

De AMICITIA – On FRIENDSHIP

BY MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

written c 44BC

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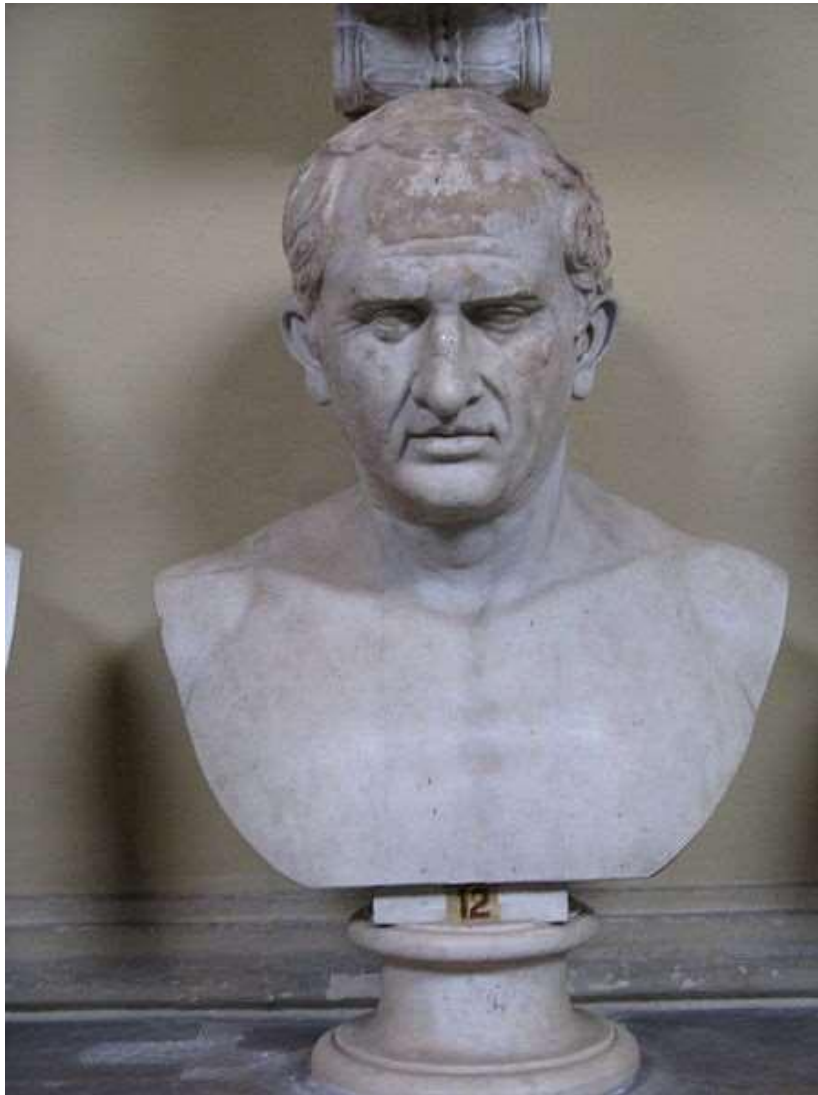


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Editor's Note: The original translations of Cicero's writing "On Friendship" contain numerous references to people and events that were well known at the time of his writing in early Rome, but have little relevance to the modern reader today (except for Roman historians). Largely, these have been left out of this edition to focus on its timeless insights.

Additionally, there are many instances when the translator stuck too closely to the literal translation, making for awkward sentence structure, syntax, and tense, resulting in an English translation that frequently espouses somewhat convoluted meanings. I have remedied such problems, while attempting to make minimal changes to the text. -- RPL

ONE PAGE SYNOPSIS

1. **Friendship is Paramount to Life**
I urge you to regard friendship as the greatest thing in the world; for there is nothing which so fits in with our nature – it is so exactly what we want in both prosperity and adversity.
2. **First Law of Friendship**
We should ask from friends, and do for friends, only what is good. Do not wait to be asked; let there be an ever-eager readiness, and an absence of hesitation
3. **Golden Rule in Friendship**
Put yourself on an even level with your friend. If there is any advantage in personal character, intellect, or fortune, be ready to make our friends sharers and partners in it with ourselves.
4. **Don't Confuse True Friendship with Imposters**
Trusted, devoted friends have a deep soulful connection, displaying love and mutual aid without reservations. This is different from mere acquaintances and transactional relationships.
5. **Union between Love & Friendship**
In Latin, both *Love* and *Friendship* come from the same root. Thus, in a great friendship the honorable Roman experiences brotherly/sisterly love for their friend.
6. **Good Character is the Basis of Solid Friendships**
Poor character undermines friendships; people who strive to be virtuous make lasting friends. Invest time needed to develop personal goodness; determine its existence in others.
7. **Friends Bring Out the Best in Others**
Being a great friend means you seek to reinforce your friend's best qualities: their wisdom, their trust, their goodness, their capabilities. This must be a mutual endeavor.
8. **Refrain from Transactional Expectations**
Friendship is not about give and take; men should not measure the value of their friends based on how much they give, it is not a business relationship. It seeks neither repayment, nor keeps score.
9. **Cherish the Esteem of Friendship**
Can life be worth living lacking the spirit found in the mutual good-will of a friend?
Is not prosperity robbed of half its value if there were not someone to help you in adversity?
10. **True Friends Must be Honest**
Friends will tell you what you *need* to hear, not what you *want* them to say. Real friends never indulge in flattery for their own purposes. A true friend risks your anger by telling you the truth.
11. **Friendships are Honorable**
A friend never asks another to act wrongfully; a friend will risk much for another, but never honor. If a friend asks you to lie, cheat, or do something shameful, they are not a true friend.
12. **Friendships Embrace Humility**
Honorable friends are never arrogant, boastful, or unsympathetic. They consciously shun "intemperate passions" (like uncontrolled anger, hatred, revenge or manipulation).

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Cicero as a man, in spite of his self-importance, the vacillation of his political conduct in desperate crises, and the whining despondency of his times of adversity, stands out as a patriotic Roman of substantial honesty, who gave his life to check the inevitable fall of the commonwealth to which he was devoted. The evils which were undermining the Republic bear so many striking resemblances to those which threaten the civic and national life of America to-day that the interest of the period is by no means merely historical.

As a philosopher, Cicero's most important function was to make his countrymen familiar with the main schools of Greek thought. In the fields of religious theory and of the application of philosophy to life he made important first-hand contributions. *On Friendship* has proved of permanent and widespread interest to posterity, and which give a clear impression of the way in which a high-minded Greek and Roman thought about some of the main problems of human life. -- Evelyn Shirley Shuckburgh

MY FRIEND IS DEAD, BUT I DON'T GRIEVE

Affected of course I am by the loss of my friend Scipio, as I think there will never be again, such as I can fearlessly say there never was before. But I stand in no need of medicine. I can find my own consolation, and it consists chiefly in my being free from the mistaken notion which generally causes pain at the departure of friends. To Scipio I am convinced no evil has befallen. Mine is the disaster, if disaster there be; and to be severely distressed at one's own misfortunes does not show that you love your friend, but that you love yourself.

What need to mention the exquisite grace of his manners, his dutiful devotion to his mother, his generosity to his sisters, his liberality to his relations, the integrity of his conduct to every one? You know all this already. Finally, the estimation in which his fellow-citizens held him has been shown by the signs of mourning which accompanied his obsequies. What could such a man have gained by the addition of a few years? Though age need not be a burden —as I remember Cato arguing in the presence of myself and Scipio two years before he died —yet it cannot but take away the vigour and freshness which Scipio was still enjoying.

We may conclude therefore that his life, from the good fortune which had attended him and the glory he had obtained, was so circumstanced that it could not be bettered, while the suddenness of his death saved him the sensation of dying. As to the manner of his death it is difficult to speak; you see what people suspect. Thus much, however, I may say: Scipio in his lifetime saw many days of supreme triumph and exultation, but none more magnificent than his last, on which, upon the rising of the Senate, he was escorted by the senators and the people of Rome, by the allies, and by the Latins, to his own door. From such an elevation of popular esteem the next step seems naturally to be a [Heavenly] ascent to the gods above, rather than a descent to Hades. For I am from the ancient philosophy based upon the maxims and doctrines from those educated Magna Graecia¹ that our souls do not perish with our bodies, and that death does not end all.

FRIENDSHIP IS GOOD AND NECESSARY

[The difficulty arises when one does not trust – have confidence – in oneself. First, one must know] “Who am I?” and “What ability have I?”

[These questions are very appropriate] for professional Greek philosophers, who are used to have the subject for discussion proposed to them on the spur of the moment. It is a task of considerable difficulty, and requires considerable practice.

¹ Magna Graecia (Latin): Great Greece, in Southern Italy, was a settlement of Greek émigrés from the 8th century B.C. It was these Greeks who were primarily responsible for the importation of Hellenistic culture to Italy.

All I can do is to urge on you to regard friendship as the greatest thing in the world; for there is nothing which so fits in with our nature – it is so exactly what we want in [both] prosperity and adversity.

FRIENDSHIP'S FOUNDATION CONSISTS OF WISDOM COMBINED WITH VIRTUE

At the very beginning I must lay down this principle—true friendship can only exist between good men... Those, I mean, who say that no one but the "wise" is "good." But the "wisdom" they mean is one to which no mortal ever yet attained.

We mean then by the "good" those whose actions and lives leave no question as to their honour, purity, equity, and liberality; who are free from greed, lust, and violence; and who have the courage of their convictions.

MUTUAL GOODWILL AND AFFECTION

A "Friendship" excels beyond a "Relationship." Whereas you may eliminate affection from a Relationship," you cannot [eliminate affection] from "Friendship." Without it a Relationship still exists in name only; Friendship does not.

You may best understand this friendship by considering ... [affection] is so concentrated, and confined to so narrow a sphere, that affection is [seldom] shared ... only at most with a few.

Friendship may be thus defined:

***a complete accord on all subjects human and divine,
joined with mutual goodwill and affection.***

And with the exception of wisdom, I am inclined to think nothing better than this has been given to man by the immortal gods.

There are people who give the first priority to riches or to good health, or to power and office, many even to sensual pleasures. This last is the ideal of brute beasts; and of the others we may say that they are frail and uncertain, and depend less on our own prudence than on the caprice of fortune.

Then there are those who find the "chief good" in virtue. Well, that is a noble doctrine. But the very virtue they talk of is the parent and preserver of friendship, and without it friendship cannot possibly exist.

I use the word *virtue* in the ordinary acceptance and meaning of the term; let's not define it in high-flown philosophic language.

How can life be worth living which lacks that calmness and relaxation which is to be found in the mutual good-will of a friend?

What can be more delightful than to have someone to whom you can say everything with the same absolute confidence as to yourself?

Is not prosperity robbed of half its value if you have no one to share your joy?

On the other hand, misfortunes would be hard to bear if there were not someone to feel them even more acutely than yourself.

In a word, other objects of ambition serve for particular ends—riches for use, power for securing homage, office for reputation, pleasure for enjoyment, health for freedom from pain and the full use of the functions of the body.

THE BLESSINGS OF FRIENDSHIP

Friendship embraces innumerable advantages. Turn which way you please, you will find it at hand. It is everywhere; and yet never out of place, never unwelcome. Fire and water themselves, to use a common expression, are not of more universal use than friendship. I am speaking of the of that true and complete friendship which exists between the select few ... Such friendship enhances prosperity, and relieves adversity of its burden by halving and sharing it.

Great and numerous as are the blessings of friendship, this certainly is the sovereign one, that it gives us bright hopes for the future and forbids weakness and despair.

In the face of a true friend a man sees as it were a second self. So that where his friend is he is; if his friend be rich, he is not poor; though he be weak, his friend's strength is his; and in his friend's life he enjoys a second life after his own is finished. This last is perhaps the most difficult to conceive. But such is the effect of the respect, the loving remembrance, and the regret of friends which follow us to the grave. While they take the sting out of death, they add a glory to the life of the survivors.

Yet, if you eliminate from nature the tie of affection, there will be an end of home and city, nor will so much as the cultivation of the soil be left.

If you don't see the virtue of friendship and harmony, you may learn it by observing the effects of quarrels and feuds. Was any family ever so well established, any State so firmly settled, as to be beyond the reach of utter destruction from animosities and factions? This may teach you the immense advantage of friendship.

Whatever in nature and the universe was unchangeable was so in virtue of the binding force of friendship; whatever was changeable was so by the solvent power of discord. This is a truth which everybody understands and attests by practical experience, especially in light of loyal friendship confronting or sharing danger, which everyone applauds.

THE ORIGIN OF FRIENDSHIP (Summary)

Who could discourse on it more easily than the man whose chief glory is a friendship maintained with the most absolute fidelity, constancy, and integrity? The desire for friendship is natural to humans and arises from a need for sympathy and companionship, virtue and kindness.

FRIENDSHIPS DON'T ALWAYS LAST

The most difficult thing in the world is for a friendship to remain unimpaired to the end of life.

So many things might intervene: conflicting interests; differences of opinion in politics; frequent changes in character, owing sometimes to misfortunes, sometimes to advancing years.

As illustration, assess the evidence from the analogy of boyhood, since the warmest affections between boys are often laid aside ... sometimes broken by a rivalry in courtship, or for some other advantage to which their mutual claims are not compatible. Even if the friendship is prolonged beyond that time, yet it frequently receives a rude shock should the two happen to be

competitors for position. The most fatal blow to friendship in the majority of cases is the lust for gold. In the case of the best men, it is a rivalry for power and reputation, from which the most violent animosity and even hatred often arises between the closest friends.

HOW IMMORALITY DESTROYS FRIENDSHIPS

Wide breaches, for the most part justifiable ones, are caused by an immoral request being made of friends, to pander to a man's unholy desires or to assist him in inflicting a wrong.

A refusal, though perfectly right, is attacked by those to whom they refuse compliance as a violation of the laws of friendship. Now the people who have no scruples as to the requests they make to their friends, thereby allow that they are ready to have no scruples as to what they will do for their friends; and it is the recriminations of such people which commonly not only quench friendships, but give rise to lasting animosities. Scipio used to say, "these fatalities overhang friendship in such numbers that it requires not only wisdom but good luck also to escape them all." Should their friends to have assisted them in their attempt to establish a tyranny? We cannot even suspect that any one of these men ever asked Scipio anything that conflicted with his honour or his oath or the interests of the republic.

I conclude that the plea of having acted in the interests of a friend is not a valid excuse for a wrong action. For, seeing that a belief in a man's virtue is the original cause of friendship, friendship can hardly remain if virtue be abandoned. But if we decide it to be right to grant our friends whatever they wish, and to ask them for whatever we wish, perfect wisdom must be assumed on both sides if no mischief is to happen.

In the case of such men as these there is no point in saying that one of them would not have obtained such a request if he had made it; for they were men of the most scrupulous piety, and the making of such a request would involve a breach of religious obligation no less than the granting it.

**We may then lay down this rule of friendship
—neither ask nor consent to do what is wrong.
For the plea "for friendship's sake" is a discreditable one,
and not to be admitted for a moment.**

This rule holds good for all wrong-doing, but more especially in such as involves disloyalty to the republic. For things have come to such a point with us that we are bound to look somewhat far ahead to what is likely to happen to the republic. The constitution, as known to our ancestors, has already swerved somewhat from the regular course and the lines marked out for it.

As one thing leads to another; and once set into motion, the downward course proceeds with ever-increasing velocity. There is the case of the ballot: what a blow was inflicted first by the law which instituted secret voting for the election of magistrates, and two years afterwards by the law which instituted anonymous ballots for the court jurors.

Already people are estranged from the Senate, and the most important affairs at the mercy of the multitude. For you may be sure that more people will learn how to set such things in motion than how to stop them.

What is the point of these remarks? This: No one ever makes any attempt of this sort without friends to help him. We must therefore impress upon good men that, should they become inevitably involved in friendships with men of this kind, they ought not to consider themselves under any obligation to stand by friends who are disloyal to the republic. Bad men must have the fear of punishment before their eyes: a punishment not less severe for those who follow than for those who lead others to crime.²

We conclude, then, not only that no such confederation of evilly disposed men must be allowed to shelter itself under the plea of friendship, but that, on the contrary, it must be visited with the severest punishment, lest the idea should prevail that fidelity to a friend justifies even making war upon one's country. And this is a case which I am inclined to think, considering how things are beginning to go, will sooner or later arise. And I care quite as much what the state of the constitution will be after my death as what it is now.

FIRST LAW of FRIENDSHIP

Let this, then, be laid down as the first law of friendship, that

We should ask from friends, and do for friends, only what is good.

But do not wait to be asked either: let there be an ever-eager readiness, and an absence of hesitation.

What noble philosophy! You might just as well take the sun out of the sky as friendship from life; for the immortal gods have given us nothing better or more delightful.

For the first condition of a happy life is freedom from endless worries, fears, and insecurity, which no one's mind can enjoy if one is entangled in the travail and bondage of others.

Friendships must be sought for more than solely the sake of the assistance they give devoid of feelings and affection. Those men who are weak, victims, powerless, and financially destitute, make poor friends because they are most eager to gain friendships for the assistance they gain to

² Extend this thinking to Edmund Burke's 1770 commentary: "*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing*," in a letter addressed to Thomas Mercer in which he continues: *Whilst men are linked together, they easily and speedily communicate the alarm of any evil design. They are enabled to fathom it with common counsel, and to oppose it with united strength.*

Whereas, when they lie dispersed, without concert, order, or discipline, communication is uncertain, counsel difficult, and resistance impracticable. Where men are not acquainted with each other's principles, nor experienced in each other's talents, nor at all practised in their mutual habitudes and dispositions by joint efforts in business; no personal confidence, no friendship, no common interest, subsisting among them; it is evidently impossible that they can act a public part with uniformity, perseverance, or efficacy.

In a connection, the most inconsiderable man, by adding to the weight of the whole, has his value, and his use; out of it, the greatest talents are wholly unserviceable to the public. No man, who is not inflamed by vain-glory into enthusiasm, can flatter himself that his single, unsupported, desultory, unsystematic endeavours, are of power to defeat the subtle designs and united cabals of ambitious citizens. When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall, one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.

fill the gaps in their conditions. Strong friendships are based more on the strengths each brings to the union than the emptiness that is filled.

What is the value of this "freedom from care"?² It is very tempting at first sight, but in practice it has in many cases to be put on one side. For there is no business and no course of action demanded from us by our honour which you can consistently decline, or lay aside when begun, from your mere wish to escape from anxiety. Nay, if we wish to avoid anxiety we must avoid virtue itself, which necessarily involves some anxious thoughts in showing its loathing and abhorrence for the qualities which are opposite to itself—as kindness for ill-nature, self-control for licentiousness, courage for cowardice.

Thus, it is the just who are most pained by injustice, the brave by cowardly actions, the temperate by depravity. It is then characteristic of a rightly ordered mind to be pleased at what is good and grieved at the reverse. Thus, the wise are not exempt from the heart-ache (which must be the case unless we suppose all human nature rooted out of their hearts), why should we banish friendship from our lives, for fear of being involved by it in some amount of distress?

If you take away our deepest emotions, either painful or happy, what difference remains? I don't say between a man and a beast, but between a man and a stone or a log of wood, or anything else of that kind?

Neither should we give any weight to the doctrine that virtue is something rigid and unyielding as iron. As in so many other, friendship is so supple and sensitive that it expands, so to speak, at a friend's good fortune, contracts at his misfortunes. We conclude then that mental pain which we must often encounter on a friend's account is not of sufficient consequence to banish friendship from our life, any more than it is true that the cardinal virtues are to be dispensed with because they involve certain anxieties and distresses.

THE RULES OF FRIENDSHIP (Summary)

- Virtue makes friendship a joy.
- Those who primarily pursue pleasure make poor friends because they are poor models of virtue.
- Men must draw boundary lines and demand their friends be of unblemished virtue.
- Trust is essential in a friendship.
- Friendship is not about give and take; men should not measure the value of their friends based on how much they give.
- A man should treasure the esteem of his friends.
- The characters of two friends must be stainless.
- Friends must have mutual interests.
- Friends do not sacrifice their reputations or honor for each other.

FRIENDS SHOULD BE CHOSEN CAREFULLY

Scipio complained everyone could tell exactly how many goats or sheep he had, but not how many friends. Upon friendship men bestowed so little effort; and while they took pains in procuring their flock, they were utterly careless in selecting friends, and possessed no particular marks or tokens by which they might judge of their suitability for friendship. The qualities we ought to look out for in making our selection are firmness, stability, constancy.

There is a plentiful lack of men so endowed, and it is difficult to form a judgment without testing. Now this testing can only be made during the actual existence of the friendship; for friendship so often *precedes* the formation of a judgment, and makes a previous test impossible.

If we are prudent then, we shall rein in our impulse to affection as we do chariot horses. We make a preliminary trial of horses. So, we should of friendship; and should test our friends' character by a kind of tentative friendship.

It may often happen that the untrustworthiness of certain men is completely displayed in a small money matter; others who are proof against a small sum are detected if it be large. But even if some are found who prefer money to friendship, we then must look for those who put friendship before office, civil or military promotions, and political power, and when the choice lies between these *things* on the one side and the claims of *friendship* on the other, do not give a strong preference to the former!

It is not in human nature to be indifferent to political power; and if the price men have to pay for it is the sacrifice of friendship, they think their treason will be thrown into the shade by the magnitude of the reward. This is why true friendship is very difficult to find among those who engage in politics and the contest for office. Where can you find the man to prefer his friend's advancement to his own? Think how grievous and almost intolerable it is to most men to share responsibility for political disaster. You will scarcely find anyone who can bring himself to do that. Although what Ennius says is quite true — "the hour of need shows the friend indeed," — it is in these two ways that most people betray their untrustworthiness and inconstancy, by looking down on friends when they are themselves prosperous, or deserting them in their distress. A man, then, who has shown a firm, unshaken, and unvarying friendship in both these contingencies we must reckon as one of a class the rarest in the world, and all but superhuman.

LOYALTY IS ESSENTIAL

What is the quality to look out for as a warrant for the stability and permanence of friendship? It is *loyalty*. Nothing that lacks this can be stable.

We should also in making our selection look out for *simplicity*, a social disposition, and a sympathetic nature, moved by what moves us. These all contribute to maintain loyalty. You can never trust a character which is intricate and tortuous. Nor, indeed, is it possible for one to be trustworthy and firm who is unsympathetic by nature and unmoved by what affects ourselves.

What's more, he must neither take pleasure in bringing accusations against us himself, nor believe them when they are brought. All these contribute to constancy. And the result is that friendship is only possible between good men.

Seneca, writing a century later, reflects Cicero:

If you consider any man a friend whom you do not trust as you trust yourself, you are mightily mistaken and you do not sufficiently understand what true friendship means...

When friendship is settled, you must trust; before friendship is formed, you must pass judgment. Those persons indeed put last first and confound their duties, who ... judge a man after they have made him their friend, instead of making him their friend after they have judged him.

Ponder for a long time whether you shall admit a given person to your friendship; but when you have decided to admit him, welcome him with all your heart and soul. Speak as boldly with him as with yourself...

Regard him as loyal and you will make him loyal.

There are two characteristic features in the treatment of friends that a good (which may be regarded as equivalent to a wise) man will always display.

First, he will be entirely without any make-believe or pretense of feeling; for the open display of dislike is more indicative of an ingenuous character than a studied concealment of sentiment.

Secondly, he will not only reject all accusations brought against his friend by another, but he will not be suspicious himself either, nor be always thinking that his friend has acted improperly.

Besides this, there should be a certain pleasantness in word and manner which adds no little flavour to friendship. A gloomy temper and unvarying gravity may be very impressive; but friendship should be a little less unbending, more indulgent and gracious, and more inclined to all kinds of good-fellowship and good-nature.

But here arises a thorny question: Are there any occasions on which, assuming their worthiness, we should prefer *new* to *old* friends, just as we prefer *young* to *aged* horses? The answer causes no doubt whatever. For there should be no over-indulgence in friendship, as there is in other things. *The older the sweeter*, as in wines that keep well. And the proverb is a true one, "You must walk many miles with a man to be thorough friends with him." Novelty, indeed, has its advantage, which we must not despise. There is always hope of new fruit, as there is in healthy blades of corn. But age too must have its proper position; and, in fact, the influence of time and habit is very great.

There is another golden rule in friendship:

Put yourself on an even level with your friend.

For it often happens that there are certain superior levels in honor and prestige. For example, my friend Scipio never assumed any airs of superiority over friends of a lower social rank. For instance, he always showed a deference to his older brother Quintus Maximus because he was his senior, who, though a man no doubt of eminent character, was by no means his equal. He used also to wish that all his friends should be the better for his support. This is an example we all should follow.

If any of us have any advantage in personal character, intellect, or fortune, we should be ready to make our friends sharers and partners in it with ourselves. For instance, if their parents are fine citizens in humble circumstances, if their relations are neither powerful in intellect nor means, we should supply their deficiencies and promote their rank and dignity.

We know legendary stories of children brought up as servants, ignorant of their parentage and family. When they are recognized and discovered to be the sons of gods or kings, they still retain their affection for the shepherds whom they have, for many years, looked upon as their parents. Much more ought this to be so in the case of real and undoubted parents. For the advantages of genius and virtue, and in short, of every kind of superiority, are never realized to their fullest extent until they are bestowed upon our nearest and dearest.

But the converse must also be observed. For in both friendships and relationships, just as those who possess any superiority must put themselves on an equal footing with those who are less fortunate, so those less fortunate must not be annoyed or envious at being surpassed in genius,

fortune, or rank. Yet most people of that sort are forever either grumbling at something, or harping on their claims; and especially if they are always bringing up professional services of their own to offer along with their zeal and friendship. These people who are always bringing up their services for monetary compensation are a nuisance. The recipient ought to remember them; the performer should never mention them.

In the case of friends, then, as the superior are bound to descend, so are they bound in a certain sense to raise those below them. For there are people who make their friendship disagreeable by imagining themselves undervalued. This generally happens only to those who think that they deserve to be so; and they ought to be shown by deeds, as well as by words, the groundlessness of their opinion. Now the measure of your benefits should be in your own power to bestow, and then in your capacity assist those upon whom you are bestowing affection and help. For however great your personal prestige may be, you cannot raise all your friends to the highest offices of the State.

As a general rule, we must wait to make up our mind about friendships until men's character and years have arrived at their full strength and development. People must not, for instance, regard as fast friends all whom in their youthful enthusiasm for hunting or football they liked for having the same tastes. By that rule, if it were a mere question of time, no one would have such claims on our affections as our childhood nurses and school teachers. Not that they are to be neglected, but they stand on a different ground. It is only these mature friendships that can be permanent.

ENDING A FRIENDSHIP

Another good rule in friendship is this:

Do not let an excessive affection hinder your friend's highest interests

... as often happen.

I will venture into legend to illustrate. Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles, could never have taken Troy if he had been willing to take the advice of his grandfather, who had brought him up, and with many tears tried to prevent his grandson from going there.

Again, it often happens that important business makes it necessary to part from friends: the man who tries to baulk it, because he thinks that he cannot endure the separation, is of a weak and effeminate nature, and on that very account makes but a poor friend. There are, of course, limits to what you ought to expect from a friend and to what you should allow him to demand of you. And these you must take into calculation in every case.

Also, as difference of character leads to difference of aims, and the result of such diversity is to estrange friends. The sole reason, for instance, which prevents good men from making friends with bad, or bad with good, is that the divergence of their characters and aims is the greatest possible.

At times there is a disaster requiring one to break off a friendship. And sometimes it is one we cannot avoid. For at this point the stream of our discourse is leaving the intimacies of the wise and touching on the friendship of ordinary people.

It will happen at times that an outbreak of vicious conduct affects either a man's friends themselves or strangers, yet the discredit falls on the friends. In such cases friendships should be allowed to die out gradually by an intermission of interaction. Rather, they should, as Cato used to say, be “unstitched” than “torn asunder one against the other;” unless, indeed, the injurious conduct be of so violent and outrageous a nature as to make an instant breach and separation the only possible course consistent with honour and rectitude.

Again, if a change in character and aim takes place, as often happens, or if party politics produces an alienation of feeling (I am now speaking, as I said a short time ago, of ordinary friendships, not of those of the wise), we shall have to be on our guard against appearing to embark upon active antagonistic acrimony while we only mean to resign a friendship. For there can be nothing more discreditable than to be at open war with a man with whom you have been intimate friends. Scipio abandoned his friendship for Quintus Pompeius on my account; and again, because of political differences of opinion, he became estranged from my colleague Metellus. In both cases he acted with dignity and moderation, showing that he was offended indeed, but without rancour.

Our first objective should be to prevent a breach; our second, to ensure that if it does occur, our friendship should seem to have died a natural, rather than a violent, death. Next, we should safeguard that friendship is not converted into active hostility, from which flow personal quarrels, abusive language, and angry recriminations. These last, however, provided that they do not pass all reasonable limits of forbearance, we ought to endure, and, in compliment to an old friendship, allow the party that inflicts the injury, not the one that submits to it, to be in the wrong.

Generally speaking, there is but one way of securing and providing oneself against faults and inconveniences of this sort—not to be too hasty in bestowing our affection, and not to bestow it at all on unworthy objects.

BEING WORTHY OF FRIENDSHIP

By “worthy of friendship” I mean those who have integrated in themselves the qualities which attract affection. This sort of man is rare; as, indeed, all excellent things are rare; and nothing in the world is so hard to find as a thing entirely and completely perfect of its kind.

Seneca admonishes a century later against the common tendency to regard others as “utilitarian tools” advance one’s personal goals and self-interest. He denigrates those who form phony friendships by calculating how much a potential friend can help them in a moment of need:

He who regards himself only, and enters upon friendships for this reason, reckons wrongly.

The end will be like the beginning: he has made friends with one who might assist him out of bondage; at the first rattle of the chain such a friend will desert him.

These are the so-called “fair-weather” friendships; one who is chosen for the sake of utility will be satisfactory only so long as he is useful.

Hence prosperous men are blockaded by troops of friends; but those who have failed stand amid vast loneliness their friends fleeing from the very crisis which is to test their worth.

Hence, also, we notice those many shameful cases of persons who, through fear, desert or betray. The beginning and the end cannot but harmonize.

He who begins to be your friend because it pays will also cease because it pays. A man will be attracted by some reward offered in exchange for his friendship, if he be attracted by aught in friendship other than friendship itself.

A bargain is not a friendship... One who seeks friendship solely for favourable situations, strips it of all its nobility.

Yet most people falsely recognize nothing is good in our life unless it is profitable. Thus, they look upon friends as so much stock, caring most for those by whom they hope to make most profit. Accordingly, they never possess that most beautiful and most spontaneous friendship which must be sought solely for itself without any ulterior object. They fail also to learn from their own feelings the nature and the strength of friendship. For everyone loves himself, not for any reward which such love may bring, but because he is dear to himself independently of anything else. But unless this feeling is transferred to another, what a real friend is will never be revealed; for he is, as it were, a “second self.”

For a worthy man not only loves himself, but seeks another whose spirit he may so blend with his own as almost to make one being of two.

Quite unreasonably (not to speak of modesty), most people want such a friend as they are unable to be themselves, and expect from their friends what they do not themselves give.

The proper course is first to be good yourself, and then to look out for another of like character.

It is between such that the stability in friendship ... can be secured; when ... men who are united by affection learn, first of all, to rule those intense passions and ill temperaments which enslave others, ... to take delight in fair and equitable conduct, to bear each other's burdens, never to ask each other for anything inconsistent with virtue and rectitude, and not only to serve and love but also to respect each other.

I say "respect"; for if respect is gone, friendship has lost its brightest jewel. And this shows the mistake of those who imagine that friendship gives a privilege to licentiousness and sin. Nature has given us friendship as the handmaiden of virtue, not as a partner in guilt: to the end that virtue, being powerless when isolated to reach the highest objects, might succeed in doing so in union and partnership with another.

Those who enjoy in the present, or have enjoyed in the past, or are destined to enjoy in the future such a partnership as this, must be considered to have secured the most excellent and auspicious combination for reaching nature's highest good. This is the partnership, I say, which combines *moral rectitude, prominence, peace of mind, serenity*: all that men think desirable because, with them, life is happy; but without them cannot be so.

In the grand scheme of civilization, Seneca beholds a wisdom and vision where virtue, trust, and friendship becomes the glue that binds humanity together.

Friendship produces between us a partnership in all our interests.

There is no such thing as good or bad fortune for the individual; we live in common.

And no one can live happily who has regard to himself alone and transforms everything into a question of his own utility; you must live for your neighbour, if you would live for yourself.

This fellowship, maintained with scrupulous care, which makes us mingle as men with our fellow-men and holds that the human race have certain rights in common, is also of great help in cherishing the more intimate fellowship which is based on friendship... For he that has much in common with a fellow-man will have all things in common with a friend. --
Seneca

This being our best and highest object, we must, if we desire to attain it, elevate ourselves to virtue; for without virtue, we can obtain neither friendship nor anything else desirable. In fact, if virtue be neglected, those who imagine themselves to possess friends will find out their error as soon as some grave disaster forces them to make trial of them. Wherefore, I must again and again repeat, you must satisfy your judgment before engaging your affections: not love first and judge afterwards. We suffer from carelessness in many of our undertakings: in none more than in selecting and cultivating our friends. We put the cart before the horse, and shut the stable door when the steed is stolen, in defiance of the old proverb. For, having mutually involved ourselves in a long-standing intimacy or by actual obligations, all on a sudden some cause of offence arises and we break off our friendships in full career.

It is this that makes such carelessness in a matter of supreme importance all the more worthy of blame. I say "supreme importance," because friendship is the one thing about the utility and value of which everybody agrees with one accord.

That is not the case in regard even to virtue itself; for many people speak slightly of virtue as though it were mere puffing and self-glorification. Things desirable in the eyes of some are regarded by very many others as worthless.

But of friendship all think alike to a man, whether those have devoted themselves to politics, or those who delight in science and philosophy, or those who follow a private way of life and care for nothing but their own

For what purpose, then, do I make a man my friend? In order to have someone for whom I may die, whom I may follow into exile, against whose death I may stake my own life, and pay the pledge, too. -- Seneca

business, or those lastly who have given themselves body and soul to sensuality—they all think that without friendship, there is no life. For friendship, in one way or another, penetrates into the lives of us all, and suffers no career to be entirely free from its influence. So true it is that nature abhors isolation, and ever leans upon something as a stay and support; and this is found in its most pleasing form in our closest friend.

But though Nature also declares by so many indications what her wish and object and desire is, we yet in a manner turn a deaf ear and will not hear her warnings.

MUTUAL RESPECT AND AFFECTION (Summary)

- If respect is gone, friendship has lost its brightest jewel.
- Men who are united by affection learn, first of all, to rule those intemperate passions which enslave others, and in the next place to take delight in fair and equitable conduct, to bear each other's burdens, never to ask each other for anything inconsistent with virtue and rectitude, and not only to serve and love but also to respect each other.

FRIENDSHIP REQUIRES HONESTY

The intercourse between friends is varied and complex, and it must often happen that causes of suspicion and offence arise, which a wise man will sometimes avoid, at other times remove, and at others, treat with indulgence.

The one possible cause of offence that must be faced is when the interests of your friend and your own sincerity are at stake. For instance, it often happens that friends need rebuke and even critical disapproval. When these are administered in a kindly spirit they ought to be taken in good part. But somehow there is truth in the saying: Compliance gets us friends; Plain honesty hate.

Plain, honest-speaking is a cause of trouble if the result of it is resentment, which is poison to friendship. Yet, if a man's ears are so closed to plain, honest-speaking that he cannot hear the truth from a friend, we may give him up in despair. This remark of Cato's, as so many of his did, shows great acuteness:

"There are people who owe more to bitter enemies than to apparently pleasant friends: the former often speak the truth, the latter never."

But compliance is really the cause of much more trouble, because by indulging in this fault lets a friend plunge into headlong ruin. But the man who is most to blame is he who resents plain speaking and allows flattery to egg him on to his ruin. On this point, deliberation and care are needed. If we are critical and find fault, it should be without bitterness; if we admonish, there should be no words of insult or castigation.

In the matter of compliance, while exercising every courtesy, we must never be enablers of the most debasing kind: that which assists another man in vice, for it is unworthy of an honorable man, to say nothing of a friend.

In today's world of Social Media, where a "likes" emoji indicates a form of flattery, Seneca observed:

How closely flattery resembles friendship!

It not only apes friendship, but outdoes it, passing it in the race.

With wide-open and indulgent ears, it is welcomed and sinks into the depths of the heart, and in its pleasing is precisely wherein it does harm.

GIVING & TAKING ADVICE

Besides, it is a strange paradox that some recipients of advice should feel no annoyance where they ought to feel it, and yet feel so much where they ought not. They are not at all vexed having committed a fault, but very angry at being reproved for it. On the contrary, they ought to be grieved at the crime and glad of the correction.

If it is true that to give advice with freedom, without bitterness, and receive advice with patience, without irritation—which is peculiarly appropriate to genuine friendship – it is no less true that there can be nothing more utterly subversive to friendship than flattery, adulation, and base compliance. I use as many terms as possible to brand this vice of light-minded, untrustworthy men, whose sole object in speaking is to please without any regard to truth. In everything, false pretense is bad, for it suspends and impairs our power to discern the truth. But to nothing it is more so hostile than to friendship; for it destroys that frankness without which friendship is but a hollow name.

RATING FRIENDS

For the essence of friendship -- two minds becoming as one -- how can that ever take place if the mind of each of the separate parties is not single and uniform, but variable, changeable, unstable, and complex? Can anything be so pliable, so wavering, as the mind of a man whose attitude

depends not only on another's feeling and wish, on his very looks and nods? If one says "No," I answer "No"; if "Yes," I answer "Yes," laying this task upon myself to echo all that's said.

To admit such a man into one's intimacy is a sign of folly. It is when they are superior either in position or fortune or reputation that their flatteries become mischievous, the weight of their position making up for the lightness of their character. But if we only take reasonable care, it is as easy to separate and distinguish a genuine from a specious friend as anything else that is coloured and artificial from what is sincere and genuine. A public assembly, though composed of men of the smallest possible culture, nevertheless will see clearly the difference between a mere demagogue (that is, a flatterer and untrustworthy citizen) and a man of principle, standing, and solidity.

Let us have the courage to give advice with candour. In friendship, let the influence of friends who give good advice be paramount; and let this influence be used to enforce advice not only in plain-spoken terms, but sometimes, if the case demands it, with sharpness; and when so used, let it be obeyed.

FRIENDSHIP IS BUILT ON A FOUNDATION OF TRUTHFULNESS & TRUST

Now, if on a stage, such as a public assembly, where there is the amplest room for fiction and half-truths, truth nevertheless prevails if it be fairly laid open and brought into the light of day.

You can neither trust nor be certain of anything— no, not even of mutual affection – unless you can be sure of its sincerity.

Flattery, injurious as it is, can hurt no one but the man who takes it in and likes it. And it follows that the man to open his ears widest to flatterers is he who first flatters himself and is fondest of himself. This is ought not to happen in the case of friendship, which rests entirely on truthfulness.

CONCLUSION: VIRTUE CREATES AND PRESERVES FRIENDSHIP

I grant you that Virtue naturally loves herself; for she knows herself and perceives how worthy of love she is. But I am not now speaking of absolute virtue, but of the *belief* men have that they possess virtue.

The fact is that fewer people are endowed with virtue than wish to be thought to be so. It is such people who take delight in flattery. When they are addressed in language expressly adapted to flatter their vanity, they look upon such empty persiflage as a testimony to the truth of their own praises. It is not properly friendship at all when the one will not listen to the truth, and the other is prepared to lie. Your servile flatterer always exaggerates what his victim wishes to be proclaimed strongly.

It is virtue, virtue, which both creates and preserves friendship. On it depends harmony of interest, permanence, fidelity. When Virtue has reared her head and shown the light of her countenance, and seen and recognised the same light in another, she gravitates towards it, and in her turn welcomes that which the other has to show; and from it springs up a flame which you may call either *love* or *friendship* as you please. Both words are from the same root in Latin;³

³ **Love** = Amare; **Friendship** = Amicitia

love is just the cleaving to him whom you love without the prompting of need or any view to advantage—this blossoms spontaneously in friendship, little as you may have looked for it.⁴

But in view of the instability and perishableness of mortal things, we should be continually be on the lookout for some to love and by whom to be loved; for if we lose affection and kindness from our life, we lose all that gives it charm.⁵

For me, indeed, though torn away by a sudden stroke, Scipio still lives and ever will live. For it was the virtue of the man that I loved, and that has not suffered death. And it is not my eyes only, because I had all my life a personal experience of it, that never lose sight of it: it will shine to posterity also with undimmed glory. No one will ever cherish a nobler ambition or a loftier hope without thinking his memory and his image the best to put before his eyes. I declare that of all the blessings which either fortune or nature has bestowed upon me I know none to compare with Scipio's friendship. In it I found sympathy in public, counsel in private business; in it too a means of spending my leisure with unalloyed delight. Never, to the best of my knowledge, did I offend him even in the most trivial point; never did I hear a word from him I could have wished unsaid.

One piece of advice on parting.; make up your minds to this:

***Virtue (without which friendship is impossible) is first;
but next to it, and to it alone, the greatest of all things is Friendship.***

⁴ Today's 21st century Christian reader should not overlook the implications of Cicero's insight. Whereas the Greek meaning of love is *multi-dimensional* and *kaleidoscopic*, the Roman meaning is very simple and straightforward. Thus, when Christ states: "Love Thy Neighbor," the Grecian interpretation has a rainbow of possibilities. See [The Ten Great Loves \(robertporterlynch.com\)](http://robertporterlynch.com). In contrast, the Roman would interpret Christ's message as "Love & Befriend Thy Neighbor." Our modern civilization can benefit from both points of view.

⁵ Seneca (4 BC – 65 AD) inherited the Cicero's mantle as the Roman who sought to integrate the best of the Greek and Roman values. As a stoic, while taking a slightly different view of friendship, supported Cicero's main theme of the importance of virtue and morality as the cornerstone of friendship. "Ponder for a long time whether you shall admit a given person to your friendship, but when you have decided to admit him, welcome him with all your heart and soul. Speak as boldly with him as with yourself... Regard him as loyal, and you will make him loyal.... For what purpose, then, do I make a man my friend? In order to have someone for whom I may die, whom I may follow into exile, against whose death I may stake my own life, and pay the pledge, too." (Seneca, *Moral Letters, On true and false friendship*). Seneca was a contemporary of St. Paul of Tarsus; [they exchanged letters](#) -- 8 letters from Seneca and 6 letters from Paul. (rediscovered by Sixtus Senensis 1520-1569, a Jewish convert to Christ,) [from Wikipedia:] The early Christian Church was very favourably disposed towards Seneca and his writings, and the church leader [Tertullian](#) possessively referred to him as "our Seneca". By the 4th century an [apocryphal correspondence](#) with [Paul the Apostle](#) had been acknowledged creating linking Seneca into the Christian tradition. The letters are mentioned by [Jerome](#) who also included Seneca among a list of Christian writers, and Seneca is similarly mentioned by [Augustine](#). Medieval writers and works continued to link him to Christianity because of his alleged association with Paul. The [Golden Legend](#), a 13th-century [hagiographical](#) account of famous saints that was widely read, included an account of Seneca's death scene, and erroneously presented Nero as a witness to Seneca's suicide. [Dante](#) placed Seneca (alongside [Cicero](#)) among the "great spirits" in the [First Circle of Hell](#), or [Limbo](#). [Mussato](#) and [Colonna](#), concluded that Seneca must have been a Christian convert.