

## (Piya) Mitta Sutta 1

Paṭhama (Piya) Mitta Sutta The Discourse on a (Loving) Friend 1 | A 7.35/4:31

Theme: Qualities of a true friend (a layman)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2007, 2010

### Introduction

**1.1 TWO KINDS OF TRUE FRIENDS.** It is interesting that **the Cūḷa Niddesa**'s commentary on the first two lines of **the Khagga,visāṇa Sutta** (Sn 37ab), speaks of two kinds of friends, that is, the householder or layman friend (*agārika mitta*) and the renunciant friend (*anāgārika mitta* or *pabbajita mitta*). The qualities of the layman friend as listed here are very close to those of a true-hearted friend mentioned in the (Piya) Mitta Sutta 1 [§2], thus:

**What is a householder friend?**<sup>1</sup> Here, he is one who

- (1) gives what is hard to give;
- (2) sacrifices what is hard to sacrifice;
- (3) does what is hard to do;
- (4) reveals his secrets;
- (5) keeps your secrets;
- (6) does not forsake you in misfortune;
- (7) will even lay down his life for you; and

does not look down (on you) when you have failed [are destitute]. (Nc 2:227)<sup>2</sup>

**1.2 THE TWO (PIYA) MITTA SUTTAS.** There are two discourses of the same name—the **(Piya) Mitta Sutta 1** and the **(Piya) Sutta 2**—that deal with the qualities of a “true-hearted friend” or “a friend with a good heart” (*suhadā mitta*). While the first discourse deals with a householder or laymen friend, the second deals with a monastic friend.

**The Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31) list these four kinds of true-hearted friends, or better, the four qualities of a true-hearted friend, that is,

- (1) the helper (*upakāra*),
- (2) the one constant in joy and in sorrow (*samāna,sukha,dukkha*),<sup>3</sup>
- (3) the good counselor [the who points out the good] (*atth’akkhāyī*),<sup>4</sup> and
- (4) the caring [the compassionate] (*anukampaka*). (D 1.21-26/3:187 f) = SD 4.1

The Sigāl’ovāda Sutta goes on to detail the various qualities of these *four kinds of true-hearted friends* or *four qualities of a true friend*. Each of us should cultivate such qualities, especially amongst our peers, but not just them. These qualities should be reciprocally active amongst friends.<sup>5</sup> Here, as in the two Piya Suttas, the context is social one.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Seven of these qualities (excepting “will even lay down his life for you”) are those listed in **Mitta S 1** (A 7.35-4:31 = SD 34.13) as those of one worthy of having as a friend. See below: “Two levels of friendship.”

<sup>2</sup> See **Upaḍḍha S** (S 3.18) @ SD 34.9 Intro (2.1.2) (“Two levels of friendship”) & **Spiritual friendship** = SD 34.1(2.3.3).

<sup>3</sup> Alt trs: “the one who shows benefits,” “the shower of the goal.”

<sup>4</sup> Omitting this, the NC Comy mentions only the remaining 3 kinds as householder friends (NcA 113 f): see **Spiritual friendship** = S 34.1 (2.3.5).

<sup>5</sup> On the reciprocal duties of a true friend, see **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31.31/3:190) = SD 4.1.

<sup>6</sup> Cf “spiritual friend” (*kalyāṇa,mitta*), who as a rule is a meditation teacher: see **Upaḍḍha S** (S 45.2/5:2 f) = SD 34.9 (which includes relates suttas and how to study them).

**1.2 A RECIPROCAL FRIENDSHIP. The Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 16), in its section on the six directions, dealing with friendship,<sup>7</sup> details what is briefly listed in the (Piya) Mitta Sutta 1, thus:

**31** (4) In five ways, young householder, **friends and companions** as the north should be ministered to by the son of family, thus:<sup>8</sup>

- (a) With generosity.
- (b) With pleasant [courteous] speech.
- (c) With beneficial conduct [in looking after their welfare].
- (d) With impartiality [treating them as he would treat himself].
- (e) By not going back on his word.

**Friends and companions**, young householder, as the superior direction [the north], having been ministered thus by the son of family, show him their compassion in these five ways:<sup>9</sup>

- (f) They guard him when he is heedless.
- (g) They guard his property when he is heedless.
- (h) They are a refuge to him when he is in fear [or danger].
- (i) They do not abandon him in his troubles.<sup>10</sup>
- (j) They respect his family members.<sup>11</sup>

In these five ways, young householder, friends and companions, as the superior direction [the north], having been ministered thus by the son of family, show him their compassion.

Thus the superior direction [the north] is covered by him and made safe and secure.

(D 31.31/3:190) = SD 4.1

From this teaching, we can see that true friendship is a reciprocally wholesome relationship. Unlike a business situation, where the vendor or salesman has to be friendly to sell his products, true friendship is an ongoing exchange of wholesomeness between two individuals, or amongst individuals as a community.

**1.3 HOW TO KNOW A TRUE-HEARTED FRIEND.** The question now is: “How do we know a friend to be true-hearted?” We find very clear guidelines in **the Thānāni S** (A 4.192), which gives these four ways of truly knowing a person:

- (1) through living with another, another’s moral virtue is known;
- (2) through dealing with another, another’s honesty is known,
- (3) through adversities, another’s fortitude [moral strength] is known, and
- (4) through discussing with another, his wisdom is known.

Even then, advises the Sutta, this understanding arises only after a long time, not after a short time; by one who is attentive, not by one inattentive; by the wise,<sup>12</sup> not a dullard.<sup>13</sup> — — —

<sup>7</sup> See D 31.15-26/3:185-188 & 31.31/3:190 = SD 4.1.

<sup>8</sup> The first four items below are called *saṅgha, vatthu*, the four conditions (*dāna, peyya, vajja, attha, cariya, samān’attatā*) for the integration of a group or of society, or consolidating friendship, partnership and unity (D 3:-152, 232; A 2:32, 248, 4:218, 363). **The (Saṅgha) Bala S** (A 9.7/4:363-365) explains them as follows (a) The gift of Dharma is the foremost gift (cf Dh 354a); (b) The foremost of pleasant speech (*piya, vācā* or *peyya, vajja*) is the teaching of the Dharma again and again to those who desire for it and listen attentively; (c) The foremost of beneficial conduct (*attha, cariyā*) is to rouse, instill, establish faith (*saddhā*) in the faithless; to rouse, instill, establish moral virtue (*sīla*) in the immoral; to rouse, instill, establish charity (*cāga*) in the miser; to rouse, instill, establish wisdom (*paññā*) in the foolish [ignorant]; (d) The foremost impartiality is a streamwinner’s impartiality towards a streamwinner, a once-returner’s impartiality towards a once-returner, a non-returner’s impartiality towards a non-returner, an Arhat’s impartiality towards an arhat. See **(Saṅgha) Bala S** = SD 2.21.

<sup>9</sup> Qualities (f), (g), and (h) are part of those of the true-hearted friend who is “a helper” [§22(1)].

<sup>10</sup> This is a quality of the true-hearted friend “who is the same in joy and in pain” [§23(2)].

<sup>11</sup> “Other family members,” *apara, paja*, lit “other generation,” which Comy explains as “one’s children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, such as organizing auspicious occasions for them” (DA 3:956).

<sup>12</sup> *Paññavatā* here, apparently, refers to the true individual (*sappurisa*): **Dhammaññu S** (A 7.64) = SD 30.10 Intro (3.1).

## The Discourse on a (Loving) Friend 1

A 7.35/4:31

1 Bhikshus, a friend who is accomplished in seven things should be associated with. What are the seven?

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 2 (1) He gives what is difficult to give.                                | <i>duddadam dadāti</i>        |
| (2) He does what is difficult to do.                                     | <i>dukkaram karoti</i>        |
| (3) He tolerates what is difficult to tolerate.                          | <i>dukkhamam khamati</i>      |
| (4) His secrets he reveals.  | <i>guyham assa āvi karoti</i> |
| (5) Your secrets he keeps.   | <i>guyham assa pariguhati</i> |
| (6) In misfortune he forsakes you not.                                   | <i>āpadāsu na jahati</i>      |
| (7) He does not look down (on you) when you have failed [are destitute]. | <i>khīṇena nātimaññati</i>    |

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 3 <i>Duddadam dadāti mitto<br/>dukkaraṇ cāpi kubbati<br/>athōpi'ssa duruttāni<br/>khamati dukkhamāni ca</i>         | A friend gives what is hard to give,<br>what is hard to do, he does, too,<br>bad speech, too, he bears,<br>and what is difficult to bear, too, he bears. |
| 4 <i>Guyhañ ca tassa akkhāti<br/>guyhassa parigūhati<br/>āpadāsu na jahāti<br/>khīṇena nātimaññati</i>              | His secrets he tells,<br>your secrets he keeps,<br>in hard times, he forsakes you not,<br>when you fail, he scorns you not.                              |
| 5 <i>Yam hi etāni thānāni<br/>saṁvijjantīdha puggale<br/>so mitto mitta, kāmēna,<br/>bhajitabbo tathā, vidhōti.</i> | Whichever of these qualities<br>are found here in a person<br>is a friend out of love for a friend—<br>one should associate with such a one.             |

— evaṃ —

100919; 100920; 100921

<sup>13</sup> A 4.192/2:187-190) = SD 14.12.