

## **Vissāsa**

One word for love, trust, goodness, agreement  
[Previously published as fb200508 Piya Tan]

*Vissāsa* is one of the most beautiful Buddhist Pali words. It has the following senses: “Love, trust, confidence, closeness, intimacy, of one mind and heart, mutual agreement.” For convenience, it is often translated as “**trust**,” but this lacks vital aspects of the other qualities. Perhaps, a closer translation is “**trueheartedness**,” which is rather long, but serve well as an explanation.

Sutta definition

**The Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31) gives the following practical description of one with *vissāsa*:

**23 (2) The one constant in joy and in sorrow** [a friend through thick and thin] should be known as a true-hearted friend for these 4 reasons:

- (1) He tells you his secrets. (*guyham assa ācikkhati*)
  - (2) He keeps your secrets. (*guyham assa parigūhati*)
  - (3) He does not abandon you in your troubles. (*āpadāsu na vijahati*)
  - (4) He would even give up his life for you. (*jīvitam pi’ssa atthāya pariccattam hoti*)
- (D 31,23(2)), SD 4.1

Buddhist example

A famous example of one with these qualities is that of **Ānanda**, who is willing to die for the Buddha. He stands right in front of the Buddha to prevent the intoxicated elephant Nālāgiri from trampling the Buddha. Ānanda remains where he is despite the Buddha forbidding him thrice. The Buddha “makes the earth turn around” to get Ānanda out of the way.

In past lives, too, Ānanda was willing to put the Bodhisattva’s life before his own. In this connection, the Buddha relates

**the Cūḷa Haṃsa Jātaka** (J 533, 5:333-354),  
**the Mahā Haṃsa Jātaka** (534/5:354-382), and  
**the Kakkāṭa Jātaka** (267/5:341-345).

On what is even higher than dying for those (or what) we love, see **Spiritual friendship**, SD 34.1 (2.5.3).

The Buddha lives for us

In the God-religion, death is the ultimate end of life on earth. Hence, it is seen as the highest sacrifice to make: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” When this is the last resort, especially in a situation of life-and-death, this may be true.

The Buddha is unique in declaring that we do have a choice: that **life** is better than death. For some, death is the final solution for the world's problems. But those loved who are left behind will suffer in many ways.

The Buddha left his **biological** family to discover the liberating truth for all. As Buddha, he is now open to all sentient beings, the world, as his **spiritual** family. In this sense, too, the sangha, especially of those who have walked the path, is of the same family. This is the sangha of the 10 directions: the 4 cardinal points, the directions in between, above and below; the whole universe, a universal family (including aliens, we call the gods).

Chinese

In Chinese, the word for *vissāsa* is 信 *xìn*, which also means faith. This is also part of my Chinese name, which is 明信 *míng xìn*, “of bright faith, radiant trueheartedness.”

Tagalog

The Tagalog word for “trust” is **tiwala**. But *vissāsa* also includes “intimacy,” **lapit**; “kindness,” **mabait**; “of one mind,” **iisang kaisipan**. We are looking for a single Tagalog word for all these qualities, that is, for *vissāsa*.

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