

### Friendship in a Social-Networked World

"What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies." This quote is attributed to the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle who wrote extensively about the notion and importance of true friendship as a determinant of *meaningful* living.

Aristotle's view on this matter stands in sharp contrast to what we all experience these days in various social networks. While witnessing all the publicly exposed feelings ranging from heart emojis to hate texts shared between "friends" one cannot help wondering what the definition of "friend" is in this kind of social networking context.

The notion of "friend", of course, is used rather loosely in the online world. However, the question arises: what is happening to true friendship? Is it dying away? Or are the various social media platforms simply redefining or transforming our modern-day notion of friendship? How might the social media advances influence the nature of friendships between people and the human quest for meaning?

A recent article by Mark Vernon, a research fellow at Birkbeck College in London, addressed the issue of the social media's influence and concluded, "Just as our daily lives are becoming more technologically connected, we're losing our more meaningful relationships. Yes, we're losing our friends." In other words, the joys of real human contact are being replaced by *shallow* friendships, that is, "social connections" rather than the kinds of true friendships described by Aristotle. In our post-modern society, there is evidence while we have plenty of acquaintances, more and more of us have few individuals to whom we can turn and share our authentic selves, our deep intimacies.

Moreover, according to research published in the *American Sociological Review*, the average American has only two close friends and some twenty-five percent don't have any friends! We are **effectively living alone** in the midst of a socially-networked world! Now how ironic is that?

In his classical work *Ethics*, Aristotle also offered ageless wisdom: "The desire for friendship comes quickly. Friendship does not." It takes time and effort to build true friendships; relationships through which you are able and willing to disclose your authentic self — close thoughts, intimate feelings, and sensitive vulnerabilities including fears. While a social connection on a social network may be only a click away, cultivating a true friendship is not that easy or straightforward if you believe in and take Aristotle's advice.

In today's busy, fast-paced world, many people are more likely to tell their hopes and troubles to bartenders, taxi drivers, hair stylists, and therapists than they are to the people who are regularly in their lives. Many people seem to have drifted away from true friendships and a sense of "community" and are now living very private, even lonely, lives. It's time to resurrect the meaning and value of authentic relationships with others. It's time to refocus on and allow friendships to flourish in *meaningful* ways, both in our personal and work lives. "A friend is another self," Aristotle also told us. True friendships are not simply a manifestation of what is being called "social connectivity" in social networking parlance. No, true friendships are the key to a flourishing, meaningful life, well-being, and a truly connected society and world.

According to the article, today people tend to share their problems with...

1. ...people they hardly know.
2. ...members of their families.
3. ...friends on social networks.
4. ...their colleagues at work.