

Friendship

by David Bruce – USA

[As a young child, David Bruce learned about Theosophy from his mother, Vera Bruce. In 2003 he joined the staff of the Theosophical Society in America where he worked as the director of education until 2010, at which time he assumed the responsibilities of national secretary, a position he holds to this day.]

Aristotle, Facebook, and Friendship

I'll begin with a question: "Who doesn't need friends?" To pose that question is to beg the obvious, because the need for friendship is so deeply ingrained in human nature. The young need friends ... and so do the elderly. The poor need friends ... as do the prosperous. Ordinary people need friends ... and so do celebrities. People in positions of power need friends ... as do the rest of us. So, to rephrase the original question: Who needs friends? The answer, of course, is everybody.

It may be said that a life of wealth without friends would be a sad and lonely existence; but a life filled with the laughter and love of dear friends would be a life that is rich indeed. Throughout the ages, this has been one of those enduring truths of human existence. But what exactly is friendship? And who can define it? Ask ten people and you will likely get ten definitions, similar perhaps, but not identical. Even Plato, in his dialogue on friendship, *Lysis*, does not provide us with a conclusive definition.

The English writer Hugh Kingsmill once amusingly referred to friends as "God's apology," meaning that by allowing us to choose our friends, God was making amends for our families. So, what is a friend? Most of us would agree that a friend is different from an acquaintance. But that doesn't get us very far. When it comes to friends, we talk of those who are "close," "old," "out-of-town," "professional," "male," "female," "fair-weather," and sometimes "high-maintenance." In regard to the last, Oscar Wilde once said of a certain individual, "He has no enemies, but he is intensely disliked by his friends."