

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, most Kind, most Merciful



Surat al-Kahf 18:29

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ
فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ
وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ

And say: '[This is] the truth from your Lord: let anyone who wishes believe it, and let anyone who wishes disbelieve it.'

Learning Objectives

- To examine reasons why some people choose disbelief over faith and evaluate their arguments.
- To explain the difference between an atheist and an agnostic.
- To relate a *du'a* seeking Allah's protection against disbelief.

Key Words

كَافِرٌ *Kafir*
disbeliever

شَرٌّ *Sharr*
evil

خَيْرٌ *Khayr*
good

Existence of Allah

In the previous lesson, we looked at clear proofs for the existence of Allah. Despite this, there are many people today who refuse to believe in Him. The Holy Qur'an says about these people:



Surah Yusuf 12:105

وَكَأَيِّن مِّن آيَةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يَمُرُّونَ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ عَنْهَا مُعْرِضُونَ

How many a sign there is in the heavens and the earth that they pass by while they turn away from them!

Throughout history, there have been people who have denied belief in Allah and refused to follow the true path to which Allah has invited them through His *anbiya* and His books. Instead, they have rejected both Allah's revelation and belief in the Day of Judgement.

In this lesson, we will examine a few reasons why some people choose disbelief over faith and evaluate their arguments.



ACTIVITY AND IDEAS

Can you think of one reason why some people refuse to believe in God? Write them down here:

Atheism is the absence of belief in a god or spiritual beings, believing that they are myths and legends. The word atheism comes from 'a' meaning without, and 'theism' meaning belief in God or gods.

An **agnostic** either believes that it is impossible to know whether there is a god or is non-committal on the issue.

Reasons for disbelief

Some reasons why some people do not believe in Allah, include:

1 Arrogance

Some people refuse to believe in Allah because they are too stubborn or they have too much pride. They do not want to obey Allah, but instead want to be free to live as they please. Believing in Allah will restrict their freedom, and so they simply decide not to believe in Him.

Islam says:

Without any doubt, the source of this kind of attitude is that person's arrogance. Allah tells us in the Qur'an:



Surat an-Nahl 16:22

إِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ فَالَّذِينَ لَا
يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ مُنْكَرَةٌ
وَهُمْ مُسْتَكْبِرُونَ

Your God is the One God.

Those who do not believe in the hereafter, their hearts are in denial, and they are arrogant.

REMEMBER...

Fir'awn was one such person who refused to believe in Allah due to his arrogance, and thought himself to be superior. Allah narrates his story and arrogant attitude to us in the Holy Qur'an and reminds us of his fate:

“Has the story of Musa reached you?

When his Lord called out to him in the holy valley of Tuwa? [And said:] 'Go to Fir'awn, for indeed he has rebelled, and say: "Would you purify yourself? I will guide you to your Lord, that you may fear [Him]?"'

Then he showed him the greatest sign.

But he denied, and disobeyed.

Then he turned back, walking swiftly, and mustered [the people] and proclaimed, saying:

'I am your exalted lord!'

So Allah seized him with the punishment of this life and the Hereafter. ”

(Surat an-Nazi'at, 79:15-25)



Faith in Action

Allah exists, and one day even those who have refused to believe in Him will have to admit that they were wrong. The very fact that we believe in Allah is a blessing from Him that we should be grateful for. We should always pray to Allah to always keep us on the right path.

Memorise the two *du'as* below from the Qur'an in which we thank Allah for His guidance, and ask Him to always keep us on right path. Recite them in your *qunut* in your daily *salah*.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا أَنْ هَدَانَا اللَّهُ

All praise belongs to Allah, Who guided us to this, and we would have never been guided had Allah not guided us. (Surat al-A'raf, 7:43)

رَبَّنَا لَا تُزِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ

[They say:] 'Our Lord! Do not make our hearts swerve after You have guided us, and bestow Your mercy on us. Indeed You are the All-Munificent.' (Surah Aal-Imran, 3:8)

2 Lack of scientific proof that Allah exists

Some atheists do not believe in the existence of Allah because they argue that there has not been any reliable and scientific evidence to support this. They conclude, therefore, that it is not rational to believe in Allah. They say that if Allah interacted with our universe in any meaningful way, then the effects of His interaction would be detectable and measurable, but no such interactions have been recorded.

Islam says:

Allah is not physically perceivable and hence it is illogical to even try to observe Him or test for His existence! →

Science can neither affirm nor deny the existence of Allah. He cannot be put on a microscopic slide for laboratory observation! Allah is the Creator of the physical universe, but He himself is not made of matter.

Having said this, science has enabled us to find valid reasons and signs for admitting the existence of Allah. We examined some of these in the previous lesson (for example, the order of the universe). In addition, there are many things we believe in even though we cannot see them, for example electricity, gravity, feelings, etc. It is their signs and their effects that have led us to believe in their existence.

Scientists admit that there are many things beyond their understanding and measurement. For example, they cannot explain what happened before the big bang. Nor can they explain the intelligent design and fine order of the universe that we examined in the previous lesson.

But rather than admit the existence of Allah, they come up with untestable theories to explain these things. For example, one such theory is that of the multiverse, held by scientists such as Stephen Hawking, despite having absolutely no scientific or empirical evidence to support it.

At the end of the day, Allah is beyond the realms of experimental science. He is not a bodily substance that can be perceived by our five senses and therefore there will never be any experiment that can prove His existence, or for that matter disprove His existence!

Allah has made His signs clear. The atheist chooses to deny them: →

Surat al-An'am 6:103



لَّا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ
وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْأَبْصَارَ
وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ

The sights do not perceive Him,
yet He perceives the sights, and
He is the All-Attentive,
the All-Aware.



Surat ar-Rum 30:8



أَوَلَمْ يَتَفَكَّرُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِم مَّا خَلَقَ
اللَّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا
إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا
مِّنَ النَّاسِ بِلِقَاءِ رَبِّهِمْ لَكَافِرُونَ

Have they not reflected in their own souls? Allah did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them except with reason and for a specified term. Indeed many of the people disbelieve in the encounter with their Lord.



Throughout the ages, people have wanted scientific proof of the existence of Allah, and some have refused to believe without it.

Some of the people of Nabi Musa were like this. A group of 70 elders demanded to see Allah and hear His voice, otherwise they refused to believe in Him. They said to Nabi Musa:

“ O Musa, we will not believe you until we see Allah visibly. ”
(Surat al-Baqarah, 2:55)

Nabi Musa explained to the people that Allah could not be seen, but upon their stubborn insistence, he took their request to Allah, and Allah replied:

“ You shall not see Me. But look at the mountain: if it remains firm in its place, then you will see Me.’ So when his Lord disclosed Himself to the mountain, He levelled it, and Musa fell down in a swoon. And when he recovered, he said:
‘Glory be to You! I turn to You, and I am the first of the believers.’ ”
(Surat al-A’raf, 7:143)

When Allah disclosed Himself to the mountain, it crumbled and the people of Nabi Musa died. Allah then brought them back to life. In their ignorance, they did not know that Allah cannot be perceived by human senses. Therefore, their demand was met by another proof: the raising after death.

“ Then We raised you up after your death so that you might give thanks. ”
(Surat al-Baqarah, 2:56)



REFLECTION

We cannot see Allah with our eyes or perceive Him with our five senses. Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a) once explained to Mu’awiyah ibn Wahab, in response to his question about whether Rasulullah (s) had seen Allah:

“ O Mu’awiyah! Muhammad (s) has not seen Allah with the eye. We have two kinds of seeing – seeing by heart and seeing by eye. Therefore, if anyone considered seeing Allah as seeing by heart, he would understand it correctly, and if anyone considered it as seeing by eye, he would not have faith in Allah and His signs; because Rasulullah (s) said:
‘One who likens Allah to His creatures is a disbeliever.’ ”

DID YOU KNOW?

When asked what he would say when facing God on the Day of Judgement, Bertrand Russell, the famous 20th century philosopher and self-declared agnostic, famously replied that he would say:
“ Not enough evidence, God! Not enough evidence! ”

3 The problem of evil

The so called 'problem of evil' is perhaps one of the most common reasons people give for not believing in Allah. The 'evil' being referred to here is of two types:

a

Natural evil

suffering caused by events that have nothing to do with humans, and which are to do with the way the world is, for example natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions, floods, or earthquakes.

b

Human/moral evil

suffering caused by humans acting in a way that is considered morally wrong, for example bullying, murder, rape, theft, or terrorism.

For the disbeliever, the existence of 'evil', whether it be natural or human, is inconsistent with the existence of Allah, Who is good and powerful. The disbeliever may ask:

“ If Allah exists, why is there so much evil? ”

They argue that evil can only happen if:

- Allah is unwilling to prevent it, in which case He is not good, or
- Allah does not know about it, in which case He does not know everything, or
- Allah cannot prevent it, in which case He is not all powerful, or
- Some combination of the above

From this they conclude that there is no being who is all good, knows everything, and is all powerful. And so they conclude that Allah does not exist.

Islam says:

Atheists argue that it is logically impossible for Allah and evil to co-exist. They say that if Allah exists, then evil cannot exist. If evil exists, then Allah cannot exist. The problem with this argument is that there is a fundamental misunderstanding about what is good (*khair*) and evil (*sharr*) and also the purpose of life.

One reason that the problem of evil seems so puzzling is that we tend to think that if Allah exists, then His goal for human life is happiness in this world. This is not the case. The chief purpose of life in this world is not happiness, but rather it is for us to get to know Allah and get closer to Him. When we come to this world, our souls are like unwritten books. The purpose of life in this world is that our soul reacts to stimuli of different kinds, like sadness, happiness, comfort, discomfort, fortune and misfortune, so that it unfolds and develops and manifest its merits like patience, gratitude, contentment, etc.

One way by which our souls can develop and find its place in the final abode is through trials and difficulties. Allah tells us in the Qur'an that everyone will be subject to one trial or another.

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a) has said:

Paradise is surrounded by trials and patience. So whoever endures trials in this world will enter paradise. Hell is surrounded by pleasures and desires. Thus, whoever allows himself the pleasures and desires [of the world] will enter the fire.

Surat al-Baqarah 2:155-156



وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ
مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ
وَنَقْصِ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ
وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالْثَّمَرَاتِ وَ
بَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ
الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمْ
مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا
إِلَيْهِ رَاغِعُونَ

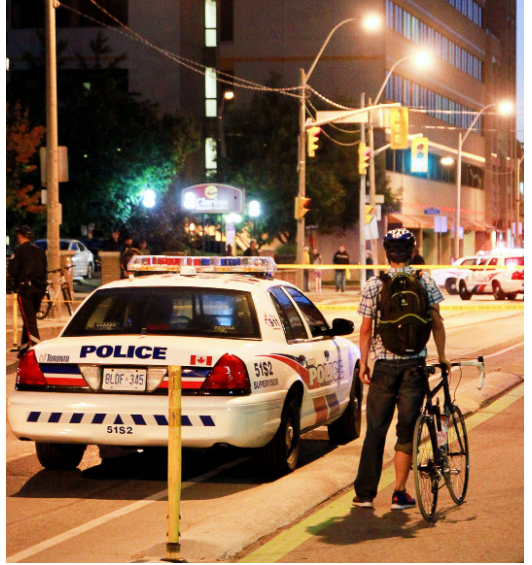
And We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient, those who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: 'Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we surely return.'

Whether we get closer or not to Allah will depend upon our response to those trials. Do we respond with anger and bitterness towards Him, or do we turn to Him for hope and strength?

Consider if someone is told to learn to swim by simply reading about it. Even if they spend their whole life reading about swimming, they will not learn how to swim, until they get into the water and struggle with the danger of drowning.

Even the *anbiya* were subjected to trials. Nabi Ayyub and Nabi Ibrahim were both subjected to trials and difficulties. Recall what you know about Nabi Ibrahim. What were the different trials he went through and what stages and stations did he attain as a result of passing those trials?

Hardship and trials make us stronger and can bring us closer to Allah, provided we respond to them appropriately - with patience and trust, knowing that they are from Allah. Freely choosing to do good and rejecting evil is what allows human beings to achieve their potential as the greatest of Allah's creation. In this way, we become even better than angels. Allah tells us in the Qur'an:



Surat al-Mulk 67:2

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ
أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفُورُ

He, who created death and life that He may test you [to see] which of you is best in conduct. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Forgiving.

The Qur'an tells us that Allah is Wise, and everything that He does is right, just, good, and fair.



Surat al-Baqarah 2:216

وَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ
وَعَسَى أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ
وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

It may be that you dislike something while it is good for you, and it may be that you love something while it is bad for you, and Allah knows and you do not know.



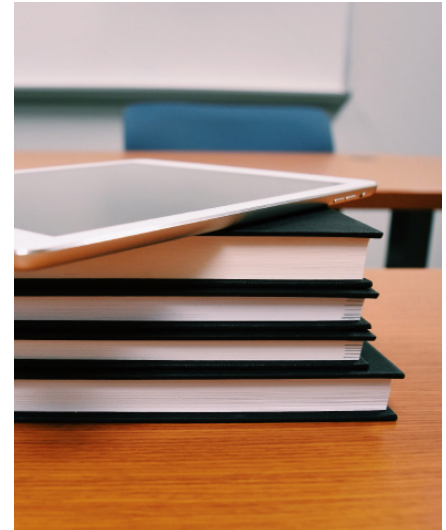
4 Societal influence

Some people do not believe in Allah because of the influence of the society in which they live. A person may have grown up with parents who did not believe in Allah, and never taught their children about Him. Therefore, the children – like the parents – do not believe in Allah.

Similarly, someone that was raised in a Communist country is unlikely to believe in Allah because the education system and culture make being an atheist the natural and desirable thing to do.

Or a person may have gone to school or college and was taught that evolution is true and that Allah is not needed since nature can account for everything. When this happens, belief in evolution takes the place of belief in Allah.

What do you think Islam's response would be for this category of people?



Surat al-Jathiyah 45:23

أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ
إِلَٰهَهُ هَوَاهُ

Have you seen him who has taken his desire to be his god?

5 Materialism

Others, on the other hand, are just too attached to the material world. They want to live a sinful life and take drugs, smoke, drink, or engage in sex before marriage. And they do not want Allah telling them they should not. Therefore, they choose not to believe in Allah so they can do certain things without feeling guilty.

Islam says:

These people think that the free enjoyment of certain things that religion has prohibited will give them happiness. They think that religion stops all enjoyment. In fact, the opposite is true. Allah is All-Powerful and does not need our worship, nor has anything to gain from it. Believing in Allah frees us from being a slave to our desires and being caught up in materialistic pleasures not realising this world is but temporary and what really matters is the life Hereafter:

Allah has created us and knows exactly what is good (*khair*) for us and what is bad (*sharr*) for us. He has made those things that are good for our well-being as *wajib* upon us and those things that are very bad for us as *haram*.

Surat ar-Rum 30:7

يَعْلَمُونَ ظَاهِرًا مِّنَ
الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ عَنِ
الْآخِرَةِ هُمْ غَافِلُونَ

They know just an outward aspect of the life of this world, but they are heedless of the Hereafter.



HIGHER LEVEL

Create a poster illustrating either one of the arguments used by atheists to deny the existence of Allah, or Pascal's wager.

Pascal's Wager is the name given to an argument of Blaise Pascal (a 17th century French mathematician and philosopher) for believing, or for at least taking steps to believe, in Allah. His argument can be briefly stated in this way:

“ If you believe in the life Hereafter you will gain everything if it really exists; and you lose nothing if it does not exist. Therefore, it is better to bet that it does exist. ”

What Pascal is saying is that if Allah does not exist, then it does not matter what you believe.

This is because there is nothing to win after death and nothing to lose after death. But if Allah does exist, then your only chance of winning eternal happiness is to believe in Him, and your only chance of losing is if you refuse to believe! Therefore it is pure common sense to believe in Allah!

To put the argument in practical terms, suppose someone is dying with no hope of a cure other than a new 'miracle drug' which has a 50-50 chance of saving the person's life. Wouldn't it be utterly reasonable to try it and utterly unreasonable not to?

Pascal's wager says that it is completely irrational not to believe in Allah! Interestingly, Imam Ali (a) presented a similar argument to a man who debated with him on the question of the Hereafter. Imam explained that if the truth was that there was no Hereafter, then we shall all be saved; but if the truth is that there is a Hereafter, then the man will be condemned and he (the Imam) shall be saved.

KEY POINTS

- 1 Atheist: One who does not believe in Allah.
Agnostic: One who neither believes nor disbelieves in the existence of Allah.
- 2 There are many reasons why some people do not believe in Allah.
Some of these are:
 - The way they were brought up and their social surroundings
 - Their attachment to this world
 - Arrogance
 - Not being able to physically prove the existence of Allah
 - Not understanding the 'problem of evil'
- 3 Our primary purpose in this life is not happiness, but to know Allah and get closer to Him.
- 4 Allah also created us for a test, and part of this test is to undergo hardship and suffering to enable us to get closer to Allah and grow as human beings.
- 5 Allah has given us free will, and free will includes choosing whether we do good or evil acts.





- 1 What is the difference between an atheist and an agnostic?

- 2 List three reasons why some people refuse to believe in Allah.

- 3 Is it true that natural disasters are evil?

- a True, because they cause massive destruction.
- b True, because they cause death intentionally.
- c False, because the statement is based on a wrong assumption about 'evil'.

- 4 Evil comes about when:

- a A person chooses to do good.
- b A person chooses to do bad intentionally.
- c A person does bad unintentionally.

- 5 Is it evil for Allah to allow children to die from natural disasters?

- a Yes, because they had their entire lives ahead of them.
- b No, because we all belong to Allah and He can take us away from this world whenever He wishes.
- c Yes, because children are innocent.

- 6 There is wisdom and mercy associated with natural disasters.

- a True, because they cause massive destruction.
- b True, because they cause death intentionally.
- c False, because the statement is based on a wrong assumption about 'evil'.