

## Footnote: A Definition of Friendship

*To think I could necessarily and sufficiently define a concept so profound as friendship would be my ultimate act of arrogance. What follows is therefore simply my personal observations and feelings on what the term 'friendship' means to me.*

We each have a powerful inner drive to satisfy a ravenous natural hunger for *intimacy of mind* with other human beings. This greatly desired *intimacy of mind* is what we call friendship. But sadly, in this present austere world ruled by its divisive spirit of greed and competition, it is not possible to achieve this *intimacy of mind* to any worth-while depth with just anybody. The minds of potential friends must, from the outset, already possess a mutually sympathetic resonance - an interpersonal affinity.

### A Natural Affinity

This affinity is strange. I can often sense it very strongly just by being in somebody's presence, even if no words are spoken. I have sensed this affinity with people with whom I did not even share a common spoken language. Mutual affinity is somehow conveyed by a person's atmosphere or aura. A pair of friends can just enjoy being together without having to say anything. This mutual affinity can even be picked up remotely. People have sensed a deep affinity with me just by browsing my web site from which we have then gone on to develop an intense friendship by email without ever meeting at all. However, a friendship never feels quite consummated without at least one face to face meeting.

What creates this affinity that provides the channel through which two people may become friends? Firstly they must each have the kind of personality that harmonises with the other. People of the same gender view the world in the same gender-specific way. I think therefore that same-gender friends need to have *similar* personalities - personalities with considerable overlap. Men and women, on the other hand, each view the world in slightly different gender-specific ways that are mutually complementary. Consequently, for [male-female friendships](#), I think it is far better for the male and the female to have *complementary* personalities.

### Need For Shared Values

However, this natural affinity - also known as personal chemistry - is not all that is needed for us to achieve the depth of mental intimacy required to truly assuage our hunger for friendship. We also need to share a greater part of our interests, pleasures and aspirations. But most importantly of all, we need to share the same *core values*.

Not all value-sets are conducive to friendship. The all-pervading spirit of competition and greed in current Western society reflects an underlying set of values that is not, to my mind, conducive to friendship. This value-set is powered by the lust for self-gain at the expense of others. It is the desire to *take* more and to *give* less. It generates relationships in which one possesses the other in some way. One becomes a slave of self-imposed obligation trapped by the other's crushing emotional dependence.

Friends *give and receive* in a way that enhances the ability of each to develop freely as he or she wishes. Friendship has no regard for wealth or status. There can be no hierarchy of friends. Friendship can exist only between two who regard each other as equal peers and who share a *mutually agreed part* of their experiences, knowledge, wisdom and pleasures.

## Building Mutual Trust

Friendship is a partial sharing of minds. The extent of that sharing depends on the depth to which the friendship goes. Each of a pair of friends constructs a mental model of the other in his or her mind. This model has both intellectual and emotional elements. The process of building and maintaining this model requires an openness of communication in which each friend provides the other with a progressive revelation - an honest inner exposure - of him or herself.

Honest exposure of the inner self to another is not easy. Becoming friends from first meeting to bosom pals requires a progressive growth of mutual trust. But you shouldn't be naive. Don't expose your inner being too much too quickly. Like a rock climber, gradually reach out a little further, but only as far as you can afford to fall. At each successful stage, you each hammer in a piton. Then you each risk a further outreach towards the other from your respective points of established trust. Repeat this process until you eventually achieve the depth of mutual trust you both desire.

If you fall into quicksand at any stage, grab your rope and haul yourself back to the previous piton (established level of trust). Take this as the appropriate depth for that particular friendship at that particular time. The depth, degree or level of intimacy in friendship is a continuous scale. You have to find the point on that scale that is right for each friendship.

## Love Between Friends

Love is the driving force that creates and sustains friendship. The kind of love friends have for each other is the desire to know, serve and share. It is the antithesis of lust - the desire to acquire, possess and control. It is what makes one want to connect with another human consciousness - intellectually, emotionally and physically.

Unspoken doubts and suspicions are barriers that limit the possible depth to which a friendship can progress. Love empowers friends to say how they feel about each other without inhibition or fear of hurting each other's feelings. It thereby allows them to resolve their doubts and suspicions about each other, thus removing the barriers and opening the way to an ever deeper friendship.

Because friends love each other, one never attempts to force, coerce or control the other to change for the better. One friend only informs the other of the way he or she feels. Love will motivate the informed friend to change him or herself for the better. Because friends love each other, they will never use each other as a means to an end - as a human resource to be used and abused for self gain. A friend - as a precious sentient being - is an end in him or herself. That end is the joy of sharing experiences and reciprocal love.

## Means of Communicating

Friendship can exist only between two who share a *mutually agreed part* of their experiences, knowledge, wisdom and pleasures. In order to be able to do this they must communicate in a multiplicity of ways. The first and most intensive form of communication is by words - spoken or written language. This can be by such channels as letter/email, phone and face-to-face.

Written communication - especially email - is the most effective way for friends to learn about each other in a factual way. Its relative anonymity makes it much easier and less embarrassing to exchange deep intimate personal details as a firm foundation on which to build a friendship. Later, the telephone can add the extra emotional expressiveness that only subtle nuances of the voice are able to convey. Nevertheless, to my mind, friendship can never be truly consummated without meeting face-to-face.

Face-to-face presence not only facilitates a much more rapid exchange of words through speech, but also a very broad band channel for communicating emotionally. Eye contact is the most intimate form of emotional connection. The frequency and duration of eye contact with which a pair of friends feel comfortable depends on the depth of their friendship.

Touching enhances the emotional connection and relaxes any potential tension between friends. Various degrees of tactile intimacy become comfortable at various stages as their friendship deepens along the *continuum of intimacy*. The handshake signals the first stage of affinity. Next is probably the hug. Inter-gender friends may then perhaps progress to the male-female [kiss of friendship](#). As their friendship deepens even further, their emotional communication may be further enhanced by a full kiss. Further on still, inter-gender friends may gain great pleasure from holding some of their conversations within the comfort of a relaxed cuddle.

The ultimate level of tactile communication is of course sex. This can be anything from light petting to full intercourse. Friends should only progress to a more advanced level of *sexual intimacy* when their *intellectual and emotional intimacy* has progressed at least to the point along the *continuum of intimacy* at which that particular kind of relating becomes appropriate and comfortable to both.

It is important to be aware, however, that the whole spectrum of tactile exchange is simply to enhance the intellectual and emotional connection facilitated by conversation and eye contact. So from the hand shake to the most intimate state of human coupling, good conversation and eye contact are key.

## Summary

Friendship is a mutual *intimacy of mind* which we all naturally crave. Each of a pair of friends possesses within his or her mind a detailed mental model of the other.

Friendship is possible between equal peers with compatible personalities who share a natural affinity and the same core values, interests, pleasures and aspirations.

Friendship is created and sustained through an iterative cycle of building mutual trust through the love-motivated communication of progressively intimate personal thoughts and details.

The result is an ever-closer and deeper intellectual and emotional resonance between two intimate minds, which is the ultimate element of creation.

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