1.1 Belief, practice and experience

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 30 marks**

KEY WORDS belief • practice • experience • adherent • diversity • academic study

Objective

Learn how to study religion **academically** : describe **beliefs** , **practices** and **experiences** accurately and fairly, use the insider's own terms, and avoid treating one believer as the whole tradition.

You must be able to:

- distinguish belief, practice and experience
- distinguish academic study from devotional commitment
- use insider (emic) terms correctly
- explain diversity within one tradition
- describe a practice with its meaning for adherents

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

Three dimensions

dimension	question	example
belief	What do adherents hold to be true?	Sikhs believe in one God (*Ik Onkar*)
practice	What do they do?	Sikhs share food in the *langar*, the free community kitchen
experience	What do they report living through?	a sense of peace in meditation; belonging at a festival

Ninian Smart added more dimensions: narrative (myth), ethical, social (institutions) and material (buildings, objects).

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■ **Academic study**

The academic study of religion **describes and explains**; it does not ask the student to believe or reject. Use phrases such as "Muslims believe…", "for many Buddhists…". Use the tradition's own terms (*emic*), explained in English.

Diversity : every tradition has branches and local forms (Sunni and Shi'a Islam; Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism; Orthodox and Reform Judaism), and individual adherents differ. One person's practice does not prove what the whole tradition teaches.

Worked example. "Christians go to church on Sunday" is too general. Better: "Many Christians attend a Sunday service; for Catholics and many others, receiving the Eucharist there recalls Jesus' last supper. Practice varies by denomination and by individual."

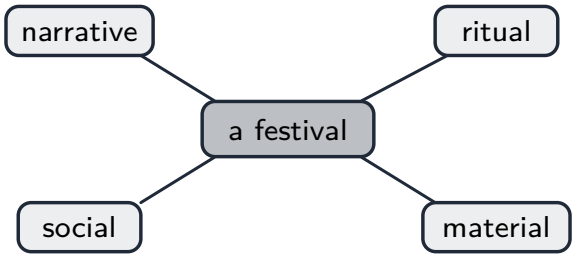
2 Practice

2.1 Distinguish **belief** from **practice**, with an example of each from **one** religion. [2]

2.2 Rewrite this sentence in an academic way: "Buddhists believe in reincarnation, which is not true." Explain **two** changes you made. [3]

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2.3 Using Ninian Smart's dimensions, describe **four** dimensions of **one** festival you have studied. [4]



2.4 Two members of the same tradition describe their religion very differently. Explain **three** reasons why, and what this means for an academic study. [6]

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3 Exam-style questions

3.1 *(Paper 1 style.)* With reference to **one** religion, explain how a central **belief** is expressed in a **practice**. [7]

3.2 *(Paper 1 style.)* Explain why the academic study of religion should describe the **diversity** within a tradition. [8]

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Solutions

Marking: **M1** a correct method, **A1** the correct answer, **B1** an independent mark.

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

belief: what adherents hold to be true, e.g. Muslims believe in one God (Tawhid); practice: what adherents do, e.g. Muslims pray five times a day (salah)

2.2

an academic rewrite, e.g. "Many Buddhists understand death as followed by rebirth (not of a fixed soul), shaped by karma."; change 1: removed the student's own judgement on truth (descriptive, not devotional or critical); change 2: used accurate terms: rebirth, not "reincarnation" of a soul; "many", showing diversity

2.3

one mark each for four dimensions correctly applied to a named festival, e.g. Diwali: narrative (Rama's return; Lakshmi), ritual (lamps, puja), social (family visits), material (diyas, rangoli), experiential (joy, renewal)

2.4

any three reasons explained: different branches or denominations; different cultures and countries; different personal experience, age or level of practice; meaning for study: avoid generalizing from one person; use a range of sources; say "many / some adherents" (maximum 6)

3.1

belief stated accurately with the emic term; explained; practice described accurately; clear link: how the practice expresses the belief; diversity noted, e.g. different branches practise differently; academic language

3.2

definition of diversity within a tradition; example of branches in one religion; example of local or cultural variation; individual differences; risk of stereotyping or generalizing; fairness and accuracy as academic values; insiders' own self-descriptions; a clear conclusion

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