

### Fast 29: Argument between materialistic and spiritual outlooks of life

- There has always been an argument between the persons sent by God with a Divine mission of reform who emphasize the spiritual side of life and materialists who believe that the physical world is all in all. One such argument is as below:

“Have you not thought of him who **disputed** with Abraham about his Lord, because Allah had given him **kingdom**? When Abraham said, ‘My Lord is He Who gives life and causes to die’, he said: ‘I give life and cause death’. Abraham said: ‘Surely Allah causes the sun to rise from the East, so you make it rise from the West (if you can).’ Thus he who disbelieved was baffled. And Allah does not guide the unjust people.” (2:258)

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِي حَاجَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ فِي رَبِّهِ أَنْ آتَاهُ  
اللَّهُ الْمُلْكََ إِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّيَ الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَ  
يُمِيتُ قَالَ أَنَا أُحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ  
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْتِي بِالشَّمْسِ مِنَ الْمَشْرِقِ فَأْتِ  
بِهَا مِنَ الْمَغْرِبِ فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ وَاللَّهُ لَا  
يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٥٨﴾

This is said to be an argument between Abraham and Nimrod, the king of his time. Abraham was often arguing and reasoning. The Quran also relates his arguments with his people (21:52–67), with his father (19:42–49), and within himself (6:76–79), about the oneness of God. Here he is arguing about the existence and power of God.

Abraham, like other prophets, arose with the message that it is guidance from God which gives people true, human life, showing them how to live and behave as human beings should, as befits human dignity. Without that guidance, they are as good as lifeless. Accordingly, the Quran says to Muslims: “O you who believe, respond to Allah and His Messenger, when he calls you to **that which gives you life**” (8:24).

The king only believed in material things and his power and rule over them. The only life and death he recognises is the life and death which he controls under his rule. Throughout history, many tyrants have come and gone who thought people’s life and death were in their control. Whoever they wished to kill, he was put to death, and whoever they wished to let live, he lived. Modern materialism has the same view. Powerful nations believe that they have the power to allow to live only those whom they wish, and to bring death upon those whom they wish. Modern science also strives to have that power, both for giving life, for example by saving the lives of those who are dying of illness, and for killing millions of people by means of the most destructive weapons. This is the kingdom (*mulk*), or power and control, mentioned in

this verse. Due to possession of this kingdom, man argues “about his Lord”, about whether there is a God Who controls life and death, or if man holds all control.

- Abraham replies by asking the king if he has control over the movement of the sun, so that he is able to reverse the law of God governing its rising and setting. By asking this, what Abraham points out is that the **system** of life and death on earth depends on the sun. The king knew that. The ancients were well aware of the life-giving role of the sun. That’s why they worshipped it. Abraham’s reply means that the king does not control the operation of nature which is the real cause of bringing about life and death. Just by holding some people’s lives in your hands, you don’t acquire control over the **system** of life and death on earth. (You can crush underfoot as many ants as you like, but they still keep on coming!)
- Abraham’s reply indicates that there is a far more fundamental system in nature than what man controls. Humans foolishly think that by their power they have control over the world, but this control is very narrow and limited, and behind it, in the background, is a much bigger system over which man has no control.
- But prophets not only teach that God has control of physical life. In fact, God sends them with the means of giving spiritual life to people. Those who do not accept them remain dead. This is how it is Allah Who gives life and causes death. The Quran says:  

“Is he who was dead, then We raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people, like him whose likeness is that of one in darkness from which he cannot come forth?” (6:122)
- This life-giving system of revelation and guidance coming from God cannot be generated by human efforts. It goes wherever God intends. Abraham’s challenge, “Surely Allah causes the sun to rise from the East, so you make it rise from the West (if you can)” has a resonance in modern times. Allah made the sun **of guidance** to rise first in the east (i.e., in eastern countries), but the man in the west despite all his advancement and power is unable to create or produce such guidance by his own thinking and effort, and to make the sun rise in the west. But God can certainly make that guidance and revelation reach the west and thus make the sun rise from the west.
- Abraham may also be indicating to the king that his kingdom and rule are subject to rise and fall too, just like the sun. His kingdom rose, but when God would bring about its decline the king would not be able to reverse that decline any more than he can stop the setting sun and reverse its course to rise from the west. Therefore the king’s claim that “I give life and cause death” has no permanent value in comparison with God’s power, Who gave life to the king and his rule, and will bring them to death.