



Muslims
in
Encounter
STUDENT'S BOOK



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FACE2FACE

MUSLIMS IN ENCOUNTER

STUDENT'S BOOK



EDUC8

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CONTENT

06 INTRODUCTION

NAVIGATING THE BOOK

10 MODULE 1

ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER: DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

32 MODULE 2

ENCOUNTER WITH SACRED TEXTS: TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

54 MODULE 3

ENCOUNTER WITH THE ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

68 MODULE 4

WHEN ENCOUNTER BECOMES CONFLICT: JUST WAR AND JUST PEACE

82 MODULE 5

DIVINE AND HUMAN LAWS: COMPATIBLE OR NOT?

98 MODULE 6

DIVINE AND HUMAN LAWS: COMPATIBLE OR NOT?



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

NAVIGATING THE BOOK

Terrorism, war, authoritarian regimes, poverty, natural disasters, violence... Things do not seem to be going well in the world. Our society is very diverse and consists of a multitude of worldviews. Often religion and violence are linked. In a world full of violence, how can we find the good? In this book, we start from the Islamic tradition to find an answer to this question. We will journey together and discover more about the Islamic faith.

How does the book work?

This textbook on **Islam** is divided into **six chapters**, also called **deep modules**. Specifically, it covers the following six topics:

1. Encounter with the other: dealing with diversity
2. Encounter with sacred texts: texts on violence
3. Encounter with the environment: social and ecological issues
4. When encounter becomes conflict: war and peace
5. Divine and human laws: Compatible or not?
6. Free speech: Profane or sacred?



Figure 1
Video Clip



Figure 2
Diversity
Source: © vector_s/
Adobe Stock

The first module on the encounter with the other examines the way in which Muslims view, and interact with, the other, which includes other believers or non-believers. In what way do Muslims want to deal with the existing diversity in society and what are possible barriers and facilitators?

The second module focuses on the Quran, the sacred text of Islam. In what way do Muslims read the Quran? For example, how can we deal with difficult Quran passages where violence seems to be legitimized?

A third module shifts the focus to the relationship between ecology and Islam. How do Muslims interact with their environment (nature, animals), and care for fellow human beings? What social issues do Muslims struggle with regarding this topic?

The fourth module highlights how Muslims deal with conflicts in the world. What position do Muslims take on war and peace?

The fifth module deals with how human laws and Islamic laws relate to each other. And how the Muslims deal with contradictions between those two laws.

The sixth and final module approaches freedom of expression from an Islamic perspective. This module explores the relationship between freedom of expression and how Muslims can deal with it.

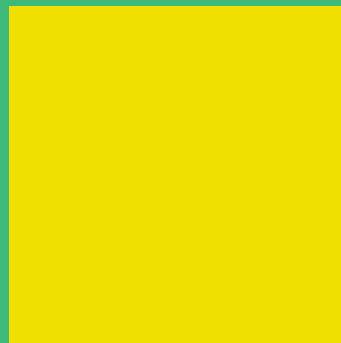
Getting started

At the beginning of each deep module, you will see a **video clip**. In this video clip, you will see friends going on different adventures. Throughout the video clip, **quiz questions** are asked. After watching this video clip and answering the quiz questions, you will start working with the **exercises** in this textbook.

Good luck!

“CORRUPTIO OPTIMI PESSIMA”
OR
“THE VERY BEST BECOMES THE
WORST WHEN IT TURNS INTO ITS
OPPOSITE”

1



ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER:
DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

MODULE ONE

DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

1.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE VIDEO



Figure 1.1
Video Clip

The video clip is in a school and work context. The story is about Pieter-Jan and Ahmed. They are 11 years old and they are best friends and classmates. They study together and play together after school on Wednesday.

Harun, the father of Ahmed searches for answers on the internet after receiving some islamophobic and racist remarks at work. He does not speak Dutch very well and therefore cannot defend himself verbally. He starts to watch Youtube videos of a narrow-minded Islamic preacher.

Ahmed his father is starting to adopt a very closed attitude towards non-Muslims.

He puts pressure on his family to follow him in this close-minded interpretation.

He doesn't want to ask too many questions about his father's religious ideology.

Ahmed's wife, Fatima, was looking for solutions and invited Ahmed's friend, Samir, who is theologically trained to bring Ahmed to different insights about the Quran texts that are violent in nature.

1.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT: QURAN IN HISTORY

1.2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Quran has a very important place within the Islamic intellectual and religious tradition. More than a billion Muslims consider the Quran as the word of God, revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad. It is important to understand the context of the tribal Arab or *ma'ud al'rab*¹ and the period in which the Quran was revealed to understand the Quran properly².

1.2.2 THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

Mecca was located in the Arabian Peninsula. At that time, about 570, the Arabian Peninsula was surrounded by two major empires that both wanted to rule the entire Near East. On one hand, you had the Christian Byzantine Empire. On the other hand, there was the Sassanid empire in Persia. There was tension between the two empires because both wanted to expand their powers of domination. This was the context in which the Prophet received the Quran.

It is important to keep the tribal society of Arabs in an international context in mind. In order to discover the wisdom of the Quran, it is essential to understand the Arab civilization of that specific time. This means you have to understand their customs, culture, philosophy and language affinity, poetry, etc. 'Abdallāh Ibn 'Abbās (a companion of the prophet) made a statement to a companion of the Prophet: "Poetry is the tradition of the Arabs, so if there is a word for us in the Quran that Allah has revealed in the language of the Arabs that is not clear, then we return to their poetry".³ The International context and the Arab civilization / period or *ma'ud al'rab* as the theologian Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī puts it, are very important to understand the verses and stories in the Quran.



Figure 1.2
Source: © kstudija /
Adobe Stock

¹ This is a term used by the great theologian Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī to emphasize the spirit of the Arabs during the time of revelation. With this he means that the knowledge of the habits and the way of life of the Arabs is an important fact to understand the Quran. The Muslim theologian Asshāfi has the same opinion.

M. IBN IDRIS ASSHAFI'Ī, *Arrisala*, Beiroet, Dar Al-Marefah, 2004, volume 1, p. 376.

² I. IBN IBRAHIM ASSHATIBI, *Almuwafaqat Fi Usul Ashari'a*, Beiroet, Dar Al-Koutboub Al'Imiya, 2005, p. 59.

³ J. ABD ARRAHMANE ASSOUYOUTI, *Alitqaan fi 'lum Alquraan*, Medina, Majma' Malik Fahd, 2002, p. 449.

1.2.3 THE ENVIRONMENT OF MUHAMMAD: WHERE DID HE LIVE?

Figure 1.3
Arab bedouin
Source: © aarstudio /
Adobe Stock



Moḥammad was born in the year of the Elephant which corresponds to the year 570 of the Gregorian calendar. He was born in a noble family in Mecca, the tribe of Banū Hāshim. This tribe was highly regarded by other tribes in Mecca and the surrounding areas. Muhammad had lost his father

before he was born. He had a dual status for the inhabitants of Mecca. He belonged to an important clan, but he was also vulnerable because he was fatherless. The name “Mohammad” was completely unknown at that time in the Arabian Peninsula. His mother received the name “Mohammad” through a vision during her pregnancy. It also announced the birth of the “lord of this people”. During the birth of Mohammad, she mentioned: “I place him under the protection of the only One, from the wickedness of every envious person.” The Quraish had a special relationship with the nomadic lifestyle of the Arab Bedouin. They entrusted the care of their boys to the Bedouin foster families. The belief was that in the desert, the children would learn more self-discipline, nobility, and freedom. It requires a high level of solidarity and a high level of respect for the appreciation of human value in order to have a successful life in the desert.



Figure 1.4
Source: © frenta /
Adobe Stock

1.2.4 RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

The Arabian Peninsula had different religions. For example, you had Arabs who followed the religion of Ibrahim. They believed in one God. In addition, there were also Jews and Christians. Most Arabs worshiped different idols. Each tribe had one or more idols which they considered to be their gods. Since Mecca was a large religious center, most of the idols were located there. The Ka’ba was also located in Mecca. This religious center attracted many believers, while promoting trade. Abu Sufyan, one of the greatest idol worshipers said, “Our Gods are both religion and trade”.

This was economically in the disadvantage of the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula because they attracted less visitors. Many southern Arabs moved to the north of the Arabian peninsula. A second Ka'ba was built in the south to prevent the southern Arabs from moving to the north.

The Southern Ka'ba continued to exist until the 18th century. At the beginning of the revelation, according to Islamic tradition, more than 360 idols, images or statues were present in the Ka'ba. The worshipers were considered to be heathens. The Southern Ka'ba continued to exist until the 18th century. At the beginning of the revelation, according to Islamic tradition, more than 360 idols, images or statues were present in the Ka'ba. The worshipers were considered to be heathens.



Figure 1.5
Petra, Jordan
Source: © dzain /
Adobe Stock

1.2.5 EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Fill in the Blank (Context)

Assignment: Answer the following questions below.

1. What is the difference between monotheism and polytheism?

2. Right or wrong: The Meccans were economically dependent on their gods?

3. Why did the Quraish entrust their children to the Bedouin foster families?


4. Name the empires that surrounded the Arabian Peninsula?



5. What were the major religions present in the Arabian Peninsula?



6. How did they attempt to prevent people from moving to the North in the South of the Arabian Peninsula?



7. Give two reasons that were the causes of the tribal wars?

Exercise 2: The Life Of The Prophet

Assignment: Put the right letter with the associated number

1. The clan or family of the Prophet Muḥammad	a. Christian
2. The tribal Arab or the <i>ma'ud al'rab</i>	b. Mecca
3. Year of birth of the Prophet Muḥammad	c. A term used for the Arab civilization/time spirit when the Quran was revealed
4. Religion of the Byzantine Empire	d. Poetry
5. A cultural tradition of the Arabs	e. Year of the Elephant
6. City of birth of Prophet Muḥammad	f. Banū Hāshim

1	2	3	4	5	6

1.3 INTERPRETATION OF THE QURAN

1.3.1 INTRODUCTION



Figure 1.6
Source: © BillionPhotos.com / Adobe Stock

“O you who believe! do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are friends of each other; and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them; surely Allah does not guide the unjust people.” (Al-Mā'idah verse 51)

It is important to understand the verses in the Quran in their context of existence. The society in which the Quran originated is a survival society. When reading the Quran, it is essential to keep the structure of the Quran and the reason of revelation in mind.

1.3.2 PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERPRETATIONS

1. Society

Studying both the political and the social context in which the Quran is revealed is a prerequisite for understanding the Quran⁴. The Arab society at that period was a tribal society in which various tribes were constantly in war and conflicts.



Figure 1.7
Source: © supanut / Adobe Stock

2. Structure of the Quran

Exegetes divide the Quran into two parts: Meccan verses and Medinan verses.

a. Meccan verses are verses revealed before the immigration of the Prophet PBUH from Mecca to Medina. The Meccan period was known for laying the foundations of Islam including attawhied (monotheism). Emphasis are placed on the universal values and norms such as justice, fairness, equality etc. Therefore, you cannot find detailed explanation in those verses.

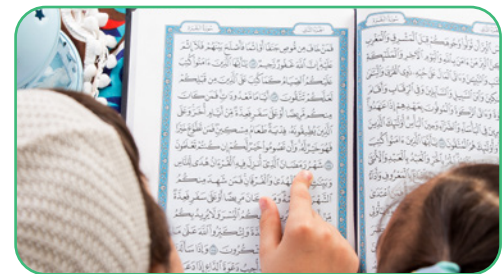


Figure 1.8
Source: © arapix / Adobe Stock

b. Medinan verses are more detailed because Medina has a different context than Mecca.

⁴ Cf. M. ATTAHAR IBN ASSHOUR, Maqasid Assharia Al-Islamiya, Amman, Dar Annafa-is, 2002, p. 153.

Important condition: Medinan verses must be understood in light of the Meccan verses!

3. The reason of revelation (*sabāb an-nuzūl*)

Asbāb an-nuzūl (pl.) means the reasons why a verse was revealed. This is related to events that occurred during the time of the Prophet upon which the Quran responded with an answer.



Figure 1.9
Diversity
Source: © oraziopuccio /
Adobe Stock

Now let's apply those three aspects to the following verse:

*"O you who believe! do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are friends of each other; and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them; surely Allah does not guide the unjust people."*⁵

1. The Arab society

This verse was revealed in Medina. The societies of Mecca and Medina differ from each other. Mecca was a city of trading and Medina was a rural society. Medina consisted of a series of hamlets inhabited by different ethnic groups. Medina was surrounded by volcanic rocks that were not fertile. Most residents were farmers who got their living from dates, palm groves and arable farming. So, they were not fully dependent on trade like the people of Mecca. They were more hostile towards other ethnic groups. They also felt inferior towards the Jewish tribes in the oasis. The Jewish tribes were pioneers in agricultural development.

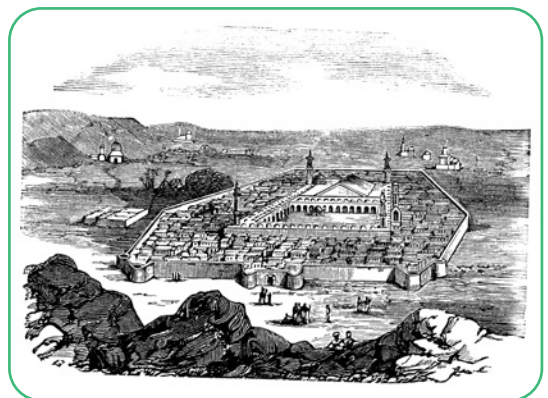


Figure 1.10
Medina
Source: © Morphart /
Adobe Stock

⁵ <https://quran.com/5/51> (access 14.08.2020).

The Aws and Khazraj are two tribes that played an important role in the arrival of the prophet Muḥammad in Medina. They were able to settle in Medina, especially in places that were not yet fertile. They were under the protection of the Jewish tribes. So, they had a subordinate position.

The three largest Jewish tribes in Medina were the Qaynuqa', the Qurayzah and the an-Naḍīr. The Jewish tribes formed separate alliances with the Arab groups and were often at war with one another. In addition, the constant battle between the Aws and Khazraj created tension in the city.

2. Structure of the Quran

Considering what we explained earlier in part 1 (Arab society), verse 51 in Surat Mā'idah is a Medinan verse. Medinan verses, as previously explained, are more detailed. In other words, this verse should not be understood out of context and should be placed in the light of Meccan verses, which emphasize justice.

3. The reason of revelation of *sabāb an-nuzūl*

At-Ṭabarī, a high-ranking Quran exegete, believed that this verse provides an answer to a war situation in which some Muslims, Jews and Christians took allies. At-Ṭabarī mentions the following: "The correct view is that Allah forbids Muslims to take Jews and Christians as allies against the people of faith in Allah and His Messenger"⁶.

Jewish tribes in Medina had broken their pact with the Prophet. The pact includes the defense of the city of Medina from Meccan attacks. This caused Jewish tribes to be at odds with the Muslims of Medina. There were some Muslims who sought their refuge in Jewish tribes. They feared that they would suffer defeat by the Muslims. This is forbidden by the Quran because it weakened the Islamic community that was in its infancy. Knowing that at the time a weak community in the Arabian Peninsula - as mentioned earlier - did not have much chance of survival.

Arab society, which is a tribal society, had no mercy for the weak, so making an alliance with war enemies could spell doom for the young Muslim community. This verse is a Medinan verse and all Medinan verses are context bound and cannot conflict with Meccan verses. In other words, Medinan verses have no universal character. Every verse has a reason for revelation (*sabāb an-nuzūl*).

⁶ M. IBN JA'FAR IBN YAZID ATTABARI, *Jami' Albayan 'An Tawil Ayi Alquran*, Beiroet, Dar Arrisala, 1994, volume 4, p. 34.

1.3.3 EXERCISES

The reason for revelation of Al-Mā'idah verse 51 is that some Muslims took refuge in Jewish tribes who were at odds with the Muslim community after breaking a pact. Finally, it is important to place other passages in the Quran alongside this verse. This way the reader has a general view.

Exercise 1: Class Discussion

Assignment: Have a class discussion with the students and ask the following questions. The students will think about their understanding of the Quran.

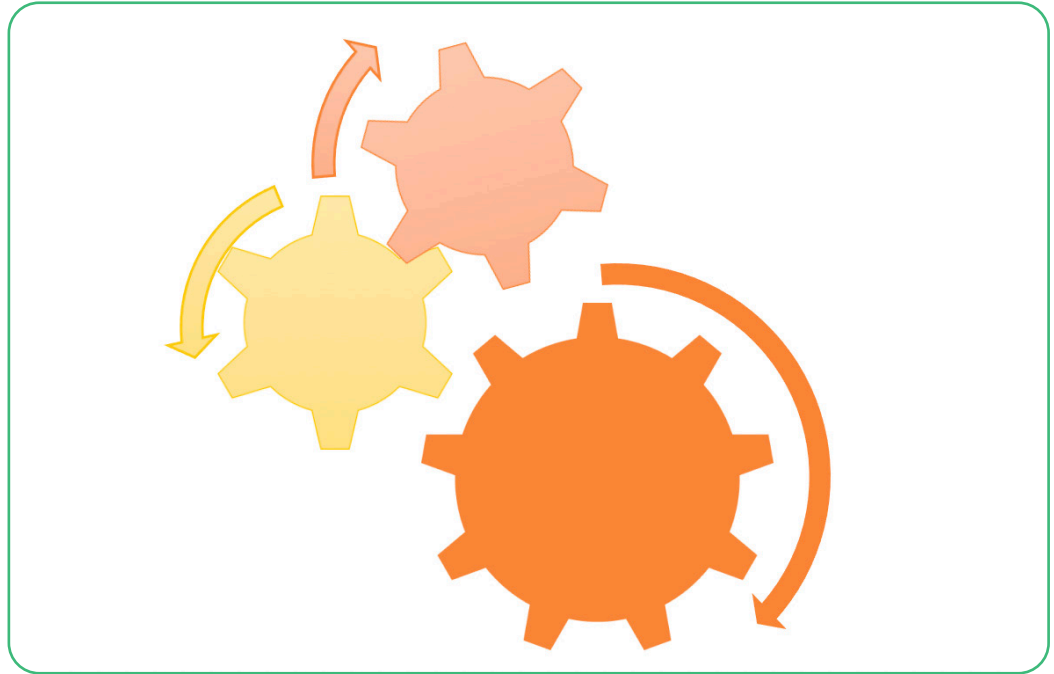
Guiding questions:

- Who do you ask for explanation if you do not understand something from the Quran?
- Is it possible to understand Quran in several ways?
- Do you think it is possible to search for your own answers to your questions about the Quran?



Exercise 2: Schedule

Assignment: Fill in as a class the schedule about the principles of the interpretation of the Quran.



Principles of the interpretation of the Quran

1.4 PROPHET MOHAMMED'S FUNCTIONS

1.4.1 INTRODUCTION

Moḥammed is an important person and an example for all Muslims. He is the source of morality alongside the Quran. However, it is very important to distinguish between the different functions of Moḥammed. In other words, Prophet Moḥammed acts in various functions. Sometimes he acts as a messenger / Prophet or as a leader or as a mufti or as a judge.

1.4.2 THE QUALITY OF A MESSENGER

These different functions of the Prophet each have a separate influence on the morality of Islam. Some functions apply to the morality of Islam if they meet certain conditions.

The most common function is the Prophet's capacity as a messenger. This means that the message of this function is universal. For example, Moḥammed who proclaims monotheism (*tawḥīd*). This announcement is universal and applies to all Muslims.



Figure 1.11
Diversity
Source: © Fatemah
Khaled | Pexels

1.4.3 THE QUALITY OF A LEADER

The quality of the Prophet as a leader has an important condition. In particular that the act he performs only relates to leaders or governments. This position is a political function. It only applies to political leaders and is not intended for everyone.



Figure 1.12
Source: © Dezay /
Adobe Stock

1.4.4 THE QUALITY OF A MUFTI

A mufti is a spiritual religious leader who has the authority to give religious advice regarding certain phenomena. The religious advice of a mufti is called “*fatwa*” in Arabic. A Fatwa is always context-bound and should in no way be applied in other contexts without taking the customs and tradition into account.



Figure 1.13
Source: © shock /
Adobe Stock

The Prophet also issued *fatwas*, which should also be understood in context.

1.4.5 THE QUALITY OF A JUDGE

The capacity of the Prophet as a judge also has an important condition. In particular that the act he performs as a judge only concerns judges. This function is therefore a judicial function and only applies to judges and is also not intended for everyone.

The Prophet also served as a judge, and his judgments should be understood in context of his specific period.

In summary: It is very important when one studies Islam to distinguish between those different qualities. Unfortunately, especially among young people, we notice that they mix up the different functions of Prophet Moḥammed with often drastic consequences.



Figure 1.14
Source: © New Africa /
Adobe Stock

1.4.6 APPLICATION OF THE QUALITIES TO VERSE 51 SURAH AL-MĀ'IDAH

If we return to verse 51 of surah Al-Mā'idah⁷, then we can distract that what we have seen earlier in the principles of interpretation, the Prophet acted as a judge. This matter is a competence of leaders / theologians and not the task of a layperson.

The Muslims who, as previously quoted lived at odds with Jewish tribes due to a breach of contract and not based on faith. The Quran and the Prophet forbade taking Jews as allies for that specific reason.

⁷ “O you who believe! do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are friends of each other; and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them; surely Allah does not guide the unjust people.” (Al-Mā'idah verse 51)

Is a battle between Muslims and the Meccans. The battle was fought on Tuesday, 13 March 624 CE and was marked the beginning of the six-year war between Mohammad and his tribe in what is now known as the Muslim–Quraish War.

1.4.7 EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Which the type of leadership applies to the Hadith Military leader - religious leader - mufti – judge

ḤADĪTH	Type of leadership
<p>Khabab Ibn Mundhir was on the day of Badr critical of the Prophet's military strategy. When he understood that the strategy was an opinion of the Prophet and was not divinely inspired, he proposed a different approach to the Prophet. The Prophet chose Khabab's proposal because he believed it was better. That was the Prophet's philosophy, he consulted the Companions and considered their opinions to be very important. The companions, in turn, were able to distinguish between the human contribution (profane) and the Divine.</p>	
<p>Ḥadīth of the five pillars: You will encounter people of the book, teach them the <i>tawḥīd</i> first. If they understand / accept this concept, then tell them that Allah has put out five prayers a day. If they have understood / accepted this concept tell them that Allah has prescribed zakat, and this means in concrete terms that part of their wealth is given to the poor</p>	
<p>"A person from the Ansar (native of Medina) asked the Prophet Muḥammad for advice regarding a disagreement with Zubayr (a migrant from Mecca) about the fertilization of soil. The Prophet asked Zubayr to fertilize half of his soil - although he is entitled to more - and then let the water flow to the Ansari's soil. The Ansari got angry and said to the Prophet, "It is because he is a relative of yours." The Prophet also got angry and said to Zubayr, "Fertilize your soil completely and then let the water flow."</p>	
<p>Ḥadīth from Hind bint "Utba and her husband Abū Sufyān:" Hind said to the Prophet: Abū Sufyān is a miserly person. He does not give me and my children enough maintenance money, except what I take without his knowledge. The Prophet replied, "Take from his money what is enough to cover your costs and those of your children.</p>	
<p>Mugīth was madly in love with his wife Barirah. But Barirah did not like him and wanted to divorce him. The Prophet tried to intercede, "The Prophet said to Barirah," Will you come back to Mugīth, he is the father of your children! " Barirah (with all respect she had for the Prophet) said honestly, "O messenger of God, is this an order you ask me to carry out?" The Prophet replied: No, I am only a mediator. She replies without any embarrassment: "No messenger from God, I don't want it"</p>	

1.5 GLOSSARY

Ma'ud al'rab

This is a term used by the great theologian Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī to emphasize the spirit of the Arabs during the time of revelation. With this he means that the knowledge of the habits and the way of life of the Arabs is an important fact to understand the Quran.

Hadith

What is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad of both words, deeds, approvals, outward features and inward features.

Meccan verses

Are verses revealed before the immigration of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina.

Medinan verses

Unlike the Meccan verses, Medinan verses are more detailed in nature because Medina had a different context than Mecca.

The reason of revelation or *sabāb an-nuzūl*

Asbāb an-nuzūl (pl.) .) means the reasons why a verse was revealed. This is related to events that occurred during the time of the Prophet upon which the Quran responded with an answer.



Photo: © Annie Spratt | Unsplash

1.6 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

We see kids playing, talking amongst each other like any normal day at school. Then we see a group of 3 kids pushing around 2 smaller kids, Ahmed and Pieter-Jan, who are being bullied.

Bully 1: Here they are again the goodie-good shoes...

The bully pushes Ahmed on the floor and we see him getting angry.

Bully 1: Oh no watch out!! He might use his math-head to do some calculations... hahaha

Pieter-Jan: Just leave us alone!

Bully 1: Oh no...What are you going to do?

The bully is going towards Pieter-Jan, intimidating him

Pieter-Jan: Euh... My friend here has a black belt in karate!

Bully 1: Ah seriously? (turns towards Ahmed again) hahaha why don't you show it then... come on!

Ahmed stands up and the bully pushes him back down...

Bully 1: Wow... A black belt? hahaha

We hear the school bell ringing!

Bully 1: Aah saved by the bell it seems!

The bully backs down.

He puts his fingers to his eyes and then pointing to Ahmed. Then he turns around and walks away...

Pieter-Jan turns to his friend.

Pieter-Jan: I know how hard you would have liked to show your black belt in karate to those guys... So why didn't you?

Ahmed: Yeah I know... but the principal would kick me out of school if that would have happened...

WORKPLACE OF HAROON, AHMED'S FATHER

We see cars being assembled in a factory. Haroon a 40-year-old Muslim is working at the assembly line with 2 white colleagues. Then the director (who is a beautiful woman) walks passed. Both white colleagues turn their head when she passes and when she is gone, they turn to one another.

Colleague 1: Sigh... What a woman! I want to ask her out so badly!

Colleague 2: Euhm, last time i checked on you , you were still married?

Colleague 1: Ah yeah... But I could convert to Islam and take a second one, no... hahaha

(turns to Haroon): Hey Haroon, how many wives do you guys get?

Haroon looks to his colleagues and is a bit perplexed.

Colleague 1 (not listening to what Haroon says): I would at least take 3: One for cleaning the house, one for cooking and one for...

Colleague 2: Hahaha, you dog...

We see Haroon getting frustrated by the situation and things the colleagues are saying but he refrains from saying anything.

FAMILYHOUSE

We see Haroon arriving at his house.

We see Ahmed and his family (his father, Haroon, his mother, Fatima and his sister, Zeynep) at the dinner table together. It is quite silent as Haroon and Ahmed both had a very bad day. The mom of the family tries to open a conversation.

Fatima: So how was everybody's day?

Nobody answers.

Zeynep: Ahmed got picked on again in school today!

Haroon's eyes open up widely and we see he is getting furious.

Fatima: Ahmed, is this true?

Ahmed: Sighs... yes mother... but I didn't get into a fight!

Fatima: Thank Allah!

Haroon (screams): I can't take this any longer!!! These people think they are so much better than us! (swears in Arabic:)

Haroon leaves the room and everyone left behind is in shock

Fatima: Let him cool down a bit, I'll go talk to him.

Fatima gets up and leaves as well.

Haroon is sitting behind his computer in his room. He is clicking angrily on his pc. The door opens and Fatima enters.

Fatima: Haroon, are you ok? You have been acting so strangely the last couple of months! You changed your clothes, you don't want to see Karim anymore, (stresses) your best friend! And you keep up late every night surfing on the internet and...

Haroon: I need time to think!

Fatima: Dear, please let's talk! And why don't you call me by my name anymore, we have been married for 16 years now!

Fatima leaves disappointed. We see Haroon locking the door.

He puts himself back into his chair and puts on his headphones. We then hear the pc:

Computer: And never will the Jews or the Christians approve of you until you follow their religion.

Haroon repeats: Indeed, the guidance of Allah is the only guidance.

Computer: "You who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for friends. They are friends one to another and who takes them as friends is indeed one of them. Verily, Allah guides not the unjust people. If you were to follow their desires after this knowledge has come to you, you would be against Allah and have no protector nor helper."

The scene ends on Haroon's eyes who are completely mesmerized. Then there is a transition on Haroon waking up and walking towards the kitchen for breakfast.

The family is eating together. Haroon arrives last, looking very tired. He sits down silently.

Fatima: Do you feel better dear?

Haroon: Not at all...I hate my work; I hate living here. I don't speak the language, I'm the only person at the workplace who isn't Christian. And they make fun of us and our religion. The only thing we can do is protect ourselves.

Ahmed: Father, what are you saying?

Haroon: Son, we are Muslims and our religion does not allow us to mingle with unbelievers like Christian, or any non-Muslims people.

Everyone: what?!

Haroon: We can't be friends with them. The Koran forbids it. Do you understand?? We are different and they want to make us like them.

Ahmed: Uhm... and what about my classmates and my best friend Pieter-Jan?

Haroon stands up will putting his fist on the table!

Haroon: Show some respect to your parents or you will find yourself without a home! Our religion is never wrong! You can't be friends with Pieter-Jan anymore!! Do you understand?!"

Ahmed looks down and is silent while closing his eyes...

Classroom

The clock ticks towards 4PM. We see the end of the day at school. All kids jump up when hearing the school bell.

Kids: Yeeey!!

Teacher: So don't forget to read page 42 up until 55 for tomorrow!

We see the kids walking out. Pieter-Jan approaches Ahmed.

Pieter-Jan: Hey Ahmed, my mom said it's ok for Friday! You know... our sleepover! We can finally take a shot at our high score!

Ahmed: Euhm... sorry... Pieter-Jan I can't... I have other things to do...

Pieter-Jan: but you promised?

Ahmed:.. I'm sorry... It's my dad, he went completely nuts saying he doesn't want us to be friends anymore because you are not a Muslim... I'll have to listen to him until this blows over...

Pieter-Jan: But that is ridiculous!

Ahmed: I know but I have to show respect to my father... I have no choice!

Ahmed silently walks away leaving Pieter-Jan shocked. He walks to a car.

Ahmed's father is waiting in the car to pick up his son. Ahmed steps into the backseat and his father drives off...

Haroon: Who was that you were talking to?

Ahmed: sighs... That was Pieter-Jan...

Haroon (gets angry): This is unacceptable! Wasn't I clear when I forbade you to have contact with him! Stay away from Christians and Jews and all other infidels!

Ahmed: But Father,...

Haroon: There are no buts... This is your last warning!! Or you are no longer a son of mine...

Ahmed looks down and is clearly very sad

Ahmed: okay father...

We see Fatima gets a message:

Karim: Fatima, I'm at the door, I came as soon as I could.

We see Fatima going to the door while watching through the window. She opens the door and Karim is standing there.

Fatima: Thank you so much for coming Karim.

Karim: No worries, Fatima, he is my best friend. Where is he?

Fatima: He is upstairs again. Please go talk to him.

We see Karim going up.

Karim is visiting Harun

We see Haroon behind his computer watching the same video as before.

Then someone knocks on the door.

Haroon: I'm busy now.

The door opens and Haroon looks to the door and is surprised.

Harun: "Salaam Karim."

Karim: "Aleykoum Salam. It's been a long time since we've seen each other."

Harun: "Indeed my friend, come in."

Karim: "Harun, you have been acting very distant. Are you trying to avoid me?"

Harun: "It has nothing to do with you. I don't feel well. I'm very frustrated. I don't like this country anymore. I don't feel comfortable living here as a Muslim." My friend you have a lot of knowledge about islam. I reflected a lot about surah Al-Maidah, verse 51:

O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you - then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing people.

Karim: "Harun my dear brother, if you want to understand the Quran and the meaning of religious verses you have to understand the context, because these texts usually emerged as answers to problems that occurred within the social contexts of that time. Taking a single verse out of its context can result in a misinterpretation of the purpose and essence of those verses.

Harun: "What do you mean?"

Karim: "At that time, the newly emerged Muslim community was persecuted by Arab, Jewish and Christian tribes. They broke a charter and tried to outnumber the weak Muslim community. This war was a very specific situation with specific tribes. Before and after the war, the Prophet Mohammad established love, tolerance and coexistence between different communities and tribes, regardless their religion. The constitution of Medina is an example.

Harun: "Really... interesting..."

Samir: "Yes my friend, we have to avoid the misguided use of sacred texts, we have to understand the context in which the texts appeared the first time.

Harun: "I really missed our dialogues my friend."

Harun: "Ahmed, listen to the wise words of your uncle Samir. You will learn a lot."

Pieter-Jan

We see the 2 kids playing on a videogame.

Pieter-Jan: I'm so glad your dad changed his mind!

Ahmed: Oh believe me... me too

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2



ENCOUNTER WITH SACRED TEXTS:
TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

MODULE TWO

ENCOUNTER WITH SACRED TEXTS: TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

2.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE VIDEO



Figure 2.1
Video Clip

Anwar is 16. He becomes discouraged because he cannot find a student job and suspects that it has to do with his Islamic name and place of residence (Molenbeek, Brussels). Shahid try to convince him and he tries to label non-Muslims as the enemy, using the part of a quote from the Quran. He believes that the verse justifies violence against non-Muslims and tries to convince his friends that the verse doesn't need any contextualizing.

But Anwar is not convinced. He shows his friends Shahid and Pieter-Jan a new application that helps to understand the Quran better. It's becoming number one research application. It also has a safety screener based on the Odin software to avoid interpretation hazards of any kind. The brightest minds of the world have worked on this AI solution, so it should be able to help them to understand the Quran in it's context.

2.2 VIOLENT TEXTS

2.2.1 IS THE QURAN A VIOLENT TEXT?

When reading the Quran, it is important to ask yourself for what purpose you are doing it. The position you take after the reading also differs from person to person.

We limit ourselves to the following 3 purposes:

1. Understand what is in the Quran.
2. The reader only wants to read and memorize the text.
3. The reader only wants to commemorate Allah or do *Dhikr*.



Figure 2.2
Source: © BillionPhotos.com / Adobe Stock

2.2.2 UNDERSTAND WHAT IS IN THE QURAN

For this purpose, it is important to apply the theological rules of interpretation.

When speaking of interpretation, we must take into account three factors:

1. Reader
2. Author
3. Place

The Reader: The reader is of course a person with feelings, a certain background and life experience. These feelings, background and life experience will play an important role while reading. To understand a text, you always must consider who the author of the text is, the place and context.

Read the example below to understand the meaning of this background influences:

As part of an exchange project, a teacher from Belgium went to teach in a poor village in Burundi for 2 months. The first lesson was about the family and society. The teacher projected an image in class. In the picture there was a large villa with a beautiful garden and a small cage with chickens.

The teacher asked, "What do you see?"

Most students gave the following answer: "We see chickens."

The teacher did not expect this answer. After the lesson, the teacher asked for an explanation for the answer that was given. The student replied: "most students in the class are hungry so the chicken is the first thing they saw."



Figure 2.3
Source: © GraphicsRF /
Adobe Stock

This example teaches us that the feelings and background of the students influenced how they experienced the image. The students were hungry (feelings) and they lived in a poor village (the background). They were not familiar with the style of the house represented in the picture.

Everyone notices what is important to him or her. The students think food is important because they are hungry, so they chose the chicken. A chicken means food to them.

The teacher chose that image from his own perspective. He considers what is in the picture very normal. He comes from a prosperous country, where houses are quite large and usually have a garden.



Figure 2.4
Source: © Brett /
Adobe Stock

This is also the case with the Quran. The Quran was created in a specific context and time spirit. Every part of the Quran has its reason for revelation. Every person who reads the Quran also has his own background. A jihadist who searches for violence in the Quran will find it in it. A person who has a passion for animals will mainly remember the passages that dealing with animals. Each person will find a snippet of text and keep in mind things that interest them. When reading the Quran, the rules of interpretation are of great importance. This means that you cannot just interpret everything in your own way.

You must bring all the Quranic verses together. It is a whole in which you must try to discover a chronological line. In addition, we must also take into account two periods in which the Quranic verses are revealed: The Medina period and the Meccan period.

2.2.3. SELECTIVE READING

The problem of misinterpretation also occurs when selectively reading Quranic verses about violence. You should not selectively extract violent verses to interpret them literally. It is important to situate violent passages in the social context in which they originated.

Violent Quranic verses refer to situations that happened at that time, in a society that functioned completely differently. That society was a tribal society that is not comparable to our current context.

These passages took place in the seventh century in the Arabian Peninsula. They tell us about what happened then and in that specific place, about conflicts with specific tribes and persons. They also tell us more about the political actions that the Prophet Mohammed s.a.w. undertook. Every era and every society



Figure 2.5
Source: © Bits and Splits
Adobe Stock

has dealt with its violent moments. The challenges they faced are not the challenges we face today. The Quran on its own is not violent, although there are passages that deal with violence, death and destruction. In the next section, we will discuss in detail how to understand violence in its context.

2.2.4 CONTEXTUAL APPROACH

“And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out where they drove you.”

Jihadists use this verse from the Quran to justify their violent acts. At first sight, this verse appears very violent. It orders Muslims to kill unbelievers.

A jihadist focuses only on this kind of verses. This tells us more about how he reads the Quran. As we discussed in the previous chapter, the reader reads being affected by his feelings, background and life experiences. A jihadist selects Quranic verses that are violent to legitimize his own violent beliefs and even acts. This way of reading the Quran is not correct. The place and context and the intention of the author or “Maqṣad Ashari” is essential to understand the meaning behind it.

The verse: “And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out where they drove you out” . is revealed in Medina. The verses of Medina are contextually bound. It is important to study the specific context of Medina.



Figure 2.6
Source: © Yabresse /
Adobe Stock

The Muslims in Medina had fled from Mecca. Their enemies could attack at any time. To survive, they had to be very careful. This verse allows Muslims to kill their enemies if their enemies attack them first. Several Muslim theologians such as Taher Ibn Ashour and Ibn Khatir share this interpretation of self-defense.

2.2.5 EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Fill in the Blanks

Fill in the missing words.

Muslim theologians - Focuses - Feelings - Violent acts - Medina - Belief

“And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out where they expelled you?”

Jihadists use this verse from the Quran to justify
At first sight, this verse appears to be very violent. It orders Muslims to kill unbelievers.

A jihadist only on these kinds of verses. This tells us more about how he reads the Quran. As we discussed in the previous chapter, the reader reads a text along with his background and life experiences.

A jihadist selects Quranic verses that are violent to legitimize his own violent .

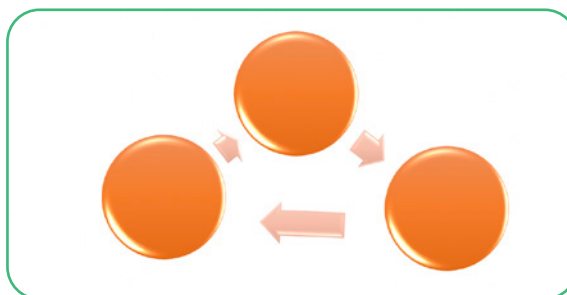
This way of reading wrongs the Quran. The place, context and intention of the author or “*Maqsad Ashari*” is essential to understand the Quran.

The verses of are contextually bound. It is important to study the specific context of Medina.

The Muslims in Medina had fled from Mecca at the time. Their enemies could attack them at any time. To survive, they had to be extremely wary. This verse allows Muslims to kill their enemies if their enemies attack them first. Several such as Taher Ibn Ashour and Ibn Khatir share this.

Exercise 2: Schedule Aspects

There are three aspects to consider when reading a text. Complete the schedule below:



2.3 THE JIHAD

2.3.1 THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF JIHAD

'Jihad' is a term often misinterpreted by both jihadists and Islam critics. Both sides interpret the term violently. The noun jihad comes from the word *jahada*. It means effort (*jhud*). Originally it was about the effort that must be made to achieve a goal. One can clearly deduce this from a verse from the Quran: "But if they (the parents) insist (*jahada*) to worship other Gods with me of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them...."¹.

The concept of a "holy war" does not exist in the Islam. For the term war, the term *qitaal* (battle) is used. Translating or explaining the term *jihad* as a holy war is therefore wrong.

2.3.2 HOW TO INTERPRET THE VERSES IN THE CORAN

Verse 191 of surat al-Baqara is often abused by jihadists and critics of Islam. One group wants to justify violence, the other group wants to portray Islam as a violent religion.



At first glance, the first verse says that Muslims are allowed to kill polytheistic worshippers or non-Muslims. Let's study the verse through the following aspects:

- a. Context of the verse
- b. Kind of verse
- c. Reason of Revelation

Figure 2.7
Source: © zef art /
Adobe Stock

¹ <https://quran.com/29> (access 18/08/2020).

a. Context of revelation

This verse was revealed during a war between Muslims and non-Muslims from Mecca. As mentioned earlier, the entire context in which the verse was created is essential. The young Muslim community was weak. They had little chance of survival. The Prophet made political and military decisions from his position as leader to protect his community.

b. Kind of verse

“And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out where they expelled you?”

The Quran can be divided into two categories: Meccan verses and Medina verses.

Meccan verses

Verses Revealed in Mecca. The Meccan period focuses on the foundations and basic principles of Islam or “attawhid” (monotheism).

The emphasis goes to the universal values and norms such as justice, fairness, equality, etc. These verses are very clear and self-explanatory. For that reason, no detailed explanation can be found regarding Islamic regulations regarding these verses.

These verses were revealed before the Prophet Muhammad immigrated.

Medinan verses

These verses are more detailed in nature and take place after the immigration from Mecca to Medina. They are about a specific context and about a specific society.

They are contextual just like ‘the verses of the sword’. Therefore, they cannot simply be used outside that place and that time.

Therefore, verse 191 of surat al-Baqara is a Medinan verse. Medinan verses, as explained earlier, are more detailed in nature and context. In other words, this verse should not be taken out of context and placed in the light of Meccan verses, which emphasize righteousness.

c. Reason of Revelation

Reason of revelation or *Asbāb an-nuzūl* (pl.) means the causes or reasons why a verse was revealed. This refers to events that occurred in the time of the Prophet to which the Quran responded with an answer.

The reason for revelation of verse 191 of surat al-Baqara is that the Muslims of Medina agreed on a treaty with the Meccans. There was tension between the different parties. When the Meccans violated the treaty, the Quran gave permission to the Muslims to make war with the Meccans. This allowed the Muslims to defend themselves and protect themselves from destruction.



Figure 2.8
Source: © BillionPhotos.com / Adobe Stock

EXERCISE 1

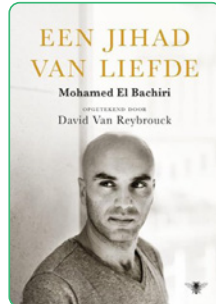
Fill in the basics principles of Islam revealed in Mecca.



○ ○ ○ ○ ○

EXERCISE 2: The Jihad of love.

Show the students the video “The Jihad of Love”
(Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clkzGkyqzoo>)
Then let them answer the questions below.



Mohamed El Bachiri is a Moroccan Belgian, Muslim and lives in Molenbeek. He lost his wife Loubna Lafquiri during the attacks on March 22, 2016 in Brussels. Mohamed was left as a widower with three young children. His plea for a jihad of love in the TV program ‘De Afspraak’ became one of the most watched videos on Flemish television.

Figure 2.9
Source: © Goodreads

1. What made Mohamed El Bachiri call for jihad during an evening in a Molenbeek church?

2. What does Mohamed mean by: “I call young people to jihad”?

3. In the Quran it says: “*La ikraha fi dine.*” What does this mean?

4. Mohamed is talking about “The search for truth”. Which path did he choose?

1. How does a humanist Muslim view the Quran?

2. What does Mohamed end his plea with?

EXERCISE 3: A letter to Al-Baghdadi.

120 Islamic scholars have written an open letter that was addressed to Al-Baghdadi (the leader of IS). They explain to him in detail why the ideology of IS goes against the basic principles of Islam.

Read the letter and answer the questions below.

Summary of the letter to Al-Baghdadi

1. A fatwa

It is forbidden in Islam to issue a *fatwa* [religious decree] without having the required training. Even then, a fatwa must follow Islamic theology as laid down in the classical texts.

Furthermore, it is forbidden to quote [hereby] only some or only part of a verse from the Qur'an without including the Qur'an as a whole and the *ahadith* [the tradition of the deeds and words of the Prophet] as a whole. on the subject in question.

There are strict rules for a fatwa; one may not use verses as an argument at will without observing the entirety of the Qur'an and the *ahadith*.

2. The language

It is forbidden in Islam to impose obligations without a thorough knowledge of Arabic.

3. Simplism

It is forbidden in Islam to simplify *Shari'ah* [Islamic law] and to ignore established Islamic science.

4. Differences

[For scholars] it is permissible in Islam to disagree except on the foundation of religion that all Muslims should know.

5. The reality

In Islam it is forbidden to ignore contemporary reality when issuing decrees.

6. You will not kill

It is forbidden in Islam to kill someone.

7. Nor shall you kill ...

It is illegal in Islam to kill envoys, ambassadors and diplomats therefore, also to kill journalists and aid workers.

8. The jihad

Jihad [holy war] may only be used in defense. This is also prohibited without a legitimate reason, without a legitimate purpose and without observing the rules of conduct.

9. Infidels

It is forbidden in Islam to declare someone an unbeliever (non-Muslim) unless he or she publicly declares this disbelief.

10. You shall not ...

It is forbidden in Islam to harm or mistreat Christians or other people with a [Holy] Book in any way.

11. The Yazidis

[Pronounce: "Yezidis"; write 'Yazidi's']
It is mandatory to see the Yazidis as people with a Holy Book.

12. Slavery

Islam is prohibited from re-introducing slavery. There is a worldwide consensus on this.

13. Repent

It is forbidden in Islam to force people to repent.

14. Women

It is forbidden in Islam to deny women their rights.

15. Children

It is forbidden in Islam to deprive children of their rights.

16. Penalties

It is forbidden in Islam to carry out judicial punishments without observing proper procedures of justice and mercy.

17. Torture

It is illegal to torture people in Islam.

18. The deceased

It is forbidden in Islam to deform a mortal remains.

19. God

It is forbidden in Islam to attribute any evil to God.

20. The graves

It is forbidden in Islam to destroy the tombs and tombs of prophets and their companions.

21. Rebellion

It is forbidden in Islam to rebel for any reason, except for explicit disbelief from the legislator and the prohibition to pray.

22. The caliphate

It is forbidden in Islam to create a caliphate without the consent of all Muslims.

23. The state

Islam permits a Muslim to be loyal to a person's nation or state.

24. Emigrate

Since the Prophet's death, Islam has not obliged anyone to emigrate anywhere

Question:

1. Which verses are about violence?

2. Which verses are about rights?

3. Which verses are about freedom

2.4 SHARIA

2.4.1 INTRODUCTION OF SHARIA

Many people associate the term “*sharia*” with injustice, harsh legislation and brutal punishments such as women’s oppression, corporal punishment, etc.

This is because the media, certain politicians and jihadists use the term inappropriately. **But do they use the term correctly?**

The meaning of the term “*sharia*” means more than just Islamic law. It not only contains legislation, but also rituals, doctrine and philosophy. It is wrong to limit the translation of “*sharia*” only to “Islamic law”.

Sharia is not a law that contains strict rules. There is no book on “*sharia*” that contains Islamic laws as is the case with the Belgian code. All books on Islamic fiqh are individual interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah.

Allah’s words are eternal, but every person who interprets Allah’s words is a product of his time. There are thousands of tafsirs and books about the fiqh, everyone has a different interpretation and opinion. All those books are human works and can therefore contain errors contrary to the words of Allah.



Figure 2.10
Source: © David Carillet /
Adobe Stock

But what does “*sharia*” actually mean?

2.4.2 ORIGINAL MEANING OF THE TERM SHARIA

The Arabic term “*sharia*” originally means the path that leads to the water. This is not about a water well from which you get the water, but the path you have to follow to find a fertile place or a place where water flows.

Water stands for life, which means that “*sharia*” is the right path to follow to protect human nature. The natural disposition of man must be protected, and this will automatically lead to a more just and peaceful society. Unfortunately, this term is often misinterpreted, which gives a negative connotation of Islam.



Figure 2.11
Source: © pierluigipalazzi
Adobe Stock

2.4.3 EXERCISES

Exercise 1: *Sharia*

Answer the questions below.

1. What does sharia mean?

2. What is sharia often associated with?

3. What happens to society when man protects his human nature?

Exercise 2: '*Sharia* above the law'.

Read part of the article by theologian Jonas Slaats and put a cross in the appropriate column.

Sharia above the law:

Sharia is not a series of laws that are neatly written in the Quran or in any other book. In other words, you cannot enter a library to get sharia from the rack of 'religious rules'.

As a concept, the word "*sharia*" merely refers to the idea that there are divine principles that support life and that an ethical guideline follows from those principles. In other words, if there is a God, it is likely that God will expect people to behave in a certain moral way. Evident examples: do not murder, do not steal, be as compassionate as possible, maintain certain rituals, etc.

Throughout history, the precise interpretation of this *sharia* remained infinitely subject to debate and was never written down in its entirety. All kinds of scholars kept discussing the exact way God wants people to live.

Chop hands and the guillotine

So no, it is not the case that “chopping off hands of those who have stolen” is an eternal rule of a firmly chiseled *sharia* that every Muslim adheres to. When such a rule is pronounced, it concerns only some scholars who in certain contexts concluded that this was a correct rule based on their beliefs about (God-wanted) justice in society. This is little different from, for example, the fact that the legal system in France approved the death penalty through the Guillotine up to the 1970s. It was a rule that arose from old beliefs about justice (wanted by laicity) in society.



Figure 2.12
Source: © Emilio Ereza / Adobe Stock

But just as guillotine’s death penalty could be ended because of changing ideas in the society, the interpretation of Islamic scholars can be contradicted and changed. What one found correct is not justified by the other, and some rules that may have been accepted in theory were not always followed in practice.

Place a cross in the appropriate column

	YES	NO
Is <i>sharia</i> a set of laws that we can find in the Quran?		
Does <i>sharia</i> refer to divine principles that support life?		
Is chopping hands off someone who stole an eternal rule?		
Can someone discuss and contradict the interpretation of Islamic scholars?		
Did people continue to discuss throughout history about the precise interpretation of <i>sharia</i> ?		

2.5 GLOSSARY

At-tawheed

Synonym for monotheism or belief in one god.

Ayat As Sayf

The verses of the sword. These are verses that are violent in nature and should be understood in context.

Dhikr

Commemorating God.

Fiqh

Written rules about Islamic rituals and Islamic law. There are different opinions on certain matters. Basically, fiqh means in simple terms that every Muslim or Muslima through the study of Islam, gains knowledge and insight about the understanding and application of Islamic rules and the assessment of the consequences.

Hadith

What is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad of both words, deeds, approvals, outward features and inward features.

Jihad

It comes from the word "jahada" which means effort. Originally, it was about the effort that one must do to achieve a goal.

Maqsad Ashari

Purposes of Islam.

Sharia

The rights path to follow in order to achieve a peaceful society.

Tafsir

Interpretations by Islamic Scholars



Photo: © Annie Spratt | Unsplash

2.5 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

We see Mr. Roberts standing in front of his class like any other day.

Mr Roberts: This afternoon I want to focus on ways for decent communication. We will learn why it is important to have good language skills so that you'll learn how to argue respectfully. This will save you from awkward situations and sometimes even violence!

Sarah: Whispers: Like these guys in Molenbeek.

Ahmed: What did you say?

Sarah: I didn't say anything. But now that the teacher is talking about violence, I want to express my opinion. I have read on the internet that Quran justifies violence against non-Muslims, is that correct? If that's the case, I find it very scary to be sitting next to a Muslim.

Ahmed: Euh... oh come on...why are you always picking on me? what do you want?

Mr. Roberts: Okay enough, this was clearly not the intention of this lesson at all. You should respect each other.

Sarah: Can you give us more clarification, Mister Roberts? This was a genuine question.

Mr. Roberts (hesitates clearly): Euh... I don't know, Sarah, Let me think about it and I'll come back to you. But in the meanwhile you have to stop bullying Ahmed and bothering the class or you'll get detention!

2. EXT PARK DAY

We see Ahmed and Pieter-Jan crossing the park while walking home.

Ahmed: Sarah was being a complete nightmare again...

Pieter-Jan: Yeah I know. She should know when to stop...

A group of adults are hanging around a bench. Pieter-Jan and Ahmed walk by and we hear them speak to each other:

Shadid: No but seriously, we all know why the offices don't call you back. Change your name into Tim and case closed, I guarantee you, the next week you'll have your student job. It's the Arabic name and the fact we live in a place like Molenbeek... They just can't stand us...

Anwar: I don't know... My dad is an example of how it can all work out, no? And he said that focusing on 'us versus them' won't help us further in life. And look where he is now, a lawyer in a respectable firm...

Ahmed: Anwar, is that you?

Anwar looks up to Ahmed.

Anwar: Ah Salam Ahmed! Wow you have grown! It must have been 2 years or something that I didn't see you.

Shadid, this is Ahmed, the son of my dad's friend Haroon.

Shadid: Salam!

Ahmed: Salam!

Pieter-Jan (hesitant): hey guys.

Shadid turns a bit away when he sees Pieter-Jan also joining the group.

Ahmed: I heard you guys talking about Karim, right?

Anwar: yeah, my dad. I just don't know how I will be able to get where he is, I'd like to follow in his footsteps and become a respected lawyer and have a good life. But I can't get a loan to get into university, can't get student apartment and let alone find a stupid student job.

Shadid: Look Anwar, I'm not inventing this 'us versus them'. It's also in the Quran. "And kill them wherever you find them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you..." reads Koran. As far as I remember it is in Surat Baqarah.

Ahmed: Wow that seems a bit violent.

Pieter-Jan: Yeah, I feel the same. Isn't every religion supposed to be about bringing peace?

Shadid: I used to think the same. But this is something I just recently came across while on internet.

Anwar: Calm down Shadid. I think both you and Pieter Jan are right about religion. I think we have a problem about correctly interpreting the religious texts. I have an idea. There is a new application that -I think- might help us understand the Quran better. It's becoming number one research application. It also has a safety screener based on the Odin software to avoid interpretation hazards of any kind. The brightest minds of the world have worked on this AI solution, so it should be able to help us out!

3. INT APPLICATION DAY

Anwar takes his phone out and everybody looks on his screen. He opens 'the vault of knowledge' application and a small intro screen is shown.

Then a screen appears 'for the interactive experience an update is needed'.

Anwar: Oh wait it needs an update.

Ahmed (laughs a bit): Isn't it a bit weird that an application on ancient texts, needs an update?

Anwar: It's not only on ancient texts! It's everything and more! Ah it's here already! Let's take a look.

On the screen we see an image of a vault and a text that is being said as well:

Vault: 'for all who need enlightenment and guidance towards knowledge, please place your finger on the screen for an interactive experience'

The four guys place their finger on the phone and a bright light starts to shine from the phone. They are engulfed in light and appear in a very bright room with a vault in it.

Anwar: woooooow... This new update is insane!

Shadid: Indeed, I can't believe my eyes, where are we?

Ahmed: This is incredible...

Pieter-Jan: Wow that light.

Vault: Please type in your question... Please type in your question... Please type in your question...

Ahmed: I think we that thing there wants us to ask it a question.

Anwar: well let's do it then!

Shadid: alright I'll prove it's in the Quran! Please show us the verse which basically says "And kill them wherever you find them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you..."

Vault: The text you cited is part of 191th verse in Chapter Baqarah.

Shadid: You see! We are actually very tolerant compared to what the Quran tells us to do.

Vault: DANGER....DANGER....DANGER....DANGER....

The vault starts shaking and an alarm starts sounding. There is an earthquake and then suddenly everything is still. A big red Scissor sign appeared on the vault.

Ahmed: What just happened?

Anwar: Let me check the tutorial.

Anwar takes his phone.

Anwar: (while searching) How to put in your question,...., a red eternal sign, no, Aaah here is it: 'When a big red scissor appears on the vault it means this phrase is cut out of its context and the red means it can even be dangerous!'

Shadid: Really? So what is the context then?

Pieter-Jan: You have to push in the red scissor.

Ahmed: alright let's see.

Ahmed pushes on the red scissor and a computer voice starts explaining:

VAULT: Dangerous 'cut and choose' approach towards this passage can lead to violence. The part you cite is only a part of the whole verse 2:191 which reads:

(2:191) Kill them whenever you confront them and drive them out from where they drove you out. For though killing is sinful, wrongful persecution is even worse than killing.

Do not fight against them near the Holy Mosque unless they fight against you; but if they fight against you kill them, for that is the reward of such unbelievers.

This verse cannot be truly understood if various parts are cherry-picked. For a better understanding please read in context, from 2:190 to 2:195. Allah only makes it evident to fight those only who fights them first.

Shadid: Aah, I see now, it's like a sort of fighting in self-defense?

VAULT: exactly. Thanks for using the Vault of knowledge, please let yourself be enlightened again soon.

The red scissor becomes green and then disappears.

Anwar: We should have known because "Whoever kills an innocent life, it is as if he has killed all of humanity", also a verse in the Quran, in Al-Ma'idah 5:32.

Anwar types in Al-Ma'idah 5:32 into the vault's input!

VAULT: Makes a happy sound. No misleading hazard. Thanks for using the Vault of Knowledge please let yourself be enlightened again soon.

Shadid: And that's the complete opposite of the other verse.... I guess a literal interpretation can be misleading.

Anwar: Yeah my dad told me the other day I should think about the time when it was written and the context as well.

Pieter-Jan: guys? Where do we get out?

Just when Pieter-Jan asks about leaving a sign appears.

Ahmed: look there is an exit sign!

4 EXT PARK DAY

We see everyone back at the park a bit amazed of what just happened.

Everyone: wow! Amazing...

Ahmed: Now ask the vault where we can find the best pizza's?

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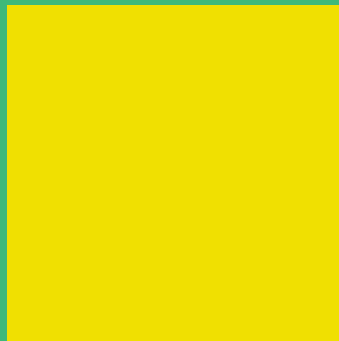
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3



ENCOUNTER WITH THE
ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND
ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

MODULE THREE

ENCOUNTER WITH THE ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

3.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE VIDEO



Figure 3.1
Video Clip

Young people across the country are encouraging each other on social media to periodically demonstrate for a new climate policy and social justice. The demonstrations take place every Monday from 10:00 am. While most of the protesters should actually be in school at that time, they argue that their actions serve a higher interest of society. While many schools implicitly agreed to the protesters' absence for the demonstrations, they do not agree with the way some protests occur.

3.2 THE CREATURE

3.2.1 INTRODUCTION

The problem is that many young people are experiencing an enormous frustration towards what we call “the rich polluting business people”. A small group of young people demonstrate in the driveways of wealthy people.

The Quran refers to the creature as *khalq*. The term *khalq* is related to nature and the universe and can be found in 261 Quranic verses. As for example in Surat Al-Baqara verse 29: *It is He who created for you all of that which is on the earth. Then He directed Himself to the heaven, [His being above all creation], and made them seven heavens, and He is Knowing of all things..*¹ (Al-Baqara:29)

Islam addresses all parts of creation, including ecology. Out of the totality of Quranic verses, 1/8 of it deals with ecology, environment and nature. After all, all human beings has been given the task of maintaining the balance of Allah’s creation. In Sura Arrahman it says: *“..And the heaven He raised and imposed the balance. That you not transgress within the balance. And establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance.”*²(Ar-rahmane: 7,8 en 9)

Islam’s view on the relationship between mankind and ecology is talked about in both the Qur’an and the Hadiths.³ Everyone is repeatedly encouraged to treat nature and the earth in a sustainable way. Moreover because the entire universe was created by Allah as a unity. It is therefore up to mankind to preserve and respect that unity of nature and man.



Figure 3.2
Source: © PRASERT /
Adobe Stock

3.2.2 MAN AS KHALIFA ON EARTH

There is a correlation between all the elements of the creature. Allah also added structure in here. That is why we speak of a well balanced creature or *mizan* as explained in the Quran: *“The sun and the moon follow a fixed path. The stars and the trees worship their Lord. He has lifted up the heavens and brought balance. Don’t disturb it (this balance), keep the right size and don’t lose it.”*⁴ (Ar-rahmane: 5,6,7,8 en 9)

¹ <https://quran.com/2/29?translations=101,21,20,19,18,17,84,85,22,95> (acces 7.10.2020)

² <https://quran.com/21/47?translations=43,18,101,84,85,22,20> (acces 7.10.2020)

³ I. M. HOPE, J. YOUNG, *islam and ecology*, , 2014, p.1.

⁴ <https://quran.com/22/18?translations=17,18,84,20,95,101,85,22,21,19> (acces 7.10.2020).



Besides ecology in general, the Quran also draws attention to the environment. Here too, the central message is that it is the task of man to maintain and respect the balance in nature. We speak

Figure 3.3
Source: © sarayut_sy /
Adobe Stock

of 'laws of nature' to indicate that Allah created the unity of nature in all perfection with the correct calculations. Thus it says in Sura Al Mulk: "You see no imbalance in the creation of the Most Merciful."⁵ (Al-Mulk:3).

The interpretation of the Quran makes us realize that man should not be a controller, but rather a guardian of nature. That is why man is considered a steward or *khalifa*: "And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels, I will appoint a *khalifa* upon the earth."⁶ (Al-Baqara:30) The original meaning of a *khalifa* is the one responsible for protecting the earth and its capabilities.

The nature gives us signals or *ayats* when things are not going well in nature. It is then up to us, human beings, to give the right reaction and to protect nature more and in a better way. As already explained, man is part of the entire universe along with all other creations. Yet man differs from all other creations because he has the ratio and free will. People have the capacity to think about their actions and choose whether to protect something or not. So unlike animals who just follow their instincts, humans have the intelligence to understand and carry out the imposed task of protecting nature.⁷

In concrete terms, *khalifa* or being responsible means that you as a person take on the following responsibilities:

1. Protect yourself (spiritually, biological, ...)
2. Protecting society (society in general, relationships, your own community and that of others, ...)
3. Protect the earth and its resources (nature, animals, energy sources...)



Figure 3.4
Source: © onephoto /
Adobe Stock

⁵ <https://quran.com/55?translations=18,85,22,20> (access 7.10.2020).

⁶ <https://quran.com/2/30?translations=17,101,22,21,19,20,18,95> (access 7.10.2020).

⁷ I. M. HOPE, J. YOUNG, *Islam and ecology*, 2014, p.1.

3.2.3 EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Fill out Exercise

Complete the scheme with the correct answer.



Exercise 2

Read the statements below and put a mark in the right column.

Statement	True	False
1. 1/8 of the Quran is about ecology, environment and nature.		
2. Animals have a free will and a ratio. That's the reason why they have the task of taking care of nature.		
3. A khalifa is responsible for protecting himsel/herself, the society and the earth.		
4. The creation of Allah is unbalanced or not a mizan.		
Did people continue to discuss throughout history about the precise interpretation of <i>sharia</i> ?		

3.3 ISLAMIC ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

3.3.1 HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR

In the section on human beings as *khalifa's* we've already discussed the fact that the Quran draws a lot of attention to the environment in general. It's not enough to just follow the rules stipulated in the Five Pillars of Islam to be a good Muslim. There are other (un)written ethical principles such as respecting and protecting the environment. As humans, we should be careful and frugal with the resources, we should pollute nature as little as possible and carry out a sustainable and ecological behavior. These principles of responsible behavior are not less important than the well-known Five Pillars of the Islam.

The *hadith* tells us more about the lifestyle of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. It also confirms that the Prophet considered environmentally responsible behavior as part of the authentic Islamic way of life. Fun fact is that most of the prophets were shepherds, which meant they were constantly in touch with nature and animals. The Prophet also asked Muslims to be careful with nature in every situation, even during difficult times like war.

This is emphasized by Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, a close companion and successor of the Prophet Muhammad. He said to one of his military commanders: *"I advise you the following ten things (regarding the rules of warfare). Do not kill women or children, the elderly or the sick. Do not cut down or*



*burn trees, especially if they are fruit-bearing trees. Do not destroy uninhabited places. Do not kill animals except for providing food. Do not burn or separate bees. Do not steal any of the items that were confiscated during the battle. And don't act cowardly."*⁸ (Al-Muwatta, Volume 21, Hadith 10)

The Quran constantly reminds us of the beauty of nature. Surah Al Ghashiyah in verses 16-18 explicitly invites to be aware of the beauty of nature by regularly observing and enjoying it: *"Don't they look at how the camels were created? And how the mountains stand firmly? Don't they look at how spread out the earth is?"*⁹ (Al-Ghashiyah: 17,18,19,20) If we take the time to look at nature in a more conscious way, we will be able to realize the greatness and the beauty it has in it.

Figure 3.5
Source: © Jon Anders Wiken / Adobe Stock

⁸ I. MALIK, al-Muwatta, Beiroet, Dar Iyha Attourat Alarabiya, 1985, p. 212.

⁹ <https://quran.com/15/19?translations=22,85,101,84,20,21,19,18,17,95> (acces 7.10.2020).

3.3.2 EXERCISES

Exercise 1

Fill out the missing words.

the environment – resources – respecting and protecting – *khalifa* – ecological behavior - Five Pillars of Islam

In the section on human beings as we've already discussed the fact that the Quran draws a lot of attention to in general. It's not enough to just follow the rules stipulated in the to be a good Muslim. There are other (un)written ethical principles such as the environment. As humans, we should be careful and frugal with the we should pollute nature as little as possible and carry out a sustainable and These principles of responsible behavior are not less important than the well-known Five Pillars of the Islam.

3.4 ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

3.4.1 RESPONSIBLE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

In a society with social justice, every person has the same right and access to the basic needs. Ecology and nature can be linked to this topic of social justice. A good example is a society in which everyone is entitled to water as a basic need.

The Quran emphasizes the crucial role of water. Water is considered a source of life and one of the most precious resources.¹⁰ The word water or ma'a occurs more than seventy times in the Quran.¹¹ Some examples are:

"And Allah has sent water from heaven, and He revives the earth with it after its death. Verily in this is a sign for those who listen."¹² (An-Nahl:65)

" And have you seen the water that you drink? Is it you who brought it down from the clouds, or is it We who bring it down? If We willed, We could make it bitter, so why are you not grateful?!"¹³ (Al-Waqi'ah: 68,69,70)

Water is an essential source for the creation and development of life. For example, it is necessary for the livelihood of humans, of animals and it is necessary for plant growth. Humans and animals need drinking water. Finally, we can barely imagine a life without the possibility to take a shower or a bath; water provides us good hygiene.



Figure 3.6
Source: © willyam /
Adobe Stock

It is clear that water will always play a vital role in the universe. But it is also becoming clear that we are dealing with the problems of water scarcity, dryness,... Water is not inexhaustible and might, at some moment, run out. It is therefore our responsibility to prevent water shortages by creating sustainable solutions.

As a khalifa, we must be aware of the scarceness of energy sources and carry out a sustainable and ecological behavior.

¹⁰ S. CATOVIC, J. YOUNG, Islamic sacred texts related to water, New Jersey , p.1-5.

¹¹ More examples can be found on: https://www.faithinwater.org/uploads/4/4/3/0/44307383/islamic_sacred_texts-water-greenfaith.pdf

¹² <https://quran.com/16/65?translations=101,22,17,21,19,18,20,84,95> (access 7.10.2020).

¹³ <https://quran.com/56/68-78> (access 7.10.2020).

3.4.2 USING NATURAL RESOURCES FAIRLY

It is common knowledge that humans consume a lot. We often consume much more than we actually need to survive. Think of the food scraps after every meal that end up with the garbage. It is important to find a balance in that consumption. Even if there would be an abundance of certain natural resources, it wouldn't have been just to unnecessarily exhaust these resources. Ending overconsumption by consuming in a balanced way, would help to achieve the goal of unity and conservation of nature.¹⁴ A real *khalifa* always keeps these goals in mind.



Figure 3.7
Source: © VectorMine /
Adobe Stock

The Quran explicitly states not to waste nor to overconsume. Surah Al A'raf points out that consuming is obviously not forbidden, but that it must be done in a balanced way: ***“O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess.”***¹⁵ (Al-A'raf: 31)

Balanced consumption makes it easier to equally distribute natural resources in order to achieve a society with social justice. Yet we see that this has become more and more difficult over the years. If everyone only thinks about himself when consuming, he will not be able to remind himself that the supply of natural resources must also provide other people, animals and plants for a living. This creates an unequal and unjust distribution of natural resources. This is the negative effect the Quran tries to warn for.

¹⁴ S. OZKAYA, *Islam en Ecologie: De ecologische ethiek van de islam gezien vanuit de visie op de relatie tussen mens en natuur*, Leiden, 2013, p. 14.

¹⁵ <https://quran.com/7/31-41> (access 7.10.2020).

3.4.3 EXERCISES

Exercise 1

Answer the following questions.

1) What characterizes a society with social justice? Give an example:

2) How many times does the term ma'a or water occur in the Quran?

3) How can we achieve the goal of unity and conservation of nature?

3.5 GLOSSARY

Hadth

All that is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad of words, deeds, implicit approvals, appearance and personality.

Khalifa

An trustee on Earth or protector of nature.

Ratio

Reason, the human mind able of thinking and understanding.

Ayats

Verses from the Quran.

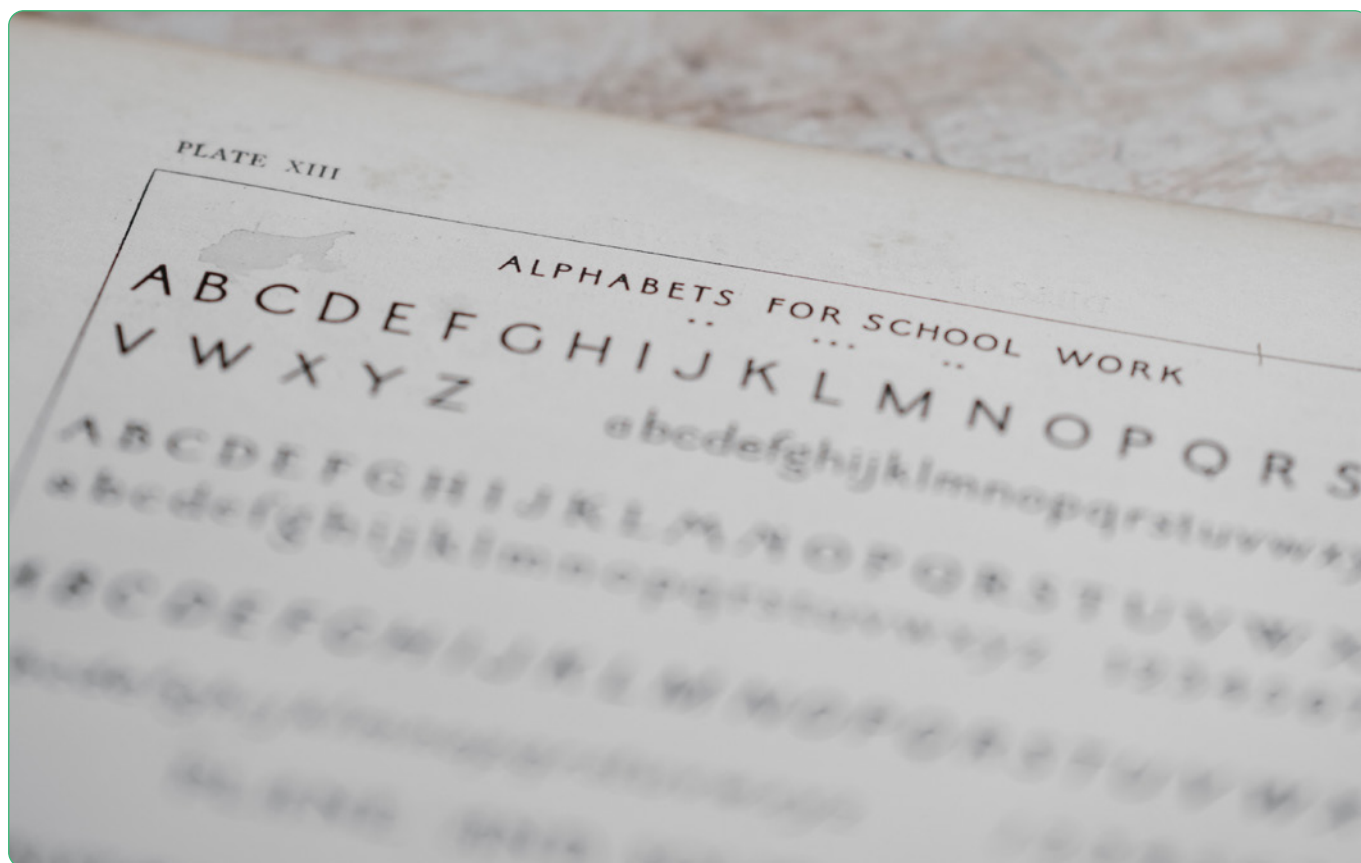


Photo: © Annie Spratt | Unsplash

3.6 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

Ahmed and Pieter-Jan are watching the news.

Television:

After the climate march, the students finished their protest in front of the house of the well known businessman Tarik Hadid. The students also destroyed the garden of mister Hadid. According to them, Tarik Hadid is also responsible for the problem of environmental pollution.

The climate march is an initiative of students in order to make the government and polluting companies to take their responsibility.

Ahmed:

"Oh no, I know these people. Tarik Hadid is weekly present at our local mosque to pray. But I also know the students! I've heard that Tarik is very upset because they destroyed his garden and I actually understand that.

Pieter-Jan:

"Really?"

Ahmed:

"These students have gone too far, don't you think?"

Pieter-Jan:

"I understand their concerns but this is not the right way to create awareness."

Ahmed:

"Indeed, I understand them too. They should enter into a dialogue with each other."

Pieter-Jan:

"Why don't you bring them together then? Maybe you can bring them around the table and even mediate?"

Ahmed:

"What a good idea! You know what? During Islam class we learned about the importance of taking care of our planet. Now I have to set up an ecological project. The aim of the project is to create awareness and small changes in your own environment. I can start my project with this situation! We must be encouraged to take responsibility for the environment. I can bring the students and mister Hadid together in our mosque."

Pieter-Jan:

"Wow, that's a good idea. It's a win-win."

Meeting in the local mosque:

Ahmed has invited everyone to enter into a dialogue about climate change.

Mr. Hadid is a major investor of the mosque. He is a progressive thinker and always open to new ideas.

Ahmed: "Mr Hadid, we are so thankful that you wanted to speak to the students."

Mr Hadid:

"You are welcome Ahmed, I am curious why exactly you invited us to meet in the mosque."

One of the students:

"In the Quran it is said that Allah has made us, humankind, as protectors of the universe." (35:39) "He is the one who has appointed you as a proxy on earth."

We want to apply this Islamic environmental ethics in our mosque. The mosque is the most important place of worship. Allah has given us the responsibility to take care of our earth. Taking care of nature is one of our tasks as human beings.

Our Prophet Mohamed lived in the nature which made him aware of the importance of animal welfare,... All our prophets were also shepherds and took care of animals and nature. That's quite a difference from how most of us live now. We are no longer in touch with nature."

Mr Hadid:

"Okay, I know what you mean. But what is your concrete proposal? How can the mosque become more ecological in your opinion?"

One of the students:

"We want to make people aware of environmental pollution and global warming. We strongly believe, Mr Hadid, that people like you can make a difference."

Mr Hadid:

"Okay guys, you have a lot of interesting things to say. I want to hear more about your ideas.

Ahmed:

"We have developed a plan with multiple suggestions.

For example, we can start a community-garden project. This project provides resourceful green spaces on which we can grow sustainable food while also creating community cohesion. In this way, Muslims come into closer contact with each other and with nature.

We can also set up a water project by for example putting up signs to make people aware to limit their use of water. There are also several hadiths about the use of water we can refer to.

We also need to reduce the use of plastic.

(While the plans are being explained, they appear on the screen in clouds of thoughts)

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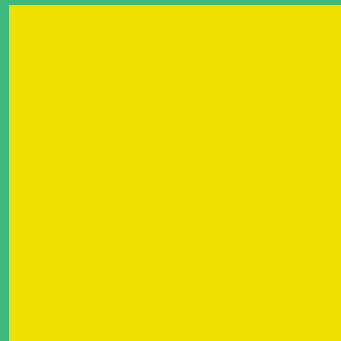
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4



WHEN ENCOUNTERS BECOMES
CONFLICT: JUST WAR AND
JUST PEACE

MODULE FOUR

WHEN ENCOUNTERS BECOMES CONFLICT: JUST WAR AND JUST PEACE

4.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE VIDEO



Figure 4.1
Video Clip

Ahmed goes to a boxing club after school. His father's best friend (Samir) is a boxing coach at Ahmed's boxing club. The boxing club is also a youth center where youngsters come together. They want to reach other youngsters through the boxing activity. The club helps young people get off the street by boxing in the club.

The club is open to everyone, including children and young people from disadvantaged areas. Even social workers are involved. The club also focuses on personal development in a space where they come into contact with other cultures. A boxing champion who belonged to the boxing club radicalized. He rejected the society in which he lived, and after many troubles, he radicalized and went to the 'Islamic State' to fight in the name of Jihad.

4.2 ISLAM AND VIOLENCE

4.2.1 INTRODUCTION

Islam and violence are often associated to each other. Several incidents 'in name of the Islam' created an incorrect perception of what is prescribed in Islam. Examples hereof are the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11 2001, but also the growth of extremist organizations such as ISIS in 2014, the terror attacks in several European cities. As a result, Islam has often been discussed in the media in a negative way.

Although these attacks were initiatives of Islamic groups, their actions are in contrast to the principles of Islam. These extremist groups justify their actions by calling it 'jihad' thereby misusing the term to justify violence.

Although radicalism and extremism have often been associated with Islam over the last two decades, violence is not at all inherent in Islam. Islam forbids the use of violence against anyone, without difference between believers and non-believers. It is true that the Qur'an contains certain verses about violence, but one must read these verses in their intended context. It is not the intention that we interpret and apply Koran verses literally in our current society. This would be inconsistent with the intent of the text.

Radicalism and extremism have taken different forms over the years. In the last century, for example, we were faced with a number of right-wing extremist organizations and groups. Communist extremism also had a negative impact on Western society. In recent years, we have also been contending with advancing Islamic radicalism. What becomes clear here is that violence is not necessarily inherent in a particular belief, philosophy or ideology, but that many different factors lead to extreme thinking. This stems from different beliefs, philosophies and ideologies and Islam has no patent on that. This is also confirmed by the Israeli writer and intellectual Amos Oz: "Fanaticism is not only the heritage of Al Qaeda or IS, Jabhat Al-Nusra, Hamas and Hezbollah, of neo-Nazis, anti-Semites, white supremacist thinkers, Islamophobes, the Ku Klux Klan, the hilltop hooligans and other blood shedders in the name of their beliefs. All those fanatics and what looks like them - we all know them. They look at us day after day from the television screen, passionately waving in front of camera lenses preaching all kinds of slogans into the microphone...."¹

Violence is not inherent to faith, but man people and groups use faith for their own interests. Everything that ends up in the hands of people can go wrong. The most sublime object in the hands of people can end in evil. In Latin it is expressed as follows "Corruptio optimi pessima" or "The very best becomes the worst when it turns into its opposite".

¹ O. AMOS, *Beste Fanatici*, Drie essays, Amsterdam, De Bezige Bij, 2017, p.23.

4.2.2 CONCEPTS OF VIOLENCE

Before we zoom in on the content, we will define some concepts about violence from the Quran, hadith and Islamic theology:



Figure 4.2
Source: © kalpis /
Adobe Stock

1. Jihad: Linguistically, jihad means ‘to make an effort’. The term is usually used in the context of acts of war; endeavor in war. But in the overarching sense of Jihad as assumed in this manual, war is only a small part. Various Islamic scholars attribute thirteen meanings to the term Jihad. The main meaning is therefore to make an effort, but not necessarily in the context of war. For example, you can make efforts for justice, for a well-functioning society, ...

2. Al-Qital: Linguistically means fighting. This term is also usually used in a war context, but, like jihad, has a broader meaning.

3. Al-Harb: Literally it means war, like for example two countries attacking each other. Al-Harb differs fundamentally from jihad. War mainly revolves around the domination and victory of the other. Jihad refers to the efforts made to guarantee general security.

4. Al-Unf: Literally means violence. Although Al-Unf is often associated with Islam, the term is not mentioned anywhere in the Quran.

5. Al-Irhab: Al-Irhab stands for terrorism. ‘Terrorizing’ is stated in the Quran, in Surat Al-Anfal verse 60. It says: **“And use whatever means of power you have, including war horses, to terrify the enemy of Allah, your enemy and the others.”**² (Al-Anfal: 60) It is important to correctly interpret the term ‘terrorization’. Terrorizing here does not mean carrying out the acts of violence as in the recent terrorist attacks, but rather means impressing the opposing party to gain respect.

². <https://koran.nl/soera-8-al-anfal-de-buit/>

4.2.3 USING FORCE FOR CHANGE

There are Islamic groups who are convinced that they can reach social change only through violence. For them, the purpose justifies using all necessary means, such as terror attacks on the innocent. However, such acts are absolutely prohibited and in no way prescribed in the Quran. Yet the supporters of those groups pretend that various Islamic regulations justify this violent behavior. They use the following strategy³ :

First, they try to undermine the legitimacy of a head of state. If the head of state is a Muslim, they label him as a non-Muslim. Then they claim that the head of state is not applying Islamic laws. The strategy is even easier if the head of state is not a Muslim. In that case they declare with even more conviction that Islamic laws are not being applied: such as the fact that they are allies of Western countries. This, they say, is enough to deny the authority of a head of state and to even demonstrate against it. The main aim then is to depose the head of state in any way, even by use of force.

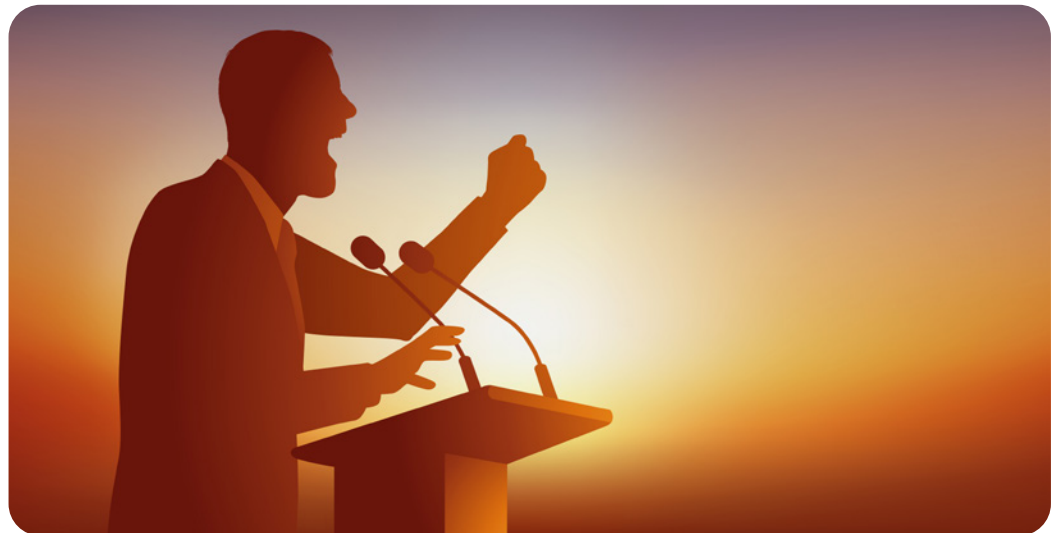


Figure 4.3
Source: © pict rider /
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In Islamic theology this subject is called “Takfir”. It is a very sensitive issue where a Muslim gets labelled as non-Muslim. It is not the job of any Muslim or just any person to judge someone else’s religious experience. There are situations in which people openly admit that they no longer (want to) be a Muslim. In that case, it is clear that a person himself no longer wishes to be considered a Muslim, but it must be emphasized that there are no consequences. Again, it is not a Muslim’s job to judge or sanction another’s religious experience. Moreover, the Quran provides for the freedom of religious choice, it says: **“There is no compulsion in our religion.”** (Al-Baqara: 256)

³ Y. ALQARDAWI, Fiqh Aljihad, Dirasat Muqaranatu Li-Ahkamihi wa Falsafatihi di daw al-Quran wa As-Sounna, Cairo, Dar Al-Koutboub Al’Imiya, 2009, p. 16-18.

Secondly, they incite the broad population to depose the head of state. Again, they justify violence to achieve the goal of deposition. The process of deposition causes chaos and a camp of supporters and non-supporters within society arise. The head of state is labeled as “apostate” who may be murdered because of the non-application of Islamic law. This is a very vehement view in contrast with the Quranic referred above emphasizing that there is no compulsion in religion. Therefore, there is no deposition or killing allowed. Also in a Quran verse is stated: **“The Truth is from your Lord. Anyone who wants to believe, let him believe. Anyone who doesn’t want to believe, let him not believe.”**⁴ (Al-Kahf: 29). We must respect everyone’s freedom to believe or not believe what he/she wants.

Use of violence is therefore by no means a justified manner of bringing change in society. Violence must always be condemned. However, there are specific situations where violence is allowed like war for protection. When a Muslim country is threatened and all alternatives to stop violence have been exhausted, one may resist with violence, if the strict rules of war within Islam are still respected. The rules are:

- 1) No violence until all alternatives to stop violence are exhausted.
- 2) No violence unless a country is wronged.
- 3) No violence unless people are driven from their homes.
- 4) Do not kill women, children, the elderly or sick people (only use of force against soldiers in a war).
- 5) Always respect nature and animals.
- 6) Always respect people’s homes.
- 7) Looting is never allowed.

As we see, the rule that allows violence refer purely to protection. These rules are included in the following verse and the sunnah of the Prophet:

“Go both (Moses and his brother) to Pharaoh, for he has transgressed. Speak both to him softly. Maybe he will take it to his heart.” (Ta-Ha: 43.44). The scholars conclude from this verse that one must first choose the diplomatic path to stop violence. For Pharaoh is known as a great tyrant and yet Allah commands Moses and his brother Haroon to speak softly to him.

⁴ <https://koran.nl/soera-18-al-kahf-de-grot/>

The other rules are to be found in the following verse:

“To those who are fought [the fight] is permitted because they have been wronged; God has the power to help those who have been unjustly expelled from their homes just because they say, “Our Lord is God” - and if God had not let men restrain one another, then there were hermits, churches, synagogues and mosques in which God’s name often mentioned is certainly destroyed. But God will certainly help those who help Him; God is powerful and mighty.”⁵ (Al-Hajj / 39: 40)

This is also emphasized by Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, a close companion and successor of the Prophet Muhammad - pbuh -. He said to one of his military commanders: ***“I advise you the following ten things (regarding the rules of warfare). Do not kill women or children, the elderly or the sick. Do not cut down or burn trees, especially if they are fruit-bearing trees. Do not destroy uninhabited places. Do not kill animals except for food. Do not burn or disperse bees. Do not steal any of the items seized during battle. And do not act cowardly.”***⁶ (Al-Muwatta, Volume 21, Hadith 10)

In another hadith, Abu Bakr added not to attack priests and monks and not to destroy their places of worship. Buildings must also remain intact. Even consuming the animals’ milk is strictly prohibited, except with the permission of the owners.

Thus, waging war is subject to strict regulations based on the Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Mohamed.

⁵. <https://koran.nl/soera-22-al-hajj-de-bedeavaart/>.

⁶. Ima. MALIK, al-Muwatta, Beiroet, Dar Iyha Attourat Alarabiya, 1985, p. 212.

4.2.4 EXERCISES

Exercise 1

Underline the correct meaning of the term

1. Linguistically, jihad means:

War - Make an Effort - Violence

2. Al-Qital means:

War - Fighting - Terrorist

3. Al Harb means:

War - Extreme – Islam

Exercise 2

Answer the following questions.

1. How can you apply the linguistic meaning of jihad in your daily life?

2. Can any person apply Al-Qital and Al Harb. Explain why or why not.

4.3 SPIRITUAL JIHAD

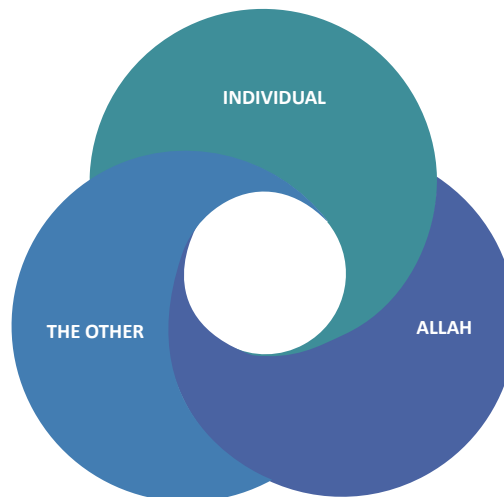
4.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Spiritual jihad is the highest rank of jihad and means that the Muslim must do his utmost to be a good person. He does this by fulfilling his religious obligations such as the obligations towards Allah, towards himself and towards others.

4.3.2 TRIANGLE RELATIONSHIP

In Islam there is always an important triangular relationship between:

1. An individual
2. The fellow man or the other
3. Allah



It is up to every Muslim to maintain balance between these different relationships. This is part of spiritual jihad, which is to fulfill its religious obligations in order to achieve and maintain harmony within the triangular relationship. Compliance with this obligation is not so easy. That is why jihad means making a great effort. According to Islamic rules, a person should cleanse the soul because the soul is the core of man. By cleansing his core, a person will be able to maintain a harmonious relationship with himself, with others and with Allah. In the Quran it is quoted as follows: **“Surely he who cleanses it (the soul) (from sins) will succeed. And surely the one who spoils it, will lose.”**⁷ (Ash-Shams: 9 and 10).

Clearing the soul of desires and always maintaining harmony within the triangular relationship requires a lot of effort. It is therefore part of the spiritual jihad.

⁷ <https://koran.nl/soera-91-ash-shams-de-zon/>.

EXERCISE 1: Triangle Relationship

In the Islam there is always an important triangular relationship between the individual (me), the fellow man (the other) and Allah. In the relationship with which of these three actors does one try to achieve harmony in the examples below?

Fill in the column and choose between: Me – The other - Allah

Description	Who?
Jareer Ibn Abdullah, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated: "The Prophet Sallallahu 'alaihi wasalam said: Whoever has no mercy towards men will not have a merciful..."	
Spiritual worship	
Healthy living "	
"The best way to remember Allah is to recite the Shahada. This is Laa illaaha illa Allah and means there is no god but Allah." ⁸	
To donate food	
For those who follow a path of knowledge, Allah will facilitate the path to Paradise."	

4.5 GLOSSARY

Jihad

Linguistically, jihad means making an effort.

Al-Qital

Linguistically means fighting.

Al-Harb

Literally means war.

Al-Unf

Literally means violence.

Al-Irhab

Al-Irhab stands for terrorism.

Takfir:

Declaring someone as a non-Muslim.

Spiritual Jihad

A Muslim must do his utmost to be a good person.

Hikma

Ultimate wisdom.

An-Nafs Al-Ammara

The desirable soul.

An-Nafs Al-Lawama

The warning soul.

An-Nafs Al-Moetma-iena

The stable/calm soul.

Jihad of ideas

A figurative battle of different ideologies.

Social jihad

Making efforts to take care of yourself and others in society.

Economic jihad

The financial maintenance and support of one's family, relatives, loved ones and everyone for whom one has financial responsibility.

Jihad for the environment

Make all necessary efforts to protect the environment.

4.6 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

Ahmed starts sparring with his sparring partner. He is extremely aggressive today. After the spar session:

Sparring partner: Hey Ahmed, what's going on? You are full of aggression! I've never seen you sparring like this.

Ahmed: Pfff I don't want to talk about it.

Sparring partner: Tell me, you shouldn't keep your problems for yourself, talk about it. You can share it with me.

Ahmed: I'm really mad! I was on my way to the club after school. The police stopped me. AGAIN. They were looking for me and started investigating my sportbag and even my schoolbag.

It all happened close to my school. People I know from school looked at me as if I had stolen something. I felt so humiliated. They really treated me without respect. I'm so done with these situations happening so often.

Sparring partner: I know what you're going through. I've also experienced it many times. They hate Muslims. They are actually our enemies because they are not muslims.

A friend of mine recently said that even the Quran speaks about our "enemies" and that jihad is even allowed. "And those who strive for Us - We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allah is with the doers of good."

Ahmed: Wow yes bro...I don't know if it's true but it is not the first time I have heard about these Quranic verses.

Trainer Samir hears the boys talking to each other. He interrupts them

Trainer Samir: Guys, these are recognizable stories. This is called "racial profiling". It is unfair to experience this kind of injustice. On the other hand, we should not generalize the problem. It often concerns a few individuals. This type of frustration can generate so much anger and I understand that. It can even lead you to dangerous ideas. But please don't quote Quranic verses in such a situation and don't take them out of their specific context. The word jihad has much more meanings than the one often used by everyone.

Ahmed: Really? How can we understand jihad then?

Trainer Samir: According to well-known scholars, spiritual jihad is the highest form of jihad. In this concrete situation, it would imply to control your frustrations and don't generalize whole groups by criticizing an individual's behavior. It is very difficult, I know, but that's why it is also called jihad. Because jihad originally means making a great effort.

Ahmed: Samir... I feel like the society doesn't want us to be part of it, no matter how hard we try. I will forever remain the 'on of the other ones'. I'm so tired of that feeling.

Trainer Samir: Ahmed listen up. Just look at the diversity within our boxing club. This diversity reflects the reality in our society. It doesn't matter who you are or where you come from. We share the same passion, in this case boxing, and that is what is binding us.

I'll tell you something. I have been a trainer of a very talented champion boxer. He had a lot of potential to break through. The problem was that he was full of frustrations. He even didn't show up to the boxing club and in the end lost his motivation. Boxing means fighting back. You might be knocked down 10 times but you have to get up 11 times. You have to stay dedicated if you want to achieve your goals and create changes. And what do you think the talented boxer did to achieve changes and to reach his goals?

Ahmed: No idea trainer, what did he do?

Trainer Samir: He stopped believing in himself. He has given up on himself. He no longer believed in our society or in the possibility of change. He went to Syria believing he could change our society here by fighting there. He dealt with the wrong people that made him believe that he could change society through violence. He and his group of extremists made a strategic call to jihad. They considered the leaders of Islamic countries as non-believers because they were partners Western countries.

Ahmed: Really?

Trainer: Their vision on the use of violence is totally wrong. To consider a muslim as an non-believer or takfir is dangerous. Besides, there is no compulsion in our religion. As indicated in surat al baqarah verse 256: "There is no compulsion in our religion". Therefore, this form of violence is by no means legitimate even if someone is a non-believer, that would be her or his choice.

Ahmed: Hmmm okay...

Trainer Samir: Muslimscholars have also attached conditions to the use of violence: The conditions are:

- 1) When all alternatives to stop violence are exhausted.
- 2) When a country is wronged.
- 3) When people are driven from their homes.
- 4) You may never kill women, children, the elderly or sick people

- 5) When using violence, always respect nature and the animals.
- 6) Respect people's homes.
- 7) Looting is not allowed.

None of these rules were respected by the jihadi extremists. While Islam commands us to peacefully arrange everything, they go directly to violence. Like the example of Pharaoh and prophet Moses in the Quran: "Go both (Moses and his brother Aaron) to Pharaoh, for he has transgressed. Speak to him both softly. Maybe he will take it to heart.

The scholars conclude from this verse that one must first choose the diplomatic path to stop violence. Pharaoh is known as a great tyrant and yet Allah commands Moses and his brother Haroon to speak softly to him.

Ahmed: It is certainly not a matter of them against us, nor is it that non-Muslims are our enemies. So they are using jihad in a wrong way?

Trainer: Exactly. Set goals in life and be ambitious. I learned how to accept failures and to move on without losing hope. Courage is the willingness to face fear. Also as Muslims, we are responsible for our contribution to society. Everyone is welcome here. WE ARE ONE TEAM. We are in this together.

Ahmed: I really look up to you trainer. Your words are so inspiring!

Trainer Samir: Thanks kiddo. By the way, A friend of mine is giving a lecture to the police and social workers about cultural and religious awareness. The lecture can be held in our club, maybe? In that way we can have a dialogue with them and share our daily experiences with racial profiling. What do you think?

Ahmed: I would love to share my frustrations with them.

Trainer Samir: Ok great! Let's organize a meeting with the club members and brainstorm together. I'll invite my friend!

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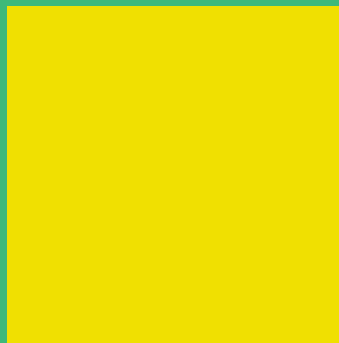
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5



DIVINE AND HUMAN LAWS:
COMPATIBLE OR NOT?

MODULE FIVE

DIVINE AND HUMAN LAWS COMPATIBLE OR NOT?

5.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE VIDEO

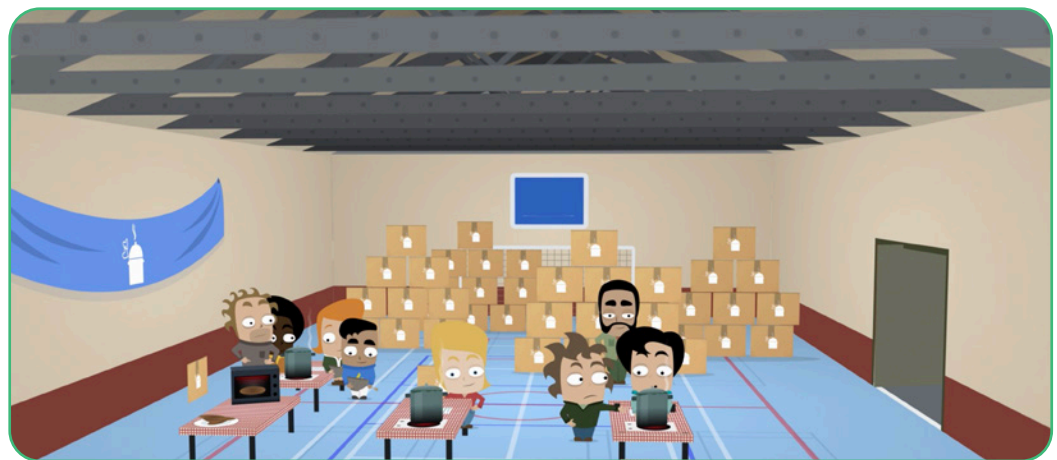


Figure 5.1
Video Clip

Ahmed and his fellow students volunteer at school. The volunteers make food parcels and deliver the food parcels to the less fortunate. Such a package contains everything an average family needs to not go hungry for a few days. While preparing the food parcels, a conversation arises between Ahmed and his teacher about democracy and Islam.

Hassan is an extracurricular volunteer sharing his experiences and vision on this topic. War has started in his country of origin. Fundamentalists were given a free hand to interpret Islam in favor of their extreme vision.

In this scenario we want to make young people aware that Islam does not have absolute forms of government, but that it pursues fundamental universal values. They were also against democracy and believed that Islam is the only law we must obey. And while the main ethical principles in Islam are, our foundations reflect universal values such as the human laws prohibiting murder, theft, injustice, discrimination, etc., they choose a different interpretation to impose their way of thinking on all of us.

5.2 HUMAN LAWS

5.2.1 INTRODUCTION



Figure 5.2
Source: © Murrstock /
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The contradiction between divine laws and human laws is an age-old discussion. This, in fact, fits in the context of “How does reason relates to faith?” The ancient Greeks spoke of *logos* (ratio) versus *mythos* (belief). They tried to explain everything rationally.

The Islam has known the tension between mind and faith in the past as *tarud al aql wa annaql*. Several scholars, such as the great muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes)¹ has attempted to remove that contradiction. In his book *Fasl Almaqaal* (the decisive word) he spoke out the fatwa that reason and Islam complement each other and do not contradict each other.

Ibn Rushd explains how to interpret the Quran in such a way that it doesn't contradict with reason. In fact, using reason is a religious obligation, he says. He substantiates this statement with a few verses such as “*Take this for your example, O you understanding ones*” (Quran 59: 2), “*Have they not seen the kingship of the heavens and the earth, and all the things that God has created?*” (Quran 7: 185).

Ibn Rushd explains the first verse as follows: “*This is a textual foundation for the obligation to use logical reasoning, or possibly a combination of logical and legal reasoning.*”² The second verse, according to the author, is an incentive to study everything that exists.³ Then he comes to the conclusion that the Quran obliges man through reason to think about everything that exists.

Ibn Rushd was strongly convinced that it is impossible for reason to be in contrast with Islam. That is why he says: “*After all, the truth is not contrary to truth, but rather must agree with it and be a confirmation of it.*”⁴ With the first truth he refers to the truth that one obtains through the mind and the second truth refers to Islam. Finally, he concluded his book with the following statement: “*... by this I mean that the mind is the friend and foster sister of religion.*” In other words, reason and faith are two methods of finding out the truth.



Figure 5.3
Source: © artisticco /
Adobe Stock

¹ Ibn Rushd or Averroes born in Córdoba (Spain) He lived between 1126 and 1198

² M. AVERROES, *Het beslissende woord*, Kampen, Uitgeverij Klement, pag 31.

³ M. AVERROES, *Het beslissende woord*, Kampen, Uitgeverij Klement, pag 31.

⁴ M. AVERROES, *Het beslissende woord*, Kampen, Uitgeverij Klement, pag 38.

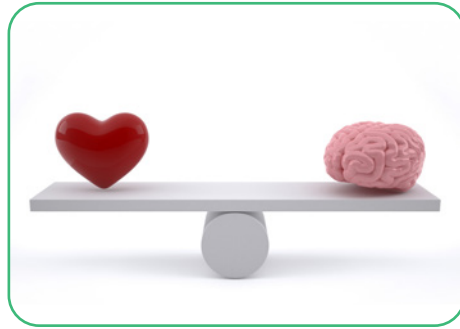


Figure 5.4
Source: © harunyigit /
Adobe Stock

Of course, everything depends on the interpretation of rules in the right context. If you choose for a literal interpretation of rules of centuries ago in order to apply them today, you will face some problems. By the way, the Prophet has never been obsessed with the rules, but with justice as an outcome.

5.2.2 DEFINITION OF DIVINE LAWS

Divine law according to Islam is the will or guidance of Allah revealed to man through his prophets. This will or guidance can be found in the first place in the Quran and in the second place in the Sunna.

The basic question is, “*How can man find out the will of Allah?*” Many Islamic scholars have investigated this very carefully. They use the method called *ijtihad*.

Ijtihad is a well-known term in Islamic teachings. The term literally means “*to make every effort*”⁵.

After all, every effort is made in order to create an opinion on the guidelines of Islam. It is important to emphasize that it’s an opinion for no one can claim the absolute truth with all certainty. In other words, no one represents God on earth and only He knows the absolute truth. That is why all scholars always end their *ijtihad* with *Allahu a’lam* (which means “Allah knows better”). In short, the divine laws include the will or guidance of Allah and these are interpreted through *ijtihad*.



Figure 5.5
Source: © rudall30 /
Adobe Stock

⁵ M. FAIRUSABADI, *Alqamus Almuhiid*, Beiroet, Al-Resalah Publishers, 2005, p. 387.

5.2.3 EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Answer the following questions individually

1. What was the fatwa that Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd spoke out in his book Fasl Almaqaal?

2. What was the fatwa that Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd spoke out in his book Fasl Almaqaal?

3. Was Prophet Mohammed obsessed with rules?

Exercise 2: Missing words

Fill in the missing words.

Religious obligation - Complement- Muslim Philosopher - Quran - Reason

Islam also had known a tension between and belief in history. Ibn Rushd a great raised this in his book Fasl Almaqaal pronounced a fatwa. In his book he emphasizes that reason and Islam are mutually exclusive and certainly not contradictory. In his book Averroes teaches us how to read while taking into account the rules of interpretation. According to him, it is even one .

5.3 THE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN DIVINE AND HUMAN LAWS

5.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Each country has its own legal system to maintain order in society. Human Laws strive for harmonious societies in which justice and equality stand central. Therefore, people are expected to fulfill duties and avoid society harming behavior.



Figure 5.6
Source: © kuroksta /
Adobe Stock

5.3.2 MEANING AND FUNCTION OF HUMAN LAWS

Human or secular laws⁶ are not inspired by religion. In the Roman Empire, religion was a state affair (state religion) where the state tolerated or suppressed certain religions. Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire in the 4th century. Until the 18th century, there was a direct relationship between church and state: coronation of the emperor by the pope, appointment of bishops by the local king, link between local law and church law, inquisition, local tax and church tax, waging war in the name of religion. This direct relationship started ending from the Enlightenment: the state did not interfere anymore within the personal faith of the citizens, nor with the church, and the church does not interfere with the state. A separation of institutes arose. Therefore, the state from then on cannot condemn or punish anyone for particular religious beliefs and it does not determine or judge the truth claim of a religion.

The European model has always left room for religion and allows people to draw inspiration from their faith. Freedom of religion is thus an important good in Europe. As long as that inspiration is in accordance with the constitution, science and reason, it



can fit within the story of European values. But this requires a reflection for muslims by reading their faith more to the spirit and less to the letter.

Philosopher Karl Popper⁷ makes a difference between “the context of discovery” and “the context of justification”. The “context of discovery” indicates where a theory comes from and that it should not play a role where the rule comes from. Someone may even dream about a theory.

The “context of justification” means that the theory must be subjected to

⁶ Secular Laws: Laws Made by Man

⁷ Karl Popper (Vienna, July 28, 1902 - London, September 17, 1994) was an Austro-British philosopher widely regarded as one of the greatest philosophers of science of the 20th century.

scientific methods. If the theory passes this test, it can be a plausible and useful theory.

Moreover, laws are nothing more than values converted into standards. Values can have their origin anywhere, even in ideological ideas. Laws are not secular or religious, laws are formal rules of the game that can be justified or articulated into a common basis in the public space from both secular and other philosophies of life. For believers, those values grow from the fact that every human being is a child of God. Rationalists see every person as a rational being and seek their values from that rational perspective. Utilitarians start from the idea that everyone is entitled to the highest form of happiness and ecologists refer to the idea that everyone is part of an ecological system seeking a balance. In this way there is a common basis that be formed into different laws. In addition, standards are not static, but dynamic and evolving depending on the context.

5.3.3 EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Definition of values and norms Give your own definition of the term “values” and norms.

Definition of values:

Definition of norms:

Exercise 2: Value Top

A. Make a list of 5 values that are important to you.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

B. Creat Students create their top 3 of values:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Exercise 3: Conflict of values

1. **Anes's case:** Anes's friend makes a discriminating comment about a female classmate. Anes thinks his friend's comment is unacceptable.

In conflict of value, you start doubting between two values that are conflicting.

What are the conflicting values in the case of Anes and his friend?

What value would you let go first in this situation. Why?

Selma's case: Wearing a headscarf is very important to Selma. Her headscarf helps her express herself in her own way. At school on the other hand, they think Selma should take off her headscarf. Religious symbols are prohibited at school, this is stated in the school regulations. Selma finds her education very important and has a lot of respect for the school, but she also considers her freedom, self-determination and religious beliefs important.

- **What are the conflicting values in the case of Anes and his friend?**

5.4 THE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN DIVINE LAWS AND HUMAN LAWS

5.4.1 INTRODUCTION

"If we are to think intelligently about the relations between Islam and British law, we need a fair amount of 'deconstruction' of crude oppositions and mythologies, whether of the nature of sharia or the nature of the Enlightenment"⁸.

This citation from former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams points out that the expanded meaning of the term Sharia is very important. In other words, it is unjustified to reduce the term *sharia* to a narrow interpretation of Islamic criminal law.



Figure 5.8
Source: © David Carillet /
Adobe Stock

The correct interpretation of the term is important to know whether or not there is a contradiction between divine laws and the human laws. Many people associate the term *sharia* with injustice, harsh legislation and brutal punishment such as oppression of women, corporal punishment, etc.

This is because the media, certain politicians and jihadists use the term inappropriately. But are they using the term correctly?

The meaning of the term *sharia* means more than just Islamic law. It does not only contain legislation but also rituals, doctrine and philosophy. It is therefore incorrect to limit the translation of *sharia* only to Islamic law.

Sharia is not a law that contains strict rules. There is no book on *sharia* that contains Islamic laws as is the case with the Belgian code. All books on Islamic *fiqh* are individual interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah.

Allah's words are eternal, but the one who interprets Allah's words is only a product of his time. There are thousands of *tafsirs and books about the fiqh*, everyone has a different interpretation and opinion. All those books are obviously works made by humans and therefore may contain errors in contrast to the words of Allah.

⁸ HUMBERTO, *Islam and Enlightenment*, Baltimore, Maryland, The Johns Hopkins University Press 2012, p 223.

5.4.2 WHAT DOES SHARIA REALLY MEAN?

The Arabic term *sharia* originally means the path that leads to the water. This does not refer to a well from which you get water, but refers to the road that you have to follow to find a fertile place or a place where water flows to.

Water represents life. That means that *sharia* is the way to go to protect human nature. The natural disposition of man must be protected and this will automatically lead to a more just and peaceful society. Unfortunately, this term is often misinterpreted and misunderstood.

5.4.3 CONTRADICTORY OR RECONCILABLE?

Usually the term *sharia* is considered as Islamic law. This interpretation does not cover the entire content of sharia. *Sharia* largely contains religious norms pertaining to doctrine and rite (*ibadaat*), the latter of which falls within the freedom of religion granted by the European legal order. Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees freedom of religion and also guarantees its expression.

Even when *sharia* is translated as Islamic law, there is still a wide range of sharia norms that are fully consistent with European legal norms, provided the term sharia is understood in its entirety.



Figure 5.9
Source: © STOATPHOTO /
Adobe Stock

In view of the foregoing, there is no problem for Islam to function reasonably in a democratic state. Islam contains a large extent of religious norms pertaining to doctrine and rite, and the latter falls within the freedom of religion granted by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. On the other hand, Islam also contains many norms relating

to social actions (*mu'amalaat*), but as mentioned earlier, it is Islamically legitimate to approach this category rationally provided that Islamic principles are taken into account. And the latter almost always coincide with Western norms and values.

So if secularism means the separation between Church and State and the State determines its norms and values by reason, then there is no problem. Because the State usually regulates the mutual social actions of its subjects on a rational basis, which is an Islamic belief, provided that justice is the ultimate goal. If secularism is a form of managing philosophical diversity, then Islam has no problem here either. For it is Islamic irresponsibility to enforce any religion individually as plainly and clearly states Al-Baqara verse 256:

“In religion there is no coercion. Reasonable insight is clearly distinguished from corruption.”

As mentioned before, justice is the highest principle of sharia and it doesn't matter how this is realized or brought about as Ibn Alqayyim beautifully stated.⁹



Figure 5.10
Source: © mehmet / Adobe Stock

5.4.4 EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Are the following statements true or false? Motivate your answer.

Statement	True	False	Reason
1. Sharia only means Islamic law.			
2. Tafsirs and books on the fiqh do not contain mistakes because they are made by man.			
3. The term sharia is often associated with injustice and oppression.			
4. There is no book on sharia containing Islamic laws.			
5. The books on Islamic fiqh are not individual interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah.			
6. It is correct to reduce the term sharia to a narrow interpretation of Islamic criminal law.			
7. Media, certain politicians and jihadists often use the term sharia without the proper meaning and context.			

⁹ Allah sent His prophets and revealed His books that mankind may rule with uprightness which means as much as justice with which the heavens and the earth came into being. So when one recognizes signs of righteousness and the direction is clear, then this is the shar'ia of Allah and his religion. Allaah has not limited the attainment of justice, his proofs and his signs to one particular method, and thus has rejected all other methods that are identical or even better. However, he has shown that the methods he uses are for righteousness to prevail and that mankind must act with uprightness. So whatever method is used to achieve justice and uprightness is part of religion."

Exercise 2: Sharia

1. With what did you associate the term *sharia*?

2. With what did you associate the term *sharia*?



Figure 5.11
Source: © zendograph /
Adobe Stock

5.5 GLOSSARY

Ta'rud al'aql wa annaql: Tension between mind and faith.

Ibn Rush, Averroes: Muslim Philosopher.

Fasl Almaqaal: Book written by Ibn Rush.

Ijtihad: Make full effort.

Allahu a'lam: Allah knows better.

Divine Laws: The will or guidance of Allah.

Sharia: Islamic Law, Rituals, Doctrine, Philosophy.

Tafsir: Interpretation of Islam.

Fiqh: Doctrine of duties, Islamic Rituals, Islamic Law.

Mu'amalaat: Social acts.

Secularism: Separation of Church and State.

Hasana: Reward for a good deed.

Hadith: Traditions of events in the Life of the Prophet Muhammad.

Maslaha: Well-being.

Nas: Revelation or text.

Hanafia: The Pure Religion.

Kitab Almastoer: Revelation.

Kitab almandoer: Reality.

Ibda'at: Rituals

5.6 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

INT Sporthall School DAY

We see some kids working together in a large kitchen environment cooking under the close watch of their teacher and some other volunteers:

Teacher: Lindsay, watch out with the salt please, you only need a little bit, not the whole sack. Ahmed how is the Khubz coming along your mother prepared for us?

Ahmed: I think it is almost finished, Mr Roberts!

The teacher walks by.

Lindsay: I think it's great we are doing our part in society. Feeding the poor as a community effort really feels like being part of our democracy.

Ahmed: I don't know... My father said the other day that he and he actually means we as Muslims don't acknowledge Democracy as there can't be anything above Islam.

We see one of the volunteers in the kitchen eavesdropping on the conversation of the kids.

Lindsay: and what do you think?

Ahmed: I'm a bit confused. I mean,... they say democracy is about the human laws which I think is true. And my father also says that it is Allah and Allah only who can make laws, not some kind of committee of ...people. The volunteer who was eavesdropping starts to talk out loud:

Hassan: Did you father use people in that sentence or did he use the infidels?

Ahmed: I don't recall... Does it really matter?

Hassan: Well kiddo, I think the ideas you are struggling with can lead to dangerous thoughts.

Lindsay: Hey, you don't have to scare him for having a different opinion.

Ahmed: No Lindsay please let him speak.

Hassan: "I come from a country where Islam is instrumentalized and sometimes for political reasons.

Lindsay: Wow I can't even imagine how that would feel like, not being able to speak freely.

Hassan: Believe me, freedom is underrated but you only know when it is taken away from you. In my country I was a respected man. As a pharmacist I knew a lot of people personally. It was even a greater shock to me when it were those people that I helped that turned against me. And that under the false interpretation of my own beloved faith.

Ahmed: I don't understand...

Hassan: They were also against democracy and believed that Islam is the only law we must abide. And although the main ethical principles in Islam, our foundations reflect universal values like the human laws that forbid murder, stealing, injustice, discrimination, etc. they choose another interpretation to force their way of thinking on all of us.

Lindsay: I see... You didn't have the freedom to practice your beliefs anymore.

Hassan: Exactly... And by penalty of death I fled my home country. Seeking shelter.

Ahmed: Wow that is a rough story.

Hassan: And you know... what I really don't understand about those radicals is when you look closely to the principles of the declaration of the Human Rights and the ones in Islam. There are so many things in common.

I mean the freedom of thought, conscience and religion is almost the same as Quran 2:257: 'There shall be no compulsion in acceptance of religion' which also guarantees that religion can never be something to be forced upon people.

Lindsay: That is actually really interesting.

Ahmed: This seems again something that has a lot to do with the interpretation of words coming out of text with a very different context. I never imagined that people would make religion this complicated?

Hassan: Yes indeed, People often make things more difficult than it is and often for their own interests. And that is not only the case with religion. This also arises from different ideologies... Did you guys know that it actually different in every Islamic country as well.

A lot depends on the culture and interpretation of the Quran. You'll see countries with a conservative interpretation also reflect that in their legislation.

Lindsay: I believe in most democracies the freedom of religion is a constitutional right and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights also guarantees freedom of religion and its expression.

Ahmed: The Prophet Muhammad led efforts for preparation of the constitution of Medina which established love, tolerance and coexistence between different communities and tribes, regardless their religion.

Hassan: Indeed I see you are seeing the right way to interpret the Quran young one. This would not be true in a radical Theocracy, a country where religion is the law. I am happy Europe provided me shelter. And now I'm giving back to society by doing charity actions for the league for Human Rights. It only feels right.

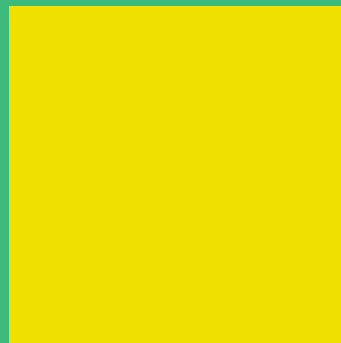
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6



FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION:
PROFANE OF SACRED?

MODULE SIX

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION: PROFANE OF SACRED

6.1 INTRODUCTION VIDEO CLIP



Figure 6.1
Video Clip

Ahmed and Pieter-Jan are confronted on the playground with a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed. Ahmed felt hurt and thinks that this is not acceptable. Pieter-Jan also thinks that more respect should be shown. Bully, the student who showed the cartoon believes that anyone and anything can be laughed at. Muslims should also tolerate this according to him.

Afterwards Ahmed told his father at home what happened at school. His father became furious, but Fatima Ahmed's mother tried to calm him down. She indicated that the Prophet was also in a similar situation of being scolded but he never responded with violence.

Pieter-Jan and Ahmed then went searching on the Internet for answers to their question, specifically how it is that Islam is mocked under the guise of freedom of expression. Moussa Karim talked to them and explained how to deal with this phenomenon from an Islamic perspective.

Finally, Pieter-Jan and Ahmed told the class who the prophet was and how he dealt with being ridiculed. The teacher then thanked Ahmed and invited everyone to be more.

6.2 FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

6.2.1 INTRODUCTION

Freedom of expression means that every individual has the right to express his beliefs both religiously, philosophically, politically, as well as personally.

Expression can occur in a variety of ways both through word, writing and actions:

- a) Word: such as through education or media
- b) Writing: Press or petition
- c) Acts: Worship services, meetings and associations



Figure 6.2
Source: © Trifonenko
Ivan / Adobe Stock

These freedoms are explicitly protected by democratic constitutional states, for example in Article 19 of the Belgian Constitution as well as in Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In concrete terms, this means that every individual can express his beliefs without fear of persecution.

Every individual therefore has the right to practice his beliefs. For example, a Muslim can freely practice his beliefs in words, writing and actions. He can found schools, publish a weekly newspaper and build mosques. In Belgium, the community is eligible for recognition, provided it meets certain conditions, and can therefore be subsidized.

Freedom of speech and writing also means that everyone is free to say and write whatever they want without fear of prosecution, therefore censorship is out of the question. Especially in press and cartoonist circles, “self-censorship” is unacceptable.

Indeed, freedom of the press means that journalists are not kept within bounds. The danger is that important information will be withheld from the public.

Consequently, the question that this subject undoubtedly raises is, “Is freedom of speech absolute?” We will discuss this in detail in the next subchapter.

6.2.2 IS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ABSOLUTE?

For a time, wars were waged to claim the right to freedom of expression. They succeeded and this right was then enshrined into rules and laws that guarantee our freedom of expression.

Yet it is not always possible to say or write everything at will. Incitement to racism, xenophobia, defamation or insulting speech, hatred or violence are punishable by law.

The question is whether insulting the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) falls under freedom of speech. Or should this also be punishable?



Figure 6.3
Source: © Siam /
Adobe Stock

As mentioned earlier, freedom of speech is a common good. Therefore, minorities can openly and freely practice their beliefs. If the majority can decide for themselves to whom freedoms are or are not granted, then this is an undermining of free democratic society.

Through legislation, people tried to organize society in such a way that the weak would be protected from (the abuse of power by) the strong.

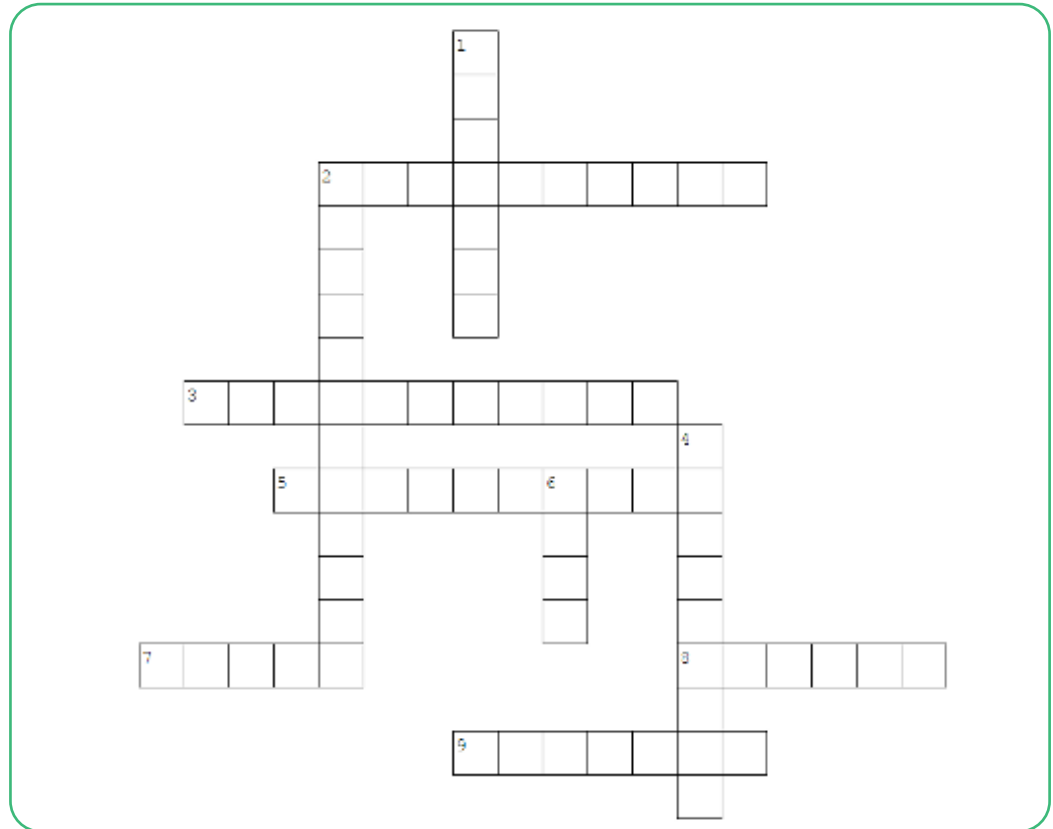
The French preacher and activist Henri Lacordaire says: “Entre le fort et le faible, entre le riche et le pauvre, entre le maître et le serviteur, c’est la liberté qui opprime et la loi qui affranchit.” (“Between the strong and the weak, between the rich and the poor, between the master and the servant, it is freedom that oppresses and law that sets free”).

Mocking the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is undoubtedly hurtful to Muslims. However, if Muslims demand that it be banned by law because it comes across as hurtful, then they should be consistent in doing so. Suppose a citizen demands that the Quran should be banned by law because it contains passages that are offensive or because he/she believes it incites violence. Imagine that every time someone is offended by statements, pictures,... of his fellow citizen, he can sue him. Then we would end up on an endless street that leads to absurdities.

But that same freedom of speech means that the Muslim can morally disapprove of those same cartoons and has the right to feel offended. Citizens have the right to freedom. But those who exercise that right may also prepare for a non-violent rebuttal. In other words, you may disapprove matters that are legally permissible within the framework of freedom of expression.

This freedom is enshrined in the laws of democratic constitutional states as well as in the European Convention on Human Rights and has provided the foundation for peace that has been fought for over time.

Exercise 1: Complete the crossword puzzle



Horizontal

2. Check for prohibited items in publications or films and omit them
3. With this, the society protects the weak from the rich
5. It is ... to incite racism, xenophobia and insults
7. The holy book of the Muslims
8. The view that one human race is better than another
9. Another word for ceremony in a religious context

Vertical

1. This a community can receive from the government when it meets certain conditions
2. Freedom of expression is enshrined in the Belgian ...
4. A type of government over a country in which the inhabitants have a great deal of say
6. In addition to word and writing, you can express your opinion in this way

Exercise 2: Answer the following questions.

1. How is freedom of expression defined in the Belgian Constitution?

2. In what ways can a believer practice his right to hold his own beliefs?

3. Has the right to free speech always existed?

4. What is the main purpose of the European Convention on Human Rights?

5. Can a Muslim demand by law that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) not be insulted?

6.3 WHO WAS THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PBUH)?

6.3.1 BIRTH OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PBUH)

Muhammad was born in the Year of the Elephant which corresponds to the year 570 of the Gregorian calendar. He was born into a noble family in Mecca, the Banu Hashim clan which was held in high esteem by the other tribes in Mecca and surrounding areas. Even before his birth, Muhammad had lost his father and therefore from the beginning he was given the double status which, for the people of Mecca, constituted the prestige of the descendant and the frailty of a fatherless child. At that time, the name “Muhammad” was completely unknown in the Arabian Peninsula. His mother had received this name through a vision during her pregnancy. In it, the birth of the ‘*lord of this people*’ was also announced. During the birth she was instructed to say, “*I place him under the protection of the One and Only from the falsity of all envious people.*” The Quraish, the tribe that included the Banu Hashim, had a special relationship with the nomadic lifestyle of the Arab Bedouins. They entrusted their boys to the care of Bedouin foster families. They believed that the Bedouins lived a freer, healthier and nobler lifestyle than those who lived in the city. To have a successful life in the desert required a high level of solidarity and consequently a high level of respect for one’s personality and appreciation of human value.



Figure 6.4
Source: © meen_na /
Adobe Stock

Halimah bint Abi Dhu’ayb and her husband Harith ibn ‘Abd al’Uzzah of the Hawazin tribe came to Mecca in search of an infant to take to the desert. They were the poorest of their clan and could not convince any family of the Quraish to entrust them with the care of their child. Aminah, Muhammad’s mother, was also in a desperate situation and could not find a Bedouin foster family to care for Muhammad because he was fatherless. Halimah realized that a young widow like Aminah could not afford her services. Nevertheless, she agreed to take Muhammad with her because she did not want to return to her people empty-handed. Even though it would not bring her any material gain, Halimah thought their generosity might bring them other blessings. Her decision indeed brought good changes to their lives because Muhammad’s presence brought a lot of blessings to their household. Halimah and Harith raised Muhammad as their own son and returned to Mecca regularly to show Aminah his progression.

One day Halimah returned to Mecca to tell Aminah about an incident that Muhammad had experienced. Halimah’s son had seen the incident and came to tell her about it. Two men in white garments came up to Muhammad with a golden basin full of snow. They took hold of him and opened his chest, took out his heart and opened it. They took out a black clot and threw it away.

Then they washed his heart and body with snow until they made him clean. Troubled by this event, Halimah brought Muhammad back to his mother. Aminah was not surprised by this incident and told them that she herself had witnessed signs that her child was being prepared for a special fate.

6.3.2 THE CHILDHOOD OF THE PROPHET (PBUH)

The fact that Muhammad was both orphaned and poor caused him to experience vulnerability and humility first hand when he was very young. After that he loses his mother on the young age of 6, it brings him almost directly under the care of God but at the same time very close to people who have nothing at all. The Qur'an reminds him not to forget this throughout his life and especially during his prophetic mission.

Your past is a school of learning from which you can gain practical and concrete knowledge. Also, the time he spent with the nomads in the desert has given him certain experiences that will guide his life later. The first years of the Prophet's life are the breeding ground for a very special relationship with nature that will play a constant role throughout his mission. Thus, the Prophet had an important relationship with nature from an early age. Living close to nature, observing, understanding and respecting it is necessary for a deep faith. The universe is full of signs that remind us of the presence of the Creator and the desert opens the human mind for observation, meditation and initiation. The first years of Muhammad's life were undoubtedly years of preparation in which his gaze was directed to the signs of the universe.



Figure 6.5
Source: © Michael /
Adobe Stock

6.3.4.EXERCISES

Exercise 3: Match the following columns and write down the answer below.

1. Year in which the Prophet was born.	A. 6 years
2. Clan from which the Prophet came	B. Abu Talib
3. Foster mother of the Prophet	C. Banu Hashim
4. How old was the Prophet when his mother died	D. His heart
5. This person took care of the Prophet after his grandfather died	E. Halimah bint Abi Dhu'ayb
6. Which part of the Prophet's body was washed by angels when he was only 4 years old	F. Yathrib
7. The ancient name of the city of Medina	G. His mother Aminah
8. Who gave the Prophet the name Muhammad?	H. Year of the Elephant (570 A.D.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Exercise 4: Answer the questions below.

1. What was the wisdom behind the Prophet experiencing what it is like to be a poor orphan at a young age?

2. Why were newborn children raised in the countryside?

3. What role did nature play in preparing the Prophet's task as messenger?

4. What was the wisdom behind the story where the Prophet's heart was cleansed?

5. What influence did the Prophet have on the household of Halimah?

6.4 TRIALS, HUMILIATION AND MOCKERY OF THE PROPHET

6.4.1 REVELATION AND RESISTANCE

When the Prophet Muhammad received the revelation and began to proclaim it publicly, he encountered resistance from the chiefs of Mecca. Every day they became more aware of the danger lurking: it was, in their opinion, a rebellion against their gods and their customs. This could eventually endanger their power.



Figure 6.6

Source: © Erica Guilane-Nachez / Adobe Stock

The tribal leaders first tried to convince Muhammad to stop the proclamation of his message. For this purpose they sent his uncle Abu Talib but this did not bring any results and the Prophet persisted and said, *"O my uncle, I swear by God that even if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand to dissuade me from this matter, I will not let them discourage me from this matter until He (Allah) has brought it to a successful conclusion or I die!"*

Because the Prophet persisted, his opponents began a campaign of slander against him in which hostilities broke out against him: the Prophet (pbuh) was insulted and called a sorcerer and insane. Abu Lahab had his two sons who had married the daughters of the Prophet separated from them. And Abu Lahab's wife scattered her garbage cans whenever the Prophet walked by. She told the people that Muhammad was possessed by the devil and that he broke up families and promoted chaos and debauchery. In none of these cases did the Prophet (pbuh) respond to these insinuations with violence.

When people outside Mecca came to Mecca to listen to Muhammad's message they were warned against the Prophet's so called misdeeds. The Prophet also faced humiliation and ridicule. But the Prophet (pbuh) never used violence in response.

The pressure grew and the opposition manifested itself more and more violently: the tribal leaders were particularly targeting the weaker Muslims. For example, Bilal, who was then a slave, was tortured by his master. Later Abu Bakr bought him and immediately gave him back his freedom.

One day, the Prophet was humiliated by Abu Djahl so harshly that even the non-Muslims considered that he had transgressed the limits of decency. The situation became increasingly difficult for the Muslims and especially

for the most vulnerable among them but the Prophet remained steadfast and he answered every attack with wisdom and not with violence.

6.4.2 THE HUMILIATION OF THE PROPHET (PBUH) IN TA'IF

The humiliations and persecutions were getting worse and worse. Therefore, the Prophet decided to go to the city of Ta'if in the hope that the leaders of the city would heed his message and protect him from his enemies.

He was not received as he wished and the leaders mocked him. They not only refused to comply with his request but also turned the population against him. Upon his departure, insults rained down and children threw stones at him resulting in bloody injuries.

He was unable to find support among his fellow men and took refuge in an orchard to get rid of his assailants. There he turned to Allah and prayed to Him, *"O God, to You alone I complain of my weakness, my impotence and my insignificance in relation to men. O most Merciful among the merciful, You are the Lord of the weak and You are my Lord. To whose hands do You entrust me? To some distant stranger who will treat me badly? Or to an enemy to whom You have given power over me? As long as You are not angry with me, I know no fear. Your gracious support, however, would open for me a wider road and a vaster horizon! I take refuge in the light of Your countenance, with which all darkness is illumined and things in this world and the other are put right, so that You do not cause Your wrath to descend upon me and I am not touched by Your wrath. Yet to You belongs the right to rebuke, as long as You are not satisfied. There is no power beyond You."*

At the moment when there seemed to be no way out, he turned to God for spiritual revival and mental strengthening.

All in all, we have noticed that in no case did Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) seeked refuge in violence. He was mocked, humiliated, insulted and even physically attacked. The Prophet (pbuh) always resisted these insults and mockeries with wisdom.

6.4.3 EXERCISES

Exercise 5: Insight questions. Answer the questions below.

1. Give five examples of how the Quraish fought the Prophet.

2. What was the reason the Prophet went to Ta'if?

3. What lessons can you draw from the supplication the Prophet made after he was expelled from Ta'if?

4a. How would you react if you had experienced the same thing as the Prophet (both in Ta'if and Mecca)?

4b. What can you learn from the way the Prophet responded to the various confrontations?

6.5 GLOSSARY

Freedom of expression: Means that every individual has the right to express his beliefs both in terms of faith, philosophical, political, as well as personal.

Self-censorship: Is a version of censorship in which media or individuals impose publication restrictions on themselves. This is done, for example, to spare feelings of their audience or to avoid problems with the government.

Xenophobia: is the fear or hatred of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange.

Rebuttal: a statement that a claim or criticism is not true.

Nomads: people who travel from place to place to find fresh pasture for its animals and have no permanent home.

Slander: a false spoken statement about someone that damages their reputation.

Debauchery: behavior considered to be excessively decadent, indulgent, and depraved.

6.6 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

We see Ahmed and Pieter-Jan walking on the playground while a bully calls out to Ahmed:

Bully: ah look there you have one of those Muslims. I hope he hasn't seen the new cartoon of the week in Minmaxed magazine yet.... he'll explode...

Ahmed: Huh? Sigh... What are you talking about now?

Bully hands Ahmed the magazine.

Bully: Here you go! (laughs mockingly)

Pieter-Jan jumps in and grabs the magazine and looks at the cartoon.

Pieter-Jan: WOW, sorry but this is unacceptable. I'm not even Muslim but this is just mocking their religion.

Bully: Yeah yeah sure.... it's just a cartoon man.... Muslims need to learn to accept self-mockery for once. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right, here in the West and we are not going to deviate from that. That's what our ancestors fought for.

Ahmed casts a glance at the magazine and is disgusted....

Ahmed: (saddened) Why is it always about my religion. If it was any other group you wouldn't be so insensitive. But because we are Muslims it is okay to insult us. Two weights and two measures. Islam, Islam, Islam... and it's always negative.

Bully: boo hoo hoo.... Go cry to your mother about it.... I'm out of here.

We see the bully leave

Ahmed goes home and tells about the cartoons that were shown. Father Harun reacts very

angrily. He doesn't understand why the prophet Mohammed is brought in. He is offended. Mother Fatima calls for peace. Uncle Samir, who is also present, calls for dialogue.

Ahmed: Dad, a kid at school showed me cartoons today. Guess what those cartoons were about.... indeed, the Prophet Muhammad.

Father: Our Holy Prophet. Surely that can't be true. They are doing this to bully us. This makes me so angry. How hard it is to respect others. When they attack the Prophet, it's like they're attacking me personally.

Mother: Calm down, calm down. You shouldn't get so excited. It's not good for your heart. Maybe we should put everything in perspective. I think our prophet Muhammad was a strong person. He was insulted, scolded and humiliated and even then, he was the bigger person.

Ahmed: Is that so? I just don't see why freedom of speech is a good thing if it only serves to bully the Islam community....

Later, Ahmed is surfing the computer while in videocall with Pieter-Jan.

Ahmed: I can't imagine that 'Freedom of Speech' is just an excuse to insult others....

Pieter-Jan: Yes, of course it's not... Just look at this website: It says that the idea of freedom of speech is to make sure that even unpopular opinions can be heard in order to move society as a whole forward.

Ahmed: Yes I can understand that. But why do people always use this as an excuse to ridicule Islam?

Pieter-Jan: Maybe this man can give you an answer to that question.

Pieter-Jan sends a link to a blog by an Arab reporter named Mousa Karim.

Ahmed opens the web page and goes back to Pieter-Jan:

Ahmed: Look it seems he also has an opinion page on freedom of speech.

Ahmed clicks on the link and a pop-up appears.

'Mousa Karim has just gone offline. If you want to contact him, please wait a moment'

Ahmed: I hate these pop-ups.... Where can I close this.

He looks for a cross to close the pop-up. We see a countdown begin.

Computer: Contact Mousa Karim in 5...4....3...

Ahmed: no I don't want to contact him!

Pieter-Jan: quickly... close it then!

Computer: 2 ... 1.... Calling....

We hear a sound of a call being started...

Mousa Karim appears on the screen.

Mousa (surprised): Well, hello young friends. How are you today? What can I do for you?

Ahmed: Oh, I'm sorry to disturb you. It was a mistake.

Mousa: Oh I don't think so.... Why did you visit my website?

Pieter-Jan: We were looking on the internet why freedom of speech is used as an excuse to ridicule Muslims... My friend Ahmed here was confronted with some Mohammed Cartoons earlier today....

Ahmed: yes... sigh....

Mousa: Ah I see, and how did that make you feel?

Ahmed: It felt very bad... I just don't understand why it's always us who are targeted....

Mousa: I'm going to tell you a story. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was also ridiculed. And those who converted to Islam were persecuted and tortured.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) met with the chiefs of the most important tribe in Ta'if. The Thaqeef tribe. He told them about Islam, but they rejected his message. The Thaqeef tribe insulted him. They released the children to throw stones at him. As he bled and the people laughed at him, he fled and found shelter in an empty orchard. And he never used violence.

He returned to his God and pleaded the following: "To You, my Lord, I complain of my weakness, my lack of support, and the humiliation inflicted on me. Most merciful and gracious, You are the Lord of the weak and You are my Lord. To whom do You leave me?"

Ahmed: I cannot imagine how he must have felt.

Mousa: He was alone, bleeding, and rejected by other people. The Prophet was resting on a rock. He was praying to Allah. He was so compassionate and merciful. He did not ask Allah to punish the people of Ta'if or take revenge on them.

Ahmed: Wow...so intense. How did Prophet Muhammad respond to those who insulted and attacked him?

Mousa: He chose mercy and not violence towards them. He was not overcome by hatred or revenge. He said to the angel Jibreel, "I prefer that Allah should beget from their progeny people who will worship Allah the One and will not ascribe to Him any partners."

This means that he also found a way to deal with these feelings. Tell people how you feel. Engage in a dialogue with them. That is the only way you can understand each other.

Ahmed: *pff what a headache. I don't know how to deal with this.*

Mousa: *Maybe you should talk about it in class with your classmates. That way they can support you. There will always be bullies in this world, but try to ignore them. Most people are willing to listen to your feelings and show empathy. At least that's my experience....*

Ahmed: *Thank you, Mousa.*

We see Ahmed and Pieter Jan standing in front of the class.

Ahmed: *When the Prophet (pbuh) himself was mocked, insulted and even molested, he responded by saying, "O Allah, forgive my people, for indeed they know not what they do."*

And after his entourage encouraged him to curse his opponents, he said, "I have not been sent as a curse, but as a mercy."

Furthermore, we also read in the Qur'an that Allah spoke to His Prophet (pbuh) and said, "And be patient with what they say about you. And turn away from them appropriately."

The Prophet stood up for the weak. He fought injustice. He was reasonable and always respected others. That is what the prophet means to me. So yes that's why it hurts to see him as the subject of ridicule....

Pieter-Jan: *Everyone is allowed to have an opinion, but I don't think it's ok for my friend to be offended. A harmonious society is only possible if people respect each other. For example, if a man and a woman belittle each other every day based on free speech, their marriage will not last long.*

Ahmed: *The Prophet Muhammad has several hadiths in which he calls on people to love each other, be in solidarity with each other, respect each other despite different opinions.*

Teacher: *Thank you for sharing this with us. I think we learned a lot today! And remember: Violence should never be tolerated. Take care of each other. Show empathy. You may have an opinion, but don't impose it. Respect each other.*

6.7 REFERENCES

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