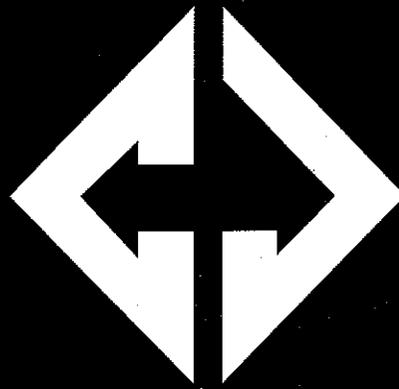


CONTEMPORARY JEWRY

PUBLISHED IN COOPERATION WITH THE ASSOCIATION
FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF JEWRY

Volume 40 Number 1 March 2020



Special Issue: Judaism in Comparative Perspective

Guest Editor: Alon Goshen-Gottstein

 Springer

Contemporary Jewry

Volume 40 · Number 1 · March 2020

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Sharing Wisdom

Jerome Gellman¹ 

Received: 8 April 2019 / Accepted: 19 May 2020 / Published online: 12 June 2020
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Abstract

In this paper I propose a number of distinctions to be noted and applied in the endeavor of sharing wisdom between religions. I propose different categories of wisdom and urge greater attention to sharing what is the active wisdom of religious sharers and not just “official” wisdom. Authentic sharing of wisdom should be sensitive to these layers of religious wisdom: (A) wisdom found in the home religion; (B) wisdom in the home religion that figures actively in the lives of devotees (or not), and to what degree; (C) wisdom in the home religion the person before us believes in or cherishes in his or her own religious life.

Keywords Wisdom descriptive · Wisdom evaluative · Wisdom bracketed · Wisdom by translation

One aim of contemporary interreligious dialogue is to increase one’s familiarity with devotees of other religions, to enhance peaceful living side by side, and to sponsor cooperative ventures across lines. This aim involves both becoming familiar with the main religious tenets and practices of other religions and personally interacting with devotees of other religions. Whether or not you agree with them, you can “understand” them and appreciate “where they are coming from” and respect them, or forgive them, for that.

A second aim of contemporary interreligious dialogue can be sharing religious wisdom with others. This can come from wishing to share with others some wisdom of your own religion and/or wanting to hear of the wisdom of religions other than your own. This goes well beyond the first aim, which might be no more than telling non-Jews things like “We Jews do this and that ...” or “We Jews believe this and that ...”

The volume, *Sharing Wisdom*, edited by Alon Goshen-Gottstein (2017), is a collection of essays by devotees of different religions, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish, offering their individual attitudes toward sharing wisdom with

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other religions. What makes this collection important is that each author attempts to anchor his or her attitude toward sharing wisdom in their own religious framework and understanding. Thus, this volume is not only *about* sharing wisdom but is a prime *example* of sharing wisdom between religions, since the *wisdom* of sharing wisdom between religions is shared here in an open and sincere manner. I have been asked to present a constructive review of this volume, by which I understand an attempt both to analyze the contributions to this collection and to advance the cause of “sharing wisdom.” My main interest in what follows is to raise precautions, which, if heeded, should enhance the quality and value of sharing wisdom. Almost always, sharing wisdom pertains only to sharing collective beliefs—what *we Jews* believe and what *we Muslims* think. This leaves out what should be prominently included in the discourse.

Sharing Wisdom: Important Distinctions

To redeem my task, I will not attempt to define “wisdom”—that is too much for me—but I do find it necessary to introduce a number of distinctions in the vicinity of “sharing wisdom” relevant for our purposes. First, we need to distinguish between “wisdom” taken in a purely descriptive sense and “wisdom” taken as a positive evaluational category. As a purely *descriptive* category, “wisdom” refers to what someone, a group, or a religion *considers* to be wisdom. If I call this “wisdom” in the descriptive sense I am not evaluating it positively. I might reject it, or parts of it, as prosaic and not very worthwhile, contrary to what others have thought. Or, my basic outlook might be so different from where the wisdom is coming from that it clashes with my dearest and deepest understandings. The differences are just too big for me to positively evaluate what is being presented. In this *descriptive* sense, to speak of Mesopotamian “wisdom” literature might be no more than to speak of what is *considered* or *was* considered by some to be wisdom. In this sense I can refer to something as wisdom without endorsing it.

The other category of wisdom is *positively evaluative*, involving an endorsement of something as truly worthy of having been discovered, worthy of my attention, and possibly of ultimate adoption into my understanding. In this sense, to speak of “wisdom” is to endorse its value and importance. I will mark this distinction with subscripts as “wisdom_d” for wisdom in the descriptive sense and “wisdom_e” for wisdom in the evaluative sense. (Note that in principle I might judge something to be “wisdom_e” when no one else has. Others might not think of it as wisdom at all, yet I find something very penetrating about it.)

Now for a distinction within a distinction. Go back to where I deem something to be wisdom_d only, refraining from giving it the honor of wisdom_e. There is a further distinction to be made within this account. For I might yet appreciate it as a profound piece of wisdom, wisdom_e, *granting* the framework from within which it originates, a framework that I myself do not accept. For me, it is not wisdom_e. Yet it is not simply wisdom_d. To mark this category, I will use “wisdom_[e]” to indicate what a person judges to be deservedly positively evaluated, wisdom_e, *only* from the perspective of the other person, given the other person’s background beliefs, but not

from her *own* perspective. While “wisdom_e” denotes wisdom positively evaluated, simpliciter, with “wisdom_[e]” the positive evaluation is under brackets, neutralized within. Wisdom_[e] straddles the gap between wisdom_d and wisdom_e. What is for me wisdom_[e] is in the end nothing more than wisdom_d, but that is not the whole story. It shares the positive evaluative attitude of wisdom_e but only in a limited manner, not in the full way of wisdom_e.

I must raise an additional possibility about how one manages wisdom_[e]. I might think of something as a bit of wisdom_[e], because it does not really count as wisdom from my own perspective. Yet, I might have a way to transform that piece of wisdom_[e] into something nearby that will be cherished wisdom_e from inside my own perspective. This has happened to me, for example, when reading some Christian texts about Jesus. When discovering there wisdom about Jesus, *as it is* it will be for me no more than wisdom_d or wisdom_[e]. At best, it strikes me as wisdom_e, granting the Christian point of view it represents, which is not mine. Yet, I am at times able to translate what is said about Jesus to be about God instead, so that what was at first wisdom_[e] now reconfigures as wisdom_e. I will call the resulting wisdom “wisdom_e by translation.” I suspect that a quick implicit translation of this sort underlies a significant degree of appreciation of wisdom borne on foreign wings.

Now for a different type of distinction within wisdom_e and derivatively within wisdom_[e]. That is between what is wise because it conveys a *truth* or truths, and what is wise because it conveys *understanding*, although it not be true. It conveys understanding by being “true enough” to give us an understanding of matters beyond the question of its truth. An example of the latter kind of wisdom would be my grandmother’s favorite saying, “Nobody does harm to a person as great as what he does to himself.” Taken as a statement of fact, my grandma was not correct. She was not thinking of the enormous harm others can do to a person far more than what one could do to oneself. Another person can torture me for hours with excruciating pain far more than any pain I could possibly inflict on myself. But as a piece of wisdom, my grandma’s saying conveys a profound *understanding* of human nature. She was telling me that people too often overlook the damage they do to themselves by bad decisions and actions made in haste, as in anger. These decisions can have an effect over a long term and even for a lifetime. Instead, a person likes to blame their woes exclusively or mostly on others, not paying attention to the havoc they have inflicted on themselves. If only we acknowledged the damage we do to ourselves we would be better off and also less condemning of others. My grandma’s motto was false as stated but was *true enough* to convey an important piece of wisdom about human nature and how to deal better with life. So, there is wisdom that is true and wisdom that is not true but apt for advancing understanding.

A final distinction to be kept in mind is that between what I will call an *individual* epistemic attitude versus a *collective* one. In the *individual* case, I am speaking for myself as an individual, saying what I believe or disbelieve, what I am willing to accept or am not willing to accept. I might, for example, say “I believe the messiah will only come in the future,” as a personally held belief. With a *collective* epistemic attitude, I am speaking for my group defined *as a group*. Consider an announcement by the chair of the committee that “the committee believes that taxes should not be raised,” when the vote was ten to nine. The chairperson happens to have voted with

the minority, and as a member of the committee believes taxes *should* be raised. In making the announcement, therefore, she is not speaking for herself. She speaks for the committee as *a whole*. It is a collective belief that she is announcing.

Similarly, I might say, “We Jews believe that the messiah will only come in the future.” I will be reporting on what is true of my group as a group, an “official” position, as it were. Personally, in my heart or known by those who know me well, for example, I might not believe in the coming of a messiah at all or have doubts whether the official position is really true. As an individual belief it is false to say that I believe what my group as a group does about the messiah.

Sharing Wisdom Between Religions

Miroslav Volf, the Christian contributor to our volume, informs the reader that the Christian is obligated to share wisdom: They have an *obligation* to share wisdom. After his death and resurrection Jesus Christ said to his disciples: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21)—with a mission to announce the Good News, and more broadly to share God’s wisdom with the world. Christians share wisdom because Jesus Christ commanded them to do so. (Volf 2017, 5)

For Christians, wisdom is first an “integrated way of life” and secondly, wisdom includes pieces of advice on how to live a “good life.” Yet,

There is yet a third *and most basic way* [my emphasis] in which Christians understand wisdom—surprisingly, perhaps, wisdom as a *person*.... The Apostle Paul also writes that Jesus Christ “has become for us wisdom from God” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Here *human beings are wise if they follow Christ* [my emphasis] and, even more fundamentally, if they allow that personified Wisdom to dwell in them, conform them to itself, and act through them (Galatians 2:20).

And:

To reject wisdom as a way of life, *or Christ as the embodiment of wisdom* [my emphasis], is not like leaving the dessert untouched after a good meal; rather, it is like refusing the very nourishment without which human beings cannot truly flourish. (Volf 2017, 2–3)

These last two sayings restrict the extent to which I, a religious Jew who “rejects Jesus,” can contribute wisdom_e to Volf. For any content that I convey to him that might imply that Jesus is not the embodiment of wisdom or that I do not follow Jesus in my life will thereby not qualify as wisdom_e for him. And what Volf gives to me might be severely restricted from being wisdom_e for me. Much of what he calls “wisdom” might be for me at best wisdom_[e] or wisdom_e only by translation. To illustrate, if “an integrated life” and “a good life” are code words for Volf for living with Jesus, they would not mark wisdom_e for me, though they might be wisdom_e by translation.

However, if what Volf offers me as a piece of wisdom_e will be tightly imbedded within his Christian framework, I might not be capable of translating it into *my* religious framework, so that it remains no more than wisdom_d for me. An example of this is a Christian work I read that presents a theology of the atonement by Jesus in his suffering at the cross. I found myself unable to translate the theme of the book about Jesus's atonement into non-Christian terms so that it could become for me wisdom_e by translation. The content is embedded too essentially and inextricably in the theme of the suffering of Jesus. I can appreciate the book as wisdom_[e], perhaps, but no more.

By contrast, in the *Confessions* of Augustine I have found much Christian content that smoothly becomes for me wisdom_e by translation. For example, Augustine writes how his mother prayed that he should not travel to Rome lest when arriving there he fall in with the Manichaeans. Augustine did go to Rome, against his mother's wishes, and did not join the Manichaeans. Instead he became a devout Christian and eventually Saint Augustine. When writing about his going to Rome against what his mother had been praying for, in delicious irony Augustine writes that God answered his mother's prayers and sent him to Rome! I see in this passage great wisdom_e—the idea is easily translatable into a Christian-neutral context while retaining the wisdom_e of the original.

The Hindu contributor, Anantanand Rambachan, tells us, through quotations from the Bhagavadgita, that “these texts, and countless others, make two significant wisdom disclosures.... The first is the disclosure that God is present in all beings.... The second wisdom disclosure is the emphasis on the equality of the divine presence” (Rambachan 2017, 19). Rambachan adds that in Hinduism “wisdom is equated with the discernment of God in all and all in God” (20). The human problem, therefore, is caused “by ignorance of the impossibility of any form of separation from God” (20). There can be no separation from God because God is in all and all in God, essentially and irreversibly. Thus does Rambachan inform the reader of the nature of wisdom.

From such a premise, one might expect the next step to be that wisdom_e emanates mostly or almost exclusively from Hinduism outward, and not in the other direction. According to the starting point, we would expect that a Hindu would not recognize as wisdom_e what another person predicates on an ontological distinction between God and creation. Such talk would display “ignorance” of the impossibility of such a separation. At most, Hinduism could gain wisdom_e only from religious outlooks similar to it in relevant ways, such as Sikhism (see below), save for lessons about life detached from their religious soil. But here we have an unexpected move. For it turns out that for Rambachan the following two premises would be consistent with one another:

- (1) According to Hinduism, wisdom_e is that God is in all and all is in God.
- (2) Religions that do not accept (1) have wisdom_e to contribute to Hinduism.

These are consistent with one another because, while holding fast to the idea of all in God and God in all, Rambachan avers that humans are limited in their capacity to conceptualize the God to which (1) refers.

The [Hindu] tradition has admitted consistently that God transcends all limited human efforts at definition and description.... If it is impossible to confine the One within the boundaries of our religion or to represent it entirely through the language of our theologies, we must be open to the possibility of meaningful insights from others that may open our hearts and minds to the inexhaustible and multifaceted nature of the divine. Our confession of the limits of human understanding and language provide a powerful justification for relationships of mutual sharing and humility with people of other faiths and no faith. (Rambachan 2017, 21)

No one cultural-historical context can have an exclusive say here, including the Indian Hindu one. A cooperative effort by plural perspectives from different cultural and historical circumstances is called for to advance our ability to conceptualize God, however limited that conceptualization will always be. So, when a Muslim, say, speaks of God she might be giving a piece of wisdom_e to the Hindu, because helping to explicate the meaning of “God” in the wisdom_e of (1). Hence the Muslim will be speaking wisdom_e to Rambachan. This is a rather liberal, mutual conception of sharing wisdom that stands in some contrast to the main focus of the Christian position in this volume. It means to be inclusive of Buddhist nonbelief in God (indeed also “no faith”!) and transcendentalist views of God.

In “A Sikh Perspective,” Pal Ahluwalia tells us in an edifying passage that:

Wisdom is the ability to know that which is of the deepest significance. This “knowing” comes not through mental calculation or shrewdness but rather through what we may call “intuition.” This form of knowing is about an inner experience, an inner knowing that is embodied within us. Such wisdom is manifest within us and can be harnessed or awakened through prayer, meditation, service, and contemplation. It is, in short, an inner form of knowing. This form of knowledge cannot simply be acquired through reading books but entails an experiential element. (Ahluwalia 2017, 33)

Ahluwalia is telling us that we should not think of wisdom_e simply as in ideas and texts. Rather we should think of these latter as facilitators of wisdom_e, enabling and hopefully prodding the receiver to deeply internalize what is offered in an experiential appropriation. This wise_e observation naturally recommends shared “prayer, meditation, service, and contemplation” to heighten the likelihood of appropriation by those other than Sikh.

In what follows, Ahluwalia goes on to offer a limiting view of what for him is wisdom_e. So, he writes that “wisdom in Sikhi is about experiencing the Creator and creation” (34), limiting wisdom_e to what is consistent with there being a creator. More than that, later Ahluwalia adds, “In Sikhi, wisdom results only from fusion—the merging of the self and the Divine” (36), limiting wisdom_e not only

to what is consistent with there being a creator but also to what sees an ultimate oneness of some sort between the creator and the creation.

With these statements, Ahluwalia is excluding Buddhist teachings when predicated on the absence of a creator, and Western religious teachings when predicated on God as transcendent and not “fused” with creation. Ahluwalia, therefore, should be able to think of such Buddhist and transcendentalist teachings at best only as wisdom_[e] or as wisdom_e by translation.

Now, Ahluwalia does go on to tell the reader that

All revelations of the Divine are valid and hence it is stated that no single religion (including Sikhi) can claim to be the full and final expression of God because of the inexhaustible and infinite nature of God’s attributes as well as the relativity of the modes of perception. (Ahluwalia 2017, 37)

This excerpt seems to parallel the passage of Rambachan, our Hindu author, in which he opens to other religions.

In “A Buddhist Perspective,” Sallie B. King writes that “sharing wisdom is a two-way street; there is sharing with others what one has realized and there is receiving from others what they have realized” (47). King goes on to recognize that “some Buddhists acknowledge today that they learn spiritually from other religions” (47). She acknowledges two areas where Buddhists have gained or can gain spiritually from other religions. One is compassionate social activism to be learned from “Catholic hospitals, schools, and charitable enterprises.” King gives extensive credit to Western religions for the turn to greater social activism in contemporary Buddhism:

There is something of a consensus among contemporary Buddhists who participate in global discussions about religion that Buddhism has the most to learn from other religions in the area of learning how to put their compassion and loving-kindness into practice in concrete action in the world. This process involves developing forms of action, but it may also require a rethinking of the status and value of things such as human history and human relationships. (King 2017, 56)

It is clear that King sees the Western teaching of social activism as a case of wisdom_e.

The other area where Buddhists have or can gain spiritually from other religions is, says King, in appreciation that belief in God is not in conflict with Buddhist meditation. Concerning the American Buddhist Bernie Glassman, she writes that at first he did not understand how Catholic nuns could be meditating. Yet, “He ultimately learned that there is no conflict between meditation and belief in God. He now is happy when his Zen students go to a local Sufi center for zikr (Sufi prayer—which, of course, involves God), in addition to their Zen Buddhist practice” (King 2017, 48–49). King does not tell us just what wisdom she learned from realizing that theists could do Buddhist meditation. I propose that in her appreciation of this lack of inconsistency, King learned an important insight about her own Buddhist meditation and so gained wisdom_e as a result. That Buddhist meditation need not assume atheism allows a new vantage point on her meditation, namely, that the meditation’s

value does not depend on any metaphysical assumption about God, that its value transcends any particular metaphysical posit. (Perhaps this should take us back to elements of the Pali Canon where the Buddha appears to disown any definite metaphysical positions.) This can free King to have a different understanding of the nature and intrinsic value of her own meditation. The best way to categorize this piece of wisdom is wisdom_e by translation.

The Muslim contributor, Timothy Gianotti, writes that

Far from claiming exclusive access to Divine Truth and Wisdom, the Qur'ān celebrates the fact that God, in His mercy benevolence for humankind, has broadcast the message all over the world from the time of Adam on. Indeed, the Qur'ān goes so far as to say that every nation has been sent a messenger. And no message is believed to be *complete or exhaustive*. (Gianotti 2017, 68–69; my emphasis)

Giannotti goes on to tell us that

The most familiar and recurring examples of these authentic teachings can be found in Qur'ānic references to the Torah and the Gospels.... We find many passages attributing “guidance” and “light” and “wisdom” to the Gospels and the Torah.... To boil it down to a simple question we pose: can truth and wisdom be sought in other religious texts, traditions, and cultures? The simple Qur'ānic answer seems to be clear.

I will return to this contribution below.

The Jewish contributor, Meir Sendor, acknowledges the need for Judaism to gain wisdom from “other cultures,” but forcefully warns against what he calls dangers of sharing wisdom between *religions*:

A premature, uninformed and uncritical sense of commonality can lead to an inauthentic syncretism and generalization, to false assumptions of sameness, obscuring important distinctions between faiths. ... Missing this point has led to misguided attempts to see certain commonalities between theistic Judaism and nontheistic, nonpersonal Buddhist thought. Such examples of syncretism distort our sense of the other and of ourselves. (Sendor 2017, 87)

Sendor's worries apply to a follower of Judaism receiving wisdom from another religion, especially a nontheistic one. Note, first, that sharing wisdom between religions need not include accepting commonalities between religions. There are other forms of wisdom sharing. I might receive what is wisdom_e for *you* merely as wisdom_d or as wisdom_e, neither of which amounts to a commonality between my religion and another. And, even what I accept as wisdom_e need not be a commonality, but something that I might not have ever thought about before.

More to the point, however, Sendor is assuming that finding something similar of importance between two religions can easily lead to “syncretism,” and he is claiming that finding a point of similarity between faiths will obscure “important distinctions between faiths.” Hence, it is a misguided syncretism, to Sendor, to find similarities between a theistic and a nontheistic religion, for example.

None of this is compelling. Of course, finding something similar between religions *has at times* served the purpose of syncretism and *has at times* been used to obscure “important distinctions between faiths.” But there is nothing compulsory about that motivation or that outcome. I myself have found a common ingredient worth pointing out between Buddhism and traditional Judaism, without advocating or implying that the common ingredient should be grafted onto my Judaism in its Buddhist form, as a kind of “syncretism” (Gellman 2012). Nor do I advocate that the two are *similar religions*. They decidedly are not.

To find *something similar* between religions X and Y is not the same as saying that religions X and Y *are similar religions*. Finding *something similar* between religions X and Y means that X and Y are similar *in that respect* and does not imply that X and Y are *similar religions*. To claim otherwise would be to commit a logical fallacy. Finding some commonalities, even significant ones, will not obscure massive differences between a theistic and a nontheistic religion, between a religion of divine revelation and one without divine revelation, between a religion of a particular people and a universal religion, between a religion of Halakhah, Jewish law, and one that does not have a Halakhah of a kind Judaism has. There is no quick slide from “here is a commonality” to “there is no important difference between them.”

Most importantly, the fact is that there *are* similarities, and some *important* ones, between religions. These do not disappear because we push them to the shadows. Pretending that there are no similarities can have, and has had, most negative consequences for relations between people of different religions living together. And, of course, nowadays we all live together—in a global apartment building.

That is precisely one reason I would want to point out a similarity between another religion and my home religion, without my serving as a front for syncretism or for obscuring differences. Yes, there is a danger out there from those wanting to show that “we are all the same” and that “it does not really matter what religion you believe in,” and the like. But that is not a given. We who think otherwise should not forgo finding some similarities between religions all because others misuse the enterprise in a simpleminded tactic of political correctness. We who respect the individuating characters of our varied religions should be finding similarities while upholding the integrity of each other’s religion, allowing free and unimpeded religions to live side by side.

Sendor tells us that his teacher Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik stood for omitting theology and spiritual experience from interfaith-dialogue contexts:

[Rabbi] Soloveitchik is concerned to counter certain attitudes he detects among some Jewish and Catholic participants. To maintain the religious integrity of all parties in interfaith contacts, R. Soloveitchik suggests that the participants avoid discussions of theology and spiritual experience, which cannot be authentically translated from one religious community to another, and instead focus on moral, social and political areas of common cause among all religions, including combating secularism and materialism and their consequent immorality. (Sendor 2017, 88)

Sendor endorses this view that matters of theology and spiritual experience cannot be “authentically translated” from one religion to another. I am not sure what

is to be understood here by “translation.” There are, to be sure, theological matters that one cannot easily divorce from their specific religious context. I gave earlier the example of a Christian theology of the atonement of our sins by Jesus on the cross. We cannot simply lift it from Christianity and place it down into Judaism. But there are other contents that can become wisdom_e by *translation* for another religion, if we adopt *my* sense of wisdom_e by *translation*. Recall that in my sense, “translation” does not retain the original form of the offered wisdom_e but changes it to a new, analogous form that is compatible with the receiving religion. Earlier, I gave the example of what Augustine writes in his *Confessions*, that while set in Christian terms is translatable out of that context to an analogous form for non-Christians.

In any case, gaining wisdom_e by translation from another religion need not be the result of searching for commonality between *religions*, but an outcome of discovering a commonality of *humanity* between the wise ones of different religions, which enables the transfer of wisdom_e by translation. To know that a common humanity engenders some analogous wisdom_e by translation should be a good corrective to a sense of haughtiness that sometimes overcomes those of us who think their religious sensibilities are all so unique as to leave all others in the dust. It should be a corrective to the putting of a fence around one’s own religion as a protective strategy.

On Sharing Wisdom

Religions have a lot to say about a lot of things. Some of those sayings will clash with others. Some of those sayings will be pushed up to the front of consciousness and actions of institutions and individual devotees while others will lag behind and perhaps have little use in practice. Some of these will be widely endorsed while others discouraged or abandoned altogether. Some individual devotees on their own will choose to highlight certain teachings in their life and ignore or demote others.

Authentic sharing of wisdom should be sensitive to these layers of religious wisdom:

- A. Wisdom found in the home religion.
- B. Wisdom in the home religion that figures actively in the lives of devotees (or not), and to what degree.
- C. Wisdom in the home religion the person before us believes in or cherishes in his or her own religious life.

These levels need not indicate the same wisdoms, and may not in many cases. The need for (A) is self-understood. (B) is necessary to distinguish between a live teaching with real influence among devotees, and those that play an insignificant role or that are dead letters, for at least some devotees. If we are to advance mutual relationships on a factual and not an imaginary basis, this is crucial in detecting the variations and nuances that might flourish in a religious community that on the surface appears to be uniform. Level (C) brings us down to the reality of live interpersonal relations between followers of different religions. Some of us

may be smiling posters for our home religion, but many of us are not. We should not approach members of a different religion as though they are cardboard advertisements of what their “religion says.”

There is insufficient reference in this collection to either level (B) or (C). Authors tell me some things their religions have to say about sharing wisdom, belonging to level (A). They tell me hardly anything about how these teachings actually function in practice within their religious communities, or parts of them, which would be level (B). And they tell me little about to what degree these teachings figure in their personal religious life, which would be level (C). With a few exceptions, such as Sallie King, whose two examples I discussed above, and such as the Sikh representative’s writing about Jesus as a model of compassion, contributors fail to give an ample report on specific pieces of wisdom that they have learned from another *religion* (as opposed to—from another “culture,” as by the Jewish contributor), wisdom that speaks to them personally.

While the Hindu author tells us of the Hindu openness to learning from other religions about God, we do not read of an example of such a contribution to Hindu thought. The reader will want examples of how a transcendentalist understanding of God will provide wisdom for the Hindu. Our Muslim contributor makes do with general statements about learning from the Bible and the Gospels. The reader will want some concrete examples. Of course, in neither case do I mean to imply that good examples are not there. My point is that the giving of examples attests to the personal commitment of the writer beyond generalities and advances the benefits of sharing wisdom between religions.

That level (B)—wisdom in the home religion that figures actively in the lives of devotees, or not, and to what degree—does not receive adequate attention in this volume leaves many crucial questions unanswered. For example, when Miroslav Volf writes that Christians are obligated to spread Christianity, does that mean that live Christians believe in proselytizing others to convert away from the religion they hold to Christianity? And if not, why not? We are left not knowing how this supposed obligation is played out in real life. We need to know this. And when the Muslim, Timothy Gianotti, quotes verses from the Qur’an to the effect that there is wisdom to be gained from other religions, including from the Torah and the Gospels, how are we to understand how operative these verses are and have been in the life of the Muslim *ummah*? To what degree can I expect a Muslim I sit next to on a plane to believe this as well? We need to know this.

In my Jewish religion, on many subjects I could quote sources seriously at odds with one another. I can give you quotations favorable to non-Jews and other quotations demonizing non-Jews, quotations favorable to women as well as opposing quotations, and quotations appreciative of converts to Judaism as well as those averse to converts. And so on. To know which sources are live and which neglected and by which group of devotees is important for the task of promoting shared wisdom between religions. Our authors make a welcome contribution when highlighting the sources they choose. For the purpose of interreligious relations, it would be helpful, in addition, to set out the place of sources in the consciousness of devotees to pinpoint targets for educational advancement.

That level (C)—wisdom in the home religion the person before us believes in or cherishes in his or her own life—is not seriously addressed in this volume suggests that the sharing of wisdom in this volume pertains to what above I have called *collective* and less so to *personal* epistemic attitudes. It is much of “we Muslims” and “we Hindus” “as a religious group believe in receiving wisdom from other religions,” rather than “I, who am a Hindu, have gained the following wisdom from other religions for my own religious life,” followed by some examples. Let us urge sharers of religious wisdom to enrich their discourse with more personal confessions.

I end by going back to my distinction between wisdom_e that is true, and what is not true and is wisdom_e because it provides understanding. I find many instances in which religious Jewish people are not interested in hearing from other religions because they take those religions to be false at their core and/or find a piece of wisdom to be saying something false by their Jewish religious lights. Here most important is to advertise the difference between truth and that which provides real understanding, and to show that to provide understanding a statement or system need not be true. There are cases where it need only be *true enough* for the purposes we wish to advance. And if our purpose is to share wisdom, to enrich understanding, wisdom_e need not entail truth.

Textbooks will picture molecules in a closed container as little round balls and tell us how they bang against the side of the container and bounce off. This helps explain a number of laws about the behavior of gases. Now, this picture and explanation are clearly false. Molecules are not little round balls and they do not “hit” the sides of the container or bounce off as would a ball. The textbook has used a false presentation, but one true enough to allow us to gain understanding about the behavior of gases. Just so, a piece of wisdom I hear from another religion might strike me as saying something false. But that should not be the end of it. I should not automatically categorize it as wisdom_d. For within that falsity might lie an understanding that does not depend on truth. For if I look further, I might be able to find there wisdom_e by translation in virtue of discerning understanding.

More deeply, the understanding that I gain might not even be wisdom_e by translation. Perhaps the understanding I find there is an understanding beyond words, an understanding that can be grasped only in the soul and not in the mind. The kind of understanding that can be confirmed only by a knowing smile.

This volume deserves praise for advancing the endeavor of sharing wisdom between religions in such a straightforward and welcome way. I pray that my few comments help advance the enterprise even further.

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