

# Social Convention

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## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson talks about how family, society, and culture influence and affect the religious life of the individual. You're going to see that religion often operates behind the scenes in a way that's not consciously recognized in society. You'll look at examples from the East and West to see that religious tradition and social convention are very much entwined. They can either indirectly or directly support the religious life of the individual. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Social Convention](#)
2. [Morality and Ethical Conduct](#)

## 1. Social Convention

Most people don't work on Sunday. They take the day off. Why is that? This goes back to the Jewish and Christian practice of commemorating God's creation of the universe.

Now, it has penetrated society in a way that is just accepted. Most people don't think about it. If you're Jewish, you would observe Shabbat from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. If you're a Christian person, you will recognize the Sabbath on Sunday. There are many levels of observance. Some people might just recognize it as a day of family time. So for them, it's more a secular **social convention** than it is a religious custom.

Another social convention that has its origin in religious tradition and sacred text is the idea of gender-specific clothing. In the Bible, for example, it says "the woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, and neither shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God."

That is in the Old Testament, and it's a reference to gender-specific clothing. Today, there's lots of crossover with that, and it's not a problem, but you can still see it. For instance, most men in the West still do not wear skirts. This is an example of religious tradition that has become a part of social convention without much conscious thought.

In Muslim culture, a lot of women will wear the hijab. It's a social convention, but it has its roots in the Qur'an. Again, there are different levels of observance. Some women might simply wear the hijab out of respect and modesty, and some might formally understand their clothing as a religious symbol.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Social Convention

Customs derived from the norms or standard practices of a society.

## 2. Morality and Ethical Conduct

Every religious tradition has references to morality and ethical conduct in the world, such as prohibitions against killing. In the Bible, the Ten Commandments are the moral guidelines. In Jainism, nonviolence and self-control are the principle means of spiritual liberation.

These religious values have become social values, as well. They are either recognized as a conscious influence from religious tradition or as a secular way of being in the world. It's an accepted norm and convention to simply behave properly in the world and respectfully with your neighbor.

### IN CONTEXT

Take a look at the social institution of slavery. There are many, many references to slavery in the Bible, and they have been interpreted in many different ways. In the Middle Ages, there were very influential arguments that slavery was a result of original sin—original sin being that man has gone astray. Man is inherently corrupted, and therefore it justifies some of the evil results.

In the 18th century, many Roman Catholic priests condemned this and didn't agree with the idea that slavery was a valid and justifiable social institution. Then, of course, in the 19th century in the US many Bible passages were interpreted in different ways to defend slavery as a necessary social and economic reality.

In this realm of ethical conduct and moral values, you could look to the example of Buddhism. The Buddhist generally follows the four Noble Truths along the Eightfold Path, which includes right conduct, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right knowledge, and right intention. All of these things are considered ways of moving toward spiritual freedom. Now they're such a part of the society that they are unlikely to be questioned.

At this point, it functions as **white noise** behind the scenes. People are not consciously recognizing them, but it informs a common sense of what is right and what is wrong.



## TERM TO KNOW

### White Noise

A steady or unchanging noise that eventually ceases to be noticed.



## SUMMARY

Religious values and traditions often influence society's customs and conventions in ways that might not be consciously recognized. You saw the example of the Jewish and Christian Sabbath that commemorates God's creation of the universe. Many secular people still practice observance because it has become a **social convention**. You looked at examples from the East and West while talking about **morality and ethical conduct**, prohibitions, and proscriptions for certain types of behavior and ethical conduct in the world.

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Social Convention**

Customs derived from the norms or standard practices of a society

### **White Noise**

A steady, or unchanging noise that eventually ceases to be noticed.