Extended personal worldviews

Our worldviews include the things that matter most to us, the things that deeply affect our everyday living and help us decide how to live. These things include beliefs, attitudes, desires and hopes. They are influenced by our upbringing and family, by what we see in the world around us, by people who inspire us, and by what we learn at school and outside.

On the following pages there are some examples from individuals, most of whom are part of a religious tradition. Here are the questions they are answering.

• What matters to you on a day-to-day basis?
• How do you decide how to act?
• How do you decide what is true and important?
• Do you have beliefs that affect how you see the world and how you act? How important (or not) are they?
• Are there any stories, texts or people that inspire you?
• You live in a country and a city with lots of people from different religions and none. Does this ever affect how you live your life? Do you take on any ideas, traditions or customs (e.g. Christmas)?

a. How would you answer these questions? Draft some ideas. (We don’t always know what we think, so don’t worry about putting down tentative ideas here.)

b. Consider why you have given these answers. Why do you think the way you do? What are the major influences on how you live, think, feel and respond to life? Are these good influences? Are you happy to be influenced like this?

c. Choose two contrasting voices from the interviews on the next pages. Read through some of the answers and list at least three similarities and three differences you find between these individuals and your own personal worldview.

d. Some people describe the difference between ‘organised’ and ‘personal’ worldviews. Organised worldviews are represented by formal structures, agreed teachings and official practices, such as the Roman Catholic Church. Personal worldviews are how individuals make sense of living. Someone can be a member of a religious tradition – an organised worldview – which will influence their personal worldview, in varying ways. Looking at the interviews, highlight or note down any places where ‘organised’ worldviews influence the answers.

e. Give three ways in which having a Sikh or Muslim or agnostic worldview would change how you think and live. Can you put yourself in someone else’s position?

f. Look back at your draft answers to the interview questions (activity a, above). In a different colour, make any changes or additions in the light of what you have read from the two interviews.

g. People within religious traditions have some ready-made guides for how to live, from sacred texts and teachings, for example. Most young people in the UK are non-religious. Where could or should non-religious people go for guidance? Use the interviews to help with this – the interviewees often talk about influences that are not specifically religious.

h. Put together an Instagram story (or equivalent), selecting 6–10 images that show your worldview – what matters most to you, and what sort of thing influences how you think and act.
What does the world look like to a member of the Sikh tradition brought up in Birmingham?

Sukhmani

I am Sukhmani, I’m 18 years old and I live in Birmingham. I really enjoy spending time with my family and friends as well as listening to a variety of music. I am aiming to become a solicitor or barrister when I am older. I am very in touch with my religion and appreciate what it brings into my life.

What matters to you on a day-to-day basis?

Day to day, I care about people showing respect and kindness to others. Along with this I appreciate honesty and consistency. This is mostly shown in friendships; however, it can also be seen when communicating with people that I am less familiar with.

How do you decide how to act?

I’d like to think that I have morals which give me a guide on how to act. These morals include things such as: respect, kindness, humility, equality, telling the truth, having an open mind, supporting others when they need help etc. These are basic qualities which allow me to act in a way that would be acceptable in any environment and with any person. These are also things I like to receive from those around me. Morals such as humility, equality and helping others have largely been shown to me through my Sikh faith, where things like selfless service with Langar (our communal free kitchen) is encouraged. The Sikh faith has also taught me that everyone is equal, therefore we should always remain humble as we should never view ourselves as above another.

How do you decide what is true and important?

By prioritising certain things I am able to know what is important to me. I can know how to prioritise through knowing what is more beneficial or important to me, especially on a moral or personal level.
Sukhmani’s worldview, continued

Do you have beliefs that affect how you see the world and how you act? How important are they?

The beliefs and morals I have do allow me to act in particular ways. For example, I am considerate of other people’s feelings. I put myself in their shoes and understand how they would feel if I decided to do certain things. I also believe that everyone should be treated equally and given the same opportunities, regardless of their background or personal beliefs. This has been strongly taught throughout the Sikh religion and importantly in the Guru Granth Sahib. A quote from Guru Granth Sahib says, ‘Recognise the Lord’s Light (Spirit) within all, and do not consider social class or status; there are no classes or castes in the world hereafter.’

This is an important quote as it highlights a key issue: social status or caste which many people still find important; however by taking these teachings from the Guru literally I have been able to detach myself from more cultural or traditional views of things like the caste system. I think that by having morals like this it does affect how I view the world, as I may sometimes expect the same morals from others. This could be a problem because not everyone has the same morals or beliefs as me, which means I must adapt myself to certain situations. This is something that I find relatively easy to do, as again I can put myself into others’ shoes.

You live in a country and a city with lots of people from different religions and none. Does this ever affect how you live your life?

Living in such a diverse country and city is exciting as there are so many different cultures and traditions brought from different backgrounds. It affects me as I am able to explore new reasons, viewpoints and decisions on different situations depending on someone’s background and religion, if they have one. By being around people who do not have a religion I can explore secular views on many philosophical or personal matters, which is something that I am very interested in. I celebrate Christmas especially, as it is a time for my family to get together and spend time with each other. Although we have regular family gatherings anyway, Christmas allows for a more festive and exciting spirit that is very much contagious across many religions, not just Christianity.
What does the world look like to a member of the Sikh tradition brought up in Birmingham?

Reean

I am Reean, I’m 17 years old and I live in Birmingham. I enjoy reading, baking and spending time with my family and friends. I aspire to become a restorative dentist in the future. Although I do not habitually practise my religion (i.e. frequently visiting the gurdwara), I can implement elements of it on a daily basis, and I believe Sikhism acts as a guide that helps me to live peacefully and with fulfilment. I feel that I can learn from the teachings outlined by the 10 Sikh Gurus.

What matters to you on a day-to-day basis?

On a day-to-day basis, what matters to me is making the most of the day and ensuring that whatever I do impacts positively on both me and others I meet. I try to adhere to the basic Sikh principle of Seva, which is selfless service by trying to help anyone in need. In accordance with Sikhism I am on a constant learning journey and I relish the challenges my daily life brings me.

How do you decide what is true and important?

When deciding on what I consider to be true and important, I prefer to have an understanding of the facts and evidence before reaching a judgement. One of the teachings of the Sikh Gurus is that going to the Gurdwara frequently does not equate to being closer to God. Instead, God is all around us, and when deciding what is true or important I feel confident enough in my own faith to make my own decisions.

How do you decide how to act?

As per the teachings of all religions, not only Sikhism, I try to act with respect and kindness towards everyone that I meet. I try to be a good person who stays away from the Five Deadly Sins according to Sikhism: desire, anger, greed, attachment and ego/excessive pride. In addition, I try to follow the principles of humanitarianism which were set by the Gurus. For example, I should not judge another based on their colour, creed, religion etc. but instead base my interactions with them on how they behave overall as a human.
Reean’s worldview, continued

**Do you have beliefs that affect how you see the world and how you act? How important are they?**

My beliefs include ensuring that I am a good human being who interacts with everyone and everything fairly. Being a Sikh, my guiding principles are my beliefs in equality and selfless service to others. Sikhs believe that everyone is equal. The langar in the Gurdwara, where people eat together, is a constant reminder of the equality of humanity. Sikhs believe that it is vital to serve others. I think my beliefs are very important because they have set a foundation for who I am and serve as a constant reminder to be humble and have gratitude for what I am fortunate enough to have. I feel that my beliefs are less spiritual and more practical, in the sense that I prefer to put things into action rather than pray.

**You live in a country and a city with lots of people from different religions and none. Does this ever affect how you live your life?**

Living in a multicultural city has allowed me to learn about a variety of religions and cultures. It has even influenced my friendship group, which consists of people of numerous different faiths and backgrounds. I have adopted other traditions, like celebrating Easter, Christmas, Eid etc, and I believe this enables me to show support towards the religions my friends follow. Although we may not be celebrating for the same reasons, we all enjoy the festivities and are happy to share in each other’s celebrations. In the same way, I also enjoy hearing from my peers who are agnostic or atheist, and enjoy having discussions about our different views. We all respect each other and the religions we have chosen to follow.
What does the world look like to a member of the Sikh tradition who was brought up as a Catholic? Leanne

My name is Leanne Kaur and I live in the West Midlands in England. I am a nurse, and work for the NHS. My hobbies are baking sweet treats, going out on long walks to new places and spending time with my family. I am a baptised (Amritdhari) Sikh, and have been practising Sikh for around 7 years. I was raised in a Christian family, and when growing up I spent a lot of time in Church, but in 2013 my now husband and I decided to become Sikhs, after connecting with the religion.

What matters to you on a day-to-day basis?
On a day-to-day basis my appearance matters, as that is a large part of being Sikh. As Sikhs, we have the Five Kakaars (commonly known as the 5 Ks). This changes how I feel in a modern, western society and also how others identify me. For me, this gives me a consistent reminder of how a Sikh you are meant to be. For me, Sikh is not a religion: it is a way of life and a lifestyle choice which sets out boundaries that naturally allow me to be a good person and prompt me to do the right things.

How do you decide how to act?
My decisions are based on two structures: Sikhi, which is filled with ideal values; and my own personal morals. I feel my morals come from the way I have been raised. I was raised by well-rounded parents and bought up in a multi-cultural society and schooling system. My mom is a practising Catholic, and I feel her religion influences her morals, although only a small number of her family were Catholic Christian. My mom chose her religion independently, and she also went around trying different faiths, and didn’t feel like ‘I am just in a box’ and there is more in life to be found in different religions.

How do you decide what is true and important?
To me, truth is a feeling. I can feel when someone is lying by looking at their body language or tone etc. I feel the same way about religion, I can feel that this religion feels true to me. One of the biggest ways I worship is through music, and Sikh is filled with hymns (kirtan). From when I heard Sikh devotional music and experienced inner peace, I felt that I had connected with the truth.

What I see as important is decided in the same way. A lot of things that are important to me might not be to someone else. My decision for importance comes more from my morals, instead of my religion, but both things work together. For me, being a good, truthful and honest person is the most important thing and truth and honesty are what I look for in other people.
One of my favourite quotes from scriptures is, ‘This world is a play, it is temporary. Says Nanak, nothing is stable or permanent’. This world is full of its weird and wonderful ways, but I get reassurance knowing that God is the only thing that is stable and permanent in your life.

The way I act is to see if they would break my code of conduct. The Sikh code of conduct (Rehat Maryada) gives us a clear set of guidance to live a clean life, so every decision I make needs to make sure that it doesn’t affect my faith or my lifestyle. As living a Sikh life is a commitment, it is always the first thing to think about and influences my decisions every time.

Living in England, Christianity is very much embedded around us, especially as I went to a Catholic primary school. Singing together in assembly, giving thanks to God and weekly church services were all very familiar. I very much enjoyed being an altar girl at ceremonies and felt a sense of pride.

As Sikhi is a relatively new addition to my life, my favourite family memories and traditions come from Christian festivals with my family. Even as practising Sikhs, my husband and I still put up a Christmas tree, cook dinner, give presents etc. My mum is a choir singer, so each Christmas Eve we always attend Midnight Mass, and I never feel unable to join in with the hymns or carols, as God's praises can be sung in every language, in many different ways. The important thing is, that He is praised.

As I grew, my idea of God also grew in a different direction. I didn't see God through the imagery that I was used to, but felt Him more as a feeling. I guess I was looking to connect with the God around whom the Trinity is centred. Sikhi is the same, although it uses a lot less imagery and idols. You have pictures of the Gurus, but they are not revered as God, but the closest thing to Him. Even they are governed by Waheguru, the Holy Spirit. I found this spiritual mystical element of Sikhi much simpler and easier to understand. It made sense, as Sikhi recognises prophets from other faiths as divine too. I never lost my faith in Jesus as a Holy Man, I just learned that what Jesus means to the Christian, the Guru means to a Sikh. I found it reassuring that Sikhi doesn’t try to funnel you into one route – we are encouraged to know and learn about all faiths, but have belief in Waheguru as the one God and ruler of all.
What does the world look like to a young Muslim brought up in Birmingham? Yumnaa

My name is Yumnaa, I am 13 years old and attend a large secondary school. I live in Birmingham, the second biggest city in the UK. I enjoy my own space. It helps me write my journals, be creative and clean, organise my room. I love changing the layout of my room and upcycling old things. Currently, I am reading Vampire Diaries and watching ‘The Originals’. Religiously I would describe myself as a Muslim. I am dedicated to my religion, not as much as I could be, but I still make time for it every day. It plays a big part in who I am and how I decide things, so I would say I am religious. I think it helps me be a better person and to do good things for myself and people around me.

What matters to you on a day-to-day basis?

To attempt reading all my prayers properly and working hard at school because the praying brings me closer to God, and helps me focus on myself and focus on the important things in my life. Working hard in school is important, as I know this will help me in my decisions for a career later on.

I try really hard to be a good person in general. This is important to me as a Muslim because Islam teaches you good values/manners/charity/compassion/kindness – which all start at home, as my parents keep reminding me! Just getting through the day can be difficult, especially with the pandemic, but I think I stay focused with having mini-goals, which I look at daily – and, oh yes, my journals. My journals are helpful because I can talk to myself and verbalise and visualise my thoughts, both positive and negative.

During the pandemic my day-to-day religious life has been very different as we as a family have made time to reflect and talk about religion, acts of worship and their purpose. We try to pray one ‘Salah’ together as a family with my younger siblings running around and laughing while we try and concentrate. My dad leads and we have a special space in our house for this, making it a nice bonding session. I think my faith has really helped me deal with the pandemic, focusing on the bigger picture in life, and there is always a positive end if we believe in it.

How do you decide how to act?

I try to follow the things my parents have taught me such as listening before jumping in with an opinion – thinking before speaking, basically – as not doing that often gets me into trouble. I have an understanding of what is morally right, and again this comes from people around me. I have lots of good role models around me, and this helps me understand how I should behave and deal with things. My aunty is a very positive person, and she always gives me lots of positive praise and constructive advice; this helps me all the time when I am feeling low or have had an argument with someone. I stay calm and think what my aunt would do in this situation and it always gets me through, helping me make amends.
Things around me – books, family – help, and social media also play an important part in my life, though my parents always remind me to be cautious with it, but I think it helps young people relate to others. In terms of books, the Islamic study books I have are very useful in understanding my religion and its origins/history or even practical elements such as certain types of worship, how to fast, when not to fast etc. However, I always ask questions, sometimes too many! The questions are encouraged in my house, as my parents love a good discussion; it helps me decide how to use my time or what I should aim for in life or even commit to. One example being the way I dress. This is a subjective and personal journey rather than something dictated by culture/parents/social media etc. Talking about this helped me understand how I wanted to have that relationship with God, and can in part be a reflection on how I dress, as modesty is such a big part of Islam. However, like I said, my parents have said this is something that I have to determine and interpret, obviously using my religious guidelines. I am quite close to my aunty and find I can always turn to her too.

Yes, I do. My religion helps guide me to live a certain way, with all answers to my questions. It guides me to be a better person, such as always being charitable and helping my neighbours, which comes directly from being a Muslim. Sometimes I am seen as being different as my beliefs are not the same as my friends’ beliefs, but we all still get along. I suppose my beliefs are very important to me as they determine how I am as a person and what things I choose to do.

My beliefs are very significant as they are there to protect me and help me in my journey through ‘life’. It helps me make the right decisions in life and protects me from harmful things that I should stay away from such as smoking, drinking alcohol or taking drugs. But it also helps me be a good person in society and accepting of others. One quote from the Prophet (sall Allahu ‘alayhi was sallam: peace be upon him): ‘None of you [truly] believe until he loves for other people what he loves for himself.’ This reminds me that I should treat others like how I want to be treated, so I should always be compassionate in treating others. (Ahmad #13875)

I love where I live and the school I go to, as I am able to make friends from lots of different backgrounds. It helps me understand my own religion better, as they always ask why I do things the way I do; but also, how others involve themselves in spiritual acts like fasting for Lent or the practice of fasting in Hinduism. Although I do not take part in other religious customs as such, I have a good awareness of it and love receiving gifts/sweets/food from friends celebrating. However, we always use Christmas as a way of getting all the family together for a big meal, and it’s my dad’s birthday, so it becomes a big celebration.
What does the world look like to a Muslim living in Johannesburg, South Africa? Aneesa

I am Aneesa Walimia and I live in Johannesburg, South Africa. I am Yumnaa’s aunty. I enjoy spending time with my family and being outdoors, exploring the South African wildlife. I also enjoy learning how to sew and experimenting with fashion. I would say I am fairly religious; Islam plays a big role in all aspects of my life. This includes how I dress, what I eat, where I socialise etc. There is a big community of Muslims in South Africa, though we are still considered a minority. With the way South Africa was politically, the socio-demographics of the country reflects where people were placed due to their colour, and although now there is no apartheid you can still see people live in areas that were assigned to them. This is true of the place I live in, which is Lenasia (mainly ethnically South Asians) and consists of Muslims and Hindus mainly, with some Christians too. However, there is a large Muslim community in Cape Town, who descend from East Asians, in particular Indonesians, who came as slaves.

What matters to you on a day-to-day basis?

Trying to incorporate the five pillars of Islam into each day and continuously trying to gain knowledge within my faith. My five daily prayers (Salah) and my remembrance of Allah help me maintain that spiritual relationship. Charitable acts are often small things like helping a neighbour and just being nice; even smiling is considered a charitable act in Islam, which you are rewarded for.

At the same time trying to teach my young child the basic principles of our religion and lead by example. Turning to Allah in happiness and in moments of difficulties is what I want my child to take on board, in addition to being a morally good person, kind, compassionate and thoughtful. The five daily prayers are a good way of showing my child how you can have a conversation with Allah so many times in the day, which helps build that trust and connection with Allah, but also referring to his guidance (Quran/Hadith) for all issues in life.

How do you decide how to act?

I decide how to act through my religion as Islam teaches me to always have good manners and always be kind, as do most religions. The main role model revered by Muslims is our prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him), and his whole life story shows characteristics, behaviours and actions that we should emulate. He had many enemies, but always sought to find peaceful resolutions and was forgiving. He was described as the most merciful person. Allah called him as ‘a mercy to the worlds’ (Al-Anbiya’ 21: 107).
Aneesa’s worldview, continued

How do you decide what is true and important?

I believe that what is true comes from the teachings of the Holy Qur’an straight from God which were also taught to us in our homes from a young age. Stories of the prophets, learning the hadiths, all added to my understanding of what is true. As Arabic is not my first language, understanding the Qur’an in English is what guides me on all matters.

Deciding on what is important was also implemented in my life from a young age from my parents, family and teachers. One example of something learnt from my parents was ‘respect’, to both oneself and others. Respect can be interpreted in many ways but what I took from my parents was ‘respect’ meaning tolerance, and even in disagreements to respect the other person.

Do you have beliefs that affect how you see the world and how you act? How important are they?

Yes I do have beliefs, which are stated in the Holy Qur’an, that this world is only temporary and a test for me to gain God’s ultimate rewards and to strive for all that is good in the hereafter. In turn this also relates to the way I act; to be kind and good-mannered are my beliefs towards acting as a good Muslim and to becoming a good person. It is important to understand that being a religious person also requires you to be morally good person. The five pillars not only offer more rituals but have moral dimensions linked to them, which informs me of my relationship to Allah and to others. These beliefs are very important as they keep me grounded and focused on what is important in this world, which will benefit me for the hereafter.

You live in a country and a city with lots of people from different religions and none. Does this ever affect how you live your life? Do you take on any ideas, traditions or customs?

I live in a country that has many diverse cultures and religions, and enjoy knowing about them watching their beautiful celebrations, such as Diwali, which is so colourful, etc. I can’t say I take on any other customs as there are so many in my own religion to keep me busy! However, the awareness helps us all get along and live a more fulfilling life.

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I’m Sarah, and I’m training to be a teacher at the moment. I am training at Chester Uni and teaching in a school in North Wales. You might say that I am a confused agnostic theist!

What matters to you on a day-to-day basis?

I think lots of things matter to me on a day-to-day basis to varying degrees. My family is at the forefront of this, whether it is something as simple as making sure I am able to watch my daughter’s football games, or the more serious struggles and concerns a human has as a mother, partner, sister, daughter and so on.

How do you decide what is true and important?

I find it very difficult to know what is true. I think we spend a lot of our time trying to prove, or disprove, certain theories or concepts, and I’m not always sure how helpful this really is. Especially since a lot of the time anything can become ‘truth’ if one wills it to be. Two people reading a version of the same story in the Mirror and the Daily Mail are likely to have two very different versions of ‘truth’. It is easy to accept something as truth if it fits within your narrative, I always strive to understand those things which sit outside of my worldview to be able to understand what the reality is. A lot of what I consider to be important comes from external factors such as my primary and secondary socialisation. However, I also think that this is almost innate, that ‘gut feeling’ which we often take as ‘proof’ of some truth we have been seeking.

How do you decide how to act?

For the most part I think a lot of my simple decision making happens unconsciously, I don’t make a conscious decision to say please or thank you, but I suppose I do make a conscious decision to be polite and courteous. I very much believe in the importance of kindness and compassion, and the decisions I make to act in kind and compassionate ways stem from empathy. I consciously choose to avoid, or at least minimise, any role I may have in the suffering of others. I follow a vegan diet and in large part this is due to my not wishing to cause harm to other sentient creatures. As such I avoid consuming animals or wearing their skins, or contributing financially to companies who test on animals. I decide how to act based on the consequence of that action. I have a very clear sense of what I believe to be right or wrong, which is influenced by numerous different sources.
Sarah’s worldview, continued

Do you have beliefs that affect how you see the world and how you act? How important are they?

I do have strong beliefs about the way we should treat other humans, other animals, and the planet – and they most definitely affect the way I see the world and how I act. They are incredibly important to me, and I think that they underpin virtually every aspect of my life in one way or another. My entire worldview is shaped around compassion, justice, care and understanding.

My idea, or understanding, of ‘God’ is difficult to express, and honestly I find myself confused quite often when trying to fully comprehend my beliefs. I think much of my understanding comes from my family, I have Roman Catholic and Anglican grandparents, but both of my parents turned away from their respective churches; one is now a Buddhist and one a Pagan. I always enjoyed visiting my grandparents’ church but never found myself to have faith as such. The more I considered it the more I found that I wanted to believe in certain aspects or beliefs around a higher power, a divine presence and a form of guided evolution. I very much enjoy speaking about ‘God’, and found a surprising love for theology during my degree, but this interest doesn’t really impact my day-to-day living. I think that we have such an inclination towards proof and evidence today that it makes faith in ‘God’ incredibly difficult for some. I am dismissive of the more anthropomorphic language used to describe ‘God’, and believe rather that if such a divine being exists it would be incomprehensible to humans – but that still doesn’t mean that such a being doesn’t exist. As I said – confusing. I think perhaps my inability to articulate my beliefs about ‘God’ reaffirms my thinking of myself as an agnostic theist.

Are there any stories, texts or people that inspire you?

To some degree yes. The ‘Golden Rule’ as found in various forms across many religions and worldviews I find so simple yet incredibly powerful.

You live in a country and a city with lots of people from different religions and none. Does this ever affect how you live your life? Do you take on any ideas, traditions or customs (e.g. Christmas)?

In all honesty where I live I don’t see much diversity of religious practice or belief. We celebrate Christmas as a family in a secular manner. The children have always taken part in nativity plays or Christmas concerts but there has never really been a genuinely religious element to our celebration of it. We celebrate no other religious festivals, which is something I would actually very much like to do on a community level if the opportunity ever arose.