

**INTERRELIGIOUS
DIALOGUE AS FRIENDSHIP**

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RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN THE USA

- Transformation of the Religious Map of the USA
- Today, a Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim will find a place of worship/meditation in almost every major city.

CHALLENGE OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

- The challenge of our interreligious context is one of commitment with openness to our neighbors of other faiths.

CHALLENGE OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

- New religious landscape presents us with challenges as well as opportunities for enrichment.

THE IDEAL OF FRIENDSHIP

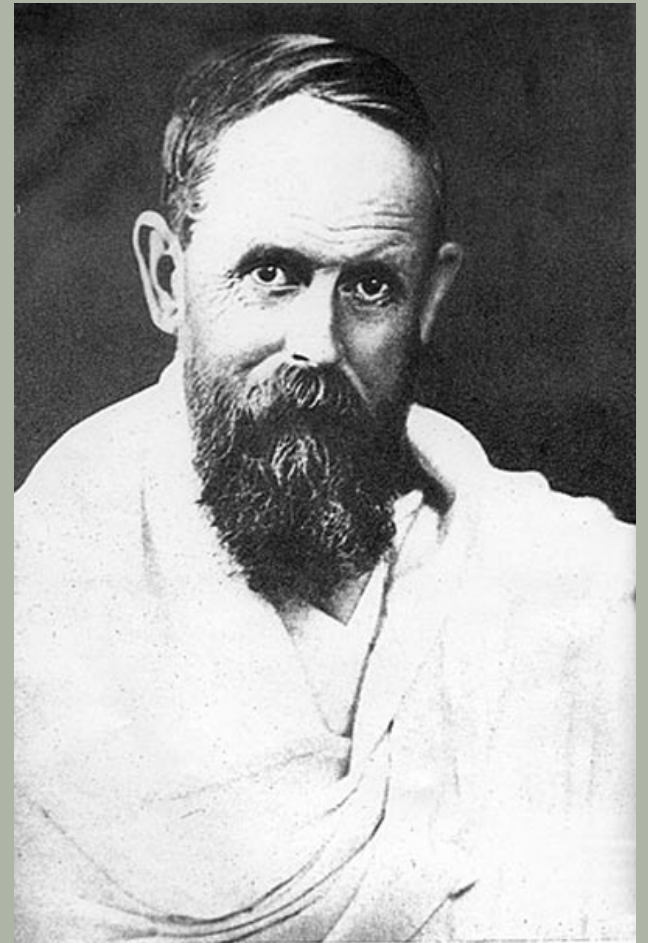
- Friendship is highly valued in the Hindu tradition.
- Bhagavadgita (12:13) describes the ideal human being as a friend to all.

FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF FRIENDSHIP

- Shared Identity
- Ethical Responsibilities
- Trust
- Generosity

ANDREWS TO GANDHI

- “I didn’t quite know how much you had learnt to love me till that morning when you put your hand on my shoulder and spoke of the loneliness that there would be to you when I was gone. When I saw you on the wharf, standing with hands raised in benediction, I knew, as I had not known, even in Pretoria, how very, very dear you have become to me.”

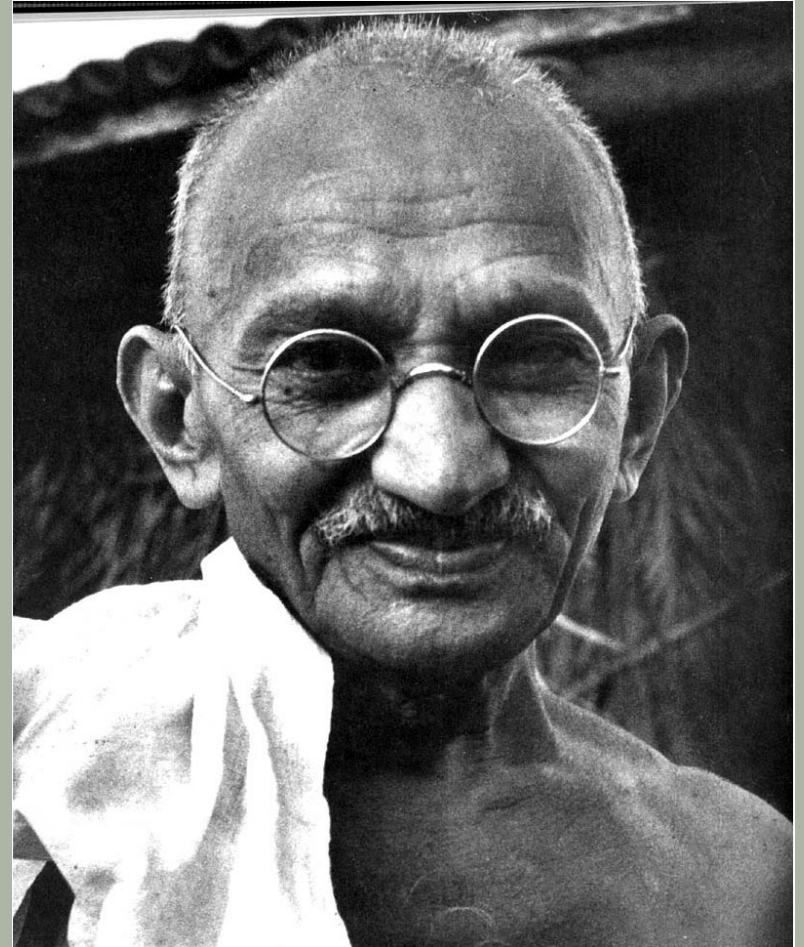


SHARED IDENTITY

- For persons belonging to the same religious tradition a shared identity is defined by loyalty to person, doctrines or rituals.
- In the case of friendship across traditions these may not be shared.

GANDHI ON ANDREWS

- “When we met in South Africa, we met as brothers and remained as such to the end. It was not a friendship between an Englishman and an Indian. It was an unbreakable bond between two seekers and servants.”



TWO SEEKERS

- For Gandhi, Truth was always beyond full human comprehension.
- Andrew's journey to India helped him to see the limits of his theology and to discover God in the teachings and practices of Hinduism.

TWO SERVANTS

- The shared quality of openness to deeper religious truths was complimented by a deep concern to live their lives as servants of the poor and oppressed.

ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS

- Though difficult, ethical obligations save interreligious friendships from superficiality and relativism.
- Interreligious friendships do not require that we dispose of our deepest values and commitments.

GANDHI TO ANDREWS

- “Instead of a letter, I have inflicted upon you what may almost read like an essay. But it was necessary that you should know what is passing in my mind at the present moment. *You may now pronounce your judgment and mercilessly tear my ideas to pieces where you find them to be wrong.*”



GANDHI ON ANDREWS

- “It is so like him. Whenever he feels hurt over anything I have done-and this is by no means the first of such occasions – he deluges me with letters without waiting for an answer. *For it is love speaking to love, not arguing.* And so it has been over the burning of foreign clothes”.

DIFFERENCES OVER CONVERSION

- “If I want a pattern of the ideal missionary, I should instance C.F. Andrews. If he were here, he would blush for what I want to say. I believe that he is today truer, broader, and better for his toleration of the other principal religions of the world. He never speaks with me about conversion to Christianity though we are closest friends. I have many friends, but the friendship between Charlie Andrews and myself is especially deep.”

TRUST

- **The face of our friend is always before us and we learn to speak the same in his absence as in his presence. When trust is not established, public criticism of another tradition will be heard as demonization.**

CRITICISM OF THE OTHER

- Gandhi believed that the right to criticize another tradition had to be earned. One had to first befriend the other, and to show reverence for all that is good in other tradition.

GENEROSITY

- Generosity is the mutuality of giving and receiving. Interreligious friendships cannot grow and flourish if one thinks of oneself as having everything to give and nothing to receive.

THE RISKS OF FRIENDSHIP

- There is a real fear that deep friendships across traditions will diminish one's commitment and faithfulness to one's own.

CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

- Diversity is not a problem to be overcome.

CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

- Friendship should not be used as a ploy in program of conversion.

CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

- **Meaningful interreligious relationships exemplify a willingness to receive and to give.**

CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

- **The religious traditions of our neighbors are embodied in their lives and friendship deepens our understanding of their traditions.**

CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

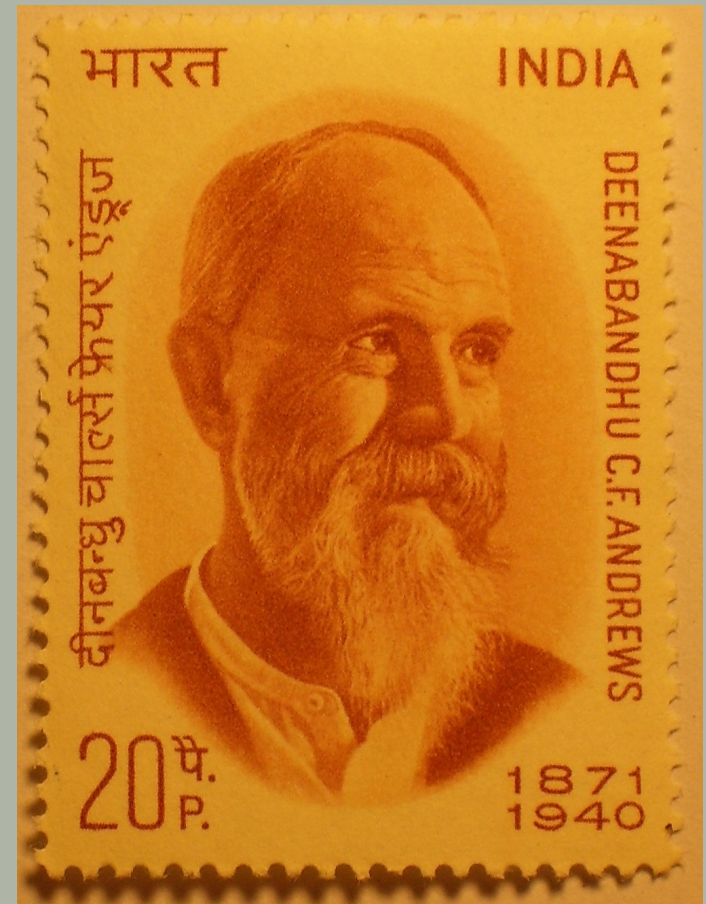
- Friendship does not require that we conceal our commitments.

CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

- **Interreligious friendships grow deeper through a shared commitment to justice and the service of the oppressed and disadvantaged.**

ANDREWS ON GANDHI

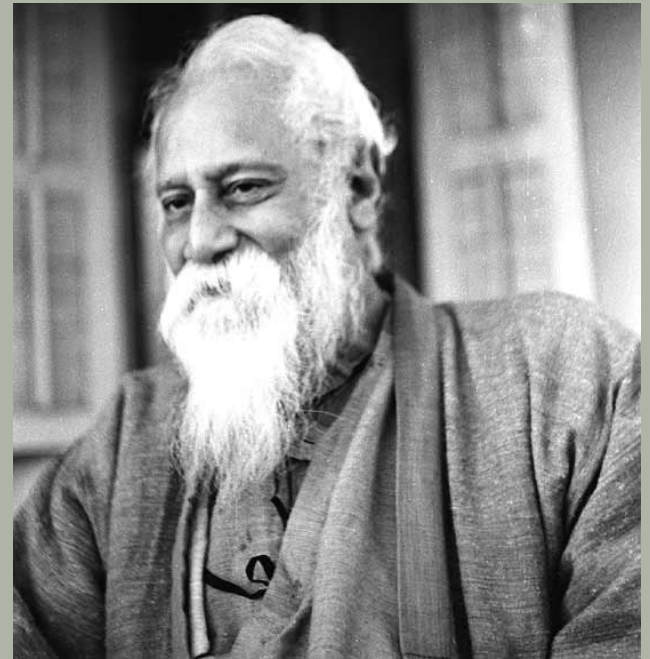
- “Our hearts met from the first moment we saw one another and they have remained united by the strongest ties of love ever since. To be with him was an inspiration which awakened all that was best in me and gave me a high courage, enkindled and enlightened by his own.”



Gandhi foundation

TAGORE

- Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not.
- Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own.
- Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.
- I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave my accustomed shelter; I forget that there abides the old in the new, and that there also thou abidest.



Kolkata pages

ANDREWS

- If I were asked what had been the best of all human gifts in a long lifetime, I should answer without a moment's hesitation, "The gift of noble friends who have trusted me with their love."