
The Progression Of Western Tradition In The Bible, Quran, Epic Of Gilgamesh And The Odyssey

The books read in Search are historical texts that laid the foundation for societies, ancient and modern. The western philosophy of society is illustrated throughout the texts. The common themes that link them shows the moral compass that was valued, then and now. Western tradition is sewn deeply into the texts of the Search course to guide one according to the norms of the time. Whether it is to be honorable, loyal, or any other moral characteristics of ancient western culture, these texts laid the tiles for the path toward knowing ethics of “the west”. Our society today is deeply founded in western philosophy. Through our laws, our religions, and what is believed as right and wrong, it is clear that those principles were made and preserved by western texts like The Bible, The Odyssey, and even as far back as The Epic of Gilgamesh. As all of these texts are intertwined to show western tradition, the Search course rightfully can be represented as a study of western religion and philosophy.

The first text read in Search, The Epic of Gilgamesh, is the oldest epic poem, predating Homer by many centuries. The story was preserved on tablets that date back to approximately 2700 BC. The Epic of Gilgamesh shows the origin of epic poetry; it sets the foundation for the Greek and Roman texts to come. Though it is placed in Sumerian Uruk, modern day Iraq, it would still be considered a western text because of the influence it has on later western text. The concepts of friendship and the fear of death that play out throughout The Epic of Gilgamesh are themes found throughout the texts after. For example, in the Hebrew Bible, it states that “Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death” (John 8:51). The Bible is referencing death in this passage as escapable if you follow God. The fear of death is shown best when Gilgamesh’s friend Enkidu dies, and he searches for the source of immortality (Tablet VIII). His friend, Enkidu, leads to great mourning for him but overall, he is faced with the inevitable fact that everyone’s lives come to an end. Enkidu was a destined friend of Gilgamesh, made to help Gilgamesh grow as a person and a king. The theme of friendship and how it betters one another is frequent throughout different texts as well. In the Aeneid, Nisus and Euryalus are a pair of friends and lovers who briefly are shown as an example for their amour pious, a love that shows to be one of Aeneas’s own distinguishing virtues throughout the book. The Western tradition begins with The Epic of Gilgamesh, illustrated for years to come through the texts of later ancient societies.

The Odyssey is western epic poem written in Greece and attributed to Homer in 675-725 BCE. The Odyssey covers themes of loyalty, honor, and hospitality, showing the model for the society of Greek culture. Loyalty is a highly important characteristic valued by ancient Greek society. Throughout The Odyssey, the men travelling with him were tested in loyalty alongside Odysseus’s wife, who remained loyal to Odysseus, although he was absent. In the Qur’an, the theme of loyalty, is shown as honorable and faithful. For example, in book 2, it states, “Do you not see those who claim to believe in what has been sent down to you, and in what was sent down before you, yet still want to turn to unjust tyrants for judgement, although they have been ordered to reject them?” (2.12). The Qur’an is explaining how people will talk about God and believing in him while not truly being loyal to him in the face of authority on earth. The Bible also talks about being loyal to him and not to false idols in the ten commandments found by Moses (Exodus 20:1). The theme of loyalty throughout these texts are representing the important

characteristics to western tradition. Being loyal leads to honor for oneself that is also valued throughout history.

Honor is valued throughout multiple western texts and showed as a moral character to be treasured. In the *Odyssey*, honor and glory was valued as a trademark of a good person of society. For instance, when Odysseus binds the cyclops Polyphemus in order to avenge the deaths of six crew members: the violence is an act of honor because vengeance is customary and just (9.210-230). Honor for a greater cause is valued throughout western texts. In Saint Augustine's confessions, he says 'Wondrous depth of Thy words! whose surface, behold! is before us, inviting to little ones. Yet are they a wondrous depth, O my God, a wondrous depth! It is awful to look therein, an awfulness of honor and a trembling of love.' (12.14.17). He is referring to himself and the society as a whole as a dishonor for their sins. He is seeing how people have colluded honor to fit their own schemes rather than the plan of God. Honor for oneself had evolved to being kind to one another and to be hospitable.

Hospitality was shown numerous times throughout the *Odyssey* as honoring one another by inviting strangers into their home. Telemachus inviting Athena, in disguise as a stranger, into their home, despite the ruckus of the suitors who pervert the tradition of hospitality (1.120-130), shows the value and importance of hospitality to someone in ancient Greek culture. Hospitality and kindness for one another is represented throughout all the texts studied in search. The action of hospitality towards others is also illustrated throughout the Qur'an, as the prophet Muhammad reminds the Islamic people of the high status of one who treats guests well by stating "Behold, they entered his presence and said: 'Peace!' He said: 'Peace!' Then he turned quickly to his household, brought out a roasted fattened calf, and placed it before them. He said: 'Will you not eat?' (51: 24-27). Honoring one another by showing kindness and hospitality is a virtue valued amongst the Islamic texts while also being illustrated as a vital virtue. In The Bible, for example, "At that hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds; the immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household." (Acts 16:33-34). Holding the Western Tradition dear, these texts perpetrate it through these writings to preserve and continue to tradition to come.

The Bible is a religious western text read throughout both semesters of Search. The Bible is a collection of works that date from 1200 BC to the first century AD. The Bible is an important text of western culture because of the influence it has had in history and society today. The followers of the Bible are Christians and Jewish. Each book of the bible leads with a distinct theme to teach through parables and story. The major themes that relay back to the constructs of western tradition are forgiveness and mercy towards one another.

According to The Bible, having grace and forgiveness for one another is an invaluable principle to grasp. Because of the story of Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross, the book of Luke states plainly, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." (Luke 6:37). To walk under the practice of the New Testament Bible, one needed to follow the virtues presented as characteristic of Jesus. Forgiveness for one another is also held to a high status in the Qur'an: "Show forgiveness, enjoin what is good, and turn away from the ignorant." (7.199). The sympathy and forgiveness throughout western religious texts are to be shown as virtues of God, in which one would want to follow. Forgiveness is a fundamental principle of western philosophy and religion. In Dante's *Inferno*, to reach the reader and show of Dante's character as an honorable character, Dante

considers the quality of compassion—defined as having pity for another man’s suffering—an essential human trait (Canto 5). Sometimes Dante’s compassion for the sinners’ plights reaches such a depth that Dante himself seems to suffer with them. However, as he continues going to lower and lower circles, he is seen to become compassionless and lacking mercy or forgiveness to those in hell. He lacks sympathy for those in hell less and less because they didn’t get forgiveness from God. The theme of forgiveness and sympathy towards one another are depicted as a valuable principle of being human. Forgiveness is to have mercy on someone, to not hold someone back because of past mistakes.

Mercy is spoken about throughout The Bible to be given to one another as it has been given by God to the world. The book of Luke states to “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” Mercy is a value of the Qur’an, which states “No one despairs of God’s soothing mercy except those who have no faith.” (12:87). Mercy as morality in western religion is to lead people to follow in the footsteps of God and not be hateful or vengeful towards one another. Because of the brutality and merciless Roman empire at the time, a new idea of being merciful to one another changed the social norm of Roman culture.

Throughout all these texts, the underlying themes embedded into the western traditions have been engraved in time to be remembered as a moral code for people today. As all these texts are from, geographically, the same western Indo-European area, they show more of their western culture through the values and morals they hold. Western philosophy and religion can show where civilization began and adapted as a society we know today. The influential texts being referred to as “the west” is valid while still being revered as vital and influential to this day. The Bible, Qur’an, Epic of Gilgamesh, The Odyssey and so forth, represent the progression of western society as they moved towards slowly changing the societal norms and how far they had come. As the themes demonstrated throughout these texts are intertwined with one another, they are undoubtedly what founded the moral code and status quo of ancient civilization and society of today.