

## Further Information for Leaders and Facilitators

### General Guidance

General tips and guidance about how to organize an event and facilitate discussion are contained in the *Scripture & Violence Event Leader's Guide*, available at [www.scriptureandviolence.org](http://www.scriptureandviolence.org).

While the current module can be used on its own, it may help the quality of your discussion to have your group watch the introductory videos on our website first, or to read some of our other introductory resources. Scriptural interpretation is a complex process, and the relationship between scriptural texts and real-world actions is multi-faceted. Our introductory resources give a brief overview of key concepts and ideas.

### Tips and Guidance on Module Questions

Here are some tips and guidance on the questions posed in this module.

In order to allow participants to make their own discoveries, it is best to read the scriptural passage and discuss the questions in an open-ended manner first, before referencing these notes. Often, group members will come up with these ideas themselves, as well as many other interesting thoughts and questions that are not discussed below.

This guidance is not meant as a set of “answers” that participants need to reach, but is designed to help leaders feel confident facilitating discussion. Leaders do not need to be “experts.” The group can have a stimulating discussion, even if some questions arise that no one in the group is able to answer.

Participants should generally be allowed to discuss freely. Leaders should draw upon the material in these notes primarily when the conversation gets stuck.

### *Getting Familiar with the Text from Quran 24*

1. *For what actions are punishments prescribed in these verses? What punishments and consequences are mentioned?*

Question 1 can be answered simply by reading the passage. Of particular note is the fact that “accusing chaste women of fornication” without providing sufficient evidence is one of the actions condemned in Q 24.

2. *What is said in Q 24:2-4 about witnesses?*

Question 2 draws attention to the role of witnesses in Q 24, which implies that someone who accuses a person of fornication needs to provide four witnesses (Q 24:4), and also says there should be witnesses punishment for fornication is carried out (Q 24:2).

***Digging Deeper***

3. *How do you think the requirement in Q 24:4 to provide four witnesses when accusing a woman of “fornication” – and the consequences for the accuser if they cannot do so – might affect how often the punishment listed in Q 24:2 would actually be carried out? Does the requirement for four witnesses make you view the passage differently than if it allowed punishment based on the testimony of just one witness?*

Question 3 encourages participants to think carefully about what is being said in Q 24:2-4, where the initial instruction to “strike fornicators” is far from the whole story. How often would one be able to find four witnesses to an act of sexual intercourse, especially before the days of internet and film? Question 3 is designed to help participants realize that the instruction to “strike fornicators” needs to be understood within this wider context, and would probably not lead to many actual punishments in the real world.

4. *The need for four witnesses in the case of “fornication” (Q 24:2-4) suggests that the purpose of the Quranic passage might not actually be to prescribe punishments that will be regularly carried out. What other sorts of purposes do you think such passages could serve, if the punishments they describe are not expected to be regularly enacted in daily life?*

Question 4 builds on Question 3, and invites participants to think about what the point of such verses might be. Why issue direct commands that are so difficult to implement in practice? We will never know the ultimate “answer” to this question, but it can still be instructive to think through some of the possibilities. For example, the passages clearly condemn certain actions, and the mention of punishments could serve to instruct the audience about the seriousness of those actions: “These sorts of actions deserve punishments like that!”

***A Second Hudud Passage: Quran 5:38-39***

5. *Imagine you were asked to teach a group of schoolchildren in the city where you currently live about “theft.”*
  - a. *How would you define the word “theft”?*
  - b. *Can you think of any circumstances in which an action would technically fit the definition of “theft” you just gave, but you would not actually consider it “theft”? Give some examples.*
  - c. *What questions does this exercise raise for you about what counts as “theft” in Quran 5:38?*

When we read scriptural passages, we sometimes take the definitions of particular words for granted. Question 5 is designed to help participants realize that the definitions of words in the Quran are not always self-evident – and that some concepts, like “theft,” can be hard to define in any language or cultural context.

Many participants will initially define “theft” in a concise way – e.g., “theft is when someone takes something that belongs to someone else.” But what if the person who took the object was the other person’s child? Is that theft? What if the person who took the object found it lying on the sidewalk? What if the object was a single piece of blank paper, or a pen? By thinking through situations like these, participants will come to realize that defining “theft” is not as straightforward or easy as one might think – and that the scope of “theft” in Quran 5:38 is not immediately obvious just from reading the verse.

6. *What reasons are given in Quran 5:38-39 for why punishment is imposed? Have you encountered similar ideas in other contexts?*

Q 5:38 describes the punishment as a “deterrent.” This concept is also employed in many modern systems of government.

### **Exploring Later Interpretations**

7. *Does learning about these features of the Islamic legal tradition change how you feel about these Quranic verses? If so, how?*

Question 6 is intentionally open-ended, and participants can mention any aspect of the discussion of the Islamic legal tradition that interests them or causes them to think.

For example, some participants might note that just reading the passages from the Quran on their own would not allow one to anticipate how those passages are actually understood in Islamic law. Similarly, someone who had only read the Quran might not expect that so many different restrictions would be put on carrying out the *hudud* punishments in the Islamic tradition. This ongoing discussion by Islamic legal specialists makes sense when one considers the brief nature of the Quranic verses, which do not specify precisely what counts as “theft” or *zina*, and which do not provide many details about when and how the punishments should be applied. There are parallels here to modern legal systems, in which judges are often called upon to consider whether or how certain laws might be applied to real-world cases.

Some participants might also be surprised at the Islamic tradition’s call for mercy in applying the punishments.

8. *Imagine someone said to you, “Islam preaches the cutting off of hands!” How would you respond?*

Participants may have encountered statements like this on the internet or in their daily lives. Question 7 gives them a chance to think about how they might respond the next time they encounter such a claim. Possible responses could include:

- Rather than “preaching” the cutting off of hands, the Islamic tradition has gone to great lengths to *limit* the possibility of actually doing so.

- The Quran mentions cutting off of hands, but does not say precisely when that punishment should be carried out. Later Islamic tradition sets such strict conditions for the punishment that it has rarely been performed in actual Muslim communities.
- According to the Islamic tradition, Muhammad himself counselled making an effort to avoid carrying out *hudud* punishments.

Participants can also be invited to think about the possible motivations people might have for making claims such as “Islam preaches the cutting off of hands.” What do they gain by saying negative things about Islam?

Similarly, participants can think about how people making such claims might have formed their impressions of Islam. Are they just looking at the Quran on its own, without finding out how it is understood in actual Muslim communities? Are they focusing selectively on some verses or parts of verses, and failing to consider the larger context? Have they read the Quran at all, or are they just repeating ideas they have heard elsewhere?