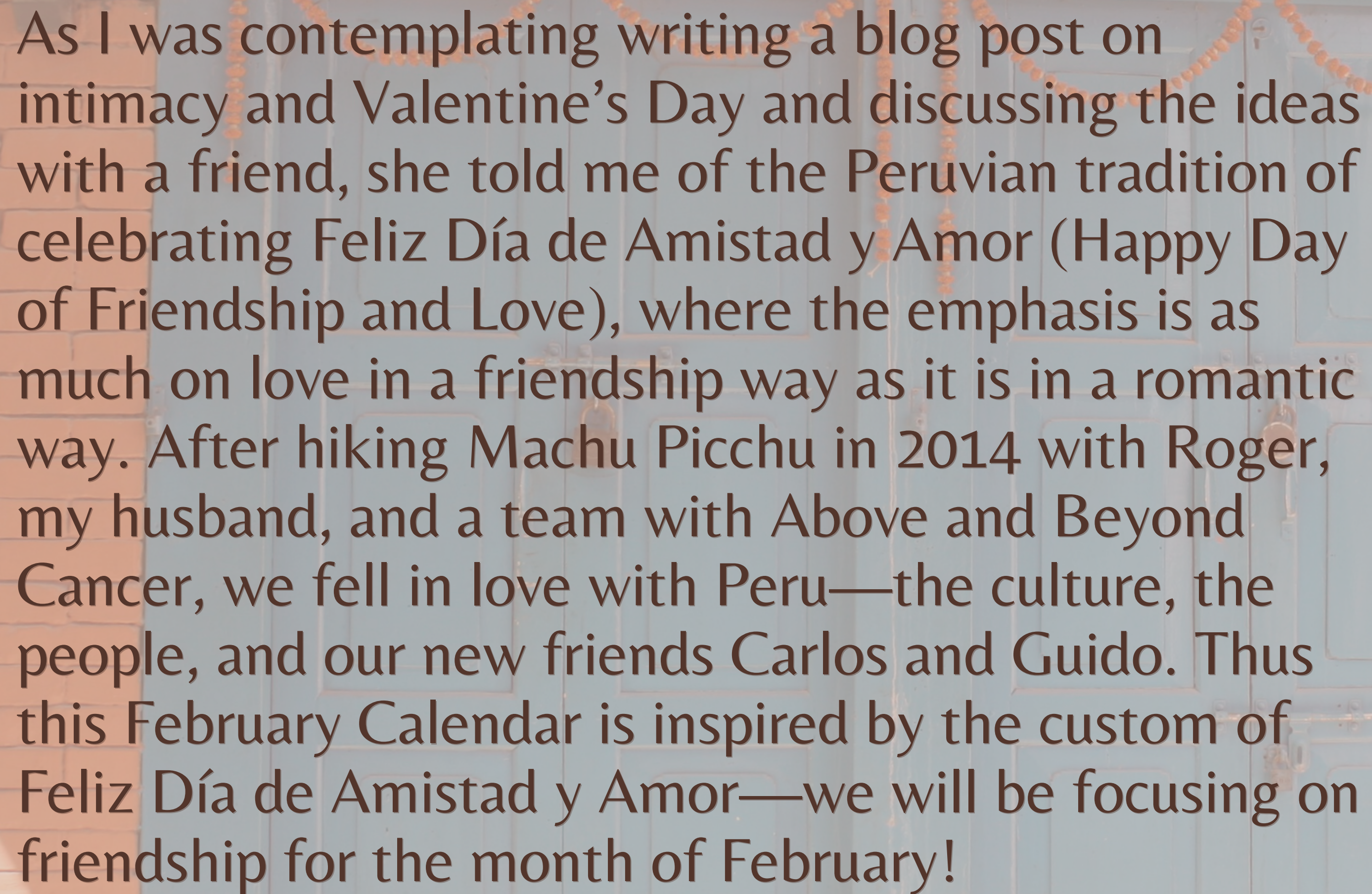


A photograph of a double blue door set in a brick wall. The door is decorated with orange beaded garlands draped across the top and hanging down the sides. Each door has a brass handle and a brass padlock. The text is overlaid on the image in a dark brown, serif font.

Stop Breathe Believe® & Dianne Morris Jones Present

Keys to Unlocking the Door
to Intimacy of Friendship



As I was contemplating writing a blog post on intimacy and Valentine's Day and discussing the ideas with a friend, she told me of the Peruvian tradition of celebrating Feliz Día de Amistad y Amor (Happy Day of Friendship and Love), where the emphasis is as much on love in a friendship way as it is in a romantic way. After hiking Machu Picchu in 2014 with Roger, my husband, and a team with Above and Beyond Cancer, we fell in love with Peru—the culture, the people, and our new friends Carlos and Guido. Thus this February Calendar is inspired by the custom of Feliz Día de Amistad y Amor—we will be focusing on friendship for the month of February!

Keys to Unlocking the Door to Intimacy of Friendship

Key 1: Communication - One of the first precepts of friendship is recognizing the imperfections within ourselves and tenderly embracing these parts of ourselves so that we can have the courage to reach out and touch another in a meaningful way.

"We are not as near each other as we would like to imagine. Words create bridges between us. Without them we would be lost islands. Affection, recognition and understanding travel across these fragile bridges and enable us to discover each other and awaken friendship and intimacy. Words are never just words. The range and depth of a person's soul is inevitably revealed in the quality of the words used. When chosen with reverence and care, words not only describe what they say but also suggest what can never be said." - John O'Donohue

Thoughts to ponder: How carefully do I choose my words in a conversation? How can I trust my words to reflect the care in my heart? How can I embrace and accept my imperfection of communication? Can I have the courage to risk again?

Key 2: Conversation and Connection - Sometimes when teaching a workshop in February I will use the little candy conversation hearts with words printed on them in an exercise: Out of the random hearts selected, we try to form a coherent sentence. The experience often gives way to hilarious laughter.

But the point of the exercise is much deeper: What is a meaningful conversation, and how can I help create one? How can I be curious about you and get to know you by asking questions? We are often hesitant to ask others questions, but the reality is that most of us like to be known and heard. Caring friends converse in a caring way.

"A connection is the energy that exists between two people when we feel seen, heard, and valued; when we can give and receive without judgment and when we derive sustenance and strength from the relationship." - Dr. Brené Brown

Thoughts to ponder: What was a significant conversation that I had with someone this week? What makes that conversation notable? What makes it different from the casual conversations I've had recently?

Key 3: Listening - Deep listening is such a gift we can give someone. The times when we can listen intently without distractions and without being preoccupied with what our response will be are deeply meaningful gifts that last far beyond the time of the conversation. To fully listen and ask deeper questions opens up space in the heart for growth, empathy and understanding. It prepares the way for deeper, richer friendships and intimacy.

"Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable." - David Augsburger

Thought to ponder: Recall a time you felt truly listened to. How did that experience make you feel?

Key 4: Shared Experiences - Spending time doing things together is such an essential component of healthy relationships. At times, distance may separate us from participating in the activities we enjoy together, but there are creative ways to create new experiences long-distance. Maybe it's as simple as coordinating a Zoom or FaceTime chat. The little things, the everyday conversations, the meals shared, the trips together, the games played together, even the plans that fall apart...these are all moments of connecting and creating memories together. In these moments of sharing experiences, we can share our uniqueness with others AND deeply understand how they are.

Keys to Unlocking the Door to Intimacy of Friendship

You Are Special (Feel free to sing/hum along)

You are my friend,
You are special.

You are my friend,
You're special to me.

You are the only one like you.
Like you, my friend, I like you.

In the daytime

In the nighttime

Anytime that you feel's the right time

For a friendship with me, you see

F – R – I – E – N – D

Special.

You are my friend,
You're special to me.

There's only one
In this wonderful world.

You

are

special.

- Fred Rogers

Thought to ponder: What is a dream of a shared experience with a particular friend? What can I do to make that dream become a reality?

Key 5: Pain - Experiencing pain together can be a profoundly bonding experience. Even something as simple as camping or traveling together can produce some uncomfortable moments than can serve as bonding experiences. More serious pain, the tragedies and the griefs we all encounter, can spark friendships and cement permanent bonds when we share that pain together. Often it's in our deepest pain and grief that we recognize and appreciate the beauty of friendship.

"The wound is the place where the Light enters you." – Rumi

Thought to ponder: Who is in pain, this very day, that I could reach out to and share their pain?

Key 6: Time - Friendships take time. Maybe it is the beginning of a friendship and we are spending time together in learning about one another and developing memories. Maybe if we've been friends for years, there is the effort, energy and time required to continue to connect and participate in one another's lives in a meaningful way. Time is one of the most precious commodities that we have, so to be intentional and cherish the time with friends is a practice that is enriching to the landscape of our lives.

"Make new friends, keep the old
One is silver, the other is gold."

Thought to ponder: Who is a silver friend for you? Who is a gold friend? When is the last time you've shared a meaningful connection with your silver and gold friends?

Key 7: Courage - Why is it that reaching out for a bid for connection with others can take so much courage? Prior to the pandemic, I attended a conference where I knew only a few people. It takes courage to reach out to complete strangers. One of the greatest gifts of the workshop was the connections that came from the intentional and courageous "reaching out" to others over the week. Even in everyday life with familiar people, have we reached out to a co-worker, a neighbor, a family member, a friend? We can simultaneously hold our hesitations and our intentions to reach out. We can walk forward in courage with open hands and open hearts.

"Our greatest glory is not in never failing – but in rising up every time we fall." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Thought to ponder: If I could be "gifted" an extra dose of courage, what would it look like in my friendships?

Key 8: Self-Compassion - What does it look like if we can speak to ourselves as we speak to our friends? What would it feel like if we were able to calm ourselves by repeating a mantra? A phrase or blessing I often tell myself is, "May I be deeply and radiantly beautiful." The idea of radiating love and beauty both to myself and to others is a calming, empowering, and self-compassionate statement. Actively loving myself as I would love others is a practice worth developing.

"We cannot change the world by a new plan, project or idea. We cannot even change other people by our convictions, stories, advice and proposals, but we can offer a space where people are encouraged to disarm themselves, lay aside their occupations and preoccupations and listen with attention and care to the voices speaking in their own center." - Henri Nouwen

Thought to ponder: What act of self-compassion could strengthen me this week?

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Key 9: Laugh Together - Laughing together is one of the greatest privileges of relationships. To look at life through a lens of play, joy and a spirit of laughter is a healthy perspective—and just plain fun. I love the quote that says, “A joy shared is a joy doubled. A sorrow shared is a sorrow cut in half.” Isn’t it beautiful that as we laugh, there is a contagious spirit of fun and lightheartedness, a spirit that invariably draws people together?

"To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived—that is to have succeeded." -Ralph Waldo Emerson

Thought to ponder: If I were to choose to share joy and laughter with a friend this week, who would it be?

Key 10: Acceptance - One year I made it my intention to stop judging others. Admittedly, it was more than a yearlong process—actually, I think it’s more of a lifelong project. But the beauty that comes forth as we release judgment and reach out to accept others, just as they are, is a gorgeous kaleidoscope of love that opens up our awareness and brings compassion into the world. What a gift—I accept you just as you are. Will you please accept me, just as I am?

"Acceptance doesn't mean resignation; it means understanding that something is what it is and that there's got to be a way through it."
– Michael J Fox

Thought to ponder: What might change if you accepted how you are in a particular situation? If you were able to accept how your friend was in a particular situation? If you really were okay with it?

Key 11: Intention - One of the key ways I discern how my values are matching up with my actions is to take a close look at my intentions. Why am I taking homemade cookies to the new neighbors? What’s my true intention? Do I want them to think I’m nice? Do I want them eventually to feed our dog or shovel our snow when we are out of town? Do I do it because my Mother always took cookies to the new neighbors? When we can reflect and discern the true intention of what we are doing, we are learning a new layer of our heart and cultivating honesty and courage in the process. Strong, lasting friendships need intention—a strong plan—to help nourish the relationship.

"Intention is not just about will but about our overall everyday vision, what we long for, what we believe is possible for us. If we want to know the spirit of our activities, the emotional tone of our efforts, we have to look at our intentions." - Sharon Salzberg

Thought to ponder: How can I be intentional in strengthening, fertilizing, and cultivating deeper friendships in my life?

Key 12: Honesty - Honesty is one of the most important qualities in a relationship. We must send each other accurate messages and receive accurate responses. “Getting to know one another” includes both good and bad feelings, frustrations, fears, problems—anything that is on our minds and hearts. By telling the truth in a friendship, we are building emotional stability—a foundation for a quality friendship.

"When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares." — Henri J.M. Nouwen

Thought to ponder: In what areas is it difficult for you to be totally honest in your relationships?

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Key 13: Empathy - In teaching workshops, I often teach Theresa Wiseman's four defining attributes of empathy: 1) to be able to see the world as others see it 2) to be nonjudgmental 3) to understand another person's feelings and 4) to communicate your understanding of that person's feelings. Empathy is an incredibly powerful aspect of any relationship. It allows us to perceive another's wound and to reach out and touch the place in someone's heart that needs tender attention.

"Not so much to be loved as to love, not so much to be consoled as to console, not so much to be understood as to understand." - St. Francis Prayer

Thought to ponder: How can I "see" and understand others in a fresh and deepening way?

Key 14: Presence—Being There—Being Together For One Another - There is no greater gift than being fully present with one another. We are often tempted to multi-task—make a phone call, jot down a quick list, concern ourselves with our response to their conversation. Being intentional about being present in the moment is a practice that takes consistent effort. Our minds quickly wander even amidst conversations with others. The value of the gift of presence is priceless.

Thought to ponder: How can I be present in a new way with a friend? What do I need to set aside so that I can focus on this friendship at this very moment?

Making Contact
I believe
The greatest gift
I can conceive of having
from anyone
is
to be seen by them,
heard by them,
to be understood
and
touched by them.
The greatest gift
I can give
is
to see, hear, understand
and to touch
another person.
When this is done
I feel
contact has been made.
- Virginia Satir

"Key 15: Accompaniment

The human soul doesn't want to be advised or fixed or saved. It simply wants to be witnessed – to be seen, heard and companioned exactly as it is. When we make that kind of deep bow to the soul of a suffering person, our respect reinforces the soul's healing resources, the only resources that can help the sufferer make it through." – Parker Palmer

Thoughts to ponder: How can I honor the soul of a friend? What would that look like for me to make a deep bow to the soul of a friend?

Key 16: Vulnerability

"Take the time to see people.
I mean really see them.
See the parts of them they
try to hide and disown.
The more you see in another,
the more you're able
to love them deeply.
The more you reveal about yourself,
the more others can deeply love you."
- Vienna Pharaon

Thoughts to ponder: How can my taking time to deeply see another honor their heart? Who is a safe friend to hear my story? Am I safe friend for another to share their story with me?

Key 17: Play

"Play is the highest form of research."
- Albert Einstein

Thoughts to ponder: How does it feel to play? Do I feel vulnerable in play? What does play look like for me in my friendships?

Key 18: Non-Judgment

"When we judge people, we have no time to love them." - Mother Teresa

Thought to ponder: How can I begin to practice non-judgment? What would a daily practice of non-judgment of other people look like for me?

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Key 19: Circling Back - "May I circle back with you about something?" I was first introduced to the concept on "circling back" during the training phases of becoming a Certified Daring Way™ Facilitator (the work of Brené Brown). What a wonderful way to re-open a conversation to clarify what didn't seem to settle in my heart after leaving the conversation. So many times for me, the need to clarify can come from my own insecurities and vulnerabilities. Thank you to Brené for giving us wording that is so kind and caring. What I have found is that when I can have the courage to circle back with someone in a conversation, they are honored that I care enough to inquire.

"Circle back means "I moved forward too quickly and I'd like to revisit that conversation," or "I'd like to talk more about what happened," or "I need to make amends for something I did or said or for not showing up." - Brené Brown

Thoughts to ponder: Who do I need to circle back with? Do I have the courage to circle back? How could my circling back with someone truly honor our friendship?

Key 20: Seeing

"The human face is the subtle yet visual autobiography of each person.... The face always reveals the soul; it is where the divinity of the inner life finds an echo and image. When you behold someone's face, you are gazing deeply into his or her life." – John O'Donohue

Thoughts to ponder: Do I take time to see my friends? Do I take time to behold?

Key 21: Kindness

"The majority of us lead quiet, unheralded lives as we pass through this world. There will most likely be no ticker-tape parades for us, no monuments created in our honor. But that does not lessen our possible impact, for there are scores of people waiting for someone just like us to come along; people who will appreciate our compassion, our unique talents. Someone who will live a happier life merely because we took the time to share what we had to give. Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have a potential to turn a life around. It's overwhelming to consider the continuous opportunities there are to make our love felt." - Leo Buscaglia

Thoughts to ponder: What is one small practice of kindness and compassion that I can offer today? When have I felt an act of kindness from another?

Key 22: L-O-V-E

"Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope." — Maya Angelou

Thoughts to ponder: How can I express my love and care for a friend today? What could our words mean to them?

Key 23: Freedom

"A loving relationship is one in which the loved one is free to be himself — to laugh with me, but never at me; to cry with me, but never because of me; to love life, to love himself, to love being loved. Such a relationship is based upon freedom and can never grow in a jealous heart." - Leo Buscaglia

Thoughts to ponder: Can I be free to be "just me" in my friendships? Which friendships do I feel most alive, most "me" in? How can I cultivate those friendships more?

Key 24: Openness

"We hunger to be known and understood. We hunger to be loved. We hunger to be at peace inside our own skins. We hunger not just to be fed these things but, often without realizing it, we hunger to feed others these things because they too are starving for them. We hunger not just to be loved but to love, not just to be forgiven but to forgive, not just to be known for all the good times and the bad times that are for better or worse have made us who we are, but to know and understand each other to the same point of seeing that, in the last analysis, we all have the same good times, the same bad times, and for that very reason there is no such thing in all the world as anyone who is really a stranger." - Frederick Buechner

Thoughts to ponder: How can I stretch myself in friendships? How can I reach out to another? What do I desire in having others reach out to me?

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Key 25: Encouragement

"One of the most beautiful gifts in the world is the gift of encouragement. When someone encourages you, that person helps you over a threshold you might otherwise never have crossed on your own. There are times of great uncertainty in every life. Left alone at such a time, you feel dishevelment and confusion like gravity. When a friend comes with words of encouragement, a light and lightness visit you and you begin to find the stairs and the door out of the dark. The sense of encouragement you feel from the friend is not simply her words or gestures; it is rather her whole presence enfolding you and helping you find the concealed door. The encouraging presence manages to understand you and put herself in your shoes. There is no judgment but words of relief and release." - John O'Donohue

Thoughts to ponder: Who might need my encouragement today? Can I create time to strengthen the bond of friendship? How can I offer hope to a friend today?

Key 26: Kindness

"Let no one come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the expression of God's kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile." - Mother Teresa

Thoughts to ponder: What would kindness to a friend look like today?

Key 27: Authenticity

"Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go of who we think we're supposed to be and embracing who we are. Choosing authenticity means cultivating the courage to be imperfect, to set boundaries, and to allow ourselves to be vulnerable; exercising the compassion that comes from knowing that we are all made of strength and struggle, and nurturing the connection and sense of belonging that can only happen when we believe that we are enough." – Brené Brown

Thoughts to ponder: In what way could I invite the practice of authenticity into my friendships today?

Key 28: Knowing Ourselves

"Experience tells us that we can only love because we are born out of love, that we can only give because our life is a gift, and that we can only make others free because we are set free by the One whose heart is greater than ours. When we have found the anchor places for our lives in our own center, we can be free to let others enter into the space created for them and allow them to dance their own dance, sing their own song and speak their own language without fear." - Henri J.M. Nouwen

Thoughts to ponder: Can I listen to the language of others? Can I broaden my perspective to love others more openly? How can I give the gift of friendship to another today?

My Friend

To you, my friend, I owe much gratitude
for your investment in me

To you, my friend, I wish well-being and
optimism for hopeful times.

To you, my friend, let there be warmth,
comfort, and perseverance through those cold,
dark times.

Thank you, my friend, for the times we've
had together, for hearing me and believing in
me.

Thank you, my friend, for understanding those
times
I seemed distant or too busy.

Thank you, my friend, for looking for my good
side,
and for your endurance when I've been out of
sort.

May you sense the pride I feel for
the honor of our bond.

May our times ahead, whether plenty or few,
reflect our mutual admiration, and

May we keep extending arms of
wide spaces for others.

Here's to you, now and evermore,
my friend.

- Roger Jones