

# Traditional African Religions

The Traditional African religions or traditional beliefs and practices of African people are a set of highly diverse beliefs that includes various ethnic religions. Generally, these traditions are oral rather than scriptural and passed down from one generation to another through folk tales, songs and festivals, include belief in an amount of higher and lower gods, sometimes including a supreme creator or force, belief in spirits, veneration of the dead, use of magic and traditional African medicine. Most religions can be described as animistic with various polytheistic and pantheistic aspects. The role of humanity is generally seen as one of harmonizing nature with the supernatural.

**Animism:** is the belief that objects, places, and creatures all possess a distinct spiritual essence. Potentially, animism perceives all things—animals, plants, rocks, rivers, weather systems, human handiwork, and perhaps even words—as animated and alive. Animism is used in the anthropology of religion as a term for the belief system of many indigenous peoples, especially in contrast to the relatively more recent development of organised religions.[8]

Although each culture has its own different mythologies and rituals, animism is said to describe the most common, foundational thread of indigenous peoples' "spiritual" or "supernatural" perspectives. The animistic perspective is so widely held and inherent to most indigenous peoples that they often do not even have a word in their languages that corresponds to "animism" (or even "religion");[9] the term is an anthropological construct.

**Polytheism:** is the worship of or belief in multiple deities, which are usually assembled into a pantheon of gods and goddesses, along with their own religions and rituals. In most religions which accept polytheism, the different gods and goddesses are representations of forces of nature or ancestral principles, and can be viewed either as autonomous or as aspects or emanations of a creator deity or transcendental absolute principle (monistic theologies), which manifests immanently in nature (panentheistic and pantheistic theologies).

**Pantheism:** is the belief that reality is identical with divinity, or that all-things compose an all-encompassing, immanent god. Pantheist belief does not recognize a distinct personal god, anthropomorphic or otherwise, but instead characterizes a broad range of doctrines differing in forms of relationships between reality and divinity.[Pantheistic concepts date back thousands of years, and pantheistic elements have been identified in various religious traditions.