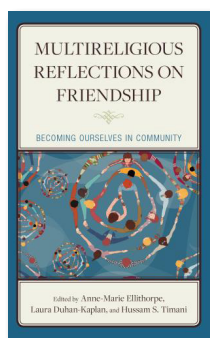


## BOOK REVIEW

***Multireligious Reflections on Friendship: Becoming Ourselves in Community.*** Edited by Anne-Marie Ellithorpe, Laura Duhan-Kaplan, and Hussam S. Timani. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2023. 239 pages. ISBN 978-1-66691-735-2. (hardback) \$105; (eBook) \$45.



Friendship is a great topic for multifaith reflection. Many people first begin thinking about interreligious issues when they encounter someone from another faith community. The editors of *Multireligious Reflections on Friendship* have gathered widely varied scholarly perspectives. Some faith communities are not represented, of course, as is inevitable in any book. We read reflections from many perspectives but none from Bahá'ís, Brahma Kumaris, Jains, Latter-day Saints, Sikhs, or Unitarian Universalists, to name a few. Notwithstanding, the editors have rounded up more than the usual suspects: many contributors are Canadian, two are doctoral candidates, one is a US Army chaplain.

Some writers dash across the centuries, offering a dry sentence or two in passing about myriad philosophers and theologians of their tradition, but others immediately grab our attention. Raymond C. Aldred and Allen G. Jorgenson open the book with a conversation between the two of them, one a Cree and the other a Paleface. They suggest that we might all learn something from indigenous understandings of treaty-making: treaties, alliances, families, and friendships need to be intentionally renewed at regular intervals. The chaplain, Adam Tietje, begins his exploration of how friends can help each other recover from trauma by stating, “War is hell. Coming home is hell, too” (173).

Several contributors tell us what they have learned from thinkers outside their own tradition. John M. Thompson suggests that Buddhism might help the rest of us extend friendship toward all living things. Jeffrey D. Long reflects on what Hindu philosophers, the Canadian religious scholar Lori G.

Beaman, and the Lebanese-born French author Amin Maalouf, can teach us about interreligious relationships: friendship is built on unconditional acceptance, friendship requires equality, and faith (or doubt) is an important part of our identities but only one of many things that shape us. Problems arise when friendships hinge on our approval of the other person, when we imagine that power dynamics do not matter, or “when we define ourselves in terms of just one of our many allegiances” (34).

The best chapters are built around personal examples. Brandy Daniels and Shelly Penton tell how they were changed by the long conversations as they brewed beer together. Laura Duhan-Kaplan writes movingly about teaching at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte in the wake of 9/11 attacks. Inspired by an idea from Rabbi Marcia Prager, she asked her philosophy class to keep a daily “WOW Journal” of things that surprised them. She ended each class session with one of them reading an entry aloud, three students responding, and everyone else writing a personal comment. Stunned by the terror attacks, anxious about the future, and divided over how the nation should respond, they supported each other with attentive listening and kind feedback. They forged friendships that transcended their differences and became, Duhan-Kaplan says, “a sacred community of learners” (77).

We need more storytelling in interreligious work. There are some good stories in *Multireligious Reflections on Friendship*, but not enough of them. Our friendships, after all, are built on tales we tell each other and experiences that become our shared stories. Nearly every chapter could have benefited from more of these. Sometimes, a book’s shortcomings can be instructive.

*Multireligious Reflections on Friendship* reminded me about the power of narrative. I need to tell how my best friend in grade school finally revealed that he was Jewish, a secret his Shoah-traumatized family was afraid to divulge, and how I was forced to confront what my tribe had done to his. I need to tell how I first wondered if I might be called to preach after my favorite Scoutmaster asked me to lead a worship service at Scout camp, but noted he and his son would be absent because they were Jewish and our Sunday service was always Christian. How could Protestants, Catholics, and Jews worship together without papering over our differences? Young and inexperienced, I undoubtedly committed some ecumenical and interreligious faux pas, but the Scoutmaster and his son remained and enjoyed the service. We need to share tales of the events that shaped our lives, narratives that can draw us closer together.

Thomas W. Goodhue  
New York, NY

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