




## **Friend In Buddhist Perspective: The Benefit of Social Welfare**

**Sitthiporn Khetjoi<sup>[a]\*</sup>**

<sup>[a]</sup> *Mahamakut Buddhist University, Isan Campus, Thailand.*

*\* Author for correspondence email; piakealexander@yahoo.com*



### ***[Abstract]***

This article has the objective to describe about the nature of good and bad friend, the characteristics of a good and bad friend, how to associate with a good friend, how to avoid a bad friend, what the benefit of good friendship based on the Buddha's discourse. The help of good friend is necessary for the development of welfare because no one can live alone or isolate in the society. When he tries to make an effort for the development of his welfare, he absolutely needs the help of his good friends. He cannot get the development of his welfare without the help of his good friends. The reason is that human being is interrelated or inter-dependent on one another as well as welfare of human being. Similarly, friends need the mutual help of each other to develop their welfare in the society. Thus, the Buddha emphasizes the help of good friendship for the development of social welfare and social work.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Friend, Social Work, Social Welfare.

---

## **Introduction**

### **Definition and Interpretation of Friend**

The meaning of friend is, in the sense, equal to the terms of ‘mitta, sahaya, sakha, etc, in Pali language. The word ‘Mitta’ is defined in the commentary as follow:

“Mitteyantiti mitta, minantiti va mitta; sabbaguyhesu anto pakkhipantiti attho” meaning that ‘one is called ‘mitta’ because he is affectionate and loves his friend and he encloses in all that is hidden (Ashin Janakabhivamsa, 1995:73). According to the interpretation of the commentary, the former characteristic of friend is to love his friend and the latter is to enclose in all that is hidden for his friend.

One has the same or equal emotion of richness and poverty like his friend. And he forgives his friend’s fault or offensive towards him. The word ‘Suhada’ is a synonym of ‘Mitta’ and it is meant ‘dear heart’ and he is called ‘Suhada-mitta’ that it has the same meaning with ‘dear friend. Another one is ‘Patirupaka’ (a false friend). He is called ‘a false friend and he is one who is pretending to be a friend. Regarding this kind of false friend or pretending friend, there are four types of them .

These are:

- (1) Anna-datthu-hara : a friend who takes anything,
- (2) Vaci-parama : a friend who is only a great talker without any help,
- (3) Anupiyabhani: a friend, who flatters his friend empty-handed,
- (4) Apaya-sahaya: a friend who is a spendthrift companion.

They are nothing but false or pretending friends. They give their friends only the help of empty-hand (Nandasena Ratnapala, 2005).

Mitta is often combined with similar terms, devoting relationship or friendship, e.g. ‘amicca-mitta’: colleagues and ‘nati-salohita’: blood relations in stereotype. Again, ‘-Mitta’ can be combined with ‘nati’: ‘natimitta’: relatives & friends and ‘Suhajja’ is one who is dear to one’s heart. ‘Sahaya’ means a companion and it is a neuter form that occurs for kind things.

(Ven. Nyanatilaok, 1988) ‘Sapatta’ (enemy) and amitta (a sham friend or enemy) are the opposite of words- ‘mitta, nati-mitta, nati-salohita, suhada, suhajja, sahaya’, etc. ‘papa-mitta’ means a bad friend and it is the opposite of kalyana-mitta: one who pleases his friends. This kind of friend is defined as “Mittesu adubbhamano” by commentary. It is meant that one who does not injure or betray his friends. On the contrary, ‘Mitta-dubbhi’ is one who injures or betrays his friends.<sup>75</sup> (Ven. Nyanatilaok, 1988)

There are two kinds of friends that is distinguished at Culaniddesa pali in exegesis of Suttanipata Pali. They are:

Agarika: a house or lay-friend and anagarika: a homeless or clerical friend. The former is possessed of all ordinary qualities of kindness and love, the latter of special virtues of mind and heart. The latter is a friend who acts as a sort of mentor and a spiritual advisor is called a ‘Kalyana-mitta’, a good and loyal well-wisher.

According to the definition and interpretation mentioned above, we can summarize two kinds of friend or companion -- and kalyana-mitta or kalyana-sahaya and papa-mitta or papa-sahaya; good friend and bad friend. The Buddha pointed out that one who wants to develop his worldly and secular welfare in the present and future life should associate with good friends and avoid bad friends.

That is, generally, because a bad friend has the bad nature or characteristic of physical, verbal and mental behaviors and misconduct. Accordingly, he can make one’s welfare or well-being decreased and at least he usually encourages his friend to do bad deeds, etc. Thus, the Buddha preached not to associate with the bad friend. The discourses pertaining to this statement can be found in many Pali texts and commentaries, their sub-commentaries and exegesis of commentaries mentioned above.

### **Significance of Good Friend:**

The importance in association with a good friend is pointed out by the Buddha to Ven. Ananda in Kalyanmitta Sutta as mentioned below:-

“Ekamidham, maharaja, samayam sakkesu viharami nagarakam nama sakkyanam nigamo. Atha kho, maharaja, Anando bhikkhu yenaham tenupasankami; Upasankamitvā mam abhivadetva ekamantam nisidi. Ekamantam nisinnō kho, maharaja, Anando bhikkhu mam etadavoca- ‘upaddhamidam, bhante, brahmacariyassa - yadidam kalyanamittata, kalyanasahayata, kalyanasampavankata’”ti.

“On one occasion, great King, I was living among the Sakyans, where there is a town of Sakyans named Nagaraka. Then bhikkhu Ananda approached to me, paid homage to me, sat down to one side, and said: ‘Venerable Sir, this is half of holy life, that is, good friendship, good companionship and good comradeships.’” (Anguttara Nikaya Tika, 1999)

As seen in this discourse, the help or assistance of a good friend which is called Kalyana-miita-sampada is completely required not only for secular welfare but also supra-mundane welfare (worldly) such as the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path leading to Nibbana. Nowadays, it is evident that every country is inter-related with each other for their own well-being. They are co-operative at social, cultural, education, economic and political affairs. Especially, they are co-operative at the investment of economy. This is the feature of friendship and relationship in the social context.

### **Characteristics of Good Friendship:**

The good friendship is the fact that can make social work and social welfare development. According to the guidance of the Buddha, it is to be fulfilled for the development of social welfare. It is pointed out as the cause of development in worldly or secular life by the Buddha. The utterance of the Buddha can be seen in Vyagghapajja Sutta or Dighajanu Sutta of Anguttara

Nikaya as the following:

“What is good friendship? Herein, Vyagghapajja, in whatsoever village or market town a householder dwells, he associates, converses, engages in discussions with householders or householders’ sons whether young and highly cultured or old and highly cultured, full of faith (saddha), full of virtue (sila), full of charity (caga), full of wisdom (panna). He acts in accordance with the faith of the faithful, with the virtue of the virtuous, with the charity of the charitable, with the wisdom of the wise. This is called good friendship.”

In the discourse mentioned above, we can see the four general characteristics and other prestigious quality of a good friend that is the major character in the relationship of friends. They are:

- (1) Sadha: faith; confidence
- (2) Sila: morality; virtue; moral ethic
- (3) Caga: charity; generosity; alms-giving
- (4) Panna: knowledge; wisdom; insight-knowledge
- (5) Having highly cultured
- (6) Associating or engaging with a person who is highly cultured.

These are the common characteristics of a good friend and they are essentially needed for oneself and others. It is needed to be fulfilled to be accomplished with a good friendship. It is essential not only for the development of welfare but also for anyone in order to live peacefully and harmoniously in the community. There are four kinds of Loyal friends who are worthy of associating with them. It is stated in the section of ‘Suhadamitta’ in Singala Sutta, of Digha Nikaya. They are those who are dear friend or good-hearted to their friend. They can be considered as true and real friends and they should be associated with the whole life. There will surely be much welfare associated with them.

They are divided into four by the Buddha as follows:

“Cattarome, gahatiyputta, mitta suhada veditabbo. Upakaro mitto suhado veditabbo, samanasukhadukkho mitto suhado veditabbo, atthakkhayi mitto suhado veditabbo, anukampako mitto suhado veditabbo.” it means that: “ ‘Householder, son, there are these four types who can be seen to be loyal friends: the friend who is a helper is one, the friend who is the same in happy and unhappy times is one, the friend who points out what is good for you is one, and the friend who is sympathetic is one’”(Acharya Buddharkhita,1985: 88)

According to this exposition of the Buddha, the four loyal friends can be seen one after another. They are:

- (1) Upakara-mitta: a friend who is a helper,
- (2) Samanasukhadukkha-mitta: a friend who is the same in happy and unhappy situation,
- (3) Atthakkhayi-mitta: a friend who points out what is good or bad,
- (4) Anukampaka-mitta: a friend who is sympathetic

According to these four, it can be said that a dear friend, or who is good-hearted always wishes the welfare of his friend and looks after him in any situation. He never, for instance, avoids him even though his friend is a drunkard when he is lying on the ground and falls into a sleep. He gets his friend to his home and looks after or keeps his possession. Some people avoid their friends when their friends fall into this situation with drinking. Yet, it does not mean to associate with the drunkard. Buddha has clearly expounded not to associate the drunkard because he can make his friend’s welfare declined. Nevertheless, it is the explanations that one should put his attitude towards his friend when he may inevitably encounter this situation. The attitude of a true friend is in a stable situation and a stable relationship. It is not likely change or ends suddenly a stable attitude. We can understand the attitude of a friend or partner through thick and thin. This kind of friend has the stable attitude towards his friend any situation. Nowadays, it is absolutely scarce to see the fourth characteristic of a true friend because everyone fears to death or dare not to sacrifice his life for another one. It is

very difficult to sacrifice one's life for another one in a matter of life and death. It does not mean that there is no one who dear not sacrifice his life for someone in the world. Generally, Buddha or Bodhisatta (Bodhisattva) in Pali literature such as in the case that they were fulfilling their perfections (Paramis) to attain the Buddhahood. Bodhisatta dare to sacrifice his life for anyone, if he can get the life of the Buddha. Sacrificing one's life is called 'Jivita-pariccaga' and it is involved in the 'Five Great Acts of Sacrifice (Panna-maha-pariccaga).' In the world that no one can be isolated or live alone in the society, everyone should get to know about good qualifications of friends. If he knows such them, he can choose and associate with good friends who have these qualities. Only friends of these qualifications can support him to develop his welfare (FL. Woodward,2003:92)

Sometimes people require the help of their friends in a crisis. At that time, some of them can get the help of their friends and some cannot. Although some people want to help their friends in need, they do not have mental and material qualifications. There is no reason to blame or condemn friends of this kind. Some people, however, have mental and material qualifications, but they do not want to help their friend. These kind of friends should be blamed or condemned and they are not worthy of good friend. So the Lord Buddha refers to those human beings who do not want to help others although they have mental and material qualifications. Thus, the demonstrations of Buddha are in conformity with the English proverb "A friend in need is a friend in deed. As regard to Kalyanamitta, the friendship between Venerable Sariputta and Venerable Moggalana should be described as revealed the attitude of good friends with reference to Sariputtamoggalana Theravatthu (the chronicle of Ven. Sariputta & Moggalana) the commentary of Anguttara Nikaya.

Venerable Sariputta and Venerable Moggalana were very friendly and acquainted friends. Before they attained enlightenment, Ven. Sariputta was called Upatissa and Ven. Moggalana was called Kolita. They were from Upatiss village and Kolita village respectively with reference to the name of their village. Before they became the chief disciples of the Buddha,

they were wandering ascetics under the guidance of the great wandering ascetic, Sancaya. At that time, they did not realize the Four Noble Truths (Ariyasacca) and they were worldly or secular persons. After that, they departed from each other making a formal promise to seek the Noble Truths. The promise is that one who sought the Noble Truths must inform another one. After listening to the discourse from Ven. Assaji, the enlightened one and one of the monks in the first group of five. Ven. Sariputta attained the first stage of stream (Sotapanna). Afterwards, they got the news that the Siddhattha Gotama has been enlightened from Ven. Assaji. And then, they went to the Buddha. After listening to the discourses of the Buddha, they attained enlightenment and became the chief disciples of the Buddha.

Before going to the Buddha, they inform their great teacher, Sancaya, and they called him to go to the Buddha together with them. But their great teacher did not follow them. The story of the two chief disciples is widely stated by the commentator. This is the story in brief. To get to the point, the attitude of good friends can be seen in the story of two disciples. The attitude of good friends is that one wishes the well-being or welfare of another. A good friend never abandons his friend in any situation. Not only that, they wanted to share their experience to their great teacher, Sincaya, who did not realize the Four Noble Truths. In addition, a good friend does not secret and hide something that he gets. Thus, good friendship of Ven. Sariputta and Ven. Moggalana is ideal for the relationship in the society.

In these characteristics of good friend, we can see one's good three actions called physical, verbal and mental actions. A good friend is the same with a good person. One who has good three actions can be generally called a good person and if he is a good person, he will surely be a good friend. To be a good friend is to be a good person and to be a good person is to be a good friend in rotation. Thus, a good friend needs to have good mind, word, and behaviour. Such good mind, word, and behaviour are only the basic of being good person and friend.



### **Four Kinds of a False Friend**

A false friend is someone who is not real friends. They are the type of people who ones sometimes accidentally become friends with. With regard to false friends, The Buddha pointed out four kinds of a false friend and how to identify the characteristics of a false friend. According to this demonstration of the Buddha, the four types of foes can be seen in series as follows:

(1) Annadatthuhara-mitta: friend who only takes all from his friend in guise of friend but helps nothing,

(2) Vaciparama-mitta: friend who is only a great talker in guise of friend but helps nothing,

(3) Anuppiyabhani: friend who flatters his friend in the guise of friend but helps nothing,

(4) Apaya-sahaya-mitta: friend who is only the fellow-spendthrift in the guise of friend but helps nothing.

Thus the Lord Buddha continued to point out each of their characteristics in four-fold ways. This kind of a false friend can be said that he is a very fearful one and one should be aware of associating with him. One can be ruined or spoiled by him in association with him. It is sure that he can make the welfare of his friend decrease or reduced in the near future. Thus he is involved in the group of false or pretended friends. He should be avoided from far away. Even though one inevitably associates with him, he should not associate with him from the bottom of the heart. Nevertheless, it is the best for someone by avoiding him far away (Acharya Buddharakkhita, 1985:103).

### **Causes of End of Friendship:**

Close friendship is not the fact that is permanent relationship in society. Sometimes, it can be ended or stopped by some reasons or causes. So, there are the reasons for the end or breaking of friendship talked by the Buddha “Accabhikkhanasamsagga, asamocaranena ca. Etena mitta jiranti, akale yacanaya ca.”

According to this Jataka Pali, the three reasons for end of close friendship in social relationship. There are: (Acharya Buddharakkhita,1985: 112 )

(1) ‘Accabhikkhana-samvasa’: Visiting always and having very close friendship,

(2) ‘Asamosarana’: Never visiting and not pay attention to close friendship,

(3) ‘Akalayacana’: Very asking for something from friend in an improper time.

Sometimes, visiting always and very close friendship can make the end of relationship between two parties. It is defined “Ativiya abhinhasamsaggena” meant “Very close friendship” by the commentator(Acharya Buddharakkhita,1985: 113 ). According to this definition, one should not always pay a visit to his friend. Visiting always can make close friendship reduced when time has passed away. So, one should avoid visiting always to his friend. It, sometimes, is good for him to pay a visit to his friend.

In turn, never visiting or not pay attention to close friend can make friendship between two parties subsided as well. Thus, in order to be sustainable friendship, one should, sometimes, pay a visit to his friend and pay attention to his close friendship to maintain relationship.

Again, very asking for something valued in an improper time is one of the reasons that can make end of friendship or subsided friendship. It means that one should ask for something he wants from his friend in an appropriate time. He should understand what, when and where is suitable for both of them. In other words, he should be aware of other’s wishes or existing circumstances. In connection with very asking for something valued, it is defined by the commentator as “Akaleti ayuttappattakale parassa piyabhandam yacanaya mittam jiranti”.It means that “Improper time is referred to asking for valuable things that is beloved by the owner and what want to be given by the owner in an improper time”.

### **Causes of Stable and Steady Friendship:**

Additional causes of stable and steady friendship can be seen as follows:

- (1) Straightforward,
- (2) Giving away in charity in analysis,
- (3) Being capable of tolerance in everything,
- (4) Having deliberate ability to give away in charity in accordance with the balance of his properties,
- (5) Having ability to be compatible with everyone without contradiction,
- (6) Having innocent and sincere mind, or lack of pretending,
- (7) Having a word of truthfulness, or having a word of righteousness.

In this statement is also very useful for everyone in social relationship. If one wants to develop social relationship, he, initially, need to develop friendship. This is the reason why we need to develop friendship. That is because friendship is a basic relationship in the society. If we have a good friendship, we will surely have a good social relationship. Good social relationship will provide the development of social welfare. No one can develop his social welfare without the help of his friend. If he wants the help of his friend, he needs to have good friendship with him. It is of vital importance in social relation. Thus, we need to cultivate good friendship because the development of social welfare is connected with social relationship. It is also important for the relationship between individual and society.

### **The Duties of a Good Friend**

After knowing the nature and nurture of friends, we have left something to be known about the duties of friends. When a person has become a friend with another one, he has had the duties of a friend. If only he fulfills these duties, he can be called a good friend. In our society, if there is a social relation – called making friendship, there will be social duties, responsibilities, obligations, principles, etc.

Thus, the Buddha pointed out the duties of a friend as follows:

“Pamcahi kho, gahapatiputta, thanehi kulaputtana utara disa mittamicca paccupatthatabba danena, peyyavajjena, atthacariyaya, samanattataya, avisamvamanataya.”

“There are five ways in which a man should act to his friends and companions as the directions: by gifts, by kindly words, by looking after their welfare, by treating them like himself, and keeping his word (Acharya Buddharakkhita, 1985)”.

The duties of a friend can be put into series as follows:

- (1) Dana: giving friend material and spiritual support,
- (2) Peyyavaca: encouraging him with kindly words,
- (3) Atthacariya: looking after and helping their welfare,
- (4) Samanattata: treating him like oneself (not suppressing or pressing down him because of his any social status)
- (5) Avisamvadanata: keeping his word (not making a contradiction between what he say and what he does)

These are common duties of a friend that a person should serve his friend in five ways. This is a basic principle for making friendship in social relation. If they have a good friendship, they will have good social relation. In the same way, if they have a good social relation, they will certainly have a good social welfare. If they have good social welfare, their social welfare will certainly develop as well. That is to say, having good friends will provide the development of social welfare. Thus, the Lord Buddha pointed out the accomplishment of good friend as the third way of making social welfare developed.

The Buddha pointed out effort or diligence as the first way of developing social welfare. Although someone has fulfilled with how much other achievements has except making effort, if he has no effort, he cannot develop his

welfare anyway. It is the pioneer of how to develop social welfare. There is no cause for the development of welfare without effort. It is said that “Viriyavato kim nama kammam na sijjhati” meaning there is nothing to be accomplished or achieved for one who has a persistent effort. In other words, it means that everything can be achieved by the person who has persistent effort. So, it is obvious that the person who wants to develop his welfare has to save and protect his wealth in systematic way. The way to develop welfare is the associating with a good person or having good friendship. When making an effort for the development of welfare, one needs absolutely the help of friends. Nobody can stand in the community without the help of friends. Generally, it can be said that a person who can help or provide his friend is a good friend. However, it is not enough for him. He is to be a friend who has good character or moral ethics and discipline. If that it be so, he can be trusted. Thus, the Buddha said that the person who wants to develop his welfare must inevitably have a good friendship.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, by studying the discourses demonstrated by the Buddha as seen above, it can be concluded that the common characteristics or qualifications of a good friend, or a noble person, or a wise man can be briefed as follows. These are:

1. He is accomplished with confidence (Sadha)
2. He is accomplished with moral ethic (Sila)
3. He is accomplished with knowledge (Suta)
4. He is accomplished with charity or generosity (Caga)
5. He is accomplished with diligence or effort (Viriya)
6. He is accomplished with mindfulness (Sati)
7. He is accomplished with concentration (Samadhi) and
8. He is accomplished with wisdom (Panna)

These are the best qualifications of a good friend in the society. As discussed above in this topic, the Buddha emphasizes and praises good friendship.

When one makes an effort to develop his welfare, he certainly needs the help of his good friend. If that it be so, he can try to develop his welfare. The word 'social welfare' is composed of two words social + welfare. Social means relating to society and the way people live. Welfare means public health and happiness. To develop one's health and happiness, he need to do welfare work which consists of actions or procedures, especially on the part of government and institutions striving to promote the basic well-being of individuals in need. In other words, social welfare is an organization of education, food and health for the needy.

#### References

- Anguttara Nikaya Tika 1, 2, Chatthasangayana, Version 3, 1999.
- Acharya Buddharakkhita.( 1985). *The Dhammapada: Buddha's Path of Wisdom*. Buddhist Publication Society, Sri Lanka.
- Ashin Janakabhivamsa. (1995). *Abhidhamma in Daily Life*. Department of Trade, Ministry of Commerce, Myanmar.
- FL. Woodward.(2003). *The Book of The Gradual Saying(Aguttra Nikaya) or Sutta( Vol. V)*, The Pali Text Socieity, Oxord, U.K.
- Nyaanaponika Thera.(1976). *Abhidhamma Studies, third edition*. Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.
- Nandasena Ratnapala.(2005). *Buddhist Sociology*. Vishva Lekha Publishers, Sri Lanka
- Thera, N. (2004). *Buddhist dictionary: Manual of Buddhist terms and doctrines*. Buddhist Publication Society.