

## Lecture DE01: The Meaning of Friendship in Buddhism Uryen Sangharakshita

### Originally given in Berlin with a German translation (Not transcribed)

[Transcriber's note: the microphone seems to have been placed close to, or in, the audience when recording this talk which means that some words have been difficult to identify. I hope this does not interrupt your study in any way]

Friends,

Dharmapriya, our chairman, has already referred to the fact that, standing here with all these lights, the speaker cannot see the audience. And I'm sorry to say I can't in fact see you. I can see just a very few people sitting in the front, and beyond that there's only darkness. But I imagine you sitting there, and I'm very happy indeed to be addressing you on this occasion; on the occasion of my first visit to Berlin, the undivided Berlin. And it gives me great pleasure to be in the midst of all our Friends, not only members of the FWBO, but others who have come along this evening to this talk. It's very natural that we should gather together in this way, because man is a social animal, and to be human at all means to be related to other human beings. The first other human being to whom we are related, to whom we become related, is of course our mother. That relationship is very intimate, very close, and the effects of it remain with us usually for the rest of our lives. Then as we become a little older, of course, father comes into view. So there's mother and father. And then perhaps, if we have brothers and sisters, they also gradually come into view. And then of course, if we're fortunate, there are grandparents. [Laughter] Then of course there are aunts and uncles. I personally had many aunts and uncles! I think I had about twenty aunts and uncles! [Laughter] And, of course, if there are aunts and uncles there will usually be cousins. I had many cousins.

So all of these people with whom we are in contact at that early age make up the family circle. And then of course there are neighbours, the people who live next door. People who live in the same street. People who live over the way. And when we become four, five or six, well, then there are teachers. There are schoolfellows, and of course there are friends. And of course, inevitably, in most cases as we grow up, finally, there are husbands and wives. And of course children. And then of course there are employers and employees as we enter the sphere of work and employment. There are our work-mates. There are government officials, bureaucrats, rulers. And so in this way, by the time we reach maturity, we find ourselves in the midst of a whole network of relationships. We find that we're directly related to scores, and perhaps hundreds, of people, and we are indirectly related to very many more; the friends of our friends, the relations of our relations and so on.

So this network of relationships, as we may call it, is the subject matter of a very important Buddhist text. It's a comparatively early text, and the substance of the text at least goes back, we can be reasonably certain, to the Buddha himself. This text is found in the Pali Canon, in what is known as the Digha Nikaya or Collection of Long Discourses, and the text itself is known as the Sigalovada Sutta. That means the discourse, by the Buddha, of advice to Sigala. So who is Sigala? Sigala is a young Brahmin. He belongs to the highest caste, that is the priestly caste. They were very important and influential in the Buddha's day. An introduction to the sutta tells us that the Buddha happened to meet the young Brahmin, Sigala, early one morning, and it seems that Sigala had just taken a purificatory ritual bath. The Brahmins, it seems, attached great importance to these purificatory ritual baths. They were always dipping in the river, reciting mantras, purifying themselves. They do this even today. You can see if you go, say, to Varanasi, to Benares. So Sigala had just been doing this, and as a result his clothes and his hair were streaming wet. So, having taken his purificatory bath, Sigala is engaged in worshipping the six

directions. He was worshipping the North, the South, the East and West, and the Zenith and the Nadir. And the sutta tells us that he was worshipping them in order to protect himself from any harm that might be coming from them. Why was he doing this? We are told that he was doing it because his father, at the time of his death, had told him to do so. So, being a very pious son, he was obeying that instruction. But it seems that the father had not explained why he should do this. So the young Brahmin, Sigala, was just doing it. He was doing it, we may say, blindly. And when the Buddha asked him, 'Why are you doing it?', he couldn't say. So the Buddha said, 'What you are doing is all right but it is not really the right way to worship the six directions.' The Buddha said, 'That's not really the way to protect yourself.' He said Sigala hasn't understood what the six directions really are.

So the Buddha proceeds to explain, and with that explanation the sutta proper begins. The Buddha says that the East, for instance, is not just the direction in which the sun rises. The East means mother and father. In Pali and Sanskrit and other Indian languages, by the way, mother is always put before father.

The Buddhist scriptures always say 'mother and father'. They never say 'father and mother'. I just mention this in passing as a matter of interest! Perhaps it has a significance.

The Buddha says that mother and father are the East because it's from one's mother and father that one takes one's origins, just as the sun originates, so to speak, in the East. [Laughter] But in the same way, he says, teachers are the South; child and wife are the West. Here, of course, child always comes before wife. That also may have some significance. [Laughter] And then the Buddha says, friends and companions are the North, and servants and workers are the Nadir; and ascetics and holy men are the Zenith. So, having explained that, the Buddha says that true worship of the directions consists in carrying out one's duties towards these six kinds of persons. In this way, the Buddha says, one protects oneself. One protects oneself in this way because acting in this way one is acting ethically. And ethical actions, he says, are productive of happiness.

So, in this way, the Buddha sees man as being at the centre of a network of relationships. In this sutta, of course, the Buddha does not enumerate all the possible human relationships. As we've seen, he enumerates only six, corresponding to the six directions. But these six which the Buddha enumerates represent the six primary relationships of human life, even though they may not all be of exactly equal importance. So in this way, in this sutta, in the advice to Sigala, the Buddha envisages a fairly widespread of human relationships. And in the discourse, in the sutta, the Buddha does not emphasise any one kind of relationship more than the others. He seems to give all of them equal emphasis. And in this respect, we may say, the Buddha is characteristic of his culture. That is to say the Buddha is characteristic of the culture of North-East India in the sixth-century BCE.

Now other cultures in other parts of the world, in other ages, were rather different in this respect. Some of these other cultures emphasised one kind of human relationship more than the others. In ancient China, for example, very great emphasis was always placed, especially in Confucian times, on relationship between parents and children. Especially, emphasis was placed on the duties of the children towards parents, and what we call, nowadays, filial piety was regarded by the ancient Chinese as one of the greatest of the virtues. According to some Confucian writers filial piety was in fact the greatest of all the virtues, and in classical times even monuments were erected to sons and daughters who were conspicuous examples of filial piety. This is very strange now. In modern times it might almost be the other way around. [Laughter] The children who

were disrespectful to parents might get monuments! [Laughter] But in ancient classical China it wasn't at all like that. Sons and daughters who were conspicuous examples of filial piety could even be officially honoured by the government. They might be rewarded or recognised with a title, or given a large piece of land, or an archway named after them might be erected. They were so pious and respectful towards the parents.

So similarly, in medieval Europe, the emphasis was rather placed on the relationship between master and servant, particularly in the form of the relationship between the feudal lord and the vassal; and this kind of relationship, when developed, gave rise to what we call the feudal system. In the feudal system the great virtue is loyalty - loyalty to your feudal superior, that is especially to one's immediate feudal superior, the one directly above you, the next in the chain up. If you were a great lord it would be the king. If you were a small landowner it would be the local lord, or if you were an ordinary servant or serf it would be your knight. But loyalty was the great virtue. You'd be prepared and you'd be ready and willing to die for your feudal superior. So coming to the modern West, to Europe and America, what do we find? Where is the emphasis here now? In our case the emphasis is very often placed on one's relationship with one's sexual partner, who may not, however, always remain the same person. This is the so-called 'romantic' relationship, and it is the central relationship, as we know very well, of many people's lives. It's this relationship which, for many people, gives its meaning and colour to life. One is not usually prepared to die for one's lover! [Laughter] Then very often one declares that one cannot live without the other. [Laughter] And also the romantic relationship is the principal subject matter of films, novels, plays, and poems. And in the modern West, because of this emphasis on one's relationship with one's sexual partner, other human relationships very often are lacking. They're not given the same weight, the same importance. And in particular we neglect our relationship with our parents, and we neglect our relationship with our friends. We never take them so very seriously. And we may not even notice that this is what is happening, because we're so accustomed to the idea that the sexual relationship or romantic relationship is the central relationship of human life. We think that this is the way things are. We think that this state of affairs is perfectly normal. We tend to think that it has always been like that everywhere in the world, but that's not really the case. You might even say that this is a distinctly abnormal state of affairs. And it has one unfortunate result, quite apart from the neglect of other relationships. It results in us overloading, as we may call it, the sexual-cum-romantic relationship. We come to expect from our sexual partner far more than he or she is really able to give. If we're not careful we expect him or her to be everything for us. We expect them to be our sexual partner, friend, companion, mother - especially in the case of men, as I understand it - father, advisor, counsellor, source of security, everything. We expect them to give us love, security, happiness, fulfilment and all the rest of it. [Laughter] We expect it to give meaning to our lives, and in this way the relationship becomes overloaded, just like an electric wire becoming overloaded with a too powerful charge of electricity. The result is that the poor, unfortunate sexual relationship or romantic relationship very often breaks down under the strain, or at least there are some serious difficulties. So what we need is what I've called a greater spread of relationships. We need a network of different kinds of relationship, all of which are important to us, and to all of which we give great care and attention.

So let us go back to the Sigalovada Sutta. Let us go back to the Buddha's advice to the young Brahmin Sigala. And specifically let us go back to what the Buddha says about friends and companions. In the modern West, friendship is probably the most neglected of all the primary human relationships, but from the spiritual point of view, from the Buddhist point of view, friendship is extremely important. It has, according to Buddhist tradition, a direct connection with spiritual life, as we shall see later on. So what does the Buddha say in the Sigalovada Sutta about

friends and companions? He says friends and companions are the lords, and they are to be ministered to, they are to be served and looked after in five ways. In other words he says we have five duties towards our friends. If we perform these five duties towards our friends, the friendship will be kept alive and flourishing.

First of all, generosity, giving, sharing. We should share with our friends whatever we have. There is a lot that could be said about this. In some of our FWBO communities in England, the community members have decided on a common purse even. They even share their money. This isn't an easy thing to do. Some people find it even difficult to share a book, to share a cup and saucer. So this is one of the duties we have, according to the Buddha, towards friends, to share with them whatever we have: time; money; resources; interest; energy - to share everything. So this is the first of the five duties.

And then, secondly, we should speak to our friends kindly and compassionately. We should never speak harshly or bitterly to our friends. Never be sarcastic or (unclear). Now in Buddhism, as you probably know, we have five precepts and ten precepts and so on - and in the list of ten precepts there are no less than four precepts which cover speech. There is only one for action even, but there's four precepts for speech. So why is this? It's so easy to use wrong speech. Only so easily we speak a bit roughly, we speak a bit unkindly, harshly even, to our friends. So the Buddha says the second duty we have towards our friends is to speak kindly and affectionately. Not even in an indifferent sort of way. With respect and kindness and affection, and this should be something that we do all the time with our friends. So that's the second duty.

And then, thirdly, we should look after the welfare of our friends, especially their spiritual welfare. We should just see that they're all right. Look after their health, look after their economic well-being. Should they have any sort of difficulty, help them. Help them to grow as human beings, help them to develop. So that's the third duty.

And then the fourth duty is that we should treat our friends in the same way that we treat our own self. This is a very big thing indeed. It means breaking down the barrier between ourselves and others. There's a very important Mahayana Buddhist text which deals with this very topic in great detail and great depth. That's the Bodhicaryavatara of Shantideva. This is very widely studied in the FWBO. In the course of the last twenty years there have been dozens of seminars held on this text. One of our Order members, Nagabodhi, the editor of Golden Drum, has specialised in this text. People find his seminars on this particular text, which he's given all over the world practically, very very inspiring indeed. So if ever Nagabodhi gives his seminar on this text, the Bodhicaryavatara, in Germany, make sure you attend. [Laughter] It'll really show you how to treat others, especially your friends, just like your own self. So that's the fourth duty.

And the fifth duty is, we should keep our word to our friends. Keep our promise. If we say we'll do something for him or her, do it. Because very often we are quite careless about our promises. Sometimes that's because we make them carelessly. But once we've given our word, once we've made a promise, we should adhere to that, come what may.

So these are our five duties towards our friends. But it's not a one-way matter. These duties, we may say, are reciprocal. According to the Buddha, all human relationships are reciprocal. So the friends and companions thus minister to, thus serve, reciprocate, in five ways. They watch over us when we're (sick?). Secondly they watch over our property when we're (sick?). In other words they take more care of our possessions than we take ourselves. That's a sign of friendship. And then thirdly, they are our refuge in time of fear. They can allay our anxiety, and if we have

objective cause for fear they help remove it. And then, fourthly, they do not forsake us when we are in trouble. As the English proverb says, 'A friend in need is a friend indeed'. [Laughter] And lastly they show concern for our dependants. If we have children our friends are concerned for our children. Or if we have disciples our friends are concerned, our fellow gurus and teachers are concerned for our disciples. Because between them, these ten duties of the friend towards the friend and then their reciprocal duties towards him or her represent a very high ideal of friendship.

So let us spend a little more time with the duties, particularly with the first set of five. If we look at this first set of five duties, we may notice something interesting; that is if we know a little bit about Buddhism. The first four duties of this set are identical with another well-known set of categories, a set of categories that occupies an important place, especially in Mahayana Buddhism. The first four duties of the friend are identical with the four Samgrahavastus, as we call them. The term Samgrahavastus is usually translated as 'the four elements of conversion', and these four elements of conversion form a part of the seventh paramita, the seventh out of the ten Perfections to be practised by the Bodhisattva. Some of you may know the Bodhisattva not only practises the ten paramitas or perfections but passes through ten stages of development. The seventh paramita or perfection is what is called upayaparamita. Upaya means skilful means, and the four Samgrahavastus are part of upaya. So the fact that the four Samgrahavastus are called such - that they are called the elements of conversion - is very interesting. It suggests that the best way of converting people is simply by being friends with them. Some people try to convert you to their point of view or their religion almost forcibly. They bring pressure to bear on you, but in Buddhism that's not the right path. In Buddhism we convert people - if that, in fact, is the right word at all - simply by being friendly. We just make friends, and there's no need to preach to them. There's no need to knock on their door and say 'Have you heard the word?', whatever that word is. [Laughter] Quite a few people have tried to convert(?) me in that sort of way. I'm glad to tell you they didn't succeed. So if you want to convert someone, so to speak, or to bring that person on to your path, just be friends, just be generous, just share with them whatever you have. Speak kindly and affectionately. Show concern for their welfare, especially their spiritual welfare, treat them in the same way that you treat yourself, and keep your word to them.

So these five things themselves, in fact, constitute a communication of the Dharma. You communicate the Dharma itself by practising friendship in this way. You could even go so far as to say friendship is the Dharma, in fact. I'm reminded - this is a little bit out of the way, but I'm reminded of a saying of William Blake, the great English poet and artist and mystic. In one of these he says 'Religion is politics'. In one place he says 'religion is politics', and he says 'politics is brotherhood', so that means also religion is brotherhood, the Dharma is friendship. If you're practising friendliness you're not only practising the Dharma, you're spreading the Dharma. Now there's a lot more that could be said on this topic but there's no time. But I will say a few words about our fourth duty to our friends and companions, which is also the fourth element of conversion. In Sanskrit it is samanarthata. In other words, treating our friends and companions like our own self, treating them equally. Saman means equal. So we could even say that a friend is, by definition almost, one whom you treat equally, and it's interesting to note in this connection that the English word 'Friend' is etymologically connected with the word free. I don't know whether it's the same in German or not. [Laughter]

So Friendship is a relationship that can exist only between two, or more, free people, that is to say people who are equals. The ancient Greeks realised this, and the ancient Greeks maintained that there could be no friendship between a free man and a slave. We can take this metaphorically as well as literally. And this brings us to another very important point - the relation between master

and slave is based upon power. It's an expression of what we sometimes call in the FWBO 'the power mode'. But friendship is based upon love. It's an expression of what we've come to call 'the love mode'. Unfortunately the English word 'love', L-O-V-E-, is highly ambiguous. It can mean a number of different things. So here I'm using 'love' as the equivalent of the Pali Metta or Sanskrit Maitri. In both Pali and Sanskrit, metta or maitri is very sharply distinguished from pema or prema. Pema or prema is what we may call 'attachment love'. It's characterised by clinging and possessiveness. It's fundamentally selfish, and it can very easily turn into hatred. And sexual love, of course, is very often of this kind. But metta or maitri is non-attached. It's concerned only with the happiness and the well-being of the other person or persons. It's unselfish, as we say. So friendship is of this kind. Friendship, therefore, is an expression of 'the metta mode', as we should perhaps call it. Now the Pali word mitta or friend comes from metta, just as the Sanskrit word mitra comes from maitri. Many of you, I expect, are already familiar with the word, the Pali word, metta. You've heard of it in connection with the Metta Bhavana, that is to say the development, as a form of meditation, of strong positive feelings of friendliness towards all living beings. Those of you who have done the metta bhavana practice know that first of all you develop metta towards yourself. Then you develop it in the next stage towards a near and dear friend, but not to a sexual partner. And then in the third stage you develop that same feeling of metta, which by this time is quite strong, towards a neutral person - someone you know fairly well but you neither particularly like them nor dislike them. And then in the fourth stage you develop that same metta towards the enemy. Someone whom you regard as an enemy or perhaps who regards you as an enemy, or both. It might sound incredible that you could develop metta towards an enemy, but people who have done the metta bhavana practice know, from their own experience, that it is actually possible. And then in the fifth stage you develop metta towards all four persons - to yourself, friend, neutral, enemy - and then we can start, as we say, expanding. You develop that same metta to all the people in the room; all the people in the house; all the people in the neighbourhood; and your whole country; whole continent; and you do this in so many different ways. You can say all men, all women. Traditionally we say 'gods and men', because in Buddhism even the gods need your metta. So there are so many ways of practising, but you end up, hopefully, directing your metta towards all living beings. Not just human beings, but also animals.

So in this way we develop what we may call a friendly attitude. With the help of this metta bhavana practice we shift from 'the power mode' to what I've called 'the metta mode'. You know very well that only too often we operate in accordance with the power mode. We try to get what we want - if necessary even by force. We manipulate other people. We try to get them to do what we want them to do, and we try to get them to do it not for their good so much as for our good. We try to coerce them. Very often of course we don't do this very openly. We do it very subtly, very indirectly. Some people are very good at this. You hardly know that they are manipulating you. They don't know it themselves, some of them. It's so indirect. We do it by deception; we do it by cheating, by emotional blackmail, and of course we do it by lying. But in metta there's nothing of all this at all. In friendship there's nothing of all this. In friendship there is unselfish affection. In friendship there is only concern for the happiness and wellbeing of the other person, which of course is mutual. In fact in friendship there's only equality. There's no question of operating in accordance with the power mode. No question of using force of any kind.

So from all this we can perhaps begin to see that there's more in the idea of friendship than maybe we thought. We can begin to see perhaps that friendship has a very definite spiritual dimension. We can begin to see the meaning of friendship in Buddhism.

So let's go a little further. Let's turn to another early Buddhist text, a Buddhist text that may be even earlier than the Sigalovada Sutta. Let's turn to what is called The Udana, chapter Four. In this chapter of the Udana we find the Buddha staying at a place called Calika. With him there is a monk called Meghiya. Just the two of them - the Buddha and Meghiya. So one day Meghiya, who seems to be quite a young monk, happens to see a beautiful grove of mango trees. You may have eaten mangoes, but I've seen many mango groves. In India you often get them on the outskirts of the village. The mango trees are very beautiful. They have plenty of very dark green leaves, and they grow close together. They provide in the hot Indian summer very cool shade, and of course they give mango fruit. So you get lots of them in India, lots of these mango groves.

So Meghiya, the young monk who was staying with the Buddha, happened to see a beautiful grove of mango trees, and he thought, 'Oh, what a beautiful grove of mango trees. It would be a very fine place in which to sit and meditate - so cool'. So he asked the Buddha for his permission to go and spend sometime there, but the Buddha doesn't agree. He asks Meghiya to wait a little. He asks Meghiya to wait until some other monk arrives, because Meghiya is supposed to be looking after the Buddha. The Buddha, apparently, is getting rather old. Even Buddhas when they get old need a bit of looking after. But Meghiya doesn't take much notice of what the Buddha says. He says, 'No, it's such a beautiful mango grove, I really want to go there and meditate.' In fact, I'm sorry to say Meghiya argues with the Buddha. He uses a very clever argument. He said to the Buddha, 'You're Enlightened, aren't you?' The Buddha says, 'Yes!' [Laughter] So Meghiya says, 'I'm not Enlightened. I need to meditate - you don't!' [Laughter] What could the Buddha say? Meghiya has confidence. Disciples are very good at catching their teachers in this way. [Laughter] So in the end the Buddha had to agree. Off he goes (unclear) The Buddha's left on his own. Poor old Buddha! [Laughter] But then, after Meghiya has started meditating in the mango grove a strange thing happens - or maybe it's not so strange. Even though the mango grove is such a fine, peaceful place and Meghiya very much wants to meditate, he can't meditate. As soon as he sits down his mind is absolutely overwhelmed with all sorts of bad, negative thoughts - greed, jealousy, lust, false views - he just doesn't know where he is. So he comes back to the Buddha. He tells the Buddha what has happened. The Buddha doesn't scold him, doesn't blame him - he just gives him a teaching. He says, 'Meghiya, when you are spiritually immature there are five things that conduce to spiritual maturity.' He says, 'First of all, spiritual friendship and spiritual companions.' It's as though Meghiya had disregarded the spiritual friendship and companionship of the Buddha. 'Then the second thing', he said, 'is the practice of ethics, ethical action; and then thirdly - the third thing that conduces to spiritual maturity - serious discussion of the Dharma. And then fourthly energy; eliminating negative mental states and developing positive ones. And then fifthly insight, in the sense of a deep understanding of universal impermanence.' So the Buddha said, 'if you are spiritually immature these five things conduce to spiritual maturity.' He's essentially saying that Meghiya should have put spiritual friendship first, and of course, as we've seen, it was particularly relevant in Meghiya's case. Meghiya had been staying with the Buddha. What would we think to argue with the Buddha? Meghiya had been enjoying the spiritual friendship and companionship of the Buddha, but the foolish young monk he wanted to go off and meditate on his own, and he thought he was ready to do this. Of course he soon discovered he wasn't ready at all. He hadn't realised the extent to which he was dependent spiritually on his personal contact with the Buddha.

So we ourselves are in much the same position. We need spiritual friendship. We need spiritual friends. It's very difficult to make any spiritual progress without them. The Buddha himself is no longer around, so we can't have spiritual friendship with him. Probably we're not ready for it anyway. We'd probably act just like Meghiya. But though we don't have the Buddha, we do have one another. We can develop spiritual friendship with one another. We can help one another. We

can encourage one another in our practice of the Dharma. We can confess our faults and weaknesses to one another. We can share our understanding with one another. We can rejoice in one another's merits. We have, of course, to practise the Dharma ourselves. No one can practise it for us, but though we have to practise the Dharma ourselves, we do not have to practise it by ourselves. We don't have to practise it on our own. We can practise it in the company of other like-minded people who are also trying to practise the Dharma, and this is the best way to practise. In fact we may say for us it's the only way to practise.

So the Buddha made this very clear, and on another occasion - apparently some years later - he was staying at a place called Sakka, and while he was staying there his disciple and cousin, Ananda, came to see him, and Ananda happened to say that he thought that spiritual friendship was half the spiritual life. But the Buddha told him not to speak in such a way. The Buddha said, 'No. Spiritual friendship is not half the spiritual life.' He said, 'Spiritual friendship is the whole of the spiritual life.' So what does this mean? What is the meaning of friendship? We can understand that friendship is important. We can understand that friendship is one of the six primary relationships of human life, but that friendship, even spiritual friendship, should be the whole of the spiritual life, that we find very difficult to understand. So let us look at the actual Pali word the Buddha uses. Perhaps this will help us. The word that I've translated as 'spiritual life' is 'brahmacharya'. Sometimes brahmacharya means celibacy or chastity that is to say abstention from sex - but here in this context, brahmacharya has a much wider meaning. The word 'brahmacharya' consists of two parts -brahma and charya. The brahma means high, noble, best, sublime, and real. It also means divine, not in the theistic sense but in the sense of the embodiment of all the best and noblest qualities and virtues. Charya means walking, faring, practising, experiencing, and even living. This is what charya means. So 'brahmacharya' means something like 'practising the best', or we could say 'experiencing the ideal', or we could even say brahmacharya means 'the divine life', or just 'spiritual life' as I've translated it. So in the same way the word that I've translated as 'spiritual friendship' is 'kalyana mitrata'. Kalyana is a very beautiful and expressive word. It's more poetic than philosophic. Kalyana means beautiful. It means charming. It means auspicious. It means helpful. It means morally good. So the connotation is both aesthetic and moral and religious. It covers much the same ground as the Greek expression 'kalonekyagathone' which means the beautiful fantasy. Mitrata of course means friendship and companionship.

So 'kalyanamitrata' or 'kalyanamittata' means something like 'beautiful friendship' or 'morally good companionship', or as I've translated it 'spiritual friendship'. So it is this spiritual friendship or kalyanamittata that the Buddha has declared to be the whole of the brahmacharya or spiritual life. So in order to understand this we have to look a little more deeply into the term 'brahmacharya'. In early Buddhism there's a whole series of terms beginning with this word 'brahma'. We've got, for instance, brahmaloka. 'Brahmaloka' means the 'sublime realm' or the 'divine world'. Or else we could also say the 'spiritual world' in the highest sense. So the brahmacharya or spiritual life is that way of life that leads to the brahmaloka or spiritual world. But how is it able to do this? By virtue of what quality or characteristic? Now, we can find the answer to this question in another early Buddhist text. It's the Mahagovinda Sutta. Here there's a question asked - I won't go into the details; it's a long story - and the question is 'How does a mortal reach the immortal - brahma - world?' In other words how can one pass from the transient to the eternal? How can one become eternal? And the answer given is short and simple: One reaches the brahma world by giving up all possessive thoughts; by giving up all thoughts of me and mine. In other words, one reaches the brahmaloka by giving up egotism, by giving up selfishness. One reaches it by giving up all sense of 'I'.



So we can now see the connection between spiritual friendship and spiritual life. We can see why spiritual friendship is the whole of the spiritual life. Spiritual friendship is a training in unselfishness. Spiritual friendship is a training in egolessness, and it is in this that the meaning of spiritual friendship consists. As we saw earlier, you share everything with your friend or friends. You speak to them kindly and affectionately, and show concern for their welfare, and especially their spiritual welfare. You treat them in the same way as you treat yourself. You treat them equally. You relate to them in accordance with the metta mode. In this way you learn gradually to relate to all in accordance with the metta mode. Of course this is very difficult. It goes against the grain, seeing that we are naturally selfish. So it's very difficult to relate to all beings in accordance with the metta mode. The development of spiritual friendship is very difficult. Leading the spiritual life is very difficult. Being a Buddhist - a real Buddhist is very difficult. So we need help. So where do we get that help? We get it, as I've said, from one another. We can't perhaps be with our spiritual teacher all the time, though we can be with our spiritual friends all the time, or at least much of the time. We see them, perhaps live with them, in a residential spiritual community. We can work with them in what is called in the FWBO a Team-Based Right Livelihood. We can live in a spiritual community, especially a single-sex spiritual community. If we spend time with spiritual friends in this way we will get to know them better. They will get to know us better. We will learn to be more open, more honest. We'll be brought up against our own weaknesses. And even in particular we'll be brought up against our natural inborn tendency to operate in accordance with the power mode. But if we have spiritual friends, this will help us to learn to operate in accordance with the metta mode. We will learn to relate to all our friends in accordance with the metta mode, become more unselfish, more egoless; and we will begin to see that spiritual friendship is indeed the whole of the religious life, and we will begin to realise from our own experience the meaning of friendship in Buddhism.

Checked June 2001