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## Sharing Wisdom

### Benefits and Boundaries of Interreligious Learning



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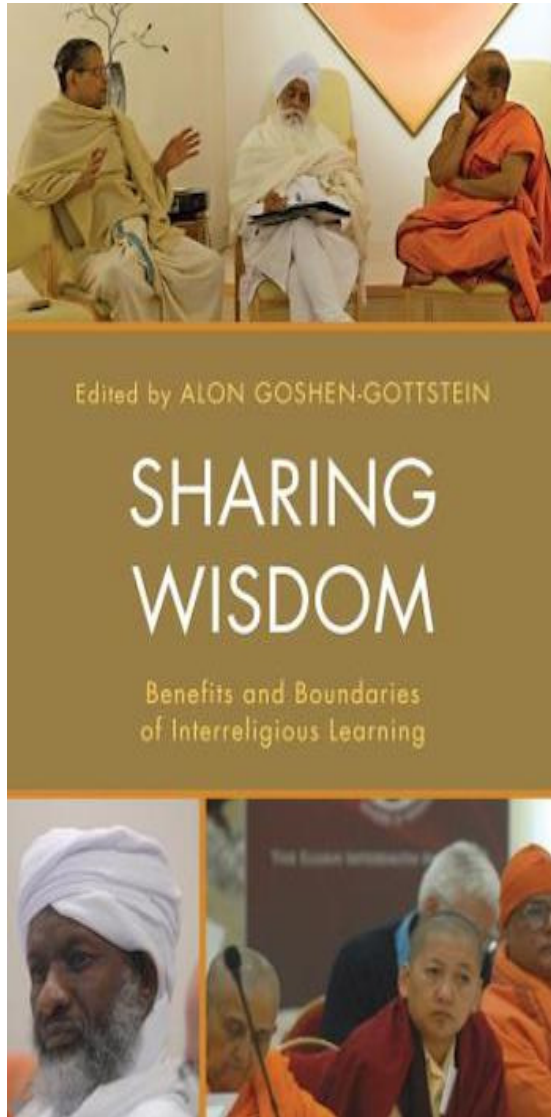
Editor(s): Alon Goshen-Gottstein

Interreligious Reflections

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## Review



Religious leaders often come together for a statement of their respective beliefs seeking a false satisfaction that they are working for world peace by a disparate series of talks meant to only emphasize differences among faith traditions. This book is a welcome departure from such meaningless exercises and hopes to create a tradition of “sharing wisdom” among the followers of different world religions.

*Sharing Wisdom* is a “response to a challenge posed by one of the members of the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders. Sri Sri Ravi Sankar made a statement at a conference jointly attended, in which he posed the following question: “If we can share each other’s food, listen to each other’s music, and wear each other’s clothes, why can we not share each other’s wisdom?” (xi). The chapters of *Sharing Wisdom* “were written initially for the third meeting of the Elijah Board of World Leaders, that was hosted by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and by Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh in Amritsar, in 2007. They have been updated for the purposes of the present publication” (ix).

Alon Goshen-Gottstein is the founder and director of the Elijah Interfaith Institute and is engaging in bringing a better, and practical, understanding among religious traditions. In his Introduction, he presents the problem of “sharing wisdom” by defining basic concepts such as “wisdom” and “sharing,” and proceeding to “construct an argument based upon the religious concerns of each of the traditions, for why, on internal religious grounds, wisdom should be shared on religious traditions” (xii). *Sharing Wisdom* aims to achieve this objective by presenting perspectives from the Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish traditions. Each chapter tackles the issue of “sharing wisdom” by addressing the questions: “What is wisdom?”, “Why share wisdom?”, “How to share wisdom responsibly?”, and “How to cultivate love and forgiveness.”

Presenting “A Christian Perspective,” Miroslav Volf explains that Christians share wisdom “primarily because the Wisdom dwelling in them *seeks to impart itself* through them to others” (5). Volf ends the chapter with a hope that all attempts of sharing wisdom should help people to connect with God, and cautions against attractive “packaging” of religious wisdom.

Anantanand Rambachan offers “A Hindu Perspective,” and affirms that “Hindus can understand well the impetus to share one’s religious convictions and experiences with others since a similar impulse is commended in Hinduism” (25). Rambachan points out that, “meaningful faith is not awakened and nurtured through aggressive proselytizing or exploitation of the vulnerability of others in conditions of tragedy and need” (25). He gives the example of the Hindu Temple of Maple Grove, Minnesota to show how a Hindu community forgave two youths, who had attacked the temple and received them with love.

Giving “A Sikh Perspective,” Pal Ahluwalia shows how sharing is “an essential part of” Sikhism “because altruism is a necessary prerequisite for serving the Creator and creation” (38). In “A Buddhist Perspective” Sallie B King refers to the process of sharing wisdom and clarifies that “it cannot be shared directly; it must be discovered experientially by each person” (51). While sharing “A Muslim Perspective,” Timothy J Gianotti states 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” (68). In “A Jewish Perspective,” Meir Sendor warns that the “sharing of wisdom between cultures risks certain dangers. 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” (87). He further states that the “Jewish understanding of the hiddenness of God and the insistence on non-representational theology is not merely an anti-aesthetic, and not even just an epistemological principle, but also stands as a fundamental ethical guarantee of the personal reality of God as transcendent, infinite Other” (87).

Goshen-Gottstein gives “A Composite Picture,” pulling “together various insights and key notions found in the individual chapters” (95). He is hopeful that the “combined wisdom of our traditions may present an equilibrium that is itself an expression of the higher wisdom, in which all our traditions are rooted” (104). *Sharing Wisdom* is not a simplistic putting together of the beliefs of different faith traditions but a systematic approach to bring about a culture of actively sharing wisdom without sacrificing the unique features of a particular faith tradition but trying to absorb more from the others.

**About the Reviewer(s):**

[Swami Narasimhananda](#) is the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*.

**Date of Review:**

June 29, 2017

**About the Author(s)/Editor(s)/Translator(s):**

**Alon Goshen-Gottstein** is founder and director of the Elijah Interfaith Institute. A noted scholar of Jewish studies, he has held academic posts at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University and has served as director of the Center for the Study of Rabbinic Thought, Beit Morasha College, Jerusalem.

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