

PART ONE

WHAT IS THE HEBREW BIBLE?

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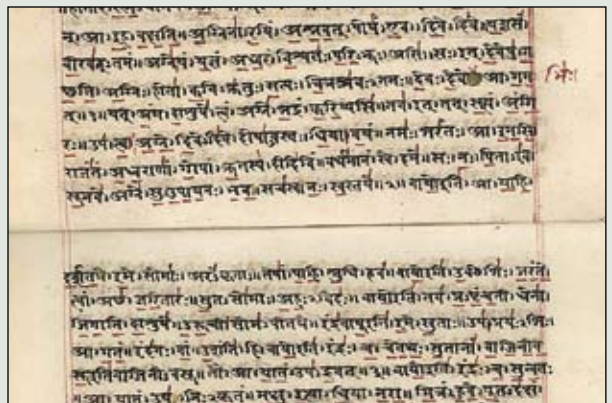
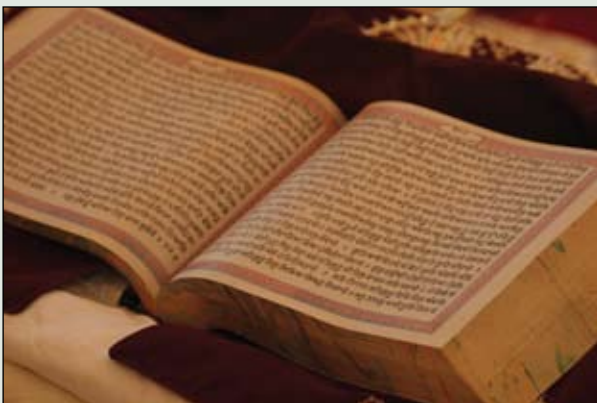


Fig. 1.1. Holy writings in the world's religions include, clockwise from top left, a scroll of the Torah (Judaism), the Qur'an (Islam), an ancient Chinese sutra (Daoism), The *Rg Veda* (Hinduism), the *Gura Granth Sahib* (Sikhism), and an ancient Tibetan Buddhist text.

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. (Joshua 1:7-8)

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Then We [that is, God] gave Moses the Book, completing Our grace on him who would do good, making plain everything and serving as a guidance and mercy, so that they may believe in the encounter with their Lord. (Qur'an 6:154)

If there is one point on which Jews, Christians, and Muslims agree, it is that the **Hebrew Bible** is a **holy** book. The common term for a book that is viewed as holy by the members of a religion is **Scripture**, which comes from a Latin word that means “written.” If we wish to understand the Hebrew Bible, we must first learn something about the role of Scriptures in religious communities.

THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURES

Most people who grew up around a synagogue, church, or mosque simply assume that all religions have books of Scripture that are fairly similar to their own. The truth is quite different. Not all religions have Scriptures, and those that do often view and use them in different ways. The reasons for these differences are complicated, reflecting the varied beliefs and histories of the individual religions.

Most religions that have Scriptures also have a class of scholars or other experts who study the Scriptures and apply them to the life of the community. Some of these scholars devote their entire lives to understanding the meaning and significance of the Scriptures. Because they know the Scriptures better than other people, they typically bear the responsibility for teaching the rest of the community about the Scriptures. In some groups they are also charged with enforcing obedience to the words of Scripture and punishing offenders.

The last few centuries have seen the rise of a different type of Scripture scholar, one who works within the walls of a university, not a religious community. Many of these scholars are members of religious groups, but many are not. Their goal is to advance human knowledge about religion, not to train religious believers. Often they ask hard questions about Scriptures that scholars within religious groups tend to avoid. Some of their findings agree with traditional understandings of Scripture, but many do

not. Most are professors who pass on their methods and insights to college and university students in classrooms around the world. (For more on the differences between these two types of scholars, see chapter 5.)

The majority of these university-based scholars study the Scriptures of a single religion (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, and so forth). Some, however, have turned their attention to broader questions concerning the role of Scriptures within religious communities. Questions that they seek to address include:

- How does a book come to be regarded as Scripture within a religious community?
- How do the Scriptures of different religions resemble and differ from one another?
- What roles do Scriptures play in the lives of religious communities?
- How do religious people view and interpret Scriptures?

The remainder of this chapter will examine some of the answers that scholars have given to these questions.

DEFINING OUR TERMS

Perhaps the most fundamental question raised by the academic study of Scripture is this: What makes books of Scripture different from other books? The following definition provides a useful starting point for examining this question: *“Scripture is the writing accepted by and used in a religious community as especially sacred and authoritative.”*¹ This definition is valuable because it highlights some of the chief characteristics of books that are regarded as Scriptures.

1. Scriptures are written.

The most fundamental requirement for the existence of Scriptures is the presence of people who know how to read and write. **Literacy** is a skill that is taken for granted by virtually everyone in the developed world today. For most of human history, however, the ability to read and write was limited to a small, elite class of people who

could afford the time and expense of a formal education. In some cultures this included most of the members of the wealthy or ruling classes; in others, literacy was prevalent only among the **scribes**, **priests**, and scholars who kept records for the ruling **elites**. Some societies never developed a written language or the technology of book production.

Virtually all books of Scripture were written long ago in societies where the great majority of the population was illiterate. Like other works of literature, Scriptures were composed by members of the educated elite. The implications of this observation are profound. While religious people tend to think of their Scriptures as being universally valid (that is, relevant beyond their time and place of composition), the truth is that books of Scripture reflect the culture, beliefs, and biases of the people who produced them—usually upper-class males. Contemporary academic studies of Scripture have called attention to the effects of class and gender bias within books of Scripture. The presence of bias does not invalidate the message of the books, but it does mean that readers must be aware of the various ways in which elite biases might have affected the depiction of nonelites within the texts. Many books of Scripture express negative opinions about the religious beliefs and practices of the illiterate masses (including women) that may not have been shared by the majority of the population. In some cases the religious ideas and attitudes expressed in books of Scripture represent a minority viewpoint within the culture in which they arose.

In societies where literacy is limited or unknown, religious beliefs and practices are normally passed from generation to generation via **oral traditions**. Oral traditions serve many of the same purposes in the lives of illiterate people that books of Scripture do among the educated elites. For this reason some scholars have argued that the category of Scripture should be broadened to include oral materials. Most scholars have resisted this move, however, due to their conviction that the transition from oral traditions to written texts marks a fundamental change in the nature and history of a religious community, a change that often coincides with new developments in the organizational structure and thought-patterns of the group. This does not mean that having written texts makes the religions

of literate cultures somehow better than those of illiterate cultures; the presence of technology says nothing about the relative merits or truthfulness of a society's ideas about the nature of reality. The chief difference is that writing tends to freeze the traditions at a particular stage in their development, whereas oral traditions can continue to evolve and change with the needs and insights of the culture.

2. Scriptures are accepted by and used in a religious community.

Literate societies produce a variety of written materials: financial records, stories, legal codes, poems, news reports, songs, historical works, and the like. In societies where religion plays a dominant role, as in virtually all cultures across human history, much of the literary output is tied directly to religion or reflects a religious outlook on life. Yet relatively few of these documents ever come to be regarded as Scripture. Why do some texts attain this status while others do not?

The elevation of a book to scriptural status reflects a judgment by the members of a particular religious group or culture that the book contains a classic statement of some of the central beliefs, values, and/or practices of the group. Sometimes this judgment is expressed through a formal vote or declaration by the members or leaders of the group, but usually the process is more gradual and

informal. The process typically begins with the composition of a book that is copied and circulated among a small group of literate individuals. The author might be a well-known leader or teacher, a group of people charged with preserving the traditions of the group, or a complete unknown. Some of these early readers find the book useful and pass it on to others. Since books had to be copied by hand during the centuries when most books of Scripture were composed, the process of dissemination was often rather slow.

Once the book is placed into circulation, the process can move in a variety of directions. In some cases the book becomes so widely known and respected over time that it is incorporated into the cultural heritage of the group and passed on in families and schools over the generations. In other cases a book finds a place of honor within a narrower audience, as when a collection of ritual texts is deemed useful by the people who oversee the ritual life of the community. In still other cases a book is endorsed by the leaders of the group and thus becomes an official text of the community. Finally, many books are simply lost or never attain an elevated status within the community.

But this does not explain why people come to believe that certain books deserve a position of honor beyond other books that are known and used within a particular group or society. There is no single explanation that applies in every case. In cultures with a rich history of oral traditions, a book that renders those traditions faithfully into writing (especially the more important ones) might be seen as authoritative by people who know and respect the traditions. The same is true for books that summarize the group's time-tested wisdom for daily living. Books that express divine support for the present social order are always popular among the elites, while books that criticize the authorities are cherished by the followers of dissident leaders. Books that explain how religious **rituals** are to be conducted are likely to be honored by those who are charged with performing the rituals. Some books gain a following due to their literary qualities, especially poetic texts. Others are valued because they offer helpful observations about the nature of reality and the fundamental questions of human existence. Finally, some books earn respect due to their close association with the supernatural realm, whether because they claim to be divinely



Fig 1.2. Ancient scribes copy texts onto scrolls in an Egyptian tomb painting.

inspired or because they contain instructions for interacting with or manipulating superhuman powers.

3. Scriptures are viewed as especially sacred.

The word **sacred** means “set apart from the ordinary sphere of life.” To call a book sacred is to suggest that it is different from other books, often through some sort of association with the supernatural realm. Religions differ in the way they define this association. Among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the traditional view has been that the Scriptures are somehow inspired by the **deity**. To some people, this means that God dictated the words of Scripture directly to human authors, thus ensuring the truth of its contents. Others believe that the deity may have guided the production of the texts, but in a manner that respected the individuality and creativity of the human authors. Still others would limit the term **inspiration**



Fig. 1.3. Thoth, the Egyptian god of writing, dictates a text to a scribe.

to the belief that God speaks through the texts when they are read by people of faith.

The uniqueness of sacred texts is understood quite differently in the religious traditions of Asia (Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and so forth). Most of the Scriptures in these religions are honored for the insights that they offer concerning the nature of ultimate reality (including

the supernatural realm) and the way humans should live in light of that reality (both ethical and ritual conduct). These insights are credited to the wisdom of great teachers and holy people from the past, not to divine inspiration. Their ideas are regarded as sacred because people have found them to be uniquely valuable for making sense of reality and ordering their daily lives.

The sacredness of Scriptures can be exhibited in a variety of ways. In some religions, only certain people are allowed to touch or read from books of Scripture. In others, the use of the books is limited to particular religious settings. Some groups use special materials, special tools, and special forms of writing for copying or binding their Scriptures. Virtually all religions preserve their Scriptures in the original language in which they were written, and some use the books only in this form, even when most of the people in the group no longer understand the language. Where translations of the text are allowed, most religions still grant primacy to the original language of the text.

In most groups the physical books of Scripture are treated with special reverence. Official copies are often kept in special cases or wrappings when not in use. Sometimes the books are paraded in front of the followers who are encouraged to touch them, kiss them, kneel before them, or otherwise express their respect for the holy book. Books of Scripture are frequently read aloud in public worship, accompanied by oral instruction regarding their meaning and application. In private homes, books of Scripture are often displayed in a position of honor and treated differently from other books.

Belief in the sacredness of Scripture also lies behind the common practice of using books of Scripture as channels of sacred power. People recite the holy words of Scripture in prayers, songs, chants, and incantations in order to open their minds to the supernatural realm and/or to call superhuman powers to their aid. Similar benefits are sometimes associated with studying or even touching the sacred books.

4. Scriptures are viewed as especially authoritative.

All religions recognize one or more sources of authority that serve to define and preserve their beliefs and practices

over time. Common authorities include group leaders or institutions, religious experts, oral traditions, sacred texts, personal religious experience, and the conscience or reasoning capacities of the individual believer. Some groups hold one of these sources of authority in highest regard, while others honor multiple authorities.

To say that Scriptures are especially authoritative means that they are given more weight in determining and regulating the beliefs and practices of the religion than are other books that might be used from time to time within the group. Literate members of the group study the Scriptures in order to gain a better understanding of the nature of reality, the way the group should be organized, and the way individual believers should live. In some groups, the authority of the Scriptures is regarded as absolute: whatever the Scriptures say must be believed and obeyed without question. In other groups, the words of Scripture are open to criticism and must be confirmed, balanced, or interpreted by other authorities.

The list of books that are regarded as authoritative Scriptures within a religious community is called the **canon**. In some groups the canon includes only books that have been officially approved by the leaders of the group, while in others the canon is defined by custom, encompassing a variety of books that have gained the respect of the community over time. Religions also differ in the way they define the limits of their canons. In some groups the canon is considered closed, meaning that no new books can be added to the canon and no revisions can be made to the wording of the sacred texts. In other groups the list remains open, signifying that the individual books of Scripture can be revised and edited and the collection expanded or reduced over time.

Virtually all religions that have a closed canon went through a period when their canon was open. This is true even for a religion like Islam that insists that its sacred book (the **Qur'an**) was dictated directly by God to Muhammad: Muslims believe that the message was received over a period of twenty-three years and thus remained open to further additions and revisions until Muhammad's death. In most religions the existence of an open period is evident from the fact that their Scriptures contain books that were written at various times and places. Clearly the canon had to have been open

during the period when the books were being composed, a period that sometimes spanned centuries.

The move from an open canon to a closed canon is usually associated with some sort of crisis in the life of the community during which the Scriptures come to be seen as the primary guarantor of the group's identity in the face of external or internal threats. Many religious groups never faced such a threat or else responded to it in a different way; thus they never felt any obligation to close their scriptural canon. This does not mean that groups with an open canon think of their books of Scripture as less important or less authoritative than do groups with a closed canon. It simply means that they remain open to the creation or acknowledgment of additional books that might come to be regarded as sacred.

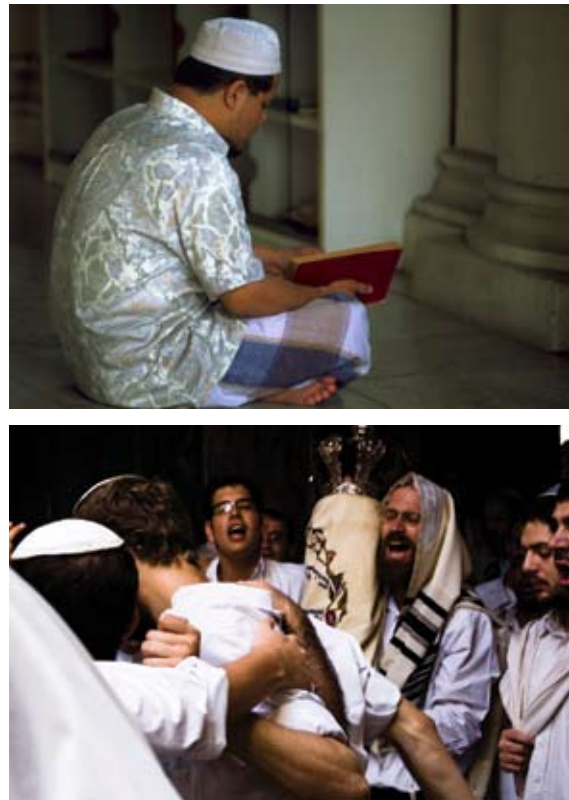


Fig. 1.4. (top) A Muslim engages in quiet reflection on the Qur'an; (bottom) a group of Jewish men celebrate the beginning of a new year of Torah readings.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

While there are many similarities in the ways religions view and use Scriptures, there are also significant differences. Identifying these differences is important for understanding the nature of Scriptures.

1. Scriptures vary in number.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims are accustomed to thinking of Scripture as a single, unchanging book that is honored above all other books in their community. This view is fairly accurate for the Muslim Scriptures (the Qur'an), but not for Judaism and Christianity, whose "book" of Scripture is actually a collection of dozens of books that were composed at various times and places over the course of hundreds of years.

Most religions, in fact, honor multiple books of Scripture. Confucianism acknowledges five classic texts along with four supplemental books that are held in equally high esteem. Taoism employs two primary texts, the *Daode Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, but Taoists have created hundreds of texts through the centuries that are valued as Scripture by different branches of the religion. Hinduism is grounded in a primary set of Scriptures called the Vedas, but in practice Hindus can choose from hundreds of books that are recognized as Scripture. Most Buddhists would accept the *Tripitaka* (a collection of Buddha's teachings) as sacred, but the religion includes many different schools that have their own canons of scriptural texts.

2. Scriptures contain different types of material.

The kind of material that one finds within books of Scripture varies widely from group to group. At one end of the spectrum are collections like the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, which contain books reflecting a broad range of literary styles: stories, songs, legal codes, letters, poems, historical narratives, theological treatises, **proverbs**, **apocalyptic** texts, and more. At the other end are books that contain only one or two types of literature. The *Adi Granth* of Sikhism is made up almost exclusively of hymns, while the *Analec*t*s* of Confucius and the *Daode Jing* of Taoism consist primarily of sayings and dialogues

(some situated within a narrative framework) that explain how people should live.

Among religions that recognize a large number of books as Scripture (Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, and so forth), one book will sometimes contain a single type of material and another book a different type, or else different types of literature might be segregated from one another within the same text. In Hinduism, for example, each of the four texts called the Vedas contains a section of hymns, a list of instructions for performing various rituals, a set of philosophical reflections on the meanings of the rituals, and a collection of dialogues between students and their masters, but each type of literature appears in its own section. Other Hindu Scriptures like the *Mahābhārata* and the *Laws of Manu* are more uniform, the former consisting mainly of ancient myths and legends and the latter of practical ethical instruction.

More often than not, the presence of diverse content within a set of sacred texts reflects a long history of development. As a result, it is not uncommon to find tensions and even contradictions within books of Scripture. Some religions freely acknowledge the presence of conflicting materials within their sacred texts, while others argue that such differences are more apparent than real. Often people within a religious tradition will disagree on this point, with the more liberal followers embracing the presence of diversity in their Scriptures and the more conservative members seeking to defend the unity of the texts.

One of the tasks of scholars in most religious traditions is to figure out how best to reconcile these differences within the sacred text. Sometimes this means finding a way to paper over apparent disagreements, as when scholars argue that certain texts pertain only to specific circumstances in the past while others are more universal in meaning. At other times a scholar might be charged with deciding which of several competing texts is relevant to a particular situation. Many of the conflicts that have arisen among religious people over the centuries can be traced to different ways of interpreting a common set of Scriptures.

3. Scriptures have varying degrees of authority.

Virtually all religions have certain books or passages of Scripture that are regarded as more important and

authoritative than others. Often the followers of a religion will disagree about which texts should carry more weight in a particular situation. In some groups the dividing line between books of Scripture and other books is also rather vague.

For Jews, the **Torah** (the first five books of the **Bible**) is the most important part of Scripture. The remaining books of the Bible are viewed as extensions of the message of the Torah. The situation is complicated, however, by the existence of the **Mishnah** and the **Talmud**, later Jewish texts that discuss how the Torah should be applied to the daily lives of believers, as well as other ancient texts like the **midrashim** that seek to define the meaning and relevance of the Torah. Since these books are linked so closely to the Torah, many traditional Jews would view them as having more authority than some of the other books that are included in their canonical Scriptures. A similar view prevails among many Muslims concerning the *hadith*, collections of stories about the life and teachings of Muhammad that are used to interpret their sacred text, the Qur'an. Most Christians regard the later part of their Scriptures, the **New Testament**, as having more authority than the earlier part, the **Old Testament**, while some go further and privilege certain portions of the New Testament (for example, the words of Jesus or the teachings of Paul) over others. Hindus distinguish between Scriptures that they believe were revealed to ancient seers (*shrutis*) and texts that apply those early revelations to the circumstances of later societies (*smritis*). In principal, the earlier texts are the final authorities within Hinduism, but much of the language and content of these texts is incomprehensible to ordinary Hindus. As a result, those who read the Scriptures usually pay more heed to the later texts, especially those that pertain to their favorite god or goddess.

4. Scriptures are used in different ways.

Religions differ in the amount of weight that they grant to Scriptures in comparison with other aspects of their religion. In some groups, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism, Scriptures occupy a central place in the lives of both individuals and the group. The words of Scripture are read or recited routinely in public and private worship, and most of the beliefs and practices of the group are grounded in the teachings of Scripture. Ordinary believers turn to the Scriptures for guidance



Fig. 1.5.

concerning their daily conduct and ethical choices, while the leaders of the group study the Scriptures to learn how the group should be structured and how they should carry out their duties.

Other religions give their books of Scripture a less central position. Hindus acknowledge the value and importance of Scriptures, but most Hindus follow beliefs and practices that have been passed on orally for generations. Hindu Scriptures are often chanted in public and private worship, and many Hindu rituals follow patterns spelled out in the Scriptures. Nevertheless, few Hindus besides members of the priestly class or philosophers ever read or study the Scriptures for themselves, and even the experts no longer understand much of the language that is used in the foundational Hindu Scriptures, the Vedas. In a similar way, all Buddhists are familiar with the teachings known as the *Four Noble Truths* and the *Eightfold Path*, but they learn these teachings through oral instruction, not through reading Scriptures. Meditation and ethical conduct are more important to Buddhists than the knowledge of sacred texts, most of which are highly technical and studied only by monks and scholars.

CONCLUSION

The Hebrew Bible is a particular expression of a common human tendency to create and canonize a set of written texts to guide the life of a community. Not every religion has books of Scripture. Those that do have them vary

greatly in the kinds of material that they include and the manner in which they view and use them.

Scriptures are not fundamentally different from other books: they are written and compiled by ordinary human authors and editors using the common language and images of their society, and they are copied and circulated and become popular in the same manner as other books within that culture. Like all literary works, they express the viewpoints and biases of their authors, which in ancient times usually meant the views of elite urban males.

What makes books of Scripture different from other books is not their mode of composition, but the fact that a particular religious community has decided that they are worthy of special respect. Such a decision reflects the group's judgment that these books are uniquely valuable for ordering the social, intellectual, ethical, or devotional life of the community. In some groups the human origin of the sacred books is either downplayed or forgotten, giving rise to stories that attribute the books to supernatural inspiration or to a group of supremely wise ancestors. By the time this happens, books of Scripture are usually well on their way to becoming a dominant source of religious authority within their community.

Note

1. Robert E. Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*, 4th ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2003), 6.

EXERCISE 1

Read these excerpts from the Scriptures of various religions and answer the following questions about each passage.

- (a) What kind of literature does the passage represent? Is it a story, a song, a law code, a poem, a letter, a historical narrative, a theological treatise, a collection of proverbs, an apocalyptic text, a piece of ethical instruction, or some other kind of literature?
- (b) What is the general subject matter of the text?
- (c) How do you think a text like this might have been used by followers of the religion? What leads you to this conclusion?

Qur'an 44:41-56 (Islam)

The tree of bitterness will surely be the food of the sinner,
 Like molten lead, which boils in the bellies, like boiling water.
 "Take him and thrust him into the pit of Hell.
 Then pour over his head the agony of the boiling water,
 Saying, 'Taste, you who are truly the mighty and noble one.
 That is the punishment that you used to doubt.'"
 However, the God-fearing are in a secure place, in gardens and well-springs.
 They wear silk and brocade facing each other. Thus it will be.
 And We gave them wide-eyed houris [female heavenly beings] in marriage.
 They call therein for every fruit in perfect security.
 They do not taste death therein, except the first death;
 And he guards them against the punishment of Hell,
 As a bounty from your Lord. That is the great triumph.

Mahābhārata: Astika Parva 18 (Hinduism)

Long ago, when the sea was still milk, Narayana said to the gods of heaven, "Churn the ocean, and she will yield amrita, the nectar of immortality, and precious gems, and all manner of illusion and revelation." So they placed the snow mountain Mandara in the middle of the milk sea. Its deep-striking roots rested on the ocean floor; its summit rose high above the surface. The great serpent Sesha, whose hood is an island of jewels, stretched himself across the sea, his body wrapped endlessly round the mountain in the center. On one shore his tail was held by the Asuras, the dark, olden gods; on the other shore his neck was held by the devas, the mortal gods of heaven. They each pulled in turn, so that the mountain spun first one way, then the other, while his trees and stones were thrown off into the foaming sea. First the mild Moon rose from the milk sea; then the Lady Lakshmi, bearing good fortune to men; then the smooth jewel adorning Narayana's breast; then Indra's elephant Airavata, white as clouds; then Surabhi, the white cow who grants any wish; then Parijata the wishing-tree of fragrance; then Rambha the nymph, the first Apsaras; and at last Dhanwantari the physician, robed in white, bearing a cup filled with amrita, the essence of life.

Hebrew Bible: Leviticus 6:8-13 (Judaism)

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the ritual of the burnt offering. The burnt offering itself shall remain on the hearth upon the altar all night until the morning, while the fire on the altar shall be kept burning. The priest shall put on his linen vestments after putting on his linen undergarments next to his body; and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar, and place them beside the altar. Then he shall take off his vestments and put on other garments, and carry the ashes out to a clean place outside the camp. The fire on the altar shall be kept burning; it shall not go out. Every morning the priest shall add wood to it, lay out the burnt offering on it, and turn into smoke the fat pieces of the offerings of well-being. A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar; it shall not go out.

Analects 16.7-9 (Confucianism)

Confucius said, "There are three things which the superior man guards against. In youth, when the physical powers are not yet settled, he guards against lust. When he is strong and the physical powers are full of vigor, he guards against quarrelsomeness. When he is old, and the animal powers are decayed, he guards against covetousness."

Confucius said, "There are three things of which the superior man stands in awe. He stands in awe of the ordinances of Heaven. He stands in awe of great men. He stands in awe of the words of sages. The mean man does not know the ordinances of Heaven, and consequently does not stand in awe of them. He is disrespectful to great men. He makes sport of the words of sages."

Confucius said, "Those who are born with the possession of knowledge are the highest class of men. Those who learn, and so readily get possession of knowledge, are the next. Those who are dull and stupid, and yet compass the learning, are another class next to these. As to those who are dull and stupid and yet do not learn—they are the lowest of the people."

New Testament: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 (Christianity)

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ādi Granth: Raga Bihagra, Mahala 5 (Sikhism)

Listen to my prayer, O my Lord and Master.
I am filled with millions of sins, but still, I am Your slave.
O Destroyer of pain, Bestower of mercy,
Fascinating Lord, Destroyer of sorrow and strife:
I have come to Your Sanctuary; please preserve my honor.
You are in all, O Immaculate Lord.
God hears and beholds all; He is with us,
The nearest of the near.

I was separated from Him, and now,
He has united me with Himself.
In the Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy,
I sing the Glorious Praises of the Lord.
Singing the Praises of the Lord of the Universe, forever sublime,
The blissful Lord is revealed to me.
My bed is adorned with God; my God has made me His own.
Abandoning anxiety, I have become carefree,
And I shall not suffer in pain any more.

Daode Jing 31 (Taoism)

Good weapons are instruments of fear; all creatures hate them.

Therefore followers of the Tao never used them.

The wise man prefers the left.

The man of war prefers the right.

Weapons are instruments of fear; they are not a wise man's tools.

He uses them only when he has no choice.

Peace and quiet are dear to his heart.

And victory no cause for rejoicing.

If you rejoice in victory, then you delight in killing;

If you delight in killing, you cannot fulfill yourself.

On happy occasions precedence is given to the left,

On sad occasions to the right.

In the army the general stands on the left,

The commander-in-chief on the right.

This means that war is conducted like a funeral.

When many people are being killed,

They should be mourned in heartfelt sorrow.

That is why a victory must be observed like a funeral.