

The Importance of Friendship in Different Cultures

(adapted from Sagandykova, A. 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.topuniversities.com/blog/importance-friendship-different-cultures>)

Read the text below and find the synonym of the highlighted words—words that are more familiar to you.

When I asked my Spanish friend if it is better to have \$100 in the wallet or 100 friends in life, he without a second of **hesitation** chose \$100. In post-Soviet countries this dilemma is not a dilemma at all. There is an old saying in Russian: “Instead of having 100 rubles, better have 100 friends.”

This apparent difference of opinion about the importance of friendship does not really mean that people of one region are more financially **prudent** while their peers in Russia have exclusively pure hearts and thoughts. But different mentalities can create **apparent** barriers between cultures and countries. While you may think ‘culture’ has little to do with decades of political conflict between Russia and the US, the media plays a key role in forming and shaping opinions and deepening already existing cultural misunderstandings.

So, is the importance of friendship really a point of difference, or something on which all cultures agree?

The Importance of Friendship in Post Soviet Countries

People in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States, a collective of **post-Soviet countries**) are known as extremely **hospitable** and overall very **amicable**, openhearted human beings. Furthermore, the term “friendship” is given lots of **significance** when raising children. One is supposed to be a loyal and faithful friend.

Of course this does not really mean that friendship in post-Soviet countries is perfect for everyone. They are just normal people and consequently subject to the universal pros and cons of human essence, with both attractive and **repulsive** elements. So relationships can never be ideal.

Different Kinds of Friendship

At the same time, classic American literature also abounds with stories about friendship. Readers can feel what friendship means while reading, for example, Hemingway’s memories of Paris in *A Moveable Feast*: “When you cannot make friends any more in your head is the worst.”

One of my American friends who has worked in post-Soviet countries for a while tried to explain the difference between two **types of friendship**. “You know, I have a friend in the US. We used to play golf every other weekend. We are friends. Golf friends. And here is the line. Everything else is outside this relationship.”

My tour guide in Spain made a similar point about different types of friendship. “I have been living in Spain for 11 years and, of course, I have friends. We usually have a nice time together. We can share thoughts, debate and give each other presents. But there is a **barrier** that starts at any problematic

point. We are friends, but every single person is responsible for his or her life and there is no way to share this responsibility. Your problems are just yours. You have to find a solution yourself.”

These different types of friendship are also expressed in various definitions. The Oxford English Dictionary, however, suggests there may be two different levels of friend – of which the more common may be closer to mere **acquaintance**: “A person with whom one has developed a close and informal relationship of mutual trust and intimacy; (more generally) a close acquaintance.”

The Importance of Friendship Worldwide

The Western saying, “A friend in need is a friend indeed” echoes the Russian **proverb** “a friend is known in a trouble” and the words of Kazakh philosopher, poet and writer Abai: “You can distinguish a good friend from a fake one. Fake friends are like a shadow. On a sunny day you cannot get rid of them. When it is cloudy you cannot find them, no matter how much effort you make.”

I have friends with diverse origins. And friendship makes me feel happy **regardless** of whether I met a friend in Chicago, Yekaterinburg or Lisbon. Plus, as scientists from North Carolina have found, a strong friendship has a positive effect on health and overall physical state. So, good friendships make people healthier and happier.

As for the different types of friendship, if you are studying, working or just traveling in a country with another culture, be prepared to experience new approaches to friendship and just enjoy it! And as a tip for anyone making new friendships in the post-Soviet region, try calling your new friends “brat”. That means “brother” and is a very common informal expression of friendship.

Answer the following questions. You can read the text again to check your answers.

1. How many types of friendship being described in the text?
2. How does the writer view the importance of friendship?
3. What is the meaning of the saying “a friend in need is a friend indeed”?
4. Should we worry about the different concepts of friendship across cultures?
5. How do you view friendship?