

SEARCH FOR GOD

Dr Shakeel Ahmad, Tabligh Department, UK

Comparing the UK population censuses of 2001 and 2011, it is evident that the number of people who follow and practice Christianity is decreasing, while the number who do not believe or follow any religion is increasing [1]. This is similar to findings in other Western countries [2]. It is also interesting that while Islam is the fastest growing religion in UK, the rate of non-belief is increasing faster [1].

It is also not unfair to observe that world problems like wars, armed civil conflicts, poverty and disease, economic pressures and general unrest are also on the increase over a similar period.

Islam, on one hand, allows the freedom to believe or not in God's existence, choose or not any religion, and also teaches that there should be no coercion in matters of religion [9]. At the same time, according to Islam, living life in accordance with God's guidance leads to a just and peaceful society, and not following this guidance has an opposite consequence.

We will look at the issue of existence of God in some detail in this article.

Some common difficulties in believing

1. Conceptualising a non-physical *Being* is not easy. Just like it is not possible for an ant to comprehend the mountain on which it crawls, just the sheer size difference makes it impossible, for humans to conceptualise a *Being* that is not just so much bigger, but which does not have a body or a shape, and thus cannot be perceived by our sensory organs, is very difficult. Additionally, the *Being* is 'present everywhere' and therefore cannot be approached or 'observed from aside'.
2. We know growth is not possible without discipline e.g. an athlete requires intense discipline to develop their skills to win a gold medal. The same applies to excelling in our moral-spiritual spectrum. Belief in God requires discipline in how one conducts their life. It requires one to give up some of their daily pursuits that they 'enjoy' for a higher cause, and it is harder to do so for the person who is used to enjoyment-seeking lifestyle.
3. Out of sight, out of mind. Non-tangibility of God is an obstruction for some in the way of belief.
4. Inappropriate behaviour by some 'followers' of a religion is commonly cited as an argument against existence of God e.g. The God Delusion [19]. There are two inherent problems with this argument. Firstly and more importantly, one needs to distinguish between the actual Divine teachings and any distortion of these teachings caused by the people. These distortions are either a result of some vested interest, be it political or

personal, or people misled by those in-charge of a religious group. In fact, no religion at its source has ever taught intolerance or extremism. Secondly, even if some undesirable behaviour is carried in name of religion (albeit falsely), this does not rationally conclude non-existence of God.

Some secular arguments that make existence of God much more likely than non-existence

1. Majority of people believe in some form of religion or deity. Out of around 7.5b world population, there are around 2.5b Christians, around 2b Muslims, around 1.2b Hindus, 0.6b Buddhists and then smaller populations of other religions [3]. Hence the non-believer holds a view at odds with the majority. Hence the onus of proof of non-existence is at least as much on the non-believer as is on the believer for proof of existence.
2. Quest for God is well known to have existed from pre-historic times and well before we had 'messengers' who introduced God formally. There is archaeological and historical evidence of religious rituals and worshipping a 'higher authority' in the indigenous populations of Americas, Middle East and Australia [4]. This evidence dates back to around 70,000 years ago, virtually the age of modern human race evolving in North-East Africa and beginning to spread around the globe [5, 6]. Why would such a common quest exist amongst all these people who lived in diverse geographical and cultural setups and had no ways of inter-communication, particularly when no such thing like *God* exists?
3. An interesting question is whether this quest about God is just an intrigue on our part about our origins and a *vague* possibility of a creator, or has it been planted in us as part of a purposeful evolutionary process that was to enable the advanced specie to contemplate, conceptualise and communicate with its creator for higher 'spiritual' development?
4. Human conscience provides the proof. All people agree that they feel more at peace with goodness than with evil. Our inner self warns us about bad and diverts us towards what is good. All religions are unanimous that God teaches goodness.
5. Out of sight is no proof of non-existence. We have scientific evidence about many things that exist but cannot be perceived with our primary senses. For example, an empty room is in fact filled with radiation of various types including radio waves, and sound and light frequencies beyond the range of human perception. A radio receiver can provide definite proof of such existence. Therefore, inability to perceive something by our perceptual senses is hardly a proof for its non-existence. Furthermore, as our senses are unable to comprehend anything more than a small range of the total existence, why should it be a surprise that, unless our senses are specially prepared, they are unable to comprehend God, who is beyond all realm of creation.

6. There has to be an ultimate source of all creation. The atheistic argument is that if there is a creator, who created the creator? They consequently imply that the universe started by itself without a creator. Science tells us that is not true. Obviously, any creator who was created by another being cannot be the ultimate cause and is therefore not the ultimate Creator. While tracing the creation of universe, scientists recognise that it had not existed from ever, and that the origin of universe is from a state of *singularity* [10]. According to scientific description of this state, it did not comprise of matter but was a unified state of immense energy which we do not yet completely understand. Further scientific exploration may enable us to understand better the manifestations of *The Ultimate Cause* that existed before the universe existed, and which was the ultimate source of all energy that went into creation of universe.
7. Ancient philosophy, modern science and scriptural knowledge are mutually more agreeable than is commonly understood, including on the subject of existence of an ultimate source of all creation. Aristotle spoke of *The Final Cause* of all that exists [7]. Socrates spoke of the influence on our day to day lives of the One who created us and all else that exists, while refuting other deities. Science of entropy that explains some loss of matter when it changes its form, derives that the ultimate source of all *created* matter could not have been a form of matter as we know it as that would have meant loss of matter during the process of creation of universe, while what science actually observes is the opposite during the *first* creation of the universe i.e. immense amount of matter coming into existence from non-matter *state of singularity*. All religious scriptures, of course, speak of a creator *God*.
8. According to the fundamentals of Quantum physics, consciousness is the basis of all creation. Quantum Theory determines that the universe, including all conscious life, could not come into existence without a ‘consciousness’ present beforehand and regards all matter as derivative from pre-existing consciousness [8].
9. Intelligent creation does not come out of random or chance work. Even a piece of broken pot discovered at an archaeological site confirms presence of a *maker* at some time in history. The universe, though complex and continually evolving, is an absolutely balanced system governed by natural laws. This flawless running of universe, both micro and macro, would in itself require the presence of an intelligent creator. Creation by chance of such a system has been described as the same as of wind blowing through a scrapyard leading to building of an airplane [21].
10. Out of several examples of a *planned* process of evolution, one is that of development of speech. If mere chance was responsible for all evolution, speech development would have taken place over millions of years, passing through several species with varying degrees of gradually developing speech, before finally reaching complexity of human speech. However, what we actually observe are three important facts: 1) human speech appeared without these interim stages, 2) it appeared not earlier or later but exactly at the stage when life had become intelligent enough to contemplate on workings of nature and to communicate complex ideas, and 3) it appeared at the stage when it was to play a key role in psycho-moral-spiritual development of the specie that developed it.

These arguments suggest that if we are to believe in our own existence as intelligent beings, which can understand, explore and manipulate our environment, we must also believe in existence of a ‘Conscious Creator’. On the other hand if we deny the existence of such a creator, we are in some way denying our own existence!

Some arguments that can ONLY be explained by accepting the existence of a Master Creator

Ongoing Testimony of the Most Truthful

We know that prophets lived in different times and in different parts of the world, without any communication whatsoever between them. In addition, prophets are well known to be people with highest standards of moral dignity and truthfulness, and there is no exception to this rule. If we then observe a common theme in the teaching of all known prophets, is it not likely to be true? All prophets talked about God as the ultimate creator and master of all existence. The prophets also taught us about a process of accountability in an after-life.

Amazing Life Accounts of the Prophets

Life histories of all prophets present an amazing account. They are virtually alone at the time of their initial claim to be recipients of ‘God’s message’, usually very weak in comparison to their adversaries in worldly resources, and they face strong persecution at the hands of their opposition which usually much more worldly power than the prophets [22]. Prophets demonstrate incredible patience, tolerance, grace and forgiveness in return. What we then see is that all prophets ultimately succeed in achieving what they had set for, while the opposition is unsuccessful in preventing them to achieve their goals. Throughout their lives, prophets claim that they are acting under ‘Divine command’, and that they are in receipt of ‘Divine support’.

This has been the case of Adam, Noah, Lot, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Confucius, Jonah, Jacob, Job, Joseph, Krishna, Moses, Aaron, Zoroaster, David, Solomon, Buddha, Elisha, Zachariah, John, Jesus and Muhammad [peace be on all of them], to name some.

Wisdom of Divine Guidance

Evolution of life has led to humans as the most intelligent life form yet. Modern humans began to spread on the planet about 80-70,000 years ago [11]. However it was not until around 10,000 years ago that we developed communities and social interactions of some meaningful scale [23]. Following this we have seen prophets at different stages of history leading successfully the establishment of just and peaceful societies, of varying sizes and duration. Many world historians have recognized this fact [12, 13, 14].

Source of knowledge that is beyond human scholarship

Once bio-socio-cultural evolution reached the stage of human communities, we have also seen evolution of Divine guidance to aid human spiritual development. Evolution of Divine guidance is evident if we compare the *guidance* passed on through earlier prophets with that given through later prophets.

Quran, has claimed to be the final and complete Divine guidance for all mankind [15]. Profound depth of knowledge in Quran is acknowledged by several scholars of different domains of science [16, 17], who recognise that this knowledge could not have been conceived by any human source at the time it was *revealed*. The prophets have consistently claimed that God reveals to them this knowledge.

Quran that was revealed 1500 years ago, has mentioned historical and scientific facts and prophecies about the future, many of which have already come true with amazing accuracy. Some of these include the process *and purpose* of evolution of life, modern travel and communication modes, human attempts to intervene in natural processes e.g. genetic engineering, and some major current political trends. Similarly, definite existence of extra-terrestrial life is mentioned in the Quran, and while scientists still search for extra-terrestrial life, one should be able to confidently predict that they would one day succeed in discovering life in another part of the universe.

Where does all this true knowledge come from? On one hand it has been beyond the scope of human scholarship of the time, and on the other hand the informants are claiming that they are only ‘messengers’ and not inventors of this knowledge and this is being revealed to them by ‘God’. To reiterate, all of this is in the context that we have no reason to doubt the truthfulness of these messengers. This claim not only just provides strong evidence for existence of God, but also for communication between God and the human being.

Further on, does it not then make it more likely that further knowledge contained in (authentic sources of) Divine revelation, will be proven true as our understanding of nature develops further?

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE TAKES US BEYOND DOUBT

Prophets have indeed described their *instruments* to recognize the existence of God, which are based not just on certainty of *evidence* alone, but also on certainty of *witness*, and certainty of *personal experience* [18].

An example of *evidence* could be manifestations of Creator that we see in all creation around us, and so we are lead to the ultimate cause of all causes. An example of *witnessing* God in action could be what we see in the ongoing balance in laws of nature over billions of years, and witnessing principles described in Divine guidance manifesting in our own lives.

An example of one's *experience* of God is an individual's personal communication with God, and acceptance of one's prayer. What doubt would a person have in existence of God once they have personally experienced communication with God or having achieved through prayer what was otherwise beyond their individual ability?

Prophets have also taught us how to *develop communication* with God; it is through persistent meditation and prayer while living a life of moral discipline. We know that natural phenomena are determined by natural laws that remain true to their underpinning principles and never 'deviate'. If we were to set ourselves to the same principle of *truth*, and nothing but the truth, our mind becomes more in *tune* with the natural principles, and ultimately to the ultimate cause of all creation. This leads to creating the required instrument, a mind-set, which is fertile to receive *communication* from our Creator. As it develops, the communication does not remain one sided i.e. from man to God alone, but becomes two sided, as God responds to prayer and supplications.

BENEFIT TO SOCIETY IF THERE IS A GOD THAT GIVES US GUIDANCE

In evolutionary terms development of increasingly complex life forms actually meant development of increasing consciousness, which in turn led to increasing awareness of our environment. This also meant been given a choice of behaviour spectrum, which on one hand can be totally hedonistic and ruthless, like a wild animal, and on another being completely virtuous and *godly*. We are taught that the need of religion came about because of human need for a code to guide our selection of what is better behaviour for us and for society; a code of behaviour that could help us develop moral and spiritual strength. Religion gives us a code of conduct that helps us develop towards the *godly* end of the spectrum.

If the original and undistorted religious teachings are followed, our ambitions are disciplined and sensibilities refined. Our energies are channelized constructively for the benefit of mankind, and our pleasure is associated with doing good and being fair. We become sensitised to suffering of others, and alleviating others' suffering becomes a source of pleasure and contentment to a person so refined by religion. Anything otherwise becomes distasteful for such a person.

Prophets are the best example in this respect, but the examples are certainly not confined to prophets alone. Millions benefit from this code and become a source of beneficence for society.

GOD-LESS VOID

According to Self Determination Theory of human psychology, our mind functions by seeking goals, which it then works towards [20]. When these goals sometimes deviate from healthy

ones, the affected person gradually begins to show signs of maladjustment e.g. drug seeking, or emotional turmoil. Similarly, when the *constructive code* of conduct (given by Divine guidance) is removed as a goal, less healthy codes begin to fill this void; e.g. ‘live the life to its full’ i.e. hedonism, driving one to live for pleasure irrespective of its individual or social consequences; ‘it’s my life’ i.e. selfishness, implying lack of consideration for others while the individual gains from the action; materialism, pursuing material gains even if dishonestly as long one is not apprehended by law; strife for power may it even negatively impact others, etc. One can understand that risk of developing such attitude increases if our mental *satans* are not controlled through moral discipline.

Some suggest that we do not need a code and can determine our conduct through our intelligence. Let us just ponder, if safe and adequate traffic flow be expected without a traffic code and if individual drivers were left to make their own decisions how to best conduct themselves through crossways?

STUDY OF HUMAN HISTORY

If we make a comparative study of civilisations that developed, and those that declined, we observe that growth of civilisation took place by following principles of Divine guidance and decline was determined by giving up on these principles. The principles in question e.g. justice, developing knowledge base etc., of course are of universal application. However their diligent application is determined by nations’ sincerity to the principles and thus *directly or indirectly* to principles of Divine guidance.

THE ILLUSION OF ‘THE GOD DELUSION’

Richard Dawkins in his book *The God Delusion* has cited four main reasons why he postulates that there is no God [19]. These have been already dealt with above and are only summarised below for simplicity.

- a) *Religion has led to problems* – it is the distortion of religion that has caused problems, while actual religious teachings have led to resolution of the same problems time and again throughout history.
- b) *Religion is dogmatic* – misled and misunderstood ‘religion’ can lead to dogma, but not if understood as guided by God’s apostles.
- c) *Progress of man is not linked to religion* – societies that progressed followed the principles that are taught by religion, and the societies that declined did so because they had stopped following those principles. Worldwide recognition of Ahmadiyya Muslim conduct is a recent living example of this.

- d) ‘God’ is a product of human thought – universal quest, pre-historic evidence of peoples’ belief in God, even before the prophets came, and majority are believers prove otherwise. Factually it is not true that that there was no concept of God originally and that it is a recent product of ‘organised religion’. Cycles of belief and disbelief have occurred in history, with advent of prophets re-igniting belief and consequent justice and development, which is then lost over time due to human deviation from the original teachings, and the cycle is restarted with the advent of the next prophet.

CONCLUSION

Hence if we are to search for God, let us not follow the example of the Russian cosmonaut, who on return from space declared that he had searched even beyond the limits of our planet and has not found God [24]; or the poet, who went deep into the caves and shouted for God, and on receiving no response, concluded that God did not exist [25].

Let us try to search for God in a manner taught to us by the prophets who not only appealed equally to their friends and foes during their own lifetime, but whose following continues to run into billions, even millenniums after they pass away.

We would welcome readers to make an open minded analysis of the arguments presented.

References

1. Office of National Statistics, UK, 2011
2. US Census Bureau, Govt of USA, 2008
3. Pew Religious Centre’s Forum on Religion and Public Life, Global Religious Landscape, 2012
4. Encyclopaedia Britannica,
<http://concise.britannica.com/oscar/print?articleId=109434&fullArticle=true&tocId=52333>;
5. Andrew Lang, The Making of Religion, Longmans, Green and Co, London
6. Peter Wilhelm Schmidt, *Ursprung der Gottesidee*, 1925
7. Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/aristot/>
8. Max Planck, Nobel Laureate, and Neil Bohr, founding physicists of Quantum Theory
9. Holy Quran, 2:257
10. Stephen Hawking, Brief History of Time, 1988, Bantam Book Incorporation, NY, USA
11. Guy Gigliotta, The Great Human Migration, Smithsonian, 1988
<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-great-human-migration-13561/?page=2>
12. Karen Armstrong, Mohammad: A Prophet of Our Time, 1991, HarperOne
13. James Michener, Islam: The Misunderstood Religion, Reader’s Digest, 1955
14. Michael H Hart, The 100, A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History, 2000
15. The Holy Quran, 5:4, 3:20
16. Prof E Marshall Johnson, Professor of Anatomy and Developmental Biology, Daniel Baugh Institute, Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, USA
17. Dr Maurice Bucaille, The Bible, The Quran and Science, The Holy Scriptures Examined in the Light of Modern Knowledge, 2003 Paperback
18. Promised Messiah [pboh], Three Types of Knowledge, Philosophy of Teachings of Islam, Revised Ed 2010, Islam International Publications, UK
19. Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion, 2006

20. Edward L Deci and Richard M Ryan, The 'What' and 'Why' of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self Determination of Behaviour, *Psychological Inquiry*, 2000, Vol 11, No 4, 227-268
21. Fred Hoyle, *The Intelligent Universe*, 1983
22. The Holy Quran, 6:35
23. Michael Balter, The Seeds of Civilisation, *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 2005
24. Yuri Gagarin, Russian Cosmonaut, first man in space, after his flight in 1961
25. Percy Bysshe Shelley, English poet, 1792-1822