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## AN OUTLINE OF COMMONALITIES AMONG RELIGIONS

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article History</b> Published Online: _Publishe d_</p>	<p>The essence of all religions is one which is Godliness, Spirituality, and Morality. There are striking similarities in the system of belief, forms of worship, and precepts. There are commonalities in the concept of God, Worldview, Man, and the soul's eternity. Dara Shikoh was the first Muslim thinker who compiled a book on such commonalities.</p>
<p><b>Key-words:</b> Commonalities among religions God World-view Man Morality Spirituality</p>	<p>The first commonality is in the concept of God. Belief in one God is the cornerstone of all religions. All prayers, in all religions, are addressed to the One and the same God. There are striking commonalities in Worldview, the Concept of Man, and the Philosophy of History. The morality of all religions is common, while they are one in the sphere of Spirituality.</p> <p>With so many similarities, there is no reason why followers of religions may not have Interfaith Understanding instead of communal hatred, conflicts, and talk of a clash of civilizations. There will be no lasting peace on earth unless we learn to tolerate and celebrate plurality and respect other Faiths.</p>



## **OUR VISION**

### **1. INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING IS THE ONLY WAY**

➤ **No Peace without Interfaith Dialogue:**

In the trouble-torn World Today, Interfaith Understanding is the only way. There cannot be peace in the world without peace among communities, and there cannot be peace among communities without interfaith dialogue and understanding.

➤ **Societies are threatened by Violence:**

Human history is filled with numerous past and present examples that make religion and violence appear to be best friends. Since 9/11, religiously inspired violence has been considered one of the most pressing issues of our times.

➤ **Crucial for Our Pluralistic Society:**

India is a great country with different Faiths, with a rich history of religious tolerance. Great leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sir Syed, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr. Ambedkar preached the gospel of inter-religious understanding and tolerance.

➤ **It is crucial for National Unity and National Integration**

It is vital for our country that the followers of all religions come together.

➤ **It is a prerequisite for Economic Development:**

India is going to become a world economic power. Communal harmony, peace, and a conflict-free environment are necessary for National development and global investment attraction.

➤ **India has a legacy of Inclusiveness and Love:**

India is the land of the sages of Upanishads, Gita, Buddha, Mahavira, Amir Khusro, Khwaja Ajmiri, Nizamuddin Auliya, Dara Shikoh, Guru Nanak Dev, and Kabir. It has a tradition of inclusiveness, love, and ahimsa.

Thus, working for interfaith understanding is the only way to vigorously follow and promote interreligious understanding, which is crucial for Global Peace, National Integration, and Sustainable Development.



## 1. Commonalities in Belief in God

The first commonality among religions is that almost all of them believe in the existence of a Supernatural Reality.

### ➤ All religions believe God is the Eternal and Necessary Existence

They believe God is Absolute perfection, knowledge, power, and love. God is Eternal and predates and postdates our present. The self-subsistence of God is declared in *Āyat al-Kursī*.<sup>i</sup> The Eternity of God is also proclaimed in *Sūra-al-Touhīd*:112:1-4

Say He is God alone  
God the Eternal  
He begets not nor is begotten  
Nor is there like Him any one.<sup>ii</sup>

In this *sūra*, the word *samad* means both eternal and self-subsistent

### ➤ All Religions believe God is One and Unique:

*Touhīd* is Islam's fundamental belief; Hindus recognize one God, Brahman, and Jesus taught Fatherhood of One God.

Unity of God is emphasized in the Qur'an. In the *Sura al-Baqara*, it is declared:

Your God is one; there is no God but He, the Merciful, the Compassionate.<sup>iii</sup> In *Sura al-Nisa*, it is stated: God is only one God. Celebrated be his praise.<sup>iv</sup>

### ➤ All Religions believe that God is the Creator.

The Abrahamic faiths and Sikhism believe in creation, and the Hindu-Buddhist philosophy in emanation. The mythical stories of creation are found in all religious traditions.

### ➤ All Religions believe that God is the Sustainer:

God is the *Rab* and *Qayyūm* in the Quran, and Vishnu is the name of the sustainer in Hinduism. The Bible says in John 5:17: *My Father is always at his work*; St Augustine commented on this verse: "all created things would perish if God's working were withdrawn".

The Qur'an declares it beautifully in *Sūra al-Baqara*, verses no 95 to 100<sup>v</sup>

### ➤ All religions believe God is Omnipotent and All-Mighty:



All religions believe God is omnipotent. In Rig Veda, the Bible, and the Qur'an, All-Powerfulness is the Divine attribute. In Hinduism, Durga and Shakti symbolize that.

➤ **All religions believe God is Omnipresent, everywhere:**

In Hinduism, Brahman is All-Pervading; in the Bible, in Colossians 1:17, it is stated: *He is before all things, and in Him, all things hold together*; The Qur'an says: *Wherever you turn, there is God's face*

➤ **All religions believe God is Omniscient, All-Knowing:**

His knowledge encompasses all. He knows what we have in our mind

➤ **All religions believe that God is Just and loves justice**

Judaism and Islam believe in a just God. In Christianity also, it is an attribute of God. In Rig Veda and Mahabharata and Gita. God protects *dharma*.

## 2. Commonalities in Worldview:

Worldview is philosophy or opinion about the nature of the universe, its creation, and its goal. There are striking commonalities in the worldview of all religions.

**All religions believe that the world is more than the matter:**

➤ All religions share a belief in the Unseen Order and an extra-material dimension of the universe, believing that the universe is not only the matter and that creation is not accidental. The prophets sought to raise man's vision from the sensible to the intelligible, from the evident to the hidden, and from the limited to the limitless.

**All religions believe in the Spiritual dimension of the universe:**

➤ Spiritual reality, Brahman, or *Haqq*, is manifested everywhere. Hindu theosophy considers Brahman as the only reality and the universe as an illusion or *Maya*. The theistic viewpoint of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is realistic; it believes in the reality of the material world, but it is relatively unreal.

**Religions believe in an 'Unseen World also:**

➤ The creation is not limited to the world of senses but has other spiritual spheres and spiritual beings.



### **3. Commonalities in Philosophy of History:**

Philosophy of History is different from History. History deals with what happened in the past; the philosophy of History with what always happens.

#### **All religions believe that God's laws govern History.**

- Christianity believes in the eternal laws of God. The Quran speaks about the *sunan-e-ilahī*. Hindu texts talk about the *riti*,

#### **All religions believe that Divine Guides appear in History**

- All religions believe in the necessity of Divine Guides and the necessity of Divine Guidance for man. These vehicles of the Divine Grace and Guidance may be called the prophets, the Messengers, the Rishis, the Avtararas, the Buddhas, Tirthankars, or the Word of God, Imams, and saints.

#### **All religions believe in a golden era:**

- Hindus believe in Satya Yug and Ram Rajya; Muslims in *al-qurūn a-ūlā*,

#### **All religions believe in constant conflict between good and Evil in History**

- They also believe the curve of History bends toward justice.

#### **All religions believe that, ultimately, the truth will prevail.**

- Hinduism believes in Kalki; Christianity believes in the coming of the kingdom of Heaven. Islam believes in the period of the advent of Imām al-Mahdī.



## 4. Commonalities in the Concept of Man:

➤ **All religions believe that Man is more than the body:**

All faiths share a belief in the extra-physical dimension of man- that man is more than a body. They reject the material viewpoint that humankind has appeared accidentally, and that man is just a mammal belonging to the Homo sapiens species, which is without a tail, walks on two feet, and can speak.

➤ **All Religions believe that Man has a goal:**

All religions believe in the purposefulness of Human existence. In this world, man has a mission, and the mission is sublime.

➤ **All Religions believe that man has a Divine spark:**

The Hindu religion considers Atman as the inner form of Brahman; the Bible declares God created Man in His image, and in the Qur'an, God says: I blew into him (man) from my spirit. Idealistic religions believe Man is only a spiritual being. Realistic religions like Islam hold that man has a Divine spark, but his physical existence is also actual.

➤ **All religions believe that Man is the unique creation of God:**

They believe God created man in His image. The myths of creation in different religions have striking similarities.

➤ **All Religions believe in the two-dimensional nature of man:**

Man has many common things with animals; these constitute his animal nature. But some elements distinguish him from animals; Spirituality, morality, and rational faculty are the most important. These constitute his human nature. All religions call man to move from animal nature to human nature.

➤ **Free-Will: and Intellect: Supreme Distinction of Man:**

Intellect, reasoning faculty, and Free Will are distinctions of Man. Animals are incapable of reasoning and are motivated by their instincts. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam believe in free-will as a great bounty of God for man. The Indian religions believe in conditional free will, tampered with by *samsara*. The Bhagavad Gita says that man has free will but is conditioned.



➤ **All religions believe in the accountability of Man.**

Man is an accountable being. Whatever good or bad he does, he will be rewarded or punished for that. Belief in the eternal life of the next world is one of the essential points of Abrahamic religions but is found in all Faiths in one way or other.

## 5. Morality Is Common

The moral perspective of all religions is the same. Controlling animal passions and cultivating humanity is the goal of all religions.

➤ **The Qualities of character emphasized are the same.**

Honesty, truthfulness, integrity, selflessness; God-fearing, *taqwa*, piety, godliness; Rationality, wisdom, open-mindedness, originality, and creativity. Determination, courage, bravery, toughness, and self-confidence, are among such qualities.

➤ **Qualities of personal behavior are also the same, such as:**

Humility, sincerity, politeness, and admitting one's mistakes; Patience (*sabr*), perseverance, thankfulness (*shukr*); contentedness (*qanāah*), reliance on God (*tawakkul*); Cleanliness, attentiveness, manners, punctuality, simplicity, moderation; dedication, hard work, independence, being industrious.

➤ **Family values and behavior are the same too. All religions emphasize:**

Kindness and respect for parents and elders; the love between spouses and attentiveness to children and youngsters; helping family members, especially those in need; and kindness to neighbors.

➤ **Social values emphasized by all religions are also the same. These are:**

Love, mercy, kindness, compassion, equanimity; altruism, empathy, mutual respect, and spirit of brotherhood; Charity, generosity, and service to all.

Tolerance, not hurting others' feelings; loyalty, faithfulness, keeping promises, trustworthiness; gratitude, thankfulness, forgiveness and admitting fault,



➤ **Finally, civil and political values are the same :**

These are non-violence; peace, unity, solidarity; Justice, freedom, respect for human rights, law-abiding; development and democracy, and love for country,

Ninety percent of values emphasized by different religions are common. There is hardly a 10% difference, which is also a difference in focus, not in essence.

## 6. Commonalities in the System of Worship:

An essential part of religion is its system of worship. There are striking similarities in the object, the spirit, and the forms of prayers:

- All religions enjoined worship of one God who was all-Pervasive.
- The spirit and goal of worship are the same in all religions.

There are striking similarities in worship, Daily worship, fasting, pilgrimage, alms, and charity. All are common among religions.

## 7. Spirituality is One

Spirituality is an esoteric, intuitive, experiential science of gaining perfection and enlightenment through knowing, loving, and moving toward God. It suggests a way (*ashtanga yoga*); describes the inner states (*ahwāl*), *stages*, and *stations* (*maqāmāt*)

**Spirituality consists of four elements:**

- Theosophy or the Spiritual Philosophy and the Eightfold Way (*ashtanga*),
- The states in treading this way (*ahwāl*). The stages and stations (*maqāmāt*)

**1. Commonality in Theosophy or the Spiritual Philosophy:**

Following are the common realities discovered by all mystics:

- *Wahdat al-Wujūd* or Monism and Seeing God in everything
- Belief in the Divine Spark in Man and that man belongs to another realm





## 2. Commonality in the Practical Spirituality (āshtang Yoga)

Spirituality is not just a Philosophy but a systematic way (*tarīqah*) to realize spiritual goals. Yoga has systematized it in an eightfold way. Following are these components of the way which are common among all spiritual traditions:

- Initiation rite, Murshid-Murīd, Guru-Shishya tradition, and surrender
- Teaching of *zikr* or mantra zuhd, renunciation, and austerities.
- Exercises or riyāzat, breathing *exercises*, and concentration exercises.
- Meditation (*murāqiba*), samādhī or *jazba*, and feeling of annihilation (*fanā*)

## 3. Commonality in the Description of the Spiritual States (ahwāl)

In the journey towards God, the seeker passé through various states. Sufis call them *ahwal*, the plural of *hāl*. Some of them are:

- Love, Ishq, Shauq, longing justujū (quest), temptations, khauf (fear)
- *Hijr* (feeling of separation, tawakkul, raza, contentment, and bliss, *itmīnān*)

## 4. Commonality in the Description of the Spiritual stations (maqāmāt)

In the journey toward perfection, the seeker reaches various stages and stations. Sufi call them *maqāmāt*. These are more or less common in religions. Some are:

- The Stages of riyāzat (penance), Sabr (patience), meditation (*Murāqaba*), *Karāmāt* (siddhis), *ma'rifat* (gnosis), witnessing (*mushāhida*) *saut-e sarmadī*, or shabd yoga, *Qurb* or presence of God, *Haqq al-Yaqīn* (Certainty), and *Fanā*.

Thus, the Spirituality of all religions is almost one with no difference

**With so many similarities, there is no reason why followers of religions may not have Interfaith Understanding instead of communal hatred, conflicts, and talk of the clash of civilizations. There will be no lasting peace on earth unless we learn not merely to tolerate but to celebrate plurality and respect other Faiths.**



## REFERENCES

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- <sup>i</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Sūra al-Baqarah, verse 255
  - <sup>ii</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Sūra-al-Touhīd: 112:1-4
  - <sup>iii</sup> The Holy Quran, Sūra al-Baqarah: verse 163
  - <sup>iv</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Sūra al-Nisa 4: 167
  - <sup>v</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Sūra al-Baqara, verse no 95 to 100