



# Journeys in the Spirit

inward outward upward downward

Children's work edition February 2013 Issue 72



## Other Religions – which is the best?

### Getting ready

Difficult questions are the motive for this series of *Journeys in the Spirit*. Looking at other religions and asking questions about what is similar or different is the focus for this issue.

This may also lead us to other questions like - who are we? If we are wondering whether or not somebody else is similar to or different from us, conversations may lead us to find out more about ourselves.

Then there is another necessary reflection: religions are somehow abstract, it is how people live a faith we need to be looking at. We can probably only compare one religion with another by looking at how faith and belief unfold in the lives of people of those religions.

Also, can we talk about Quakers as a religion?

This issue of *Journey in Spirit* invites those preparing to work with children or in all-age settings to embark on an exciting journey of discovery with people of all ages, to uncover some of the beauty in other religions, explore shades of faiths and find out what we can do together. We also introduce quite big philosophical and theological thinking – it can be done! It is probably most important that we are open to raising questions that are difficult and challenging. It might be that this shared questioning changes our lives as much as the answers we, children or adults, arrive at.

The core of this issue is a piece of literature written by G.E. Lessing in 1779: the *Parable of the Ring* (*Ring Parable* in the original) from the play *Nathan the Wise*. There are ideas for working in one session or spreading across several.

### Gather

Gathering in mind and body can be supported by meeting in a circle and welcoming everybody – it is good to be together! Start with a little time of stillness. Ask if anybody has any news that they would like to share. Listen to what is said and then go on to say that, this session, we are going to find out and do things about other churches and places people go to worship.

Ask a question like, 'Are people who go to other churches, temples, synagogues or mosques very different to us? Which religion is best?' In some Meetings younger and older Friends might have different religious backgrounds! Listen to each other with care.



It can be helpful to pass around a "talking-pebble" so that everybody apart from the person holding the pebble is listening.

*Journeys in the Spirit* offers resources and ideas to Quakers engaging with children and young people.

This children's work edition comes out monthly. It offers resources and ideas to Quakers engaging with 5–12 year olds in a Quaker setting.

It provides opportunities for exploring, creating and learning in an atmosphere of worship in partnership on our shared journey in the spirit.

### Underpinning references

Religion is living with God. ... To find religion itself you must look inside people and inside yourself. And there, if you find even the tiniest grain of love, you may be on the right scent. ... So you mustn't look where God is confessed and acknowledged. You must look everywhere, to find real religion. *Bernhard Canter 1962. Quaker faith & practice 26.37*

# Engage

## Talking about other religions.

Use the pictures of different places of worship on *Additional Resource 72.A* to help conversation. Lay the pictures on the floor or on a table – also have the names of the different places of worship ready to put out. Ask if children know what the different places are called and who might go there. Ask if anybody knows what is different about what people think or believe. Ask if anybody knows what might be the same. When the place or religion has been named lay down the words. Name the places, religions and any differences that you can think of if they are not mentioned. Depending on the age of the children this may take a shorter or longer time. Now say that you are going to tell a story that might help everybody talk about some of the different things that people who go to the churches, mosques or synagogues do or believe. You could also say that is a type of story called a 'parable' – a parable is a story with a secret meaning that you can find.

## Parable of the Ring

Tell this story in a way that suits you and your age group – there are two versions on *Additional Resource 72.B and 72.C* – one with richer, poetic language and one simpler. You will also need *Additional Resource 72.D* which has pictures of opal rings. You might just want to read the parable to the children, tell it as a storyteller using some props of your devising, use the Godly Play approach if you are familiar with it (see sidebar), or, if you have keen actors in your meeting, it could be done as a performance.

The parable's storyline invites you to tell the story in two steps, allowing time to ponder the dilemma in which the parent is trapped. As you get to the point where the father doesn't know what to do ask the children what they think might happen. After conversation continue with the parable. When the story is ended pause for a few moments and then ask some wondering questions such as:

I wonder what you like best about this story. I wonder which is the most important part of the story. I wonder if any part of this story is like your life. I wonder if there is any part you could leave out, and still have all the story you need.

# Respond

## Unpacking the parable 1

*Resources needed for this activity are: a 2 ft length of curtain rod and 2 curtain rod ends (finials); a roll of paper to fit the rod – wallpaper lining paper is good; glue sticks; some felt pens; the pictures of places of worship from Additional Resource 72.A; pictures of other places of worship on Additional Resource 72.E; cut out golden rule quotes from Additional Resource 72.F.*

After the wondering questions explore more about what is similar or the same about what happens in the different places of worship and religions.

Say that you have another bit of a puzzle to share and do. Say there are lots and lots of religions and even the ones we have talked about get into fights and arguments – just like the people with the three rings. Are they really all different or are there things that are the same? Say again that the good ways to live we were told about in the story were: being gentle, kind, patient and listening for god.

Go on to say that, just like the people in the ring story, a long, long time ago lots of people who called god different names started to write down special words about how it is best to look after each other and ourselves. Begin to unroll the blank scroll you have made. On the floor and around the scroll put down the pictures of places of worship from *Additional Resource 72.A and 72.E* and the golden rule quote linked to each of them that are on *Additional Resource 72.F*. Put out glue sticks as well. Pause for a moment and then pick up one of the

## References & other resources

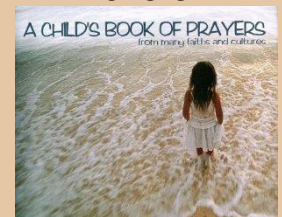
The Godly Play approach - suggestions for story kit:

Cloth to create the story's stage, simple figures, and 3 jewels or rings:



A Child's Book of prayers from many faiths and cultures.

ISBN 978-0-87156-978-3



## Looking at the Quaker testimonies -

See Series 2 of *Journeys in the Spirit* children's work edition at:

<http://www.quaker.org.uk/childrens-work-edition-series-2-exploring-quaker-testimonies>

*Additional Resources 72.A, 72.B, 72.C, 72.D, 72.E and 72.F* can be found at: [www.quaker.org.uk/resources-children](http://www.quaker.org.uk/resources-children)

## References & other resources

Interesting people:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janusz\\_Korcak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janusz_Korcak)

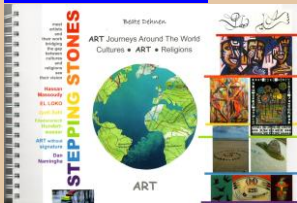
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahatma\\_Gandhi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahatma_Gandhi)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Luther\\_King,\\_Jr](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_King,_Jr)

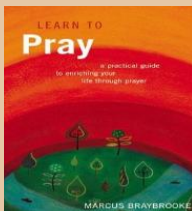
To find out more about other faiths, cultures and art see the book by Beate Dehnen who wrote this issue:

*'Stepping Stones - Art Journeys Around the World.'*

Available from:  
[amanda@christiansaware.co.uk](mailto:amanda@christiansaware.co.uk)



Marcus Baybrooke: Learn to Pray, anthology of prayers from many faiths.



*Additional Resource 72.G* can be found at:  
[www.quaker.org.uk/resources-children](http://www.quaker.org.uk/resources-children)

golden rule cards. Say something like, "these special words come from people who call themselves ....." and read the words. Each quote has a matching picture. Lay the picture and quote on to the scroll.

Ask the children, in pairs, to try to match other quotes and pictures and lay them on the scroll. If they want to be very clever they could try to arrange them in order of earliest to latest. The pictures and quotes can now be stuck on.

You may want to talk with the children about taking the scroll into the main meeting – they could practice unfurling and holding the scroll.

If there is time, have a bit of run around time outside of the meeting house or play a simple throwing and catching game with a bean bag or soft ball.

### Unpacking the parable 2.

*Resources you might need: A4 paper and card (some with lines dividing the sheet into 4 equal panes like a cartoon strip), pens and pencils, pastels, scissors, glue sticks (or PVA glue and brushes), magazines and fabric.* This is a simple drawing, colouring or collage activity with some interesting questions.

Ask children if they can think of any other ways the parent could have solved the problem – cut the ring? Give it to the eldest child? Have a rota? What would they have done? Are there other ways in which the parent could have been kind or gentle?

After talking about this the children could draw or make a picture or a four panel cartoon strip about the story – this might include their other solutions.

### Unpacking the parable 3. Looking at other people's lives.

Do we know someone who tries to live like the first person with the ring in the story? This might be an opportunity to invite other members of our meeting to join the children's meeting, probably at a following Sunday. The children will tell them the parable of the ring and ask them to share a story from their lives about living a life as if you had this ring. There are always amazing people with fascinating stories. You just need to find out about them.

What happens when people try to live in ways that are kind, gentle and patient? Three people from different religious communities who tried to do this are: Janusz Korsak (Judaism), Mahatma Gandhi (Hinduism) and Martin Luther King (Christianity) - see sidebar for web links. You might know of others!

### Unpacking the parable 4. How to treat the world and everybody and everything that lives on Earth. An activity for older children.

On *Additional Resource 72.G* there are several phrases from different religions. These represent some more of the values at the heart of these faiths. Cut out and give different ones to the children. If they can, ask them to read them out (if necessary do this for them).

Ask children to say what they think they mean – make sure you say that it is OK to not know and to ask questions. Which phrase do they like the best?

Have some discussion. Ask if they can say which, if any, religion is best. Set out the colouring pencils, oil pastels and paper. What would the children put in a picture of the words or value they like the best? Draw the picture.



## Reflect

**Gathering in a circle.** This helps to gather with head, heart and hands, centring down and conveying the feeling of togetherness and belonging.

If you have made a scroll place it in the centre of the group. If pictures have been made say that children can place them in the middle if they would like to.

Sometimes the silence, thoughts and activities we have shared need nothing more than to share togetherness and allow the “things” we have been busy with to sink in, settle and shape. To support this, elements of what we have used during the session can be arranged on a plain cloth in the middle of our circle. It might feel right to pose the question: *Other Religions – are they too different from us?* or ‘*Other religions – is there one that is best?*’

Finish the session by saying goodbye to everyone, similar to the welcome, so that each and everyone feels appreciated and valued, we might be different, but we are friends.



## Review

Take some time to feel and think...

Take some time to be silent for yourself...

Take some time to tidy up.

Reflections: before and after planning a children's meeting!

Give everybody the time they need. Sometimes there might be a child who cannot engage but will be happy to quietly be close to the group and doing something else. That is okay. A plan of what you want to do is a guide only; the shared journey might take a different path. That is okay. Just try to start and finish as a group. Use your talents! We are all learners. Ask yourself: What have I learned? What did the children give to me?

**This issue was written by Beate Dehnen and edited by Chris Nickolay and Howard Nurden. Chris Nickolay wrote the Topical activity.**

**Issue 73** will explore questions about ‘When is it OK to break the rules?’ Available from 1 March 2013.

**Issue 74** will look at the question, ‘How can I talk about being a Quaker?’ Available from 2 April 2013.

**Issue 75** will explore very difficult questions about using animals in science. Available from 1 May 2013.

### Materials available online are:

Current issue Additional Resources Sheets

An easy to use plan for a Children’s Meeting

A simple plan for an all age Meeting for Worship

A topical activity – how a village in East Africa helped one of their friends

Also a ‘How to use *Journeys in the Spirit*’ guide; a link to special issues; an archive of previous issues; a discussion forum and a link to the *Journeys in the Spirit* Youth edition.

Go to:

[www.quaker.org.uk/journeyschildren](http://www.quaker.org.uk/journeyschildren) and choose from the range of links in the sidebar.

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# Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional resources 72.A

Engage

Talking about other religions



**Mosque**



**Church**



**Synagogue**



**Quaker**



# Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional resources 72.B

Engage

The Parable of the Ring - story 1



The Parable of the Ring (Ring Parable) is the centrepiece of the play *Nathan the Wise* by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 1779. Key characters in our part of the play are: Nathan, Salah-al-Din (Salah-al-Din) and the Young Templar. The original is written in German and the setting of the play is Jerusalem around 1192 CE.

The play is raising its voice for religious tolerance, very uncommon for the time. A performance wasn't allowed until after Lessing's death in 1783 in Berlin. The character of Nathan is shaped after Lessing's lifelong friend the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn.

The friendship between the wise Jewish merchant Nathan, the enlightened Muslim sultan Salah-al-Din and the Christian Templar are an example of the possibility of good relationships between Judaism, Islam and Christianity. It is the individuals who matter when people of faith discover the face of a friend in each other. This play highlights the importance of dialogue and listening for the enabling of constructive encounters.

Salah-al-Din and Nathan meet - they like to talk about complicated things. Salah-al-Din asks Nathan a difficult question, not entirely fair because Salah-al-Din and Nathan don't share the same faith and Salah-al-Din, a Muslim, is the more powerful of the two - he is the country's ruler and Nathan, a Jew, is only a merchant - someone who buys and sells things.

The Parable of the Ring (Ring Parable) is Nathan's answer to Salah-al-Din's question in the form of a story. Salah-al-Din has demanded that Nathan tell him which religion is the true one - Judaism, Islam or Christianity?

The father in Nathan's story has inherited a ring of unfathomable value: *It had the hidden virtue him to render of God and man beloved, who in this view, and this persuasion, wore it.* As this father feels the end of his life approaching he finds himself with the dilemma that he doesn't want to favour one of his three sons and thus in turn promises the ring to each of them. But with only one ring he looks for help from his jeweller who creates two identical rings. On his deathbed the father entrusts each of his sons with a/the ring. Of course there is a conflict to settle - who is it who has the real and only ring? It will be the virtues of the ring-bearer is the judge's ruling: *The virtue of his ring; assist its might with gentleness, benevolence, forbearance, with inward resignation to the godhead.* The parable's father symbolises God and his three sons are the three Abrahamic faiths of Lessing's time. So who is the real ring-bearer?

There are two versions of the story - one is in the rich language of the translation with some slight amendments; the other is a simplified story version perhaps more suitable for younger children - see *Additional Resource 72.C*. If you are using the original version with older children, or adults, make sure you say that you there will be a chance to ask questions about what words or phrases mean. Enjoy the language!

Excerpt -found at: [http://www.fredsundervisning.no/english/t4t\\_5.php](http://www.fredsundervisning.no/english/t4t_5.php)

## Salah-al-Din (the Sultan):

Since you are a man so wise, tell me  
which faith, which religion appears to you the best?

## Nathan:

Sultan, I am a Jew - that must mean what I believe is best?

## Salah-al-Din:

And I a Mussulman/a Muslim: The Christian stands (*here*) with us too.  
Of these three  
Religions surely though only one can be true.

## Nathan answers with a story:

A long time ago there lived a man who from a special person had been given a ring of endless worth: the

stone of it an opal, (*show the pictures on Additional resource 72.D*)  
That shot (*that has*) an ever-changing tint (*colour*):  
It also had the hidden virtue (*power*) to make him loved by God and people, and  
so because of this never drew it off his finger,  
And made sure it stayed within his family.  
He gave it to his son, who gave it to his son and on and on so that,  
each child should always remain the lord of the' house – the most important.

From son to son,  
this ring descended until it came down to a father,  
Who had three sons, whom he loved the same,  
although sometimes this one, or that, at times the third, he loved some more  
but each received the overflowings of his heart and so he thought each deserved to  
have the ring, and, because he would not hurt them he privately promised it to them each.  
This went on for a while. But his death approached,  
and the good father grew embarrassed.  
He did not want to disappoint two sons, who trusted what he had said.  
What's to be done? (*Pause for a little conversation about his choices*)

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(*Continue*) He sends in secret to a jeweller, whom he asks to make  
two models of the ring, and commands him  
to spare no cost or pains to make them like, quite like the true one.  
This the artist managed.  
The rings were brought, and even the father's eye  
could not distinguish which was which.  
Quite overjoyed he summons all his sons,  
and saying goodbye to each alone, and gives each one  
His blessing and his ring, and dies.

Scarce is the father dead, each with his ring  
Appears, and claims to be the lord of the house, the most important.  
Then comes arguments, complaint and fighting - all to no end;  
For the true ring could no more be distinguished  
Than we can say which religion is the best.

**Salah-al-Din:**

I must think that the three religions can be told apart  
because of what they say or wear or eat.

**Nathan:**

I know and not only that but surely we must trust what people tell us  
in our families, in our church, synagogue or mosque (or Meeting) when we are told our religion is right?

Now let us to our rings return once more.

As said, the sons complained, argued and fought. Each went to a Judge, a clever person,  
and said that they had the ring from his father's hand.

The judge said, you tell me that the real ring  
Enjoys the hidden power to make the wearer loved by God and by people - let that decide which is best.  
So, if each of you has had a ring presented by his father,  
let each believe his own the real ring.

'Tis possible the father chose not to let one ring to rule them all  
And certainly, as he much loved you all,  
And loved you all alike, it could not please him  
By saying one was best to hurt the other two.

Let each of you feel this love and, no longer thinking 'I'm the best',  
try to show the power of their ring

by being gentle, kind and patient and thinking about God (*the Light in everyone*)

And if the powers of the ring continue

To show themselves in your children and your children's children,

After a thousand thousand years, come back and ask your question about which ring is best  
and then we will see what is decided, which one is best – if any.



# Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional resources 72.C



Engage

The Parable of the Ring - story 2

When people believe in God, Allah or Yahweh they have special and different ways of saying prayers, singing songs, listening to words about their god or sitting very, very still in worship – we call all these things part of their religion.

These things usually happen in a church, mosque, synagogue or meeting. Is one of these places the best? When a person asks their god to listen or listens for what their god is saying does god listen or speak better in a church, a meeting, a mosque or a synagogue – are they the same?

Here is a story to help us think about these very big questions.



Three people sat down to talk. One person was Jewish and thought a God with no name was the most powerful; one person was Christian and thought the God who said love was most important was best; one person was a Muslim thought the God called Allah was most powerful and right.

The Muslim person said to the Jewish person, tell me, which of our three Gods, our religions, is true and the best? The person who was Jewish said, “Well, I don’t know but I have a story that might help” and he began:



Once upon a time there was a person who had been given a very special thing – it was a beautiful ring. The ring had a jewel in it called an opal. (See *Additional Resource 72.D for pictures of opal rings – lay down the pictures*).

The person believed that the ring had special powers - it would help the person who wore it to be gentle, kind and patient (waiting for people to finish doing things without getting cross) then the person wearing the ring would be loved by everybody and feel what some people call god's love – Quakers call this the 'special light inside'. All the things the ring could do are a bit like what people think about their church, mosque, synagogue or meeting.

The person with the ring wanted their child to have it and for their child to have it and their child and on and on and on. Their wish came true and the ring went from person to person until it came to someone who had three children and didn't know what to do.

The person loved each child just the same and wanted each to have the ring so they could be gentle, kind, patient and have all the love that would come to them from people and from god. The person with the ring didn't want to hurt the children, now nearly grown up, so told each one they would have the ring.

Oh dear what to do now?

*(Pause for a little conversation about his choices)*

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So, the person asked a jeweller, a ring maker, to come to the house. The ring maker was asked to make two more rings just the same. They were made and they were very beautiful.

The person who had the first ring was getting very, very old and knew that, soon, they would die, stop living, so.....each of the three children, now nearly grown up, was given one of the three beautiful opal rings, Each believed it was the special ring.

Soon, the old person, their parent, died and each of the three children, now nearly grown up, said they had the special ring, the real one. They argued, moaned and had fights.

What was happening? They each thought that they were right, that their ring was the best and would make them gentle, kind and patient. They needed help. They went to talk to someone who didn't have a special ring but who was still gentle, kind and patient – and also clever, wise and good at listening.

This person listened, sat still for a long time and said, "Hmmmmmmmmm....". Well, you each say the ring you have is the special, powerful one and yet all you do is argue, moan and fight. Maybe none of the rings is special because none of you are being gentle, kind and patient."

Then the person smiled and said, "Here's what you must do. Wear your ring. Imagine that it is the special one and be gentle, kind and patient; think about god (the Light inside each person), do good things.

Make sure you give the ring you have to your child and that they give it to their child and they give it to their child. Make sure your child knows, and tells their child, to be gentle, kind and patient.

Then, say to your child that, after a long, long, long time their child or the next one or the next one must come back here and ask the clever and wise person sitting here then which ring is the special one, the most powerful – which has helped the person live the best.

*(If you think it necessary say that the three rings are, in a way, like the three religions and places of worship.)*



# Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional resources 72.D

Engage

What opals look like.





# Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional resources 72.E

Respond

Unpacking the parable 1



**Confucian**



**Mahabharata -  
ancient India**



**Ancient Egypt**



**Jain**



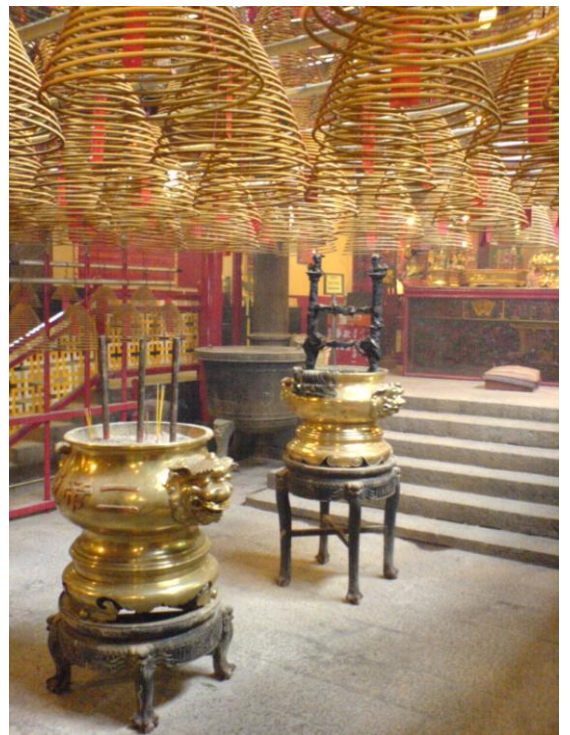
**Buddhist**



**Hindu**



**Sikh**



**Taoist**



# Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional resources 72.F

Respond

Unpacking the parable 1



There is a very special idea that is found in lots of religions including the three we have been talking about. Some people call it the golden rule. Here are some of the things that make up this golden rule.

From ancient Egypt ( From 664 BCE – 323 BCE):

**"That which you hate to be done to you, do not do to another."**

Ancient India

In Mahābhārata the ancient epic: (*Shānti-Parva 167:9*),

**"...treat others as you treat yourself."**

Sikhism

**The truly enlightened ones are those who neither incite fear in others nor fear anyone themselves. p.1427, Slok, Guru Granth Sahib**

Buddhism

**Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. *Udanavarga 5:18***

Christianity

**And as you would have people do to you, do to them the same. *Luke 6.31***

Confucianism

**The word 'shu' means something like: never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself. *Confucius, Analects XV.24***

Hinduism

**One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of life.**

Islam

**“...and you should forgive and overlook(what people do): Do you not like God to forgive you? And Allah (God) is The Merciful Forgiving.”**  
*Qur'an Surah 24*

Jainism

**Nothing which breathes, which exists, which lives, or which has essence or potential of life, should be destroyed or ruled over, or subjugated, or harmed, or denied of its essence or potential.** *Acaranga Sutra*

Judaism

**You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk. Love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.** *Leviticus 19.18*

Taoism

**Be kind to the kind but also kind to the unkind.**  
*Tso Teh Ching, Chapter 49*



# Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional resources 72.G

Respond

Unpacking the parable 4



## Looking at the core values of different faiths and worldviews

It is equally interesting to look at quotes from many religions about how to treat the world and everybody and everything that lives on Earth.

This might be more suitable for older children to read, listen and discuss.

## Indigenous Faiths, North America

All things are our relatives; what we do to everything, we do to ourselves. All is really One.

(Black Elk)

## Hinduism

I look upon all creatures equally; none are less dear to me and none more dear.

(Bhagavad Gita 9.29)

## Buddhism

O what of all these titles, names, and races?

They are mere worldly conventions.

(Sutta Nipata)

## Judaism

I call heaven and earth to witness: whether Jew or Gentile, whether man or woman, whether servant or

freeman, they are all equal in this: that the Holy Spirit rests upon them in accordance with their deeds.

(Midrash, Seder Eliyyahu Rabbaah 10)



## **Christianity**

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

(Gal 3,28)

## **Islam**

And the Lord answers them, "I waste not the labour of any that labours among you,

be you male or female – the one of you is as the other".

(Qur'an 3.195)

## **Sikhism**

To the God-conscious being, friend and foe are the same. The God-conscious being has no egoistical pride. The God-conscious being is the highest of high. Within his own mind, he is the most humble of all.

They alone become God-conscious beings, O Nanak, whom God himself makes so... The God conscious being shows kindness to all. No evil comes from the God-conscious being. The God-conscious being is always impartial.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib)