Summary of Essays on Interreligious Friendship

Stephen Butler Murray

Understanding Jewish Friendship,
Extending Friendship Beyond Judaism
Alon Goshen-Gottstein

Alon Goshen-Gottstein explores friendship in a Jewish context and how Jewish understandings of friendship may be expanded to an interreligious context. Goshen-Gottstein begins by examining important Jewish sources for wisdom concerning friendship. Several lessons become apparent from mining such sources, which are that friendship occupies a fairly low position in the overall scale of rabbinic values, that friendship is limited in its uses because of how it is valued, and the realization that rather than being a value to be celebrated on some level in and of itself, friendship is instrumentalized in favor of governing spiritual values. Contrasting Jewish patterns of thinking with Greek and Christian patterns, Goshen-Gottstein articulates that there are no Jewish tractates devoted to friendship, nor are there extended discussions of friendship and its virtues within the commentarial tradition, nor did any of the systematic tractates on key philosophical issues deal with friendship. He demonstrates that the formative references to friendship seem to have thus limited the scope of how the tradition developed the notion of friendship.

Goshen-Gottstein is mindful to locate friendship as a social fact, inseparable from the social institutions or realities within which friendship is practiced. Within this context, he develops the important concept that friendship is governed by a principle of elasticity, by which he means that different situations call forth and make possible different manifestations of friendship, a notion particularly important when considering interreligious friendship.

He illustrates his claims within the presentation of one key text from Mishna Avot, following the method of classical Jewish learning in tracing the commentarial tradition of key statements. The key context wherein friendship is understood is Torah study, leading to the juxtaposition of teacher and friend. However, the spiritual literature of Judaism goes beyond viewing friendship as an instrument for Torah study, and understands friendship in relation to the divine. Here the basis for a theology of friendship is found, in the close association of the friend and God. From a review of the history of interpretation of this key text, Goshen-Gottstein moves on to present friendship in the thought of Rabbi Kook, where universal friendship and love exemplify an ideal life.

Turning toward interreligious friendships specifically, Goshen-Gottstein is mindful that for most of its history, Judaism has not enjoyed friendly relations with the religious other, meaning that the very concept of interreligious friendship may need to be constructed, rather than being taken for granted or justified through the force of precedent. The distinction between Torah-based friendship and God-based friendship allows for the development of a fuller notion of friendship, extending from the more particular community that shares the value of Torah to the broader community that shares the quest for God. Goshen-Gottstein suggests that the finest teachings on friendship are those that go beyond the Torah centered instrumentality of friendship and make God the focus and the locus of friendship, which he believes makes it possible to extend friendship to friends of another religion. In seeking a model for interreligious friendship that bears the qualities of the spiritual and experiential reality of Rav Kook and the practice of universal friendship that it allows, Goshen-Gottstein points to Abraham Joshua Heschel. At the same time, Goshen-Gottstein is aware that Heschel is a modern, his actions and relationships growing out of his

embeddedness in tradition, but not making appeal to tradition in terms of interreligious friendship

Goshen-Gottstein is mindful that contemporary interreligious relations go beyond adherents to the Abrahamic religions, providing opportunities for forming spiritual friendships with practitioners of religion who cannot relate to theistic notions of God, making a God-centered friendship problematic. He realizes that something fundamental may be lacking in friendships that do not feature God as the ground of their relationship, but does not rule out the possibility that the common ground found between two spiritual friends, one believing God the other not, may be equally deep. Indeed, Goshen-Gottstein maintains that where interreligious relations are more than collective diplomacy is where the heart is engaged, and believes that members of different religions can share the wisdom of the heart

Having established the countours for a Jewish theology of interreligious friendship, Goshen-Gottstein addresses the various challenges, historical and scriptural, that could obstruct the practice of interreligious friendship. He notes the impossibility of cultivating friendship under conditions of persecution, forced conversion, repeated expulsion, abuse and fear that characterized many moments in Jewish life. Considering the situation on the whole, Goshen-Gottstein maintains that Judaism seems to only be ready for the kind of interreligious friendship that is based on practical collaboration, serving the common purposes of daily existence of the community and the individual. Yet, with theoretical reflection and education, he believes it is possible to cultivate interreligious friendships and even the more intimate form of spiritual friendship. Indeed, he holds out hope for a higher form of interreligious friendship, the experience of those individuals who have gone beyond conventional relational paradigms, and says that those persons clear the path for others. The ability to cultivate friendship with members of other traditions can be spiritually transformative and serve as a corrective to weaknesses suffered by the tradition. From a spiritual perspective, argues Goshen-Gottstein, interreligious friendship is not only possible, but is recommended.

Goshen-Gottstein considers legal and practical challenges to interreligious friendship, as well as the complexities of the modern era for the Jewish community. He maintains that Jews are called to walk a path that strikes a balance between the needs of Jewish continuity, survival and faithfulness and universal love, acceptance and friendship

Very Two as Very One:
A Response to Understanding Jewish Friendship
Meir Sendor

Meir Sendor responds to Alon Goshen-Gottstein's paper by fleshing out the implications of the interplay of self and other through a rigorous phenomenological approach, thereby turning some of the obstacles to interreligious friendship discussed by Goshen-Gottstein to some advantage. While Sendor acknowledges that classic Western philosophic analyses of friendship generally assume that what draws individuals together is commonality, which would seem to disadvantage interreligious friendship, he notes a contrasting thread of discourse that acknowledges a counter-principle at the heart of friendship. Indeed, Sendor maintains that this principle may not merely enable the inclusion of interreligious relationships within a broadly defined range of friendship, but even raise the possibility that a close relationship between members of different religious traditions, each committed to their own faith, may facilitate the discovery of the authentic character of friendship itself.

Sendor notes that in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* that a high degree of similarity may lead to competition rather than friendship, and that Aristotle goes on to examine the role of similarity and dissimilarity in friendship. Indeed, Aristotle's famous assertion that friendship is, "one soul abiding in two bodies" raises similarity rhetorically to the level of identity. Sendor goes on to speak of the complexity of the structure of friendship, noting that the close friendship of the scholars Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Shimon bar Lakish was dependent not only on a shared passion for the activity of study, but coupled with the intellectual and emotional delight each took in each other's differing opinions, their otherness.

Sendor goes on to reference Emerson's claim that friendship requires a "rare mean betwixt likeness and unlikeness that piques each with the presence of power and of consent in the other party." It is the irreducible otherness of the friend, who yet freely enters into the trust of abiding friendship, that grants friendship its supreme meaningfulness and joy. Further, authentic friendship honors the self-aware individuation of the parties, and rests upon mature differentiation – a technical psychological

term describing an ideal of healthy relationship in which each person is secure in their independence and thereby able to relate freely to the other as other. The bond between high friends cannot be motivated by neediness and dependence. Finally, Emerson observes that the more mutually differentiated the parties are, the greater the opportunity to discover their most significant identity, which runs deeper than any thematic agreements. He speaks of "identity" in the singular, signaling not merely a set of commonalities, but what must be an existential unity.

In addition to his meditation on Emerson, Sendor references the phenomenological analysis of Maurice Blanchot, who agrees with Levinas that any attempt to know or categorize the other may, in fact, reveal a moment of pure encounter with otherness. Indeed, there is an essential dissymmetry in friendship, prior to reciprocity: each must reach and take responsibility for the other with a whole commitment before there can be reciprocity. Derrida further grapples with the question, "How strange another can the friend be and still be friend," realizing that inner dynamic of friendship that maintains a creative and necessary tension between similarity and dissimilarity.

Sendor articulates that the discovery of an inevitable, necessary, even precious dissimilarity at the heart of all friendship confirms and provides theoretical grounding for the Talmudic exemplum of welcoming otherness and difference within friendship, very two as very one. This, in turn, raises the question of the possibility of extending this model to interreligious friendships. Sendor acknowledges Goshen-Gottstein's analysis concerning the Halakhah's discouragement of interfaith relations, the lack of genuine cross-religious relationships recorded or memorialized in the Jewish tradition, and reluctance to over-idealize a model relationship between a Jew and someone of another religious tradition.

That said, Sendor argues that there is one unusual and exceptional interreligious friendship described in the Talmud and midrashic literature, the close friendship between the scholar and political leader of second century Judea, Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi and the Roman Emperor Antoninus. In this interreligious friendship, there is a robust and healthy give-and-take on a range of personal, communal and intellectual issues. However, Sendor notes, this is a relationship among elites, an exceptional friendship, which makes it not a normative model for everyone. Nonetheless, Sendor says, it leaves open the possibility that certain unique individuals, secure enough in their religious identity, of strong mind and open heart, could embrace such a friendship, in all its complexity, with the assent of the tradition. Authentic friendship welcomes difference and distance, thereby enabling the discovery of the other as other and all the more so as friend, which lays the ground for the possibility of real interreligious friendship.

A Christian Perspective on Interfaith Friendship
Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz

Writing in an ecumenical and theological partnership, Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz address the question of interfaith friendships not merely as Christian theologians discussing a theological issue, but an issue that they acknowledge also has personal, social, and spiritual dimensions. Among the primary questions that they endeavor to address are: Do interfaith friendships put the Christians' faithfulness or theological orthodoxy at risk? Do they offer any goods that distinguish them from friendships with other Christians? Should a Christian try to convert her friends from other traditions to her faith? How deep can a friendship go if the friends do not share a vision of the ultimate end of life?

Volf and McAnnally-Linz are careful to define the friendships that they have in mind in this discussion, requiring commitment of time, extended communication, open communication, which are not restricted to a certain facet of life, and that are marked by affection. That said, the authors acknowledge that much of the Christian tradition has been either explicitly or implicitly skeptical, even hostile, toward friendships between Christians and members of other faiths. They suggest that this skepticism is connected with the legacy of the classical philosophical tradition's accounts of friendship, and in this regard explore the works of Aristotle and Cicero, before moving on to Aelred of Rievaulx's dialogue *On Spiritual Friendship*, an example of the centrality of friendship in the spiritual life and its importance for the monastic vocation, as well as the impact of classical accounts of friendship on Christian thought. Shifting their focus to Augustine, who rejects friendship between Christian and non-Christians, and even between non-Christians themselves, the authors claim Augustine is representative of a trajectory in Christian thought that is, explicitly or implicitly, either hostile to,

suspicious of, or dismissive of friendships between Christians and non-Christians.

The authors summarize a number of *prima facie* cases within Christianity against supporting interfaith friendships, including the problems of teleology, difference, evangelism and frank speech, 2 John 10-11, and identity. Noting that these potential objections to interfaith friendship focus on the classical tradition and the Christian reflection that it influenced, the authors then point out that there is another stream of sources in the Christian scriptures which may nourish Christian understandings of friendship. Three tributaries to that stream are important: namely that Abraham is described in James 2:23 as a friend of God (whereby equality is not a necessary condition of friendship), that Jesus is called a friend of publicans and sinners (whereby friendship may exist among those who differ in virtue and whose lives are not oriented toward the same goal), and that Jesus said in John 15:13 that the greatest love is to give one's life for friends, which was a love that Jesus himself showed to all people.

Keeping these three points in mind, the authors then speak to the goods that may come from interfaith friendship, specifically those goods that intra-faith friendships are less suited to produce. Volf and McAnnally-Linz maintain that interfaith friendships can give us a better, fairer understanding of other faiths through interaction with their concrete instantiations in the lives of our friends, thereby helping to avoid the injustice of prejudice; can lead to a clearer and enriched understanding of our own faith; and can develop our ability to authentically articulate our faith to others. These goods are made manifest by the authors through historical instances of interfaith friendships, such as the relationship established between Mohandas Gandhi and Charles Freer Andrews.

Noting that their reflections on interfaith friendships have practical consequences, the authors name four such consequences: (1) Interfaith friendships must not ignore the friends' faiths or flatten out the differences between them if they are to yield their rich goods; (2) Christian education should emphasize personal contact with members of other faiths and intentionally create spaces for the sort of informal interaction that can foster friendships; (3) Christian should welcome both shared projects with people of other faiths aimed at provisional goals and the friendships that are likely to grow out of such projects; and (4) the cultivation of interfaith friendships must not be a mere tactic in evangelization.

The Sacramentality of Inter-Religious Friendship
Johann M. Vento

Johann M. Vento offers a response to Miroslav Volf's and Ryan McAnnally-Linz's treatment of inter-religious friendship in Christian perspective, highlighting the concept of sacramentality as another resource within the Christian tradition beyond the biblical and philosophical focus of the previous essay. Vento affirms that deep, intimate, spiritual inter-religious friendships are sacramental: experiences of God's grace which transform, heal, and nurture those in the path of holiness. After defining sacrament and sacramentality, she highlights the medieval theology of spiritual friendship in Aalred of Rievaulx and the contemporary sacramental theology of Bernard Cooke, with his use of friendship as a primary metaphor for sacrament.

In the Christian tradition, sacraments are understood both as specific liturgical celebrations which are understood by the Church as being means of grace, as well as the more general concept of sacramentality, which describes the capacity of all created material reality to mediate God's grace. This grace is understood to be God's gift of Self to creation through a relationality mediated by the Christian God's Trinitarian character as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, relating to the world through creation, redemption, and ongoing sanctification. Broadly understood, the sacraments as liturgical ritual celebrations draw Christians into the life of the Trinity. However, in the Roman Catholic tradition specifically, there are four levels of sacramentality: creation, incarnation, the church, and liturgical celebrations. The principle of sacramentality highlights the embodiedness of the spiritual life, affirming that human beings live in a spiritual life, experiencing the presence and self-gift of God, only by means of the mediation of material reality. That said, certain strands of Christianity, especially those nurtured by monastic culture and the spiritualities of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Ignatius of Loyola, have emphasized "finding God in all things," a notion that other Christian traditions refute by emphasizing the limitations and tendencies toward sinfulness of the world and human culture.

Vento sees parallels between Volf and McAnnally-Linz's concerns that some Christians may discourage inter-religious friendship for fear that it might dilute or endanger Christian faith with Aalred of Rievaulx's defense of friendship against a backdrop of monastic norms that discouraged "particular friendships" as dangerous to the spiritual

life, detracting from the love of God. Aalred countered that friendship is essential to spiritual life, for it is through friendship that one might experience love of God, and thereby, friendship has a sacramental character by which spiritual friends experience grace through the presence of Christ. Aalred goes on to claim that the experience of spiritual friendship is a foretaste of the complete and perfect experience of love and joy that awaits the Christian in eternal life, for through the love of spiritual friendship, one experiences the love and presence of God in the present. In fact, there is a circular relationship among love of friend and love of God whereby the spiritual friendship becomes a vehicle for God's communication of Self to humanity. With a nod to McAnnally-Linz and Volf, Vento confirms that for Aalred, Christ was the third person in a spiritual friendship. Noting that Aalred was writing from the context of a Christian monastery in the 12th century, Vento nonetheless believes that Aalred's reflections on spiritual friendship may be a rich resource from the Christian tradition for constructing a contemporary Christian theology of inter-religious friendship as sacrament. She does not believe that the sacramental experience of friendship is diminished in an inter-religious friendship if the one who is not a Christian understands this friendship and its relation to the divine differently.

Vento then turns to the contemporary Roman Catholic theologian Bernard Cooke, who develops his sacramental theology using friendship as the centerpiece of his reflection, focusing untraditionally at first not on baptism and Eucharist, but on the sacrament of marriage. Cooke speaks of the sacramental quality of human friendship, which due to its deeply personal nature has a privileged status as a foundational and indispensible experience of God. As human life itself is created in the image and likeness of God, human friendship teaches us to trust, which amidst the brokenness of the world opens avenues once again to trusting God. Friendship nurtures our personal growth in maturity, responsibility, and faith, allows us to create human communities which in turn allow humans to more fully understand God's relationality to humanity. Cooke goes so far as to claim that friendship does not serve merely as a metaphor for God's love for humanity, but that humans and their relationships are a "word" that is constantly being created by God by which God is made present to humanity, revealing divine self-hood through the sacramentality of our human experience with one another, revealing our humanity while revealing God.

At the close of her response, Vento draws together these insights from sacramental theology and the sacramentality of friendship together with key ideas about the nature of inter-religious friendship. Understanding that inter-religious friendship is a very specific form of friendship characterized by sharing of faith, which means sharing in each other's liturgy and rituals, entering into deep conversations about the reality of each other's faith and practice with openness and trust, the foundation of inter-religious friendships is mutual participation in an intentional spiritual path, keeping the divine life ever in focus. Such sacramental friendships, mysterious and profound, are characterized by challenge, work, personal growth, enlivening faith, sweetness, joy, and an ever-deepening experience of God explicitly felt and understood as such. By thinking of such inter-religious friendships as sacramental, it is possible to shift those boundaries and alienating differences toward becoming sites of bonding, love, and trust. Vento argues that inter-religious friendships are, for the participants themselves and potentially for their faith communities, powerful sacramental signs and transformative experiences of God, who transcend all of our boundaries and heals all forms of alienation. Indeed, in the body of inter-religious friendship, a word of God may be experienced in a unique and profound way.

Toward a Muslim Theology of Inter-Religious Friendship
Timothy J. Gianotti

Timothy J. Gianotti attempts to formulate a faithful and intellectually honest Muslim framework for building friendships between individuals of different faith traditions, beginning with the Qur'ānically-identified traditions of Judaism and Christianity and expanding beyond them to include other faith traditions, a topic that gives rise to controversy and strong opposition within the Muslim community.

After giving two accounts of personal experiences of inter-religious friendship, Gianotti explores the understanding of friendship within the Qur'ānic and prophetic foundations, specifically seeing friendship as "brotherhood" or fellowship. In this regard, Gianotti explains that the bond of belief, containing a shared sense of ultimate concern or ultimate purpose, teleology, is Qur'ānically understood to be the most meaningful foundation of friendship. This concept of brotherly or sisterly

friendship does not always mean easy agreement, for love, mutual concern, and truthfulness require mutual interrogation and challenge. Central to this discussion is that belief factors centrally in the traditional Islamic formulation of friendship.

Given this, Gianotti explores the possibility of a friendship that involves sincerity, truthfulness, close companionship, love, and support but lacks a unity of belief or religious confession. Riffing on the Qur'ānic admission in 5:48 attesting to the fact that, just as Muhammad was sent a scripture or "book in truth" that confirms and guards the earlier books sent to humankind, so too did God give a religious code and way of life to each community before. The religious diversity of the human family is thus something divinely ordained in order that God might "test" each community in the light of what God has given each community.

Gianotti argues that the Qur'ān speaks positively of the foundational scriptures and fundamental characters of its sister, Abrahamic faiths, and yet it also seems, at times, to rebuke some Christians and Jews for turning away from the true teachings of their own faith traditions, for "selling the signs of God" for a miserable gain in the world, against which the Qur'ān warns. (5:44) These unfaithful, "sold-out" Jews and Christians seem to be the ones targeted for harsh rebuke here, the ones who are said to treat Muhammad's message with mockery, "insolence and defiance" (5:68). When one takes the entire context into account, then, these seem to be the ones who are to be avoided as guardians/allies. As for the faithful Jews and Christians, who are grouped with the believers, there seems to be no Qur'ānic prohibition preventing the Muslims from befriending them and collaborating with them. Thus, the prohibition of building inter-religious alliances with Jews and Christians cannot be taken as a sweeping or general prohibition; rather, it clearly pertains to those Jews and Christians who are unfaithful to their own traditions and who, in addition (possibly as a result), ridicule, mock, and oppose the religion of Islam. Such are the ones who receive rebuke here and elsewhere: not for their religious uniqueness but rather for their infidelity to the unique way of life and religious law they were given. The Qur'ānic phrase, "People of the Book," can therefore be seen primarily as a compound term of relation rather than of contrast.

Gianotti goes further than this, arguing that while there is not exactly a Divine call to go out and aggressively befriend the peoples of the religions of the world, the Qur'ān does clearly make a case for building reverent and just relationships with people of good will from other faith communities. The verb, "relating reverently" or "treating with reverence" suggests more than getting along; it points to a relationship of the utmost respect, a relationship conceived as an extension of one's highest religious principles. Gianotti asks, "Might, then, the interreligious "friend" be my "brother" or "sister"?: If so, then loving for my brother or sister what I love for myself would mean wanting my interreligious friend to dig deeply into her own faith and revelation so that she may have the joyous opportunity to discover the treasures God's mercy and wisdom and generosity have hidden there, even as I accept her challenge for me to do the same. The interreligious friendship then comes as a call to be more authentically religious rather than less.

Exploring if this argument adheres as well to those whose religious identity is not within the Abrahamic faiths, Gianotti maintains that if we agree that the Qur'ānically-described 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 – then it seems entirely possible for this purpose to be fulfilled as readily within Muslim-Buddhist or Muslim-Hindu friendships as it is within Muslim-Jewish and Muslim-Christian friendships. More, the Qur'ānic characterization of such friendships as a pious competition to do good works remains valid for all inter-religious friendships, especially between traditions that share a transcendent teleology and agree upon the ethical principles of universal compassion and justice. While political and cultural obstacles may remain, this theoretical or theological exploration of the Qur'ān and Prophetic traditions finds no reason why such friendships cannot or should not be allowed to form and flourish.

However, there are significant obstacles to inter-religious friendships, which Gianotti names as a xenophobia that springs from historical and cultural factors which might outweigh or overshadow theological considerations: colonization, occupation, and political, economic, and cultural domination by western, nominally Christian nations. Because of such factors, many Muslims have sought guidance from religious leaders and activists within the more traditionalist realm of Islamic political thought, leaders such as Ayatullah Khomeini among the 12er Shī'ah community and Sayyid Qutb among the ranks of Sunni Salafists and other traditionalists.

Their rejection of western hegemony and reassertion of a somewhat puritanical Muslim identity has tremendous appeal in many parts of the traditionally Muslim world, where the West, with its inescapable modernizing, secularizing, and globalizing influences, is viewed with anger and tremendous suspicion. This, of course, affects Muslim relations with Christians and Jews and Hindus and other religious communities in their midst, communities that are suspected of harboring sympathies with the west or, worse, to have "sold out" to western, secularist ideals. These cultural and political factors thus make the question of inter-religious friendship a complex and controversial one in the contemporary world.

Gianotti emphasizes the importance of a sense of shared teleology, even if that supreme *telos* is understood to be an ineffable, transcendent truth or good, something eternally beyond (*akbar*) all of us and yet intimately and subtly woven into the very fabric of our being and identity as religious women and men. More than any other factor, it is that shared sense of transcendence which enables inter-religious friendship to exist and makes such friendships vital for spurring us on to seek the next horizon of awakening.

"Love Speaking to Love":
Friendship Across Religious Traditions
Anantanand Rambachan

Anantanand Rambachan writes that one encounters another tradition most meaningfully through its embodiment in persons who express that faith in their way of life and the impact is inevitably profound. In the vision of the Bhagavadgita, one who has attained the ideal of friendship transcends the dualism of friend and enemy and sees all beings with the vision of friendship. Such a person is free from hostile attitudes towards others and is described as "the same with reference to an enemy and friend, and in honor and disgrace." (Bhagavadgita 12:18). The fulfillment of friendship in the Hindu tradition is the overcoming of the division of the world into friends and enemies, those who are loved and those who are hated and despised. At the heart of the ideal of an all-inclusive friendship is the teaching that the infinite *brahman* exists identically in all beings. Since the infinite is present in each being as the warp and woof of selfhood, to see the infinite in another is to see oneself in another. 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.

Attaining this ideal of friendship is undoubtedly challenging. The principal obstacle, from the perspective of the Hindu tradition, is Hindus non-recognition of the culturally and socially constructed nature of the many identities that they profess and their tendency to regard these as absolute and unchanging. Such identities may be constructed on the basis of race, ethnicity, culture and, in the case of many Hindus, caste. Such identities are then opposed to other similarly constructed but different identities that are regarded as inferior. Such ways of seeing obscure the fundamental and unconstructed identity that all human beings share – the unity of self in the infinite.

Friendship describes the character of the relationship that we establish with others when our understanding is centered on life's unity and the indivisibility of the infinite. Rambachan turns to the 16th century poet-saint, Tulasidasa and his version of the Ramayana. In the fourth chapter (Kishkindhakanda) of his text, Tulasidasa characterizes friendship as having a fourfold character and Rambachan notes each one in turn. The first, according to Tulasidasa is a shared identity expressing in compassion or concern for the other. Second, according to Tulasidasa, 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. He illustrates his understanding of the meaning of trust in friendship by explaining that 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. For Tulasidasa, therefore, friendship signifies a relationship infused with compassion, ethical obligations, trust and generosity.

Rambachan delves deeply into the relationship of Gandhi and C.F. Andrews as a means of exemplifying the promises and challenges and interreligious friendships. There are several

lessons that Rambachan mines from this particular interreligious friendship which may be generalized. In the case of friendship across religious traditions, common doctrine and ritual may not be sources for a shared identity that enable the flourishing of identification with others. Gandhi and Andrews discovered their common humanity and shared identity by recognizing in one another the earnest seeker and the servant of the poor. This found expression in a profound care for each other. Second, interreligious friendships do not require that we dispose of our deepest values and the theological commitments that serve as our norms for decision-making. The growth and maturity of an interreligious friendship into one in which each enjoys the liberty to critically question and disagree with the other is powerfully exemplified in the Gandhi-Andrews relationship. Third, mutual trust is essential. The face of our friend is always before us and we learn to speak the same in absence as in presence. When trust is not established, public criticism of another tradition will be heard as demonization. Fourth, within the dimension of generosity, interreligious friendships cannot grow and flourish if one thinks of oneself as having everything to give and nothing to receive.

This said, there are certain risks of interreligious friendships which Rambachan highlights. First, there is a real fear that deep friendships across traditions will diminish one's commitment and faithfulness to one's own. Second, interreligious friendships will not germinate and flourish in soil saturated with mistrust about mutual intentions, particularly with regard to the issue of conversion. Third, the Hindu tradition recognizes that religious boundaries are porous and fluid, and this porous quality tends to make interreligious friendships less problematic. There is no persistent and widespread negativization of the fact of religious diversity and no systematic effort at homogenization. Hindus tend, on the whole, to see religious diversity as naturally reflecting the diversity of human nature and experience, whereas caste identity acts as a barrier.

Rambachan concludes the essay by noting that friendship, in the Hindu worldview, is the ideal towards which we must aspire in all relationships. A person who realizes the ideal of friendship overcomes the dualism of friend and enemy and sees all beings with the vision of friendship. Gandhi reached for this ideal in his relationships even with those against whom he struggled. Interreligious friendship is a particular expression of this universal ideal of friendship between human beings. It is made possible by the universal ideal of friendship that enables us, in the first instance, to reach out to human beings across constructed boundaries. As a particular relationship, it has its own potential and challenges arising, in part, from differences in doctrine and ritual.

Friendship Across Traditions:
Buddhist Perspectives
Maria Reis Habito, with Ruben L.F. Habito

Maria Reis Habito and Ruben L.F. Habito argue that while spiritual friendship within one's own religious community is of the utmost importance in deepening one's understanding of the ultimate purpose of life and putting that understanding into practice, friendship outside of one's tradition may serve more powerfully in this regard by shedding light on the understanding of oneself and one's own religious tradition, as it does on one's understanding of the Religious Other. Starting with the assertion that friendship with the Religious Other starts from an encounter, Habito posits that friendship across traditions, in order to be deeply transformative, requires a grasp of or feeling, to some extent, for the liturgical language of the other. Attempting to become more familiar with the language of the Religious Other is a sign of the depth of engagement one is willing to undertake for the sake of friendship across traditions. Further, she develops the idea that spiritual friendship is of utmost importance in Buddhism, in contrast to the idea of Buddhism as a tradition which promotes monasticism and familial renunciation. The paper focuses on the Sanskrit expression for good friendship, translated as "spiritual friendship" by Subhuti: *kalyāṇa mitratā*. In the *Metta Sutta*, this is exemplified in the attitude of a mother who would risk her life to protect her only child, and it is the attitude that a friend is to cultivate towards her friend and towards all sentient beings. The expression "spiritual friendship" distinguishes it from all other sorts of friendships by highlighting the basis and essence of this friendship as a shared spiritual aspiration, path and experience. Further, the Buddha explains that he, the Buddha himself is *the* Good Friend. Habito affirms that relying on the Buddha as a spiritual friend and teacher *per se* is the whole of the spiritual life, but advances this concept further by highlighting the importance of spiritual friendship among equals. Having spiritual companions on the path is foundational teaching

that transcends the monastic-lay divide. Spiritual friendship is not a first stage that is left behind when the next stage is arrived at, but the continuous condition which makes progression on the path possible.

While one task of this paper is to examine the notion of friendship in Buddhism, the question of course is whether the lessons learned about friendship between practitioners of the same tradition can be applied to friendship with adherents of others traditions. Habito and Habito argue that a spiritual friend from outside of the tradition can help and inspire us to lead a more authentic and ethical life, to deepen our understanding on spiritual matters, to bring energy and determination to our practice, and to develop wisdom ---the five conditions to reach spiritual maturity mentioned in the *Meghiya Sutta*. This is just as much and perhaps more so than a friend from within the same (Buddhist) tradition, because mutual rapport and spiritual friendship with non-Buddhists who are of admirable character and who exhibit exemplary spiritual qualities may inspire and challenge a Buddhist all the more to live in an authentic way as befitting one's own (Buddhist) tradition that professes to be a path of awakening grounded in wisdom and compassion. Such admirable persons, with whom a Buddhist may be privileged to enter into bonds of friendship, may in an extended sense be considered as members of that person's Sangha, though they themselves may not identify as Buddhist in the formal sense, as they belong to the wider community of support that enables a practitioner to deepen in the Buddhist path.

Habito and Habito are vigilant of the problem that exists with viewing the Other as someone in a still less mature stage of development, as it manifests a condescending attitude vis-à-vis the Religious Other, rather than regarding the latter as someone from whom one can learn and whose friendship can be a help on one's own path of awakening. This kind of attitude, needless to say, creates the unwarranted illusion of spiritual superiority, one that would preclude spiritual friendship with the other as a mutual learning process. Citing early Buddhist and Mahayana scriptural or commentarial texts upholding spiritual friendship as a vital aspect on the path of awakening, Habito and Habito then turn to the living testimony of contemporary practitioners and teachers for examples of interreligious friendship that forge new horizons for those on the Buddhist path.

Interfaith Friendship: Insights from the Sikh Tradition
Eleanor Nesbitt

For the purposes of Eleanor Nesbitt's paper, 'friendship' encompasses a spectrum of relationship that includes deep, long-standing companionship as well as encounters and exchanges in which the participants sense a resonance in their insights and outlook. Her consideration of Sikhism and inter-religious friendship examines some distinctive features of the Sikh experience: the majority Punjabi ethnicity of Sikhs, the relatively short history of Sikhism (the first guru was born in 1469 C.E.) and accompanying less extensive literature than other religious traditions.

Nesbitt elucidates the Sikh understanding of friendship and its purpose, suggesting that "friendship" is sometimes subsumed by, transformed into (and needs to be understood within) the category of family – of kinship. This social reality accords too with some of the scriptural imagery for the relationship between the individual and the Divine (as, *inter alia*, father and mother). Among other analogies for the devotee in relation to the Divine are the lover longing for the beloved, and the devotee as disciple (*sikh*) to the Guru. Importantly, too, God is repeatedly invoked as friend.

At the heart of Sikh life is the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture. Nesbitt argues that the Gurus' insights unquestionably support friendships between humans of whatever community, although in practice in the Punjabi cultural matrix of Sikh tradition, social divides such as castes are more problematic to friendship than religious faith or identification. Sikhs assume that religions guide their adherents to the same point - i.e. union with the divine, via moral life and divine grace. 'He is my friend, my dear friend, who imparts to me the knowledge of God'. Sikhs have no concept for or strategy of forging friendships instrumentally with the intention of winning converts.

In terms of the Gurus' teaching, humans are either *gurmukh* (facing towards the Guru) or *manmukh* (egoists, preoccupied with their own whims). What is crucial is the direction in which, metaphorically, one is looking. For friendship to be spiritually supportive the orientation of all concerned must be Guru-ward and so God-ward. Such persons will live lives of *seva* (selfless service) and *daya* (compassion). Another relationship that is central to Sikh tradition is that of disciple (*sikh*) and teacher (*guru*), with the etymology of *guru* frequently being

explained in devotional literature as 'remover of darkness', even though its root meaning in Sanskrit is 'weighty' (so cognate with English 'grave' and 'gravity').

In addition to the many references to God as one's friend (see above), human relationship with God is also evoked repeatedly in the Guru Granth Sahib by images of lover and beloved. *Bhakti* (devotion) is at the heart of the Guru Granth Sahib and of the observant Sikh's existence. As moving expressions of this devotion, *biraha* and *vairag* (both meaning the yearning of separation from one's beloved) pervade the scripture. In exploring the Sikh context for inter-religious friendship it is noteworthy too that Sikh history affords examples of categorising some people as inappropriate for the social interactions that enable friendship. It has been surmised by a non-Sikh scholar that the *rahit* attributed to Guru Gobind Singh aimed to reduce contact between his Khalsa and Muslims. (This could, in this scholar's view, have been a rationale for the *rahit*'s ban on using tobacco and eating halal meat, as well as its prohibition of sexual relations with Muslim women.).

Indic society, and its expressions of religious devotion, are intrinsically fluid, whether one attempts to distinguish 'religion' from 'culture' or attempts to define 'Hindu' and 'Sikh' in mutually exclusive ways. Focus on 'inter-religious' must not be allowed to obscure just how problematic it is to impose uncritically on South Asian society the western concept of religion, for which there is no one-to-one equivalent in Indic languages. Indeed, contemporary critical scholarship discloses the part played by colonial administration and Western discourse in hardening boundaries in Indian society and applying to its various communities the designation 'religion' replete with understandings that developed in the context of European Christendom and Enlightenment.

One's approach to debates on the evolution and definition of 'religions' in Punjab clearly shapes one's understanding of what 'inter-religious' means, and so what constitutes 'inter-religious friendship', as this concept presupposes firm boundary drawing of the sort associated with the *tat khalsa* and its twenty-first century heirs. In this regard words attributed to Guru Nanak can bear divergent interpretations. Particularly well-known is his dictum *na koi hindu na musalman* (there is no Hindu, no Muslim), a statement attributed to Guru Nanak as he returned a three-day-long mystical experience of being in God's presence at the outset of his ministry. Whether these words are interpreted as meaning that in Nanak's view no-one was a sincere follower of his/her faith, or whether he was dismissing religious labels and identities as unimportant, or indeed suggesting the ultimate indistinguishability of these two man-made categories, he certainly proclaimed repeatedly the insight that integrity (rather than conspicuous religious observance) was the nub of spirituality. He emphasised the irrelevance of religiosity and religious labels to attaining *mukti* (*moksha*, liberation from the cycle of rebirth). On the basis of Guru Nanak's famous pronouncement, the unimportance of religious labels and divisions to forging friendship appears unquestionable.

Nesbitt provides several historical cases of Sikh friendship with non-Sikhs, but also explores the main obstacles to friendship: inter-communal bloodshed and trust issues due to history and politics. Nesbitt argues that within the Sikh community the issue of inter-religious friendship highlights the dynamic tension between, on the one hand, the theological universality expressed in the Guru Granth Sahib together with its emphasis on a loving relationship between the Divine and the devotee and, on the other hand, Sikh responses to social and political developments, from the Gurus' times to the present. Another concern is the gender imbalance in what Nesbitt has reported and discussed: all the human Gurus and all the other poets whose work is included in the Guru Granth Sahib were men. While some women played significant historical roles, Sikh women authors only began to emerge in the twentieth century. All of the instances that Nesbitt cites of friendship between Sikh and non-Sikh were friendships between men.

Sikh Perspective on Friendship: Inside View
Balwant Singh Dhillon

Balwant Singh Dhillon argues that Sikh concepts of inter-religious friendships are deeply rooted in the religious and historical experiences of Sikh Gurus, noting that Sikh relations with others has been marked by amity, goodwill, and friendship.

Exploring Punjab as the land wherein Sikhism was born and flourished, Dhillon emphasizes the stunning range of nationalities, cultures, and ethnicities that have come into direct contact with one another due to trade, commerce, and war, contributing to a rich regional cultural identity for what otherwise might be characterized as an agricultural, village-based landscape.

Although Punjab historically has been a meeting ground for different cultures, the dominant religions of its society, Hindus and Muslims, have practiced a religiously exclusivist outlook toward one another, leading to segregation both inter-religiously and due to the caste system. This analysis leads one to realize that the social and religious climate of Punjab has not been accommodating to inter-religious friendships.

Guru Nanak observed that the ennobling aspect of religion had been suppressed by the cultural boundaries of caste, creed, race, and ritual, and thus based his mission on the perspective that irrespective of religious affiliations, all are equals. With this core belief, Guru Nanak met with a variety of religious leaders, articulating the perennial spring of spirituality that is at the core of every religion, promoting mutual trust and harmony as the essential, concrete steps necessary for forging bonds of friendship.

The basic principles of Guru Nanak's message are the unity of the Godhead and the brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind, the two principles which form the bedrock of Sikh perspective on friendship. Teaching the Oneness of God who is transcendental as well as immanent, creator as well as prevalent in creation, Guru Nanak and the Sikh gurus who followed him articulated a God free from sectarian affiliations. The Sikh concept of God does not belong to any particular race, community, or gender, but is the common parent of all human beings, and thus no one religion can lay exclusive claim over the revelation of God. Sikhism believes that all paths lead to the same supreme being, and that any attempt to claim or own custodianship of God's revelation leads to discord. This Sikh idea of unity of divine being accepts the revelation of God in other religious traditions as well, believing that God has revealed itself in history in order to vindicate the cause of righteousness. Sikhism accepts the plurality of religions, which is an important ingredient in their approach to others in a friendly and respectful manner. The names attributed to God in Sikhism indicates that the God of Sikhism is free from fear and enmity, a god of justice and righteousness.

Examination of important teachings among Sikh gurus shows the high value placed on friendship. Relationships based on friendship are no less significant than kinship, an inseparable, long lasting and affectionate bond which involves sacrifice of one's own interests, characterized by truthful living. The ethical mandate of Sikhism regarding friendship is that it is universal in spirit and humanitarian in its outlook, transcending communal boundaries on the religious level and aiming at promotion of brotherhood, equality, and solidarity on the social level. True universalism is the prerequisite for entering into friendship with others.

Dhillon explains that the institutional characteristics of Sikhism, the *Sangat* (congregation), Gurdwara (religious center) and *Langar* (community kitchen), are where Sikh values of equality, brotherhood, selfless service, and welfare toward others are not merely a dogma, but find practical manifestation in daily life. Indeed, a person of any faith can join the Sikh congregation without inhibition, may enter at Gurdwara, may partake of food in the community kitchen without any distinctions based upon class, creed, caste, gender, or race. For a Sikh, love of human beings is equal to love of God, an essential value for cultivating friendship with religious others. As Sikhs believe that all humankind are the offspring of the same singular supreme being, the creator of all, all are equal. Dhillon points out that the Sikh scripture offers a living model of interfaith understanding and co-existence, for alongside the hymns of the Sikh gurus, the writings of the Hindu Bhagats and Muslim Sufis form an integral part of Sikh scripture, embodying a sense of catholicity, tolerance, and peaceful co-existence. This was practiced by the Sikh gurus, who were highly critical of discrimination against other people on religious grounds, wanting to preserve the multi-religious and multicultural character of Indian society, strongly protecting the principle of freedom of worship.

Dhillon presents a remarkable 500 year history of Sikh interaction with people of other faiths, wherein Sikhs have played the role of peace makers and humanitarians. He attributes this history to the Sikh mission to eradicate evil, to the extent that Sikhs may take up arms in self defense, commissioned to act against the degeneration of social order. This capacity for armed self-protection, however, has produced some societal confusion and pressure put upon Sikhs, historical occasions which have put serious constraints on interreligious friendship. Further, within the communities of Sikhs, there have been occasions where certain schismatic and heterodox groups have led to rupture due to endangered interactions with Muslims around concerns of dietary and sexual morays.

Characterizing Sikhs as defenders of the downtrodden and deprived, Dhillon argues that Sikhs are open minded, tolerant, and liberal in their outlook toward other religions, with a low level of formality and superstition in their worship. The Sikh gurus and the spiritual leaders who followed them have left a rich legacy of friendship with non-Sikhs. He declares that Sikhs have inherited a rich legacy for accommodation of the other, irrespective of social, religious, and political differences. In order to enter into a long-lasting friendship, one must respect the sensitivity of others, and thus interfaith friendship can play a very useful role in overcoming age-old religious prejudices, paving a way toward mutual trust and cooperation.