

## The Question

Everybody believes in something, why do you believe what you believe? Hindus believe in reincarnation. Buddhists believe in karma. Muslims believe that there is only one God and Muhammad is his prophet. Naturalists believe that we are hairless apes. Humanists believe that we are inherently good. Mystics believe there is a spark of divinity in all of us, and atheists believe there isn't a spark of divinity anywhere in the universe. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. Agnostics believe that you can't be certain about such things. The Baha'i believe that every religion affirms essentially the same thing – and that everyone is right.

Everybody believes in something. Why do you believe what you believe? I am not interested in *what* you believe just yet. To be sure, *what* you believe – especially *what* you believe about God – is the second most important thing about you.<sup>1</sup> It colors everything else. But right now I want to look past the content of your beliefs to the pillars that undergird it. What supports your beliefs?

Are your views based on science or were they inherited from your parents? Did you arrive at them through reason or accept them on the basis of a college professor's endorsement? There are plenty of different belief systems to choose from, and not everyone agrees with where you've landed. In fact, no matter what you believe millions of people think you are wrong. How do you know you're not?

Have you given this topic much thought? Most people have not. In fact, most people's eyes glaze over as soon as the conversation starts down this path. "What do I believe? Why do I believe it? I don't know! I am not a theologian. I am not a philosopher.

I am far too practical for any of that!" Of course they couldn't be more mistaken. We are all theologians and philosophers. The question isn't whether we have thoughts or opinions about God, the question is, are they any good. And we all hold views about life that silently shape everything we think, do and say. What could be more practical? The question is whether we are right in what we think about these most important matters. Is our world-view correct? Does it hold together? Is it true? And how can we be so sure?

### Backing Up to the Very Basics

For the sake of clarity let's back up and get a running start.

We all have a set of beliefs – assumptions about life that are so basic that they cannot be explained by some other idea. For example, if you were to ask a college student why he was taking the classes he was taking the conversation might unfold like this:<sup>2</sup>

**You:** "Why are you taking philosophy?"

**Student:** “To satisfy a humanities requirement.” **You:** “Why do you want to satisfy a humanities requirement?”

**Student:** “So I can graduate!”

**You:** “Why do you want to graduate?”

**Student, now rolling their eyes:** “To get a job, what did you think!”

**You:** “Why do you want a job?”

**Student:** “So I can make money.”

**You:** “Why do you want to make money?”

**Student:** “So I can buy stuff !” (He is now wondering what planet you are from.)

**You:** “Okay, but why do you want to buy stuff ?”

**Student:** “So I can be happy.”

**You:** “Okay, but why do you want to be happy?”

It is at this point that they just stare. He has stated a basic belief. It is relatively unthinkable to him that anyone would ever not want to be happy.