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- *Religion should be about asking questions rather than providing answers.*

God shares with each of you all that you encounter—what inspires, what challenges, what affirms, what threatens, what seems to give, and what seems to take. God surrounds your experience of human life with grace, with comfort, and emerging understanding.

Your conversation together this evening was intimately connected to the issues of transformation that we spoke of earlier, but a different kind of transformation. At this point it was centered on a transformation of belief, a transformation of understanding, not only a transformation of forms of energy.

Human life from its emerging has always had within it a sense of wonder. What filled humans in the past with wonder also filled them with fear, for wonder is part of fear, for wonder is built out of hope, a reaching that lifts beyond current understandings. The evolution of all religious thought begins with the desire to remove the veil of fear and uncertainty from one's experience. Religion has always been a kind of escape card which, when all seems to fail, is turned to.

We, your guides, are not opposed to formalized religious thought, for such understandings can help enormously to gather a sense of meaning from what otherwise could be considered chance or even chaos. All religions, therefore, are valid—religious practices and beliefs of the past, the practices and beliefs of the present, and practices and beliefs yet to emerge. They are a way—**A** way, not the only way—to find relevance, to identify how one fits into what one is aware of.

You hear often of events around the world of great tragedy, and you ask yourselves quite rightly, *How can this happen if there is an all-powerful God? How can this be part of all that God is when it creates suffering—emotionally, physically, spiritually?* Faced with such fundamental questions, human beings turn to an explanation that has spiritual foundations. This effort then provides comfort and importantly, a sense of belonging.

You have all experienced events in life when there is shared concern or shared suffering. That experience of sharing frequently binds you together. Imagine those who serve in military conflicts together. The bond that unites them remains a bond of steel in the future. There is something about the sharing that also binds one to another.

So it is with religious thought. There are many approaches to try to understand the nature of life experiences, and those approaches coalesce, and a religious canon is established. As long as there are those who try to find meaning from adversity and meaning from beauty, there will be religions that are formed and that minister to groups of people sharing that vision.

Each of you comes from different religious backgrounds, and yet you seek truth. You seek knowledge of what it means to be alive. You seek an understanding of

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suffering in a world that belongs to God. You seek fundamental questions to be asked and such answers as are appropriate to be offered. Your experiences in human life-form are of course different one from another, but they do share a common thread of inquiry and the desire to know more fully the nature of human life—its purposes, its goals.

Your question regarding a foundation for searching is precisely the question in different words but with the same intention that has been asked by countless others for years beyond what numbers can prescribe. That question goes to the very core of shared spiritual journeys. It is the question that occurred to the ancients with equal fervor and lack of confidence. It is the question that all must ask themselves. *What do you believe in? What is your core, not just in theoretical terms, but what does that core mean for you, and are there others who share the same basic question?*

Religious thought that is of highest value is thought that poses questions but does not provide answers, for the answers that are necessary are the answers that are appropriate for each person. There are not answers that are appropriate for all people at one time. Religious thought asks and asks and then asks again. Religion which does not ask and only answers becomes doctrinal, and for each of you, for all human beings, understanding why you exist is gained by the asking, is gained by the openness to ask, to explore, not by simple concise answers.

The grounds for dissatisfaction with Religion with a capital R are dissatisfaction with specific beliefs but never dissatisfaction with the questions that are posed. When you ask a question that is the same as a question posed by your neighbor, and you are open to God's response, the response to your neighbor, the insight that your neighbor achieves, is not necessarily the same as what you gain. Insight and understanding are individually tailored to the needs of each soul.

The way to unite is through a willingness, a commitment that is shared, to ask the same questions. What unites each of you here is that you are searching. It is the questions you ask. It is not specifically determined by the answers that you accept. The principle of unity is really found in the principle of inquiry. Unity does mean inquiry. Unity requires inquiry. You will never find two individuals who share absolutely the same answers to their inquiry. If you find a collection of individuals who seek a greater understanding of the life of spirit, who seek an understanding of what is spirit, you have a group. But if you seek a group where all share the same belief in answers, you will never succeed, because for every question that is offered, the insight, the answers that are received, will be truly unique to the individuals posing the questions. If you look for a collection of friends, true friends are pursuing the same objective. They are not insisting on their total knowledge.

The faith journey is not a journey of answers but of questions, for the questions signify the intent. For those who feel they have the answers, there is no impetus to stretch beyond what is known. Without the stretching, there is no growth. The spirit requires growth. Their souls thrive through their growth, and it is a growth that is

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achieved through pursuit, through questions. It is not a growth that is achieved through certainty.

Yes, you agree, each of you, that there is a higher order of spiritual presence, but in an intimate way there is no agreement on what is God. You may pray to God, you may pray for God's presence to be made known, but none of you have a full understanding of what God is. Much of what we communicate to you in this manner is an exploration of the manifestations of God, and it is through those manifestations that you are drawn to question, not their existence but their implications. If you say God is the center of nature and all that is, you may agree, but you then must ask yourself, *What is the meaning of God being the center? What is the implication? What are the consequences of God being the center of all?*

The growth that you seek is the growth that is experienced through the contemplation of those consequences. No human being will know fully the reality of God, but everyone has some capacity to ask essentially who is, what is God, and why God? The religions of the world generally begin with such questions, but it is the institution of one religious set of beliefs or another that canonizes those understandings as being a requirement for those who choose a particular direction for their own spiritual growth. Churches have creeds that serve to direct thought to the implications of those creeds. Those creeds are a statement of belief, but those beliefs are empty unless they are somehow given life. They are not merely abstract concepts. The action that comes from an understanding of given creeds will help to identify what those beliefs really are. For each group of believers, there are a given set of beliefs. When those beliefs are felt as an acceptance of the importance or validity of the search, asking the questions, then those beliefs have real meaning and permanence.

It would be unusual, certainly, if a church recited its creeds only as questions, but what a grand effect that would have, because any gathering of faithful could then share in the conviction of the importance of those questions. The answers to those questions would have meaning to each individual according to his or her own needs. The answers to those questions would speak to the true needs of spirit. Seldom do you find gatherings that are committed to questions. Too often they feel a sense of unity as a result of the security of knowing answers.

You gather as a group to ask. You gather as a group to seek. You gather as a group to be open. You gather as a group to listen, but listening not just for answers, but listening to understand what really is most important to ask.

Your guides are a means of your own understanding of answers, but with the understanding, the belief that such answers are given as they are needed, and as your needs change, so will your acceptance and perception of what you are given. So you cannot hold solely to the answers you are given now, for those answers are a response to what your needs are now, but asking the questions guarantees that as your needs change, so shall your understandings.

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Part of the reason for human life is to be present in order to ask. The real goal of human life is the seeking. It is not the knowing. You all seek to be loving, but your needs for being loved change and evolve, and those changes nourish the giving that takes place, and so the giving changes. You give on the basis of your understanding, and so in a way, your giving is based on the answers that you feel you are given. Because your needs change, those answers change, but the permanence of asking will guarantee that all who wish to be associated with one another can be assured that they are on the path of spiritual seeking, and it is the seeking that provides the unity that you so fervently may wish to happen.

Your examination and discussion of various religious processes speak to the importance of seeking, for what remains the strongest in its impact on each of you is the seriousness with which the pursuit of understanding was carried out, not the specifics, but the answers that were received at a particular moment in time.

Devote your lives to seeking. Be committed to the sacredness of the search. Avoid being blinded by the security of answers. In so doing, you'll continue to grow. You will continue to evolve as spirit, and you will more meaningfully reflect the understandings you do have, accepting the impermanence of your knowledge, and rejoicing in the brilliance of its pursuit.

Offer your prayers to God, not just as statements but as questions. *How may I live a more meaningful life? How may I reach out to others?* In asking those questions, you are acknowledging there is a more meaningful life. You are acknowledging the wisdom that comes from knowing that you can and must reach out.

It is in your engagement that you are strengthened. Follow the quest and you will discover meaning in your lives. The insight gained will have a profound impact on your response to life. How you reach out will change.

You are blessed in your seeking.

Amen.