

Friendship

Adapted from Heart to Heart by C. Robinson & A. Hawkins

Let there be spaces in your togetherness,
And let the winds of the heavens dance between you.

-Khalil Gibran

Those truly linked don't need correspondence. When they meet again after many years apart, their friendship is as true as ever.

-Deng Ming-Dao

Consider This:

A friend is someone whom you share your soul – your innermost being. That means that the best lovers are also friends and parents can be friends. Friendships can be sudden and short-lived as we come and go through each other's lives, and that even people who live together for years may not be especially close friends. This definition of friendship excludes many important, pleasant, and useful relationships that we tend to call friendships, but which don't involve much deep sharing. We may trust a neighbor with a spare key but not the depths of ourselves. With friends we take the risk of knowing and being known, giving our friends the space to be who they uniquely are.

Comfort and Risk. There's nothing quite as wonderful as sharing something important with another person and feeling known and accepted in return. But there's a risk in friendship. Because we've let that person in behind our defenses, shared our secrets, and asked for acceptance, no one can hurt us like a friend. We might feel rejected, taken for granted, or used. But when it comes from a friend, often the relationship means enough to patch it up, forgive and go on. That means hearing the other person's side, forgiving each other's foolishness, understanding one another's lives. These understandings enlarge our souls. They help us to learn to forgive our own foolishness and be sympathetic to our own missteps. The hurts themselves become the fuel for greater friendship as we learn to understand each other and ourselves, accept our flaws and foibles, and become more aware of who we are.

Unity and Boundaries. The Roman poet Cicero called a friend a "second self" and Aristotle said that friendship is "a single soul dwelling in two bodies." But the fact of the matter is that there are two souls and two selves, each must have integrity or there can be no friendship. The irony is that we can only be close because we are separate. We must resist the temptation to make our friends in our own image or to become so enamored of them that we are no longer ourselves. Friendship thrives when we honor

other's boundaries. This is especially difficult when we are friends for the long term – partners, siblings, parents, children. There must always be spaces in our togetherness to let others grow in his/her own way.

Activities: Before the gathering, reflect by doing one or both of these activities.

Simple Meditation. From the Dalai Lama. As you breathe in, say, "May I cherish myself." As you breathe out, say, "May I cherish others." Spend 5 minutes on this meditation at the beginning of the day. Notice that you start by loving yourself and then move to loving others.

Journaling Suggestion. Make a list of people you think of as your friends, past and present. Put a star by those who fit this definition: someone with whom you share your soul, your innermost being, the depth of your life.

Questions/Sharing Suggestions:

- What do you think of the author's definition of friendship? Do you agree, if not why not?
- Have you ever had a friendship where you felt enamored of them & noticed changes in yourself? Or have you ever tried to change a friend – making them in your own image?
- Was there a time that you were deeply hurt by a friend? Or have you ever deeply hurt a friend? Tell us about it.
- Instead of giving advice and fixing our problems, some friends are able to listen with an open heart. If you have ever experienced this kind of friend, how did those moments feel? If you have tried to be that kind of friend, how did it go?
- Is there a friendship that you are willing to talk about with the group? Tell us about the friend & friendship.
- Did you do either or both of the activities? What did you learn from doing them?

Next meeting: August 8th.