

WHO IS GOD?

NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS



Abstracts of Proceedings
31st World Religions Conference

Held October 1, 2011
University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Representatives of
Aboriginal Religions, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism,
Humanism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.

Organized by the
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at of Canada



Acknowledgments

Our gratitude to the speakers representing various faiths and philosophical traditions, for participating and providing an abstract of their speech on the theme “Who is God? Nature and Characteristics” for the 31st World Religions Conference. These abstracts are compiled in this booklet for easy future reference.

In the staging of this conference, we have received support and help from numerous organizations and individuals and it is not possible to list them all. In addition to the speakers and guests that attended the event, we acknowledge the contributions of all our partner organizations; The City of Waterloo, The City of Cambridge, The University of Waterloo and the Federation of Students, Ahmadiyya Muslim Students Association of UW, Brahmarishi Mission of Canada, K-W Council of Churches, Church of Saint Michael, Forest Hill United Church, St. Philip’s Lutheran Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Waterloo Riverview Dharma Centre, Aboriginal Community of KW, the Society of Ontario Freethinkers, WLU FreeThought Alliance, The Waterloo Record and Guelph Mercury, CTV, Muslim Television Ahmadiyya (MTA), 570 News Talk Radio, Across Boundaries Multifaith Institute (Toronto), BOSS Inc, Callture and the Cross Cultures magazine.

Moreover, we recognize the cooperation and volunteer services of the Conference moderator - Jeff Allan of 570 News Talk Radio, and the volunteer services of the entire WRC team, WRC Organizing Committee and approximately 120 other volunteers who worked with great enthusiasm for the organization of this conference.

Nabeel A. Rana
Chief Planning and Event Coordinator
31st World Religions Conference,
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada
October 1, 2011

Contents

Acknowledgments	2
Introduction to the World Religions Conference	4
By Mubarak A Nazir, National Vice President Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama`at, Canada	
Greetings from the Governor General of Canada	5
His Excellency The Right Honourable David Lloyd Johnston	
Greetings from the Prime Minister of Canada	6
The Right Honourable Stephen Joseph Harper	
Greetings from the Premier of Ontario	7
The Honourable Dalton McGuinty	
Greetings from Supreme Court Justice	8
The Honourable Mr. Justice Marshall Rothstein Supreme Court of Canada	
Abstracts of Theme Speeches on “Who is God? Nature and Characteristics”	
Jewish Perspective by Dr. Allan Gould	9
Hindu Perspective by Swami Bhagwan Shanker	11
Sikh Perspective by Hari Nam Singh Khalsa	13
Humanist Perspective by Doug Thomas	15
Islamic Perspective by Muhammad Afzal Mirza	16
Christian Perspective by Pastor Rick Pryce	19
Aboriginal Spiritual Perspective by Gerard Sagassige	21
Buddhist Perspective by Sister Thich nu Tinh Quang	22

Introductory Remarks World Religions Conference

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all on behalf of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama`at of Canada and our partner organizations to this wonderful celebration of mutual respect and harmony.

Standing against intolerance and discrimination for the past 31 years, this conference continues to enrich the discourse on faith and belief in Canada by virtue of the contribution of different faith communities. WRC has become the largest multi-faith event of its kind in Canada and continues to be acknowledged for its organizational standards, quality of content and wide appeal.

Every year this event assembles people from diverse faith communities to promote mutual understanding, respect, cohesion, and fraternity amongst all members of the Human Family. We are all aware of the disastrous consequences resulting from misunderstandings of each other's faiths and ideas. Therefore, we continue to strive to narrow the gap between faith communities, and to demonstrate that we can live together in a spirit of acceptance, harmony, and compassion.

This event is special, as it is a distinctive learning experience for delegates belonging to any faith or not belonging to any faith.

The Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, envisioned the format of such conferences over a century ago.

Describing the basis of the World Religions Conference he writes:

"I am certain that such a conference will be highly effective for the dissemination of truth. Each party will present the beauties of their respective faiths in a polite and civilized manner, without making any disparaging remarks against other religions. I take responsibility that such a conference will be held in an atmosphere of peace and tranquility"

(Majmu`a Ishteharaat Vol. 2, 198)

I congratulate all the speakers, participants, partner organizations and guests, who have been participating in this unique event.

I wish you all a successful and memorable conference.

Sincerely
Mubarak A. Nazir
National Vice President & Missionary Incharge
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama`at Canada

October 1, 2011
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada



THE GOVERNOR GENERAL · LE GOUVERNEUR GÉNÉRAL

I am pleased to send greetings to the participants in the 31st World Religions Conference at the University of Waterloo.

Canadians have the good fortune of living in an inclusive society, where religious diversity is appreciated and recognized as a great strength. This conference, which brings together people from diverse faiths and backgrounds in a spirit of goodwill and collaboration, serves to address important societal issues and to strengthen our mutual respect.

I would like to applaud your exemplary commitment to building tolerance and understanding in a multi-faith Canada. I wish you a productive and enlightening conference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David Johnston".

David Johnston

October 2011



PRIME MINISTER . PREMIER MINISTRE

I am pleased to extend my warmest greetings to everyone attending the 31st World Religions Conference.

This annual gathering provides delegates from various religious backgrounds with a unique opportunity for the exchange of ideas and for the exploration of topical issues in a spirit of openness, fraternity, and understanding. This year's theme — "Who is God?" — will surely generate a great number of thoughtful discussions on the philosophical and theological postulates accepted by the different faith communities represented here.

I would like to commend the organizers and everyone in attendance for contributing to strengthening our country's fundamental values of religious tolerance and respect for diversity. I am certain that this conference will continue to thrive as an inspiring forum where ideas can flourish for the common good.

Please accept my best wishes for a most memorable and enlightening meeting.

The Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.

OTTAWA
2011



31st WORLD RELIGIONS CONFERENCE

October 1, 2011

*On behalf of the Government of Ontario,
I am delighted to extend warm greetings to everyone
attending the 31st World Religions Conference.*

*This event finds a particularly fitting home
in Ontario, a province that has been enriched by cultures,
languages and religions from the four corners of the globe. We are very
fortunate because ours is a nation that embraces diversity and overcomes
challenges through constructive dialogue — and Ontarians believe that mutual
respect and a genuine desire for understanding are key to a peaceful world.*

*The World Religions Conference embodies these
values as it brings together people of different beliefs in a spirit of
cross-cultural and inter-faith appreciation and acceptance. I commend
everyone in attendance for taking part in this significant initiative.*

*Please accept my best wishes for
a memorable and inspirational gathering.*

Dalton McGuinty
Premier

**Greetings from the
Honourable Mr. Justice Marshall Rothstein
Supreme Court of Canada
301, rue Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada**

I appreciate the opportunity to bring greetings to the delegates at the 31st World Religions Conference on Saturday, October 1, 2011 at the University of Waterloo.

In providing exposure and profile to many religions, your conference recognizes the importance of fostering understanding and respect for the religious faiths of others, so important in our globalized world today.

I wish you an interesting, stimulating and successful Conference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Marshall Rothstein

Who is God? Nature and Characteristics Jewish Perspective

Dr. Allan Gould - Toronto
Author, Lecturer, Humourist, Speechwriter

Judaism – Brief overview

A very famous anecdote found in the Jewish Talmud--which consists of over five dozen massive volumes of inspired rabbinical commentary and interpretations of verses from the Hebrew ("Old") Testament, or the Five Books of Moses (a/k/a the Torah), describes Hillel being approached by a man who wishes to mock the brilliant rabbi/scholar. "Teach me the entire meaning of God's Law while I stand on one foot," he insists. How insulting. Yet this giant of learning smiles and states, "Do not do to others what you would not wish them to do to you." He then continues, inspirationally, "All the rest is commentary. GO AND STUDY."

In the impossibly brief few minutes I have this morning, let me share just two tiny passages from our Talmud, which I shall comment on in depth on October 1st. When put together, these brief three selections from rabbinical commentaries, written down about two millennia ago, help capture what I admire and love about the Jewish faith.

a) "It was taught in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua: The poor person (at the door) does more for the householder than the householder does for the poor person." (I shall study this and the others with our esteemed attendees).

b) Rabbi Joshua ben Levi taught his son, "Be mindful of the honour of an old man who has forgotten his learning under duress. For it is said, "both the whole tablets and the shattered tablets lie in the Ark of the Covenant."

And that is it! Here I am, hardly an Orthodox Jew, or I would not have driven here on our Jewish Day of Rest, to this impressive conference. But I shall try--the Yiddish word is "chutzpah" or "outrageous nerve"--to match the revered Rabbi Hillel of 2,000 years ago, to capture this extraordinary faith of mine--which gave birth to the two other magnificent Abrahamic religions, Christianity and Islam--while all of you out there are essentially "standing on one foot" while I do so!

Look at the beauty of the first of these two brief rabbinic anecdotes from our Talmud: now, why on earth should a beggar at one's door do more for us middle-class or wealthy homeowners than we do for him? He took us away from our family dinner and bugged us, like a telemarketer--and we may be giving him our hard-earned cash! The rabbis left the answer open, but with study, it soon becomes clear: All we comparatively rich people have done is handed over a few bucks to the poor guy, so we have a good feeling of being generous. Big deal! But what has the beggar done? He has given us the chance to help out another of God's creatures; possibly saving him or his family from starvation or eviction from their hovel. He has given us the opportunity to fulfill one of the greatest "mitzvot"--the Hebrew word for "commandments from God"--that "good deed" being, to perform TZEDAKAH. Think about this, please: that Hebrew word means "RIGHTEOUSNESS," and it is NOT to be confused with "CHARITY." The problem with "charity" is that it comes from the Latin, meaning "LOVE." But what if I do not love this beggar, or even like him? What if he has AIDS or lung cancer, which I feel strongly he

brought on himself, through unprotected sex or by smoking himself into deadly lung cancer? The concept of CHARITY, dear students of world religions, contains a risk of letting us off the hook! "I don't like this guy; I won't give him a penny!" I may think. But the Jewish concept of Tzedakah means that I HAVE NO CHOICE IN THIS MATTER! I CANNOT BE RIGHTEOUS, IN THE EYES OF GOD, IF I DO NOT GIVE MONEY TO THIS PERSON! As you see, the poor person at our door, or on that downtown street with his or her hand outstretched toward us, is doing FAR more for us than we could ever do for him! I may give him a few bucks, which hardly puts a dent in my financial well-being. But he just gave ME the chance to fulfill the holy act of Tzedakah--of being a righteous person; of fulfilling God's expectations of me--one of the most important of the 613 Commandments found in the Hebrew Testament. Islam, with its obsession with giving alms to the poor, borrowed this from Judaism, and we were proud to share the holy concept with them, and thrilled that they chose it as one of the pillars of their faith, as well.

The second little gem from the tens of thousands of pages of rabbinic insights and challenges to us humans, is my favourite, and I love to joke when I have taught this particular Talmudic passage in lectures I have had the honour of giving across North America, that an entire religion, or way of life, could be based on this handful of words alone.

Here are some of the questions I shall throw at you, and try to answer for you, and preferably with you, this morning: What is this ageing rabbi requesting here? Does he have Alzheimer's? What do you think he means when he talks about his "forgetting his learning." What does the rabbi mean by the phrase "under duress"? Why is he making this request to one of his sons? And what ARE these "tablets" he is referring to? Think back to what every Western child, whether Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or any other major faith, has been taught, when they hear "Bible Stories"!

And what are these "shattered tablets"? What are the rabbis teaching us in this brief, two-line story? And what does it say about the Ancient Greeks, who arguably had the greatest of civilizations--and about us, or NOT about us, in the 21st century?

The Greeks, as historians have discovered, used to leave their sickly children and elderly, dying grandparents, on the sides of mountains, where they were often devoured by wolves. And how many of you are aware that the Nazis, during the 1930s, coined an expression, "LIFE UNWORTHY OF LIFE"--using it as the reason for dragging blind children, crippled children, mentally-disturbed children--and adults--from their beds, and then threw them into crowded trucks, which had gasoline piped into their exhaust systems, killing them off by the dozens, every hour--in major hospitals across Germany. After all, these obviously useless men, women and children were taking up valuable beds, which would soon be needed by wounded soldiers coming home. That is right, dear people: German doctors--"do no harm" was their motto, please recall--saw themselves as doing the State's work, if not God's--by getting rid of all these expensive cripples. Who needs them? What a waste of money they were. The gassing of several million Jews, Poles, homosexuals and gypsies had been practised for a full decade like this, before the first state-organized gassing at the death camps began in the early 1940s. Life unworthy of life? Hardly a Jewish concept, as we see in this deeply moving, inspiring little exchange from the Jewish Talmud.

Who is God? Nature and Characteristics Hindu Perspective

Swami Bhagwan Shanker
Divya Jyoti Jagrati Sansthan

To begin, let's ask 'Who is God? First, one must know God and this idea of knowing God has always been around since time began. Mankind seeks an answer to this question and it seems he is unable to find the truth.

As it was in the past and now, people try to know God through theological explanation, folkloric storytelling, traditional beliefs, plays, rituals, theater, and even through science. Yet it seems as if the conclusion to answer the question who is God, one comes up with an inconclusive answer. Scientists have said that after probing the same inquiry, God is unknown. Sometimes a person may turn to scriptures and after a while one will find it is difficult and unable to unlock the true secret message of the scriptures. Scriptures can appear to be confusing, its mysteries seem to be endless and such pursuit for God also seems endless.

There are times when people change their religious practice and faith hoping that they may find the answer to the question "Who is God"? Yet the searches are in vain. Some people study and memorize scriptures and recite passages of scriptures but when the question is asked whether they know God most people will say I really don't know but I believe in God.

As this mind boggling inquiry was in the past, so it is now. The time has come for man-kind, as it was in the past, to practically realize God, as the practical solution, TO KNOW GOD (Saakshaatkarah). Once a man realizes God, this knowledge of self-realization can be useful to solve all problems of this world such as peacelessness, poverty, illiteracy, pollution, unemployment, population growth and religious intolerance.

One will even observe that in the entire society today there is no science, no technology, no invention, or discoveries yet done, or no model yet design which can transform the mindset of man-kind and make man a peaceful individual of his society. However according to scriptures there is an eternal sovereign science to self-realize God, which can be unraveled by the blessings of a Satguru, Spiritual Preceptor, Perfect Master, Rasool, or the one who himself knows God can reveal God.

This eternal sovereign science is known as ATMA GYAN, BRAHMA GYAN, AWAKENING OF THE SOUL and UNVEILING OF THE SACRED HEART.

Even though this knowledge of Brahma Gyan is written in all scriptures such as Vedas, Ramayana, Ram charit Manas, Gita, Sashras, Upanishads, Bible, Koran, Guru Grants, etc. this knowledge of GOD (Brahma Gyan) cannot be realize at the mind level. There exists in man-kind an entity greater than the mind call the Atman or the Divine Self. The Divine Self can be practically experienced and seen with the Third Eye. The Third Eye gives direct perception, revelation of the Soul (Atma) transcending mind to consciousness, a pure and peaceful state.

A spiritual practitioner, to maintain consciousness of Atma and Paramatma , to establish the kingdom of God with-in the Self, as prescribed in the scriptures, one must Meditate (Dhyaan, Sadhana, Holy Communion, Worship, Ibadat -----). It is through Dhyaan (Dhye---Dhyata---Dhyan) Subject --Object and Practical perception, Meditation, the True Divine Nature and Attributes of God is revealed.

Here are some examples of some self-revealing truth as to the question WHO IS GOD, God Nature and Attributes.

- “OM“
- “Ekam sat vipra Bahudah Vadanti “
Truth is one. Sages say it by Different Ways
- Rig vedas: Gayatri Mantra
Om BhūAur Bhuvah Swah, Tat Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi, Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat
- Brhadaranyaka Upanishad ==I, iii.28
Asato Ma Sadgamaya
Tamaso Ma Jyotir Gamaya
Mrtyorma Amrtam Gamaya

Lead us from Untruth to Truth
Lead us from Darkness to Light
Lead us from Death to Blissful Immortality

- Tvameva mata ca pita tvameva
Tvameva bandhusca sakha tvameva
Tvameva vidya dravinam tvameva
Tvameva sarvam mama deva deva

You are my Mother and my Father
You are my family and my friend
You are my knowledge and my wealth
You are my All, God of Gods

- Dhyana-mulam gurur-murtih
Puja-mulam Gurur-padam
Mantra-mulam Gurur-Vakyam
Moksa-Mulam Gurur-Krpa

The root of meditation is the Guru's form
The root of worship, the Guru's feet
The root of mantra, the Guru's word
The root of freedom, the Guru's grace

Who is God? Nature and Characteristics Sikh Perspective

Hari Nam Singh Khalsa
Spiritual Leader, Mentor, Author, and Teacher

Within Sikhism the nature of God is described in the Mool (Root) Mantra. The Mool Mantra is the most important concept within the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh Holy Scriptures), and is considered the basis of Sikh theology. It is said that the Mool Mantra was the first composition of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh Faith.

Mool (Root) Mantra

Ek Ong Kar , Sat Nam
Karta Purkh, Nirbao Nirvair
Akal Moorat, Ajoonee
Saibhung, Gurprasaad
Jap
Aad Suchh
Jugaad Suchh
Haibee Suchh
Nanak Hosee Bhee Suchh

The creator of all is One, Truth is the identity (name)
The creator is the doer of all, without fear or anger
And is undying, unborn and self-illuminated
This is revealed through the True Guru's grace
Meditate
True in the beginning
True through all the Ages
And is True even now
O' Nanak, God shall ever be True

In relationship to God, Sikhism teaches three basic principles of conscious living, Kirat Karo, to work righteously as a contributor to society, Naam Japo, to meditate daily and Vand Chakkō, to share what you have with others.

In the Western World for the most part we are taught that God lives outside of us and that we have to reach out to find God. Guru Nanak, taught that God lives and breathes in the heart of every soul and that we can experience the God that lives within. His simple concept was:

“If you cannot see God in All, You cannot see God at All”

In that consciousness it is through the eyes of every human being that can see the light in each soul. When we hold that concept then life can become a joy and a celebration. That is truly seeing God in all.

There is a very popular saying that we are created in the image of God. That is easy to say and very easy to

recognize, but the most difficult part is that we are created in the image of God, but do we LIVE in the image of God?

In the nature and characteristics of God we have to understand how God lives within each of us. We are born pure, but we forget to live purely. We put too much commotion and feeling into our life. One way to test something is to say: "Does this make me noble, does this make me Divine, does this elevate me to my Creator?" If the action or thought does not align with these three things, depart. And make it as a habit. First ask yourself, are you noble or not? If you are not, do anything you want—anything, it will not matter, because you are not noble, and your decision must be blessed. But if you care to decide you are noble, honorable, truthful, and pure, then whatever comes to you, filter it with one word that is very personal. "Does it make me noble, pure, truthful? Is it a love without condition or with condition?"

This is the essence of God in each of us.

We are human beings. "Hu" means "halo, light" which we all have. "Man" means "mental." "Being" means "for the time being." For the time being, you are a mental halo of light. Once you decide to be noble, Mother Nature and God will treat you so. Otherwise your life will be up, down, up, and down, left, right, and left, right, left. But you won't go anywhere. Our relationship is not what our relationship is here. It comes from many lives, and it will go on for many lives. As a human we have a breakthrough chance. We have come from Infinity to finite to merge back into Infinity. This is our temporary place. It's a motel. Do not take the pillows from the motel away with you.

Why pollute this beautiful human life with emotion and commotion, and ruin the whole thing? Why? There's a beauty in spiritual grace. That beauty is very attractive, very real. Conscious living is better than God itself. When you live consciously, you dwell in God. Then you have a very beautiful power. Wherever you cast your gaze, elevation occurs. Wherever you touch, elevation occurs. Wherever you speak, elevation occurs.

For three thousand years we have been told by every religion, "Find God." Where are you going to find God? God is everywhere—Omnipresent, Omniscient. That is the truth given by Guru Nanak in the Mool Mantra.

I believe that God is perfect, and I believe God, created as perfect and cannot create imperfection. It's a science. Action has a reaction, equal and opposite. It's Newton's Third Law. It's a law of life. Action has a reaction equal and opposite. Polarity has reality in the base of all Infinity. Finite is a part of Infinity and merger is possible when reality becomes pure in clarity. It's a simple law and there's no nonsense about it.

Sikh religion and its concept is very realistic. It believes not in One God. It believes in the TOTALITY of One God. It does not have a guilt of good and bad: "Aval allah, noor upaayaa...." There is ONE light which created the whole universe and everybody is created by One God, the same God for all.

Ek Ong Kar – this is the fundamental universal truth of the Sikh Faith. There is One God who is the God for everyone regardless of religion, faith, cast, colour, creed, gender or preference.

In this God consciousness we can find peace, prosperity and happiness.

Who is God? Nature and Characteristics Humanist (Atheist and Agnostic) Perspective

Doug Thomas
Retired Teacher, Canadian Historical Fiction Novelist
President, Society of Ontario Freethinkers

God is a Metaphor

In the absence of any empirical evidence, we non-believers do not think about gods or any supernatural beings as real entities, but rather the product of mankind's psychology and imagination. God is a metaphor for all the unexplained occurrences that have confronted human beings ever since our brains became sophisticated enough to facilitate self awareness and to make connections between the environment we have been adapting to all these millennia and our future. That metaphor has several corollaries including: God the creator, God the controller of seasons, God the leader, God the judge, and God the scapegoat. All of these modes are at the behest of the human beings who have created him, or her, or it in all its thousands of forms and attitudes over the millions of years of human development and in all of them we see the direct reflection of the culture and knowledge of the society that created them and worshipped them.

God the creator has had many forms, but I will use the one in the Bible primarily, even though there are some really interesting ones in other religions. In Genesis, God creates the Heavens and Earth in six days and rests on the seventh. From a non-believing perspective, this seems very human. Why would an omnipotent being need to rest after six days of rather nominal labour? After all, when he said, "Let there be light" there was light. Rubbing two cosmic sticks together or even flicking a divine Bic would have required more energy. This God of creation had the kind of human weaknesses that his creators also had.

God the controller of seasons, Father or more popularly, Mother Nature, explained, in the absence of Environment Canada, why the frost came earlier than expected or why there was a drought. Ancient agricultural cultures spent quite a bit of time trying to appease the Gods of nature. Of course, the gods of early societies were intimately involved with nature. Even the sophisticated Greeks ascribed lightning to Zeus, and storms at sea to an angry Poseidon. My ancestors whom those Greeks named Keltoi – the outsiders – had Druid priests who constructed serious mechanisms to determine the exact day of winter solstice in an attempt to give farmers a better chance in northern Europe's shorter growing season. They were, of course supported by their culture in the manner to which they aspired and sacrificed a few human beings along the way to ensure their positions of power – a religious tradition that has been carried on in one form or the other since.

God the leader is a constant in all of the Gods invented, but to stick with the Judeo-Christian-Muslim God, we must go back to His discovery in the person of an obscure Egyptian war god named – you guessed it – Yahweh. He was exactly the kind of God a rebelling Hebrew slave culture needed to terrorize Egyptians in to granting them freedom; unfortunately he wasn't much of an economist since he led the Jews to the only place in the Middle East with no oil. Nevertheless his war leader qualities come to the fore often enough. In both of the 20th centuries major wars, German soldiers wore belt buckles embossed with "Got ist mit uns" – "God is with us" and every allied regiment that landed at Normandy brought with it a coterie of chaplains to remind the allied soldiers that He was with them. The Japanese

warlords who took over that country in the late 1930s and 40s made sure the Shinto Gods were on their side.

God the judge is an important one even to us non-believers. The rules that were given to Moses, tribal thought they were, are still quoted, after suitable interpretation by one of the 33,000 Christian sects, as rules for behaviour. Naturally, we non-believers are assumed to be evil sinners by default, because we don't accept these as rules from and divine being. This assumption has nothing to do with us really. We Humanists consume less alcohol per capita than the Canadian average and more of us are vegetarian than the Canadian average, to name but two very inaccurate measures of goodness. Theists tend to define goodness as obeying those Ten Commandments. Of course, they don't cover such problems as racism, and slavery. To be fair, neither do Epicurus' forty principles. They are, after all, all rules made up by men of their time. One thing separates God the judge from the other metaphoric existences – He seems to need help in the form of the Devil, another human creation who lives, like the Druid Dragon beneath the Earth's surface and keeps those hell fires going for eternity – or until the Leafs win the Stanley Cup – whichever comes first.

God the scapegoat is the worst of the metaphoric projections. Whenever there is a disaster, large or small, some theist is likely to use the magic phrases, "God's will" or "He works in mysterious ways" so salve the angst of the victims. Thus, the tsunami that ripped into the Philippines was a demonstration of God's wrath because not enough people were going to Mosque regularly and a little girl was injured by farm machinery was a part of God's will and plan rather than of her father's inattention – at least, that's what he said to a reporter.

So, God the metaphor is omnipresent by virtue of the ubiquitous imaginations of human beings, all trying to cope with the harshness of a universe into which we have evolved and in which we have little significance except as a parasitical organism that insects will have to clean up after when we have finally relied enough on the metaphoric meanderings of our minds to really mess up the planet.

Who is God? Nature and Characteristics Islamic Perspective

Muhammad Afzal Mirza
Islamic Missionary
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama`at Canada

Say `He is ALLAH, the One! ALLAH the Independent and Besought of all. HE begets not, nor, is HE begotten, and there is none like unto HIM (Holy Qur'an 112:1-5)

He is Allah, the Originator, the Creator, the Designer. His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the Heavens and the earth glorifies Him. And He is the Mighty, the Wise. (Holy Qur'an 59:25)

HIS is the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth; HE gives life and HE causes death, and HE has power over all things, He is Compassionate and Merciful. He is Kind, Loving, and Wise. He is the Creator, the Sustainer, and the Healer. He is the One who Guides, the One who Protects, the One who Forgives. (Holy Qur'an 57: 3)

The founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian said: "It is His work to bring a thing into existence from nothingness. For example, in the visions of dream you see how He creates a world without matter and shows you every mortal and nonexistent being as having existence. Thus are all His Powers." (The Will, p.12-15)

It is interesting to note that a majority of world's population are believers in the Existence of God and that approximately three fourths of world's population believe in some form of deity. From amongst those who are unsure about this issue or even Those who do not believe, there appears to be an ongoing expression of a quest for a Better understanding of this issue. All this may not be conclusive in its own right but Neither is it insignificant in any manner and puts the debate in some context. We can Also infer from this that proof of non-existence of God should at least be as much Required if not more than the proof of existence of God. The non-believer is after all Claiming what is at odds with the belief of majority of world population. One of the primary arguments given by a non-believer is that since God cannot be seen, heard or touched, this is strong enough a reason to believe in non-existence.

However, we have definite scientific evidence about many things that exist but we cannot perceive them with our primary senses. For example an empty room is not actually devoid of any existence. In fact it is filled with air along with the composing mixture of gases, although we cannot see, hear, smell, taste or touch any of this. We also know that certain birds and animals communicate with each other at frequencies that they can well perceive but which are beyond our perception. Thus inability to perceive something by basic human senses is hardly a proof for its non-existence.

REVELATION

God says: "I was a hidden treasure; I loved to be known. Hence I created Adam so that I could be known. It has always been God's practice to communicate to people of every age.

Why should we try to find out about God?

Let us answer the question as to whether we need to inquire into the existence of God. If it is proven

that God does exist, then: (1) Is there any benefit for us to believe in Him? (2) Do we disadvantage ourselves in any way by denying Him? Now, the answer to these questions would depend on how the question is put before us. If it is presented to us in such a way that it makes little difference to us whether we believe in God or not, then it would merely be a hypothetical question, and everyone, with the exception of those who are interested in such hypothesis would be justified in refusing to go into this research.

When we return to the question of God, we find that that there are three sources which put the question before us:

1. Human Nature; 2. Reason; 3. Religion

I shall first of all take up human nature. Everyone who has a mind prone to analysis and whose true nature is not covered by veils of darkness and ignorance, does occasionally feel in his heart of hearts that there is likely to be a God Who has created him and Who governs this universe.

The same is true of human reason, which, even though it might eventually come to the conclusion that there is no God, poses these questions to us very forcefully. In fact, it presents these questions much more clearly and elaborately than human nature does. It warns us to reflect and consider lest there be a God Who has sent us to this world for a particular purpose and lest we should die without knowing Him and being unaware of the purpose of our creation. We must therefore wake up and try to find Him!

Our Last, but not least, this question is also raised by religion. All religions in the world invariably raise the question of God Almighty before us. God and His attributes form the very core of the teachings of every religion and billions of their followers believe their religions to have originated from God and to be based upon the Divine Word which has been revealed throughout the ages and has kept the world illuminated. Though some teachings of these religions have been interpolated and corrupted, they were originally based on Divine Revelation. Hence, religions provide much more detailed, clear, and definite descriptions of the Being of God, than human nature or human reason.

In other words, the brief message contained in human nature and reason has been elaborated by revelation. Human nature and reason only hint at the possibility of the existence of God, but religion tells us as a matter of absolute certainty that we do have a God, Who is our Creator and Master and Who has sent us to this world for a special purpose. The different religions may differ on many of their teachings, but they are in total agreement on the basic points.

Hence we conclude that the search for God is so important that no sensible person can afford to ignore it for an instant. After discussing the unanimous testimony of religions, I would like to say something in particular about the teachings of Islam. Islam tells us that we have One God, Who is our Creator and Master, and that He has brought us into existence from nothingness and it is He Who controls our lives. He wants us to achieve a higher status. He has made all kinds of provisions for our welfare Islam says that we have One God Who is Gracious

All I say is that these are the attributes of our God as proclaimed by Islam. Islam goes further and proclaims that we can find this God if we seek and strive for Him. Do you now consider this search and investigation to be useless and irrelevant? If you have a mind that ponders and a sensitive heart, you will never consider this quest futile.

Who is God? Nature and Characteristics Christian Perspective

Pastor Rick Pryce
St. Philip Lutheran Church

Introduction

- Isaiah 55
 - *My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*
 - God cannot be domesticated. God is not limited to past experiences or understandings, to previous rituals or stories. God is, in fact, Other than what Isaiah's people thought, even Other than what they had previously experienced.
- Mark 8
 - Jesus said, “*You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*”
 - Jesus, too, proclaimed that God could not be domesticated. God was Other than what Jesus' followers thought, what they had experienced, as well.

Theme Point 1 - God is Other

- The witness of the Christian Scriptures, in both their Hebrew and Greek collections, is that God is not just different. God is, in fact, utterly Other.
- One of the ways that Christianity has attempted to proclaim this Otherness of God is by asserting, with numerous other traditions, that God is the Creator.
- Embracing God's Otherness is not easy, for any of us. Too often, we have fallen back on trying to domesticate God to further our own ends.
- The Christian tradition carries an important, life-giving corrective to this effort, however.

Theme Point 2 - God is The Other who came - Jesus

- John 1
 - The first chapter of John's gospel describes Jesus as “*The Word,*” that is, God's eternal self expression.
 - The writer goes on to say that this eternal self-expression, this Word, “*became flesh and lived among us.*”
- A number of traditions claim the Incarnation of their god, gods and/or goddesses
- For Christians, the life Jesus lived challenges how humans have most frequently told their Incarnation stories.
 - Jesus lived up to no one's expectations.
 - He played by no one's rules.
 - He called into question every assumption made by virtually everyone.
 - He embodied Otherness.

- The death of Jesus, the death of God
 - Asking How can God died? is a valid question
 - However, we must first acknowledge that the question reveals our assumptions about God
 - § We assume we know the nature of God as *God* knows the nature of God
 - § We assume our minds are capable of understanding this nature
 - § We assume our “religious vocabulary” is sufficient to explain this nature
 - The Biblical writers do not make this assumption
- We humans do all we can to avoid God's Otherness
 - We must acknowledge that humans killed Jesus as our ultimate attempt to get rid of this challenging Other
- For Christians, asserting that God died when Jesus died, is a primary way we proclaim the Otherness of God
- For Christians, asserting that Jesus rose from the death to which we put him, is a primary way we assert that God is the Other who comes

Theme Point 3 - God is The Other who comes - Spirit

- What Christians mean when we talk about the Holy Spirit is the presence of this God
 - who is Other
 - who is the Creator
 - who came in Jesus
 - who comes beyond death
 - who comes in the stories of Jesus which challenge our assumptions
- A primary struggle of the early Church was, “Who is to be included?”
- Galatians 3
 - *“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”*

Theme Point 4 - God is The Other who comes in the Other

- God comes to us, to our Present, in the Other
- Otherness might be gender, race, age, nationality, religious tradition, economic status, criminal record, medical history, or anything else

Summation

- For Christianity, God is the ultimate Other, who came, and who comes, and who continues to come, even to us, and to all of us.

Who is God? Nature and Characteristics Aboriginal Spiritual Perspective

Gerard Sagassige
Cultural Advisor/Sweat lodge Conductor
The Healing of The Seven Generations

Boozhoo n Ahnii....I hail from the great Mississauga people of the Ojibwa' and was raised in dual education dual belief and when I was mature enough I was given the gift choice to mark my own path and spirit guidance..My name Gerard Sagassige is as Indian and Northern Affairs however creator's creation knows me as?(Announcing my spirit name) and how it is defined.

Through out my path there isn't a day that passes I don't reflect a memory of my original teacher's my grand parents. My short walk of 5 decades have nurtured my Being and allowed my child hood memory and my own grand parent hood to keep the sacred fire strong for Turtle Island Indigenous Beings. The mannerisms and self respect practice to life long to all Planet Beings here physically and those ones dancing in the world of Spirit which mainstream refer's to heaven...I am still gifted honored guidance by a circle of all knowledge (ELDER'S)and often they remind me that some things should not be written down so this reason is to why this submission isn't so comprehensive

As we celebrate this day with all, just as when we planted my Mom, the ones looking down are saying finally he's sharing.. There is song which prophesizes this gathering celebration and Creator's naturalisms to which Creation embraces our friendship, fellowship and belief and mostly wombs the braid of sun, moon and earth.

I was circled with humor and I will share some this at various times when the spirit appropriately allows me too. Thus is my grand parents humor. A quote which I raised on was never walk before spirit but allow spirit to guide you and again embracing throughout my walk I practice this.

The ever so pain to healing indigenous people has/have endured unto the assimilation of belief will be spoke about in a kind understanding way of historical over view through residential school and scoop of the 60-70's of the young in those era of time.

2011 we witness the spiritual strength youth which i am a small part who are now wanting natural language, prayer and songs...we are witnessing prophecy before our eyes which says we will see a great spirit migration back to the original way of prayer belief and song and the gift of ceremonial life is meant to be celebrated.

In closing I would like to leave a personal quote which as of this submission isn't yet to be voicedand again it has taken timeless time of creator's wisdom under the rainbow of creation which allows me to share only with respect, love, honor and prayer through the voices of life long guidance .All who embraced me.nurtured me enough to be kind,respectful, truthful and brave enough to strengthen my biggest fear myself.

Miigwech,(thank-you)

Who is God? Nature and Characteristics Buddhist Perspective

Sister Thich nu Tinh Quang
Founder,
Blue Heron Zen Buddhist Centre

Who is God? The word “God” has many perceptions, depending upon culture and religion. This problem has far-reaching repercussions, as wars have been fought over which belief in God is the right one. Buddhism neither believes in the existence of God nor of a soul. If there isn’t a God, then to whom do Buddhists pray? How did the universe come into being? In this talk, I hope to bring some understanding of the reasons Buddhists don’t believe in God and in what they do believe.

The Buddhist approach to life is to take responsibility and discover Truth for ourselves. The Buddha, in the Kalamas Sutra, asked people to not believe anything unless they have experienced that it is true, not because somebody has told them it is true. In Zen, our entire practice is experiential; reading is discouraged, because they are the words and experiences of another person. The Buddha encouraged us to discover for ourselves.

A number of Buddhists are atheists, while some believe in a non-creator god. Buddhism teaches that we must see clearly and be respectful of whatever a person’s beliefs are, regardless of whether they believe as we do.

There is much emphasis on emptiness and form or the noumenal and phenomenal, in Zen Buddhism, as is chanted in the “Prajnaparamita Hrdaya Heart Sutra” and in the “Harmony of Relative and Absolute.” Out of these teachings, some may believe in a power in the universe, not to be confused with a loving god who is watching over us.

Buddhism is in alignment with modern science, including the ideas of Einstein and Hawking. The Buddha discovered much of what was thought to be discovered in the 20th Century, 2,500 years ago, while meditating under tree. Scientists use the ideas of Einstein and Hawking to explain as much as they can. But, the scientists don't rule out making changes to them. They may even invent new ones.

As His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama said, if science were to prove that Buddhism is wrong in its beliefs, then we will have to change our beliefs.

The Harmony of Relative and Absolute

Shih-t'ou , 8th century China

The mind of the great sage of India
is intimately conveyed from West to East.
Though human beings may be sharp or dull,
the Way has no northern or southern ancestors.
The subtle source is clear and bright.
The branching streams flow through the darkness.
To be attached to things is delusion.
To encounter the absolute is not yet enlightenment.
Each sense gate and field are related
and at the same time independent,
related and interacting, though each keeps its own
place.
Forms are different in character and appearance;
sounds can be either pleasant or harsh.
The dark makes all words one.
The brightness distinguishes good and bad phrases.
The four elements return to their true nature
as a child to its mother.
Fire is hot, wind moves, water is wet, earth hard.
Eyes see, ears hear, nose smells,
tongue tastes the sweet and sour.
Each is independent of the other
like leaves that come from the same root.
Root and branches must return to the great reality.
The words high and low are used relatively.
Within light there is darkness,
but do not try to understand that darkness.
Within darkness there is light,
but do not search for that light.
Light and darkness are a pair,
like the foot before and the foot behind in walking.
Each thing has its own intrinsic value
and is related to everything else in function and
position.
Ordinary life fits the absolute as a box and its lid.
The absolute works together with the relative
like two arrows meeting in mid-air.
Hearing words, you should grasp the great reality.
Do not judge by your own standards.
If you do not see the way, you do not see it
even as you walk on it.
When you walk the way, it is not near, it is not far.
If you are deluded, you are mountains and rivers
away from it.
I respectfully say to those who wish to be enlightened,
do not waste your time by night or by day.

THE MAHA PRAJNAPARAMITA HRIDAYA SUTRA

The Bodhisattava of Great Compassion from the
deep practise of Prajnaparamita perceived the
emptiness of all five skandhas and delivered all
beings from their suffering.
O Sariputra, form is no other than emptiness,
emptiness no other than form.
Form is emptiness, emptiness form.
The same is true of feeling, thought, impulse, and
consciousness.
O Sariputra, all dharmas are empty.
They are not born nor annihilated.
They are not defiled nor immaculate.
They do not increase nor decrease.
So in emptiness no form, no feeling, no thought, no
impulse, no consciousness.
No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind;
No form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or objects of
mind,
No realm of sight; no realm of consciousness.
No ignorance, no extinction of ignorance.
No old age and death, nor extinction of them.
No suffering, no cause of suffering.
No cease from suffering, no path to lead out of
suffering;
No knowledge, no attainment, no realization.
For there is nothing to attain.
The Bodhisattva holds onto nothing but
Prajnaparamita.
Therefore, her mind is clear of any delusive
hindrance.
Without hindrance there is no fear;
Away from all perverted views he reaches final
Nirvana.
All Buddhas of past, present, and future through
faith in Prajnaparamita
Attain to the highest perfect enlightenment.
Know then the Prajnaparamita is the great dharani,
The radiant, peerless mantram, the utmost supreme
mantram,
Which is capable of allaying all pain.
This is true beyond all doubt.
Proclaim now the highest wisdom, the
Prajnaparamita
Gate, gate, Paragate
Parasamgate
Bodhi Svaha! (3x)

i. Kalama Sutra (Anguttara Nikaya of the Tripitaka); ii. Prajnaparamita Hridaya Heart Sutra; iii. Harmony of Relative and Absolute (T'san T'ung Ch'i), by Shih-t'ou, 700-790

Published by
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama`at Canada
5 Elliot Street, Cambridge
Ontario N1R 2J3
Ph: 1-877-463-6972
Fax: 1-866-524-4621

ISSN 1712-1833

