



Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center

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November 2022 Newsletter



Spiritual Friendship

This essay will describe the qualities and characteristics of a spiritual friend and why a spiritual friend is helpful and a necessary condition for the training of the mind for liberation from suffering, the realization of Nibbāna. I will refer to various suttas found in the Pali Canon to illustrate the points made in this essay.

The Upadḍha Sutta is number 45.2 in Saṃyutta Nikāya. The sutta relates a conversation between Lord Buddha and Venerable Ananda. Ananda was the Buddha's loyal and trusted disciple who served to assist the Buddha in numerous duties and also had an extremely keen memory who remembered the teachings of the Buddha for posterity. Ananda said to the Buddha in this sutta that spiritual friendship was half of the holy life. The Buddha corrected Ananda and said that spiritual friendship is the whole of the holy life. Spiritual friendship is a necessary condition to traverse the training path consisting of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, and thereby reach liberation from all suffering.

Spiritual friend is the translation of "kalyāṇa-mitta" in the Pali language. "Kalyāṇa" means lovely or beautiful and "mitta" means friend. The meaning of "kalyāṇa", lovely and beautiful, does not refer to one's physical attractiveness, but to beautiful inner qualities; such as: faith, loving-kindness, compassion, virtue, generosity, and wisdom. In the English language kalyāṇa-mitta is also translated as "admirable friend", "virtuous friend", "good friend", "benevolent friend", "ideal friend" and "noble friend."

The Dīghajāṇu Sutta is number 8.54 in Aṅguttara Nikāya and lists four qualities of a spiritual friend.

1. virtue,
2. faith,
3. generosity, and
4. wisdom.

The spiritual friend trains in virtue, ethical behavior, rooted in the training of Five Precepts. The Five precepts are as follows.

1. The first precept refrains from killing sentient beings: humans, animals, birds, reptiles, fish and insects. Causing injury to living beings also goes against the spirit of the precept. The precept is a training to respect the dignity of life, and to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion. Instead of causing harm, all sentient beings are protected so that their minds can be at peace and happy.
2. The second precept refrains from theft, taking that which does not belong to you. Deceitful dealings, fraud, cheating and forgery are also included in this precept.
3. The third precept refrains from sexual misconduct such as adultery and trains in sexual responsibility; i.e., respecting one's personal commitment and mutual agreement in a relationship.
4. The fourth precept refrains from falsehood, deliberately telling a lie. This precept may be extended in order to have greater usefulness and power in purifying the mind by avoiding

other forms of wrong speech such as malicious speech, harsh speech and gossip. In Buddhist texts, this precept is considered second in importance to the first precept, because a lying person is regarded to have no shame, and therefore capable of performing and creating much unwholesome kamma. Lying is not only to be avoided because it harms others and oneself, lying also goes against the spiritual necessity of finding and knowing the truth.

5. The fifth precept refrains from intoxication through alcohol, recreational drugs or anything that clouds the mind of awareness and wisdom. This precept may also be extended in order to develop mindfulness and wisdom in regards to the consumption of food, preoccupation with work and the desire for keeping oneself constantly busy. Habitual busyness is an obstruction to the training of mind and is often used in order to avoid the practices of watching the contents of mind and the development of stillness and silence. Medieval Pāli commentator Buddhaghosa have written that violating the first four precepts may be more or less blamable depending on the person or animal affected, the fifth precept is always "greatly blamable", as it hinders one from understanding the Buddha's teaching and may lead one to "madness".

The spiritual friend has great faith and is committed to the practice of the Buddha's teaching known as the Dhamma. There is trust in the Noble Saṅgha consisting of fully enlightened beings, Lord Buddha and Arahants, as well as in others who have also realized the Dhamma: Stream-enterer, Once-returner and Non-returner. The spiritual friend's faith in summary lies in the Triple Gem: the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Noble Saṅgha; and also have great faith in various concepts of Dhamma, such as in the efficacy of kamma and the possibility of liberation from mental suffering.

The spiritual friend practices generosity, gives what is worthwhile and gives with non-attachment. Giving without seeking anything in return is the soil for the arising of spiritual wealth, wholesome mental faculties that purifies the mind of unwholesome habits and conditions. Generosity reduces the impulses of greed and craving which are the causes of suffering. Generosity can be given in both material or immaterial ways. Spiritual giving is the immaterial gift of noble teachings, the Dhamma, and is said by the Buddha to surpass all other gifts.

The spiritual friend possess wisdom, penetrating insight into the Three Characteristics of Existence and the Four Noble Truths. The Three Characteristics of Existence describes the nature of the body-mind and the contents of the world, namely: impermanence, suffering, and no personal self. The majority of beings are deluded in that they don't recognize the Three Characteristics of Existence and this results in suffering. The removal of that delusion is the end of suffering. The Three Characteristics of Existence are the following.

1. The characteristic of impermanence refers to all things are composed of and conditioned by components are in a constant state of flux as the components themselves change. All physical and mental events arise, change and dissolve. Beings are in flux: they are born, become sick and die; and their physical form and environment change within the cycle of repeated rebirth and death. No-thing remains the same and everything decays. All beings whether they are reborn in heavenly realms or in hell realms are subject to impermanence. The impermanence of the conditional realms are in contrast to Nibbāna, the reality that has no birth, change, decay or death.
2. The characteristic called dukkha in Pali means unsatisfactoriness, suffering or pain. Dukkha includes the physical and mental sufferings that follows each rebirth, aging, illness, and death. Dukkha is dissatisfaction from associating with what a being dislikes and not getting what is desired. Dukkha is lack of satisfaction with all things because all things are conditioned by elements that are impermanent.
3. The characteristic of no personal self refers to the insight that there is no conditioned mind, personality or ego that is unchanging or permanent. Identification with the body-mind or with the ego results in suffering due to their impermanence. Only the realization or identification with Nibbāna will liberate one from suffering.

The Four Noble Truths are the following.

1. The first noble truth is that there is suffering inherent in the Three Characteristics of Existence.

2. The second noble truth is that the cause of suffering is craving. The desire, attachment or identification to any conditioned thing or content of experience is the cause for psychological suffering.
3. The third noble truth is the end of suffering and is achieved by letting go of the cause. The end of suffering is Nibbāna.
4. The fourth noble truth is the way or means to let go of the causes of suffering, namely, the Noble Eightfold Path.

The spiritual friend encourages others to train the mind in order to have liberating insight into the Three Characteristics of Existence and the Four Noble Truths in each and every moment, here and now; i.e., insight into suffering and freedom from suffering. Training of the mind requires energy directed at developing mindfulness and concentration. With adequate mindfulness and concentration the mind lets go of all conditioned states and impurities or defilements of the mind; whereby, there is the experience and knowing of the unconditioned, Nibbāna.

The Dīghajāṇu Sutta defines the spiritual friend as one who is training to perfect the qualities of virtue, faith, generosity, and wisdom for the benefit of all beings as well as for oneself.

The next sutta under consideration is the Mitta Sutta whose number is 7.35 in Aṅguttara Nikāya. The sutta list the following seven characteristics of a spiritual friend.

1. he gives what is hard to give;
2. he does what is hard to do;
3. he endures what is hard to endure;
4. he reveals his secrets to you;
5. he keeps your secrets;
6. he does not abandon you in misfortunes and
7. when you are down and out, he does not look down on you.

I was unable to locate a commentary that expands on the meaning of these seven characteristics; therefore, I offer the following elucidation. Please note that I refer to the spiritual friend with the pronoun 'he' even though the spiritual friend may be a female.

A spiritual friend gives what is hard to give.

- It is hard to give loving-kindness when feeling angry or fearful.
- It is hard to give peace and be at peace where there is conflict or disagreement in a relationship.
- It is hard to give ones' focused attention completely in the moment and in any situation or relationship.

A spiritual friend does what is hard to do.

- It is hard to do what is unpopular even when the action is believed to be beneficial and wise.
- It is hard to put forth energy when feeling tired or lazy.
- It is hard to walk the talk; i.e., it is hard to have integrity, to do what one says will be done and does not do what one says will not be done.
- It is hard to make time for the other and bring the other into your space.
- It is hard to act with loving-kindness, to be intimate with the other in order to connect, join and bond with the other; this is accomplished by knowing the other as the same in essence as oneself; i.e., pure consciousness.
- It is hard to dissolve boundaries and defenses that separate oneself from others, to become vulnerable and completely open.
- It is hard to stop playing roles, pretending and acting like a character in the drama of worldly life.
- It is hard to stop the mind spinning with opinions, judgements, fears and hatred.
- It is hard to be silent, to value internal and external silence, for silence is sacred. The spiritual friend will break the silence in order to speak the truth that will cause no harm and which is beneficial.

A spiritual friend endures what is hard to endure.

- It is hard to endure anxiety and restlessness and do nothing but wait with patience.
- It is hard to accept, understand and patiently endure the false self or ego in oneself and in the other.

- It is hard to discipline the egoic mind with the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.
- It is hard to endure the defilements of the mind: ignorance, ill-will and greed; especially, during the process of training and purifying the mind.
- It is hard to endure the 'dark night of the soul'; the seemingly endless bardo when the mind is still very much conditioned with ignorance but has also experienced some light of liberation.

A spiritual friend reveals his secrets to you.

- He is willing to trust others.
- He is open handed, shares the Dhamma with everyone, and does not withhold teachings from anyone.
- He communicates what he is doing and why it is being done.
- He invites you into his life to participate in making plans and decisions.

A spiritual friend keeps your secrets.

- He can be trusted.
- He is reliable and dependable.
- He wants to participate and be present in your life.

A spiritual friend does not abandon you in misfortunes.

- He loves you and will not abandon you.
- When you are physically or mentally sick, he will help you get well.
- When you have lost your wealth, fame or reputation, he will be there for you and help you get back on your feet.
- He will not abandon you if you error in ethical behavior or you move from the true path of deliverance.

A spiritual friend does not look down on you when you are down and out.

- He will not judge or condemn you.
- He will accept your current wholesome and unwholesome qualities with the understanding that with proper training wholesome qualities will increase and unwholesome qualities will decrease.
- He respects your fundamental goodness and light.

The Mitta Sutta defines a spiritual friend with seven characteristics.

1. he gives what is hard to give;
2. he does what is hard to do;
3. he endures what is hard to endure;
4. he reveals his secrets to you;
5. he keeps your secrets;
6. he does not abandon you in misfortunes and
7. when you are down and out, he does not look down on you.

These characteristics of a spiritual friend may be considered as included within the two main characteristics: loving-kindness and wisdom.

Associating with and imitating the qualities and characteristics of a spiritual friend will enable one to match and possibly gain a higher degree of those qualities and characteristics. The following are additional functions of the spiritual friend.

- The spiritual friend is an example to emulate and is a role model.
- The spiritual friend is a guide and teacher.
- The spiritual friend is a source of encouragement and motivation to continue striving towards freedom or liberation from suffering.
- You may bounce ideas, perceptions, views, beliefs, and judgements off of the spiritual friend.
- The spiritual friend is someone to learn from: what works and what doesn't work; and is a source of experience, wisdom and knowledge.
- The spiritual friend is a source of love and emotional nutriment.
- The spiritual friend is a center of stability and a source of strength.
- The spiritual friend is patient and perseveres regardless of the obstacles.

- The spiritual friend is truthful and has integrity.
- The spiritual friend is fearless and courageous in practicing the Dhamma and protecting all beings. He knows himself to be pure consciousness and therefore invulnerable and cannot be harmed.
- The spiritual friend knows how to listen and hears what is not being said between the lines.

The spiritual friend respects all beings and treats everyone the same. This principle is mentioned in the Sangaha Sutta: The Bonds of Fellowship number 4.32 in Aṅguttara Nikāya. In this sutta we learn that a layman named Hatthako Alavako was always accompanied by five hundred lay disciples, and was one of seven laymen who had such a following. The Buddha asked Hatthako how he could command the allegiance of such a large company. "By the four bases of sympathy," he answered. The four bases of sympathy or sangaha-vatthu in Pali means qualities that bond people in unity or principles for helpful integration. The four principles are the following.

1. Giving gifts, sharing material possessions, time and energy. This principle enables one to connect with others by relaxing the habit of being preoccupied with oneself.
2. Friendly and kind speech. Speaking words that are truthful, polite and gentle, and speech that are helpful for connecting with others. Abstaining from harsh speech. The Buddha taught the importance of loving and true speech for producing harmony, friendship and happiness.
3. Helpful and kindly action, performing actions that are useful to sentient beings. Doing what is good by way of thought, speech and action.
4. Promoting equality of treatment by treating everyone equally and behaving consistently in a fair and impartial manner.

The spiritual friend practices these four bases of sympathy or principles in a consistent manner.

The spiritual friend is available for the other. By communicating the suffering to the spiritual friend, the suffering becomes bearable and may be reduced. The great Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh taught how a spiritual friend joins with the other with love and understanding by contemplating the Four Mantras of True Presence in thought, speech and action. The four mantras are the following.

1. Darling, I am here for you.
2. I know you are there, and I am very happy.
3. Darling, I know you suffer; that is why I am here for you.
4. Darling, I suffer. Please help.

Darling, I am here for you. The spiritual friend is present here and now. In true presence, this mantra will produce a miracle, the miracle of love. Love is the reality and when you become real, the other person becomes real, and life is real in that moment. Happiness is shared in the presence of love and understanding.

I know you are there, and I am very happy. The spiritual friend is happy to be with you knowing that you are in essence the same as the spiritual friend. To be really present and know that the other is also there is a miracle, the miracle of love. The spiritual friend is really here and now, and in that presence he is able to recognize and appreciate the presence of the other.

Darling, I know you suffer; that is why I am here for you. The spiritual friend is mindful and aware of your pain and wants to help. When we suffer and if the person we love is not aware of our suffering, we will suffer even more. The presence of the spiritual friend alone will relieve a lot of your suffering.

Darling, I suffer. Please help. The fourth mantra is the most difficult. It is practiced when the spiritual friend suffers and believes that the person he loves is the cause of the suffering. The spiritual friend can say the mantra, "Darling, I suffer. Please help." because the spiritual friend does not have the pride that prevents him from saying these five words. The spiritual friend also suffers because you suffer and the suffering is a boundary that separates. The spiritual friend is asking for your help with his suffering by revealing your suffering to him.

Please understand that the spiritual friend may be a male or a female, young or old in physical years, a lay-person or a monastic. The spiritual friend may have trained the mind over many life-times and have developed mindfulness, concentration and purity even though in this life-time the spiritual friend appears as a novice. One cannot judge a book by its cover; therefore, it is prudent to respect everyone as a wise spiritual friend until you know otherwise.

A person is known as an authentic spiritual friend only by associating with that person for a longtime. One need be careful before trusting someone as a spiritual friend.

The following two verses found in the Dhammapada are worth contemplating.

Verse 78: One should not associate with bad friends, nor with the vile. One should associate with good friends, and with those who are noble.

Verse 328: If one finds a sagacious friend, who is a virtuous and steadfast companion, one should live with him joyfully and mindfully, overcoming all dangers.

The spiritual friend is the nutriment, the sunshine for spiritual growth, purification of mind and liberation. Spiritual friends are rare in the world; therefore, please consider to make a determination to be a spiritual friend for the benefit of others and to help develop beautiful beings. The training of a spiritual friend benefits all beings and in so doing the mind is purified and realizes Nibbāna.

Announcements

- Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center has a presence on Meet-Up social media and we ask that you please sign-up for every event that you are planning to attend at www.MeetUp.com. Some people are intimidated by a small number of attendees and a larger number will be encouraging.
- Please help advertise Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center by providing a review at www.google.com/maps.
- Every Monday at 4:00PM the Meditation Center will be cleaned. Please join us in maintaining a clean space for practicing and discussing the Dhamma.

Activities of the Meditation Center

- Sitting meditation is held everyday at 6:30AM and 5:30PM. After meditation, Ajahn Kumāro is available to answer questions and discuss the Dhamma. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email mittameditation@gmail.com on the days and time you would like to participate.
- The days of the full moon, new moon and the two half moons are called in Pāli: The Uposatha, and is a Buddhist day of observance. A lunar calendar is available at <https://cal.forestsangha.org>. Ajahn Kumāro will perform the ceremony of giving the eight precepts on the full and new moon days after the 5:30PM meditation. You may elect to take the five precepts instead of the eight and may determine to keep the precepts as long as you see fit (one night, a week, a lifetime, etc).
- Meditation Workshop on the first Sunday of each month between 11:00AM and 1:00PM. The workshop will provide instruction and practice for sitting and walking meditation. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the Dhamma. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email mittameditation@gmail.com on the days and time you would like to participate.
- Question and Answer Tea on the third Sunday of each month at 3:00PM. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email mittameditation@gmail.com on the days and time you would like to participate.
- Everyday at 8:40AM Ajahn Kumāro leaves for alms-round in order to give residents of Asheville the opportunity to earn merit by practicing generosity of giving food and placing it into the alms bowl. Ajahn does not accept or handle money. Ajahn usually arrives at the Whole Foods Market, 70 Merrimon Ave. just before 9:00AM and stands in front of the store for alms.
- Ajahn is available at other times during the day to meet with individuals or groups when requested.

- For more information please send an email to mittameditation@gmail.com. We also have a presence on Facebook and Meet-Up social media.

Request for Support

The Meditation Center is in need of support in order to accomplish its' mission and vision. The support may take various forms. You will support the Meditation Center by:

- Being present at the Meditation Center for group meditation.
- Giving alms during alms-round.
- Bringing to the Meditation Center items that are listed on the support page of the website: www.mittameditation.com.
- Volunteering your skills, energy and time at the Meditation Center.
- Informing your family and friends about the Meditation Center and encouraging them to participate in the activities.
- Donating financial contributions for the Meditation Center's expenses. Kalyana-Mitta Meditation Center is recognized as a tax-exempt organization by the IRS under section 501(c)(3). Donations are deductible in accordance with IRS regulations. Financial contributions may be made on the support page of the website: www.mittameditation.com and additional means for making financial donations may be discussed with Elisha Buhler at (910) 922-1549.