

## Friendship

Friendship is close fellow feeling between two or more individuals who feel intimate understanding between them. (Intimate understanding can mean intellectual topics in common, strong preference for the Red Sox, or a lasting pleasure in birding together on the Massachusetts shore.) The definition of friendship can of course be expanded. Friendship can easily include more than two people. It need not necessarily take place between two human beings, for we all know cases in which domesticated animals appear to have shared friendship with humans or with one another. Montaigne considered friendship the greatest human pleasure. Jealousy, anxiety, and competition are to the greatest possible degree excluded from friendship.

Friendship can perhaps best be defined by what it is not. It is not self-interested or full of demands, from one party, on the goods, services or special attentions of the other. Friendship is not about acquisition from another, although it does not exclude useful and pleasant trade of possessions—a spontaneous gift offered by friend to friend can convey the heart's freshness. Friendship is not to be confused with love, which has nothing to do with gain, and remains ever ready at the tipping point of self-sacrifice, where the other person's gain is one's own. Friendship does not put life on the line, as does love.

Much wisdom—Cicero, Montaigne, Bacon--supports the wonders of friendship, and in fact, in a world dominated by secular values, it is difficult to find a more satisfying recourse than a friend, who will listen to your difficulties, share his or her opinion of them, and respond by putting you into their world. Is this individual a kind of secular confessor, then, who will hear you out, in all your weakness, prescribe remedies, and then take you down to the pub for a Guinness?