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This month we explore the idea of **Connecting Across Religions**. March holds deep spiritual reflections, traditions, and rituals for many religions in 2013: Nowruz, Easter, Shivrati, Passover, and Spring Equinox just to name a few. Often we find religion and spirituality topics that are difficult to broach with friends and strangers alike; sometimes for fear of offending or disagreeing, sometimes out of respect or privacy, sometimes out of embarrassment with our own lack of knowledge about religions other than our own. We hope that you will take a quick minute to reflect on your own traditions as well as consider being curious about others out of a sense to connect with your neighbor.

Although we live in an age of acceptance of religious differences, it can sometimes be difficult to make this idea practical in important relationships. Most people feel that in order to maintain a close friendship with a person of differing religious beliefs, they must avoid the topic of religion altogether. Instead of viewing these differences as barriers to closeness, they can be used to foster growth and intimacy. Here are a few helpful strategies to use in talking with a friend about religion:

1. Take the position of a curious (but respectful) student: Whether you believe another person's religion is "wrong" or "right" is not important right now. What is important is providing a healthy and respectful atmosphere for conversation about a sensitive topic. Ask questions about how religion is a part of their family heritage; how it is helpful to them; what annual celebrations they might observe. The key here is to be a really good listener and to honor something that is important to a friend.
2. Look for similarities: Try to find ideas, concepts, or stories that are shared between your religions. Examples could be emphasis on family values, love, prayer/meditation.
3. Read a book about your friend's religion and see if they'd be curious to read a book about yours.
4. Remember that religion is a part (be it big or small) of who you are. Even if you are person who feels your religion defines you, there are many other points of connection with others (such as social interests, music, hobbies, intellectual pursuits, the fact that you are both members of the human race ☺).

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There is no need to run outside  
for better seeing.  
Nor to peer from a window. Rather abide  
At the center of your being;  
For the more you leave it,  
the less you learn.  
Search your heart and see  
if he is wise who takes each turn:  
The way to do is to be.

Tao Te Ching by Lao-tzu  
(translated by Witter Bynner, 1944) as quoted in A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook ©2010 by Bob Staahl, PhD & Elisha Goldstein, PhD

**Want to Learn More?**

*One World, Many Religions: How We Worship*  
by Mary Pope Osborne