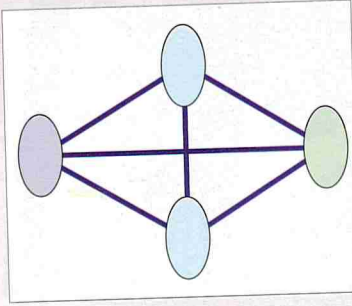


How do sources of authority within Islam relate to each other?

On pages 6 and 7 you should have found that Dr Darsh used various sources of authority to support his answers. The panels on this page describe Muslims' different sources of authority.

B



- 1 Draw your own simplified copy of the diagram on page 7, like this.
 - 2 Add arrows, and labels to explain what the arrows show (use the definitions on this page to help you).
 - 3 Explain why there are arrows from the Qur'an to all three of the other elements.
 - 4 Some Muslims think that they should copy literally everything that Muhammad ﷺ did. For example, Muhammad ﷺ made his welfare payments in barley – so should they.
- Others believe his lifestyle gives them a model to adapt their lives to. How might Muslims explain their decision to:
- a) copy Muhammad ﷺ literally or
 - b) adapt his practices to their own situation?

Qur'an – meaning 'recitation'

All Muslims regard the Qur'an as their most important source of authority

- It was:
- revealed to MUHAMMAD ﷺ in the Arabic language over a period of 23 years
 - recited by Muhammad ﷺ and memorised by him and his companions
 - written down by others during Muhammad's ﷺ lifetime (570–632CE)
 - collected together in Arabic and arranged in 114 surahs (divisions) after Muhammad's ﷺ death, and checked for accuracy against what many people had learned by heart.
 - Some Muslims learn the entire Qur'an by heart and earn the title of HAFIZ, a very respected status.

Sunnah – meaning 'customary practices'

This is the second most important source of authority for Muslims

- Sunnah refers to the practices, customs and traditions of Muhammad ﷺ that are considered to be 'model' – a perfect example. They are found in hadith (see right) and other texts.
- Muslims try to imitate Muhammad's ﷺ life as closely as they can and regard him as a perfect human being. He is an inspiration to all Muslims.
- Muhammad ﷺ is known as the 'seal of the prophets', the last prophet, to whom Allah revealed the Qur'an.

Shari'ah – meaning 'the straight way' or 'clear straight path'

This is the Islamic law

Muslims believe that by following Shari'ah, they are living life the way that Allah wants them to. In Islam the law is based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah and is used by Muslims to make moral decisions. Some people become experts in Shari'ah. The Shari'ah explains how to put the principles of the Qur'an and Sunnah into practice. By following the Shari'ah, Muslims can live the way they believe Allah wants them to.

How do Muslims use these sources of authority?

- The first question for any Muslim on any issue is, 'What does the Qur'an say?'
- If the Qur'an does not give clear guidance, the next question is, 'What more can I find out about this from other texts?'
- The third question is, 'How have scholars interpreted all this?'

Here is an example of the way this process works in practice. How could these sources of authority help a Muslim to know how to pray?

Stage 1

What does the Qur'an say about prayer?

The Qur'an talks a lot about the importance of prayer. Again and again it instructs Muslims to pray regularly, often, and at fixed times and explains the value of prayer. But it doesn't lay down precisely how to pray or when.

Stage 2

What more can you find out about prayer from hadith and the example of Muhammad ﷺ?

Muhammad ﷺ often taught about prayer. There are clear accounts of him performing the prayers at the five set times. There are detailed descriptions of the different prayer positions he used and the words from the Qur'an he used to recite in his prayers.

Stage 3

How have scholars interpreted all this?

Different traditions have developed different ways of praying based on their interpretations of what they believe are the authoritative (genuine) accounts of Muhammad's ﷺ words and deeds. Most Muslims pray five times a day, whilst others say that it is permissible to pray just three times, by joining together the midday and afternoon prayers and by joining together the evening and night prayers. Some use slightly different positions or different forms of words, but all agree that they must pray and that it is their duty to Allah to do so.

Of course, many ordinary Muslims do not go through these stages every time on every issue. They more usually learn from IMAMS (religious leaders), their parents or their teachers what to do. But the advice they receive is based on this process.



Hadith – meaning 'saying, report, account'

This is the written record of the Sunnah

- Hadith are the sayings of Muhammad ﷺ as told by his household, family and companions.
- There are different collections of hadith. Different groups of Muslims accept different collections of hadith as reliable sources of authority.

