



ADMIRABLE FRIENDSHIP

(Kalyāṇa-mittatā)

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An Anthology of Buddhist Texts, Dharma Talks,
Book Excerpts, and Quotations

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As he was sitting there, Ven. Ananda said to the Blessed One,
“This is half of the holy life, lord: admirable friendship,
admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie.”

“Don't say that, Ananda. Don't say that. Admirable friendship,
admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie
is actually the whole of the holy life.” (SN 45.2)

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Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Definitions and Texts	9
Spiritual Friendship, by Ajahn Amaro	19
Association with the Wise, by Bhikkhu Bodhi	29
Spiritual Friendship, by Bhikkhu Bodhi	34
Good Company, by Subhuti	42
Admirable Friendship, by Thanissaro Bhikkhu	53
The Power of Judgment, by Thanissaro Bhikkhu	59
Ven. Sariputta: A Good Friend, by Nyanaponika	70
Kalyanamitta, by Jake Davis	78
The Good Friend, by Sarah Shaw	81
Sacred Friendship, by Steven Smith	84

DEFINITIONS AND TEXTS

Kalyāṇa-mittatā

Kalyāṇa-mittatā (Pali; Skt.: **-mitratā**) is a Buddhist concept of "spiritual friendship" within Buddhist community life, applicable to both monastic and householder relationships. One involved in such a relationship is known as a "good friend," "virtuous friend," "noble friend" or "admirable friend" (*kalyāṇa-mitta*, *-mitra*).

Since early Buddhist history, these relationships have involved spiritual teacher-student dyads as well as communal peer groups. In general, such is a supportive relationship based on shared Buddhist ethical values and the pursuit of enlightenment.

(from Wikipedia)

“Therein, what is *kalyāṇa-mittatā*? To follow after, to frequent the company of, and associate with, such persons as have *saddhā*, virtuous, learned, generous and wise; to resort to and consort with them, to be devoted to them, enthusiastic about them, mixed up with them.”

(from the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*)

ADMIRABLE FRIENDSHIP: *kalyanamittata*

The definition

"And what is meant by admirable friendship? There is the case where a lay person, in whatever town or village he may dwell, spends time with householders or householders' sons, young or old, who are advanced in virtue. He talks with them, engages them in discussions. He emulates consummate conviction [in the principle of kamma] in those who are consummate in conviction, consummate virtue in those who are consummate in virtue, consummate generosity in those who are consummate in generosity, and consummate discernment in those who are consummate in discernment. This is called admirable friendship."

— AN 8.54

A cause for the development of skillful qualities

"With regard to external factors, I don't envision any other single factor like friendship with admirable people as doing so much for a monk in training, who has not attained the heart's goal but remains intent on the unsurpassed safety from bondage. A monk who is a friend with admirable people abandons what is unskillful and develops what is skillful."

— Iti 17

Choose your companions with care

"These are the four drains on one's store of wealth: being debauched in sex; being debauched in drink; being debauched in gambling; and having evil people as friends, associates, and companions. Just as if there were a great reservoir with four inlets and four drains, and a man were to close the inlets and open the drains, and the sky were not to pour down proper showers, the

depletion of that great reservoir could be expected, not its increase. In the same way, these are the four drains on one's store of wealth: being debauched in sex, being debauched in drink, being debauched in gambling, and having evil people as friends, associates, and companions."

— AN 8.54

A prerequisite for Awakening

"If wanderers who are members of other sects should ask you, 'What, friend, are the prerequisites for the development of the wings to self-awakening?' you should answer, 'There is the case where a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues. This is the first prerequisite for the development of the wings to self-awakening.'"

— AN 9.1

The whole of the holy life

As he was sitting there, Ven. Ananda said to the Blessed One, "This is half of the holy life, lord: admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie."

"Don't say that, Ananda. Don't say that. Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life. When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues, he can be expected to develop & pursue the noble eightfold path.

"And how does a monk who has admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues, develop & pursue the noble eightfold path? There is the case where a monk develops right view dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in relinquishment. He develops right resolve...right speech...right action...right livelihood...right ef-

fort...right mindfulness...right concentration dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in relinquishment. This is how a monk who has admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues, develops & pursues the noble eightfold path.

"And through this line of reasoning one may know how admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life: It is in dependence on me as an admirable friend that beings subject to birth have gained release from birth, that beings subject to aging have gained release from aging, that beings subject to death have gained release from death, that beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair have gained release from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair. It is through this line of reasoning that one may know how having admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life."

— SN 45.2

The benefits of admirable friendship

"Meghiya, when a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, and colleagues, it is to be expected that he will be virtuous, will dwell restrained in accordance with the Patimokkha, consummate in his behavior and sphere of activity, and will train himself, having undertaken the training rules, seeing danger in the slightest faults.

"When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, and colleagues, it is to be expected that he will get to hear at will, easily and without difficulty, talk that is truly sobering and conducive to the opening of awareness, i.e., talk on modesty, on contentment, on seclusion, on non-entanglement, on arousing

persistence, on virtue, on concentration, on discernment, on release, and on the knowledge and vision of release.

"When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, and colleagues, it is to be expected that he will keep his persistence aroused for abandoning unskillful qualities, and for taking on skillful qualities — steadfast, solid in his effort, not shirking his duties with regard to skillful qualities.

"When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, and colleagues, it is to be expected that he will be discerning, endowed with discernment of arising and passing away — noble, penetrating, leading to the right ending of stress."

— Ud 4.1

Qualities of a Dhamma teacher

"It's not easy to teach the Dhamma to others, Ananda. The Dhamma should be taught to others only when five qualities are established within the person teaching. Which five?

"[1] The Dhamma should be taught with the thought, 'I will speak step-by-step.'

"[2] The Dhamma should be taught with the thought, 'I will speak explaining the sequence [of cause & effect].'

"[3] The Dhamma should be taught with the thought, 'I will speak out of compassion.'

"[4] The Dhamma should be taught with the thought, 'I will speak not for the purpose of material reward.'

"[5] The Dhamma should be taught with the thought, 'I will speak without disparaging myself or others.'

"It's not easy to teach the Dhamma to others, Ananda. The Dhamma should be taught to others only when these five qualities are established within the person teaching."

— AN 5.159

Keeping company with the wise

It's good to see Noble Ones.
Happy their company — always.
Through not seeing fools
constantly, constantly
 one would be happy.

For, living with a fool,
one grieves a long time.
Painful is communion with fools,
as with an enemy —
 always.

Happy is communion
with the enlightened,
as with a gathering of kin.

So:
the enlightened man —
discerning, learned,
enduring, dutiful, noble,
intelligent, a man of integrity:
 follow him
 — one of this sort —
 as the moon, the path
 of the zodiac stars.

— Dhp 206

Never with an evil companion

I'm blind,
my eyes are destroyed.
I've stumbled
on a wilderness track.

Even
if I must crawl,
I'll go on,
but not with an evil companion.

— Thag 95

(from Access to Insight web site; accessed 1/27/2012;
www.accesstoinsight.org)

"When mind-deliverance is as yet immature, Meghiya, five things lead to its maturity. What five?

"Here, Meghiya, a bhikkhu has good friends, good associates, good companions. When mind-deliverance is as yet immature, Meghiya, this is the first thing that leads to its maturity.

"Furthermore, Meghiya, a bhikkhu is virtuous, he lives restrained by the restraint of the Patimokkha, endowed with conduct and resort; seeing danger in the smallest faults, he trains in the training rules he has accepted. When mind-deliverance is as yet immature, Meghiya, this is the second thing that leads to its maturity.

"Furthermore, Meghiya, a bhikkhu obtains at will, with no trouble or difficulty, talk that is effacing, a help in opening up the mind, and which conduces to complete turning away, dispassion, cessation, peace, direct knowledge, enlightenment, and Nibbana -- that is, talk about fewness of wishes, talk about con-

tentment, talk about seclusion, talk about being non-gregarious, talk about putting forth energy, talk about virtue, talk about concentration, talk about wisdom, talk about deliverance, talk about the knowledge and vision of deliverance. When mind-deliverance is as yet immature, Meghiya, this is the third thing that leads to its maturity.

"Furthermore, Meghiya, a bhikkhu lives with energy instigated for the abandoning of unwholesome states and the acquiring of wholesome states; he is vigorous, energetic, and persevering with regard to wholesome states. When mind-deliverance is as yet immature, Meghiya, this is the fourth thing that leads to its maturity.

"Furthermore, Meghiya, a bhikkhu is wise, endowed with the noble ones' penetrative understanding of rise and disappearance leading to the complete ending of suffering. When mind-deliverance is as yet immature, Meghiya, this is the fifth thing that leads to its maturity. When mind-deliverance is as yet immature, Meghiya, these five things lead to its maturity.

"It is to be expected of a bhikkhu who has good friends, good associates, good companions, that he will be virtuous, that he will live restrained by the restraint of the Patimokkha, endowed with conduct and resort, and that seeing danger in the smallest faults, he will train in the training rules he has accepted. It is to be expected of a bhikkhu who has good friends... that he will obtain at will, with no trouble or difficulty, talk that is effacing, a help in opening up the mind... talk about the knowledge and vision of deliverance. It is to be expected of a bhikkhu who has good friends... that he will live with energy instigated... vigorous, energetic, and persevering with regard to wholesome states. It is to be expected of a bhikkhu who has good friends... that he will be wise, endowed with the noble ones' penetrative understanding

of rise and disappearance leading to the complete ending of suffering.

(Meghiya Sutta; Ud 4.1;
<http://www.accesstoinight.org/canon/sutta/khuddaka/udana/ud4-01a.html>)

The *anam cara* experience opens a friendship that is not wounded or limited by separation or distance. Such friendship can remain alive even when the friends live far away from each other. Because they have broken through the barriers of persona and egoism to the soul level, the unity of their souls is not easily severed. When the soul is awakened, physical space is transfigured. Even across the distance two friends can stay attuned to each other and continue to sense the flow of each other's lives. With your *anam cara* you awaken to the eternal.

[from *Anam Cara*, by John O'Donahue]

SHANTIDEVA'S BODHICARYĀVATĀRA

But those who fill with bliss

All beings destitute of joy,

Who cut all pain and suffering away

From those weighed down with misery,

Who drive away the darkness of their ignorance—

What virtues could be matched with theirs?

What friend could be compared to them?

What merit is there similar to this?

...

Directly, then, or indirectly,

All you do must be for others' sake.

And solely for their welfare dedicate

Your actions for the gaining of enlightenment.

Never at the cost of life or limb,

Forsake your virtuous friend, your teacher,

Learned in the meaning of the Mahayana,

Supreme in the practice of the bodhisattva path.

—from *No Time to Lose: A Timely Guide to the Way of the Bodhisattva*, by Pema Chödrön

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

Ajahn Amaro

[A Sunday afternoon talk given by Ajahn Amaro at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery; 19th September, 1993]

In some of the Theravada countries the tradition of forest monasticism still flourishes. This style of practice, going off and living in the countryside, finding solitude and meditating alone in the wilds, is very often praised. Our teacher, Ajahn Chah, practiced in this way for many years. But in the latter part of his life, after spending a long time travelling, meditating and living alone, he integrated practice and teaching into the creation of a spiritual community.

He had found that he could develop profound concentration and insight, and experienced some interesting mind states when he went off into the hills alone, but then when he would come back and stay with the other monks, he could only cope for a little while. He would begin to lose his temper and get upset, angry and annoyed about how incompetent and useless everybody else was. After a few years of this, he realised that he had some lessons to learn: 'Well, it is easy for me to go and be alone and be the fierce ascetic off in the forest. What is difficult is to be with other people, to learn how to spend time with others.' So he began to put himself in that position more and more, and eventually he developed his monasteries in that style.

Often his monasteries were criticized because the monks and nuns seemed to have so little time to meditate. They were always working, and people seemed to have to spend so much time together: chanting together, meditating together. Many

complained that this was an obstruction. He listened and understood the criticism but was never intimidated by it. He saw that there were profound lessons and great richness in learning to live together with other people.

In fact, it is the spiritual community or spiritual friendship that really holds the spiritual life together. It is interesting that of all the meditation masters in Thailand (not that one is keeping score), Ajahn Chah managed to establish far more monasteries than any other meditation teacher - all in all about 130-140. So it really works for ordinary human beings. We realise that to develop in the spiritual life, we need the support of companions; without that, we tend to drift or sink.

There is a very often-quoted saying in the scriptures on spiritual friendship. One day Ananda, his closest disciple, came up to the Buddha and said: 'Lord, I think that half of the of the Holy Life is spiritual friendship, association with the Lovely.' And the Buddha replied: 'That's not so; say not so, Ananda. It is not half of the Holy Life, it is the whole of the Holy Life.

The entire Holy Life is friendship, association with the Lovely.' Now, the Pali word for 'friendship with the Lovely' is kalyanamitta. 'Kalyana' means 'lovely' or beautiful and 'mitta' means 'friend'. So it is often translated as association or affiliation with the Lovely (with a capital L), being an epithet for Ultimate Reality or the Unconditioned.

It is interesting that for years I always used to quote it as: 'Spiritual friendship is the whole of the Holy Life', but the Buddha was making a play on words - he was also saying that it is not just having spiritual friends that is the whole of the Holy Life, but our affiliation, our intimacy with the Lovely, with the Ultimate Truth. These two support each other. Our like-minded companions and associates in spiritual life support our effort,

but it is actually our ability to awaken to that which is truly Lovely, to the Wonderful, to Ultimate Reality - that is, in its own way, the very fire of our spiritual life.

When we say 'spiritual friendship', do we just mean the kind of people we meet in Buddhist monasteries? Does the spiritual friend have to have a shaven head? Or could it also be our husband, our wife, our life's companion? There are many different kinds of relationship or friendship that we can have. So we might wonder which ones are spiritual and which ones are not. Can a romantic friendship be spiritual? Or does spiritual friendship have to be platonic? Can it be a relationship of teacher to student, or of brother and sister? Rather than categorising it in these ways, or trying to figure out which styles of friendship are spiritual and which are not, it is much more important to look at the basis of that relationship and our approach towards it. Relationships, I would suggest, fall into two basic categories. In one kind of relationship we tend to relate to the other person with a sense of separateness, in the other we relate with a sense of wholeness.

The relationship of separateness hinges on a profound sense of 'me' and 'you', of 'self' and 'other', and that is something very concrete, solid. We always look to the other person to fulfil a need that we have, due to a feeling of something lacking in ourselves; and that other person seems to fill that space. So this kind of relationship or friendship has a quality of dependency in it. We need the other person to be around in order to support us, to make us feel good; or we may even need to have the other person around to be an enemy - a good protagonist that we can struggle with!

We may have a very intense, profound relationship when we're in love with someone and we experience very blissful times, a

sense of wholeness or completeness. But these times also entail feelings of desolation and loss, of loneliness and separation. Even a strong friendship, such as with a teacher or a helper with whom we meditate or share a profound understanding of each other's innermost world, may disappoint us in this way. As long as that relationship is based on a sense of 'me' and a sense of 'you', and that polarity is not recognised, there will always be pain and loss in it.

An incident is described in the scriptures when Visakha goes to the Lord Buddha one morning, having just come from the funeral for one of her grandchildren. Visakha was one of the Buddha's great disciples. She had ten sons and ten daughters, and each of those had ten sons and ten daughters. So she was surrounded by an ocean of grandchildren, and she adored them. The Lord Buddha saw that her hair and her clothes were all wet, and he asked her why.

'Lord, a dear and beloved grandchild of mine has died, that is why I have come here in broad day with my clothes and hair all wet.'

'Visakha, would you like to have as many children and grandchildren as there are people in the whole city of Savatthi?' (the local capital)

'Yes indeed, Lord.' She replied.

'But Visakha, how many people die each day in Savatthi?'

'Ten people die in a day in Savatthi, Lord, or nine or eight...or three or two or at least one. Savatthi is never without people dying.'

'Then what do you think, Visakha, if you had as many children and grandchildren as there are people in Savatthi, you would be attending funerals for your offspring

every day. Would you ever be with your clothes and hair not wet?'

'No Lord - enough of so many children and grandchildren for me!'

Then he said: 'Those who have a hundred dear ones have a hundred pains..' (Udana VIII 8)

The ones who are dear to us, that attachment that we have towards them, this is beautiful and lovely but it also brings us pain. It carries a sting with it, a shadow, and this is unavoidable. If we invest in the delight of such association then, when there is separation, we cannot avoid feeling loss. So, a spiritual friendship of this type will always have this slightly unbalanced quality to it.

Now, on the other side, what I like to call a relationship of wholeness, is where our association with another person is based not around the sense of self at all. Instead, it is based on an attitude of relinquishment, of unselfishness; of openness rather than neediness.

This can be consciously developed in various ways. One such way is through devotional practice towards an idealised figure, such as Buddha, God, Jesus, Krishna or whoever it might be; or some living person, such as a guru. That act of self-relinquishment, of giving oneself in devotion to a divine figure, works by the power of one's faith in the divinity of the person and their presence. This forms an important bond between oneself and the other. By giving oneself up completely to the Divine, whether it is internal or external, whether we create an object for it or we relate to a person who exhibits divine qualities, we can bring about a truly spiritual relationship. As the mind opens to that, we begin to internalise the qualities that they embody. We develop an inner joy and release from within our own being, without creating a state of unwholesome dependence.

Last weekend we had a conference of contemplatives here, with many Christian nuns and monks of different orders, as well as some Hindus and Sufis attending. It was interesting talking with them because, whereas Buddhists are quite unusual in practising a non-theistic religion, most other traditions have a very strong God-figure that occupies the focus of their attention. The whole manner of their prayers, liturgy and religious expression is created around devotion to God; giving yourself to God, praying to God, or giving up your heart to Jesus, Mary or Krishna.

If we relate in this way, letting go of 'self' and dropping the feeling of 'I' and 'me' and 'mine', the experience of being together is one of delight, of pleasantness, rather than neediness.

It was apparent that the more you practise in this way the more you see Krishna or God, not only on the outside, but also on the inside. You begin to find yourself through this process of self-relinquishment in a complete, pure identification with that divine figure. In Sufi mystical poetry they often refer to Ultimate Reality. Their traditional verses move back and forth between sounding like love-songs describing a passionate affair, and the relationship between the individual and the Divine. We can see in some of the Sufi poetry the whole process of spiritual practice ends up with the realisation that we ourselves are 'The Beloved'. There never was any real difference or separation between myself, as an apparent individual, and the Divine or God or Ultimate Reality.

The other way of developing this relationship of wholeness is through the path of meditation and wisdom. Using this ap-

proach, we become more aware of how we create the sense of 'self'. By letting go very directly of the sense of 'I' and 'me' and 'mine' in our daily activity, we engage in a process of self-relinquishment, without any external object, being or deity to empower or to strengthen us. Just by inquiry, contemplation and insight - using the power of the mind - we break through the sense of 'self', allowing the mind and the heart to be fully opened to the Truth.

A friendship or relationship that is developed in this way brings with it a freedom from dukkha - incompleteness and dissatisfaction. If we relate in this way, letting go of 'self' and dropping the feeling of 'I' and 'me' and 'mine', the experience of being together is one of delight, of pleasantness, rather than neediness. There is no sense of insecurity, alienation or loneliness in the relationship and so there is a tremendous freedom. We can enjoy each other's company and be supported by each other, but we are not requiring it. It is the same in a spiritual training, where we must be careful not to become dependent on the teacher; likewise, a true teacher will not need the admiration or attention of their students.

There is a whole culture nowadays of blaming our problems in life on our 'dysfunctional' family or on a dysfunctional relationship. We can find ourselves locked into a relationship where we can neither love the other person, nor can we leave them. We are, to use another current term, 'co-dependent'. The relationship is very destructive: we can't live with them, and we can't live without them.

If we try to establish a spiritual friendship without any real understanding of spiritual beauty, or Truth, then it will always end up being dysfunctional and co-dependent; but if we try to live with an awareness of or an intimacy with Truth, without any

spiritual companions or support, we very easily lose our way. Neither approach will bring good results. The two support each other and it is just this symbiosis that, ideally, the four-fold community of Buddhist disciples symbolises and embodies. Laymen, laywomen, nuns and monks, as spiritual community, can empower the opportunity for insight into Truth.

Even though many of us like to be alone, we can find it difficult to use such an opportunity fully. I often feel it is rather like Ajahn Chah's experience: he liked to be alone, he could enjoy himself being off in the forest without anyone to bother him, but it was the monastic form within a community lifestyle that he used to train his monks and nuns. In community life spiritual maturity, that quality of true independence, is put to the test. Regardless of what the world throws at us, there has to be the effort to sustain an equilibrium; we have to open ourselves up to the points of view and feelings of others, and yet sustain an inner integrity, so that we don't wobble, crumple or sink. I am always impressed by those who maintain their spiritual life and practice far away from other people. It takes tremendous strength to develop a real penetration of Truth, and there may only be a handful of people that can do it on their own without support.

Certainly, for myself, I deeply value coming across the Sangha. I started my vague attempts at spiritual practice as a teenager; by the time I was twenty-one I was in a profound mess. It was then that I visited a branch of this monastic community in Thailand. What really impressed me there was how powerful a presence that group of people had. Simply knowing on my own that it would be a good thing for me to meditate and practice yoga, or to stop drinking and smoking did not have the same impact in helping me to break my habits, and to resist the influence of so-

cial norms. I just did not have the clarity of mind to sustain a true and honest spiritual perspective. But suddenly, being in a place where people had given up all the things that I was trying to give up, and were doing all the things that I was trying to do, it felt rather like having been lost in the wilderness and then stepping onto a bus that was heading in the right direction. At last I did not have to struggle on my own.

From an idealistic position one could say: 'It's better to do it on your own; that's the way to be strong.' But for most of us it's very easy to be fooled, to follow our own desires and fears and to be dishonest with ourselves. Living amongst like-minded people provides a great mirror to see our own preferences, our own fears and shortcomings.

One of the great blessings of giving oneself to a spiritual community, or even to a standard of spiritual teachings, is the objective measure we receive for the conditioning of our own mind; it is like watching the habits of the mind being projected onto a screen, rather than just following them around and never really seeing them. We are given the chance to stand back from them and to see what we always run away from, what we are always being pulled towards, what we seek as a place of comfort and safety, what makes us feel good or bad. That kind of objectivity enables us to stop being impressed by our thoughts or moods; once we can see things as they are, we are able to witness the movements of the mind and we are then able to transcend them.

This year I learnt the word, 'schmoozing', 'to schmooze'; I think it is a Yiddish word. It means to hang out with your friends, and chat and drink tea, doing nothing very much, just having a good time together. To schmooze is a very admirable and useful activity, and I'm not being facetious here. It is amazing how often people who are interested in spiritual practice come to a centre

like this monastery, and listen to a talk or do a retreat and, as soon as it is over, everyone goes home. Sometimes you go to Buddhist groups for years, and you find that the people in the group hardly know each other. But part of developing our spiritual life is to spend time with each other, to generate a sense of respect and gratitude for each other's interests and commitment to spiritual values; not to just think: 'The talk is over, now it's time to go home.' or, 'The retreat is finished, now I'll go off, I've got this and that to do.'

Through getting to know those who delight in the Buddha's teaching we create a connection with them; we establish a support system. This is *kalyanamitta*, the network of spiritual friendship. This is what really enables us as a human society to hold together. Political agreements don't work, laws don't work; it is our ability to strengthen and affirm our qualities of inner beauty, of kindness and generosity, and to encourage those in others - that's what enables human beings to live in a wholesome and profitable way.

In spiritual friendship, we can actually be with each other. We open ourselves to the other person, ready to notice any grudges that we have, or the opinions and obsessions we have about them, as well as the attractions towards them. Then we can enter more into the place of listening, of forgiving, of letting go of the past and just being open to the present. And this is the most wonderful and beautiful gift we can give.

(from the *Forest Sangha Newsletter*, No. 41, July-September 1997)

ASSOCIATION WITH THE WISE

Bhikkhu Bodhi

The Maha-mangala Sutta, the Great Discourse on Blessings, is one of the most popular Buddhist suttas, included in all the standard repertoires of Pali devotional chants. The sutta begins when a deity of stunning beauty, having descended to earth in the stillness of the night, approaches the Blessed One in the Jeta Grove and asks about the way to the highest blessings. In the very first stanza of his reply the Buddha states that the highest blessing comes from avoiding fools and associating with the wise (*asevana ca balanam, panditanan ca sevana*). Since the rest of the sutta goes on to sketch all the different aspects of human felicity, both mundane and spiritual, the assignment of association with the wise to the opening stanza serves to emphasize a key point: that progress along the path of the Dhamma hinges on making the right choices in our friendships.

Contrary to certain psychological theories, the human mind is not a hermetically sealed chamber enclosing a personality unalterably shaped by biology and infantile experience. Rather, throughout life it remains a highly malleable entity continually remolding itself in response to its social interactions. Far from coming to our personal relationships with a fixed and immutable character, our regular and repeated social contacts implicate us in a constant process of psychological osmosis that offers precious opportunities for growth and transformation. Like living cells engaged in a chemical dialogue with their colleagues, our minds transmit and receive a steady barrage of messages and suggestions that may work profound changes even at levels below the threshold of awareness.

Particularly critical to our spiritual progress is our selection of friends and companions, who can have the most decisive impact upon our personal destiny. It is because he perceived how susceptible our minds can be to the influence of our companions that the Buddha repeatedly stressed the value of good friendship (kalyanamittata) in the spiritual life. The Buddha states that he sees no other thing that is so much responsible for the arising of unwholesome qualities in a person as bad friendship, nothing so helpful for the arising of wholesome qualities as good friendship (AN I.vii,10; I.viii,1). Again, he says that he sees no other external factor that leads to so much harm as bad friendship, and no other external factor that leads to so much benefit as good friendship (AN I.x,13,14). It is through the influence of a good friend that a disciple is led along the Noble Eightfold Path to release from all suffering (SN 45:2).



Good friendship, in Buddhism, means considerably more than associating with people that one finds amenable and who share one's interests. It means in effect seeking out wise companions to whom one can look for guidance and instruction. The task of the noble friend is not only to provide companionship in the treading of the way. The truly wise and compassionate friend is one who, with understanding and sympathy of heart, is ready to criticize and admonish, to point out one's faults, to exhort and encourage, perceiving that the final end of such friendship is growth in the Dhamma. The Buddha succinctly expresses the proper response of a disciple to such a good friend in a verse of the Dhammapada: "If one finds a person who points out one's

faults and who reproves one, one should follow such a wise and sagacious counselor as one would a guide to hidden treasure" (Dhp. 76).

Association with the wise becomes so crucial to spiritual development because the example and advice of a noble-minded counselor is often the decisive factor that awakens and nurtures the unfolding of our own untapped spiritual potential. The uncultivated mind harbors a vast diversity of unrealized possibilities, ranging from the depths of selfishness, egotism and aggressivity to the heights of wisdom, self-sacrifice and compassion. The task confronting us, as followers of the Dhamma, is to keep the unwholesome tendencies in check and to foster the growth of the wholesome tendencies, the qualities that lead to awakening, to freedom and purification. However, our internal tendencies do not mature and decline in a vacuum. They are subject to the constant impact of the broader environment, and among the most powerful of these influences is the company we keep, the people we look upon as teachers, advisors and friends. Such people silently speak to the hidden potentials of our own being, potentials that will either unfold or wither under their influence.

In our pursuit of the Dhamma it therefore becomes essential for us to choose as our guides and companions those who represent, at least in part, the noble qualities we seek to internalize by the practice of the Dhamma. This is especially necessary in the early stages of our spiritual development, when our virtuous aspirations are still fresh and tender, vulnerable to being undermined by inward irresolution or by discouragement from acquaintances who do not share our ideals. In this early phase our mind resembles a chameleon, which alters its color according to its background. Just as this remarkable lizard turns green when in the grass and brown when on the ground, so we become fools

when we associate with fools and sages when we associate with sages. Internal changes do not generally occur suddenly; but slowly, by increments so slight that we ourselves may not be aware of them, our characters undergo a metamorphosis that in the end may prove to be dramatically significant.

If we associate closely with those who are addicted to the pursuit of sense pleasures, power, riches and fame, we should not imagine that we will remain immune from those addictions: in time our own minds will gradually incline to these same ends. If we associate closely with those who, while not given up to moral recklessness, live their lives comfortably adjusted to mundane routines, we too will remain stuck in the ruts of the commonplace. If we aspire for the highest -- for the peaks of transcendent wisdom and liberation -- then we must enter into association with those who represent the highest. Even if we are not so fortunate as to find companions who have already scaled the heights, we can well count ourselves blessed if we cross paths with a few spiritual friends who share our ideals and who make earnest efforts to nurture the noble qualities of the Dhamma in their hearts.

When we raise the question how to recognize good friends, how to distinguish good advisors from bad advisors, the Buddha offers us crystal-clear advice. In the Shorter Discourse on a Full-Moon Night (MN 110) he explains the difference between the companionship of the bad person and the companionship of the good person. The bad person chooses as friends and companions those who are without faith, whose conduct is marked by an absence of shame and moral dread, who have no knowledge of spiritual teachings, who are lazy and unmindful, and who are devoid of wisdom. As a consequence of choosing such bad friends as his advisors, the bad person plans and acts for his own

harm, for the harm of others, and the harm of both, and he meets with sorrow and misery.

In contrast, the Buddha continues, the good person chooses as friends and companions those who have faith, who exhibit a sense of shame and moral dread, who are learned in the Dhamma, energetic in cultivation of the mind, mindful, and possessed of wisdom. Resorting to such good friends, looking to them as mentors and guides, the good person pursues these same qualities as his own ideals and absorbs them into his character. Thus, while drawing ever closer to deliverance himself, he becomes in turn a beacon light for others. Such a one is able to offer those who still wander in the dark an inspiring model to emulate, and a wise friend to turn to for guidance and advice.

(from the Buddhist Publication Society Newsletter, #26; 1st mailing, 1994)

*A bodhisattva's practice is to cherish more than our bodies
Our hallowed spiritual mentors, to whom,
By entrusting ourselves, our faults come to deplete
And our good qualities come to expand like the waxing moon.*

—from *Thirty-seven Bodhisattva Practices*, by Togmey-zangpo

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

Bhikkhu Bodhi

People new to Buddhism often take the Dharma to be a purely individual path of spiritual development. They imagine that the only correct way to follow the Dharma is to lock oneself up in one's room, turn off the lights, and devote all one's efforts to practicing meditation. However, if we look at the Buddhist texts, we would see that the Buddha again and again stressed the value of spiritual friendship as a support for the Buddhist path throughout the entire course of its practice. On one occasion the Venerable Ananda, the Buddha's attendant, came to the Buddha and said that in his view half the spiritual life revolves around spiritual friendship. The Buddha immediately corrected him and said, "Do not say this, Ananda! Do not say this, Ananda! Spiritual friendship is not half the spiritual life. It's the entire spiritual life!" Then, with reference to himself, the Buddha added, "In this whole world, I am the supreme spiritual friend of living beings, because it is in dependence upon me, by relying upon me, that those who are subject to birth, old age, and death become liberated from birth, old age, and death."

I want to make a distinction between two types of spiritual friendship, which might be called the "horizontal type" and the "vertical type." What I call horizontal spiritual friendship is friendship between people who are at roughly the same level in following the path; this is the friendship between "partners" in following the path, and what unites them as spiritual friends is a common dedication to following the Buddhist path.

People come together and unite as friends for various reasons. We usually take the gregarious side of human nature for granted, but to understand the nature and importance of friendship it's instructive to reflect on the factors that bring people together and unite them as friends. To do so, will give us a standard for evaluating our own friendships and seeing which are helpful and which harmful.

The Buddha says that it is because of an “element” that people come together and unite. What is meant by “element” here is the basic disposition or trait of character. Thus the Buddha says that those of inferior disposition come together and unite with those of inferior disposition, whereas those of superior disposition come together and unite.

So, if we cast our mental eye out upon the world, we can see that on a given Saturday night many people will go out to night clubs to enjoy themselves dancing; others will go to bars to enjoy drinking and chatting together; others might go to sports matches; others will get together and watch crude films. That is what unites them in friendship. So this is how people of inferior disposition come together and unite.

But others come together to listen to Dharma talks, participate in meditation retreats, and study the Dharma. In this case, what unites them is a shared dedication to the Dharma. So, the defining characteristic of spiritual friendship is dedication to a common teaching, in this case, the Buddha's teaching. This is dedication to a common teaching, dedication to the practice of the same path, dedication based on similar ideals and aspirations, unity based on engagement in similar practices. To unite with others in a common dedication to the spiritual path has a strengthening and uplifting effect upon our own practice. When we try to practice the path alone, we may feel as though we are

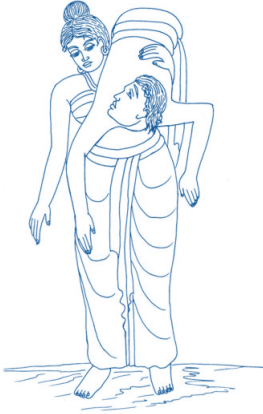
walking through a desert. It can be very lonesome, the landscape around us is rough and barren, and we have no refreshment, no inspiration from others to replenish our energies. But when we unite with others in spiritual friendship based upon common aspirations, this reinforces our own energies. When we walk a common path and engage in common practices, we gain encouragement, strength, and inspiration to continue in our practice. This is like crossing the desert in a caravan: others help us carry the supplies, we can pause for conversation, we have a sense of sharing the trials along the way, and we rejoice together as we approach our destination.

When we unite with others in spiritual friendship, this not only transforms our approach to the practice, but also has an impact upon the very nature of our friendships.

In our worldly life, our friendships are very closely connected with personal attachments, which in turn are rooted in our own egocentric needs. Even when we think we love the other person, often we really love that person because this relationship in some way satisfies a deep need within ourselves. When the other person fails to satisfy this deep need within us, our feelings quickly become embittered and our love turns into resentment or even enmity.

But when we enter into a spiritual friendship based upon dedication to a common goal, this friendship helps us to transform our attachments and ego-centered drives. Even more, it helps us to transcend the very idea of the ego-self as a substantive reality. Spiritual friendship, we discover, is not about satisfying my personal needs, or even about my satisfying the other person's personal needs. It's about each of us contributing as best we can to uplift each other, and to bring each other closer to the ideals of the Dharma.

In spiritual friendship we are concerned with the other person not because of the ways that person satisfies us, but because we want to see the other person grow and develop in the direction of greater wisdom, greater virtue, greater understanding. We want the other person's wholesome qualities to attain maturity



and bring forth fruits for the benefit of others. This is the essence of “horizontal” spiritual friendship: a keen interest in helping our friends grow and develop in the practice of the Dharma, in maturing their potential for goodness, for understanding, for wholesomeness.

The other aspect of spiritual friendship is what I call “vertical” friendship. This is the spiritual friendship between people who are at widely different levels on the path. We might also call this “asymmetrical” friendship, in that the relationship between the two members is not one of equality. This type of spiritual friendship is the bond between senior and junior followers on the path, especially the bond between a teacher and a student.

Because the relationship between the two is not equal or symmetrical, if this relationship is to be mutually beneficial, different qualities are required of the teacher and the student. In a relationship that revolves around the Dharma, the ideal teacher should have wide knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures and also abundant practical experience in following the teaching. Few teachers measure up to the ideal in all respects, and thus most students must be ready to settle for teachers who, like themselves, are still far from perfect. But two essential qualities in a

teacher are a clear understanding of the fundamental principles of the Dharma and a sincere dedication to the proper practice. Besides knowledge and practical experience, the teacher must be willing or eager to teach. This willingness or eagerness to teach, however, shouldn't stem from personal ambition or ego-tism, from the desire to be an outstanding teacher surrounded by a flock of admiring disciples. Rather, the teacher should regard himself as a humble transmitter of the tradition, and his desire to teach should be motivated by compassion for his students and by a sincere wish to uplift the students by improving their knowledge and practical experience.

The teacher should treat the students with kindness and gentleness when they are well disciplined and obedient; but though he should be kind and gentle, he should not treat his students too leniently but should know how to maintain the proper distance needed to preserve his own dignity as a teacher. And if he's a true spiritual teacher and not just one who is imparting knowledge, he should be ready to discipline his students when necessary by admonishing them, pointing out their faults, and attempting to correct their faults.

The student should adopt the proper attitude in relation to the teacher. In Buddhist spiritual training, the attitude required is quite different from that of a student at a university. The attitude required of a student is one directed toward spiritual understanding and realization. Whereas academic study can lead to success independently of the personal character of the student, in the study of the Dharma, success is directly proportional to the purification of one's character. Thus at the outset students need the qualities conducive to spiritual growth.

Students should have faith in the teacher, confidence that the teacher is a superior person able to help them, to guide them in

their spiritual development. This, of course, is not a blind faith, but a trusting confidence in the spiritual capacities of the teacher. It is the trust that the teacher has invested a long period of time in his own spiritual training and thus is sufficiently qualified to guide the student at least a few steps further in the practice of the Dharma. Both teacher and student are united in a common faith, faith in the Triple Gem, faith in the efficacy of the Dharma as a path to liberation and to the realization of the ultimate good. But students should assume that the teacher, by reason of his role, has a faith that is deeper and more solidly grounded than their own and thus that the teacher's advice and guidance should be accepted as worthy of trust. This does not mean that the student must regard the teacher as infallible and accept every bit of advice that the teacher offers, nor does it mean that the student must docilely follow every order that the teacher issues. The Buddha respected the capacity of mature human beings to make independent judgments; he did not subscribe to the view held by many Indian religious teachers that disciples must regard their teacher's word as absolute law. In the Vinaya, the Buddhist code of monastic discipline, pupils are authorized to correct their teachers if they see them engaging in improper modes of conduct or hear them advancing wrong interpretations of the teaching. This principle, laid down over two thousand years ago, is still valid today and should regulate the relationship between teachers and their students.

But to allow students to evaluate their teachers' ideas and conduct does not mean that the students are entitled to act without respect. To the contrary, one can only advance in the Dharma if one is respectful and reverential towards one's teachers. One should never be obstinate, proud, or arrogant towards anyone, least of all towards the person one regards as one's guide to the understanding and practice of the Dharma. The practice of the

Dharma aims at subduing the ego, the false sense of self, and to act in ways that inflate the sense of self is to defeat one's very purpose in following the Dharma.

The relationship between student and teacher provides an ideal field for both to work at tackling the importunate demands of the ego. The student gains this opportunity by developing a respectful attitude towards the teacher and by showing respect in bodily and verbal conduct: for example, by standing up when the teacher enters the room, by making anjali towards him, by speaking to him politely and with a humble demeanor. The teacher also can use the relationship to subdue his own ego: by refusing to adopt an arrogant attitude towards the pupil, by treating the pupil with kindness and consideration, by sharing his knowledge with the pupil.

One quality that the Buddha considered essential in a qualified student is called (in Pali) *suvaco*, which means being "easy to speak to." A student who is "easy to speak to" is ready to listen to his or her teacher and to accept the teacher's advice without resentment, without vindictiveness, without arguing back, without complaints. Spiritual growth in the Dharma is a process of abandoning one's faults and replacing them with the opposing virtues. Yet too often we are blind to our own faults, unable or unwilling to see them.

A skillful teacher is like a mirror: he shows us our faults clearly, insistently, without deception, reminding us of the faults we continually strive to hide from ourselves. For it is only when we are willing to see our faults that we can correct them. If we go on denying these faults, insisting that we are perfect, then we will continue to wallow in them, like a buffalo in the mud. But when we open up to the teacher and show a willingness to see our own faults, to subdue our self-will, we then take the first major step

in the direction of correcting them. It is through this consistent, continuous process of removing our faults, of subduing our ego-centric tendencies, that we move in the direction that the Buddha is pointing us, the direction taken by all the noble ones of the past. It is in this way that we can collect the precious jewels of the noble virtues and embed them in our own hearts and minds, so that we shine resplendent in the world. For this reason, the Dhammapada says that when the teacher points out a student's faults and tries to correct them, the student should feel as though the teacher were pointing out hidden treasure.

(from the *Buddhist Publication Society Newsletter*; 1st Mailing 2007)

The bud
stands for all things,
even for those things that don't flower,
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;
though sometimes it is necessary
to reteach a thing its loveliness,
to put a hand on its brow
of the flower
and retell it in words and in touch
it is lovely
until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing

(From "St. Francis and the Sow," by Galway Kinnell)

GOOD COMPANY

Subhuti

Friendship is vital to the spiritual community, argues Subhuti. For peers on the path – as well as teachers or students – can spur and support our growth.

There is an intriguing account of a conversation between the Buddha and his disciple Ananda, whose name appears frequently in the Buddhist scriptures. He was the Buddha's younger cousin, and the two must have known each other since Ananda's boyhood. In the last 25 years of the Buddha's life, Ananda was the Buddha's personal attendant, storing up the Buddha's words so that they could be passed on to later generations. We can also see from these accounts that the Buddha and Ananda were close friends.

At the start of the discourse in question Ananda approaches the Buddha, intent on sharing a thought. Something – perhaps the cumulative effect of day-to-day association with the Buddha – has suddenly made him realise that such 'lovely companionship' is far more crucial to spiritual progress than he had imagined. He enthusiastically declares, 'Lord, this spiritual friendship, spiritual companionship and spiritual intimacy is no less than half of the spiritual life.' 'Say not so, Ananda,' the Buddha replies. 'It is the whole, not the half of the spiritual life.'

Many of those Buddhists who are familiar with this concept of spiritual friendship or kalyana mitrata think of it in terms of a 'teacher-disciple' relationship (or 'vertical' friendship). As a result they pay little attention to a vital dimension of spiritual friendship that could be called 'horizontal' friendship: that is,

friendship with one's peers. Those who are fortunate enough to enjoy intimate, day by day contact with their teacher may not feel they are missing anything. Few, however, are so fortunate. My own experience has taught me that a small circle of spiritual peers, enjoying intimate friendship and in close mutual association, can aid one another's progress greatly, provided they also have some contact with more mature friends. The ideal situation is actually to live with spiritual friends, or to work with them, or both.

One could ask for no better example of horizontal friendship than the two close friends who were also the Buddha's most famous disciples: Moggallana and Sariputta. As young men they had gone out into the world together in quest of wisdom. They made a pact that if one of them attained 'the Deathless' he would tell the other. Sariputta met a disciple of the Buddha and heard from him a brief summary of the Buddha's teaching, the inner meaning of which he immediately penetrated in a profound insight.

Sariputta immediately set off to tell his old friend. Moggallana saw instantly that his friend had attained 'the Deathless', and the two became followers of the Buddha. Notwithstanding the common image of the Buddha as solitary and withdrawn, in the East many images depict the Buddha accompanied by his chief disciples Sariputta and Moggallana, with hands raised in respect before them. Such images are, in effect, representations of the Buddha and the Sangha, incorporating the vertical and horizontal axes of spiritual friendship in a single image.

Anyone who has taken up the spiritual life in earnest knows that it isn't easy, and may frequently feel tempted to give up the struggle. We may lose confidence in our ability to meditate. If we have given up worldly opportunities to work for the Dharma, we

may find ourselves wistfully thinking that we could easily have more money and more comfort. We may doubt the tradition we are following, or the Dharma itself. Worst of all, we may feel estranged from our fellow practitioners.

Often in such cases, only a trusted friend can bring our spiritual ideal back to life. As well as reviving the flame when it is sputtering, friends can feed it up into a blaze. Mere association with them constantly nourishes that part of us that loves the good. Conversely, if we spend time with people who have no interest in spiritual life, our own feeling for it will fade and our whole spiritual ideal may start to seem unreal.

Our peer friends can help us in refining our ethical awareness. In some regards they will be more sensitive than we are. Through frequent contact with us, they may be much more aware of our ethical blind spots than our mature friends (with whom, in an unfeigned way, we tend to be 'at our best'). Peers can help us to overcome these blind spots, not by pointing accusing fingers, but through benevolence and intimacy. Sometimes we are unable (or unwilling) to recognise that something we have said or done is contrary to our spiritual aims, but a friend can help us to see this, without offending us.

True spiritual friends do not let us off the hook, but at the same time are gentle, sensitive and kindly in their speech, choosing their moment carefully. They try to emulate the sensitivity of the Buddha, who 'knows the time' to say things that are 'true, correct and beneficial' but also 'disagreeable' to the hearer. Friends also help us to eradicate the unwholesome in ourselves by receiving our confessions, and by rejoicing in our merits, reinforcing the good in us. By seeing and loving the best in us, they draw it out more fully, just as rain and sunlight nourish a plant.

Far from being an incidental pleasure in the essentially solitary business of spiritual life, there are passages in the Buddhist scriptures which suggest that friendship between peers belongs not only to the Path but also to the Goal. An example is the moving story of Anuruddha and his friends, found in the Culagosinga Sutta.

Anuruddha, Nandiya and Kimbila are staying together in a quiet forest grove, where the Buddha goes to visit them one evening. He asks whether they get on well with one another. Anuruddha

Not much to offer you—
just a lotus flower floating
in a small jar of water.

—Ryokan

confirms that he and the other two are 'living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water,

viewing each other with kindly eyes.' The Buddha (who knew that not all his monks got along so cordially together) enquires how they do this. Anuruddha explains that he considers himself fortunate to be living the spiritual life together with such companions as Nandiya and Kimbila. To do so is a 'great gain'.

The way they live together is an expression of metta, that is, of loving kindness or friendliness. Accordingly, he 'maintains' towards the other two a kindly attitude that manifests in kindly deeds, affectionate speech and loving thoughts. In conclusion, he tells the Buddha, 'We are different in body, venerable sir, but one in mind.'

The Buddha expresses pleasure at these words and asks whether they are living 'diligent, ardent and resolute'. In other words, are they striving for spiritual progress? Anuruddha confirms that they are and he describes their shared way of life, which

seems to be the natural expression of the spirit of harmony and mutual service that they have already mentioned. His description imparts a sense of how their spiritual practice flows from their friendship, just as much as their friendship flows from their spiritual practice:

'Whichever of us returns first from the village with alms-food prepares the seats, sets out the water for drinking and for washing, and puts the refuse bucket in its place. Whichever of us returns last eats any food left over, if he wishes; otherwise he throws it away where there is no greenery or drops it into water where there is no life. He puts away the seats and the water for drinking and for washing. He puts away the refuse bucket after washing it and he sweeps out the refectory. Whoever notices that the pots of water for drinking, washing or the latrine are low or empty takes care of them. If they are too heavy for him, he calls someone else by a signal of the hand and they move it by joining hands, but because of this we do not break out into speech. But every five days we sit together all night discussing the Dhamma. That is how we abide diligent, ardent and resolute.'

In other words they just silently serve and help each other, each attending to whatever needs to be done for the sake of the others, without pausing to calculate whether the distribution of labour is fair, nor to check up on whether the others are doing their share. They live in constant kindly attentiveness to one another's needs, and their kindness goes beyond mere reciprocity.

Such untalied acts of mutual care are the bricks and mortar of friendship. They avoid unnecessary speech on mundane matters and hence keep silent most days, thus maintaining the thread of their mindfulness. Far from observing perpetual silence, howev-

er, they have regular discussions of spiritual matters, and obviously take the view that the opportunity to do so is one of the advantages of living together.

The Buddha expresses approval of these friends' way of life and asks, 'While you abide thus É have you attained any superhuman state, a distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones?' Anuruddha reveals that all three of them are Arahants, all fully Enlightened. Needless to say, the Buddha is delighted by this wonderful news.

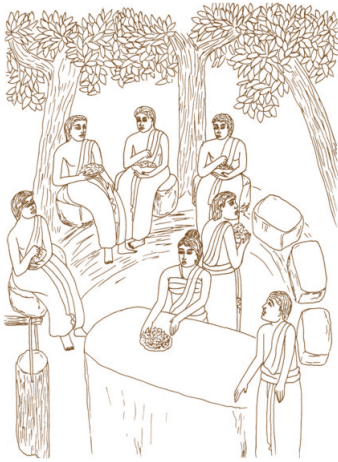
The success of the three friends suggests the profundity of the practice of friendship at its fullest development. The three were 'different in body, but one in mind' and so dwelt together in the bliss of Enlightenment. Borrowing a phrase from the great Buddhist poet Shantideva, we could call this 'the exchange of self and other'.

As unenlightened humans, we divide the world into self and not-self, separating what is 'in here' sharply from what is 'out there'. This dichotomy of subject and object is the most fundamental pattern in our feeling and thinking, structuring our perception of everything. Yet Buddhism teaches that this distinction is not given in our experience but something we impose upon it. It is in fact precisely this delusion that is the ultimate cause of our suffering – the *ahamkara* or 'I maker', the invisible and baneful house builder who incessantly 'raises the roof-tree of deceits' and builds 'the walls of pain.'

Our sense of self and other is a practical necessity. If we didn't learn to organise our world in this way, we would remain stuck in the infantile stage of psychological development. A baby sees no distinction between itself and the world, and only gradually learns to perceive the dividing line. The subject-object dichotomy is therefore something we have all had to hammer out by

trial and error in our early lives. Indeed, for many people a more accurate perception of the boundary between self and other is still a big part of their spiritual task.

Nevertheless Buddhism teaches that, having become individuals, we are still far from Reality. We still don't see things as they really are. Spiritual growth, although it may begin by completing and securing a true discrimination of self and other, must go on



to transcend it. Until we can do so we remain preoccupied with 'looking after number one'. In the abstract, we know that others are, like us, centres of consciousness, desire and suffering. At a deeper level of our minds, however, they remain 'objects' – aids or hindrances to our private goals.

The spiritual life consists in realising ever more fully that others, too, are subjects, and in living from that realisation. This can be a spiritual practice, something undertaken outside meditation as well as within it, just as systematically as other practices. The method is to adopt the 'self' of another person as our own – that is, to give it equal or even preferential treatment.

Shantideva expressed the idea beautifully in his classic poem the *Bodhicaryavatara*:

'All those who suffer in the world do so because of their desire for their own happiness. All those happy in the world are so because of their desire for the happiness of others. For one who fails to exchange his own happiness for the suffering of others, Buddhahood is certainly impossible.'

The capacity to identify with others is thus an attack on our root delusion of selfhood, and an avenue to Enlightenment. Shantideva makes it clear that we must ultimately practise this exchange of self and other in relation to all beings, but we can hardly hope to go straight to that ultimate stage. Common sense suggests that, until we can practise it in relation to a few people – at least one – we have little hope of doing it indiscriminately.

Metta, or loving-kindness, is the basis of the exchange, so it is logical to start with someone for whom we already feel benevolence. Lovers and family members are too close to being extensions of 'self', so the best choice will surely be a close spiritual friend. The warmth and intimacy of friendship provide the perfect springboard for the dive into selflessness. And a friend (unlike someone to whom we are attached by possessive affection) is not an object of needy attachment, so our dive will not unwittingly lead us into a subtler form of selfishness.

We can practise the exchange of self and other with spiritual friends by developing mindfulness of their needs and putting them before our own. Whenever we give up something for the sake of our friends, we take another small step forward on the path of transcending ourselves. We enter more deeply into their subjectivity and let go of our attachment to our own. In Anuruddha's words, 'Why should I not set aside what I wish to do, and do what these venerable ones wish to do?'

Eventually, we will be able to identify not just with friends but with all beings, and not just in flashes, but as our habitual mode of consciousness. In short, friendship can be the path on which we travel from selfishness to selflessness. Here, perhaps, is the deepest meaning of the Buddha's saying that friendship is the whole of the spiritual life. It gives us a context in which to prac-

tise selflessness. And since selflessness is the goal of the spiritual life, friendship must be co-extensive with that life.

Spiritual friendship (not just including friendship between peers) is also vital to Buddhism socially or collectively because it creates the Sangha. Membership of a spiritual community consists not in adherence to a list of abstract propositions, but in participation in a common spirit, and this spirit can only be adequately experienced in friendship. One of the benefits of spiritual friendship is the development of the Sangha, with the Aryasangha – the community of the Enlightened – at its summit. It is only through the medium of the Sangha, especially the Aryasangha, that the Dharma (the truths that Buddhism imparts through its teachings) can be perpetuated as a living force over a period of generations.

The great sociologist Max Weber identified a pattern in the development of religious groups that he called the 'routinisation of charisma'. This is the phenomenon whereby the followers of a 'charismatic' religious teacher attempt to perpetuate their cohesion and purpose by codifying a doctrine, formulating rules and founding institutions. This process is probably necessary, yet how often, in the history of religious movements, it seems to contribute to the loss of what was most vital in the founder's vision.

A striking historical example of this phenomenon is the rapid rise and equally rapid ossification of the Franciscan Order within the Catholic Church. The Order, inspired by the leadership and example of Saint Francis himself, grew very swiftly in his lifetime. Not long after his death, however, a serious conflict developed between two wings – the 'spirituals', who wanted to stick to the pure vision of Francis, and the 'conventuals', who wanted to establish the Franciscans on the same lines as the other mo-

nastic orders of the time. The conflict finally ended in the triumph of the conventuals and – tragically – the execution of some of the spirituals.

Although Franciscans remain numerous in the Catholic Church to this day, they are divided into many separate orders, for the same tension has been played out again and again since that time. What is more, the bitterness of the original conflict seems to show that Francis failed to transmit his own inspiration fully. The most likely explanation of his failure is that he allowed his order to grow too fast for the successful communication (and therefore the preservation) of his spiritual vision. There was no possibility that his influence – his spiritual friendship, as one might call it – could be transmitted throughout such a rapidly expanding body.

One lesson from this story is that a spiritual community can only expand at the speed at which a circle of friendships can grow. Otherwise it becomes merely an institution. An institution may still be a

force for good in the world: it may still be animated here and there, from time to time, with flashes of the original fire, but in itself it is something less than a spiritual community. A mere institution lacks the spiritual community's harmonious unity – its 'oneness in mind' – and its spiritual vitality.

Let me emphasise that I am not saying that 'institutions' as such are the enemy of harmony or vitality. Actually, they are indispensable if a spiritual group wishes to grow beyond a small, private circle, to have a real influence on the world. But institution-

A test of the spiritual vitality of any spiritual institution is therefore whether there are strong friendships among its members.

al growth must be the servant of an expanding network of friends, not a substitute for it.

A test of the spiritual vitality of any spiritual institution is therefore whether there are strong friendships among its members. A clue would be found in the relative importance given to friendship over other kinds of relationship. If, on examining such a group, one saw that even married members put more emphasis on their spiritual friendships than on their family relationships (while not shirking their family duties, of course) it would augur well for the survival of that fellowship as a true spiritual community. One should also, however, consider whether the members not only got on well among themselves, but were also friendly to people beyond their own charmed circle. True friendship is not exclusive; it always includes a willingness to make new friends.

Through the Sangha, the Dharma can live on as something more than a body of texts or an institutional 'shell'. In this way, spiritual friendship, as well as benefiting the individuals who practise it, also benefits future generations. This gives us yet another perspective on the Buddha's statement that friendship is the whole of the spiritual life.

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ADMIRABLE FRIENDSHIP

Thanissaro Bhikkhu

Practicing the Dhamma is primarily an issue of looking at yourself, looking at your own thoughts, your own words, your own deeds, seeing what's skillful, seeing what's not. It's not so much an issue of self-improvement as one of action-improvement, word-improvement, and thought-improvement. This is an important distinction, because people in the modern world — *especially* in the modern world — seem to be obsessed with self-image. We've spent our lives bombarded with images, and you can't help but compare your image of yourself to the images of people you see outside you. And for the most part there's no comparison: You're not as strong, as beautiful, as wealthy, as stylish, and so forth. I noticed in Thailand that, as soon as television became rampant, teenagers became very sullen. I think it's largely this issue of people's looking at themselves in comparison to the images broadcast at them. And the whole question of self-image becomes very sensitive, very painful. So when we say that you're looking at yourself, remember you're not looking at your "self." You're looking at your thoughts, words, and deeds. Try to look at them as objectively as possible, get the whole issue of "self" out of the way, and then it becomes a lot easier to make improvements.

The same applies to your dealings with other people. The Buddha said there are two factors that help most in the arising of discernment, that help you most along the path. The foremost internal factor is appropriate attention. The foremost external factor is admirable friendship. And it's important that you reflect on what admirable friendship means, because even though

you're supposed to be looking at your own thoughts, words, and deeds, you're also looking at the thoughts, words, and deeds of the people around you. After all, your eyes are fixed in your body so that they point outside. You can't help but see what other people are doing. So the question is how you can make this knowledge most useful to yourself as you practice. And this is where the principle of admirable friendship comes in.

To begin with, it means associating with admirable people, people who have admirable habits, people who have qualities that are worthy of admiration. One list puts these qualities at four: Admirable people have conviction in the principle of kamma, they're virtuous, they're generous, and they're discerning. There's a well-known line from Dogen where he says, "When you walk through the mist, your robe gets wet without your even thinking about it." That's his description of living with a teacher. You pick up the teacher's habits without thinking about it, but that can be a double-edged sword because your teacher can have both good and bad habits, and you need to be careful about which ones you pick up.

So in addition to associating with admirable people, the Buddha says there are two further factors in admirable friendship. One is that you ask these people about issues of conviction, virtue, generosity, discernment. And this doesn't necessarily mean just asking the teacher. You can ask other people in the community who have admirable qualities as well. See what special insights they have on how to develop those qualities. After all, they've obviously got experience, and you'd be wise to pick their brains.

The second factor is that if you see anything in other people worth emulating, you emulate it, you follow it, you bring that quality into your own behavior. So this makes you responsible for your end of admirable friendship, too. You can't sit around

simply hoping to soak up the mist, waiting for it to blow your way. You have to be active. Remember that passage in the Dhammapada about the spoon not knowing the taste of the soup, while the tongue does know the taste.

But again, when looking at people around you, it's important that you get away from your sense of competitiveness, of this person versus that person. You look, not at them, but at their activities. Otherwise you start comparing yourself to the other person: "This person's better than I am. That person's worse than I am." And that brings in questions of conceit, resentment, and competition, which are not really helpful because we're not here to compete with each other. We're here to work on ourselves. So again, look at other people simply in terms of their thoughts, their words, their actions. And see what's an admirable action, what are admirable words, what are admirable ideas, ones you can emulate, ones you can pick up. In



[T]here are two further factors in admirable friendship. One is that you ask these people about issues of conviction, virtue, generosity, discernment...The second factor is that if you see anything in other people worth emulating, you emulate it, you follow it, you bring that quality into your own behavior.

this way the fact that we're living together becomes a help to the practice rather than a hindrance.

The same is true when you notice people around you doing things that are not so admirable. Instead of judging the other person, simply judge the actions by their results: that that particular action, that particular way of thinking or speaking is not very skillful, for it obviously leads to this or that undesirable result. And then turn around and look at yourself, at the things you do and say: Are those unskillful words and actions to be found in you? Look at the behavior of other people as a mirror for your own behavior. When you do this, even the difficulties of living in a community become an aid to the practice.

The Buddha designed the monkhood so that monks would have time alone but also have time together. If you spent all of your time alone, you'd probably go crazy. If you spent all of your time together, life would start getting more and more like dorm life all the time. So you have to learn how to balance the two. Learn how to develop your own good qualities on your own and at the same time use the actions and words of other people as mirrors for yourself, to check yourself, to see what out there is worth emulating, to see what out there is clearly unskillful. And then reflect on yourself, "Do I have those admirable qualities? Do I have those unskillful qualities in my thoughts, words and deeds?" If you've got those unskillful qualities, you've got work to do. If you don't have the admirable ones, you've got work to do there as well.

What's interesting is that in both of these internal and external factors — both in appropriate attention and in admirable friendship — one of the crucial factors is questioning. In other words, in appropriate attention you learn how to ask yourself questions about your own actions. In admirable friendship you ask the oth-

er people you admire about the qualities they embody. If you find someone whose conviction is admirable, you ask that person about conviction. If you find someone whose effort and persistence are admirable, you ask him about persistence. In other words, you take an interest in these things. The things that we ask questions about, those are the things we're interested in, those are the things that direct our practice. And it's the combination of the two, the internal questioning and the external questioning, that gets us pointed in the right direction.

So this is something to think about as you go through the day and you see someone else doing something that gets you upset or something that offends you. Don't focus on the other person; focus on the action in and of itself, as part of a causal process, and then turn around and look at yourself. If, in your mind, you create other people out there, you create a lot of problems. But if you simply see life in the community as an opportunity to watch the principle of cause and effect as it plays itself out, the problems vanish.

The same with admirable people: You don't get jealous of their good qualities; you don't get depressed about the fact that you don't have their good qualities. Where do good qualities come from? They come from persistence, from effort, from training, which is something we can all do. So again, if you see something admirable in other people, *ask them about it*, and then try to apply those lessons in your own life. If we go through life without asking questions, we learn nothing. If we ask the wrong questions, we go off the path. If, with practice, we learn how to ask the right questions, that's the factor that helps us get our practice right on target.

I once read a man's reminiscences about his childhood in which he said that every day, when he'd come home from school, his

mother's first question would be, "What questions did you ask in school today?" She didn't ask, "What did you learn? What did the teacher teach?" She asked, "What questions did you ask?" She was teaching him to think. So at the end of the day when you stop to reflect on the day's activities, that's a good question to ask yourself: "What questions did I ask today? What answers did I get?" That way you get to see which direction your practice is going.

("Meditations 1: Forty Dhamma Talks", by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*, 2 December 2011, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/meditations.html>. Retrieved on 28 January 2012.)

Great enlightening beings have ten kinds of rules of behavior: they should not slander any enlightening teachings; their faith in the buddhas should be indestructible; they should honor and respect all enlightening beings; **they should never give up their friendship with wise people**; they should not think of those who seek individual salvation; they should avoid all regression on the Path of enlightening beings; they should not give rise to any malice toward sentient beings; they should cultivate all roots of goodness to perfection ; they should be able to conquer all demons; they should fulfill all the ways of transcendence. Based on these, enlightening beings can attain the supreme discipline of great knowledge.

—*Avatamsaka Sutra*

THE POWER OF JUDGMENT

Thanissaro Bhikkhu

When the Buddha told Ananda that the entirety of the practice lies in having an admirable friend, he wasn't saying something warm and reassuring about the compassion of others. He was pointing out three uncomfortable truths — about delusion and trust — that call for clear powers of judgment.

The first truth is that *you can't really trust yourself to see through your delusion on your own*. When you're deluded, you don't *know* you're deluded. You need some trustworthy outside help to point it out to you. This is why, when the Buddha advised the Kalamas to know for themselves, one of the things he told them to know for themselves was how wise people would judge their behavior. When he advised his son, Rahula, to examine his own actions as he would his face in a mirror, he said that if Rahula saw that his actions had caused any harm, he should talk it over with a knowledgeable friend on the path. That way he could learn how to be open with others — and himself — about his mistakes, and at the same time tap into the knowledge that his friend had gained. He wouldn't have to keep reinventing the dharma wheel on his own.

So if you really want to become skillful in your thoughts, words, and deeds, you need a trustworthy friend or teacher to point out your blind spots. And because those spots are blindest around your unskillful habits, the primary duty of a trustworthy friend is to point out your faults — for only when you see your faults can you correct them; only when you correct them are you benefiting from your friend's compassion in pointing them out.

Regard him as one who
 points out
 treasure,
the wise one who
seeing your faults
 rebukes you.

Stay with this sort of sage.

For the one who stays
with a sage of this sort,
 things get better,
 not worse.

— Dhp 76

In passing judgment on your faults, an admirable friend is like a trainer. Once, when a horse trainer came to see the Buddha, the Buddha asked him how he trained his horses. The trainer said that some horses responded to gentle training, others to harsh training, others required both harsh and gentle training, but if a horse didn't respond to either type of training, he'd kill the horse to maintain the reputation of his teachers' lineage. Then the trainer asked the Buddha how he trained his students, and the Buddha replied, "In the same way." Some students responded to gentle criticism, others to harsh criticism, others to a mixture of the two, but if a student didn't respond to either type of criticism, he'd kill the student. This shocked the horse trainer, but then the Buddha explained what he meant by "killing": He wouldn't train the student any further, which essentially killed the student's opportunity to grow in the practice.

So the first prerequisite in maintaining an admirable friend is being willing to take criticism, both gentle and harsh. This is why the Buddha told his disciples not to teach for money, for the person paying is the one who determines what's taught, and

people rarely pay for the criticism they need to hear. But even if the teacher is teaching for free, you run into the Buddha's second uncomfortable truth: *You can't open your heart to just anyone.* Our powers of judgment really do have power, and because that power can cause long-term help or harm, you have to take care in choosing your friend. Don't fall into the easy trap of being judgmental or non-judgmental — judgmental in trusting your knee-jerk likes or dislikes, non-judgmental in trusting that every dharma teacher would be equally beneficial as a guide. Instead, be judicious in choosing the person whose judgments you're going to take on as your own.

This, of course, sounds like a Catch-22: You need a good teacher to help develop your powers of judgment, but well-developed powers of judgment to recognize who a good teacher might be. And even though there's no foolproof way out of the catch — after all, you can master a foolproof way and still be a fool — there is a way if you're willing to learn from experience. And fortunately the Buddha advised on how to develop your powers of judgment so that you know what to look for along the way. In fact, his recommendations for how to choose an admirable friend are a preliminary exercise in discernment: learning how to develop judicious powers of judgment so that you, too, can become an admirable friend, first to yourself and then to the people around you.

The first step in being judicious is understanding what it means to judge in a helpful way. Think, not of a Supreme Court justice sitting on her bench, passing a final verdict of guilt or innocence, but of a piano teacher listening to you play. She's not passing a final verdict on your potential as a pianist. Instead, she's judging a work in progress: listening to your intention for the performance, listening to your execution of that intention,

and then deciding whether it works. If it doesn't, she has to figure out if the problem is with the intention or the execution, make helpful suggestions, and then let you try again. She keeps this up until she's satisfied with your performance. The important principle is that she never directs her judgments at you as a person. Instead she has to stay focused on your actions, to keep looking for better ways to raise them to higher and higher standards.

At the same time, you're learning from her how to judge your own playing: thinking more carefully about your intention, listening more carefully to your execution, developing higher standards for what works, and learning to think outside of the box for ways to improve. Most important of all, you're learning to focus your judgment on your performance, and not on yourself. This way — when there's less you invested in your habits — you're more willing to recognize unskillful habits and to drop them in favor of more skillful ones.

Of course, when you and your teacher are judging your improvement on a particular piece, it's part of a longer process of judging how well the relationship is working. She has to judge, over time, if you're benefiting from her guidance, and so do you. But again, neither of you is judging the worth of the other person. She's simply deciding — based on your progress — whether it's worth her while to continue taking you on as a student. You're judging the extent to which her recommendations are actually helping you perform more effectively. If either of you decides to terminate the relationship, it shouldn't be because she's a bad teacher or you're a bad student, but simply that she's not the teacher for you, or you're not the student for her.

In the same way, when you're evaluating a potential dharma teacher, remember that there's no Final Judgment in Buddhism.

You want someone who will evaluate your actions as a work in progress, and you have to apply the same standard to him or her. And you're not trying to take on the superhuman role of evaluating that person's essential worth. You're simply judging whether his or her actions embody the kinds of skills you'd like to develop, and the types of mental qualities — which are also a kind of action — that you'd trust in a trainer or guide. After all, the only way we know anything about other people is through their actions, so that's as far as our judgments can fairly extend.

At the same time, though, because we're judging whether we want to internalize another person's standards, it's not unfair to pass judgment on what they're doing. It's for our own protection. And it's for the sake of our protection that the Buddha recommended two qualities in a teacher: wisdom and integrity. To gauge these qualities, though, takes time and sensitivity, which is why the Buddha also advised that you be willing to spend time with the person, and try to be really observant of how that person acts.

Most important of all, you're learning to focus your judgment on your performance, and not on yourself. This way ... you're more willing to recognize unskillful habits and to drop them in favor of more skillful ones.

Once, when King Pasenadi came to see the Buddha, a group of naked ascetics passed nearby. The king went over, got down on one knee, and offered them homage. Then he returned to the Buddha and asked, "Are those ascetics worthy of homage?" The Buddha replied that you could fairly answer that question only after having spent time with them, and only if you were really observant. The king praised the Buddha's caution, and added,

"Those men are actually my spies. They're on the way back from having scouted out the enemy, and soon — after bathing and clothing themselves — they'll be back enjoying themselves with their wives." So you can't judge people just by first impressions. The appearance of wisdom is easy to fake. In the past, people were impressed by extreme austerities; at present, the ads for dharma books and retreats show that we're attracted to other surface criteria, but the principle is the same.

To save time and needless pain in the search, however, the Buddha noted four early warning signs indicating that potential teachers don't have the wisdom or integrity to merit your trust. The warning signs for untrustworthy wisdom are two. The first is when people show no gratitude for the help they've received — and this applies especially to help from their parents and teachers. People with no gratitude don't appreciate goodness, don't value the effort that goes into being helpful, and so will probably not put out that effort themselves. The second warning sign is that they don't hold to the principle of karma. They either deny that we have freedom of choice, or else teach that one person can clear away another person's bad karma from the past. People of this sort are unlikely to put forth the effort to be genuinely skillful, and so are untrustworthy guides.

Lack of integrity also has two warning signs. The first is when people feel no shame in telling a deliberate lie. As the Buddha once said, "There's no evil that such a person might not do." The second warning sign is when they don't conduct arguments in a fair and aboveboard manner: misrepresenting their opponents, pouncing on the other side's minor lapses, not acknowledging the valid points the other side has made. People of this sort, the Buddha said, aren't even worth talking to, much less taking on as teachers.

As for people who don't display these early warning signs, the Buddha gave advice on how to gauge wisdom and integrity in their actions over time. One question he'd have you ask yourself is whether a teacher's actions betray any of the greed, anger, or delusion that would inspire him to claim knowledge of something he didn't know, or to tell another person to do something that was not in that person's best interests. To test for a teacher's wisdom, the Buddha advised noticing how a potential teacher responds to questions about what's skillful and not, and how well he or she handles adversity. To test for integrity, you look for virtue in day-to-day activities, and purity in the teacher's dealings with others. Does this person make excuses for breaking the precepts, bringing them down to his level of behavior rather than lifting his behavior to theirs? Does he take unfair advantage of other people? If so, you'd better find another teacher.

This, however, is where the Buddha's third uncomfortable truth comes in: *You can't be a fair judge of another person's integrity until you've developed some of your own.* This is probably the most uncomfortable truth of all, for it requires that you accept responsibility for your judgments. If you want to test other people's potential for good guidance, you have to pass a few tests yourself. Again, it's like listening to a pianist. The better you are as a pianist, the better your ability to judge the other person's playing.

Fortunately, the Buddha also gave guidance on how to develop integrity, and it doesn't require that you start out innately good. All it requires is a measure of truthfulness and maturity: the realization that your actions make all the difference in your life, so you have to take care in how you act; the willingness to admit your mistakes, both to yourself and to others; and the willingness to learn from your mistakes so you don't keep repeating

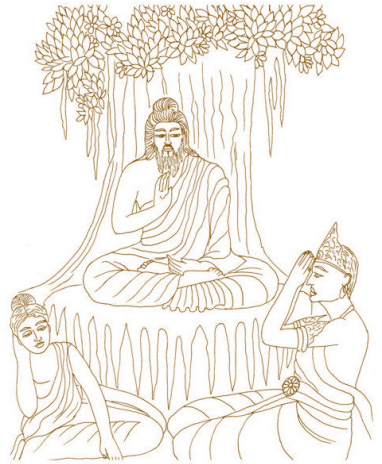
them. As the Buddha taught Rahula, before you act in thought, word, or deed, look at the results you expect from your action. If it's going to harm you or anyone else, don't do it. If you don't foresee any harm, go ahead and act. While you're acting, check to see if you're causing any unforeseen harm. If you are, stop. If not, continue until you're done. After you're done, look at the long-term results of your action. If it caused any harm, talk it over with someone else on the path, develop a sense of shame around the mistake, and resolve not to repeat it. If it caused no harm, take joy in the fact and keep on training.

As you train yourself in this way, you learn four important principles about exercising judgment in a healthy way. First, you're judging your actions, not yourself. If you can learn to separate your sense of self from your actions, you tend to be more willing to admit your mistakes to yourself, and less defensive when other people point them out to you. This principle also applies to the sense of shame the Buddha recommends you feel toward your mistakes. It's directed not at you, but at the action — the sort of shame felt by a person of high self-esteem who's realized she's done something beneath her and doesn't want to do it again. Shame of this sort is not debilitating. It simply helps you remember the lesson you've learned.

This relates to the second important principle about healthy judgment, that it requires mindfulness in the original meaning of the term: keeping something in mind. Mindfulness of this sort is essential in developing your judgment, for it helps you remember the lessons you've learned over time as to what works and what doesn't. Because we often try our best to forget our mistakes, we have to train our mindfulness repeatedly to remember the lessons we learned from those mistakes so that we don't have to keep learning them over and over again.

Sometimes you hear mindfulness defined as a non-judging state of mind, but that's not how the Buddha understood it. He often compared mindfulness to a gatekeeper in the way it helps you judge what should and shouldn't be done:

"Just as the royal frontier fortress has a gatekeeper — wise, experienced, intelligent — to keep out those he doesn't know and to let in those he does, for the protection of those within and to ward off those without; in the same way a disciple of the noble ones is mindful, highly meticulous, remembering & able to call to mind even things that were done & said long ago. With mindfulness as his gatekeeper, the disciple of the noble ones abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful, abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is blameless, and looks after himself with purity." — AN 7.36



So mindfulness actually plays an essential role in developing your powers of judgment.

As you keep trying to apply the lessons you've learned, you discover the third principle about healthy judgment: that the lessons you learn from your mistakes, if you act on them, really do make a difference. The present moment is not so arbitrarily new that lessons from yesterday are useless today. You may keep finding new subtleties in how to apply past lessons, but the general outlines of how suffering is caused and how it can be ended always remain the same.

The fourth principle is that you learn how to benefit from the judgments of others. When you've chosen a person to confide in, you want to be open to that person's criticisms, but you also want to put his or her suggestions for improvement to the test. As the Buddha told his aunt, Gotami, you can test genuine dharma by seeing the results it gives when put it into action. If it leads to such admirable qualities as being dispassionate, modest, content, energetic, and unburdensome, it's the genuine thing. The person who teaches you this dharma has passed at least that test for being a genuine friend. And you're learning more and more how to judge for yourself.

Some people might object that it's selfish to focus on finding friends you can benefit from, and inhumane to keep testing people to see if they fit the bill. But that's missing the point. The benefits that come from this sort of friendship don't end with you; and in testing your friend you're also testing yourself. As you assimilate the qualities of an admirable friend, you become the sort of person who can offer admirable friendship to others. Again, it's like practicing under a good piano teacher. As you improve as a pianist, you're not the only one who can enjoy your playing. The better you get, the more joy you bring to others. The better you understand the process of playing, the more effectively you can teach anyone who sincerely wants to learn from you. This is how teaching lineages of high caliber get established for the benefit of the world.

So when you look for an admirable friend, you're tapping into a long lineage of admirable friends, stretching back to the Buddha, and helping it to extend into the future. Joining this lineage may require accepting some uncomfortable truths, such as the need to learn from criticism and to take responsibility for your actions. But if you're up for the challenge, you learn to take this

human power of judgment — which, when untrained, can so easily cause harm — and train it for the greater good.

("The Power of Judgment", by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*, 20 April 2011, http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/power_of_judgment.html . Retrieved on 28 January 2012.)

I have said Nhat Hanh is my brother, and it is true.

Merton and Nhat Hanh...met only once, and then for a very short time; yet in that brief meeting a true friendship was established. They both acknowledged in subsequent writings that they had made a genuine spiritual connection in spite of their social, cultural, and religious differences. They appreciated the depth and sincerity of each other's faith and realized that neither one fit the other's stereotype of his religion.

Thomas Merton and Thich Nhat Hanh: Engaged Spirituality in an Age of Globalization,
by Robert Harlen King, p. 168

VEN. SARIPUTTA: A GOOD FRIEND

Nyanaponika Thera

If **Sariputta was notable** for his lasting sense of gratitude, he was no less so for his capacity for friendship. With Maha Moggallana, the friend and companion of his youth, he maintained a close intimacy, and many were the conversations they held on the Dhamma. One of these, which is of special interest as throwing light on the process of Venerable Sariputta's attainment, is recorded in the *Anguttara Nikaya, Catukka-nipata*, No. 167. It relates that once the Venerable Maha Moggallana went to see the Elder and said to him:

"There are four ways of progress, brother Sariputta:
difficult progress, with sluggish direct-knowledge;
difficult progress, with swift direct-knowledge;
easy progress, with sluggish direct-knowledge;
easy progress, with swift direct-knowledge.

"By which of these four ways of progress, brother, was your mind freed from the cankers without remnants of clinging?" To which the Venerable Sariputta replied: "By that of those four ways of progress, brother, which is easy and has swift direct-knowledge."

The explanation of this passage is that if the suppression of the defilements preparatory to absorption or insight takes place without great difficulty, progress is called "easy" (*sukhapatipada*); in the reverse case it is "difficult" or "painful" (*dukkhapatipada*). If, after the suppression of the defilements, the manifestation of the Path, the goal of insight, is quickly effected, the direct-knowledge (connected with the Path) is called

"swift" (*khippabhiñña*); in the reverse case it is "sluggish" (*dandabhiñña*). In this discourse the Venerable Sariputta's statement refers to his attainment of arahantship. His attainment of the first three Paths, however, was, according to the commentary to the above text, connected with "easy progress and sluggish direct-knowledge."

In such ways as this did the two friends exchange information about their experience and understanding of the Dhamma. They were also frequently associated in attending to affairs of the Sangha. One such occasion was when they combined in winning back certain monks who had been led astray by Devadatta. There is an interesting passage in this connection which shows that the Venerable Sariputta's generous praise of Devadatta's achievements before the latter brought about a schism in the Sangha was the cause of a slight embarrassment. It relates that when the Buddha asked Sariputta to proclaim in Rajagaha that Devadatta's deeds and words should no longer be regarded as connected with the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, the Venerable Sariputta said: "Formerly I spoke at Rajagaha in praise of Devadatta's magical powers?" "Yes, Lord," the elder replied. "So you will now speak truthfully also, Sariputta, when you make this proclamation about Devadatta." So, after receiving the formal approval of the Sangha, the Venerable Sariputta, together with many monks, went to Rajagaha and made the declaration about Devadatta.

When Devadatta had formally split the Sangha by declaring that he would conduct Sangha-acts separately, he went to Vultures' Peak with five hundred young monks who through ignorance had become his followers. To win them back, the Buddha sent Sariputta and Maha Moggallana to the Vultures' Peak, and while Devadatta was resting, the two Chief Disciples preached to the

monks, who attained to stream-entry and went back to the Master.

Another time when the Venerable Sariputta and the Venerable Maha Moggallana worked together to restore order in the Sangha was when a group of monks led by Assaji (not the Elder Assaji referred to earlier) and Punnabbassu, living at Kitagiri, were misbehaving. In spite of repeated admonitions, these monks would not mend their ways, so the two Chief Disciples were sent to pronounce the penalty of *pabbajaniya-kamma* (excommunication) on those who would not submit to the discipline.

Venerable Sariputta's devotion to his friend was fully reciprocated; we are told of two occasions when Sariputta was ill, and Maha Moggallana attended to him and brought him medicine.

Yet there was nothing exclusive about the Venerable Sariputta's friendships, for according to the commentary to the *Maha-Gosinga Sutta* there was also a bond of mutual affection between him and the Elder Ananda. On the part of Sariputta it was because he thought: "He is attending on the Master — a duty which should have been performed by me"; and Ananda's affection was due to the fact that Sariputta had been declared by the Buddha as his foremost disciple. When Ananda gave Novice Ordination to young pupils he used to take them to Sariputta to obtain Higher ordination under him. The Venerable Sariputta did the same in regard to Ananda, and in that way they had five hundred pupils in common.

Whenever the Venerable Ananda received choice robes or other requisites he would offer them to Sariputta, and in the same way, Sariputta passed on to Ananda any special offerings that were made to him. Once Ananda received from a certain brahman a very valuable robe, and with the Master's permission he

kept it for ten days awaiting Sariputta's return. The sub-commentary says that later teachers commented on this: "There may be those who say: 'We can well understand that Ananda, who had not yet attained to Arahantship, felt such affection. But how is it in the case of Sariputta, who was a canker-free arahant?'" To this we answer: 'Sariputta's affection was not one of worldly attachment, but a love for Ananda's virtues (*guna-bhatti*).'"

The Buddha once asked the Venerable Ananda: "Do you, too, approve of Sariputta?" And Ananda replied: "Who, O Lord, would not approve of Sariputta, unless he were childish, corrupt, stupid or of perverted mind! Learned, O Lord, is the Venerable Sariputta; of great wisdom, O Lord, is the Venerable Sariputta; of broad, bright, quick, keen and penetrative wisdom is the Venerable Sariputta; of few wants and contented, inclined to seclusion, not fond of company, energetic,

Metta and Mitta



Loving-kindness is also understood as the innate friendliness of an open heart. Its close connection to friendship is reflected in its similarity to the Pali word for friend, *mitta*. However, *metta* is more than conventional friendship, for it includes being open-hearted even toward one's enemies, cultivated perhaps from empathy or from insight into our shared humanity.

—from *The Issue at Hand*,
by Gil Fronsdal

eloquent, willing to listen, an exhorter who censures what is evil."

In the Theragatha (v. 1034f) we find the Venerable Ananda describing his emotion at the time of Sariputta's death. "When the Noble Friend (Sariputta) had gone," he declares, "the world was plunged in darkness for me." But he adds that after the companion had left him behind, and also the Master had passed away, there was no other friend like mindfulness directed on the body. Ananda's sorrow on learning of the Venerable Sariputta's death is also described very movingly in the *Cunda Sutta*.

Sariputta was a true friend in the fullest sense of the word. He well understood how to bring out the best in others, and in doing so did not hesitate sometimes to speak straightforwardly and critically, like the ideal friend described by the Buddha, who points out his friend's faults. It was in this way that he helped the venerable Anuruddha in his final break-through to Arahatship, as recorded in the Anguttara Nikaya (*Tika-Nipata* No. 128):

Once the Venerable Anuruddha went to see the Venerable Sariputta. When they had exchanged courteous greetings he sat down and said to the Venerable Sariputta: "Friend Sariputta, with the divine eye that is purified, transcending human ken, I can see the thousandfold world-system. Firm is my energy, unremitting; my mindfulness is alert and unconfused; the body is tranquil and unperturbed; my mind is concentrated and one-pointed. And yet my mind is not freed from cankers, not freed from clinging."

"Friend Anuruddha," said the Venerable Sariputta, "that you think thus of your divine eye, this is conceit in you. That you think thus of your firm energy, your alert mindfulness, your unperturbed body and your concentrated mind, this is restlessness in you. That you think of your mind not being freed from the

cankers, this is worrying in you. It will be good, indeed, if the Venerable Anuruddha, abandoning these three states of mind and paying no attention to them, will direct the mind to the Deathless Element."

And the Venerable Anuruddha later on gave up these three states of mind, paid no attention to them and directed his mind to the Deathless Element. And the Venerable Anuruddha, living then alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, with determined mind, before long reached in this very life, understanding and experiencing it by himself, that highest goal of the Holy Life, for the sake of which noble sons go forth entirely from home into homelessness. And he knew: "Exhausted is rebirth, lived is the holy life, the work is done, nothing further remains after this." Thus the Venerable Anuruddha became one of the Arahats.

Sariputta must have been stimulating company, and sought after by many. What attracted men of quite different temperament to him and his conversation can be well understood from the incident described in the *Maha-Gosinga Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya* No. 32). One evening the Elders Maha Moggallana, Maha Kassapa, Anuruddha, Revata and Ananda went to Sariputta to listen to the Dhamma. The Venerable Sariputta welcomed them, saying: "Delightful is this Gosinga Forest of Sala trees; there is moonlight tonight, all the Sala trees are in full bloom, and it seems that heavenly perfume drifts around. What kind of monk, do you think, Ananda, will lend more luster to this Gosinga Sala Forest?"

The same question was put to the others as well, and each answered according to his individual nature. Finally, Sariputta gave his own answer, which was as follows:

"There is a monk who has control over his mind, who is under the control of his mind. In whatever (mental) abiding or attainment he wishes to dwell in the forenoon, he can dwell in it at

that time. In whatever (mental) abiding or attainment he wishes to dwell at noon, he can dwell in it at that time. In whatever (mental) abiding or attainment he wishes to dwell in the evening, he can dwell in it at that time. It is as though a king's or royal minister's cloth chest were full of many-colored garments; so that whatever pair of garments he wishes to wear in the morning, or at noon, or in the evening, he can wear it at will at those times. Similarly it is with a monk who has control over his mind, who is not under the control of his mind; in whatever (mental) abiding or attainment he wishes to dwell in the morning, or at noon, or in the evening, he can do so at will at those times. Such a monk, friend Moggallana, may lend luster to this Gosinga Sala Forest."

They then went to the Buddha, who approved of all their answers and added his own.

We see from this episode that Sariputta, with all his powerful intellect and his status in the Sangha, was far from being a domineering type who tried to impose his views on others. How well did he understand how to stimulate self-expression in his companions in a natural and charming way, conveying to them the pensive mood evoked by the enchanting scenery! His own sensitive nature responded to it, and drew a similar response from his friends.

There are many such conversations recorded between Sariputta and other monks, not only the Venerables Maha Moggallana, Ananda and Anuruddha, but also Maha Kotthita, Upavana, Samiddhi, Savittha, Bhumiya and many more. It seems that the Buddha himself liked to talk to Sariputta, for he often did so, and many of his discourses were addressed to his "Marshal of the Law," to use the title he gave him.

Once, Sariputta repeated some words the Master had spoken to Ananda on another occasion. "This is the whole of the Life of Purity (*brahmacariya*); namely, noble friendship, noble companionship, noble association."

There could be no better exemplification of that teaching than the life of the Chief Disciple himself.

(excerpted from "The Life of Sariputta", compiled and translated from the Pali texts by Nyanaponika Thera. *Access to Insight*, 7 June 2010, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel090.html> . Retrieved on 28 January 2012.)

***One who follows the true Dharma
Should associate with benevolent people.
Such people, knowing the true nature of the Dharma,
Have the virtues of realization and teaching,
As well as great compassion and eloquence.***

How does a person qualify as good and knowledgeable? ... Good and knowledgeable persons have five qualities. First, the virtue of realization: this includes the three studies of pure precepts, meditation, and wisdom. Second, the virtue of teaching: good and knowledgeable people must have studied widely and deeply... Third, knowledge of true nature--that is, the true Dharma... Fourth, compassion... Fifth, eloquence: with this quality one can preach skillfully and tactfully, and people will understand easily and receive benefits.

--from *The Way to Buddhahood*, by Ven. Yin Shun

KALYANAMITTA

Jake Davis

In the throes of distress or exhilaration, in the face of totally novel experience, it is often very difficult for practitioners to know what course to take. When doubt about one's practice becomes strong, for instance, any decision or resolve made will be second-guessed, and sometimes third- and fourth-guessed, thus rendering the practitioner totally indecisive and unable to concentrate or to progress. While doubt can also arise about a teacher's advice, practitioners can be helped out of many sticky situations by someone in whom they have developed strong trust. This is the role of a kalyāṇamitta.

In Buddhist literature the word kalyanamitta is usually translated as a good, honest, or spiritual friend. But kalyanamitta means more than just that. The words "sacred friendship" come closest to describing the depth of connection and commitment, the pure and unconditional relationship, that can exist between a student and a spiritual teacher, as well as between friends.

Steven Smith's comments derive from personal experience. He cites a beautiful Burmese expression for the kind of friendship between two people that happens because of good deeds done together or for one another in past lives. 'Yezed sounde' [ye sek soun de], literally means 'water drops – come together': two life streams flowing onwards, meeting again. It conveys the strength of a bond that has endured and matured over lifetimes. Indeed, this is the kind of reconnection I have felt with Steven, as he felt with his own kalyāṇamitta. Meeting my teacher Sayadaw U Paṇḍita was yezed sounde [ye sek soun de], an immediate recognition, a reunion, and a radical love at first sight. I had traveled

to Burma with a dear friend to ordain as a monk at the monastery of the great Mahasi Sayadaw. My mission was principally Dharma practice and study, and the rich discipline of wearing the robes of monk. I was not looking for a teacher in Burma, rather a profound lineage of teachings. I found such teachings, I found an abounding spiritual home, and unexpectedly, I found a teacher. Sayadaw U Paṇḍita was the senior meditation master at the time I took robes. The moment our eyes met in his modest monastic cottage, I realized that I had found a teacher. It was not exactly like finding him. There was just this powerful connection: yezed sounde. His initial gaze was at once profoundly reassuring and deeply unsettling. The Sayadaw seemed to see into the very core of my being. Light and shadow, vulnerability and shame, were all laid bare – and accepted. The power of his spiritual friendship was immediate. I felt seen, exposed, yet unconditionally accepted.

Not every connection is so deep. A particularly protected, trusting kind of relationship can develop between a meditation master and a student. Such a friendship allows the teacher the opportunity to mentor and guide a practitioner through the most difficult experience.

“We take refuge in the Saṅgha through wise friendship,” writes one American teacher.

Narayan Liebenson Grady's rendition echoes the Buddha's words to Ānanda on the 'entire holy life' in a distinctly modern voice. She describes two primary means by which a 'good friend' can help one practice the Eightfold Noble Path: by giving advice, and by setting an example. To have wise friends can help keep the practice alive when our motivation and confidence are faltering. We can read and study and practice, but at times we find ourselves lost. At times the teachings may not seem quite real or

quite enough... When we see that others have changed and have grown into deepening levels of freedom through practice, we see that this path of liberation is also available to us.

In addition to acting as an inspiration, a 'good friend' gives advice. Liebenson Grady's description of gentle truth-telling is indeed beautiful to a Western ear. Nonetheless, as her words make clear, if our advisors shy away from pointing out the hard truths, deluding ourselves is easy. This is precisely why the 'fierce compassion' exercised by certain Asian masters can be so valuable. Teachers at IMS [Insight Meditation Society] tend not to manifest this ferocity with nearly as much force.

It is a true treasure in this life of attempting to awaken to find friends who will tell us the truth when we ask. It is very easy to find people who will talk behind our backs, but to receive the truth from friends in a kind way is a wonderful gift. We can take refuge in their discernment. We can check out our assumptions and conclusions. Discerning friends can help us examine ways that we habitually cause suffering for ourselves and others... It is hard to walk on this path of awareness without friends gently pointing out our blind spot.

(From *Strong Roots*, by Jake Davis; <http://www.dharma.org/bcbs/Pages/documents/StrongRoots.pdf>)

If you call upon a teacher or solicit the help of a good friend, they descend from the heavens and appear out of the earth. As for the guidance of a true teacher, it is to be requested of sentient beings and even of insentient beings.

--Dogen, *"The Sounds of the Valley Streams and the Forms of the Mountains"*

THE GOOD FRIEND

Sarah Shaw

At the time of the Buddha, the sense of debate and the even argumentative nature of contacts between proponents of various views indicate that there were all kinds of teachers around, and a practitioner might go from one to another. Special emphasis is given in the canon, however, to a particular relationship, that of the *kalyāṇamitta*, the "good" or "lovely friend" or "the friend in what is lovely", who may give guidance and encouragement in meditation. The "good friend" is important as someone in whom one can place trust and to whom one can talk openly about the meditation practice and problems connected with it: at Thig.43, for instance, the nun Uttamā describes her teacher Paṭācāra as trustworthy (*saddhāyikā*). Upatissa [in the *Vimuttimaggā*] says that someone who goes on the path without such a guide is like someone setting out alone on a distant journey, or an elephant without a goad. The good friend, however, is compared to an elephant trainer, a good road, a rain from, a nursing mother, a father, parents that protect their children or a teacher who guides his or her pupils. As suggested by the last analogy, he or she is to a certain extent identified with the teacher (*acariya*), though ... a rather more companionable as well as independent relationship is being described. A stress on seclusion in Buddhist texts is constantly balanced by a sense of the community: loving-kindness towards the local *sangha*, the community of monks where one is staying, is recommended by Buddhagosa as a practice suitable for everyone... As an antidote to each one of the hindrances to meditation, one text recommends contact with a good friend and identifies one of the stages in

meditation practice when a teacher is likely to be needed. The Buddha often visits struggling meditators after perceiving their problems with the "divine eye"...

The early manuals describe how one should search for such a person. Upatissa suggests that one should find one of two kinds of "merit fulfiller": someone who has understanding of the three "baskets" of texts, or one who understands to the seed of *kamma*, has beneficent worldly knowledge and knows the four noble truths. If such a person cannot be found one should go to a friend who has seven qualities [dear and pleasing; respected; just as he should be; speaks up; kindly in speech; discusses things in depth; does not urge without a reason]. Buddhaghosa says that one should look for a teacher who is an arahat, failing that one who is non-returner, and so on down through to the ordinary man who has attained *jhāna*, or, lastly, one who is familiar with one group of texts. His final words, suggesting the need for some pragmatism whatever the situation, give a helpful "bottom line": "Hence the ancient elders said three times 'One who is conscientious will guard it.'"

... The commentaries also outline ways that the person wishing to learn meditation should look after and honour teachers in a monastic context; teachers are accorded great respect to this day in the east. Early Buddhism, however, was unusual in its attitude towards the place of the teacher. Theravāda Buddhism is not a "guru" tradition: the practitioner takes refuge in the Triple Gem when he or she wishes to develop meditation, either as a monk, in which case the ordination procedure follows, or as a lay person, in which case the practitioner undertakes the five precepts. This does not indicate a lack of respect, but rather the importance attached to the *dhamma* as something to be known by the wise. According to Buddhaghosa, it should be visible not

"in the way that an ornament on another's head is, but rather it is visible only in one's own mind." But a teacher is needed to help this to happen, rather like a singing teacher would be needed to train a voice, or a good friend might be particularly helpful over a problem period in one's life. Vajirañāna writes: "It is for beginners especially that association with a teacher is an indispensable support; for the immediate success of meditation is largely due to a capable teacher who is a guide on the path of emancipation". Perhaps the main point to emerge... is that the relationship with the teacher and others following the path needs to have good heart. The teacher should, to a certain extent, be a friend; one's friends on the path are, to a certain extent, one's teachers.

(From *Buddhist meditation: an anthology of texts from the Pāli canon*, by Sarah Shaw, pp. 10-11)

***I know that for thousands of lifetimes,
you and I have been one,
and the distance between us is only a flash of thought.
Just yesterday while walking alone,
I saw the old path strewn with Autumn leaves,
and the brilliant moon, hanging over the gate,
suddenly appeared like the image of an old friend.
And all the stars confirmed that you were there!***

—from "Looking For Each Other," by Thich Nhat Hanh

SACRED FRIENDSHIP

Steven Smith

In Buddhist literature the word *kalyanamitta* is usually translated as a good, honest, or spiritual friend. But *kalyanamitta* means more than just that. The words "sacred friendship" come closest to describing the depth of connection and commitment, the pure and unconditional relationship, that can exist between a student and a spiritual teacher, as well as between friends.

Kalyanamitta, sacred friendship, has two aspects: empathy and wisdom. Empathy is the capacity to resonate and connect on a level deeper than the persona, to feel what another is feeling in one's own head. Free from judgment or interpretation, empathy means being right there with another on a pure, energetic level. The other half of sacred friendship, wisdom, attunes to the other person's inherent goodness, a sacred place within. A spiritual friend might see this goodness long before we know it is there. Overtly or subtly, he or she then skillfully brings that goodness out and inspires us to live up to our true potential. As a student on retreat once joked, "I want to become the person my dog thinks I am!"

It feels good to be unconditionally loved by someone who is faithfully attuned to our goodness, ever forgiving our faults. Sacred friendship is unconditionally inclusive. Undesirable aspects of the friend are not excluded from the depth of one's heart. Being unconditionally loved by someone radically affirms our core being.

While being attuned to our goodness, a spiritual friend also accepts our less desirable traits and forgives our imperfections. To

offer this rare kind of love to a friend requires both commitment and courage. Sacred friendship may be easiest to see in archetypal relationships between great leaders and their fold or between teachers and students. Sometimes even an "ordinary" friendship develops this uncommon sacred character. These relationships suggest the possibility of what complete sacred friendship can be.

Kalyanamitta is beautifully evoked in one of the *Jatakas* ("birth stories"), which are tales of the previous lives of the Buddha, or the "Bodhisattva," a Buddha-to-be.

This legend tells us that once upon a time, the Bodhisattva was born as a Monkey King. He grew up stout and strong, and became a vigorous leader of eighty thousand monkeys who all lived together in one mammoth mango tree. Imagine the size of such a magnificent tree! It grew on the bank of the great river Ganges, spreading its branches partly over water and partly over land. This mango tree was an elaborate mansion of thickly layered leaves, like a forested mountain with richly landscaped regions down its flanks. The mangoes were as large as water pots and had a sweet fragrance, brilliant sunset colors, and the taste of ambrosia. The monkeys loved their mango tree. For timeless generations their ancestors had lived in the region. Now, bodhisattvas have intuitive knowledge about unforeseeable events and other mysterious things, so throughout their residence in this mango tree, the Monkey King laid down one rule: they must never allow even one of the mangoes to fall into the river.

But the palatial mango tree was home to many other beings as well, including a giant colony of forest ants, and their huge nest stretched out along a large limb growing over the great river. The monkeys didn't see that the ant's nest was hiding a cluster

of mangoes. One day a large ripened mango fell into the flowing river and floated away.

After a long journey downstream the shiny orange orb became caught in a fisherman's net set to catch river flotsam upstream from where a great Human King of the province happened to be bathing. Seeing this brightly colored object, the king climbed out onto the riverbank and ordered the fisherman to fetch it. "What is that?" the King wondered aloud. The fisherman didn't know. They stared at the strange-looking forest jewel. Then the King's forester came and identified it as the "mango" fruit. The forester ran a sharp knife across the thick skin until the succulent yellow interior was exposed. Instantly an otherworldly aroma arose. The King reached for the fruit and hit into it. Flavor pervaded his entire being. Never had he tasted anything so divine. He said, "We must have more."

The Human King and his retinue sailed upstream for what seemed like a long time, seeking the source of the mango. At last they came to the huge mango tree along the banks of the river in the early evening. No one was around. Mango clusters hung like lamps from the deep green tree and lay like large jewels on the ground. The travelers feasted on mango, enjoying the sublime flavors. Then they built fires around the boundaries, and the King camped at the base of the tree with his archers on guard.

Around midnight the Monkey King returned with his retinue of eighty thousand. The monkeys happily swung into their home tree after their evening forage in the forest. Immediately the archers alerted the sleeping King. Spying the plump monkeys, the King ordered, "Shoot some of them before they flee. We'll have monkey meat with our mango in the morning."

Quickly the archers readied deadly arrows in their bows. Commotion in the mango tree erupted as the Monkey King soothed

his tribe: "Do not fear, I will give you life"—and in a flash he led a retreat to the higher reaches of the great tree, where they were momentarily safe from harm's way. But the archers jockeyed for a better shooting position with their deadly poison-tipped arrows. The great Monkey King then leaped from the tallest branch, across the wide Ganges, and onto the far bank. When the Human King saw this, he said to his archers, "Don't shoot them yet," and all the humans watched what was to unfold.

Expertly, the Monkey King broke several long lengths of bamboo, strung them together, and attached one end to the trunk of a tree, the other end to his waist. With the speed of a thundercloud torn by wind, he jumped back across the river, aiming for a mango branch in order to form a bridge of bamboo that would stretch from bank to bank. But the width of the Ganges was a hundred bow lengths, and the Bodhisattva had forgotten the part he wrapped around his waist. Just as he was about to reach the mango tree, he realized he would fall one bow length short. His mighty body became the last link. He then implored his monkeys, "Go quickly across my back and slide down the bamboo to safety." They began their escape to the other side.

Among the monkey tribe was an envious and resentful monkey named Devadatta. When Devadatta saw the outstretched body of the Monkey King, he thought, "Here is my chance to see the last of my enemy." With the other 79,999 monkeys safely across the bamboo bridge, Devadatta leaped from the highest branch and jumped hard on the Bodhisattva's back, breaking his heart. The Monkey King looked up and said, "Oh, Devadatta, you fool. Now just save your life from the deadly arrows." Devadatta shamefully slid across the Bodhisattva's broken body and joined his tribe, now safe on the other side. The Bodhisattva was alone, and mortally wounded.



The Human King, who had witnessed the unfolding of the entire drama, was overwhelmed with emotion. He said, "This is a great being indeed. He offered his life for the safety of all of those in his care. Now I will care for him. He is a pure friend and a great teacher." The King had the dying Bodhisattva brought carefully down from the tree. He gently washed him in the Ganges and wrapped his own

kingly robes around him. He made a comfortable bed and offered fresh fruit and water. Then the Human King asked the Bodhisattva, "Great King, why did you do that? You have sacrificed your own precious life for them. Who are they to you?"

The Bodhisattva answered, "I am their sacred friend, their refuge. I do not fear death. My monkeys are safe now. Freedom was won for those in my care. My dear friend, if you wish to live by the Dharma, the Truth, then the happiness of all in your realm should be most dear to you. This is the way of a true friend, a true King."

As the Bodhisattva made his transition into his next life, the Human King's heart awakened as if from a long sleep. He remained a long time at the site of his transformation. Then he made a shrine at the foot of the mango tree depicting his great friend's fantastic leap across the wide Ganges for the sake of his tribe. And for the rest of his days he honored the Great Being's memory. Established in the Bodhisattva's teachings of generosity, compassion, and wisdom, he found his true calling as a leader in the joy of serving others. He left a legacy for generations of

leaders who followed. The Human King, like his teacher, became a friend to all, a protector of life, justice, and peace.

The Monkey King is the complete kalyanamitta: no being is excluded from his care. He is the savior of his tribe and the protector even of his enemies. He has both the compassion and the wisdom that understands the supreme value of giving everything, even his own life, for the benefit of others. Such sacrifice is a movement of the heart motivated from a place of loyalty that is beyond time. Just as the Buddha spent countless lives as a bodhisattva developing the qualities that would eventually enable him to awaken, so the kalyanamitta is also a bodhisattva cultivating these qualities. When seen from this perspective, the entire world, including our internal and external "Devadattas," can be our benefactor, offering ceaseless teachings of compassion and understanding. Envy, conceit, lust for power, anger, and fear, whether seen within or experienced in others, can teach us patience and forgiveness. It is because Devadatta is not excluded from the tribe that the Bodhisattva is charged to protect, that the Bodhisattva both grieves and feels grateful when Devadatta strikes him a mortal blow. He is grieved by the harm Devadatta causes himself, and glad that as a bodhisattva he is able to offer his life to save all beings. The Human King understood the entire scope of the Monkey King's sacred friendship—and seeing this in action is what transmitted to the Human King the most essential teachings of kalyanamitta.

We need not turn only to legends and literature for inspiring examples of sacred friendship; in our contemporary world there are also great leaders who exemplify this ideal. Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace laureate from Burma, is one such hero. Suu Kyi is a good friend with whom I have enjoyed numerous meaningful conversations, great Burmese curry, and afternoon tea at

her home in Rangoon. We discovered we had a mutual regard for the Jataka of the Monkey King. We discussed the great power of the Jatakas to encourage the development of qualities of awakening, called paramis, in the midst of life's vicissitudes. I noted the parallels of the Monkey King tale to the difficult situation in Burma.

As a leader in the struggle for democracy, Suu Kyi is virtually confined to her home by the opposing military authorities. Yet, like the Monkey King, she and her colleagues strive to create a bridge to freedom for millions of followers. She has said that she does not like to be regarded as a hero, someone separate from the many people who are struggling for freedom. We discussed the quality, or parami, of "courageous energy and strength of heart" (viriya) as a deep motivation of the heroic actions of a bodhisattva. She feels that a leader with courageous energy is not a grandstanding "hero," but rather one who tries to work selflessly and courageously with others for the benefit of all.

Although Suu Kyi has a strong intellect, her passion is simple: basic needs such as health, education, and liberty to express oneself. Using the nonviolent forces of love and compassion to bring about change, she inspires courage through her renunciation of self-interest and her loyal friendship. I think the reason millions of people in Burma and throughout the world respect and love her is that she genuinely offers herself as a friend to all. Her spirit of generosity, sacrifice, and friendship nurtures the light of hope in an era of darkness. In the intimacy of friendship, the sense of kinship with all beings creates a "sacred canopy" under which we all live in a natural morality and integrity of intention.

When we were talking about the Monkey King, I observed that Suu Kyi herself seemed to be a living aspect of this Jataka tale.

There are many people who rely on her as a symbol of hope. And she said, "You know, if there was only one person, one friend, left in all of Burma, I would not leave." I thought of the Monkey King's assertion: "I am their refuge."

The Burmese have an expression that describes sacred friendship: *yezed sounde*, which literally means "water-drop connection." It describes the experience of meeting someone and feeling an immediate bond. The image evokes what happens when water drops come close to one another: they combine and become one, the confluence of two streams. In Buddhist cosmology, our lives are viewed as streams of interrelated cause-and-effect energy, a movement of mental and physical forces in ceaseless flow from moment to moment, and life to life. Burmese people would think, "In some past life I did something good for you, you did something good for me, or we performed skillful actions together for the benefit of others. The power of these past actions set in motion a current of complex forces that result in the reunion in the present life of these separate streams of existence." Much more simply said: *yezed sounde*, water-drop connection. The two meet once again. Pure friendship of this intensity kindles a feeling of recognition and the sense of being "seen."

Meeting my teacher Sayadaw U Pandita was *yezed sounde*, an immediate recognition, a reunion, and a radical love at first sight. I had traveled to Burma with a dear friend to ordain as a monk at the monastery of the great Mahasi Sayadaw. My mission was principally Dharma practice and study, and the rich discipline of wearing the robes of a monk. I was not looking for a teacher in Burma, rather a profound lineage of teachings. I found such teachings, I found an abounding spiritual home, and unexpectedly, I found a teacher. Sayadaw U Pandita was the sen-

ior meditation master at the time I took robes. The moment our eyes met in his modest monastic cottage, I realized that I had found a teacher. It was not exactly like finding him. There was just this powerful connection: yezed sounde.

His initial gaze was at once profoundly reassuring and deeply unsettling. The Sayadaw seemed to see into the very core of my being. Light and shadow, vulnerability and shame, were all laid bare—and accepted. The power of his spiritual friendship was immediate. I felt seen, exposed, yet unconditionally accepted.

The gift of a teacher's unconditional acceptance is a significant condition in creating an inner rest and freedom. From this ease and clarity the truth of things as they are is naturally revealed, and our life flows out of wisdom and compassion.

The power of sacred friendship is not only a catalyst for awakening to truth. It also creates a cohesive and protective surround in one's psyche that heals, empowers, and liberates. We see with eyes of compassion and understanding. When we see in this way, we can begin the long and rewarding journey of accepting all the disparate and fragmented regions of our psyche, and we discover the goodness enfolded within.

Years after I left the monastery and resumed life as a layperson, I asked for U Pandita's blessing for my marriage to Michele McDonald. His response was just as concerned with the heart of the matter as if I were still in robes asking about one of the rules of conduct. He questioned my motivations. He wanted to know if it was *kama* or *kamma*—desire or deep karmic (water-drop) connection. It was a good question, and an important one. Was my wish to marry based on sensual desire and clinging to comfort and convenience—possibly undermining commitment to practice and awakening? Or was it the kind of affiliation between two people that is rooted in an underlying ground of deep spiritual

friendship? The ultimate motivation of a yezed sounde connection would be the mutual wish for and support of one another's liberation, not simply the satisfaction of worldly desires. As a true spiritual friend, U Pandita pointed me back to the most important aspect of my decision to marry.

The staggering range of joys and sorrows all beings experience is the way of the world. It is natural law, the truth of things as they are. Just as the nature of the physical world is turbulent systems with the ever-changing conditions of wind, water, heat, and earth, so too our inner environment is a turbulent system. We are ever challenged with changing fortunes of gain and loss, pleasure and pain, praise and blame, fame and disrepute. Spiritual friendships show the way of the wise; with wisdom and lovingkindness one can skillfully navigate through these systems with equanimity. It is acceptance of one-self, and life as it is, that is the secret of navigational success.

The Dalai Lama says that we can survive without religion but not without affection. Unconditional love is a nutriment as essential to our being as food. Because it is rare to receive unconditional love, we yearn for it; we long for the experience of being seen, of being recognized to the core in a genuine and authentic way. The trust experienced with a spiritual friend nurtures the places in the psyche that have always longed to love and be loved unconditionally. The power of association with a wise friend helps us to live from our depth, wherein all of life is experienced intimately and as very real.

As an adolescent I had a friend whom I loved and trusted more than anyone else in the world. It was an archetypal friendship, a water-drop connection. I met Peter in the ocean one Saturday while body-surfing at Sandy Beach, a popular yet treacherous shore break. Waves the size and force of Mack trucks were rising

up out of deep water, cresting, and pounding down several yards shoreward in a few feet of water. Peter was gracefully riding these dragons, and I saw him as a beautiful youth at skillful play in the foaming intensity of Hawaiian surf.

Confidence—which is essential in riding these massive volumes of water and escaping them before being crunched against the sandy, shallow bottom—was still a developing quality in me. Those waves instilled fear in me. Peter looked at me in a way I still clearly recall four decades later. It was a look of affection and acceptance that at once transmitted confidence, truth, and trust. Under Peter's caring tutelage, I entered a higher level of big-wave body surfing that day at Sandy Beach.

As a lowly freshman, I was an unlikely partner for Peter, a senior "god," yet we formed a deep bond. It was a magical and adventurous friendship: journeys to rural island valleys, caves, and hidden beaches. Yet all these beautiful outer forms mirrored an inner nature more profound than I realized back then. It was an innocent, original spiritual friendship. The beauty of Peter's being was in loving others in such an unconditional, good-hearted way that each of his friends felt their goodness in his presence. He was a "friend to all."

Tragically, Peter died nine years after our meeting at Sandy Beach. When I learned at my family's seashore home about his untimely death, I swam into the surf in a desperate attempt to wash away the pain of unbearable loss. A short time later, on the island of Molokai, I stood on a high, lush valley ridge between two tropical waterfalls looking out over the ocean. A strong feeling of Peter came to mind. I sought him in the beauty of the land we had so often played in throughout our youth. Now he was gone and the pain of it was too unbearable to let in. So I just pushed it away.

Twenty years later, about a month into an intensive *metta* (loving-kindness) retreat, a strong feeling and image of Peter arose in the depths of very concentrated practice. The force of concentration and *metta* was strong. Yet so potent was the feeling of Peter that I felt impelled to come out of the deep meditation and go with the feelings. My body then began to surge with energetic contractions, releasing emotions of sadness, grief, and loss. I wept.

And something shifted. All those years I had been looking for Peter in each of my relationships, but nothing could compare with the idealized memory of its perfection, and so I rarely felt fully met. Who can compete with perfection? In the wake of this deep and mindful mourning, my view of Peter altered, and I could appreciate the gift he had left in my heart. Only when I let go of Peter as an ideal, and fully mourned his loss, could I accept and appreciate the depth of true-hearted friendship.

Our wisdom tradition of love and understanding teaches us the practice of letting go. When we let go of striving for the perfect, archetypal friendship and just practice being a friend, we discover it is not about finding friendship; it is about being a friend.

Whenever we are unconditionally present, the friend before us feels affirmed, safe, and seen on the deepest level so that the goodness and authenticity of his or her being shines forth. In this moment the friendship is a sacred connection. And it flows both ways: when we are living from our own depth, everything and everyone is experienced as real, not as an interpretation or idealized image. We also become more forgiving as we accept our failings. We experience in lifelong friendships a compassionate acceptance of each other's longtime flaws.

A movement into intimacy reveals imperfections as well as strengths. Though we may seek supportive and nurturing rela-

tions, the closer we become with someone, the more our disturbing, difficult, and dissatisfying traits are revealed. But here is where we meet depth and emotional closeness. Sacred friendship is a way of being, an intimacy with oneself and the world that invites the presence of another into that space.

In this process, friendships can be a crucible of healing. A history of fear of abandonment and longing for connection might be deposited in this crucible. The journey into intimacy may trigger old emotional wounds that have nothing to do with the friend in question. Or maybe an old karmic "knot" simultaneously attracts and repels two individuals in a tension arc of contradiction. The shadowy side of friendship, the competition and jealousy, needs to be recognized and acknowledged.

How do we hold a friendship when the cord of connection has been frayed or broken, when the water drops have separated and cannot seem to find their way back to cohesion? Some betrayals may feel too hurtful to forgive. Yet by allowing ourselves to feel the pain, to forgive our own failure to forgive, eventually we may be able to still feel the sacred in broken friendships.

Within the wide embrace of sacred friendship, acceptance and forgiveness are what make real intimacy possible. Intimacy rests in the simplicity of being fully present, responsive to what is there in the moment, with no agenda or anticipation. By fully being in the moment we are there in just the right way. We rediscover the mystery of who we are through this interchange of opening and surrender. Such friendships create heaven on earth.

There are such connections, which must be a very great, an almost unbearable happiness, but they can occur only between very rich beings, between those who have become, each for their own sake, rich, calm, and concen-

trated; only if two worlds are wide and deep and individual can they be combined.

For the more we are, the richer everything we experience is. And those who want to have a deep love in their lives must collect and save for it, and gather honey.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

[from *Voices of Insight*, Sharon Salzberg (ed.), Shambhala Publications, 1999]

