

## The 4 kinds of false friends

Source: Spiritual Friendship: A textual study, the nature and duties of friendship ©Piya Tan, 2010.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.2 THE 4 KINDS OF FALSE FRIENDS

Just as the **Sigāl'ovāda Sutta** (D 31) speaks of the 4 kinds of true-hearted friends [2.3.1], it also warns us against these **4 kinds of false friends**:

“Young householder, there are these 4 who should be known as enemies in the guise of friends:

- (1) **The downright taker**,<sup>2</sup> young householder, should be known as an enemy in the guise of a friend.
- (2) **The mere talker**,<sup>3</sup> young householder, should be known as an enemy in the guise of a friend.
- (3) **The sweet-talker**,<sup>4</sup> young householder, should be known as enemy in the guise of a friend.
- (4) **The destructive companion**,<sup>5</sup> young householder, should be known as an enemy in the guise of a friend.

Young householder, these are the 4 who should be known as enemies in the guise of friends.

(1) **The downright taker**, young householder, [186] should be known as an enemy in the guise of a friend for these 4 reasons:

- (a) He merely takes without ever giving.
- (b) With little, he desires much.
- (c) He does what needs doing only out of fear.
- (d) He serves only his own ends.

The downright taker, young householder, should be known as an enemy in the guise of a friend for these 4 reasons.

(2) **The mere talker**, young householder, should be known as an enemy in the guise of a friend for these 4 reasons:

- (a) He claims to having been hospitable in the past.<sup>6</sup>
- (b) He promises hospitality in the future.<sup>7</sup>
- (c) He worms his way with empty favours.<sup>8</sup>
- (d) When you need help, he feigns his own misfortune.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/34.1-Spiritual-friendship-a-textual-study-piya.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> “The downright taker,” *añña-d-atthu, haro*, lit “one who merely takes away,” the out-and-out robber.

<sup>3</sup> “The mere talker,” *vacī, paramo*, lit “who is word at best,” “a man of much profession” (DPL), one who merely pays lip-service, an empty vessel, an insincere person.

<sup>4</sup> “The sweet-talker,” *anuppiya, bhāṇī*, lit “speaker of what is pleasant,” one who says what others like to hear, one who is politically correct at best, a flatterer, a toady.

<sup>5</sup> “The companion who destroys one’s wealth,” *apāya, sahāya*, lit “a companion who leads one to loss”; Comy: “a companion who brings about loss of wealth” (*bhogānaṃ apāyesu sahāyo hoti*, DA 3:948), a wastrel. Qu at J 2:390, 19\*.

<sup>6</sup> *Atītena paṭisantharati*, lit “he is hospitable with the past.” Comy: He sweetly claims, “So much maize was set aside for you. We waited by the road but you did not come. Now it has gone bad.” (DA 3:949).

<sup>7</sup> *Anāgatena paṭisantharati*, lit “he is hospitable about the future.” Comy: He sweetly claims, “This time we have good maize and loads of fruit. We will be sure to set aside a pile of maize for you.” (DA 3:949).

<sup>8</sup> *Niratthakena saṅgaṇhāti*, ie he displays kindness but it is an empty promise.

For these 4 reasons, young houselord, the mere talker should be known as an enemy in the guise of a friend.

**(3) The sweet-talker**, young houselord, should be known as an enemy in the guise of a friend for these 4 reasons:

- (a) He approves of your doing wrong.
- (b) He approves of your doing right [or disapproves of it, depending on what profits him].<sup>10</sup>
- (c) He sings your praises to your face.
- (d) He runs you down behind your back.

For these 4 reasons, young houselord, the sweet-talker should be known as an enemy in the guise of a friend.

**(4) The destructive companion**, young houselord, should be known as enemy in the guise of a friend for these 4 reasons:<sup>11</sup>

- (a) He is your companion in taking strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks and that which causes heedlessness.
- (b) He is your companion in roaming (and loitering in) the streets at unseemly hours.
- (c) He is your companion in frequenting fairs [shows].
- (d) He is your companion in indulging in gambling, a basis for heedlessness.

For these 4 reasons, young houselord, the destructive companion should be known as an enemy in the guise of a friend.”

The Blessed One said this.

Having said that, the Sugata [well-farer], the Teacher, further said this:<sup>12</sup>

The friend who merely takes,  
and the one who sweet-talks,  
destruction—  
these 4 are not friends.  
they should be avoided from afar

and the friend who only talks,  
and the companion who brings

Thus the wise should know:  
like a dangerous path.

(D 31,14-20/3:186 f), SD 4.1

A more detailed study on “bad friendship” has been done elsewhere.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Paccupannesu kiccesu vyasanam dasseti*, lit “he points to his misfortune in what is to be done now.” Comy: If you need a cart, he claims it has broken a wheel, etc (DA 3:949).

<sup>10</sup> All MSS have vll reading either *kalyāṇam pi’ssa anujānāti* or *kalyāṇam pi’ssa nānujānāti*. Both Be (VRI) and Se (BUDSIR) edd read *anujānāti*, which is preferred as it reflects the moral nonchalance of the false friend. Alt tr: “He does not consent to your doing good.” Although this characteristic may at times apply to him, considering the fact that (d) “He runs you down behind your back,” the false friend, being a sycophant, is more likely to be a sort of “yes-man.” In the ultimate, both readings apply here since such a person would both approve or disapprove of one’s doing good, depending on whether it benefits him.

<sup>11</sup> These 4 reasons are also the ways of squandering one’s wealth [§7].

<sup>12</sup> This verse is qu at **Puṭa, dūsaka J** (J 280), where W H D Rouse gives a charming tr: *The friend who robs another without ceasing; | He that protests, protests incessantly; | The friend who flatters for the sake of pleasing; | The boon companion in debauchery;— | These four the wise as enemies should fear, | And keep aloof, if there be danger near.* (J:R 2:266)

<sup>13</sup> See [Bad friendship](#), SD 64.17.