

(This list of questions is based on the question and answer session of NAIST Tea Time with Mr. Mohsen Shaker Bayoumy, Imam and Director of Osaka Ibaraki Mosque.)

1. When Muslims cannot pray at the times specified each day?

The prayers are very important for Muslims and they must pray five times a day. When they cannot pray at a specific time, they can wait until a time when they are able to pray. But when they do this they cannot skip the prayers. So if they must wait to pray and during this time they didn't pray three times, they cannot skip two times and start from the third time. They must keep the order of the prayers.

2. Why can't Muslim people eat pork?

It is written in the holy Koran that we shall not eat pork, that Allah said don't eat pork. In Islam we believe in Allah as our creator so whatever Allah says we have to follow. Also we believe that what Allah decides for us is the best, so when Allah says don't eat pork it means it is good for us to not eat pork

3. If you don't have access to Halal foods or if you don't know whether a food is Halal or not, what would a Muslim person do?

If you are in a case when you do not have access to Halal food, for a Muslim person he/she will do their best to choose foods which are not prohibited while avoiding eating foods that are prohibited. For example fish, vegetables, fruits and many other things can be eaten, while avoiding other dishes. Also, in some cases where someone may die if he/she goes without eating, at that time the person may eat pork if there is no other food available to eat.

4. In Japan there are many sects of Buddhism. How about in Islam? Are there different sects and different mosques for the sects? And do they pray separately?

Of course there are many different Muslim sects, like Sunni and Shia, that have their own mosques which they go to separately, but here, in Japan, we pray together in the same Mosque. There is no problem. Shia followers may come to a Sunni mosque and pray together.

5. How large is the Muslim population in Japan?

There is no official number released pertaining to the Muslim population in Japan. Some say there are about 300,000 people but others say around 100,000 people, so we do not really know for sure.

6. Why do you celebrate or perform Ramadan?

This is a very big question. For Muslims this is a very long answer but simply put, Ramadan is a very important month for us. Muslim people look forward to Ramadan because they have a great experience then and have high spirits. As you may know there are creations of Allah like angels that do not eat or drink at all and spend all their time worshipping Allah. For Muslim people during Ramadan when they are fasting they try to have some characteristics of angels by not eating and not drinking and this brings about good feelings in their hearts. They feel closer to Allah. At the same time this fasting makes the Muslim people have more understanding of the poor and needy people of the world. In the world there are many people who have no food and are suffering greatly. When you are fasting you are able to feel a little as these people do, and this encourages you to be more kind to these people and to try and help them as much as you can. That is why also at the end of Ramadan it is preferable that the Muslim people give some donations to the poor and the needy people.

7. (From a Muslim student) Is there a better way to deal with people in Japan who, without reason or any information, yell “terrorist” other than just ignoring them?

The good way to deal with this type of situation is to ignore what is being said because it is not good to have conflicts with other people because of what they say. So the best way is to try and ignore this and to try to show non-Muslim people the beauty of Islam through your good character. If someone has a wrong image or understanding of Muslim people, you can change his/her mind by showing their good character and demonstrating that Islam is not what he/she thinks.

8. (From a Muslim student) There is a celebrity from UAE on Instagram that has pictures with her wearing a Hijab that does not completely cover her hair. My friend asked me why this person can show her hair and I cannot. How can I answer this question?

Actually, in Islam there are some general rules for most things. Of course to believe in Allah, this is very important in Islam. Then there are some rules we have to follow. For example, to pray five times every day, to fast the month of Ramadan, to give or to pay Zakat, a very small amount of money, to the poor people, to perform Hajj, to go to Mecca. Other than the general rules, the Muslim people are free. I mean that the Muslim people, for example those living in some places, they can live according to their environment. One of the general rules for Muslim women is Hijab which covers their hair. This Hijab is for all Muslim women everywhere, not just in some areas. So if some Muslim women is not covering her hair well, this is not a good example. According to the teachings of Islam, the hair of the woman has to be covered, and when she does not do this, she is doing that because she is ordered by Allah. So she is doing that and feeling that she is doing something that is beloved by Allah and that she will be rewarded by Allah.

9. Sometimes in the Quran, Allah refers to himself as “we.” How can this be explained to a non-Muslim?

In the Quran Allah says, when talking about himself, “we” and not “I.” Actually in the Arabic language if I use the word “I” I say “ana.” For “we” we say “nahnu.” So “I” and “we” is “ana” and “nahnu.” In the Arab language, for a person in a very high position, they can use the word “nahnu” or “we” for himself. So Allah, of course, is our creator, he can use the word we when talking about himself. It doesn't mean many gods, it just means only him, because his position is the highest position. According to the language rules this is what it means.

10. NAIST has come to have a very multi-cultural community of students, researchers and staff, so is there anything that we should be careful of when trying to make a comfortable environment for our Muslim community at NAIST? Also, are there things to be avoided to make them comfortable?

This community here at NAIST contains many cultures and religions and in Islam it is very important to respect all peoples' beliefs and cultures. For non-Muslim people who are concerned with what they should or shouldn't do when with Muslim people, I would say that all people are the same so just the common respect of others' beliefs and actions, such as prayers, is important. For example, if people are going to eat certain things. Respect Muslim people are the same as everyone else.

11. If you are born to an Islamic family are you automatically a Muslim? Are there any rituals, etc. required?

No, there is nothing special to be done to become a Muslim, no rituals are required. Anyone can be a Muslim.

12. The Islamic religion is spread throughout the world, across many different countries, cultures and environments. With this and all the differences that occur, can you say that the Islamic religion is one religion and not many different religions?

As was said earlier, the Islamic religion lays out general rules concerning many things so the Muslims follows these. Outside of these, the Muslim people are free to live according to their environment. That is why you can see in the Islamic world, for example in Indonesia, Malaysia Bangladesh, India, Arab countries and Africa, they have different cultures but they are all Muslim people. They follow the general rules of Islam and then are free to decide the other things.