

## Spiritual friendship

In the **Upaḍḍha Sutta** (S 45.2), the Buddha is recorded as stating that spiritual friendship is the whole of the holy life. Spiritual friendship here refers ideally to the meditation teacher's relationship with his pupil. The teacher here inspires the student so that he (the student) is able to tap his spiritual potential to attain mental peace and clarity.

The Meghiya Sutta (U 4.1.7) further speaks of five qualities of spiritual maturity that comes from spiritual friendship. In an important sense, this is how spiritual friendship works.

The very first benefit of spiritual friendship is an intrinsic one: it is good in itself. When we meet our spiritual friends, our spiritual mentors, we cannot but feel a sense of secure joy. In a sense, spiritual friendship is an unequal relation: the mentor is wiser and more experienced than we are, and from which we benefit, conducing to our own spiritual growth. This is as natural as water flowing downwards from the heights.

Yet, spiritual friendship, on account of its interactivity, also brings the best out of both the mentor and the mentee. In fact, the spiritual friend or mentor, too, often learns a lot from such an interaction, unless he is an adept (non-learner), an arhat. As such, spiritual friendship is also open to an interactivity on a level ground, as it were. Here, the mentor and the mentee inspire each other in the expression of beauty and truth, in mutually raising and refining one another's consciousness. This is called "true-hearted friendship."<sup>1</sup>

So much spiritual energy arises from such an interaction. This is the kind of energy that best fuels a Buddhist community, and which inspires others to see their innate goodness and bring it onto the conscious and active level. It is from such true friendship that we inspire and bring out the artistic talents, intellectual genius and unconditional goodness in others. Spiritual friendship is the ground for beauty and truth, and where we are able to truly appreciate that beauty is truth, and truth beauty.

When we are truly happy, we will naturally do good. The truly happy are also morally virtuous. Conversely, when we are morally virtuous, we will naturally be happy, too. Spiritual friendship, by its very nature, is a morally interactive relationship. Moral virtue ideally entails the best that we can offer to others, to healthily work and interact with others, through our bodies and speech. This is essentially what the five precepts are about.

Such a morally virtuous life only enhances our spiritual energies, fuelling us more joyful interest in our connections, fellowship and working with others. But we should direct the most vital effort towards our own spiritual development. For, it is our *inner* energies that make our friendship *spiritual*. In exerting such effort, we continue to grow spiritually and empower ourselves to become spiritual mentors to others.

Spiritual friendship and true-hearted friendship not only create and build beauty and truth, but they also refine our senses to see things within and without more clearly. We become truly

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<sup>1</sup> True-hearted friendship (*suhada mittatā*): see **Sigāl'ovada S** (D 31.21-26/3:187 f) = SD 4.1.

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wise, so that in due course, we are able to see directly into true reality. We become *awakened*. For this reason, the Buddha declares that the spiritual life is the *whole* of the holy life.<sup>2</sup>

[This revisioning is an abridgement of the conclusion to the essay entitled “Bad Friendship: Avoiding unwholesome teacher-pupil relationships” SD 64.17. See: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/64.17-Bad-friendship.-piya-PREV-34.1.pdf>

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<sup>2</sup> **Upaḍḍha S** (S 45.2/5:2 f = SD 34.9) = **(Kalyāṇa,mitta) Appamāda S** (S 3.18/1:87 f = SD 34.3).