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Introduction

Kalyanamitta in Pali means good or beautiful friends while kalyanamittata means good or beautiful friendship. This does not refer to physical beauty but rather the beauty of a person's character or heart.

Mitta is a derivative of metta, translated as loving kindness or loving friendliness.

Whole of Holy Life

Upaḍḍha Sutta

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Sakyans. Now there is a Sakyan town named Sakkara. There Ven. Ānanda went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side.

As he was sitting there, Ven. Ānanda said to the Blessed One, "This is half of the holy life, lord: having admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues."

"Don't say that, Ānanda. Don't say that. Having admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues 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 effort... 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 having admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues 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 people as friends, companions, & colleagues is actually the whole of the holy life.” (SN 45:2)

Commentary

Janet Surrey and Charles Hallisey (2021) wrote: We have been reminded repeatedly of a basic truth that, as persons, we are always in relation with other persons. Key to what we have learned, however, is the significance of being aware and acknowledging that whenever we are on the Path, so are others. Indeed, as we are always in relation, we are always on the Path together with others and for others. Our relations, then, are not something separate and especially not something to be overcome or transcended. Quite the contrary, our relations are both the foundations for practice as well as the fruits of practice

Bhikkhu Bodhi describes two types of spiritual friends. Thus spiritual friendship is of two types, horizontal and vertical. Horizontal spiritual friendship is friendship between people who are at roughly the same level in following the path; that is, it is the friendship between companions on the path, and what unites them as spiritual friends is a common dedication to following the Buddhist path. 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.

Friendships as a Foundation of Practice

Dīghajāṇu Sutta

In Dighajanu Sutta, the Buddha identified friendship as one of four qualities that lead to a layperson's happiness and well being. The other qualities are initiative, vigilance, and right livelihood. The Buddha defines conditions for good friendship.

“And what is meant by admirable friendship? There is the case where a lay person, in whatever town or village he may dwell, associates with householders or householders’ sons and daughters, young or old, who are consummate in conviction, consummate in virtue, consummate in generosity, consummate in discernment. He talks with them, engages them in discussions. He emulates consummate conviction 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 85.4)

Sambodhi Sutta: Self-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.'"

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

"When a monk has admirable friends, admirable companions, admirable comrades, it is to be expected that he will get to hear at will, easily & 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 & vision of release.

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

"When a monk has admirable friends, admirable companions, admirable comrades, it is to be expected that he will be discerning, endowed with discernment of arising & passing away — noble, penetrating, leading to the right ending of stress. (AN 9.1)

Dhammapada

From the Dhammapada, the Buddha instructs:

If you find an intelligent companion,
A fellow traveler
A sage of good conduct,
You should travel together,
Delighted and mindful
Overcoming all dangers (Dhp 328)

Friendship as a Quality to Develop

Sigalovada Sutta: The Discourse to Sigala, the Layperson's Code of Discipline

In a lesson directed to a young householder not connected with the Buddha, the Buddha outlines what to look out for in a false friend, and qualities of a good friend.

“These four, young householder, should be understood as foes in the guise of friends: he who appropriates a friend's possessions, he who renders lip-service, he who flatters, he who brings ruin... The friend who appropriates, the friend who renders lip-service, the friend that flatters, the friend who brings ruin, these four as enemies the wise behold, avoid them from afar as paths of peril...

"These four, young householder, should be understood as warm-hearted friends: he who is a helpmate, he who is the same in happiness and sorrow, he who gives good counsel, he who sympathises... The friend who is a helpmate, the friend in happiness and woe, the friend who gives good counsel, the friend who sympathizes too — these four as friends the wise behold and cherish them devotedly as does a mother her own child." (DN 31)

Mitta Sutta: A Friend

"Monks, a friend endowed with seven qualities is worth associating with. Which seven?

He gives what is beautiful,
hard to give,
does what is hard to do,
endures painful, ill-spoken words.

His secrets he tells you,
your secrets he keeps.

When misfortunes strike,
he doesn't abandon you;
when you're down & out,
doesn't look down on you.

A person in whom these traits are found,
is a friend to be cultivated by anyone wanting a friend."
(AN 7:35)

WORDS

Speak the words and phrases that touch you. Listen deeply to words shared by others.

Speak only words of the text. Ruminates. Let them find a home in your memory.

FELT RESPONSES

Remain absorbed in the words and turn towards resonances in the body. "When I read this, I feel this."

What emotions are evoked, what images? Speak only felt responses related specifically to the text.

MEANING

Explore the meaning of the words and phrases. Inquire. Do not be afraid to analyze. Notice how threads of meaning are woven. Are there ambiguities, metaphors, contexts? How clearly can these words be understood?

ESSENCE

Discern what is true in this text: universal, timeless, beyond the personal.

Intuit what is being named that is simply the operation of nature.

Sense how the essence of this text comes to life now in you. Speak that essence.

Move patiently between the printed words, inner words, and silences.

DIALOGUE

Join together in immediate experience of the Dhamma: the way things actually are.

Release the text; trust it will inform the moment. Speak to the present moment.

Listen deeply with ample silence to soak in every spoken word.

Friendship is not friendship
which dissolves when we are
harmed
or slighted by those whom
we hold dear.
Let me judge myself and
others
On the nobility of our
intention
and see a friend as true
indeed
who ever errs and lets me
down
but whose heart is free of
malevolence.

Ian MCCrorie

The Moon Appears When the Water is Still: Reflections of the the Dhamma.

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