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The test of marriage is tolerance. The test of parenting is values. The test of leadership is inspiration. And the test of friendship is time. When a potter knocks an unbaked pot, it cracks; when time knocks at an unripe friendship, it shatters. Making a pot is easy, but preserving it till it reaches its destination is difficult. And so it is the same with friendship.

During times of adversity, one looks toward old relationships for relief. In the excitement of newfound relationships, old ones are often buried deep in dusty memory lanes. With the advent of adversities in life, a man begins to gaze at all his relationships like a beggar pitifully scanning for a compassionate soul to relieve him of his hunger.

Such times often throw up names of old friends. Unfortunately one tends to use friends as garbage bags to toss in their problems. Once the bag is full, he/she looks for another to replace the present one.

Often, friendship is eaten away in the quest for relief from our frustrations. Before expecting to be a good friend to others, one needs to be a good friend to oneself. If one is not satisfied with

FRIENDSHIP: A Test of Time

Keeping old friendships intact with changing times comes from cultivating them with care

himself, one tends to look at others as possible tools for satisfying one's needs.

Cultivating friendship is like growing a plant. It grows to the extent it is watered. When a friendship is revisited after ages, it remains at the same level at which it was when last watered. People expect friendship to grow with age, as if time has been auto-watering them.

In the Mahabharata, the saga of the tragic expectation-driven friendship between Drona and Drupada is graphically described. Both studied in the same *gurukul* and developed a very deep friendship. Drupada loved Drona so much that he even promised to give him half his kingdom when he became the king.

But childhood promises were forgotten and both continued in life as destiny had willed. Drupada went on to become a powerful king of Panchala and Drona became a poor Brahmana who begged for a living.

The pitiable sight of his son Ashwattama's plight, struggling with the basic needs of life to even get a cup of milk, brought tears to Drona's eyes. He decided to revive his old friendship with Drupada and seek his help.

He reminded King Drupada of his childhood promise and requested him for half the kingdom. The king's natural defense mechanism came into action

and he reacted violently at Drona's impudent request.

Far too many people come to exploit powerful leaders by using the tactic of reviving such old forsaken relationships. Draupada said that promises made in childhood were not to be taken seriously. Dead relationships cannot be revived. If Drona wanted some charity, he should humbly accept the charity of a cow that the king was ready to offer. Drona left fuming in anger, promising to seek revenge.

When a hand pump isn't used for a long time, some water must be poured in from the top of the pump, so that the capillary action of the water in the pump attracts the ground water to the top. Similarly, to revive memories of old friendship, some new deposits of love must be poured in.

Humans tend to forget events with time, but they seldom forget feelings. To revive a long lost friendship, one must create an environment where the old feeling or emotion is rekindled. When there is no investment in a relationship for a long time, old deposits tend to evaporate and the relationship becomes like an unused pump where love doesn't flow out easily, but weird unfamiliar sounds surface. With new deposits, old memories spring up.

Make
NEW FRIENDS BUT
Keep the old
ONE IS Silver
the other
Gold



EPIC MUSINGS

Drona did not bother with any attempt to make new deposits in that old friendship, but wanted to make a huge withdrawal. He didn't carry any gifts of love, but expected Drupada to gift him half his kingdom. By allowing his desperation for wealth to come in between their friendship, Drona exposed his self-interest in reviving this old friendship.

For a dormant volcano to erupt, there must be movements in the earth's tectonic plates. Similarly, for dormant love to erupt from the heart, some deep emotional churning must be initiated.

In the Bhagavata Purana, we find a similar saga that demonstrates the fabulous way in which old relationships can be gently rekindled and ushered to the forefront of life.

Like Drona and Drupada, Sudama and Krsna were thick friends during their *gurukul* days. Krsna became Dwarakadhisha and Sudama remained a poor austere Brahmana. Urged by his wife and considering the plight of their emaciated children, Sudama decided to approach his old friend.

His first thought was regarding the gift he should carry for his aristocratic friend. Though the household was bare, his wife managed to get a few handfuls of chipped rice from the neighborhood which became Sudama's gift bundle.

On his way to Dwarka, Sudama felt extremely ashamed at his decision of asking his friend for a favour. He decided to spend some precious moments with Krsna and not to ask for anything at all.

As soon as Krsna saw Sudama, he burst into happiness. He pulled his friend into his innermost chambers and seated him on his own bedstead. He happily massaged Sudama's tired feet while his wife Rukmini gracefully fanned him.

Forcefully taking the chipped rice from the embarrassed Sudama's hands, Krsna enthusiastically ate all of it. Then they spent hours reveling in fond memories of their younger days together. Krsna began to feel ashamed thinking that he had nothing worthwhile to offer in exchange for the wealth of friendship and love that Sudama had offered him. Though Sudama hadn't uttered a word about

his sad plight, Krsna intuitively understood his friend. He silently sent vast riches and commissioned the building of an enormous palace for Sudama.

Unaware of Krsna's plan, the innocent Sudama walked out of Dwarka carrying only gratitude in his heart and absolutely no regret for not having asked for a favour. Krsna was so happy to get a long lost friendship back and was even happier for not having embarrassed his friend by way of showing his greatness through the offer of charity.

True friendship is when love doesn't alter with changing positions in life. Love between friends cannot be purchased by money. No matter how much you are ready to pay, you cannot make a fruit ripen faster. And no matter how much you try, you cannot make a friendship deepen faster.

It is the most fragile commodity in the world. A good friend communicates even through the unspoken language of silence. He/she empathetically perceives the unnoticed tears of the heart. Friendship is the opportunity to celebrate the joy of serving one another.

Deep friendship is like a springboard that pushes you up when the world throws you down. Shallow friendship is like a point of suicide that pushes you down when you are up.

Friendship with a bad intention is worse than enmity with the worst intention. While Drona wanted to use a friend, Sudama genuinely tried loving a friend. While Drona and Drupada met only once after so many years, with both of them hardly remembering each other, Krsna and Sudama corresponded regularly through the heart via memory sending 'm-mails' and

'm-visits'.

While Drona visited only to ask a favour making no attempt to revive old emotions, Sudama decided to bask in the love of his friend and express gratitude to him for the loving moments they spent together. While Sudama and Krsna's relationship bounced back to where they had left off, Drona and Drupada's relationship went on a downward cascade from this meeting onwards, finally ending with both being brutally killed in the battle of frustrated friendship.

Friendship is a jewel when handled with sensitivity, care and selfless love. But it becomes a jewel on the head of a poisonous snake when handled with insensitivity, egotism and selfish agendas.

Friendship can be a touchstone that can transform and beautify every aspect of your life when handled delicately. But when handled egocentrically, it can easily become like a heavy stone of hate tied to your neck that can drown you in a salty ocean of frustrated expectations.

Like a plant, friendship too needs watering. It cannot flourish otherwise. It remains at the same level in which it was when last watered.

To revive old friendships, new deposits of love must be made. With new deposits, old memories spring up. When Sudama met Krsna after a long time, he only exchanged love with

him. He walked out carrying only gratitude with him. Krsna too did not embarrass him by offering charity. True friendship doesn't change with time.

No matter how much you try, you cannot make a friendship deepen faster. The test of friendship remains time.



Old friends
remind me that
loyalty really
does exist.