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- *Commonalities and differences in religions*
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Your God and the God of all surrounds your lives with life, light, and love. The power that you call love, the character of giving, of sacrifice, all belong to a figure that you call God. Throughout the world people acknowledge a strength that is somehow beyond their own. This strength has many names. For some it is Allah, Yahweh, God. There are many names for this strength that you recognize as manifest in so many different ways. It is not really important how you identify God in terms of name. What is essential is that you recognize and affirm the universality of this great presence, and it is this universality that binds everyone together.

Beneath the overall acknowledgment of God by whatever name, there are many secondary related beliefs or understandings that serve to provide a link between this enormous power of love and the daily lives of human beings. As the nature of those lives is so different, one from another, so must also these links be different. The links that are used by one society or group of believers will therefore differ in noticeable ways from the links of other groups.

The religions of the world are differentiated more by the links that have been created than by the essential belief in a higher power that is manifested through a form of love. Eastern religions and western religions are not so different at the highest level. The differences you observe are those that are caused by the variety of links that have been created. For some religions, God is judgmental, and for other believers, there is no room for judgment. These are links. The common element that binds those philosophies together is that there is an existing reality which is essentially responsible for all of life, and it is to that reality that life in human form responds.

For some societies, a sense of a judgmental god is important. It is not important per se whether or not the god that is worshipped is judgmental. What is important is that God represents a kind of relationship that is sought after. Whether individuals believe there is punishment when the goals are not reached or no punishment at all is of little consequence.

We can say to you, not just because you come from a Western philosophy but because it is the truth, that God is not a judgmental power. God is a creative power. God is a creative love. God is a creative force in the world, in the universe. God is beyond the ultimate understanding of science. You will never fully understand the influence, the importance, the meaning of God until you are living in a purely spiritual state. The physical state restricts that view significantly. If you choose to believe that judgment is an important concept which helps you understand God's place in your

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lives, that can be a purely valid belief, for the end result is one of influencing your relationships with others. It is a way of encouraging humans to develop compassion and understanding, to express love and to receive it. The goals are indeed worthy. The means are much less significant.

The belief in a specific number or a critical number being appropriate in an understanding of unity of God is another such link. These links can be positive or negative depending on how you use them. They are positive when they encourage god-like behavior. They are negative when they encourage competitiveness and judgment, but that is true of all beliefs. The same belief can be used in a positive manner that is employed in a negative way by someone else. The same biblical text can be interpreted in one way by one scholar and in a totally competing, alternate way by another. The real truth is not so important. It is your focus which is most important. By focusing on God, by focusing on what it means to be loving, you are doing what you need to be doing.

Goodness means turning one's life toward one's perception of God. That perception evolves, it changes, and therefore one's life must evolve, must change. But when you live according to your beliefs, recognizing that those beliefs are fluid, you are representing and experiencing and spreading goodness. When you reject your vision of God, when you turn your back on that vision, when you deny that vision, you are not committing yourself to act and to reflect God's presence in your daily lives.

For some, that may be defined as evil, but evil is really just the rejection of what you know to be correct. Action which brings harm to another that is pursued with the best of intents is not evil per se. It does not spread God's light, but it is not specifically evil. You may act in an evil way and yet bring no harm to another, because that action is a rejection of that which you know to be true.

The greatest challenge that anyone has in life is living as a reflection of one's knowledge. Your knowledge improves, it becomes deepened, the vision becomes broader and clearer, you gain a greater perspective. But this evolution of knowledge is really meaningless unless it is reflected in action, in how you live your lives. You must be open to an understanding of your current vision. You must recognize the temporal aspect of that vision. It is not permanent. It will change, it will continue to evolve. But you must always recognize where you are in your vision of God, in your understanding of love and compassion. Then comes the challenge of responding to that vision. It's that challenge of response that creates so much difficulty in life.

Part of your responsibilities in the human plane of life is to help others broaden their vision. You cannot really make them live according to that vision, for only they can make that choice, but you can provide a means for that vision to grow. How is this done? It is done by example. It is not done by words. You can preach about God and reach no one. You can show God and reach all. It is how you live your life. It is what you do with your life that is more telling than all the words you may ascribe to your own

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beliefs. Those actions provide a perspective of God to those around you. One cannot convince another of God through logic. It just doesn't work, for an equal amount of logic can be applied to deny the existence of God. Logic is not the answer. You must show your beliefs by how you live. That is the positive life that can be part of your experiences.

The insight and understanding that you achieve as a result of your meeting together is important, but it can be rejected, it can be ignored. You can turn your back to it and proceed according to your own chosen goals, and that is evil. That is the negative side of love. That is the negative power of living. That is the challenge for each of you: 1) to improve your vision, and 2) to walk on a path that is shown to you through your vision. A godly life is not a perfect life, for that is impossible. A godly life is a life lived according to one's perception of God. The godly life that is lived in one society will not be considered godly to another because their perceptions are different. Thus, the folly of judging one another. Suspend judgment and be more concerned about living a godly life. The results will take care of themselves without judgment from anyone.

Your perception of God will always be colored by the society in which those beliefs are held. You must respect, you must honor the perception of God that is held by others. By definition, you will not agree, but that should never diminish your respect. Approach your lives with an understanding and an acceptance of an honest effort being made on the part of others on their God-directed approach. Allow them the space to exercise their beliefs. Have faith that those who are searching for God are in the process of living according to that search. By so doing, you provide an environment that allows for growth by all. You no longer stifle the growth of another. You do not hinder their development. You provide an environment that encourages the search. That is why you are experiencing human life—because of the sacredness of the search. That search will be so different from one culture to another, but it is still a search and it is why all share in the common experience of human life.

You are blessed through your search. We are blessed to help you in your search and to enable you to follow the path that is shown to you as a result of that search. Pray for your strength to act according to your awareness, and pray that others will also have the strength to follow their vision. Do not pray that others will accept your vision, that others will share your search, for that may not be appropriate for another. Your prayers should be only for your own search and for the empowerment of others to act as a result of their vision.

You are blessed in your search by God. You are blessed in your search by your guides who accompany you on that journey and who serve to clear away the fog, to clear away the doubts, and to enable your soul to reach forward and lead you to a godly life.

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Amen.