

The 4 true-hearted friends

Source: SD 34.1 Spiritual Friendship: A textual study, the nature and duties of friendship ©Piya Tan, 2010.¹

2.3 KALYĀṆA, MITTA AS A “TRUE-HEARTED FRIEND.”

2.3.1 The 4 true-hearted friends. On a more “Buddhist” level, that is, from teachings of *the Buddha* (instead, for instance, of his utterances as a Bodhisattva), we have the well known “layman’s discipline” (*gihī, vinaya*),² found in **the Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31). The Sutta lists 4 kinds of “true-hearted friends” (*suhada mitta*) and defines them as follows:

THE 4 KINDS OF TRUE-HEARTED FRIENDS (OR, 4 ASPECTS OF A TRUE-HEARTED FRIEND)

“Young houselord, there are these 4 who should be known as true-hearted friends:³

- (1) **The helper** (*upakāra*) should be known as a true-hearted friend.
- (2) **The one constant in joy and in sorrow** (*samāna, sukha, dukkha*)⁴ should be known as a true-hearted friend.
- (3) **The good counsellor** (*atth’akkhāyī*) should be known as a true-hearted friend.
- (4) **The caring** (*anukampaka*) should be known as a true-hearted friend.

(1) **The helper**, young houselord, should be known as a true-hearted friend for these 4 reasons:⁵

- (a) He guards you when you are heedless.⁶
- (b) He guards your property when you are heedless.
- (c) He is a refuge to you when you are in fear [or danger].
- (d) When you have tasks to complete, he provides you with double the supply you need.⁷

The helper, young houselord, should be known as a true-hearted friend for these 4 reasons.

(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:⁸

- (a) He tells you his secrets.
- (b) He keeps your secrets.
- (c) He does not abandon you in your troubles.⁹

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

² This term is commentarial (DA 3:492), a byname for **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31/3:180-193), SD 4.1 (DA 3:959). For suttas related to the householder’s discipline, see **Dīgha, jānu S** (A 8.54/4:281-285), SD 5.10 Intro.

³ “True-hearted friends” *suhada mitta*, or “friends with good hearts”: see **Dūta S** (A 8.16) = Intro (8.2). Here the context is social one. For “spiritual friend” (*kalyāṇa, mitta*), on a more spiritual level, see SD 8.1. **Ṭhānāni S** (A 4.192) lists and defines these 4 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 (A 4.192/2:187-190), SD 14.12.

⁴ Alt trs: “the one who shows benefits,” “the shower of the goal.”

⁵ The first 3 qualities below are given as part of those reciprocal qualities that your “friends and companions” should show you [D 31.31fgh/3:189].

⁶ Comy: “When he sees that you have fallen in the middle of town or at the city gate or on the road after having taken some drinks, he sits down by you until you wake, lest your clothes be stolen.” (DA 3:949)

⁷ *Uppannassa kicca, karaṇīyesu tad diguṇaṃ bhogaṃ anuppādeti.*

⁸ These 4 qualities are part of the 7 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: “The 2 levels of friendship” [2.3.3].

(d) He would even give up his life for you.¹⁰

The one who is constant in joy and sorrow, young householder, should be known as a true-hearted friend for these 4 reasons.

(3) The good counsellor [the one who shows benefits or the goal] should be known as a true-hearted friend for these 4 reasons:¹¹

- (a) He restrains you from bad.
- (b) He exhorts you to do good.
- (c) He lets you hear what you have not heard before.
- (d) He shows you the way to heaven.

The good counsellor, young householder, should be known as a true-hearted friend for these 4 reasons.

(4) The caring¹² should be known as a true-hearted friend for these 4 reasons:

- (a) He does not delight in your misfortunes.
- (b) He delights in your good fortunes.
- (c) He prevents others from speaking ill of you.
- (d) He commends others who speak well of you.

The one who is compassionate, young householder, should be known as a true-hearted friend for these 4 reasons.”

The Blessed One said this.

Having said that, the Sugata [well-farer], the Teacher, further said this:

The friend who is a helper, and the friend who gives good counsel, these four are (true) friends, and devotes himself with respect	and the friend in weal and woe, and the caring friend— thus the wise should know as a child would his parents.
The wise accomplished in moral virtue, building his wealth his wealth piles up having gathered his wealth thus, truly he binds his friends to himself. ¹⁵	glows like a fire on a hill-top, ¹³ the way bees do, ¹⁴ the way an anthill grows, he is ready for family and home— (D 31,21-26/3:187 f), SD 4.1

2.3.2 Friendship on a wholesome social level. The context here is a *social* one¹⁶ [6.1]. In fact, the term the Sigāl’ovāda Sutta uses for a wholesome friend is not “spiritual friend” (*kalyāṇa,mitta*) [2.2],

⁹ This is also the reciprocal quality that your “friends and companions” should show you [D 31,31/3:190].

¹⁰ A famous example here is that of **Ānanda**, who stands right in front of the Buddha to prevent the intoxicated elephant Nāḷāgiri from trampling the Buddha. Ānanda remained where he is despite the Buddha forbidding him thrice. The Buddha “makes the earth turn around” to get Ānanda out of the way (J 533/5:335 f; DhA 1.12/1:140 f). In this connection, the Buddha relates **Cūḷa Haṃsa J** (J 533, 5:333-354), **Mahā Haṃsa J** (534/5:354-382), and **Kakkaṭṭa J** (267/5:341-345) on how even in previous lives, Ānanda gave up his own life to save the Buddha’s. For something even higher than dying for those (or what) we love, see (2.5.3) below.

¹¹ These duties are almost identical to those of the recluses and brahmins reciprocating the son of family [§33f-k].

¹² “Caring,” *anukampaka*, fr the verb *anukampati* = *anu* (after) + *kampati* (shake, tremble), lit “he shakes or trembles along after (someone)” (D:RD 3:171).

¹³ Comy: That is, like a fire burning on a hill-top at night (DA 3:951).

¹⁴ An allusion to Dh 49.

¹⁵ *Save mittāni ganthati*: this line actually comes after the next line, “He divides his wealth into 4,” but fits better with the preceding quatrain. Cf **Aḷavaka S** (S 10.12): “How does one bind friends to oneself? ... By giving, one binds friends” (S 10.12/850*+ 852*/1:214 f).

but “true-hearted friend” (*su,hada mitta*), a much less common term.¹⁷ The Pali word for “true-hearted” (or “good-hearted”) (*su,hada*) is also spelt *su,hadaya*, as found in **the Miga,luddaka Peta,vatthu** (Pv 3.7), the story of the deer-hunter:

*Tassa me sahāyo suhadayo*¹⁸
saddho āsi upāsako
*so’pi*²⁰ *maṃ anukampanto*
nivāresi punappunam

There is a true-hearted friend of mine,
he was a layman of faith:¹⁹
he, too, out of kindness to me,
often warned me thus:

Mā’kāsi pāpakam kamman
mā tāta duggatim agā
sace icchasi pecca sukham
virama pāṇa,vadhā asaṃyamā

“Do no bad deeds,
my friend, do not go to a state of misery.
If you wish for happiness hereafter,
refrain from wantonly killing of living beings.”
(Pv 3.7.4-5/59; PvA 205 f)

Clearly, here we see an overlapping of the qualities of a spiritual friend with those of the true-hearted friend. In all the references to the true-hearted friend, however, there is no reference to meditation, which is the specialty of the spiritual friend.

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¹⁶ “True-hearted friends” *suhadā mittā*, or “friends with good hearts”: see **Dūta S** (A 8.16), SD 46.7 (8.2). For “spiritual friend” (*kalyāṇa,mitta*), on a more spiritual level, see (2.1.1.3) below + SD 8.1. **Ṭhānāni S** (A 4.192) lists and defines these 4 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 (A 4.192/2:187-190), SD 14.12.

¹⁷ DA 3:949; **J 518**/5:81 (*Sahāyā vā’ti suhadaya,mittā vā*), **358**/3:181*, **532**/5:330*. One who is *suhadaya* is said to have a “beautiful and beneficent mind” (*suhadayo ti sundara,citto hita,cittako*, J 5:114).

¹⁸ Ce *suhada*.

¹⁹ “Faith,” *saddhā*. There are 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*): (1) “rootless faith” (*amūlika,saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith. (M 2:170); (2) “faith with a good cause” (*ākāravati,saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M 1:320,8 401,23); also called *avecca-p,pasāda* (S 12.41.11/2:69). “Wise faith” is syn with (2). *Amūlaka* = “not seen, not heard, not suspected” (V 2:243 3:163 & Comy). **Gethin** speaks of two kinds of faith: the cognitive and the affective (eg ERE: Faith; also Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387): “Faith in its cognitive dimension is seen as concerning belief in propositions or statements of which one does not—or perhaps cannot—have knowledge proper (however that should be defined); cognitive faith is a mode of knowing in a different category from that knowledge. Faith in its affective dimension is a more straightforward positive response to trust or confidence towards something or somebody ... the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary.” (Gethin 2001:107; my emphases).

²⁰ Se *So hi*.