**On Friendship**

By Ian Lee

I don’t have a lot of friends, but the ones I do have are the ones I truly appreciate because of their dedication, loyalty, and the benefits that they can give. Whether we’re aware of them or not, every individual has his/her set of values for friendships, and these values can vary greatly from person to person.

In my country, it’s perceived that the more friends you have, the happier you’ll become, but in reality, this couldn’t be further from the truth. I once had many more friends than I do today, and for the most part they just emotionally drained my mind and body. This was largely due to the fact that I didn’t truly appreciate them. I only hung out with them because I had nowhere else to go, and I felt accepted, but because I didn’t value them for who they were and just stuck by because I didn’t want to be an outcast, in the end I was emotionally drained and obtained little to no benefit.

As with many other introverts I mainly find satisfaction and content from within myself, but at the same time this goes against society’s image of happiness, so instead I chose to hang out with people I didn’t appreciate. This ultimately caused me to use up a lot of energy trying to achieve happiness, which got me nowhere except emotional exhaustion due to my introvertive nature. In the end, I wasted a lot of energy which I could’ve spent building up other aspects of my life such as my sports or my studies.

People often look down on me for spending a lot of time alone and for not having many or “normal” friends, but they don’t know the experience I’ve been through with friendship. I’ve come to the conclusion that I need to spend my time with people carefully and that the energy I spend can either benefit me or waste my life away. This has made me who I am today, and I feel lucky to have realised this in my early childhood rather than later.

This doesn’t mean that people should spend most of their time alone in the fear of wasting their lives away because of pointless relationships. This is far from the message that I imply. Simply talking to people provides benefit because you’re able to learn social skills in order to interact with people. By interacting with people, you’re developing the skills necessary in order to be successful in society, and you might find a friend who’d mean the world to you and stick with you until your funeral. The point that I’m trying to make is that once you’re able to recognize that a friendship is pointless, you should start limiting your time with that particular person and to not use up too much energy on him/her. You shouldn’t stop the relationship completely, since the relationship may change, but you need to be able to recognize when you’re spending excessive amounts of energy on that person.

Time is a precious thing that you can’t take back, so we need to spend it wisely as well as have a good judgement on whether you’re spending too much or too little time on something or someone. If too much time is spent on one thing or person, then you’ll find that you’ve wasted a considerable portion of your life on something or someone useless. This is why it’s important to be able to distinguish between “good” and “bad” friend – in other words, the friends that you appreciate and the friends that you don’t appreciate. Those are two types of friends out there. Whether we say it out loud or not, friendship is just a symbiotic relationship, meaning that friends only stick together for the mutual benefits that each person provides. These benefits could be tangible, such as money or favours, or they could be intangible, such as emotional support, advice or encouragement. Without benefits, they “friendship” quickly turns from mutualism – where both organisms benefit – to parasitism – where one organism benefits and the other organism suffers. It’s said that there are three main symbiotic relationships, the third being commensalism – where one organism benefits and the other is unaffected – but in society, friendships can only be categorized into two groups: those that provide mutual benefits and those where one “friend” leaches off the other “friend”. In the end, whether we admit it or not, those are the only two types of friends.

Personally, I appreciate friends who are loyal and beneficial. These are my two main values in friendships, and if a person lacks one of those qualities, it’s quite difficult for me to be able to consider them as a “good” friend. If a person is loyal but can’t provide benefits, then what good does that friend to for you? If he/she is unable to do anything with that loyalty to help you, it’s completely useless. If a person can provide many benefits but isn’t loyal, then that person lacks reliability, and can’t be trusted to even provide the benefits that he/she can provide. Hence, the two qualities are binded together. The ideal friend would be someone who you can count on to provide you with benefits – that’d be the qualities of a friend that I’d appreciate.

A good example of when an unappreciated friendship leads to emotional drainage would be from my own personal experience. I once had a friend who I met during the first week of school. He was a nice person, and he was lonely, like me, so we decided to stick together. Although he was loyal and would do almost anything for me, I found no benefit in being friends with him. He had little to no intellectual capability and very little competence in technology (or anything, for that matter). Despite these flaws, I still stuck by him because I knew that without him, I’d be an outcast. This was a mistake of mine. In order to maintain that friendship, I had to occasionally visit his house and sit with him at recess and lunch. I’d also have to listen to his pointless rambling which got both of us nowhere. Being an extrovert, he was the type of person to cling onto me. Since I was his only friend at school, he’d feel hurt if I cancelled an appointment. This got me into a cycle which led me to emotional exhaustion. This could have been partially due to my nature of not wanting to let other people down, but I think most people wouldn’t want to hurt the feelings of other people. He’d also invite me to sleepovers where I’d stay for the whole day at his house, but since we had very little in common, for the most part we’d just sit on the couch and do or own thing on our devices, which was very boring since all I had for stimulation was a laptop. Needless to say, the second I made some new friends I left him behind. I left the exhausting cycle, the meaningless memories and the little-to-no help I got from him, but what I didn’t leave behind was a lesson – the lesson that I shouldn’t waste my time on friendships that I don’t appreciate.