

## **SNEHAM (FRIENDSHIP)**

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### **The need for true friends**

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.

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It has been said that if you can count your true friends on the fingers of one hand, you are blessed. A friend is one whom you can be yourself with and never fear that he or she will judge you. A friend is someone that you can confide in with complete trust. A friend is someone you respect and that respects you, not based upon worthiness but based upon a likeness of mind.

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.

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### **Friendship should be based on Sathya (Truth) and Prema (Love)**

The ideal friendship should be inspired by and founded on love (Prema) and truth (Sathya). The ideal friendship is based on altruism, which adopts the motto: love for all and malice towards none, keeping in view the well-being of others, overlooking personal interests. Such an attitude makes life enjoyable and helps, also, to set right the world. Such ideal friends or altruists voluntarily give more and receive less, whereas egoists, whom we see more and more of in everyday life, like to receive more and give less.

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### **The Nine forms/stages of devotion**

Devotion aims at acquiring friendship with God through purity in thought, word and deed. The nine forms/stages of expressing devotion to God prescribed for humanity and the lives of the great exemplars of these forms of devotion have been described by the sages and the Puranas: Sravanam (listening to the glories of God—Example-Parikshit); Kirthanam (Chanting the praise of God—Narada); Vishnu Smaranam (ever remembering the name of the Lord—Pralhada); Paada Sevanam (Worshipping the Lord's feet—Goddess Lakshmi); Vandanam (Prostration—Akrura); Archanam (Worshipping the figure of the Lord—Prithu); Daasyam (Service—Hanuman); Sneham (friendship—Arjuna); Atmanivedanam (Self-surrender—Emperor Bali).

<http://Arjuna.ssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume22/sss22-28.pdf>

<http://Arjuna.ssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume35/sss35-05.pdf>

<http://Arjuna.ssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume19/sss19-22.pdf>

<http://Arjuna.ssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume27/sss27-11.pdf>

<http://Arjuna.ssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume22/sss22-01.pdf>

### **Sneham (Friendship)**

Of all the nine forms of devotion, sneha (friendship) is the most important. Sneham (friendship) is the eighth of the 9 stages of devotion and is placed just before Aathma nivedhanam (offering of the Self), because between friends, there is no fear, no doubt or disbelief or hesitation. It is only when you cultivate this hear-to-heart relationship and develop the feeling of being a companion or comrade of God (sneham) that you can reach the last stage of Atmanivedanam (self-surrender). For this purpose, you must have a pure heart, which in turn is based on love and devotion. You must have pure and selfless love toward one and all. Such love is not a one-way traffic. Today, we are prepared to receive love from all people, but we are hesitant to share our love with others. It should be a give and take policy. Love begets Love.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume36/sss36-04.pdf>

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume35/sss35-05.pdf>

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<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume14/sss14-10.pdf>

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume06/sss06-40.pdf>

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### **Friendship we generally see in the world today**

Generally, friends come together for mostly selfish, temporary and worldly reasons. People who are rich gain friends quickly, as others try to be friendly with them in the hope of gaining some personal benefits. Similarly, persons with power and authority gain friends quickly not only because they are feared but also because they can do favors. Such persons gather friends, who, of course, stay on during fair weather but disappear when their wealth, status, or authority fades. Friendships should not be based on such considerations of fear and favor. Such friendships last only as long as selfish interests are promoted thereby. As the proverb goes, "When the lake is full there are also frogs in plenty, but when it runs dry not a single croak is heard."

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume14/sss14-10.pdf>

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/summershowers/ss1973/ss1973-30.pdf>

### **True Friendship**

A friendship knit by monetary bonds is disrupted as soon as you ask the loan to be repaid. 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.

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A true friend is one who will follow you like a shadow and remain with you in times of both joy and sorrow and in prosperity and adversity. Make friendship with only such persons with proper discrimination. Don't make friendship with everybody who says hello, hello to you. This is a great mistake.

### **Study the persons before you befriend them**

One acquires all sorts of bad feelings due to bad company. As is the company, so you become. Therefore, it is said, "Tell me your company, and I shall tell you what you are." There is no harm in taking time to enquire whether the person with whom you want to make friendship is good or bad.

You should know the background, habits, behavior, discipline, and other qualities of the person with whom you want to make friendship. You should also try to know with whom they associate and what type of company they keep. If you come to know that someone is in bad company, do not even look at their face. Even if they say hello to you, move away from them, saying goodbye, because such company can even endanger your life. But today, due to the effect of modern education, students develop friendship with all types of people. It cannot be called true friendship. Such a type of friendship is temporary, like passing clouds. Entertain such friendship only to the extent necessary.

Character is very important for a student. A student without character is like a living corpse. Never make friendship with those who have no character. One who does not have individual character will not have social character also. How can a person without social character have national character? Therefore, first and foremost, you should have individual character. You should develop steady vision and unwavering mind. You should not even look at the face of someone who has a wavering mind like the pendulum of a clock. Such students are very bad persons. You should develop no intimacy with such bad persons. Otherwise, you will also ultimately become a bad person. Develop friendship with only those who are good. As I have already said, if iron, which is a very hard and strong metal, is kept in dust, it loses its strength. But when it is put in fire, it becomes bright, pure and soft. All its impurities also get removed and it can be changed into any shape or instrument by beating it with a hammer. Good company is also like fire, which makes your heart pure by removing the dust of all impurities, which then makes it possible for you to transform internally and overcome all your sorrow, grief and misery. Do not cultivate close friendship with anybody unless you know that his motives on the other side are pure, unselfish and spiritual.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume29/d960708.pdf>

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume14/sss14-10.pdf>

### **Whom should you befriend?**

All are equal in society. There is no need for you to hate anyone and there is no harm in offering your respects to everyone. Whomsoever you salute, it reaches God (Sarva jiva namaskaram Kesavam pratigachchhati). However, you should use your discretion in choosing your friends and follow certain principles for your own good. Without discipline, there can be no well being (Na sreya niyamam vina).

Don't have a relationship with people who lack character and good qualities. It is better not to have any friend at all rather than developing friendship with a foolish person. Cultivate friendship only with good people.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume29/d960708.pdf>  
<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume29/d960708.pdf>

Similarly, the Bible in Proverbs 13:20 warns, “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm,” and in Proverbs 22:24-25, the Bible exhorts us, “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared.”

Who is a good person? Those whose thoughts, words and deeds are in perfect harmony are noble ones (Manasyekam vachasyekam, karmanyekam mahatmanam). You should choose a person as your friend who has unity of thought, word, and deed (trikarana shuddhi). Do not even go near a person who thinks something, speaks something else, and acts without any relation to their speech or thinking. Those who lack harmony of thoughts, words, and deeds are wicked (Manasyanyath vachasyanyath, karmanyanyath duratmanam).

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume29/d960708.pdf>

One should not cultivate friendship with all and sundry. Friendship should be cultivated only towards those who are one's equals in age, status, culture, etc. Friendship with those above or below one should be avoided. This is the true meaning of friendship. When you try to befriend those above you in status etc., they may try to patronize you. When you do not like to be lorded over, the friendship will break. When you develop friendship with those below you, you may attempt to boss over them. When they do not acquiesce in this, the friendship will break up. Therefore friendship will be enduring only when it is as between equals in age, wealth, status, etc.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume22/sss22-13.pdf>

Comment: Swami recommends this approach only for Man's friendship with Man; it is not applicable to God's friendship with Man—See example of Krishna & Kuchela below.

In the Bible, Proverbs 18:24 cautions, “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” In effect, the Bible cautions us against having too many friends and of spreading oneself too thin. It is better to have a few but truly good friends who will stick with us through thick and thin. If one has too many interests and distractions as a result of having too many friends, the one true friendship we can develop with God—who will really stick with us through thick and thin—will probably be the one pushed aside. It is better to be loyal to one true friend who is faithful at all times than numerous unreliable ones. Similarly, Proverbs 12:26 says, “A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.”

### **Swami's advice to youth on the importance of acquiring good friends**

A student should not develop relationship with all sorts of people. There are students, both boys and girls. Neither should boys develop any connection with girls nor girls with boys. Boys and girls who develop such relationship and go on the wrong path are worse

than dogs. Such boys and girls deceive even their parents. They waste their life, and their birth is itself a curse. Do not lead such a useless life.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume29/d960708.pdf>

Young age, the celibate stage (brahmacharya ashram) is the foundation of the multi-storied mansion of life on which the first floor, the householder stage (grihastha ashram), is built. The floor of the recluse stage (vana– prastha ashram) is similarly built on the first floor, the householder stage. The top floor, the renunciant stage (sanyasa ashram), is similarly built on the recluse stage. If the foundation of this mansion is not strong, the entire mansion will collapse. Therefore, you should make the foundation strong. Young age is the golden age and is very important and sacred and it should be free from the rust and dust of evil qualities. Students should have good qualities. All that they see, speak, hear, and do should be sacred. It is, therefore, necessary that first of all they fill their heart with love for God.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume29/d960708.pdf>

So it is desirable to undertake various practices to win the grace of the Lord at this young age while you have the energy and ability to learn and concentrate. It is quite probable that some of your friends may point out to you that this is the age to make a success of yourself in worldly affairs. They will advise you to earn money and enjoy life. According to their way of thinking, the pursuit of God can be kept in abeyance till the age of retirement from active life. But, the fact is that the young age, being impressionable and formative, is the right age to develop sacred ideas and practice spiritual sadhanas. It is common knowledge that if throughout one's life one pursues Maya, then at the time of death it will not be possible to divert one's thoughts towards God. Therefore now is the time for you to lay the foundation for a good future.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/summershowers/ss1973/ss1973-30.pdf>

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.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume12/sss12-18.pdf>

### **Chinna Katha: Beware of the Company You Keep**

Once a hunter captured two beautiful parrots. He sold one to the butcher and the other to a Haridasa, that is to say, one who gathers devotees around him and glorifies his Lord Hari through song and story.

After six months the hunter happened to pass by the side of the butcher's stall. He remembered the parrot. He stepped into the stall. Immediately he heard the parrot's shrill voice, "catch, kill, carve, slice." He left the stall ruminating over the words uttered by the parrot. He was curious to know about the other parrot. He walked into the ashram of the Haridas. The parrot in the cage fluttered its wings with joy and cried out: "Welcome! Welcome! Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare! Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare!" He was delighted at the sight of the parrot and to listen to its words.

As he was walking towards his hut, he marveled at the words uttered by the two parrots which were poles apart in their tone, temperament and content. The words of one were outrageous and repulsive. Those of the other parrot were sweet, soothing and sublime. It is the environment and the constant company in which they had grown up that made all the difference. Rightly has it been said, "Tell me who your friends are, I shall tell you what you are"

(From CHINNA KATHA, PART II)

#### **A true friend should correct his friend who goes astray**

If a person is adopting wrong ways, a true friend should not be afraid of pointing out his errors with a view to improving him. It is not enough to merely share joy with each other; but it is more important to share the sorrow with each other. Sacred friendship is that which enables one to help others, at all times, and in all circumstances.

<http://Arjuna.ssbpt.info/summershowers/ss1973/ss1973-30.pdf>

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 honor 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.

<http://Arjuna.ssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume12/ss12-18.pdf>

The Bible says, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." Proverbs 27:5-6. What this means is that true criticism from a friend may hurt for a time but may be welcomed, for it issues from his love, whereas the kisses of an enemy are an attempt to conceal his hatred. When a friend (a true friend) wounds you for the moment, it is to help you in the long run. Criticism (preferably constructive criticism) is good as it helps you to improve. An enemy that flatters you with his lips is trying to maneuver you to his advantage. He wants

something; and he thinks by flattering you, you will give him whatever it is that he wants.

Similarly, Proverbs 27:17 says, “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17). This can be interpreted to mean that just as there is mutual benefit in the rubbing of two iron blades together as the edges become sharper, making the knives more efficient in their task to cut and slice, similarly, a good friend is not someone who necessarily agrees with everything you do and say--it's somebody who lovingly challenges you to be a better person. We grow in maturity when we can test our thoughts and ideas against another person, and when we're open to correction when we're wrong.

### **Chinna Katha: Who is a Real Friend?**

King Bhoja was a patron of pundits, artists and poets. His court was veritably a nest of great poets-the greatest among them being Kalidasa. Kalidasa was not only a poet in the Court but a close friend of Bhoja. Bhojaraj was really a very good king but for one flaw of his being fond of gambling. Kalidasa hit upon a plan to make the king realize that gambling is one of the seven vices.

Every day the king used to go in a palanquin to the royal gambling den after the court session for the day was over, Kalidasa knew the route by which the king would go.

One day Kalidasa donned himself in ochre robes and matted hair. He wore sacred beads too. He deliberately stood in front of a butcher's shop situated on one side of the road along which the king would go in his palanquin. When the palanquin was drawing near, he raised the pitch of his voice and was talking to the butcher, evincing interest in the sale of meat. The king naturally would look this way and that way, out of curiosity, just to be acquainted with the ways of the world whenever he went in the palanquin. His eyes fell upon the man in ochre robes. He asked the palanquin bearers to halt for a while. He sent one of his messengers to that man just to enquire what business had a sanyasin to stand near a butcher's shop and whether it was an act of propriety. Kalidasa replied: “Oh don't bother, tell your king I not only eat meat but drink liquor too.” The messenger conveyed the news to the king. The king got furious and sent word again that, as a king, he would not tolerate the sight of a sanyasin eating meat and drinking liquor. He further desired to know how he managed to procure money to purchase meat and drink. Kalidasa replied with a sly smile: “Oh it is simple, I gamble and win money. One of the easiest ways of getting money from the other man's pocket is by way of gambling.” The king realized that the man in ochre robes was not an ordinary man. He decided not to proceed towards the gambling den and ordered the palanquin bearers to take him to the palace.

After some time he sent word to his dear friend Kalidasa to discuss the man in ochre robes. Kalidasa came in the same guise of a sanayasi as the king had seen that afternoon. The king sternly demanded: “What is all this drama?” Kalidasa replied calmly:



“My dear friend! I have enacted this drama only for your benefit. If a sanyasin eats meat, drinks liquor and gambles the consequences that he has to face would be purely personal. But if the king takes to any of these vices, he would be setting a bad example to his subjects. Have you not heard of the adage ‘As the king, so the subject’. Pardon me oh King! I have taken too much liberty and displeased you.” King Bhoja embraced his friend and said: “Oh Kalidasa! How fortunate I am to have such a friend, philosopher and guide as you!

From Chinna Katha, Part 2: Who is a Real Friend?

### **God only can be the true friend of man**

“Genuine friendship can only be possible between one Aathman and another, that is to say, between two persons who have each realized that Aathman is the core of their being. Nowhere on the mundane plane can you get the genuine sneha which is declared as the penultimate stage to sharanaagathi or aathmanivedhana (total surrender and dedication to God), among the trivial, transitory friendships of worldlings.”

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume14/sss14-10.pdf>

True friends should be willing to make sacrifices for their friends. Jesus is a pure example of such true friendship. He sacrificed His life for His “friends”. Jesus Christ gave us the definition of a true friend: “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” (John 15:12-15) If we are to be His friends, Jesus makes it clear—we should show it in our obedience to His commands.

God will not abandon or reject us no matter what our circumstances. Swami says, “I ask only that you turn to me when your mind drags you into grief or pride or envy. Bring me the depths of your mind, no matter how grotesque, how cruelly ravaged by doubts or disappointments. I know how to treat them. I will not reject you. I am your mother.”

God is one's greatest and closest friend. He is interested in one's real welfare while worldly friends are influenced by one's position and wealth, only as long as these last. The relationship with God is from heart to heart. It alone is permanent and unchanging. Nature is the best teacher, heart is the real Guru and God is the only Friend. The relationship with God should be based on love. Love for God alone leads to Bliss.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume30/sss30-30.pdf>

### **Nature of Friendship (Sneha) between Krishna and Arjuna**

Arjuna exemplifies how devotion can be developed by cultivating the friendship of the Lord through complete faith and loyalty. Friendship implies also love. Arjuna's love was totally concentrated on Krishna. He acquired all powers by the grace of Krishna.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume22/sss22-28.pdf>

Arjuna and Krishna had this genuine sneha between them. Arjuna saw Krishna as his sakha (friend), and therefore had the temerity to use words of jesting irreverence during play, or while in repose, or when seated by him, or at meals' (vihaara shayyaasana bhojaneshu). The two often ate meals from the same plate, and were ready to help each other under all circumstances. Do not be under the impression that Arjuna was insidiously overpowered by Krishna. He was mature in character, well-versed in the Vedhic lore and a redoubtable warrior and bowman full of courage and heroism. Krishna was the Purushoththama (Supreme Being), Arjuna the naroththoma (best human). It was a friendship between the Embodiment of the Highest and the embodiment of the best. Krishna was the Avathaaric (incarnated) Person; Arjuna was the aanandhic (blissful) person; it was a coming together of the Avathaara muurthi and the aanandha muurthi. Arjuna was often addressed by Krishna as Kuru nandhana. This name has a deep significance. Kuru means 'act, activity, karma. Arjuna Nandhana means 'happy, delighted. Arjuna Kuru nandhana, therefore, means he who is delighted while engaged in activity. Throughout the eighteen chapters of the Geetha, Arjuna is alert and active, participating vigilantly in every turn of argument."

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume14/sss14-10.pdf>

However, this friendship had its restraints. Krishna told Arjuna: "You are my devotee and you are my friend." Arjuna did not declare to Krishna: "I am your devotee." Krishna was not content to declare: "Arjuna, you are my devotee." Why did He go on to say: "You are my friend?" Would it not have been sufficient if Krishna had declared, "you are my friend"? Why should he say, "you are my devotee"? In this declaration, there is a profound spiritual significance. This will be clear only when we practice the spiritual life. If merely the Lord were to say to Arjuna, "you are my friend" his ego will get inflated and he will take undue liberties with Krishna. If He were to say, "My dear, you are my devotee," he will be extremely submissive. A kind of fear will be instilled in him. Fear should not be instilled; nor should he be encouraged to take excessive liberties. Hence, the terms devotee and friend, were used by Krishna. "You are my friend. You may be free with me up to a point. You are my devotee. So observe certain restraints. Exercise control over yourself in your devotion."

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume21/sss21-17.pdf>

Arjuna accompanied Krishna like a shadow. He experienced innumerable troubles and was subjected to calumny and abuse. But through all these experiences, he did not allow his faith in Krishna to waver. He always prayed: "Krishna! You are my sole hope and refuge. There is none other to protect me." In this way, looking upon Krishna as friend, kinsman and alter ego, Arjuna relied on Krishna for everything. Krishna, for his part, was even ready to act as Arjuna's charioteer in battle. Arjuna made Krishna the charioteer of his life. Krishna hereby acquired the appellation Parthasarathy--the charioteer of Partha (Arjuna). <http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume19/sss19-22.pdf>

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.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume12/sss12-18.pdf>

The sneha (friendship) stage of Arjuna is the stage when all distinctions between the devotee and God disappear and the two friends are One. When this stage of utter trust, unshakeable faith, and complete absence of doubt, fear and anxiety is reached, the next stage of aathmanivedhan is natural and easy to cover. This is real friendship to which the youth must aspire. See God in every being and then true sneha will blossom, This type of true sneha can come only when you follow the advice of Krishna.

Adhveshta sarva bhuuthaanaam maithrah karuna eva cha  
Nirmamo nirahamkaarah sama dhukha sukha kshami.

("He who has no trace of hatred towards any creature, who is friendly and compassionate towards all, who is free from the bondage of 'I' and 'mine, Arjuna who takes pain and pleasure as equally welcome and who is forbearing in spite of provocation...") Develop these qualities in you, for they are the signs of true sneha, for it is only when you are proceeding on the Godward journey along the nine stages of bhakthi (devotion) that you can attain this Divine ideal of true friendship.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume14/sss14-10.pdf>

### **The friendship between Kuchela and Krishna**

You might have heard of the friendship between Kuchela and his 'class-mate' Krishna. As they grew up, Krishna became a king and Kuchela was so poor that he could not even feed his children. 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.

Due to their extreme poverty, Kuchela's 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.

So, Kuchela hesitatingly revealed his identity to the guards and requested them to inform Krishna that an old boyhood friend had come to see Him. As soon as this message reached Krishna, Kuchela was escorted to the palace. All his fears melted away, when Krishna recognized him and came forward to welcome Kuchela with hospitality and 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 Him for it; but, His love took that shape, His Grace awarded them the happiness. On returning home, Kuchela found that Krishna had already showered His grace resulting in all kinds of riches given to him. Kuchela told his wife, "Krishna received me with great love, and this shows His kindness and generosity towards the poor people. He looked at me from head to foot. Out of His love, He gave me all the riches for the little parched rice that He ate from my hand." 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.

<http://Arjuna.ssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume12/sss12-18.pdf>

<http://Arjuna.ssbpt.info/summershowers/ss1973/ss1973-30.pdf>

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.

<http://Arjuna.ssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume12/sss12-18.pdf>

### **Parable of the Friend in Need/Persistent Friend**

God is not only our closest, true and best friend, He also permits us to be persistent in our pleas to him. Immediately after teaching His disciples how to pray by giving them the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11: 1-4), Jesus told the story of the neighbor who was in need of bread for a visitor (Luke 11: 5-10). Here, Jesus taught his disciples, through this parable, to be persistent in prayer.

"Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a

scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:5-13).

This is a story of a villager who is in bed with his family at midnight and a neighbor with a need. Hospitality was a strictly observed custom in the Middle East, and a man caught without bread for a visitor would be in a shameful and desperately needy position. Only such a need would drive a man to his neighbor's house at midnight and to this level of persistence.

In this parable, Jesus tells us to ask and keep on asking (Mathew 7:7—"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.") and whatever we ask in God's will is assured to us. Jesus had just taught the disciples to pray the Lord's Prayer, which includes the phrase "Your will be done" (Luke 11:2). So, putting it all together, we see that we are to be persistent in asking for God to work in our lives and answer our prayers according to His perfect will and timing, having confidence that He will do so.

Swami also tells us that our best and true friend is our good actions, virtues and service as they stand by us in birth after birth.

**Chinna Katha: The Best Friend in Life: Friends who stand witness for ages**

Friendship rampant these days can be illustrated by a story. 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. The first friend 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 up to the porch of the Court. I will not enter the witness box." The third friend said, "Yes, your troubles are mine, my troubles are yours and I shall help you in whatever manner you wish me to help". "I shall speak for you, wherever you want me to." For your life also we have three such friends. It is quite clear that amongst these three, the third is the best kind of friend. The first friend is the 'property and possessions', which can bear witness only from within the house. At the time of death, one has to leave behind all that one owns. Wealth and status do not accompany you. The second is 'the kinsmen, the members of the family, who come as far as the cemetery and thereafter will return home and would not accompany you to the Judgment Seat. The third friend is the fair name earned by your-"virtues and service," and the good and bad acts that you have performed which will accompany you and persist even after death and burial; Your good and bad actions stand witness for ages, and announce your innocence and greatness. Your next birth will be carved out according to your deeds in this life. In order to remain good, you must cultivate respect for truth, which is permanent, whereas everything else including your body is subject to change, decay and death.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume12/sss12-18.pdf>

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### **Cultivate True friends and 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. From now on, you should make a determination to cultivate friendships based upon love. Do not allow the current meaning of friendship to corrupt your minds. Only such sacred relationship, associated with prema, springing from the fountain of one's heart, is true friendship. 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.

<http://Arjuna.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume12/sss12-18.pdf>

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