

Oral traditions of islam

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



Islam is a religion based on oral tradition. It is very important because many of what we know of Islam in the present is based on orally transmitted information. Even when it comes to the authorities of the religion it can be traced to oral tradition. In this essay the emphasis would be put on how oral tradition sets up authority in the religion, in both sunni and and shi' ite sects. Why is oral tradition so important in Islam? During the time when Muhammad was alive, unfortunately nothing was ever recorded. In the pre-Islamic times, there were Arab tribes. These tribes were heavily into poetry. Many believe that this may have helped in the recollection and transmission of oral history in Islam. The Quran is the central religious text of Islam. It is said to be the literal words of Allah recited to Muhammad. This is the first of oral authority in Islam. The Quran at first was not compiled. Several years after Muhammad passed away, in the Uthmanic period around 650, they gathered the sayings of Allah and created the Uthmanic Codex. At that time this was the most important authority on judging what is right and what is wrong in the religion. The idea of Quran being the utmost important in authority is generally accepted in the Muslim religion. All though there are some controversies between the two sects about the Quran, neither would deny the importance and the authority of the Quran. Unfortunately, although the Quran, states what we should do in order to be on the right path, but it never tells us how. This is the part where oral history becomes very important. Most of what and how we practice in this religion has been transmitted orally. There is no other superior authority in the Sunni sect. of Islam then that of the Quran and the Hadith. What is the Hadith? It is a compilation " of statement[s] made or description of an act performed by the

Prophet Muhammad" (Islam p. 13). They legitimate the hadiths through isnad, which is a list of narrators reaching back to the original narrator, being the prophet. Without the Isnad the Hadith has no valid authority. Many of those who are involved in law in Islam, believed that those Hadiths that can be seen as 100 percent factual should be seen second in authority to the Quran (Islam p. 19). The idea of authority and oral transmission is key when it comes to the hadith. It is stated that hearing a Hadith from someone is more authoritative than one reading the hadith themselves, keeping in mind that the person reciting the hadith had heard it personally from someone earlier (Islam p. 15). The Hadith is a living example of a righteous Muslim. It allows everyday Muslims to understand how to pray and how to live on a day to day basis. In the shi'ite sect of Islam they do believe in the hadith, accept they omitted parts of it. The word sunna in the shi'ite sect of Islam holds the meaning of the way or deeds of Muhammad and the twelve Imams in Shi'a Islam. The twelve Imams were believed by Shi'a Muslims as Imams chosen by Allah to succeed the prophet and to lead mankind in every aspect of life. The word sunna at times can be interchangeable with hadith, the word exists also in the sunni tradition except it omits from the definition the part of the twelve Imams. It is found that the early Imams never wrote anything down (Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shi'ism). Their teachings were also orally transmitted at first. It is said that many of the works ascribed to the Imams were holy scriptures which were handed down to them or composed by themselves (Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shi'ism). The two books in sunni islam, the Quran and the Hadith, to this day have superior authority in the religion. The Islamic laws and jurisprudence is based on

these two texts stated earlier. Fiqh, which means to extract religious rulings on practical matters based from the main sources of Islam, which is the Hadith and the Quran. In other words, the traditions that were orally transmitted in the early days are now the bases for Islamic Divine law, called Shahria. Since the Quran and the Hadith, or Sunnas can be interpreted differently there are different schools of thought. There are four major schools in the Sunni sect, the Hanafi school, the Maliki school, the Shafi'i school and the Hanbali school, which represent the generally accepted Sunni authority for Islamic jurisprudence and in the Shia sect. there is the school of Ja'fari. In general all of these schools base their jurisprudence on the two orally transmitted authorities of Islam. When it comes to evidence in the Islamic law, there is a " stress on the authority of oral transmission mirrored [to hadiths] the priority given to oral testimony over documentary evidence in the Islamic law courts and carried over into matter that had nothing to do with the religion" (Islam, p. 16). In conclusion the idea of oral transmission is the basis of what Islam is today. From the time the Quran was created to now, oral transmission plays a huge part in the authorities of the religion. The most important authority of the religion, the Quran, the word of God, was believed to be orally transmitted to Mohammad. The second most important authority in the religion, the Hadiths, or sunnas, were both compilations of orally transmitted information about the Prophet and the twelve imams for Shias. These documents to this day creates authority in the religion through the Shahrias. The shahrias, which governs almost every aspect of a Muslims life today.