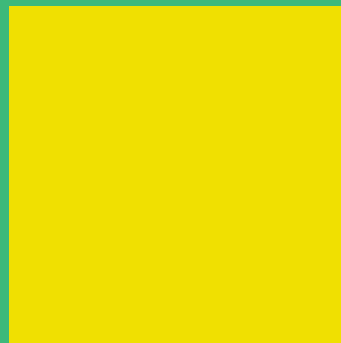


6



FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION:
PROFANE OR SACRED?

MODULE SIX

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION: PROFANE OR SACRED

6.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This manual for teacher' is a didactic packet that elaborates on the following theme: "Freedom of expression: profane or sacred?" Developed for the age group of 13 to 18 year olds, this package offers the teacher or supervisor of a learning group the opportunity to work out this theme at the level of their own class group. In this guide, the teacher can work around various topics that connect to the overarching theme of "Freedom of expression: profane or sacred?" Using impulses and didactic suggestions, it is possible to approach this theme from different perspectives. Impulses are elements that the teacher can bring into the classroom to start the conversation.

This manual contains a variety of impulses with different levels of difficulty. These impulses aim to contribute to the learning process and come in different forms. It is not necessary to use all impulses. The teacher can select the most appropriate impulses based on (the starting situation in) his learning group. The didactic suggestions are concrete proposals to work with the impulses and are aimed at philosophical reflection and communication. This ensures that the teacher can approach the different impulses in a varied way that fits in with his own learning group.

6.1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE MANUAL

The following sections are covered in this manual:

- First, a general introduction to the meaning of freedom of expression is offered. Then it is examined whether freedom of expression is absolute or not. Finally, moral responsibility is explained. This chapter belongs to the students' basic learning alongside 'theme 3.3 moral responsibility'.
- Secondly, there will be an explanation of the Prophet's biography. In this chapter, students get to know the Prophet better. This chapter is also part of the students' basic curriculum.
- The third chapter of this manual goes into detail about how the Prophet dealt with personal insults and mockery. Using this chapter, students learn to reject violence as a response to insults. This chapter is part of the students' basic learning.
- Fourth and final chapter deals with a number of real-life cases approached in the light of the prophetic and Quranic ideal. Based on this chapter, students learn how to deal with some cases from reality that mock Islam. This is an in-depth chapter.

To conclude, this manual contains a glossary where all difficult terms are explained briefly and concisely at the student's level. This is followed by a bibliography for each chapter of this didactic volume.

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 6.1
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 6.2
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.

6.2.3 MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

A harmonious society is only possible if people respect each other. Therefore, the moral question that arises is, "Is everything that is legally possible also morally desirable?" In other words, not everything that can and may be said should be said. Imagine a man and a woman humiliating each other every day on the basis of freedom of speech. Will their marriage last long then?

Having the right to do something as an individual is fundamental. But Islam also obliges one to show reverence for one's fellow man. For example, Islam forbids disrespecting saints or important characters of other believers. In Surah al-An'am verse 108 we read the following about this: *"And do not insult those whom they worship besides Allah, lest they accuse Allah without knowledge."*¹ The verse commands the Muslim to value that which is valuable to someone.

In a hadith, the Prophet (pbuh) forbade insulting the father of others: *"One of the greatest sins is for a man to insult his own parents. It was said, O Messenger of God, and how can a man insult his own parents? He (pbuh) said, When someone insults the father of another person, then that person will insult his father and mother."*

In other words, the Prophet (pbuh) teaches us to be respectful of one another and teaches us standards of decency. In another hadith, he (pbuh) says: *"No one is a true believer until he wishes for his fellow man the same as he wishes for himself."*

Treat another as you wish to be treated yourself. A harmonious society is only possible if we apply this golden rule. However, this is not a simple task in a time where the freedom of the individual is central. In an individualized society, it is difficult to take account of others. Everything starts from "me." "Each to his own, and God to us all, and to the devil with those left behind."

This way of life undermines the solidarity that is nurtured, among other things, by faith. As a result, today man feels obliged to mould everything into laws in order to bring order to society. Indeed, God is no longer central in the West and is no longer allowed to determine anything. *"God is dead,"*² said Nietzsche. But Nietzsche also said, *"Is not the magnitude of this act too great for us?"*

Man will henceforth take the wheel and use reason as his moral compass. This has undoubtedly brought great progress in many areas. But a human being also has its weaknesses; such as greed or ego. As Polish writer Sławomir Mrożek, an inveterate freethinker disgusted by the clergy and all things clerical, discovered, "When we felt unhappy in earlier times, we blamed God, who was the manager of the world in those times; we assumed He

¹ <https://koran.nl/soera-6-al-an-am-het-vee/> (consulted on 07.02.2021).

² Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche is a German philosopher who is considered one of the most influential modern thinkers. Lived between 1844 - 1900.

was not doing His job properly. Therefore we dismissed Him and appointed ourselves as new rulers." He also said, "...Things did not get better under the new management and that was because when the dream and hope of a better life is completely focused on our own egos and reduced to tinkering with our own bodies and souls, there is no limit to our ambition for honor and to the temptation to make that ego bigger and bigger but to refuse to accept any limit in the first place (...). People said to me 'invent yourself, invent your own life and lead it as you wish, at any time and from the beginning to the end'. But am I capable of accomplishing this task? Without help, without trial and error, without trial and error, and above all without doubt."³

So the human being is central, the ego or the "I" is central. This is actually what modern Western philosophy is based on. The philosophy of Descartes⁴, the father of modern philosophy. His famous statement is, "cogito ergo sum", "I think therefore I exist, I think therefore I am." Here again we see the term "I" pop up. While solidarity considers the 'other' as important as the "I".

This is also what the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas⁵ observed. His philosophy involves a reflection on his experience as a Jew in the concentration camps and argues that concentration camps are not an accidental phenomenon, but a corollary of the ego-logical and totalitarian nature of Western thought.⁶

The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas is based on the relationship with the "Other." The face of the "Other" is an ethical signal to the fellow human being that he also exists or that he also has a right to a full existence.

Islam is a religion of "I," the "Other," and "Allah". When too much emphasis is placed on any of these three aspects, a disturbance in the faith occurs. When, for example, an individual puts too much emphasis on his rights, so that no account is taken of his fellow man (the other), then his relationship with Allah is, as it were, also disturbed. Indeed, according to Islam, God manifests Himself in relation to fellow human beings, as one can clearly deduce from the following hadith:

"The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said, "Allah (will) say on the Day of Judgment, O son of Adam, I felt ill and you did not visit Me." He will say, "O Lord, and how should I have visited You when You are the Lord of the worlds?" He will say, "Did you not know that My servant, such and such, fell ill and you had not visited him? Did you not know that if you had visited him, you would have found Me with him? O son of Adam, I have asked you for food and you have not fed Me." He will say, "O Lord, and how should I have fed You, when You

³ M. BAUMAN, *Vloeibare tijden, Leven in een eeuw van onzekerheid*, Zoetermeer, Uitgeverij Klement 2011, pag. 138.

⁴ René Descartes is a French philosopher and mathematician. Is known for his method of doubt. He lived between 1596 -1650).

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas is a French-Jewish philosopher of Lithuanian descent. He lived between 1906 - 1995.

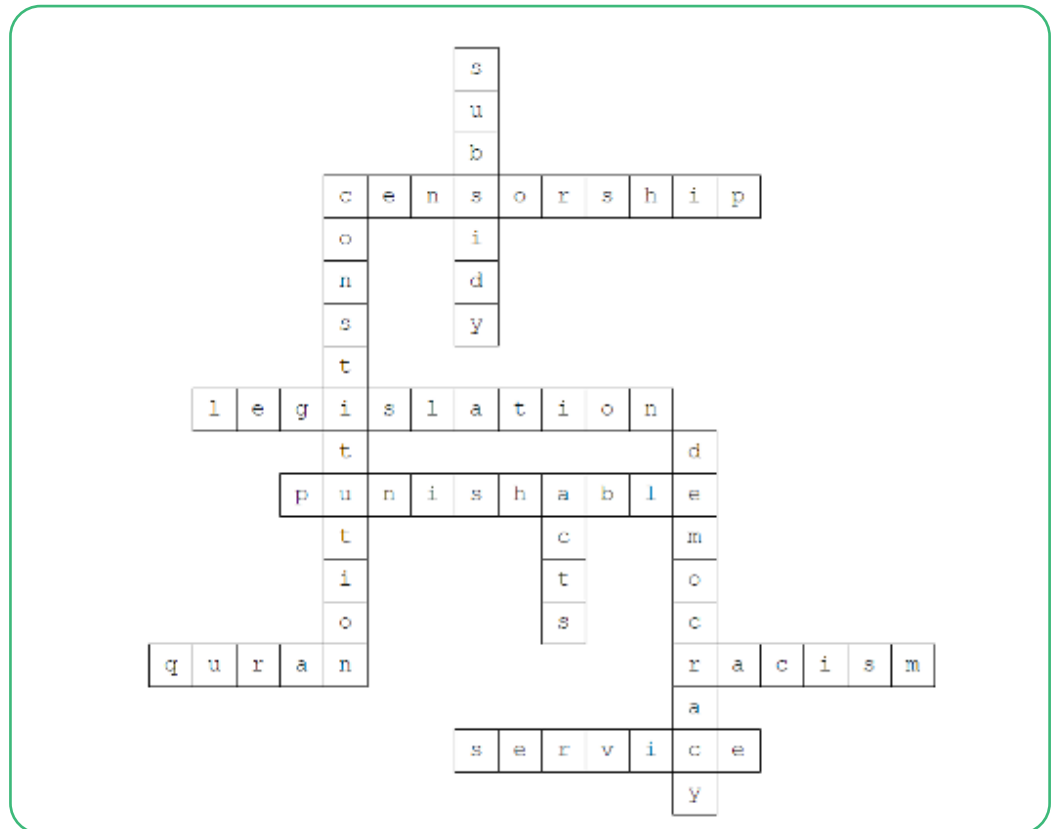
⁶ A. CLOOTS, *Fundamentele wijsbegeerte*, Leuven, Acco, 2013, pag. 185.

are the Lord of the worlds?" He will say, "Did you not know that my servant, such and such, had asked you for food and you did not feed him? Did you not know that if you had fed him, you would surely have found it with Me. O son of Adam, I asked you to give Me drink and you did not give Me drink." He will say, "O Lord, how should I have given You to drink for You are the Lord of the worlds." He will say, "My servant such and such, has asked you for drink and you have not given him drink. If you had given him to drink you would surely have found it with Me.""

Indeed, when each individual takes into account himself and his fellow man, peace automatically arises in society. In fact, that peace cannot and must not only be guaranteed in law, but also in morality.

Our task is to sincerely seek, time and again, an open and tolerant society in which peace and free speech find each other in law and morality.

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?

Every individual can express their beliefs without fear of persecution.

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

He can found schools, publish a weekly newspaper and build houses of worship.

3. Has the right to free speech always existed?

No, there was a long struggle for this. Eventually it was established in several articles to protect this right.

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

To establish peace among people by protecting everyone's rights.

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

No, this freedom exists in a democratic country. At the same time, a Muslim does have the right to disapprove of this insult and to feel insulted. However, if incitement to hatred or insult is made, it is punishable.

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 6.3
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.

Aminah had been living separately from her son for four years now and decided to keep him in Mecca where he grew up with his playmates Hamzah and Safiyyah. When he was six years old, Muhammad traveled to Yathrib with his mother to visit their relatives of the Khazraj tribe. On the return trip, his mother fell ill and died in the city of Abwa'. Muhammad then returned with Barakah, the servant of Aminah, to Mecca where his grandfather 'Abd al-Muttalib was waiting for him. 'Abd al-Muttalib was inseparable from the young Muhammad and took him with him wherever he went. Two years after his mother's death, however, Muhammad's grandfather also died at the age of 81. Before he died, he entrusted the guardianship of Muhammad to 'Abd Allah's brother, Abu Talib. He and his wife Fatimah bint Asad loved their nephew very much and sacrificed a great deal for him.

At the age of 8, Muhammad already knew what it was to be fatherless, to be poor, to be lonely, to lose his mother and grandfather, ... In addition to the grief, suffering and distress, there are also many signs in his path of a predestined life that would facilitate his development and education. Many family members will care for him and love him. The Qur'an will also later recall Muhammad's special position as a fatherless orphan and the spiritual lessons of living in the desert:

“Did He not find you an orphan; He took you in! Did He not find you when you were lost; He guided you! Did He not find you when you were poor, He made you rich! Therefore ... Never treat the orphan badly, do not reject the needy, and make known the beneficence of your Lord!” (Qur'an 93: 6-11).

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.

There is a very important spiritual lesson to be learned from this, both in terms of the formation of the Prophet himself and our own formation through the centuries. Living in nature, respecting it, as well as looking at and reflecting on what it shows us, has to offer us, and takes (back) from us are requirements of a faith that seeks to nurture and deepen itself in its quest. Nature is a school whose signs and meaning the mind gradually learns to understand. Nature is the first guide and intimate companion of faith. Far removed from soulless religious rituals, this kind of education establishes a relationship with the divine based on contemplation and depth that will later allow for a second phase of spiritual education. In a second spiritual learning moment, the meaning, form and purposes of the religious ritual can then be understood. Far away from nature, in our cities, we seem to have forgotten the meaning of this message, so much so that we make a dangerous inversion of the order of religious obligations and think that learning techniques and forms (prayers, pilgrimages, etc.) is sufficient to grasp and understand their meaning and purposes. This is a mistake with great consequences because in the end it causes religious education to be so stripped of its spiritual substance that should be its very beating heart.



Figure 6.4
Source: © Michael /
Adobe Stock

6.3.3.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
H	C	E	A	B	D	F	G

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?

The fact that Muhammad was both orphaned and poor caused him to experience vulnerability and humility first hand when he was very small. In this way, he later learned to have affection for the weak as a messenger.

2. Why were newborn children raised in the countryside?

The countryside had a freer, healthier and nobler lifestyle.

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

The countryside had a freer, healthier and nobler lifestyle. Living close to nature, observing, understanding and respecting nature 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.

Living in nature, respecting it, as well as looking at and reflecting on what it shows us, offers us, and takes (back) from us are requirements of a faith that seeks to nurture and deepen in its quest. Nature is a school whose signs and meaning the mind gradually learns to understand. Nature is the first guide and intimate companion of faith. Far removed from soulless religious rituals, this kind of education establishes a relationship with the divine based on contemplation and depth that will later allow for a second phase of spiritual education.

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

This protected him from future mistakes and misdeeds that would be committed.

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

His presence brought many blessings.

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 6.5

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.

- They accused him of being a sorcerer and a lunatic.
- Abu Lahab had his two sons who had married the daughters of the Prophet separated from them.
- Abu Lahab's wife scattered her garbage cans when the Prophet walked by.
- The Prophet was humiliated and mocked.
- New Muslims like Bilal were tortured.

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

The Prophet had hoped that the leaders of the city would heed his message and want to protect him from his enemies.

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

- We should always trust in Allah and never become desperate
- The most important thing is that Allah is pleased with us
- Allah has power over all things and thus also over our destiny
- In times of difficulty we should always turn to Allah because only He can offer us a way out.

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

- Angry
- Frustrated
- Giving up
- Fighting Back
- ...

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

- Never answering hostility with violence or insulting back but always with patience and wisdom.
- Always rely on Allah and never stop making supplications.

6.5 SOME CASES IN THE LIGHT OF THE PROPHETIC AND QUR'AN

6.5.1 #JESUIS(PAS)MILA

Title article: #JeSuis(Pas)Mila, or how a French girl of 16 is fueling the discussion on Islam and intolerance⁷

This article is about a French teenage girl who caused a stir in 2020 by distributing a video message in which she made inappropriate insults toward Islam and Muslims. She had also spoken harsh words about God. This caused a stir in France and abroad. So much so that even the girl was threatened. The Prophet also experienced similar insults, indeed, he was even physically attacked several times. Just think of the events in Ta'if. There the Prophet was treated in a terrible way by the people of Ta'if. He was even pelted with stones and physically beaten badly. The Prophet saw could easily have made a supplication and asked Allah to punish and destroy these people, but he did not! On the contrary, he hoped that in the future there would be only one among them who will embrace Islam and took peace with that.

In the Qur'an Allah says: "And (remember) when We made a covenant with the Children of Israel, saying: "Worship none but Allah and be dutiful and good to parents and relatives and orphans and the poor who beg, and speak well to people and perform the prayers and give zakat. Then you shirked it, except for only a few of you, turning away." (Al Baqarah: 83)

Allah exhorts us to always speak with the good word towards our fellow man. Allah used the word 'people' and not 'Muslims'. From this we may deduce that dissenting people also have the right to be addressed with the good word. Only in this way will we achieve results.

6.5.2 RAMADAN PROGRAM ENDS IN DEATH THREAT

Title article: Dutch Ramadan program stops after threats: 'Gonna riddle you with bullets⁸

Dutch radio station FunX is stopping "Ramadan Late Night. That decision came after presenter Morad El Ouakili received very explicit death threats. "If I walk out of the studio with two security guards riding along to my house, it stops," he said. Dj Moradzo - as El Ouakili's stage name goes - received death threats for playing music during Ramadan Late Night, which would be inappropriate during the Islamic month of fasting. "Several FunX employees and those around them have received death threats and as their safety is paramount we have had to hire additional security," the station stated in a press release. "An unacceptable consequence for us of an initiative that was meant to bring people together." FunX, a radio station of the Dutch

⁷ <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2020/02/03/mila-eeen-frans-meisje-van-16-ontketent-politieke-rel-over-islam/> (consulted on 27.04.2021)

⁸ https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20200505_04946017 (geraadpleegd op 27.04.2021).

public broadcaster that focuses on the cities with a lot of urban music, started the program last year and decided to resume it this year after a lot of positive reactions. It is a program in which we want to bring out the beauty of Ramadan, El Ouakili explained this morning on the NOS Radio 1 Journaal. "That beauty is gone when I walk out of the studio with two security guards riding along until I get to my house. Then it stops." The radio presenter already reported the death threats last week. According to him, they come mainly from extremist quarters, after campaigning against him on Instagram. El Ouakili read on the NOS Radio 1 News some of the very explicit threatening messages he received in recent days: "Morad imagine that you walk out of the studio after a long night, you see two guys in rain suits get off a motor scooter and then riddle your chest with bullets. Would this have been worth it all then? Things like that really happen."

Nowadays, it is a trend to be quick to judge and condemn your fellow man. This often involves not thinking things through or giving the benefit of the doubt. Nor is it realized that it is a characteristic of every human being to make mistakes or commit sins. In this case, however, the artist's intention was to unite people but was misconstrued by a small group. The Qur'an mentions this:

"O you who believe, avoid many of (your suspicious) suspicions. Verily, some of these (suspicious) suspicions is a sin. And do not spy on one another..." (Suraat al- Hudjuraat: 12)

Islam emphasizes the importance of continuously engaging in dialogue with each other and correcting each other in a friendly manner. Furthermore, it should be realized that the final judgment always rests with God:

"Judgment belongs to Allah, the Exalted, the Greatest." (Surah Ghaafir: 12)

Surely when these verses are read it is very clear that one should not threaten each other because you have a different view, or because someone lives other than you. Consequently, the first thing that should always be considered is the perspective of the Qur'an or the hadith before formulating an opinion.

Title article: Foreign troops set fire to Qur'an in Afghanistan⁹

U.S. General John Allen apologized to the Afghan people after reports that soldiers at the Bagram base improperly disposed of a large number of Islamic documents overnight including the burning of the Quran. Thousands of Afghans protested violently in front of Bagram, the largest U.S. military base in Afghanistan, near the capital Kabul. They threw firebombs, among other things. The population accuses the foreign troops of burning the Quran in the base, police recently reported. John Allen ordered an investigation to be opened. When we found out about those practices, we immediately intervened and stopped them, the general said. The religious authorities will take care of the documents. Similarly, we will teach our soldiers how to be respectful of other faiths mentioned the general. The desecration and burning of the Koran by foreign soldiers, which occurs regularly in Afghanistan, leads time and again to violent manifestations.

A similar scene occurred during the Prophet's life. One day when the Prophet was sitting in the mosque along with his companions, a Bedouin came in and started urinating in the mosque. The companions immediately wanted to attack the man and punish him but the Prophet ordered that he first complete his need. When the man had completed his need he saw that the people around him did not attack him because the Prophet showed mercy to the man. The man then made a supplication and left. This gentle approach teaches us that we must always reciprocate evil with good. The Qur'an says the following about this:

"And good and evil are not alike: Answer evil with that which is better, then the one with whom you were at enmity will become a sincere friend." (Surah Foessilat: 34)

⁹<https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/buitenlandse-troepen-steken-koran-in-brand-in-afghanistan~bf1c42fc/>
(geraadpleegd op 27.04.2021).

6.5.4 EXERCISES

Exercise 6: Rebus. Make the rebus and write the answer at the bottom.

 s=n  x=f  y+  x=u
 NONE OF YOU

 -ck+  n=l  l=i+  y=v
 TRULY BELIEVES

 a=u+  -sk+l  -art  +s
 UNTIL HE LOVES

f+  x=r  -at+i+  -ki
 FOR HIS

b+  -eu+  -wea  c=t
 BROTHER THAT

 -ale+i+  -at  -art  +s
 WHICH HE LOVES

f+  x=r
 FOR

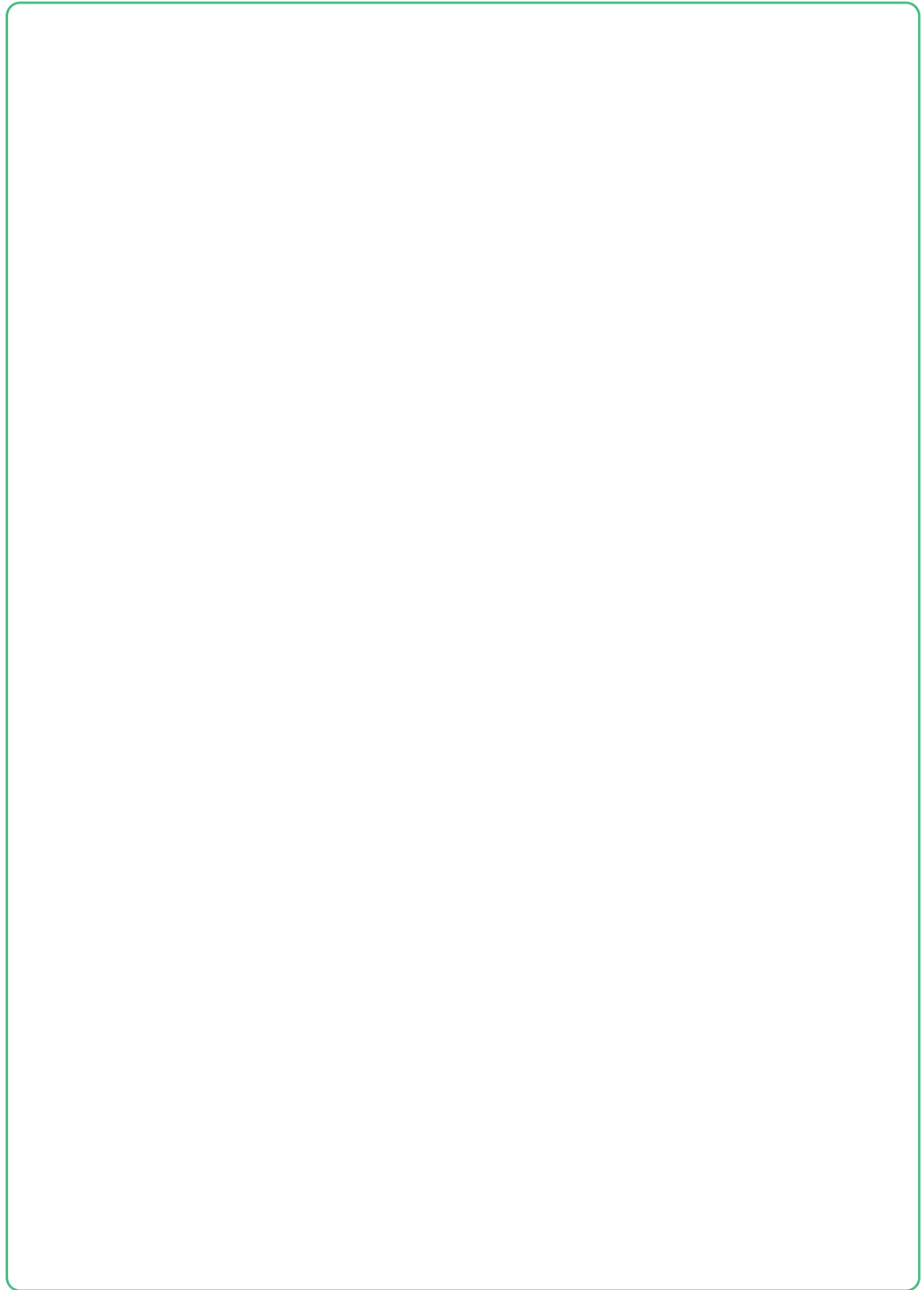
 -at+i+  -an+  -ro+  -go+.

HIMSELF

Answer:

None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself.

Exercise 7: Write in 10 to 15 lines what you have learned from this bundle. In doing so, write down lessons you would like to apply in your personal life.



6.6 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.

6.7 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.*

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Brahim Bouzarif (1982) is lecturer in Islamic theology and philosophy and deputy director of CIRRA. He is graduate of the Islamic Faculty-Imam University in Riyadh and holds master's degree in religious studies at KU Leuven. He is Khatib Al-Jumu'a (imam of Friday prayer). He has preached in several mosques in Flanders (Belgium). Brahim Bouzarif has been extensively involved in de-radicalisation and assessment efforts in schools, prisons and probation in Belgium since 2017. He also gives training to teachers and principals on how to deal with religious diversity in secondary schools.

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