

Core Curriculum

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5 The Qur'an and Hadith

5.1

Islam and Other Religions

The Qur'an makes a distinction between two groups, the People of the Book (Ahl al-Kitāb) and polytheists and idol worshipers (mushrikīn). The mushrikīn are those who believe in, and worship gods other than Allah. The Ahl al-Kitāb refers to Jews, Christians and Sabians which are all, or for the most part, Abrahamic religions.

This means that the religions of the Ahl al-Kitāb can trace themselves back to the universal monotheistic message of the Prophet Abraham (as). There are a few fundamental differences between these two groups and how Islam views them.

In terms of the mushrikīn, Islam believes that such beliefs are deviant and contradict the truth and reality. In fact, Islam goes as far as believing that worshiping idols is in essence a Satanic activity. As such, there is no truth behind idol worship but it is instead a deviation of God's plan for humanity.

The Ahl al-Kitāb, or People of the Book, trace their origins traced back to a divinely revealed religion and a divinely inspired Prophet. Islam, for example, believes in Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them both), their teachings as well as the Divine Books that were given to them by God.

One cannot be a Muslim without belief in the divine nature of these religions. For this reason, Islam will allow Muslims to marry non-Muslims under specific

conditions and contexts whereas under no circumstances does Islam allow Muslims to marry idols worshipers.

5.2

What is the Qur'an? A Short Introduction to Islam's Holy Book

The Qur'an is the Holy Book of Islam. It would be an incorrect statement to say that the book is simply divinely inspired. The Holy Qur'an is the literal word of God that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (s).

None of the words contained in the Qur'an are the words of the Messenger of Allah. Think about it this way, if someone gives you a magazine article to read out loud which someone else has written, are you reading your own words or the words of someone else?

The Qur'an contains all the central principals and guidelines we need in order to reach the salvation both as individuals and a collective Muslim community. In this sense, the Qur'an therefore acts like a constitution, that is, a guiding framework for our lives for avoiding sin, doing good works, having good manners and ultimately finding faith in God and success in the Hereafter.

Despite the centrality of the Qur'an, it alone is not enough. Just like a constitution needs interpreters, so does the Qur'an. The Qur'an's interpreter is the Messenger of Allah (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (as). The Qur'an thus needs a teacher so that humankind will be able to understand and implement the Qur'an properly.

5.3

The Structure of the Holy Qur'an

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (s) by Allah during the month of Ramadan on what is known as the Night of Power or Laylat al-Qadr. Laylat al-Qadr, the night of the Qur'an's revelation, is the most important night of the Islamic calendar and praying on that night is the occasion through which Muslims can gain the most blessings from God.

The medium through which God revealed the Qur'an was the archangel Gabriel. The Qur'an was all revealed to the Prophet (s) at once, but it was gradually revealed to people over a span of two decades.

Each verse that was revealed to the Prophet (s) was revealed in a particular context. The reason for this is because each verse in the Qur'an has practical applicability. The teachings of the Qur'an are not abstract or theoretical, they are concrete and directly relevant to human life in this world as well as the Hereafter. The occasions of revelation in the Qur'an are what are called the *shan al-nuzūl*.

The occasions of revelation provide us with the historical context, moment, situation as well as the persons involved when the verse was revealed. Through this we are better able to apply the Qur'an's verses in a practical way in most or all aspects of our lives. Some of the *shan al-nuzūl* are evident in the Qur'an, but others must be derived from the authentic hadiths or transmitted sayings of the Prophet (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (as).

5.4

The Quran and Islamic law

The Qur'an is the ultimate source of Islamic law. It sets the general principles on how we should understand the law. It sets the ethical and moral paradigms of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable behavior.

For example, the Qur'an rules against stealing the property of orphans or forcing women into prostitution. These rules are important for they set the parameters of how far we can interpret Islamic law. So if we take these two examples, we know that any interpretation that would somehow legalize forced prostitution or theft of an orphan's property would be totally invalid.

Knowledge of the Qur'an is essential in understanding Islamic law, especially in our modern world. We often see extremists committing many barbaric acts and justifying them through a warped understanding of Islamic law.

But any in-depth reading of the Qur'an, and careful consideration of the moral

and ethical principles that it preaches will make one quickly realize how unislamic the behavior of some violent extremists are.

The Qur'an, however, does not contain all of Islamic law. As we said, it sets the general principles, especially moral and ethical principles, which guide the law. For example, the Qur'an asks us to pray, but it does not tell us how many units of prayer we should perform. Similarly, it tells us to fast, but it does not give us the details as to how to fast.

So where are we supposed to get these details from? They are to be taken from the hadiths of the Messenger of God (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (as). These hadiths give us the details, and the Qur'an gives us the general principles.

5.5

The Qur'an, Allah and Humankind

The Qur'an is the foundation of all of Islam. The Qur'an sets the foundational beliefs of all Muslims, which includes tawhid, that is, belief in the absolute oneness of God, the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad (s) as well as the reality of the Day of Judgment.

Many times over, we've seen how the Prophet (s) is the explainer of Islam's Holy Book. What we haven't touched upon much, however, is how the Holy Qur'an is proof of the Messenger of Allah's

(s) truthfulness, that is, it is a proof of his claim that he was indeed a Prophet from God. Every Prophet of Allah that wishes to establish himself as genuine Prophet must produce miracles.

The Qur'an was and is still the miracle of the Prophet Muhammad (s) for its sheer eloquence in Arabic was something which the Arabs of the time could not reproduce despite being having the top experts of Arabic eloquence in their communities.

One of the primary reasons for the existence of the Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt was for them to expand and explain the Qur'an for us. Without the Ahl al-Bayt

(as), the Qur'an remains incomplete, and similarly, without the Qur'an, the Ahl al-Bayt (as) cannot fulfill their mission.

5.6

Hadith and Sunnah, difference and variations

Hadiths and Sunnah are often confusing terms for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The distinction between the two are sometimes hard to make so what we'll try to do here is try to unwrap some of these concepts so as to get a better understanding going.

Sunnah means tradition and practice. As such, Sunnah refers to the practice and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (s) and at times, that of his Ahl al-Bayt (as). Of course, everything the Prophet did was his own Sunnah, but in technical terms, sunnah refers to the good practices the Prophet did that are not necessarily obligatory. So, for example, one of the "sunnahs" of the Prophet was that he used to brush his teeth before prayer

Hadith means "saying," in other words, it refers to the transmitted sayings of the Prophet (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (as). When we say transmitted, we mean that they were transmitted by a chain of people who heard the teachings of the Prophet and related it down onwards to other people until it was compiled into a book.

So as the Sunnah refers to the practices of the Prophet, the hadiths are the vehicles through which much of the Sunnah is transmitted to us from.

5.7

The Reliability of Hadiths

Muslim scholars grade hadiths into a number of categories, the most popular of these categories are called saḥīḥ (meaning reliable) and da'īf (meaning weak). Obviously this does not exhaust the grading of categories for there are many more, but we just want to get an idea across at this point.

So a hadith is composed of a chain of transmitters. A chain of transmission in a hadith works like this. Imagine person A hears that the Prophet said X from person B. Person B says he heard the hadith from person C, and person D says he heard it from a companion of the Prophet (s) who was present when the

Messenger of Allah (s) stated X.

So now if we go back to our question, how do we know these people are truthful? Early in Islam's history, Muslim scholars painstakingly researched about narrators. Often enough, they were contemporaries of these narrators. Through in depth study of these individuals, Muslim scholars would compile biographical dictionaries outlining their assessment of hadith narrators.

If all the narrators were reliable (both in their moral integrity and their memory) and the chain of transmission was unbroken, then the hadith would be labeled as *sahīh*, meaning authentic or reliable. If the chain of transmission contained people of dubious character, known to be dishonest, or at the very least, someone with a bad memory, then the hadith would be considered *da'īf* or weak.

By no means did this mean that the hadith was reliable from a historical perspective. All it meant was that Muslims were giving the hadith the benefit of the doubt and a probable chance of being an authentic utterance of the Prophet (s) or his Ahl al-Bayt (as).

5.8

A Reflection on Verses of the Holy Qur'an

N/A

5.9

Hadith al-Thaqalayn

N/A

5.10

Imam Ali (as) and Nahj al-Balagha.

N/A

5.11

Taqlid and Tawḍīh Al Masail Genre of Literature

Few people have the time or ability to become scholars of Islamic law. Knowing the law and how it is derived is not an easy thing to do. It takes years of study, practice and time.

No one can know everything, except for Allah. Muslim jurists or scholars of Islamic law, are just like doctors. They are a group of people who have studied the law for years in order to uncover truths about divine law.

The process of following a scholar of law is called taqlīd, which literally means to “imitate” where we imitate his laws. For taqlīd to be valid, the scholar in question must hold a number of characteristics. These characteristics include, among other things, being just, not having committed major sins and being knowledgeable about Islamic law.

Since we're not experts, it is obligatory to do taqlīd. We must do personal research or ask knowledgeable members of the community on who the most knowledgeable marja' is. A marja' is a jurist whom one does taqlīd of.

When a marja' gives a definitive verdict on a legal matter, this verdict is called a fatwa. Fatwas can be obtained in various ways. A popular way to get a fatwa nowadays is online. A person can find his or her marja's website and look through the question and answer section of the site.

A Marja's fatwas and legal views can usually be found in a genre of legal literature called Tawḍīḥ al-Masā'il, which can also be pronounced as Tawzīḥ al-Masā'il - meaning “explication of legal questions/problems.”

The word Tawḍīḥ al-Masā'il is usually used when the contents of the work are in Persian. Arabic versions of Tawḍīḥ al-Masā'il are usually called Minhāj al-Sālihīn which means “the path of the righteous.”