

Unit 10: Religious Texts--Societal Implications

Objectives:

At the end of this unit, you will...

Be aware of the following:

- Qur'an, Hadith and Shariah sources of Muslim ethical practice
- Importance of internal motivation (intention) within Islamic ethics
- Variety of Shariah composition throughout the Middle East
- 'Reminders' as spurs to Muslim ethical behavior
- Great themes of Muslim ethics
- Necessity of obedience within Islam
- Creation as motive for environmental concern
- 'In Sha Allah' applied to Islamic motivation
 - Perspectives on jihad, violence and religion, and violence within the Qur'an.

Identify:

- Hadith, Shariah
- 'Nominal'
- Umma and Dar al-Islam
- Usury, Sura
- Divine Decree, 'reminders'
- Paradise
- 'Lesser' and 'greater' jihad
- Martyrs
- Religious terrorism
- 'Verses of the Sword'
 - Commentary

Realize:

- Muslim ethical view encompasses all of life
- Value of practice over belief within Islam
- Nominal, 'in name only,' religious practitioners
- Positive benefits of Islam applied to society
- Value of peace, mercy, compassion, and family within Muslim ethics

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- Prohibited actions
- Importance of martyrdom in battle as Islamic motivational tool
- Widespread influence of violence within religion
- Muslim perspectives on 'Verses of the sword'
 - Forgiveness and laws of war as part of Muslim ethics

Unit 10: Major Religious Texts-- Societal Implications

American soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines have ready access to knowledge and understanding concerning Jewish and Christian Scriptures (Torah and Bible). Less well known are aspects of Islamic ethics. Thus, this overview of Muslim personal/societal thought and practice.



I. Introduction: Islamic Ethics/ Motivation.

Islam sees no part of life--social, political or economic--as being outside of ethical consideration. (See Seyyed Nasr, Our Religions, p. 476)

1. Practice over belief. Islam values practice over belief. Of the Five Pillars, four concern practice--acts, deeds, endeavors--which adherents must fulfill. Living correctly takes precedence over creeds and doctrines.

Islamic ethical practice begins with revelation--the Qur'an. Secondly, the Hadith (hah-DEETH)--the report of the Prophet's utterances in his role as guide for the umma--serves to guide the faithful. The Sharia--Divine law in its totality--then maps the road men and women follow in this life.

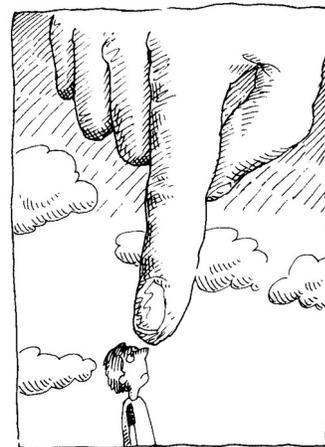
2. Internal motivation. Intention is critical to practice. What is the underlying motive in reciting daily prayers? To what aim is the hajj made? For what purpose is the fast of Ramadan kept? In reciting the Qur'an, what does the reader intend to learn, heed, find?

3. Nominal/devout dichotomy. Like claimants of most religions, there are 'nominal' and devout Muslims. The 8 SEP 96 New York Times Magazine described Ines, Nedim and Emir, three people in their early 20's who live in Sarajevo. Theirs would be a nominal faith.

"All consider themselves moderately religious-- Ines is a Croat Catholic, Nedim and Emir are Muslims-- but it is a religiosity that doesn't require much heavy lifting: no proscriptions against smoking or drinking or dating, no thought to praying five times a day or going to church on Sunday or arguing the righteousness of one's faith over that of another..." ("Bosnia's Last Best Hope," by Scott Anderson, page 49).

4. Reminders.

The emphasis on repeating phrases of the Qur'an or names of God serve as reminders to call the faithful back to original, foundational belief. Humankind is so hostile, inattentive, and negligent that it needs reminders to practice the faith correctly.



For newly converted populations, reminders are doubly important. As author Jacques Jomier states, *"individuals remain superficially Islamicized for several generations or even longer. Since Islam asks only for a simple profession of faith from the new convert, he [she] and even his descendants often continue to think and act in ways which are very dubious."*

The faithful follow both personal and collective requirements. Puberty usually becomes the binding age for observance. Suras 16:151-153; 17; and 25:63-76 give broad summations of Islamic moral values.

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II. Great themes of Islamic ethics.

The following great topics address Islamic ethics and internal motivation.

1. Umma (OOM-muh, peoplehood) and **Dar al-Islam** (DAHR-ul-is-lam, abode of Islam).

Individuals belong in community. The positive benefits of those who embrace Islam--social justice, solidarity and purpose, political stability--are enjoyed by all in areas guided by Islamic law.

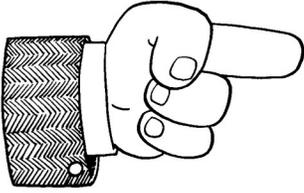


2. Peace. "O mankind!...we made you into nations and tribes that you may know and cooperate with one another" (Sura 49:13). Some see within Islamic thought grounds for pacifist belief. Writes Glenn Paige of the Center for Global Nonviolence, "*From the beginning the Prophet Muhammad exhibited maximum tolerance, fellow-feeling and brotherhood, peace towards all, compassion and love, righteousness and freedom of conscience, courtesy towards all; and duty towards parents, kith and kin, and especially towards the downtrodden and exploited.*" (Islam and Nonviolence, page 41).

3. Obedience to Divine Law. Muslims take the Sharia seriously. Their concern for its application to all of life--there being no sacred/secular distinction--is uppermost. Severe punishments--flogging, cutting off hands, death penalties and executions--though applied inconsistently across the world, bear witness to the high regard Islamic law places upon obedience.

4. Prohibitions. Dr. Kamil Said, professor of Islamic studies at the Naval Postgraduate School, identifies the following list of prohibited actions which regulate duties and obligations among Muslims.

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Prohibited actions include :

- To believe in any one as partner of God.
- To disbelieve in God or His prophets or His Books or deny any fundamental principles of Islam.
- To lie.
- To rob or steal.
- To commit adultery or sodomy.
- To cheat or deceive anyone.
- To bear false witness.
- To bring false charges against anyone.
- To backbite.
- To abuse anybody or injure anyone's feelings.
- Usury (lending money at excessively high interest).
- To kill a human being other than in self-defense or in defense of your country against aggression.
- To run away from battle while you are defending sacred principles.
- To be a traitor to your nation.
- To be homosexual.
- To use an orphan's fund or property in a way that is not in the orphan's interest.
- To insult the parents.
- To spread hatred among people by preaching prejudice.
- To spy on others, except to protect your nation or yourself.
- To conceal the truth when called for testimony in litigation.
- To be a briber or accept bribery.
- To convey to a person a bad word of another person about him [her].
- To envy people, wishing them ill.
- To hinder a good cause deliberately.

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- To be a hypocrite.
- To be extravagant.
- To be profane.
- To be arrogant, looking down upon others.
- To be an oppressor or to aid an oppressor.
- To be a deceiver.
- To gamble.
- To take intoxicants.
- To violate a deceased's will deliberately.
- To practice magic.
 - To neglect any of the Islamic devotional duties such as prayer, fasting, paying alms and pilgrimage.

5. Mercy and Compassion.

"In the name of God the compassionate, the merciful" are words which begin every Sura of the Qur'an.

The merciful God (Sura 55) enjoins His followers to be merciful and compassionate. *"We...put compassion in the hearts of his followers"* (Sura 57:26-27). In an imitation of the 'golden rule,' the Hadith enjoins:



"A Muslim should treat others as he would wish them to treat him...Like for others what he would like for himself."

6. Creation. A constant theme in the Qur'an is creation--God's power in forming men, women and the created order, and humankind's role in caring for that creation. This theme supports concern for environmental concerns and the conditions of all individuals.

7. Family. Writes Seyyed Nasr, the most...



"important concrete reality in the life of a Muslim after God, the Prophet, and spiritual/religious figures...is the family; in the family the most important figures who preserve organic bonds are women."

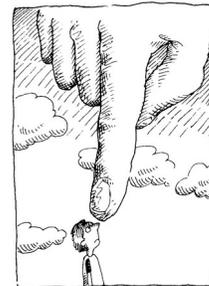
Margaret Nydell observes that loyalties and obligations to the family take precedence over requirements of job or friend.

The extended family--cousins, aunts, uncles--is the Middle East focus. General Khaled bin Sultan describes a gathering of his family. "Lunch was a very important occasion. It was served every day at the house of my grandmother, Hussa bint Ahmad al-Sudairi, widow of King Abd al-Asis, a remarkable old lady universally known as Umm Fahd, 'Mother of Fahd,' after her eldest son, King Fahd. All of us would go there to eat--the King, my father, my other uncles and aunts, and all their sons and daughters, invariable a very large gathering." (Desert Warrior, page 55).

III. Motivation.

Inspiration to follow an ethical Muslim path derives from the following:

1. God's Will. Since the divine decree (all is decided by God and in some sense comes from him) governs this world, God instills right ethical desire within his followers.



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Reminders of His presence (Qur'an quotes in architecture and on household objects, calls to prayer, beautiful mosques and minarets) are still necessary.

2. Assurance of paradise. To attain 'heaven,' a Muslim's good works must outweigh his/her bad actions. Many Muslim traditions believe at death the soul will undergo an interrogation by two angels...who will examine a person's faith and weigh out the good and the bad.

3. Respect within society. Fear of punishment and esteem within society (achieved by ethical integrity), undoubtedly serve as internal/external stimuli to right action.



4. Genuine obedience. Many Muslims possess an earnest desire, with right intention, to follow God by living according to His decrees.

5. Achieve higher heavenly rank. In contrasting the way of a shirker with that of an enthusiast, the Qur'an states, "those who fight for the cause of God with their goods and their persons...[achieve] a higher rank than those who stay at home. God has promised all a good reward; but far richer is the recompense of those who fight for Him." (Sura 4:95-96).

6. Desire for 'instant paradise.' Martyrdom in battle (lesser jihad) can result in attainment of paradise. As referenced in Mircea Eliade's The Encyclopedia of Religion, "If the enemy attacks Muslim territory, jihad became an individual duty for all able-bodied inhabitants of the region under attack. Those killed in jihad are called martyrs...Their sins are forgiven and they go straight to paradise." (Vol. 8, page 89). Sura 3:157 records, "If you should die or be slain in

the cause of God, His forgiveness and His mercy would surely be better than all the riches they amass. If

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you should die or be slain, before Him you shall all be gathered."

IV. Jihad

George Gawrych, instructor in the art of war in the Middle East at the US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, describes jihad in an article entitled "Jihad in the 20th Century" (Military Review, SEP 95, pages 33-39). "Jihad (ji-HAD) comes from the verb jahada: to strive, struggle or fight. Muslim jurists have identified two types of Jihad in the religious sense.

1. 'Greater' Jihad.



The Greater Jihad (al-jihad al-akbar) refers to the personal struggle of the heart, where the believer strives to overcome personal temptations and the carnal self. This inner struggle is Jihad's highest form.

During this Jihad, Muslims strive to internalize the Islamic message through prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

2. 'Lesser' Jihad.

The Lesser Jihad (al-jihad al-asghar) is the outward struggle of Muslims against those attacking the faith and requires using the tongue, hands or sword. Only in the last instance, however, do Muslims engage in mortal combat by taking up arms against Islam's enemies" (page 34).

V. Violence and Islam.



The question of Muslims who engage in violence raises the larger issue of violence condoned in the name of religion in general.

1. Violence and religion in general. Mark Juergensmeyer discusses this question in an article entitled 'violence and religion' (HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion, pages 1120 - 1123). Dr. Juergensmeyer's discussion mentions the following.

a. Symbolism. Whether cross, saber or sword, the symbolism of many religions evokes emotions--over time--which may promote violence and brutality. Warfare, sacrifice and martyrdom become part of the accumulated myths and rituals of religion. Underlying religious passions--stoked by political demagogues--can easily erupt into a fever of violence.

b. Religious justification for violence. 'Crusading spirit, zealotry and acts of assassins' recall violent acts in Christian, Jewish and Islamic history. For Islam, violence is only justified as 'punishment' (see jihad above).



c. Politics of religious terrorism. Rigidly held perspectives on divine revelation--seeing all other religions as threats--can lead to legitimization of violence. Some doctrines readily divide the 'ins from

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the outs.' Throughout history, some practitioners of
theocracy (the rule of a state by God or priest