

Text-Study

Friendship Across Religions

Buddhist sources:

Source 1:

“Thus I have heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the **Sakyans** where there was a town of the Sakyans named **Sakkara**. There **Ven. Ānanda** approached the Blessed One. Having approached, he paid homage to the Blessed One, sat down to one side and said to him: “Venerable sir, this is half of the holy life: good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship.” Not so, Ānanda! Not so, Ānanda! This is the entire holy life, that is good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship.”

Samyutta Nikāya 45.2, translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi in “The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: a new translation of the Samyutta Nikāya, Wisdom Publications, Boston 2000, p.1524

Source 2:

The four kinds of good friends are: 1) ‘the friend who is a helper’, 2) ‘the friend who is the same in happy and unhappy times,’ 3) the friend who points out what is good for you”, and 4) the friend who is sympathetic.’ The Buddha then describes the qualities associated with each of the four types of friends. The friend ‘who points out what is good for you’ is clearly seen as a moral and spiritual guide, since he is described as someone who “keeps you from wrong-doing, supports you in doing good, informs you of what you did not know (i.e. his understanding of moral and spiritual matters)...and points out the way to heaven.” Other qualities described in the four types of good friend are loyalty, trustworthiness, intimacy (keeping and sharing each other’s secrets), love, selfless service, and willingness to sacrifice one’s life for the other.

In contrast to this, the four kinds of bad or false friends to be avoided are 1) ‘One who takes (instead of gives),’ 2) ‘One who is a great talker,’ 3) ‘One who flatters (or only says pleasant things),’ and 4) ‘One who is a fellow-spendthrift or debauched companion.’ Again, four detailed characteristics are given of each type. The Buddha’s advice to Sigālaka to avoid contacts with those who are not devoted to practicing good is common-sense, and underscores the teaching of the importance of true spiritual friends on the path.

Maurice Walsh 1995 (transl), p. p.461-9, verse 24, Subhuti, 2004, p. 44.

Source 3:

“By the following method too, Ānanda, it may be understood how the entire holy life is good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship: by relying upon me as a good friend, Ānanda, beings subject to birth and death are freed from death; beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair are freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure,

and despair. By this method, Ānanda, it may be understood how the entire holy life is good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship.”

Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000 (transl), p. 1524-55.

Questions for Buddhist sources:

Source 1:

1. *Is good friendship something just to enjoy or is it important? In what way?*
2. *What is meant by ‘this is the entire holy life’? Is the emphasis on ‘holy’ or is it on ‘life’?*

Source 2:

1. *Do the qualities of the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ friend resonate with you? Would there be other characteristics you could attach to ‘good’ or ‘bad’ friends?*
2. *Why do you think the word ‘friend’ is used for a ‘bad’ friend?*

Source 3:

This source is an extension of source 1 and considers the benefits of having Buddha as a friend. Is it beyond the scope of normal interpersonal relationships to have such benefits or can a true friend really have such an impact?