

December Discussion Topic – The Value of Friendship

Ikeda Sensei says: “Those who have suffered truly devastating blows or lived through great tragedy can deeply appreciate the profundity of life and the beauty of genuine friendship. People of conviction, who stand alone, who pursue their chosen path are not only good and trustworthy friends themselves, but can make genuine friendship of others.

“The bamboo groves of autumn are gorgeous. Each bamboo tree stands independently, growing straight and tall toward the sky. Yet in the ground, out of sight, the roots of each tree are interconnected. In the same way, true friendship is not a relationship of dependence but of independence. It is the enduring bond that connects self-reliant individuals, comrades who share the same commitment, on a spiritual dimension.”¹

“You may think friendships just happen spontaneously and develop by themselves, but they must be infused with and supported by the youthful spirit to grow and advance. They involve an unflagging commitment to always be there to encourage and help one another as we work toward the realisation of our goals.”²

Regardless of our inner strength and capabilities, there will inevitably come a time when we’ll need a true friend to support us on life’s uneven paths. Through such support and nourishment, we can grow into strong, independent people, who can in turn support the growth of others. And when we become someone who can chant for our friends, it can be said that we’ve become a true friend ourselves.

While most of us are aware that having friends is beneficial, making good friends can be difficult, especially as we get older. Our lives become more complex, our hearts less open and our free time, well, less free. There are times when our efforts to make or deepen friendships go unanswered. This can cause us to doubt our abilities or even our self-worth. Buddhism teaches, however, that the key to fostering dynamic, healthy relationships is to resolve to become a great individual, regardless of our present circumstances.

Friendship depends on us. If we are looking for true friends, it is important to be sincere and give our all in every encounter. Then, over time, we develop bonds that nothing can shake. From such an open heart, we develop wonderful friendships.

Buddhism teaches that each of us is an infinitely precious Buddha with a unique mission that we alone can fulfill. Our Buddhist practice enables us to stay true to ourselves and become strong so that we can become a true friend to all.

As Nichiren Daishonin writes: “How gratifying! You have associated with a friend in the orchid room and have become as straight as mugwort growing among hemp.” (WND-I, 23)

- What does friendship mean to you?
- What do you do to build good friendships?
- Have you built deeper friendships through your Buddhist practice? Do you have an experience with that?

¹ *Discussions on Youth*, 45-46.

² *Idem*, 47.