an important **daily ritual** in the Hindu faith. It's believed that bathing **cleans the body** but also the **mind** and **soul**.
- Bathing in the morning is thought to help **remove all negative energy**, and 4am is considered the most auspicious time.
- Many Hindu temples have **public water tanks** so that worshippers can bathe before entering the temple.

Sacred water

- Rivers play an important role in the Hindu faith. Many are **believed to be sacred**, and people bathe in them **to cleanse themselves of their sins**.
- **There are seven principle holy rivers:** Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu/Indus, Kaveri
- **Ganga (the Ganges) is the holiest of the sacred rivers.**
- **Most rivers are considered female** and are personified as **goddesses**. Ganga is usually shown riding on a crocodile, and Yamuna rides on a turtle.

Word glossary

Ganga	The Ganges – the holiest river for Hindus
Bhakti	Showing devotion to a god, often by making an offering of water, flowers or incense
Kumbh Mela	The major Hindu pilgrimage and festival held on the banks of the river Ganges



Water and pilgrimage: the Kumbh Mela

This major pilgrimage and festival is held on the banks of four alternating sites of the river Ganga. Every year, millions of Hindus take a dip in the river Ganga during the holy days of the Kumbh Mela, to cleanse their sins and atone for their mistakes.

Thirteen monks bathe first, accompanied by a celebratory march with horses, elephants, musicians, flags and banners, after which the festival opens for pilgrims to bathe.

The Kumbh Mela is the largest human gathering in the world!

Water and rituals

- **Bhakti** is where Hindus offer water, flowers or incense to a statue or picture of a god, believing it will take them from the material to the spiritual world.
- Believers will often make **offerings** of flowers and petals to sacred rivers, and float shallow clay dishes filled with oil and lit with wicks.
- Believers will often take small quantities of **river water back home** for use in rituals.

Water in Islam



In Islam, water is believed to be a blessing from Allah that gives and sustains all life in the world. Muslims believe that water is pure like God, and through water they are able to renew their togetherness with God. Water is mentioned in the Qur'an hundreds of times.

Water and cleanliness

- Personal **hygiene** and **cleanliness** are very important in Islam.
- Muslims are required to wash their **hands** before and after meals and to wash their **clothes** to purify them.
- Even at **death** cleanliness is vital – a body is washed with water before being laid to rest.

Water and prayer

- Muslims pray **five times a day** and must be **clean to pray**.
- To **prepare for prayer** muslims perform **wudu – ritual washing** which starts with the hands, then the mouth, nose and face, then arms, head, ears and feet.
- In **mosques** water is provided for believers to clean themselves before prayer. Mosques are often planned with water sources nearby, and fountains are common in old mosques.

Word glossary

Mosque	A place of worship for Muslims
Qur'an	The holy book of Islam
Wudu	Ritual washing before prayer
Zamzam Well	The holiest place in Islam and a major pilgrimage site in Mecca, where the water was miraculously generated by Allah thousands of years ago.



“Without water, your way of praying is not proper. When there is water you have to perform a ritual, to wash yourself before you go to the mosque to pray. Water is very important, it plays a significant role for everyone who prays to God because God loves cleanliness. There is no other thing to make you clean except for water.”

Ibrahim Vandi, Imam in Tombohuaun Village, Sierra Leone

Water and pilgrimage

Every year, millions of pilgrims visit the well of **Zamzam** in the heart of Mecca to drink its water.

According to Islam, water in the well was miraculously generated by Allah.

The water sprang spontaneously thousands of years ago, when Ibrahim's son Ishmael was left in the desert, crying with thirst.

The water in the well is now bottled and sold to visitors.



Water in Judaism



Handwashing and hygiene are a particular focus in Jewish law. Hands must be washed after waking up, before eating bread, after a meal, before worship and after leaving a cemetery.

Schoolchildren must be clean to study the sacred texts.

Water and the birth of Israel

- Within Judaism, Israel is the Holy Land, and the place where the faith began. Israel's birth is closely linked with water.
- God **parted the Red sea** and the Israelites walked safely to dry land on their exodus from Egypt, while the Egyptians drowned as the sea came together again.
- In this story, **water is an instrument of God** – for blessing and punishment.



Water and rituals: the mikveh

- A mikveh is a Jewish **traditional bath used to restore purity**.
- Often found in **synagogues**, the bath is a pool of natural water, where believers submerge their whole body while reciting a prayer. The water in the pool must arrive from a **natural source of water**, untouched by human hands.
- The mikveh is used for **cleansing** after **menstruation** or contact with a dead body. It is also used as part of the initiation ceremony for **converts** to Judaism, for women to use before their **wedding**, and after **childbirth**.
- The mikveh **originated in ancient times**, when people had to be purified before they could enter the Temple area.
- The word mikveh contains the same root as the word used in the Book of Genesis to describe how **God brought the waters together** to create oceans and land.



There are six different words for rain in Hebrew, which shows how closely people watched and studied the rains in ancient times.

Word glossary

Synagogue	A Jewish house of worship
Mikveh	Traditional Jewish bath used to restore purity
Temple	An ancient Jewish place of worship on the Temple Mount in the old city of Jerusalem
The Book of Genesis	The first book of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament.

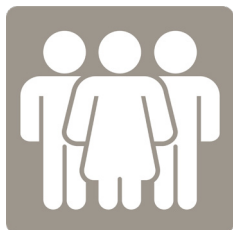
Water in Sikhism



Water is a key part of Sikh prayer – it is thought to purify and clean the soul and mind as well as the body. Devout Sikhs bathe themselves every morning while performing isnaan, the act of washing one's body and soul.

Water and ceremonies

- A Sikh baptism ceremony is called the **Amrit Sanskar**.
- Anyone being initiated must **take a bath and wash their hair** before the ceremony.
- During the ceremony, the **Amrit** is prepared – a mixture of sugar and water, stirred by a double-edged sword.
- The person being initiated drinks some of the Amrit, and has it sprinkled on their eyes and hair.



Sacred waters: the sarovar

- A sarovar is the **sacred water near a gurdwara** (a Sikh temple). The sarovar may be:
- A square or rectangular open pool with steps descending into the water
- A moat-like structure completely or partially surrounding the gurdwara fed from a river or other water source
- A covered tank or well beneath the ground
- A fountain and pool
- A trough.
- Many sarovars were **originally built for practical purposes** – so there was fresh water for cooking and bathing.
- Nowadays sarovars are **mainly used by pilgrims** for washing their feet, and performing isnaan.
- The waters in some sarovars are thought to have **curing powers**, because prayers are continually recited in the vicinity.

Word glossary

Isnaan	The act of washing one's body and soul
Amrit Sanskar	Sikh baptism ceremony
Amrit	A mixture of sugar and water
Gurdwara	A Sikh temple
Sarovar	The sacred water near a gurdwara