

## Spiritual Friendship

### Part I: "Horizontal" Friendships

People new to Buddhism often take the Dharma to be a purely individual path of spiritual development. They imagine that the only correct way to follow the Dharma is

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**If you find a wise person  
Who points out your faults and corrects you,  
You should follow such a sage  
As you would a revealer of treasures.  
It is better, never worse  
To follow such a sage.**

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— Dhammapada v.76

to lock oneself up in one's room, turn off the lights, and devote all one's efforts to practicing meditation. However, if we look at the Buddhist texts, we would see that the Buddha again and again stressed the value of spiritual friendship as a support for the Buddhist path throughout the entire course of its practice. On one occasion the Venerable Ananda, the Buddha's attendant, came to the Buddha and said that in his

view half the spiritual life revolves around spiritual friendship. The Buddha immediately corrected him and said, "Do not say this, Ananda! Do not say this, Ananda! Spiritual friendship is not half the spiritual life. It's the entire spiritual life!" Then, with reference to himself, the Buddha added, "In this whole world, I am the supreme spiritual friend of living beings, because it is in dependence upon me, by relying upon me, that those who are subject to birth, old age, and death become liberated from birth, old age, and death."

I want to make a distinction between two types of spiritual friendship, which might be called the "horizontal type" and the "vertical type." What I call horizontal spiritual friendship is friendship between people who are at roughly the same level in following the path; this is the friendship between "partners" in following the path, and what unites them as spiritual friends is a common dedication to following the Buddhist path.

People come together and unite as friends for various reasons. We usually take the gregarious side of human nature for granted, but to understand the nature and importance of friendship it's instructive to reflect on the factors that bring people together and unite them as friends. To do so will give us a standard for evaluating our own friendships and seeing which are helpful and which harmful.

The Buddha says that it is because of an "element" that people come together and unite. What is meant by "element" here is the basic disposition or trait of character. Thus the Buddha says that those of inferior disposition come together and unite with those of inferior disposition, whereas those of superior disposition come together and unite.

So, if we cast our mental eye out upon the world, we can see that on a given Saturday night many people will go out to night clubs to enjoy themselves dancing; others will go to bars to enjoy drinking and chatting together; others might go to sports matches; others will get together and watch crude films. That is what unites them in friendship. So this is how people of inferior disposition come together and unite.

But others come together to listen to Dharma talks, participate in meditation retreats, and study the Dharma. In this case, what unites them is a shared dedication to the Dharma. So, the defining characteristic of spiritual friendship is dedication to a common teaching, in this case, the Buddha's teaching. This is dedication to a common teaching, dedication to the practice of the same path, dedication based on similar ideals and aspirations, unity based on engagement in similar practices. To unite with others in a common dedication to the spiritual path has a strengthening and uplifting effect upon our own practice. When we try to practice the path alone, we may feel as though we are walking through a desert. It can be very lonesome, the landscape around us is rough and barren, and we have no refreshment, no inspiration from others to replenish

#### NEW — Small Children's Dharma Class

Beginning on April 3rd, we will be offering two children's Dharma classes for different age groups. These classes take place between 9:50 and 11:00 am on specifically scheduled Saturdays.

#### Small Children's Dharma Class:

For children ages 4-6 years old.

Dates: 4/3 and 4/17

Teacher: Duke De Groat

Contact: dukedegroat@nac.net or phone 201 259 0938.

#### Youth Dharma Class:

For children ages 6-13 years old.

Dates: 4/3, 4/17, 5/1, and 5/15

Teacher: William Bertolotti.

Contact: williambertolotti@yahoo.com.

#### July Dharma Retreat

The week-long 2004 Dharma Retreat (Fo Fa Du Jia) will be held this summer at Bodhi Monastery from Saturday, July 10th, to Friday, July 16th. Look for more details in the next Bulletin.

#### Venerable Analayo to Return in April

From late April until early June, Bodhi Monastery will again host a visit from Ven. Analayo, a Buddhist monk from Germany. When Ven. Analayo visited us last October he gave a lecture on "Key Points in the Practice of Right Mindfulness," and we expect he will give further talks on this topic.

#### Venerable Dhammadipa to Lecture Again

Ven. Dhammadipa visited us in January and will return on April 25th, staying until May 3rd. While here, he gave four Saturday lectures on the practice of meditation according to the Yogachara school of Buddhism. He will give a final lecture in this series on May 1st.

#### Ven. Master Yin-Shun's 100th Birthday

On April 7th Ven. Jen-Chun will leave for a trip that will take him to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, returning to Taiwan for Master Yin-shun's 100th birthday celebrations on the first weekend in May. He will return to New Jersey on May 7th.

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## Spiritual Friendship *(continued from front)*

our energies. But when we unite with others in spiritual friendship based upon common aspirations, this reinforces our own energies. When we walk a common path and engage in common practices, we gain encouragement, strength, and inspiration to continue in our practice. This is like crossing the desert in a caravan: others help us carry the supplies, we can pause for conversation, we have a sense of sharing the trials along the way, and we rejoice together as we approach our destination.

When we unite with others in spiritual friendship, this not only transforms our approach to the practice, but also has an impact upon the very nature of our friendships. In our worldly life, our friendships are very closely connected with personal attachments, which in turn are rooted in our own egocentric needs. Even when we think we love the other person, often we really love that person because this relationship in some way satisfies a deep need within ourselves. When the other person fails to satisfy this deep need within us, our feelings quickly become embittered and our love turns into resentment or even enmity.

But when we enter into a spiritual friendship based upon dedication to a common goal, this friendship helps us to transform our attachments and ego-centered drives. Even more, it helps us to transcend the very idea of the ego-self as a substantive reality. Spiritual friendship, we discover, is not about satisfying my personal needs, or even about my satisfying the other person's personal needs. It's about each of us contributing as best we can to uplift each other, and to bring each other closer to the ideals of the Dharma.

In spiritual friendship we are concerned with the other person not because of the ways that person satisfies us, but because we want to see the other person grow and develop in the direction of greater wisdom, greater virtue, greater understanding. We want the other person's wholesome qualities to attain maturity and bring forth fruits for the benefit of others. This is the essence of "horizontal" spiritual friendship: a keen interest in helping our friends grow and develop in the practice of the Dharma, in maturing their potential for goodness, for understanding, for wholesomeness.

*(An excerpt from a lecture by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi. Part II: "Vertical" Friendships will appear in a future Bulletin.)*

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## The Bodhi Monastery Food Pantry – Helping the Local Community

The Bodhi Monastery Food Pantry assists in providing food for eligible people within our community who meet the guidelines for poverty set up by the Food Bank of New Jersey. The Pantry is also a source of food for less impoverished but needy families and individuals. Our volunteers pick up food from the Food Bank as well as bread and vegetables from the Sparta Stop & Shop on a weekly basis.

The Food Pantry opens every Friday at 8:45 am and the volunteers distribute the food at 9:30 am. After distribution, volunteers stay to prepare the bags for the following week. The Food Pantry serves more than 25 families weekly, and up to 45 families during the holiday season.

Besides food, The Food Pantry also supplies clothing to the community. Extra clothing is then sent to countries in need with assistance from the Help Me organization.

You are welcome to participate by donating canned goods (no exotic, unique types of food, please). Clothing donated should be clean and in good condition. Average to large adult sizes are preferred, as well as children's clothing. The Food Pantry is located in the monastery. Donations can be dropped off at the monastery reception desk from 9 - 11am on Fridays and 11 am - 12:30 pm on Saturdays.

### Bhante's Dharma Study "Exploring the Word of the Buddha"

Bhikkhu Bodhi's study course on the Majjhima Nikaya is held every Tuesday evening from 7 to 8 pm. The course offers a detailed and systematic overview of all the major teachings of Early Buddhism. You are welcome to join this class at any time. Students should have a copy of *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi.

## March/April Dharma Schedule

We will be following our regular Dharma Schedule in March and April. Please note that Ven. Jen-Chun's Madhyamaka class will be cancelled from April 13th through May 4th.

### SATURDAYS:

9:50 - 10:40 am	Dharma discourse by Ven. Jen-Chun
10:45 - 11:15 pm	Work period
11:15 - 12:15 pm	Lunch and cleanup
12:30 - 1:30 pm	Dharma discourse by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi or Ven. Xin Xing
1:45 - 2:30 pm	Dharma discussion
2:45 - 4:15 pm	Pali class

### FIRST SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH:

9:50 - 10:30 am	Dharma discourse by Ven. Jen-Chun
10:40 - 11:10 pm	Devotional Service

(The rest of the schedule follows as above.)

### SUNDAYS:

9:00 - 9:30 am (First Sunday of each month)	Beginners instruction in meditation
9:30 - 11:00 am (Every Sunday)	Meditation Group guided by Bhante
10:00 - 11:30 am (dates to be determined)	Ven. Jen-Chun Dharma Talk at Ch'an Center

### WEEKDAYS:

Tuesdays,* 9:50 - 10:50 am and 1 - 2 pm	Madhyamaka Philosophy with Ven. Jen-Chun (in Chinese)
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*\*Cancelled from April 13th through May 4th.*

Tuesdays, 7 - 8 pm	Sutta Study Class with Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi (in English)
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### DAILY:

4:30 - 5 pm	Chanting Liturgy
5:05 - 6 pm	Sitting meditation

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BODHI MONASTERY

67 Lawrence Rd. Lafayette, NJ 07848

Please contact us for more information on any of our programs:  
973 940 0473 or  
info@bodhimonastery.net

