

VOLUME FOUR / OTHER TRADITIONS

ATHEIST *VS* BELIEVER

Questions Other Traditions
Must Answer



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Atheist vs Believer: Questions Other Traditions Must Answer

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This is an atheist argument about religious claims and authority. Scientific results, historical judgments and moral reasons are distinguished in the text.

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Ordinary examples are invented illustrations, not events from the author's life. Web and source records were reviewed for this edition in October 2026.

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Author's note

I want a belief to be answerable. If someone says a rule is good, I want to hear why it is good. If someone says a teacher knew what others could not know, I want to see what was checked. If someone asks me to trust a promise about another life, I want more than the comfort of the promise.

This is the fourth volume of *Atheist vs Believer*. The earlier volumes examine Islam, Christianity and Hindu traditions. Here I question selected teachings from Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, the Bahai faith and Zoroastrianism. I also examine claims about manifestation and survival after death. These chapters cover named positions. They cannot stand for every community, school, text or individual in these traditions.

"Other traditions" is a label for this volume's place in the series. Each tradition has its own questions. Sikh belief in one creator, Buddhist not-self and Jain accounts of souls cannot be treated as one doctrine. Even the same word, such as karma, can have different meanings. The first duty of a critic is to understand the claim well enough to challenge it accurately.

My position is atheist: I remain unconvinced that a god exists. Some traditions examined here do not require a creator god. My questions about them concern other claims, including rebirth, hidden causes and religious authority. The word atheist alone does not settle any of those questions.

I am direct about the claims I reject. I also give a strong reply before explaining what remains unresolved. A reply that

corrects an error in the criticism should be accepted. The purpose is to reach better reasons. Humiliating a person cannot make a weak argument stronger.

What counts as an answer?

A scientific question asks about the world and how we can check a proposed account of it. A historical question asks what happened and what records support it. A moral question asks what we have reason to do or permit. A theological question asks about a religion's account of divine or ultimate reality. One conversation may contain all four.

I will not dress a moral judgment as a laboratory finding. I will not treat a moving story as an independent witness to its own supernatural cause. I will not call every unexplained event a fraud. "We do not know" is an honest answer when the evidence does not settle a question.

Religious sources in the notes show what is taught or argued. They do not independently verify the realms or powers they describe. Scientific sources have their own limits. A study of anxiety does not measure final liberation. A cardiac-arrest study does not automatically establish survival after irreversible brain death.

How to read the book

Every chapter begins with a short answer. Read that first, then follow the claim, the reply and the reasons. Replies in quotation marks are reconstructed arguments, not verbatim quotations from a named believer. Technical words are explained in context and collected in the glossary. The question chains at the end help keep a conversation focused on one claim at a time. They are invitations to inquiry, not scripts that guarantee victory.

Raised source numbers lead to the notes. Religious passages, translations, community explanations, research papers and official scientific summaries are identified by kind. Some research is used at abstract level, as stated in its note. I have not carried out new experiments, interviewed witnesses or independently examined ancient manuscripts or the underlying case files of reported past lives.

Ordinary scenarios about schools, boxes, kitchens and committees are invented examples. They illustrate reasoning and are not events from my life. No follower's private motives are assumed from their religion. A specific action requires evidence about that action.

You may disagree with my conclusion and still share the standard I ask for: state the claim, give the reasons and allow a fair check. If a belief cannot answer that request, its age and authority do not supply the missing answer.

I. QUESTIONS AND STANDARDS

CHAPTER 1

What exactly are you asking me to believe?

My short answer

A claim needs reasons that fit the claim. Feeding people shows that a kitchen feeds people. It does not show that a holy book came from God. A calm mind is evidence of calm. It does not, by itself, show a life after death.

Start with a clear claim

The first question I ask is simple: what would be true if your belief were true? A creator made the universe? A mind survives death? A teacher can know everything? A rule is morally right because a sacred text gives it? These are different claims. Each needs its own support.

This volume examines selected teachings from Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, the Bahai faith and Zoroastrianism. It also examines modern spiritual claims. The label "other traditions" describes the fourth volume's place in this series. It does not mean that these traditions are small, interchangeable or less worthy of careful study.

The Sikh code names one immortal being. The Buddhist discourse examined here teaches a path out of suffering. The Jain account describes souls and karmic matter. Arguing

with all three as if each proposed the same creator would waste everyone's time.^{1,2,3}

The strongest reply

A believer may say: "Religion joins thought, practice and community. A laboratory cannot measure its whole value. You cannot reduce a life of faith to a single experiment."

I agree that one experiment cannot measure a whole life. Friendship also has more than one kind of value. Yet a friend's claim that a medicine cures an infection still needs evidence. A religious practice can help someone and include a mistaken explanation of why it helps. We should examine the benefit and the explanation separately.

Imagine a teacher says that reading a poem improves attention because an invisible spirit enters the room. A fair test may find that reading helps. That result leaves open whether rhythm, rest, interest or the spirit caused the change. Finding the benefit does not settle the cause.

Four questions worth keeping

First, what is the claim? "Everything is connected" could mean that people affect one another, or that thoughts control distant events. The first idea does not show the second.

Second, what supports it? A text tells us what its writers or communities taught. A controlled study can help compare outcomes. A moral reason can explain why coercion is wrong. Changing the kind of evidence in the middle of an argument can hide the missing step.

Third, what would count against it? Some broad beliefs are hard to test. That does not make them automatically false. It

What exactly are you asking me to believe?

does mean that a believer should explain why I should choose that belief over another equally hard to test.

Fourth, how large is the conclusion? Finding one false miracle story does not refute every religious teaching. Finding one wise teaching does not certify every miracle story. I will not grant either shortcut.

The question I would ask back

"Would you accept this evidence if it supported a different religion? If you would reject it there, what makes it enough here?"

That is a demand for the same standard. It also applies to me. If an atheist explanation depends on a guess, I should call it a guess. The aim is a claim that survives checking, not a speaker who looks beaten. A person can lose a debate through nerves while holding the better argument.

I can reject a demand for belief without claiming that I have explained every mystery. An honest gap is a reason to investigate. It does not give a favourite answer a free pass.

II. SIKH TEACHINGS

CHAPTER 2

If hukam includes everything, why does it include this much pain?

My short answer

Calling events God's order does not explain why that order permits needless pain. Accepting what has happened may help a person cope. It does not prove that a good creator had a good reason to allow it.

The teaching under discussion

The opening of the Guru Granth Sahib describes one creator, beyond fear and hostility. Japji speaks of hukam, often rendered as divine command or order. The passages place created life within it. Translations need care: "order" can suggest more than a command spoken by a human ruler.^{4,5}

My criticism concerns the claim that a wise and good divine reality stands behind the world's order. I am not assuming that Sikhs picture an old man making a separate choice about every falling leaf. A believer can describe God as present throughout creation and still face the question of suffering.

Consider a child born with a painful disease. The child's pain is not a choice to be proud or selfish. If this world rests within a caring order, why does that order need a child to suffer before the child can understand a lesson?

If hukam includes everything, why does it include this much pain?

The strongest reply

"Hukam teaches that my small wishes do not govern reality. Pain does not show that the whole is pointless. Sikh life asks us to serve people, face suffering with courage and resist injustice. Accepting hukam does not mean leaving a sick child without help."

That reply corrects a poor criticism. Acceptance and action can work together. A person can accept that a flood has happened and still rescue neighbours. I have no objection to that courage. My question is about the source and moral character of the order itself.

If human compassion rightly aims to reduce a pain, why would perfect compassion permit it when it could prevent it? Free human choices explain some harms. They do not explain every inherited disease or a disaster that reaches people who made no relevant choice.

Does a larger plan answer the question?

A larger plan is a possible reply. To become a reason for belief, it needs more than possibility. We can invent an unseen benefit for almost any event. An explanation that can excuse every possible pattern gives us little help in choosing between a caring order and a world without a caring planner.

Imagine two schools. One prevents a dangerous roof from falling. The other lets it fall and later says the accident taught courage. We would ask whether the lesson required the injury. Saying that the second head teacher understands more does not, on its own, answer that question.

The example is limited. God, if real, would not be a school employee. The moral point still requires an answer: if a good

aim can be reached with less suffering, why choose the costlier route? If it cannot, what makes the suffering necessary?

The question I would ask back

"What evidence would distinguish a compassionate hukam from ordinary events that people have learned to accept?"

Someone may say that divine reality lies beyond this comparison. Then the claim has become harder to assess. It has not gained public proof. Personal trust can remain meaningful to a believer while giving me too little reason to share it.

My conclusion is narrow. Hukam can offer a way to face life. The comfort it offers does not show that every permitted harm fits perfect goodness. That unresolved problem concerns a theological claim, not the worth of Sikh people or their acts of service.

If grace frees us, what decides who receives it?

My short answer

Grace means help that is not simply earned. It can explain why a believer hopes for mercy. It leaves a hard question: why would a good God withhold needed help from anyone who has no fair chance to find it?

Action, birth and release

Japji links action and grace in a passage on the body and liberation. English versions can render the terms differently. In the cited translation, action relates to receiving embodied life, while grace relates to release. I am examining that relation, without treating one English sentence as a complete account of Sikh thought.⁵

Karma, in this discussion, connects actions with consequences across lives. Grace brings divine help into the account. They raise two questions. What evidence supports the chain of lives? And what makes the distribution of help fair?

A present choice can have clear effects. Studying may improve an exam result. Hurting a friend may damage trust. Those facts do not by themselves show that a child inherits the moral results of an unseen earlier birth. An extra claim needs extra support.

The strongest reply

"Grace is not a prize God hands to a few favourites. It breaks the ego's claim that freedom can be bought through status or ritual. We are responsible for how we live, but liberation cannot be reduced to a payment system. God is available beyond the limits of one community."

This is stronger than saying that membership alone earns rescue. It also blocks my right to claim that Sikh teaching condemns every outsider merely for being an outsider. The question of fair opportunity remains.

People meet different teachers, languages and family pressures. Some grow up with safety and time to reflect. Others spend their energy surviving abuse or hunger. If insight depends partly on those conditions, how does divine help account for unequal starting points?

An invitation is not an equal opportunity

Suppose a tutor offers free lessons to everyone. One pupil can reach the classroom. Another cannot hear the lesson, has no transport and must work to eat. The tutor can honestly say that the offer is open. Equal access still requires more.

If grace supplies whatever each person needs, I would ask what grounds there are for thinking so. If everyone will finally receive release, ask why the painful route was needed. If some never do, ask how perfect care permits a permanent failure that it could repair. These questions test different possible replies. I am not assigning one final answer to every Sikh.

An appeal to beginningless lives answers the objection "Who committed the first act?" by rejecting a first act. I should not

keep asking for the first life after that premise has been refused. I can still ask why I should believe in the chain and how an unremembered past can justify a present burden.

The question I would ask back

"What makes grace fair to someone who never had the same chance to understand, choose or trust?"

Humility about our limits is sensible. It does not show that an unseen system has already solved the problem. Nor does uncertainty justify telling a person in pain that a previous life must explain what happened.

I can support kindness without a theory of deserved birth. Help is justified by the need in front of us. If grace describes that spirit of generosity, I understand its appeal. If it describes a literal divine process that controls liberation, its existence and fairness still need reasons.

How do you know a scripture speaks with divine authority?

My short answer

A book can contain wisdom without being free from error. To call it a divine guide, show why its authority reaches beyond the insight of its writers. Love, age and beautiful language cannot settle that by themselves.

What the claim says

The SGPC's account presents the Guru Granth Sahib as the guide that carries the Gurus' message. Its role as a guide is central to Sikh religious life. The Sikh code also includes belief in the scripture and the teachings of the ten Gurus.^{6,1}

I do not answer this by saying that paper cannot teach. Books plainly can. Nor does reverence for a text mean every reader treats ink as a magical substance. The question is why the teachings should count as reliable access to divine reality.

A history of a text can show who preserved it, what versions exist and how a community used it. Those are important questions. Even a perfectly preserved human sentence can be wrong. Faithful copying and divine origin are separate issues.

The strongest reply

"Read the teachings, practise them and examine what happens. Their unity, moral force and power to change life give reasons for trust. Revelation is known through a transformed life, not only through a document's history."

That invitation deserves a real answer. Practice may show that a discipline helps. It can also reveal problems that reading alone misses. Yet a good result leaves open the source of the teaching. Human observation, care and trial can also yield useful guidance.

Imagine two manuals that help people resolve quarrels. One claims divine origin. The other openly draws on human experience. If both help, what additional result singles out the first claim? Calling the success "divine" simply repeats what needs to be shown.

Can the book prove its own authority?

If a passage is true because the Guru is trustworthy, and the Guru is trustworthy because the passage says so, the reasoning circles back to its starting point. Every rival tradition could build the same circle around its own text.

A believer may have reasons outside the text: a specific experience, a historical claim or a philosophical argument. Those can be discussed in turn. I would ask how each rules out sincere human error. Feeling deeply moved is real as a feeling. It does not identify the speaker behind the words.

There is also the problem of interpretation. If two devoted readers disagree, which method settles the dispute? A claim that a scripture cannot err often leaves the human interpreter with enormous power. The person who says what the text

really means can gain the authority that was said to belong only to the text.

The question I would ask back

"Which belief from this scripture would you revise if strong evidence counted against your reading?"

The answer shows whether inquiry can correct anything. If all conflict is assigned to the reader's failure, the claim of perfect authority has been protected from correction. That protection may preserve faith, but it does not test faith.

I can read a sacred poem carefully, learn from it and disagree with it. I need no certificate of perfection to do so. To accept a book as a divine guide is a much larger step. I need stronger reasons to take it.

If equality is sacred, can practice be questioned?

My short answer

Equal treatment is a good principle. A community should let people check whether it follows that principle. An ideal cannot excuse an unfair act. An unfair act also does not prove that the ideal itself is false.

Give the teaching its due

The SGPC account rejects contempt for women and describes equal participation. Its code says that caste or origin should not bar a person from initiation. Langar, the shared community meal, gives a practical setting for service and shared eating.^{6,1}

Those teachings deserve to be described accurately. It would be dishonest to treat Sikh equality as though it simply endorsed birth rank. A critic who invents that position gives a believer an easy and justified reply.

My question is whether an institution welcomes scrutiny when someone says that treatment falls short. A good declared rule has value. It does not erase a specific person's complaint or make evidence of unequal treatment irrelevant.

The strongest reply

"When Sikhs discriminate, they violate the teaching. You should blame prejudice, not a tradition that tells them to reject it. Religious ideals can give people the courage to confront their own community."

That reply can be right. An equality rule does not cause every violation of equality. It may help resist one. I should ask who did what, which rule applied and how the institution responded. A story about one family cannot show how every Sikh lives.

Suppose a committee promises equal access. Someone reports that a well connected family receives a privilege denied to another family. We need the actual record. Was there a fair reason? Can the decision be appealed? Does the committee publish a rule it would apply to its own friends?

Does the ideal prove God?

Even perfect consistency would leave a separate issue. Why should equality show that a revelation came from God? A human being can understand that humiliation hurts and that birth does not determine moral worth. A believer can say God grounds that understanding. The good rule alone cannot decide between that view and a human account.

Imagine a nonreligious kitchen and a religious kitchen serving equally nourishing meals without discrimination. Both deserve credit. To infer the truth of one theology from the second kitchen, we need another step. The food can show care in action without identifying the ultimate source of care.

The reverse shortcut also fails. If a religious kitchen treats someone badly, that is a reason to fix the treatment. It does

not logically settle whether a creator exists. Moral conduct and supernatural belief have connections in people's lives, but they are not identical questions.

The question I would ask back

"Can someone question a decision in the name of equality without being accused of attacking the whole faith?"

A tradition that values equality has a reason to welcome that question. The person who reports unfair treatment needs a hearing, including when the complaint is uncomfortable for a respected leader.

My own standard is equal standing: nobody's basic dignity rises or falls with ancestry, sex or religious label. I state that as a moral commitment, supported by the harms of exclusion and the need for rules people can share. I do not pretend that a laboratory instrument can measure dignity. A moral argument still gives us reasons we can examine together.

If a prayer helps, what exactly did it change?

My short answer

A prayer can bring comfort, focus or support from other people. A claim that it changes a disease needs a different kind of evidence. Recovery after prayer does not tell us, by itself, what caused the recovery.

Ask about the actual promise

The Sikh code rejects several superstitious practices, including charms and certain forms of ritual dependence. Its account of religious life cannot fairly be reduced to buying miracles. A Sikh may pray while also accepting medical help.¹

My question concerns a specific claim someone might make: "This prayer caused this cure" or "This sacred act guarantees protection." I am not attributing either promise to every Sikh. A person who says prayer changes only their courage has made a much more limited claim.

To test a cure claim, ask what the illness was, how the diagnosis was established, which treatments were given and what usually happens without the prayer. A striking story without those details may be moving and still give little help in finding a cause.

The strongest reply

"God is not a machine we can command. Prayer is a relationship and a way to face hardship. Demanding that God repeat an event for a test misses the meaning of faith."

If that is the claim, I will not pretend that a failed guarantee refutes it. The believer has not offered a guarantee. But the same reply limits what can be claimed when a person recovers. If outcomes cannot reveal divine action when they disappoint us, explain why they reveal it when they please us.

Suppose ten people pray during treatment. Some improve and others do not. If we report only the recoveries, readers cannot judge the whole pattern. If every result is called God's answer, prayer has not supplied a prediction that separates it from the ordinary range of outcomes.

What would a fair comparison do?

A fair comparison tries to separate the proposed cause from other causes. People being compared should have similar conditions and treatment. The outcome should be chosen before seeing the results. Every relevant result should be counted, including failures. These principles do not assume that prayer is false. They help avoid mistaking coincidence or selective reporting for an effect.

No proposed example in this chapter is a new trial or a report of actual patients. It explains how one would examine a public medical claim. A test would also have to respect consent and sound medical practice.

There is a difference between saying "We have not shown a special effect" and "No possible divine act could ever occur." The first is an evidence judgment. The second reaches far

beyond a specific comparison. I have no need to make the second claim to reject a story offered as proof.

The question I would ask back

"Are you claiming comfort, a better medical outcome, or proof of God? What evidence supports that specific claim?"

Someone's gratitude after surviving an illness is understandable. I will not mock it. I will challenge the suggestion that people who did not survive lacked faith or deserved the result. Such blame requires evidence and adds cruelty to grief.

We can offer company, practical help and respect without pretending to know that a recovery was a supernatural reward. Care can be real while the explanation remains uncertain.

When does a religious discipline become an unfair demand?

My short answer

People may freely choose a demanding way of life. A rule still needs reasons when it controls someone else's choices or shuts them out. Calling a rule sacred does not settle whether its effects are fair.

Commitment and boundaries

The Sikh code gives rules for conduct and for religious roles. Its initiation section permits women among the six participants who administer or attend the ceremony. The same section excludes certain disabled people from the five who administer it. These are the provisions of the cited code; I am not claiming that all Sikh groups apply every provision identically.⁷

This gives a concrete question. If the task is to understand, explain and administer a ceremony, why should a missing limb or blindness automatically settle a person's fitness? We can ask about the actual needs of a role without treating a person's body as a measure of spiritual worth.

The strongest reply

"A community has the right to define a religious role and preserve the form of a ceremony. A restriction on one role does not mean the person has less human dignity. Shared disciplines also give members identity and responsibility."

Those distinctions matter. A rule about who can do a task need not be an insult. A person unable to perform a necessary task may reasonably need assistance or a different role. The question is whether the named limitation is necessary, whether support could remove it and whether the rule goes further than the task requires.

Imagine a reading group that bars anyone who cannot climb stairs. If its only room is upstairs, there is an access problem. Calling stair climbing part of the group's identity would not explain why moving the meeting is forbidden. A practical obstacle can be confused with a moral qualification.

Choice must include a real chance to disagree

Religious identity can bring belonging, history and purpose. Leaving or revising it can be emotionally costly. A formally voluntary choice can still involve heavy pressure when family love, housing or safety seems to depend on agreement.

This is a general ethical concern, not a documented accusation against every Sikh family. To judge a real case, ask what pressure occurred and what alternatives the person had. A polite statement of freedom cannot settle a complaint about actual coercion.

The same standard applies to atheists. A parent who humiliates a child for becoming religious has not defended

reason. A group that punishes every disagreement can become dogmatic whatever its label.

The question I would ask back

"Can you explain why this restriction is needed in terms a person excluded by it can examine?"

If the only answer is that an authority decided it, the question has been postponed. We still need a reason to trust that decision. If a better explanation exists, state it clearly and allow people to test its relevance.

A community can preserve a language, song or ceremony while revising a rule that unfairly bars participation. Whether a specific revision fits its theology is an internal religious question. Whether the exclusion has a sound moral reason is open to everyone affected.

My criticism here concerns a named rule and its justification. It does not erase the equality taught elsewhere, nor should that equality prevent a hard look at the rule. A good principle becomes useful when it can correct the institution that proclaims it.

III. BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

CHAPTER 8

Does a good account of suffering prove the whole Buddhist path?

My short answer

Wanting things that cannot last can cause pain. Learning to loosen that grip may help. That insight does not prove every teaching about rebirth, other realms or final freedom from future lives.

What dukkha means here

Dukkha is often translated as suffering, stress or unsatisfactoriness. It reaches beyond the claim that every moment feels miserable. The first discourse cited here connects it with birth, ageing, death, separation and frustrated desire. It names craving as the origin of dukkha and gives a path towards its ending.²

It would be a poor objection to say, "But I enjoyed lunch, so Buddhism is false." Enjoyment can be real while being fragile. A pleasant afternoon does not guarantee that our wishes and the world will stay in step.

My question concerns how far that diagnosis reaches. Craving can cause distress. A child with an infection also needs us to examine the infection. If a spiritual explanation

claims to cover all suffering, it must make room for the different causes and kinds of pain.

The strongest reply

"The teaching does not deny ordinary causes or demand that people become lifeless. It asks us to see how grasping adds distress. Ethical conduct, attention and understanding can change our response even when the body still hurts."

That is a strong practical claim. Consider failing an exam. The failure has consequences, but telling myself that I am worthless may add avoidable misery. I can question that judgment while planning what to do next. An atheist can recognise this without treating every part of the path as revealed truth.

We must also distinguish craving from every useful wish. Wanting to relieve a neighbour's hunger is not automatically the same mental habit as demanding that life satisfy my ego. The text's account of the path includes purpose and effort. It is not a simple instruction to stop caring.²

Where the larger claim begins

Suppose a practice reduces anger in a specific person. That tells us something about that person and practice. It does not yet show that the practice ends a cycle of births. To reach that conclusion we need reasons to believe that the cycle exists and that this practice can end it.

Calling the whole path a cure can hide differences between its parts. A clinic may give good advice about sleep and still sell an ineffective remedy. The useful advice cannot certify the remedy. In the same way, sound observations about mental

habits cannot silently certify every account of the universe joined to them.

A believer can offer further experience or reasoning. I am willing to hear it. I am asking that each additional claim carry its own evidence instead of borrowing the success of the easiest part to test.

The question I would ask back

"Which part can I check in this life, and which part asks me to accept something beyond that check?"

Some people practise a secular form of Buddhism and set aside claims about future lives. Their position should be addressed as they hold it. A criticism of literal rebirth does not refute a breathing exercise or a lesson about anger.

I accept that habits can be examined and improved. My doubt begins when a helpful method is treated as proof of an unseen cosmic system. A teaching can offer a useful tool while leaving its largest promises unproved.

If there is no permanent self, what is reborn?

My short answer

Buddhist rebirth need not mean that an unchanging soul moves into a new body. A continuing chain of causes is a more careful reply. That avoids one easy contradiction. It still needs evidence that the chain crosses death in the claimed way.

Understand the reply before attacking it

The not-self discourse examines bodily form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. It rejects treating these changing things as a self under our complete control. Another discourse redirects a question about "who" feels towards the conditions of feeling.^{8,9}

I cannot fairly answer that position by asking where Buddhism stores an eternal soul. The position under discussion denies the need for one. "No permanent self" also need not mean that people do not exist in ordinary life or that no action has consequences.

There are two questions here. Can a person change and still have a continuing life? Plainly, we can speak that way. Does such continuity extend into a new life after the body dies? The first answer does not show the second.

The strongest reply

"One event conditions the next. The later life is neither an unchanged copy nor something wholly unrelated. You already accept change within a life. Rebirth extends the causal process beyond this body."

That proposal has a structure. It is not refuted just by shouting "contradiction." Yet extending a process is a claim about what the process does. We need to know what carries the connection, how the connection is recognised and what observations favour it over no rebirth.

Think of one candle lighting another. The second flame is not the first flame as a fixed object. A connection can still be observed: heat reaches the wick and starts a new process. The analogy shows how continuity without strict sameness is possible. It does not show that dying minds actually light new lives.

What makes the later life relevant to this one?

Suppose the later person remembers nothing, has a different body and lives elsewhere. Which facts make that life a consequence of this specific one? A believer can propose a subtle causal link. Naming the link does not yet identify it in evidence.

There is also a moral question. If a later life bears painful results, why should that person carry them? One reply says this is causation, not a judge giving punishment. That corrects the language of a cosmic court. It leaves open why the process should be called morally just or used to explain anyone's misfortune.

If there is no permanent self, what is reborn?

We do not normally call every natural consequence deserved. A child can suffer from someone else's pollution. Showing a causal chain would not by itself establish that the child's pain is fair. The same distinction applies to a proposed chain of births.

The question I would ask back

"What evidence shows this connection across death, and what does the connection explain that ordinary inheritance and learning do not?"

Reports of unusual memories can be examined, as discussed in Chapter 29. They require checks on information transfer, selection and the record made before a claimed match. A puzzling case is a reason for work, not permission to fill every gap.

My conclusion is that the no-self reply defeats a crude objection. It does not provide a public demonstration of rebirth. A better criticism follows the actual claim far enough to see where its evidence runs out.

Does Buddhism say every pain is your past karma?

My short answer

No. The Sivaka discourse explicitly rejects the view that every pleasant or painful feeling comes from past action. A criticism that ignores this gets the teaching wrong. The remaining question is how any particular claim about past-life karma could be checked.

Read the passage that complicates the slogan

In SN 36.21, a questioner asks about the view that all experience results from past deeds. The reply names several causes of feeling, including bodily disorders, climate, careless behaviour, assault and karma. It rejects the all-from-the-past account.¹⁰

The bodily categories reflect the medical language of the text's setting. Citing them does not make that medicine identical to modern medicine. The important point here is the clear refusal to make past action the sole cause of every feeling.

This matters when someone explains a person's illness or injury as deserved karma. That judgment is not established merely by the fact that the person is suffering. It also goes further than this discourse permits.

The strongest reply

"Karma concerns intentional action and its consequences. It is not a licence to blame every victim. The present has many conditions, and compassion is a proper response to pain."

That reply should be taken seriously. It removes one charge against the position: it need not say that helping a sufferer interferes with a deserved penalty. It also gives the believer a reason to challenge cruel explanations made in the name of karma.

My question now becomes more exact. If some events are karmic results and some are not, how do we tell them apart? A claim that explains everything is too loose. A claim that explains only some things needs a method for identifying those things.

What would count as a diagnosis?

Imagine a mechanic says that a car may stop because of a flat battery, an empty tank or a hidden moral fault in the driver's previous life. The first two causes can be tested. What test singles out the third? We should not choose it simply because the easier tests have not yet found the fault.

The example does not assume that people are machines. It illustrates a gap in reasoning. Not knowing a cause does not identify an unseen cause. A future discovery could change the available explanation without ever involving karma.

If someone proposes that karma shapes habits and relationships in this life, ordinary observations may support parts of that account. A choice can build a habit, and repeated harm can destroy trust. Extending the account

across births is an extra proposal. The familiar consequences cannot do all its work as evidence.

The question I would ask back

"What would let you identify a karmic result before you knew whether the event was fortunate or painful?"

If the explanation is chosen only after the outcome, it risks fitting the story to the result. A fair method should explain in advance which observations matter and what would make the interpretation doubtful.

I do not need a story about deserved suffering to justify care. An injured person needs help because the injury hurts and can limit their life. We can debate ultimate causes while refusing to turn uncertainty into an accusation. That refusal is consistent with this Buddhist passage as well as with my own atheist ethics.

Does "test it yourself" make a religion scientific?

My short answer

Trying a practice can teach you something about your own experience. A science test must also check for mistakes that an honest person can make. Private certainty alone cannot tell everyone else which explanation is true.

What the Kalama discourse asks

The Kalamas face teachers who praise their own doctrines and attack rivals. The reply warns against accepting a teaching merely through tradition, scripture, reasoning or loyalty to a teacher. It asks about harmful and beneficial qualities, with attention to the judgment of the wise. Its closing assurances include living well even if there is no afterlife.¹¹

This is more demanding than "Believe whatever feels right." It is also different from a modern laboratory protocol. I should not turn a religious discourse into an early copy of every later scientific method in order to praise or criticise it.

The strongest reply

"You call religion blind faith, yet this teaching welcomes investigation. Practise, observe the result and ask experienced people. You cannot know a skill by refusing to try it."

There is truth in that reply. You will learn little about swimming by only reading complaints about water. Some understanding requires participation. Yet participation can also strengthen expectations. A person may interpret an ordinary experience in the terms a teacher supplied before the exercise.

Suppose a class expects to feel warmth in one hand after an exercise. If several people do, what have we established? We may have learned that the exercise affects sensation or attention. To show that a new spiritual force caused it, we need to compare that explanation with other causes.

Why other people need a way to check

Shared checking helps us catch errors that private reflection misses. Were participants told what to expect? Were people who felt nothing counted? Would an alternative exercise do the same? Can observers who disagree with the theory still repeat the result?

The right test depends on the claim. A report that "I feel calmer" can be meaningful without proving a hidden realm. A report that "I can know a concealed fact" invites a direct test of that claimed ability. We should not demand the same procedure for both, nor let the first report stand in for the second.

The appeal to wise people raises another question: who counts as wise, and how can we tell? If only people who agree with the teaching qualify, the check becomes circular. Expertise should include a record of careful judgment and willingness to correct errors.

The question I would ask back

"Could a sincere practitioner reach the wrong explanation, and what would help them discover that mistake?"

A method that can answer this is stronger than one that treats doubt as proof of poor practice. The right to investigate includes the right to reach a conclusion a teacher dislikes.

I welcome the invitation to examine harmful habits. I also apply its caution to religious claims and to atheist ones. A pleasing outcome gives us a reason to value that outcome. The source of the outcome remains a further question.

A tradition can contain a valuable habit of inquiry without all its conclusions becoming verified. Respect for the habit means allowing the inquiry to continue when it reaches a cherished belief.

Can a calmer brain prove enlightenment?

My short answer

Meditation may help with some kinds of distress. A study of stress or pain measures those outcomes. It cannot, from that result alone, show that a person has ended rebirth or reached final spiritual truth.

What the evidence actually supports

A 2014 systematic review combined evidence from 47 trials involving 3,515 participants. It found moderate evidence of some improvements in anxiety, depression and pain from mindfulness programmes, with weaker evidence for some other outcomes. It did not establish superiority over active treatments. That is a finding about the studies reviewed, not a verdict on every form of meditation.¹²

The NIH's NCCIH describes possible benefits alongside variation in the evidence and limits in safety research. Meditation is not one single technique, and a programme may include teaching, group support and other activities.¹³

These limits do not erase the benefit. They help identify it. If a practice helps someone manage pain, that can matter a great deal without becoming a proof of Buddhist cosmology.

The strongest reply

"Enlightenment is more than a low stress score. It is a deep change in how experience is understood. A short clinical course cannot test the achievement of years of practice."

That reply is fair. A study should not be asked to show something it did not measure. The same fairness should stop a promoter from using a short clinical study to advertise an unmeasured spiritual promise.

We need a clear meaning of enlightenment. Does it mean less greed and anger? A lasting change in attention? Certain knowledge about the world? Release from future births? These meanings make different demands on evidence.

Do not let the conclusion change halfway

Imagine a course claims that its students make fewer hostile comments. We can ask how that was measured and whether the effect lasts. If it then claims that graduates can never be morally wrong, that is a much larger claim. If it says they have left a cycle of lives, the question changes again.

Brain changes cannot settle on their own the larger claims. A brain measure may show that a practice affects a person. We still need to explain what the measured change means, whether it caused the reported benefit and whether other practices produce a similar result.

An unusual experience can feel more certain than everyday thought. The strength of the feeling is itself something to study. It does not prevent error about the experience's cause or what it reveals beyond the person having it.

The question I would ask back

"Which result did the study measure, and where is the evidence for the extra promise you are attaching to it?"

If someone only claims a useful practice, I can discuss it on that basis. If someone claims perfect insight, their judgment must remain open to checking. A calm voice is not a guarantee of accuracy or ethical conduct.

This chapter does not diagnose anyone or prescribe a treatment. It asks how health evidence is used in an argument. The honest conclusion can be that a practice helps with a defined problem while its spiritual explanation remains uncertain. We do not need to deny the first finding to question the second claim.

Are hells and other realms places or teaching stories?

My short answer

A story can warn against cruelty without describing a real place. If a teaching claims an actual realm after death, ask what supports its existence. If it is a metaphor, its value must be judged as a metaphor.

A named example

The Devaduta discourse, MN 130, describes rebirth in hell and severe suffering connected with wrongdoing. It presents the account as more than an ordinary tale about feeling guilty. The cited text belongs to a specific early Buddhist collection. It does not fix how every Buddhist today reads every account of other realms.¹⁴

The point of naming a text is to avoid inventing an easy target. Some readers accept such accounts literally. Others interpret them through mental states or take a selective approach to the tradition. We should ask which reading a speaker is defending.

The strongest reply

"Human perception does not exhaust reality. These accounts describe conditions outside ordinary sight. Their warning can also help people see the cost of harmful action. Lack of ordinary access does not prove that the realms are unreal."

That is correct as far as possibility goes. Many real things were once unknown. But "not ruled out" is weaker than "well supported." There are countless unseen worlds we can imagine. We need a reason to accept this account over another.

If the reason is the teacher's special knowledge, we must examine that claim. How was the knowledge checked? What prevents a sincere teacher from misreading an experience? Using the realm to prove the teacher, while using the teacher to prove the realm, brings us back to a circle.

Can a warning work without being literally true?

Yes. A story about a ruler destroyed by greed can teach a lesson without giving a verified history. Its moral value depends on the reasons it makes visible. If the story claims that a specific future suffering will happen to a specific kind of person, it has added a factual promise.

Suppose a parent tells a child that lying will make an invisible animal attack them after death. The warning might reduce lying. That effect would not show that the animal exists. It would also leave an ethical question about using fear when an explanation of trust and harm is available.

This example is deliberately invented. It tests the reasoning, not the origin of the Buddhist discourse. A believer can argue that the realm is real and the warning therefore truthful. The need for evidence then returns.

The question I would ask back

"If I accept the ethical lesson but doubt the realm, what evidence have I failed to account for?"

If no independent evidence is offered, the demand for literal belief remains unfulfilled. If a metaphorical reading is offered, discuss what it explains about human life without treating it as a map of the afterlife.

The ethical issue is separate again. Does a suffering outcome help anyone learn or repair harm? Is it proportionate? Calling it an impersonal consequence avoids imagining a divine torturer, but does not make it morally deserved. We can oppose cruelty without accepting an unseen system of suffering as either established fact or perfect justice.

IV. JAIN TEACHINGS

CHAPTER 14

If karma is matter, where is the evidence for it?

My short answer

Invisible things can be real. We establish them through effects that can be checked. Calling karma a very fine kind of matter raises a clear question: which finding points to that matter rather than to an ordinary cause?

The Jain claim is specific

JAINA's account describes karma as subtle matter that binds to souls and affects embodied life. The relation is presented as beginningless. It also says that liberation involves removing karmic bondage. This is a religious account of how the world works, not merely another word for everyday habits.^{3,15}

I should not ask which creator assigned the first karmic burden as if Jainism required such a creator. The account does not depend on one. Beginninglessness also refuses a first moment of bondage. Those replies remove two crude objections. They do not show the proposed matter.

The strongest reply

"You accept things you cannot see, including tiny particles. Karma is too subtle for ordinary senses. Its effects are visible in differences between lives, and disciplined insight can reveal what ordinary observation misses."

The first sentence is right. Visibility is not the standard. The question is how a proposed unseen cause is separated from other possible causes. A tiny physical particle becomes a scientific claim through defined properties, measurements and successful tests. An unseen thing is not established merely by comparing it with something science has measured.

Take two children with different health conditions. Genetics, infection, nutrition and environment may help explain the difference. If we add karmic matter, what new observation supports that addition? It cannot simply receive credit for whatever ordinary inquiry has not yet explained.

An explanation must do some work

Suppose a sealed box contains an unknown object. I propose a small magnet. You propose an invisible moral substance. The magnet idea can lead to a specific test. Your proposal also needs some account of what it would do and what could show that it was not doing it.

This example does not show that all real things must be tested like magnets. It asks a fair question of something described as a cause of worldly differences. If the claim affects bodies, lifespan or conditions of birth, explain how those effects support this cause in particular.

Calling a matter subtle does not make it impossible. It can, however, make a proposal hard to distinguish from no such matter. An account that fits both a kind person's illness and a cruel person's comfort can always be adjusted after the event. It needs a method that controls that flexibility.

The question I would ask back

"What result would be more likely if karmic matter existed than if it did not, and how could we check that result fairly?"

If the answer depends entirely on an omniscient teacher, then the evidence question moves to the teacher. How do we know that the claimed knowledge is complete and accurate? Chapter 16 takes that up.

I can accept that actions shape life without accepting subtle moral particles. A harmful action can have observable consequences. A theory that extends those consequences into an unseen, beginningless system asks for another level of belief. The everyday truth cannot substitute for evidence of the added system.

Does respect for life prove the Jain account of souls?

My short answer

Reducing harm can be a sound moral goal. It does not prove that every life has the kind of soul a religion describes. We should examine the ethical goal and the proposed biology separately.

What the classification says

The JAINA explanation classifies embodied souls partly by senses. It includes one-sensed beings associated with earth, water, fire, air and vegetation. Another community explanation compares ancient concern for tiny life with later knowledge of microorganisms.^{16,17}

Care is needed here. "Earth-bodied being" is a category within the doctrine. It should not be casually replaced with the claim that every stone is a bacterium. Nor does discovering living organisms in water show that water itself has the same kind of life as those organisms.

These are different propositions. Water can contain microbes. A plant is alive. Fire is a process of combustion. Saying that all three fit a sacred classification needs more argument than noting that all can be found in nature. The categories must be compared by their actual properties.

The strongest reply

"The spiritual classification concerns souls and harm, not the boundaries of modern cell biology. Its point is to make people careful about forms of life that ordinary pride ignores. Ahimsa, or nonviolence, asks us to reduce avoidable injury."

That reply protects an important ethical insight. People can overlook suffering when the sufferer is small, distant or inconvenient. A practice of care may correct that habit. Yet a spiritual purpose does not automatically make every statement about living things factually accurate.

If the classification is moral or symbolic, we can ask what habits it supports. If it is a literal description of which entities possess awareness and souls, we need evidence for that description. Moving between the two meanings can make a scientific challenge disappear without answering it.

How can we reduce harm when some harm is unavoidable?

A person must eat and use resources. A sensible ethic has to distinguish intentional cruelty from unavoidable effects of living. It also needs a way to compare risks. A rule that tries to protect unseen life may affect the care available to visible people or animals.

Consider an invented case: a village must choose between leaving contaminated water untreated and using a method that destroys microbes. The choice has consequences for people and for microorganisms. What makes one consequence more serious? Does capacity to suffer matter? Does intention matter? Can the rule explain why?

These are questions for any demanding ethic, including a secular one. It would be unfair to portray every Jain as unable to make practical distinctions. The concern is whether the reasons given for those distinctions can be examined and revised.

The question I would ask back

"Which part of this teaching is a moral caution, and which part is a claim about what exists?"

A true moral caution can survive the failure of a proposed process. We can reduce cruelty even if subtle souls remain unproved. Likewise, a factual discovery does not by itself decide every moral priority.

I support careful attention to harm. I question the step from that attention to certainty about an unseen soul in each religious category. Moral seriousness is not a substitute for evidence, and evidence alone cannot decide every conflict of duties.

Who checked the claim of perfect knowledge?

My short answer

A teacher can know a great deal without knowing everything. To claim perfect knowledge, show how that claim was checked. A hard discipline may show effort and resolve. It cannot, by itself, certify every belief held by the person who practises it.

The claim and its cost

The Jain account describes a liberated soul as possessing complete knowledge, vision and freedom from karmic bondage. Community explanations connect the path with self-restraint and the removal of karma. These are claims about spiritual attainment beyond ordinary expertise.¹⁸

Jain sources also discuss demanding forms of austerity. A historical JAINA statement defends *sallekhana* or *santhara* as a religious practice. That statement documents the community's position at its date; it is not a statement of current law or proof that every real case has the same conditions.¹⁹

I am examining knowledge and moral justification here. No instructions for a dangerous fast are needed to ask whether an austerity proves a cosmic claim, or whether a person's choice is truly free.

The strongest reply

"Ordinary knowledge is limited by passions and karmic obstruction. Removing them reveals knowledge already possible for the soul. Austerity is meant to weaken attachment, not to display power. A sincere, voluntary practice should not be confused with coercion."

This is a clear statement of the belief. The problem is showing its truth. If a teacher is called free of error because the doctrine says so, and the doctrine is accepted because the teacher was free of error, the two claims support each other in a circle.

We can instead ask about particular statements. Did the teacher know a concealed fact accurately? Was the fact recorded before anyone could find it by ordinary means? Could an independent check fail? A correct result would support that demonstrated ability. It would still be a large step from some correct answers to knowledge of everything.

Sacrifice does not guarantee truth

People can make painful sacrifices for incompatible beliefs. Their sincerity cannot make all those beliefs true. Effort may support a judgment about commitment. It cannot settle which account of the universe is correct.

Imagine two students who both stay awake all night before an exam. One uses a correct method and one uses a mistaken method. The cost of their effort is equal. The answers can still differ in accuracy. We do not show a calculation by measuring how much the student suffered while making it.

For demanding religious practices, there is a further ethical issue. Consent should involve understanding, freedom from

threats and a real chance to change one's mind. A community's honour should not depend on a vulnerable person's willingness to bear harm. These are moral criteria I am proposing, not accusations that every practice violates them.

The question I would ask back

"What would show that a revered teacher made an error, and could the community acknowledge it?"

If no possible finding could count, perfect knowledge has been assumed rather than checked. If checking is possible, we should judge the result honestly, including limits and failed predictions.

I can respect discipline and still reject an unsupported claim of knowing everything. I can defend a person's dignity while asking whether an institution has made refusal too costly. Reverence should not remove either question from discussion.

If truth has many sides, can a belief still be wrong?

My short answer

Yes. Two views can each describe a different part of something. That does not make every pair of claims compatible. We must say which part, time or point of view each claim concerns.

A stronger account of many-sidedness

The Jain doctrine of *anekantavada* concerns the many aspects of reality and the limits of a one-sided judgment. *Syadvada* qualifies statements by relevant conditions or standpoints. The cited Jain explanation does not simply say that every opinion is wholly true.²⁰

The common objection "Then the claim that Jainism is false must also be true" is too quick. A qualified statement need not assign equal truth to every unqualified denial. A thoughtful reply can explain which respect a claim concerns.

Think of a cup. It may be heavy compared with a paper cup and light compared with a bucket. Both statements can be true because their comparisons differ. It may be hot at noon and cold later. The times differ. Neither example shows that the same cup has and lacks the same property in the same respect at the same time.

The strongest reply

"You demand a single flat answer to a complex reality. Our method asks you to state your standpoint and recognise what it leaves out. It can reduce arrogance without making truth disappear."

I welcome that demand. Critics should not turn a limited observation into a claim about everything. A photograph from one side of a building cannot show its whole structure. A witness can report something true and incomplete.

My question concerns what happens when the standpoints have been made clear. Suppose one claim says a sealed container contains water, and another says it contains no water, at the same time and under the same meaning. We can investigate. Calling both perspectives valuable does not settle which report is accurate.

Humility needs a method for correction

An appeal to complexity can protect inquiry or obstruct it. It protects inquiry when it asks what was missed. It obstructs inquiry when every failed claim receives a new, undefined standpoint after the evidence arrives.

If a prediction fails, the response should explain the error or state the relevant condition in a way that can be checked again. Otherwise qualification becomes an escape route. No claim is allowed to face the result it seemed to predict.

There is also a question about perfect knowledge. If ordinary speakers grasp only aspects, on what grounds do they identify a teacher who grasps the whole? A tradition can consistently propose that such a teacher exists. Identifying

If truth has many sides, can a belief still be wrong?

that person still requires evidence beyond a person's confidence in the proposal.

The question I would ask back

"Which precise conditions make your claim true, and what finding would show that it is false under those conditions?"

That question respects many-sidedness because it asks for the relevant side. It also preserves the possibility of error. Without that possibility, debate loses its ability to correct anything.

I can learn from an intellectual discipline without accepting every religious doctrine associated with it. Asking for context is good reasoning. Treating context as a way to excuse any result is poor reasoning, whether the speaker is religious or atheist. The useful principle is careful qualification followed by a real check.

Why should one people have a special covenant with God?

My short answer

A special duty does not imply greater human worth. That is a serious reply to the claim of being chosen. It leaves another question: what evidence shows that God made this covenant, and what makes it fair to people born outside it?

Read the claim carefully

Exodus, called Shemot in Hebrew, presents Israel as a treasured people under a covenant, with obligations to obey. Deuteronomy 7 connects the choice with divine love and a promise to ancestors, rather than numerical greatness.^{21,22}

These passages do not show a claim about superior genes. It would be dishonest to turn a theological relationship into a theory that every Jew thinks everyone else has less worth. Jewish identity also includes family, history and culture; an individual's identity does not tell us every doctrine they hold.

The question I am asking concerns an actual agreement with God. A community can preserve a story of duties and belonging without that story becoming public proof of an agreement made by God.

The strongest reply

"Chosen means called to responsibility. Different people may have different roles without one having greater dignity. A parent can ask one child to do a task without despising the others."

That reply addresses a real confusion. Difference is not automatically unfairness. A duty to serve can be demanding rather than flattering. I should ask what the special role permits, what it requires and how it treats the rights of others.

Yet the family analogy cannot prove the divine selection. It only shows that a fair selection is conceivable. The historical and theological claim still needs support. Many communities tell stories of a special calling. Their sincerity cannot make every incompatible account correct.

Can descendants be bound by an ancestral choice?

Suppose my ancestors made a promise. I may value it, learn from it or decide to continue it. Whether it can bind me without my choice depends on the kind of duty. A promise about managing a shared inheritance differs from an order controlling belief or private life.

If a covenant imposes obligations on descendants, why do those descendants owe them? A believer can say that duties arise from God rather than from voluntary agreement. That answer moves the issue to God's authority and whether the commands are good. It does not settle the issue by using the word covenant.

There is a related question about outsiders. If knowledge of divine duties matters, why should access depend so much on

birthplace and upbringing? A believer may have an account of duties shared by all people. That account should be stated and examined, rather than assuming that everyone outside the covenant is condemned.

The question I would ask back

"What does this special relationship allow you to claim, and which evidence supports that claim beyond the community's own tradition?"

This question can be asked without denying anyone's history or right to live securely. It concerns the truth and moral force of a doctrine. No theological argument gives permission to rank human lives by ancestry.

I can respect a community's commitment to service while doubting the divine source it gives for that commitment. Responsibilities can be defended through the needs and rights of actual people. A sacred origin is an extra claim, and the addition needs reasons of its own.

Does a story about many witnesses give us many independent witnesses?

My short answer

No. A text can say that a whole crowd saw an event. That statement is evidence that the text makes the claim. To establish the event, we must also examine how the report arose and what independent evidence supports it.

The Sinai argument

Maimonides, also called the Rambam, argues in Foundations of the Torah, Chapter 8, that trust in Moses rests on the public revelation at Sinai rather than on wonders alone. Exodus 19 presents the people hearing the divine speech to Moses, or Moshe in Hebrew.^{23,21}

This is a stronger argument than a claim that one private vision should convince everyone. Public events can leave broader evidence. The question is whether we now possess independent records of the witnesses or an inherited account that says there were witnesses.

The strongest reply

"A community would not simply accept the claim that its own ancestors all witnessed an event if no one had ever heard of it. A national tradition passed through families is harder to invent than a story about a single prophet."

That is a claim about how a tradition could develop. It deserves analysis, but it needs support. We cannot assume there was only one possible route: a stranger arriving on one day and persuading every family to accept a completely unfamiliar story.

Stories can develop through teaching and repeated retelling. A later generation may inherit an account without being able to examine its earliest form. That possibility does not prove that this specific event was invented. It shows why a claim of impossible invention requires a stronger argument.

Count sources, not people inside a source

Imagine a modern account says ten thousand people saw a light over a town. Later websites may all copy that account. We still need the first record and the witnesses' own reports. We must check whether those reports depend on one another. Ten thousand people in a narrative are not automatically ten thousand surviving, independent records.

This is an invented example about evidence. It is not a proposed history of Sinai. To reconstruct an actual history, one would need textual evidence, dates, transmission and other relevant records. This chapter does not claim a new examination of ancient manuscripts or archaeology.

There is also an issue of interpretation. Even if a crowd experienced an unusual event, what would identify it as speech from a specific God? The experience, the explanation and the later authority claimed from it are separate steps. Establishing one does not silently establish all three.

The question I would ask back

"Which independent evidence establishes the event, and which evidence only repeats the tradition about it?"

A believer can still find inherited testimony persuasive. I am asking how much weight it can bear for someone outside the tradition. Trust in ancestors may explain a person's faith. Other people still have a reason to check the sources, as they would for any other claim.

The fair conclusion is limited. This argument does not, on its own, show a national revelation merely by describing it as national. It also does not show that every person who preserves the story is lying. Sincere transmission and historical certainty are different things. A careful critic can reject the proof without pretending to know every step by which the tradition formed.

Can a flood story be meaningful and historically wrong?

My short answer

Yes. A story may raise serious moral questions without being a literal record of the whole Earth. If someone claims a worldwide flood happened as described, physical evidence becomes relevant. A spiritual meaning cannot do the work of that evidence.

Which reading are we testing?

Genesis, called Bereshit in Hebrew, describes Noah, or Noach, surviving a flood in an ark. Chapter 7 speaks of waters covering the high mountains and of destruction beyond the ark. A literal global reading makes claims about nature and history. A local or symbolic reading makes a different claim.²⁴

We should choose the reading before testing it. A regional disaster would not establish that all mountains on Earth were covered. A symbolic warning about violence would not establish the geology of a worldwide event.

The strongest reply

"The text teaches about moral failure, responsibility and survival. Its language belongs to its ancient setting. Demanding a modern scientific report misses what the story is for."

That reply can defend a nonliteral reading. I would then ask what moral lesson the reader accepts and why it is sound. I would not accuse that reader of denying geology unless they actually made a geological claim.

A literal defender faces a different task. They must explain why the physical record fits a single global catastrophe rather than the much longer history described by geology and climate research. Finding evidence of a flood somewhere cannot show a flood everywhere.

What kinds of evidence matter?

The National Park Service describes Grand Canyon's rocks as recording long sequences of changing environments, including shallow seas and dunes. Its account spans hundreds of millions of years for major sedimentary layers. These are not presented as the deposit of one recent flood.²⁵

A separate 2004 research paper reports a North Greenland ice-core climate record extending back about 123,000 years. That result comes from a defined physical record and its dating framework. It is not a direct study of Genesis, and I am not claiming that one number alone tests every possible flood proposal.²⁶

Together these sources show what a literal proposal must engage: specific records, methods and timelines. A defender must explain the proposed date, extent and effects, then

show why the model accounts for those records. Saying that a miracle could remove or rearrange every trace makes the claim harder to test. It supplies no positive evidence that the event happened.

The question I would ask back

"What precise event are you proposing, and which observations would distinguish it from local floods or no such global event?"

There is also a moral question within the narrative. How does collective destruction become just for infants and animals who did not make the relevant choices? A claim of divine ownership does not answer why suffering was necessary. Power to destroy is not a moral reason to destroy.

I reject the idea that a sacred story automatically overrules physical evidence. I also reject the shortcut that every Jewish reader must defend a recent global flood. The criticism should follow the claim a person actually makes. A nonliteral reading can preserve a lesson while conceding that the story gives us no verified map of Earth's flood history.

Can a divine command make slavery or collective killing right?

My short answer

A command needs a moral reason, even when it is called divine. Ancient context can help explain a rule. It does not make owning a person or killing a child morally acceptable. We must examine what the text permits and how the permission is defended.

Two difficult passages

Exodus 21 regulates servitude, including release in some cases and penalties for some injuries. Verses 20 and 21 discuss a master striking an enslaved person and distinguish immediate death from survival for a day or two. The passage uses the person's economic status in its reasoning. Verses 26 and 27 also give release for specified injuries.²⁷

Deuteronomy 20 gives different war instructions for distant cities and specified peoples in the land. Verses 16 to 18 prescribe leaving no living soul among the named groups. These are disturbing prescriptions. Their presence in a text does not by itself establish exactly what happened historically or what every Jewish person today supports.²⁸

The strongest reply

"You ignore protections and later interpretation. The laws arose in a violent ancient world. Some restricted existing practices, while later religious law shaped how they could be applied. A modern reader cannot treat every passage as a current instruction."

That reply includes points a critic must acknowledge. Regulation can reduce harm compared with an unrestricted practice. Interpretation can also make an enormous difference. It would be wrong to erase those developments or claim that every contemporary Jew endorses ancient warfare.

The moral question remains: why would perfect guidance stop at regulating ownership instead of clearly forbidding it? If historical conditions limited what people could accept, how do we distinguish divine accommodation from a human law reflecting its setting?

Improvement is not perfection

Imagine one law allows a master unlimited violence and another limits certain injuries. The second can be less cruel. It still leaves a person under another's ownership. Calling a rule an improvement does not make it a final model of justice.

The same applies to collective killing. A claim that a group did wrong does not show the guilt of every infant born into it. If a defender says God knew each case perfectly, ask what supports that claim and why nonlethal protection or change was impossible. Unlimited knowledge and power should broaden the options, not make collective harm the only unexplained option.

These are moral arguments. A laboratory cannot directly measure a command's justice. We can still reason about avoidable suffering, individual responsibility and rules that protect people against being treated as property or targets because of birth.

The question I would ask back

"Would this act be wrong without the sacred command? If so, what morally relevant fact does the command add?"

If the answer is only the speaker's authority, goodness risks becoming obedience to power. If a separate reason makes the act right, state that reason so that it can be examined. The authority's name cannot supply the missing reason.

I can recognise a tradition's later moral criticism and reform while rejecting a claim of flawless original legislation. Reading difficult passages honestly requires both facts: what the texts prescribe and what later readers have done with them. Neither fact should be hidden to make the debate easier.

Does Job explain innocent suffering, or leave it unanswered?

My short answer

Job gives a powerful challenge to the idea that suffering proves guilt. Its account still leaves a moral problem about divine permission. Telling a sufferer that the universe is vast does not explain why their pain had to happen.

What the story presents

Job, called Iyov in Hebrew, is introduced as upright. The opening narrative has God permit the adversary to test him within limits, and terrible losses follow. The adversary here should not simply be equated with every later doctrine of a rebellious Satan.²⁹

Later, the divine speeches ask Job about creation and the limits of human knowledge. Job 38 opens that challenge. This is a literary and theological text with much more complexity than a slogan that good people always prosper.³⁰

I value the refusal to infer guilt from suffering. The story itself makes it difficult to say that Job's losses simply reveal his wrongdoing. That is a better starting point than accusing every person in pain of having earned it.

The strongest reply

"The book unsettles shallow answers rather than giving a neat formula. It shows how little humans know. Faith can include protest, grief and a refusal to pretend that we understand the whole."

That is a serious reading. A text can be valuable because it exposes the failure of easy explanations. My objection concerns using the same mystery as proof that God must have a morally sufficient reason.

Limited knowledge applies to both sides. I may not know every possible reason. The believer also may not know that a good reason exists. The limit blocks certainty in either direction; it cannot do all the work for one conclusion.

Permission still raises a question

If a powerful protector allows a vulnerable person to be harmed to settle a challenge, we would ask why that person had to bear the cost. Did the lesson require this method? Could the harm have been prevented? Was the sufferer treated as someone with their own interests?

The difference between an ordinary protector and God does not remove the need to explain which moral difference justifies the permission. Saying that God owns creation gives an account of power or status. It does not show why care for a person's well-being can be set aside.

The literary form also matters. The story does not become a historical case file merely because it raises a profound problem. I am examining its moral argument and the explanations people draw from it, without claiming that

modern research has independently established every narrated event.

The question I would ask back

"Does the text give a reason that makes the suffering necessary, or does it ask the reader to trust beyond the explanation?"

Trust beyond explanation can be a believer's choice. It is different from an explanation that should compel an outsider. A moving encounter in a story does not supply all the missing moral premises.

My response to innocent suffering begins with help and listening. The person in pain should not have to prove their innocence before receiving care. I can learn that lesson from Job while remaining unconvinced that a good and powerful God has been justified by the story. A text can state an unresolved problem well without solving it.

If a tradition changes, what makes the new reading authoritative?

My short answer

A tradition can improve when people question it. Change can be good. How does a group choose which old rule to keep or change? Why should we trust the new answer?

One named approach

The Central Conference of American Rabbis' 1999 Reform statement speaks of ongoing revelation and the continuing study of commandments. It treats Jewish life as a living commitment rather than a simple repetition of every ancient prescription. This is a Reform statement, not a definition that every Jewish movement accepts.³¹

That distinction matters for criticism. If a person understands revelation as ongoing human engagement with the divine, replying only to a rigid dictation model misses their position. We must ask how this different model works.

The strongest reply

"People grow in understanding. A divine relationship can continue through argument, study and ethical change. A living tradition should not be judged by the demand that no interpretation ever develops."

I agree that learning involves revision. Scientific and secular moral views also change. The question is what controls the change. A change needs reasons that people can state and check. Those reasons must also apply when they challenge an admired leader.

Suppose a community revises an exclusion because it recognises the excluded people's equal abilities and the harm the rule caused. Those are reasons other people can examine. Calling the revision a deeper revelation adds a religious reading of the moral change. What evidence singles out that interpretation?

Can every outcome be called the intended one?

If keeping a rule proves fidelity, and reversing it proves a deeper fidelity, the authority claim may fit opposite outcomes equally well. A believer can still explain why one reading is better. The explanation needs more than a label applied after the decision.

We should ask what would count as a mistaken interpretation, who can challenge it and how dissenters are heard. An institution that admits human error has a clearer route to correction than one that assigns every failure to outsiders or disloyal members.

It would also be unfair to treat every revision as mere convenience. People can change through careful study and moral courage. A critic needs evidence before accusing a specific decision maker of bad motives. The argument here concerns justification, not an invented account of anyone's inner life.

The question I would ask back

"Which reasons decide the revision, and could those same reasons lead you to conclude that an inherited claim is false?"

If the answer is yes, there is room for inquiry. If the tradition must be true before we start, say which answers we are not allowed to reach. That limit affects how much weight as evidence the result can have.

Jewish identity is not exhausted by assent to a single doctrine. Family, practice and culture can remain important when theological belief changes. Criticising a supernatural claim need not demand that someone abandon their language or history.

I welcome honest moral revision. I remain doubtful when revision itself is offered as evidence that the tradition has had divine authority all along. A method's ability to improve does not prove that its earlier guidance was perfect, or that its present answer is beyond further correction.

Can all major revelations come from one source?

My short answer

Religions can share moral concerns while disagreeing about reality. A theory of changing divine guidance may explain some differences by their setting. It must still show which differences are new advice and which are claims that cannot both be true.

The Bahai proposal

The Bahai account presents divine revelation as unfolding through messengers who guide humanity in different ages. It distinguishes an underlying spiritual purpose from guidance suited to changing human conditions. Bahá'u'lláh has a central place in this account.³²

This is a serious attempt to explain religious diversity. It is stronger than pretending that every sentence in every tradition says the same thing. My question is how the proposed unity is established and who has authority to decide what each earlier tradition really means.

The strongest reply

"A good teacher gives different lessons to pupils at different stages. Apparent contradictions may arise from later interpretation, language or laws suited to a specific age. A single source need not repeat identical instructions forever."

That analogy makes changing guidance possible. It does not show the single source. We still need evidence that the teachers share it, that the differences fit the proposed stages and that the later interpretation is justified.

Some changes concern instructions: a community may need a different rule in a new setting. Others concern what exists. A permanent soul and the rejection of a permanent self cannot be treated as the same statement without examining the meanings carefully. Calling every disagreement a matter of stage can hide the disagreement instead of resolving it.

Who gets to explain the earlier teaching?

Suppose a later movement says that an earlier teacher truly meant its own view. Followers of the earlier teacher may disagree. The later movement needs textual or historical reasons for its reading. The fact that its framework can include the earlier teacher does not show that the earlier teacher endorsed the framework.

Imagine someone combines several maps by redrawing any road that does not fit. The finished map may look consistent. We still need to compare it with the ground. A consistent interpretation is an achievement in arranging ideas; it is not automatically evidence that the arrangement describes their actual origin.

This example does not claim that every Bahai interpretation is arbitrary. It states the test a specific interpretation must face. Some differences may be resolved by context. Others may remain real. The answer has to come from examining them individually.

The question I would ask back

"Which disagreement would count against progressive revelation, instead of being explained as a stage in it?"

If every possible sequence of teachings can fit, the framework has little power to distinguish a true history from a mistaken one. If it excludes some sequences, those limits should be stated clearly.

Unity can be a worthwhile social aim without becoming a proof that all religions share a divine origin. We can cooperate across beliefs while acknowledging disagreement. Agreement on compassion does not show agreement on souls, authority or the afterlife.

I support peaceful cooperation. I remain unconvinced that a later religious account can settle the truth of earlier traditions merely by placing them in its own story. The story needs evidence beyond the harmony it hopes to create.

If women are equal, why is the highest elected body reserved for men?

My short answer

Equal worth and equal access are related but different claims. Saying women have equal worth does not explain a rule that bars them from a governing body. The exclusion needs a reason that can be examined now.

A documented tension

A letter dated 22 December 2013, written by the Department of the Secretariat on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, addresses the rule barring women for membership of that body. It affirms equality, notes women's service in other Bahai institutions and says the reason for this restriction has not been explained. It appeals to a wisdom to become clear in the future.³³

This is a specific rule about a specific institution. It does not mean women are excluded from all leadership or that Bahai teaching openly says women have less human worth. The same letter rejects that interpretation. Accuracy makes the remaining question sharper.

The strongest reply

"Equality does not require identical roles. Women serve in important offices. The restriction comes from authoritative sacred teaching, and its wisdom will become clear. A believer can trust divine guidance before understanding every reason."

Different roles can be justified when their requirements differ in a relevant way. The question is what difference justifies this rule. If the reason is unavailable, pointing to possible reasons does not show that a good one exists.

Imagine two equally able candidates for a committee. One is excluded because she is a woman. If the committee says that she is equally valuable but the reason for her exclusion will be revealed later, she still has no present explanation she can evaluate. Praise for her worth does not remove the unequal opportunity.

What can a future explanation prove today?

A future discovery may change our judgment. Before it arrives, it cannot be treated as evidence already in hand. The same is true in science: a researcher may promise that a missing result will support a theory, but the promised result is not yet a finding.

The believer can defend trust in the authority. That makes the authority the next subject of inquiry. Why is its judgment reliable enough to override a present concern about fairness? Can an excluded person disagree without their moral judgment being dismissed as lack of faith?

This is a moral challenge, not a claim that a scientific instrument has measured the correct membership rule. I

If women are equal, why is the highest elected body reserved for men?

defend equal access unless a relevant reason justifies a restriction. The burden lies with the rule that excludes, because the exclusion imposes a concrete cost on one group.

The question I would ask back

"What present reason justifies the exclusion, beyond the authority that commands it?"

If no explanation is available, the honest answer is that the rule is accepted on trust. That may describe a believer's commitment accurately. It does not compel me to call the rule fair.

Women's recognised service elsewhere makes this question more pressing, because lack of ability is not the stated explanation. I can acknowledge the faith's equality teaching and still criticise this exception. A principle should be tested at the point where an institution asks us to suspend it.

Does an evil principle solve the problem of evil?

My short answer

Giving evil a different source can answer the claim that a good creator directly made every harm. It raises new questions about that source, its power and why it exists. A new explanation still needs evidence.

Avoid a false picture of Zoroastrian belief

Yasna 30 describes opposed spirits and a choice between better and worse. The Bundahishn gives a later account of creation and conflict. These texts belong to different layers of the tradition. They should not be flattened into a claim that every Zoroastrian believes in two equal gods.^{34,35}

Interpretations differ over how to understand the opposition and its relation to Ahura Mazda, the wise lord. This chapter tests two possible answers: evil as a real opposing power, and evil understood chiefly through destructive choice. It does not pretend that the alternatives exhaust Zoroastrian thought.

The strongest reply

"Goodness does not produce evil as a whim. Human beings take part in a struggle by choosing good thoughts and actions. The world is a field of responsibility, and evil will not have the final victory."

That account gives moral effort a clear place. It avoids treating cruelty as something to admire merely because it appears within creation. Yet the account's moral appeal is different from evidence that a cosmic struggle exists.

If an evil power is independent, where does its ability to harm come from? If the good divine power cannot yet stop it, the familiar claim of unlimited present control has changed. That may be a consistent theological choice. It needs to be stated rather than using unlimited power when convenient and limited power when suffering becomes difficult.

Follow each answer to its next question

If the evil power was created by the good one, ask why a fully informed creator permitted the result. If it was uncreated, ask why we should believe in this additional reality. If the conflict is mainly moral language for human choice, ask how it explains harms without a relevant human choice, such as a painful inherited condition.

These are conditional questions. A defender does not need to answer for a model they reject. They do need to explain which model they accept and what supports it.

Imagine discovering damage in a garden. Saying that a second gardener caused it might clear the first gardener of direct responsibility. We would then ask for evidence of the second gardener and whether the first had a duty or ability to

prevent the damage. The second agent does not end the investigation.

The question I would ask back

"What makes this account of evil more likely than a world in which natural causes and human choices produce harm without a cosmic enemy?"

A believer can offer textual testimony, philosophy or experience. Each deserves the relevant checks. The name given to evil does not itself identify a cause.

I accept that choices can worsen or improve lives. I do not need a metaphysical enemy to oppose cruelty. A tradition's call to act well may be valuable while its account of cosmic powers remains uncertain. The criticism should recognise that distinction and ask for evidence at the point where the moral call becomes a claim about the universe.

What supports the promise that everyone will finally be restored?

My short answer

A final world without suffering is an appealing hope. Hope does not show that the event will happen. We must ask what grounds the promise and why the path to it contains the suffering it is supposed to overcome.

A distinct account of the future

Chapter 30 of the Bundahishn describes resurrection and a renewed existence. Its account includes a passage through molten metal, experienced differently by the righteous and wicked, followed by purification and restoration. This is not simply a copy of an account of endless punishment. It belongs to this specific text and its theological setting.³⁵

The prospect of eventual restoration answers one concern about permanent exclusion. If harm and corruption finally end, nobody remains trapped in them forever. That is a moral difference worth acknowledging even while questioning the factual claim.

The strongest reply

"A good reality will not leave the world broken. Final renewal completes the struggle against evil and heals what present life cannot repair. The promise offers a reason to persevere."

It can offer that reason to someone who trusts the source. For a person who does not yet trust it, we need to examine the source and the promise. Describing a desirable ending does not show that the universe is heading towards it.

We should also ask whether the claim makes a checkable prediction. If it gives a date or a defined sequence of public events, those details can be assessed. If the event can always be moved to an unspecified future, present failure cannot count against it. That flexibility limits how much the claim can function as evidence.

Does a good ending justify every earlier cost?

Imagine a doctor can heal a child today but instead allows years of avoidable pain before offering the cure. The eventual cure is good. It does not explain the delay. We would ask what required the child to pay that cost.

The example has limits. A divine process might face conditions unlike those of a doctor. A defender needs to identify those relevant conditions. The assertion that the final outcome is good cannot, by itself, show that every route to it is justified.

There is a similar issue with purification. What does pain accomplish that another method could not? If it changes understanding, explain why the suffering is needed for that change. If it merely happens as part of the cosmic process, calling it inevitable does not make it fair.

The question I would ask back

"What evidence supports this future, and what makes the suffering on the way to it necessary?"

What supports the promise that everyone will finally be restored?

These are two separate questions. A promise might be morally attractive and factually unsupported. An event might be physically possible while morally troubling. Neither judgment should be smuggled into the other.

I would welcome a future in which people are safe, informed and free from pointless suffering. That preference does not entitle me to announce the future as fact. We can work to repair harm now without assuming that a later world will repair what we leave undone. A hope becomes more useful when it encourages action without demanding that we overstate what we know.

Can thoughts order the universe to deliver what you want?

My short answer

Thoughts can change what you notice and do. That can change your results. It does not show that the universe sends events because your thoughts broadcast the right frequency. A physical claim needs a defined process and evidence.

A public claim to test

The Secret's official account of the law of attraction describes thoughts in terms of energy and frequencies attracting matching things, people and events. This is a promotional source for the claim, not independent scientific confirmation of it.³⁶

Some people use "manifesting" to mean setting goals and taking action. That modest meaning should be distinguished from a claim that thoughts directly arrange external events through a universal law. Good planning cannot serve as evidence for every added claim about cosmic attraction.

The strongest reply

"Expectation affects behaviour. People who imagine a goal may see opportunities and persist. You cannot deny the role of mindset just because the language is spiritual."

I do not deny that thoughts can affect behaviour. The disputed step is the extra mechanism. A person who plans a job search may prepare better applications. That does not show that the universe changed another person's decision by receiving a thought frequency.

We need to ask what the term energy means. In a physical explanation it must do more than express mood or enthusiasm. What is being measured? By which instrument? What observation would show the claimed transfer and separate it from ordinary behaviour or chance?

Quantum words do not fill the gap

Quantum experiments reveal correlations that ordinary classical accounts cannot fully reproduce. The Nobel committee's 2022 explanation discusses entangled particles and tests of Bell inequalities. It does not report that human wishes attract money, relationships or cures.³⁷

This distinction is a limit on the evidence being offered. It does not claim that every philosophical question about quantum theory is settled. An unfamiliar scientific result cannot support whichever spiritual conclusion a speaker adds to it.

Imagine two otherwise similar groups attempting a clearly defined task. If the claim concerns thoughts acting without ordinary communication or action, the test must block those routes and count all outcomes. The prediction should be

fixed before seeing the result. A list of successful stories, selected afterwards, cannot tell us the overall success rate.

The question I would ask back

"What outcome would make you admit that the proposed law did not work?"

If failure always means the person secretly thought wrongly, the claim has been protected against correction. It can also become cruel. A person harmed by violence or illness has not been shown to have attracted the event merely because it happened to them.

Some goals conflict. Two teams can both want to win one match. A law that is said to deliver everyone's desired outcome must explain which result it predicts and why. Ordinary effort and chance already explain why wishes alone do not settle the match.

I support clear goals and practical action. I reject the claim that their usefulness verifies a cosmic delivery system. Show the extra effect, define the method and report the failures. Without that, the scientific language lends authority that the evidence has not earned.

Do near-death reports and past-life memories prove survival?

My short answer

Unusual reports deserve careful study. A sincere report does not, by itself, establish that a mind left a body or lived before. We need to check when it happened, what was known and what else could explain it. We should not pretend that every case has been solved.

What one prospective study found

AWARE-II, published in 2023, studied 567 in-hospital cardiac arrests across 25 sites. Of 53 survivors, 28 completed interviews. Some reported memories or experiences. Nobody identified the visual image, while one interviewee identified the auditory stimulus. The paper also reported EEG activity during CPR and noted that low survival limited parts of the inquiry.³⁸

These figures are not a simple test of everyone who ever had a near-death experience. Nor does the lack of a visual identification prove that no experience occurred. The sample, survival and testing conditions matter. A stopped heart and the efforts to restart it are what this study examines. That does not show that a mind survives after the brain has permanently stopped working.

The strongest reply

"Some accounts contain details that people should not have known. Children also report memories that appear to match deceased people. Dismissing them all as lies is not a scientific response."

I agree that a blanket accusation is not a case analysis. The University of Virginia's Division of Perceptual Studies investigates children's reported past-life memories and presents cases it regards as important. Its institutional research summary documents that programme and the researchers' interpretation. It is not a fresh independent reanalysis by me.³⁹

The right response is to choose the strongest case and check its record. We should not replace that work with either instant belief or instant ridicule.

What must be checked?

When was each statement recorded? Was it written before anyone searched for a match? Which details failed to match? Could the family have learned information through ordinary contact? Were leading questions used? How many possible people were considered before a match was chosen?

For a medical report, ask when the experience may have formed, what was happening during resuscitation and whether the proposed timing was independently established. A memory reported later does not automatically date itself to the precise moment a theory needs.

These are questions about reliability. They do not show that every unusual report has an ordinary explanation. A case can remain unexplained after checks. "Unexplained" describes

the state of our knowledge; it does not identify the correct cause.

The question I would ask back

"Which record rules out ordinary information transfer, and what further step identifies survival rather than another unknown cause?"

Even strong evidence for an unusual ability would not automatically prove a whole religion. It would not establish every rule about karma, a specific God or which scripture is authoritative. The conclusion should be no larger than the finding supports.

I would change my view in response to strong, independently checked evidence. That includes evidence gathered under conditions that expose mistakes and can be repeated where the claim allows repetition. I do not need to promise in advance which explanation a future finding must support.

The honest position can be that some reports are puzzling while a proposed afterlife remains not yet shown. That is enough to keep investigating. It is not enough to declare that death has been explained or that one tradition has won.

What would make me change my mind?

My short answer

Good evidence could change my mind. I ask the same of a believer. A view deserves trust when it can face correction, explain its reasons and admit what remains unknown. A title or a loud voice cannot do that work.

What this volume has challenged

A moral ideal does not certify a revelation. An account of changing experience does not show rebirth. An unseen cause needs more than an unexplained result. A tradition about public witnesses is not automatically a set of independent records. A future explanation cannot be counted as a present finding.

These are limits on arguments, not a claim that every religious sentence is false. Some teachings encourage care, restraint or courage. I can accept those aims on reasons that can be discussed without accepting an unseen system attached to them.

The strongest reply

"Your standards may exclude what matters most. God or final truth may be known through a whole life rather than through one public test. You also trust things you cannot prove with absolute certainty."

That is a useful warning against demanding impossible certainty. Everyday knowledge works with degrees of support. I do not need absolute proof to cross a bridge. I do need enough reason for the kind of trust being asked of me.

The request to accept a private meaning differs from the request to accept a public fact or obey a binding rule. A belief that comforts one person does not automatically gain authority over another person's body, choices or conscience. The larger the demand, the stronger its justification should be.

What kind of evidence would matter?

A clearly recorded prediction that succeeds where a rival account fails could matter. So could independently checked knowledge acquired under conditions that block ordinary routes. A philosophical argument could matter if its premises were defensible and its conclusion followed. A sound moral reason could change my judgment of a rule.

These are examples of routes to revision, not a guarantee that one result proves a whole theology. A finding may show an unusual fact while leaving its source unknown. We should investigate the extra steps rather than letting excitement choose the conclusion.

I also owe an answer when evidence counts against my preferred explanation. Calling a believer irrational cannot replace showing the error. Dismissing a result because I dislike its possible consequences would be the same failure I criticise in dogmatic faith.

Questions without humiliation

Bhagat Singh's essay challenges inherited belief through reasons, including questions about suffering and divine authority. I value that willingness to ask what a claim can answer. I am not borrowing his name as proof of my own conclusions. Those conclusions must stand on their reasons.⁴⁰

The most useful question in a conversation is often small: "How do you know that?" Then listen. If the answer depends on a source, examine it. If it depends on a moral premise, discuss it. If it changes the claim, name the change.

The question I would ask back

"What could show you that you are mistaken, and would you let yourself follow it?"

Some conversations end without agreement. That does not make them failures. A precise disagreement is more useful than a staged victory. Nobody should have to pretend certainty to keep their dignity.

I remain unconvinced by the supernatural claims examined here. I can still share work, friendship and equal rights with people who accept them. My demand is that claims face evidence and authority give reasons. Anyone who asks for my belief should be prepared to answer both demands.

Twenty question chains

Use one chain at a time. Ask the first question and listen to the answer. Choose the follow-up that fits what the person actually said. These are reasoning exercises, not a claim that every believer holds the same position. The relevant chapter gives the fuller argument and sources.

1. A clear claim

What are you asking me to believe? Is it a claim about what exists, a moral rule or a way of coping? What evidence would support that specific claim? Would the same evidence convince you if it supported a different tradition? See Chapter 1.

2. Hukam and pain

Does hukam describe what happens, or also tell us that what happens fits perfect goodness? What makes an avoidable pain necessary? Could the same good aim be reached with less harm? What would distinguish a caring order from events without a caring planner? See Chapter 2.

3. Grace and opportunity

What does grace do? What makes it available to someone with a very different upbringing? Is an open invitation the same as a fair chance to receive it? If the outcome depends on trust, how are barriers to trust accounted for? See Chapter 3.

4. Scriptural authority

What shows that this text gives divine guidance? Does a good effect show the source was divine? Could a human work have the same effect? Which reading could you revise if strong evidence counted against it? See Chapter 4.

5. Equality in practice

What does the equality rule require in this case? What evidence would show whether it was followed? Can an affected person appeal a decision? If the ideal is good, what further step makes it proof of God? See Chapter 5.

6. Prayer and outcomes

Are you claiming comfort or a change in an external outcome? What else happened that could explain the change? Were unsuccessful cases counted? If every possible result confirms the claim, how could a result ever test it? See Chapter 6.

7. Religious eligibility

What task does the role require? Which relevant ability does the excluded person lack? Could assistance remove the obstacle? Can the restriction be justified to the people it excludes without relying only on sacred authority? See Chapter 7.

8. Suffering and a wider system

Which habit causes the distress in this example? Does changing the habit help? What further evidence shows a cycle of lives or final release? Are you using the success of a practical method to support a different claim? See Chapter 8.

9. Rebirth without a fixed self

What continues if no permanent self continues? What evidence identifies the connection across death? Does the analogy show a possibility or an actual event? If a later life bears a cost, what makes that cost morally deserved? See Chapter 9.

10. A particular karmic cause

Do you accept that pain can have several causes? What method identifies a past-life cause in this case? Could an unknown ordinary cause explain the event? What finding would make you revise the karmic explanation? See Chapter 10.

11. Testing experience

What did you experience? Which explanation are you giving it? Could expectation or a different practice produce the same result? How can the method help a sincere person discover their own mistake? See Chapter 11.

12. Meditation and evidence

What outcome did the study measure? Which comparison did it use? Does it establish the larger spiritual promise? How would you test that promise without substituting a stress score for it? See Chapter 12.

13. A hidden realm

Is the realm literal or metaphorical in your reading? If literal, what evidence supports it? If metaphorical, which ethical lesson follows and why is it sound? Can the lesson be accepted while the realm remains doubtful? See Chapter 13.

14. Karmic matter

Which effects identify the proposed matter? How are they separated from other causes? Is the explanation fixed before the result is known? What would be more likely if this matter existed than if it did not? See Chapter 14.

15. Perfect knowledge

Which knowledge was checked? Did the check block ordinary ways of learning the answer? Would some correct answers establish knowledge of everything? Could the community acknowledge a genuine error by the teacher? See Chapters 16 and 17.

16. A national revelation

How many independent records do we have? Which accounts repeat an earlier account? What shows the event rather than only the tradition about it? Even if an unusual event occurred, what identifies its divine source? See Chapter 19.

17. A difficult command

What does the passage prescribe? How does context explain it? Would the act be wrong without the command? Which morally relevant reason makes it right with the command, and why could a less harmful method not work? See Chapter 21.

18. A promised explanation

What present reason supports the restriction? Does the text give that reason or promise one later? What shows the authority as reliable enough to override the fairness concern? Can a person excluded by the rule openly disagree? See Chapter 25.

19. Cosmic attraction

Does thinking change behaviour, or do thoughts directly arrange distant events? What does frequency mean in the second claim? How is it measured? Which result would count as a failure rather than being blamed on secret doubt? See Chapter 28.

20. Survival and revision

What was recorded before a match or explanation was chosen? Which alternative causes were checked? Does an unexplained result identify survival? What evidence would change your mind, and will you apply that standard to your own preferred answer? See Chapters 29 and 30.

Words used in this book

Ahimsa. Nonviolence or the effort to avoid harm. Jain traditions give it a central place. The exact duties and practical distinctions need to be stated.

Ahura Mazda. The wise lord in Zoroastrian tradition. Claims about divine power and its relation to evil must be examined within the particular interpretation being discussed.

Analogy. A comparison used to explain or examine an idea. Showing that something could work like a flame lighting another flame does not show that minds actually work that way across death.

Anekantavada. A Jain teaching about reality's many aspects and the limits of one-sided accounts. It does not simply make every opinion wholly true.

Atheism. Here, remaining unconvinced that any god exists. The label alone does not decide every question about consciousness, morality or rebirth.

Authority. A claimed right to guide judgment or action. Expertise can give reasons for trust; a claim of authority can still be questioned.

Bahai. A plain English spelling used here for the Bahá'í faith. It teaches divine guidance through successive messengers and gives Bahá'u'lláh a central role.

Bereshit. The Hebrew name of Genesis, the first book of the Torah.

Beginningless. Having no first moment. A theory can propose a beginningless process; the proposal still needs reasons and evidence.

Bundahishn. A Middle Persian religious work with accounts of creation and final renewal. It belongs to a later textual setting than the Gathas.

Causation. A relation in which something helps bring about an effect. Being a cause does not automatically make an outcome fair or deserved.

Collective responsibility. Holding a group answerable together. Assigning guilt or punishment to every member, including infants, requires a moral justification beyond saying the group did wrong.

Consent. A person's free and informed agreement. Threats, dependence and heavy pressure can affect whether agreement is truly free.

Covenant. A binding relationship or agreement. Biblical covenant raises questions about its divine source, duties and claims on later generations.

CPR. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation: emergency efforts to restore circulation and breathing after cardiac arrest. Studying experiences during CPR is not automatically studying survival after irreversible brain death.

Dukkha. A Buddhist term often translated as suffering, stress or unsatisfactoriness. It includes more than the claim that every moment feels bad.

EEG. Electroencephalography, a method for recording electrical activity through electrodes on the scalp. A particular recording has limits on what it can establish about experience and timing.

Empirical. Based on observation or measurement. A claim about an outcome should be tested by an appropriate method.

Enlightenment. A term for spiritual awakening. Its meaning must be specified before evidence is offered: reduced anger, changed understanding and release from rebirth are different claims.

Evidence. Information that gives a reason to accept, reject or revise a claim. Its value depends on its relevance and reliability, not only on how striking it feels.

Gathas. Hymns within the Zoroastrian Yasna. This book uses a named English translation and distinguishes them from later religious works.

Grace. Divine help or favour that is not reduced to something a person simply earns. Its relation to choice and fairness is a separate question.

Guru Granth Sahib. The central Sikh scripture, revered as Guru. Its teaching role and the claim of divine authority must not be confused with a claim that paper cannot guide anyone.

Hukam. A Sikh term often rendered as divine order or command. Its theological meanings reach beyond the picture of a human ruler giving orders.

Independent evidence. Evidence that does not simply repeat or depend on the same unverified source. A thousand copies of one report are not a thousand independent witnesses.

Jiva. Soul or living being in the Jain account discussed here. Its proposed nature should not be assumed from a word's use in another tradition.

Kamma. The Pali form of karma. Buddhist meanings and the causes described in a specific discourse need to be distinguished from other uses.

Karma. Action and its consequences, with different meanings across traditions. Jain accounts of subtle matter, Buddhist intentional causation and Sikh discussions of action and grace are not one identical doctrine.

Langar. A Sikh community meal and setting for shared service and eating. Its value does not by itself establish a supernatural claim.

Literal reading. A reading that treats an account as making the factual claim under discussion. A literal global flood and a metaphor about moral failure require different kinds of evaluation.

Manifestation. Here, a modern claim that thoughts help bring desired events. Goal-directed action and a proposed cosmic attraction of events are treated as different claims.

Metaphor. Language that explains something through an image or comparison. A metaphorical hell is not the same factual proposal as a realm after death.

Metaphysics. Questions about basic reality, such as souls or ultimate causes. Some proposals are difficult to test; difficulty does not by itself make them true or false.

Moral reason. A reason about what we ought to do or permit. It can address harm, fairness or rights without pretending to be a laboratory measurement.

No-self or not-self. The Buddhist position examined here rejects treating changing aspects of experience as a permanent, fully controllable self. It is not simply the claim that nobody exists in ordinary life.

Omniscience. Knowledge of everything, or perfect knowledge in the teaching in question. Several correct answers cannot alone establish an unlimited ability.

Prediction. An expectation stated before the outcome is known. A flexible story fitted after an event is a weaker test of a theory.

Progressive revelation. The Bahai account of divine guidance through messengers in different ages. Its explanation of unity and change must be distinguished from independent proof of the account.

Rebirth. A proposed continuity into another life. Different traditions disagree about what continues, so a criticism must identify the relevant account.

Reform Judaism. A Jewish religious movement. The 1999 statement discussed in this book does not define the views of every Jewish movement or person.

Rehat Maryada. A Sikh code of conduct and conventions. A named institutional rule is evidence of that rule, not proof of identical practice everywhere.

Revelation. Guidance claimed to come from divine reality. A religious account of its origin needs to be distinguished from the text's preservation or practical usefulness.

Sallekhana or santhara. A Jain religious practice associated with a deliberate final renunciation of food and drink under conditions described within the tradition. This book examines authority and consent without giving instructions or stating current law.

Selection bias. A distortion caused by the way examples are chosen. Collecting success stories while leaving out failures can give a false impression of the overall result.

Shemot. The Hebrew name of Exodus, the second book of the Torah.

Steelman. A clear and serious version of an opposing argument. Giving a strong reply helps a criticism address the claim worth discussing.

Syadvada. A Jain approach to qualifying statements by relevant conditions or standpoints. A qualification should make a claim clearer enough to examine.

Testimony. Someone's report of what happened or what they experienced. It may be evidence, but its reliability and interpretation still need checking.

Torah. Often the five books of Moses; it can also refer more broadly to Jewish teaching. The meaning depends on context.

Universal House of Justice. The international elected governing body of the Bahai faith. Chapter 25 examines the documented restriction of its membership to men.

Yasna. A Zoroastrian liturgical text containing the Gathas. Chapter 26 discusses the named passage in Yasna 30 rather than attributing one reading to all Zoroastrians.

Notes and sources

Raised numbers in the text lead to these entries. Religious texts and commentaries show the teachings under discussion. Their testimony alone does not independently verify a supernatural event. Each entry identifies the source and the limits of its use.

Translations and later explanations are distinguished. Some original research was consulted through the published abstract; other sources were read as full text or an official explanation. Historical judgments, scientific results and moral reasons are kept distinct. No raw-data analysis or original field investigation was performed for this book.

1. *Sikh Rehat Maryada: Sikh Code of Conduct and Conventions*. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, official English edition.

<https://sgpc.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Sikh-Rehat-Maryada-English-n.pdf>

Article I defines Sikh allegiance; the code discusses personal conduct, superstition, langar and initiation. A normative institutional code, not evidence that every Sikh follows every provision. Specific eligibility rules are also identified separately.

2. *SN 56.11: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion*. Translated from Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu; Access to Insight.

<https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html>

Named early discourse on dukkha, craving, cessation and the path. A religious text, not a clinical trial. No assertion that every Buddhist school reads all terms identically.

3. *Karma Theory*. Federation of Jain Associations in North America, JAINA.

<https://www.jaina.org/page/KarmaTheory>

Community explanation of karma as subtle matter and beginningless bondage. Used to describe the doctrine; not an independent physical measurement. Jainism is not treated as requiring a creator who assigns a first karmic burden.

4. *Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 1: opening and Japji*. SriGranth.org; English translation by Sant Singh Khalsa.
<https://www.srigranth.org/servlet/gurbani.gurbani?Action=Page&Param=1&g=1&h=0&r=0&t=1&p=0&k=0>

Opening description of divine reality and passage on hukam. The Gurmukhi and named English translation are distinguished; English terms do not exhaust Sikh interpretations.

5. *Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 2: Japji*. SriGranth.org; English translation by Sant Singh Khalsa.
<https://www.srigranth.org/servlet/gurbani.gurbani?Action=Page&Param=2&g=1&h=0&r=0&t=1&p=0&k=0>

Passages on hukam, action and grace. Examined as religious teaching. The terms can carry meanings that differ across translations; no single verse is presented as the whole of Sikh theology.

6. *Main Principles*. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, official account.
<https://new.sgpc.net/sikhism/main-principles-2/>
Community statement on scriptural guidance, service and equality, including women. Supports the stated ideals; does not independently demonstrate supernatural authority or establish universal social practice.

7. *Sikh Rehat Maryada, Section Six, Article XXIV*. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, official English text.
<https://sgpc.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Sikh-Rehat-Maryada-English-n.pdf>

Section Six initiation provisions: women may be among the six officiating participants; certain disabilities exclude a person from the five administering initiation. Distinguish the named institutional rule from every community or individual practice.

8. *SN 22.59: Five Brethren*. Translated from Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu; Access to Insight.
<https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.059.than.html>
Examines form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness as not-self. Does not independently verify rebirth; used to avoid attributing an eternal migrating soul to the position criticised.

9. *SN 12.12: To Phagguna*. Translated from Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu; Access to Insight.

<https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.012.than.html>

Redirects questions about who experiences towards conditions of experience. Used for a causal account, without treating an analogy of continuity as evidence that a chain crosses death.

10. *SN 36.21: Sivaka*. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 2000; SuttaCentral.

<https://suttacentral.net/sn36.21/en/bodhi>

Explicitly rejects the view that all feeling is caused by past deeds; names several causes. Ancient medical categories are not represented as modern medical knowledge.

11. *To the Kalamas, AN 3:66*. Translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, dhammatalks.org.

https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN3_66.html

Updated translator page. Numbered AN 3.65 in some other editions. Discusses ethical testing and the wise, and assurances with or without an afterlife. Does not describe a complete modern experimental protocol.

12. *Meditation Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-being: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis*. Madhav Goyal and colleagues, *JAMA Internal Medicine* 174 (2014), 357-368.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4142584/>

47 trials and 3,515 participants. Limited outcome-specific benefits and comparisons reported; the review does not establish enlightenment or metaphysical claims. Published synthesis, not a new trial or raw-data reanalysis by this author.

13. *Meditation and Mindfulness: Effectiveness and Safety*. US National Institutes of Health, National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health.

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/meditation-and-mindfulness-effectiveness-and-safety>

Official health-evidence overview; techniques, programme components, possible benefits and evidence limits. Used to frame claims accurately, not to prescribe treatment or claim that all methods have identical effects.

14. *MN 130: The Deva Messengers*. Translated from Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu; Access to Insight.

<https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.130.than.html>

A named discourse with rebirth and hell descriptions. The text is evidence of a teaching, not independent observation of a realm. Literal and metaphorical readings are treated separately.

15. *Theory of Karma*. Federation of Jain Associations in North America, JAINA.

https://www.jaina.org/page/Theory_Of_Karma

Additional community account of karmic particles and their effects. Normative religious explanation, not a demonstrated scientific mechanism.

16. *Jain Reality/Existence*. Federation of Jain Associations in North America, JAINA.

<https://www.jaina.org/page/RealityExistence>

Religious classification of embodied souls, including one-sensed earth-, water-, fire-, air- and vegetation-bodied beings. These categories are not silently substituted for modern cell biology.

17. *Basic Jain Concept of Universe*. Federation of Jain Associations in North America, JAINA.

<https://www.jaina.org/general/custom.asp?page=BasicJainConcept>

Community account compares tiny life and modern biological knowledge and describes subtle karma. Its comparison is a religious interpretation, not proof that all proposed categories map onto microorganisms.

18. *The Philosophy of Karma and the Nine Jain Tattvas*. Federation of Jain Associations in North America, JAINA.

<https://www.jaina.org/page/KarmaTattvas>

Explains jiva, karmic bondage and liberation, including claims of complete knowledge. Notes that some accounts count seven principles by grouping virtue and sin differently. No test of omniscience is reported.

19. *JAINA Newsletter, 2 September 2015: Santhara update*. Federation of Jain Associations in North America, JAINA.

https://www.jaina.org/page/09_02_15_newsletter

Historical community defence of the religious practice. Documents that position at its date. Not used as current legal guidance or a finding that consent is valid in every case; no fasting instructions are provided.

20. *Syadvada: Theory of Non-Absolutism*. Jainworld, exposition associated with Prasamarati Prakarana.

<https://jainworld.com/scripture/prasamarati-prakarana/syadvada-theory-of-non-absolutism/>

Named Jain philosophical exposition on many aspects and qualified judgment. Does not mean that every contradictory proposition is wholly true in the same respect. Distinguish exposition from direct quotation of an ancient sutra.

21. *Shemot / Exodus 19*. Hebrew text with JPS 1917 English translation, Mechon Mamre.

<https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0219.htm>

Verses 5-6 on covenant and vocation; verse 9 on hearing divine speech to Moses. The narrative is not counted as a collection of independently preserved eyewitness reports.

22. *Devarim / Deuteronomy 7*. Hebrew text with JPS 1917 English translation, Mechon Mamre.

<https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0507.htm>

Verses 6-8 connect choice with love and ancestral promise. No genetic superiority claim is inferred from the passage. Theology, identity and universal human worth are kept distinct.

23. *Mishneh Torah, Foundations of the Torah, Chapter 8*. Maimonides; English translation by Eliyahu Touger, Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/904992/jewish/Chapter-Eight.htm

Maimonides grounds Moses' authority in Sinai rather than miracles alone. Translation and later explanatory notes are distinguished. The argument is not independent historical confirmation of the narrative.

24. *Bereshit / Genesis 7*. Hebrew text with JPS 1917 English translation, Mechon Mamre.

<https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0107.htm>

Flood narrative, especially verses 19-23. Literal global, regional and nonliteral readings make different claims. No claim that every Jewish reader accepts a recent worldwide flood.

25. *Grand Canyon's Three Sets of Rocks*. US National Park Service.

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/grcatime-grand-canyon-s-three-sets-of-rocks.htm>

Official geological explanation: different rock groups and changing environments over long times. A particular physical record a global-flood proposal must engage, not a new geological investigation or a standalone test of every flood model.

26. *High-resolution record of Northern Hemisphere climate extending into the last interglacial period*. North Greenland Ice Core Project members, *Nature* 431 (2004), 147-151; doi:10.1038/nature02805.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/nature02805>

Published abstract and associated publisher record consulted for the approximately 123,000-year climate record. Not a Genesis study or a raw-data reanalysis. Dating frameworks and the scope of a proposed flood must be examined rather than treating one number as a universal disproof.

27. *Shemot / Exodus 21*. Hebrew text with JPS 1917 English translation, Mechon Mamre.

<https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0221.htm>

Servitude regulations; verses 20-21 on beating and death, verses 26-27 on release for specified injuries. Protections are acknowledged without calling ownership fair. Prescription is distinguished from historical occurrence and present Jewish practice.

28. *Devarim / Deuteronomy 20*. Hebrew text with JPS 1917 English translation, Mechon Mamre.

<https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0520.htm>

Different rules for distant cities and named peoples, especially verses 10-18. Used for a moral criticism of collective violence; does not establish every narrated historical event or a contemporary licence accepted by all Jews.

29. *Iyov / Job 1*. Judaica Press English translation, Chabad.org, with separately displayed Rashi commentary.

https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/16403/jewish/Chapter-1.htm

Job's uprightness, the adversary and divine permission. Literary/theological narrative, not an independently verified case file; the adversary is not equated with every later Satan doctrine.

30. *Iyov / Job 38*. Hebrew text with JPS 1917 English translation, Mechon Mamre.
<https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2738.htm>

Beginning of the divine speeches on creation and human limits. The ethical question about permission is the author's argument, not a laboratory result or a claim that every Jewish reading agrees.

31. *A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism*. Central Conference of American Rabbis, Pittsburgh, 1999.
<https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-statement-principles-reform-judaism/>

Reform movement statement on God, ongoing revelation, commandments, pluralism and equality. A named movement's position, not the doctrine of every Jewish community.

32. *Revelation: God and His Creation*. Bahai International Community, What Bahais Believe.

<https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/god-his-creation/revelation/>

Official account of divine revelation through successive messengers and changing historical conditions. Describes the faith's explanation; does not independently verify one source behind the traditions it interprets.

33. *Letter of 22 December 2013 to an individual*. Department of the Secretariat, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice; Bahai Reference Library.

https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20131222_001/1

Explains restriction of House membership to men, affirms equality, notes women's other institutional service, and says the reason is unexplained with future wisdom promised. Criticism concerns that specific restriction and its justification.

34. *Yasna 30: opposed spirits and choice*. English Gathas version attributed to C. Bartholomae, via J. H. Moulton (1913) and I. J. S. Taraporewala (1951); Joseph H. Peterson digital edition, Avesta.org.

<https://www.avesta.org/yasna/index.html>

Relevant verses 30.2-5. The digital edition explains the complex translation lineage; its Gathas version is not attributed to Mills, who translated other Yasna sections. Interpretations differ; no blanket claim that all Zoroastrians teach two equal gods.

35. *Bundahishn, Chapters 1 and 30*. E. W. West translation, Sacred Books of the East, volume 5; Avesta.org.

<https://www.avesta.org/mp/bundahis.html>

Later Middle Persian account of conflict, resurrection, purification and final restoration. Related Avesta.org chapter edition identifies an 1897 printing. Not treated as identical in date or emphasis to the Gathas, or as an endless-punishment doctrine shared by all Zoroastrians.

36. *Law of Attraction*. The Secret, official promotional website.

<https://www.thesecret.tv/law-of-attraction/>

Primary statement of the claimed attraction of matching events through thoughts, energy and frequencies. Documents the claim; not independent scientific evidence. Goal-setting through action is treated separately.

37. *How entanglement has become a powerful tool*. Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences / Nobel Prize in Physics 2022, popular science background.

<https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2022/10/popular-physicsprize2022-2.pdf>

Official explanation of entangled states, Bell tests and quantum information. Does not demonstrate wish-driven events, religious metaphysics or a cosmic law of attraction.

38. *AWAreness during RESuscitation - II: A multi-center study of consciousness and awareness in cardiac arrest*. Sam Parnia and colleagues, *Resuscitation* 191 (2023), 109903; doi:10.1016/j.resuscitation.2023.109903.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37423492/>

Published abstract consulted: 567 arrests, 53 survivors, 28 interviews, no visual identification, one auditory identification; EEG during CPR and survival limits. Does not establish survival after irreversible brain death; no patient-level reanalysis.

39. *Children Who Report Memories of Past Lives*. University of Virginia, Division of Perceptual Studies.

<https://med.virginia.edu/perceptual-studies/our-research/children-who-report-memories-of-previous-lives/>

Researchers' own programme summary and interpretation. Supports that cases are studied, not the claim that every case is solved, fraudulent or conclusive. No independent examination of underlying case files is claimed.

40. *Why I am an Atheist*. Bhagat Singh, 1930; online text at Marxists Internet Archive.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bhagat-singh/1930/10/05.htm>

Historical essay cited for its challenge to inherited belief and divine explanations of suffering. Intellectual inspiration, not borrowed proof or a fabricated quotation. This volume uses its own arguments and source checks.

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About the author and this edition

Lovepreet Singh writes at misterlove.in. *Atheist vs Believer* examines religious claims through direct questions, plain examples and sources readers can check. This fourth volume addresses selected other traditions and modern spiritual claims. It is the first English edition, October 2026.

The author welcomes corrections that identify the exact passage or factual claim, provide a reliable source and explain what should change. A disagreement about a moral premise should name that premise. A correction to a translation should identify the original wording and the proposed meaning.

Sources and reading further

The notes link to the specific religious passages, community statements, published research and official explanations used here. Read the context around a passage before using it in a conversation. A community's own account is useful for understanding its position. It does not replace independent evidence for every factual claim it makes.

The scientific papers address defined questions and populations. Their dates and limits matter. They do not become a verdict on every possible version of a religious idea. The moral arguments in this volume remain arguments, with reasons open to challenge.

The four-volume plan

Volume One examines Islam. Volume Two examines Christianity. Volume Three examines Hindu traditions. Volume Four examines the selected traditions and claims named in this book. They are distinct volumes in their first editions, not invented revised editions of the same text.

Find the author's available work at <https://misterlove.in>. Availability of this specific edition depends on the author's release decision.

How much does a sacred claim prove?

Can a true moral insight prove a revelation? If there is no permanent self, what is reborn? If karma is matter, where is the evidence? Why should sacred authority escape ordinary questions?

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Includes a glossary, notes, a topic index and twenty question chains for a conversation that can survive a fact check.

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