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- *The nature of God*
- *Accept inadequacies of self and others*
- *Analogy of partially charged battery in relationships*
- *All are guided and grow toward God*

God reflects great warmth and comforting presence upon each of you.

It is not by accident or coincidence that our last message related to issues of relationships, for you are all intimately aware of challenges in this arena of life. The guest's presence in your gathering is also not by accident or coincidence. You are all drawn by common bonds to drink as you may from the same well. You journey to this well from different origins, from different directions, but you are nevertheless drawn here to pause and to seek reflection.

Relationships with others would be so much more satisfying if all could drink from a common source, for there is nourishment for all who truly seek direction and inspiration from their God. It makes no difference what name is given to their God, for the source is the same. The power and loving compassion are always present. There are those who believe in a God that is judgmental, that rewards good and punishes evil, that rewards courage and punishes cowardice. But in truth, the God that all worship is indeed a God of peace and mercy and forgiveness.

The punishment that comes arrives from a source that lies within humankind—the punishment of guilt, the punishment of deep repentance. God does not require constant repentance. God does not insist on the infliction of guilt. The God that all seek is a God full of patience and forgiveness. It makes no sense whatsoever if you accept that humanity is imperfect to in turn feel guilt for that imperfection. You may regret certain actions taken, words spoken, decisions made, but that is a reflection of imperfection. It is not a categorical sinfulness or cause for guilt.

If you accept your imperfection as being a part of the design of God, then you must also be willing to accept your failings as being part of the growth toward perfection. Accepting your own inadequacies empowers you to accept the inadequacies of others, be those inadequacies expressed individually or collectively. Your relationship with others is directly connected to your capacity to forgive. It is directly related to your ability to accept imperfection as part of God's design. If God has created a world that contains conflict, inequality, injustice, then you must accept those conditions, not with a fatalism but with a sense of challenge.

One can easily accept one's own imperfections, followed by a lack of effort to change them, rationalizing this lack of change through the belief that if God wanted it any other way, it would be another way, thereby taking oneself out of the equation. The fact is that imperfections are a challenge and a means of your viewing what needs improvement, what merits growth, what deserves reflection. Recognizing the imperfect

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characteristics of God's creation is meant as a way of focusing where you are to move, how you are to grow.

Recognizing such imperfections in others is not grounds for criticism but constructive challenge. By supporting others in their growth, you are responding to those imperfections in a godly manner. Recognizing and accepting, therefore, that which you do not agree with in terms of the behavior of others or their attitude allows you to accept the common bond that you share with others. If you are willing to accept that common bond of imperfection, then the potential for your relationships with others being positive is greatly enhanced.

You cannot support others with compassion if you remain critical of them. You cannot reach out toward others in love if you are unwilling to accept their divinity. A positive tone to interpersonal relationships is achieved only with a sense of equality, a sense of shared value. Therefore, expend considerable effort finding ways that support the validity and sacredness of another. If you find yourself in a relationship full of tension or anger or remorse, concentrating on the common bonds that you share will serve to erase much of the conflict that is felt.

It is both more difficult and of the highest importance that you fully accept yourself as you are, being willing to allow yourself to grow forward without judgment, without impatience. You are evolving; you are in the process of growth. You are becoming as you are meant to become. There is no timetable; there is only a goal. Freeing yourself of a timetable or a sense of what you feel you must be at this moment, you are then ready to accept who you are and where you are. It is the most difficult stage, the most difficult challenge that you face in human form, for out of that self-love, that self-respect, that unconditional acceptance of self grows the capacity of accepting and loving others, of achieving accepting and loving relationships. Without a firm sense of your own worthiness, your own value, you cannot fully accept the value of another human being. First comes the self, and then comes the reach outward.

This setting of priorities—self and then others--does not mean that you must be fully self-aware before you can hope to reach outward. A battery that's being charged is still capable of being functional. It is not necessary that the battery be fully charged before it can be used. It is the same with your sense of self-acceptance. You do not wait until you are fully aware and accepting of yourself before you are able to foster and encourage and engage in positive relationships with others. It is an ongoing and interrelated process. But we divide it up in this way to allow you to understand the importance of one in the application of another.

God's relationship to each of you is firm. It is loving and all-embracing. It is nonjudgmental. There is indeed nothing that you can do or say or think that will in any way diminish your place in God's creation. There is nothing that will distance you further from where you currently are. That should be both a comfort and a freeing concept, for

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when looked at carefully it means you could only grow in one direction. You could only evolve in one direction and that is toward God. You will never move away from God.

The most violent criminal imaginable does not move away from God. That individual may not reflect God's presence but nevertheless, will never be drawn further away. Even individuals who reject God openly, visibly, are in no way distancing themselves further from God. It may be that growth is more gradual, but it is certainly not an anti-growth; it is certainly not a pulling away.

Every human being has been provided with guides. Every human being is looked upon with love and support, active support. Every human being is growing toward God. Accepting this fact, it is impossible to reject another. There are of course those who offer a kind of rejection, a judgmental behavior, but that need not divide individuals or communities or nations. Such attitudes are an expression of where an individual or community is, and it is only that. When you face rejection or disappointment or frustration or the anger of someone else, you do not have to take in that frustration and allow it to feed upon your sense of self. You can accept it as an expression of another but not as a judgment of self. Likewise, you can disagree with others and yet simultaneously affirm their value.

The next time you are faced with such a disagreement, give pause for a moment and think of how you and the other are the same. Recognize the equality that exists between you and another. Recognize the divinity that you share. Your disagreement, then, will be directed toward the ideas or the actions, opinions of another, but no longer directed toward another. With that change in direction you will learn to disagree and be loving at the same time. The dynamic of that relationship will be strengthened, for it is honest and nonjudgmental.

We pray for your peace—your peace in relationships, your peace within, and a sense of perspective allowing you to recognize and embrace where you are and who you are. God's light surrounds your lives and embraces them and affirms the value of your humanness. Be glad in that affirmation, and welcome those opportunities for affirming the humanness of others.

Amen.