What is Religion and What is an African Religion?
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©2008-08-28

Excerpt from the book
AFRICAN ORIGINS OF CIVILIZATION, RELIGION, YOGA SPIRITUALITY AND ETHICS PHILOSOPHY
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Introduction: Where is African Religion From and Who are the African Peoples?

Most people consider that African religion relates to the peoples who today live in the area of the continent of Africa referred to as sub-Saharan. The term “Sub-Saharan Africa” relates to the geographic area south of the Sahara desert. This term denotes the countries of Africa that generally are not considered as part of North Africa. This term may also be expanded to include some areas in West Africa due to the change from African culture to Islamic culture in those areas. In the 19th Century many Europeans referred to sub-Saharan Africa as “Black Africa” or as “Dark Africa,” or the “Dark Continent.” The assignment of the term was partly due to the dark skin of the indigenous inhabitants and also because much of Sub-Saharan Africa had not been explored and fully mapped by Europeans.
Those terms [“Black Africa” “Dark Africa” or the “Dark Continent.”], are presently considered as obsolete and even derogatory and therefore also offensive. Another term, “African Uplands,” has been devised to substitute for the derogatory terms but they are still used in some quarters. Yet, that phrase mostly refers to the African interior and not to coastal regions.

After the last Ice Age, the North part of Africa and sub-Saharan Africa were separated by the climate changes that altered the Sahara region from populated and full of vegetation to harsh climate and sparsely populated with low vegetation. The Nile River basin was the only place where life could be supported. The inhabitants of the ancient region now called the Sahara migrated north, east, west and south. It has been determined by climatologists that it was no later than 10,000 B.C.E. to 7,000 B.C.E. that there were any substantial rains in that area of the world.

Most of sub-Saharan Africa is within the tropics. Tropical Africa is an ecological term relating to the location of the land territory on earth which would exclude South Africa if strictly applied since South Africa lies outside the Tropical zone.

The reference to Sub-Saharan Africa in one way relates to the ecological situation because the Sahara desert separates North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. However, the term also applies ethnically since North Africa is now populated by Arabs, coming from Asia Minor, who moved there after the early conquest period of Islam after its inception by the Prophet Muhammad in the late 1st millennium A.C.E. Previous to that period the inhabitants of north Africa were native Africans who resembled the population of the south and were culturally and ethnically related to other native Africans. Some scholars and politicians classify the present day North Africans as “Caucasoid.” However, the "Caucasoid" and "Arab" populations that currently reside in North Africa often possess swarthy and other “Africoid” type physical characteristics due to miscegenation with the indigenous “blacks” that originally resided in the region.

The Nile valley was the only region where life could be sustained but the Nile also provided regular floods that facilitated farming. The peoples of that region, sometimes referred to as Nilotic (encompassing an area from Uganda at the source of the Nile to the Mediterranean), migrated north and created civilizations that were later referred to as Kush and Kamit (Ancient Egypt). It has been adequately demonstrated by many scholars that the Ancient Egyptians were indigenous African peoples, dark-skinned, black Africans. Therefore, Ancient Egyptian religion should be considered as a member of the family of African religions.

In the 19th century, European countries set out to colonize Africa and that led to the “Scramble for Africa,” a period of rapid proliferation of colonies in Africa that was mediated by the Berlin Conference (1884 - 1885) where the imperial competitors decided how to divide Africa and what constituted a viable colonial claim. This process almost completely destabilized the social order of African nations, the traditional practice of civilization, social order, religion, etc. was sometimes stopped or completely changed from what it was in favor of the culture of the invading European culture. In some cases
the practice of traditional religion was changed to incorporate western beliefs or it might have been abandoned altogether.

African spirituality encompasses many original forms of religious practice, many of which are related. However, the study of African religion should make a distinction between what constitutes African religion or an extrinsic form of spirituality due to the special circumstances that were experienced in the African continent. Unlike some other colonial locations, most of the African colonies were exposed to harsh racism and the inhabitants were forced to abandon most customs as well as the indigenous language. Many village priests and griots were lost in the period of colonialism. So much of the knowledge that was passed on orally was also lost. In the case of Ancient Egypt we have an unusual situation since it is the only pre-colonial African civilization that left a written record of their activities and spiritual culture. It provides a record of religion in ancient Africa. From that record we can derive many aspects of pre-colonial African religion and establish the fundamental principles of African religion through comparative studies. Kamit and Kush are the only African nations that left extensive written records of the culture, civilization and religion. Other nations used the oral tradition, which is more susceptible to damage or interruption due to social disruptions such as war or colonialism.

Throughout the history of Africa’s countless social changes, migrations, invasions, disease, war, slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and other changes through Africa’s history, many African societies and systems of religion have been dispersed or disrupted. Many people in Africa and the peoples of African descent in the Diaspora feel that African religions are separate and distinct. Yet, many features of pre-colonial African religions appear to be similar in their fundamental tenets, rituals or traditions. The fundamental tenet of any religion is its concept of theism. Many, if not most, African Traditional Religions employ Henotheism. This study seeks to explore the concept of henotheism in African Traditional Religion.

The appearance of African religions would seem to point to disintegrated and primitive individualized cultural manifestations of spirituality and that would support the idea that African religions are separate and competing religious ideologies as opposed to parts of a greater overall theistic whole that would support the idea of a central or original source that spread out throughout Africa and affected it generally. This problem is both religiously and culturally important. If the fundamental principles of African religion were a product of individual and separate developments arrived at through speculation or random chance, they could be seen as disjointed practices. The approach to the study of religion can be affected by the context in which that religion presents. A limited religion that could be seen as being followed by a distinct group of people in a particular geographical area would be approached in one way. However, if it could be seen in a wider context, as an expression of a religion that is also followed by other groups in adjacent geographical areas or even a vast continent it could be approached in another way, taking into account the expressions of the other groups in order to derive insights that could be drawn from apparently distinct traditions that actually contribute to a whole.
Culturally, the determination of African fundamental religious principles could be important to many peoples within and outside of Africa who could be benefited by learning about the religious principles of other Africans. They could learn about their own religions so as to fill in gaps in their own knowledge that might have been lost over time. These researches could also affect cultural interactions between cultures with practitioners of African religions and practitioners of other religions.

I am not aware of specific studies that may have been accomplished relating to the specific question of comparative theism in African religions focusing specifically on the henotheistic principles. In the study of African Religions there has been a difference of opinion among scholars about whether or not the practice of religion in Africa should be referred to in the plural or the singular. That is, do African religions have fundamental features that make them compatible even across countries or are they distinct forms of religious expression?

The author John V. Taylor noted that there are a great amount of similarities between sub-Saharan African religions. E. Bolaji Idowu expressed the line of reasoning more forcefully. John S. Mbiti advocated the opposite argument, that African traditional religions are distinct and unique. Authors such as Benjamin Ray and E. Ikenga-Metuh supported the opinion of Mbiti.

Studies that focus on the nature and attributes of a God or Deity in an individual African tradition are readily available. Additionally, there are Journal Articles and individual studies on the theism of particular African Traditional Religions. However, this study seeks to engage in an exploration and identification as well as comparative study of the henotheistic manifestations of the presentation of the divinities in the religions in order to determine the exact parameters of the theistic perspective of the religion(s) and if possible also the relationship(s) theologically, philosophically or cross culturally of their respective theistic perspectives.

What are Religion and Spirituality?

The way religion is practiced in modern times it is often not spiritual. From a political perspective it is often used as a tool to control others. In the field of religious studies many scholars approach religion from a spiritual activity without ultimate purpose besides a social pastime. Many practitioners of religion in the masses follow their religions as a faithful endeavor not requiring ethical conscience. The English term “religion” is derived from the Latin “relegare” (“re-link,” or “link back”), meaning a process for human beings to rel-link (reconnect) with God (a deity, divinity) or whatever a people consider to be a Supreme Being or cause behind existence. Theology is the study “ology” of “theism” a belief in a divinity as opposed to atheism which is disbelief in the existence of a god, deity or divinity. In its full form religion has three steps: Mythology, Rituals and Metaphysics. Most people know something about the myth and rituals but not about their true meaning. This is when religion becomes degraded and loses its spirituality.
The African definition would be similar in that religion is a process of reconnecting with the “Higher Self” the Supreme Being. However, while the supreme being concept of western religion is monotheistic, and relating to a phenomenal 1 divinity, the African, East Asian, Native American is based on a Henotheistic 2 conception. In the higher perspective of the African, Indian and Buddhist as well as Native American practice of religion the Supreme Divinity is not just a phenomenal personality as in Western monotheism, but rather a phenomenal and transcendental divinity; this means that God appears as a personality, as nature and also transcending forms and names, beyond Creation itself; so religion is a process for attaining spiritual development by re-linking one’s soul with God, or the Divine. In Ancient Egyptian terminology, the term “Shetaut Neter” means “Hidden (mysterious) Divine Essence” this term has been rightly interpreted as the “religion” of the Ancient Egyptians. However, in the strict application of the grammatical meaning, the term “Shetaut Neter” is a known while the term religion is a known referring to a process. In Ancient Egyptian language the term “Shedy” is more applicable as it means: “process of penetrating the mysteries (i.e. the “Hidden (mysterious) Divine Essence”).

The term “Spirituality” is defined as: “that which pertains to what is incorporeal or pertaining to the supernatural as distinguished from the physical nature”: a spiritual approach to life. “Spiritology” is the study of the spiritual aspects of the soul and or of life (aspects that transcend the physical). However, in popular culture “spirituality” can also has been applied to mean something pertaining to sacred things or matters; religious; devotional; the sacred or the spirit or soul. So the term religion specifically relates to a theistic 3 perspective on spirituality: it relates to the soul and a Divinity. The term “spirituality” may or may not relate to a Divinity and may relate to incorporeal matters or concerns with non-physical matters. Religion without the three steps may be considered spirituality but in the strict interpretation it is not true religion. Thus, while true religion (religion that contains the three steps or levels of practice) will incorporate spirituality, we cannot say that all spirituality is religious, related to a Divinity (theistic) or even that it is enlightening. The term “mystical” is similarly misinterpreted by the popular culture just as the term “spiritual” is automatically confused with something sacred, altruistic, or even purer or sometimes even as a belief system or practice that is better than religion, etc. in the strictest terms we cannot say that a person worshipping a tree is practicing religion since religion is worshipping a Supreme Divinity unless that tree is an access point to the Higher Divinity. We cannot say that a person had a religious experience if they had an out of body experience. The OB experience may be spiritual but not specifically religious unless it relates the person to the Supreme.

Mysticism relates to the achievement of consciousness wherein the individuality is evolved into universality, a oneness of soul with the Divine, like a drop with the ocean. So we cannot say that we had a “mystical” experience by “going to a movie,” “falling in love,” “traveling,” “seeing a celebrity” or “having a child,” as is expressed often in

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1 Existing in time and space and appearing with name and form
2 There is a Supreme Divinity with lesser gods and goddesses that emanate from it.
3 Belief in a god or goddess
modern culture, unless we are meaning that those experiences have led us to discover higher consciousness by transcending our physical reality, time and space and becoming one with the universe and what transcends it!

What is the proof that religion is a reality; in other words what is the substantiation that there is a god and that we are to reconnect with that divinity? If there is proof it lies in the experience of those who have reconnected (through the process enjoined by religion (myth, ritual, mysticism)) and who have reported about that reconnection to those who have not yet reconnected. However, disbelieving in religion (atheism) without engaging in the process enjoined by religion does not constitute proof of the invalidity of religion or non-existence of the Divine. Also, having faith in religion without engaging in the reconnection process does not constitute the authentic practice of religion. Faith in the existence of a divinity is not religion in and of itself, it is part of the myth aspect or stage of religion but alone may only be considered as theism or spirituality until the full course of a reconnection process is engaged. To be clear here, in order to be considered a religion, the discipline or tradition needs to incorporate as its goal the objective of reconnection of the soul to the high god or goddess, or supreme being or ultimate agency causing and sustaining existence; it is derived from the experience of those who have reconnected, that there is an ultimate agency or being that is responsible for the existence of souls and Creation and that there was an original connection between that being and the souls of human beings that was disconnected and needs to be reconnected so that a human being may find peace, contentment and completeness. Those practices that do not incorporate this goal may not be included as part of the definition of religion but would more aptly be included in the definition of spirituality.
Religion and Culture and their African Manifestations
Overview of African Religions

Among some scholars of African Religion(s) there has been debate about the issue of whether or not there is one African Religion or if there are many African Religions. This may depend on the perspective or criteria that one applies to the question. This issue may be similar to the issue of humanity; are there many races of human beings or is there one human race? If we look at the culture, the outward manifestations of human societies we would tend to think that there are many different “kinds” of human beings. However, if we look at the DNA of all human beings we would find that they are all related and that in fact they all originated from one original line of human beings that came out of Africa 150,000 to 200,000 years ago to populate the earth. That means that there is only one human race. In the same way, if we look at the folkloric manifestations of the religious practices throughout Africa we may tend to feel that there are many “different” religions being practiced. If we look at the “Fundamental Principles” of those religions, that is to say, the DNA of religion, we can find basic tenets of religion, what makes a kind of religion discernible from another, in common. If we engage in this study we find that African religions throughout Africa hold the same tenets in common, and that this makes them manifestations of the same tradition.

The term “African Religions” as used in our present context relates to the forms of religions that were developed on the continent of Africa by its indigenous or native peoples from ancient times. It will refer to those forms of religions which existed prior to the introduction of religions from outside of Africa and prior to influences from other societies outside of Africa. As of 1999, about half of the people in Africa consider themselves as adherents to Islam. A lesser number are adherents to Christianity and African Religions. A smaller number are adherents to Judaism or Hinduism. So despite the work of Muslim and Christian missionaries, a substantial number of Africans still practice one of the African Religions. Also there are a substantial number of people of African descent who practice one of the African Religions outside of Africa as well.

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4 "African Religions: An Interpretation," Microsoft® Encarta® Africana. © 1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
5 African Religion: World Religion by Aloysius M. Lugira
6 African Mythology by Geoffrey Parrinder
7 African Religions and Philosophy -- by John S. Mbiti
8 Civilization or Barbarism by Cheikh Anta Diop
9 See the Book Comparative Mythology, Cultural and Social Studies and the Cultural Category-Factor Correlation Method: A New Approach to Comparative Cultural, Religious and Mythological Studies by Muata Ashby
10 "African Religions: An Interpretation," Microsoft® Encarta® Africana. ©&©(p) 1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
Though the colonial period in Africa was short-lived when compared to the overall view of history, it had a profound effect on the culture and also never truly ended in many parts of the continent because of the imposition of Neocolonialism (control of individual countries by controlling the government that is run by locals.) and the new moves in the late 20th century to impose Globalization (control of the world economy by Western governments) on the world community. The following excerpt from Compton’s Encyclopedia concisely sums up the colonial history of European nations in Africa.

“In what is called the “Scramble for Africa,” European nations partitioned Africa at the Berlin West Africa Conference (1884-1885). The Germans got southwestern Africa, along with Tanganyika in East Africa. The Portuguese got Mozambique and Angola, in southern Africa. Belgium took the Congo, and France got Senegal, the Cameroons, and several other colonies in the western Sudan and Central Africa. The British got the rest, including Kenya and Uganda in East Africa, the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and the territory that became Nigeria in West Africa. The British already controlled Egypt, which they had occupied in 1882, as well as English-speaking Cape Colony and Natal on the southern tip of Africa. The British also dominated Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) through the British South Africa Company under the leadership of Cecil Rhodes. The result was that almost every part of the African continent was a European colony.”11

Another method to discern the essential elements of African religion is to study its most ancient forms, and then to correlate these with the aspects that persist into the present and compare these with the aspects that developed later. Thus, the study of Ancient Egyptian-Nubian (Cushite) religion is of extreme importance in reconstructing African religion and philosophy. As we have already seen, there are several areas of commonality between Ancient Egyptian-Nubian religion and other African religions. In this manner, Ancient Egyptian-Nubian spirituality may be seen as a centerpiece and perhaps even a pinnacle of African religious culture and philosophy.

The developments in Ancient Egypt are central to understanding African Religions and their history both before and after the rise of Kamitan civilization. This is because there was a close relationship between Neterian Religion and other African religions, as there was a relationship between Ancient Egypt and other African nations. The connection between Ancient Egypt and Nubia has been elaborated in previous chapters. Also, the fact that the Ancient Egyptians were “black” Africans and that the original Ancient Egyptians originated in the heart of Africa, the land now called Uganda, was also explained earlier. What is important to understand now is that the fundamental Ancient Egyptian Religious tenets can be found in other African religions. This means that the tenets were a common product of African spirituality. In this context, Ancient Egypt exemplified the concepts of African Spirituality in their most highly advanced form. This form, (Neterian Religion – Shetaut Neter) also led to the development of pre-Judaic and Islamic Arabian religions, Judaism, Christianity, as we will see throughout this book.

11 Colonialism and Colonies,” Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000. © 1993-1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
One of the problems in studying African religion is that the concepts, traditions and rituals of the varied religions were generally not committed to writing. The exception to this is the Neterian Religion, where there is extensive writing that has survived. Western researchers have tried to advance the idea that North-east Africa and Ancient Egyptian culture and religion was part of Middle Eastern (Arabic) culture and religion, and that “Sub-Saharan Africa” is the land of “blacks” who do not have a refined notion of spirituality. From this, negative stereotyping led to the denigration of African culture and its people as backward savages who live in the jungle, ignorantly worshiping pagan gods. To those involved in initiating and perpetuation the salve trade, this made the enslavement of Africans a more justifiable act during the period after the colonization of the New World (1492 A.C.E.-1800 A.C.E.) and then the colonization of Africa itself (1750 A.C.E.-1960 A.C.E.). The lack of scriptures or worship in western style churches or Mosques was used by Europeans and Arabs as an excuse to claim that they were bringing religion to Africans, and thus, according to the mandates of their scriptures (especially as will be discussed with respect to the Judeo-Christians and Muslims which sanctions the conquering of other peoples to “spread the word”), they were able to justify their actions to themselves as being Divine in nature. Another problem is that the African religious culture was and continues to be supported by language and shared history. The introduction of European languages, and the systematic prevention of the African people from speaking their own native languages or introducing tribal names has led to a situation of inter-tribal conflicts which were not previously present. This is due to the introduction of distorted ethnonyms, names given to the groups of villages or nations by the Europeans based on their anthropological studies and the pre-colonial African names of societies. This means that people who were at one time actually relatives might be caught in two different geographic areas, but due to colonial pressures their common language and common identity is suppressed until forgotten. Then the two begin to see one another as strangers, following the cause of the colonial ruler against the colonial ruler of the other territory. Thus, the modern interpretation for the word “tribe” as “a group of people who are descended from common ancestors and ruled by a hereditary "chief," who share a single culture (including, in particular, language and religion), and live in a well-defined geographical region,” is a misapplication as concerns many groups in present day Africa due to all of the distortion of African society in the past 200 years. In other words, people living in a present day “tribe” may not have a connection with common ancestors from other tribe members, or the tribe may have no such legacy because the disruption by colonists resulted in the tribal memory being lost or in other cases, the members of the tribe may be composed of people who lost their cultural identity (refugees, orphans, etc.) and were brought together for political or economic reasons and forced to speak a language, etc. This definition of the word “tribe” may be equated with or thought of interchangeably with the term “ethnic group.”

12 From the 1520s to the 1860s an estimated 11 to 12 million African men, women, and children were forcibly embarked on European vessels for a life of slavery in the Western Hemisphere. Many more Africans were captured or purchased in the interior of the continent but a large number died before reaching the coast. About 9 to 10 million Africans survived the Atlantic crossing to be purchased by planters and traders in the New World, where they worked principally as slave laborers in plantation economies requiring a large workforce. "Transatlantic Slave Trade," Microsoft® Encarta® Africana. © 1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Author’s note: Other estimates run much higher but this one has been presented here to avoid needless arguments over the issue. Nevertheless this number pales in comparison to the deaths caused by the forced enslavement and kidnapping of Africans which estimates project at 100,000,000 (one hundred million) or more men, women and children.

13 "Ethnicity and Identity in Africa: An Interpretation" Microsoft® Encarta® Africana. ©1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
African culture views religion as a living aspect of life which is passed on from parent to child and from elders and storytellers to the younger generations who grow up and continue the tradition by passing on the myths, culture and religious traditions to the next generation, and so on. This is called the *Sacred Oral Tradition* in African religion. The *Sacred Oral Tradition* was passed on through mentorship, rituals, and intensive periods of education, including rites of passage.  

European travelers and missionaries later realized that the practice of religion did exist in Africa, but it was not consistent with their interpretation of what religion was supposed to be. Despite this realization, the invalidation of African spirituality continued and the missionary movements of Christianity and Islam continued, not in the spirit of sharing views on religion or having a meeting of minds on religious issues, but from a perspective of bringing a “superior” religion to people with inferior or no religion. This attitude also led to the denigration of African people as well.

Due to the transatlantic slave trade, colonization of Africa and the ensuing chaos which was perpetrated by European nations on African nations, with the special intent of preventing the continuation of the transmittance and practice of African religions and the promotion of Western religions and social concepts, the traditions of African religions have sometimes been altered, disrupted or completely lost. The lack of concrete writings prior to the time of the pre-African holocaust has led to a situation wherein much reconstruction of Ancient African traditions has been required. Some European scholars began this work, but many have been accused of distorting African religion, skewing it in light of Western cultural values and religious tenets, and in the context of European religion being superior by virtue of the fact that Europeans came to believe that monotheism is the advanced concept of religion. This means that some of the original wisdom of the practices, myths and systems of gods and goddesses has been misunderstood. The particular form of monotheism espoused by the three major Western religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) is actually a narrow concept which, when examined, is actually a form of intensified dogmatic idolatry. In contrast to African Religions, there are several examples of Western religions going to war against one another. The same is not the case with African religions originally. Conflicts between African groups did exist but not for the same reasons as between the Europeans; one such issue is ethnic differences as in the case of Rwanda. However, in modern times, Africans have fought each other over religion, especially those involved with Christianity and Islam. This is because the concept of African religion, while incorporating the teaching of monotheism, actually incorporates the pantheistic understanding as well. Pantheism relates to the understanding the God or the Divine, manifests as Creation and everything in it. So here we are confronted with the African concept of *Polytheistic Monotheism*, system of religion presenting a Supreme Being with many “lesser gods and goddesses” who serve the Supreme and sustain Creation and lead human beings to spiritual enlightenment and worldly prosperity. This form of conception of God has also been termed “henotheism”. These religious principles will be discussed more in depth later on.

In this context the Western concept of monotheism has been degraded to a circumscribed idea that is expressed in a strict form of expression based on a “revelation.” This is erroneous in view of the actions that Western Culture has perpetrated on other cultures and among themselves (wars, slavery, economic subjugation, etc.). The concept of revelation in the Western religions (Judaism,

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14 *Microsoft® Encarta® Africana.* ©1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
Christianity and Islam) holds that some absolute and perfect knowledge about the Supreme Being has been given. This is in stark contrast to the philosophy and tenet of African Religions (including Ancient Egyptian philosophy), Indian Vedanta philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, Chinese Taoism and other mystical traditions which holds that which is transcendent and unintelligible cannot be related in words, as the intellect cannot fathom the true nature of the Supreme Being. Thus, the Western religions and some orthodox religions that developed in Asia Minor such as the Zoroastrian religion, stand alone with the narrow concept of the Supreme Being that is touted as a high revelation that must be imposed on the rest of the world’s societies.

As missionaries preached throughout Africa, they translated the European texts into the African languages. In the process of doing so, the missionaries realized that there was a term in African spirituality for “Supreme Being.” But even then they attempted to characterize this African concept as a limited idea related to a Creator personality, and they viewed the rituals and propitiations to lesser divinities as proof of the inferiority of African religious concept. This European view of the African concept of the Supreme Being was called *deus otiotus* meaning “a remote god who is rarely invoked.” The African concept of the Supreme is so lofty that it views a direct approach to the Supreme Being, an unintelligible existence, as presumptuous and irreverent. As expressed above, the African religious philosophical view is that the very naming of such a being constitutes the act of conditioning it, and this is contradictory to its essential nature. Further, the so-called reverence of Western religions which extol the glory of the Supreme Being does not cause the European practitioners of religion to be more faithful or peaceful, as history has shown. Rather, what develops is a form of lip service which denigrates the religious process since the words are expressed but the reverence, if any, does not translate to virtue or even tolerance of others. So the Western idea that reverencing a Supreme Being directly makes the people or the society more pious is unfounded. Within authentic Ancient African systems of Religion, the Supreme Being is to be approached not through intellectualizing (naming and classifying), but through ritual which facilitates the entering into transcendental consciousness wherein the being can be directly experienced without the encumbrances of illusory and limited mental concepts. Also, an approach through gods and goddesses was devised.

Further, Ancient African Religion does not therefore ascribe a gender to the Supreme Being. Thus it is less susceptible to male chauvinism (sexism, bigotry) unlike the patriarchal western religions. So there is more of a balance in African Religion between the roles played by men and women in the religious practices. Hence, philosophy and ritual in African Religion are highly advanced and integral aspects of religious practice and therefore, rituals are not primitive displays of superstition.

Some Western scholars have characterized African societies as resistant to change and this view has been accepted by some leading African scholars of religion such as John Mbiti. This in part explains the persistence of African religion despite the tumultuous history of Africa. In some parts of present day Africa, there is an upsurge in the revival of traditional African religion. Some Africans living in and outside of Africa feel that many social problems are due to interference from European governments, businesses and religions and a backlash of negative sentiment has begun to develop in recent years against the Western Culture and religion.
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<td>Baluba Religion</td>
<td>Ga Religion</td>
<td>Yoruba Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamakonda Religion</td>
<td>Galla Religion</td>
<td>Zulu Religion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unknown Past Religions
Manifestations of African Religion in Latin America and the Caribbean

The religions of Latin America and the Caribbean are strongly rooted in African religion as a result of African peoples being brought to the Americas as slaves. These religions therefore reflect the slavery experiences (including but not limited to racism, exploitation and mistreatment) of the original African slaves and their descendants. They also reflect a mixture of traditions, including religious elements from the religions of the slave masters which were not in the original traditions brought from Africa. Some of the developments in the Americas included elements from Native American religions. One example of this is the spirituality of the African slaves who were brought to the Island of Puerto Rico in the Caribbean.

The first Africans actually arrived in Puerto Rico with Columbus in 1493 A.C.E as sailors. The African slave trade in Puerto Rico was not authorized by the Spanish government until 1510 A.C.E. The Taino Native American population were the native inhabitants of Puerto Rico and they were also enslaved by the Spaniards upon their arrival to the island. The enslavement and mistreatment of Taínos went on before and after slavery was permitted by the Spanish government. It was legally prohibited by a royal decree in 1542. However, the Spanish settlers (slave masters) continued to enslave them illegally. Since they were not physically suited for the heavy physical labor and violent clashes with European slavers as well as the rigors of European diseases, their numbers were reduced dramatically. The African slaves who were brought to the island of Puerto Rico, beginning in 1510 A.C.E., created a new culture as they mixed with the Taíno Native American Population, creating an admixture of religious thought. The culture of Puerto Rico was further shaped by the amalgamation with the Spanish ruling class and the later Anglo-Americans. The Anglo-Americans who took control of the
country imposed a form of racism that led to the development of a form of caste system. The almost extinct Native American population and those of (unmixed) African descent were segregated and discriminated against in favor of the mulatto population. However, even within this population, the darker skinned members were discriminated against in favor of lighter skinned members, who received the greater latitude of freedom in the general society. This policy of discrimination based on the shading of skin was instituted by the Europeans generally, but intensified when the USA took over Puerto Rico after the so called Spanish – American War.

In present day Puerto Rico, an independence movement has managed to prevent statehood. However, the majority of the population is pro-western. The society maintains an aspect of Creole culture wherein the lighter skinned members of the population feel a superiority that is supported by preferential treatment from the Anglo society of the United States. It must be clear that in most, if not all of the groups brought over by slave masters, slavery destroyed traditional African secret societies and priesthoods. Roman Catholicism was the only officially recognized religion in Puerto Rico as Puerto Rico was a colony of Spain and Roman Catholicism was the official religion of Spain also. However, most of the population practiced varied forms of religion which combined the African beliefs with Christian images and traditions. This situation was typical in other parts of the Caribbean and the Americas. Puerto Rico, like other Caribbean and American countries, has produced African scholars and African patriots.

Perhaps one of the best-known scholars in the field of African history and culture is Arturo Alfonso Schomburg. However, not many people know that he was born in Puerto Rico in 1874. He grew up in Puerto Rico and studied in the Dutch West Indies. When confronted by another student who challenged him by saying that peoples of African descent had not done anything significant in history, he countered with the achievements of those people of African descent on the island of Puerto Rico who had made such advances in the arts and writing that they had gained international recognition. This further spurred him on to travel the world seeking to document the achievements of Africans. He became a mentor to many 20th century Africentrists and is honored for amassing one of the largest and finest collections of books and evidences on the African contribution to humanity. By the time of his death in 1938, Arturo Alfonso Schomburg was recognized as a great scholar, humanist and African historian.

The African influence on Puerto Rican culture can be seen in such areas as the arts, food, music, dance, and language. For example, there is an African beat called La Bomba, that is still played especially within the circles of people of African descent and which has been recognized as an influence on latin music. The last enslaved Africans who came

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15 Creoles, a name adopted by or applied to a number of ethnic groups in the New World who were descended from European colonists and/or African slaves. "Creole" can also refer to the language of such groups. Creoles," Microsoft® Encarta® Africana. ©1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

16 Religions, African, in Latin America and the Caribbean," Microsoft® Encarta® Africana. ©1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
to the island were relatively young and came from Nigeria, Ghana, and Zaire. Some African words that survive in the Puerto Rican language include:

- bembe – party
- bembas – lips
- guarapo – sugarcane juice
- mongo – limp

The major African-derived religions of Latin American and Caribbean slaves include:

- Shango in Trinidad – Based on Yoruba Religion mixed with Christianity.
- Rastafarianism in Jamaica – based on Ethiopian Christianity and Judaism.
- Umbanda in Brazil – Based on Yoruba Religion mixed with Christianity
- Candomblé in Brazil – 3 Types all based on Yoruba Religion (Supreme Being with Orishas)
- Voodoo in Haiti – From Fon Vodun religion of Benin
- Santería in Cuba – Combination of Yoruba Religion and Christianity

The Common Fundamental Principles of African Religion

For many years, Westerners, specifically anthropologists, Christian missionaries and Muslims, did not regard African Religion as “true” religion. Muslims moving into Africa called the Africans *kaffirs*, or “unbelievers,” which relates them as people who are atheistic, as opposed to having their own religion. Christians adopted the similar terms, and henceforth African religion came to be regarded as magic or superstition, fetishism or animism. If we look closely at the traditions of other African religions besides the Ancient Egyptian, we will discover that many, if not all, of the fundamental aspects of the highly evolved Kamitan religion that were later infused into the world religions can also be found in the African Religions of the past and present. Though there are many variations of religious practice among African Religions there are some discernible common fundamental principles that they all share. A fuller treatment will be presented in an upcoming work. This essay will present only two of the most basic defining principles; these relate to the basic arrangement of religion that relates to it’s (A)Ideal of Spiritual Evolution and it’s (B)Theistic format.

(A) Principle of Stages of Religious Practice and Spiritual Evolution

(B) Principle of One Supreme and Transcendental God and Many Gods and Goddesses

Among the essential concepts common to all African religions are the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BLACK AFRICAN RELIGION (Sub-Saharan)</th>
<th>ANCIENT EGYPTIAN RELIGION (Corresponding name given to the same teaching in Kamit)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. There is one God (Supreme Being)</td>
<td>1. Neter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. That God expresses as Lesser divinities = gods and goddesses</td>
<td>2. Neteru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. God and the universe are One = All objects in the universe are alive and divine</td>
<td>3. Neberdjer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Seek to discover the Meaning of Life.</td>
<td>4. Shetaut Neter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. No separation between Sacred and Secular</td>
<td>5. Neter – Neterit, Heka – Hekat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Human beings have fallen from divinity due to vice</td>
<td>6. Isfet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Human beings can raise themselves up (discover the Divine) through virtue</td>
<td>7. Maakheru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Social order achieved through Ubuntu (African Spiritual Humanism)</td>
<td>8. Maat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Divine monarchy - King and Queen (A) administer secular (cultural) duties such as protecting the populace and administering equal justice for all and (B) (non-secular duties) officiate at spiritual ceremonies (as heads of the national religion)</td>
<td>9. Peraah (Pharaoh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Men and Women can serve as priests and priestesses with equal rights and privilages.</td>
<td>10. Hm and Hmt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Highest Goal of Life = Mortal humans discover god and become godlike</td>
<td>11. Akhu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principle of Stages of Religious Practice and Spiritual Evolution
The Stages of African Religion

The complete program of religion has three steps which are necessary for the goal of religion, to discover and experience God, to be realized. Any spiritual movement that includes these steps can be called “religion” regardless of the name that it may be given by the culture that practices them. These steps include Myth, Ritual and Mysticism or Metaphysics. The table above shows how these three steps or stages manifest in African Religion (2nd column) and also how that same program is enjoined in the practice of Egyptian Yoga (3rd column). Egyptian Yoga (Sema Tawi)\(^{18}\) may be thought of as the advanced disciplines to be practiced in order to promote the highest goal of the religious movement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Stages of African Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program of Religion</strong> (Universal Religion) 3-Stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysticism/Metaphysics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In African Religion, storytelling achieves the purpose of transmitting myths which contain the basic concepts of human identity as part of a culture, and offers insight into the nature of the universe. Myths also contain a special language of self-knowledge and also proverbs that provide moral education for an ethical society. Rituals are formal (ceremony) and informal (virtuous living) practices which allow a human being to come

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\(^{18}\) See the books *Egyptian Yoga Vol. 1* for more on the disciplines of Egyptian Yoga and *Mysteries of Isis* for more on the teachings of the Temple of Aset, by Muata Ashby
into harmony within themselves, the environment and the Spirit. This movement leads to an ecstatic experience which transcends time and space and allows a human being to discover and experience the Divine.

**The African Definition for the Word “Religion”**

Most African religions do not have a world that is correspondent to the western term *religion*. However, there are terms to describe the various activities, rituals, and traditions of the religious process. The African culture that developed in northeast Africa (Ancient Egyptian) did have a name for the practices and concepts of religion. In the Ancient Egyptian texts, a term appears which is used to describe the religious process as well as the disciplines to attain entry into knowledge of the higher aspects of spirituality, i.e. religion: *Shetaut Neter*.

*Shetaut Neter*
(Secrets about the Divine Self)

The term above is derived from *Sheta* (Mystery), *Sheta* (Hidden) and *Neter* (The Divinity). Thus we can now see why the Ancient Egyptian religion has come to be referred to as the “Egyptian Mysteries.” Actually, this term is more closely approximated by the Chinese term “Tao.” The term Tao in Taoism relates to the “Way of Nature.” The Ancient Egyptian term relates to the quality of divinity which is “hidden.” Thus, in Kamitan spirituality it means “the process of uncovering or discovering what is hidden or unknown about the Spirit - (Divine Self-Goddess-God)
Principle of One Supreme and Transcendental God and Many Gods and Goddesses
The Concept of The Supreme Being and the Gods and Goddesses in African Religion

Theism, is the idea that there is a God that exists and that that God is engaged in the affairs of Creation. Monotheism is a form of theism that asserts the existence of only one God; polytheism, another form of theism, asserts that there are many gods; henotheism concurs with polytheism in that there are many gods, however, henotheism places more importance of and reverence towards one of them.

The term Henotheism comes from the Greek ἕ θεός heis theos "one god". This term was coined by Max Müller. Henotheism means devotion to a single "God" while accepting the existence of other gods. Müller affirmed that henotheism signifies "monotheism in principle and polytheism in fact." Müller used this concept as the foundation of his criticisms of the Western religious and theological concepts of exceptionalism which had developed as a western cultural dogma that monotheism was better defined and superior to other forms of concepts of God.

Other terms for Henotheism include: inclusive monotheism and monarchical polytheism. These terms have been used to differentiate between some manifestations of henotheism. The terms monolatrism and kathenotheism have also been used. Monolatrism means essentially that the worshiper worships only one god. Kathenotheism means essentially, "one god at a time."

In African Traditional religions (indigenous), including Ancient Egyptian religion, there was/is practice of henotheism in most cultures. In most forms of African henotheism, the supreme divinity is revered but not worshipped directly. For example, in India there is also practice of henotheism, yet, Supreme Divinities such as Brahman are openly reverenced and paid homage even though the worshiper may use Krishna or Rama, for example, for daily spiritual worship. In African henotheism, such as in the case of Ancient Egyptian religion, the High Deity, Neberdjer, is acknowledged by the priests as the transcendental Supreme Divinity but the masses may select any of the lesser divinities or may even select from local or cosmic divinities to be seen as the High God or High Goddess, for communal and/or personal spiritual practices. So this form of henotheism where the Supreme Divinity is acknowledged but not talked about or referenced openly or frequently may be termed Shetatheism. The term “sheta” is derived from the Ancient Egyptian/African term “Shetaut” meaning “hidden”. What is hidden is unfathomable, unapproachable and that is why the lesser divinities serve the purpose of providing an approachable means to discover the hidden Supreme Divinity.

In the Kamit (Ancient Egypt) religion, Pa-Neter means “The Supreme Being” and neteru, , means “the gods and goddesses or cosmic forces in Creation.” Also, the word “neteru” refers to creation itself. So, neter-u emanates from Neter. Creation is
nothing but Supreme Being who has assumed various forms or neteru: trees, cake, bread, human beings, metal, air, fire, water, animals, planets, space, electricity, etc. The neteru are cosmic forces emanating from the Supreme Being. This is a profound teaching which should be reflected upon constantly so that the mind may become enlightened to its deeper meaning and thereby discover the Divinity in nature. The Divine Self is not only in Creation but is the very essence of every human being as well. Therefore, the substratum of every human being is in reality God as well. The task of authentic spiritual practice such as Yoga is to discover this essential nature within one’s own heart. This can occur if one reflects upon this teaching and realizes its meaning by discovering its reality in the deepest recesses of one’s own experience. When this occurs, the person who has attained this level of self-discovery is referred to as having become enlightened. They have discovered their true, divine nature. They have discovered their oneness with the Divine Self.

African religions recognize powers that emanate from the Supreme Being that circulate in the universe like a kind of life force. For example, the Dogon worship Amma, the Supreme Being, whose vital force, operates throughout the universe, and is called Nyama. The Igbo of southeastern Nigeria call the Supreme Being Chiu kwu or Chineke, and the life force that operates in the universe is known as Chi19. Another example is to be found in Ancient Egyptian religion with the concept of Neberdjer, the Supreme Being, and Sekhem as the life force which operates throughout the universe. In this manner, the life force itself is to be understood as an intelligent cosmic energy which pervades all of Creation, sustaining it at all times and thereby also unifying it as well.

In African religion the Supreme Being is viewed as a transcendental essence which cannot be defined and therefore cannot be approached directly. One important reason given as to why the lesser spirit powers are invoked while the Supreme Being is seldom invoked or the recipient of offerings is that the Supreme Being, as the ultimate and all-pervasive power in the universe, already owns all and can therefore, receive nothing. For this reason representations of the Supreme Being do not occur in African religions, only the manifesting aspects are given form. These are used to promote the religious movement of the individual by allowing the individual to approach and understand a concrete aspect of the transcendental Spirit. This understanding of course relates to the higher, mystical aspect of religion. Thus, in African religion we see a consistent pattern of structure in the way in which the Spirit is presented across the panorama of African nations. This structure is simple, but extremely profound in conceptualization: The transcendental Supreme Being manifests as lesser or associated powers that emanate from the ultimate source (the same Supreme Being). There are also human beings that, through virtue, become higher powers, i.e. gods and goddesses. Thus, the higher concept behind the practice of ancestor worship in African religion is not of worshipping the souls of the departed relatives, but of propitiating the saints (deified forbears, i.e. canonized) and sages of the past who have elevated themselves and who have become part of the cosmic forces of the Supreme Being. This pattern holds true for African Religions including Ancient Egyptian religion. Again, this is the same course taken by the Western religions, although they do not admit nor profess to view the angels and saints in this way, in practice, many of the followers of those religions worship the angels and saints in the same fashion as within African Religion.

19 Which is incidentally also the name for the life force in Chinese and Japanese spirituality.
In most African religions, including the Ancient Egyptian, masks, headdress, costumes, the impersonation of lesser divinities are used as means to attract and propitiate the lesser spirits. Statues are also made of the lesser spirits as symbols (and not as idols in the Western sense of the concept). These are also used to attract and propitiate the lesser spirits. Again, these representations are not made of the Supreme Being.

Since the African Religious concept holds that God and the Universe are one, it follows that there is no conflict between what is secular or sacred and the current, ongoing conflict in the West over Creation or Evolution as the cause behind the universe is inappropriate.

The Consistent Pattern of Structure in African Religion:

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Supreme Being

Gods and Goddesses

Deified Ancestors

Mortal Human Beings
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Human beings may attain the status of higher being through a life of virtue and or righteous leadership. This concept is accentuated in the religions of the peoples of East, Central, and Southern Africa, as well as the ancient Northeast (Nubia-Egypt) Africa. It is acknowledged within the philosophy that many of the lesser spirits in the religions of those areas once lived as human beings, often as kings. This is especially true of the Buganda of Uganda and the Shona in Zimbabwe. Also, Ancient Egypt is to be included in this category, since there was a high teaching related to the Sheps and the Akhus. Shep means venerated ancestor and Akhu means enlightened ancestor, someone who has attained spiritual enlightenment. Also, the Pharaonic system of Ancient Egypt had as one of its main tenets that the kings and queens became divinities upon their death. So Ancient Egyptian religion and the religions of other African peoples appear to follow close parallels in many fundamental aspects of religious philosophy as well as the general program of religious movement.

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Table 1: Examples of African Religions with the System of Supreme Being and Lesser Divinities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>African Religious System</th>
<th>Supreme Being</th>
<th>Lesser Spirits (Gods and Goddesses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kamit (Ancient Egypt)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nubia (Kush-Ethiopia)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakele</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bambara</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bantu</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buganda</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dahomey</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinka</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogon</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dokos</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edjou</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fon</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galla</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gugsa</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jola</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makoosa</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masai</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuer</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shekani</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “High God” and The Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt

There were several "High God" systems in Ancient Egyptian religion as in other African religions. This is the next lowest position in the hierarchy of divinity after the Supreme Being. The term “High God (or Goddess)” means that the highest God or Goddess within that particular system of theology is considered to be the original deity from which all others emanated as cosmic forces. Thus, in the Asarian religion of Ancient Egypt, Asar is known as Pa Neter or The God (High God) and Creation is composed of the cosmic forces, neters or gods and goddesses, which originates from Asar. It is important to understand that the High Gods and Goddesses as well as the Egyptian Trinities originated from the same transcendental Supreme Being which was without name or form, but was referred to as Neter Neteru (Neter of Neters - Supreme Being above all gods and goddesses) and Neb-er-tcher (Neberdjer – All-encompassing Divinity).

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21 This is a partial list only since the list is quite extensive.
In this manner, the initiate (in virtually all African religions) is to understand that all of the gods and goddesses are in reality symbols, with names and forms, which represent the Divine in the varied manifest forms of nature. This produces a two aspected format of religion in which there is a personal aspect and a transpersonal aspect of God. The personal aspect is fixed in time and space with a name and form. This form is readily understood by the masses of human beings with ordinary spiritual awareness and is used in myths and stories. The second aspect, the transpersonal side, points our interest towards that which lies beyond the symbolic form. This is the unmanifest form of the Divine as it is expressed in the mystical teachings of religious mythology. Thus, the High God is a personal symbol or representation, with a name and form, of the nameless, formless, unmanifest and transcendental Supreme Being. The High God or Goddess usually appears alone and gives rise to male and female gods and goddesses and human beings. One important reason given as to why the lesser spirit powers are invoked while the Supreme Being is seldom invoked or the recipient of offerings is that the Supreme Being, as the ultimate and all-pervasive power in the universe, already owns all and can therefore, receive nothing.

**Single Supreme, Transcendental Being**  
(unmanifest realm beyond time and space - names and forms)  
↓  
**High God or Goddess**  
↓  
**Lesser Gods and Goddesses**

**The Concept of God and Creation According to Ancient Egyptian Religion and Mystical Philosophy**

The term “Trinity” was misunderstood by the Orthodox Catholic Christians and, because of this misunderstanding, some Gnostic groups even ridiculed them. However, upon closer examination it will be discovered that the Ancient Egyptian Trinity, which was later adopted by the Christians and Hindus, is nothing less than a development on the same system of polytheistic monotheism that characterizes African religion. The three in one metaphor was ancient by the time it was adopted by Catholicism. It was a term used to convey the idea of different aspects of the one reality. This same idea occurs in Egyptian as well as in Indian mythology. However, for deeper insights into the mystical meaning of the Trinity, we must look to Ancient Egypt. In Egyptian mythology, the Trinity was represented as three metaphysical neters or gods. They represent the manifestation of the unseen principles that support the universe and the visible aspects of God. The main Egyptian Trinity is composed of Amun, Ra and Ptah. Amun means that which is hidden and unintelligible, the underlying reality which sustains all things. Ra represents the subtle matter of creation as well as the mind. Ptah represents the visible aspect of Divinity, the phenomenal universe (gross physical matter). The Ancient
Egyptian “Trinity” is also known as a manifestation of Nebertcher (Neberdjer), the “all encompassing” Divinity. Thus, the term Nebertcher is equivalent to the Vedantic Brahman, the Buddhist Dharmakaya and the Taoist Tao. The Ancient Egyptian text reads as follows:

“Nebertcher: Everything is Amun-Ra-Ptah, three in one.”

The following passage from the *Hymns to Amun* (papyrus at Leyden) sums up the Ancient Egyptian understanding of the Trinity concept in creation, and that which transcends it.

He whose name is hidden is *AMUN. RA* belongeth to him as his face, and his body is *PTAH*.

Thus, within the mysticism of the Ancient Egyptian Trinity, the teaching of the triad of human consciousness (seer-seen-sight) is also found. Amun, the hidden aspect, is called the “eternal witness.” This witness is one of the most important realizations in mystical philosophy, because it points to the existence of a transcendental awareness that lies beyond the conscious level of the mind. This mystical concept of the “witness” is also to be found in Indian philosophy under the Yoga teaching of *Sakshin* and the Buddhist teaching of *Mindfulness*. Sakshin is the “fourth” state of consciousness, beyond the waking, dream and dreamless sleep states. It is the goal of all mystics to achieve awareness with this state (Enlightenment).

The visible “gods” and “goddesses” with a name, form and other attributes are considered to be emanations of the one God, Nebertcher, meaning that which is without name, form or attributes (absolute). In the same way the Indian Trinity (Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu) arises out of Brahman, the Absolute. They are responsible for the direction (management) of creation at every moment. In Indian mythology, each male aspect of the Trinity of Brahma - Shiva - Vishnu had his accompanying female aspect or manifesting energy: Saraswati - Kali - Lakshmi, respectively. Similarly, in the Egyptian system of gods and goddesses we have:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amun</td>
<td>Amenit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ra</td>
<td>Rai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ptah</td>
<td>Sekhmet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Changes in the Way Lesser Beings (Spirits) are Viewed in African Religion Over Time**

European and African historians have discovered many changes in the understanding and worship of lesser beings (gods and goddesses and deified human beings) in African Religion, over time. Some changes have been correlated to the emergence of agriculture, metal and even the slave trade. For example, the emergence of the earth goddess Ala religious sect among the Igbo people correlates to the increasing importance of agriculture. Among the Congo people of Central Africa and Jola people of Senegal, certain new religious sects related to lesser beings emerged in
relation to the slave trade. They developed out of a need to explain the adversity that had befallen them, foreign conquest, enslavement, and the challenges of colonialism.\textsuperscript{22}

Therefore, when studying specific African religions, the history of the peoples who developed the religion must be taken into account. Local variations should be evaluated as to their meaning for discerning the nature of African religion only in the context of general principles which are common to all the religions and exhibit the qualities that denote them as being ancient, preceding the historical influences from outside factors. The major outside factors influencing the development of African Religion include Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Arab slave trade, European slave trade, colonialism, and neocolonialism. So this means that when studying African culture and religion, caution must be exercised so as not to misinterpret the higher original aspects of African religion and culture with those that were engendered by disruptions, and then later on became assimilated into the culture. A superficial study would lead to the erroneous conclusion that all African Religion and its derivatives in the Diaspora are intact, correct or authentic forms of the practice of African Religion. Thus, careful studies, taking into account the disruptive factors above, must be undertaken.

It is also important to note that the practices of African religion, which constantly seek to bring a balance between the spirit and the material, seeing them as essentially the same, is still misunderstood by most Westerners. Many Africans who believe in the pantheistic view of African Religions have also accepted the Western religions, but this is not seen as a conflict since they inherently believe in one God. However, this belief of the Western traditions denies the divinity that is to be discovered in the realm of time and space, the realm of human events, due to the sharp demarcation between heaven and earth. In this philosophy there is a separation between God and humanity. So within the framework of orthodox Christianity, even if they see Jesus as an intermediary, a lesser spirit as the gods and goddesses of African religion, they do not see him as being able to fulfill all their needs in all situations. Thus, there is still a need for the variety of gods and goddesses in African religion. So while there is a commitment to God by many African converts to the Western religions, there remains a need to seek the assistance of minor deities to resolve concerns of a worldly nature. So there are many followers of religions like Islam, Christianity and Judaism who also continue to consult diviners and traditional healers, attend traditional rituals and participate in other aspects of African religion.

**Manifestations of African Religious Expression and Transmission to the Next Generation**

African religious thought expresses through oral traditions and the recitation of myth, and also through discussions between elders and the current generation. Rituals are a powerful means of transference of religious culture from generation to generation. They form an important part of African religion. Rituals are designed to attract and propitiate the spirit powers. Libations of millet beer, palm wine or water, and sometimes also foodstuffs are usually offered as part of a ritual. The libation is believed to augment the power of the spoken word. Less prevalent is the practice of animal sacrifice, which is believed to release the Life Force of the animal to augment the Life Force of the person promoting the ritual.

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The concept of the divine word or Hekau is an extremely important part of Ancient Egyptian religion and is instructive in the study of all African religion. Some of the few differences between Ancient Egyptian religion and other African religions were the extensive development of the philosophy related to the “written word” in Ancient Egyptian religion and the expansive social infrastructure that allowed the development of advanced monumental architecture.

As explained earlier, the word religion is translated as Shetaut Neter in the Ancient African language of Kamit. These Shetaut (mysteries-rituals, wisdom, philosophy) about the Neter (Supreme Being) are related in the Shetit or writings related to the hidden teaching. Those writings are referred to as Medu Neter or “Divine Speech,” the writings of the god Djehuti (Ancient Egyptian god of the Hekau or divine word), and also refers to any hieroglyphic texts or inscriptions generally. The term Medu Neter makes use of a special hieroglyph, which means “medu” or “staff - walking stick-words.” This means that speech is the support for the Divine, . Thus, just as the staff supports an elderly person, the hieroglyphic writing (the word) is a prop (staff) which sustains the Divine in the realm of time and space. That is, the Divine writings contain the wisdom that enlightens us about the Divine, Shetaut Neter.

If Medu Neter is mastered, then the spiritual aspirant becomes Maakheru or true of thought, word and deed, that is, purified in body, mind and soul. The symbol Medu is static while the symbol of Kheru is dynamic.

This term (Maakheru or Maa kheru) uses the glyph kheru which is a rudder – oar (rowing), symbol of voice, meaning that purification occurs when the righteous movement of the word occurs, that is, when it is used (rowing-movement) to promote virtue, order, peace, harmony and truth. So Medu Neter is the potential word and Maa kheru is the perfected word.

The hieroglyphic texts (Medu Neter), which are the spiritual scriptures in general, become useful in the process of religion (Maakheru) when they are used as hekau - the Ancient Egyptian “Words of Power” when the word is Hesi, chanted and Shmai- sung and thereby one performs Dua or worship of the Divine. The divine word allows the speaker to control the gods and goddesses, i.e. the cosmic forces. This concept is really based on the idea that human beings are in reality higher order beings (neteru-gods and goddesses), and this attainment becomes possible if they learn about the nature of the universe and elevate themselves through virtue and wisdom.
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