

Spiritual Friendships

1 Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

Proverbs 13:20

2 Love makes your soul crawl out from its hiding place. **Zora Neale Hurston**

3 The spiritual director or friend of the soul is someone who listens to us lovingly and accurately and, by the gift of caring attention, reveals to us God's open heart. As such, spiritual direction has political and social implications of tremendous importance because it is, of its very essence, an antidote to violence. It is a strategy of inner disarmament — the dismantling of the arsenal of destruction we amass inside ourselves. **Alan Jones**, Exploring Spiritual Direction

4 “Five things induce release of heart and lasting peace,” the Buddha said. . . .”First, a lovely intimacy with good friends. Second, virtuous conduct. Third, frequent conversation that inspires and encourages practice. Fourth, diligence, energy, and enthusiasm for the good. And fifth, insight into impermanence.”

The Buddha then went through the list again, this time preceding each of the other items with the first: “When there is a lovely intimacy between friends, then there is virtuous conduct,” etc.

In other words, friendship is the most important element in the spiritual path.

Norman Fischer

5 If we are to develop the tools lauded in the dharma—empathy, compassion, calm reflection, embodied awareness, and so on—we need to undo the impulses compelling us to fight, flee, shut down, or fall into spirals of self-loathing.

Only connecting with those that are caring and supportive can reach the unconsciously held beliefs that steer us behaviorally. To develop spiritually, we need to heal with others. **Josh Korda**

6 A spiritual friend is one to whom we can entrust all the secrets of our heart and before whom we can place all our plans. In other words, a spiritual friend offers a safe place to try things out, to stretch and to grow: we need not fear shaming or ridicule, no matter what we might say. . . . St. Brigit among others is reported to have said that a person without a soul friend was like a body without a head. **Margaret Guenther**, Toward Holy Ground

7 When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share

our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares. **Henri Nouwen**, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*

8 The glory of friendship is not the outstretched hand, not the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship; it is the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when you discover that someone else believes in you and is willing to trust you with a friendship. **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

9 What can any of us do in those moments when we can feel ourselves sliding into a situation that we know in our heart of hearts will be a mistake? Aha. This is the job of spiritual bodyguards. Maybe your spiritual bodyguard is a local monk or minister. Maybe it's a best friend . . . Maybe it's a saint — dead or alive. **Geri Larkin** in *Tap Dancing in Zen* by Geri Larkin

10 To grow in friendship, ultimately it is one's own heart that must be transformed; it must become deeper and more encompassing. **Brother John of Taizé**

11 "I don't feel very much like Pooh today," said Pooh.

"There there," said Piglet. "I'll bring you tea and honey until you do."
— **A.A. Milne**, *Winnie-the-Pooh*

12 Sometimes the easiest way to appreciate ourselves is by looking through the eyes of someone who loves us. A friend told me that when he sees himself through the eyes of his spiritual teacher, he remembers how deeply devoted he is to seeking the truth. One of my clients realizes he is lovable when he remembers how his grandfather used to delight in his boyish curiosity and inventiveness. Sometimes seeing ourselves through the eyes of a close friend can help us to remember our good qualities. Our friend might love our humor and warmth, our passion about saving the environment, our honest willingness to say what's really going on in our lives. We don't have to limit our appreciators to the human world. I once saw a bumper sticker that said: "Lord, help me to see myself the way my dog sees me." We might ask ourselves what makes our dog happy to see us. Even if the answer is that he just wants to get fed or walked, our animal's appreciation of our constancy reflects an aspect of us that is worthy. The practice of looking through the eyes of one who loves us can be a powerful and surprisingly direct way to remember our beauty and goodness.

Tara Brach

13 When we embrace the sanctity in each other we have a foundation on which much can be built. We naturally want to understand more about what has made us who we are. That is the stuff of intimacy. **Gunilla Norris**

14 We are indebted to one another and the debt is a kind of faith — a beautiful, difficult, strange faith. We believe each other into being. **Jennifer Michael Hecht**

15 We are not strong enough to go it alone. A stone thrown in the stream sinks on its own. The sangha is like a boat to carry the stone on the water. **Thich Nhat Hanh**

16 This is what distinguishes spiritual friendship from other relationships. In spiritual friendships the friends are centred in Christ, they seek Christ, and they strive to live according to Christ. Through their friendship they want to help one another live a godly and holy life. They want each other to be resplendent in goodness. **Paul J. Wadell**

17 “What Does Spiritual Friendship Look Like?” (excerpt)

In a spiritual friendship, we have shifting roles. Sometimes you are the teacher who deepens our mutual journey with your insights and observations. Sometimes you are the student who asks questions that make both of us stop and think. And we’re always partners on a journey, walking steadily beside each other, shining our lights on the unfolding path before us and walking alongside each other in illumined service.

We learn from each other. We teach each other. We challenge each other. We encourage each other.

At some point, our paths may separate. We usually walk alongside a spiritual friend for only a portion of our journey, taking from the experience what we need to deepen and expand our own journey and give what we’re destined to give to the other person. The length of our journey together may vary from long to short, even a momentary connection, but the impact will be profound and long-lasting.

. . . .If you look back over your life, you may recognize times when you’ve shared your path with someone. . . . Now that I have fully and enthusiastically embraced the idea, I consciously work to walk beside others whenever I can. With this awareness, I can look back over my past and see other spiritual friends who have walked beside me for a while.

Each person you spend extended time with is sharing their gifts with you. What are you giving? What are you receiving?

It’s not the type of work you do, it’s the spiritual intention behind it that connects you with other spiritual partners.

Cara Lumen, What Does Spiritual Friendship Look Like? Blog post for her website, Sing a Deeper Song

18 Red Brocade

The Arabs used to say,
When a stranger appears at your door,

feed him for three days
before asking who he is,
where he's come from,
where he's headed.
That way, he'll have strength
enough to answer.
Or, by then you'll be
such good friends
you don't care.

Let's go back to that.
Rice? Pine nuts?
Here, take the red brocade pillow.
My child will serve water
to your horse.

No, I was not busy when you came!
I was not preparing to be busy.
That's the armor everyone put on
to pretend they had a purpose
in the world.

I refuse to be claimed.
Your plate is waiting.
We will snip fresh mint
into your tea.

Naomi Shihab Nye

For Reflection and Discussion

A How do you define "spiritual friendship"? Do you understand spiritual friendships to be long term friendships or can they also be short term?

B What role do spiritual friendships play in your life? Are you more comfortable in the role of teacher or student? Would you like these answers to be different a year from now?

C How have spiritual friends influenced or changed you? Be as specific as you can be. Do you believe you have influenced others as a spiritual friend?

D Do you look to form spiritual friendships? How do you form spiritual friendships? How do you nourish spiritual friendships? What would you do to make spiritual friendship a larger part of your life?

E How does your experience at All Souls relate to your understanding and experience of spiritual friendship?

---Mary Beth Hatem, for covenant groups at All Souls Church, Unitarian