Places of Worship & Sacred Spaces

Around the globe, billions of people practice different world religions. While these religions have unique beliefs, histories, and traditions, they also share many things in common. One major connection is that almost every religion sets aside special locations where followers can gather. By looking at these locations, we can learn about both religion and the people who are part of our community.

The Challenge of Defining Holy Places

While words like "place of worship" and "sacred space" are helpful starting points, there really isn't one perfect term to describe every spiritual location. For instance, the phrase "place of worship" implies that the primary activity inside the building is worshipping a Supreme Being. However, this word doesn't quite fit religions like Buddhism, where there's often a focus on quiet meditation, or Islam, where there's a focus on prayers and teachings.

On the other hand, "sacred space" is a much broader term that often extends far beyond organized religion. It might include landscape features (like mountains, rivers, or trees), burial grounds, monuments, or even a quiet spot in your own backyard.

Because human beliefs are so diverse, no single label can totally capture what makes these spaces so special to everyone. We will use both "place of worship" and "sacred space," but neither term is perfect.

Key Words

Worship: Actions that show respect, honor, or love for a god, a group of gods, or a divine energy.

Sacred: Something that is considered holy, special, and connected to a spiritual purpose. It is treated with a high level of respect and is set apart from ordinary, everyday things.

Instructions

This is a thought exercise, which means there are no right or wrong answers. Please keep the following "rules" in mind:

1. Your answers will come from your own knowledge and experience, so be ready to think and share!
2. Be respectful of one another and remember that others may have experiences different from your own. Learning from each other is part of the point!.
3. For each question, challenge yourself to explain how you know what you know and why you answered in a particular way. Where did your ideas come from?