



AVOIDING ARGUMENTS

SOCIAL ISLAM

LEVEL 4

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Know that different people have different opinions about things
- Know the ills of arguing with parents and those in authority
- Understand that arguing can have many bad effects on the person and the society
- Understand some ways of avoiding arguments especially:
 - the practice of agreeing to disagree
 - avoiding arguments where one has little or no knowledge
 - accepting criticism as improvements not as personal attacks
 - avoiding talking back in anger/frustration and discussing disagreements when calm.
- Understand that Allah does not like those who argue and fight between themselves.

AVOIDING ARGUMENTS

Arguments and quarrels are usually a result of a difference of opinion on an issue and usually arise when one party or more, often both sides, have little or no access to the truth or reality. We as Muslims believe that there is only one truth, but sometimes we may have access to only part of the truth and we may think that that is the whole truth. This ignorance makes us feel as if we are right and everyone else is wrong. This is arrogance and is disliked by Allah (SWT)

On the other hand, sometimes we may know the truth but no one is willing to listen or agree to it. Allah (SWT) in the Qur'ān teaches us that when we meet such people, instead of arguing and quarrelling we have to agree to disagree.

"To you be your religion, and to me my religion" (109:6)

WHY WE ARGUE

There are many reasons why people argue

- 1- Sometimes we feel we know the truth and need to share it with others and when others do not agree, an argument erupts. As Muslims, though we must share the truth, we are discouraged from trying to convince someone who is not willing or ready to be convinced.

The Ahlul Bayt have told us that:

"If a person meets Allah with these three qualities, he will enter paradise from whichever gate he wishes: he whose manners are good, he who fears Allah (swt) when in public and when alone, and he who avoids quarrelling even when in the right"

- 2- Sometimes we feel threatened by someone else and in order to show ourselves as strong or in control we do not concede to the truth if it is presented to us. We feel that if we concede then we will be perceived as weak. As Muslims, we are encouraged to submit to the truth however painful it may be. We cannot be stubborn to the truth.
- 3- Sometimes we argue and rebel when we want to be heard, when we feel no one is listening to us and we feel frustrated. This is as a result of anger. This kind of anger is also prohibited in Islam. Imam 'Ali (a) said:

“Protect yourself from anger for its beginning is insanity and its end is remorse.”ⁱ

We shall discuss anger further in future lessons.

- 4- Sometimes we get defensive and argue when we are criticized about something we have done. This is because we have pride in our hearts. Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) says:

“Amongst my brothers my favourite is one who informs me of my failings and defects”ⁱⁱ.

- 5- Sometimes, or many times, we are completely ignorant of an issue and yet we argue. This is the most disliked form of argument and is a symptom of a disease of the soul. Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) says:

“Avoid arguing, for it leads to disease of the heart”.

This can be due to nationalistic attitudes (e.g. my country/ethnicity is somehow better than yours!), nepotistic family attitudes (e.g. my family is better and bigger than yours), arguments around sports and sporting teams, etc...

- 6- Sometimes we are bored and have nothing to talk about so we start arguments on issues that have no relevance in this world or the next (blue is better than white!?). This Idle talk is also highly discouraged in Islam.

THE EFFECTS OF BEING ARGUMENTATIVE

Entering arguments unnecessarily has many effects on the society in general and on the person as well:

- It leads to animosity between the people arguing and therefore a lack of trust and co-operation especially if arguments happen between friends and family. It can destroy relationships leading to divorce, family feuds and sometimes often lead to major sins such as backbiting, lying etc....
- It leads to the faults of people being exposed and therefore the erosion of trust between people.
- It can waste a lot of time and often perpetuates ignorance and malice.
- It brings about enmity: even though we may be trying to convince a person of the truth, if we are very argumentative, we may end up driving people away from us.

PREVENTING QUARRELS

As Muslims, we are encouraged to stop arguments to the extent that we can even lie to bring believers closer.

“And if two parties of the believers quarrel, make peace between them; but if one of them acts wrongfully towards the other, fight that which acts wrongfully until it returns to Allah’s command; then if it returns, make peace between them with justice and act equitably; surely Allah loves those who act equitably. The believers are but brethren, therefore make peace between your brethren and be careful of (your duty to) Allah that mercy may be had on you.” (49:7-10)

Allah (SWT) says, in this āyah, that we have to promote peace between believers. This āyah applies especially between biological brothers and sisters.

HOW CAN WE STOP BEING ARGUMENTATIVE?

There are several ways in which we can stop being argumentative

- Agree to disagree- This is the most effective means and is encouraged in Islam as we have discussed.
- Only have discussions when the intent from you or the other party is to gain knowledge or increase understanding.

- Avoiding arguments and discussions where one has little or no knowledge
- Accepting criticism as constructive, not as a personal attack
- Avoiding talking back in anger/frustration and instead discussing disagreements when calm. Also accepting scolding in anger (even when we are right or have not done anything wrong) from a parent or authority and discussing the matter calmly once tempers have dissipated. Arguments are often more lethal when in anger and one should avoid and be very passive to an angry person, rather than antagonise them.
- Avoid places of idle talk and ignorance, especially online chat rooms and arguments on social media (Facebook etc...) and similarly avoid people who like to argue.

EXCEPTIONS

We should always remember, however, that engaging in mannered, constructive debates in order to defend or promote Islam is a highly rewarding act. For example, if we have a friend who genuinely wants to learn about Islam, or who accuses Islam but is genuinely interested in getting answers, it is very good to talk to such a person about Islam, especially if we are knowledgeable in this regard. ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Al-Amidi, *Gharar ul-Hikam wa darar ulKalim*, hadith # 2635

ⁱⁱ Bihar, Vol 74, Page 282

ⁱⁱⁱ References: Social Rules in Islam, 'Avoiding Arguments' – Lecture by Sheikh Mansour Leghaei

Review Questions

Q1. Arguing a lot:

- a. Improves our debating skills
- b. Improves our reputation
- c. Leads to disease of the heart

Q2. If someone is not willing to listen to the truth, we are encouraged to:

- a. Get angry at them and never give up until they start listening
- b. Speak to them in a calm and mannered way, and leave them be if they do not want to accept
- c. Get our friends to join in and try to convince them as well. They will be scared of big numbers

Q3. Allah (SWT) promises paradise to a person:

- a. Who avoids quarrelling when they know they are wrong
- b. Who avoids quarrelling when they know they are right
- c. Both of the above