

Voices from Muslim Worldview Traditions

Over the last few years we have collated responses to questions about religion and worldviews from different perspectives. This resource provides personal answers to questions from lived experience and were written directly by believers.

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1. What, in your opinion, are core beliefs of Islam and what is the best way for a Muslim to show commitment to God?

I believe in the teachings of the Qur'an, which is the speech of God and thus to all earlier revealed scriptures. I believe in the principle of continuity: one God, one humankind, one human project, therefore one essential guidance that is sent to humankind to guide them to the best possible way of life (din al-fitra), the last, universal and enduring rendition of which is the Qur'an.

It is a fundamental belief of Islam that God is the one and only God of all humankind and not the god of one small section. We need to go in search of a wider starting point yet. The only ultimate starting point for the story of Islam as far as Muslims are concerned would be with God. God alone existed before anything was created; God is the only eternally existing being. As soon as we put a capital G on the word God, we have made a statement. God in the one and only, there is no plural form of the word.

God is one and God created one human family. All human beings are called to live in obedience to this one God; that is the human project.

God has no favourites. The whole human family has been guided by God to live the human project with the prospect of drawing ever- closer to God in this world and the life hereafter [Q. 40:78].

Here is a crucial point: one God, one human family, one human project and one human destiny; therefore, the guidance sent by God to guide this human family to their destiny has always been in essence the same.

All the peoples of the earth have been sent at least one scripture and at least one prophet by God; the message of those scriptures and prophets has always been in essence the same. Now one could see Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an in context.

The Prophet Muhammad is the final and universal prophet of humankind bearing witness to the essential human way of life to which all are called. Likewise, the Qur'an is the last and definitive scripture sent to guide humankind with the pure, essential, timeless guidance that God has sent throughout the human centuries.

The best way to show commitment is to do what God has ordered and to refrain from what God has forbidden us to do. The best way is to remember God as much as possible.

Q. 33:41-42 O you who believe! Remember God abundantly and glorify him morning and evening.

Dhikr is the prayer of the heart in which the emphasis is placed on giving thanks to God and patiently accepting the will of God in all things.

A typical example would be in the frequent repetition of phrases such as Al-hamdu li'llah, (All praise/thanks be to God)

2. What does Islam say about Life after death? And does belief in Akhirah help Muslims lead good lives?

Islam believes that all human beings who follow God's guidance by treading the path, the Shari'a, that has been laid out for them, are capable of living an ethical life. There is nothing flawed in the human make-up and God does not limit salvation to 'an elect', but it is open to all. This life is not all there is. It is only a testing ground and preparation for the life hereafter. This is the true and abiding abode of human beings. Every human being who becomes truly the servant of God in all things can rely upon the mercy of God on the Day of Judgement [Q. 2:286]. This life is a test that prepares us for death, which is inevitable [Q. 28:88; 3:185]. Death is the point of transition to the afterlife, or akhirah.

Every human being has two angels (Kiraman and Katibin) assigned to them to record their good and bad deeds throughout their lives [Q. 82:10-12]. It is a mercy from God that good deeds are written down as soon as the intention is formulated, whilst bad deeds are not written until after the act has been performed, thus the intention to carry out a bad deed does not in itself incur a penalty. These records will be brought out on the Day of Judgement. When we are dead, there is nothing more that we can do to affect our records of good or bad deeds – except for three things that we can leave behind us. Upright children full of taqwa (God-consciousness) can be an on-going credit to us after we die. If we do something for education, as a teacher, or through writing a book, or contributing to a library, the knowledge goes on spreading long after we are dead. Finally, we can establish a charitable trust (waqf) to go on doing good for later generations.

As soon as human beings are buried and the mourners have filled in the grave and left, the angels of the interrogation, Munkar and Nakir, appear. They ask the dead person: Who is your Lord? What religion did you follow? and Who was your prophet? This is followed by a foretaste of the joys of heaven or the torments of hell. If heaven, the grave expands, becomes light and airy and is filled with the sweet scents of heaven. If hell, the grave contracts, becomes dark and cold, and is filled with the stench of hell.

Life in the grave, or barzakh, is understood in Islam as a timeless state in another dimension, in which one awaits the resurrection [Q. 23:100]. Some Muslims believe that they can perform pious acts in the name of the person who has died and thus assist them during their time in barzakh. The state of barzakh is difficult fully to understand. After death one enters into another realm that lies beyond our powers to describe. On the one hand, it is real and is to be feared, or awaited, but on the other hand, Muslims know that if one digs up a dead body some time later, the process of decay will have taken place.

Our human language and knowledge break down when we try to describe what happens beyond death. One way of glimpsing this is to recall the mi'raj or night journey and ascent to heaven of Muhammad. Muhammad was taken from Makkah to Jerusalem and from there ascended to heaven where he had an audience with God. All this took place in a single instant. Yet the tradition tells us that on the way to Jerusalem, Muhammad passed the grave of Moses and saw Moses there in prayer. When he arrived in Jerusalem, Muhammad was greeted by all the earlier prophets, including Moses, and he led them in prayer. After his initial audience with God, Muhammad met Moses in heaven and held conversation with him. That is three meetings with Moses in three quite different contexts all in a single instant. In this way we can see that something that happens after death can be both 'real' and beyond our earthly comprehension.

The Final Judgement: On that day, no-one will be held responsible for the sins of another, blame cannot be offloaded, and merit cannot be transferred to anyone else [Q. 82:19]. There will be no place to hide anything. Everything will be known by God and must be acknowledged. The records kept by the recording angels will be

produced and each person will be weighed in the balance of God's justice [Q. 84:7-12]. The tradition is that every good deed will count ten times more than every bad deed. This is a clear indication that God's wrath is overcome and justice is tempered by mercy. This can be seen by two Hadith:

When God decreed the creation, he pledged himself by writing in his book, which is with him: my mercy shall overwhelm my wrath.

The whole universe with all its inhabitants, the angels, whatever God has created will enter akhirah together.

Death is scary because we look at it from this side.

If we look at it from the other side it is a blessing.

Death looked from this side = destruction, annihilation

Death looked from the other side = birth, blessing

1- it elevates the human existence

2- it takes us one station closer to our ambitious destination: meeting with God.

Some reflections on Akhirah

First: what is before the final abode is way and travel, but dar al-akhirah is arrival and home

We started the journey from dust, we arrived at a drop of water, proceeded to become a foetus, travelled to this world, we soon move out of it, we will go and go and go until we arrive in dar al-akhirah and rest there for ever

Second: in the final abode matter would not perish but will change qualities

In dar al-akhirah heavens and earth will exist but with new features

Third: in the final abode different layers of existence which are separate from each other in this plane mix.

The world will become more comprehensive for all.

Fourth: intelligence will become universal

In the final abode all creation, from objects like wood and stone to plants and animals to the heaven and the earth, all will have intelligence, all will speak and can communicate. It is not by means of language, but through a means unknown to us.

Fifth: most importantly, God will not be hidden behind the chains of causes and effects in that final abode. His direct presence and control will be seen everywhere and at all times. You will see that it is God's power and grace that effuses in everything.

Sixth: according to all the above, the real life will only come about in the plane of akhirah.

Seventh: finally, meeting with God will be possible only in such a plane.

A world which is no more play and sport but is serious and real.

A world in which we are no more infants but will have grown to full maturity.

A world which is no more in its cocoon.

3. What are your thoughts on Global Warming as a Muslim?

According to the Muslim code of living, we can see the underlying ecological principles of balance, respect, justice and a sense of fairness. The earth is created in a state of balance in which all living beings have their right to a share.

Even though the earth is provided for human sustenance [Q. 16:10-11; 80:24-32], we are not at liberty to abuse it but rather must learn to live within it and read the signs of God contained therein [Q. 3:190-191; 16:66; 51:20-21; 88:17-20]. This is a duty placed upon every human being [Q. 17:70; 7:172], in regard to which we will be held to account [Q. 23:115; 99:7-8]. Thus, there is a God-given balance in nature, which human beings must comprehend and put into practice in all their dealings with the environment.

The Qur'an makes clear that the earth was created by God and belongs to God [Q. 22:64] and that the way in which it is looked after by human beings is a test from God [Q. 7:129]. This led to a principle in shari'a that the land, air, sunlight, water and fire are the common property of all creatures and not the private property of human beings. Men and women are given the right to use God's earth [Q. 55:10] but not to waste its produce [Q. 7:31]. God created the world with a balance in nature and not out of a sense of play; human beings must accordingly act with responsibility towards it [Q. 55:3-9; 21:16-17; 14:19-20]. All the elements of creation were created and live in a state of submission to God, that is, they are Muslim [Q. 22:18]. The human being, created to be the *abd* and *khalifa*, that is, the obedient servant and the regent of God on earth, has the responsibility to cherish, protect and conserve the earth although some people rebel and spread corruption in nature [Q. 30:41]. Such corruption incurs God's displeasure and must be accounted for on the Day of Judgement [Q. 2:204- 206].

4. Why are you not allowed to drink alcohol?

The Qur'an has three references to alcohol made from fermented grapes. The first was revealed in the early years of Islam in Makkah when the small Muslim community was under persecution. It counselled the Muslims "not to come to their prayers when they had consumed alcohol". To understand this injunction, we need to know that in pre-Islamic times in Makkah it was part of their religious rituals to assemble and drink alcohol. As the level of alcohol consumed increased, so did the licentiousness of their activities until, when they were well under its influence, things ended in debauchery and sexual immorality. We see here one of the grave problems with alcohol; it reduces human capacity for self-control, demeans our human dignity and can lead to far worse things.

The second Qur'anic verse on alcohol was revealed soon after the infant Muslim community had moved to Madinah. This called on people's better human nature and told them to exercise wise judgement and refrain from it. "There are good things in alcohol and bad, if only you knew it, the bad outweigh the good and you would abstain from it." Any human being can work out that alcohol reduces human inhibitions and makes people do things that they would not do if they were fully sober - even if some people find a little wine 'tastes good'. Therefore, the Qur'an counsels people to reflect on this effect of alcohol and choose wisely to avoid it.

The third verse in the Qur'an on the subject tells us that "all grape-wine is forbidden". To know how this verse was understood by the Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslims, we need only read the accounts of what they did after it was revealed: they destroyed all their alcohol and the containers that held it. That was the end of alcohol production and consumption within the Muslim community of the Prophet.

In this way we can see that God has revealed verses that caution people, lead them to reflect and make wise judgements and then reform their lives completely. Alcohol is forbidden for Muslims by divine command in the Qur'an.

The verses actually refer to grape-wine and so the question must be addressed as to whether other intoxicating substances come under the same prohibition. This question is approached by looking at the effects of grape-wine and thus the reasons why it has been forbidden by God. Human reason does not produce the ban, that is from God, but our reason is able to work out why it has been banned by God. In this way, the ban can be extended to other things that produce the same effect and thus demean human dignity. All forms of alcohol are thus forbidden and any other substances ('drugs') that people take that have the same effect.

5. What is it like to live as a Muslim? What are the experiences and feelings associated with it?

I believe in the teachings of the Qur'an, which is the *kalam Allah*, the speech of God and thus to all earlier revealed scriptures. I believe in the principle of continuity: one God, one humankind, one human project, therefore one essential guidance that is sent to humankind to guide them to the best possible way of life (*din al-fitra*), the last, universal and enduring rendition of which is the Qur'an.

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Now we can ask: What is *Islam*? And answer: *Islam* is that natural state of the whole of creation in harmony, balance, justice, peace etc. with God and within itself, which is the way that God created things and the state in which God wants them to live. This can only come about when everything lives according to the designer's plan, which for human beings means choosing to submit our wills to the divine will. Only then will we and all creation flourish in this world and the life hereafter. Our second word, *Muslim*, is an adjective based on the same root; it describes something in the state of *Islam*. We can say that God creates the universe in the state of *Islam* or God creates a *Muslim* universe. You might also recognise the third of our words, *Salam*, from the greeting that Muslims exchange: *Salam 'alaykum*. This is often translated as, "Peace be with you" but we can now see its deeper meaning: "May you come ever more fully and completely into that state of perfect peace, which is *Islam*, which will only come about when you submit to the divine will in every way" [Q. 33:44]. That state of abiding *Islam* is the condition of Paradise, one of the names for which is *Dar al-Salam*, the Place of Peace [Q. 10:25]. You might also notice that this word is similar to the word *shalom* in Arabic's sister language, Hebrew.

6. What effect does your religion have on your life? What is a typical day like for a Muslim?

My religion affects my life by making it in harmony with the order of life. Islam is that natural state of the whole of creation in harmony, balance, justice, peace etc. with God and within itself, which is the way that God created things and the state in which God wants them to live. This can only come about when everything lives according to the designer's plan, which for human beings means choosing to submit our wills to the divine will. Only then will we and all creation flourish in this world and the life hereafter. Our second word, Muslim, is an adjective based on the same root; it describes something in the state of Islam. We can say that God creates the universe in the state of Islam or God creates a Muslim universe. You might also recognise the third of our words, Salam, from the greeting that Muslims exchange: Salam 'alaykum. This is often translated as, "Peace be with you" but we can now see its deeper meaning: "May you come ever more fully and completely into that state of perfect peace, which is Islam, which will only come about when you submit to the divine will in every way" [Q. 33:44]. That state of abiding Islam is the condition of Paradise, one of the names for which is Dar al-Salam, the Place of Peace [Q. 10:25]. You might also notice that this word is similar to the word shalom in Arabic's sister language, Hebrew.

God sent guidance upon every people upon earth who have ever lived (Q. 2:30).

I begin my day at around 4.45am waking up and performing the ablution called wudu before praying the morning prayer called Fajr. Then I go back to sleep and wake up at around 7am to get ready for school. When our school day begins at 8.50 am, after collectively reading a small chapter from the Quran, I then read some narrations called hadiths from the Prophet on different issues such as good manners and ethics called akhlaq.

After teaching in the morning, I help supervise and pray with our students the midday prayers called Zuhr and Asr. After lunch, twice a week, I go to College and the other days I go after the school day ends at 4pm. I am studying Islamic Seminary studies called Hawza studies until 8pm. The subjects that I am studying include

Arabic, Jurisprudence, Ethics and Theology. Then I return home and eat my dinner, wash the dishes and watch the news. I tell my boys to get off the PlayStation and study!

I pray the evening prayers at around 9.30pm called Maghrib and Isha. I also read part of the night prayer which is recommended. I sleep around 11.30pm. I try to remain in a state of ablution all the time because God loves those who try to purify themselves. I read five verses from the Quran in Arabic and then English and I try to reflect upon what I have read and how I can implement it in my life. I try to think back as to how my day progressed to see if I made any mistakes and if so try to rectify in the future. I check my emails; my eldest son says that I am always on my laptop!

This is a normal weekday in term time.

7. Hajj – a personal experience

a. Have you ever been to Makkah and what was it like?

Yes, when I performed the Hajj, I went to Makkah.

The Hajj is a fantastic experience because you have very pure, very simple rituals. It is to walk in a procession around the Kabah, it is just to stand in total humility in front of God among other Muslims, it is to drink a bit of water, Zamzam, it is to throw pebbles at those columns representing. So, all things that are accessible to every human being whatever his background, his level of culture. So, you could say the ritual investment is very limited, it's very simple, it's very pure; but the spiritual benefit is enormous. It is enormous because you are brought back to the essential and you are brought back to Muslim history. It relates you to Abraham, who built the Kabah, but it also projects you into your own future and shows the end of the whole story, which is the Day of Resurrection. Because when we are all in Arafat, it is like a rehearsal for the Day of Judgement and it transcends history from this point of view. You are in another dimension of reality, it's not just being in Makkah relating to past history, Abraham, or being with the rest of the community there; it is also making you think of what you will have to go through one day with the Judgement, with all the other Muslims. Hajj is a journey of regeneration of my spirituality, and it is a journey of piety and devotion towards God. At the same time, I personally felt when I was performing Hajj, that it is a great international festival of brotherhood and equality. Also, I think that Hajj is a great experience that has forced many of us to rearrange our thought patterns and our lifestyles.

b. Did you get to touch the cornerstone of the Kabah?

No there were so many people I could not get an opportunity to touch the cornerstone.

When people pass the Black Stone, it is recommended that pilgrims kiss it, but due to the large numbers most pilgrims salute it by raising their right hands as was the practice of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Beside the Ka'ba, another stone marks the Station of Ibrahim, where tradition has it that Ibrahim used to pray. If possible, pilgrims will try to pray at this special place.

c. Did you drink from Zamzam, what was it like?

Yes, I drank the Zamzam and it very nice and pleasant. I had an intention whilst drinking the water to pray to God to purify my body and soul too.

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d. Did you have a favourite part of Hajj? What was your best moment?

I think staying in Arafat was the best part of Hajj.

There is a Hadith from the Prophet (peace be upon him), who says the whole Hajj is summarized in Arafat. And the reason is that in Arafat you feel [you are] standing before God without any mediation. You feel you are

anticipating the Day of Judgement. Everyone there, with all their different cultures, different ranks, different positions, are standing in simple white clothes, calling their Lord, talking to their Lord, asking forgiveness, asking whatever they want, and you really feel that there is no-one on this earth that can help you, on whom you can rely, except the one Lord to whom everyone is turning. It gives a collective sense of turning towards the Lord, which is very, very pleasant. You feel that you are not alone in this respect. Although faith is a private thing in your heart but suddenly you see that it's not private, it's something which is in the heart of everyone around you. Everyone is calling upon one thing, which is loved by everyone, there on that one plain. And that is really, really a nice experience.

The high point of the Hajj comes when pilgrims travel to the Plain of Arafat, about twelve miles from Makkah. By tradition, this was the site where Adam and Eve were reconciled to God. Rising above the plain is a small hill, "the Mount of Mercy", from which Muhammad preached his Farewell Sermon, during the Hajj a few months before his death.

Visiting the Prophet's grave in Medina and also visiting the graves of the family of the Prophet was very very special for me.

After or even before people have completed their Hajj (or umrah) most Muslims will go on to make a ziyara or visitation of the Prophet's grave in Madinah. Here they will pray to God and ask the Prophet to add his prayers to theirs. Many will go on to visit the tombs in the graveyards in Madinah, especially those of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, Hasan, his grandson, and those of his other wives. Based on a Hadith, many try to remain eight days in Madinah and pray the prayers that occur on those days in the Prophet's Mosque. By so doing they hope for the Prophet's intercession on the Day of Judgement.

e. What impact does it have on you if you visit Makkah?

The impact is huge firstly because all your sins are forgiven, and you have completed the obligatory act of Haj which needs to be performed only once in your lifetime.

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f. What difference has making Hajj made to your life?

I felt 'lighter' and satisfied that I have completed an obligatory act that has to be completed only once in a lifetime. It was a spiritual and social journey. People used to scare me that you could get crushed with the crowds, but it was nothing like that and it could be described as a spiritual holiday going for a long walk. You just move with the flow and it is very easy. It was interesting to see men and women following the footsteps of a woman, namely Hajar, Abraham's wife when she was running between Safa and Marwa in search of water. Drinking the Zam water was also a spiritual act, feeling that the water was to cleanse the body also. Probably the coolest and pleasant water I have ever drank! All your sins are forgiven and so we are even more careful not to make a mistake which is a sin. Another difference that Haj has made to my life is to try and remember God as much as possible.

8. What does the Qur'an mean to you? Do you have a favourite part? Should we always forgive people, or are there some acts beyond forgiveness?

The Quran needs to be understood with the correct understanding and explanation. The Quran is a book of guidance and adds light to the soul. It is said that when someone reads the Quran the angels in Heaven look down on those houses in the same way that we look up and see stars in the sky.

I feel at peace when I listen to the Quran and it is important that the verses are read in a beautiful manner.

The Qur'an was revealed over a period of twenty-two years, and the revelations appeared within a particular social and historical context. To know these is of great importance in interpreting the Qur'an so they have been recorded in the early works of scholarship.

The first and best interpreter of the Qur'an was Prophet Muhammad himself. This means that careful attention is paid to the ways in which he put Qur'anic principles into practice in his life, teaching and judgements. These incidents are recorded in the biographies of Muhammad and his companions, and the great collections of Hadith, which contain what Muhammad said, taught, did and approved of.

For Shi'a Muslims, the divinely appointed Imams were also infallible interpreters of the Qur'an and were able to give guidance under divine inspiration. This means that the body of interpretation built up by them, especially by the sixth Imam, Ja'far al- Sadiq, is of great importance. To understand the teaching of the Qur'an one needs to take every reference on a particular topic and interpret it within its own context and in relation to the whole.

My favourite part of the Qur'an are the verses that deal with tolerance. Tolerance expresses therefore both an obligation and a right: the obligation to permit people of different faiths to manifest their own specific ways of embodying and radiating the spiritual, intellectual, legal and cultural values which are universally recognizable as such; and the right of all to benefit from the unique and therefore irreducible manifestations of these universal values. This is one important aspect of the purpose of human diversity, according to a key verse in the Quran:

'O mankind, We have created you male and female, and We have made you into tribes and nations in order that you might come to know one another. Surely the noblest of you before God are the most reverent of you. Truly God is Knowing, Aware.' (49:13).

This is one of the most famous verses of the Quran. 'From a male and female' can be understood as a reference to Adam and Eve. 'That people can be divided' into diverse peoples and tribes that they may come to know one another indicates the manner in which differences and tribes, race, ethnicity and religion can be sources through which human beings gain a deeper appreciation for the reality of the human condition. The combination of nobility and reverence marks a transition from the attitudes of pre-Islamic Arabia to a moral order where the true worth is no longer defined by lineage but by the depth of faith and piety. He made us into different nations and tribes so that we might learn about and benefit from our racial and cultural diversity. Here the Quran affirms both racial equality and the value of all cultures. The Prophet said, "People are equal like the teeth of a comb". Bernard Lewis makes the point, that in a context of religious plurality, the crucial verse 'There is no compulsion in religion' (2:256) enjoins tolerance and forbids the use of force in matters concerning religious faith; he then provides this useful starting-point for any discussion of the practice of tolerance in the Islam.

Forgiveness is so highly recommended in Islam. Forgiveness keeps people together. I was involved in an Abrahamic texts group recently and the topic was called forgiveness and so I have attached some notes from that event and I have put some verses below that are relevant to this topic that I had used in the Abrahamic Texts group. I think the quote I like the best from the notes below is that "It is hard to swallow forgiveness because it is the head of wisdom and the fruit of knowledge."

Therefore, forgiveness can be a very difficult thing to do in difficult situations like the one you have described. Muslims are encouraged to show mercy so that God will show mercy to them on the Day of Judgement.

Forgiveness Verses from the Qur'an

1. Surah Qasas verses 15-16

And [one day] he entered the city at a time when [most of] its people were [resting in their houses,] unaware of what was going on [in the streets]; and there he encountered two men fighting with one another-one of his own people, and the other of his enemies. And the one who belonged to his own people cried out to him for help against him who was of his enemies-whereupon Moses struck him down with his fist, and [thus] brought about his end. [But then] he said [to himself]: "This is of Satan's doing! Verily, he is an open foe, leading [man] astray!"

[And] he prayed: O my Sustainer! Verily, I have sinned against myself! Grant me, then, Thy forgiveness!" And He forgave him - for, verily. He alone is truly forgiving, a dispenser of grace. This story is related in more detail in Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ.

An interpretation is that Moses had no choice in the matter. The word used to describe the fight between the two men is "yaqtatilān – they (two) were fighting" (28:15), the verb "iqtatal" deriving from the root Q-T-L, implying killing and lethal force. Moses, then, was faced with this deadly confrontation between two people and it was incumbent upon him to do all in his power to protect the one who was from his followers who had asked for his help. In this case Moses acted completely in defence and is guiltless of the crime of murder. A final interpretation is that Moses did not mean to kill the man. Encountering the two men fighting and, having been called out to help by one of his followers, he rushed in and struck the man, causing the man to fall and die, without stopping to think his actions through.

Here are three interpretations in which Moses has not committed a sin, but how can we square his subsequent statements? Let's look at them one by one. First, he says "haḏa min `amali al-šayṭān" – "this is from the work of the Devil". We can understand this as referring not to his actions, but to the fight which had just taken place before him. Next he says: "inni ḡalamtu nafsī" – "I have wronged myself". We should pay particular attention to the fact that he says "ḡalamtu nafsī – I have wrong myself" and not "ḡalamtu rabbī" – "I have wrong my Lord". Murder is, of course, a crime against God since no human being has the right to take away an innocent life. But Moses did not say he had wronged God, only himself, and so was not guilty of having committed a sin. Rather, he is expressing his own dissatisfaction with his actions, of having acted hastily and not taken the time to consider. But what of: "faḡfir lī faḡafara lah" – "so forgive me, so He forgave him"? In this case, the exegetes tell us that the word "ḡafar" meaning "to forgive" is derived from the sense of concealing, and it's in this original sense that we should interpret the word in this case. As such, Moses is asking God to protect him from the retaliation of the Egyptian authorities by concealing the incident. This correlates with how the story is referred to in Sūrat Ṭā Hā, where God says: "waqatalta nafsan fanajjaynāka min al-ḡamm" – "and you killed someone, so We saved you from retaliation" (20:40).

Following this God tells Moses: "wafatannāka futūnā" – and "We tried you with a trial" (20:40). At this point the trials God uses to test human beings can be either positive or negative in nature, citing the following verse from Sūrat al-'Anbiyā': "wanablūkum bil-šarri wal-xayri fitnah" – "We test you with bad and good as trials" (21:35).

Many people, when faced with trials and tribulations in their lives, ask why they should suffer so. However, many times when we look back, with the benefit of hindsight, at the trials we have faced, we see that they have had a positive impact on our lives. They allow us to gain knowledge of our strengths and our weakness, and give us perspective on our lives, allowing us to become better human beings. So, it was with Moses who went through hardship, just as many of our Prophets and Imams, and came out all the better for it. We must remember that Moses was brought up as a prince, living in the lap of luxury in Pharaoh's palace. Following the incident in which he killed someone he exiles himself to Midian.

2. Surah Noor verse 22

And let not those who possess dignity and ease among you swear not to give to the near of kin and to the needy, and to fugitives for the cause of Allah. Let them forgive and show indulgence. Yearn ye not that Allah may forgive you? Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

3. Surah Haj verse 60

That (is so). And whoso hath retaliated with the like of that which he was made to suffer and then hath (again)

been wronged, Allah will succour him. Lo! Allah verily is Mild, Forgiving.
It is hard to swallow forgiveness because it is the head of wisdom and the fruit of knowledge.

9. Why do you wear the hijab?

I wear the scarf on my head because the vast majority of scholars say observing the hijab is compulsory. The key seems to be modesty.

Human dignity and virtue, ennobling of human spirit, self-respect, self-worth, some things are private, some things are "just within the family", the hallmark of a Muslim. The hijab does not just mean a piece of cloth on the head, there is also **the hijab of the heart**.

Hijab of the heart: Q. 24:30 "Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them: and God is well-acquainted with all that they do."
Conversion of the heart: the real *jihad*. The Prophet said: "Lower your gazes and you will see wonders."
Custody of the eyes: not seeing what we know we ought not to see. Images > thoughts > desires > actions. "Look once and look away". The Prophet said: "O Ali, you are allowed the first glance but the second is against you and not in your favour." A huge challenge! Unisex: next verse goes on to speak of women in just the same way.

We each have a responsibility to help others to preserve the spirit of hijab; therefore, what I wear affects your hijab too. Non-see-through clothing. Not revealing the figure. Hanging from the shoulders. Covering over the front like an apron or long shirt. Again: unisex and part of being human: "**O Children of Adam!** We have certainly sent down for you clothing to cover your nakedness as well as to be an adornment to you. Yet the garment of God-consciousness (*taqwa*), that is the best" (Q. 7:26).

Hadith: "God is beautiful and loves beauty". Beauty as a quality of God. What is beauty? Radiance? Shining forth? Coming from within? Imam Ali said: The adornment of your inner selves is more beautiful than the adornment of the outer. It doesn't exclude our clothes! "**O children of Adam!** Wear your beautiful clothes [or put on your adornment] (*zeena*) at every place of worship..." (Q. 7:31).

What's the difference between "being beautiful" and "being attractive"? Q. 24: 31 "they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments" Drawing attention to oneself. Hadith: "Whoever wears clothes to show off so other people will look at him, God will not look at him until he takes it off."

There is hijab for men too.

Starting with the men: navel to knee (generally regarded as a recommendation in prayer).

Men also need to observe modesty and for this reason Muslim men are not allowed to just walk around with shorts on leaving the rest exposed. Tight T-shirts, lack of clothing or otherwise are not deemed appropriate dressing for men.

Women: key bit is the chest, high neckline, long arms, long legs/skirts

Various interpretations: to wrists, to ankles. With regards to hijab for women, covering is recommended so the figure of a woman is not on show.

Key for both sexes: not putting oneself on display to attract attention and disturb others and our inner hijab of the heart.

Q. 24:31 "and not to display their (*zeena*) adornments or allurements or charms except for what is ordinarily appears". Taken by most scholars to include hair. Various forms of head covering. "Women" therefore after puberty (but many younger girls are trained in the habit). Some practising women do not cover their heads but

are never dressed immodestly; what goes on from the neck downwards is the most important. Headscarf for prayers: modesty before God.

The major theological views on hijab are a genderless concept that requires different but equally significant manifestations between genders for the purpose of exterior social harmony and internal humility.

10. How does prayer affect your daily life? How is prayer uniquely important to you? How does it feel when Muslims are fasting?

Praying the five daily prayers are like having a bath five times a day. You can pray anywhere. Wherever Muslims are in the world, they turn towards Mecca in prayer.

The day is structured around the pray times. The five prayer times are: *Salat al-Fajr* before sunrise *Salat al-Zuhr* a little after the sun has passed its midpoint *Salat al-Asr* in the late afternoon when the shadows lengthen *Salat al-Maghrib* directly after sunset *Salat al-Isha* at night-time. Prayers can be read with others in a congregation. This form of salat is led by an imam, who is not a specially ordained person. Anyone who is pious and knowledgeable enough can act as an imam.

The prayer enables you to connect to God, so you feel good and light when you pray.

I only need to get up really early in the summer because dawn is very early in that time of the year around 3am. However, as Autumn approaches and particularly in the Winter the time for sunrise is around 7.30am which is around the time I normally get ready to go to work.

As the sun rises and sets at different times in different places, a prayer (salat) timetable must be worked out for each location.

For each prayer/ salat, there is flexibility about the precise timing. This allows people to arrange their lives so that the prayers naturally fit it. It is a principle of Islamic law that God does not want to make life difficult for people [Q. 2:185, 286].

Du'a are prayers in which the believer talks to God, in any language and using their own words or written prayers. They relate to all the activities of our lives and can be said, for example, before going to work, eating or going on a journey [Q. 33:41-42].

Q. 33:41-42 O you who believe! Remember God abundantly and glorify him morning and evening.

Dhikr is the prayer of the heart in which the emphasis is placed on giving thanks to God and patiently accepting the will of God in all things.

Before praying there are special preparations. It takes about two minutes to do wudu the ablution (wash) before prayers and about four minutes approximately for each prayer. Just as the place of prayer must be clean, so must the worshipper – both physically and ritually. Ritual cleansing (wudu) is achieved by washing or wudu – of the hands, face, arms and wiping of the feet and the head. Q.5:6.

If water is not available for wudu or if someone's illness prevents its use, then a ritually clean state is attained by dry ablutions (tayammum). This involves striking the hands on clean dust, sand or stone and then wiping them on the face, hands and forearms.

Fasting feels good because you are obeying an instruction given by God in the Quran. Not fasting would result in a sin. The first day people may find difficult because you don't get to drink tea which I normally do and so on the first day, we may get a bit of a headache. You do feel very sleepy in the afternoon too. Even if you sleep when fasting it is considered as worship.

Muslims are supposed to observe a fast during the daylight hours, each day during the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, called Ramadan. This month is particularly sacred to Muslims because it was toward its end in 610CE that the Qur'an was first sent down as guidance for all humanity. Fasting is commanded by the Qur'an [Q. 2:183- 186].

In fact, Ramadan is the name of the ninth month in the Arab calendar, which was designated as the month of fasting by the Qur'an [Q. 2:185]. As with many ancient calendars worldwide, the Arab calendar was regulated by the moon. In any desert climate, with clear skies at night, it is easy to observe the phases of the moon and thus measure the passing of time. The Qur'an laid down the moon as the measure of time for Muslims [Q. 10:5]. Each month begins with the sighting of the new moon and runs until the next new moon is sighted. The Qur'anic verses commanding Muslims to fast [Q. 2:183-186], make it clear that this is part of the essential guidance of God for humanity, which was commanded by earlier revelations too, so that human beings may grow in God-consciousness (taqwa). So, the fast is something owed directly to God, who alone sees the inner disposition of the one fasting, as well as something of benefit to human beings.

The Qur'anic command is for a fast of total abstention from food, drink and sexual activities from before dawn (first light) until after the sun has set [Q. 2:187]. First light is spoken of as streaks of light in the dark sky and was traditionally determined by there being sufficient light to distinguish between a black thread and a white thread. Different schools of Islam understand sunset as the disappearance of the disk of the sun or "nightfall" understood as the disappearance of the reflected light of the sun in the sky, which is generally some minutes later. Before the day's fasting begins, it is recommended to drink plenty and eat sustaining, non-salty foods; this meal is called sahur. Fasting is the act of a free and competent person, so it is necessary for the one fasting to declare their intention (niyya) to fast; some schools of Islam require this to be done each day whilst others permit that one declaration of intention will suffice for the whole month. The time between stopping eating and the pre-sunrise prayer (fajr) is usually spent in quiet reading of the Qur'an. The end of the fasting day is marked precisely by taking liquids and something light to eat; the tradition of Muhammad was to eat a few dates. This is followed by the prayer after sunset (maghrib) and then one can proceed to eat a more substantial meal. The meal that breaks the fast is called iftar and this is often taken communally, with people inviting friends and neighbours to break the fast with them.

The prohibition of food, drink and sexual relations does not in any way imply that these are bad or impure activities. They are permitted during the hours of darkness. They represent some of the most powerful urges that human beings have, so by exercising control and abstaining from these, one learns self-discipline, this can benefit human beings in all aspects of life. The key to understanding fasting during Ramadan is that it concerns discipline and not torture; it is forbidden, for example, to extend the fast – discipline requires that one submits to the divine command. Muslims observe the time of fasting with minute attention to detail, not only as regards the timing but also by refraining from activities that might break the fast unintentionally, such as showering or brushing one's teeth.