

Text-Study

Friendship Across Religions

Hindu sources:

Source 1:

Tulasidas (16th Century) 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?*