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TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AREA

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THE INSTITUTE FOR FAITH AND FLOURISHING

Enemy, Stranger, Neighbor, & Friend

a rough guide on religion and othering

by and for young scholars, activists, and development workers
engaged in peacebuilding and the cultivation of social resilience

Published by the World Council of Churches

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Introducing the Rough Guide on Religion and Othering

The Focus and Purpose of the Project

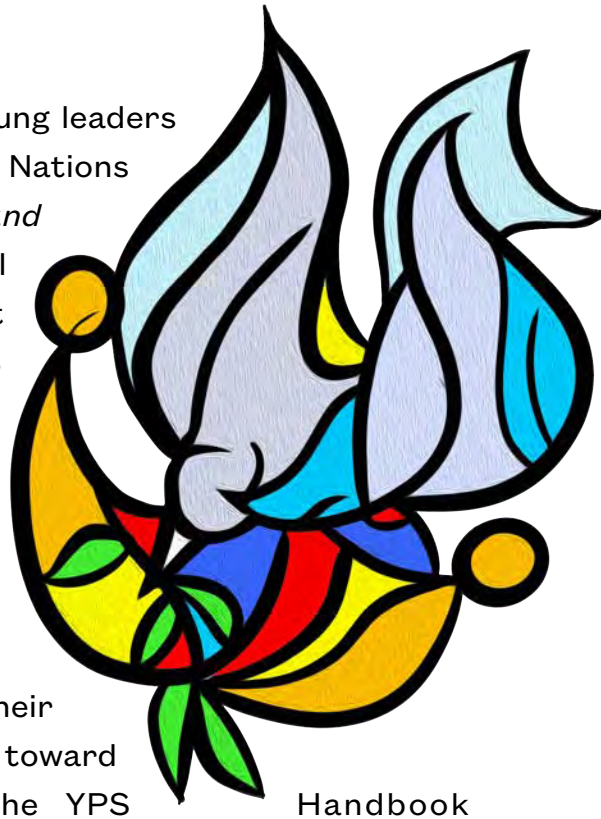
How do religions represent inside and outside "others" in their ideas, symbols, and practices? How do religious representations of others influence social cohesion? And what role can young leaders play in engaging with the challenges and the potential found within religious traditions' representations of "others" to cultivate social resilience?

This *Rough Guide On Religion and Othering* offers a practical resource for group study and project visioning that can inspire and equip groups to address core tensions that emerge in religious representations of "otherness". The guide presents four chapters on how religious ideas, symbols, and practices represent other persons and groups as enemies, strangers, neighbors, and friends. The guide includes anecdotes drawn from real-world situations, short essays on each topic, group reading exercises that draw on the sacred writings of many of the world's religious traditions, and a gallery of projects developed by young leaders to engage with the challenges of othering by drawing on their religious traditions' beliefs, symbols, and practices as resources.

After working through this guide, we hope that you and your communities will be equipped with:

- **a set of rigorous questions** to ask yourself about how to work with your own religious tradition's potential for engagement with others in ways that promote social resilience and flourishing.
- **a selection of source materials** drawn from different religious traditions illustrating their wisdom for practical and prudent engagement with, as well as radical love and acceptance of, outsiders.
- **new ideas for projects and approaches** to cultivate mutually life-giving relationships with outsiders in your own (inter)religious communities and projects.

Youth, Peace, and Religion



The *Rough Guide On Religion and Othering* is written for young leaders and produced primarily by young leaders. In 2021, the United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy published *Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook* (YPS Handbook). Several key insights of the YPS Handbook are central to the format and purposes of this *Rough Guide*. In particular, the YPS Handbook challenges simplistic notions of seeing young people as perpetrators or victims of violence. The sober reality is that young people are profoundly influential leaders today who are partners in preventing violence and sustaining peaceful societies.[1]

The main questions then become how young leaders affirm their roles and how theories of change developed for working toward peace can be "youth-focused" and even "youth-led". The YPS Handbook emphasizes that social cohesion correlates strongly to the degree of meaningful participation opportunities in decision-making processes and self-organizing that community members experience.

But this does not only apply to the identification and management of socio-environmental challenges in post-conflict situations and approaches to addressing those challenges - for example, distribution of leadership roles, jobs, or material resources or creating bridges of

[1] This combines the recommendation of the UN's Youth Peace and Security Agenda of persons aged 18-29 and the African Union's definition of persons aged 15-35. "Security Council, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2250 (2015), Urges Member States to Increase Representation of Youth in Decision-Making at All Levels", United Nations, accessed May 15, 2021 https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm . African Union, *African Union Charter,* (Addis Abeba: African Union, 2006) https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-treaty-0033_-_african_youth_charter_e.pdf

social contact between opposing groups. Researchers and outside development actors have often focused on these kinds of things in the past and observed that such approaches do not seem to translate into increased connectedness, trust, or solidarity among opposing groups. Instead, as the YPS Handbook argues, robust social cohesion requires something more specific: that the communities involve themselves as **beneficiaries, partners**, and **leaders** who themselves identify the challenges to social cohesion their communities are facing and, indeed, that they name them explicitly *as* challenges to social cohesion.

This means that communities would draw on their own past experience and beliefs about others to represent those relationships in language and action as relationships characterized by trust and deceit, solidarity and isolation, welcome and exclusion. Such representations are never merely descriptive and factual but evaluative and ethical and draw on communities' treasuries of ethical knowledge for guidance.

The YPS Handbook mentions but does not discuss religion. This *Rough Guide*, however, assumes it reasonable to expect that religious traditions, and the wealth of ethical wisdom they store up, would inform and influence communities' representations of outside others. It is only natural then to ask what representations of outside others are preserved in religions' textual, aesthetic and ethical traditions. In addition, the YPS Handbook treasures the role of community-based leadership as an entry point for youths' meaningful participation in actions such as intergenerational work, dialogues, decision-making, conflict transformation, and other governance processes. This *Rough Guide* seeks to combine the YPS Handbook's call to learn from young leaders with the expectation that religious commitments play an important role in their lives. The goal here is to invite young leaders who are involved in communities where religious traditions hold an important place in the

community to share their ideas and experiences concerning (1) intra- and interreligious representations of outside others and (2) the potential therein for peace.

Religion and Social Resilience

The language of "reconciliation" has become widely used in peacebuilding contexts. The meaning of this term and the objectives it means to highlight can be better understood if we look at two other terms that are often used in conjunction with it: social cohesion and social resilience.[2]

Social cohesion refers to the sense of connection to a group within the group, as reflected in social ties, participation in the group, and the stability of institutions organizing the group's resources, as well as trust in those forms of organization. Social resilience considers these factors as well, but particularly in situations of conflict, trauma, or crisis. With this focus, a group's resilience is a reflection not only of its ability or capacity to persevere through hardship and bounce back afterward to a state of in-group cohesion. It also includes the group's capacity to integrate changes into the in-group, to welcome new groups and their ideas and practices, and to grow and flourish together.

Beyond cultivating social cohesion, religious communities also have a significant influence in cultivating social well-being, or "social resilience". Yet, in highly diverse contemporary societies, indeed, in the age of a "global society", the influence of religious communities can be ambivalent: sometimes

[2] For development and research resources, see the Appendix "Additional Resources for Growth and Challenge" below on page 111.

serving as a source of social cohesion (helping groups stick together internally) or of social resilience (helping differing groups join together and flourish). Religious communities can cultivate trust, stability, vision, purpose, and hope, but they also sometimes sow suspicion, distrust, fear, and serious insecurity.

Understanding the specific roles that religions play in pursuit of societal well-being becomes even more complicated in contemporary societies where the boundaries between the ideas, aesthetics, and ethics of a *religious group* and those of specific *nations* or *ethnicities* are highly porous. Religions' characterizations of enemies and strangers, for example, can be overlapped with ethnicity, cultural heritage, or political party. In the context of ethnic conflict, nationalistic pride, and populist social movements, one result of such overlapping is that religious communities can be instrumentalized in service of the ends of inclusion/exclusion. For example, identity-based beliefs, symbols, and practices might be used to include the members of one's group and to exclude the members outside of one's own group in a zero-sum, "us vs. them" struggle for rights and resources.

However, religions also possess significant resources for welcoming, caring for, and protecting outsiders, such as narratives about neighborliness, symbols interrelating multiple groups, and ethical guidelines about how to treat strangers and enemies.

So it is tremendously important for leaders or persons of influence in their religious communities to give attention to the ways in which "others" are represented, how these representations are used, and how they might be open to multiple interpretations––with various outcomes.

This *Rough Guide on Religion and Othering* considers four basic human relationships with "others" that all of the world's religious traditions engage with: the enemy, the stranger,

the neighbor, and the friend. In doing so, the purpose is to reflect on religious representations of "others" and their significance for social cohesion and social resilience. In doing so, the guide draws on the wisdom of several different religious traditions, focusing on their textual sources and the ideas, images, and practices those sources discuss.

Against this background, the main questions animating this guide are:

(1) How are the enemy, the stranger, the neighbor, and the friend represented and practiced in the textual, symbolic, and ethical traditions of a society's religious communities?

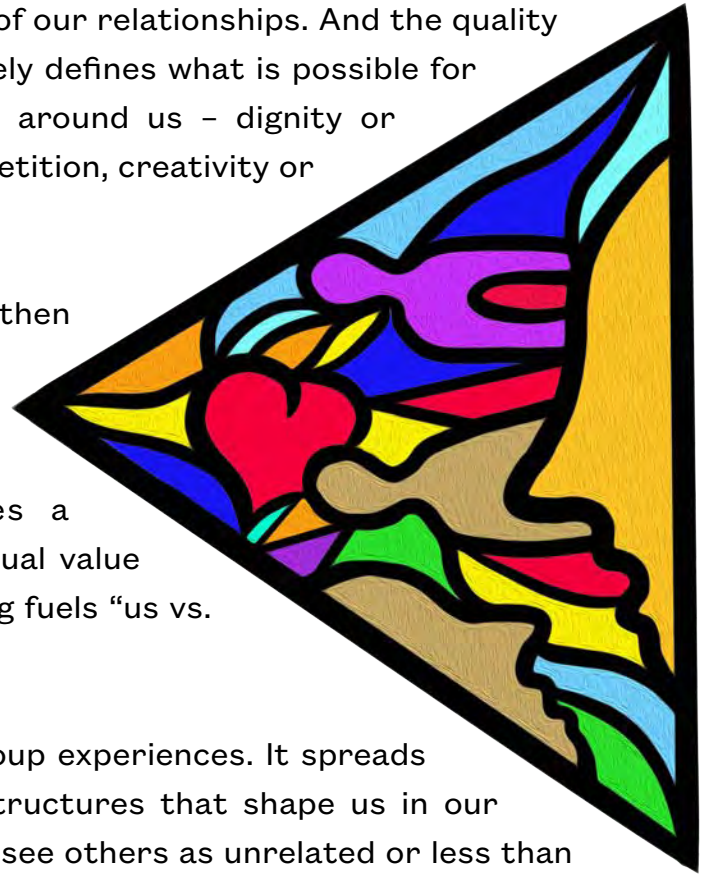
(2) How do these understandings and practices impact the cultivation of social cohesion and social resilience?

(3) How might negative representations of "others" be named and refined toward reconciliation and mutual well-being among religious communities and their "others"?

Religion and the Challenges of "Othering": Enemy, Stranger, Neighbor, Friend

Othering, Relationships, and Religion

The way we see others profoundly influences the society we see around us. The reason is simple: the way we see others defines the quality of our relationships. And the quality of our relationships, as individuals and groups, largely defines what is possible for our society. What do we see growing among and around us – dignity or disrespect, trust or suspicion, cooperation or competition, creativity or conflict, flourishing or suffering?



If the way we see others shapes the society we see, then othering is extremely important for our social cohesion and resilience. **We describe othering simply as seeing others as unrelated or less than ourselves.** The othering vision creates a disconnection between people and a sense of unequal value or even a need to exclude or attack others. Othering fuels "us vs. them" mindsets and relationships.

Othering often grows out of painful personal or group experiences. It spreads through the words, images, stories, beliefs, and structures that shape us in our families, communities, and wider cultures. When we see others as unrelated or less than ourselves, the door is open to picture others as enemies, which can lead to dehumanizing or demonizing them. And these attitudes, words, and images can lead to violence, war, or genocide. An escalating cycle of othering is unleashed.

Our action movies vividly illustrate what is at stake in othering: when we see others as unrelated or less—think of Stormtroopers, Orcs, or other (in)famous "bad guys"—we don't care what happens to them. They may get shot, blown up, or annihilated, and their suffering doesn't make us feel sad or disturbed. We may even joyfully cheer. **What happens on our screens and in our societies is sourced in the way we see others.**

Our religious beliefs, values, and practices profoundly influence how we see others. **And thus, religion can play a very powerful role in othering, both to fuel and to heal it.**

Religion can fuel othering by sanctioning our sense of exceptional identity, picturing others as uniquely sinful or even satanic, and justifying our desire to exclude or punish others as God's will. But religion can also be a powerful force for healing othering. Some of the most basic teachings of our faith traditions—that God has created all people with precious value, that we all make mistakes and need mercy, that we are called by God to practice love and compassion even when "the other" least deserves it—can uproot othering. These religious visions give us new eyes to see that we are fundamentally connected as people and equal in precious value, even in our disagreements and conflicts. And these visions are vital for cultivating social resilience and mutual flourishing.

This manual invites us to explore the rich resources in our diverse faith traditions for healing othering, cultivating shared flourishing, and practicing hope in our relationships with enemies, strangers, neighbors, and friends.

Enemy

The enemy is the first category of relationship we will explore in this manual. Conflict is a familiar and painful reality in our relationships with others. Out of conflict, we may begin to see others as our enemies. “Enemy” literally means the opposite of a friend: an individual or group we dislike, fear, resent, or hate. Labeling people as enemies is a powerful form of othering because it can harden our conscience and justify excluding, attacking, or even annihilating others. This is the gateway to dehumanization, which may lead to mass violence, atrocity, and genocide.

Here our faith traditions can offer profound resources for interrupting enemy-making and healing relationships. The teaching that God has created all people with inherent value cuts to the root of othering. Recognizing that we too are imperfect and capable of evil cultivates self-awareness and expands compassion. Hearing the radical call to love our enemies opens new imagination and energizes practices of hope that cultivate reconciliation, social resilience and shared flourishing. Our most painful experiences can become places of profound healing and transformation, both for ourselves and the society we share.

Who are your enemies? Which voices and platforms fuel othering and enemy-making in your context? What words, images, and ideals do they appeal to? What does your faith tradition teach about how we should see and treat our enemies? Are you familiar with its call for compassion, rejection of hate, and practices of love for others? How will you actively practice loving your enemy?

Stranger

The stranger is the second category of relationships to be explored in this manual. The idea of the stranger is considered important because of its paradoxical nature. On the one hand, it is easy to create conflict by perceiving the stranger as an enemy due to the fear of the unknown. Yet, on the other hand, the appearance of the stranger at our doorstep and in our neighborhoods offers us the opportunity of practicing one of the most important human virtues, namely, hospitality, which opens up to neighborliness and friendship.

Hospitality is highlighted not only in ancient classical literature (for example, in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*), but also takes a central place in virtually all existing faith traditions. In this manual, we shall explore the idea of hospitality to the stranger in some select Jewish, Christian, and Islamic sources. The fact that the stranger stands at the crossroad of vice and virtue, of enmity and hospitality, raises our consciousness to the choices of positive transformation as well as the consideration of some important questions.

Who is a stranger to me? How do we overcome real fears and prejudices in dealing with the presence of a stranger in our community? In our lived reality, are there ways of promoting the narratives and practices of hospitality, which are deeply rooted in our faith traditions?

Neighbor

The neighbor is the third category of relationships to be explored in this manual. Contemporary understandings of the neighbor can be traced back to the Latin *vicinus*, meaning “district” or “place”. Similarly, the English word “neighbor” comes from “neah” meaning “near” and "gebur" meaning “dweller.” The concept is used to name the person who dwells with others in the same area or neighborhood although in separate homes. In this way, the neighbor is traditionally regarded as someone we know better than a stranger based on our proximity to one another.

Not all neighbors are friends, however, and the potential to become enemies if tensions among neighbors escalate must be carefully considered. The conceptual construction of the neighbor often involves the exploration of different elements related to proximity and preference, the balances of power, reciprocity, and the love both to God and to the neighbor . The Abrahamic religions, include within their scriptures the precious value of the neighbor and of neighbor-love as a reflection of God’s love.

Who are my neighbors, and how do I define them? What does loving the neighbor entail? How do we build neighborhoods, and what is expected in terms of responsibilities, time investment, and religious ethics?

Friend

Friendship is the final category of relationships we will consider in this manual. True friendship has been regarded as one of the most valuable gifts a person can hope for, indeed, as a treasure worth seeking and guarding at all costs. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle famously described a certain kind of friendship as a relationship with another whom you see as another instance of yourself; the friend is you in the shape of another person. Our friends complete us, and we would not be who we are without our friends. There is a certain way in which our friends are part of who we are, and we of who they are: our memories, our interests, the concrete plans we make and then pursue in our lives and which then become our future realities, the knowledge that we acquire, the convictions we hold dear. We become the individuals that we are in and as relationships with others. As we will see in each of the episodes of this series, we are who we are in a relationship with others. But this insight is especially revealing when we consider who and how we are in friendship.

What kinds of friendships are there, and what forms of othering take place in the context of friendship? Are all friendships created equal? And how can insights drawn from our religious traditions offer guidance as we seek to discern the potential in friendship for cultivating peace?

How to Use this Rough Guide

Engagement and Learning Together

For the purposes of this *Rough Guide on Religion and Othering,* knowledge is held to be inseparable from know-how. Know-how is, in turn, something produced and refined on the ground, by actors and communicators who are engaged in the contexts that they not only wish to understand but also to improve. For this reason, the guide sees the experience and expertise of all project participants as an essential and primary source for the work of identifying ("concept"), reflecting upon ("closer examination"), and then transforming ("transformation") the ways we see others and the roles our religious traditions can play in that process. It is out of this desire to highlight and learn from one another that this guide has been designed in a way that gives a higher priority to the input of participants than to presentation of content by the project coordinators. The project is the participants - you! Participation is listening to and sharing with one another. The product is the know-how that we can produce together for enhanced social resilience and shared flourishing.

What to Expect and What is Expected

The *Rough Guide on Religion and Othering* consists of four chapters organized thematically around the topics of the enemy, the stranger, the neighbor and the friend. These chapters are meant to be read and discussed in "Enemy, Stranger, Neighbor, Friend" (ESNF) study groups.

What to Expect 1. Chapter Structure

Each chapter follows the same structure. The chapters introduce the topic by drawing on personal experiences of the authors. This is followed by a short essay organized around the concept + closer examination + transformation structure and outlining some of the most important aspects of the topic and consulting the wisdom of various religions. A selection

of readings for group study drawn from sacred texts and textual traditions then follows. Finally, projects are highlighted for inspiration in closing that illustrate the ways young leaders have engaged with the topic to effect positive social change. A list of further readings is provided for continued study.

What to Expect 2. Engagement with Religious Traditions

Throughout, the guide engages primarily with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions and to a lesser extent Buddhist, Hindu and non-religious traditions. In this way, we have drawn on more familiar texts in the hopes of offering an accessible set of materials. However, we recognize the selective nature and limitations of both of these choices. Other religious traditions not represented here also have contributions to make, while behind the texts we do engage with stand rich traditions of interpretation, which would certainly add nuance and complexity to the pictures we have presented. We offer them, not with any pretense to comprehensiveness, but as an invitation and hopefully inspiration for further inquiry and engagement from participants.

What Is Expected 1. Gatherings

Each chapter can be read individually, and should then be worked through in a group setting, with the structure of the chapters in the guide corresponding to the structure of group gatherings. Each chapter can be completed in the gathering in 90 minutes, and time suggestions are included in the chapter margins.

As a participant in an ESNF study group, you will attend five group gatherings: one introductory and four sessions addressing each topic. The group gatherings are structured into (1) a time of greeting, to be followed by (2) an anecdote drawn from lived experience and a related generative question. The generative question sets the tone for (3) a short precis and provocation of approximately 10 minutes, shared by the unit facilitator and serving the purpose of summarizing key questions and challenges to consider in

approaching the topic of that unit. This is followed by (4) a time of guided reading in small groups, inspired by the *Havruta* method of textual study (see page 17), to deepen your learning from and with one another. Finally, approximately 30 minutes of every group gathering is devoted to "elevator pitch"-style presentations by participants about projects they have been involved in or plan to work on, with particular attention given to the dynamics of othering.

What is Expected 2. Cooperative Exchange via Social Media and an "Elevator Pitch"

In an effort to bring your listening and sharing into a form that challenges and benefits everyone involved, in an ESNF study group all participants will be asked:

- to create a **social media post** (to be shared on the ESNF project social media accounts) of 4-5 frames/slides featuring a project that you have been involved in or are planning and that has relevance to the issues of othering and the enemy, stranger, neighbor or friend. The posts should introduce the project and summarize its objective, methods, outcomes and lessons-learned.
- to make at least one **comment** on each post of your fellow participants. For a group size of 20, the posts of 5 participants will be featured every week. This means you will make 5 comments every week on social media (and only 4 in the week in which your own post goes live). All participants should tag the project and use the hashtags **#ESNF**, **#enemy**, **#stranger**, **#neighbor**, **#friend** respectively so that the project facilitators can keep track of the collective conversation as well as any broader resonance the conversation finds beyond the project.
- to give a 3-4 minute "**elevator pitch**" on the basis of your social media post.

Complete instructions, along with examples, and a step-by-step guide for preparing the posts and the pitch can be found on page 24-35 of this guide.

These digital forms of listening and sharing are meant to generate a set of resources and skills which each participant can then adapt and refine in their own projects and organizations: new project types, new perspectives, and different methods along with guidance for choosing them and steps for implementation. At every point, attention will be given to the ways we "other" other people and groups, and how the representation of others facilitates belonging and exclusion, peace and conflict, and not just social cohesion but potentially social resilience also.

Program Guide

Modality

- The program can be offered in a 100% online modality with the use of this manual, social media platforms of your choice, and live sessions conducted via a video conferencing platform.
- The program has a length of at least four weeks - one each exploring one of our units: Enemy, Stranger, Neighbor, Friend. An additional introductory meeting to go over the use of the manual and a concluding wrap-up are recommended.
- Each week, organize a 90-minutes live session with an ice-breaker (15 min), a lecture from one of your facilitators (15 min), a group reading and reflection (30 min), and the pitch presentation and dialogue sessions (30 min).

Topic: ESNF Youth
Time / Place:

In this box you can add information on where and when your course will take place.

Time:

Place:

Remember to distribute a link to your online meeting, if you're planning on conducting the course remotely!

Session Dates Table		
Unit	**Topic/Facilitator**	**Date and Time**
Unit 1	The Enemy	
Unit 2	The Stranger	
Unit 3	The Neighbor	
Unit 4	The Friend	

You can use this timetable at your first meeting to schedule your sessions as a group.

- The participants are encouraged to read the unit concept notes included in this manual before every weekly live session.
- During the week, the participants will be required to comment on the participants' posts (See Guide to Participation on page 24-32). This aims to review the content of the week's unit.

Program Completion Requirements and Ethics

- Committed participation is essential to individual and group success in using the ESNF *Rough Guide*. In order to motivate and recognize participant commitment, facilitators are encouraged to clearly define the conditions of participation and program completion.[3]
- Participants should be expected to complete all conditions of successful participation and program completion. These activities might include: attendance, participation in the live session, the creation of the social media posts, the pitch, and comments on the social media posts of others.
- If absence at a live session is truly unavoidable or if completion of a requirement is not possible, participants are expected to communicate with the facilitators to discuss appropriate alternative means for fulfilling participation expectations.

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[3] The ESNF program development partners, the Institute for Faith and Flourishing and the University of Bonn, do not monitor, control, or evaluate use of the ESNF program or of this *Rough Guide*. As such, no certificate of completion can be issued by either institution. Organizations sponsoring or hosting a run of the ESNF program may issue a certificate in the name of their own institution or organization. Such a certificate may state that participants "completed an interreligious peacebuilding training, along with all participation requirements, using the training manual *Enemy, Stranger, Neighbor, Friend: A Rough Guide on Religion and Othering*, hosted by" a particular institution. Bibliographic information for the ESNF *Rough Guide* should also be included. Such a certificate is not backed by the Institute for Faith and Flourishing or the University of Bonn, and use of copyrighted materials on the certificate (including but not limited to official logos or ESNF artwork) is strictly forbidden.

- Participants are expected to obtain, where necessary, proper copyright permissions for any audio, visual, or textual materials used for the social media post and pitch.

Ground Rules

- Be fully present.
  - Accomplish the course requirements, activities, and learning resources.
  - Respect the times to deliver/present the activities and be punctual for the live sessions.
  - Listen patiently and attentively to others and avoid interrupting.
  - If possible, keep your camera on.
- Fair participation for all.
  - Share time so that all can participate.
  - Everyone in the meeting is expected to share ideas, ask questions, and contribute to the discussions. Commit to sharing your perspective and speaking honestly.
- Stay on point and on time.
  - Respect the groups' time and keep comments focused on the point.
- Ask for clarification.
  - If there is something that you don't understand, please ask for clarification. If you don't understand the issue or solution, then there are probably others who also don't understand.
- Attack the problem, not the person.
  - Differences of opinion are normal. You may not agree with everything that other participants say. Please be open to hearing other people's perspectives. If you don't agree, respectfully challenge the idea – not the person.
- Mute yourself.

- Background noise disrupts the meeting for everyone and might prevent us from hearing the information that we need. Choose a quiet location – away from pets, children, etc. Use the mute button when you are not speaking.

- Respect
  - Respect each other's thinking and value everyone's contributions with the same respect you would want from them.
  - Communicate respectfully with the participants and the program staff.
  - Respect copyright materials and learning resources.
  - Use inclusive and professional language during the sessions and activities.

If you have any questions or comments, do not hesitate to contact your gathering facilitator or the program coordinators:

gnet@uni-bonn.de

Guide to Group Reading (*Havruta* Method)

What Is *Havruta*?

Where do questions come from? Perhaps a lack of understanding? Or perhaps differences of opinion? But how are difference of opinion and lack of understanding discovered? One way is through critical conversation with others who have not experienced a situation or understood it in exactly the same way as we did. *Havruta* highlights the importance of asking questions for deeper understanding in life and in community.

Havruta focuses textual study through asking questions and conversation.[4] But *havruta* also recognizes that asking an honest question or expressing disagreement are vulnerable acts. For this reason, one studies with a friend or trustworthy companion. Each person promises understanding and sympathy, each expects just and fair treatment, each listens with anticipation of learning from the other.

Havruta is a traditional Jewish form of textual study with a partner. From the Hebrew word *haver*, "friend" or "comrade," *havruta* refers both to one's partner in study and to the process. In the practice of *havruta*, one partner reads a passage (usually only a few lines or even just a few words) and the other person summarizes in his or her own words and raises questions. Then both partners discuss possible meanings and nuances. After switching roles, the process repeats.

Havruta as an Orientation to Group Reading in ESNF

Each unit of this guide includes a section for group reading to be conducted in a *havruta*-inspired format. The ESNF project facilitators and participants acknowledge that there are risks in borrowing from the traditions of others for other ends and purposes than those originally intended. ESNF, however, seeks not to reuse *havruta* study for other purposes, but to be guided by its spirit and toward the shared end of what Paul Ricoeur famously called seeing oneself as another. If readers are interested in learning more about this traditional practice in the context of Judaism and study of Torah, see the section "Additional Resources" on page 81 below.

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[4] For more information on the traditional mode of textual study with companions (Havruta), see the resources offered by Pedagogy of Partnership at: https://www.hadar.org/pedagogy-partnership/resources-for-online-learning

In the group reading section of each unit, you will find a selection of very short texts drawn from the scriptural and sacred texts of a variety of religious and non-religious traditions. There are also risks here in selectively picking such short passages, including loss of context, incompleteness, misrepresentation. Translation from original languages into English creates further distance from traditional communities of interpretation. We can acknowledge such drawbacks with humility and still learn from these texts by careful, respectful reading in community with a group of diverse others.

Steps for Group Reading Following the Principles of *Havruta* Study

As you enter into times of group reading, organize your reading into three movements and roles, one for each group member:

- Reading
- Responding to the text
- Responding to one another

Reading. The texts reproduced in this manual are short, but they are rich and complex, full of texture, light and shadow, melody and rhythm. In order to honor this richness, the reader can

- read the text aloud very slowly;
- read only one sentence or even just one phrase at a time, slowly several times;
- as you read multiple times, place the emphasis on different words each time.

Responding to the Text. In *havruta* study, the text is seen as itself a member of the study group. The text brings its own background experience into the conversation, it carries its own concerns and interests, and offers its own insights and ideas. So in responding to the text, respond with the same respect, patience, and eager interest you would show to any person you are having a conversation with. The responder should:

- ***Wait.*** Begin by listening to all that the voice of the text has to say (through the voice of the reader).
- ***Ask.*** Once the text is done speaking, ask sincere and serious questions, aimed at understanding the text as its authors and communities would want to be understood. Avoid rhetorical or trivial questions and try instead to ask questions to which you genuinely do not have an answer and questions that really matter. In other words, show genuine interest and care.
- ***Wait again.*** With these questions in your heart, either re-read the text once again, as many times as helpful. Or, move on to the final movement

Responding to one another. As you now begin to respond to the responder, do not forget the text! The second responder should keep the text at the center but will respond to both the text and the first responder's reflections. The second responder might:

- ***Ask.*** Are there additional meanings in the text that the first responder may not have highlighted;
- ***Note.*** Highlight points of agreement or disagreement;
- ***Wonder.*** Conclude the round with an open-ended observation that follows the text beyond the text toward your own situations. For example, "In light of _____ (in the text), I wonder what it would mean to…"

Move on to the next text, shift the roles within your group, repeat these movements until you have worked through each text.

Guide to Participation: Social Media Posts and Pitch

ESNF is meant to be a mutual leading and learning experience. This tool is not a curriculum but a rough guide, meant to outline a general framework for discussion that comes alive through participants' contributions as co-learners and co-leaders. The program (that is, the guide + gatherings) intends to serve as an incubator for creative exchange and encouragement, where young peace innovators can draw from their own religious traditions and share their own ideas, projects and methods, as well as learn from the ideas, traditions, projects, and methods of others.

Perhaps you have not been involved in any projects that explicitly take the language of enemy, stranger, neighbor, or friend as a central or organizing theme. Or maybe you have but without realizing it: The chapters of this guide draw attention to a whole host of interpersonal and social dynamics that these terms entail. Each chapter begins with a list of keywords to help you reflect more deeply on the direct language of enemy, stranger, neighbor, and friend and dynamics like suspicion and trust, distance and proximity, surprise and familiarity, need and provision that come into consideration when reflecting on these relationships. In what ways have you, your project, and communities engaged with these and other related issues? What did you learn about enemies, strangers, neighbors, or friends and about peace and social resilience along the way?

The ESNF program design helps participants get to know one another and facilitates a high level of interaction with a minimal amount of time investment in three ways.

1. Introduce Yourselves to One Another

Once you have formed an ESNF program group, we recommend you introduce yourselves via a shared online document (such as Padlet or even Google Docs) prepared in advance by your gathering facilitators. Here are some ideas for what to include:

- A selfie
- A short personal introduction
- A quirky fact about yourself
- A related project you have been involved in
- The organization to which you belong
- Your interest in the ESNF project

2. Post Your Project and Comment

Each participant should create **two social media posts,** using the social media format selected by the facilitators, introducing a project

- that they have been involved in, are currently part of, or one that they would like to create, and
- that is related to the problems of "othering" and relating to enemies, strangers, neighbors, and friends in ways that promote peace and social resilience.

The First Post

The first post should include five elements addressing the following elements

- What was the project? (title, organizing group, etc.)
- Who was involved? (leading and/or participating)
- What methods did you use, and why those methods?
- What were the intended outcomes?
- Can you suggest best practices or lessons learned from the project?

You may choose to make the first post at any time of your choosing within the first two weeks of the course; this will serve as the basis for your "pitch" (see below).

The Second Post

The second post should include three frames and should reflect on the representations of otherness in the project introduced in your first post, engaging this with the terminology of ESNF, religious traditions, and social resilience. The second post should be done in the last week of the course.

Remember to give credit! Properly cite any text or images for which you do not own the copyright. All participants are responsible for securing re-use permissions where necessary.

Comments on the Posts of Others

In addition to your social media posts, all participants should make a contentful comment on the posts of at least two or three other participants every week. Something like "Exciting!" can be an encouraging comment, but is not very contentful. Instead, try sharing how the post challenged you, inspired you, made you wonder or worry. Your comments can also be practical or religious questions which can be incorporated into the live sessions. The aim is to create richer conversation and knowledge-exchange. Remember to include the hashtag #ESNF so that your facilitators can follow the group's progress!

3. Pitch your Project

Thirty minutes of each gathering is to be devoted to listening to and learning from one another's experiences working on projects promoting peace and social resilience. Again, you are the learners and the leaders! As you participate in the ESNF gatherings, ask

yourself, “What can I learn from my fellow program participants? What can I share with them?”

The “elevator pitch” format is a fun and engaging way to share project ideas. In the business world, elevator pitches serve the purpose of attracting interest from potential employers and investors in your ideas. In the ESNF context, however, you are not looking for financial investment of start-up capital for your project idea. Instead, you can offer one another a human investment of encouraging and constructively critical feedback and engaged interest.

Making your Pitch

Use the content of your **first post** to help you plan your pitch. However, since your co-participants will already have seen your first post, it is important that you do more than simply show the post again! This time you are going to premier your **second post**, which deepens the level of religious reflection on the elements of othering that your project touches on. Here are some ideas to help you transform your visual posts into an engaging personal presentation:

- Describe a situation and draw attention to some problematic consequences that resulted from the situation
- Formulate a question about that problem that invites the reader to imagine alternatives or solutions
- Introduce the available cultural and religious resources (teachings, symbols, and practices) that actors in the situation did or could draw on for promoting peace and social resilience
- Explain how those resources did or could make a difference in the ways people related to enemies, strangers, neighbors, and friends

- Finally, write all of this into 300 words using a very natural-spoken engaging tone of voice, memorize it, and practice in advance!

Scheduling

In a group of twenty participants, each person will pitch one project idea during the course of the five ESNF gatherings (only four of which include the thirty-minute block for project pitches). The pitch should be no longer than three minutes in length. This schedule allows for five pitches per gathering and leaves enough time for three additional minutes per pitch for a couple of questions from the rest of the group.

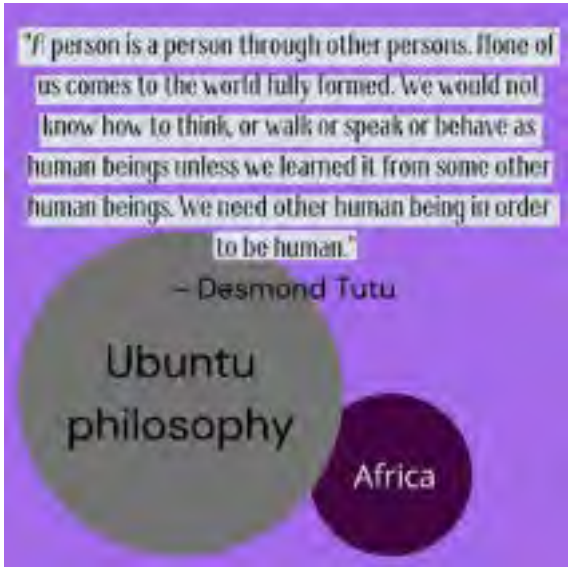
Hashtags

In order to make it easier for project participants and facilitators to follow one another's contributions, **use the hashtag #ESNF** on all program-related content!

If you build on the ESNF program and expand it in other directions, we'd love to follow and support you! Help us keep in touch by **using the hashtags #ESNF and #ESNF+.** You can follow and join our network via Instagram using the QR-Code here.

Example Content for Posts and Pitch

The following pages illustrate the kind of content creation that ESNF hopes to inspire. These instagram posts were designed by creative students in an international G_NET seminar conducted in 2021 on the theme of “The Neighbor”. Content used with permission of the creators: Lara Weller (Germany), Esther Akinade (Nigeria), and Dina Willci (India).


"A person is a person through other persons. None of us comes to the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk or speak or behave as human beings unless we learned it from some other human beings. We need other human being in order to be human."
– Desmond Tutu
Ubuntu philosophy
Africa


Love your neighbor as yourself
Leviticus 19:18
Be good to neighbors near and far
Quran 4:36
"I am because you are"
- Ubuntu Philosophie
Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you
Luke, 6:27


Three Exampels of Neighbor love
Germany
India
Nigeria
from our local contexts


the person living next door
every man, woman, child across every boundary and identity
the person in need
Who is your neighbor?


"In India there are so many social discrimination are still out there, But in the midst of flood they stood or united as one to help each other and overcome the disaster."
Photo by Tim Mossholder on Unsplash


"Even when their own homes were water-logged, volunteers travelled to Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta, Kochi and Thrissur, to save the lives of people marooned in homes and institutions."


Railway
mission
Germany


"We trust that God wants every human being and gives him his own dignity. Philanthropy, charity and solidarity guide our doing."


LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR
Is loving my neighbour in fulfilment of a command to love my neighbour actually loving the person who is my neighbour, or is it instead serving the one giving the command?


Serving God might be the initial motivation to actually go and meet the neighbor, but in order to really love them I need to accept and care for whom they are


Ubuntu Philosophy: Loving the neighbor does not come from a command to love the neighbor or serving the one who gives the command. Rather, it is more of a social responsibility binding on all members of the community.
BE KIND. LET'S LOOK OUT FOR ONE ANOTHER.
Photo by John Cameron on Unsplash


make people feel loved today
The call of God to love is not just transforming theory into practise and not speaking about practice but being practical.

Meet the Team!

Andrew DeCort is passionate about seeing the precious value of each person, encouraging love, and challenging cultural patterns that devalue others. Andrew directs the Institute for Faith and Flourishing and is the co-founder of the Neighbor-Love Movement. He is the author of *Flourishing on the Edge of Faith: Seven Practices for a New Me* and holds a Ph.D. in Ethics from the University of Chicago. He has lectured in ethics, theology, and Ethiopian studies at Wheaton College, the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, the University of Bonn, and the American Theological Initiative.

Ikenna Paschal Okpaleke is a lecturer at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, and a researcher at the Research Institute of Religions, Spiritualities, Cultures Societies (RSCS), Université Catholique de Louvain. Dr. Okpaleke holds a Ph.D. and two Master's degrees from KU Leuven. His interests include ecclesiological questions, ecumenical theology, African theologies, and spirituality. He is passionate about dialogue, tolerance, and mutual flourishing of all humans irrespective of cultural and/or religious backgrounds

Lani Anaya is a specialist focused on projects related to peacebuilding, the 2030 Agenda, and ecumenical/interfaith dialogue, in relation to youth meaningful inclusion. Lani holds a BA in International Relations from UNAM, an MSc. in Peace and Conflict Studies from Uppsala University, and a MA in Ecumenical Studies from Bonn University, and a specialization from Bossey Ecumenical Institute. She currently works at the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the faith-based organization Act Church of Sweden.

Matthew Robinson holds a PhD in theology and religious studies from Northwestern University. He leads the Department for Intercultural Theology at the Protestant Theological Faculty of the University of Bonn. His main research interests are in religion and inter-/trans-culturality. He loves learning from students and is inspired by young leaders who think global and act local.


enemy

Unit 1. The Enemy

Keywords: *Othering, Conflict, Violence, Faith, Love, Hope, Practice*

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink." **Proverbs 25:21**

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven." **Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:43-45)**

"Shall I tell you what is better than much prayer and sadaqa [giving to the needy]? Mending conflict. And beware of hatred; it strips you of your religion." **Prophet Mohammed (ibn Anas, Muwatta Malik, Book 47, Hadith 7)**

"The command to love one's enemy is an absolute necessity for our survival. Love, even for enemies, is the key to the solution of the problems of our world." **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

Introduction

Conflict is a painful and familiar reality in our relationships with others. Out of conflict, we may begin to see others as our enemies. “Enemy” literally means the opposite of a friend: an individual or group we dislike, fear, resent, or hate. Labeling people as enemies is a powerful form of othering, because it can harden our conscience and justify excluding, attacking, or even annihilating others. This is the gateway to dehumanization, which may lead to mass violence, atrocity, and genocide. At root, hate means the desire for the other not to exist. Here our faith traditions can offer profound resources for interrupting enemy-making and healing relationships. The teaching that God has created all people with inherent value cuts to the root of othering. Recognizing that we too are imperfect and capable of evil cultivates humble self-awareness and expands compassion. Hearing the radical call to love our enemies opens new imagination and energizes practices of hope that cultivate reconciliation, social resilience, and shared flourishing. With love and courage, our most painful experiences can become places of profound healing and transformation, both for ourselves and the society we share.

Icebreaker

- What is your favorite food?
- Have you ever shared a meal with an unexpected person and/or in a surprising place?

Anecdote: Ferdosa’s Declaration

In October 2018, I was invited to speak to about 200 youth at a city hall in eastern Ethiopia near Somalia. Serious ethnic conflict had broken out in the region. I saw huge camps with dark tents sheltering people who had been labeled as enemies and driven from their homes.

I spoke to the youth about loving our enemies and how this radical love can cultivate healing and hope in our communities. Intense question and answer followed as the youth wrestled with this unusual response to conflict.

When the meeting ended, a young woman named Ferdosa came up to me, and she spoke passionate words I will never forget: "Dr. Andrew, **no one has ever told me to love my enemies before! Starting today, I will love my enemies and teach others to love their enemies!"**

Ferdosa then held my hand and raised it up, almost like she was making a covenant or oath. We took a selfie together to symbolize our shared commitment to love our enemies. Years later, Ferdosa told me that she considers this one of her greatest strengths: "I am a person who loves even my enemies."

Reflections on the Enemy

- Who are your enemies?
- Which voices and platforms fuel othering and enemy-making in your context?
- What words, images, stories and ideals do they appeal to?
- What does your faith tradition teach about how we should see and treat our enemies? Are you familiar with its call for compassion, rejection of hate, and practices of love for others?
- How will you actively practice loving your enemy? Explore several practices at iffglobal.org/love-your-enemy.

Ferdosa's words deeply inspire me: even in contexts of high conflict, youth are hungry for an alternative to othering, hatred, and violence. Sometimes all they need is an explanation of why loving their enemies makes sense and an invitation to start the journey.

Questions for Reflection and Preparation

Have you ever heard the call to love your enemy? If you have, when was the first time and how did you respond?

An Essay on the Enemy

By Andrew DeCort (USA / Ethiopia)

Concept

Conflict is a painful and familiar part of our lives. We experience it in our families, friendships, neighborhoods, and other personal relationships. We also experience it between larger groups of people, identities, and entire nations.

In "Crossing Enemy Lines," Aziz Abu Sarah writes about how his brother Tayseer was tortured and murdered by Israeli soldiers.[5] Aziz's personal family experience was rooted in a bitter group conflict. And this devastating loss influenced Aziz as a Palestinian Muslim to despise Jews, even though he had never had a conversation with a Jewish person.

Aziz's story doesn't end here. As we'll see, he ends up meeting Jewish people in a Hebrew class and choosing to practice radical forgiveness. But his experience movingly illustrates what we all know: Conflict creates incredibly powerful **emotions** within us and between us. It's like our souls and relationships are set on fire. We feel pain, anger, fear, grief, hatred, and desires to avoid others, exclude them, or make them suffer.

In the process, we begin seeing other people or whole groups of people as "the enemy." The words "**enemy**" and "**enmity**" share the Latin root inimicus, which means "not a friend" or someone who is disliked or hated. Jim Forest writes, "**An enemy is anyone I feel threatened by and seek to defend myself against. An enemy is a person or group of**

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[5] See Aziz Abu Sarah, "Crossing Enemy Lines" in *Strangers, Neighbors, Friends: Muslim-Christian-Jewish Reflections on Compassion and Peace* (Cascade Books, 2018), 7-11.

people whose defeat I would count a victory. What for them would be bad news for me would be good news."[6]

Closer Examination

Our enemies often fall within two overlapping categories. First, we may have personal enemies who are near us and with whom we share a relationship: family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and community members. We may also have **identity-based,** often impersonal enemies based on categories and stereotypes: their ethnicity or race, the country where they were born, the religion they claim, the political views they hold, their sexual orientation, or other markers of identity.

At heart, we see the enemy as unrelated and less than ourselves. We "**other**" them. In "Healing the Imagination," James K.A. Smith points out how this othering vision can become so normal to us that we don't even notice it in ourselves. We may even actively deny it. He writes, **"The way we reflexively imagine others is what truly shapes our action in the world. Of late, many people have overwhelmingly been shaped by stories that portray others as threats and competitors, even stories that fundamentally dehumanize those who differ from us.** Our habits of perception have been subtly trained to imagine the other as an invader, a competitor, an adversary… We then make the world in our image." [7]

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[6] Jim Forest, *Loving Our Enemies: Reflections on the Hardest Commandment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 18.

[7] See James K.A. Smith, "Healing the Imagination: Art Lessons from James Baldwin," in *Image Journal*, Issue 107.

Before we know it, “the enemy” comes to be seen as evil, perhaps even less than human or demonic. We attach insulting words and images to them like “weeds,” “dogs,” “cockroaches,” “cancer,” or “devil.” We shift from seeing these others as fellow humans with precious value who, like us, make mistakes––sometimes truly terrible mistakes––to seeing them as completely different, worthless, or worthy of death.

This othering, enemy-making process is how **violence**, mass killing, and genocide get started. For example, in the German Holocaust, Jews were regularly labeled and represented as “rats” by Nazi propaganda. In the Rwandan genocide, Tutsis were described as “cockroaches.” Of course, we think of “rats” and cockroaches” as dirty creatures to be exterminated for the health and safety of the community. Unsurprisingly, then, these dehumanizing enemy images made it possible for ordinary Germans and Rwandans to accept or actively participate in killing their neighbors.

We experience a mini simulation of this dynamic when we watch action movies. When the less-than-human “bad guys” get destroyed, we’re rarely disturbed or ask questions. We may even laugh or cheer. The reason is simple but powerful: we see the Orc, Storm Trooper, or other “enemy” as unrelated or less than ourselves. [8]

Conflict is real. Enemy-making is all too familiar. And leaders often exploit both to mobilize people, resources, and power for their advantage. We know that this cycle unleashes incredible pain and devastation in our relationships and societies.

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[8] For a profound study of this dynamic in modern history with numerous visual examples, see Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1986). For a more recent study, see David Livingstone Smith, *On Inhumanity: Dehumanization and How to Resist It* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021).

So this reality raises a crucial question: **Will we follow the popular trend of excluding and/or attacking "enemies," or, like Ferdosa, will we choose a different way of seeing and treating others in conflict?**

Transformation

Basic biology and our own experiences show that we naturally try to avoid or attack our enemies. We want to cut them out of our lives or cut them down entirely. This is our **flight or fight instinct.**

But our **faith traditions** invite us into another way of seeing and treating our enemies rooted in a different story of God and humanity.

Jesus audaciously taught, "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27). Before Jesus, **Moses** commanded Israel to reject hating Egyptians, to abandon revenge, and to love their neighbor (Deuteronomy 23:8; Exodus 19:18). After Jesus, the **Prophet Mohammed** taught that reconciling conflict is the highest form of virtue in God's eyes, even more sacred than prayer (ibn Anas, Muwatta Malik, Book 47, Hadith 7).

These religious visions of the enemy are counter-cultural and challenging. Each of them is rooted in a profound story of God as our Creator and Lover.

The **Hebrew Scriptures** teach that in the beginning, God created each person in God's image. Each person has God-given value stamped into them (Genesis 1:26-29). The most basic task of being human, then, is to recognize and respect this sacred value in one another, even when we make mistakes and fail (Leviticus 19:18, 34).

In the **New Testament,** Jesus went further and taught that God Godself loves enemies. God's "perfection" is defined by a radical generosity that gives good gifts like sunlight and rain, even to the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45). Jesus says that God is "kind to the ungrateful and wicked," and that God is merciful (Luke 6:35-36).

Similarly, the **Holy Quran** teaches that God created each person and all peoples with sacred value and thus to recognize and honor one another––not to compete and kill (Quran 49:13). God is compassionate and merciful, and thus to take a single life is like murdering all of humanity, while saving one life is like saving all of humanity (Quran 5:32).

These profound visions of God interrupt our instincts toward isolation and aggression––flight or fight. And they can heal othering by overcoming the vision that sees the other as unrelated or less than me and my group. They remind us that we are all created by God, equal in value and connected to each other.

Through these sacred lenses, we can learn to see that even an enemy is an object of God's love and our sibling in God's family. In other words, they have enduring value and can be healed through God's mercy, even when they are lost and change may seem hopeless. Nelson Mandela said it like this: "All [people], even the most seemingly cold-blooded, have a core of decency, and if their heart is touched, they are capable of changing."[9]

And this vision of the other leads to courageous **practices** of loving our enemies. Here **love is not a fuzzy feeling or naive romanticism. Love is a courageous choice and practical**

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[9] Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (New York, NY: Bayback Books, 1994), 462.

commitment to care for the well-being of others, even when they do wrong and need to change.

For example, in his groundbreaking teaching, Jesus mentions five concrete practices of loving our enemies.[10] These practices are echoed in Judaism, Islam, and other moral traditions as we'll see in the texts for group reading.

1. **Pray for enemies:** Prayer is an intimate act of bringing the other before God and asking for their wellbeing. It opens our hearts to God's love for them, uproots bitterness, and cleanses hate.
2. **Turn the other cheek:** This practice of calm presence courageously refuses to run from aggression. It also defiantly refuses to mirror it. It faces injustice while embodying dignity and awakening the aggressor's conscience.
3. **Bless enemies:** Blessing doesn't mean accepting harmful behavior. It means declaring our desire for the other's well-being, healing, and flourishing. The practice of blessing surrenders curses and condemnations and declares hope for a new story.
4. **Do good to enemies:** This practice recognizes the enduring dignity of the other and embodies our desire for them to be well. It practically declares our humanizing vision and commitment to a different relationship. Here Jesus echoes the Hebrew Bible's call to give food and water to our enemies (Proverbs 25:21). Aziz mentions how his Hebrew teacher's unexpected smile and dignifying comment about a Palestinian leader disrupted his vision of Israelis as enemies and shattered his stereotypes.
5. **Forgive:** Forgiving releases the failure of the enemy and holds on to their value as we seek reconciled relationship. Forgiveness sets us free from being controlled by the past

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[10] See Andrew DeCort, "How Should We Treat Our Enemies?" originally published on andrew-decort.com on March 17, 2019. For many more practices of loving our enemies, see iffglobal.org/love-your-enemy.

and those who have harmed us; it sets the offender free to reimagine themselves and make a new beginning. Forgiveness is a practice of liberation.

Each of these practices lays the foundation for one of the most practical methods of overcoming enmity: meeting the enemy, getting to know them, and developing a personal relationship of mutual care. Aziz Abu Sarah's story "Crossing Enemy Lines" powerfully illustrates what this can look like even in the face of systemic injustice, murder, and hate. Aziz writes, "I learned to choose compassion. 'Grievous to me is what you suffer.' Choosing love crowded out all thoughts of revenge, and I began to act with kindness and mercy." This transformation started for Aziz by attending a Hebrew class and getting to know ordinary Jewish people.

This practical vision of loving our enemies has led to **radical, real-world change,** both in interpersonal relationships and socio-political systems. Erica Chenoweth, professor of human rights at Harvard University, researched over three hundred cases of socio-political conflict from 1900 to 2006. She found that nonviolent civil resistance is twice as effective for producing sustainable change compared to using violence. [11] Loving our enemies is the fuel we need for nonviolent civil resistance.

Dr. **Martin Luther King** and the **Civil Rights Movemen**t in America is a powerful example. King's movement was fueled by Jesus's command to love the enemy. Thus, King refused to demonize white racists or use violence against them, even as he fiercely opposed racist

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[11] See Erica Chenoweth, "The Success of Nonviolent Civil Resistance," filmed September 2013 in Boulder, CO, TEX videos, 12:33, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJSehRlU34w and Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011)

systems. He referred to them as “enemy-neighbors,” naming that our “enemies” are more deeply our neighbors and have enduring value and connection with us.

With this neighboring vision of the other, King and his partners practiced creative nonviolence to expose the evil and cruelty of racism while increasing social resilience. They organized bus boycotts, marches, and sit-ins that disrupted racist systems without replicating racism’s othering hate and violence. The results were profound: racial segregation in the United States was overthrown in federal law, universal civil rights were established, and mainstream culture began changing. Of course, much work remains to be done.

Let’s return to where we started. We know that conflict is real, and through it, we can become enemies of one another on personal and identity-based levels. This process often manifests itself in explosive emotions, insulting words, dehumanizing images, and violent actions. Denying this reality is dishonest and doesn’t help us heal ourselves and our communities.

But there is an alternative to flight or fight––to cutting enemies out or cutting enemies down. Our faith traditions call us to start by seeing our enemies differently: as children of God and our siblings in God’s creation. Even the enemy is our neighbor, and God invites us to love them as ourselves. This isn’t the fluff of fuzzy feelings or romantic words. It’s the hard work of resisting hate and practicing compassion in ways that honor the other’s dignity, while resisting and transforming their injustice. We do this out of obedience to God and our highest values.

Ultimately, loving our enemies is a practice of hope. It declares that God is merciful, that our failures are not final, and that we can move toward healed relationships with

expanded social resilience. New beginnings are possible. A new story can be written. According to Jesus, loving our enemies is the mark of God's children and the pathway to everlasting life.

Dr. Martin Luther King declared, "Far from being a pious [teaching] of a Utopian dreamer, the command to love one's enemy is an absolute necessity for our survival. Love even for enemies is the key to the solution of the problems of our world."

You have the key. How do you want to use it to unlock conflict and open new pathways to our shared flourishing in your context?

Group Reading

From the Hebrew word *haver*, "friend" or "comrade," *havruta* refers both to one's partner in study and to the process. In the practice of *havruta*, one partner reads a passage and the other person summarizes in his or her own words and raises questions. Then both partners discuss possible meanings and nuances. After switching roles, the process repeats. For more detailed instructions, see page 21 above. Try to read and discuss the following texts in 30 minutes.

Jewish Sources

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." Leviticus 19:18

"Do not hate an Egyptian, because you resided as foreigners in their country." Deuteronomy 23:8. *Note*: The Israelites had recently escaped centuries of

slavery in Egypt. "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."[12] Proverbs 25:21-22.

Christian Sources

"[Jesus said,] 'But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Luke 6:27-36 "As the soldiers led Jesus away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him... Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Jesus to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified Jesus there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'" Luke 23:26-34

Islamic Sources

"The most virtuous behavior is to engage those who break relations, to give to those who withhold from you, and to forgive those who wrong you." Prophet Mohamed, Hadith Al-Tabarani, 282

"Shall I tell you what is better than much prayer and *sadaqa* [giving to the

[12] *Note*: In ancient Egypt, holding a basin of burning coals over your head represented purifying your mind, not punishment.

needy]? Mending conflict. And beware of hatred -- it strips you of your religion." Prophet Mohammed, Ibn Anas, *Muwatta Malik*, Book 47, Hadith 7; Malik 1642

"Ibn Salul [a chief leader of the Khazrag tribe in Medina] worked for nine years against the Prophet and was known for mocking the Prophet. For instance, he spread rumors that the Prophet's wife, Aisha, had committed adultery. His efforts to create dissent among Muslim groups were so successful that Ibn Salul's son, a devout Muslim, asked the Prophet for permission to kill his own father. The Prophet rejected the request. Ibn Salul was not punished for his actions or words, despite the Prophet having the power to do so. When Ibn Salul was on his deathbed, the Prophet went to visit him. There, Ibn Salul asked for the Prophet's shirt, which was believed to have some sort of mystical powers, and asked him to attend his funeral. The Prophet agreed. Umar ibn al-Khattab (a respected Muslim leader who would later become the second successor of the Prophet) reminded the Prophet of all the things Ibn Salul had said and done against him and against Islam and tried to persuade him not to attend. However, the Prophet said that in spite of Ibn Salul's deeds, he would petition God more than seventy times if it would save Ibn Salul's soul… we should respond to people who mock our faith with compassion -- we should generously share our tunics, sincerely weep at their funerals, and fervently pray seventy times for their souls."

"Go my friend
bestow your love
even on your enemies
if you touch their hearts
what do you think will happen?" Rumi[13]

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[13] The last two Islamic sources may be found in: Aziz Abu Sarah, "Insulting Islam" in Kelly James Clark, Aziz Abu Sarah and Nancy Fuchs Kreimer, *Strangers, Neighbors, Friends: Muslim-Christian-Jewish Reflections on Compassion and Peace* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 33; and Rumi, *The Love Poems of Rumi* (New York, NY: Wellfleet Press, 2015), 126.

Op-Ed

Understanding the Enemy

By Moti Daba (Ethiopia)

Before we focus on others as enemies, let's take a moment to reflect on ourselves! Who is your "enemy," and why? Have you ever considered yourself as an enemy to others? Do you know a person, society, or religious group that has been labeled as an "enemy"?

Many African traditions teach about compassion and loving one another. Our most inspiring cultural practices insist that even our "enemies" are still people or even friends. Ubuntu is one of the most beautiful examples. This African philosophy insists, "I am because we are." It shows us how our lives are fundamentally connected and equal in value. We have a lot to learn from these traditions.

But we also need to face problems in our traditions. In extreme situations, religious groups and sects see each other as enemies, and, as a Christian, I've observed that some churches may even fuel this conflict. This can lead to groups of people being demonized and communities mobilizing around attacking their "enemies" rather than cultivating peace.

This vulnerability may be connected to cultural and religious values in which defeating "enemies" is seen as necessary for survival and success. This competitive mindset motivates people to work hard to shame their "enemy" rather than reconcile and cooperate together. If things go well and their family flourishes, people may feel proud and like they have embarrassed their "enemy." Conversely, when the individual or family suffers

injury or loses a loved one, the “enemy” may be thought to be laughing. These attitudes create a sense of rivalry that fuels conflict and drains empathy.

But this isn’t the whole picture. We hear an echo of the possibility for a transformed relationship in the common saying, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend”. A positive takeaway from this conflict-minded saying is that there is no permanent enemy. In fact, when we change our perspective, an enemy can even become a good friend or ally. The key is learning to see one another as cooperators, rather than competitors, toward a shared goal: peace, security, and dignity. This is the insight of Ubuntu. Seeing our connectedness and making strangers, even enemies, into friends is the starting point for transforming conflicts.

To sum up, the interpretation and treatment of enemies varies in African traditional and religious perspectives. Some can turn us into rivals and fuel conflict. But our most inspiring religious and cultural traditions can play a powerful role in contributing to peaceful harmony. “I am because we are.” All of us are connected, equal in value, and invited into the practice of peace.

May peace start with each one of us.

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Andrew DeCort, "How Should We Treat Our Enemies?" originally published on andrew-decort.com on March 17, 2019. DeCort explores Jesus's groundbreaking command to love our enemies in its cultural context and for today. (5 pages)

Aziz Abu Sarah, "Crossing Enemy Lines" in *Strangers, Neighbors, Friends: Muslim-Christian-Jewish Reflections on Compassion and Peace* (Cascade Books, 2018), 7-11. Aziz explores how he shifted from hating his enemies after his brother was murdered to practicing compassion. (4 pages)

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stranger

Unit 2. The Stranger

Keywords: *Difference, The Other, Alien, Fear, Hospitality, Out-Group*

"Friendship transforms a stranger into a relative." **Traditional Arabic saying**

"Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them." **Paul (Romans 12:13-14)**

"This is only some poor man who has lost his way, and we must be kind to him, for strangers and foreigners in distress are under Jove's protection, and will take what they can get and be thankful; so, girls, give the poor fellow something to eat and drink, and wash him in the stream at some place that is sheltered from the wind." **Princess Nausicaa on Odysseus in Homer's *The Odyssey* VI (Butler, 1932), 105**

"I beg you not to disturb yourself. I particularly beg you to be my guest." **Father Zossima in Fyodor Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov**

"Strangers from the Unseen have arrived in the meadow; go forth, for it is a rule that 'the newcomer is visited'." **Rumi, *Mystical Poems of Rūmī*, 141:3**

Introduction

Defining the identity of a stranger is difficult today because there are many senses of "strangeness" that shape our responses to others. We might focus on geography and understand the stranger as someone who is passing by, unknown, and not staying. Still, this geographic focus may be too limiting. Today we have neighbors who are strangers just because they are "not staying" in our relationship circles. The digital world also blurs the borderline between the one who is familiar but still a stranger.

This complexity shows the importance of exploring the meaning of "strange" and "strangeness" in our lived experience. We need to examine our emotional and rational impulses and reactions when we encounter the stranger. Some of our negative reactions are based on the concrete experiences of ourselves and others, whether friends, neighbors, or other strangers. **The fears, suspicions, and hesitations we feel are not to be dismissed casually without proper interrogation**. At the same time, we should also familiarize ourselves with our faith traditions' counter-narratives that celebrate strangers and call for radical hospitality. Progress toward positive transformation and social resilience demands this serious engagement with our experiences and convictions.

To different degrees, every individual in our **relationship circle** was once a stranger. This striking fact can encourage us to be actively open to positive transformation in our encounters with strangers and welcoming them into our relationship circles. Still, this transformation requires **intentionality**: How can we consciously create positive encounters with others in the different circles of our relationships? How can strangers find peace in our neighborhoods? This intentionality also nudges us to face the real **difficulties** in making such transformations: Are there limits to making friends out of strangers? We know that **there can also be a negative movement in which the stranger is turned into an enemy**.

Our encounters and the relationships that grow out of them are a two-way street. But each of us is an agent who can take the initiative to cultivate positive relationships and a culture of hospitality. So what kind of disposition should *we* have towards a stranger? And what frameworks can help us to avoid contributing to exclusion or conflict?

Icebreaker

- Where is the strangest place you can imagine traveling? Why do you think so?
- Have you ever travelled to a place where you were a complete foreigner? If so, where? How did you feel at first, and how did the people make you feel when you encountered them?

Anecdote: The Hot Seat in a Summer Integration Class

In summer of 2019, I decided to do the integration course organized by the government in Belgium for immigrants. Eighteen of us from eighteen countries took the course. We were complete strangers to one another. Our class instructor, a Moroccan immigrant who naturalized in Belgium, had such a warm personality. He found creative ways to not only teach us what was in the syllabus but also to make us bond with one another. Soon we felt like one lovely family.

One of our instructor's methods was called the 'hot seat moment'. In turns, each of us sat in the middle of the class and was asked all sorts of questions. There were no limits to the questions we could ask, but the one in the hot seat was also free to decline answering. This helped us to know each other better and even to connect with one another's families. The instructor did this exercise with every set of students.

On the last day of the 'hot seat moment', he normally invites one of the Belgian instructors to voluntarily take the 'hot seat'. On one such occasion, a student asked the instructor how long he had been facilitating the integration of immigrants into Belgian society. The instructor answered, quite confidently, "For 15 years".

Then came the next question by another immigrant: "Has any immigrant become your friend?"

Dead silence followed.

Questions for Reflection and Preparation

What does this story say to you about our attitudes toward strangers? What might have been responsible for the lack of transition from strangerhood to friendship? Can the values of our faith traditions contribute to transforming integration processes into true hospitality and relationship?

An Essay on the Stranger

By Ikenna Paschal Okpaleke (Nigeria/Belgium)

Concept

In the classical traditions of ancient Greece, the most common term for the stranger or the foreigner is **Xenos**. This word shares a similar root with the Gothic **gasts** as well as the Latin **hospes** (guest) and *hostis* (enemy). Essentially, the Greek *Xenos* refers to an unknown person, who arrives in a particular land, either for a short or long stay, depending on whether he or she is passing through or seeking a permanent dwelling. The term presumes a considerable distance between the place of departure and the place of arrival or reception. The idea of the strange or of strangeness is synonymous with words like alien, other, unknown, and abnormal.

Who is a stranger? Consider these ways that we encounter the "stranger."

First, we might consider the **stranger as an alien**. While the alien can be strange, the stranger is most likely not an alien. If the stranger refers to a fellow human being that is unfamiliar to us or our immediate environment, does it necessarily imply that the unfamiliar completely falls outside the scope of our knowledge and experience?

Second, we might identify the **stranger as "the Other"**, whether divine (as in Rudolf Otto's understanding of God as "the Wholly Other") or human (as in the philosophy of Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, or Bernhard Waldenfels). The stranger is essentially considered as another who is different from the self. In that case, he or she is **the other-**

self that differs from the 'my-self' or the 'known-self' (represented by neighbors, friends, and even enemies in some cases).

Third, a **stranger might also appear as the unknown.** This raises questions like "**Who is known?" And "Who is unknown?" "Who is within the circle of my experience?"** And "Who is outside my circle of experience?" Knowledge and experience through encounters could serve as determinants of who is to be identified as a stranger or not. But what type of knowledge or experience is required? Past events as well as the narratives of others (friends, media, and other sources) may provide useful resources but may also be misleading.

Of course, strangeness often disrupts what we consider normal. As such, a s**tranger emerges** as abnormal. But what belongs to the realm of normality and abnormality? Who defines the criteria for the abnormal? We need to question our habit of focusing on ourselves or our immediate environment in measuring what is considered abnormal. Or perhaps instead of the binary of 'normal-abnormal', we can apply that of 'common-uncommon' in our evaluation of ourselves in relation to the other. In that case, the 'uncommon' becomes open to the possibility of being considered as 'special'.

Beyond these ways of perceiving the stranger, we can also consider different types of strangers. The identity of a stranger may be determined by the particular circle or community that one steps into. In that sense, there are often **differentiated ways of labeling strangers**. For instance, a neighbor at a workplace might be a stranger in my religious community.

Here we see the way that social spaces can determine the identification of a stranger. These social spaces can be **religious**, in which the stranger is identified as **belonging to a different religious community.** Consider the ways being a stranger can emerge as a product of intra-religious (ecumenical, denominational, confessional) or interreligious diversity. We might also think of **socio-cultural** spaces, where one belongs to a different social or cultural group. We find here the elements of ethnicism, racism, and apartheid active in distinguishing others as strangers. There is also **political** space that can categorize the stranger as belonging to a different political group by virtue of citizenship or party affiliation, for example. The coding and resulting division of “liberals" and “conservatives” could serve as an important illustration of this dynamic. Finally, there is also **economic** space, which, via inclusions and exclusions maintained by markets, draws our attention to economic status and class belonging, and consciousness. Here we encounter the poor and the rich in the stranger social quadrants of exclusivity and exclusion.

Closer Examination

Three elements influence how we experience the stranger. The first is the basic ideas that strangeness evokes in our minds. These are the theoretical presuppositions concerning the stranger. The second is a **set of four behavioral attitudes** that kick at the moment the stranger is encountered, referred to as the 4Ds. The third element is the **common prejudices and biases** that often shape people’s response to the stranger in their midst. Most of these are learned or culturally internalized over a long period of time. Let’s look at them one by one.

Four common presuppositions that may influence our encounters with the stranger:

First is the attribute of **non-belongingness**, which depends on a pre-existing relationship circle to which the stranger does not belong. Relationships are marked by borders that determine several **levels of participation** and degrees of **in-groups** and **out-groups.** The stranger falls outside this circle and could either be admitted or rejected. Once admitted, a person ceases to be a stranger as far as that relationship circle is concerned.

The second is the 'belongingness' to an **out-group**. Here the stranger is an **outsider**. He or she belongs to the outer part of the relationship circle and is not included in any of the levels of participation within an existing network of relationships. He or she is therefore seen as an '**intruder**', even if unintentionally. This attribute is a direct consequence of the first trait of non-belongingness to a particular in-group.

The third is the attribute of **anonymity**. The stranger has no name per se. Names are a mark of familiarity. Sometimes the perpetration of evil against fellow human beings is made possible by the process of anonymization. For example, the Nazis identified the Jews with numbers, and the Hutus identified the Tutsis with "cockroaches" in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Here we are referring to **fundamental anonymity,** where the stranger is reduced to the sphere of **namelessness**. Anonymity puts the stranger in a vulnerable state within the environment he or she inhabits.

Fourth is the attribute of **co-strangerhood,** which affects both the perceived stranger and the one that encounters the stranger. We often ignore the fact that, normally, it takes a stranger to encounter a stranger. At work here is the principle of **reflexivity**. Once you encounter a stranger, be mindful that for that stranger, you are equally a stranger. Strangeness imposes unknownness on both sides in a particular but disproportionate way.

Let's now look at four "D's" of encountering a stranger.

In encountering a stranger, the element of **distance** emerges quite strongly. Encounter implies a crossing over into proximity, which can be geographical or digital, or even religious/spiritual. For example, when one converts to a particular faith, he or she is no longer a stranger to other adherents of that faith.

Another element is the **disruption** that is provoked by the presence of a stranger. An encounter brings about a disruption of familiar spaces and even modes of living. A stranger in a neighborhood creates a situation of extra curiosity. For the lone stranger, they may experience a fear of the unknown, of being unaccepted, of being easily misunderstood, or of new challenges.

De-anonymity is another issue that is implied in any encounter with the unfamiliar or the unknown. An encounter begins with an interrogative process of identification. Who is that? Who are you? What is your name? The de-anonymization of the stranger is the first step towards the evaluation and designation of the stranger, as well as the beginning of a relationship.

After the process of identification, an encounter with a stranger is marked by the element of **designation**. This means that once a stranger is identified, a determination is formed in terms of categorizing him or her based on initial impressions. Are they friends or enemies? A visitor or intruder?

Third, we need to look at the **common prejudices and biases** -- the pre-judgments -- that may affect our encounters with strangers. When we encounter strangeness, we are often

overtaken by the emotion of fear. We may presume that the object of our fear is harmful or dangerous. This could be a judgment formed from previous unpleasant experiences. It is important to note that fear, which is an unpleasant emotion, is different from hate.

Most times, the emotion of fear might be propelled by the human tendency of **self-preservation,** which may be considered natural. It leads to the tendency to protect ourselves from the unknown or the stranger that is prejudged as harmful. This can come in the form of shutting down channels of communication or encounter with a stranger. It can also take the form of direct attack or harm to the stranger as a form of self-defense.

The attention to the self comes from a recognition of, and even a prejudice against, **difference**. When we consider ourselves exceptional or dissimilar to other persons, we tend to ignore how similar we are to 'the other'. Differences do not imply absolute dissimilarity because human beings, despite their backgrounds, are similar in many ways. Differences also point to areas of connection between the self and the other.

Once we fail to recognize these basic human connections, we fall into the problem of extremism that comes in different versions. One of these is **racism**, namely the discrimination or antagonism of one towards people of another race based on a superiority-inferiority complex. Often this plays out based on skin color but may manifest in other forms such as ethnicism or the caste system.

Another form of extremism is the attitude of **classism**, which denigrates people who belong to a particular social class. Classism is often manifested along cultural or economic lines, such as in the distinction between the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterates, and the cultured and the uncultured.

These presuppositions, D's, and biases are all significant factors in our encounters with strangers.

Transformation

Transformation can happen either positively or negatively once we have encountered a stranger. This is determined by various factors, some of which we'll explore quickly.

The negative transformation includes the **risk of developing enemies out of strangers.** To avoid this, we need to make a clear distinction between strangers and enemies, while remembering that even our enemies have value and call for our care. **A stranger is not necessarily an enemy.** Still, strangers are often perceived as enemies. What is responsible for this negative transitioning? Does the experience of others (friends and even strangers) serve as a template for judgment? How valid is such a template?

This perception might influence us to maintain a **critical distance** from strangers. In the light of the risk of transitioning from stranger to enemy without experiencing 'the other', we need to question whether the option of critical distance should be adopted in such encounters. The critical distance here is framed as the **space** between friendship and the enemy. As such, it remains an insecure position for the stranger. Should the stranger be perpetually boxed in such a position, if adopted as an option? Or should there be a transition, and if so, to what other category? Should there be any duration to the period of in-betweenness?

Still, we don't need to **trivialize previous experiences**. The August 2021 murder of Fr. Olivier Maire in France has many parallels to the murder in September 2020 of Fr. Roberto

Malgesini in Italy. Both died at the hands of refugees to whom they offered shelter, food, and assistance in the name of charity. These instances raise the question of fear and suspicion that people have concerning strangers.

Paying attention to these sobering cases places us **between popular prejudice and discernment.** Prejudices and biases against strangers could be explained using **social categorization theory** (John C. Turner, Michael Hogg) within the framework of in-group and out-group construction of social identities. By contrast, discernment requires questioning the historical and social sources and processes of categorization. How does categorization or labeling eventually lead to prejudice? What is the distance between prejudice and experience?

Still, our relationships with strangers can lead to positive transformation through exciting and worthwhile practices.

One practice is to **explore the strange with a sense of wonder.** This involves the religious disposition to encounter beauty before and within the other, the stranger. The analysis of Jeannine Hill Fletcher is helpful here. Fletcher argues that **"the moment of wonder in the presence of a tradition one does not understand can be a moment that brings one to the awareness of the incomprehensible mystery of God."**[14] The stranger is constitutive of this tradition that lies outside our immediate understanding, and so ought to be encountered with a sense of wonder.

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[14] Jeannine H. Fletcher, "As Long as We Wonder: Possibilities in the Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue," *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 531– 554; 549.

Second, **living the command of love i**s another way of encountering the stranger positively. The commandment of love is very central in the teachings of most religious groups as we saw in the chapter on the enemy and will see again when we look at the neighbor. Beyond the injunction to love one another, it is important to examine **what it means to love a stranger.** The group readings from different faith traditions provide very concrete examples.

Third, loving a stranger presupposes **an inner attitude of openness.** Every true transformation begins from **the inside,** the seat of openness. What does it mean to be open towards the other? How can one be authentically open to a stranger without losing one's sense of security or identity? Douglas Pratt's Being Open, Being Faithful: The Journey of Interreligious Dialogue (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2014) offers useful lessons in this exploration.

In the process of opening up oneself to love and encountering the stranger, one can **overcome the insecurities that lead to the exclusion of strangers from relationship circles.** We know that human insecurity, which can be ontological (Rowan Williams), can hinder openness to the stranger. It is worthwhile exploring the various types of human insecurity and finding out how they deeply influence the way we behave as humans. It is also important to indicate that both individuals, the stranger, and the interlocutor, are all subject to insecurity. How does this play out? And what is the positive element of acknowledging this fundamental insecurity?

Fourth, mediation may be needed for positive transformation. This can happen through individuals or ecclesial communities, what we can refer to as the **"Barnabas Effect"**. In Acts 9:26-29, Barnabas mediated integration when he introduced Paul to a community that

saw him with fear and suspicion. Given the many possible negative dispositions in encountering the stranger, could **mediated integration** serve in transforming strangers into neighbors and friends? What role should individuals with faith backgrounds play in this regard?

In all of these practices, **hospitality** (Genesis 18:1-15) emerges as the key to the transformation process and project. In our group readings and pitches, we shall explore some inspiring narratives of encounters from various scriptures and your own lived experiences. Without ignoring the difficulties involved in encountering strangers, we can come to a place of positive transformation where a stranger no longer evokes fear and insecurity but rather our shared humanity and a commitment to live out the demands of love and hospitality.

Group Reading

From the Hebrew word *haver*, "friend" or "comrade," *havruta* refers both to one's partner in study and to the process. In the practice of *havruta*, one partner reads a passage and the other person summarizes in his or her own words and raises questions. Then both partners discuss possible meanings and nuances. After switching roles, the process repeats. For more detailed instructions, see page 21 above. Try to read and discuss the following texts in 30 minutes.

Jewish Sources

"The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. 3 He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 5 Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on–since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." 6 And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." 7 Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. 8 Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate." (Genesis 18:1-8)

Christian Sources

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you

since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' 44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' 45 "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' 46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matthew 25:31-46)

Islamic Sources

Prophet Muhammad's Charter of Privileges ("Ashtiname") granted to the monks of St. Catherine Monastery in Mount Sinai in 628AD:

"This is a message written by Muhammad the son of Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, far and near, we are behind them. Verily, I defend them by myself, the servants, the helpers, and my followers, because Christians are my citizens and by Allah I hold out against anything that displeases them. No compulsion is to be on them. Neither are their judges to be changed from their jobs, nor their monks from their monasteries. No one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything from it to the Muslims' houses. Should anyone take any of these, he would spoil God's covenant, and disobey his Prophet… Their churches are to be respected. They are neither to be prevented from repairing them nor the sacredness of their covenants. No one of the nations is to disobey this covenant till the Day of Judgment and the end of the World."[15]

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[15] In Aziz Abu Sarah, "Are Non-Muslims Infidels?" in Kelly James Clark, Aziz Abu Sarah and Nancy Fuchs Kreimer, *Strangers, Neighbors, Friends: Muslim-Christian-Jewish Reflections on Compassion and Peace* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 47.

Op-Ed

Toward a Loving Understanding of the Strangers Closest to Us

By Hannah J. Visser (Netherlands)

In 2015, partly due to the tragic war in Syria, many European countries, including the Netherlands, experienced a rise in people applying for asylum. A so-called 'refugee crisis' followed: many European countries could not process the applications, which created inhumane circumstances in asylum seekers' centers and long waiting lists. Politicians in the Netherlands required towns to open their doors to the increasing number of asylum seekers, which led to demonstrations against opening these asylum seekers' centers (azc). As the number of asylum seekers declined and the crisis was 'over', public attention also diminished. The state closed many of the centers that were opened in the 'crisis year' of 2015. In 2022, with the devastating war in Ukraine and dramatic developments in other parts of the world, we now face a number of consequences. The closing of asylum seekers' centers, lack of structured finance for the Dutch immigration services, and, on top of that, a housing crisis and rising inflation numbers have once again created a situation of inhumane conditions and long waiting lists for asylum seekers. Similar to 2015, we observe resistance in places that are required to take in asylum seekers – especially when they come from African or Middle Eastern countries. Photographs of a demonstration in the Dutch village of Albergen show signs that display the not-so-hidden racist opinions of some of the protesters.[16]

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[16] Source: https://www.rtvoost.nl/nieuws/2133157/van-nexit-tot-priktatuur-besluit-azc-albergen-ook-voer-voor-andere-onvrede (assessed on 14 November 2022).

When I was asked to write about the concept of stranger in my Dutch context, I immediately thought about the inhumane ways the Dutch government organizes its asylum procedures for people on the move. I could name innumerable reasons why these procedures should be improved and I could provide counter-arguments to the 'anti-azc' protesters. Then I wondered, who is the stranger that I do not want to welcome? While striving towards welcoming the stranger on the move, we sometimes, following the principle of reflexivity, forget to acknowledge that the stranger is deeply rooted in our societies, communities, and families. Those who protest against asylum seekers; those whose opinions are alienating to us which we do not want to see, let alone tolerate constitute as it were the **intolerant stranger.**

How far should we go in tolerating the intolerant stranger? I have long been puzzled by this particular question. There is a paradox in tolerating the intolerant stranger because if we allow intolerant opinions to exist, will we not lose the idea of tolerance in the end? Philosopher Karl Popper called this 'the paradox of intolerance,' and stated that the boundary of tolerance is at the level of a rational conversation: as long as we can converse, we must tolerate the intolerant stranger (1945, 1963, p.265). Similarly, John Rawls states that only if there are 'considerable risks' to the 'constitution with all its equal liberties', should 'intolerant sects' be suppressed (Rawls, 1971, 1999 p.192.) For me, the key in Popper's and Rawls's argument is not the idea that we should suppress intolerant voices when they cross the line in terms of the generally accepted principles of democracy, constitution, and justice. What I find more interesting is the idea that we should go as far as possible in accepting this intolerant stranger in a conversation: re-humanizing and empathizing with the stranger closest to us.

In addition, our fixation on the 'intolerant' opinions of the intolerant stranger can make us forget about the hatred and prejudices we carry ourselves, and can be a way to deny our positionality. It is easy to point the finger at others without analysing how our privileges (and as a white, secular person from the Netherlands, I hold many) may cause harm to others. It is easier to alienate these opinions as improper and intolerant than it is to examine how we contribute to a system of privilege and oppression ourselves. Paolo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed inspires a critical consciousness to escape the system of oppression and oppressor, through which we should reflect on the oppressor present in each one of us.

In our stride toward a humane asylum system – which, to be clear, is necessary – we sometimes fall into the trap of dehumanizing the stranger closest to home. We forget to reflect on our position, point the finger, and disagree. We forget that this intolerant stranger is someone with a background, needs, feelings, and reasons. Instead of further contributing to an already polarized society, we should withhold our judgements and start listening as much as possible, to find out that we are all humans with a need for warmth, safety, and shelter. As Michael Kleber-Diggs wrote beautifully in his poem The Grove:[17]

> *Planted here as we are; see how we want to bow and sway with the motion of the earth in sky. Feel how desire vibrates within us as our branches fan out, promise entanglements, and rarely touch. Here, our sweet rustling. If only we could know how twisted up our roots are; we might make vast shelter together – cooler places, verdant spaces, more sustaining air. But we are strange trees, reluctant in this forest – we oak and ash, we pine – the same the same, not different. All of us reach toward star and cloud, all of us want our share of light, just enough rainfall.*

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[17] Kleber-Diggs, Michael, Worldly Things/poems by Michael Kleber-Diggs (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2021).

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neighbor

Unit 3. The Neighbor

Keywords: *Trust, Social Cohesion, Reciprocity, Community.*

"Here I am, ready to take on the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself." **Morning Prayer, *Jewish Reconstructionist Prayer Book,* 1.**

"The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbor." **A Common Word, *An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders,* 2.**

"...choose for your neighbor that which you choose for yourself." **Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, 64.**

"Regard your neighbor''s gain as your own gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss." **Li Ying-Chang , *T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien*, 213-218.**

"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" **Paul (Colossians 3:14).**

Introduction

The neighbor is the third category to explore in this manual. Neighbor is a term that comes from the Latin *vicinus* that meant “district” or “place". In Latin and English, the concept is used to name a person who dwells with others in the same neighborhood although in separate homes. Given this **proximity**, the category of the neighbor suggests greater closeness than that of the stranger. Yet, neighbors have the potential to become friends or enemies. Building a neighborhood can be complicated and often requires going an “extra mile”. This requires the investment of time or other resources, moving beyond individual comfort zones, showing patience and long-suffering, and negotiating potentially ambiguous responsibilities with kindness. This could be one of the reasons why many religious texts and teachings talk about loving the neighbor as God and as one’s own self, popularly known as the Golden Rule.

Who is my neighbor? Do I perceive and consider as neighbors only those who are the “same” as me? What does loving the neighbor entail?

Icebreaker

- How many different “neighborhoods” do you “live” in?
- How did those groups form?
- Who is present and participating there and who is not?

Anecdote: Intercultural and Interreligious Neighbors

During my BA, I had the opportunity to do a group exchange programme to Malaysia, a predominantly Muslim country. My mom was particularly worried about the implications for me as an active youth Christian living surrounded by people with a different belief. To be

honest, I was more concerned about cultural protocols: I wondered if being-left handed, for example, could carry serious misunderstandings with the soon-to-be-neighbors.

As soon as our group arrived, we met our Malay student leader, Nik. Since we were all living at the university, some members of our group began to hang out with Nik and other local students. Nik and I spent a lot of time talking about life and, in particular, our religious backgrounds. Over the course of my time in Malaysia, I observed how Nik treasured his religious tradition in ways that went against the stereotypes I had unfortunately learnt. By sharing life, we could see similarities in our religious neighborhoods, while also appreciating our different perspectives. As in any multicultural context, cultural and religious tensions inevitably arose in the Malay-Mexican neighborhood that both groups of Malay and Mexican had co-created, and we had to learn to move beyond our comfort zones to care for one another despite those misunderstandings.

Reflections on the Neighbor

- What kind of neighborhoods do you inhabit?
- Where are these formed today?
- What does proximity mean in relationship to preference and neighborhoods?
- How can we expand our neighborhoods?
- What expressions of hospitality and hostility can we find in our neighbor relationships?

Some years later, Nik came to Mexico, and I was able to introduce him to some of my neighborhoods. By this time, each one had developed more hospitality to welcome one another in our differences. Our neighbor relation became a genuine friendship in which we have both extended our neighborhoods to welcome and be welcomed by the other. Last year, we met again in the Scandinavian region, as happens over the course of a globetrotting academic career. There, we discussed what had been for us as newcomers

who come from strong faith settings, our arrival to new and more secularized neighborhoods.

Nik has taught me the value of neighbor-love in the most simple actions. Our current friendship is a vivid example of how a person who might be seen as the “enemy” or a “stranger”, has flourished beyond physical neighborhoods.

Questions for Reflection and Preparation

How have you transitioned from being a stranger to becoming a neighbor? Do you tend to focus on the differences or rather the similarities we have with our neighbors? How do you build your neighborhoods?

An Essay on the Neighbor

By Lani Anaya Jiménez (Mexico/Sweden)

Concept

It is not uncommon to categorize others with concepts that are familiar to us. The idea of the neighbor embraces community-based relationships related to getting to know each other, obeying shared agreements, respecting others' space and tranquility, and handling problems maturely.

The concept of the neighbor seems simple; nevertheless, the definition of who the neighbor is can be tricky.[18] A neighbor is a person that is not a stranger in the sense that certain knowledge of the person comes almost automatically with living in close yet separated proximity; however, is not emotionally close enough to be a friend. One becomes neighbors with another person simply by dwelling in adjoining spaces or experiencing a connection of care. [19]

In the world today, this common dwelling is itself highly complex. Where, exactly, are the spaces we inhabit? We spend many hours of our days staring at screens and interacting in multiple online communities simultaneously. We interact with actual human faces but rarely with a physical point of reference beyond the office, bus, or even a device screen.

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[18] Hannu Rionavaara, "The Anatomy of Neighbour Relations," *Sociological Research Online* 1 (2021): 2.

[19] Nancy Rosenblum, Good Neighbors: The Democracy of Everyday Life in America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

The conceptual construction of the neighbor involves the exploration of different elements related **to proximity and preference, balances of access, power, and participation, hospitality-hostility continuums, and reciprocity. And, across all of these layers, we can uncover dynamics interrelating our experiences of ourselves and of others before what we understand to be finally good and real. In this chapter, these dynamics are explored in terms of relationships taking place in the interaction of God, self, and world.**

Closer Examination

The most immediate association with the idea of the neighbor is probably the ones who live near us. However, **this proximity is not necessarily geographical.** Proximity to people might be found in other similarities.

For example, we might be inclined to prefer people based not on location but on interest, belief, class, ethnicity, and other shared similarities. "Positionality" - the idea that our identities or sense of self form in the multiple, overlapping communities to which we belong and participate - extends well beyond geographical borders.[20] The digital spaces and the ongoing world crises such as conflicts, climate change, and the Covid-19 pandemic, have shrunk boundaries and allowed us to explore more neighborhoods than at any previous time in history. [21]

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[20] Burrell Kathy, "Lost in the 'Churn'? Locating Neighbourliness in a Transient Neighbourhood," *Environment and Planning.* 48(8) (2016): 1603.

[21] Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (London et al: Penguin Books 2009), 160.

Talking of neighbors and neighborhoods might evoke social and ethical expectations of a welcoming attitude toward others. Nevertheless, "neighbors" who are currently cohabiting numerous digital, international, and intercultural spaces quickly find themselves navigating oceans with both hospitable and hostile "piers".[22] How do we think about these new multilayered neighborhoods and our relationships with the persons living in our surroundings?

Neighbor-love commands in many religions have contributed to an understanding of the neighbor as one who needs help. While there is a good intention behind this narrative, there is also a risk of encouraging unbalanced relationships where one part takes a "savior" position and the other one automatically becomes the "assisted" one. The risk with such understanding is that , already existing power disparities may deepen. Such relationships are not negative; nonetheless, an unbalanced relationship might hinder parties from unique opportunities for mutual growth in which both equally get to know one another beyond provision and need, superiority and inferiority. More balanced neighbor relationships are spaces of potential mutual generosity, cohesion, and community resilience where people share a fundamental connection of equal worth and mutual care.

Maintaining balanced and mutual relationships among neighbors might raise even more questions about the reciprocity, expectations, and requirements from one party to the other and vice versa. The recognition of our neighbors as equal human beings is essential. But how do we move a step forward from being strangers to building bonds of sympathy, empathy, generosity, and -- even more challenging -- moving beyond our comfort zone?

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[22] Lani Anaya, "Between Hospitality and Hostility: Ethical Perspectives on Refugees in Times of Rising Radicalization in Sweden," *The Ecumenical Review* 71(3) (2019): 369.

Sacred texts and teachings from many religions describe love for our neighbor as a divine mandate. In short, they understand **our love for our neighbor as a reflection of our love for the ultimate.** The Buddhist system teaches us that neighbor-love is patient and long-suffering gracious sensitiveness. Muslims learn from the Quran to "do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the traveler" (Quran 4:36). In Rev. Martin Luther King's words, neighbor-love is embodied as a universal, dangerous and excessive altruism. Hindu writings share neighbor-love "Golden Rule," also known as the ethic of reciprocity: "This is the sum of duty: do naught unto others what you would not have them do unto you" (Mahabharata 5,1517).

These texts are an invitation to be aware of our neignborhoods and the resulting proximities and positions we have or the ones we aim to establish with our neighbors. In Jewish Scripture, God commands, "Love your neighbor as yourself – I am God." (Leviticus 19:18). This is expressed by Jesus in the New Testament, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12, 30-31). **The picture we have of our neighbor might speak more than a thousand words about our relationship with the transcendent.** Our neighbor is one of our nearest relationships where we can find, see and encounter God, the good, the real.

Transformation

Neighbor-love requires us to **explore** our neighbors and neighborhoods. How do you define who is your neighbor and which are your neighborhood(s)? People who are initially strangers have the potential to become our neighbors, and it is in our hands how we manage the transition from being strangers living in the same neighborhood to becoming neighbors. Perhaps you are living in a neighborhood with people that are not necessarily

your neighbors without realizing it. Today is the day to go out of my comfort zone and meet the ones in your proximities!

People tend to interact with those **living nearby.** New residents move into areas where they know people or where people are like them culturally. While this may create positive attitudes, it may also create a limited scope in the neighborhood's boundaries and definitions of who is a "resident", a "visitor", an "enemy" or a "stranger" without really getting to know people. Those barriers hinder the flourishing opportunities for social cohesion and resilience.

In terms of **hospitality**, are we willing to take the "first step" or are we waiting for our potential neighbors to approach us? Here is an invitation to reflect on how we are encountering our neighbors. Maybe we are setting conditions to approach them or to be approached; perhaps we are showing hospitality to our neighbors; or, on the other hand, our neighbors perceive our treatment towards them as hostile. It is easy to be hospitable towards those who are being hospitable towards us; however, being hospitable to those who are being hostile is challenging. Going out of our comfort zone in the neighborhood setting might mean that while we cannot control others' thoughts, feelings or behaviors, we do have control over ours and the intentionality with which we approach others.

Regarding **balancing power,** how can we approach the notion of the neighborhood with a deep commitment to equality? Think about neighbor-love manifestations. There are many different forms to express love within our neighborhoods, including ways that could be different from what we are used to. Is there the potential for building peaceful spaces from those expressions?

Fostering love-neighbor in our neighborhoods increases the opportunities for positive transformation, humanization, social cohesion, and social resilience. Neighbor-love must embrace the social capital within the neighborhood. The reconciliation between us and our neighbors can improve the whole neighborhood ecosystem.

Finally, if we talk about the **God-Self-World** dynamics, think about how you meet God and the transcendent in your neighbor. Let's open our eyes, soul, and spirit, to encounter the fullness in the ones cohabiting in our neighborhoods!

Group Reading

From the Hebrew word *haver*, "friend" or "comrade," *havruta* refers both to one's partner in study and to the process. In the practice of *havruta*, one partner reads a passage and the other person summarizes in his or her own words and raises questions. Then both partners discuss possible meanings and nuances. After switching roles, the process repeats. For more detailed instructions, see page 21 above. Try to read and discuss the following texts in 30 minutes.

Jewish Sources

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners. I am the Lord your God. Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another. Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord. Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight.

Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord. Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly. Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the Lord. Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. (*Leviticus 19:1, 9-18, 33-34)*

Christian sources

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' [Deuteronomy 6:5]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself' [Leviticus 19:18]." "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii [two days' wage of a day laborer] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)

Islamic sources

"None of you has faith until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself... He will not enter paradise whose neighbor is not secure from his wrongful conduct." (Hadith reported by Muslim, Kitab al-iman [Book of Faith], Book 1, #72 and #74)

"[The man who disrupts my teaching] is my neighbor… Even if he harms me, I will never harm my neighbor." Later in this story, the man who was harassing Imam Abu Hanifa is arrested. When the Great Imam finds out, he goes to the authorities in the middle of the night. They tell him to go home and return in the morning. But the Great Imam insists that he won't leave until this man is released. Why? Because he is a neighbor: "My neighbor has been imprisoned. If my neighbor has defrauded someone of his right, I will take care of it. If he oppressed other people, I will take care of it." The Great Imam declares, "Even if he harms me, I will never harm my neighbor." (Imam Abu Hanifa (d. 767CE))

Bahai sources

"The word of God which the Supreme Pen has recorded on the of the Most Exalted Paradise is this: O human! If your eyes are turned towards mercy, forsake the things that profit you and embrace that which will profit mankind. And if your eyes are turned towards justice, choose for your neighbor that which you choose for yourself. Humility exalts a person to the heaven of glory and power, while pride lowers him to the depths of wretchedness and degradation." (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, 64.)

Op-Ed

Rice is Closeness

By Rev. Manda Andrian (Indonesia)

Heaven is rice
As we cannot go to heaven alone
We should share rice with one to another
As all share the light of the heavenly stars
We should share and eat rice together
Heaven is rice
When we eat and swallow rice
Heaven dwells in our body
Rice is heaven
Yes rice is the matter
We should all eat together
Kim Chi-Ha (Korean Christian poet)[23]

The poem is quoted by the Japanese Theologian, Masao Takenaka, in his book God is Rice. In the same place, he reflects further that "Asia is so big and diverse. It is not easy to identify Asia. What we have in common is the habit of eating rice, the ubiquitous bamboo, and the use of broken English as a necessary evil for inter-Asian communication. We can trace the Silk Road along which silk was transported by horses and camels. We can trace

[23] Quoted in: Masao Takenaka, *God Is Rice: Asian Culture and Christian Faith* (United States: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 18.

the ceramic route taken by boats. Both were primarily for the rulers and the rich. But we can also trace the rice road, which was used by common people all over Asia." [24]

In Javanese culture, there is a tradition of eating together with bare hands; the food is served on banana leaves. This tradition also relates to a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet said, "eat your meals together and mention the name of Allah over it, for you will be blessed in it."[25] Muslim boarding schools hold this tradition until now, and they call it talaman. Several philosophical insights animate this tradition such as teaching togetherness, equality, modesty, sharing, and solidarity. All the people eat the same food from the same place without respect to background. Such sharing can, in turn, become a good time to have a conversation and to get to know others. Interestingly, this tradition is also found in Filipino culture, where it is known as kamayan or kinamot, and in other places throughout Asia as well.

Even though it may not be directly the same, the moment of the Last Supper in the New Testament also teaches us how we are supposed to share our daily food. Indonesia is a pluralistic society, with a diversity of cultures and religions. The moment of eating together is also the moment of communion and how we are called to serve in our society. To highlight both the spiritual and social dimensions of this Christian ritual of sharing food, Takenaka notes the relationships among "peace", "rice", and "mouth" in the Chinese and Japanese characters: "The Chinese characters for peace (wa) means harmony. It derives from two words: one is rice and the other is mouth. It means that unless we share rice with all people, we will not have peace. When every mouth in the whole inhabited world is filled with daily food, then we can have peace on earth." (God is Rice, p 18-19).

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[24] Masao Takenaka, *God Is Rice*, 17.

[25] Sunan Abī Dāwūd 3764

When I was a student at Bossey Ecumenical Institute, I experienced these precious moments. And with some of my Asian friends who come from different countries used to share our food and eat it together. Of course, we shared it with others, too, though not all of my friends liked to eat Asian food. Among those of us to whom the food was familiar, shared food was also an opportunity to share common feelings about how we miss the "spicy" foods from home. At that moment, the feeling of being strangers abroad, lonely, and the feeling of being a "stranger" was replaced with joy, happiness, mutual support, and the realization of sharing a common neighborhood despite the tremendous diversity the characterized our various contexts of origin.

The moment of sharing food isn't only about the food, but rather solidarity, compassion, caring, love, justice, and neighbor-love. These values are simultaneously simple and crucial for the construction of interreligious dialogue. Interreligious dialogue can be started through hospitality, and hospitality can be started by sharing food. To me, rice is not only God, but also the closeness beyond borders that connects us to one another.

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friend

Unit 4. The Friend

Keywords: *Mutuality, Trust, Vulnerability, Dignity*

"Friendship...is an absolute necessity in life." **Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 8**

"Acquire for yourself a friend." **Maimonides, *Commentary on the Talmud* (Mishnah Avot 1:6)**

"Ananda, cousin of the Buddha, observed: 'This is half of the holy life, lord: admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie.' But the Buddha answered, 'Don't say that, Ananda. Don't say that. Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable friendship is actually the whole of the holy life.'" **Upaḍḍhasutta (Samyutta Nikaya, 45.2)**

"A friend should restrain his companion from the evil path and lead him on the path of virtue." **Gusvami Tulasidasa, Kishkinda-Kanda 130, Sri Ramacharitamanasa**

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." **Jesus (John 15.13)**

"A person is likely to follow the faith of his friend, so look whom you befriend." **The Prophet Mohammed (Sunan Abi Dawud, 4833)**

Introduction

Friendship is the final category of relationships we will consider in this manual. True friendship has been regarded as one of the most valuable gifts a person can hope for, indeed, as a treasure worth seeking and guarding at all costs. The Greek philosopher Aristotle famously described a certain kind of friendship as a relationship with an other whom you see as another instance of yourself; the friend is you in the shape of another person. Our friends complete us, and we would not be who we are without our friends. There is a certain way in which our friends are part of who we are, and we of who they are: our memories, our interests, the concrete plans we make and then pursue in our lives, and which then become our future realities, the knowledge that we acquire, the convictions we hold dear. We become the individuals that we are in and as relationships with others. As former Archbishop of Cape Town Desmond Tutu explains using the philosophy of Ubuntu, and as we have seen in each of the chapters of this guide, we are who we are in relationship with others. This insight is especially revealing when we consider who and how we are in friendship.

Icebreaker

- If you could pick one fictional character to be your best friend, who would it be and why?

Anecdote: "Fake Friends"?

In 2017, I was approached by an individual who worked with refugee youth in the city of Bonn. She wanted to develop a project connecting the young people she worked with and German university students.[26]

She had observed that, among refuge-seeking migrants, single young adults were an especially isolated and excluded group. Too old for the secondary school system but not qualified for university of for many jobs according to local official requirements, this demographic often found it difficult to plug in to social systems where they might form contacts and build relationships with German peers.

These observations led her to a simple but profound idea for a solution: What if a mutually beneficial situation could be arranged in which these young people and German students could just hang out and get to know one another in a low-pressure, no commitment setting? In the pilot project that formed out of our cooperation, six refuge-seeking young people and ten students formed "fake friendships" - artificially selected pairings - and met on a regular basis with one another for shared meals or to talk about music and poetry they liked or to

Reflections on the Friend

- How might a person holding a different vision of a good and just life than I hold nevertheless be "higher" than me and help me to "progress"? How can I show myself to be such a friend for them?
- Where do I experience my own weaknesses and limitations in cultivating a good and just life, and how might others help me in that?
- Finally, can I identify any ways in which I and others who are not my friends are still part of the same story, with our lives wrapped up in one another's good in some way? How might we go about realizing this possibility together?

[26] Matthew Ryan Robinson, "„Fake Friends", Migration Und Freundschaft," *Pastoraltheologie* 107, no. 7 (July 26, 2018): 333–52. https://doi.org/10.13109/path.2018.107.7.333.

visit a museum or meet the other's family. They even started inviting one another to social events and learning a little bit about one another's holidays.

These relationships helped to overcome some stranger anxieties and stereotypes (in both directions!), not just between the two friends, but, *via* the friend, extending toward many "others" whom the friend was assumed to represent culturally. Contact does not by itself produce intimacy,[27] and not every such "fake" friendship became a "real" one. But a few of them took root and remain strong now four years later.

I am so grateful that this colleague invited me to lead the project with her and that we could get to know one another. We ourselves were strangers with a "migration background" who became friends.

Questions for Reflection and Preparation

How can strangers become friends? Can you start a friendship with a stranger by choice, or will that be just a "fake" friendship?

"Complete friendship", according to this is a helpful start: Friendship is an interpersonal relationship of mutual affection aimed at the Good.

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[27] Mousa Salma. "Building Social Cohesion between Christians and Muslims through Soccer in Post-ISIS Iraq." *Science* 369, no. 6505 (August 14, 2020): 866–70. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abb3153.

An Essay on the Friend

By Matthew Ryan Robinson (USA/Germany)

Introduction

Friendship in one form or another is universal to all human societies, yet there are many differences in the forms and practices of friendship.

Friendship can be one of life's sweet pleasures and highest goods. Friends encourage, challenge, and support one another, through times of triumph and trial. Friends stick together and are there for one another, both in serious and silly moments. Our friends offer us patient understanding when we fail, provide someone to talk about difficult decisions, or just make space for saying and doing nothing at all. How friendships form, among whom, and what different kinds of friendships look like - these are all interesting issues to reflect on in relation to this guide's core questions about how we relate to outside others and the roles our relationships with those others play in facilitating social cohesion and social resilience.

- **Concept.** What are some basic components of (good) friendship?
- **Closer Examination.** What makes friendship unique from other relationships?
- **Transformation.** What kinds of othering take place in friendship, and how can insights drawn from our religious traditions offer guidance as we seek to discern the potential in friendship for cultivating a good society?

The rest of this chapter will introduce some basic convictions about friendship that are shared across many cultures and religious traditions and consider some of the ways friendship plays a role in the facilitation of social cohesion and social resilience.

Concept

What is friendship, and why is it thought to be so important? While answers to these questions vary across time and traditions, one insight that all seem to share is that good friends help us to lead virtuous, holy lives. Let's look at some basic components of friendship first and then think about how the arrangement of those components might relate to the pursuit of justice and goodness in the ways we relate to.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle taught that virtuous friendship "is an absolute necessity in life." (Nicomachean Ethics, Book VIII, 1155a) The Buddha taught that admirable friendship is "the whole of the holy life" (Upaḍḍhasutta, Samyutta Nikaya, 45.2). And the Jewish philosopher and rabbi Maimonides urged his students to "acquire for yourself a friend," for, as the rabbis taught, "either a friend or death." (Mishnah Avot 1.6) Indeed, friendships have the power to redeem us, transform us, and lead us beyond ourselves into new life and goodness.

But not all friendships are created equal. The Prophet Mohammed cautioned that "a person is likely to follow the faith of his friend, so look whom you befriend." (Mohammed, Sunan Abi Dawud, 4833) In the Christian tradition, Aelred of Rievaulx similarly warned, "let no one in choosing or testing friends weary of being solicitous, since the fruit of this labor is the medicine of life." (Spiritual Friendship, Book III.75)

Aristotle, the Roman senator Cicero, the medieval Christian monk Aelred of Rievaulx, and others in the Latin West all distinguished between three kinds of friendship: friendships of utility, of pleasure, and of virtue. Maimonides also follows the Aristotelian tradition in his

commentary on the Talmud, referring to friendships of benefit, enjoyment, and virtue. While friendships of benefit stem essentially from personal interest and aim at usefulness, those of pleasure and enjoyment are dependent on shared feelings. Both, however, are volatile and subject to sudden change. In a virtuous friendship, by contrast, friends wish only for what is good and in this way for one another's good.

"Complete friendship", according to the Greek Aristotle, the Roman Cicero, the Jewish Maimonides, and the Christian Aelred are formed in the coming together of persons in the virtuous pursuit of the good alone. The Vaishnava teacher Goswami Tulsidas also promoted a similar view in his account of the Ramayana, where it is written that "a friend should restrain his companion from the evil path and lead him on the path of virtue." So, too, in Buddhist teaching, the ability to renounce desire and attachment and, thereby, to overcome suffering -- that is, to attain the right insight into the four noble truths concerning the order of reality -- depends on noble or admirable friendship.

To summarize a few of the basic features, we can observe: Friendship is **interpersonal**; friendship with a lifeless object is not possible, and in friendship, we are talking about a personal relationship. Related, friendship is a relationship of **affection**, not of hate, indifference, or proximity; in contrast with the relationship with the enemy, the stranger, or the neighbor, we like, know, and have a desire for our friends. Further, the affection among friends is **mutual**; while there may also be mutual obligations or interests among strangers and neighbors, mutuality among friends is characterized by shared interests, enjoyments, purposes, and convictions about one's life as well as by a desire to pursue these things together. Ultimately, however, that which leads good friends together also leads beyond both of them, into virtue, toward what is **right and good.**

This is a helpful start: Friendship is an interpersonal relationship of mutual affection aimed at the good.

Closer Examination

Building on this short formula, let us reflect on those core elements and start to draw out certain characteristics of friendship that distinguish friendship from the other forms of relationship we have looked at in this Rough Guide.

First, friendships form around mutual interest and enjoyment.

Aristotle observed that a good deal of what people share with their friends are common immediate interests and enjoyments. Friends help one another, maybe in studying for an exam or finding a job. And friends enjoy spending time together, perhaps in the context of a shared hobby or sport, in an online community, in discussing politics over coffee, and no less in matters of religion. This means we are more likely to become friends with people in our circles of contact. We tend to become friends with people who are in the same places as we are and doing the same things that we do, and we tend to become like the people that we are around.

These are a couple of the reasons why Aristotle, Cicero, and Aelred describe a friend as one who is like oneself, and Mohammed taught that "a person is likely to follow the faith of his friend." The formation of friendship around mutual interest and joy also points to the circumstantial nature of friendship, at least in its initial formation, and **raises the question of what makes friendships last.**

Second, friendships entail voluntary involvement.

Unlike relationships with family, neighbors, and even strangers and enemies - all of which are regulated by certain duties and obligations - one cannot easily be forced into friendship because sharing common interests and enjoying another person's company cannot be commanded. These things develop over time. It can make sense to speak of duty concerning friendship, but the duty to the friend forms only within the friendship and not beforehand. Some have suggested that forming a friendship is a bit like falling in love. There is often an element of unpredictable, mutual attraction that draws us into friendship.

At the same time, to say friendship is voluntary is to say **friendship is a choice,** and in finding friends we are not subject to the forces of fate. Rather, we can and do choose which friendships to pursue and cultivate more deeply and which not to. In the voluntary context of friendship, something remarkable happens: servitude dissipates, transparency grows, and trust can form. As Jesus taught, "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything." (John 15.15) Thus Rabbi Ḥanina said, "I have learned much from my teachers and even more from my friends." (Ta'anit 7a)

Third, probing a bit deeper, the relationship of friendship forms a relationship of mutual recognition and acceptance.

As something voluntary, friendships do not sustain domination or disregard very well. Friends attend to one another and take one another seriously - just as seriously as they take themselves. But, counterintuitively, crucial to each friend knowing that the other takes them seriously is knowing that they each take themselves seriously, that is, that the friends recognize and accept themselves, too. This is something that makes friendship unique.

In a relationship with the enemy, it can be necessary to place the safety of others before one's own. In the relationship with the stranger and the neighbor, societal and religious duties and commitments might oblige us to act without regard for ourselves at all. **In friendship, however, one may and one must also attend to oneself** - and not only for personal safety but concerning one's ultimate good. This is a point that is given careful attention in all major religious traditions, for ignoring oneself and one's progress in seeking what is and good may carry eternal consequences.

Transformation

Now we are in a position to see the unique forms of othering that appear in the context of friendship. Christian and Islamic sources do warn against the religion of outside others, but in both cases, these warnings stem from a shared concern about distraction from the pursuit of God, who is the Good. Below the surface-level form of othering in a friendship that separates people, a more profound form of othering that binds and unites them can also develop. Aelred paraphrased from the New Testament, the one who "abides in friendship, abides in God," while Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib mentioned "friendship with the good" as one of two sources of joy in this world and the next. In this short section, we will reflect on how, in friendship, we each become another to ourselves, while in our union we are drawn together toward yet a further otherness that transcends us and which our religious traditions variously call the good, the infinite, and God.

In contrast with the requirements of protection in relating to an enemy, requirements of hospitality in relating to a stranger, or requirements of solidarity in relating to a neighbor, in friendship I recognize my dignity and the dignity of my friend. On the one hand, I recognize that I cannot know my friend exhaustively; there will always be more to them

than I can access and understand. **The friend remains a holy other,** unique and distinct from me. Likewise, do I remain unique and distinct from them? Here we see a mysterious combination of nearness and distance in friendship; I might be closer to my friend than anyone else in the world, and yet they exceed me infinitely. In friendship, love meets respect, and devotion is fulfilled in freedom.

Another form of delimitation is my inability to be wholly self-reliant, to process all of my concerns alone, to pursue my hopes, and realize my longings all by myself. The same is true for my friend. But in helping one another out, in filling one another up, we both transcend our limitations, and **each of us becomes another to ourselves** - someone we were not and would not have been without the friend.

At the same time, and in this way, we continue to become the individuals that we are meant to be, advancing along the road toward the goal. This is represented in various ways by the different religious traditions. In Islam, this possibility of advancement is what makes friendship so important. As Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq taught, “Make friends with ones that are higher than you so that you may progress,” in the knowledge of Allah and pursuit of his will.

As we move beyond ourselves together, we can also see in our practical interconnectedness the revelation of a deeper interdependence of all things and the path toward right living in this order. In Hindu and Buddhist traditions in their various ways, friendship plays a pivotal role in leading to Enlightenment, while in Christianity and Islam the friend is a crucial companion on the path to God and salvation. The limitations of self and the friendship of others, far from holding us down, are gracious signs of dependence on others and God which can transform our lives and lift us up.

These are no mere mystical reflections, but attitudes and practices that can be cultivated pragmatically: The Buddha taught that the good friend who helps one along the right path gives with ease, works hard for you, is longsuffering, shares transparently, holds what is shared in confidence, is faithful in hardship, and is compassionate. (Mitta Sutta) Friends reveal themselves, according to Ali Ibn Abi Talib, in times of need, when no one is watching, and even when we are gone. By contrast, as Aelred observed, those who are jealous, proud, belittling, or selfishly ambitious will not be good friends. (*Spiritual Friendship*, Book III.54-59)

These last comments raise once again the question of the significance of friendship for social cohesion and resilience. Aelred drew attention to the social dynamics of friendship in observing that a bad friend is a bad citizen, even going so far as to warn that the devotion to such a one "should not take precedence over the ruin of many." (Spiritual Friendship, Book III.58) Aristotle likewise had taught that friendship "holds cities together," for "when people are friends, they do not need justice." (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII.1155a)

The potential of friendship for social cohesion is clear: Friendship is a strong social tie aimed at a shared vision of a good and just life. The difficulty, of course, is that different groups of people with different experiences and different religious and political backgrounds have different visions of a good and just life.

Thus the potential of friendship for social resilience is a challenging invitation to live new and transformed lives together with and as the otherswhom we are and might become.

Group Reading

From the Hebrew word *haver*, "friend" or "comrade," *havruta* refers both to one's partner in study and to the process. In the practice of *havruta*, one partner reads a passage and the other person summarizes in his or her own words and raises questions. Then both partners discuss possible meanings and nuances. After switching roles, the process repeats. For more detailed instructions, see page 21 above. Try to read and discuss the following texts in 30 minutes.

Jewish sources

From Maimonides Commentary on the Talmud (Mishnah Avot 1:6): "acquire for yourself a friend"

"And he said, "acquire for yourself a friend". He said it with an expression of acquisition and he did not say, "Make for yourself a friend," or "Befriend others." The intention of this is that a person must acquire a friend for himself, so that all of his deeds and all of his matters be refined through him, as they said (Taanit 23a), "Either a friend or death." And if he does not find him, he must make efforts with all his heart, and even if he must lead him to his friendship, until he becomes a friend. And [then] he must never let off from following [his friend's] will, until his friendship is firmed up. [It is] as the masters of ethics say, "When you love, do not love according to your traits; but rather love according to the trait of your friend." And when each of the friends has the intention to fulfill the will of his friend, the intention of both of them will be one without a doubt. And how good is the statement of Aristotle, "The friend is one." And there are three types of friends: a friend for benefit, a friend for enjoyment and a friend for virtue. Indeed, a friend for benefit is like the friendship of two [business] partners and the friendship of a king and his retinue; whereas the friendship for enjoyment is of two types - the friend for pleasure and the friend for confidence. Indeed, the friend for pleasure is like the friendship of males and females and similar to it; whereas the friend for confidence is when a man has a friend to whom he can confide his soul. He will not keep [anything] from him - not in action and not in speech. And he will make him know all of his affairs - the good ones and the disgraceful - without fearing from him that any loss will come to him with all of this, not from him and not from another. As when a person has such a level of confidence

in a man, he finds great enjoyment in his words and in his great friendship. And a friend for virtue is when the desire of both of them and their intention is for one thing, and that is the good. And each one wants to be helped by his friend in reaching this good for both of them together."

Hindu sources

From the Ramayana of Tulasidasa (Kishkinda-Kanda 130, Sri Ramacharitamanasa)

One would incur great sin by the very sight of those who are not distressed to see the distress of a friend. A man should regard his own mountain-like troubles as of no more account than a mere grain of sand, while the troubles of a friend should appear to him like Mount Sumeru, though really they may be as trifling as a grain of sand. Those fools who are not of such a temperament presume in vain to make friends with anybody. A friend should restrain his companion from the evil path and lead him on the path of virtue; he should proclaim the latter's good points and screen his faults, should give and take things without any scruple and serve his friend's interest to the best of his ability and finding him in distress love him a hundred times more than ever. The Vedas declare these to be the qualities of a noble friend. He, however, who contrives to speak bland words to your face and harms you behind your back and harbours some evil design in his heart, and whose mind is as tortuous as the movements of a snake is an unworthy friend and one had better bid good-bye to such a friend.

Buddhist sources

From the Pali Canon of Buddhist Teachings (Mitta Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya 7.35)
"Monks, a friend endowed with seven qualities is worth associating with. Which seven? He gives what is hard to give. He does what is hard to do. He endures what is hard to endure. He reveals his secrets to you. He keeps your secrets. When misfortunes strike, he doesn't abandon you. When you're down and out, he doesn't look down on you. A friend endowed with these seven qualities is worth associating with."

Christian sources

From Jesus's Discourse with his Disciples at the Last Supper (John 15:12-17)
This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Islamic sources

From the Quran (Quran 43:67)
Friends on that Day will be enemies one to another, except those who fear Allah.

A Hadith of Mohammed (Sunan Abi Dawud, 4833)
And the Prophet Muhammad said in a hadith: A person is likely to follow the faith of his friend, so look whom you befriend."

A Hadith of Mohammed (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2101)
And in another hadith: "The example of a good companion and a bad companion is like that of the seller of musk, and the one who blows the blacksmith's bellows. So as for the seller of musk then either he will grant you some, or you buy some from him, or at least you enjoy a pleasant smell from him. As for the one who blows the blacksmith's bellows then either he will burn your clothes or you will get an offensive smell from him."

Op-Ed

Friendship over a Finjan

By John Munayer (Israel/Palestine) and an anonymous participant

For centuries, peacebuilders, mediators, and dialogue activists have worked on the frontlines in bringing people who stand in conflict together for reconciliation. The Middle East is often thought of and represented as merely a region of war and conflicting nations. Despite this stereotype, we seek to highlight the culture of peace and coexistence that has always been part of Middle Eastern culture and identity.

Across Middle Eastern societies, coffee or "Qahwa Arabiyya" ('Arabic coffee in Arabic) plays an important roll in cultivating community relationships and identity. We wish to contextualize the concept of the friend figure in the Middle East in relation to the ways people in the Middle East link friendship to drinking coffee. We will focus on three important elements that build true friendships over a finjan (cup of coffee): (1) The humanity that people share; (2) hospitality and host-guest relations; and (3) friendship as a communal rather than an individual concept. We have chosen to situate the discussion around coffee also due to the many cultural symbols that appear in relation to coffee in the Middle East. Drinking coffee in the Middle East also has a certain theological significance, not least due to its presence in many religious and interreligious settings (both formal and informal; clergy and laity).

1. Drinking coffee in the Middle East is more than just a random act; it is a ceremonial event where people share unique human interaction. It is a celebration that could take place in someone's home, office, or shop by sitting together and drinking it from hands-free mini

cups called the “finjan”. It is, as such, an informal gathering that encourages both casual conversations as well as deep and meaningful human interactions rather than a formal or structured meeting. People seem to find it easier to engage, to communicate and to connect on different human levels when coffee is present.t is like an interaction facilitator or magic potion that acts in a subtle way to create a warm, friendly, and safe atmosphere. It is also customary to give every single person present a cup of coffee, signaling that all are equal and deserve hospitality and care. Another human value that is evident during gatherings in presence of coffee is the respect shown for the elderly. Through serving them first and listening to their stories and adventures knowledge and collective memory are passed down to the younger generations. Likewise, discussing difficult and controversial topics is often done among the members present in this ritual. In the case of hosting guests that might be seen as having different cultural, ethnic, religious, or faith backgrounds, coffee often plays the role of the icebreaker for interaction and openness to mutual learning.

2. Hospitality, generosity, and courtesy are well-known traditions in Middle Eastern communities. Coffee has been always associated with welcoming others; inviting locals, strangers, and tourists to drink coffee in one’s home is a common practice. It communicates to the ‘other’ that they are welcomed in a space and is a brotherly custom extended by the host to honor guests. Moreover, offering coffee to guests reflects the willingness of the host to interact with other persons who are visiting, provides reassurance that this bond will be maintained, and invites openness to share and develop friendship. It is common to hear blessings exchanged between individuals at the beginning and end of such an interaction. The name of God is frequently invoked regardless of one’s religious identity and orientation. Coffee rituals can thus play a significant role in building friendships across faith boundaries and are often developed in informal rather than structural formats. For example, in a conference that has

participants from different regions, a small chat that is initiated during coffee breaks can be the foundation of a bigger interfaith initiative. This kind of dynamic shows the power of informal interaction in the field of dialogue.

3. Drinking coffee in the Middle East is not supposed to be an individual event or just between two people only. On the contrary, drinking coffee in our region is supposed to be a communal event between individuals, families, friends, neighbors, guests, business partners, or even enemies. This communal emphasis challenges other concepts of friendship, specifically to some coming from the West and other regions where friendship is often thought of as a relationship between individuals. As such, when one drinks coffee, one develops a friendship with families or communities. The responsibility and relationship go beyond the individual and extend to all members present or associated. This creates a powerful tool and method for building interreligious relations and dialogue.

The walls of peace are often built on what might initially appear to be small stones, and as such can be easily overlooked and undervalued. particularly in interreligious and interfaith engagements, where they can turn out to be tremendous socio-cultural loadbearing boulders.. Drinking coffee with another can even change the nature of a relationship, for drinking coffee together creates and strengthens relationship by fostering mutual welcome and responsibility: It is often the guest's responsibility to invite the host to their space to continue this endless journey of friendship. In an interreligious dialogue setting, friendship requires action and does not remain in the abstract realm of scholarship and intellectual exchange. And if action is to accompany such dialogue, what better assistance is there than a cup of coffee?

Further Readings

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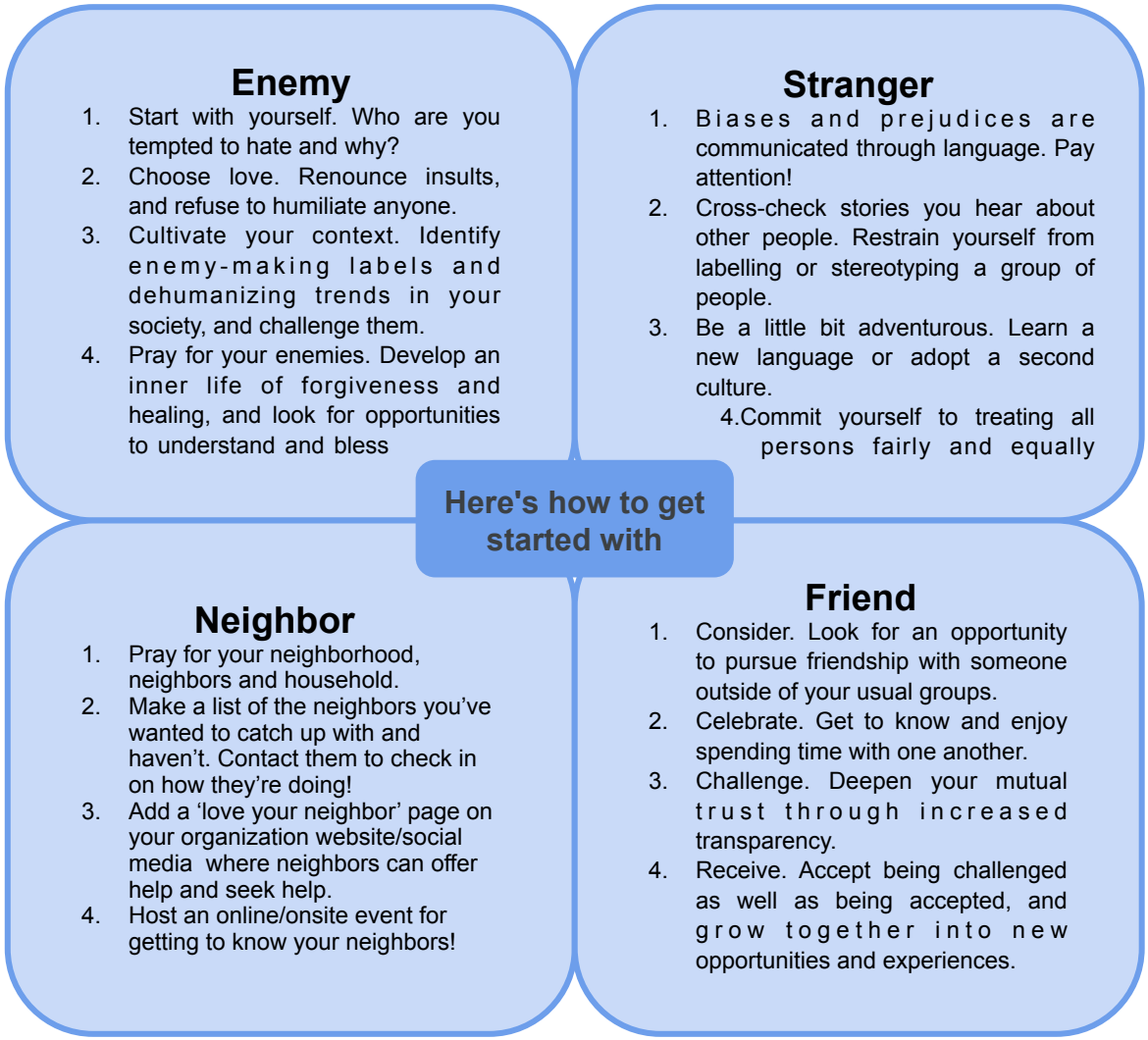
Take Action


Enemy
1. Start with yourself. Who are you tempted to hate and why?
2. Choose love. Renounce insults, and refuse to humiliate anyone.
3. Cultivate your context. Identify enemy-making labels and dehumanizing trends in your society, and challenge them.
4. Pray for your enemies. Develop an inner life of forgiveness and healing, and look for opportunities to understand and bless
Stranger
1. Biases and prejudices are communicated through language. Pay attention!
2. Cross-check stories you hear about other people. Restrain yourself from labelling or stereotyping a group of people.
3. Be a little bit adventurous. Learn a new language or adopt a second culture.
4.Commit yourself to treating all persons fairly and equally
Here's how to get started with
Neighbor
1. Pray for your neighborhood, neighbors and household.
2. Make a list of the neighbors you've wanted to catch up with and haven't. Contact them to check in on how they're doing!
3. Add a 'love your neighbor' page on your organization website/social media where neighbors can offer help and seek help.
4. Host an online/onsite event for getting to know your neighbors!
Friend
1. Consider. Look for an opportunity to pursue friendship with someone outside of your usual groups.
2. Celebrate. Get to know and enjoy spending time with one another.
3. Challenge. Deepen your mutual trust through increased transparency.
4. Receive. Accept being challenged as well as being accepted, and grow together into new opportunities and experiences.

Additional Resources for Growth and Challenge

Havruta: For more information on the traditional mode of textual study with companions (Havruta), see the resources offered by Pedagogy of Partnership at: https://www.hadar.org/pedagogy-partnership/resources-for-online-learning

Neighbor-Love Movement practices: https://balinjeraye.org/en/mindfulness

Social Cohesion and Social Resilience: Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index (SCORE); https://scoreforpeace.org/ Social Cohesion Hub; https://www.socialcohesion.info/concepts

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