

18. Friends you need

WHILE in this transient world, wading through joy and grief, man has sore need of some one of his kind to whom he can communicate his feelings, with whom he can share his discoveries and depressions, his moments of bliss and sorrow, to be by his side while trekking the hard road to truth and peace, encouraging and enthusing him towards the goal.

Who is one's true friend? Who is one's false, fake friend? It is clear that, as understood today, friendship and friends are far off the mark, of the ideal. Friends who can confer real counsel, comfort and consolation are precious gifts, rarely found today.

A friendship knit by monetary bonds is disrupted as soon as you ask the loan to be repaid. So, when you oblige your friend with a loan, the friendship too is broken at that very moment. How can friendship be cemented by words or by coins? Heart must understand heart, heart must be drawn to heart, if friendship must last. Friendship must bind two hearts and affect both of them beneficially, whatever may happen to either---loss or gain, pain or pleasure, good fortune or bad. The bond must survive all the blows of fate, and be unaffected by time, place and circumstance.

Each must correct the other; for each knows that they come from sympathy and love. Each must be vigilant that the other does not slide from the ideal, cultivate habits that are deleterious, or hide thoughts and plans that are productive of evil. The honour of each is in the safe keeping of the other. Each trusts the other and places reliance on the other's watchful love. Only those deserve the name "friends"---who help in uplifting life, cleansing ideals, elevating emotions and strengthening resolves. Those who drag you into pomp, pedantry, paltry entertainment and petty pranks are enemies, not friends. Friends cannot be got by social status, financial squandermania, outer scintillation and verbal assertions. See into the very soul, the inner motives and motivator, the deeper aspirations and achievements, and then, yield your loyalty to such.

The friendship between Kuchela and Krishna

You might have heard of the friendship between Kuchela and his 'class-mate' Krishna. How could the friendship between these two survive the immense gap between their worldly positions and their spiritual status. Krishna was God Incarnate. Kuchela was a mere man. Krishna was a ruler, a king-maker, an unsurpassed hero, monarch, and preceptor. Kuchela was so poor that he was ever at his wit's end to procure his next meal. They **had** studied together for a few years at the hermitage of the sage Sandeepani. That had sown the seed of friendship.

So, his wife sent him to Krishna, assuring him that he would not be turned from the door. Kuchela agreed to proceed but he hesitated long to send word that he had come, even when the guardsmen enquired why he had come and who he was. How could he, a broken, bent, befogged beggar dare stand before the Lord in His palatial Hall with its jewelled throne, and announce himself as a 'friend'? He was aghast at his own audacity.

God only can be the true friend of man

But, all his fears melted away, when Krishna recognised hint and came forward to receive him warmly and with evident joy. Krishna filled him with supreme bliss by His words. His acts of hospitality and His attitude of hearty welcome. Krishna also blessed his wife with enormous wealth and comfort, peace, prosperity, in quantity much more than ever she hoped for or prayed for. No one asked Hint for it; but, His love took that shape, His Grace awarded them the happiness. But, Kuchela was ever content with the friendship of Krishna; he never desired

anything other than that. He was overwhelmed with delight when he experienced the compassion and love of the Lord.

The feeling of friendship must activate every nerve, permeate every blood-cell, and purify every emotional wave; it has no place for the slightest trace of egotism. You cannot elevate the companionship which seeks to exploit or fleece for personal benefit into the noble quality of friendship. Perhaps, the only friend who can pass this rigorous test, is God.

To understand and practise this noble emotion, the Bhagavath Geetha is an invaluable guide. When Arjuna was dispirited and dejected, Krishna injected courage and a high sense of duty into him and helped him avoid disgraceful defeat. And, Arjuna, too like a good friend, took the advice in good spirit, with the full confidence that Krishna meant well by him. Why, we know how confident he was of the wisdom and power inherent in Krishna. When Krishna gave him the choice, "To help you in battle, you can have either my entire army or myself alone, unarmed and determined not to fight in spite of any provocation." And, Arjuna did not hesitate to decide which of these two he wanted. He chose the unarmed Krishna, and prayed that He might be his charioteer, during the days when he rode into the field.

Friends who stand witness for ages

Long ago, there was a person who had three friends. Quite by accident,, he was charged for some crime and a warrant was issued against him by the Court. He. approached one friend and asked him to bear witness to his innocence. He said, "I will not move out of this house; I can help you only from within this." The second friend said, "I can come only upto the porch of the Court. I will not enter the witness box." The third friend said, "Come, I shall speak for you, wherever you want me to." The first friend is the 'property and possessions' which can bear witness only from within the house. The second is 'the kinsmen, the members of the family, who come as far as the cemetery but would not accompany the person to the Judgement Seat. The third, friend is the fair name earned by one's-"virtues and service," which persist even after the death and burial; they stand witness for ages, and announce the innocence and greatness of the individual. They decide the nature of the next birth too.

Young as you are, you must make efforts to acquire good friends and keep them. Do not postpone this task, listening to some elders who advise that the path of spirituality can well be trodden later when you have retired from active life. They say that you can take on hand the Bhagavath Geetha, when you have grown old. But, that advice is like telling a nation that it can afford to wait till war is declared, to train an army to counter the enemy. Long years of preparation are needed to have an army that can meet any 'contingency; otherwise, if arms are distributed to the untrained, it spells disaster even to the persons wielding the arms.

Have God as your unfailing guide and friend

The good deeds and thoughts that one welcomes and entertains during the years of life will stand in good stead, firm, like a good friend, when one is nearing the end. So, you, young men and women, must resolve to engage yourselves in acts that promote your peace and progress and the peace and progress of all mankind. Do not damage your future by pursuing temporary benefits and selfish aggrandizement. Yearn for and earn good friends, who will keep you on an even keel. Have above all, God, as your unfailing guide and friend. The heart of the *Gopees* had struck deep roots in the love of Krishna and when Akrura came to Gokul to take Krishna with him to Mathura, the *Gopees* struggled heroically, to keep Him with themselves. They held on to the

steeds of the chariot; they gripped the wheels and sought to prevent them from moving. Friendship is the expression of unshakeable love, love that is noble, pure, free from desire or egoism. I bless you that you may have such friendship from others and that you too make others happy by granting this holy type of friendship.

Brindhaavan, 24-5-1973