

#3 Special Qualities

I began to focus on seeing at least one special quality in every person I met or knew. It was fascinating to study how the same quality was expressed so uniquely in different people. My goal was to find people who excelled in different combinations of attributes, and to learn from them. Ultimately, I wanted to work with people in relationships where it was a priority to mutually enhance such positive qualities.

After years of working on the book, I was searching for a way to unify all the different positive qualities of friendship. All at once, the word “virtue” jumped out at me. Virtues had been present all the time, yet I was not consciously aware of the powerful effect they’d had on my life. Suddenly, I saw that virtues provide a language for understanding the essential ingredients of kindred spirits. I was especially surprised by the importance of virtues in explaining the complexity of relationships. In this unifying principle I had a means to begin exploring more deeply the mystery of love and friendship.

Deep friendships need deep virtues.

The only reason that I am able to compose a book about love and friendship is because people have treated me in virtuous ways. My life has been blessed by parents, teachers and friends with well-developed virtues. These special qualities were expressed as many forms of love. My experiences of virtues in other people have instilled in me the ability to be virtuous in my own life. Writing has allowed time for further reflection on each of the virtues.

Virtuous behavior arises from a person’s core attributes and establishes our level of personal integrity. Virtues are skills necessary for raising consciousness. Such admirable qualities speak to the intrinsic nature of our personhood and are the source of our harmony, health and happiness. While physical beauty reaches a peak and then begins to fade, our virtues, or inner beauty, often improve with age. The personal assets of kindness, courage and love represent the best of our endearing characteristics. Being virtuous is living according to one’s principles. We may have good intentions, but virtues require actions grounded in those intentions. Our strength of character is demonstrated by our good deeds.

Each virtue is the result of many conscious decisions. The goal is to bring the highest level of awareness to all of our relationships. The consistent use of virtues is a sign of maturity. Virtues guide us forward in our relationships with self, parents, siblings, relatives, co-workers and community. To reach a state of deep friendship we need to bring a broad range of virtues into play.

Virtues are guidelines for being kindred spirits.

The quest is to be a virtuous person. It is to seek friendships, to be a friend and to support a friend. Lasting friendships are based on lasting virtues. Virtues are vital to a loving relationship. At the broad level of society, the degree to which our virtues are

commonly practiced and shared determines how well our culture and institutions function.

Since language was invented, humans have discussed what makes a good person. Early Greek philosophers vigorously debated whether virtues could be taught and learned, or if they were innate. Some concluded that virtues could only be truly taught by those who were already virtuous. Others contended that anyone could learn to be more virtuous. This second conclusion is crucial to our quest.