

CHAPTER 24

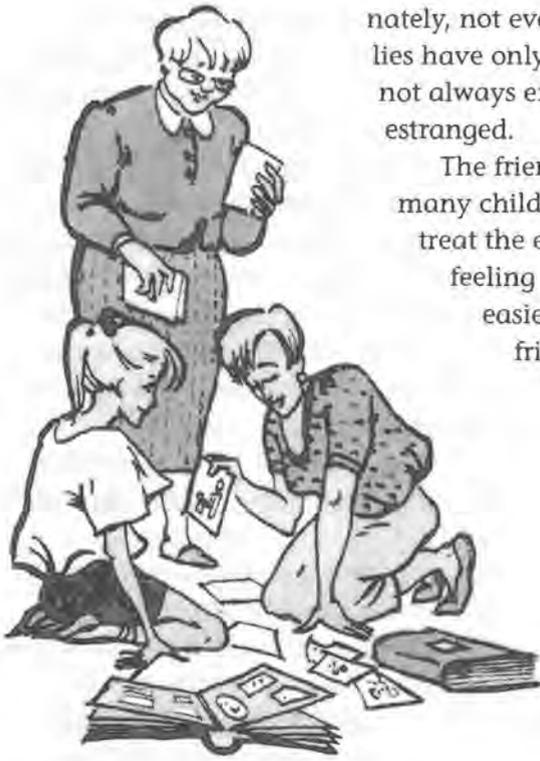
Friendship in the Family

Let us consider whether a father can be his son's friend and vice versa. Can brothers be friends? The opinions of specialists diverge on this issue. Some think that the relations between close relatives are essentially different from those between friends. Others believe that friendship can take place in all kinds of relationships. If two people, no matter what their social position, respect each other and communicate on equal terms, we can consider them friends. They become friends when each begins to sincerely care about the other. Doesn't being brothers mean being friends? Don't we say about friends who share everything in life, both good and bad, that they are like brothers?

To throw light onto this question, first we must understand that all types of relationships—those between parents and children, between brothers, between spouses and between friends—always start with some definite ideal expectations. These expectations are partly similar. All people have a need for love and care. Their expectations will be to experience love: the desire to make each other happy. But these relationships also have differences that cannot be ignored.

What are the main features of friendship between brothers and sisters? Unfortu-





nately, not everyone has a chance to experience such friendship. Many families have only one child. Even those people who have brothers and sisters do not always experience friendly relations either, because the siblings may be estranged.

The friendship between brothers and sisters is best seen in families with many children in which the elder take care of the younger and the younger treat the elder with respect. The very expression “my elder brother” has a feeling of pride to it. Those who trust their elder brothers or sisters find it easier to form other relationships, for they naturally build on the friendly relations they have established in the family.

If the attachment of the younger to the elder is quite natural, what makes the elder seek friendship with the younger? It is natural to think that the reason is the example of our parents, and the instinct of motherhood and fatherhood inherent in all of us. But there is also a deeper reason.

Through making friends with our juniors, taking care of them, we express our personality, projecting ourselves on younger friends and persuading them to follow our ideas. It is no accident that those who aspire to a profession based on personal relations (teacher, psychologist, doctor, etc.) are recommended to try communi-

cating with their juniors: If you like communicating with them

and having them as friends, then you are suited to one of these professions.

On the other hand, it is clear that relations between brothers and sisters are blood relations and have an additional dimension that does not exist in relations between friends. There is a deeper sense of duty. Brothers can work together, rest together, and go through life side by side, like friends. Even if one of the brothers has committed a crime, the tie of blood and sense of loyalty may make the other brother save him at any cost, even giving false evidence. That is why the law doesn't take into account the evidence of close relatives. The ideal relations between brothers are moral in their essence. If my brother lies to me or steals from me, morality tells me to forgive him and not to separate from him under any circumstance.

Now about friendship between parents and children: Many of us may think such friendship is impossible, for the parents' responsibility is to demand and the children's duty to obey. Indeed, a father or mother must guide the actions of the son or daughter and be an authority for them. Friendship, on the other hand, is based on equality. The relationship of a mother and daughter or father and son suggests inequality. If a son or daughter behaves immorally, the parents must remember their parental duty.

But all this doesn't contradict the ideal of real friendship between parents and children. At the age of 11 or 12 you realized that you have a personal-





ity, that you may know what is demanded of you but that you may not obey; at 13 or 14 you felt the need to be understood, the need for an adult to understand you. This person may be a teacher. Even though a person can appear in your life such as a relative or your friend's parent, most often you hope that this role will be fulfilled by your parents. This is the basis for friendship between parents and children.

As early as the 17th century the English philosopher, psychologist and pedagogue John Locke advised parents: *"When a child is small, demand from him; when he grows bigger, make friends with him."* It is good when parents follow this advice. But in reality it goes the other way round: Parents go on demanding from you, as if you were still small, and ignore your need to be understood. What can

you do and how can you change your parents' attitude toward you? To answer this question, let us think about what makes up friendships. The obvious features are common interests, purposes and activities. It is not very important what kind of activities they are; the important thing is that we pursue a common goal. So the first step toward friendship with parents is an activity performed together—such as taking care of the car or repairing your home together with your father, cleaning or sewing together with your mother. Many of us have gardens—a lot of opportunity there! Of course, at first sight such an idea is not very appealing. You may have much more interesting things to do outside your home. But it helps you to make friends with your parents. Try to overcome your feelings; then say to your father or mother, "I would like to do this together with you."

Nothing seems to strengthen the friendship between parents and children like hikes and trips together. Often on Saturdays and Sundays the cities are full of adults and children with their backpacks on their backs. It would be nice for us to do so too. Imagine a boating trip, sleeping in tents, evening at the fire! Why not suggest such activities?

Friendship, though, is more than shared activities. What do you talk about with your close friends? Of course, you share your secrets. Trust is the main feature of a real friendship. Commonly shared personal stories will strengthen your bond with your father and mother too. Of course, it is not easy to be open with parents, for they may fail to understand, but it is definitely worth the try. Begin with simple questions such as: "Dad, may I ask you ... " If you have not had a frank relationship before, your parents at first may be surprised at your trust. Don't be embarrassed or surprised, for adults need openness much more. If your attempts are successful, you may move on to more important issues.

Of course, openness is most important where there are failures or unhappiness. Children's suicide attempts usually are caused not so much by the children's failures as by the fact that they have no one with whom to share their feelings. Researchers have shown that those who are most successful in life have had some adult with

whom to share their feelings between the age of 16 and 22.

So friendship between parents and children is not only possible but also necessary for you and for your parents. There is hardly anything better than saying about a mother and daughter: “They are like two girlfriends” or about father and son: “It is a real friendship.”

The Jewish understanding of marriage is based on the commandments given to Moses for mankind at Mount Sinai. Since marriage was instituted by God,

For Your Journal



Describe those activities you do together with your parents, those situations that impressed you the most and left the most pleasant memories. What do you think is the ideal kind of relationship with parents? Can you think of a real example of such a relationship?

If Only

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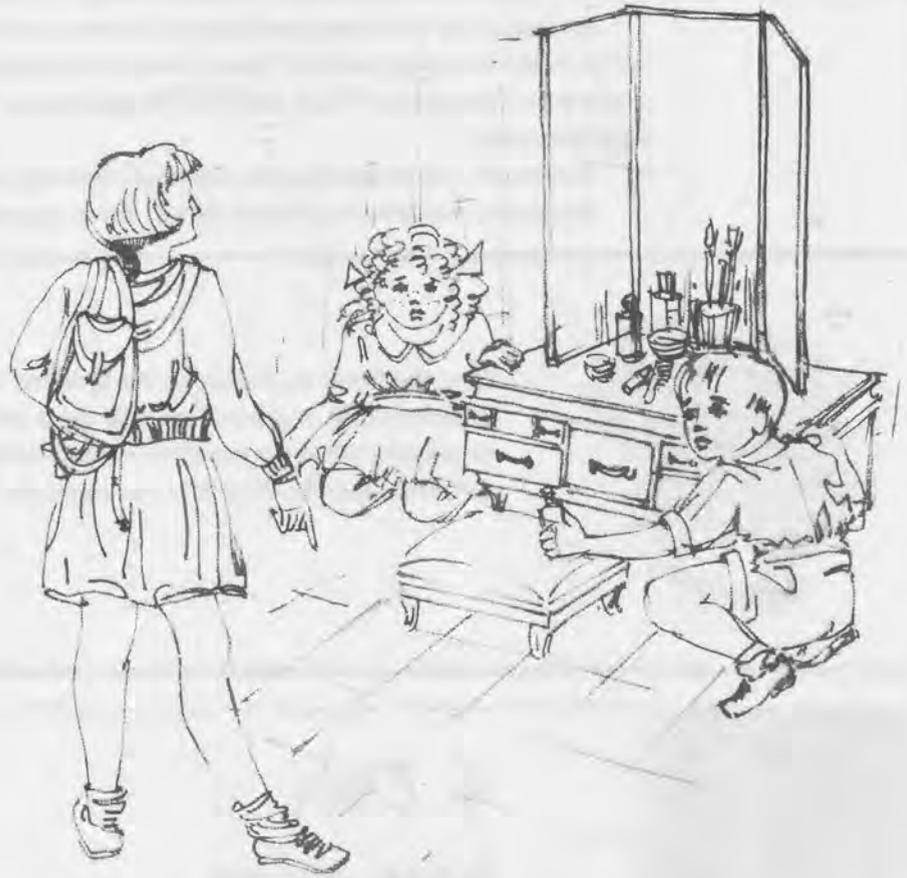
Lately I take long walks by myself. I think about life and death — things everyone wonders about, I suppose. Sometimes I walk for hours, but I always end up at the same place.

Today it was a crisp November afternoon. Not one person was in sight when I arrived. My feet moved toward the little mound of dirt, just as they had yesterday, and the day before, and the day before—every day for the past month.

I took my usual kneeling position beside the small stone inscribed with these sad tidings: “Here lies Timmy Langdon — Born May 23, 1957, Died October 14, 1965”. The words sent new shocks up my spine, just as I knew they would. For even after a month I still could not believe it. When I thought of Timmy, I thought of a golden-haired boy hurrying off to school or baseball practice, not a cold form here with all these strangers.

Something else troubled me, and I don’t think I will ever forget it. I had come home from school after a long and hectic day. Mrs. Trimble had decided our reports were due tomorrow Instead of next Friday. Mr. Johnson was kind enough to warn us of a history test on the last five chapters to be given tomorrow. Anyway, dotted here and there among these big headaches was my usual homework — algebra and bookkeeping. I had come draggin’ into the house with my “it’s been a hard day” look. Mom knew better than to ask about my day.

As I headed for my bedroom I heard two small voices laughing, I opened the door and there sat Timmy and a little neighbor friend at my desk looking at my lipstick. They weren’t making a mess. In fact, they were being very careful not to. Anyway, this was the straw that broke the



camel's back, and I lost my temper. I told them to get out and never to come back into my room when I'm not home and to "stay out of my stuff, you little pest!" I must have called him a pest four or five times. How could I have been so crude?

Tim's face turned beet red, and I know he was sorry and ashamed. He even apologized; but oh, no, I couldn't let him get away with it. I had to be firm.

At the dinner table Tim was unusually quiet and didn't eat much, but I guess I was the only one who noticed, because Mom and Dad were talking about so-and-so and should they go to the reception two hundred miles away. After supper I excused myself and got to work. While I was working, I felt someone watching me. I turned, and there stood Timmy in the doorway.

"Please close the door," I said curtly.

He hesitated, then slowly closed it, with a hurt, puzzled look.

"I'll make it up to him," I thought, then turned my thoughts back to my work.

The next morning was warm, and I felt fatigue as I climbed out of bed. I hurriedly dressed and dashed out to the breakfast table, I had five minutes to eat. Timmy was the only one at the table. Mom was cooking eggs in the kitchen. As I sat down, I felt his warm, brown eyes on me, and I met his imploring gaze with a cool stare.

"Are you still mad at me?" he asked.

"I suppose so." I really wasn't, but I felt he hadn't learned his lesson yet.

“I’m sorry, I won’t do it again.”

“We’ll see,” I said cuttingly. Then hurriedly gulping the last of my breakfast, I grabbed my books and ran for the bus stop, purposely ignoring him. But as I hurried out the door, something about the sadness in his eyes brought a guilty feeling, and I remember thinking, “I’ll make it up to him later.” That was my trouble. I was always in too much of a hurry to get close to him.

That was the last time I saw him alive — at the breakfast table.

The next time I saw him, he was lying under a white sheet.

I had come home from school as usual with my mind full of my usual thoughts. I noticed my brother’s badly twisted bike on the lawn. I suddenly felt panic sweeping over me. I ran for the house, my heart beating in my throat. The kitchen was quiet. There was no dinner cooking. The living room door was shut, and I was terrified of the circumstances that were happening on the other side; but the silence of the kitchen was too much to bear and I found myself pushing the door open.

My mother was sitting in the rocking chair with Father kneeling by her side, holding her shaking hand. Their faces wore identical expressions — very pale with eyes staring straight ahead. When Mom saw me she stood up and took me in her shaking arms.

Timmy had been in a hurry to get home and start on the new model airplane Mom had bought him. He must not have been looking as he came racing across the street. The driver of the car didn’t see him till it was too late. I had read of this type of thing many times in the newspaper; but it happened to other people, not to me, not to my family.

The next few days were full of tears. I cried until my eyes were dry and red and tears just wouldn’t come anymore. I couldn’t eat for days. I couldn’t sleep very long. I would always have the same dream of coming home from school that day.

I remember so many small things he had done for me — things like getting me a glass of water while I was studying, polishing my shoes when I was in a hurry, bringing me dandelions, showing me his new baseball bat (which I thought was a bore). If only I could do it again. If only I had one more chance!

Suddenly I wished more than anything to talk with him if for just five minutes. And when he would ask me, “Are you still mad at me?” with his brown eyes studying my face, I would take him in my arms and say, “No, my darling, I’m not mad anymore, and I’ll never be mad at you again.”

I slowly got to my feet from the misty grass. My legs were cramped and stiff from kneeling so long. I pulled my coat tighter, because November gets chilly in the late afternoon. Then I started for home.