

## CHAPTER 40

# Friendship

Friends are like crystals or jewels, something precious to be treasured. Just as you put jewels in a safe, you should keep your friendships deep within the safe of your heart. As with real gems, occasionally you will need to take them out and polish them. When you see your friend shine in the light of your love, you will feel joyful and happy. That is the nature of friendship. Unfortunately, people do not discover very many jewels in their lives, and consequently there is a great deal of vacant space in their hearts.

There are many sicknesses of the heart. The majority of them are in some way related to loneliness. People who are alone often feel a decreased sense of their own value and importance. If we develop true friends who will stick with us through thick and thin, we will not be so lonely.

Especially for teenagers, belonging to a certain group of friends and being accepted and liked by others may be one of the most important things in life. Teenagers often feel closer to their best friends than to their own family.

A true friend is someone who accepts and understands us deeply and with whom we can share any problem. We can completely trust such a friend, freely disclosing the innermost secrets in our heart, knowing that our friend will safeguard them. There is nothing to hide from a true friend, because his heart is one and the same with ours. We all need this kind of friend. The first step to finding such a friend is to become a true friend ourselves.

Friends come to understand each other with experience over time. Learning to understand someone is the basis of respect, because we begin to acknowledge each other's value. This may take some effort, time, and quite a bit of patience. But when we make that effort, we will discover the value of our friendship. Creating harmony in a friendship takes effort from *both* sides.

The quickest way to become a friend and to have a friend is to give the most valuable thing you possess — your heart.

Here is what some teenagers had to say about best friends:

- ✘ We're like sisters. We don't have to pretend or put on an act around each other. We can just be ourselves. (age 13)
- ✘ Your best friend is someone who understands you and who likes you regardless of rumors or what anyone else says. ... You can get irate with each other and still be friends. ... You can talk about anything with your best friend. (age 14)

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We live within a garden of beautiful people. Have you stopped long enough to smell the different fragrances of the roses, the lilacs, or the marigolds? If we really take the time to watch, they will bloom in front of our eyes. We have only to pick those we want to cultivate as friends and transplant them into the fertile soil of love within the garden of our hearts. When we water and tend them, they become the kind of friends whom you can call a forever friend.

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- ✘ You can just be silent. You don't always have to talk or explain everything. Your best friend just understands. You don't ever have to feel uncomfortable. You don't have to worry about losing her. She's always your best friend. (age 15)
- ✘ My best friend and I have been through a lot together. We've shared good times and also hard times. ... Your best friend sticks by you, no matter what happens. A lot of times, if there's something rotten going on, other people stay away or avoid you or act like they hardly ever even knew you. Your best friend sticks around! (age 16)

The highest level of friendship can be extended between brothers and sisters. Referring to each other as "brother" or "sister" is a natural gesture that we may

understand too simply. Brothers and sisters are often ready to give their lives for one another.

Relationships between brothers and sisters can also be quite difficult. When children don't feel enough love from their parents, they may take their frustrations out on their younger brother or sister. Anyone who constantly receives this kind of mean and unfair treatment is certainly hurt and scarred by it. The youngest member in a family is often afraid to be himself and feels inferior to his older siblings. Far too often, the competitiveness between siblings can be outright brutal or verbally and emotionally abusive.

Real brotherhood or sisterhood is achieved only when we become true friends. Likewise, true friends should establish such a close, deep and trusting relationship that they feel blood-related, like real brothers or sisters.

Who has such a friend? Although the majority of people in this world long for love and friends, most do not think so deeply about developing relationships.

There is much more to friendship than being friendly. If we want to have friends, we have to become keenly aware of and sensitive to their needs. Before becoming a friend, in a sense we have to become a servant. We need to start at the bottom, but eventually we will reach the summit. Friendship always develops and matures, even after it is established; it does not stay static but changes like the seasons. A relationship of love takes a tremendous amount of effort and sacrifice. Supreme love is unreserved and unlimited. The deepest friendship is guided by unconditional love.



### LETTER from a FRIEND

I just had to write to tell you how much I love you and care for you. Yesterday I saw you walking and laughing with your friends; I hoped that soon you'd want Me to walk along with you too. So I painted you a sunset to close your day and whispered a cool breeze to refresh you. I waited — you never called — I just kept on loving you.

As I watched you fall asleep last night, I wanted so much to touch you. I spilled moonlight onto your face — trickling down your cheeks as so many tears have. You didn't even think of Me. ... I wanted so much to comfort you.

The next day I EXPLODED a brilliant sunrise into glorious morning for you. But you woke up late and rushed off to school — you didn't even notice. My sky became cloudy and My tears were the rain.

I love you! Oh, if you'd only listen. I really love you. I try to say it in the quiet of the green meadow and in the blue sky. The wind whispers My love throughout the treetops and spills it into the vibrant colors of all the flowers. I SHOUT it to you in the thunder of the great waterfalls and compose love songs for birds to sing for you. I warm you with the clothing of My sunshine and perfume the air with nature's sweet scent. My love for you is deeper than any ocean and greater than any need in your heart. If you'd only realize how I care. ...

Parents are just that way. So please call on Me soon. No matter how long it takes, I'll wait, because ...

I LOVE YOU ...

God



Sometimes the concept of friendliness is misunderstood and equated with that of permissiveness. The two are not synonymous. A true friend will point out if you have made an error. His tenderness and deep love lie beneath the words he speaks. A person who loves or respects you or is friendly to you is not automatically your friend. If he knowingly lets you do something that harms yourself or others without trying to stop you, he is not a real friend. The same is true for any good parent or brother or sister as well. We cannot force our friends to change, but we should try to help each other to live conscientious lives.

Every human being needs friends — brothers and sisters in the true meaning of these words. When you find yourself in danger or in need, you will truly be able to appreciate a friend. If you have to rely totally upon yourself, you may feel hopeless.

True friends care about you and your real problems. When you are in trouble or have difficulties in your family life, the most valuable thing is the support of friends. That's what friends are for. Through good times and bad times, you can always count on a friend to be at your side.

### Problems with best friends

There can be problems, even between the best of friends. There may be times when the two of you fight with each other. But when you think about it, it's not

surprising that best friends fight. Any time two people are especially close, there's bound to be some fighting from time to time. In fact, an important part of a friendship is knowing that the two of you can fight and still be friends. When you have a close friend, you can let out angry feelings without having to worry that the friendship will be over. Sometimes having a problem or a fight and making up brings you closer than ever. Still, while you're in the middle of the fight, it can feel pretty bad. It helps to remember that, as awful as it might feel to fight with your best friend, it's bound to happen at least once in a while.

Below is a list of some problems with best friends that people have told us about. Circle the problems that you've run into. At the end of the list, add any other problems that you've experienced that aren't on this list.

- ✗ Your parents don't approve of your best friend and don't like you spending time together, or your best friend's parents don't approve of you.
- ✗ Your best friend acts one way when you're alone and another way when you're in a group of people.
- ✗ Your best friend is sometimes thoughtless and makes rude remarks, criticizes you, or does other things that hurt your feelings.
- ✗ Your friendship is changing. You just aren't as close as you used to be.

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### What the Buddha said about good friends

There are four friends who should be reckoned as good-hearted: the helper; the friend who is the same in happiness and adversity; the friend of good counsel; the friend who sympathizes.

On four grounds the friend who is a helper is to be reckoned as good-hearted. He protects you when you are without protection; he guards your property when you are in danger; he is a shelter for you when you are afraid; when you have tasks to perform, he gives more help than what you may need.

On four grounds the friend who is the same in happiness and adversity is to be reckoned as good-hearted. He tells you his secrets; he keeps secret your secrets; in your troubles he does not forsake you; he lays down even his life for your sake.

On four grounds the friend who declares what you need to do is to be reckoned as good-hearted. He restrains you from doing wrong; he encourages you to do what is right; he informs you of what you had not heard before; he reveals to you the way to heaven.

On four grounds the friend who sympathizes is to be reckoned as good-hearted. He does not rejoice over your misfortunes; he rejoices over your prosperity; he restrains anyone who is speaking ill of you; he commends anyone who is praising you.



- ✗ Your best friend is jealous or possessive and is hurt if you have other close friends, or you feel hurt when your best friend has other close friends.
- ✗ Your best friend is too changeable. One day you're best friends; the next day you're not.
- ✗ You have two best friends who don't get along with each other. You feel pulled between them.
- ✗ Your best friend doesn't keep the secrets you've told him or her.

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- When you were my age, did you have a best friend? If so, tell me about this person. Who was she/he? How did the two of you get to be friends? What did you like about this person?
  - Do you still know this person? If so, how often do you see him or her? How do you stay in touch with each other? If not, how and why did the two of you end your friendship or lose touch with each other?
  - I'd like to read you a list of problems people sometimes have with their best friends. (Read aloud the above list.) Did you and your best friend ever run into any of these problems or any other problems? If so, how did you feel about it at the time? How do you feel about it now that you're older? How did things turn out? If you had this same problem today, would you handle it any differently?
  - Right now I'm having a problem with my best friend. (Explain one or more of the problems you're having and how you feel about the problem.) Did you ever have this problem or a similar one? If so, tell me about it. How did you handle the problem? What would you do if you were me? What advice do you have for me?

- ✗ You feel very close to your best friend, but hardly anybody else likes him or her. People around you wonder why you're friends with such a strange person.

Although there is no easy solution to such a problem, talking about it with an older person may help. Someone older than you might have gone through these same problems and have some helpful advice. This person might be your mother, your father, an elder brother or sister, a teacher, or someone else to whom you feel close.

One way to obtain useful advice from the person you've chosen is to probe his or her memory through some thought-provoking questions. Questions such as the ones listed to the left should start the person thinking seriously about your problems and increase your chances of having a good talk and of getting helpful advice.

## Something to think about



### ...your friendships

1. What were your first childhood friendships like?
2. How are your current friendships like those childhood friendships?
3. What kind of friends would you like to have in the future?
4. Do you feel good enough to have friends? Why or why not?
5. What do you fear most in the area of friendship?
6. What do you expect of your friends?
7. What do you give to your friends?
8. How can you be a better friend?
9. Are you someone's best friend? .

### ...your best friend

1. Do you have a best friend?
2. Do you think that it is good to have more than one best friend?
2. What is the main reason that you are best friends?
3. What do you like most in your friend?
4. What bothers you most about your friend?
5. What do you think it is that your friend likes most about you?
6. What is it about you that bothers your friend the most?
7. What is the best time you and your friend ever had?
8. What is the worst fight you and your friend ever had?
9. If you don't have a best friend, why do you think this is so?

## For Your Journal



Do you have any of the following attitudes?

My friends don't support me. Everyone is so judgmental. Nobody sees it my way. My boundaries are not respected. I can't keep friends for too long. I can't let my friends really know me. I give my friends advice for their own good. I don't know how to be a friend. I don't know how to ask for help from my friends. I don't know how to tell a friend "no."