

Activity 2. Comparing the Hymn to Aton and Psalm 104

Source: Adapted from P. Riley, F. Gerome, R. Lembright. H. Myers, C. Yoon, eds, *The Global Experience. Volume 1. Readings in World History to 1500*, 3rd edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998, p. 40-45.

Instructions: During the 14th century BCE, Egyptian Pharaoh Amenhotep IV and his wife Nefertiti challenged traditional Egyptian religious beliefs. They tried to replace worship of hundreds of Gods with a Sun God they called Aton. The Amenhotep built a new capital city dedicated to the Sun God and he changed his name to Akhenaton, which means one who serves Aton. Many scholars believe this Hymn to Aton is similar in thought and language to Psalm 104 of the Hebrew Old Testament. They think that the description of the powers of two different Gods is an example of cultural diffusion in the ancient Middle East. Read the passages, underline similarities, and answer the questions that follow.

Passages from the Hymn to Aton from Ancient Egypt	Passages from Psalm 104 from the Hebrew Old Testament
A. Praise of Re Har-akhti . . . Thou appears beautifully on the horizon of heaven, Thou living Aton, the beginning of life! Thou art risen on the eastern horizon, thou hast filled every land with thy beauty. Thou art gracious, great, glistening . . . thy rays encompass the lands to the limit of all thou hast made.	A. Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great: thou art clothed with honor and majesty: who covers thyself with light as with a garment: who stretches out the heavens like a curtain . . . who laid the foundations of the earth
B. Every lion is come forth from his den; All creeping things, they sting. Darkness is a shroud, and the earth is in stillness, for he who made them rests in his horizon.	B. Thou make darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey and seek their meat from God.
C. At daybreak, when thou arises on the horizon, when thou shines as the Aton by day . . . their arms are raised in praise at they appearance. All the world, they do their work. All beasts are content with their pasturage; trees and plants are flourishing.	C. The sun rises, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens. Man goes forth unto his work and to his labor until the evening. They give drink to every beast of the field . . . He waters the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.
D. How manifold it is, what thou hast made! Thou didst create the world according to thy desire.	D. O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.

Questions

1. Which passage do you consider the most similar? Why?
2. In your opinion, are these passages an example of cultural diffusion – the spread of ideas and beliefs from one cultural to another – or of parallel development? Explain.
- 3- If these passages are an example of cultural diffusion, what are the implications for our understanding of the religion of the ancient Hebrews and modern Christianity?