

## Christian Outreach and World Religions

### Animism

#### Definition

*anima* Latin for “soul” or breath” That which empowers or gives life to something

Many formal religions have within their ranks adherents to animism. Many adherents are found in third-world cultures such as Africa.



#### Attraction to Animism

1. Animism infuses the otherwise secular reality with a spiritual reality. It provides explanations when there are no natural explanations.
2. It offers people the opportunity to cope with everyday problems. The focus of animism is very immediate: healing, business success, finding a job, relationships, guidance for the future.

“To the extent that we seek to manipulate spiritual powers--including God--for the “quick fix” of for our personal benefit, we are coming from an animistic rather than a biblical perspective. In that sense, we all have animistic tendencies.”

#### Common Animistic Beliefs and Practices

1. There is a Supreme Being who is either far removed from his creation or too abstract to be known. The Supreme Being uses intermediate spirits to do his will and serve as his representatives.
2. Most animists allow the formal religions some relevancy regarding *ultimate issues* such as who is God? what is the human problem? etc. They regard those religions as being irrelevant concerning *immediate issues* of everyday life.
3. Animists believe in personal spirit beings who possess specific powers and a localized geographically. They also believe in impersonal spiritual forces that may infuse special objects, words, and rituals.
4. Animists are not concerned about offending the Supreme Being. They are concerned about offending the local spirits and the retribution which may ensue.
5. Divination (the practice of giving information which is not available by natural means) is the means by which a person discovers either how he or she has offended some spirit a how the problem might be resolved.
6. There is no consistent belief in the afterlife. Reincarnation or becoming an ancestral spirit are two possibilities.

#### Suggestions For Evangelism

1. Be sensitive to their beliefs.
2. Be aware of the influence of naturalistic thinking in our lives. We can be misled to think that everything is “explainable.”

3. Find common ground.
  - a. Both animists and Christians believe in the supernatural.
  - b. Offending the supernatural carries with it consequences.
  - c. We hope to escape those consequences.
  - d. We both recognize a Supreme Being.
  
4. Highlight the differences.
  - a. God (the Supreme Being) has not remained distant (John 1.1,14,18; Hebrews 1.1-2; 1 John 4.4-9).
  - b. There is a sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 9.25-26; Isaiah 53.6; 2 Corinthians 5.21).
  
5. Model trust in God alone.
  - a. Encourage the animist to let go of whatever he or she is clutching for protection or prosperity. Discuss it in the sense of an addiction or a bondage.
  - b. Show them from Scripture how God is concerned for us (1Pet. 5.7, Matt. 10.29-31).
  
6. Model the deliverance of God as we pray in the Lord's Prayer "deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6.13). Talk about ways that God has delivered you. Explain the difference between an *expectant faith* and a *presumptuous faith*. The latter calls into question who is God and who is really in control.
  
7. Turn their hearts toward desiring a relationship with God (Matt. 6.28-33). Explain that temporal concerns should not be our greatest priority. God is concerned about salvation from sin, death, & the devil. He is moved by the heart that is focused in this way (Prov. 21.3, Ps. 51. 16-17, Isa. 66.1-2, Heb. 10.19-22).
  
8. Help them cope with their fears. Animists live in a perpetual state of fear. (Col 2.15, 1 John 4.4). God's solution to our ultimate problem of sin takes away fear (Rom 8.1, 1 John 4.18, Heb. 4.16).
  
9. Be clear about who Christ is and who we are in Him. Jesus is the Creator (John 1.1, 1 Cor. 8.6, Col. 1.16-17, Heb. 1.2,10). This is an opportunity to explain the Trinity. Thus Jesus has power over the demons. This is most clearly seen in the Gospel of Mark (1.24-27; 1.34, 39; 3.11-12;3.11-12; 5.1-13; 7.25-30; 9.17-29).
  
10. Point out the deceptive nature of unclean spirits (John 12.31; 2 Cor. 4.4). Show that Satan's plans are ultimately for destruction (John 8.44; 10.10; Heb. 2.14). Genesis chapter three might provide a good Bible study.

Most of the information for these Bible studies has been drawn from *The Compact Guide to World Religions* by Dean C. Halverson, Bethany House Publishers, 1996.