YAQEEN™
curriculum

How can evil coexist with a merciful God?

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Contents

Unit overview

One of the major arguments atheists forward to disprove the existence of God is to highlight that evil exists. How can a God—they argue—who is described as being all-Powerful (omnipotent) and all-Loving (omnibenevolent) allow people to suffer? It concludes that either there is no God (i.e., the pain and suffering we feel is due to random occurrences) or that God is not omnipotent and omnibenevolent. At stake here, then, is not only a question of God's existence, but a challenge of His names and attributes as a powerful and merciful Creator. Individuals confronted with this supposed problem of evil are hence left to believe that, at best, God exists but is not who we think He is, and, at worst, God does not exist at all.

In this unit, we respond to such accusations against God in a number of ways. We begin our first lesson plan by problematizing the idea of pure evil. Through a number of examples, students are presented with the case that "evil" and "good" are time-bound and culturally specific associations. Evil, in other words, does not always look and feel the same to everyone. While the first lesson encourages students to critically re-think their assumptions about evil itself, the second lesson transitions to focusing on the way we understand and relate to God and His actions. Due to the lack of any objective matrix, students will recognize that they cannot categorize God and His actions in human terms. In short, while we do not deny the reality of evil and suffering in the world, we make a distinction between characterizing God's actions, what He wants of us as humans, and what actually happens. This distinction allows students to recognize that God can both exist and be all-Powerful and all-Loving even if we experience suffering.

In the final lesson of the unit, students are presented with a framework through which they can find meaning in suffering. Rather than thinking of our experiences of pain as purely distressing, students are encouraged to reorient their perspectives by recognizing suffering as a moral challenge that is intended to bring forth the best from within us. Ultimately, students should be able to acknowledge evil as a discernible reality that we should strive to remove while also affirming God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence.

Learning objectives

Toward the completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1 Recognize the inherent limitations of human knowledge. *(cognitive)*

2 Recognize that human categories of 'good' and 'evil' are not universal and absolute, but are shaped by one's social and historical context. *(cognitive)*

3 Understand that God's knowledge of reality is all-encompassing and not bound by time or space. *(cognitive)*

4 Provide a logical defense for an all-Good and all-Powerful God despite the presence of perceived 'evil' on earth. *(cognitive)*

5 Understand how the nature of their attachment to God affects their understanding of Him. *(cognitive and affective)*

6 Recognize that the 'problem of evil' can only be resolved with a theocentric worldview. *(cognitive)*

7 Appreciate that the human response to suffering determines the ultimate value of a situation. *(affective)*

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., quantitative data, video, multimedia) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.9-10.8

Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claim or a recommendation for solving a scientific or technical problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or conclusions of a text; summarize complex concepts, processes, or information presented in a text by paraphrasing them in simpler but still accurate terms.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1.C

Use words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.

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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.F

Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

Instructions and activities

Lesson 1 • Can humans objectively identify evil?

Lesson 2

Lesson 3

How have humans historically understood categories of good and evil?

What are some factors that may influence how we evaluate categories of good and evil?

Key vocabulary

Evil
that which is displeasing to God and pushes one away from God's pleasure

Suffering
a seemingly unearned pain at the hands of some other agent (e.g., God, another person, or people)

Cultural perspective
viewing a situation or concept through the eyes of an individual's particular environmental and social contexts

Lesson plan 1

Can humans objectively identify evil?

Stage 1: Big ideas and desired results

Lesson overview

One challenge posed by new atheists such as Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins is questioning the existence of God on the basis of evil. They ask, "if God is all-powerful, why does He allow evil to exist?" A question like this may resonate with many of us when we face our own difficulties or when we watch people suffering around the world in the news. We may think to ourselves, "how could God allow this to happen?"

Muslim theologians have long addressed this question by focusing on what "evil" itself means. They problematize the notion that evil is an absolute or universal category that is fixed and unchanging. Hence, while they recognize the realities of suffering and pain on Earth, Muslim scholars also point out that categories of good and evil look different across time and space. In doing so, they break down the question "why does God allow evil to exist" by challenging the idea that evil, in the first place, looks and feels the same to everyone.

In this first lesson, students will unpack the question "what is evil?" In doing so, they will come to recognize that categories of good and evil are historical artifacts that are shaped by human context and perspective. Due to the fluidity of such categories, they are not universally applicable across time and space. In other words, today's values and sensibilities are not a measure of value that can be utilized to judge the past or the future. Rather than deny the presence of suffering or associations of evil as a time-bounded phenomena, this lesson seeks to problematize the idea that associations of evil and good are absolute since they are determined by human interpretation.

Learning objectives

Toward the completion of this lesson, students should be able to:

1 Recognize the inherent limitations of human knowledge. *(cognitive)*

2 Recognize that human categories of 'good' and 'evil' are not universal and absolute, but are shaped by one's social and historical context. *(cognitive)*

Stage 2: Learning plan

Total time: 60 min

Lesson plan outline

- Section 1, **slides 1–2:** introduce 'evil' and suffering and their relationship to individuals
- Section 2, **slides 3–4:** explore the limitations of our individual human vantage point
- Section 3, **slides 5–8:** connect the story of Musa and Khidr with our inability to judge something as absolutely 'evil'
- Section 4, **slides 9–11:** explore the cultural and historical variances in our judgments of 'good' and 'evil'
- Section 5, **slides 12–13:** accept that only God, not humans, possesses complete knowledge of what is truly 'good' and 'evil'

Supplies and equipment

- Lesson plan 1 presentation (for teacher)
- Projector/screen/computer/internet connection to display presentation and play videos
- Printouts of 1.1 for each group of three students
- Printouts of 1.2 for each student
- Printouts of 1.3 (optional for summative assessment)
- One notecard per student for exit ticket

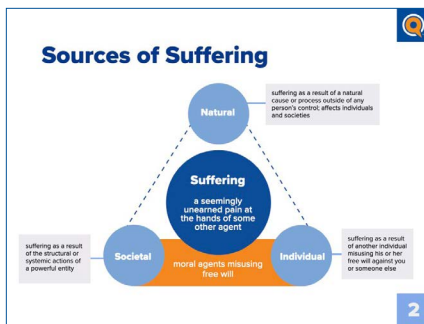## Opening activity (10 min)

Section ①

Slide 1 | Journal prompt: asking students how they relate to 'evil' and suffering

1. Open **slide 1**. Tell students that this unit explores the existence of 'evil' and suffering in the presence of an all-Knowing, all-Powerful, and all-Good God.

2. Begin by explaining that, throughout our lives, we have a tendency to judge acts and events that happen to us and around us using the categories of 'good' and 'evil.' Every one of us has experienced 'evil' in some capacity. It's a discernible reality that we should seek to eliminate. In this unit, we define 'evil' as "that which is displeasing to God and pushes one away from God's pleasure." ✎

3. Ask students to pull out a notebook or a blank sheet of lined paper and to journal about the following:

   a. How do you personally relate to the topic of 'evil' and suffering?

   b. How do these experiences relate to your belief in God?

4. Set the timer to 5–7 minutes while students journal their responses.

5. Unless some students feel comfortable sharing, ask them to hold onto their responses for later. They will revisit their journal entries later in this unit.

'Evil'
that which is displeasing to God and pushes one away from God's pleasure

Journal
How do you personally relate to the topic of 'evil' and suffering?

How do these experiences relate to your belief in God?
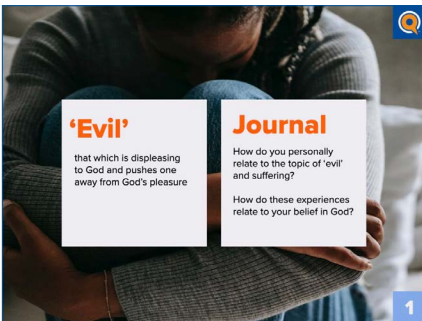
✎ **Teacher's note**

Our definition of 'evil' establishes two important points that will be covered in lessons two and three of this unit. The first point, taught in lesson two, is that 'evil' in this worldly life is any human act that displeases God by contradicting His ideals (God's deontological will, *iradah shar'iyyah*). Acts such as unjust murder, rape, racial discrimination, and so on are examples of 'evil' that God commands us to eliminate. The second point, taught in lesson three, is how our response to suffering reflects God's ultimate judgement of what is good or bad for us. In other words, a seemingly 'evil' act that brings a person closer to God is actually 'good,' and a seemingly 'good' act that pushes a person farther from God is actually 'evil.'

Sources of Suffering

Natural — suffering as a result of a natural cause or process outside of any person's control; affects individuals and societies

Suffering — a seemingly unearned pain at the hands of some other agent

Societal — suffering as a result of the structural or systemic actions of a powerful entity

Individual — suffering as a result of another individual misusing his or her free will against you or someone else

moral agents misusing free will

Slide 2 | Sources of suffering: a diagram and definition

1. Proceed to **slide 2** and direct student attention to the diagram. Tell students that we define "suffering" as a seemingly unearned pain at the hands of some other agent. Continue to explain that there are three sources of suffering (e.g., God, another person, or people). As you go through the definitions on the slide (and below), encourage students to share examples of suffering that would result from each source. Some examples are provided below for your reference.

   a. Individual: Sometimes, we experience suffering on an individual level, meaning that the source of our suffering is the action(s) of an individual who misuses his or her free will in a way that causes us undue pain.

      Examples include being bullied and called 'ugly' by a classmate. Other examples may include slander, theft, torture, and murder.

   b. Societal: Other times, we experience suffering on a societal level, meaning that the source of our suffering is the structural or systemic actions of a powerful entity.

      Examples include being systemically segregated and discriminated against on the basis of skin color. Other examples include genocide, ethnic cleansing, human trafficking, and racially-motivated chattel slavery.

   c. Natural: And other times, we experience suffering (on an individual or societal level) as a result of a natural cause or process outside of any person's control. This source of 'evil' is often attributed to God as the Maker of these natural processes.

      Examples include being born with a physical deformity, like vitiligo or a cleft on your lip. Other examples include natural disasters, diseases, birth defects, droughts, and food shortages.

2. As indicated in the diagram, suffering at the hands of an individual or a society is an example of moral agents misusing their free will in a manner displeasing to God.

3. Inform students that this lesson explores our human inability, as individuals and collectives, to judge acts and events as pure, absolute 'evil.'
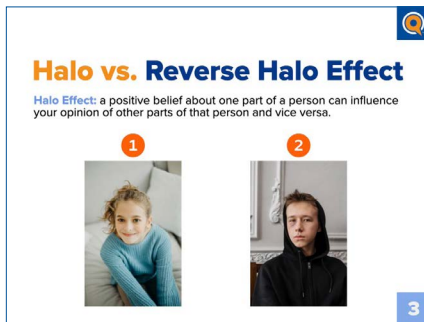
💡 **Teacher takeaway**

The purpose of this section is to introduce students to the topic of this lesson: our human experience with and judgment of 'evil.' Before delving into the learning material for this lesson, it is important to first define the terms 'evil' and suffering, and to help students relate these terms to their personal lives. This will prime students to process their personal experiences with 'evil' through the theological framework provided in this unit. The first layer of this theological framework, and the key takeaway of this lesson, is the understanding that we, as humans, do not possess all-encompassing knowledge of what is truly 'good' and 'evil.' Confined by time and space, we may place acts and events into moral categories (e.g., good, evil, neutral) while recognizing that future generations may disagree with us and find us wrong.
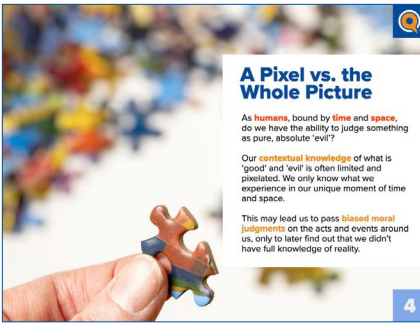
Slide 3 | Activity: halo vs. reverse halo effect 🖊

1. Proceed to **slide 3** and read the definition on the slide. "Halo Effect: a positive belief about one part of a person can influence your opinion of other parts of that person and vice versa." Ask students if they have heard of this concept and to share what they understood from the definition or what they know from prior knowledge.

2. Then, quickly complete the following activity:

   a. Refer students to the two images on the slide and ask them to quickly jot down what immediate judgment they make of the two individuals based on the images alone.

   b. Have students share some of their reactions with the class and engage in a whole class discussion using the following points:

      i. Are their judgments of the person in the first image positive, while their judgments of the person in the second image *negative*? Why?

      ii. Provide the context behind each photo: tell students that the girl in the first photo was expelled from school for cyberbullying and reputed as vicious by her peers. The boy in the second photo was recovering from a traumatic experience in which he heroically interfered to save his friend's life and was hurt in the process. After learning about the context, how do their judgements change?

      iii. It is important to recognize the limitations of our contextual knowledge when judging objects, acts, or events around us. We may judge a situation based on our individual perspective and may think they are accurate, only to later find out that we are wrong due to missing context unknown to us.

      iv. The reverse halo effect contributes to stereotypes made on individuals or groups of people, cancel culture, and discrimination. Have students share some examples of the reverse halo effect and the implications it has on an individual and societal level.

3. Before proceeding to the next slide, explain that when our knowledge of something is limited and pixelated, it is difficult to ascertain the full context and reality of that thing and to judge it accordingly.

Halo vs. Reverse Halo Effect

Halo Effect: a positive belief about one part of a person can influence your opinion of other parts of that person and vice versa.

A Pixel vs. the Whole Picture

As **humans**, bound by **time** and **space**, do we have the ability to judge something as pure, absolute 'evil'?

Our **contextual knowledge** of what is 'good' and 'evil' is often limited and pixelated. We only know what we experience in our unique moment of time and space.

This may lead us to pass **biased moral judgments** on the acts and events around us, only to later find out that we didn't have full knowledge of reality.

4

Slide 4 | A pixel vs. the whole picture?

1. Transition to **slide 4** and read the question on the slide. "As humans, bound by time and space, do we have the ability to judge something as pure, absolute 'evil?'" Ask students to give a thumbs up ("yes") or a thumbs down ("no") in response to the question.

2. Next, connect this question to the "Halo versus Reverse Halo Effect": tell students that the reason they likely misjudged the individuals in the photos, was due to the limited scope of their knowledge. Explain that the limitations of our knowledge hinders our ability to understand the full reality of an act, event, or individual. The following example can help highlight this point further:

   Example: Imagine looking into a room and seeing adults sitting quietly, completely focused on a piece of paper in front of them and writing aggressively. This action will have more significance or meaning when you know they are taking a medical school exam. Now, if someone held the belief that paper exams were a useless, ineffective way to determine the merit of a doctor, they may find this act to be a complete waste of time. Even with proper context of a situation, two people can view the same act differently depending on their personal beliefs or perspectives.

3. Then, read the text on the slide: "Our contextual knowledge of what is 'good' and 'evil' is often limited and pixelated. We only know what we experience in our unique moment of time and space. This may lead us to pass biased moral judgements on the acts and events around us, only to later find out that we didn't have full knowledge of reality."

4. Tell students that the goal of this lesson is to explore our human vantage point toward 'evil' and to determine whether we, as individuals bound by time and space, have the ability to judge something as pure, absolute 'evil.'

> **💡 Teacher takeaway**
>
> Teacher takeaway: To begin the conversation about the problems of 'evil', we first highlight two limitations we experience when judging 'evil' from our human vantage point, contextual knowledge and perspective, through the activity (Halo vs. Reverse Halo Effect). Because humans are bound by time and space, our perception of 'evil' is limited and pixelated since our perspective is influenced heavily by individual and cultural sensibilities. As this lesson establishes, we do not deny the existence of 'evil' and suffering as a test in this life. God tells us in the Qur'an, "Do people think that they will be left (at ease) only on their saying, 'We believe' and will not be put to any test?" [Surat al-'Ankabut, 29:2] And in another verse, God says, "...and when evil (sharr) afflicts him, he is in utter despair" [Surat al-Isra, 17:83]. While 'evil' is a reality of this world, known and measured by God's deontological will (i.e., what is displeasing to God, which we uncover through sincere engagement with revelation), our associations between certain human acts and 'evil' are products of time, and can never be absolute nor universal.

The following activity (slides 5–8) teaches students to consider the limitations of an individual's vantage point in the face of an apparent 'evil.' When we possess only fragmented contextual knowledge, and when we cannot access all vantage points, it is sometimes fallacious to judge an action or event as an 'absolute evil.' In fact, the story of Prophet Musa and Khidr in Surat al-Kahf captures this point succinctly.

A Tale of Two Travelers
fragmented news and partial truths

فَٱنطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا رَكِبَا فِى ٱلسَّفِينَةِ خَرَقَهَا ۖ قَالَ أَخَرَقْتَهَا لِتُغْرِقَ أَهْلَهَا لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا إِمْرًا

They travelled on. Later, when they got into a boat, the man [Khidr] made a hole in it. He [Musa] said, "Did you make a hole in it to drown its passengers? You have certainly done a **terrible thing!**" [Surat al-Kahf, 18:71]

5

18:71

فَٱنطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا رَكِبَا فِى ٱلسَّفِينَةِ خَرَقَهَا ۖ قَالَ أَخَرَقْتَهَا لِتُغْرِقَ أَهْلَهَا لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا إِمْرًا

So they set out, until when they had embarked on the ship, he [i.e., al-Khidr] tore it open. [Moses] said, "Have you torn it open to drown its people? You have certainly done a grave thing."
[Surat al-Kahf, 18:71]

A Tale of Two Travelers
fragmented news and partial truths

فَٱنطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَٰمًا فَقَتَلَهُۥ قَالَ أَقَتَلْتَ نَفْسًا زَكِيَّةًۢ بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ لَّقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا نُّكْرًا

They travelled on until they came across a boy, and the man killed him. He [Musa] protested, "Have you killed an innocent soul, who killed no one? You have certainly done a **horrible thing.**" [Surat al-Kahf, 18:74]

6

18:74

فَٱنطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَٰمًا فَقَتَلَهُۥ قَالَ أَقَتَلْتَ نَفْسًا زَكِيَّةًۢ بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ لَّقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا نُّكْرًا

So they set out, until when they met a boy, he [i.e., Khidr] killed him. [Moses] said, "Have you killed a pure soul for other than [having killed] a soul? You have certainly done a deplorable thing."
[Surat al-Kahf, 18:74]

Section ③

Slides 5–8 | A tale of two travelers: fragmented news and partial truths

1. To begin this section, explain to students that God commanded Musa to follow Khidr for the purpose of gaining knowledge and humility. Musa, being unaware of Khidr's vantage point and the deeper contextual knowledge he possessed, witnesses Khidr execute three calculated actions, each of which instantly provoke Musa into a state of confusion and shock. Details of the remainder of the story are provided below. Proceed to **slide 5**. Read aloud the verse and its translation, and explain to students the first situation Musa encountered with Khidr:

   a. "They travelled on. Later, when they got into a boat, the man [Khidr] made a hole in it. He [Musa] said, 'Did you make a hole in it to drown its passengers? You have certainly done a terrible thing!'" **18:71**

   b. Provide students with the following commentary: Musa and Khidr board the boat of some poor sailorman who generously invites them to ride along, free of charge. Khidr then damages the boat and causes a major leak. This action angers Musa—and rightfully so, considering that one of the objectives of God's law is to protect a person's property, rendering the act of vandalism legally "impermissible"—and he denounces it as an evil act. Khidr reiterates the fact that he told Musa that he wouldn't be able to have patience with him to which Musa promises that, from now on, he would not protest Khidr's actions because he is insistent on learning. You can present students with a modern analogy to try to understand why Musa reacted the way he did. Imagine you and your friend were in need of a ride one day. A kind family offers you a ride for free and as you are exiting the vehicle, you see your friend slashing one of the tires and walking away. How would you react?

2. Transition to **slide 6**. Read aloud the verse and its translation, and explain to students the second situation Musa encountered with Khidr:

   a. "They travelled on until they came across a boy, and the man killed him. He [Musa] protested, 'Have you killed an innocent soul, who killed no one? You have certainly done a horrible thing.'" **18:74**

   b. Provide students with the following commentary: Imagine a little boy, not more than 7–8 years old, playing with his friends. If you see a man walk up and kill the little boy, could anything possibly justify that in your mind? God's law seeks to preserve innocent human life, rendering the act of murder "impermissible." Musa could not stay silent after seeing that act.

A Tale of Two Travelers
fragmented news and partial truths

فَٱنطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَآ أَتَيَآ أَهۡلَ قَرۡيَةٍ ٱسۡتَطۡعَمَآ أَهۡلَهَا فَأَبَوۡاْ أَن يُضَيِّفُوهُمَا فَوَجَدَا فِيهَا جِدَارًا يُرِيدُ أَن يَنقَضَّ فَأَقَامَهُۥ ۖ قَالَ لَوۡ شِئۡتَ لَتَّخَذۡتَ عَلَيۡهِ أَجۡرًا

So they travelled on until they came to the people of a town. They asked them for food, but the people refused to give them hospitality. There they found a wall ready to collapse, so the man repaired it. He [Musa] protested, "If you wanted, you could have **demanded a fee** for this."
[Surat al-Kahf, 18:77]

18:77

فَٱنطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَآ أَتَيَآ أَهۡلَ قَرۡيَةٍ ٱسۡتَطۡعَمَآ أَهۡلَهَا فَأَبَوۡاْ أَن يُضَيِّفُوهُمَا فَوَجَدَا فِيهَا جِدَارًا يُرِيدُ أَن يَنقَضَّ فَأَقَامَهُۥ ۖ قَالَ لَوۡ شِئۡتَ لَتَّخَذۡتَ عَلَيۡهِ أَجۡرًا

So they set out, until when they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality. And they found therein a wall about to collapse, so he [Khidr] restored it. [Moses] said, "If you wished, you could have taken for it a payment."
[Surat al-Kahf, 18:77]

A Tale of Two Travelers
fragmented news and partial truths

- Grab a copy of the Qur'an with a translation (refer to Surat al-Kahf, verses 71, 74, 77, 79-82)
- Assign each reporter one incident
- Create a news headline for each interview with each subject/witness
- **Reflect & Respond:** After reflecting on the story of Khidr and Musa, what assertions can you make about our judgment of 'categorical evils' in the present? Can you truly know what is 'evil' from your individual vantage point?

3. Continue to **slide 7**. Read aloud the verse and its translation, and explain the third situation Musa encountered with Khidr:

   a. "So they travelled on until they came to the people of a town. They asked them for food, but the people refused to give them hospitality. There they found a wall ready to collapse, so the man repaired it. He [Musa] protested, 'If you wanted, you could have demanded a fee for this.'" **18:77**

   b. Provide students with the following commentary: Imagine that you are passing through a neighborhood and you are desperately in need of something—a glass of water to quench your thirst, a bandage to patch an injury, a phone to reach an emergency contact—and not one person from this neighborhood offers you what you need. While in this desperate state, rejected by an entire community, your friend decides to repair an old fence running through the neighborhood. When Musa saw Khidr performing a similar generous act in the city that rejected them, he was frustrated that Khidr didn't ask the people for compensation.

4. After laying out the three scenes for students, proceed to **slide 8** to set up the activity instructions. Divide students into groups of three and pass out copies of **1.1 "A Tale of Two Travelers."** Tell students that, to further explore our limited contextual knowledge of 'evil' from our individual vantage points, they are going to participate in an activity using the story of Musa and Khidr. Set up the activity by instructing students to complete the following:

   a. Form groups of three and then grab one copy of the Qur'an with a translation (you will need to refer to Surat al-Kahf, verses 71, 74, 77, and 79–82 during the course of the activity). Students may also use their smartphones to access the Qur'an and its translation if physical copies of the Qur'an aren't available.

   b. Imagine this: You and two colleagues are news reporters, sent by your editor-in-chief to cover breaking news on a string of incidents following two travelers in the region. The three incidents, the involved subjects, and the witnesses are listed on your handout. If you only interviewed one of the subjects immediately after each incident, what kind of story headline would you publish based on their individual vantage point (i.e., their limited contextual knowledge and perspective of the incident)?

   c. Each reporter (i.e., group member) should cover one of the three incidents and then create a news headline for each exclusive interview that captures the subjects: interpretation of the incident, moral judgment of the act/event, as well as their overall feelings and attitudes.

   d. After creating the headlines, reflect upon and respond to the following question on **1.1**: After reflecting on the story of Khidr and Musa, what assertions can you make about our judgment of 'categorical evils' in the present? Can you truly know what 'evil' is from your individual vantage point?

5. Once students have completed the activity, regroup in preparation for a whole-class discussion.

   a. For each of the three incidents, summarize what happened and then call on members of each group to share their headlines for the set of subjects and witnesses involved. The goal is for students to generate headlines that reflect each interviewee's unique interpretation of the incident, as well as their moral judgment of the act or event.

      For example, interviewing Musa after he witnessed Khidr damage the boat belonging to the poor sailormen may lead to this headline, based on Musa's vantage point and limited contextual knowledge of the situation: "Generous Sailormen Conned By Boat Vandalizer." This is because Musa interpreted Khidr's act—that is, vandalism toward poor and generous individuals—as a categorical, morally reprehensible 'evil' and a source of undue suffering to innocent lives. Musa could not perceive how this act could be a necessary good from someone else's vantage point.

      As another example, interviewing Khidr after he damaged the boat belonging to the poor sailormen may lead to an entirely different headline, based on Khidr's vantage point and deeper contextual knowledge of the situation: "Man Saves Poor Sailormen From Tyrannical King." This is because Khidr, unlike Musa, knew that a tyrannical king was confiscating every sound boat and ship in the sea for his navy. Vandalizing the sailor man's boat was not a categorical 'evil' but a necessary good—an act of compassion toward the poor men and a protection from the larger impending 'evil.'

   b. After students have shared their headlines, open the floor to a broader discussion using the Reflect & Respond question on **1.1**: "As we pass through life, we tend to interpret the 'evil' occurring around us and to us from our unique vantage point, where our contextual knowledge and perspective of an action or event are limited. After reflecting on the story of Musa and Khidr, what assertions can you make about our judgment of 'absolute evils' in the present? Can you truly know what 'evil' is from your individual vantage point?" Sample student response: Our judgment of 'evil' is built upon our fragmented, pixelated knowledge of an act or event. We do not possess all the necessary vantage points to confidently describe something as an absolute 'evil.' So even though vandalism is generally an 'evil' act of injustice upon someone else's property, and a misuse of the individual agency God gifted humankind, in the context of the poor sailorman, having his boat vandalized protected him from having his entire boat confiscated from the tyrannical king nearby. He was able to keep his boat at the cost of some minor, repairable damage.

   c. Call on various students to share the headlines they developed. Conclude by sharing the main points from the takeaway below.
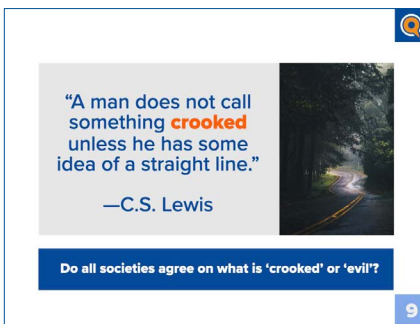
Students should recognize that, even as a knowledgeable prophet with recourse to revelation, Musa discovered with time that some acts deemed as evils, such as vandalism and murder, can actually produce necessary good when examined from another vantage point. Khidr's act of vandalism protected the sailorman from having his boat completely confiscated, and his act of murder protected the righteous parents from a lifetime of spiritual tribulation and rebellion wrought by this specific child. It's important to note that both Khidr and Musa were acting from their vantage point and were both correct. Musa made his associations of Khidr's actions by referring to revelation, but what he was missing was God's knowledge and vantage point. Khidr, on the other hand, was aware of God's knowledge so he had the correct perspective and complete contextual knowledge to perceive those acts differently. The difference between Khidr and Musa isn't to relativize or dismiss the realities of injustice and crime.   True justice exists, and by the dictates of revelation, we are provided with an index of morality by which to evaluate when murder is just or unjust. Although we cannot deny anyone's association of 'evil' to a particular act, especially if they are clearly presented in the Qur'an as good or evil, this does not mean that such an association is timeless and universal. Most importantly, it does not mean that God is enacting in an evil fashion since we do not possess complete knowledge.

The next lesson plan will delve into this idea more. The primary takeaway from the story of Musa and Khidr is that what appears 'categorically evil' at face value may not be so when factoring in other vantage points or perspectives, namely God's perspective and knowledge.

Section ④

Slide 9 | 'Crooked' versus 'straight': shifting from individual to societal judgment of 'evil'. ✎

1. Proceed to **slide 9** and read aloud the displayed quote: "A man does not call something crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line" (C.S. Lewis). Pointing to the accompanying photo, explain that a crooked line only becomes apparent when juxtaposed with a straight line.

2. Call on some students to briefly share how this quote connects to our conversations so far on the existence of 'evil.' While students are sharing, explain that, in this metaphor, the straight line is our human judgment of 'good' and the crooked line is our human judgment of 'evil.' This quote highlights that the only way to recognize a straight line is by having a clear conception of a crooked line. In other words, one recognizes 'good' or 'evil' in the absence of the other. What complicates this is that our individual, cultural, and historical vantage points may lead us to differ on what is straight and what is crooked. With such difficulty in defining 'absolute evil,' we should humbly concede that we cannot pass moral judgment on the acts and events that God wills into existence.

3. Follow up the conversation with the second question, "Do all societies agree on what is 'crooked' or 'evil'?" Facilitate a whole-class discussion around this question and invite students to engage one another in their responses and substantiating evidence. Use the following prompts to stimulate student engagement:

   a. How do you think your understanding of 'evil' or 'crooked' would be different if you were born in another generation like that of your great-grandparents? If you were born one century ago? Two centuries ago?

   b. In other words, are there acts that you would deem 'evil' or 'crooked' that people culturally and historically consider to be 'good' or 'straight,' or vice-versa?

"A man does not call something **crooked** unless he has some idea of a straight line."

—C.S. Lewis

Do all societies agree on what is 'crooked' or 'evil'?

9

✎ **Teacher's note**

Up until this point, students explored our judgment of 'evil' from the individual vantage point. We demonstrated our difficulty as individuals (with limited contextual knowledge) to judge acts and events as absolute 'evil.' This next section shifts student attention to the collective: each society across time and place experiences unique historical and cultural conditions that inform their judgment of 'good' and 'evil.' The fluidity of such moral categories make it difficult, as collectives, to judge something as an absolute, transhistorical 'evil.'

c. Prompt students to consider the way their present-day cultural sensibilities shape their judgment of 'evil.' For example, some people in our present culture may find the human consumption of animals and animal products, the prohibition of women in the workforce, or even the legal ownership of another human being (i.e., slavery) to be 'evil,' abhorrent acts that cause undue suffering to innocent populations, though that categorization wasn't the case historically.

4. To conclude the discussion, establish the following point to the class: even with revelation and a general understanding of what displeases God, each culture and historical era ushers in a particular set of circumstances that inform our ideas around moral values, which in turn inform our conceptualization of 'good versus evil' or 'straight versus crooked.' What we regard as a cause of suffering today may be more reflective of our cultural and historical sensibilities than an absolute, transhistorical value.

Slide 10 | 'Good' or 'evil?': Do societies agree on their judgment of these acts?

1. Proceed to **slide 10** and direct student attention to the images on the slide. Ask students to think about how they would interpret the two acts displayed in the images: arranged marriages and mothers in the workforce. Allow students a chance to share their unfiltered reactions prior to discussing the two acts in more detail.

2. Next, share the following information about each image:

a. Arranged marriages: Not to be confused with a forced marriage, an arranged marriage is a marital union in which the bride and groom are chosen by their respective parents/guardians. This practice is customary in many societies (and permissible in Islam when the consent of the two individuals is solicited). However, in the contemporary West, arranged marriages are commonly judged as 'evil' and a breach of a person's individual liberty. Can we label arranged marriages as an absolute, transhistorical 'evil?' Are our moral judgments of such act a product of an absolute truth or our unique historical and cultural conditions?

b. Mothers in the workforce: In the unfiltered student reactions given earlier, there may have been responses associating working women with empowerment, success, and independence. However, other cultures might look at this picture and pity the woman for having to bear the burden of motherhood and employment at the same time. They may consider the pressure to juggle two large responsibilities as a source of undue suffering while men, on the other hand, typically do not have to juggle the same mental and physical requirements that many women in the workforce face.

Before proceeding, ask students to share other acts we may judge as 'good' or 'evil' based on our cultural context that may elicit different responses from people of other cultures. Some of their responses may be polygamy, child labor, leaving your family house at the age of 18, carrying arms, etc.

'Good' or 'Evil?'

Arranged Marriages   Mothers in the Workforce

Every society will morally judge an act or event through the lens of their unique historical and cultural context.

10

3. After the discussion, read the statement at the bottom of the slide: Every society will morally judge an act or event through the lens of its unique historical and cultural context. Explain that while societies may attempt to judge an act and label it as 'good' or 'evil,' the moral categories used to place a judgement are fluid and cannot be universally applied across time and space.

Slide 11 | The implications of imposing our cultural views of 'good'

1. Proceed to **slide 11**. Before reading the text, tell students that they will now see the dangerous implications of imposing our cultural views of 'good' and 'evil' on other societies on a massive scale.

2. Provide them with the following background information prior to discussing the tweet:

   The Chinese government has detained over a million Uighurs, a minority majority Muslim group living in northwest China, and placed them in 'reeducation camps.' Since 2017, those imprisoned have been subjected to religious restrictions and forced sterilization. Many governments, UN officials, and human rights organizations have labeled what the Chinese government is doing to the Uighurs as genocide and urged them to stop. The Chinese government has defended its actions and has packaged it as liberation. The tweet on the slide is only one example of how they describe the ethnic cleansing of Uighurs.

3. Summarize the key points from the takeaway to the class.

💡 **Teacher takeaway**

In the beginning of the lesson, students realized that what we habitually label as 'good' and 'evil' today, from our limited vantage points, is simply what we think serves or contradicts our individual or collective interests. So while 'evil' and 'suffering' do exist, according to Imam al-Ghazali, "all categorical moral judgments that are not grounded in scripture entail the fallacy of universalizing the particular." This is like using a singular experience in the present as a yardstick by which to judge all other similar events, without taking into consideration the specific contextual details of those other events. For example, if an arranged marriage in our present-day context is deemed an 'evil,' this does not mean that it is an objective, universal 'evil' that applies in every case of having one's parents select their spouse. The same goes to the concept of female empowerment. A woman that is encouraged to work and is admired for it in one culture might be discouraged from it and even perceive it as a burden on her in another. The danger lies in not only the cultural insensitivity and xenophobia that occurs in our society but also when certain cultural interpretations are universalized and imposed on those around us. Governments, courts, workplaces, and individuals in power can violate basic human rights over these differences. An example of this is what is happening in China to the Uighur Muslims. The forced sterilization of Uighur Muslims is a heinous attempt to culturally cleanse this minority group by universalizing the ideal Chinese citizen (who conforms to the official atheist party's doctrines and the majority Han-Chinese society's customs) upon all those who live in China. This is an example of what happens when a powerful group attempts to universalize their way of life as the only ideal version of existence.

A Humble Admission
'evil' and 'suffering' from our vantage point

Before they embark on their journey, Khidr warns Musa, "And how can you have patience for **what you do not fully encompass in knowledge?**"

وَكَيْفَ تَصْبِرُ عَلَى مَا لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهِ خُبْرًا

[Surat al-Kahf, 18:68]

So whose knowledge and wisdom encompasses all vantage points?

12

18:68

وَكَيْفَ تَصْبِرُ عَلَى مَا لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهِ خُبْرًا

"And how can you have patience for what you
do not fully encompass in knowledge?"
[Surat al-Kahf, 18:68]

Exit Ticket
3, 2, 1

3 | Name and briefly define the three sources of suffering.
2 | List two reasons why we cannot judge with absolute certainty what is 'good' and 'evil.'
1 | Share one question you still have about 'evil' and suffering.

13

Consolidation (10 min)
Section 5

Slide 12 | A humble admission: 'evil' and 'suffering' from our vantage point

1. Proceed to **slide 12**. Tell students that 'evil' and 'suffering' are true realities of this worldly existence. Not a second passes except that, somewhere in the world, a person or people are suffering from various sources of tribulation: natural disasters, hunger, poverty, genocide, abuse, bullying, slander, and the list goes on. From our human vantage point, the suffering we or others experience may seem absolutely 'evil,' unnecessary, and perhaps excessive. In a state of anger and repulsion, we may pose the existential question, "why?" Why do 'evil' and 'suffering' exist, and why does God allow them to happen?

2. Call on a student to read the verse and its translation: Before they embark on their journey, Khidr warns Musa, "And how can you have patience for what you do not fully encompass in knowledge?" **18:68**

   a. Highlight the term (تُحِطْ) and tell students that tuhit means to fully encompass something in knowledge and understanding; to fully grasp a matter from every possible angle and aspect.

   b. Khidr utters these words to Musa as if to say, "Musa, you are going to witness acts that appear 'evil' at times. You may naturally react with anger and repulsion and make rash moral judgments about what you experience. But you have incomplete knowledge of the reality of each situation, so you will need to bear them with patience."

   c. Tell students that, during the course of this lesson, they explored personal, cultural, and historical variances in our human categorization of 'evil.' We concluded that we are wholly incapable of judging an act or event as an absolute 'evil' from our limited contextual knowledge—as the Qur'an explicitly states (لَمْ تُحِطْ). So whose knowledge and wisdom encompasses all vantage points, if not ours?

   d. The answer here is "God." While we hold pixels, God holds the entire picture.

Slide 13 | Exit ticket: 3, 2, 1

1. To conclude session one of this lesson, proceed to **slide 13** and give each student a notecard to complete the 3, 2, 1 exit ticket:

   a. Name and briefly define the three sources of suffering.

   b. List two reasons why we cannot judge with absolute certainty what is 'good' and 'evil.'

   c. Share one question you still have about 'evil' and 'suffering.'

2. Give students five minutes to complete their responses. Then, collect their notecards in order to review them and assess for understanding before the next session. If time permits, have students share out some of their responses before submission.

💡 Teacher takeaway

The purpose of this section is to help students transcend their individual vantage points—which are shaped and molded by individual, cultural, and historical experiences—and to reflect upon God's vantage point when facing an apparent 'evil.' It is important that students consider the bigger picture of an act or event that is beyond our myopic, pixelated perspectives. What we deem an absolute, universal 'evil' on the human plane, such as child marriage or an act of vandalism, is based on a fragmented interpretation of reality. For an all-Wise, all-Powerful, and all-Good God, His vantage point is not subjected to the human constraints of time (historical era), place (culture), and personal preference. He allows these moments of suffering to happen with a wisdom and knowledge that is beyond our imagination; therefore, we are not in a position to assess and judge a situation based on our extremely limited knowledge and wisdom. As explored earlier in this lesson, students discovered that the human vantage point has limited knowledge and perspective. By remembering the story of Musa and Khidr, we understand that Musa questioned Khidr's 'evil' acts before understanding ultimate knowledge since in a way, Khidr had his own vantage point that justified the acts. While we may characterize an event as 'evil' and a source of unnecessary suffering, it may not be so from God's vantage point. Instead, we must appeal to our knowledge of God as conveyed in the Qur'an when processing a situation that we feel is a source of suffering, a concept that will be further explored in the next lesson.

Worksheet 1.1

name: _____ date: _____

A Tale of Two Travelers
fragmented news and partial truths

Directions: You and two colleagues are news reporters, sent by your editor-in-chief to cover breaking news of a string of incidents following two travelers in the region. The three incidents, the involved subjects, and the witnesses are listed below. If you only interviewed one of the subjects immediately after each incident, what kind of story headline would you publish based on their individual vantage point?

Split up so that each reporter covers one of the three incidents. Then, create a news headline for each exclusive interview that captures the subject's:

• interpretation of the incident
• moral judgment of the act/occurrence
• overall feelings and attitudes

Two headlines are provided below as an example. Be creative and get ready to share your headlines with the whole class.

Reporter A: _____

Interviewee	News Headline
The sailor man	
Musa	Generous Sailormen Conned By Boat Vandalizer
Khidr	
The king	

1.1 A Tale of Two Travelers   1

1.1

Worksheet 1.2

name: _____ date: _____

Breaking News
a series of unfortunate events

Directions: You are a news reporter of the Ancient Near East, living some time between the 17th-15th centuries BCE. You hear about a missing child named Yusuf undergoing a series of unfortunate events that eventually land him in prison. During the course of your investigation, you report Prophet Yusuf's story as breaking news using one of four mediums of communication. Select your medium:

❶	Twitter Thread	• Format: short-form writing • 6 professional, well-composed news tweets, between 200-280 characters each • Submit your tweets using the Twitter templates provided • Include two hashtags at the end of each tweet
❷	Blog Posts	• Format: long-form writing • 4 professional, well-composed blog posts, approximately one paragraph each • Submit your blog posts using the blog templates provided • Include a title and a byline (your historical name) at the beginning of each blog post
❸	Radio Broadcast	• Format: short audio recordings • 4 professional, well-articulated audio recordings, approximately 2-3 minutes each • Submit your audio recordings using one of the available teacher-recommended platforms
❹	Video Broadcast	• Format: short video recordings • 2 professional, well-delivered video recordings, approximately 2-3 minutes each • Submit your video recordings using one of the available teacher-recommended platforms

1.2 Breaking News   1

1.2

Worksheet 1.3

name: _____ date: _____

@ _____

#_____ #_____

@ _____

#_____ #_____

@ _____

#_____ #_____

@ _____

#_____ #_____

1.3 Templates   1

1.3

Stage 3: Assessments

Performance tasks

Formative assessment

1. To assess the first objective—recognizing that different vantage points produce different points of views—you may collect student submissions of **1.1 "A Tale of Two Travelers."** Students study the story of Musa and Khidr and then generate news headlines that capture each individual's vantage point, based on that individual's contextual knowledge and perspective regarding some apparent acts of 'evil.' Each headline should differ from the others to reflect the diversity of perspectives, moral judgments, and interpretations of Khidr's acts. You may also use their responses to the **Reflect & Respond** question, "After reflecting on the story of Musa and Khidr, what assertions can you make about our judgment of 'categorical evils' in the present? Can you truly know what is 'evil' from your individual vantage point?"

2. To formatively assess the second objective, you may collect and review student responses to the exit ticket at the end of the lesson. The second task asks students to list two reasons why we cannot judge with absolute certainty what is 'good' and what is 'evil.' Their responses should demonstrate an understanding that what we consider 'good' and 'evil' isn't absolute, making it difficult to make categorical judgments through our individual or cultural vantage points.

Summative assessment

Students will complete take-home assignment **1.2 "Breaking News,"** which entails reporting on some of the apparent 'evil' and 'suffering' inflicted upon Prophet Yusuf from the vantage point of a third-party investigator. As outsiders, without full knowledge of Yusuf's situations and where they will eventually lead him, students will communicate their interpretation of the incidents Yusuf experiences in his youth, as well as their moral judgments and sentiments they hold, in the form of a news report using one of four mediums:

• A Twitter thread
• Blog posts
• A radio broadcast
• A video broadcast

The criteria for each medium of communication are listed on **1.2**, and optional templates for the Twitter thread and blog posts are available on **1.3 "Templates."** Students should create news reports for two of the four main incidents in Surat Yusuf:

• Part one, **sibling abuse and abandonment** (Surat Yusuf, 12:8–18)
• Part two, **slave trade** (Surat Yusuf, 12:19–20)
• Part three, **sexual assault, accusations, and gossip** (Surat Yusuf, 12:23–32)
• Part four, **imprisonment** (Surat Yusuf, 12:33–35)

To have students submit the audio or video broadcast, read through the list and determine which platform for submission would be most suitable:

1. Learning Management System (LMS): The preferred method of submission would be through the LMS that is already integrated in your school. This may be Google Classroom, Canvas, Blackboard, etc. If you already have an LMS set up for your class, instruct students to upload their video or audio submissions for the assignment through that platform.

2. If there is not an LMS available, you may choose an alternative route:

    a. Google Drive: Once students have an audio or video file completed, they can transfer it to their personal Google Drive. This can be done by simply dragging and dropping the file into the Drive from the student's desktop. Once the file is uploaded to their Google Drive, it can then be emailed directly to the teacher. This method would require students to have a Google account.

    b. Dropbox: Using a basic account on Dropbox, students can upload their audio or video files directly to dropbox.com. Once files are uploaded, students can share the link with you to review their submissions. This method would require students to have a free Dropbox account.'

    c. We-Transfer: This method acts more like an e-mail service and does not require an account to share files. Students can simply go to wetransfer.com, upload the file, and input the teacher's email address to turn in their assignment.

    d. YouTube: The final option is to have students upload their video or audio file on YouTube. Students would have to change the settings to make their upload private, which can be done in the Privacy Settings within their account. Then, students can easily share the video with the teacher through a link or by giving the teacher viewing access. This method would require students to have a YouTube account.

Optional extension

Stage 1: Big ideas and desired results

Lesson overview

The purpose of this optional extension lesson is to further demonstrate the fluid nature of our human categorization of 'evil' using the example of 'child marriages'. Classified today as a violation of human rights, the phenomenon of 'child marriages' infuriates our modern cultural sensibilities as an act of injustice that causes undue suffering to the lives of children all over the world. While such reactions seem valid in the context of our twenty-first century Western experiences, they make little sense when discussing the circumstances of past societies. By exploring historical examples of 'child marriages,' students may begin to understand the difficulty in defining an act as an absolute, categorical, transhistorical 'evil.'

Disclaimer: The optional extension of this lesson delves deeper into the second objective using the topic of 'child marriages' as a case study for the social and historical variances in our categorization of 'evil.' As a phenomenon that provokes the sensibilities of contemporary Western audiences—and perhaps at times rightfully so, given our modern context—highlighting the complex contexts in which 'child marriage' was historically categorized as an acceptable 'good' may be difficult and uncomfortable for teachers and students alike. If you choose to proceed with this topic, be sure to read the material in this lesson slowly and carefully, especially the teacher's guide at the beginning of this unit and student handout **1.4 "A Historical Exploration."** Also be sure to emphasize to your students that the purpose of this lesson is not to justify all 'child marriages' or condone child marriage in the present, but rather, to demonstrate the fluidity of our moral categories. What is deemed 'good' and perhaps necessary in one historical era may not apply to another era with a completely different set of variables and circumstances. As an easier alternative, you may choose to swap 'child marriage' for 'arranged marriage' and present new material that mirrors the style and structure of this lesson plan. Please use discretion based on your needs and the needs of your classroom.

Stage 2: Learning plan

Total time: 60 min

Lesson plan outline

- Section 1, **slides 1–3:** introduce 'child marriage' and the Prophet's ﷺ marriage to Aisha
- Section 2, **slides 4–6:** a historical exploration of 'child marriage'
- Section 3, **slides 7–11:** claim, evidence and reasoning for the fluidity of moral categories.

Supplies and equipment

- Lesson plan 1 optional extension presentation (for teacher)
- Projector/screen/computer/internet connection to display presentation and play videos
- Printouts of 1.4 for each group of three students

Opening activity (5 min)

Section ①

Slide 1 | Owning animals: an absolute, transhistorical 'evil'?

1. Proceed to **slide 1** and pose the following question to the students: "Is the act of owning an animal an absolute, transhistorical 'evil'?" Students may communicate their response with a thumbs up for "yes" or a thumbs down for "no". 🖍

2. Next, tell students to imagine that a future generation of people is studying our historical era and discovers that our generation kept animals as pets. Millions of internet photos and pet store relics from our time reveal how we captured animals from the wild, tied them to leashes, confined them to cages, and prevented them from openly exploring their natural, outdoor environment. Upon learning these facts, this new generation considers us to be perpetrators of suffering and violators of animal rights, as the practice of owning animals in their era is categorized as an 'evil.'

3. Pose the second question to students: "What if a future generation of people who categorized it as 'evil' judged us today for our present-day ownership of animals? Is that fair to us?" Allow students to indicate their responses with a thumbs up for "yes" or a thumbs down for "no."

4. Once all students have responded, call on a few of them to elaborate. You may use the following questions to propel the discussion forward: why can or can't a future generation judge our actions based on their understanding of 'evil'? Should we expect our categories of 'good' and 'evil' to remain static throughout history? As a human race, do we become more morally progressive or advanced with time?
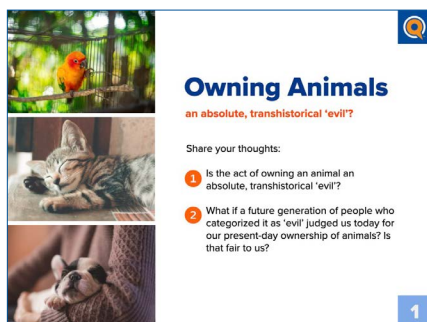
🖍 Teacher's note

It is likely that the class majority will associate animal ownership with 'good,' not 'evil,' since having a domesticated family pet is a common practice in our times. In fact, many students may even have their own pets, like a cat or a hamster, or know family and friends that have them.

The purpose of this opening activity is to prompt students to consider the nature of our moral categories. They do not remain static throughout human history, nor do humans progress with time in our understanding of 'good' and 'evil.' This is because what a society deems 'evil' and a source of suffering at one point may not apply in another historical context.

For example, our contemporary discourse around animal rights, global climate change, the human consumption of animals and animal products, and industrial animal agriculture practices have heightened our sensibilities toward our treatment of animals. Actions that were considered 'good' historically may now be under scrutiny due to shifting human sensibilities. In this optional extension lesson, students will delve deeper into the fluid nature of our moral categories in order to realize that while 'evil' is a reality of this world—known and measured by what God reveals in scripture—our general associations with 'evil' and certain human acts and events are heavily shaped by our individual, cultural, and historical vantage points. This makes it difficult to judge acts and events as absolute ontological 'evils' and then apply such categories universally.

Learning activity (45 min)

Slide 2 | 'Child marriages' and the Prophet's ﷺ marriage to Aisha: a contemporary controversy

Acts of 'Evil' | 'Child Marriages'

1. Continue to **slide 2**. Tell students that, oftentimes, our judgments of 'good' and 'evil' are time-bound and shaped by our unique historical context that cannot be applied to other historical eras. Yet we have a tendency to judge people of past societies using our present-day understanding of 'evil.'

2. Provide students with the following example "The Prophet's ﷺ marriage to Aisha, which was celebrated by his followers and completely accepted by his enemies, is a contemporary controversy. Why?" Call on some students to share their thoughts. You may use the sample response below to briefly explain this question. Then explain that you will revisit that topic as a whole class shortly.

   a. Sample answer: The Prophet's ﷺ marriage to Aisha is a contemporary controversy because societies today have feelings of revulsion and apprehension toward 'child marriages' (i.e., marriages involving an individual or individuals under the age of eighteen). Since we may consider child marriages to be evil today, we judge the actions of past societies without sensitivity and attention to their unique historical contexts. ✏️

3. Inform students that this lesson seeks to establish two points regarding our human perceptions of 'evil':

   a. The first point is that our present-day categories of 'good' and 'evil' are products of our historical era, shaped by the complex contexts and sensibilities of our time.

   b. The second point is that our present-day categories of 'good' and 'evil' are not absolute and cannot be used to judge past and future societies.

✏️ **Teacher's note**

It is important to make sure that students remain respectful when sharing their thoughts on this question. Students should not engage in or contribute to the blasphemous and vulgar comments that are common among contemporary critics of this issue.

Slide 3 | Acts of 'evil': 'child marriages'

1. Proceed to **slide 3**. Tell students that the Prophet's ﷺ marriage to Aisha is presently labeled a 'child marriage', which is "any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child," according to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

2. Next, ask students to silently think about the phenomenon of 'child marriages' for 15–20 seconds.

3. Once time is up, go around the room and have all students share something quickly about the words, images, and experiences they personally associate with 'child marriages.' Encourage students to be honest in their responses, as there are no right or wrong answers. They should also take note of the prevailing attitude, whether positive or negative, their peers have toward this phenomenon.

4. Next, click on the hyperlink embedded in the slide ("Read").

   a. Slowly scroll down the page to showcase the images and text on the UNICEF site for 'child marriage.'

   b. Tell students that, according to UNICEF, a 'child marriage' is categorized as a human rights violation—an intrinsic 'evil' that produces immense suffering by systemically barring children, primarily females, from educational opportunities, quality (reproductive) health, and overall psychological well-being.

   c. Around the world, 1 in 5 females and 1 in 30 males get married as children. Believing that this phenomenon is entrenched in gender inequality, humanitarians and social justice activists around the world are working to abolish 'child marriages', focusing especially on less developed, third-world countries in Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and the Middle East. However, 'child marriages' aren't exclusively a non-Western phenomenon. Some American state governments allow girls as young as 12 and 13 to legally wed with parental consent, and half of the states have no minimum age requirement for marriage. In fact, "it's estimated that nearly a quarter million children as young as 12 married in the US between 2000 and 2010."[1]

Section ❷

Slide 4 | Child marriage: an absolute, transhistorical 'evil'?

1. Close the UNICEF website and proceed to **slide 4**. Ask students to indicate—with a thumbs up or a thumbs down—whether or not they believe 'child marriages' are an absolute, transhistorical 'evil' and a source of suffering. You may call on some students to elaborate on their responses.

2. Next, point out that the term 'child marriage' is in single quotes. Explain to students that our use of single quotes around the term is to indicate that it is in today's historical context that a post-pubescent individual under the age of eighteen is called a 'child,' rendering his or her marriage a 'child marriage.' However, in past societies, a marriage involving people under the age of eighteen was just a normal marriage, common and suitable for the conditions of their time.

Slide 5 | A historical exploration of 'child marriages': group activity

1. Proceed to **slide 5** and pass out one copy of 1.4 "A Historical Exploration" per each group of three students.

2. Inform students that, as a group, they are going to complete a historical exploration of 'child marriages' in order to better understand how our perspectives have shifted on this issue. The exploration is broken into three sections using the Claim, Evidence, and Reasoning model (CER):

   a. Claim: A claim is a statement that is believed to be true. By the end of the activity, students should be able to establish the truth of the following claim, "We cannot speak about 'good' and 'evil' in absolute terms because, oftentimes, our categories of 'good' and 'evil' are cultural, time-bound human constructs. So while 'child marriage' is categorized as an 'evil' today, based on our cultural and historical context, this classification is not universal and absolute. Past generations that practiced 'child marriage' experienced unique historical conditions that made it acceptable and 'good.'"

   b. Evidence (parts 1–4): In order to establish the truth of that claim, students will need to study the information that is available in four parts: a timeline of changing historical conditions, a gallery of historical 'child marriages,' an infographic on the Prophet's ﷺ marriage to Aisha, and a supplementary reading on the changing definitions of "childhood," "adulthood," "maturity," and "marriage" through time. They should use the graphic organizer at the end of 1.4 to list three evidence statements, which will then be used to develop a reasoning.

   c. Reasoning: After they have studied and gathered the evidence from section two, they will formulate a reasoning which serves as a justification for how and why the claim is true. Written in 3–4 complete sentences, a strong reasoning ties in the evidence collected to support the claim. They should use the following sentence frame to begin their reasoning: "Based on the evidence, the claim is supported because…"

3. Proceed to **slide 6** for optional material, or set the timer to 20–25 minutes while students complete the activity.
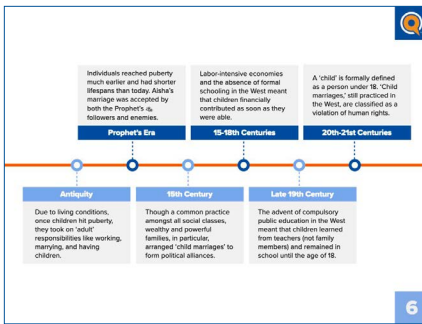
Slide 6 | A timeline of changing historical conditions (optional) ✎

1. Continue to **slide 6** to display the timeline of changing historical conditions. Tell students that as they complete the activity, they will need to keep some important historical points in mind. Read some of the points along the timeline and ask students to share what they understand from each point. Follow up their responses with additional commentary using the notes below:

   a. Antiquity (3–8th centuries BCE): Due to living conditions, once children hit puberty, they took on adult responsibilities like working, marrying, and having children. In other words, the transition to adulthood began at the onset of puberty. A person would mingle with adults, learn labor skills and marry as soon as he or she was able. Because the average life expectancy was between the ages 35 and 40, there was a societal imperative to maximize fertility. People generally married young in order to continue the human population. In fact, adolescence wasn't a recognized psychosocial developmental stage; people were either prepubescent children or post-pubescent adults, and assumed their roles accordingly.

   b. Prophet's h era (7th century BCE): People reached puberty much earlier and had shorter lifespans than today. Aisha's marriage was accepted by both his followers and enemies. It is important to note that the age of Aisha at the time of her marriage is a modern problem, one brought up by Western orientalists in an attempt to defame the Prophet ﷺ. Even the Prophet's staunchest enemies found no issue with his marriage to Aisha (who was nine and post-pubescent when she consummated her marriage). Had it been 'evil' and a source of undue suffering in their historical context, his enemies would have targeted their marriage as part of their relentless smear campaign, but they didn't. This is because the historical conditions of late antiquity made 'child marriage' an acceptable act.

   c. 15th century: Though a common practice among all social classes, wealthy and powerful families, in particular, arranged 'child marriages' to form political alliances. It wasn't until two centuries ago in the West that people selected their spouses primarily for love, compatibility, and the shared pursuit of happiness. Most societies, especially in the past, married for practical reasons beneficial to the respective families and the broader collective, not just for the wants of the individual bride and groom. For example, the political and wealthy elite arranged ''child marriage's" in order to form political alliances, strengthen regal relationships, and stave off impending war.

   d. 15–18th centuries: Labor-intensive economies and the absence of formal schooling in the West meant that children financially contributed as soon as they were able. Also, due to the lack of industrial machines, all capable hands were needed to provide for the collective needs of the community. In the past, agrarian and early industrial economies relied on the contributions of all mature and able-bodied members of society. Since compulsory, state-funded public education hadn't yet been established, children learned labor skills from their families as soon as they were physically able. Their biological maturation coincided with their psychosocial maturation, without adolescence being a buffer between childhood and adulthood.

e. Late 19th century: The advent of compulsory, state-funded public education in the West meant that children learned from teachers (not family members) and remained in school until the age of eighteen. This modern development spawned a culture in which childhood extended past the age of puberty and until the age of eighteen. Prior to that, and for most of human history, childhood was not defined by the age necessary to complete a high school education, nor was adolescence recognized as a developmental period for the formal and extended acquisition of knowledge. In this context, 'child marriages' became associated with the violation of a child's right to learn and develop the professional skills necessary for adulthood. Marrying young is now considered a limitation to one's social, educational, and economic potential.

Section 3

Slide 7 | Claim, evidence, reasoning: shifts in our categorization of 'good' and 'evil'

1. Once time is up and students have completed all three sections of their activity handout, proceed to **slide 7**.

2. Remind students that the goal of the historical exploration is to establish the truth of the following claim: "We cannot speak about 'good' and 'evil' in absolute terms because, oftentimes, our categories of 'good' and 'evil' are cultural, time-bound human constructs. So while 'child marriage' is categorized as an 'evil' today, based on our cultural and historical context, this classification is not universal and absolute. Past generations that practiced 'child marriage' experienced unique historical conditions that made it acceptable and 'good.'"

3. Then, call on each group of students to share the evidence they gathered and the reasoning they developed to support the claim. Be sure that the evidence they share is factual and specific, and that the reasoning statement weaves in the evidence with an explanation as to how and why the claim is true.

4. Use the follow-up questions below to prompt students along the way:

    a. What did you learn about the cultural and socioeconomic conditions of past societies that made the practice of 'child marriage' an acceptable 'good'? In other words, what conditions and circumstances did past societies experience that shaped how they related to and understood the notions of "childhood," "adulthood," and "maturity," and "marriage"?

    b. Is it fair to judge members of past societies as 'evil' for participating in 'child marriages'? The answer is "no."

    c. Are our judgments of 'good' and 'evil' today absolute and transhistorical? The answer is "no." Each historical era brings with it unique conditions and circumstances that shape a people's categories of 'good' and 'evil.' So while we deem 'child marriages' an 'evil' and a source of suffering today, they may not have been so in the past.

Consolidation (5 min)

Slide 8 | Consolidation: Claim, evidence, reasoning: shifts in our categorization of 'good' and 'evil'

1. Proceed to **slide 8**. After each group has shared their responses, briefly share a strong reasoning statement that supports the claim:

   Our judgments of acts as 'good' or 'evil' are not absolute and transhistorical; rather, they are time-bound, shaped by the conditions and circumstances of our environment. So while 'child marriage' is a contemporary 'evil,' associated with the suffering of children (primarily girls) all over the world, the same cannot be said about the historical practice of 'child marriage.' Centuries ago, the average life expectancy was shorter (35–40 years rather than 70–80 years) and adulthood began with the onset of puberty. Without compulsory, state-funded public education, children took on adult responsibilities—working, marrying, and starting a family—as soon as they were able. The sweeping moral judgments we make about some acts—e.g., classifying 'child marriages' as an absolute, transhistorical 'evil' and a "human rights violation"—reflect our tendency to universalize the particular without sensitivity to complex historical contexts.

2. Tell students that the reason historical 'child marriages' infuriate our modern sensibilities is because we universalize our categories of 'good' and 'evil.' We mistakenly assume that life conditions, socioeconomic opportunities, and children's circumstances and capabilities have remained static throughout history.

> 💡 **Teacher takeaway**
>
> When reviewing the available evidence, we not only find that early marriage was normal in many early societies, but it also made moral sense given their circumstances. Throughout human history, populations had to adapt to their physical and social environments while optimizing their ethical judgments accordingly—much as we do today. So while our concerns and sensitivities around 'child marriage' are undoubtedly warranted, they can sometimes lead us to make rash judgments about past communities. Today, many people seem to think that morality is absolute and that this implies that the circumstances in which moral decisions are made have remained static. As in all complex problems, black-and-white conclusions tend to miss the mark. This is because the variables around an act may shift with time and place so that what is 'good' or 'evil' today may not apply to past societies. Realizing this should lead to one humble admission regarding our perception of 'evil': we are all hostage to the cultural sensibilities that shape us.
>
> Due to the forces of tradition, socialization, and upbringing, we have a tendency to abstract our preferences into (false) universals, whereby an individual deems an act to be universally and intrinsically 'good' or 'evil' because it is 'good' or 'evil' to them. This fallacious form of reasoning is called presentism—an anachronistic misinterpretation of morality (i.e., human judgments of good and evil) based on present-day circumstances that did not exist in the past. Those who hold to the notion that we are morally superior to our ancestors attribute this dissimilarity to historical societies' ignorance about physical and psychosocial maturity or nefarious intentions to abuse and take advantage of children. Is 'child marriage' an absolute, transhistorical 'evil'? The answer is no. In truth, our perceptions of 'evil' are often confined to our unique cultural conditions that are not necessarily reflective of universal principles of justice. This isn't to deny the presence of suffering, but rather, to problematize the idea that human suffering is always 'evil,' since such a characterization may be historically bounded and not universally applicable.
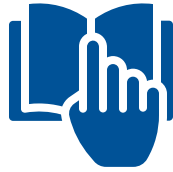
Instructions and activities

Lesson 1

Lesson 2 • God's perspective on evil is all-Knowing

Lesson 3

How does knowledge uncover the realities of the human condition?

How does God's complete knowledge alter our perception of good and evil?

What is the primary distinction between God's ontological and deontological wills?

Key vocabulary

Ontological will (*iradah kawniyyah*)
reality; what God actually transpires in this world in alignment with His knowledge, will, and power

Deontological will (*iradah shar'iyyah*)
divine ideals; human acts that are beloved and pleasing to God, known through revelation

Theodicy
God's vindication to be all-Good and all-Powerful despite the presence of perceived 'evil' on earth

Lesson plan 2

God's perspective on evil is all-Knowing

Stage 1: Big ideas and desired results

Lesson overview

In the previous lesson, we established that pure 'evil' does not exist. We, as humans, are limited in our ability to discern universal principles of justice and morality. Since our perceptions of good and evil cannot transcend the social and historical contexts that produce them, we are ultimately left with no objective standard through which to pass judgment on God or His actions. Yet, while pure 'evil' may not exist, this does not mean that we do not suffer as human beings. We witness pain and suffering throughout the world, and also experience it ourselves. So why then does a God, who we believe to be all-Good (omnibenevolent) and all-Powerful (omnipotent), allow humans to suffer? This lesson attempts to address this question in two ways.

In the first section of this lesson, students will understand that the Islamic conception of omnipotence is one that challenges a human-centered view of the universe. In other words, Muslims believe that God does not necessarily have to act in our best interests nor does He need to serve our immediate wants and desires. Muslim theologians argue that it is precisely God's ability to transcend desire that confirms His power since God acts only in accordance to His perfect knowledge and wisdom. The second way in which we address the problem of suffering is by making a clear distinction between God's ontological will (what actually happens) and God's deontological will (ideals). God may prefer things that He chooses not to enact into reality and God may abhor things that He chooses to bring into reality. This distinction between ontological and deontological will allows us to affirm God to be the Creator of all things in the universe, while also affirming the status of suffering as an evil to be eliminated as a moral test to believers. After concluding this lesson, students will be able to affirm God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence while recognizing the presence of evil and suffering.

Learning objectives

Toward the completion of this lesson, students should be able to:

1 Understand that God's knowledge of reality is all-encompassing and not bound by time or space. *(cognitive)*

2 Provide a logical defense for an all-Good and all-Powerful God despite the presence of perceived 'evil' on earth. *(cognitive)*

Stage 2: Learning plan

Total time: 60 min

Lesson plan outline

- Section 1, **slides 1–2:** recap lesson one and introduce human experience of the problem of 'evil'
- Section 2, **slides 3–4:** three-part syllogism and God's vantage point
- Section 3, **slides 5–8:** viewing God's perfect plan through the story of Malcolm X
- Section 4, **slides 9–11:** Islamic theodicy and the co-existence of God and 'evil'
- Section 5, **slides 12–14:** debunking the syllogism through understanding God

Supplies and equipment

- Lesson plan 2 presentation (for teacher)
- Projector/screen/computer/internet connection to display presentation and play videos
- Single printout of 2.1 and 2.3 (for the teacher)
- Printouts of 2.2 and 2.4 for students
- Post-it notes (3 per group)
- Blank poster board or large sheet of paper

Opening activity (10 min)

Section ①

Slide 1 | Tic-tac-toe recap: takeaways from the previous lesson

1. Open **slide 1**. To begin the lesson, tell students that they are going to review the main takeaways from lesson one in a game of tic-tac-toe. Follow the steps below to set up the activity:

    a. With a single teacher copy of **2.1 "Tic-Toe-Recap"** in hand, divide your class into two teams, Team A (X) and Team B (O).

    b. Tell Team A and Team B that they will each take turns choosing a numbered space on the tic-tac-toe grid.

    c. After a team chooses a number, read aloud the correlating question on **2.1**. Team members may quietly consult one another before sharing their final answer.

    d. To earn their chosen space, each team must answer the correlating question correctly (the answer key is available on **2.1**). If a team answers incorrectly, the opposing team may steal their space by stating the correct answer.

    e. The first team to get three-in-a-row wins!

2. If some questions are answered incorrectly, you may use the beginning of class to reteach and review some of the material from the previous lesson.

✏️ Teacher's note

The philosophical formulation of this very question is called "the logical problem of 'evil,'" a three-pronged syllogism which concludes with the incompatibility of an all-Good, all-Powerful God coexisting with 'evil' and suffering. A Greek philosopher named Epicurus posited the same conclusion: "Is God willing to prevent 'evil' but not able? Then He is not omnipotent. Is He able but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Then whence cometh 'evil'? Is He neither able nor willing? Then why call Him God?" The following section provides students with the theological framework with which to challenge the syllogism and confirm God's omnibenevolence and omnipotence, even while we perceive 'evil' and suffering around us.

If students do not know what a syllogism is and how it works, you may provide them with the following information from our unit titled "The Case for God's Existence": a syllogism is a kind of logical argumentation in which a conclusion is necessarily derived from two true premises. For example:

Premise A: "All humans are mortal."

Premise B: "Fatima is a human."

Conclusion: "Fatima is mortal." Since both premises are true, this conclusion necessarily follows.

In order to effectively debunk a syllogism's conclusion, a person must prove that at least one of the premises is false or partially untrue.

Slide 2 | The problem of 'evil': our human experience

1. Proceed to **slide 2**. Give students a few minutes to study the image and captions on the slide. Invite them to reflect on a time in their lives, if any, when they or someone they love struggled with similar thoughts about God and the existence of 'evil' and suffering:

   - If God existed, He wouldn't have allowed this.
   - I thought God was enough, but I still don't feel okay.
   - God doesn't listen to me anyway, so what's the point?
   - I don't want anything to do with a God that likes suffering.
   - Why does God allow bad things to happen?

2. Then, briefly comment that human suffering is something that we feel and grapple with on a deep, emotional level. But it can also affect our thoughts about God and His role in our lives when we do not have the knowledge to resolve our questions.

> 💡 **Teacher takeaway**
>
> When we encounter evil and suffering, our initial thoughts are usually emotional. Slide two introduces students to one of the most disconcerting questions posed to theologians, that is, God's role in the existence of 'evil' and human suffering. This question may affect individuals on an emotive and/or cognitive level. For example, we may have a painful encounter with 'evil' and immediately wonder, "If God is all-Good and all-Powerful, why would He allow this to happen?"

Learning activity (50 min)
Section 2

Slide 3 | The problem of 'evil': a three-part syllogism ✏️

1. Proceed to **slide 3**. Tell students that, on a cognitive level, it can be difficult to reconcile the existence of an all-Good, all-Powerful God with the existence of 'evil' and suffering. Some people perceive the two as incompatible. This is called "the problem of 'evil'" in religious and philosophical discourse. Historically, the problem of 'evil' has not presented a major challenge to Muslims. However, given the predominance of such arguments in our contemporary era, Muslim theologians have sought multiple means of theologically reconciling this question. We cover some of the ways they did so in this lesson.

2. Pass out copies of **2.2 "The Problem of 'Evil.'"** Note that the handout contains four parts. Students will revisit the handout throughout the course of the lesson, so they should keep it handy until the end of class.

3. While directing student attention to the diagram, present the syllogism on the logical problem of 'evil' using the following notes:

   a. Premise A: God exists. He is all-Knowing (omniscient, al-Alim), all-Good (omnibenevolent, al-Barr), and all-Powerful (omnipotent, al-Qadir).

   Assumptions behind this premise: If God is all-Knowing, then God knows when 'evil' and suffering will exist and how to prevent them. If God is all-Good, then God is motivated to prevent all of the 'evil' and suffering in the world. And if God is all-Powerful, then God is able to prevent all of the 'evil' and suffering in the world.

The Problem of 'Evil'
a three-part syllogism

Part I: Study the syllogism below. The argument concludes that God is not all-Powerful or all-Good because these attributes of God cannot coexist with 'evil' and suffering. What is problematic about the syllogism, thereby rendering the conclusion false?

God Exists. He is:
1. all-Knowing (Al-'Alim)
2. all-Good (Al-Barr)
3. all-Powerful (Al-Qadir)

+

'Evil' & Suffering Exist

Assumptions:
God knows when 'evil' and suffering will exist and how to prevent them.
God is motivated to prevent all of the 'evil' and suffering in the world.
God is able to prevent all of the 'evil' and suffering in the world

→

Conclusion:
God is not All-Powerful or All-Good

Part II: With the syllogism in mind, watch the first video clip and reflect on the events in young Malcolm X's life. Should God have prevented all of young Malcolm's suffering? Explain.

Part III: While watching the second clip, connect Malcolm X's suffering as a youth with the eventual path it led him to as an adult.

1. Were the acts and events Malcolm X experienced as a youth purely and absolutely 'evil'?

2.2 The Problem of 'Evil'   1   **2.2**

b. Premise B: 'Evil' and suffering exist.

c. Conclusion: But because 'evil' and suffering exist, then the conclusion necessarily follows that God is not all-Powerful or all-Good. In other words, God cannot be all-Good if He doesn't use His power to prevent 'evil.' And He cannot be all-Powerful if He is motivated to eliminate 'evil' but is unable.

4. Ask students to spend a couple of minutes taking turns summarizing the logical problem of 'evil' with an elbow partner. Once time is up, ask students to gesture whether or not their partner correctly summarized the syllogism (a thumbs up for "yes" and a thumbs down for "no"). If some students give a thumbs down, you may need to spend extra time reteaching the syllogism and answering their questions.

5. Next, instruct students to work with their elbow partner to study the syllogism more closely and to identify any flaws in its premises and assumptions, thereby rendering the conclusion false.

   While they work, guide students to focus especially on Premise B, our time-bound judgment as humans that absolute "'evil' and suffering exist" and the assumption that "God is obligated to prevent all of the 'evil' and suffering on earth." In other words, how might God's vantage point toward 'evil' differ from ours on the human plane?

6. After a few minutes, call on some students to share what they found problematic about the syllogism. Without providing any instruction, listen to and keep note of their responses so that you may revisit them during the course of the lesson.

Slide 4 | God's vantage point: "I know that which you do not"

1. Proceed to **slide 4** and read aloud the verse from Surat al-Baqarah: "[The angels] said, 'Will You place upon it [i.e., the earth] one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we exalt You with praise and declare Your perfection?' He [Allah] said, 'Indeed, I know that which you do not know.'" **2:30**

2. Briefly explain that even the angels were concerned over the existence of 'evil' and suffering. They asked God why He would place humans on earth that would misuse their freewill, while, as angels, they were perfect and exist for the sole purpose of praising and glorifying Him. They knew that humans would have the propensity to act in 'evil' ways, e.g., murdering, stealing, lying, and abusing one another to varying degrees. And God, being the Creator of humans and their actions, would will all of these human acts into existence.

3. Direct student attention to God's response: "Indeed, I know that which you do not." Interestingly, God does not dismiss the angels' concerns about the human experience of 'evil' and suffering. God is telling the angels and, by extension, all of humanity to suspend our judgments and assumptions about Him and His decision to allow 'evil' to exist because only He possesses all-encompassing knowledge of reality. The purpose of this lesson is to better understand God's vantage point toward our experience of 'evil.' Ultimately, humans must submit to the reality that God's knowledge is beyond the grasp of any being. We humans can only speculate and ponder the wisdom of divine actions.
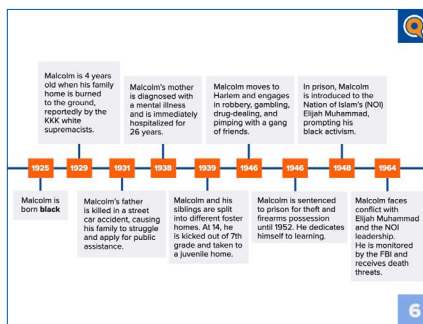

God's Vantage Point

[The angels] said, "Will You place upon it [i.e., the earth] one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we exalt You with praise and declare Your perfection?" He [Allah] said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know."

قَالُوٓا أَتَجۡعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفۡسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسۡفِكُ ٱلدِّمَآءَ
وَنَحۡنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمۡدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّيٓ أَعۡلَمُ مَا لَا تَعۡلَمُونَ

[Surat al-Baqarah, 2:30]

2:30

قَالُوٓا أَتَجۡعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفۡسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسۡفِكُ ٱلدِّمَآءَ وَنَحۡنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمۡدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّيٓ أَعۡلَمُ مَا لَا تَعۡلَمُونَ

"[The angels] said, 'Will You place upon it [i.e., the earth] one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we exalt You with praise and declare Your perfection?' He [Allah] said, 'Indeed, I know that which you do not know.'"
[Surat al-Baqarah, 2:30]

Section ③

Slides 5–6 | God's vantage point: 'evil,' suffering, and God's perfect plan (Malcolm X). ✎

1. Proceed to **slide 5** and ask students to indicate with a thumbs up, thumbs down, or a sideway thumb whether or not they are familiar with the life of Malcolm X.

2. Then, inform students that Malcolm X, a notable, revolutionary figure in American intellectual history, experienced immense 'evil' and suffering as a child in a scope unknown to most of us today. The short clip they are about to watch highlights the major misfortunes Malcolm X faced from birth until young adulthood.

3. Before clicking play, direct student attention to the following prompt (2.2, Part II): "With the syllogism in mind, watch the video clip and reflect on the events in young Malcolm X's life. Should God have prevented all of young Malcolm's suffering? Explain." ✎

1. Play the clip (0:00–1:50) and then call on some students to share their responses to the question. To refresh student memory of the video details, you may toggle between slide five (God's vantage point) and **slide 6** (A timeline of suffering) so that students can recall the 'evil' and suffering Malcolm X experienced at various junctures of his life. The timeline on slide six highlights these experiences in chronological order.

2. During the discussion, remind students that Malcolm X was born black in the heat of systemic racial injustice. He was a victim of oppression since the time of birth for merely being black. He lost his home, both parents, his uncles, his siblings, and access to quality education all before he turned fifteen. Domestic instability and orphanhood only deepened his pain and anger, and without a family and a home, he was stripped of the love, support, and protection necessary to withstand racial abuse as a black child in America. With nothing more to lose, Malcolm X then spent his late adolescent years engaging in petty crime that eventually ended with a harsh prison sentence. Should God have prevented all of young Malcolm's suffering?

   a. Remind students that God intimately knows the depth and breadth of suffering that young Malcolm experienced at every juncture of his life. God possesses more love and compassion for His creation than a mother toward her child, as the Prophet once said, "Do you think [a] woman would throw her child into the fire?" to which his companions responded, "No, not if she was able to stop it," to which he replied, "Allah is more merciful to His servants than [a] mother is to her child" [Bukhari and Muslim]. Furthermore, God loves to respond to His creation's call when they experience 'evil' and suffering, both in this world and the next [Qur'an 27:62–63]. Yet in the life of Malcolm X and the lives of many others, suffering continues. Why?

   b. The fact that an all-Good, all-Powerful God would allow and will into existence these 'evil' acts and events is at the crux of the problem of 'evil.'

Handout 2.2 | Connect Malcolm X's suffering as a youth with the eventual path it led him to as an adult.

1. Were the acts and events Malcolm X experienced as a youth purely and absolutely 'evil'?
2. God is all-Good and all-Powerful, so why doesn't He immediately react to eliminate our experiences of pain and suffering?

Teacher's note

The purpose of this question is to help students challenge Premise B in the syllogism and to recognize that 'evil,' as an independent phenomenon whereby no dimension of good is involved, has no existence in this world. There is nothing in our existence that can be called pure and absolute 'evil,' because every 'evil' in this world is good from one angle or another.

Slide 7 | God's vantage point: 'evil,' suffering, and God's perfect plan (Malcolm X)

1. After students have shared their responses to the question on slide five, continue to **slide 7**. Tell students that at the conclusion of his life, Malcolm X eventually embraced Sunni Islam and found within this new faith a sense of inner-peace, a vision for racial unity, and a solution to black suffering in America. His pilgrimage to hajj was followed by his martyrdom less than a year later. The short clip they are about to watch highlights Malcolm X at the peak of his spiritual awareness shortly after he returned from hajj (1:36–5:27).

2. Before clicking play, task students with the following prompt (2.2, Part III): Connect Malcom X's suffering as a youth to the eventual path it led him to as an adult.

   a. Were the acts and events Malcolm X experienced as a youth purely and absolutely 'evil'?

   Sample student response: No, they were not. There is no doubt that young Malcolm endured immense pain and suffering as a black child in America. However, the 'evil' acts and events he experienced and that we should want to eliminate ultimately paved the way for his future success. Had he not lost his family as a child, had he not tasted racial and structural violence on multiple fronts, and had he not been incarcerated, he may likely not have developed the passion for black civil rights that fueled his activism and informed his most revolutionary speeches. Furthermore, he may not have achieved martyrdom as a Sunni Muslim had he not faced conflict with the Nation of Islam and the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Pure, absolute 'evil' doesn't exist in this world, and only God knows the true reality of things because His knowledge transcends time and space.

   b. If God is all-Good and all-Powerful, why doesn't God immediately react to eliminate our experience of pain and suffering?
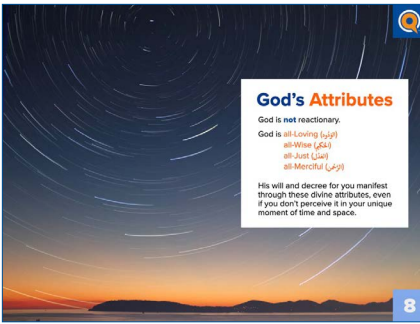
   The purpose of this question is to help students challenge the syllogism's second assumption and to recognize that God acts in alignment with His knowledge, power, and will for His creation. His perfect plan for each of us transcends our immediate needs, wants, and preferences.

   Sample student response: God is not reactionary. It is because God is all-Good, all-Powerful, and all-Knowing that He doesn't react instantly to the acts and events that we perceive as 'evil' at a specific moment in time. Transcending time and space, He knows how reality will unfold for His creation and the necessary experiences we must endure in order for His perfect plan for us to manifest. For every point of suffering in Malcolm X's life, our reaction is to immediately eliminate it (and rightfully so, considering that God commands us to preserve the wellbeing of those around us), but that does not equate to God acting in an 'evil' fashion.

3. Once the clip is done, call on some students to share their responses to the two questions. You may engage them in their responses using the notes above.

1. Proceed to **slide 8**. Tell students that Malcolm X's story is a beautiful display of God's attributes manifesting in His will and decree for His creation. Contrary to what the syllogism assumes, God is **not** reactionary, nor is He bound to act according to our timeline of needs, wants, and preferences. Rather, at the core of His acts is His love, wisdom, justice, and mercy for us, even if we do not perceive it in our unique moment of time and space.

   An example of this is how God allowed young Malcolm X's imprisonment, and while it was a cause of suffering, his imprisonment ultimately produced immense good for him. He met people there that rekindled his love for learning, that inculcated him with purpose and perseverance, and that connected him with leaders of the Nation of Islam. God is not reactionary to our suffering because He is working to fulfill a greater plan for us, even if we cannot perceive it.

2. Next, make a connection between the way parents are made to love their children and how God loves His creation. In the case of parents, if they were to see their child in immediate harm or danger, they would react instantly to keep their child safe and away from harm. On the other hand, when God's creation is suffering with an 'evil', although He sees it and can intervene, He allows the 'evil' and 'suffering' to run its course. This does not mean He loves us less. Rather, it means that God is not reactionary. The way God's love manifests for His creation is different than the way human love (i.e., parents for their children) manifests.

💡 **Teacher takeaway**

The syllogism concludes that an all-Good and all-Powerful God cannot coexist with 'evil' and suffering. Therefore, God is not all-Good and all-Powerful. There are two faulty assumptions embedded in the syllogism that render its conclusion false. The first is that all the 'evil' and suffering we experience as humans is absolute and unnecessary.he second is that God, in His perfect goodness and power, is obligated to eliminate it—that He must operate in accordance to our timeline of needs, wants, and preferences. Both of these assumptions are false.   Using the story of Malcolm X, students may realize that there is no such thing as absolute 'evil,' especially when our human judgment of such acts and events lacks full contextual knowledge. What we dislike from suffering and pain may actually produce immense good, though we cannot perceive it while locked within time and space. God revealed in the Qur'an, "...it may well be that you dislike something in which God has placed much good" [Surat al-Nisa, 4:19]. The discussion questions should prompt students to realize that the perfection of God's plan eludes us when we judge His acts and events in a fraction of time. When exploring God's vantage point and His Divine wisdom, we should remind ourselves that we are always stuck within our unique moment of time and space so our reflections are just isolated explanations. God's love, compassion, and good will for His servants lies at the core of all His actions.

The last part of this section is meant to help students understand that God is not reactionary. All of what He wills into existence of 'good' and 'evil' is in alignment with His infinite love, wisdom, justice, and mercy even if we cannot perceive it in our unique moment of time and space. While we know that God has the power to react and stop 'evil' from occurring, we must also be aware that He is not obliged to eliminate all 'evil' and suffering since such associations are human and time-bounded. Therefore, we should concede that He acts in accordance to His perfect knowledge, power, and will, and such moments of suffering are a part of His perfect narrative for reality.
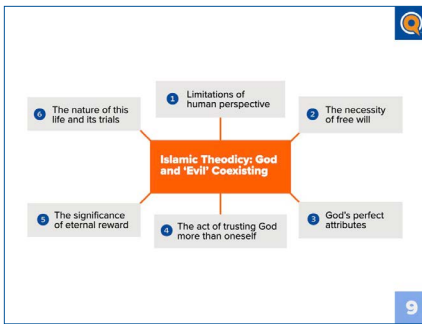
Up until this point in the unit, students briefly explored two theodicies for reconciling the coexistence of God and 'evil': the limitations of human perspective and God's perfect attributes. They will shortly engage in a group activity to explore three more entry points into Islamic theodicy (though others do exist). To prepare the activity, print out one copy of **2.3 "Islamic Theodicies"** and place one entry-point passage at each station. If you have a large class, you may print out two copies of **2.3** and double each station. Follow steps 1–3 below prior to dividing students into their groups.

Section 4

Slides 9–10 | Entry points to Islamic theodicy

1. Proceed to **slide 9** and display the diagram. Inform students that in religious and philosophical discourse, an argument proving that God is all-Good and all-Powerful despite the presence of perceived 'evil' on earth is called a theodicy.

2. Continue explaining that Muslim theologians, past and present, have formulated many entry points into Islamic theodicy, six of which are briefly mentioned on the diagram.

3. Read aloud the six points on the diagram and explain to students that they learned about the first three. They will now have an opportunity to expand on the remaining three points in a group activity:

   1. The limitations of human perspective

   2. The necessity of free will*

   3. God's perfect attributes

   4. **The act of trusting God more than oneself**

   5. **The significance of eternal reward**

   6. **The nature of this life and its trials**

4. Continue to **slide 10**. Set up the activity by dividing your students into three groups and handing each group a stack of three post-it notes. for a larger class, you have the option of dividing the class into 6 groups and having two stations for each entry point.

5. Then, read aloud the following instructions:

   a. With your group, read the passage at each station and answer its corresponding question on the slide. As an alternative to reading, you also have the option to watch a video at each station by scanning the QR code.

   b. Then, record your group answer to the question on the post-it note (one answer per station).

   c. The timer will be set for five minutes per station. When time is up, rotate to the next station.

6. After students have visited each station, collect their post-it notes while they return to their seats. On a large poster paper, consolidate their responses and write out the main takeaways from each station on the poster for the whole class to see.

7. Conclude with a brief discussion and invite students to share which of the points personally helped them reconcile the coexistence of an all-Good, all-Powerful God with 'evil.'

*The topic of free will was covered in detail in the curriculum unit on divine decree as well as briefly under slide 4 above.

Slide 11 | Debunking the syllogism

1. Proceed to **slide 11** and ask students to take a minute to revisit the syllogism on 2.2. Then, direct their attention to part four of **2.2** where they will now work independently to debunk the syllogism.

2. To set up the activity, complete the following:

   a. Tell students that the syllogism for the logical problem of 'evil' concludes that, because 'evil' and suffering exist, God cannot be all-Good and all-Powerful.

   b. Explain that this conclusion is derived from two faulty assumptions. The first is that 'evil' and suffering exist, and as humans, we can identify what is purely and absolutely 'evil' in the exact moment that it happens. The second is that God is motivated to prevent all of the 'evil' and suffering in the world, according to our immediate needs, wants, and preferences.

   c. Read aloud the prompt (**2.2**, Part IV): "A friend of yours describes to you an 'evil' they have experienced. They struggle to understand why God allowed it to happen. While consoling your friend and supporting them through their pain, you explain to yourself God's role in their suffering. Debunk the syllogism: how can an all-Good and all-Powerful God coexist with the 'evil' that your friend experienced?" They should spend 5–7 minutes reflecting on and writing their responses on 2.2, which they will submit as a formative assessment.

Section 5

Slide 12 | Still… we feel 'evil' and are morally obligated to eliminate it

1. Proceed to **slide 12** and read aloud the text on the slide: "Still… if God is not acting in an 'evil' fashion, why do I experience 'evil' and feel morally obligated to eliminate it?"

   a. Connect this with the story of Malcolm X: ask students to list the human acts and events from Malcolm's life that, according to God's revealed ideals in scripture, we experience as 'evil' and should seek to eliminate. Examples include: hate crimes against Malcolm's family by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), separation from his siblings in the foster care system, discrimination by his white school teachers, racial disparity in his prison sentencing, his assassination, and so on.

   b. Remind students that God creates these actions and wills them into existence (e.g., arson, hate crimes, racial discrimination, assassination). We believe that God doing so does not mean that He is acting in an 'evil' fashion, so the question remains: why do we still experience them as 'evil'?

2. Call on some students to share their own comments and questions on this topic.
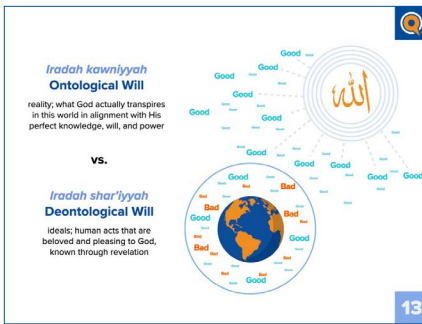
Slide 13 | God's deontological vs. ontological will

1. Continue to **slide 13** and tell students that these questions arise because there is a discernible difference between God's ideals—i.e., what is beloved to Him and what He wants us to do—and the reality that He wills into existence. Elaborate on this point using the following terms:

   a. God's deontological will (*iradah shar'iyyah*): divine ideals; human acts and events that are beloved and pleasing to God as known through revelation.

   Together, the Qur'an and Sunnah direct us to the human acts that are most beloved and pleasing to God and those that will draw us closer to Him. As a part of the test in life, we should each strive to embody these ideals.

   b. God's ontological will (*iradah kawniyyah*): reality; what God actually transpires in this world in alignment with His perfect knowledge, will, and power.

   This reality includes both acts that are loved and detested by God. For example, God detests all forms of oppression, yet He enables His creation to exercise their free will to oppress others. None of this is proof that God is pleased with or incapable of changing these instances of suffering and 'evil.'

2. Tell students that why God chooses what He actually does rather than always aligning with His deontological will is a mystery, but one that we accept given what we know of God's perfect love, wisdom, and mercy. In fact, it is precisely God's ability to transcend desire that confirms His power and wisdom. In other words, partial or subjective 'evil' occurs with God's knowledge, wisdom, and permission for a vast range of justifiable possibilities that we may never fully be able to grasp such as those we have highlighted in the story of Malcolm X.

Consolidation (5 min)

Slide 14 | A relationship with God
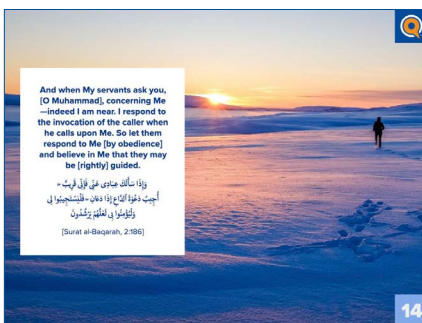
1. Conclude with **slide 14**. Ask students to recall the response they wrote to the scenario on part four of **2.2**, when their friend shared their painful experience of 'evil' and suffering and their inability to understand why God would allow such a thing to happen. In this scenario, their friend felt unresolved in the mystery between God's ideals and the reality He wills into existence.

   a. For example, someone who experienced child abuse may struggle to understand why God would allow their abuse while He detests such an act. This is the mystery between God's ontological and deontological will presented on slide thirteen. As stated earlier, understanding God's attributes and affirming His goodness helps us better process why 'evil' or events that cause suffering occur.

   b. To expand on this further and connect back to the first lesson, students should be reminded that we, as humans with limited knowledge and wisdom, cannot claim the existence of suffering offers support to the claim that God does not exist. God's knowledge and wisdom are incomprehensible and beyond our imagination.

His knowledge encompasses billions of intertwined factors with every occurrence of 'good' and 'evil,' which is inaccessible to us. Our understanding of God, therefore, must be based on what God revealed to us and one that serves as a means to cope with hardship and suffering in life.

2. Point out that the logical defenses against the problem of 'evil' may not provide spiritual assurance for someone thick in the struggle with 'evil,' and they may not resolve their negative assumptions about God's role in their suffering. In this case, what a person needs most is a secure relationship with God. Such a relationship may help them better understand God's mystery, His attributes, and the goodness and wisdom in God's perfect plan.

3. Read the verse and the translation on the slide and give students a few minutes to reflect on the meaning: "And when My servants ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning Me—indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the caller when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided" **2:186**

   a. As we experience personal suffering and witness worldly suffering around us, we are reassured by God time and time again that He is near, listening, responding, and never abandoning us.

   b. In this same verse, He reminds us that it is through belief in Him and an attachment to Him that we will thrive in the midst of our hardships.

4. Inform students that in the next lesson, they will learn more about themselves, their current attachment to God, and the healthy internal and external responses to suffering that we should strive to uphold.

2:186

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِى عَنِّى فَإِنِّى قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ ٱلدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ۖ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِى وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِى لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

"And when My servants ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning Me—indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the caller when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided"
[Surat al-Baqarah, 2:186]

💡 **Teacher takeaway**

The learning material on slides twelve and thirteen equip students with the analytical language to distinguish between what God actually allows to happen and how we, as humans, perceive those actions. On the one hand, everything that God does is categorically 'good,' but on the other, some of what He wills into existence is discernibly 'evil' according to the moral guidance in His revelation. The distinction between God's ideals (deontological will) and reality (ontological will) is also important because it allows us to work toward removing the 'evil' around us without framing it as a rebellion against God's decree. As you may recall from lesson one, although there are three pathways of evil, God is the sole efficient cause in the universe and therefore the cause of the evil and suffering we perceive. Although we know theologically that God does not act in an evil fashion by allowing such evils to occur, this does not absolve us from our responsibility in reacting to such evils as indicated in the Qur'an and Sunnah. For example, we can judge the acts of racism that Malcolm X experienced (and that Blacks continue to experience) as 'evil,' and we can work to eliminate them, while also affirming God's goodness even as He wills these 'evil' acts into existence. In the last part of this section students concluded with the realization that although we may know something from a theological perspective, that does not mean it reflects our inner monologue about how we feel towards God. In the next lesson, students will realize that this is not a reflection of God's reality but a reflection of our relationship with God.

The Problem of 'Evil'
a three-part syllogism

2.2

Breaking News
an unfolding of God's plan

God's Vantage Point
'Evil,' suffering, and God's perfect plan.

2.4

Stage 3: Assessments

Performance tasks

Formative assessment

In class, students will complete **2.2 "The Problem of 'Evil'"** to demonstrate mastery of the lesson's two objectives. The three questions about Malcolm X's suffering will capture what students understand about God's all-encompassing knowledge of reality that transcends time and space. To informally assess the second objective, see part four on the handout. Students will use that space to debunk the syllogism and provide a logical defense for the coexistence of an all-Good, all-Powerful God and the 'evil' their friend has experienced.

Summative assessment

Students will complete take-home assignment **2.4 "Breaking News,"** which parallels their summative assessment from lesson one. However, rather than reporting on Prophet Yusuf's life as a third-party investigator, students will now explore God's vantage point (as narrated in the Qur'an) in order to address two things: first, how Yusuf's suffering as a youth connects with the eventual path it led him to as an adult, and second, why God didn't immediately react to eliminate Yusuf's experience of 'evil' and suffering. Their main objective is to demonstrate an understanding of God's coexistence with 'evil' and suffering through the story of Prophet Yusuf.

Like their summative assessment from lesson one, students will submit their report using one of four mediums:

- A Twitter thread
- Blog posts
- A radio broadcast
- A video broadcast

The criteria for each medium of communication are listed on **2.4**, and optional templates for the Twitter thread and blog posts are available on **1.3 "Templates."** To have students submit the audio or video broadcast, read through the list and determine which platform for submission would be most suitable:

1. Learning Management System (LMS): The preferred method of submission would be through the LMS that is already integrated in your school. This may be Google Classroom, Canvas, Blackboard, etc. If you already have an LMS set up for your class, instruct students to upload their video or audio submissions for the assignment through that platform.

2. If there is not an LMS available, you may choose an alternative route listed under the summative assessment for lesson plan 1.

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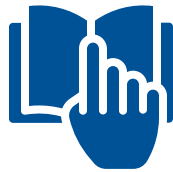
Instructions and activities

Lesson 1

Lesson 2

Lesson 3 • Finding meaning in suffering and evil

How can suffering aid in perfecting moral character?

How does a person's response to human suffering determine the moral value of an act or event?

Key vocabulary

Theocentric worldview
the belief that God created this world with purpose (known through God's deontological will, i.e., revelation and prophets) and that there is a hereafter/day of judgment

Ihsan
the state of worshiping God as though you see him; the highest spiritual station in Islam achieved through embodying Godly attributes, moral excellence, and beautiful character

Lesson plan 3
Finding meaning in suffering and evil

Stage 1: Big ideas and desired results

Lesson overview

Our primary purpose for this last lesson is to help translate our theological belief that God is necessarily good into an intimate awareness that such a God is good for us. In this lesson, students will assess their attachment style with God and learn tools that can help them develop this intimate awareness of God's goodness. Depending on the nature of our relationship with God, proving that God is all-Good and all-Powerful may ultimately be no more valuable than proving that someone else's teacher is generous. Since the student has no relationship with someone else's teacher, knowing that this teacher is generous does not prove to them that they will receive a better grade for their work.

The second focus of this lesson is to emphasize to students the necessity of understanding the presence of evil in this world through a God-centered (theocentric) worldview. This is because God provides a backdrop of meaning, value, and context to our perception of evil and suffering. Without knowing and recognizing our purpose through a theocentric worldview, suffering and evil become meaningless and random. Of our purposes in life, one role is to portray Godly attributes as they are known through His most beautiful names. In the last section of the lesson, students will recognize that all suffering on Earth has the potential to be made into something beautiful if and when we respond in a way that reflects God's attributes of love, mercy, and justice. By the end of this lesson, students should recognize that every test of suffering from God is perfectly measured to bring forth what is best for them and to be beloved to God through the establishment of Godly attributes.

Learning objectives

Toward the completion of this lesson, students should be able to:

1 Understand how the nature of their attachment to God affects their understanding of Him. *(cognitive and affective)*

2 Recognize that the 'problem of evil' can only be resolved with a theocentric worldview. *(cognitive)*

3 Appreciate that the human response to suffering determines the ultimate value of a situation. *(affective)*

Stage 2: Learning plan

Total time: 60 min

Lesson plan outline

- Section 1, **slides 1–4:** our relationship with God impacts our understanding of human suffering

- Section 2, **slides 5–10:** theocentrism, the belief that God created this world and all that is in it with meaning and purpose

- Section 3, **slides 11–13:** the prophetic response to human suffering

Supplies/equipment

- Lesson plan 3 presentation (for teacher)

- Projector/screen/computer/internet connection to display presentation and play videos

- Printouts of 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 for each student

Opening activity (5 min)

Section 1

Slide 1 | "Starving child and vulture": a photo by Kevin Carter

Starving Child & Vulture
photographed by Kevin Carter
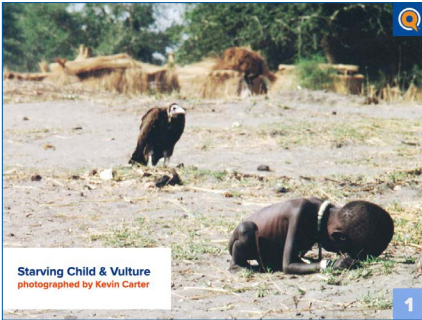
1. Open **slide 1**. Inform students about a contemporary study in which Americans were asked, "If you could ask God one question, and you knew He would give an answer, what would you ask?"[1] The most common response was, "Why is there pain and suffering in the world?"

2. Next, direct student attention to the photo on the screen titled "Starving Child and Vulture." Call on a few students to share their initial reactions and then share the background behind the photo:

   a. This photo was taken by Kevin Carter, who was born in South Africa and had an active and successful career as a photojournalist. After documenting racial violence and police brutality under South African apartheid, Carter then traveled to Sudan to capture the famine occurring amidst Sudan's civil war.

   b. In the year 1993, near the village of Ayod, Sudan, Kevin Carter stumbled upon an emaciated toddler who had collapsed and was whimpering while on his way to the United Nations feeding center. A plump vulture landed nearby just moments later and began stalking the child, waiting to strike. At that time, photojournalists were advised not to touch the famine victims to avoid transmitting disease. So instead of grabbing the child, Carter scared the creature away and watched as the child continued his way toward the feeding center. Carter turned away, prayed to God, and wept. While this photo earned Carter the Pulitzer Prize and international recognition, in July of 1994, at the age of 33, he took his own life. He wrote in his suicide letter, "I am haunted by the vivid memories of killings and corpses and anger and pain."[2]

Starving Child & Vulture

How does this story of suffering relate to God?

How does it relate to you?

Do you feel a discrepancy between how we, as humans, relate to 'evil' and how we relate it to God?

2

1. Continue to **slide 2** and pose the following questions to the class: "How do you relate this story of suffering to God? How does it relate to you? Do you feel a discrepancy between how we, as humans, relate to 'evil' and how we relate it to God? Explain."

2. **Turn & Talk:** Ask students to turn to an elbow partner and exchange their responses to the questions. Then, after a couple of minutes, invite them to share their responses with the whole class. The guiding responses may be used to facilitate and conclude the class discussion.

   a. How do you relate this story of suffering to God?

   Guided response: God willed, according to His complete knowledge, for this child to starve (alongside millions of other children), for this plump vulture to stalk him, for Kevin Carter to witness this and fall into anger and despair, and also for Carter to ultimately end his life at the age of thirty-three. But as humans witnessing this story of human suffering, we cannot implicate God as acting in an 'evil' way. God is not reactionary nor does He act with malice. He only acts in full alignment with His knowledge, power, and will for His creation. There is wisdom and some dimensions of good in this story of the starving child and vulture, even if their realities are known only to God.

   b. How does it relate to you?

   Guided response: Witnessing this story of human suffering as a bystander should prompt us to eliminate hunger crises around the world. By donating charitably, investing in Sudan's economic infrastructure, raising awareness of this crisis, and praying for the wellbeing of the impoverished, we are doing our part in responding to 'evil' with moral good.

   c. Is there a discrepancy between the two? Explain.

   Guided response: Yes, there is a discrepancy between how we personally relate to human suffering and how we relate it to God. On the one hand, we are saying that God is not 'evil' for willing this event (starvation and suicide in war-torn Sudan) into existence. And on the other hand, we as humans can still recognize this event as 'evil,' since God commanded us to eliminate greed, preserve human life, and enact economic justice. We may sense a discrepancy between the two if we believe that God should react immediately to eliminate human suffering in the same way that we should. Also, this discrepancy highlights the difference between God's ontological and deontological wills as it was explained in lesson two.

3. Conclude the whole class discussion by explaining that the inability to process human suffering in a meaningful way, and the act of mischaracterizing and harboring negative feelings toward God, are more reflective of our attachment to God than of His true nature. Building a secure attachment to God may help us resolve the tension we feel between God's role and our role in responding to human suffering.

4. Inform students that in the following activity, they will briefly explore their attachment style to God.

Learning activity (50 min)

Slide 3 | Responding to God: discovering your attachment style

1. Proceed to **slide 3** and pose the following question: "How do you feel about God, and how do you respond to Him when you experience or witness suffering?

2. To set up the attachment style assessment, pass out a copy of **3.1 "Attachment Styles"** to each student. Give students a few minutes to complete the assessment and remind them that this is a personal exercise. Their assessments will not be collected.

3. Once complete, tell students to calculate their scores and read a brief description of their results.

Slide 4 | Attachment types: our relationship with God in relation to human suffering
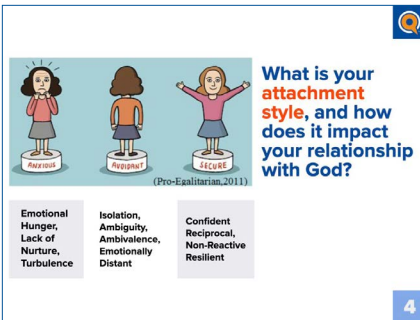
1. Proceed to **slide 4**. Inform students that they will look at the different attachment styles and how they impact our relationship with God in the face of suffering. "Attachment styles refer to the particular way in which an individual relates to other people. The style of attachment is formed at the very beginning of life, and once established, it is a style that stays with you and plays out today in how you relate in intimate relationships and in how you parent your children."[3] Studies have also found that it later impacts the way we view a Higher Power.

   a. **Secure attachment:** Holds a positive self-image and image of others. They are able to have healthy attachments without being too clingy and by trusting enough to be vulnerable.

   b. **Anxious attachment:** Holds a negative self-image and a positive image of others. They are overly concerned with the uncertainty in a relationship.

   c. **Avoidant attachment:** Holds a positive self-image but a negative image of others. They avoid close relationships with others in order to remain independent and invulnerable.

2. Conclude with a discussion using the following points:

   a. The way we view God in reality is a reflection of our own attachment styles rather than of God's true nature. Remind students of the photo they saw at the beginning of the lesson and their feelings toward God when they witnessed that story of suffering.

   b. God is not reactionary in the way humans are. God is constant and does not change based on our acts. Learn more about God and His attributes to challenge any misconceptions you created in your mind of who God is and how God responds to His creation.

   c. Research has shown that our attachment styles are heavily shaped in our childhood and may be a result of our own experiences with our parents, caretakers, friends, community leaders, and religious clergy. Our relationships later on in life can reinforce those attachments or cause us to reevaluate them. However, our attachment styles are not permanent. With self-awareness and effort, people can change their attachment style and establish a secure attachment to God.

Section ②

Slide 5 | An Islamic, theocentric worldview of human suffering: a definition

1. Proceed to **slide 5** and pass out copies of **3.2 "Human Suffering."** Inform students that, for the remainder of the lesson, they will explore what a secure attachment to God and the internalization of an Islamic, theocentric worldview afford us when we experience and witness human suffering in our lives.

   a. Define "theocentric worldview" as the follsowing: the belief that God created this world with purpose, and that there is a hereafter/day of judgment.

   b. Instruct students to record this definition on **3.2**.

2. Tell students that this exploration will come in three parts:

   a. **God's relationship with the universe:** here, they will review what God's relationship is with His creation: is He involved or uninvolved, and if He is involved, to what extent?

   b. **A world of purpose and meaning:** here, they will learn why God created the universe, i.e., His purpose for creation, humankind and our human volition, and the existence of human suffering

   c. **Our response to human suffering:** here, they will learn how they should respond to human suffering, i.e., the Islamic blueprint for responding to 'evil' in the way that fulfills our purpose

3. During the course of the instruction (slides 6–10), they should use **3.2** to complete three tasks:

   a. To take notes on each of the three aspects of an Islamic, theocentric worldview of human suffering (using keywords and images)

   b. To select a scenario and respond to the prompts

   c. To create a memorable anchor chart that illustrates and explains what an Islamic, theocentric worldview affords us as we experience and witness human suffering in our lives ✏️

Islamic Theocentric Worldview of Human Suffering

✏️ **Teacher's note**

The following instructional slides are labeled to correlate with the three sections (i.e., slide six for "what," slides seven and eight for "why," and slides nine and ten for "how") on the handout. Be sure that students are following along and taking notes on each section at the appropriate time. They will have additional time at the end of slide ten to complete the anchor chart and respond to the prompts. The content on their anchor chart should serve as an operational principle, meaning that it should provide students with the conceptual framework upon which to anchor their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors toward God and human suffering.

What: God's Relationship with the Universe

Slide 6 | The "what": God's relationship with the universe

1. Proceed to **slide 6**. To address the first part of an Islamic, theocentric worldview of human suffering, ask students to share how they perceive God's relationship with the universe. Encourage students to recall what they learned about God's vantage point from lesson two.

2. Follow up their responses with the following points:

   a. Point to the word "Rabb."

   b. Explain that this term encapsulates God's relationship with His creation, e.g., the universe, humankind (and what He designed of human nature), and everything He creates and wills into existence, both 'good' and 'evil.'

   c. Inform students that the term "Rabb" teaches us that God is the sole cause, creator, and sustainer of the universe and everything in it. He did not create and then recede, allowing things to unfold chaotically and without purpose. Rather, He is intimately involved in our most minute affairs as He continues to fulfill His greater plan for His creation.

   d. Relate the term "Rabb" to Kevin Carter's photo, "Starving Child and Vulture." God intimately knows how that starving child was feeling—his pangs of hunger, his dehydration, his fatigue, his parents' fear for his death—and He knows the mental and emotional toll it took on Kevin Carter that drove him to his eventual suicide. The precise unfolding of that incident was all created and decreed by God in perfect measure, in alignment with His perfect plan. It did not happen accidentally, meaninglessly, and without purpose.

3. After students finish taking notes under "what," ask them to consider how this first aspect of an Islamic, theocentric worldview helps us to resolve the problem of 'evil' and human suffering.

Slides 7–8 | The "why": a world of meaning and purpose

Slide 7: God created this world with meaning and purpose

Without Purpose   **With Purpose**

Meaninglessness is what renders life a prison in which occupants frantically scramble between walls of life and death, **panicking from every sting**.

"We were not playing a pointless game when We created the heavens and earth and everything in between; **We created them for a true purpose**, but most people do not understand."

[Surat ad-Dukhan, 44:38-39]

Why: A World of Purpose and Meaning

1. Proceed to **slide 7** and call on a student to read aloud the quote on the left side of the slide: "Meaninglessness is what renders life a prison in which occupants frantically scramble between walls of life and death, panicking from every sting."[4]

2. Give students a moment to discuss the quote with an elbow partner. Then, engage students in a whole-class discussion about their reflections while sharing the following points:

   a. Without an Islamic, theocentric worldview, and without a secure attachment to God, any amount of suffering will seem purely 'evil,' random, and unnecessary.

   b. Relate this quote to Kevin Carter's photo, "Starving Child and Vulture." As a photojournalist, Kevin Carter despaired in the face of all the suffering he witnessed in South Africa and Sudan. "What is the point of all this suffering?" is a question people may ask if they believe that we exist only in this material world for the purpose of immediate enjoyment, happiness, and pleasure. The belief that we can replace all pain with perpetual, material bliss—that we can create a "paradise on earth"—renders any amount of human suffering unbearable.

44:38–39

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لَٰعِبِينَ مَا خَلَقْنَٰهُمَآ إِلَّا بِٱلْحَقِّ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"We were not playing a pointless game when We created the heavens and earth and everything in between; We created them for a true purpose, but most people do not understand."
[Surat ad-Dukhan, 44:38–39]

3. Next, read aloud the verse and its translation on the right side of the slide: "We were not playing a pointless game when We created the heavens and earth and everything in between; We created them for a true purpose, but most people do not understand." **44:38**

4. Use this verse to explain the following point (students should take notes on **3.2, "why"**): God did not create humankind and the full range of human experiences for mere entertainment. Rather, He endowed this world with meaning and purpose, and everything that He wills into existence, be it 'good' or 'evil,' is working to fulfill that bigger purpose. The questions we must ask ourselves are: What is our purpose? And how does suffering allow us to fulfill this purpose? You may invite students to vocalize what this purpose is and how human suffering serves that purpose.

Slide 8: answering what is our purpose and how does suffering allow us to fulfill this purpose

5. Continue to **slide 8** and give students a moment to study the graphic. Then, ask students what they believe is the connection between our purpose and God's attributes (e.g., the Pure, the Most Generous, the all-Just, the all-Compassionate, and so on).

6. After hearing a few student opinions, explain the following connection:

   a. **God's True Nature:** God possesses the most beautiful names and attributes in their most expansive and perfect form, such as *al-'Adl* (the Most Just), *ar-Rahman* (the Most Compassionate), *al-Hakm* (the Ultimate, Perfect Judge), *as-Salam* (the Source of Peace), *as-Sabur* (the Most Patient), and so on. God loves to see His attributes manifesting throughout His creation.

   b. **Human Nature:** He created humankind as volitional beings, meaning that we possess a degree of free will and can choose how to act during our short time on earth.

   a. **Purpose of Human Existence:** According to God's revelation, our purpose for existence is to manifest Godly attributes with the volition/free-will that we have. God is *al-Mujeeb* and loves to see responsiveness in us toward those with needs. He is also as-Salam and loves to see us exude peace and spread peace between one another.

   a. **Suffering to Fulfill our Purpose:** We experience pain, 'evil' and suffering as a means through which we can manifest Godly attributes. In that regard, 'good' and 'evil' are two sides of the same coin—an inseparable cosmic pair that need each other to exist. We cannot exercise protection (*al-Hafidh*) without danger and harm, forgiveness (*al-Ghafir*) without offense, and generosity (*al-Kareem, al-Wahhab*) without deprivation and need. 'Evil' and suffering are necessary in order to extract from us Godly attributes and for our 'good' actions to have moral value.

7. After students finish taking notes under "why," ask them to consider how this second aspect of an Islamic, theocentric worldview helps us to resolve the problem of 'evil' and human suffering.

negativity · anger · sin · despair · questioning God's existence

قَالَتِ ٱلۡيَهُودُ يَدُ ٱللَّهِ مَغۡلُولَةٌ ۚ غُلَّتۡ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ وَلُعِنُوا بِمَا قَالُوا ۘ بَلۡ يَدَاهُ مَبۡسُوطَتَانِ يُنفِقُ كَيۡفَ يَشَآءُ

[Some among] the Jews said, 'God's hands are tied up [i.e., stingy, miserly].' May their hands be tied and they be condemned for what they said. Rather, He is open-handed, giving freely as He pleases..."

[Surat al-Ma'idah, 5:64]

قُبۡح
moral depravity

How: Our Response to Human Suffering — 9

5:64

وَقَالَتِ ٱلۡيَهُودُ يَدُ ٱللَّهِ مَغۡلُولَةٌ ۚ غُلَّتۡ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ وَلُعِنُوا بِمَا قَالُوا ۘ بَلۡ يَدَاهُ مَبۡسُوطَتَانِ يُنفِقُ كَيۡفَ يَشَآءُ

"[Some among] the Jews said, God's hands are tied up [i.e., stingy, miserly].' May their hands be tied and they be condemned for what they said. Rather, He is open-handed, giving freely as He pleases..."
[Surat al-Ma'idah, 5:64]

patience · prayer · obedience · hope · embodying Godly attributes

وَٱلَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا ٱبۡتِغَآءَ وَجۡهِ رَبِّهِمۡ وَأَقَامُوا ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَأَنفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقۡنَٰهُمۡ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً وَيَدۡرَءُونَ بِٱلۡحَسَنَةِ ٱلسَّيِّئَةَ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمۡ عُقۡبَى ٱلدَّارِ

And [they are] those who endure patiently, seeking their Lord's pleasure, establish prayer, donate from what We have provided for them—secretly and openly—**and respond to evil with excellence (ihsan)**. It is they who will have the ultimate abode.

[Surat ar-Ra'd, 13:22]

إِحۡسَان
moral excellence

How: Our Response to Human Suffering — 10

13:22

وَٱلَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا ٱبۡتِغَآءَ وَجۡهِ رَبِّهِمۡ وَأَقَامُوا ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَأَنفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقۡنَٰهُمۡ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً وَيَدۡرَءُونَ بِٱلۡحَسَنَةِ ٱلسَّيِّئَةَ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمۡ عُقۡبَى ٱلدَّارِ

"And [they are] those who endure patiently, seeking their Lord's pleasure, establish prayer, donate from what We have provided for them—secretly and openly—and respond to evil with excellence (ihsan). It is they who will have the ultimate abode."
[Surat ar-Ra'd, 13:22]

Slides 9–10 | The "how": how to respond to human suffering

1. Proceed to **slide 9**. Remind students that as volitional beings, God endowed us with the ability to choose how we respond to 'evil' and suffering. Our responses fall along a spectrum, with one end being destructive and the other being excellent.

2. Begin at slide nine. This side of the continuum highlights our potential for a destructive response, such as negativity, anger, sin, despair, and the decision to question God's existence (e.g., being angry at God and demanding to know "why" something is happening).

   a. Read aloud the displayed verse and its translation: "[Some among] the Jews said, God's hands are tied up [i.e., stingy, miserly].' May their hands be tied and they be condemned for what they said. Rather, He is open-handed, giving freely as He pleases..." **5:64**

   b. Explain that this verse criticizes how some Jews in Madinah responded to their economic difficulty from an ongoing drought. Believing that God must be reactionary to their immediate needs, they began questioning God and claiming that He was holding back stingily while He had the ability to give. The Jews in this circumstance failed to use their moment of suffering as a means to manifest God's attribute, *as-Sabur*, the Most-Patient, thus failing to fulfill their greater purpose.

3. Continue to **slide 10**. This side of the continuum highlights our potential for an excellent response, such as patience, prayer, obedience, hope, and the decision to embody Godly attributes.

   a. Read aloud the displayed verse and its translation: "And [they are] those who endure patiently, seeking their Lord's pleasure, establish prayer, donate from what We have provided for them—secretly and openly—**and respond to evil with excellence (ihsan)**. It is they who will have the ultimate abode." **13:22**

   b. Explain to students that God here is instructing us how to respond to 'evil' with moral excellence and in a manner that fulfills our greater purpose, i.e., manifesting Godly attributes and gaining His love. For example, imagine you witness an incident of police brutality in your neighborhood. Racial tensions escalate and people of various social affiliations respond differently to the violent act. Rather than growing angry with God (e.g., "where is God?"), you choose to respond with *ihsan* (e.g., "where are God's people?"). In an effort to restore justice, you speak in defense of the victim (*al-Adl*, manifesting God's attribute of perfect justice; *al-Haqq*, manifesting God's attribute of perfect truthfulness), donate to the family (*al-Kareem*, manifesting God's attribute of perfect generosity; *al-Wahhab*, manifesting God's attribute of perfect bestower of gifts), advocate for more rigorous and extensive implicit bias training for local police officers (*as-Salam*, manifesting God's attribute of spreading peace; *al-Hafidh*, manifesting God's attribute of perfect guardianship and protection), and commit to eliminating racism in your own circle of family and friends (*al-Hadi*, manifesting God's attribute of guiding to what is good).

   c. Our individual response to 'evil' and suffering ultimately determines the moral value of a situation. In that sense, what is seemingly 'evil' is, in reality, morally good if it extracts from us Godly attributes.

4. After students finish taking notes under "how," ask them to consider how this third aspect of an Islamic, theocentric worldview helps us to resolve the problem of 'evil' and human suffering.

5. To conclude this section, give students 7–10 minutes to complete the remaining tasks on **3.2**:

   a. First, they should synthesize what they learned into a memorable anchor chart, where they will illustrate and explain what an Islamic, theocentric worldview affords them as they experience and witness human suffering in their own life.

   b. Second, they should select a scenario and apply to it the three aspects of an Islamic, theocentric worldview.

> 💡 **Teacher takeaway**
>
> The second section of this lesson (slides 5–10) explores how an Islamic, theocentric worldview helps us resolve the problem of 'evil' and human suffering (objectives two and three). This is because the belief in a Rabb (a God who creates, sustains, and controls every minute detail of His creation) who endowed every aspect of our existence with meaning and purpose helps us perceive 'evil' and suffering as a means of extracting Godly attributes from within us, thus rendering 'evil' a moral good. So while we regard child starvation in war-torn Sudan as 'evil,' just as Kevin Carter did as a bystander, responding to that child's needs (*al-Mujeeb*, the Most-Responsive to His servants) and caring for him charitably (*al-Kareem*, the Most-Generous) turns that momentary 'evil' situation into an eternal good for us as bystanders. Similarly, the family's patience with their temporary suffering may translate into their eternal reward in the hereafter. Anchoring our feelings, thoughts, and actions onto God's reality and this worldview may save us from falling into anger and despair in the face of 'evil.' To conclude this lesson, we turn to Surat ad-Duha, where we find the prophetic model of Islamic theocentrism in a time of personal suffering.

Section ③

Slide 11 | The prophetic model for how to internally reconcile God's goodness and suffering

1. Transition to **slide 11**. Tell students that a more detailed blueprint for how to respond to 'evil' and suffering is found in the example of our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (as well as the prophets before him). At every moment of suffering throughout his life, he modeled for us what it means to internalize the Islamic, theocentric worldview. He anchored his feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in this worldview in order to earn God's love and fulfill his greater purpose.

2. Share with students the following incident: There was a time in Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ life in which revelation paused for a period of several months. The Prophet ﷺ felt intense sadness and began to think God was angry with him. To add to his suffering and pain, the polytheists around him mocked him for it and said that God had abandoned him. Surat ad-Duha was then revealed.

3. Read the first two verses of Surat ad-Duha and explain the derived lessons to students: "By the morning brightness. And [by] the night when it covers with darkness."

وَٱلضُّحَىٰ وَٱلَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَىٰ

Hope: *"There's light at the end of the tunnel."Oftentimes, in the midst of a difficult situation, we feel like it will never end and that the negative feelings we are experiencing are permanent*

4. Then, read the second verse and explain the derived lesson to students: "Your Lord has not taken leave of you, [O Muhammad], nor has He detested [you]."

<div dir="rtl">مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَىٰ</div>

Attachment: *"Trauma or suffering does not mean you have been abandoned by God. Secure attachment to a Higher Power has been linked to psychological wellness". God reminds the Prophet ﷺ that He did not leave him nor does He detest him. What does that tell us about our own suffering and relationship with God?*

5. Proceed to the third verse and explain the derived lesson to students: "And the Hereafter is better for you than the first [life]. And your Lord is going to give you, and you will be satisfied."

<div dir="rtl">وَلَلْءَاخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لَّكَ مِنَ ٱلْأُولَىٰ وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَىٰ</div>

Perspective: *Your matters are temporary. Changing perspectives is an important part of cognitive therapy.*

6. Read the next set of verses: "Did He not find you an orphan and give [you] refuge? And He found you lost and guided [you], And He found you poor and made [you] self-sufficient."

<div dir="rtl">أَلَمْ يَجِدْكَ يَتِيمًا فَـَٔاوَىٰ   وَوَجَدَكَ ضَآلًّا فَهَدَىٰ وَوَجَدَكَ عَآئِلًا فَأَغْنَىٰ</div>

Cognitive Therapy: *God is directly working on the cognitions of the Prophet ﷺ. He points out His blessings gently and reshapes his perspective.*

7. Next, read the following verses: "So as for the orphan, do not oppress [him]. And as for the petitioner, do not repel [him]."

<div dir="rtl">فَأَمَّا ٱلْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ وَأَمَّا ٱلسَّآئِلَ فَلَا تَنْهَرْ</div>

Action: *It is important to accompany new thoughts with new actions. New behaviors can strengthen a new, healthier mindset. You can connect this point to embodying Godly attributes in response to suffering as mentioned on **slide 8**.*

8. Lastly, end with the last verse: "But as for the favor of your Lord, report [it]."

<div dir="rtl">وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ</div>

Gratitude: *It is important to reflect on blessings. Science finds these small practices have an immense impact on well-being.*

9. Pass out copies of 3.3 "The Duha Approach" and give the following instructions to students: In the previous lesson, you were asked to journal about the following: "How do you personally relate with the topic of 'evil' and suffering? How do you relate these experiences with your belief in God?" You may choose to use that experience or an alternative one to complete this activity. In Surat ad-Duha, God modeled for us a framework of healing from suffering and hardships experienced in this world. Using the table below, imagine God having this conversation with you and apply the model to your own personal experience. Include how you could take the derived principles and apply them practically in your life and connect them to your experience.
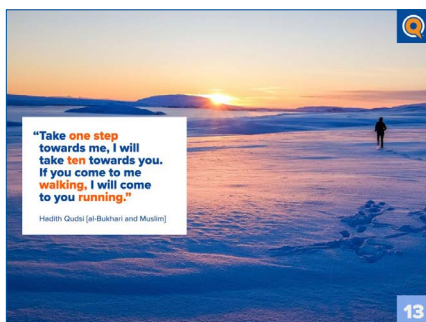
Slides 12–13 | Attachment: prayer and drawing close to God

1. Toggle between **slides 12 and 13** after reaching the third verse of Surat ad-Duha to further expand on developing a secure attachment to God.

   a. The word salah is derived from the proto-root ل-ص (sad and lam).

   a. The primary meanings of صل (sal) are: connect, link, circuit, cling, to meet, meeting, relation, communication, etc.

   b. Salah was gifted to Prophet Muhammad h after the Year of Sadness as a means of healing and attachment to his Creator."

2. Tie this to secure attachment by explaining to students that salah is a means to get through suffering by connecting and turning to God and finding God's countenance and love on the other side of suffering.

3. Transition to **slide 13** and display the hadith qudsi. Read the translation out loud for students. Ask them to share examples of what it means or how they saw it manifest in their lives.

   Allah says, "I am as My servant thinks I am.* I am with him when he makes mention of Me. If he makes mention of Me to himself, I make mention of him to Myself; and if he makes mention of Me in an assembly, I make mention of him in an assembly better than it. And if he draws near to Me an arm's length, I draw near to him a cubit, and if he draws near to Me a cubit, I draw near to him a fathom. And if he comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed." [al-Bukhari and Muslim]

*Another possible rendering of the Arabic is: "I am as My servant expects Me to be." The meaning is that forgiveness and acceptance of repentance by Allah is subject to His servant truly believing that He is forgiving and merciful.

Consolidation (5 min)

Slide 13 | Conclusion: final questions and remarks

1. To conclude the unit, remain on **slide 14** and invite students to share any final questions and remarks they have on the problem of 'evil' and suffering.

💡 **Teacher takeaway**

The prophetic response to suffering will give students a framework to a holistic response to suffering based on the conversation between Allah and the Prophet ﷺ as was revealed in Surat Ad-Duha. At the end of the instruction, students will have a chance to apply the model to their own personal experiences with suffering. It will give them a chance to circle back to the opening activity of this unit and apply all of the different concepts learned in this unit to reshape their perspective on their personal experience of suffering. It is also important to note that although Allah is responding to the Prophet's ﷺ experience of pain and suffering, we can use that same framework for our own experiences. The third verse of Surat Ad-Duha Allah states, "Your Lord has not forsaken you, [O Muhammad], nor has He detested [you]," comforting the Prophet ﷺ that, despite the suspension in revelation, Allah had not abandoned him. The same concept applies to you and your hardships or trauma. Explain to students that the traumsas in their life are not because Allah hates them or has ever stopped protecting them. Keep in mind that prior to this time of angst, the Prophet ﷺ experienced many events that would be considered traumatic to the average person, including orphanhood, poverty, and being a victim of physical assault and emotional abuse. In this section we hope to regrow your attachment and connection to Allah and for you to know that your suffering is not a means of pushing you away from faith, but bringing you closer to Him. Secure attachment to a Higher Power is linked to psychological wellness. What the Prophet ﷺ represents is the perfected model of theocentrism.

name: _____ date: _____

Attachment Styles
and their impact on our relationship with God

Directions: On a scale of 1-5, rate how much you believe each statement to be true. Use the following scale to help you score each statement. You may use the same number more than once in the same category.

1. Never	2. Rarely	3. Sometimes	4. Often	5. Always

Category one

__ I often worry about whether God is pleased with me.

__ When something bad happens to me, I feel like God is angry at me.

__ I often feel angry at God for not responding to me.

__ I am jealous at how close others feel to God.

Score: _____

Category two

__ Even if I fail, I do not question that God is pleased with me.

__ I turn to God when bad things happen to find answers and comfort.

__ Without God I could not function at all.

__ I connect daily with God through prayer.

Score: _____

Category three

__ I am uncomfortable with emotional displays of affection to God.

__ I prefer to not depend too much on God.

__ I am uncomfortable allowing God to control every aspect of my life.

__ It is uncommon for me to cry when speaking to God.

Score: _____

3.1 Attachment Styles   1

3.1

---

name: _____ date: _____

Human Suffering
constructing an Islamic, theocentric worldview

An Islamic, theocentric worldview is
_____
_____
_____

Directions: During the course of the lesson, use the space below 1) to take notes on the three aspects of an Islamic, theocentric worldview of human suffering, 2) to select a scenario and respond to the prompts, and 3) to create a memorable anchor chart that illustrates and explains what an Islamic, theocentric worldview affords you as you experience and witness human suffering in your life.

Islamic, Theocentric Worldview

1. What
(notes)

2. Why
(notes)

3. How
(sketch your anchor chart)   (notes)

3.2 Human Suffering   1

3.2

---

name: _____ date: _____

The Duha Approach
a prophetic response to suffering

Directions: At the start of this unit, you were asked to recall your own personal experience with suffering by journaling on the following: "How do you personally relate to the topic of 'evil' and suffering? How do you relate these experiences to your belief in God?" You may choose to use that experience or an alternative one to complete this activity. In Surat ad-Duha, God modeled for us a framework of healing from suffering and hardships experienced in this world. Using the table below, imagine God having this conversation with you and apply the model to your own personal experience. Include how you could take the derived principles and apply them practically in your life and connect them to your experience.

Verse	Derived Principle	Your Experience
وَالضُّحَىٰ وَالَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَىٰ "By the morning brightness. And [by] the night when it covers with darkness."	**Hope** "There's light at the end of the tunnel."	Hope _____ _____ _____ _____
مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَىٰ "By the morning brightness. And [by] the night when it covers with darkness." "Your Lord has not taken leave of you, [O Muhammad], nor has He detested [you]."	**Attachment** "Trauma or suffering does not mean you have been abandoned by God. Secure attachment to a Higher Power has been linked to psychological wellness." Consider your attachment style and how you feel it may be impacting your perception and relationship to God in light of your suffering.	Attachment _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

3.3 The Duha Approach   1

3.3

Stage 3: Assessments

Performance tasks

Formative assessment

1. To begin their exploration of the first objective, students will complete **3.1 "Attachment Styles"** to discover their attachment style to God (secure, anxious-preoccupied, or avoidant). Keep in mind that this assessment is a personal exercise and is not to be collected. Students will then explain how their attachment style can impact their perception of God during moments of personal suffering in **3.3 "Duha Approach."**

2. You may use 3.2 "Human Suffering" to formatively assess the second objective. The anchor charts students complete should communicate the resolution and personal comfort they find in internalizing an Islamic, theocentric worldview of human suffering.   For example, believing that God decreed and is intimately involved in every act of 'evil' and suffering we experisence, and that the purpose of our suffering is to extract from us Godly attributes may help us turn a moment of 'evil' into a moral good. Next, review student application of these three aspects of an Islamic, theocentric worldview to a real-life scenario. They should demonstrate how a morally-excellent response to 'evil' and suffering can help us fulfill our greater purpose, thus earning God's love.

3. Student responses on **3.2** and **3.3** may be used to formatively assess the third objective. In their final response on **3.2 "Human Suffering,"** students should highlight an appreciation of the human response to suffering and how the human response will determine the value of a situation. In their responses to 3.3 "Duha Approach," students should be able to apply the derived principles from the Duha Approach to help them determine the value of a situation, and bring out the best response to a seemingly 'evil' situation.

name: _____   **date:** _____

Islamic Theocentric Worldview
in the story of Prophet Yusuf

Directions: Revisit the story of Prophet Yusuf in the Qur'an and explore how Yusuf models for us the internalization of an Islamic, theocentric worldview during his experience with suffering.

Part 1 Select and study the verse(s) from one incident below.

Mark	Incident	Verse(s)	Response
☐	Sexual assault	12:23	Integrity and prayer
☐	Imprisonment	12:33	Turns to God (secure attachment)
☐	Mockery	12:77	Patience and forbearance
☐	Family reunion	12:92	Forgiveness

For an additional challenge, you may consider other individuals in the story of Yusuf and their response to 'evil' and suffering. Examples include Yaqub's response to his sons' jealousy and betrayal, to losing Yusuf, and later, to losing Benyamin.

Part 2 Explain how Prophet Yusuf's response in this incident of suffering is anchored in the Islamic, theocentric view. Be sure to address all three aspects of this worldview: the what, why, and how (see your notes and anchor chart on **3.2** for reference).

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3.4 Islamic Theocentric Worldview   1

3.4

Summative assessment

Students will complete **3.4 "Islamic, Theocentric Worldview"** in which they will revisit the story of Prophet Yusuf to explore how he models for us an internalization of the Islamic theocentric worldview through his experience with 'evil' and suffering. This assessment is divided into three parts:

- Part one: Students will select and study one part of Surat Yusuf where Allah highlights Prophet Yusuf's response to a moment of suffering.

- Part two: Students will explain how Prophet Yusuf's response in that verse selection is anchored in an Islamic, theocentric worldview. They will need to touch on all three aspects of this worldview in their explanation.

- Part three: Students will turn inward and reflect on their own temperament, emotional regulation skills, character traits, habits, attachment style, etc., that may prevent them from responding with ihsan in a similar situation to Yusuf's.
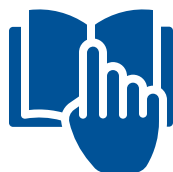
Additional readings

References

References and resources

Endnotes

Lesson plan 1—Optional Extension

1 "Child Marriage in the United States," Human Trafficking Search, last modified June 6, 2017, https://humantraffickingsearch.org/201766child-marriage-in-the-united-states/?gclid=CjwKCAiAu8SAB-hAxEiwAsodSZJlYvWLrrSJawJbY5jYFk8hVCU1pRk4KW12v-CSLZ-V2us5Aw_ybxRxoCF-IQAvD_BwE

Lesson plan 3

2 Lee Strobel, The Case for Faith (Michigan: Zondervan, 2000).

3 "Starving Child and Vulture," TIME, Accessed May 20, 2021, http://100photos.time.com/photos/kevin-carter-starving-child-vulture "Kevin Carter," Famous Photographers, Accessed May 20, 2021, https://www.famousphotographers.net/kevin-carter

4 Stephanie Huang, "Secure Attachment and Other Attachment Styles", Simply Psychology, last modified August 5, 2021, https://www.simplypsychology.org/attachment-styles.html

5 Mohammad Elshinawy, "Why Do People Suffer? God's Existence and the Problem of Evil," Yaqeen Institute, July 2, 2018, https://yaqeeninstitute.org/mohammad-elshinawy/why-do-people-suffer-gods-existence-the-problem-of-evil

Quranic references

Lesson plan 1

فَٱنطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا رَكِبَا فِى ٱلسَّفِينَةِ خَرَقَهَا ۖ قَالَ أَخَرَقْتَهَا لِتُغْرِقَ أَهْلَهَا لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْـًٔا إِمْرًا

So they set out, until when they had embarked on the ship, he [i.e., al-Khidr] tore it open. [Moses] said, "Have you torn it open to drown its people? You have certainly done a grave thing." [Surat al-Kahf, 18:71]

فَٱنطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَـٰمًا فَقَتَلَهُۥ قَالَ أَقَتَلْتَ نَفْسًا زَكِيَّةًۢ بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ لَّقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْـًٔا نُّكْرًا

So they set out, until when they met a boy, he [i.e., Khidr] killed him. [Moses] said, "Have you killed a pure soul for other than [having killed] a soul? You have certainly done a deplorable thing." [Surat al-Kahf, 18:74]

فَٱنطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَآ أَتَيَآ أَهْلَ قَرْيَةٍ ٱسْتَطْعَمَآ أَهْلَهَا فَأَبَوْا۟ أَن يُضَيِّفُوهُمَا فَوَجَدَا فِيهَا جِدَارًا يُرِيدُ أَن يَنقَضَّ فَأَقَامَهُۥ ۖ قَالَ لَوْ شِئْتَ لَتَّخَذْتَ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا

So they set out, until when they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality. And they found therein a wall about to collapse, so he [Khidr] restored it. [Moses] said, "If you wished, you could have taken for it a payment." [Surat al-Kahf, 18:77]

وَكَيْفَ تَصْبِرُ عَلَىٰ مَا لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهِۦ خُبْرًا

"And how can you have patience for what you do not fully encompass in knowledge?" [Surat al-Kahf, 18:68]

$$\text{أَحَسِبَ ٱلنَّاسُ أَن يُتْرَكُوٓا۟ أَن يَقُولُوٓا۟ ءَامَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ}$$

Do people think that they will be left (at ease) only on their saying, "We believe" and will not be put to any test? [Surat al-Ankabut, 29:2]

$$\text{وَإِذَآ أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَى ٱلْإِنسَٰنِ أَعْرَضَ وَنَـَٔا بِجَانِبِهِۦ ۖ وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ ٱلشَّرُّ كَانَ يَـُٔوسًا}$$

And when evil (sharr) afflicts him, he is in utter despair. [Surat al-Isra, 17:83]

Lesson plan 2

$$\text{وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً ۖ قَالُوٓا۟ أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ ٱلدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ}$$
$$\text{نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّيٓ أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ}$$

[The angels] said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we exalt You with praise and declare Your perfection?" He [Allah] said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know." [Surat al-Baqarah, 2:30]

$$\text{وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِى عَنِّى فَإِنِّى قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ ٱلدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ۖ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لِى وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِى لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ}$$

And when My servants ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning Me—indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the caller when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided. [Surat al-Baqarah, 2:186]

$$\text{إِذْ قَالُوا۟ لَيُوسُفُ وَأَخُوهُ أَحَبُّ إِلَىٰٓ أَبِينَا مِنَّا وَنَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّ أَبَانَا لَفِى ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ}$$
$$\text{ٱقْتُلُوا۟ يُوسُفَ أَوِ ٱطْرَحُوهُ أَرْضًا يَخْلُ لَكُمْ وَجْهُ أَبِيكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا۟ مِن بَعْدِهِۦ قَوْمًا صَٰلِحِينَ}$$
$$\text{قَالَ قَآئِلٌ مِّنْهُمْ لَا تَقْتُلُوا۟ يُوسُفَ وَأَلْقُوهُ فِى غَيَٰبَتِ ٱلْجُبِّ يَلْتَقِطْهُ بَعْضُ ٱلسَّيَّارَةِ إِن كُنتُمْ فَٰعِلِينَ}$$
$$\text{قَالُوا۟ يَٰٓأَبَانَا مَا لَكَ لَا تَأْمَ۫نَّا عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ لَنَٰصِحُونَ}$$
$$\text{أَرْسِلْهُ مَعَنَا غَدًا يَرْتَعْ وَيَلْعَبْ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ لَحَٰفِظُونَ}$$
$$\text{قَالَ إِنِّى لَيَحْزُنُنِىٓ أَن تَذْهَبُوا۟ بِهِۦ وَأَخَافُ أَن يَأْكُلَهُ ٱلذِّئْبُ وَأَنتُمْ عَنْهُ غَٰفِلُونَ}$$
$$\text{قَالُوا۟ لَئِنْ أَكَلَهُ ٱلذِّئْبُ وَنَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّآ إِذًا لَّخَٰسِرُونَ}$$
$$\text{فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُوا۟ بِهِۦ وَأَجْمَعُوٓا۟ أَن يَجْعَلُوهُ فِى غَيَٰبَتِ ٱلْجُبِّ ۚ وَأَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَيْهِ لَتُنَبِّئَنَّهُم بِأَمْرِهِمْ هَٰذَا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ}$$
$$\text{وَجَآءُوٓ أَبَاهُمْ عِشَآءً يَبْكُونَ}$$
$$\text{قَالُوا۟ يَٰٓأَبَانَآ إِنَّا ذَهَبْنَا نَسْتَبِقُ وَتَرَكْنَا يُوسُفَ عِندَ مَتَٰعِنَا فَأَكَلَهُ ٱلذِّئْبُ ۖ وَمَآ أَنتَ بِمُؤْمِنٍ لَّنَا وَلَوْ كُنَّا صَٰدِقِينَ}$$
$$\text{وَجَآءُو عَلَىٰ قَمِيصِهِۦ بِدَمٍ كَذِبٍ ۚ قَالَ بَلْ سَوَّلَتْ لَكُمْ أَنفُسُكُمْ أَمْرًا ۖ فَصَبْرٌ جَمِيلٌ ۖ وَٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُسْتَعَانُ عَلَىٰ مَا تَصِفُونَ}$$
$$\text{وَجَآءَتْ سَيَّارَةٌ فَأَرْسَلُوا۟ وَارِدَهُمْ فَأَدْلَىٰ دَلْوَهُۥ ۖ قَالَ يَٰبُشْرَىٰ هَٰذَا غُلَٰمٌ ۚ وَأَسَرُّوهُ بِضَٰعَةً ۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌۢ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ}$$
$$\text{وَشَرَوْهُ بِثَمَنٍۭ بَخْسٍ دَرَٰهِمَ مَعْدُودَةٍ وَكَانُوا۟ فِيهِ مِنَ ٱلزَّٰهِدِينَ}$$

The brothers said to each other, 'Although we are many, Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than we are, our father is clearly in the wrong.' One of them said, 'Kill Joseph or banish him to another land, and your father's attention will be free to turn to you. After that you can be righteous.' Another of them said, 'Do not kill Joseph, but, if you must, throw him into the hidden depths of a well where some caravan may pick him up.

They said to their father, 'Why do you not trust us with Joseph? We wish him well. Send him with us tomorrow and he will enjoy himself and play, we will take good care of him.' He replied, 'The thought of you taking him away with you worries me: I am afraid a wolf may eat him when you are not paying attention.' They said, 'If a wolf were to eat him when there are so many of us, we would truly be losers!' Then they took him away with them, resolved upon throwing him into the hidden depths of a well, We inspired him, saying, 'You will tell them of all this [at a time] when they do not realize who you are. At nightfall, they returned to their father weeping. They said, 'We went off racing one another, leaving Joseph behind with our things, and a wolf ate him. You will not believe us, though we are telling the truth!' And they showed him his shirt, deceptively stained with blood. He cried, 'No! Your souls have prompted you to do wrong! But it is best to be patient: from God alone I seek help to bear what you are saying.' Some travelers came by. They sent someone to draw water and he let down his bucket. 'Good news!' he exclaimed. 'Here is a boy!' They hid him like a piece of merchandise, God was well aware of what they did. Then they sold him for a small price, for a few pieces of silver, so little did they value him. [Surat Yusuf, 12:8–20]

وَرَٰوَدَتْهُ ٱلَّتِى هُوَ فِى بَيْتِهَا عَن نَّفْسِهِۦ وَغَلَّقَتِ ٱلْأَبْوَٰبَ وَقَالَتْ هَيْتَ لَكَ ۚ قَالَ مَعَاذَ ٱللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّهُۥ رَبِّىٓ أَحْسَنَ مَثْوَاىَ ۖ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُفْلِحُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهِۦ ۖ وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوْلَآ أَن رَّءَا بُرْهَٰنَ رَبِّهِۦ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ لِنَصْرِفَ عَنْهُ ٱلسُّوٓءَ وَٱلْفَحْشَآءَ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ٱلْمُخْلَصِينَ

وَٱسْتَبَقَا ٱلْبَابَ وَقَدَّتْ قَمِيصَهُۥ مِن دُبُرٍ وَأَلْفَيَا سَيِّدَهَا لَدَا ٱلْبَابِ ۚ قَالَتْ مَا جَزَآءُ مَنْ أَرَادَ بِأَهْلِكَ سُوٓءًا إِلَّآ أَن يُسْجَنَ أَوْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

قَالَ هِىَ رَٰوَدَتْنِى عَن نَّفْسِى ۚ وَشَهِدَ شَاهِدٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِهَآ إِن كَانَ قَمِيصُهُۥ قُدَّ مِن قُبُلٍ فَصَدَقَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ ٱلْكَٰذِبِينَ

وَإِن كَانَ قَمِيصُهُۥ قُدَّ مِن دُبُرٍ فَكَذَبَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ

فَلَمَّا رَءَا قَمِيصَهُۥ قُدَّ مِن دُبُرٍ قَالَ إِنَّهُۥ مِن كَيْدِكُنَّ ۖ إِنَّ كَيْدَكُنَّ عَظِيمٌ

يُوسُفُ أَعْرِضْ عَنْ هَٰذَا ۚ وَٱسْتَغْفِرِى لِذَنۢبِكِ ۖ إِنَّكِ كُنتِ مِنَ ٱلْخَاطِـِٔينَ

وَقَالَ نِسْوَةٌ فِى ٱلْمَدِينَةِ ٱمْرَأَتُ ٱلْعَزِيزِ تُرَٰوِدُ فَتَىٰهَا عَن نَّفْسِهِۦ ۖ قَدْ شَغَفَهَا حُبًّا ۖ إِنَّا لَنَرَىٰهَا فِى ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ

فَلَمَّا سَمِعَتْ بِمَكْرِهِنَّ أَرْسَلَتْ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَعْتَدَتْ لَهُنَّ مُتَّكَـًٔا وَءَاتَتْ كُلَّ وَٰحِدَةٍ مِّنْهُنَّ سِكِّينًا وَقَالَتِ ٱخْرُجْ عَلَيْهِنَّ ۖ فَلَمَّا رَأَيْنَهُۥٓ أَكْبَرْنَهُۥ وَقَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ وَقُلْنَ حَٰشَ لِلَّهِ مَا هَٰذَا بَشَرًا إِنْ هَٰذَآ إِلَّا مَلَكٌ كَرِيمٌ

قَالَتْ فَذَٰلِكُنَّ ٱلَّذِى لُمْتُنَّنِى فِيهِ ۖ وَلَقَدْ رَٰوَدتُّهُۥ عَن نَّفْسِهِۦ فَٱسْتَعْصَمَ ۖ وَلَئِن لَّمْ يَفْعَلْ مَآ ءَامُرُهُۥ لَيُسْجَنَنَّ وَلَيَكُونًا مِّنَ ٱلصَّٰغِرِينَ

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱلسِّجْنُ أَحَبُّ إِلَىَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِىٓ إِلَيْهِ ۖ وَإِلَّا تَصْرِفْ عَنِّى كَيْدَهُنَّ أَصْبُ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكُن مِّنَ ٱلْجَٰهِلِينَ

فَٱسْتَجَابَ لَهُۥ رَبُّهُۥ فَصَرَفَ عَنْهُ كَيْدَهُنَّ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ

ثُمَّ بَدَا لَهُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ مَا رَأَوُا ٱلْءَايَٰتِ لَيَسْجُنُنَّهُۥ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ

The woman in whose house he was living tried to seduce him: she bolted the doors and said, 'Come to me,' and he replied, 'God forbid! My master has been good to me; wrongdoers never prosper.' She made for him, and he would have succumbed to her if he had not seen evidence of his Lord. We did this in order to keep evil and indecency away from him, for he was truly one of Our chosen servants. They raced for the door, she tore his

shirt from behind, and at the door they met her husband. She said, 'What, other than prison or painful punishment, should be the reward of someone who tried to dishonor your wife?' But he said, 'She tried to seduce me.' A member of her household suggested, 'If his shirt is torn at the front, then it is she who is telling the truth and he who is lying. But, if it is torn at the back, then she is lying and he is telling the truth.' When the husband saw that the shirt was torn at the back, he said, 'This is another instance of women's treachery: your treachery is truly great. Joseph, overlook this; but you [wife], ask forgiveness for your sin, you have done wrong.' Some of the women of the city said, 'The governor's wife is trying to seduce her slave! Love for him consumes her heart! It is clear to us that she has gone astray.' When she heard their malicious talk, she prepared a banquet and sent for them, giving each of them a knife. She said to Joseph, Come out and show yourself to them.' And when the women saw him, they were stunned by his beauty, and cut their hands, exclaiming, 'Grate God! He cannot be mortal! He must be a precious angel! She said, 'This is the one you blamed me for. I tried to seduce him and he wanted to remain chaste, but if he does not do what I command now, he will be put in prison and degraded.' Joseph said, 'My Lord! I would prefer prison to what these women are calling me to do. If you do not protect me from their treachery, I shall yield to them and do wrong.' And his Lord answered his prayer and protected him from their treachery, He is the All-Hearing, All-Knowing. In the end they thought it best, after seeing all the signs of his innocence, that they should imprison him for a while. [Surat Yusuf, 12:23–35]

Lesson plan 3

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا ٱلسَّمَوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لَعِبِينَ وَمَا خَلَقْنَهُمَآ إِلَّا بِٱلْحَقِّ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

We were not playing a pointless game when We created the heavens and earth and everything in between; We created them for a true purpose, but most people do not understand. [Surat ad-Dukhan, 44:38–39]

وَٱلضُّحَىٰ وَٱلَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَىٰ مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَىٰ وَلَلْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لَّكَ مِنَ ٱلْأُولَىٰ وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَىٰ وَوَجَدَكَ عَآئِلًا فَأَغْنَىٰ فَأَمَّا ٱلْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ وَأَمَّا ٱلسَّآئِلَ فَلَا تَنْهَرْ وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ

By the morning brightness. And [by] the night when it covers with darkness. Your Lord has not taken leave of you, [O Muhammad], nor has He detested [you]. And the Hereafter is better for you than the first [life]. And your Lord is going to give you, and you will be satisfied. Did He not find you an orphan and give [you] refuge? And He found you lost and guided [you], And He found you poor and made [you] self-sufficient. So as for the orphan, do not oppress [him]. And as for the petitioner,1 do not repel [him]. But as for the favor of your Lord, report [it]. [Surat ad-Duha 93:1–11]

وَٱلَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا ٱبْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا ٱلصَّلَاةَ وَأَنفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً وَيَدْرَءُونَ بِٱلْحَسَنَةِ ٱلسَّيِّئَةَ أُوْلَئِكَ لَهُمْ عُقْبَى ٱلدَّارِ

And [they are] those who endure patiently, seeking their Lord's pleasure, establish prayer, donate from what We have provided for them—secretly and openly—and respond to evil with excellence. It is they who will have the ultimate abode. [Surat ar-Ra'd, 13:22]

Hadith resources

Lesson plan 3

The Messenger of Allah h said, "Allah Almighty says: Whoever comes with a good deed will have the reward of ten like it and even more. Whoever comes with an evil deed will be recompensed for one evil deed like it or he will be forgiven. Whoever draws close to Me by the length of a hand, I will draw close to him by the length of an arm. Whoever draws close to Me by the length of an arm, I will draw close to him by the length of a fathom. Whoever comes to Me walking, I will come to him running. Whoever meets Me with enough sins to fill the earth, not associating any partners with Me, I will meet him with as much forgiveness." [Muslim]

Textual resources

Lesson plan 1

Jackson, Sherman. *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Lesson plan 3

Beck, Richard, and Angie McDonald. "Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, Tests of Working Model Correspondence, and an Exploration of Faith Group Differences." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 2 (June 2004): 92–103. https://doi.org/10.1177/009164710403200202

Huang, Stephanie. "Secure Attachment and Other Attachment Styles." Simply Psychology. Last modified August 24, 2020. https://www.simplypsychology.org/attachment-styles.html

Ni, Preston. "What is Your Relationship Attachment Style?" Psychology Today. Last modified July 5, 2015. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/communication-success/201507/what-is-your-relationship-attachment-style

Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Faith*. Michigan: Zondervan, 2000.

Multimedia resources

Lesson plan 2

Who was Malcolm X? https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=ZaVlucxNeTY&feature=emb_logo

His Final Speech, Malcolm X https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5me7zrt1QA&t=97s

Allah Loves Trust https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWjaVJzk8_Q

Will I Remember Pain and Suffering from this World in Jannah? https://www.faithiq.org/Spirituality/Will-I-Remember-Pain-And-Suffering-From-This-World-In-Jannah

The Reality of this World https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fV8-2oRAeFU