

Friendship Across Religions Project Overview and Synthesis

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Introduction

Stephen Butler Murray has provided a summary of papers, so rather than presenting in turn each of the papers and its contribution to our collective efforts, I would like to offer my own overview of the project and how the voices of the different traditions cohere into a larger whole.. I will do so by highlighting key notions found in our papers.¹ I will also present my own model for understanding friendship, in light of which the contributions of individual traditions may be appreciated. This essay seeks to tease out ideas, suggesting the range of issues our project has covered and the conceptual horizons within which it takes place. It does so while noting the particularities of the papers and the traditions they describe, thereby highlighting commonalities and differences in their approaches. A concluding statement at the end of this volume sums up the achievements of the project in a more succinct form, speaking in a unified voice for all participants and the perspectives of the traditions they seek to represent.

Types of Friendship

Understanding what we mean by friendship is a good place to begin an overview of our project. Friendship means more than one thing and indeed the reader will note different levels and dimensions of friendship that are presented by our authors. This is not a problem; rather, it is an essential feature of friendship. Friendship is a broad category that is variously applied, depending on circumstances. There is something fundamentally flexible or elastic in how we use the term.²

The range of friendships covered by our

authors includes relationships of common living and association, and even attitudes to strangers.³ One author even stretches friendship beyond the realm of the living.⁴ The vision of practicing friendship and its benefits apply in day to day relationships, best characterized in terms of friendly relations with one's neighbors.⁵ I too, in my presentation of possibilities for practicing interreligious friendship from a Jewish perspective, speak of the kind of friendship that is built through day to day relationships and the opportunities they provide. But even given these broader references, most of our efforts and the unique contribution of this volume relate to friendships that are much more particular, intimate and above all spiritual and transformative. All our authors are aware of the different levels of friendship, but for many of them the real challenge is how to understand friendships that are more than everyday friendships. As Volf and McAnnally-Linz write: "As we use the term in this paper, friendship is a 'special relationship', a relationship that one cannot have with everybody at once...The friendships we have in mind require the *commitment of time* and *extended communication*. They involve *open communication* and *are not restricted to a certain facet of life* (e.g., 'office friends')...and they are marked by *affection*."

1 All references to authors, including myself, in this overview refer to the essays in our collection.

2 For a discussion of elasticity see my own paper, especially the appendix, as well as references to theoretical literature cited by Catherine Hezser.

3 See in particular the contribution by Eleanor Nesbitt, who applies the broadest uses of friendship. Her illustrations of 'friendship' include two examples of compassion and humanity towards previously unknown individuals in their hour of crisis.

4 See Gianotti's reference to Massignon's life changing friendship with the 10th century mystic, al-Hallaj. Other instances brought by him as precedent for interreligious friendship similarly stretch the category wider than its uses by other authors in our project.

5 Note Rambachan's fourth recommendation, where he considers the opportunities for understanding religious traditions, as these are embodied in the lives of our neighbors.

While this rough description hardly constitutes a technical definition, it should be sufficient to suggest the sort of relationships that concern us as we consider the possibility and value of interfaith friendships from a Christian perspective.” Both Volf and McAnnally-Linz and Rambachan illustrate interreligious friendship through the friendship between Mohandas Gandhi and Charles Andrews, a Christian minister who collaborated with him and was considered his closest and most intimate friend.

Friendship cannot exist without some commonality of purpose

This friendship may be considered our project’s showcase friendship. This is indeed a special kind of friendship whose uniqueness is in part affirmed by the criticism that it drew from more traditional quarters, as illustrated by Rambachan. Johann Vento goes so far as to apply the notion of sacramentality to such friendships. Drawing on the resources of Christian monastic tradition, she suggests that these are friendships through which God is known through and in which God is made present.⁶

Differently put, the broader kind of friendship involves friends from different religions in various

common pursuits, while acknowledging, never overlooking, their religious identities. The special kind of interreligious friendship that is the primary concern of our project is the kind of friendship that consciously engages the religious identity, experience and ideals of the participants. It is a friendship that revolves around the core of their respective spiritual lives, thereby making their friendship an integral component of each of their spiritual lives. While at times we may need to justify even the most fundamental or general friendship with members of other religions, the greater challenge, and greater promise, lie in those special friendships that are forms of spiritual friendship, practiced across religions. What do such friendships mean for the participants? How do friends draw from and impact their own religious practice and that of their communities? What is their theoretical justification and what are their practical limits? The sum total of these and related questions is a reflection, carried out from the perspectives of multiple religious traditions, that seeks to acknowledge, understand, justify and explore interreligious friendship, friendship across religions.

Understanding Friendship - A Theoretical Model

As a way of assessing different kinds of friendship and considering how they might apply in an interreligious context, I would like to propose a theoretical framework:⁷ a fivefold model, by means of which we can discuss friendship. Each of the items in this model accounts for a fundamental dimension of friendship, and each can be applied in varying degrees of depth and intensity. Accordingly, different kinds of relationships and varying qualities will emerge, as the five items come together in rich and complex ways. The difference between the broader types of friendship and the more special

⁶ Friendship as it is used by the Habitos, in their description of Buddhist ideals of friendship, may be considered as a median approached to friendship. For them, friendship is featured primarily as an instrument of learning, gaining insight and advancing on the spiritual path. The classical model is the many friends that Sudhana encounters along his path; the contemporary model is the Dalai Lama and the many relationships through which he learns of other religions, and according to the authors through which he also deepens his own being as a Buddhist. Such learning and insight oriented friendships are more than everyday friendships, but possibly less than the strongest sense of friendship featured in our project. Similarly, Gianotti’s use of friendship seems more focused than the general friendship but broader in scope than the model of the unique friendship that emerges from the Jewish, Christian and Hindu presentations. For Gianotti, friendship is intimate companionship along the way, a fellowship or brotherhood of believers who share a common goal and the path towards it. Gianotti consciously contrasts this form of friendship with broader benevolence, affection and sharing experience that characterize all forms of friendship. What makes this form of friendship particular is a shared teleology, advancing along the path. (His presentation of friendship in Rumi, however, may be a stronger form of friendship, closer to that described by Vento as sacramental). Gianotti and the Habitos thus share an understanding of the instrumentality of friendship along the spiritual path. This notion is also featured in my own presentation of Hassidic sources.

⁷ A word is in order concerning how this model was conceived. As I studied Jewish sources on friendship and sought to understand the challenges to a Jewish view of interreligious friendship, for my contribution on Jewish views of friendship, I found myself reflecting increasingly on the value of friendship itself. In a moment of synthetic integration, perhaps even inspiration, various dimensions and aspects of friendship consolidated in my mind into a model of what constitutes friendship. Obviously informed by the Jewish sources that I had been studying, as well as by various general readings on friendship, it seemed nevertheless to be helpful to thinking of friendship across religions in novel ways that would be helpful to our project as a whole. With the consent of the other participants in our project I offer this model as a framework for relating to the different religious traditions represented in our project.

“sacramental” relationships is a function of the number of dimensions that a given friendship draws upon, as well as its intensity. This model allows us to consider what is at the core of friendship, when it is at its most perfect, what we seek from friendship and how friendship with members of another faith tradition coheres with a general understanding of friendship. The model is constituted by five dimensions ranging from the more objective and visible expressions of friendship to the more hidden dimensions of feeling and internal orientation. I present them in an order that approximates the move from the outward to the interior dimensions of friendship.

1. *Commonality of purpose.* Friendship cannot exist without some commonality of purpose. Such commonality need not be thought through, as it is often provided by context. From early childhood we enjoy friendships based on such commonality of purpose without giving it much thought. The commonality of purpose of schoolchildren who seek to fulfill their social needs or to get successfully through their school years is not essentially different from that of the business partners who seek to make money together. Friendships formed based on common learning, such as might occur in an academic environment, are similar in structure, even if different in substance. In all these cases friendship is not so much a goal or a quest, but a by-product of a common purpose, provided by circumstance. Just how closely related purpose and friendship are emerges from the patterns of friendship established by social media. Groups of “friends” are organized on media such as Facebook precisely around what such groups define as common purpose. Whether it is creating a social revolution or following a certain rockstar, commonality of purpose defines the parameters and vision of a group of “friends”.

The different kinds of purposes establish different relationships. Getting along in a neighborhood, enjoying motorcycle riding and discussing theology are all causes around which friendship may evolve, but it will be pitched differently, bringing into the friendship the qualities associated with the various activities. Deep bonds of friendship may be formed based on any of these purposes, but they will draw on different aspects of the person, according to what the common bond is. A friendship formed around volunteering for an idealistic cause therefore has the potential to be qualitatively different than a friendship created through a common business venture. In similar light, if we think of spiritual friendship, that is: friendship

formed for the sake of sharing and advancing in the spiritual life, it stands to reason that such a friendship will touch other regions of the person who enjoys such friendship. If the friendship is formed around issues of ultimate concern it would touch the deepest regions of the person, involving the entire person, even as the spiritual life itself impacts the person in his or her entirety. Accordingly, its impact and transformative power will be different from the kind of self evident friendship that most of us enjoy, simply by virtue of the multitude of circumstances provided by life.

If friendship is formed around issues of ultimate concern it would touch the deepest regions of the person

Interreligious friendships range from friendships that serve the common needs of mixed religious communities to those that make religion and the spiritual life, rather than common daily life, their focal point. Different kinds of reflection and guidelines may be required if we seek to address the challenges of common living of mixed communities or those of sharing inspiration across religions. Both are important, but the latter represents what is truly unique in the field of interreligious friendship and is increasingly a sign of our times. Members of different traditions have lived alongside one another for centuries. But we have very little evidence for the existence of the latter kind of friendship in eras where theological competition, rather than collaboration, was the reigning paradigm. Thus, along with the growth of the interfaith movement and the improvement in relations between practitioners of different religions, a new challenge has emerged: How to cultivate interreligious friendship that touches those domains of ultimate concern that are the heart of the religious life? Can commonality of purpose be recognized despite diversity in faith and practice across traditions? Can a sharing of friendship based on ultimate concerns be cultivated despite differences in faith systems? Can a common teleology be recognized despite religious difference? This is the present day challenge.⁸

⁸ Gianotti, more than any other author in our collection, organizes his presentation around the question of teleology and the challenges of cultivating friendship across religious difference and its implied difference in teleology. The problem of teleology is also discussed by Volf and McAnnally-Linz, as well as in my paper and that of the Habitos.

2. *Support and practical collaboration.* I begin with the golden rule. Its Jewish formulation, as found in the Talmud states: That which is hateful to you, do not do to your friend.⁹ Friendship is defined in terms of action to be avoided. The same holds true for positive articulations of the golden rule¹⁰ and for the notion of friendship in general - friendship is measured in actions. It is not simply an attitude or a feeling. It finds expression in concrete actions of solidarity, support and collaboration. While these are in one way expressions of friendship, in fact these expressions constitute what friendship is. Friendship is about providing support. Support will vary according to the different levels of friendship. Practical living may yield support in lending a cup of sugar or signing a petition to local authorities. Spiritual friendship may yield emotional support, advice and spiritual direction. But friendship amounts to taking a stance and to being active; it is never neutral, removed or distant.¹¹

A new challenge has emerged: How to cultivate interreligious friendship that touches those domains of ultimate concern that are the heart of the religious life?

3. *Love.* There is no true friendship without love. Without love, relationships are purely utilitarian, instrumental, not expressions of friendship. Mere collaboration is not friendship, because it lacks the glue of love that is fundamental to friendship.¹² Common purposes and practical collaboration generate love and love in turn manifests through these common dimensions. Love makes it possible to act for the other, it sparks the interest of reaching ultimate goals together. Great lovers, people with a great loving capacity in their souls, will produce many friends.

It stands to reason that the purposes of friendship will also determine the quality of love generated by it. What one seeks together will affect the capacity to love and love's quality. Thus, love that is informed by a spiritual quality is likely to be qualitatively different than a love generated by common context.

Love is a force of sharing life and caring for the other.¹³ It is much more than a sentiment or a feeling. This is why it can drive action and shape relationships. This is also why we should think of love in a broad way, incorporating other notions that inform the spiritual life. Thus, compassion is an expression, or a cognate, of love. There can be a spiritual friendship based on the higher spiritual ideals also between faithful who do not share a common understanding of God or faith in a personal God at all.¹⁴ Compassion provides the equivalent drive. However, for those who share a common faith in God, love will be informed by the reality of God that is common to the two friends, bringing His love into rapport with the love of others. The more consciously God oriented a friendship is, the more it is held together by a higher or spiritual love.¹⁵ Taking into account the different possible formulations, friendship is grounded in a metaphysical force that touches the depth of being, the depth of the heart. Even if it is conceived differently and receives

9 Bavli Shabbat 31a.

10 For a Muslim formulation, see the opening quote in Gianotti's paper.

11 I would identify this feature with the second aspect of friendship presented by Rambachan, mutual ethical responsibility. Several of the qualities presented by the *Habitos* as constitutive of friendship in the Buddha's understanding would fall under this rubric.

12 While it is never stated explicitly in this way, this is in fact an important lesson that emerges from Rambachan's presentation of the Gandhi-Andrews relationship. Note the title of his essay - "Love Speaking to Love" and the opening quote by Andrews.

13 Compare to Rambachan's fourth principle - friendship as generosity. See also the first principle of expressing compassion and identifying with the experience of the friend. This also corresponds to several of the traits of friendship, described by the Buddha, in the *Habitos*' paper.

14 My essay on Judaism and Gianotti's on Islam both explore this issue.

15 This point emerges at various points in our collection. Nesbitt affirms that for friendships to be spiritually supportive, they must be Guru-ward, and thus God-ward. The ideal of a conscious presence of God in friendship is articulated in Volf and McAnnally-Linz's presentation of Aelred of Riveaux, as well as in Vento's notion of sacramental friendship. Gianotti leads us to these domains in his presentation of Rumi on friendship and the larger part of my own essay is an attempt to construct such an understanding of friendship from Jewish mystical and spiritual sources. In reviewing the essays, I have asked myself whether the lack of this motive in Rambachan's presentation of the Gandhi-Andrews friendship is accidental or whether it is a function of the broader understanding that sees God in everything and therefore aims at a universal attitude of friendliness. Does such a universal aspiration limit how special individual relationships are conceived of? In any event, Rambachan describes the character of a relationship that is established "when our understanding is centered on life's unity and the indivisibility of the infinite". This does suggest that friendship is ultimately anchored in the divine.

different emphases in various religions, the same pattern applies. According to this pattern, ordinary human relationships take on special significance because they are informed by the deepest spiritual quest, reaching into the deepest recesses of the human person.¹⁶

4. *Trust*. Friendship implies trust.¹⁷ It is trust that makes friendship more than simply a love given freely to all.¹⁸ Trust involves a personal relationship, the buildup of positive experience and a sense of security in the stability of a relationship and in the intentions of the partner to the relationship. Trust includes the certainty that the friend won't hurt you. If love describes one's attitude to the friend, trust expresses an appreciation of the friend's attitude towards oneself. The reciprocity of love brings with it the fruit of trust. Trust leads to vulnerability and it is founded on the confidence that one can safely love and be loved.

5. *Resonance of being*. Of the five points here listed, this is the most elusive, but in some ways also the most decisive for friendship. Why are friendships formed with some people, rather than others? It seems to me the answer is more than circumstantial. It relies on something other than the fact that one individual was kinder to us than another. This elusive quality I refer to as "resonance of being." Something in the very being of the other attracts us. The laws of attraction of friendship parallel those of finding love and partnership for life. They are as mysterious and cannot be readily

quantified. But this does not detract from their reality nor from the central role they play in relationship building. The conventional term "chemistry" is here replaced with the slightly more complex reference to "resonance of being". Such resonance may point to a similar psychological, spiritual or metaphysical chord that both parties to the relationship strike. It may also point to complementarity, based upon their differences.

*Friendship amounts to taking a
stance and to being active; it is never
neutral, removed or distant*

The five points listed above provide key defining elements of friendship. Because they are not present in all relationships in equal force and measure, friendships vary. It may be that not all five items are galvanized within a particular relationship. If trust is lacking, there may still be a kind of friendship, but limited by the limits of trust. Similarly, one may think of friendships that do not involve a resonance of being, but that nevertheless can withstand the test of time. Friendship is a fact of human relations and is modulated - following the principle of elasticity - according to one's station in life and one's degree of psychological and spiritual evolution. If purposes are mundane, love will be basic, though solid. Such love may not require the same kind of internal resonance that a more refined, ideological or spiritual, love might. The depth of friendship will be determined by one's capacity to love and to show trust, which antedates the given relationship and refers back to other formative relationships. Thus, one can think of rich permutations of these principles, expressing the full range of capacities, interests and aspirations of humans, as they move through life, aided by the force of friendship.

Some of the features typically associated with friendship seem to me to be outcomes of these five dimensions of friendship. Thus, one often thinks of friendship as something that brings one joy and pleasure. These seem to me to be consequences of the combination of several of the above items. Love, coupled with common purposes, can lead to joy and pleasure. The satisfaction of security and love similarly allow for the joys associated with friendship.

Another common feature of friendship is intimacy, a depth quality of emotional and spiritual relations. This too may be thought of as the coming together of several dimensions. In fact, intimacy

16 As we learn from our authors, this is the case also with regard to relationships whose specialness has not been conceptualized in terms of a three way relationship, tying human and divine love. Gandhi's friendship with Andrews is one of spiritual seekers. The same emerges with regard to the Dalai Lama's friendships, described by the Habitos. As my review of his book, quoted by Habito and Habito, suggests, spiritual friendship lies at the heart of his interfaith journey, and as the Habitos suggest, this in turn serves as a means of deepening his Buddhist path.

17 Note Rambachan's presentation, where trust is one of the four features, offered by Tulasidasa.

18 One of the distinctions to emerge from our project is between universal friendliness and particular friendships. My own essay makes this distinction apparent in relation to Rav Kook. Rambachan contextualizes the particular relationship of Gandhi and Andrews within a theory of universal friendliness, and Volf and McAnnally-Linz articulate their own understanding of special friendship against this background. One could argue that where special friendship goes beyond general friendliness is precisely where there is trust. This can also be formulated in terms of reciprocity, where special friendship, as distinct from universal friendliness, is founded upon such reciprocity and the trust it engenders.

may be thought of as a consequence of the coming together of all five dimensions. It is based on love and trust, but is clearly much aided by the sense of resonance of being, that creates the very uniqueness that enables intimacy. Why one can achieve intimacy with one friend rather than with another is in part due to the resonance of being. But it is also due to the sense of commonality of purpose and the assuredness of practical support, itself an expression of the deeper attitude of trust that conditions friendship. Intimacy may thus be considered a peak of friendship.

Similarity and Difference as Foundations of Friendship

This project, probably more so than any other project undertaken by Elijah scholars, puts in sharp relief differences between so-called Abrahamic and non Abrahamic religions. One of these differences concerns the fact that Judaism, Christianity and Islam all found themselves at key points in their development interacting with the legacy of Greek philosophy. Greek reflection on friendship therefore penetrates the thought of these traditions, first Christianity and later the other two. Greek tradition reflected much on the issue of how friendship expresses deep commonality between friends. This track of thought is summarized in a maxim attributed to Aristotle, according to which the friend is an alter ego.¹⁹ Viewing the friend as second self sees similarity as the core of friendship.

The concern for the Other, as a contemporary philosophical concern, has led modern philosophers to revisit the question of similarity as the foundation of friendship. Meir Sender's response to my paper is in fact much broader in its significance. In his essay he suggests that what makes friendship possible is precisely the otherness of the friend. Drawing on Emerson and 20th century philosophers, Sender proposes difference as another means for approaching and understanding friendship. This leads Sender to raise the possibility that a close relationship between members of different religious traditions, each of whom is committed to their own faith, may facilitate the discovery of the authentic character of friendship itself. Accordingly, interreligious friendship would emerge as paradigmatic friendship, friendship par excellence.

If difference may be presented as constitutive of friendship, it certainly constitutes the greatest challenge to friendship. If we ask wherein lies the obstacle to interreligious friendship, why should the subject of interreligious friendship even be an issue, one to which we would have to devote our reflective efforts, we would be forced to identify the cause for this in the fact of difference.²⁰ Difference constitutes the greatest challenge to interreligious friendship and Sender's own presentation of difference as the core of friendship is in fact an attempt to tackle the problem by going to its root.

*Without love, relationships are
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expressions of friendship*

The question of difference conditions the problems that impact interreligious friendship, whether these problems be metaphysical, sociological or historical. Resolving the problems that interreligious friendship poses, or that are conditions for its successful implementation, must of necessity also address the problem of difference. We shall recognize this fact as we consider obstacles and challenges to friendship as well as possible means of their resolution.

Friendship with Members of Other Religions - Challenges and Obstacles

Returning to the fivefold model presented above, we may ask: How readily can friendship be applied across religions? What are the challenges and obstacles that must be overcome and how do they relate to the fivefold presentation of friendship?

We might begin with love. Friendship implies love and interreligious relations often lack love. A basic condition for interreligious friendship is the cessation of enmity, usually stemming from religious difference. If friendship is founded upon love, the conditions for and the practice of love are preconditions for interreligious friendship. Thus, the path has to first be cleared for interreligious friendship to take hold. One solution is to overcome hatred by building better relations. This solution envisions changes in group relations as a foundation

19 For a history of Greek reflection on friendship and how it colored Christian reflection, see Volf and McAnnally-Linz. I cite this tradition of Aristotle's in my paper as does Gianotti, in his discussion of Tusi.

20 If, as I shall suggest below, Dharmic religions have an easier time accepting interreligious friendship, this is also because their view of phenomenological difference is different, relying on deeper metaphysical unity, as expounded in the presentations by Rambachan and Nesbitt and Dhillon.

for construction of individual relations. An alternative could be the cultivation of the capacity to love within the individual, regardless of group relations.²¹ The close connection between friendship and love raises the question of whether it might be possible to cultivate love as a capacity of the person, of the soul, irrespective of contemporary conditions. Love and friendship have a reciprocal relationship. Increase of love as a spiritual exercise translates into the realm of friendship. Conversely, positive experiences gained through friendship increase our capacity to love, and the positive experience of interreligious friendship increases our capacity for universal love.

Love is closely related to trust²² and lack of trust remains a major obstacle to interreligious friendship.²³ Lack of trust is a problem arising from the history of interreligious relations. But it also grows out of contemporary concerns. One the greatest sources of mistrust is missionary activity, that seeks to undermine the identity of members of one religion through conversion to another. Several of our authors point to missionary activity as one of the biggest contemporary challenges to interreligious friendship.²⁴ Thus, friendship can only be constructed when basic concerns that would affect trust are adequately addressed. Here theologizing about the nature of true friendship can also provide an important resource to curb the missionary drive.

Gianotti's stretching to the limit the meaning of the golden rule leads him to consider that its true application is not in seeking that the other should become like myself, but rather that the other should be as authentic and true to herself, as I would want to be to myself.²⁵ Thus seen, interreligious friendship amounts to mutual invitation for each party to go deeper into the wellsprings of their own tradition. True interreligious friendship deepens authenticity and commitment, rather than weakening it.

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Probably the single greatest source of concern in relation to interreligious friendship is the need to protect religious authenticity and identity.²⁶ Only when one's identity is secure can there be sufficient trust to cultivate interreligious friendship. One important way of building trust is through support and practical collaboration. Once inauthentic motivation, such as missionary intention, is excluded, mutual collaboration builds bonds of trust and engenders friendship. It is fair to surmise that the majority of interfaith friendships that have been constructed over the past several decades have grown out of such mutual collaboration.²⁷

The concern for authenticity and the fear for identity coalesce in the concern that one's commitment and faithfulness to a tradition will be diminished through interreligious friendship. For many this is the great danger inherent in interreligious friendship. As our authors suggest, based on their own experience as well as their observation and

21 Rav Kook, whom I present in my essay, may serve as a model for this. While on the ground relations were not yet historically ripe for the practice of concrete friendship, the internal spiritual disposition to all was one of love, born of a powerful capacity of the soul.

22 Whereas the present paragraph considers building trust a condition for friendship across religions, note the conclusion to Balwant Singh Dhillon's contribution, where interreligious friendship serves as a means of developing trust. The difference arises from perspectives. Dhillon speaks of individual friendships paving the way to collective trust. The following paragraph, by contrast, is conceived mainly in terms of group relations. It seems evident, nevertheless, that even individual friendship requires trust within the relationship.

23 Gianotti's presentation of the mentality of large sections of the Muslim world in relation to the West and to others may be considered as the most extreme instance of lack of trust that our authors describe. My own presentation of prevailing Jewish attitudes to other religions is a close second.

24 See in particular Rambachan and Volf and McAnnally-Linz. The difference in perspective between Gandhi and Andrews is, to a certain extent, mirrored in the attempt to strike a balance between respecting the other and maintaining the right to witness respectfully to the other, as a feature of friendship, in Volf and McAnnally-Linz's presentation.

25 Contrast this with Volf and McAnnally-Linz's application of the golden rule as a means of inviting mutual witness between religions, thereby making the drive to offer witness to the other reciprocal.

26 This emerges in all papers, with the suggestive exception of the Buddhist paper. I would draw a distinction between authenticity and identity. Identity refers to preservation of one's identity. Authenticity touches upon the fear of pollution and contamination by ideas coming from the outside, while not necessarily compromising one's identity. The accusations that Gandhi was acting under Andrews' influence, and not based on pure Hindu motivation, would serve as a good example.

27 Our showcase friendship, that of Gandhi and Andrews, grew out of practical collaboration.

reflection, the opposite is more true to reality. Deep friendship between practitioners of different religions usually has the effect of deepening one's commitment, rather than diluting it. When noting the benefits of interreligious friendship many of our authors speak of how it leads one to be more authentically religious, within one's own tradition, deepening one's engagement and practice.²⁸

If concern for one's own identity forms one pole of the challenges to interreligious friendship, the view of the other forms the other pole.²⁹ Our traditions harbor views of other religions that address key questions, including the very legitimacy of the other's otherness, that is the legitimacy and validity of the other religion as a valid spiritual path.³⁰ The core question, that impacts the possibility of interreligious friendship, is that of common purposes.³¹ Recognition of common purposes allows one to accept the other in a real way. Lacking true recognition, we are forced to settle for toleration of the other. I cannot build a friendship with someone with whose very existence I continue to argue. A cold peace, based upon cordial but distant acceptance of the fact of otherness as a given of life, is not sufficient for the cultivation of friendship. Friendship implies some warmth, generated by love, built upon trust and taking joy in the existence of the other, even in his or her diversity. Thus, interreligious friendship involves us in some theory of the other and in the domain of theology of religions. Certain attitudes block the possibility of friendship, others provide the necessary conditions for it to flourish.

How deeply acceptance of the other, on theological or theoretical grounds, goes will

determine the depth of friendship. Mutual support is readily established once some basic recognition has been given to the other, sufficient for the purposes of common living. Thus, a friendship based on the needs of different faith groups in a community seems readily within reach. It is much more challenging to establish a friendship based on the recognition of the commonality of higher purpose. The higher forms of interreligious friendship therefore require a more far reaching theological foundation - recognition that the spiritual quest and path of the other are not only legitimate, but are in fact similar if not identical to my own.³² Moreover, I have what to gain by exposure to the path of the other. It is only with such recognition that the higher kind of spiritual friendship can be constructed across religions.³³

It is trust that makes friendship more than simply a love given freely to all

The suggestion that friendship is constructed on a resonance of being adds an interesting twist to consideration of theological recognition of the other and its relation to the cultivation of friendship across religions. On the one hand, recognition of such deep existential commonality is a psychological and spiritual capacity and is therefore conditioned by our prior psychological attitudes. There are various ways in which we erect subtle boundaries when it comes to the other. These may be metaphysical, theological, legal, psychological or sociological. Whatever their roots, they inculcate in us some distance, some reserve. This reserve holds us back from being able to fully appreciate a person of another tradition and of resonating with him or her as we might with someone of our own tradition. From this perspective, recognition of deeper spiritual resonance is the fruit of the combined forces of theological appreciation of the other, buildup of trust through collaboration and the cultivation of love through personal relations. Yet, it would seem that recognition of existential resonances, much like

28 The point is particularly striking in the presentation of Buddhist perspectives, but emerges universally across our essays.

29 While for some traditions, the challenges lie in some combination of these two poles, for others we note how problems are linked to one pole rather than the other. All the obstacles Nesbitt mentions are of a historical nature and revert to the concern for maintaining identity in the face of threats emanating from other religions. This is likely the case for Hinduism, as well. However, Rambachan's paper does not address this potential distinction directly. The same may be true for the Buddhist perspective.

30 It is telling that the only two papers that address this concern are the Jewish and Muslim position papers. This, I believe, is expressive of the questions that those two communities are asking, and how present the struggle around issues of theology of religions is for them.

31 This is clearly illustrated in Volf and McAnnally-Linz's presentation of the potential objection to interreligious friendship based on the Augustinian understanding of agreement in all things human and divine as a condition for friendship.

32 Gandhi and Andrews provide wonderful illustration for how advances in mutual recognition of the validity of the other path are a complement to friendship and a condition for its deepening.

33 Of course, the sequence is not always linear in this way. Friendship among devoted practitioners of different religions may take place in advance of theological reflection, which would then be forced to catch up with lived experience. Nevertheless, the issue of theological recognition cannot be fully bracketed from serious interreligious friendship.

falling in love, does not always follow sequentially from considered theological reasoning and careful respect to community boundaries.³⁴ If we are talking about the intuitive capacity to recognize something deep about one's being in relation to the other, there is no *a priori* reason for drawing the lines once it comes to members of another faith tradition.³⁵ At times we might be moved by such resonance against our will, by force of the person, or by virtue of the spiritual reality that overtakes us. Thus, resonance may drive the process of friendship, racing ahead of theological and sociological categories and pointing to the commonality of depth of being, upon which friendship grows.

Tradition-Specific Objections: Profiling Our Religions' Views on Friendship

As we review objections and challenges to interreligious friendship, as portrayed in our collection, an interesting fact emerges. The so called Abrahamic traditions all wrestle with some specific scriptural or traditional prohibition that has the potential of inhibiting interreligious friendship.³⁶ While these may be understood in light of the more general factors discussed above - identity, the view of the other, a painful history - they have a power and a life of their own, by virtue of their appearance in scripture. Thus, the challenges to interreligious friendship are not only the broader concerns spelled out above, but also tradition-specific objections, arising out of key texts and legislations. Accordingly, they require interpretation. All three authors representing the Abrahamic traditions have to some extent attempted to interpret, contain, contextualize or otherwise address these scriptural or authoritative

texts.³⁷ This makes us aware of the fact that in dealing with religious traditions we deal not only with great ideas, but also with the challenges posed by authoritative texts. These continue to impact believers and must therefore be dealt with, if we are to make a case for interreligious friendship that can speak to those for whom these texts are authoritative.

Difference constitutes the greatest challenge to interreligious friendship

That the papers describing the Abrahamic faiths should exhibit a similar feature leads to a broader reflection concerning our project and the breakdown between traditions on the subject of friendship.³⁸ While this may be a consequence of the particular way in which our authors have approached the subject, certain resemblances seem to emerge, suggesting that our religions can be grouped into two. The Abrahamic religions emerge as a family, with the Dharma based traditions - Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism, emerging as a second family. Overall, the subject of interreligious friendship seems to be a far greater challenge, even a problem, for the Abrahamic traditions. Likely, this is a consequence of concerns of identity. Abrahamic faiths have a strong need to affirm their own identity in relation to others in general, and as each of them came into being in relation to their predecessors more specifically. Both Rambachan and Nesbitt point to the fluidity of boundaries and identities in the Hindu and Sikh communities, at least until very recent times. This leads to attitudes of greater receptivity to others and obviously facilitates friendship across religions, to the extent that one "religion" is even meaningful in this discussion.³⁹ The openness of contemporary Buddhist teachers to engagement with other traditions, as described by the Habitots,

34 Returning to our project's primary example of interreligious friendship, that of Gandhi and Andrews, it may be argued that above and beyond the factors of collaboration, recognition and love that bonded these two individuals, their friendship is expressive of the intuitive recognition of deep spiritual and existential resonances, which is precisely why this life-long friendship was the deepest for both friends.

35 Moreover, we do not enjoy the same depth of relationship with all members of our own faith community. This already suggests that more is involved in a religiously based friendship than full accord in all details of the religious life.

36 For Volf and McAnnally-Linz this is the problem of 2John 10. Gianotti struggles with various passages in the Qur'an that speak negatively of friendship (or alliances) with members of other faiths. I wrestle with the implications of various restrictions of the halacha, as well as some biblical antecedents, and whether they mean to or should limit the cultivation of interreligious friendship.

37 Sikhism presents an interesting case, in this respect. Some of the rahits discussed by Nesbitt limit contact between Sikhs and Muslims, or have been understood in this light. Whether the similar phenomenon is a consequence of similar historical circumstances or perhaps of deeper systemic features, stemming from Sikhism's monotheism, is a subject for further reflection. Here the voice of an insider Sikh scholar or authority could be helpful in confronting these Sikh restrictions.

38 In the course of our collective work, I pointed this fact as one of the emerging conclusions of our project to all members of our group, and even "threatened" the Dharmic authors that they would be presented in this light. This conclusion was met with no resistance.

39 This is particularly problematized in Nesbitt's paper, but is relevant also to Rambachan's presentation of Hinduism.

would seem to point to similar fluidity or at least to lesser concern with identitarian issues than what we find in the Abrahamic faiths. Indeed, the concern for identity in these traditions seems to take a whole other direction. For Rambachan, the foundation of friendship is recognition of the metaphysical identity of all, as opposed to constructed group identities.⁴⁰ This seems to also be the teaching of the Gurus, epitomized by Guru Nanak's statement that "There is no Hindu, no Muslim". Where obstacles to friendship have arisen, these seem to be a consequence of particular historical circumstances wherein identity is threatened, rather than consequences of deeper theological impulses.⁴¹

Beyond Obstacles - Living in God, Containing History

Throughout our essays, our scholars make various moves and suggestions that allow them to advance and offer support for the ideals of interreligious friendship, despite concerns that could be raised from within their tradition. Looking at the ensemble of our work, it seems that confronting these challenges takes place along an axis where history and the Divine constitute two poles.⁴² Interreligious relations take place in

the tension between these two poles. The religion where these two poles are most clearly contrasted is Sikhism. Its theological vision is clearly in favor of interreligious friendship; its history contains many moments where friendship is made impossible, leading to revision of practical instructions of inter group relations, making friendship unlikely. In such a clear cut case, it is relatively easy to return to a foundational theological vision and to bracket bad moments in history, as part of the quest for building a better common future. What allows for such a neat distinction is the fact that the fundamental Sikh scripture, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, contains no negative views of others and therefore does not curb the possibilities of friendship.

One the greatest sources of mistrust is missionary activity, that seeks to undermine the identity of members of one religion through conversion to another

The situation is different with regard to the scriptures of other religions. All Abrahamic faiths contain texts that can be marshalled against interreligious friendship. This means that some strategy for addressing these texts is required, if one seeks to construct a positive approach to friendship across religions. Here history emerges as an important tool. Gianotti devotes much attention to the historical context within which "problematic" passages were revealed. Containing these texts within their historical context is the key to their correct application, which is more limited than a global veto on interreligious friendship. In my essay, I point to Meiri's approach to religions, where he refers to religions of old that no longer exist, thus

solutions. This axis could apply to Hinduism's historical relations with other religions. However, Rambachan presents obstacles to friendship in terms of the challenges posed by caste system and contemporary ideologies, rather than the burden of history. His basic presentation of interreligious friendship for Hinduism is that it is relatively problem free, therefore not requiring the same kinds of efforts that other religions must undertake to justify interreligious friendship. Strikingly, then, tensions between theology and history emerge in our collection as features of the four monotheistic faiths, or (recognizing the problematics of the label "monotheistic" and the possible debate around its applicability to Hinduism) the Abrahamic faiths, as well as of Sikhism that has many features in common with them.

40 One does not need to appeal to metaphysics in order to make the point. Volf and McAnnally-Linz counter objections to interreligious friendship based on considerations of identity by pointing out that identities are in the first place never fixed and stable, but rather constructed through relationships and interactions with those who are different from us.

41 Tellingly, it is in the contact with either Islam or Christianity that most of these issues arise, though in the case of Sikhs we do encounter concern also in relation to Hindu identity and the attempts to "own" Sikhism. Rambachan leaves open for future study the impact of hindutva ideology on the possibilities for constructing interreligious friendship. The Habitos' paper makes no mention of either identitarian concerns or of objections or challenges to interreligious friendship from a Buddhist perspective. If this means anything, then it would seem to suggest that the situation with Buddhism is similar to the other Dharmic religions. In terms of fluidity of identities, the fact that the Habitos are comfortable self-identifying as both Buddhists and Christians is itself suggestive of flexibility of boundaries. It also points to deep differences in how Buddhism is constructed as a religion, compared to the other religions under discussion.

42 This axis would obviously not apply to Buddhism, and substituting "the human condition" or "the spiritual life" is only partly helpful. However, as the Habitos have not presented obstacles to the ideals of interreligious friendship from a Buddhist perspective, their contribution cannot be included in a discussion of how to overcome such obstacles. It would seem they recognize neither the problem nor the

containing biblical and rabbinic injunctions within a historical framework that makes them no longer normative for present times.⁴³

True interreligious friendship deepens authenticity and commitment, rather than weakening it

History is used as a strategy in another way as well. Our traditions contain voices that have been suppressed or not become part of the mainstream. Reclaiming those is part of identifying resources for our contemporary theological work. All three Abrahamic papers do so to some degree. The middle ages provide Gianotti with mystical and philosophical resources to offset contemporary trends and exclusive reliance on Qur'anic foundations. Volf and McAnnally-Linz identify "a stream that does not figure prominently in the classical tradition but finds its sources in the Christian scriptures. This stream has been largely neglected in the centuries long reflection of Christians on friendship, including friendship with non-Christians." My own presentation of the Meiri as a resource for tackling contemporary challenges is a similar move, intended to offset contemporary views with the help of an important historical resource. Here it is worth recalling the words of David Burrell, cited by Volf and McAnnally-Linz. It is not simply that by engagement with one tradition we make up what our tradition lacks. Rather, we engage in a dynamic of "triangulation through friendship". "Friendships allow us to interact with our faith commitment to draw out dimensions of our faith response that the shadow side of our tradition may have blocked."

Moving to the other pole of the history-divine axis, we come across fundamental traits of characterizations of God that make friendship inevitable. Accordingly, the closer we are to the reality (not simply the concept) of God, the more universal friendship, including friendship across religions, becomes an inescapable outcome. In my own essay, I presented the thought of Rav Kook as leading us in this direction.⁴⁴ A consideration of the

verses brought by Gianotti in support of friendly relations with members of other faiths similarly reveals an appeal to Gods' nature as oft forgiving and most compassionate.⁴⁵ Rumi's understanding of friendship as a theatre of Divine disclosure or revelation seems to provide an additional foundation for friendship across religions. Volf and McAnnally-Linz's presentation of Jesus' own comportment as a resource for interreligious friendship seems to make a similar argument, grounding such friendship in the character of God himself.⁴⁶ Finally, we note how the divine provides the ground for all forms of friendship in Rambachan's presentation of Hinduism. As he states: "At the heart of the ideal of an all-inclusive friendship is the teaching that the infinite *brahman* exists identically in all beings."

One specific motive that comes up in several of our presentations may be particularly helpful to thinking through difficulties posed by traditions and to encouraging friendship across religions. This is the motive of "Friend of God". The motive recognizes that friendship is not only a feature of human relations, but is also expressive of our relationship with God. The motive exists in some way in all theistic traditions. In some it is more prominent than in others.⁴⁷ Both contributions on the Sikh tradition, Nesbitt and Dhillon, emphasize friendship with God as an index to the importance of friendship in Sikhism. And it figures consciously as part of Volf and McAnnally-Linz's strategy for justifying interreligious friendship. The theme is also present in Hinduism and Islam, though it is absent from our authors' papers.⁴⁸

friendships as a function of prevailing historical conditions, and therefore as something that might be cultivated, once historical conditions are ripe.

45 Sura 60,7.

46 Though the authors make this argument more by way of example and precedent than by appeal to the divine example of Jesus.

47 I would argue that it is not very prominent in Judaism, even though there are sources that do apply it, some of which are brought in my own essay. However, most references to God as friend occur with reference to the collectivity of Israel and rarely with reference to individuals. This may be related to the broader phenomenon, discussed in my paper, wherein friendship is not a central value for Jewish reflection. That having been stated, there are sufficient cases of application of this motive in hassidic literature to recognize commonality across religions.

48 Gianotti does apply the term on his own initiative, in describing his own friends as friends of God, thereby indicating how the category can be harnessed towards interreligious friendship. In the conclusion of his paper he does refer to David Burrell's work on this theme in the thought of al-Ghazali.

43 Volf and McAnnally-Linz do not make this move in their paper. In an earlier project of the Elijah Interfaith Academy, Stephen Sykes did make this move, as a way of containing similarly problematic passages in the gospel and epistles of John. See http://www.elijah-interfaith.org/uploads/media/Hostility_and_Hospitality_in_a_Christian_Perspective.pdf, p. 57.

44 Note also my reference to lack of concrete historical

The argument can be pitched in several ways. One way is to highlight the fact that friendship does not require equality or full symmetry. "If friendship can occur across such great divides, how much more must we recognize its possibility among people of different faiths?"⁴⁹ Another possible way of constructing the argument is to argue for common friendship with God as the glue for interreligious friendship.⁵⁰ As the colloquialism has it, any friend of yours is a friend of mine. So it is with God as well. Any friend of God, my own friend, is also a friend of mine.⁵¹ At the very least, appeal to this concept allows us recognition. If someone is a friend of God, he or she enjoys a relationship with the One we love ourselves. This provides a direct means of recognition and of validation, that cuts through the more laborious reasoning of recognition provided by a theological consideration of another religion.

The single greatest source of concern in relation to interreligious friendship is the need to protect religious authenticity and identity

In terms of the two foci of concern and challenge for interfaith friendship - security of identity and recognition of the other, the notion of "friend of God" certainly provides us with a means of recognition of the other. It might also indirectly assuage concerns for authenticity and identity. The metaphor of a common friend is non threatening, suggesting that friendship and the relational appeal to God are the defining features of the relationship, rather than the more threatening approach to the other in terms of systems, paths and truths.⁵²

49 Thus Volf and McAnnally-Linz.

50 See Burrell's argument, brought by Gianotti, according to which a shared belief in the idea of friendship with God can transform our personal understanding and practice of interreligious friendship.

51 I would have liked to include in my paper on Judaism a history of interpretation of Ps. 119,63, in search of where this verse was understood as opening up to the faithful of other religions. Friendship then would pass through a common recognition, fear (though here not friendship) of God.

52 Obviously, concerns for authenticity and maintenance of identity cannot be dealt with exclusively through either appeal to history or appeal to the Divine. They must be addressed directly through means of ensuring the stability of identity and ascertaining it is not compromised. The present discussion therefore focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of interreligious friendship, rather than the

One final note concerning God as a resource for overcoming difference and challenges to interreligious friendship. While it is clearly predicated on a particular theological understanding, Vento's presentation of the sacramentality of friendship does point to an experience that can be shared without the specifically Christian vocabulary she brings to bear. If God is *experienced* at the heart of a friendship, this would obviate much discussion regarding the permissibility and possibility of friendship across religions. An experience of God at the heart of friendship would seem to validate and provide meaning to a friendship in the most direct way, regardless of historical challenges and theological complexities.

The Benefits of Interreligious Friendship

Friendships happen. They are a function of encounters and opportunities provided by life. It is one thing to accept interreligious friendship; it is another to recommend it and to see in it some kind of ideal. For the authors of our collection, interreligious friendship is something they have experienced and that they consequently consider to be of great value. The efforts that we make to justify interreligious friendship only make sense if we consider its potential benefits. But before spelling out benefits, we ought to listen to the testimony of those traditions that do not feel the need to justify interreligious friendship and that take it for granted, because it is simply the correct approach to and expression of reality. It is striking that neither the Hindu nor the Sikh perspective, presented in our volume, see the need to justify interreligious friendship in terms of the benefits it brings or the good that it achieves. Interreligious friendship is simply the appropriate expression of reality in the most fundamental way. As Blatant Singh states: "The basic principles of Guru Nanak's message are Unity of Godhead and brotherhood/sisterhood of humankind." Interreligious friendship would, accordingly, not be some virtue or value to be practiced. It is the appropriate way of being, once the fundamental metaphysical unity of all is realized. Similar is the representation of all friendship, including interreligious friendship, in Rambachan's presentation of Hinduism: "Friendship, in the highest sense, is the overcoming of alienation and estrangement from others through the recognition of one's own Self, the infinite *brahman*, in the other." Friendship across religions expresses the true

concrete steps that must be taken to maintain it.

state of fundamental existential unity. If one asks why practice interreligious friendship, a question never posed directly by our Sikh or Hindu authors, the answer would have to be either that this is an expression of true reality or at the very least a path to attaining its realization.⁵³

It is also worth noting in this context the description of friendship offered by Emerson, with which Sendor resonates so deeply: “Let it be an alliance of two large, formidable natures, mutually beheld, mutually feared, before yet they recognize the deep identity which, beneath these disparities, unites them.” In Emerson’s view what friendship does is to ultimately reveal a deep existential unity between friends. For Emerson, this unity does not displace or minimize real differences between friends. But friendship’s ultimate ground would seem to be the recognition of deep existential unity, a unity recognized all the more on account of the diversity that it respects and does not seek to obliterate.

Abrahamic traditions do not approach friendship metaphysically but relationally, that is with an eye to its consequences on our relationship with God. The question they pose is therefore what are the benefits of a given relationship and what are the fruits it bears.⁵⁴ The Muslim answer is grounded in the view of friendship as a fellowship of those who are on a common path. Friendship is therefore instrumental to the spiritual process, and interreligious friendship is, suggests Gianotti, similarly helpful to the spiritual path. Gianotti appeals to two notions: test and competition. The purpose and function of inter-religious friendship is to “test” us in what we have been given – i.e., to challenge us to more deeply explore and more fully manifest what *we believe* to be the essential teachings and treasures of *our own* faith. The

second dimension of interreligious friendship is competition. The Qur’anic characterization of such friendships as a pious competition to do good works remains valid for all inter-religious friendships. Jewish and Christian “friends” can piously compete with their Muslim friends in the “race” to do good works and challenge their Muslim counterparts to be true to what God has revealed and entrusted to them, even as the Muslims are called upon to offer a similar service to them.

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interreligious friendship*

Most interestingly, the answer provided from within the Muslim context echoes one answer provided by the Habitos for the Buddhist context. One of the main benefits of interreligious friendship is the deepening of practice. The *sangha*, the community, is required in order to allow the practitioner to sustain and to deepen her practice. By extending the notion of *sangha* to the interreligious community, the Habitos assume that interreligious friendships also serve as instruments for us to deepen our practice and to go deeper in our spiritual path.

By far the most common good that our authors ascribe to interreligious friendship can be captured in terms of the key word: *understanding*.⁵⁵ There are many dimensions to the understanding, to which our authors collectively point. Volf and McAnnally-Linz sum up several dimensions of understanding, in their discussion of the goods of interreligious friendship. Interfaith friendships can give rise to at least three distinct but inter-related goods that intra-faith friendships are less suited to produce.

(1) Interfaith friendships can give us a better, fairer understanding of other faiths through interaction with their concrete instantiations in the

53 This religious view certainly contains within it opening to approaching friendship as an instrument for spiritual realization. I have sought in vain an articulation of such instrumentality by our authors. Either the point was so obvious that it did not require stating, or else acting in accordance with the higher mandate of spiritual reality is so immediate and obvious that it eclipses an instrumental approach to friendship.

54 Our ability to answer this question provides us with a means of justifying interreligious friendship that is different from the most common approach to the subject, that appeals to common teleology as the foundation of interreligious friendship. Rather than asking if we seek to achieve the same goals, we ask what the impact and benefits of the friendship are, regardless of possible discrepancies in the self understanding of the goals and motivations of the friends.

55 It is not superfluous to recall here Rambachan’s description of Gandhi as a seeker, searching out fellow seekers in all traditions. In psychological terms, it is likely that most of those who practice interreligious friendship would describe themselves in similar terms. This quality governs the quest for understanding, transformation and the reality of God that are presented in what follows as the benefits of interreligious friendship. See further Rambachan’s discussion of the relationship of being a seeker and the epistemological humility that manifests as openness to deeper understandings of religious truth.

lives of our friends. Interfaith friendships, that is, can help us avoid prejudice.

(2) Interfaith friendships can lead us to a clearer and enriched understanding of our own faith.

(3) Interfaith friendships can develop our ability to authentically articulate our faith to others.

Thus, interreligious friendship is considered as a means for gaining better understanding of self and other.

Viewed thus, the interreligious friend is as much a teacher as a friend. It is perhaps not superfluous to note how throughout our essays friend and teacher were closely associated, at times even identified. Consider the Buddhist reference to Buddha, the teacher, as a friend. Recall the rabbinic juxtaposition of making a teacher and acquiring a friend. If so, what a friend brings us is above all understanding. It is therefore interesting to consider the examples of contemporary Buddhist interreligious friendships, cited by the Habitos. The common denominator of the various cases they cite, culminating with the impressive evidence of the Dalai Lama's practice of interreligious friendship, is that all those friendships are based on mutual learning and deepening understanding. John Makransky manifests friendship through learning and understanding and it is through friendship, by his own testimony, that he has come to many of his deeper insights. And the Dalai Lama shares with us insight after insight, that he attained through one interreligious relationship after another.

My own presentation of the benefits of interreligious friendship, shared in the first person, suggest a further dimension of benefit through learning - personal growth and transformation. To simply say that interreligious friendship increases understanding of self and other could be mistakenly understood in static terms: increasing the understanding of two self contained and static entities. But in fact, the understanding produced through friendship is dynamic, bringing about transformation and spiritual growth. In my own essay I point to specific novel understandings, ways of being enriched, the fruits of interreligious friendship.⁵⁶ Accordingly, I would argue that interreligious friendship can be transformative in

ways that exceed what friendship with members of one's own faith can bring about.⁵⁷ This may be because the teachings to which we have become accustomed have become stale and require a new light or it may be that indeed some new insight is integrated through the testimony of the other.

By far the most common good that our authors ascribe to interreligious friendship can be captured in terms of the key word: understanding

The last dimension of what interreligious friendship brings us may be considered as closing the circle we opened in presenting the Sikh and Hindu view. I refer to this as "friendship as divine gift." Johann Vento refers to this dimension of friendship as sacramental. We both share the understanding that in friendship more is involved than the encounter between two individuals and that ultimately, friendship is a means of entering into divine presence. God is present at the heart of friendship. Friendship is a way of being in God and interreligious friendship is therefore a means of discovering God in relationships that extend farther afield than our immediate circle or even our comfort zone. To recognize God in the heart of friendship is in some way similar to the Hindu claim concerning discovering the unity of all, at the ground of friendship. But rather than emphasizing the universal truth, recognized in the particular friendship, it approaches this recognition in relational terms. One relationship is transparent to another, the human friend is transparent to the divine friend, and friendship is therefore a gift of God. If friendship is a gift, we need not ask what its benefits are or why it is received. Gifts are in some way self evident, understood on their own terms. To say that interreligious friendship is a gift of God is to recognize God as the source of such friendship, to justify and ground it in His being, and to therefore make all good purposes arising from it secondary to the reality of the gift and its giver.

How to Practice Interreligious Friendship?

I conclude this synthesis of our project by moving from the *what* of interreligious friendship to

⁵⁶ Since authoring this article, I authored another one, titled "The Way of Interreligious Friendship", to be published in a collection edited by Darrol Bryant. That essay is dedicated to the memory of one particular friend, the Jesuit Franz Jozef Van Beeck and seeks to articulate what that specific friendship has brought me in terms of spiritual growth.

⁵⁷ My sense is that all parties to our project would agree with this statement, even if not all of them have been as explicit in stating it. Maria Reis Habito's personal introduction comes close to saying this much.

the *how* of its practice. Having provided justifications from our various traditions for the practice of interreligious friendship, having tackled potential objections and challenges and having spelled out its benefits, we move from theory to practice: *how* should we practice interreligious friendship?

Almost all of us come to this field without prior guidance and with little precedent. As our study has shown, interreligious friendship is mostly a recent phenomenon.⁵⁸ We therefore need to discover how to practice it in the course of our practice. Nevertheless, leaders of religious communities who wish to offer guidance to their constituents must be able to articulate some principles. It seems to me that any attempt to practice interreligious friendship must respect the following principles:

A. Full respect for the religious identity and autonomy of self and other.

B. Maintaining the depth of commitment and practice of the practitioner.

C. Continual assessment of the friendship in terms of the benefits it brings to participants. These should be viewed in light of the purposes of the religion (teleology) and the continuing quest for deepening understanding of self and other.

Different circumstances will lead to varying applications of these meta principles. It seems to me that our project should bring readers, foremost among them the religious leaders for whose benefit this work has been undertaken, from the point at which friendship across religions has to be justified to the point where practical guidelines for its practice need to be drawn. It may be that the drafting of such practical guidelines is the proper work of religious leaders. If so, at this point we must issue an invitation to them to consider how the vision that our project offers can be translated in the circumstances of their community and its life.

Scholars working as part of the Elijah Think Tank have, nevertheless, attempted to formulate what we call a manifesto of interreligious friendship. This manifesto does offer a series of practical recommendations that grow out of our common work. It is offered as the conclusion to our collection of essays. While I believe this document can be very useful to religious communities and leaders, it too amounts to an invitation to others to follow suit and to

seek to implement the core recognition concerning the importance and vitality of interreligious friendship in the various circumstances of their life. We thus conclude our project with an invitation, an invitation to join a vision, to receive its inspiration, to share a practice and to continue reflection concerning the theoretical and practical aspects of what may be one of this generation's novel expressions of the spiritual life - friendship across religions.

*Successful cultivation of friendship
among leaders of our different
religions is the gift that makes all
the efforts involved in the prior
acquisition worthwhile*

I would like to conclude with an insight that grows from the key text that provided the backbone to my presentation of friendship in Jewish sources.⁵⁹ The text I explored discusses “buying” a friend. This text assumes that friendship is not evident. It cannot be taken for granted. One must invest in it, an investment that is captured in terms as extreme as economic purchase. If this is true for everyday friendship, it is even more true for interreligious friendship. If we are willing to extend the teachings of our tradition beyond their original horizons, then the mandate to acquire a friend too must be extended beyond our own tradition. Interreligious friendship requires an enormous investment, in time, in communication, in thought, in sensitivity, in heart and even in prayer and aspiration. Unlike ordinary friendships that we often take for granted, it is a relationship that cannot be taken for granted. It must be maintained and cultivated. If it is important, as our project argues, then it must become a priority investment, a core growth component in our spiritual investment portfolio.

Now, friendship is not a formal relationship. Unlike relations of kin, it is spontaneous and cuts across other social principles of organization. It might therefore be thought that interreligious friendship too should be left to the spontaneity of human circumstances that might allow for chance meetings, informal opportunities for cultivating it. Perhaps many interreligious friendships are indeed formed in this way. However, if we realize the conscious and intentional efforts that go into “acquiring” a friend, then we must also consider

58 The Habitos go so far as to proclaim, as their concluding statement (before their epilogue): “New horizons in world religious history are being forged, as interreligious friendships bear fruit in the lives of individuals and communities of adherents of the different religious traditions of the world.

59 I thank Meir Sender for the inspiration that follows.

how to cultivate those structures that would enhance friendship. It is thus no accident that this project of reflection on friendship across traditions is offered to the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders. This project reveals one of the deeper purposes of this body, even if this purpose has come to light only as a consequence of its operations. This group of religious leaders is valued not only for their potential collaboration in a variety of reflective and practical matters. Even more importantly, it is a community that can collectively practice the virtues and receive the gifts of interreligious friendship. Setting up such an institution is establishing the grounds for abiding relationships. Laboring to keep this group active and to provide it with continuing opportunities for the practice of friendship is thus a very real way of inserting into the interreligious arena the rabbinic command to acquire a friend. Successful acquisition of the friend, in our case -- the successful cultivation of friendship among leaders of our different religions -- is the gift that makes all the efforts involved in the prior acquisition worthwhile.