

Sometimes I consider my heart as a village, with houses set in cozy neighborhoods in increasing density the closer they are to the center. The largest homes were for my closest friends. These were mansions, really, with all of the amenities of good living.

There weren't that many houses. I was not one to be a "collector", or to see how many friends I could have. I did not try to make close friends of everyone. But the friends I did have were very special to me. Thus, they had the lowest tax rates and other perks to encourage long-term residency. There were some pretty spectacular places, too, for my closest friends. My wife, of course, has the central palace (next to the place of worship)! And there were many scattered family close by.

Thinking about friends and acquaintances that I have had in the past, I now (after all these years) feel that I have had the impact of a small pebble cast into a large lake. The tiny ripples did not last long. Reunions are much less interesting because I am not on anyone's list of people that they just have to see again – everyone has lived their own different life for so long that I have become a tiny speck in their vision (as though we are looking through a telescope from the wrong end). The people from my past that I am still close to are generally my friends in the present as well.

If you were to look at the village as though on a tour, you would notice that some of the houses were damaged, and some completely destroyed. A few of these I had unfortunately destroyed my own self, by hurting people (usually without meaning to) that could have been my friends and had established permanent residences in my heart.

But at the edge of the village were many small houses that were in really bad repair, with no one living there. These were the result of an Adversary that had been working for some years to tear down my reputation, and it had obviously affected acquaintances that chose to believe the worst of me. My true friends, of course, would have at least listened to my side of life's story. But I choose not to worry about those on the periphery – not much I could do about them anyway. Those particular connections were just very weak and too far away from the heart of the village.

I found that my village was rich enough even with those losses. The interior, paved with gold relationships as it was, was good enough for me.