

ATHEISM AND DOUBTS AMONG YOUTH: THE PROPHETIC MODEL OF FAITH-BASED GUIDANCE

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Abstract

In the contemporary world, atheism has emerged as a significant intellectual and spiritual challenge, particularly among the youth. Rapid technological advancement, exposure to secular ideologies, and weakened religious education have contributed to a growing sense of doubt regarding traditional faith narratives. This paper examines the rising phenomenon of atheism among young people and explores how the Prophetic model, as exemplified in the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), provides a comprehensive framework to address this crisis of belief. By analysing the causes behind the spread of atheistic tendencies and evaluating the Prophetic methods of nurturing faith, resolving doubts, and fostering critical yet spiritually anchored minds, this study highlights actionable insights for educators, parents, and community leaders. The paper argues that a return to the Prophetic approach offers a balanced and deeply humane strategy for restoring faith in an age of scepticism.

Keywords: Atheism, Youth and Faith, Doubt and Scepticism, Prophetic Guidance, Seerah, Faith Development, Contemporary Challenges, Islamic Theology, Religious Identity.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of theism originates from the Greek word Theos meaning "God." In religious philosophy, theism denotes the belief in the existence of a divine being or beings, encompassing both monotheism (belief in one God) and polytheism (belief in multiple gods). It emphasizes the understanding that the universe and human existence are purposefully shaped by a higher power. In contrast, the term atheism is etymologically derived from the Greek prefix a- ("without") combined with Theos ("God"), thereby signifying the absence, denial, or rejection of belief in any deity. While theism affirms the existence of a transcendent reality, atheism fundamentally negates it, offering a worldview in which life and the cosmos are understood without reference

to a divine source.

In Arabic, the term *al-ilhād* (الإلحاد) is derived from the root word *lahad* (لحد), which literally refers to an inclined or slanted grave. Linguistically, it signifies deviation, turning aside, or swerving from a straight path. In theological usage, *ilhād* came to denote deviation from the straight path of belief in God and thus refers to atheism or heretical deviation from monotheism.

"An atheist is someone who denies or rejects the belief in the existence of God or any divine being.

Atheism is the rejection of belief in the existence of God or gods. It includes both the active denial that any deities exist (strong atheism) and the absence of belief in deities (weak atheism)." ⁽¹⁾

"Atheism can be broadly defined as the absence of belief in the existence of God or gods. It may range from passive disbelief to active denial of divine existence." ⁽³⁾

"Atheism: Disbelief or lack of belief in the existence of God or gods." ⁽⁴⁾

1. Understanding Atheism and Its Roots

In contemporary societies, especially among younger generations, religious disaffiliation does not emerge through a single pathway. The phenomenon of atheism represents a spectrum of intellectual, emotional, and practical responses to the challenges of faith. Understanding the different types of atheism is essential to diagnosing the underlying causes of belief abandonment and developing meaningful responses. The following typology outlines the major forms through which atheistic tendencies manifest, providing a framework for analysing the crisis of faith among youth in a rapidly changing world.

1.1 Philosophical Atheism

Philosophical atheism involves the rational rejection of belief in God, typically grounded in scepticism, critical inquiry, and the perceived absence of empirical or logical justification for religious claims. It is primarily an intellectual stance, often developed through exposure to secular worldviews, scientific materialism, or epistemological critiques of metaphysical assertions. This form of atheism views theistic belief as lacking in objective verifiability and therefore not intellectually tenable. ⁽²⁾

A general example of this would be a student who, during advanced academic study, encounters naturalistic theories of the universe, philosophical arguments about the burden of proof, or critiques of religious epistemology. If these ideas are not counterbalanced by robust theological engagement or intellectual mentorship, the student may come to regard belief in God as irrational or unnecessary, thus adopting a worldview based on reason alone. This shift represents the core of philosophical atheism: disbelief arising from systematic, reason-based analysis rather than emotional or cultural motivations.

This type of atheism emphasizes cognitive doubt and intellectual autonomy, and it is often sustained through engagement with rationalist literature, critical thinking paradigms, or scientific explanatory models that attempt to interpret existence without reference to divine agency.

1.2 Emotional (Affective) Atheism

Emotional or affective atheism stems primarily from personal suffering, existential dissatisfaction, or the perception of divine injustice. Unlike rational or

ATHEISM AND DOUBTS AMONG YOUTH: THE PROPHETIC MODEL OF FAITH-BASED GUIDANCE

philosophical atheism, which is based on logical argumentation, emotional atheism arises from deeply personal and psychological experiences that lead to disillusionment with religious belief. Individuals may distance themselves from faith after encountering traumatic events such as the death of a loved one, war, prolonged illness, or exposure to suffering that seems irreconcilable with the concept of a compassionate and just God. In such instances, disbelief is not the product of intellectual critique but of perceived abandonment, unanswered prayers, or the absence of spiritual solace during crises. As Vitz notes in his psychological analysis of atheism, the roots of disbelief often lie in unresolved emotional conflict and unmet spiritual needs rather than abstract reasoning. (3)

For example, an individual who repeatedly prays for relief during a period of extreme hardship such as family loss, injustice, or chronic illness but finds no perceivable change or support, may begin to question the reality or concern of God. Over time, this emotional pain can solidify into a rejection of divine presence altogether. Emotional atheism, therefore, reflects the existential impact of unaddressed suffering and the psychological toll of spiritual alienation.

1.3. Practical Atheism

Practical atheism refers to a condition in which an individual may formally acknowledge belief in God but lives without any meaningful reference to that belief in their daily conduct. Unlike philosophical or emotional atheism, this form is not rooted in intellectual rejection or psychological trauma. Instead, it reflects a disengagement from religious practice, moral accountability, or spiritual consciousness, even while maintaining cultural or nominal affiliation with religion. Individuals may continue identifying with a religious tradition while their lifestyle, choices, and values are shaped entirely by secular or material priorities. (4)

*A common example of practical atheism is a person who identifies with a religion for social or familial reasons but does not engage in prayer, avoid prohibited actions, or reflect on divine accountability. Their decisions ethical, financial, or relational are made independently of any religious guidance. While they do not openly deny God's existence, their life patterns suggest that divine reality holds no functional place in their worldview. This form of atheism is closely aligned with what the Qur'an refers to as *ghaflah* (heedlessness), where the heart is inattentive to truth despite outward acknowledgment.* (8)

Practical atheism is often reinforced by secular social environments, consumer-driven cultures, or a gradual decline in religious commitment due to the lack of spiritual reinforcement or community engagement.

1.4. Militant (Anti-theistic) Atheism

Militant atheism, also referred to as anti-theistic atheism, is characterized by active opposition to religious belief and institutions. Unlike philosophical atheism, which may passively reject belief on rational grounds, militant atheism regards religion as inherently harmful, irrational, or regressive, and seeks to challenge or eliminate its influence from both public discourse and private life. This form of atheism is often ideologically driven and emerges in response to perceived religious oppression, political injustice, or dogmatic authority structures. It is commonly accompanied by public

advocacy, polemics, or activism aimed at confronting religious institutions and promoting secularism as a more rational and liberated framework for society. ⁽⁵⁾

A general example of this form might involve individuals who, having experienced authoritarian religious control, gender-based restrictions, or suppression of intellectual freedom in religious contexts, become not only disillusioned with faith but aggressively critical of it. Such individuals may engage in public campaigns, online platforms, or academic spaces that denounce religious belief as an obstacle to human rights, scientific progress, or personal freedom. Militant atheism is distinguished by its explicit hostility toward religion and its goal of cultural or institutional deconstruction of faith-based worldviews.

1.5. Apatheism

Apatheism refers to a stance of indifference toward the question of God's existence. Unlike other forms of atheism that arise from critical reasoning or emotional disillusionment, apatheism is marked by a lack of concern or interest in religious belief altogether. Individuals who adopt this position are neither theistic nor explicitly atheistic; rather, they regard theological questions as irrelevant to their lives. This form of disengagement is increasingly prevalent in modern secular societies, where existential concerns are often displaced by material pursuits, digital distractions, or cultural pluralism that diminishes the urgency of ultimate questions. ⁽⁶⁾

A general example of apatheism may be found in individuals who grow up in religiously diverse, secular environments but have never seriously considered the role of God in their lives. For them, questions of divine existence, morality rooted in revelation, or metaphysical purpose carry little emotional or intellectual significance.

Their disconnection is not rooted in rejection but in apathy, a worldview shaped more by distraction and detachment than by deliberate disbelief. In such cases, the loss of faith may not be accompanied by argument or crisis, but simply by a gradual erosion of interest in the spiritual dimension of existence.

1.6. Agnostic Atheism

Agnostic atheism refers to a position that combines a lack of belief in God with an acknowledgment of the epistemological limits of human knowledge. Unlike strong atheism, which asserts the nonexistence of God with certainty, agnostic atheism maintains a stance of personal disbelief while recognizing that absolute knowledge about metaphysical realities is ultimately unattainable. This view is based on the premise that while current evidence does not support belief in a deity, it is also impossible to disprove divine existence conclusively. It reflects an attitude of intellectual humility, often emerging from prolonged reflection on the complexity of religious claims, philosophical skepticism, and the recognition of human cognitive limitations. ⁽⁷⁾

A general example of this orientation would be an individual who, after exploring religious texts, theological arguments, and scientific perspectives, concludes that belief in God is not persuasive, yet also refrains from asserting that God's existence is impossible. This person may express doubt in theism without fully committing to atheism in an absolute sense. Their position is not rooted in hostility or apathy but in a measured suspension of judgment, grounded in the awareness that ultimate truths may lie beyond empirical inquiry or human reasoning. In this way, agnostic atheism

ATHEISM AND DOUBTS AMONG YOUTH: THE PROPHETIC MODEL OF FAITH-BASED GUIDANCE

occupies a middle ground between committed disbelief and openended uncertainty.

Understanding the diversity within atheism is crucial for addressing the contemporary challenges to faith. Intellectual skepticism, emotional disillusionment, cultural detachment, and ideological opposition all contribute to the rising phenomenon of religious disaffiliation. Effective responses must recognize and engage these varied motivations with both intellectual and spiritual sensitivity.

2. Contemporary Trends in Youth Atheism

In recent years, atheism has witnessed a noticeable rise among youth globally, with particularly nuanced expressions in both Western and Muslim-majority societies. This trend reflects deep transformations in the spiritual, cultural, and intellectual landscapes of younger generations.

2.1. Global Rise of Atheism

According to the Pew Research Centre, in 41 out of 106 countries surveyed, young adults are significantly less religious than older generations, indicating a generational decline in religious affiliation. In the United States, Barna Group reports that 13% of Generation Z identifies as atheist nearly double the adult national average. This generational shift reflects increasing secularization and skepticism toward traditional religious institutions.

2.2. Trends Among Muslim Youth

Muslim-majority countries are also witnessing a complex pattern of changing religiosity. The Arab Barometer (2021–2022) found that in countries like Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt, a growing percentage of youth had previously identified as “not religious” (e.g., 46% in Tunisia in 2019), though a recent shift indicates some return to religious identification. In Iran, a 2020 survey revealed that only 32% of respondents identified as Muslim, with nearly 30% identifying as atheist or nonreligious. Similarly, in Turkey, self-identified atheists increased from 1% to 3% between 2008 and 2018. In the U.S., a Family & Youth Institute study explores emerging patterns of disaffiliation and doubt among American Muslim youth, citing pressures of identity, integration, and intellectual questioning.

2.3. Cultural, Intellectual, and Technological Influences

The surge in youth atheism is shaped by several converging forces:

- *Digital Platforms and Social Media: Widespread access to alternative worldviews challenges traditional beliefs and introduces secular and atheist arguments at a young age.*
- *Science vs. Religion Narrative: Many youth perceive a conflict between scientific reasoning and religious explanations, often leading to doubt or rejection of religious frameworks.*
- *Disillusionment with Religious Institutions: Scandals, rigidity, or perceived hypocrisy in religious leadership can result in disengagement or rebellion.*
- *Globalization and Individualism: Increasing emphasis on self-definition, freedom of belief, and relativism encourages youth to distance themselves from inherited identities.*

2.4. Emergence of “Spiritual but Not Religious” (SBNR) Identity

While many youth reject institutional religion, they do not always abandon spirituality. The SBNR identity prevalent among both Western and Muslim youth reflects a desire for personal meaning, ethical values, and transcendent experiences outside formal doctrine. A 2023 Pew study found that 22% of U.S. adults, particularly younger demographics, now identify as ‘spiritual but not religious.’ This trend suggests that the crisis is less about faith itself and more about the forms and frameworks through which it is traditionally practiced.

3. Causes of Faith Crisis Among Muslim Youth

The increasing trend of atheism or religious disaffiliation among Muslim youth is not an isolated phenomenon but the result of several interconnected social, intellectual, and emotional factors. These causes can be categorized across four major domains: educational, psychological, socio-cultural, and institutional.

3.1. Weak Religious Education and Intellectual Engagement

A major contributor to the erosion of faith among Muslim youth is the inadequacy of religious education in meeting their intellectual and spiritual needs. In many cases, instruction focuses heavily on rote memorization, ritual performance, and the transmission of fixed doctrines, with little space for inquiry, reflection, or realworld application. This approach often leaves students with a superficial understanding of religion that fails to equip them to engage with complex philosophical or ethical questions.

For example, a student who has memorized passages of the Qur’an without understanding their contextual meaning may struggle to respond when confronted with secular arguments about morality, evolution, or the existence of God in a university classroom. In the absence of educators who encourage thoughtful dialogue or present Islam as a comprehensive worldview, youth are left intellectually unarmed. This educational gap creates a form of fragile faith, which can quickly collapse when challenged by persuasive, alternative ideologies.

3.2. Perceived Conflict Between Religion and Science

Many Muslim youth encounter a perceived conflict between religious beliefs and scientific knowledge, especially when subjects like evolution or cosmology are taught without theological context. For instance, a student raised with a literal understanding of creation may find Darwinian evolution in biology class to directly contradict their faith. In the absence of educators or scholars who can provide a reconciliatory framework, such as the metaphorical interpretation of certain Qur’anic verses or the historical contributions of Muslim scientists, this tension often leads to confusion and doubt. An example is seen in university settings, where Muslim students frequently report questioning their beliefs after being exposed to scientific material that appears to negate divine design or prophetic revelation.

3.3. Psychological and Existential Struggles:

Adolescence and early adulthood are phases of deep psychological vulnerability, marked by identity formation, emotional shifts, and existential inquiry. During this stage, many Muslim youth grapple with questions about purpose, suffering, and divine justice. When they experience trauma, such as the death of a loved one, family conflict, or mental health challenges or when heartfelt prayers go unanswered, they may feel let

ATHEISM AND DOUBTS AMONG YOUTH: THE PROPHETIC MODEL OF FAITH-BASED GUIDANCE

down by religious teachings that promised divine mercy or intervention. For example, a young person struggling with anxiety might seek solace through prayer but, finding no immediate relief, begins to question the efficacy or truth of religious claims. Moreover, environments that emphasize judgment over compassion may intensify feelings of guilt or unworthiness, pushing youth further away rather than inviting them into spiritual reflection and healing.

3.4. Cultural Pressures and Identity Crisis

Muslim youth, particularly those raised in Western societies, often experience an internal conflict between their inherited religious identity and the values promoted by the surrounding secular, liberal culture. This identity duality creates cognitive and emotional dissonance, especially when Islamic beliefs are portrayed as culturally foreign, rigid, or outdated. For instance, a young Muslim student in a public school may feel pressure to hide religious practices such as prayer or fasting to avoid social stigma or being labelled as 'extreme' or 'different'. This tension is heightened when Islam is introduced at home primarily as a cultural tradition rather than a universal, rational faith leading youth to question its relevance in a pluralistic and fast-evolving society. Over time, these unresolved pressures can erode confidence in religious identity and push youth toward agnosticism or silent disengagement.

3.5. Hypocrisy and Institutional Failures

Disillusionment with religious institutions and leadership is a critical factor in the erosion of faith among Muslim youth. When young people witness moral inconsistencies such as religious figures involved in scandals, political manipulation of religion, or divisive sectarian rhetoric, they often perceive a disconnect between the ideals of Islam and the behaviour of its representatives. For example, when a respected imam is exposed for unethical conduct or a mosque marginalizes certain groups based on ethnicity or sect, youth may begin to question the integrity of the religious system itself. Furthermore, many find that religious spaces lack the emotional warmth, intellectual relevance, or ethical clarity they seek. This perception of hypocrisy or institutional irrelevance often leads them to disengage, not just from leadership, but from the faith altogether.

3.6. Influence of Online Atheist Content and Echo Chambers

The digital age has significantly reshaped how youth engage with religious ideas. While the internet has democratized access to Islamic scholarship, it has also exposed Muslim youth to a vast array of atheist, secular, and anti-religious narratives often framed in confident, persuasive language. Platforms like YouTube, Reddit, and podcasts host influential atheist voices who challenge core Islamic beliefs, such as the existence of God or the authenticity of the Qur'an, often without being met with equally accessible or intellectually rigorous Islamic responses. For example, a teenager who stumbles upon a charismatic atheist debating a weak or unqualified Muslim speaker may absorb the criticism without encountering a strong counterargument. Furthermore, social media algorithms tend to reinforce existing interests and biases, creating echo chambers where users are continuously exposed to content that confirms their doubts and reinforces skepticism. This digital reinforcement accelerates disengagement from faith, especially in the absence of guided critical thinking or

spiritual mentorship.

3.7. Peer Pressure and Social Trends

In increasingly secular educational and social environments, religious identity is often perceived as socially burdensome or intellectually inferior. Muslim youth, particularly in high school or university settings, may feel pressured to conform to dominant cultural norms that equate religiosity with irrationality or conservatism. This peer pressure does not always lead to conscious disbelief but can result in youth distancing themselves from visible expressions of faith to avoid social exclusion or ridicule. For example, a Muslim student might stop attending Friday prayers or avoid discussing their beliefs in public simply to align with a peer group that views religious practice as outdated or unscientific. Over time, this desire for acceptance can evolve into the adoption of atheistic or agnostic views not always as a result of personal conviction, but as a strategy for fitting into a perceived progressive or intellectually elite circle.

This comprehensive set of causes reflects the multifaceted reality of the crisis of faith among Muslim youth. Addressing this challenge requires more than doctrinal instruction; it demands a compassionate, intellectually rigorous, and contextually aware engagement rooted in the prophetic model.

4. The Prophetic Model of Guidance

In the face of rising doubt and disaffiliation among youth, the life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) offers a timeless and transformative model for nurturing faith. His approach to guiding individuals marked by compassion, wisdom, patience, and deep psychological insight serves as a powerful framework for engaging with contemporary challenges related to belief and identity.

4.1. Empathy and Emotional Intelligence

One of the most profound aspects of the Prophetic model of guidance is the use of empathy and emotional intelligence when addressing moral struggles and doubts. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) exemplified a pastoral sensitivity that prioritized emotional connection over judgment. Rather than reacting with condemnation, he engaged with individuals' inner experiences and moral reasoning, creating space for reflection, transformation, and growth.

A striking example is narrated in Musnad Ahmad, where a young man approached the Prophet and asked for permission to commit fornication. While the companions reacted with shock, the Prophet responded calmly and invited the youth to consider the feelings of others by asking, "Would you like it for your mother, your daughter, your sister, or your aunt?" The young man answered negatively each time, and the Prophet then placed his hand on the young man's chest and supplicated for him, saying: "O Allah, purify his heart, forgive his sin, and guard his chastity." The youth later reported that no desire for such an act remained in his heart.⁽⁸⁾ This encounter reveals the Prophet's profound understanding of human psychology and ethical formation. He did not shame the youth but appealed to his moral imagination and empathy, leading to internal transformation. Contemporary Islamic scholar Jonathan A. C. Brown highlights this as an example of "the restorative and morally pedagogical approach of the Prophet, which prioritized transformation over punishment."⁽⁹⁾

This Prophetic method is especially relevant today, where many young people are alienated by harsh moral judgment or lack of compassionate listening in religious

ATHEISM AND DOUBTS AMONG YOUTH: THE PROPHETIC MODEL OF FAITH-BASED GUIDANCE

spaces. It shows that the path to ethical correction begins with emotional rapport, not rebuke, an insight echoed in modern counselling and educational psychology.

4.2. Encouragement of Questions and Intellectual Engagement

An essential dimension of the Prophetic model is the openness to inquiry and the validation of intellectual struggle as part of the path to faith. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) fostered an environment where sincere questioning was not only tolerated but encouraged. His companions felt comfortable raising complex and sometimes unsettling topics related to faith, fate, creation, and doubt, without fear of dismissal or condemnation.

A well-known report from Sahih Muslim narrates that some companions came to the Prophet distressed by involuntary and intrusive thoughts concerning Allah and the nature of faith. Rather than reprimanding them, the Prophet said, "That is a clear sign of faith."⁽¹⁰⁾ This response reframed their distress not as a deficiency in belief but as a reflection of their moral and spiritual consciousness. By acknowledging that doubt can coexist with sincere belief, the Prophet normalized spiritual questioning as a legitimate and even necessary part of religious development.

This approach highlights the intellectual humility and psychological insight of the Prophet. Rather than silencing doubts, he redirected them into reflection, creating a culture of thoughtful engagement. Scholars such as Muhammad Hashim Kamali argue that the Prophetic method "affirmed the right to ask, to think, and to be intellectually present in one's faith,"⁽¹¹⁾ a principle that modern educators and faith leaders must reclaim to address contemporary youth disaffection.

4.3. Gradualism and Personalization in Teaching

A distinctive feature of the Prophetic model is its emphasis on 'tadarruj' gradualism in moral and spiritual development and the personalization of guidance. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) recognized that individuals differ in capacity, background, and readiness, and he adapted his approach accordingly. His teaching style reflected both contextual sensitivity and pedagogical wisdom, aiming to nurture understanding rather than impose rigid compliance.

A well-documented example appears in the incident of the Bedouin who urinated in the mosque. While the Prophet's companions reacted with alarm and moved to stop the man, the Prophet instructed them to let him finish. He then addressed the Bedouin gently, explaining the sanctity of the mosque and why such acts were inappropriate.⁽¹²⁾ This approach transformed a potential moment of humiliation into a constructive educational experience, preserving the man's dignity while effectively conveying the moral lesson.

This story illustrates the Prophet's refusal to allow zealotry or shame-based correction to interfere with spiritual growth. As scholar Yasir Qadhi notes, the Prophet's pedagogy was "based on gradual reform, rooted in mercy, not immediate perfection through harshness".⁽¹³⁾ His methods remind contemporary educators and imams that transformational teaching requires patience, compassion, and adaptability, especially when engaging youth who are navigating conflicting values.

4.4. Building a Faith-Based Community

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) actively cultivated a faith-based

community that emphasized belonging, purpose, and mutual respect. Central to his approach was the integration of youth into the heart of the community not as passive observers, but as active participants and future leaders. His model fostered a deep sense of identity formation and spiritual commitment by giving young individuals both dignity and responsibility.

Notably, the Prophet appointed Usāma ibn Zayd, a teenager at the time, to lead a military expedition, an honour that sparked criticism among some elders, yet was upheld by the Prophet as an affirmation of youth capability.⁽¹⁴⁾ Similarly, he sent Mu'ādh ibn Jabal to Yemen as a religious instructor and judge while he was still in his twenties, demonstrating trust in his knowledge and leadership.⁽¹⁵⁾ These examples reveal the Prophet's commitment to mentoring and empowering youth, fostering spiritual maturity through engagement rather than exclusion.

This model stands in contrast to many contemporary religious institutions, where youth are often marginalized or dismissed as inexperienced. By contrast, the Prophetic community was inclusive and nurturing, structured in a way that affirmed the youth's value and invited them to participate meaningfully in the preservation and transmission of faith. As Tariq Ramadan notes, the Prophet's mosque in Madinah was not only a place of prayer but a "centre for community dialogue, moral formation, and leadership development."⁽¹⁶⁾

4.5. Addressing the Heart and the Mind Together

The Prophetic model of guidance was deeply holistic, recognizing the human being as a union of 'aql (intellect) and qalb (heart). Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) did not restrict faith to abstract theological arguments; rather, he engaged both reason and emotion, appealing to the full spectrum of human understanding. His teaching method skilfully combined rational discourse, emotional sensitivity, and spiritual insight, offering a comprehensive path to conviction.

The Prophet often used parables, metaphors, and natural signs to provoke reflection and soften hearts. For example, in a hadith recorded in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, he likened his role to a man trying to stop moths from falling into a fire, symbolizing his compassionate urgency in guiding humanity.⁽¹⁷⁾ In another narration, he described the heart as the central organ whose soundness determines the integrity of the entire body, a profound link between inner purity and outward conduct.⁽¹⁸⁾ These teachings illustrate how the Prophet merged logical clarity with spiritual beauty, transforming religious knowledge into lived experience.

Modern scholars, such as Hamza Yusuf, emphasize that the Prophet's pedagogy was not limited to transmitting doctrine, but rather aimed to cultivate moral character, awaken spiritual consciousness, and invite reflection.⁽¹⁹⁾ By bridging belief with compassion, and reason with revelation, the Prophet laid the foundation for a tradition that upholds faith as both intellectually satisfying and spiritually enriching.

The Prophetic model of guidance presents a timeless and multidimensional framework for addressing the contemporary crisis of faith among youth. Rooted in empathy, intellectual openness, gradual development, community inclusion, and a harmonious balance between heart and mind, the Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) pedagogy was both spiritually nourishing and psychologically astute. His ability

ATHEISM AND DOUBTS AMONG YOUTH: THE PROPHETIC MODEL OF FAITH-BASED GUIDANCE

to meet individuals where they were emotionally, intellectually, and socially demonstrates a dynamic and deeply humane approach to religious mentorship. In an era marked by disconnection, doubt, and digital disruption, this model offers educators, imams, and community leaders a profoundly relevant template for reengaging youth with their faith not through coercion or fear, but through understanding, sincerity, and love. Reviving this Prophetic ethos is not merely a matter of tradition, but a pressing necessity for the future of Muslim identity and spiritual resilience.

5. Applying the Prophetic Model Today

In addressing the complex moral and spiritual challenges of the contemporary world particularly those faced by youth it is essential to draw upon the Prophetic model not as a relic of the past but as a living, dynamic guide. The Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) offers enduring principles that can be thoughtfully adapted to today's contexts.

5.1. Educating Youth with Hikmah (Wisdom) and Critical Faith Engagement

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) employed a teaching methodology grounded in 'hikmah' wisdom that was context-sensitive, emotionally intelligent, and pedagogically sound. Rather than enforcing belief through rigid instruction, he nurtured faith by appealing to both the intellect and the heart, especially when addressing youth. One compelling example of this approach is his interaction with the young Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), to whom he imparted concise yet spiritually rich advice. He said,

"O young man, I will teach you some words: Be mindful of Allah and He will protect you..." (20).

This brief encounter reflects the Prophet's ability to convey foundational principles in an age-appropriate and psychologically resonant manner. Instead of overwhelming the youth with complex rulings, he focused on instilling taqwa (Godconsciousness), a sense of divine presence, and personal moral responsibility. In today's educational settings, this Prophetic model highlights the importance of engaging young minds through meaningful dialogue, spiritual relevance, and critical reflection offering faith as a source of guidance and empowerment rather than mere ritual observance.

5.2. Creating Safe Spaces for Spiritual Dialogue

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) cultivated a culture of openness, emotional safety, and non-judgmental engagement particularly when addressing spiritual concerns and personal struggles. His companions, regardless of age or social status, felt comfortable approaching him with even their most sensitive questions. This aspect of Prophetic pedagogy is particularly relevant today, as Muslim youth often grapple with questions about faith, identity, and belonging in increasingly secular and pluralistic societies. One illustrative example is the case of a man who confessed to the Prophet that he had violated the boundaries of chastity with a woman but had not committed zina (fornication). Rather than shaming him or responding with harsh judgment, the Prophet listened attentively, offered a solution rooted in the Qur'an wudu, prayer, and repentance and affirmed that sincere good deeds erase past wrongs. (25) This moment exemplifies how the Prophet provided spiritual counselling that was

empathetic, accessible, and restorative. For contemporary educators, youth mentors, and religious leaders, creating similar safe spaces whether in classrooms, youth circles, or online platforms is vital. These settings must allow young people to voice their doubts, express their inner conflicts, and explore Islamic teachings without fear of condemnation. Only then can authentic spiritual growth occur, rooted in trust, sincerity, and compassionate guidance.

5.3. Empowering Parents, Teachers, and Spiritual Mentors

The Prophetic model of education was not limited to formal instruction; it emphasized *tarbiyah*, a holistic process of nurturing that involved emotional, spiritual, and moral development within a supportive social structure. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) empowered not only individual companions but also families and communities to take responsibility for spiritual growth. A notable example is his encouragement of Luqman's model of parenting, as referenced in the Qur'an, and his own mentorship of young companions like Anas ibn Malik, who served him for ten years. Anas reported that the Prophet never once scolded him harshly, nor criticized his mistakes, cultivating instead a relationship of trust and moral guidance.⁽²¹⁾ This nurturing environment allowed Anas to grow into a confident, spiritually anchored individual and an important transmitter of Hadith. In contemporary contexts, the role of parents, teachers, and spiritual mentors is similarly crucial. Their conduct must reflect prophetic values of patience, mercy, sincerity, and consistency so that young Muslims not only learn about Islam but experience it through example. Structured mentorship programs, family-based spiritual learning, and educator training in emotional intelligence can play a key role in reinforcing a stable and compassionate faith identity.

5.4. Leveraging Modern Tools for Communication

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was deeply attuned to the communication needs of his audience, embodying the principle of addressing people according to their level of understanding. He used a variety of methods of oral storytelling, analogies, poetic references, and visual gestures to ensure that his message was comprehensible, relevant, and memorable. For example, he once drew a straight line in the sand and several diverging lines beside it to explain the straight path of God and the misleading paths of misguidance. ⁽²²⁾ This method of visual teaching remains impactful even in today's context. In the modern world, where digital platforms shape public discourse and influence values, Muslim educators and scholars must creatively engage platforms like podcasts, YouTube, Instagram, and virtual classrooms to convey Islamic teachings. When employed with *ikhlas* (sincerity) and rooted in authentic scholarship, these tools can serve as effective channels for nurturing spiritual awareness, moral reasoning, and critical engagement among youth. The key lies in using technology not to entertain superficially, but to invite reflection, build community, and uphold the ethics of the Prophetic message.

5.5. Building Institutions Grounded in Prophetic Ethics

Sustainable spiritual and societal transformation cannot occur without the development of institutions that embody Prophetic ethics. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) did not merely preach justice and mercy; he institutionalized them

ATHEISM AND DOUBTS AMONG YOUTH: THE PROPHETIC MODEL OF FAITH-BASED GUIDANCE

in the governance of Madinah. The Constitution of Madinah is a prime example of this legacy: it established a pluralistic civic order grounded in mutual rights, collective responsibility, and legal equity among Muslims and non-Muslims alike.⁽²³⁾ This foundational document set a precedent for governance rooted in inclusivity, accountability, and compassion. Today, educational, religious, and social institutions must strive to reflect these same values. Policies should be rooted in fairness, leadership should demonstrate humility and moral integrity, and organizational culture should prioritize transparency, service, and inclusion. Whether building a faith-based school, a community centre, or a digital platform, the model of the Prophet offers a blueprint for ethical leadership that fosters both individual growth and collective well-being.

6. Recommendations

In light of the Prophetic model and its relevance to contemporary challenges, several practical recommendations emerge for scholars, educators, institutions, and families:

For Scholars and Educators:

Develop and implement youth-relevant pedagogies that balance critical thinking, spiritual insight, and emotional engagement. Use inquiry-based learning, storytelling, and contemporary case studies to relate Islamic teachings to real-life issues.

For Islamic Centres and Institutions:

Establish structured mentorship programs, offer professional faith-based counselling, and create welcoming environments that address the social and psychological needs of Muslim youth.

For Parents:

Foster open, judgment-free communication at home. Focus on building emotional bonds and cultivating love and trust before emphasizing legal or doctrinal compliance. Parenting should be rooted in prophetic compassion and moral modelling.

For the Academic Community:

Encourage interdisciplinary research that brings together Islamic tradition, developmental psychology, and counselling practice. Special attention should be given to Islamic psychology, adolescent spiritual development, and culturally competent mental health care for Muslim youth.

7. Conclusion

This study has explored the enduring relevance of the Prophetic model in addressing the complex spiritual and psychological challenges faced by contemporary Muslim youth. Through a close examination of the Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) approach marked by wisdom (hikmah), compassion, gradualism, and deep emotional intelligence it becomes clear that his methodology offers not only theological guidance but a comprehensive framework for moral and personal development. The Prophet's ethics, rooted in sincerity, justice, and mercy, are urgently needed in today's fractured and hyper-secularized world, where faith is often misrepresented or misunderstood.

Importantly, this analysis challenges the common assumption that today's youth are indifferent to religion. On the contrary, many are actively searching for

answers that are both spiritually authentic and intellectually satisfying. Their questions reflect not rejection, but a yearning for meaningful engagement, a quest that the Prophetic model is uniquely equipped to fulfil.

The call to action is therefore clear: educators, parents, scholars, and community leaders must move beyond rigid, formulaic instruction and instead revive the Prophetic approach, one that teaches through presence, love, relevance, and trust. By doing so, we can create environments that foster resilient faith, grounded identity, and transformative spiritual growth for the next generation.



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ATHEISM AND DOUBTS AMONG YOUTH: THE PROPHETIC MODEL OF FAITH-BASED GUIDANCE

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