

UPPER KEY STAGE 2/UNIT 2B.1

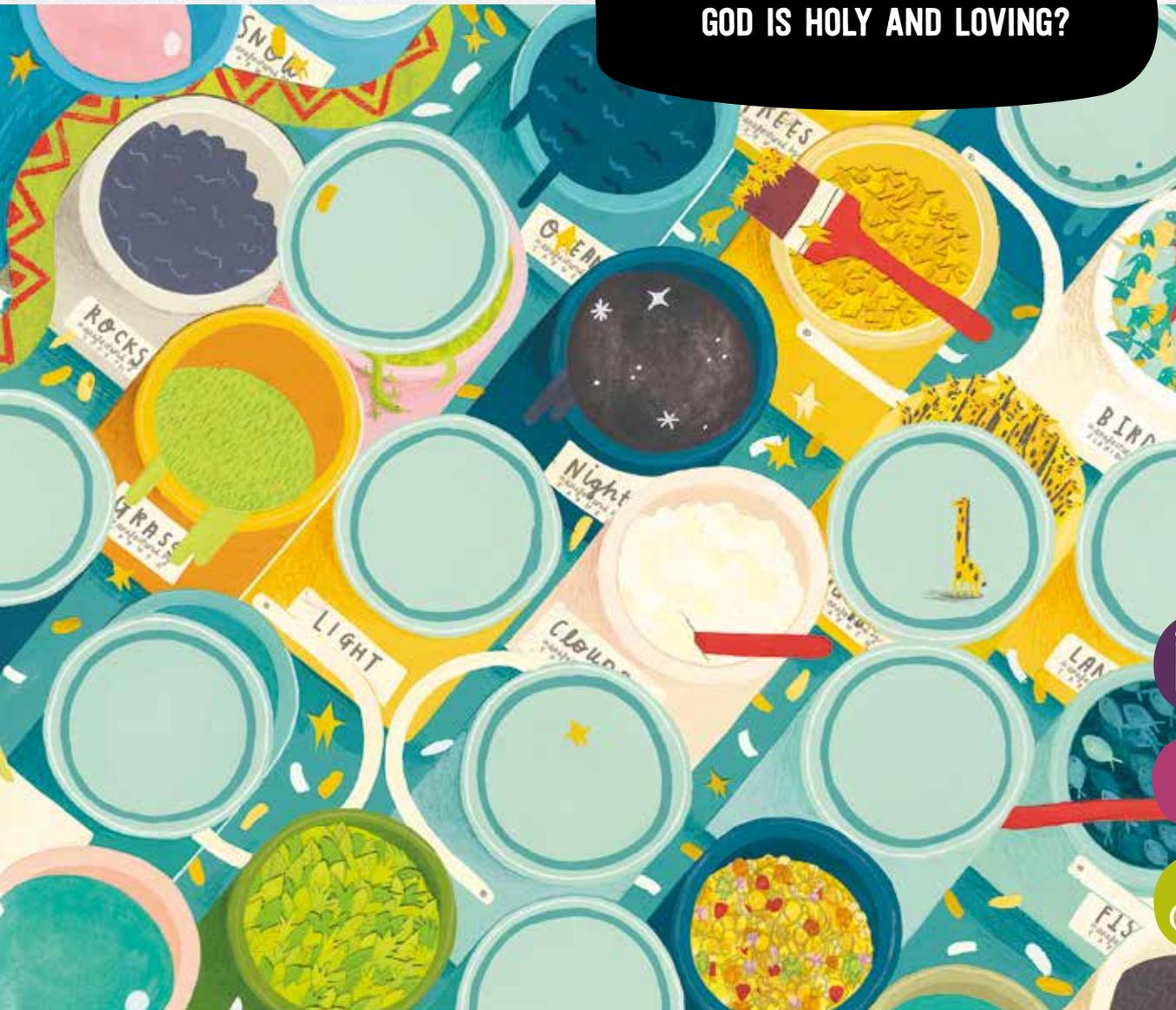
GOD

WHAT DOES IT MEAN IF
GOD IS HOLY AND LOVING?

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★ OUTCOMES

BY THE END OF THIS UNIT, PUPILS ARE EXPECTED TO BE ABLE TO:

-  Identify some different types of biblical texts, using technical terms accurately.
-  Explain connections between biblical texts and Christian ideas of God, using theological terms.
-  Make clear connections between Bible texts studied and what Christians believe about God; for example, through how churches are designed.
-  Show how Christians put their beliefs into practice in worship.
-  Weigh up how biblical ideas and teachings about God as holy and loving might make a difference in the world today, developing insights of their own.

🧱 KNOWLEDGE BUILDING BLOCKS

PUPILS WILL KNOW THAT:

- Christians believe God is omnipotent, omniscient and eternal, and that this means God is worth worshipping.
- Christians believe God is both holy and loving, and Christians have to balance ideas of God being angered by sin and injustice (see Fall) but also loving, forgiving, and full of grace.
- Christians do not all agree about what God is like, but try to follow his path, as they see it in the Bible or through Church teaching.
- Christians believe getting to know God is like getting to know a person rather than learning information.

NOTE: Teachers should read the Essential Information pages before teaching this unit.

➔ YOU MIGHT LIKE TO START WITH...

Choosing a suitable celebrity and asking pupils to describe her or him. Where do they get their information from? How well do they know the person? Are there any surprises about this person?

Talk about what it would be like actually to know someone. What difference would it make? What kinds of things are added to your relationship if you talk with them, or go through events or activities with them? If they see you when you are up and when you are down?

Make the link with the idea that for Christians, knowing God is a personal journey, a relationship not an intellectual exercise.

🔍 MAKING SENSE OF THE TEXT

STORIES, POEMS, PRAYERS AND LETTERS FROM PEOPLE 'WHO KNOW GOD PERSONALLY'!

This section offers a selection of texts that describe people's experience of and responses to God.

- **Build a god:** ask pupils to write down all the words they might use if they were to describe a being who could be 'God' – including this god's power, character, actions. Resource Sheet 1 offers some words to help – some are more helpful than others! Use these to help pupils learn some key technical words, such as omnipotent, and so on.
- **Discuss the features of God pupils have come up with.** They are now going to look at the words of three people who claim to know the God of the Bible personally – David (Psalm 103 – a psalm or prayer/song), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-5 – a prophet tells of a religious experience) and John (1 John 4:7-13 – a letter). Divide these up and give a section to groups of pupils. They are looking for words and phrases from the texts to describe what God is *like*, what God *does* and what God *does not do*; and also to identify *how the writer knows this*. (Resource Sheets 2, 2A and 2B will help.) Note the different kinds of texts here, and see if they can identify the different types, with explanations. (See background information.)
- **Compare pupils' findings with their earlier descriptions of 'God'.** What differences are there? Was there anything that surprised or puzzled them? Talk about these – get pupils to raise questions, even if you cannot answer them at this stage. Make the link with the starter activity – these texts talk about the experience of people in their relationship with God, as far as Christians are concerned. Ask pupils to sum up the top five words they would use to describe the writers' idea of God, and explain why they have selected these words. Ask them to say why Christians might think this God is worth worshipping.
- **Focus on two important ideas about God:** Christians see God as holy as well as loving. God's holiness is to do with being apart from all others, being pure, being without sin. (See Essential Information: you might read Exodus 19:1-19 to show how serious this is in the Bible). Get pupils to go back to the texts and identify the ones that are to do with God being holy, and those to do with God being loving.
- **Express learning creatively:** for example, draw/paint/design images to reflect all they have learned about God from these passages – symbols, images, signs, colours – put them together to form a class image – inside large letters of the word GOD, perhaps; or get pupils to write a series of haiku or cinquains instead of the art; or a short video documentary.



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT

Christians respond to the idea of God as omnipotent, eternal, and so on, in lots of ways. Here are two:

CHURCH ARCHITECTURE

- **What do cathedrals show about what Christians believe about God.** How do they show that Christians believe God is worth worshipping? Find out about the parts of a cathedral (or a local church). Take the words from the description of God in the earlier activities using the Bible texts and see if they could be used to label parts of the building.
- For example: stained glass tells stories; the altar talks of sacrifice; confessionals talk of forgiveness; in larger churches you can see where people used to be separated from the holiest part, the altar, by the rood screen; the size and scale of cathedrals speak of God's power as well as human creativity (in God's image); the cross shape and all crosses/crucifixes talk of God's love through Jesus (see Digging Deeper).
- You might like to focus on Coventry Cathedral for this, with its stunning artwork and architecture: www.coventrycathedraltour.org.uk/node.php (the Digging Deeper section uses Coventry Cathedral too, focusing on the link to forgiveness through the ruins of the old cathedral, destroyed by WW2 bombs).

WORSHIP

- **Listen to some Christian songs:** 'Praise my soul the King of Heaven', for example. www.youtube.com/watch?v=sx1eMwIDFb8; 'Holy, holy, holy' (www.youtube.com/watch?v=414dGGTedpM) and so on. Ask pupils to make links with the texts studied earlier. These might be sung in community (by a congregation, even with a choir) but they are also the kinds of songs Christians sing to themselves too. Ask pupils to consider what the impact might be on people who sing these songs, repeating these words regularly in their daily lives. What would they learn from this? How might it help them to get to know God better?
- **Ask pupils to write a short advert from a Christian music company/band, such as 'Hillsong United' or 'Worship Central',** persuading Christians of the spiritual benefits of listening to their songs: reminding them of God's presence, helping them to know God better, part of their praise and worship, helping to comfort and encourage them, and so on.



MAKING CONNECTIONS

- **Develop, through discussion,** pupils' ability to weigh up these biblical ideas: a) God is holy, and very different to humans; b) God is loving and forgives everyone who is truly sorry; c) God's holiness and love are seen in his dealings with his people – his commands and his willingness to forgive.
- **Take learning a bit further:** if God were just holy, and only concerned with purity and justice, what then? (For example, God would be angry with sin, perhaps distant and unapproachable.) If God were just loving, what then? (God might not mind how people behave, as if anything is OK; people might treat God as just a friend, a bit familiar, perhaps). So, if there is a God, why might Christians argue it would be better for God to be holy or loving, or a balance of both?
- **Ask pupils to imagine God is just holy and not loving,** or just loving and not holy: sketch a quick design for a church for 'holy God', or one for 'loving God'. See if there are any simple signs that would make the difference obvious. (For example, Holy God – lots of space for saying sorry to God, big gap between ordinary people and big altar; loving God – no confessional, no Ten Commandments displayed).
- **Many people do not believe there is a God.** Humanists would argue that humans should come up with their own guidelines for living, not rely on any (imaginary) supernatural being for guidance. Talk about which guidelines for living a Humanist might suggest. Talk about whether these ideas reflect a more 'holy' or 'loving' response to human beings, i.e. are they more about justice than mercy, strict or relaxed? What are the advantages of both approaches?
- **To enable pupils to think about their learning from this unit,** ask pupils what their own guidelines for living would be. A version of 'Ten Commandments' would work. They should show that they have reflected on the idea that tough rules for justice are balanced with forgiveness in Christian teaching, and include a short paragraph on what they think should happen if someone breaks the guidelines for living that they have just written, and why. Pupils should try to have some guidelines that relate to personal living, family, school and the wider community.

★ OUTCOMES

BY THE END OF THIS UNIT, PUPILS ARE EXPECTED TO BE ABLE TO:

- Identify some different types of biblical texts, using technical terms accurately.
- Explain connections between biblical texts and Christian ideas of God, using theological terms.
- Make clear connections between Bible texts studied about God and how Christians put these beliefs into practice; for example, through calling for justice, promoting forgiveness and so on.
- Show how Christians put their beliefs about God into practice in worship: for example, through confession.
- Weigh up how biblical ideas about love, holiness or forgiveness relate to the issues, problems and opportunities of their own lives and the world today, developing insights of their own.

📦 KNOWLEDGE BUILDING BLOCKS

PUPILS WILL KNOW THAT:

- Christians believe God is omnipotent, omniscient and eternal, and that this means God is worth worshipping.
- Christians believe God is both holy and loving, and Christians have to balance ideas of God being angered by sin and injustice (see Fall) but also loving, forgiving, and full of grace.
- Christians believe God loves people so much that Jesus was born, lived, was crucified and rose again to show God's love.

NOTE: Teachers should read the Essential Information pages before teaching this unit.

➔ YOU MIGHT LIKE TO START WITH...

A quick class poll of some things that your pupils love about the world today, and some things that they really don't like. These could be matters of taste (one pop star or football team vs another) or matters of justice (freedom in UK vs poverty here and around the world).

Which are the best things and the worst things on the list, and why?



➔ MAKING SENSE OF THE TEXT

WHAT DOES GOD HATE? (PROVERBS 6:16-19)

- Ask the class if they think God hates anything.** If so, get pupils to list some ideas of what God might hate, perhaps using their ideas of things they hate too. See if pupils can make links with the idea of God's holiness in the Core Learning section.
- Read Proverbs 6:16-19.** Tell pupils what type of text it is and its characteristics (see Essential information). Work out what each of the seven things listed really means. In groups list them and come up with an example of each one in action (they might suggest some scenes from Disney films to illustrate these meanings). Compare these with pupils' lists from the above activity. Are there any surprising or puzzling ideas here – or any things left out?
- Discuss:** Is it true that in the Bible, God hates evil actions, but loves people, even when they do wrong? That's what Christians believe. In small groups, create or dramatise seven scenarios in which the seven things God hates occur. What happens next? Describe the effect of these kinds of behaviours. Identify the seven opposites of the things God hates; create scenarios showing these, showing what steps someone could take to bring these positive situations about.
- Given the above list from Proverbs, talk about what pupils think this says about what God is like.** Look at their list of five words from Core Learning section 2. Ask pupils to add some short sentences to explain what this text says about God.

WHAT DID JESUS SAY ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO NAILED HIM TO A CROSS? (LUKE 23:33-34)

- Most people find forgiving people who have done something wrong really hard.** Note that this is a Gospel text. Focus on the words Jesus said from the cross in Luke's Gospel: 'Father forgive ...' Ask pupils to make links between this event and Christian belief in holiness and the love of God (see Essential Information).
- Read the passage about the crucifixion.** In groups talk about why it is hard to forgive people and why people say it is worth doing, even if it is hard.
- Consider the implications of this for Christians.** Jesus once said that his followers should forgive others 'seventy times seven' times – not a literal figure but an indication that they should keep on forgiving (Matthew 18:22). Ask pupils to come up with three reasons why this would be a good thing, and three reasons why it would be difficult.
- See how far pupils can make clear connections from these texts to the Christian belief that God is holy and loving.



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT

- Reflect on the impact of thinking about what God hates: ask pupils to consider the life of a well-known Christian, for example, Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King Jnr, or a local Christian involved in bringing love and justice. In which ways has this person worked against the 'seven things God hates', and in favour of their opposites? Produce a short guide to the life and work of the individual chosen. Explain what they did and why, and how it showed that they were taking the Bible's teaching about God's love and holiness seriously.
- Explore the impact of Jesus' words of forgiveness from the cross: teach pupils about what happened after Nazi bombers destroyed the Cathedral in Coventry in 1940. The provost made a charred cross out of burnt roof timbers. He had the words 'Father Forgive' engraved on the wall behind the altar. See the cathedral website www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/wpsite/our-reconciliation-ministry/ From that start many global reconciliation projects have flowed. Look at the Cathedral's programme for peace, the Community of the Cross of Nails (www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/ccn). Find out about how Christians have spread the message of love and forgiveness.
- Use the Coventry Cathedral website to explore examples of holiness, love and forgiveness. There are excellent examples of the art and architecture to explore. Pupils might work in groups on five different examples and report to the class (note the virtual tour listed on the Core Learning page).
- Some Christians make use of the sacrament of confession or reconciliation to remind themselves about God's offer of forgiveness through Jesus. Use Resource Sheet 3 to explore what happens and what it means to Christians. Ask pupils to write a short explanation of confession/reconciliation for a younger audience, explaining what happens and why, and specifically being clear on how this reminds Christians that God is holy (he hates sin) but also loving (he forgives people who say sorry).



MAKING CONNECTIONS

- Ask pupils to think about examples of when more love, holiness or forgiveness might be good in the world today – starting locally in your school and moving out to global issues. Discuss how far love, holiness or forgiveness are appropriate and valuable in these examples. Is holiness only for religious believers?
- Remind pupils of the works of art and architecture they have studied from Coventry Cathedral. Ask pupils to design (and make?) a new work of art for the Cathedral which shows how forgiveness is needed in the world this year. How could they use the concepts of love, holiness and forgiveness in their work? Think about the things in the world they love and hate and about what they have learned about Christian beliefs. They should reflect on how important these ideas are in a community where there are people of different faiths and of no faith.
- A triptych, with three panels, might be a good way to do this: perhaps one panel to show each idea of love, holiness and forgiveness, or one panel each for the pupil herself/himself, your local community and the world.
- Ask them to write 100–200 words to explain their artwork.

SELECT AND WEAVE TOGETHER ACTIVITIES TO ACHIEVE THE OUTCOMES

UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT

MAKE SENSE OF THE TEXT

MAKE CONNECTIONS

OUTCOMES

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

Christians read the Bible as telling a story of the relationship between God and humanity. Humans generally fail to maintain this relationship, so God is often calling people back into friendship and relation with himself.

Christians use the Bible to help them to understand what God is like. The focus of this unit is contrasting the awesome, terrifying aspect of God's character – his holiness – and the intimate, personal aspect – God as loving. For Christians, God's holiness emphasises ideas of purity and justice – God hates sin and is separate from it. On the other hand, God loves his creation, with a particular focus on drawing human beings into a loving relationship. This requires love, forgiveness and grace on God's part.

The Old Testament says that people can only come to God if they are clean and pure. Of course, no one is, so they have to ask forgiveness and offer sacrifices. Note how in Exodus 19 the people of God are not allowed to go up the holy mountain to

receive the Ten Commandments – it is dangerous for unclean people to come into contact with a holy God! (See Unit 2b.3.)

The stories of Moses and the formation of the People of God are a key to understanding the idea of a covenant, an agreement, between God and humanity. From slavery and desperation, God rescues the people, and offers a relationship: 'I have saved you; now follow these commandments, and you will be my people. I will be your God.' The relationship is based on God's initiative or grace – he rescues first. However, as God is holy, there are spiritual and moral demands upon the people too.

David and Isaiah are key people in the ongoing story of this relationship. They remind worshippers of the forgiveness that is on offer from God, and they point forward to the New Testament. John points out that all people can come to God because Jesus has paid the penalty of sin (or being unclean) – Jesus' holiness is transferred to people (see Unit 2b.6).

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT AND ITS MEANING(S)

PSALM 103

The book of Psalms includes prayers and songs used by the people of God in private and communal prayer and worship. Psalm 103, written by King David, looks like it would have been used to lead a congregation in praise and worship. It starts with individual, personal praise to God, before moving outward to include communal praise. Verses 6–18 recall how God has been with his chosen people, specifically referring to the Exodus by mentioning Moses, but implying God's ongoing presence with David and his people too. The deliverance of the people from slavery is a constant reminder of God's love and care, as well as his desire for justice. Verses 19–22 call for universal praise, even from the angels. It mentions God's anger at sin (i.e. arising from his holiness) but highlights God's mercy and forgiveness.

ISAIAH 6

Isaiah was a prophet in Jerusalem in the eighth century BCE (Uzziah died in 740 BCE). This vision represents Isaiah's call to serve God. It highlights the holiness of God and the sense of uncleanness from Isaiah – seen in the Bible as a fitting response to God. It is at God's initiative that Isaiah is forgiven, made clean and prepared to communicate God's message to his people.

1 JOHN 4:7–13

This letter is traditionally attributed to the disciple John, writer of the Gospel and the Book of Revelation, although not all Christian scholars agree. The writer emphasises the love of God. He points out that if someone claims to know God, the evidence would be in the way that they show God's love in their lives.

Note that the balance of the love of God and the fearsome holiness of God can leave some twenty-first-century Christians uncomfortable, but the Bible often pictures an encounter with God or the divine messenger as terrifying. Religious Studies recognises the experience of the 'numinous' – a simultaneous profound sense of dread and attraction – in many religions.

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT AND ITS MEANING(S)

SEVEN THINGS GOD HATES – PROVERBS 6: 16–19

This Bible text gives a definite picture of 'what kind of God' the writer believes in. Here, God does not hate any person, but the actions that hurt or harm the community.

The book of Proverbs is classified as 'Wisdom' literature (see more examples in Unit 3.5). As its name suggests, it is full of pithy sayings to guide people in living well. It is full of practical and concrete comments, not theoretical or abstract. This description of what God hates is not a theoretical account of the nature of God but a clear and direct call to moral behaviour.

The seven things God is said to hate may need some discussion and clarification:

- Proud or haughty eyes: people who look on others with contempt.
- A lying tongue: people who don't stick to the truth.
- Hands that kill those who aren't guilty: murderers.
- Hearts that make evil plans: this example is about what we intend, not just what we do.
- Feet that are quick to do evil: where choosing bad or nasty behaviour is easy.
- Anyone who pours out lies: while the action is condemned here, the person is also in danger, because the lies are not occasional, but 'poured out'.

- Anyone who stirs up conflict in the community: this includes, perhaps, many behaviours from gossiping to rabble-raising.

The Christian understanding of the holiness of God connects to this Bible teaching: God is no 'soft touch'; divine grace is not cheap. It is because God loves humanity and the whole Earth that these things are hateful. This concept of holiness is both moral and spiritual: God is spiritually 'other', completely different from us humans, who may feel trapped in between good and evil all the time. And God is morally above us, transcendent, as well: God is goodness personified, and stands for goodness in relation to humanity.

LUKE 23:33–34

Christians believe that Jesus' death was somehow for all of humanity. One way of understanding this is that God's holiness means that sin cannot go unpunished, but that Jesus' voluntary death was an action that took the punishment for the sin of all humans. (See Unit 2b.6 for more on this.) Christians find it amazing that Jesus was able to forgive those who executed him, and are inspired to try to demonstrate this love in their own lives.

RESOURCES

There are many translations of these texts. The Resource Sheets give the *International Children's Bible*, but you might like to try out some others, such as *The Message*. Search online on the Bible Gateway, which will give lots of translations:
www.biblegateway.com/

www.request.co.uk is a helpful site for background information. For Coventry Cathedral:
www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/wpsite/
Many cathedrals offer online virtual tours; for example, www.canterbury-cathedral.org/visit/tour/

KS1 Unit 1.4 includes some materials on how Christians ask for forgiveness and try to forgive each other. Have a look at the Essential Information pages and some of the Resource Sheets as background.

A detailed guide to the Roman Catholic Sacrament of Confession or Penance can be found here: <http://rcan.org/sites/default/files/files/8%20Guide%20for%20Children.pdf>



GOING FURTHER

An additional text might be the story of the Prodigal or Lost Son, Luke 15:1–2, 11–32. Pupils will have encountered this before, but could note the balance of holiness (how clear it is that the younger son is in the wrong) with love and forgiveness (the father does not stand on his own dignity but runs to embrace the repentant son). The idea of finding new and deeper learning in a text studied before is important in this whole approach to understanding Christianity.

WHY NOT LINK WITH...? Saying sorry to a holy God, receiving forgiveness and starting again are at the heart of the Jewish festivals of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Explore Hadith in Islam about forgiveness, or quotations from the Guru Granth Sahib in Sikhism.

