

Contemplating Relations, Friends, Acquaintances and Spiritual Companions

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 1 min read

Fountains of Joy. How varied our relationships are! And how we change in the presence of others according to how we feel the circumstance demands. And if we accept the limitation of certain relationships, they are all causes for joy. Relations can be difficult. There is often family history to contend with. Just because we happen to share genes doesn't mean we will get on. There are so many other factors. But contemplating that shared family history may give relations a depth even deeper than close friendships. I was surprised how close I felt to a cousin of mine dying from pulmonary embolism even though we had hardly seen each other since childhood. The closer the relation – parents and siblings as opposed to cousins and distant cousins – the deeper can be our commitment to their well-being. Friends, from close lifelong companions to social, political, work related, hobby co-enthusiasts and so on – all fill important roles in our lives. They help us develop our personalities and characters as we meld with their varied personalities and characters in the process of sharing the interests that drive us. And on the outer reaches, our friendships shade into acquaintances which given circumstance can grow into friendships. But of all friendships it is spiritual friendship that is to be most treasured and celebrated for they are helping us to realise the deepest goals of our lives. Ananda, the Buddha's companion for the last twenty years of his life, would often have only partial understanding. One day, he offered the opinion that good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship is half the spiritual life. Good here does not mean like. One of the liberating qualities of a spiritual friend is that you don't have to like them! No, no, the Buddha tells him. It is the entirety of the spiritual life. For if we have good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship, then we can expect to cultivate the Eightfold Path because of that support. (SN 45:2) How important is that! So after each meeting with a relation, a friend, an acquaintance or a spiritual companion, pause for a moment, appreciate the treasure, allow gratitude to arise and savour the joy.

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