

Teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah

by ReadWorks

From Hinduism to Christianity, each faith abides by a set of practices that outline a religiously accepted way of living. In Christianity, these practices are written in the Bible. In Zoroastrianism, they are written in the Avesta, a collection of the religion's sacred texts. In Islam, Muslims follow the teachings recorded in the Qur'an, the holy book of the religion. The faith's prophet, Muhammad, established a set of "habitual practices," or Sunnah, in Arabic. Sunnah defines the legal and social practices that are followed within Islam, while the Qur'an outlines the beliefs of the religion.

Sunnah is comprised of hadiths—texts that describe the sayings, actions, and attributes of Prophet Muhammad, who Muslims believe to be the Messenger of Allah, or God. Within these descriptions, one can find instructions on how to conduct one's daily life according to Muslim law. For example, in one chapter of one hadith, Muhammad instructs his followers on what to do and what not to do. The hadith says [translated], "The Prophet said, "I order you to do four things and forbid you from four things. The first four are as follows:

1. To believe in Allah, to testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and [Muhammad] Allah's Messenger
2. To offer prayers perfectly [at the stated times]
3. To pay Zakat [obligatory charity]
4. To give me Khumus [one-fifth of war booty].

The other four things which are forbidden are Dubba, Hantam, Muqaiyat, and Naqir [all these are utensils used for the preparation of alcoholic drinks]. This hadith was written by Imam Muhammad al-Bukhari (870 AD), a well-respected Imam (a Muslim leader) within the Islam community.

Therefore, Imam Muhammad al-Bukhari specifically states that the Prophet Muhammad instructs his followers to believe in God, to pray, to pay charity, and give Khumus, or Islamic tax. He also prohibits the consumption of alcohol. The first three of the hadith nearly mirror the first three of five pillars of Islam, the main acts of the faith, which are as follows:

1. To believe that there is only one true God, or Allah
2. To pray dutifully
3. To pay Zakat (obligatory charity)
4. To perform Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca)
5. To fast during the month of Ramadan

The Sunnah is very long, comprised of several hadiths; therefore, there are many instructions on how to live a religious life. However, the Qur'an is the holiest of all texts for Muslims. It is divided into two sections, which are further divided into suras (or chapters). One sura describes the different sections of the Qur'an: one, named muhkamat, provides "the foundation of Allah's laws." Another, mutashabihat, is said to be allegorical, giving stories that encourage various interpretations.

Whereas the Sunnah mainly focuses on specific laws and social practices within the faith, the Qur'an focuses on belief, good deeds, and prayer. It preaches obedience unto Allah. It is very important for Muslims to abide by the teachings in the Qur'an, as they are believed to be teachings of Allah. There are also several good deeds outlined in this holy book that tell Muslims how to lead their daily lives. For example, the text instructs its believers to be courteous to someone who is treating them with courtesy. Furthermore, it specifies to do so in your own home or in the home of someone else-even if an ignorant man is greeting you. This is just like another well-known golden rule, "Treat others the way you would like to be treated."

In addition to general suggestions on how to act with kindness and goodwill, the Qur'an provides specific suggestions for diet. Within the Islamic faith, pork is prohibited, along with strong alcoholic drinks and wine. "Eat of what is on earth, lawful and good" (2:168). "Eat and drink but waste not by excess" (7:31), the Qur'an states. Therefore, it instructs to eat and drink in moderation. Along with daily eating directions, the Qur'an tells its followers to completely avoid calling each other by offensive nicknames, as well as sarcasm.

The combination of the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah give rise to Sharia, or Islamic law. According to this law, there are three different types of crime, defined as:

1. Had Crimes (most serious)
2. Ta'zir Crimes (least serious)
3. Qisas Crimes (retaliation crimes)

Since some of the punishments given by the Qur'an can be violent, Islamic countries don't always adopt them. Punishments for these crimes can include stoning or even execution; therefore, they are extremely controversial within a wider international audience.

These are just a few examples of the numerous guidelines on daily living within the Islam religion. The Qur'an is similar to the size of the New Testament and contains many more instructions than the ones previously mentioned. Ultimately, both the Qur'an and the Sunnah encourage their followers to be kind to one another, to put complete faith in God, and to act according to Allah's teachings.