

How to become a good friend so that others would be able to associate sincerely and happily

By Bhikkhu T. Seelananda (Samatha-Vipassana Meditation Centre, Canada)

Association with a good friend is frequently advocated in many a discourses of the teaching of the Buddha who lived 2600 years ago. His teaching remains immutable and all those with wisdom could follow it without any hesitation. Today more wise people in the West strive to understand the teaching of the Buddha and practice it in their daily lives. Therefore, they are stress-free and always have happiness in their mind because they know well that they are their own freedom makers. Knowing they create stress (dukkha) in themselves, they themselves are responsible to free themselves from stress (dukkha). Buddhism teaches the way to escape from stress.

In order to understand oneself, first of all one should observe oneself. (One's own body and mind, [psycho-physical existence]). The Buddha's constant admonition is to observe things objectively and abandon clinging to the notions of I, my, or mine; seeing things subjectively. It is clear that seeing things subjectively is the way to the cycle of repeated births and deaths; seeing things objectively is the way to the complete dissipation of greed, hatred and delusion; the attainment of Awakening, Liberation. Buddhism is not a religion in the sense of faith where all are expected to believe in a creator and a soul. Those who follow a religion would end up with eternal heaven or hell. Buddhism never does teach such things. Buddhism teaches about you and your own nature.

The Buddha, Sakyamuni Gautama, the Buddha of our Era, has delivered thousands of discourses throughout his ministry of 45 years. In order to understand a good friend, the Buddha has used, basically, three terms, namely; "Kalyānamitta", "Sappurisa" and "Panditha". In the "Blessing Discourse", the Buddha said, "Pandithānam ca sevānā etam mangalam uttama" which means, '**Association with a good friend is a blessing**'. But how one should find a good friend to associate within this society is the question. When we come to the real situation, it is quite difficult to find a good friend to associate with mainly because of the lack of virtuous ones in this society. When talking with each other, everybody is very good, honest, generous, kindhearted, sincere and goodhearted, open minded. Whenever a person talks with others they have appreciation of their own good traits and strive to show that they are virtuous and generous. S/he when speaking is harmless, blameless, calm, and very peaceful towards others; but now, we do not see such a good result in society. So, in the first manner, if we talk with ten persons they are all good, peaceful, calm and quiet; never needing to tell lies, or backbite.

However, in our society today, we see so much of disagreement, distrust, disrespect, and dis-unity. Along with this, we see discrimination and the divisions of people who do not believe in each other. People are showing multiple faces; saying this with one person, saying that with another person, and yet again, acting in a completely

different way. This is how humans behave, in congruently. How can we understand them? Those who continually say things about themselves are not the real person living in society. Rather, they are just a puppet of societies' mores. Once when asked of the Buddha who made this puppet? The Buddha said, "craving made this puppet". It is certainly very difficult to understand humans.

How should we understand good friends

The Buddha's advice is this: "It is by living together with someone, that his virtue is to be known, and that after a long time, not after a short time; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is wise, not by a dullard.

"It is by dealing with someone, that his honesty is to be known, and that after a long time, not after a short time; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is wise not by a dullard.

"It is in adversities, that a person's fortitude is to be known, and that after a long time, not after a short time; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is wise, not by a dullard.

"It is by discussion with someone, that his wisdom is to be known, and that after a long time, not after a short time; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is wise, not by a dullard."

The Buddha further said:

"A man is not easily known by outward form
Nor should one trust a quick appraisal,
For in the guise of the well controlled
Uncontrolled men move in the world.

Like a counterfeit earring made of clay,
Like a bronze half-pence coated with gold,
Some move about in disguise;
Inwardly impure, outwardly beautiful." (S. N. Kosala Samyutta)

As most of you know, this so called man/woman is nothing but the existence of five aggregates of clinging, namely: the form aggregate of clinging, feeling aggregate of clinging, perception aggregate of clinging, volitional formations aggregate of clinging, and consciousness aggregate of clinging. Of them, the form aggregate represents the physicality which is nothing but the four great elements (earth, water, fire and wind) and the other four aggregates represent mentality. This physical and mental existence is functioning interdependently and all these units of mind and units of matter are constantly changing for the renewal of existence. That is in other words, impermanence. Within this concurrency, there is nothing to be grasped as a substantial or permanent entity. Everything is impermanent, everything is unsatisfactory, everything is soulless.

However, most of us cannot understand this fact. Therefore, we try to grasp the whole world as our own with the notions of 'I' 'me' or 'mine' and with the result we intensify our depression, distress and dis-easiness (suffering). More and more things are wanted all the time by them. They have an endless thirst that cannot be quenched. Thereby, they try to earn more and more by any means. Then we come to find in society those who are not good persons to associate with; we then go from place to place seeking the good persons. Now, where should we find this new person with which to associate? We need to understand that good persons are not dropping from a heaven nor pouring from an opening in the earth. It is we ourselves who have to become the good persons for the welfare of society. We ourselves become the bad or evil friends in society, so whatever good or evil there is, solely depends on our own actions.

The Buddha, in the Vasala Sutta, Said, **"One does never become a low-caste or a noble person because of one's birth, but because of one's actions"**

(Najaccā vasalo hoti – Najaccā hoti brāhmano

Kammanā vasalo hoti- Kammanā hoti brāhmano)

According to this teaching of the Buddha, action is the most important thing. People are divided according to their modes of actions. Whatever good or bad means actions. If one's action is harmful to oneself or to others as well, this is a bad action. If it is good for oneself and good for others, this is good action. Everything is an action. This is how the Buddha realized the world.

A good friend, always thinks to do something good for himself and others as well (sucinṭita cinti hoti). He always speaks in a manner to do something good for himself and others (Subhasita bhasi hoti) and whatever he is doing it is something good for himself and others as well (Sukata kammakari hoti). In brief, it is the good friend, who guides you to the spiritual way, from the beginning to the culmination of the realization of the Supreme Bliss of Nibbana.

So these are the three modes of actions; bodily, verbal, and mental actions. Thus, one's actions are very significant to understand the person, more so than one's color, race, or creed, or the place and country they have come from. What is most important is his or her patterns of behavior. People can behave as animals and the vice-a-versa. In this society, there are some people who are very rich coming from 'so called' high society families, known as a blue blooded family. But if they are doing unwholesome evil actions; it is certainly not fitting, as they are tormenting themselves and others as well. At the same time, we can see some who have only a very little. They are, perhaps, not from such and such accepted family backgrounds but are very simple, sincere and, certainly happy with what they have. They never do unwholesome deeds for living. They have a sense of fear and shame to do unwholesome actions. They are reluctant to come forward and move about in this busy society. This is how we lose the opportunity to associate with good friends in society, however true friends are still there, let's seek them out.

The best way to find a good friend is by turning to yourself. Once, answering a question, the Blessed One said, "Mother is the best friend at home". Friends, we

ourselves should become good friends to ourselves and others. That is the way to get the opportunity to associate with good friends in this society.

The Buddha's Admonition and Assurance

The Buddha's kind admonition on the significance of associating with a good friend is this: **" When you get the opportunity to associate with a good friend, you will get the opportunity to listen to the Dhamma, when you get the opportunity to listen to the Dhamma, you will get the opportunity to develop your confidence, when you develop your confidence you will get the opportunity to develop wise attention, when you have wise attention, you will be able to develop and maintain mindfulness and clear comprehension, when you have mindfulness and clear comprehension, you will get the opportunity to develop the restraint of the senses, when you get the opportunity to restraint the senses, you will get the opportunity to develop three modes of good conducts, when you have three modes of good conducts, you will get the opportunity to practice and develop the four foundations of mindfulness, when you have developed and cultivated the four foundations of mindfulness, you will be able to develop and cultivate the seven factors of enlightenment and when you develop and cultivate the seven factors of enlightenment, you will definitely realize real knowledge and liberation"** (See. A.N.10. Avijja Sutta)

The salient characteristics of a good Friend

1. Good friend has goodwill, loving kindness and compassion to all
2. Good friend supports others expecting nothing
3. Good friend avoids ten unwholesome deeds and develops ten wholesome deeds
4. Good friend helps others also to avoid ten unwholesome deeds and perform ten wholesome deeds
5. By revealing the path of the Dhamma, the Good friend, practices and guides others to the Noble Way to the attainment of Enlightenment

Some more characteristics

1. Good friend would support his parents,
2. Good friend would respect the elders,
3. Good friend would be gentle of speech,
4. Good friend would avoid back-biting,
5. Good friend would not be avaricious, but would be generous,
6. Good friend would speak the truth, and
7. Good friend would restrain himself from losing his temper.

Once, Ven. Ananda approached the Buddha and said, "Venerable Sir, the half of this holy life depends on good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship". Then the Buddha said, " Not so Ananda, not so Ananda, the entire holy life Ananda depends on good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship". On another occasion, the Buddha said, " When one has a good friend, it is to be expected that he will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold path". For that the Buddha gave a classic

simile. "Monks, the dawn is the forerunner and precursor of the rising of the Sun. Similarly, monks, good friendship is the forerunner and precursor for the arising of the Noble Eightfold path."

How to recognize an evil friend

1. S/he is always talking something about killing, eating meat (i.e.BBQ), drinking, fishing, or hunting and harming animals, birds and others
2. S/he is suggesting to stealing, burgling, or destroying others properties
3. S/he is engaged in sexual misconduct and suggesting others too
4. S/he is a real liar, wherever he goes he has no shame to tell lies amidst any group, whether they are monks, nuns, laymen or laywomen
5. S/he is a back-biter, uses malicious speech
6. S/he always uses harsh speech towards others
7. S/he is engaged in frivolous talks
8. S/he is jealous of others health, wealth and property and has covetousness
9. S/he is full of ill-will anger and hatred
10. S/he follows a wrong view, therefore, never sees things as they are.

The Good Friend has the direct opposite qualities of the above ten.

Whenever the good friend gains an abundance of wealth, he never misuses it. He always has a good plan to use his/her hard earned money, wealth and property. With it he:

1. makes himself happy and pleased,
2. his wife and children happy and pleased,
3. his mother and father happy and pleased,
4. his slaves, workers, and servants, happy and pleased,
5. his friends and colleagues happy and pleased
6. makes offerings to the monks and nuns, and
7. As the result, he will be reborn in heaven.

The Buddha very clearly enunciated that association with a good friend is one of the four factors for the attainment of the state of stream enterer (sotapanna). Those four are as follows.

1. Listening to others whenever there is talk on the Four Noble Truths (paratoghosha)
2. Association with a good friend (Sappurisa samsevo)
3. Listening to the Sath Dhamma (Saddhammassavane)
4. Wise attention (Yoniso manasikara)

In the Bahudhatuka Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya, the Buddha said, "**Monks, whatever fears arise, all arise because of fool, not because of the wise man, whatever troubles arise, all arise because of fool, not because of the wise man, whatever calamities arise, they all arise because of fool, not because of the wise man.**"

So, I humbly offer this for your wise reflection. Let us all understand this wonderful teaching of the Buddha and strive to be good friends to ourselves and to others. If you can become a good friend, a friend who can guide at least one other person to the spiritual way of life, that definitely will be a great thing, a great meritorious deed. Then you will be an excellent person. Be a good friend to yourself and others, be an exemplary character to all around you. We wish you all and bless you all for success of your activities.

May the Triple Gem Bless you! May you live long in peace!

