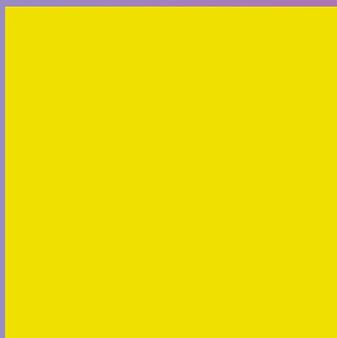


3



ISLAM

ISLAM

BEFORE WE START

1. Please write down five things that come to your mind when you think of Islam.
2. Please write down three questions you would like to ask about Islam.

3.1 A LETTER FROM SAMIR

Hello, my name is Samir and I would like to talk to you about Islam. I still remember my first religion class when the teacher of Islam told us that “Islam” is an Arabic word with several meanings. The most common meaning is submission. In other words, Islam means accepting with your heart what you cannot grasp/understand with your intellect. Therefore, faith is rather a matter of feeling, he said. He also told us that Islam means peace.



Figure 3.1
Source: © Ahmed Aqtaï /
Pexels.com

Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him, is a very important person to Muslims, because he received a revelation from Allah and he was hence acknowledged as the trustworthy (al-amine) in the Arabic society. Muslims respect Mohammad so much that any image of him is considered disrespectful.

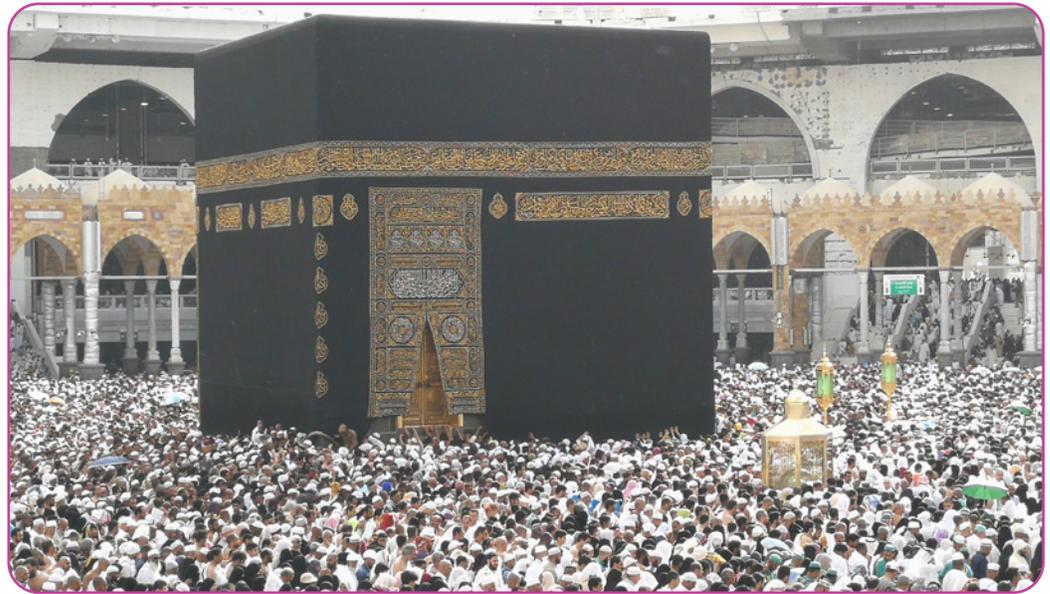


Figure 3.2
Source: @Hashem /
Adobe Stock

He was born in Mecca, a town in the western Arabian Peninsula, around 570 AD. He started receiving revelation from God at the age of 40. The religion he brought, Islam has approximately 1.6 billion followers. The spiritual capital of Islam is Mecca. Islam spread from there not only geographically, but also culturally through art, science, poetry and philosophy. In a short time, the Islamic empire stretched from the borders of China in the east to southern France (Poitiers) in the west.

The largest Muslim population is concentrated in Africa and Asia. There are also Muslims in Europe, especially Eastern European countries, such as Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Islam is the largest world religion. Due to the large migration flows in the 1950s and 1960s, Islam, especially through Moroccans and Turks, settled in Western Europe.



Figure 3.3
Source: © Peter Hermes
Furian / Adobe Stock

Today there are 2 dominant schools of thought within Islam., Sunnism and the Shi'ism. Sunni Muslims, who make up 87 of all Muslims, follow the tradition based on the life of Islam's last prophet, Mohammed. Shi'ites believe that Mohammed himself designated Ali ibn Abu Talib (Mohammed's nephew; married to his daughter Fatima) as his successor but he was prevented from this.



Figure 3.4
Source: © alexlmx /
Adobe Stock

The Sunni Islam has four main schools of law: the Hanafi, the Maliki, the Shafi'i and the Hanbali.

The different schools can also explain why some Muslims read the texts literally and others focus on the spirit of the words.

Islam has five main faith pillars:

- 1) The profession of faith (As-Shahada),
- 2) Prayer (As-Salat),
- 3) Giving alms (Az-Zakaat),
- 4) Fasting during Ramadan (As-Sawm),
- 5) Going on pilgrimage to Mecca once in life (Al-Hadjj).

1. **As-Shahada** is the testimony that Allah is the only God and that Mohammad is His prophet. As-Shahada is considered “the key” of Islam. This is also the only sentence that a person must utter if he wants to convert to Islam.



Figure 3.5
Source: © Monstera /
Pexels.com

2) A Muslim prays five times a day. **As-Salaat (The prayer)** is a form of meditation. For me, prayer is a means of escaping from human substance (body) to the universe full of goodness and beauty far from the worldly noise. While reciting from the Quran and bowing to Allah, I am in search of Enlightenment where I can find my peace.



Figure 3.6
Source: © fotokitas /
AdobeStock

3. **Az-Zakaat** means that rich people give some of their wealth to the less fortunate. For me Az-Zakaat means purification of the soul because, it is a way to purify the soul of the rich from avarice and greed and of the poor from jealousy towards the rich. In short, Az-Zakaat teaches me as a Muslim to share with others so that there is a certain justice in society.



Figure 3.7
Source: © asnidamarwani
Adobe Stock

4) The ninth month of the Islamic calendar is called Ramadan and is observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of **fasting (sawm)**, prayer, reflection and community.

I participate in fasting. This means that from sunrise to sunset I do not eat or drink. Fasting has a spiritual dimension in addition to a physical effort, especially the path to freedom. That means, I must not make my soul dependent on lusts and material things.

Fasting is, therefore, an extraordinary opportunity to find the path to freedom and liberate myself from any dependence on material things.

Furthermore, fasting helps me to think of people who are less fortunate because by fasting I partially experience the feeling of hunger.



Figure 3.8
Source: © Yudi /
Adobe Stock

5. **Al-Hadj** is the fifth pillar of Islam. This means that all Muslims who are able to do so (financially and physically) must visit Mecca, the holiest place in Islam once in their life.



Figure 3.9
Source: © Konevi /
Pexels.com

I try to read from our holy book, namely the Quran, every day. For Muslims, the Qur'an is the Word of God. The archangel Djibriel revealed those words to Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him). If I find something vague in the Qur'an, like, for example, how should I pray, I turn to the Sunnah to find an answer. The Sunnah are words and deeds of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him).



Figure 3.10
Source: © anut21ng Stock
Adobe Stock

A mosque is a sacred place for Muslims where, among other things, we participate in communal prayer. The first time I visited a mosque I was 8 years old. I experienced a pleasant feeling and peace. Most rituals are done communally. Praying together in the mosque or fasting during Ramadan are examples of this. This closeness made me feel good as a Muslim.



Figure 3.10
Source: © mitzo_bs /
Adobe Stock

Friday is an important day for Muslims. We gather for afternoon prayers and listen to the imam's sermon. He stands on a seat or minbar and preaches about social issues from a religious perspective, like, for example, poverty, climate change, and solidarity. This gathering also strengthens the sense of belonging.



Figure 3.11
Source: © Roxanne
Shewchuk / Pexels.com

In addition to the Friday prayer, prayers during the feasts of Ramadan and sacrifice are also special. The end of Ramadan is celebrated with a banquet. In the morning, I dress myself beautifully to perform the morning prayer of the Ramadan feast together with my brothers and sisters in Islam. But before the morning prayer I offer a small contribution called “zakat elfitr” to poor people, because this is a religious obligation. Thus, everyone can celebrate that day without exception. Then I spend the whole day with my family. We exchange wishes and gifts.

The feast of sacrifice is also celebrated together. After the morning prayer, those who are able to do so sacrifice a sheep. The meat is normally distributed to people who are less fortunate.



Figure 3.12
Source: © MITstudio /
Adobe Stock

Rituals are performed by both women and men. However, only men can become imams, that is religious guides of Muslims who lead communal prayer. A woman, however, may become a Mufti. A mufti is a spiritual religious leader who has the authority to give religious advice regarding certain issues.



Figure 3.13
Source: © FS-Stock /
Adobe Stock

Muslims celebrate many beautiful moments together, but during less beautiful moments, they also support each other. A few months ago, I had to say goodbye to my father. The imam closed his eyes and pronounced the As-shahada (The Creed). He was then washed and wrapped in a shroud. After washing, the prayer for the dead was performed in the mosque and then we buried him.



Figure 3.14
Source: © view /
Adobe Stock

After that, the mourning period began. The official mourning period for the relatives of the deceased is three days. Those who have not been able to send their condolences earlier will visit the family of the person who died on one of these days to do so. The mourning visit is also done to comfort and support the next of kin. Those who visit the bereaved traditionally bring food because relatives of the dead person have other concerns. There is also reading from the Quran.

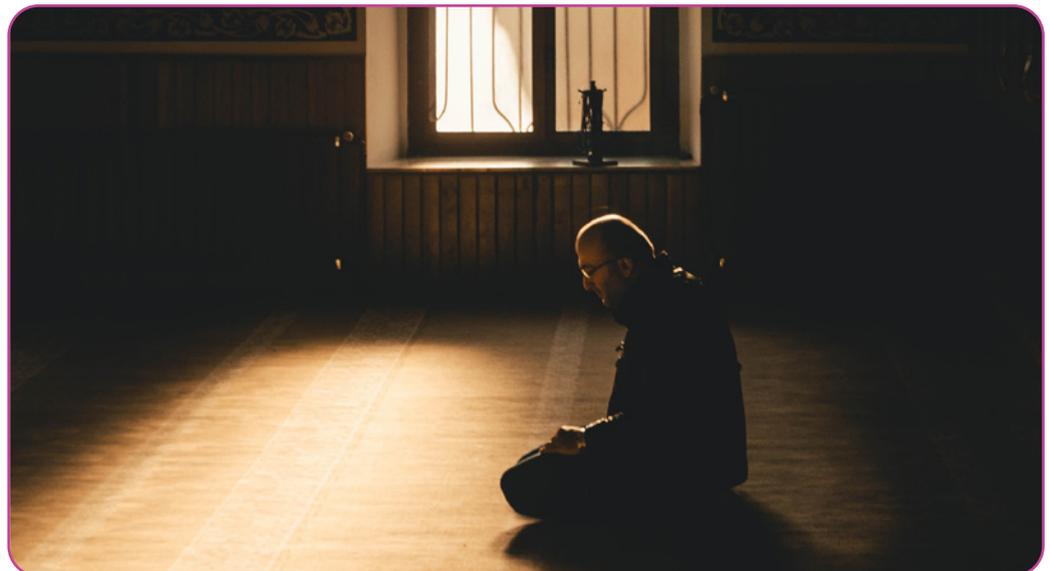


Figure 3.15
Source: © Ali Arapoğlu /
Pexels.com

Islam actually expects Muslims to be good persons. This means to live according to the Islamic principles such as respecting monotheism (the oneness of Allah), showing respect to others, doing justice....



Figure 3.16
Source: © Sawapanf
Photo / Adobe Stock

3.2 EXERCISES

Exercise 1: What do we remember from Samir's letter?

1. What does the word "Islam" mean?
 - a. Mandatory conversion.
 - b. Understand with your heart.
 - c. Understand with your mind.

2. Why is Prophet Mohammad very important to Muslims?
 - a. Because Prophet Mohammad is an Arab.
 - b. Because Prophet Mohammad is a descendant of the elite.
 - c. Because Prophet Mohammad received the Revelation from Allah.

3. Which city is the most important city for the Muslims.
 - a. Mecca
 - b. Baghdad
 - c. Fez

4. What are the two dominant currents in Islam?
 - a. Sunnism and Shi'ism
 - b. Hanbalism and Malikism
 - c. Hanafism and Shafi'ism

5. The different schools of Islam:
 - a. Prove that Islam is homogeneous.
 - b. Result from the fact that there are some Muslims who interpret the Qur'an literally and others who interpret the Qur'an in spirit.
 - c. prove that there is only one method of interpreting the Qur'an.

6. The different schools of Islam:
 - a. 3
 - b. 4
 - c. 5

7. The different schools of Islam:
 - a. On Saturdays,
 - b. On Fridays
 - c. On Thursdays

8. What are the two most important feasts in Islam?
 - a. Feast of birth and feast of marriage
 - b. Circumcision and Birthday celebrations
 - c. Feast of Ramadan and feast of Sacrifice

9. A woman can
 - a. Become a mufti
 - b. Become an imam
 - c. Become a Friday preacher

10. Islam teaches Muslims
 - a. to think only of himself.
 - b. to be a good person.
 - c. to think only of his family.

Exercise 2: Islam and interpretation

As Samir has explained to us, Islam has various currents. Read the following sentences and mark with (v) if it is right and with (x) if it is wrong:

- Islam has various currents but only one is dominant.
- Sunnism has the most followers.
- Shi'ism has four schools of law

Exercise 3: The prayer/As-Salat

In the story of Samir, you can see that prayer occupies an important place in Islam. A small ablution or wudu precedes prayer. This is a ritual washing that all Muslims perform before praying. This washing distracts them from all worldly affairs. In addition, this washing has a symbolic meaning; it is those parts, which in general take part in the daily activities that should be washed.

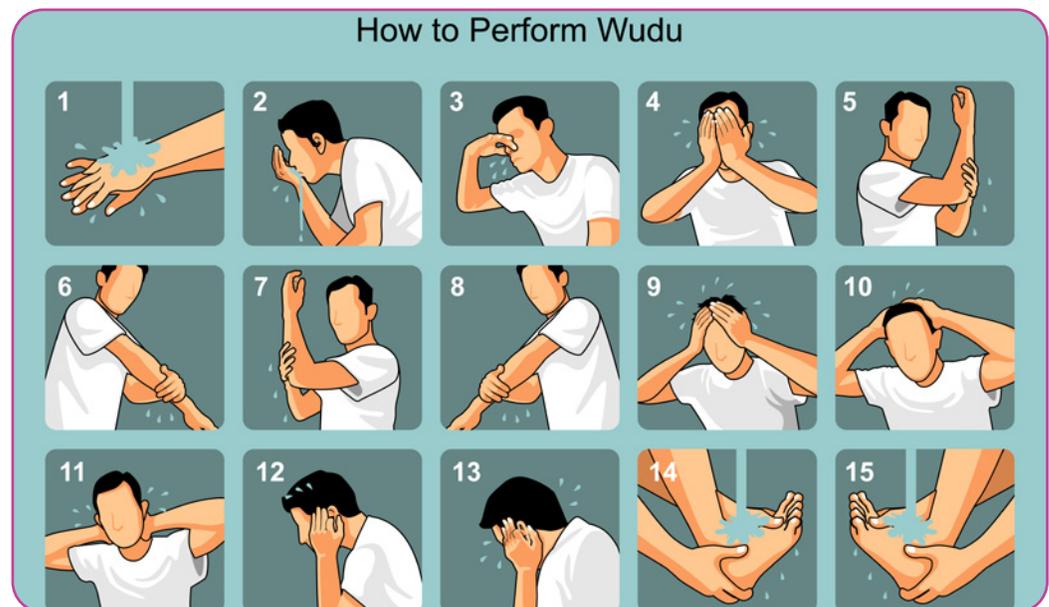


Figure 3.17
How to Perform Wudu
Source: © Ariyadi /
Adobe Stock

It is important that each person who wants to perform the wudu should have a pure intention to serve Allah. One washes their hands, then they rinse their mouth and blows their nose. Then they wash their face, then both arms up to the elbow. Then the hair on the head and ears and finally both feet up to the ankles.

As mentioned in Samir's story, Muslims pray five times a day and draw strength from this. The posture of prayer expresses reverence for God and human submission to God. Prayer consists of a number of postures: standing, bending over and kneeling. In a prescribed ritual manner, these forms are addressed during each prayer. The ultimate expression of submission is the moment in prayer when one kneels down and touches the ground with their forehead. The whole ritual is concluded with a head movement from right to left.



Figure 3.18
Praying Girl
Source: © Creativa
Images / Adobe Stock

- a. Muslims, as you may have noticed, pay a lot of attention to the prayer and draw their strength from it. What is your opinion about the prayer of Muslims?

- b. Do you also have an activity or a habit from which you draw your strength?

- c. Muslims experience prayer as a form of rest. They often regard prayer as a remedy for stress and burn-out. What is your opinion about this?

Exercise 4. You have read/watched Samir’s full description of the five main faith pillars of Islam. Please try to fill in the gaps with one of the words given below. Each word can be used only once.

Purification - Full of goodness - Freedom - Mecca -As-Shahada

1. is the testimony that Allah is the only God and that Mohammad is His prophet. As-Shahada is considered “the key” of Islam. This is also the only sentence that a person must utter if one wants to convert to Islam.
2. A Muslim prays five times a day. As-Salaat (The prayer) is a form of meditation. For me, prayer is a means of escaping from human substance (body) to the universe and beauty far from the worldly noise. While reciting from the Quran and bowing to Allah, I am in search of Enlightenment where I can find my peace.
3. Az-Zakaat means that rich people give some of their wealth to the less fortunate. For me Az-Zakaat means. of the soul because, it is a way to purify the soul of the rich from avarice and greed and of the poor from jealousy towards the rich.

In short, Az-Zakaat teaches me as a Muslim to share with others so that there is a certain justice in society.

4. The ninth month of the Islamic calendar is called Ramadan and is observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting (sawm), prayer, reflection and community.

I participate in fasting. This means that from sunrise to sunset I do not eat or drink. Fasting has a spiritual dimension in addition to a physical effort, especially the path to freedom. That means, I must not make my soul dependent on lusts and material things.

Fasting is, therefore, an extraordinary opportunity to find the path to and liberate myself from any dependence on material things. Furthermore, fasting helps me to think of people who are less fortunate because by fasting I partially experience the feeling of hunger.

5. Al-Hadj is the fifth pillar of Islam. This means that all Muslims who are able to do so (financially and physically) must visit, the holiest place in Islam once in their life.

Exercise 5: Islam and Peace

Samir told us in his letter that Islam also means peace.

However, Islam is often associated with violence. Several incidents 'in the name of Islam' created an incorrect perception of what is prescribed in Islam. Some Islamic group use Islam to justify violence. Use of violence is 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 attacked, then they can protect themselves.
3. No violence unless people is driven from their homes.

As can be understood from above, war is something to be strongly avoided in Muslim tradition. But if it becomes real, still there are humanitarian rules that should be observed. Those are:

Those are:

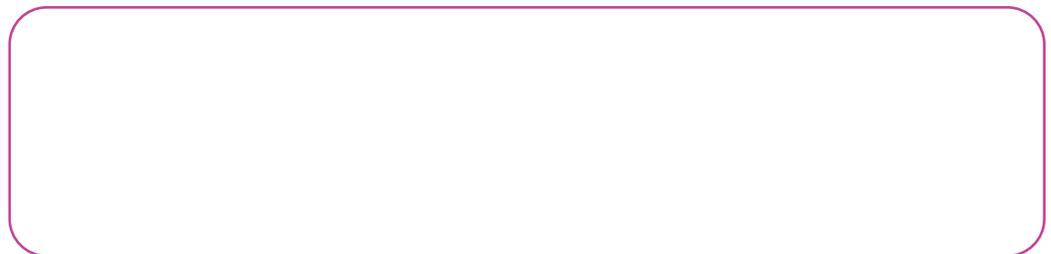
1. Do not kill women, children, the elderly or sick people (only use of force against soldiers in a war).
2. Always respect nature and animals.
3. Always respect people's homes.
4. Looting is never allowed.

As we see, the rule that allows violence refers purely to protection.

a. Why do you think Islam is often associated with violence?



b. In your opinion, are the conditions of violence righteous? Why yes/no?



3.3 GLOSSARY

As-Shahada

Is the testimony that Allah is the only God and that Mohammad is His prophet.

Az-Zakaat

It is an important rule of Islam that demands that rich people should give some of their wealth to the less fortunate.

Djibriel

Angel Jibreel is Allah's messenger Allah to all prophets. He has conveyed the revelation / Quran to the Prophet Mohammad.

Imam

The religious guide of Muslims who also leads communal prayer.

Minbar

The minbar is the pulpit in the mosque where the imam stands and gives a sermon (khutbah) during Friday's prayer.

Mufti

A mufti is a spiritual religious leader who has the authority to give religious advice regarding certain issues.

Ramadan

The ninth month of the Islamic calendar.

Sawm

This term describes the abstinence of food and drink from sunrise to sunset in the month of Ramadan. Besides its physical effort, fasting also has a spiritual dimension and is a path to freedom. It teaches that human soul should not be dependent on lusts and material goods.

Shi'ism

Current of Islam that claims that Mohammed himself designated Ali ibn Abu Talib (Mohammed's nephew; married to his daughter Fatima) as his successor but his wish was not fulfilled.

Sunnism

Current of Islam that follows the tradition based on the life of Islam's last prophet, Mohammed.

Wudu

The wudu is the small ritual ablution performed by a Muslim before salat,

Zakat elfitr

It is a small contribution offered before the end of the month of Ramadan. It is intended for the neediest and aims to compensate for the deficiencies during the fasting period.

3.4 REFERENCES

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