

Outreach

VOLUME 7 EDITION 2



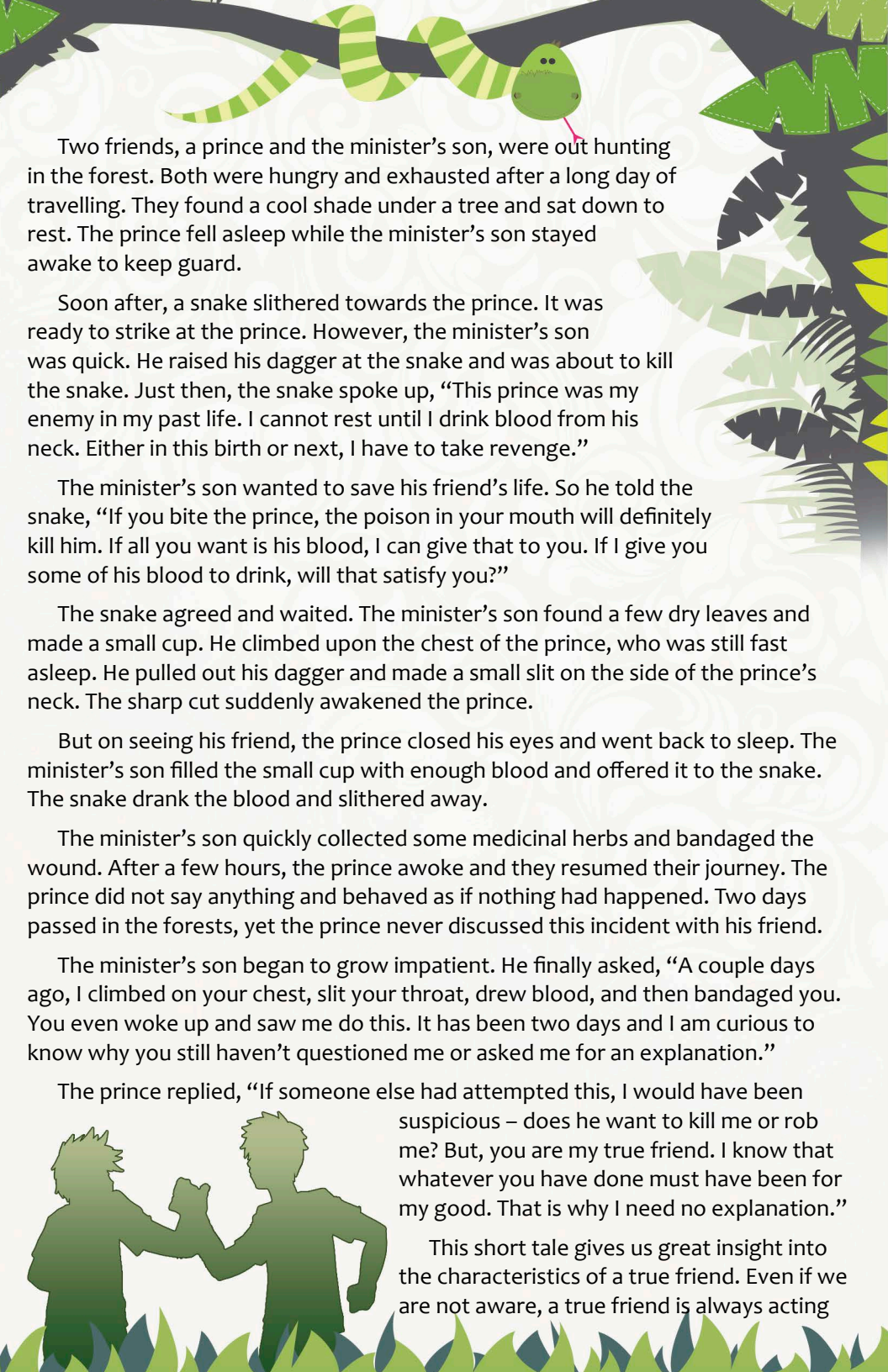
Do I Have a True Friend in My Life?

We all have many friends. Actually, we may have more friends than we can even remember. The phone books in our cell phones are filled with contacts. A few simple clicks on social media websites can instantly make us more friends. It seems that making a new friend is relatively easy these days.

In fact, a recent study by the Nielsen research company found that youths aged 13-24 have an average of 508 friends! Just imagine how difficult it would be to remember all of their birthdays!

We spontaneously make friends with those who share mutual interests with us. Common activities with friends usually include going out to eat, taking the same courses in college, playing video games together, playing sports together, or just spending time together.

Having more friends certainly makes doing our daily activities easier and more enjoyable. At the same time, it is important to identify our 'true friends.' The qualities of a true friend are clearly depicted in the following story.



Two friends, a prince and the minister's son, were out hunting in the forest. Both were hungry and exhausted after a long day of travelling. They found a cool shade under a tree and sat down to rest. The prince fell asleep while the minister's son stayed awake to keep guard.

Soon after, a snake slithered towards the prince. It was ready to strike at the prince. However, the minister's son was quick. He raised his dagger at the snake and was about to kill the snake. Just then, the snake spoke up, "This prince was my enemy in my past life. I cannot rest until I drink blood from his neck. Either in this birth or next, I have to take revenge."

The minister's son wanted to save his friend's life. So he told the snake, "If you bite the prince, the poison in your mouth will definitely kill him. If all you want is his blood, I can give that to you. If I give you some of his blood to drink, will that satisfy you?"

The snake agreed and waited. The minister's son found a few dry leaves and made a small cup. He climbed upon the chest of the prince, who was still fast asleep. He pulled out his dagger and made a small slit on the side of the prince's neck. The sharp cut suddenly awakened the prince.

But on seeing his friend, the prince closed his eyes and went back to sleep. The minister's son filled the small cup with enough blood and offered it to the snake. The snake drank the blood and slithered away.

The minister's son quickly collected some medicinal herbs and bandaged the wound. After a few hours, the prince awoke and they resumed their journey. The prince did not say anything and behaved as if nothing had happened. Two days passed in the forests, yet the prince never discussed this incident with his friend.

The minister's son began to grow impatient. He finally asked, "A couple days ago, I climbed on your chest, slit your throat, drew blood, and then bandaged you. You even woke up and saw me do this. It has been two days and I am curious to know why you still haven't questioned me or asked me for an explanation."

The prince replied, "If someone else had attempted this, I would have been suspicious – does he want to kill me or rob me? But, you are my true friend. I know that whatever you have done must have been for my good. That is why I need no explanation."

This short tale gives us great insight into the characteristics of a true friend. Even if we are not aware, a true friend is always acting



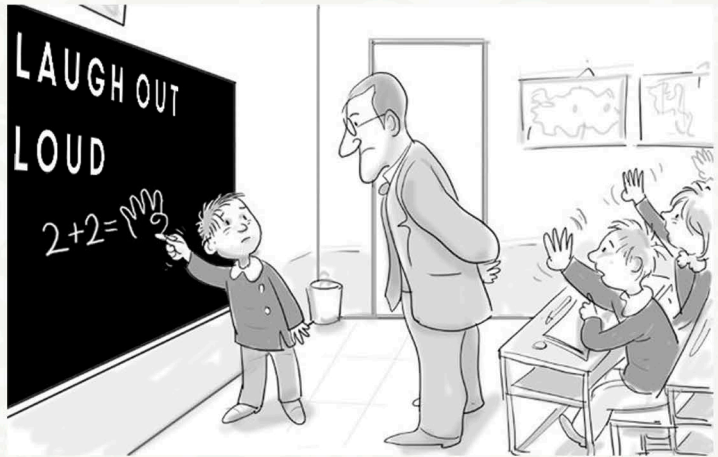


in our best interest. Describing the virtues of a friend, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has stated in the Vachanamrut (Gadhada-III 21), “Recognize a true friend to be one who can tell you that which is in your very best interest, even if it may make you sad. This is the characteristic of a true friend.”

Now let’s ask ourselves a few questions. Of the many friends that I have, how many can be considered true friends? Instead of simply passing time together, do they actually motivate me to reach my goals in life? Will they always act in my best interest even if I do not like it? Do they help me advance on the spiritual path?

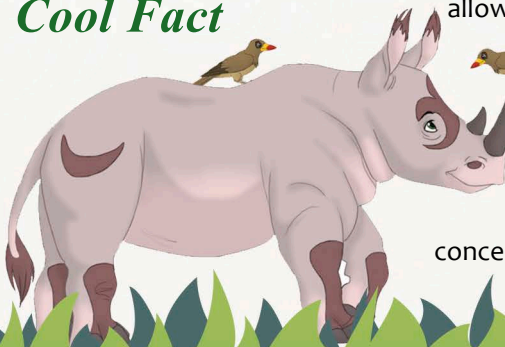
Fortunately, there are many youth leaders and saints in the *satsang* fellowship who play the role of a ‘true friend’ for countless youths. We only have to take the initiative to develop our friendship with them and follow their advice. As a result, we can get proper guidance in academics, improve our careers and social lives, and most importantly, accelerate our spiritual progress to please Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji!

A
Friend
In Need,
Is A
Friend
Indeed



It turns out that humans are not the only creatures that make friends. Friendship between different species of animals is also prevalent. For example, a type of small bird called an oxpecker has a strong friendship with large rhinos. The rhino allows the bird to sit on its back and eat the small insects that it finds there.

Cool Fact



This feeds the bird and cleans the rhino. Moreover, the bird watches for danger and alerts the rhino of any predators by making loud chirping noises. It seems that animals also understand the concept of making the right friend!

The Slap from a True Friend

There may be times in our lives that we end up doing something we know we will regret later. We may get overwhelmed by a situation. We may be influenced by our environment and forget our goals in life. At times like these, a true friend will keep us alert and guide us on the right path.

Prabhudasbhai (the name of Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji before initiation into sainthood) was a true friend for all those in his contact. He was not only living an inspirational life, but He would also inspire His friends to live a virtuous life. Prabhudasbhai's bond with His friends was truly remarkable!

In the mid-1950's, Prabhudasbhai was in the town of Anand. He was engaged in *seva* (service) of a sick, elderly saint. One afternoon, after finishing His *seva*, Prabhudasbhai was departing from the hospital and started walking towards the town.

On the opposite side of the road, Prabhudasbhai saw His friend near the Railway Station. His friend had just recently married. The friend and his wife were walking together to visit a nearby garden.

As the young couple was walking, a nurse emerged from the hospital. As the nurse walked along, the friend caught a glimpse of the nurse. His eyes fixated on the attractive nurse for a few seconds. This happened not once, but three times. His wife, who was next to him, was oblivious to his actions. But from a distance, Prabhudasbhai saw His friend's misbehavior.

Keeping one's senses positive is one of the most fundamental and important attributes to progress in satsang. Allowing the eyes to stare at others with infatuation stains the mind and soul. Even Bhagwan Swaminarayan expressed His deep desire for us to keep our senses positive in Vachanamrut Gadhada-I 18.

Prabhudasbhai and his friend were companions since childhood. They had grown up together. Prabhudasbhai had even played an important role in helping him get married. So, Prabhudasbhai, as a true friend, took it upon Himself to help His friend in this situation.

Prabhudasbhai approached His friend. The friend was delighted to see Prabhudasbhai. Then without even saying a word, Prabhudasbhai slapped His friend very hard in the face! The friend did not say a single word in return. He was well aware of Prabhudasbhai's high thinking and His virtuous life.

But the friend's wife, who was right next to him, was appalled by the slap. The wife was enraged that someone would hit her husband. So, she started taking off her sandals and was about to hit Prabhudasbhai.



Prabhudasbhai told her, “Calm down, calm down.” Still furious, the wife paused for a few seconds and waited for an explanation.

Then Prabhudasbhai revealed His true intent, “The only reason I slapped

him is so he remains committed only to you.

I am your husband’s friend. I was present at your wedding as well. Just now, you and your husband were walking

from the train station together.

But your husband’s eyes were

fixated on a nurse walking

nearby. He did not only look

at her once, but he looked at

the nurse multiple times. You two

are married and you are standing

next to him; what right does he have to

look at other women? I slapped him only

to make sure that His eyes stay positive and

to make sure that he remains committed only to you. Now you tell me, what

should have I done?” Hearing this, the wife calmed down, and she even told

Prabhudasbhai to smack him again!

The virtuous actions of Prabhudasbhai teach us two invaluable lessons about friendship. First, if we are ever straying away from our goals or if we are unintentionally doing something immoral, we need a friend like Prabhudasbhai to bring us back on track. Second, if a friend takes the initiative to help us in any way, we should not be offended or retaliate. A true friend always acts in our best interest.

Perhaps, it is possible for us to become billionaires. Yet, we will never be able to buy this type of friendship. The odds of finding a true friend are extremely rare. But we are extremely fortunate to have the association of Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji. Swamiji has been a true friend to thousands of youths. Through His love, compassion, and divinity, Swamiji has given countless youths proper direction and understanding in life.

We are actually even more fortunate. Why? Swamiji has designated certain saints and youth leaders as our true friends. These saints and youth leaders understand Swamiji’s innermost wish, and so, they can guide us and push us in the right direction.

By actively seeking their friendship, we too, can have such true friends in our lives. All we need to do is build a strong enough friendship with them so that they can take the initiative to help us. If we follow their advice, believing that they are acting in our best interest, then we can progress rapidly both in our social life and on our spiritual journey!





When a youth strays into the company of wrong friends, Swamiji ensures that His youths are guided back onto the right path. Such is an example of Anandbhai Shah. He was a focused and sincere student, but as a teenager, there was a sudden, drastic change in his lifestyle.

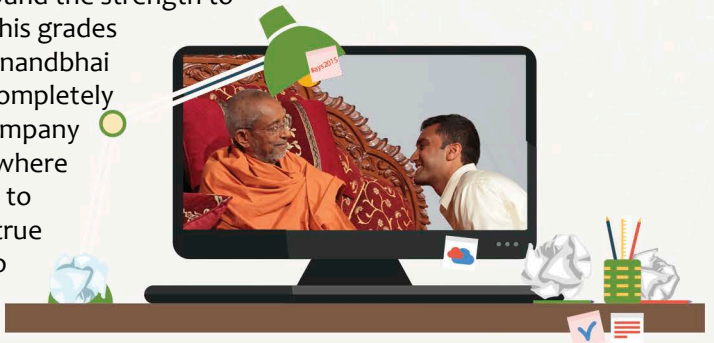
Anandbhai thought it was perfectly fine to follow the behavior of his friends. He would party until late night, have casual drinks, would sneak into casinos, and even started eating non-vegetarian food. His grades suffered, he stopped listening to his parents, and there was great distress in his family. Then, one day, a friend, whom Anandbhai had forgotten about, decided to pay him a visit.

Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji came to his house during his sophomore year of college. As Swamiji sat on the couch, Anandbhai started massaging Swamiji's feet. Then, Swamiji was given a letter written by Anandbhai's mother. The letter described Anandbhai's negative habits and immoral lifestyle.

Swamiji smiled and told Anandbhai a few words that would change his life. Swamiji told Anandbhai, "Can you do one thing for me?" Anandbhai nodded, so Swamiji continued, "All I want you to do is add two new friends to your life, Prabhushelbhai and Kishanji (who are two youth leaders in the New Jersey area)."

Realizing the simplicity of Swamiji's request, Anandbhai agreed. Anandbhai was touched by the fact that Swamiji did not tell him to stay away from his current friends. Swamiji knew that the strength of two extremely positive friends would eventually displace the influence of negative company.

Anandbhai started following Swamiji's advice. During his weekly visits to the *Haridham* temple in NJ, Anandbhai would spend time with his two new friends and openly discuss any problems he faced. He started noticing small improvements in his day-to-day life. He found the strength to stop his bad habits and his grades improved. Eventually, Anandbhai found the strength to completely remove all of his bad company and started living a life where he can be an inspiration to others. In such ways, a true friend can inspire like no other.



You know you've found a true friend when...



He helps you filter good and bad choices. You have to make many decisions every day. If you stray from good, your friend shows you your mistakes and guides you back to morality.



He urges you to stay positive. If you dwell on the past for too long, he reminds you to keep moving forward, discover new paths, and focus on your future.



He keeps you humble. While he celebrates your accomplishments with you, he keeps your ego in check and reminds you of your roots.



He motivates you to follow Swamiji's wishes. The mind can drag you into doing certain things that Swamiji would not like, but a friend inspires you to walk on the path toward Swamiji.

Lasting Thought



A true friend is one who not only lives with strong *nistha* (firm faith) in God, but also inspires others to live with strong *nistha*.

- Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji

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