Introduction

The Kalyāṇa,mittatā Sutta 1 is a succinct statement on spiritual friendship spoken by the Buddha to an assembly of monastics. It opens with a parable of the dawn [§§2-3]: just as dawn marks the rising of the sun (which brings on a bright day), so too spiritual friendship is the precondition for the realization of the noble eightfold path leading to awakening [§4]. A spiritual friend, as it were, is someone who wakens us to the sun of wisdom.

Like many other sutta definitions of spiritual friendship, this sutta, too, mentions the eightfold path in terms of the viveka,nissita (“based on solitude”) formula. This formula defines the progressive stages and goal of the spiritual life. When appears at the end of the noble eightfold path formula (in place of “right knowledge” and “right liberation”), for example, in the Nāvā Sutta (S 51.158), and of course here in the Kalyāṇa,mittatā Sutta 1, where it qualifies each of the eight factors of the noble eightfold path.

Study method

After you are familiar with the Kalyāṇa,mittatā Sutta 1, you should go on to study related suttas. The key texts are these three suttas and three essays on spiritual friendship which should be studied together, as they are all closely related. It is recommended that you study them in this sequence:

1. The Upaḍḍha Sutta (S 45.2/5:2 f) SD 34.9,
2. The (Kalyāṇa,mitta) Appamāda Sutta (S 3.18/1:87 f) SD 34.3,
3. The (Kalyāṇa,mittatā) Sāriputta Sutta (S 45.3’5:3) SD 34.10.

And if you want to learn more details on the topics, go on to read the following essays:

4. Spiritual friendship: Stories of kindness SD 8.1,
5. Spiritual friendship: A textual study SD 34.18,
6. Bad friendship SD 34.1.

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1 See Viveka,nissita = SD 20.4.
2 S 51.158/5:51 = SD 20.16.
The First Discourse on Spiritual Friendship
S 45.49/5:29 f

1 Originating in Sāvatthī.

Parable of the dawn
2 “Bhikshus, just as dawn is the forerunner and harbinger of sun-rise, even so, bhikshus, [30] for a monk this is the forerunner, the harbinger of the arising of the noble eightfold path, that is, spiritual friendship.
3 Bhikshus, when a monk has a spiritual friend, it is to be expected that he will cultivate the noble eightfold path, develop the noble eightfold path.
And how, bhikshus, does a monk who has a spiritual friend cultivate the noble eightfold path, develop the noble eightfold path?

The viveka,nissita formula
4 Here, bhikshus, a monk cultivates right view based on solitude, on dispassion, on cessation, maturing in release.
   He cultivates right intention based on solitude, on dispassion, on cessation, maturing in release.
   He cultivates right speech based on solitude, on dispassion, on cessation, maturing in release.
   He cultivates right action based on solitude, on dispassion, on cessation, maturing in release.
   He cultivates right livelihood based on solitude, on dispassion, on cessation, maturing in release.
   He cultivates right effort based on solitude, on dispassion, on cessation, maturing in release.
   He cultivates right mindfulness based on solitude, on dispassion, on cessation, maturing in release.
   He cultivates right concentration based on solitude, on dispassion, on cessation, maturing in release.
In this way, bhikshus, a monk who has a spiritual friend, a good companion, a good comrade, cultivates the noble eightfold path, develops the noble eightfold path.”

— evanī —

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3 Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu sammā diṭṭhiṁ bhāveti viveka,nissitaṁ virāga,nissitaṁ nirodha,nissitaṁ vossagga,pariṇāmīṁ. This whole phrase, beginning with “based on solitude”—viveka,nissitaṁ virāga,nissitaṁ nirodha,nissitaṁ vossagga,pariṇāmīṁ dhamma,vinaya,saṁbojhaṅgan— is called the viveka,nissita formula. See R Gethin, The Buddhist Path to Awakening, 2003:162-168. On the viveka,nissita formula, see Viveka,nissita = SD 20.4; see also “Introduction to the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas” = SD 13.1 §4.2c n.

Virāga also “fading away (of lust).”

Nirodha, that is, “cessation of suffering.”

Vossagga, also “letting go, relinquishment.” MA says that there are 2 kinds of letting go or relinquishment (of suffering) (vossagga): “giving up” (paricēga), i.e. the abandonment of defilements, and “entering into” (pakkhandana), i.e. culminating in nirvana. Gethin notes that this phrase is not unique to the 7 bojjhāga, but is also found in connection with the factors of the noble eightfold path, the indriyā and balā (2001:162 f). This formula shows that that each bojjhanga is to be developed successively “as dependent on solitude, dispassion [fading away] and cessation” (Gethin 2001:166).