

Interreligious Friendship: Selection of Primary Sources from each of the Six Religions

Buddhist sources:

Source 1:

"Thus I have heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the **Sakyans** where there was a town of the Sakyans named **Sakkara**. There **Ven. Ānanda** approached the Blessed One. Having approached, he paid homage to the Blessed One, sat down to one side and said to him: "Venerable sir, this is half of the holy life: good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship." "Not so, Ānanda! Not so, Ānanda! This is the entire holy life, that is good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship."

Samyutta Nikāya 45.2, translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi in "The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: a new translation of the Samyutta Nikāya, Wisdom Publications, Boston 2000, p.1524

Source 2:

The four kinds of good friends are: 1) 'the friend who is a helper', 2) 'the friend who is the same in happy and unhappy times,' 3) the friend who points out what is good for you", and 4) the friend who is sympathetic.' The Buddha then describes the qualities associated with each of the four types of friends. The friend 'who points out what is good for you' is clearly seen as a moral and spiritual guide, since he is described as someone who "keeps you from wrong-doing, supports you in doing good, informs you of what you did not know (i.e. his understanding of moral and spiritual matters)...and points out the way to heaven." Other qualities described in the four types of good friend are loyalty, trustworthiness, intimacy (keeping and sharing each other's secrets), love, selfless service, and willingness to sacrifice one's life for the other.

In contrast to this, the four kinds of bad or false friends to be avoided are 1) 'One who takes (instead of gives),' 2) 'One who is a great talker,' 3) 'One who flatters (or only says pleasant things),' and 4) 'One who is a fellow-spendthrift or debauched companion.' Again, four detailed characteristics are given of each type. The Buddha's advice to Sigālaka to avoid contacts with those who are not devoted to practicing good is common-sense, and underscores the teaching of the importance of true spiritual friends on the path.

Maurice Walsh 1995 (transl), p. p.461-9, verse 24, Subhuti, 2004, p. 44.

Source 3:

"By the following method too, Ānanda, it may be understood how the entire holy life is good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship: by relying upon me as a good friend, Ānanda, beings subject to birth and death are freed from death; beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair are freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. By this method, Ānanda, it may be understood how the entire holy life is good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship."

Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000 (transl), p. 1524-55.

Questions for Buddhist sources:

Source 1:

1. *Is good friendship something just to enjoy or is it important? In what way?*
2. *What is meant by 'this is the entire holy life'? Is the emphasis on 'holy' or is it on 'life'?*

Source 2:

1. *Do the qualities of the 'good' and the 'bad' friend resonate with you? Would there be other characteristics you could attach to 'good' or 'bad' friends?*
2. *Why do you think the word 'friend' is used for a 'bad' friend?*

Source 3:

This source is an extension of source 1 and considers the benefits of having Buddha as a friend. Is it beyond the scope of normal interpersonal relationships to have such benefits or can a true friend really have such an impact?

Christian Sources:

Source 1:

St John Chrysostom: In good truth, a friend is more to be longed for than the light.

Source 2:

Aelred of Rievaulx's dialogue *On Spiritual Friendship (De spiritali amicitia)*[i]

Aelred begins by adopting Cicero's definition: "Friendship is agreement in things human and divine, with good will and charity" (1.11, quoting Cicero, *De amicitia* 6.20). He then, like Aristotle, distinguishes between three types of friendship.[ii] His categories, however, are expressed in a decidedly Christian vocabulary. The first, 'carnal' friendship, is "created by a conspiracy in vice." The second, 'worldly' friendship, is "enkindled by hope of gain." And the third, 'spiritual' friendship, is "cemented among the righteous by a likeness of lifestyles and interests" (1.38). Aelred also maintains a teleological view of friendship. True friendship, spiritual friendship, is "a step toward the love and knowledge of God" (2.18).

Aelred's Christianization of his classical sources is clear in the following remark: "What statement about friendship can be more sublime, more true, more valuable than this? It has been proved that friendship must begin in Christ, continue with Christ, and be perfected by Christ" (1.10).

Source 3:

"What interfaith friendships seem to offer is a way of allowing the faith of others ... to interact with our own faith commitment to draw out dimensions of our faith response that the shadow side of our tradition may have blocked. This is far from a simple 'complementarity' approach, wherein one tradition makes up what is lacking in the other. It rather represents a process whereby triangulating from another tradition—not abstractly but through friendships—allows us to activate the critical dimensions of our own tradition, so clarifying what we may have obscured in the revelation we have received." [iii]

Questions on Christian sources:

Source 1:

Friends are compared with 'light'. In what ways can friends be compared with light?

Source 2:

1. *Are all friendships based on perceived benefits for the friends or can there be friendships that are altruistic?*
2. *Does having a 'benefit' from a friendship make it more or less 'true'?*
3. *If friendship is about 'agreement', can you have friends who are very different from yourself? Does this source suggest that Christians*

should only be friends with each other? Is that problematic for you? Why?

Source 3:

What is the author suggesting as the process by which an interfaith friendship strengthens a Christian's faith in their own religion?

Jewish Sources:

Source 1:

Avot 1,6:

Joshua ben Perachyah said: Provide for yourself a teacher and get yourself a friend; and judge every man towards merit.

Source 2:

Zohar:

How great and wondrous is the virtue of the love between friends, who adhere together and who speak from heart to heart, and each one loves his friend as his own soul. And this leads them to true repentance, to humility and joy, to the delights of performing the commandments, to soul searching and to overcoming temptation. And through it they attain both worlds, this world and the world to come, and the awakening of the heart with God's love and awe, and the quality of truth and peace, for the divine presence only dwells where there is peace.

Rabbi Abraham Weinberg of Slonim explains: The Divine Presence dwells where there is love and peace generated by friendship.

Source 3:

R. Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717-1787), a popular hassidic author, reads "friend" as a reference to the soul. Acquiring a friend is engaging in the hard spiritual work that would make a person worthy of his soul consciously dwelling with him. "The soul is called the friend of a person, and the soul does not come to one except through investment and struggle in the service of God".

Rabbi Israel of Kozhnitz (1737-1814): "By making himself and all his limbs a chariot to the divine presence, he will acquire for himself a friend, that is

attaching himself to God, and God draws Himself to him and dwells upon his limbs and his entire body”.

Questions for Jewish sources:

Source 1:

1. *This is a three-part recommendation for how to lead a virtuous life. What does each of the three components contribute to the person's ability to lead a good life?*
2. *What is the special contribution of having a friend?*

Source 2:

1. *According to this source, in what way does friendship benefit the friends? How are they transformed through having a real friendship?*
2. *According to the source, in what way do friendships benefit the entire world?*
3. *In your opinion, can friendships have such power?*

Source 3:

These sources offer a different interpretation of the first source – acquiring a friend is about cultivating your soul.

1. *Do you find the first (more literal) reading more compelling or are you drawn to this new interpretation? Why?*
2. *Can you think of God as a 'friend'? In what way does this make sense and what are the problems with defining God as friend?*

Muslim sources:

Source (s) 1:

“None of you is a true believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.”

the Prophet Muhammad, on the authority of Anas

“You shall not enter Paradise until you believe; and you shall not believe until you love one another.” [iv]

Source 2:

"You will know the [true] believers in the way they [exhibit] mutual kindness, love and sympathy; it is just like [being] one body, when one limb complains, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever. [v]

Source 3:

Those familiar with Rumi's biography know that his mystical awakening came through an unexpected friendship with a wandering mystic: Shams al-Tabriz, whose first question to Rumi in the fall of 1244 reportedly caused Rumi to swoon. As their friendship unfolded, so did Rumi's spiritual awakening. Friendship, then, became for him nothing less than the theatre of Divine disclosure or "revelation" in a non-technical sense. In a poem he later wrote about two friends – a mouse and a frog – he echoed the gospel of Matthew (18:20) when he wrote,

To watch and listen to these two

Is to understand how, as it's written,

Sometimes when two beings come together,

Christ becomes visible.

A bit further into the poem, he added,

Friend sits by Friend, and the tablets appear.

They read the mysteries

Off each other's foreheads. [vi]

Questions for Muslim sources:

Source(s) 1:

1. *These two verses instruct Muslims to form friendships and to love one another and say that true believers are loving towards each other. Does sharing a religion make you more likely to feel friendly towards each other?*
2. *Does 'love' refer to feelings or is it a call to particular behaviours?*
3. *Who is one's 'brother'? Can the commandment to love one's brother be extended to everyone or will it be limited in some way? Discuss the possibilities of understanding who a 'brother' is.*

Source 2:

Is a truly religious person more sensitive and more likely to feel the emotions of another person? Does religion, generally, encourage human friendship and provide a strong basis for it? Why might that be?

Source 3:

The Muslim poet, Rumi, uses images from the Christian and Jewish Bible to illustrate the power of friendship.

What is Rumi saying happens in a true friendship? Is this something for which we can all strive or is it something only an elite few can achieve?

Hindu sources:

Source 1:

Tulasidasa characterizes friendship as having a fourfold character:

The first, is a shared identity expressing in compassion or concern for the other. Tulasidasa describes a friend as experiencing sorrow when his friend is in sorrow. In fact, he goes on to add that, in the eyes of a friend, the other's sorrow, even though like a grain of sand, is always mountain-like in dimensions. Tulasidasa seems to be suggesting here that the ground of friendship is a form of identification with another. One includes the other in one's understanding of oneself in a manner that makes the suffering of the other a matter of concern and urgency. One cannot be a friend and be indifferent to the other's suffering.

Second, friendship implies mutual ethical responsibilities. Friends feel morally responsible for each other and are committed to each other's moral wellbeing. Friends care about each other's ethical health.

Third, friendship is a relationship of mutual trust; it excludes suspicion about the other's motivation. A friend only speaks publicly about the virtues of the other. Trust means freedom from the desire to humiliate or demean.

Fourth, friendship is generosity. Friends give and receive without anxiety. The anxiety mentioned here is the fear that one will not receive equal value for what is given. In friendship, there are times when one may give more and receive less, or when one may receive more and give less, but friends do not keep records of what is given and received. Record keeping signifies a different kind of relationship.

Source 2:

As the Isa Upanishad (6) puts it, " One who sees all beings in the Self and the Self in all being does not hate." Hate arises from the condition of ignorance (avidya), which is a blindness to the unity and identity of the infinite in all beings. The unliberated divides the world into friends and enemies, but the liberated sees only with the eyes of friendship

Source 3:

Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not.

Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own.
Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.
I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave my accustomed shelter;
I forget that there abides the old in the new,
and that there also thou abidest.
Through birth and death, in this world or in others,
wherever thou leadest me it is thou, the same,
the one companion of my endless life
who ever linkest my heart with bonds of joy to the unfamiliar.
When one knows thee, then alien there is none, then no door is shut.
Oh, grant me my prayer that I may never lose
the bliss of the touch of the one
in the play of many. **Rabindranath Tagore (Gitanjali)**

Questions for Hindu sources:

Source 1:

Do the four characteristics of friendship suggested define for you a true friendship? Is there a hierarchy or are they all equally important? Could any of them be omitted and the friendship still be sound? Would you alter any or add any additional characteristics?

Source 2:

1. *According to this source, what is the source of hatred?*
2. *The Judeo-Christian tradition speaks of humans being created in the Divine image. Is this the same idea or is there something distinct in the Hindu understanding?*
3. *How does seeing the essential unity help promote friendship?*

Source 3:

This source is a prayer of gratitude to God for His friendship.

1. *Can God be a friend?*
2. *One of the things for which it gives thanks is making 'a brother of the stranger'. To what extent do people have to work hard to make their own friends and to what extent can they say that friends have been 'given' to them?*

Sikh sources:

Source(s) 1

- When someone who attaches himself to the God then everyone is his friend (p.238).
- For an enlightened person friend and foe are the same (p.272).
- Sainly persons are tolerant and good natured; friends and foe are the same to them (p.1356).
- Guru Granth Sahib
- 'The Lord lives in the heart of those who consider friend and foe alike'. [vii]

Source(s) 2

- Persons whose sight banishes my evil mindedness, they are my true friends (p.520).
- Only those persons are my friends who can walk along with me (p.729).
- I long for such a friend who can unite me with the God (p.749).

Source(s) 3:

- Friendship with a fool never works out right (p.474).
- O sinner! No one will be your friend at the end (p.474).
- Thieves, adulterous, prostitutes and pimps make friendship with the unrighteous and eat with the unrighteous (p.790).

Source(s) 4:

- Those are false friends who do not go with you for even one step (p.238).
- O Farid! There are dozens who say they are friends; but I cannot find a true one (p.1382).
- I have grown weary of making many friends hoping that someone might be able to end my sufferings (p.37).

Questions for Sikh Sources:

Source(s) 1:

1. *In these sources, Sikhism is promoting universal friendship. Do you think that a virtuous person can learn to love all human beings?*
2. *What is required of oneself to see everyone as a friend?*

Source(s) 2:

1. *In these sources, a friend has a role to play in the friend's spiritual development. Can someone be a friend if they do not contribute to their fellow's spiritual development?*
2. *Do real friends have to be travelling the same spiritual path?*

Source(s) 3:

1. *Is it your observation that people tend to make friends with those like themselves? What are the positive and negative sides of that?*
2. *How do these sources relate to the first sources? Is there a way of reconciling these sources with the idea that a virtuous person will make friends with everyone?*

Source(s) 4:

Here, the author seems to be deeply saddened and disillusioned, either by false friendships or the failure to make friendships.

Are there any clues in the verses themselves as to why the author might have failed to find friends?

What do people need to do in order to make true friends?

[i] Available in English translation: Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. Lawrence C. Braceland (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

[ii] Aelred would not have known Aristotle's works directly, since he lived just before their reintroduction to the Latin West. His work, however, is marked by many features that we can recognize as influenced by a strain of thinking about friendship of which Aristotle is the exemplar.

[iii] David B. Burrell, "Interfaith Perspectives on Reconciliation," in *The Politics of Past Evil: Religion, Reconciliation, and the Dilemmas of Transitional*

Justice, ed. Daniel Philpott (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 123.

[iv] Found in the *S'ah'ih* collection of Muslim.

[v] Found in the *S'ah'ih* collections of both al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

[vi] From *The essential Rumi*, Coleman Barks, trans. (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1977), pp. 79-80.

[vii] Guru Arjan Dev, Gauri Rag, AG 236.

'Friendship Across Religions' Project

1. Understanding Interreligious Friendship

Basic guidelines and concerns that should govern interreligious friendship include the following:

- Interreligious friendship recognizes fundamental similarities between religions. These include the search for living in goodness and harmony and living an ethical life. Fundamental to interreligious friendship is awareness that the different religions seek to transcend ordinary life through aspiration and orientation of life toward a higher spiritual understanding of reality, or a supreme reality called by most believers 'God'.
- Interreligious friendship is characterized by a higher common interest, beyond self interest.
- Interreligious friendship is characterized by reciprocity and engages both sides to a relationship. Friendship is based on a mutual give and take.

2. Approaching Difference

Interreligious friendship is not friendship that casts aside religious difference, overlooking it in the interest of perceived commonality. Rather, it is friendship that keeps us mindful of religious difference and approaches this difference as a means of learning, growth and transformation that occur within the friendship. Religious difference can be approached as a source of blessing.

3. Upholding Identity

Maintaining the identity of our religious community is a primary concern of the teachings of our religions. The practice of interreligious friendship should not be a means of weakening or diluting identity. Rather, it should be a means of strengthening and deepening it.

4. Practicing Speech

Practicing interreligious friendship is closely related to how we speak. Questioning is fundamental to interreligious friendship. Friends must be willing to question and to be questioned. Hard questions are part of honest speech, but must be clearly distinguished from attack or criticism. In interreligious friendships, the face of our friend is always before us. We learn to speak the same in the absence as in the presence of the friend.

5. Friendship in Action

Action is a primary arena for the manifestation of friendship. We expect support, collaboration and solidarity from our friends if issues pertaining to our well-being arise. Interreligious friendship can be based on common dedication to ideals or causes such as social justice, fighting hatred, poverty and illness. The commonality shared by friends finds expression through shared commitment and collaboration for the well-being of society and the world.

6. Friendship as Spiritual Gift

As we move from ignoring differences to recognizing, understanding and respecting our differences, we are also called to discover a deeper unity that transcends our differences. Love finds its fullest expression in a friendship that is consciously grounded in God, or in the ultimate reality.

For a more detailed statement of these guidelines, [click here](#)

For position papers that provide the basis for statement and for guidelines please write to admin@elijah-interfaith.org