

Learning from Twinship

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Michael is so important to me. I really love him dearly. But about two weeks ago he *wronged* me. What he did was *unforgiveable*.

It was January 18th, my birthday.

I scrolled through our message log, many times over. There was a bunch of small talk, a few jokes and funny pictures, but no “Happy birthday!”

I guess I can't throw all the blame on him.

After all, I didn't wish him a happy birthday, either. You see -- Michael is my twin brother.

My twin is also my best friend. From birth, I've always had someone by my side to walk to school with, to collaborate with on homework, and to crack ridiculous inside jokes that are funny to no one else.

It's a sweet deal to have a twin, but we always get one particularly awkward and difficult question:

“What is it like to be a twin?”

Well, it's hard to explain. I have never been anything else.

But maybe the real and more interesting question is, "What if everyone had a twin? What if we we're all twins?"

After all, on a universal scale, we might as well be. We all breathe, feel, and live. Genetically, although every human is unique, we all share the same 99.9% of human DNA. Twins have only slightly more shared DNA, but that is beside the point. If we treated everyone we know like a twin, I truly believe that we could all live more genuine, love-filled lives.

Let me explain.

Twinship - let me call it that -- raises the bar for many important things in our lives -- of friendship, of fraternity, and of love. To have a twin is to love and be loved unconditionally. That is the greatest blessing of all, and it provides a high standard for how to treat everyone in our lives.

Twinship can be fun. Playing games with friends and family will always be entertaining.

But I think that one of the *really* rewarding parts of twinship is the level of equality in our relationship. The lack of a hierarchy in our relationship has made us both more caring, empathetic people. Being stuck with a twin forces each of us to

step into the other's shoes whenever we have a conflict -- though to be perfectly honest, it helps that I've never really been able to beat my twin up.

But twinship also comes with downsides. Growing up, we were always recognized as a pair, a package deal. A common greeting growing up, even from strangers, was "Hey twins!"

My brother says that he doesn't like the stares we get, but I think he secretly likes the attention. It was great to always have a friend by my side, but this was sometimes eclipsed by the confusion engendered by twinship.

It can be hard to figure out who one is as an individual. It's very easy to feel interchangeable when people -- even your parents - mix up who you are. I remember walking down the hallway in the tenth grade and hearing "Hey twin!" to which I snapped, "I'm a person!"

Teenage angst aside, twinship comes with a form of extreme, maybe obsessive companionship. My brother and I don't wear matching outfits or anything like that, but for the first 16 years of our lives, I saw my brother every day. Twins get to know each other *pretty* damn well.

During infancy, when English proved too difficult, we still made it work. Our parents tell us that instead of “banana” we would say “nanana” and “cacaca” was our interpretation of the word “yogurt.” Studies show that twins frequently develop their own private languages.

We’ve since outgrown our private tongue, but we still feel an unparalleled level of connectedness. When my brother and I are in our cramped kitchen, it’s a war zone: four steaming pots on the stove, a sink full of dishes, cabinets flung *wide* open. Our parents know to STAY OUT. Like worker bees, we weave above and around each other as we navigate through our tunnel of a kitchen, communicating without having to speak.
Excellent!

We’ve now parted ways. He’s a senior at Columbia, but he remains a consistent anchor and sounding board in my life.

So let me recommend that you all that consider adopting some of the best things about twinship in your day-to-day lives with other people.

... Like knowing that your twin will always get in touch on your birthday. NOT!