

# Duties and Law

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you're going to look at duties and laws and how they are prescribed and proscribed in some religions. You'll see that the territories of religious and secular laws often overlap and intersect, as do some of the duties that are associated with these laws. To demonstrate this, we'll look at a few examples from several major religions. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Secular and Religious Law](#)
2. [Law in Monotheistic Faiths](#)
3. [Law in Buddhism](#)

## 1. Secular and Religious Law

Secular law is designed to protect the interests of individuals and society. Its goal is to prevent harm from being inflicted on individuals by other individuals or society as a whole without due process of law. It therefore tends to emphasize individual rights.

Religious law, on the other hand, is much more comprehensive. It is designed to improve individuals and society. Its goal is to make individuals holy and societies righteous. In the past centuries, many nations have switched from religious law to secular law, especially civil law and aspects of international law. However, many of these nations have also reserved a continuing role for religious law in certain aspects, such as family law, for the internal use of religious organizations and sometimes for contract law.

## 2. Law in Monotheistic Faiths

Many religions spell out that there are duties that an adherent is prescribed to perform encoded in the laws, often put forth by a particular deity or deities. In Christianity, it is believed that divine law limits rights, and God commands people to act according to his universal order. In the belief system of Judaism and Christianity, the **Ten Commandments**, or the **Decalogue**, were given to Moses on Mount Sinai in present-day Egypt.

After Abraham, the first Hebrew patriarch Moses was given the law to carry and lead the chosen people out of captivity and into the promised land. This was a promise given to all descendants of Abraham. The receipt of the Decalogue is considered to be the second direct and personal revelation from a single creator, God, to a human being.

#### IN CONTEXT

There are parallels between the Decalogue and Islamic law. Some examples of what the Ten Commandments contain are commands to worship only God and keep the Sabbath and prohibitions against idolatry, blasphemy, murder, theft, and adultery.

In the Qur'an, where Allah speaks through the angel Gabriel to Muhammad, there are similar laws: Do not associate another deity with God. Know therefore that there is no God but God. You shall not commit adultery. Surely it is a shameful deed and an evil way. Do not covet the bounties that God has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Ten Commandments

The principal divine ordinances given to Moses by the Hebrew God.

##### Decalogue

The Ten Commandments.

## 3. Law in Buddhism

Proscription and prescriptions are offered in other sacred texts as well. There are sacred texts in Buddhism and Hinduism that offer guidelines for personal and communal release from eternal torment and suffering based on ignorance, desire, and cravings.

The **Noble Eightfold Path** and the Four Noble Truths are taught in Buddhism. The Four Noble Truths prescribe ways out of suffering for the adherent to Buddhism. They say that life is suffering, that suffering is based on cravings, and there is a way out of this. The attainment of nirvana is possible in this life.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Noble Eightfold Path

One of the four great truths of Buddhism that leads to enlightenment and to the end of suffering, symbolized as a wheel with eight spokes.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you looked at the difference between **secular and religious law**. Many countries have shifted to a legal system based on secular law, and especially concerning issues of civil and international law. Religious law is still often referred to for certain cases, such as family law. **Laws in monotheistic faiths** are similar to each other, and are believed to be given to humans directly from God. **Law in Buddhism** is centered around the Noble Eightfold Path, which is one of the Four Noble Truths that the adherent can follow to lessen the suffering in everyday life.

Source: THIS TUTORIAL WAS AUTHORED BY TED FAIRCHILD FOR SOPHIA LEARNING. Please see our [Terms of Use](#).



## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Decalogue**

The Ten Commandments

### **Noble Eightfold Path**

One of the four great truths of Buddhism that leads to enlightenment and to the end of suffering, symbolized as a wheel with eight spokes.

### **Ten Commandments**

The principal divine ordinances given to Moses by God.