

307 – Poems Ancient & Modern on the Theme of Friendship

Friendship of the theme of central importance in Buddhism especially in the form of spiritual friendship. And the theme which therefore is essential important and interest in the life and the work of the friends of the western buddhist order. I think you probably will not come along to a FWBO centre more than two/ three times at the most before hearing the magic words spiritual friendship. And if you go alone to a retreat then you will really likely to find it will be very surprising if you don't find the spiritual friendship is very much in the air. Now this evening I am not going to give a talk or friendship even I am just going to read some poems. Now four reasons which I don't altogether understand myself I have rather gone off giving lectures. I must give several tens or thousands of lectures already in the course of my life. but I have not really quite gone off reading poetry so have been thinking over last few months. Well friendship is a theme that does need to be emphasised. Perhaps even more than we actually do emphasised but I won't give lecture on it. As I might have done ten/ fifteen years ago. I will read some poems on subject on the theme of friendship. And I started looking through English poetry and translation from other languages. I gradually assemble a little collection of poems on the subject of friendship. And it's that collection that I am going to read this evening. I thought it would also a good idea to arranged them in sections so that the readings were not too miscellaneous so after quote a bit a thoughts arrived at five sections so that the poems are grouped under this five headings.

1) Friendship in the heroic age we then have 2) Rejoicing in friend & friendship 3) Remembering friends 4) Friendship in war and finally 5) Higher dimensions.

Now there were other aspect of friendship which I would have like to have more poems on but unfortunately I could not find them. I would like to have had a few more poems on the subject of friendship and death. That we may remember was the theme of the last poetry reading I gave here or a least one of the theme. I also have had like to had have more poems on the subject of friendship between women. But I am afraid I could find very very few poems on that particular topic so in this connection I would like to say if you personally know of any poems on friendship which are good poems which I have not included in my reading this evening please sent them to me and I would be happy to incorporate them in future reading. Which I may well be giving so lets start before the first section we have just as a sort of prelude or prologue and it come from very known work could the profit by Kalhil Gilbrain, Kalhil Gilbrain was a Lebanese. He was a poet and a mystic he lived during this century and profit is his most famous work. And in this work there is a sort of imaginary profit figure that to whom all sort of people put all sort of questions very familiar sort of set up they say speak to us about this and speak to us about that and eventually some one asked him to speak about friendship which he does. So it is this particular chapter of the profit which I am going to start of with this evening I think that strikes the sort of note that we will be sounding through out the reading.

First poem :-

Section one : Friendship in the heroic age and we going back to a very heroic age indeed. We go back to the epic of Gilgamesh and the ethic of Gilgamesh goes back some four thousand five hundred years. Gilgamesh was a king of Uruk in Mesopotamia which is now part of Iraq and Gilgamesh had a very great friend called Enkidu. And before they actually mate both Gilgamesh and Enkidu had sort of intuition about a coming great friendship. And the text says Enkidu longed comrade one who would understand his hearts because that just what a friend is. The friend is one who understand your heart and likewise Gilgamesh himself had a dream in fact he had several dream about his friend he was about to meet. The actual meeting was rather dramatic in fact the

text tells is the Enkidu when he heard about Gilgamesh wanted to challenge him and this is what he see in first extract which I am now going to read from the ethic of Gilgamesh.

Second poem :-

That what we called now a days fears friendship so Gilgamesh and Enkidu have all sort of adventures together as we encounter them in the epic but unfortunately Gilgamesh loses Enkidu. Enkidu dies and after his death Gilgamesh goes in quest for everlasting life. You might say a rather Buddhist idea, I am rather reminded of the Buddha seeing the four sights the old man, the sick man, the dead man and then the Siddhu the monk and then going in quest in Nirvana. but before Gilgamesh goes in quest for everlasting life he laments the loss of Enkidu. And he remains the loss in his elegy four hundred and fifty years ago.

Third Poem :-

So remaining in the heroic age going forward quite a few thousand years we come to China we come to the Chi king or classical poetry. This one of the five Confucian classic. Originally we are told there were some three thousand and more ancient poems. And great Confucius made a selection from these poems. He selected just over three hundred. And these three hundred poems selected by Confucius in the 6th century BCE have come down to us as the Chi king or the classic of the poetry. The poems go back it seems to the period roughly one thousand to seven hundred fifty BCE. So even though they are not ancient as an ethics of Gilgamesh they are still very ancient indeed. I am going to read two of these songs. The first is titled by the translator Bravely affection. And there is a footnote which says sung fists given by king to those of his own clan or surname. Clansman might perhaps be substituted for brothers. Through out I shall also mention the brother that brother the word brother as used in the song seems to mean something rather more like what we called friendship and word friend seems to correspond to more what we called an acquaintance so brotherly affection.

Fourth poem :-

That's it if it were a slightly a collective poem but this one is more as it were individual it's intitled, Comrades in war time in deals with the friendship between just two people and it goes like this.

Poem Five :-

Well we can take that literally or metaphorically (laughter).

Now to the heroic age in Greece Homer's Iliad. an extract. I better just place the story for you the great hero of the allied is of course Achilles. and Achilles has a great friend. Patroclus and when this aspired begins Patroclus Achilles great friend has just been killed by Hector the Trojan chief and in revenge Achilles has killed Hector and Achilles has dragged the corpse of Hector to his camp and there he gives instructions to his men. The myrmidons to prepare a pine for Patroclus. So that he can be cremated with full honours I shall also mention that in this extract Achilles is revered to as Patroclus.

Patroclus means son of Pelius, Pelius means Achilles. So Achilles has just given his orders to his men. about the construction of this magnificent funeral pine.

Sixth Poem :-

Now to section two, rejoicing in friends and friendship and we are going to start off with a great favourite at least a great favourite of mine some of you must have heard. It already before the other also I must say is a great favourite of mine none other man. Doctor Samuel Johnson and its an ode on friendship. and this poem was written . It seems when Johnson was very young man. It would seem it was written in his teens he may have been only 17 or 18 when he wrote it. In a very enthusiastic mood. So an ad on friendship.

Poem Seven :-

So from the 18th century and Samuel Johnson to the 19th century and Walt Whitman I saw in Louisiana a live oak growing.

Eight Poem :-

Now back in time a little back to the 16th century back to Shakespeare and his sonnet number 30.

Poem Nine :-

Now comes a more modern poem, a poem from 20th century and a poem by

Edward Thomas and being a modern poem of course his going to be a little difficult (laughter) lot any way will do our best its called the sun to shine.

Poem Tenth :-

Now we go all the way to China and a poem by Wang Wy who was one of the great at the Tring Dynasty roughly the 8th century AD So its entitled a farewell to Chi Wu Chi who has failed in his examinations and is Neturen home to the county, don't forget in returning home to the country, don't forget in ancient China examinations were the key the passport to official life.

Poem Eleventh :-

Then to close this section, rejoicing in friends and friendship, another poem by Samuel Johnson. This time on the death of doctor Robert levitt. Its a poem occasioned by the death of a great friend of Johnson. Not it is a poem that rejoice in his merit, Which does not lament his death. Robert Levitt had been a lumate of Johnson's house for about twenty years. Outwardly he was a quite unprepossessing a quite unattractive sort of person. he was sort of doctor, we would call him a quack and he and he worked on the poorest of poor and they were so poor. They usvely couldn't pay him and the most common form of payment seems to have been a glass of Gin. Which he readily accepted. Not though he was not at all unattractive character it's seems Johnson really appreciated him and missed him . When he died. so this is thus very moving occasion which he hi myself was quite old man on the death of doctor Robert Levitt.

Twelfth Poem :-

Now to our third section a rather short one, remembering friends and again a poem from China by one great poem about another great poet Tu Foo also of the Tang dynasty writing about Li Po again of the Tang Dynasty the poem is called dreaming of Li Po.

Thirteen Poem :-

Now back to the England back to the romantic period and to a poem by Wordsworth. it's a poem written by Wordsworth in his old age remembering dead poets. Who been his friends. The poem is called Extempore Effusion upon the death of James Hogg. James Hogg was a Scottish poet a well known in his day often called the Ettrick and its as the Ettrick Shepherd that Wordsworth refers to him in the poem itself. He also refer to the border-minstrel or simply the minstrel that is of course Sir Walter Scott who who had also died recently then he speak of Coleridge again who had died recently and of lamh who was not a poet but an essayist and then Crabbe the author of Peter Crimes. Also recently died young just very shortly before so Extemory Effusion upon the death of James Hogs.

Fortheen Poem :-

An extract now from a poetical drama it's the two noble kinsman. Which is usually trotted to Shakespeare and Fletcher, Fletcher of course old Boominghon Fletcher it could be that this very extract is from Shakesphers poem. Scholar discuss this quiet extensively . It's not certain not very likely its by Shakespear I must again give a little of setting and the story there are two characters in this little dialogues it were one is hipolita and the other is hemilia, hipolita was fermally the queen of the Amazons. She was a warrior and she was defeated by the hero Phesius who there upon married her and Hemiliais is her sister ans earlier in the play Phesius and his great friend Geruphus had gone away to fight and after Geruphus's departure the two women Hipolita and her sister Hemilia talked between themselves about the great friendship that exist between Phisius and Geruphus. But then following upon that discussion Hemilia starts recounting a friendship that she herself enjoyed in her own earlier days. When she was very young. So hemilia says.

Poem Fifteen :-

Then conclude this section the first part of the reading an extract from Coleridge whom we just heard Wordsworth's lementing from Coleridge

it's Cristible again let me give a little introduction. Introducing the story so to speak. The strange lady called Geraldine has arrived at the Barron Castle.

Late one night she spends the night with the Barron's daughter Cristabel. And in the morning Cristabel takes her new friend, takes Garaldine to meet her father the Barron.

Poem Sixteen :-

So on to our fourth section, friendship in war. The first poem in this section is by F .S . Flint and incidentally with one exception all the poems in this section one associated with or connected with the First World War which does seem to have thrown up quiet a number of good poets. Quiet a few of them wrote on this theme Friendship. So the poem is called Solder's to R.A.

Poem Seventeen :-

Then a poem by Wilfred Gibson, Century go.

Poem Eighteen :-

Then a poem by much less known poet G.A. Studdert -Kennedy it's called, His Mate.

Poem Ninetieth :-

Then the one poem not connected with the First World War. It's connected with the American Civil War. As Toilsome I wondered Virginias Woods by Walt Whitman.

Poem Twenty :-

Then a rather famous poem by Wilfred Owen called, 'Futility'.

Poem Twenty One :-

Now a poem of a rather different kind, serious even tragic but with a humorous touch. I won't tell you who it's by, I am going to give you three guesses at the end. It's called, 'The Pilot' and it's the last poem in this particular section.

Poem Twenty Two :-

Now who's that by,... Christmas Humphreys, He was quiet a good poet.

Alright, fifth and last section,' Higher Dimension'. I am going to start of with a sonnet, a sonnet by a New Zealand poet R.A K. Mason and it's called

'Sonnet of Brotherhood'. and again it's one of those difficult modern poems.

Which allow you to breathe only twice in course of the whole poem. But again we will do our best, 'Sonnet of Brotherhood'.

Poem Twenty Three :-

Then Walt Whitman once again, I hear it was charged against me.

Poem Twenty Four :-

Now from the nineteenth century back to the eighteenth century and to a poet who's not read this days Edward Young. He is the author of,' Night Thoughts'. Most of us know it as one of the works illustrated by William Blake. But it's well worth reading on its own account. His style is rather condensed and torturers. I have selected us a very short passage which will give you a little of his flavour and off course something more about friendship. It's from,' Night Second', which is entitled, 'On Time, Death and Friendship'.

Poem Twenty Five :-

Then an extract from , 'In Memoriam' a series of Elegies written by Tennyson. In memory of his very dear friend Arthur Hallam, who died very young.

Poem Twenty Six :-

Now the last poem but one this is a Persian poem. It's a Persian Sufi poem an extract from the Mathnawi Jelaluddin Rumi. The Persian poet of the thirteenth century, who was the founder of the order of Dervishes. The whirling Dervishes. Now the Mathnawi from which this extract has been taken is a very celebrated very long poem often called The Koran of Persian. On the account of it's very extensive influence.

Poem Twenty seven :-

And the last poem, the same sort of message in very few words. It's Japanese

haiku by the famous Zen hermit and poet who's dates are roughly the same as our own William Blake.

Poem Twenty Eight :-