

True Friendship Should Always Prevail Over Ideology

Shôn Ellerton, July 21, 2018

A strong friendship should never be affected by differences in ideology whether it is based on faith, belief, culture, religion or political bias.



I always maintain that true friendships can be formed regardless of differences in ideology, whether it is based on faith, belief, culture, religion or political bias. Not only have I been fortunate enough to be reasonably well-travelled, I've had the rich experience of living in environments which are richly diverse in all these elements.

During my childhood years, I was exposed to the teachings of the Church of England by my Anglican grandparents, the Presbyterian Church from Sunday school sessions and the Catholic Church from good friends of ours who lived in the hills overlooking Boulder, Colorado. Much of our family is heavily rooted in scientific doctrine which may seem totally at odds to the principles of faith and belief, but somehow or another, I never foresaw this as much of a problem, but rather, a fascinating insight to how humanity ticks. Most of our friends were like us; possessing a different set of ideologies but all being quite comfortable to talk about them and to listen to yours. Some conversations became more challenging than others, but never could they be the catalyst to upsetting a good friendship.

Being engaged with others from diverse cultural backgrounds, faiths or religions is often rewarding but sometimes challenging. I was brought up to believe, for example, that witches are predominantly malignant in nature all wearing pointy black caps, riding broomsticks and watching over their bubbling cauldrons of

potions in big black pots over the fire. The reality is often entirely different. We had a friend who lived in a secluded wooded area not far from my hometown who was a paganist and considered herself a genuine witch. She was a good friend of my mother's and there was nothing malignant in her character as far as I could recall. Then we had the devout catholic wife of the couple who lived in the hills who, on many occasions, said to me that on our left shoulder is the devil and on the right shoulder is an angel. Just like in those old classic cartoons some of us were raised up on! Sadly, she died of drinking far too much gin, but insofar that she was devout to the core of Catholicism, on no occasion do I remember any discomfort when a conversation came up which might have offended it. In every case, the same core values were shared across all: to be respectful, kind and good-natured to others.

During my later years in life from college to the present, I've made friendships with people from seemingly all walks of life; from those practicing Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Paganism to those who believe that the Moon landings are a conspiracy and that the Earth is flat. When travelling to other countries where cultures or beliefs may be quite different from yours, it is not only polite to refrain from preaching your beliefs openly but ultimately a wise personal decision as it could be all too easy to offend.

Is there a point where friendship cannot continue due to differences in faith, culture or belief? I would like to think this is not the case, but I recently experienced a situation where a very old schoolfriend became so indoctrinated in his own beliefs that, as time progressed, our conversations became more and more distant and riddle-like in nature to the point where healthy debate got 'too emotional'. I might have overstepped the mark on one occasion and he decided to 'ex-communicate' me, at least, for the time being. To me, true friendship always prevails perhaps, except in those cases where extremism begins to set in.

To this day, my wife and I host international exchange students from many cultural and religious backgrounds and it plays a large important role to be mindful of this when engaging with them. Exposure to such diversity is, not only rewarding, but arms you with some of the necessary tools to learn and respect others from various backgrounds of life.