

The Path to Winning Friends & the Noble Loneliness

One day Ven Ananda, the Buddha's chief attendant said to the Buddha " Reverend sir, I see that half of the dispensation of the Buddha (the spiritual life) depends on good association. Then the Buddha says, "Don't say Ananda, don't say Ananda like that. Not only half, but the entire Buddha Sasana (spiritual life) completely depends on good association. Here the Supreme Buddha emphasizes the significance of good friendship.

According to Buddhism, wisdom is the most important quality which directly helps us to gain enlightenment reducing ignorance. For the gaining of wisdom, four qualities should be developed from the beginning to the end of the path of liberation. They are;

1. Associating good friends
2. Listening to dhamma
3. Wise reflection
4. Practicing dhamma

Among these four qualities associating good friends plays a main role on the path of enlightenment. It is unable to achieve the highest purification of mind without good association who points out the world reality as it is. Not only it is important having good association (*kalyanamittata*), but we should get helps from them (*kalyanasahayata*) and should pay attention to what they say (*kalyanasahayata*).

To make good association, improve good friendship, Buddhism has explained some primary qualities we need to develop in our characters. They are;

1. Practicing charity
2. Having moral conduct
3. Spreading loving kindness to others

The very first quality is practicing charity or sharing.

When someone asked a question thus;

who makes friends?

The Supreme Buddha replied as;

He who is generous makes friends.

Here is clear that one of the qualities we should practice is generosity for making friends. If a person is greedy, friends don't like him. Hence the more who is generous the more he wins friends.

The second quality which helps to make friends is that having moral conduct. In the discourse of Akankheyya, the Buddha says;

He who has good discipline in speech and behavior is pleasant among relatives and friends. Also, he who spends a virtuous life is respected by relatives and friends. So it is very important to practice five precepts which is the regular discipline of a Buddhist and a good person as well. The five precepts are;

1. Abstaining from taking life
2. Abstaining from stealing
3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct
4. Abstaining from false speech
5. Abstaining from intoxicating drinks and drugs

These are the primary human values. Every society respects them. If people in a society practice them, they are respected and trusted by everyone. He who practices these values is protected by those qualities.

The third quality should be practiced for making friends is that practicing loving kindness. When someone always contemplates on "May all beings be well happy and peaceful", he generates positive energy. The highest result of practicing loving kindness is that thinking about everyone like his or her only son or daughter. Also, according to *Mettānisansa Sutta*, he who practices loving kindness is pleasant to human (*manussānam piyo hoti*) and non-human (*amanussānam piyo hoti*) as well.

When we see above three qualities, we are able to see the significance of practicing three meritorious deeds in Buddhism. They are;

1. *Dāna* = Generosity
2. *Sīla* = Virtue
3. *Bhāvanā* = Meditation

These three merits can be applied everywhere. Also, we can gain other visible results too in this life itself such as longevity, good completion, comfort and strength. As the result of practicing these qualities we are able to make friends. That is not just friendship, but an honorable association that leads to make a self-refuge which doesn't depend on anyone or anything. That is why the Supreme Buddha says;

Dwell with yourself as an island as a refuge with no other refuge

Dwell with dhamma as an island as a refuge with no other refuge

The highest level of spirituality or wisdom in Buddhism is liberation or freedom. To achieve this mental state, we have to understand the nature of life. Our entire life is six internal senses and six external objects. Realizing these twelve things helps to overcome suffering and to make an unshakable refuge.

We usually experience through our senses such as eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. When objects such as forms, sounds, smell, taste reach senses, we experience about the world. The nature of this experience is arising at the moment and instantly ceasing at once. **Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not come to (the future) occurrence.** (අනුත්ථා සම්භුතං ඉත්ථා න භවිස්සති). It means if we experience something now, it didn't happen in the past in the same way like now.

The Buddha explains this theory in his main teaching, the dependent origination like this;

"When this being - this comes to be" (*Asmim sati idam hoti*)

With the arising of this – this arises" (*Imassa uppada idam uppajjati*)

When this not being – this doesn't come to be (*Asmim asati idam na hoti*)

With the cessation of this – this ceases" (*Imassa nirodha idam nirujjati*)

Also, present experience doesn't go to the future in the same way. If somebody can understand this reality, he is ready to give up extremes about the past and the future. Also, he tries to live in the present moment seeing arising and ceasing wisely with full awareness.

In this situation to get rid of this ignorance, wise reflection guides us to live in the present moment seeing world reality as impermanence. Our real happiness depends on how much we are clever to live in the present moment. Here, it doesn't sound that we forget our past or future. We may have a good memory about the past and the future, but we don't run to the past and future without mindfulness. We see the past and future with full awareness. Buddhism never asks us to forget the past or future. When we think about something in the past or future, we have a real awareness that now I read my mind. Likewise, we practice to see the past and the future with full awareness about the present.

To make this experience permanent, we have to follow a path that is the noble eightfold path. It is,

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| 1. Right Understanding | (<i>Sammā ditthi</i>) | සම්මා දිට්ඨි |
| 2. Right Thoughts | (<i>Sammā samkappa</i>) | සම්මා සංකප්ප |
| 3. Right Speech | (<i>Sammā vācā</i>) | සම්මා වාචා |
| 4. Right Action | (<i>Sammā kammantha</i>) | සම්මා කම්මන්ත |
| 5. Right Livelihood | (<i>Sammā ājiva</i>) | සම්මා ආජීව |
| 6. Right Effort | (<i>Sammā vāyāma</i>) | සම්මා වායාම |
| 7. Right Mindfulness | (<i>Sammā sati</i>) | සම්මා සති |
| 8. Right Concentration | (<i>Sammā samādhi</i>) | සම්මා සමාධි |

As much as we have a right understanding about the path listening to the Buddha's message, we are ready to practice other steps gradually. Day by day we go forward in this path wisely seeing the reality which is impermanence. These eight steps consist of three disciplines those are virtue, tranquility (or concentration) and wisdom. With the understanding of The Noble Eightfold Path, we form self-discipline in our speech and behavior. Discipline helps us to go forward in the path of purification practicing meditation. In purification of the mind, we mainly use two meditation techniques which are concentration or tranquility and insight. In the tranquility meditation, we keep our mind with a particular good thought. As a result of concentrated mind, we can live for a long time without suffering and stress, but it is not permanent and it can be changed. Here we practice and develop our awareness especially in our mind and body. We practice to do all kinds of activities mindfully. Mindfulness is one of the most important qualities that we have to develop for purification of our mind.

Concentration is not enough to eradicate defilements completely. That is why the Buddha asks us to develop another step that is insight meditation for permanent happiness. Here, with the concentrated mind, we reflect on all kinds of things that are mental and physical on three characteristics of existence (*තිලකඛණ*). They are;

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| i. Impermanence, | (<i>Anicca-අනිච්ච</i>) |
| ii. Unsatisfactoriness | (<i>Dukkha-දුක්ඛ</i>) |
| iii. Selflessness | (<i>Anatta-අනන්ත</i>) |

We reflect on these three characteristics of existence (ත්‍රිලක්ෂණ) again and again. As a result of practicing this world reality, we develop wisdom with the knowledge of impermanence. Simultaneously, we develop five qualities which are confidence (*Saddā*-සද්ධා), effort (*Viriya*-වීරිය), mindfulness (*Sati*-සති), concentration (*Samādhi*-සමාධි) and wisdom (*Paññā*-පඤ්ඤා). As the result of practicing The Noble Eightfold Path with mindfulness and wisdom, we gradually reach real happiness increasing defilements. Final experience of this effort is living in the present moment with full awareness seeing arising and ceasing without any desirable attachment or destruction. That is the highest goal of practicing the Buddha's message which is the world reality. Then we are able to overcome dissatisfaction, sorrow, lamentations and all kinds of sufferings completely in this life itself.

This is the path to make a real refuge that no one can shake. We start this path with good association. Then we listen to dhamma through them. Further, practicing dhamma we achieve the real liberation. Finally, we live in wisdom, the we don't depend on even good association since we have overcome suffering. No matter whether we have or not any friends we have liberated. Then we can live happily like a unicorn who has only one horn. That is the nature of the enlightened one. He likes loneliness. His supreme happiness is that living alone.

Put by the rod for all that lives,
tormenting not a single one;
long not for child, how then for friend?
fare singly as the rhino's horn.

*Atta deepā bhikkhave viharatha atta saranā na anna saranā,
Dhamma deepā bhikkhave dhamma saranā na anna saranā.* (Attadeepa Sutta)

Dwell with yourself as an island as a refuge with no other refuge!
Dwell with the Dhamma as an island as a refuge with no other refuge!

Oh! All conditions are impermanent,
their nature is to arise and cease
having arisen, they cease;
their stilling is true bliss.”

Actually, if we can practice mindfulness with right understanding and reflecting on impermanence as the Buddha stated, all other qualities such as confidence, energy, concentration and wisdom also increase gradually. Therefore, we should always try to be mindful about our mind and body. Practicing mindfulness means we are on the path of liberation from all sufferings. Then our real refuge is living in mindfulness. In this situation we don't depend on any thing or any one outside or even our physical body. This is the real result we receive through good association. Finally, our best friend is mindfulness. Then we are happy to live lonely like a rhino's horn. This is the noble loneliness which the enlightened one always appreciates.

May the Triple Gem Bless You!

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