

CONCEPT OF GURU: A SPIRITUAL FRIEND (*KALYĀṆAMITTATĀ*)

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Introduction

“Guru” is supposed to call those who play essential role for teaching, especially in terms of the way to practice meditation and other instructions for getting mind trained. Owing that Buddhism emphasizes on getting mind trained constantly thereby using meditation; whether insight meditation or calm meditation, those who expert and got direct experiences in meditation are assigned as a meditative master or a teacher. To learn how to practice meditation is not only methodological idea but practical one, thus, the meditative masters must teach their followers both theoretical and practical ones. Regardingly, they must get direct experiences of meditation so as to teach their followers the right knowledge and the right liberation.

Guru and Spiritual Friend *Kalyāṇa-mittatā*

As we have known, “Guru” is a Sanskrit term used for "teacher" or "master", particularly in Indian religions, the concept of which is precisely explained by Swami Vivakananda that the person from whose soul such impulse comes is called “Guru –teacher”.² Anyways, there must be some person who complies strictly with what the Guru instructs that is called “*Sishyas*, the students”. With this, Swami Vivakananda explains the essential role of the *Guru* and *Sishya* that the guru must possess the power of transmitting the impulse to another and the *Sishya* who is to be conveyed the impulse must be fit to receive it.³ To put it more precisely, it is the oral tradition or religious doctrine or experiential wisdom transmitted from teachers to students. In *Theravāda* Buddhist tradition, the teacher is a valued and honoured mentor worthy of great respect and is a source of inspiration on the path to Enlightenment; however, the teacher is not generally called guru but rather a spiritual friend or *Kalyāṇa-mittatā*.

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² Swami Vivakananda, *Essentials of Buddhism* (Himalayas: Advaita Ashrama, 1972), p. 42.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Spiritual Friend *Kalyāṇa-mittatā*

According to Buddhism, the spiritual friend or *Kalyāṇa-mittatā* is considerably the main part for getting advance of meditation which can be approach enlightenment as saying in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* as follows:

“Bhikkhus, just as dawn is the forerunner and harbinger of sun-rise, even so, bhikkhus, for a monk this is the forerunner, the harbinger of the arising of the noble eightfold path, that is, spiritual friendship. Bhikkhus, when a monk has a spiritual friend, it is to be expected that he will cultivate the noble eightfold path, develop the noble eightfold path...[B]hikkhus, a monk who has a spiritual friend, a good companion, a good comrade, cultivates the noble eightfold path, develops the noble eightfold path.”⁴

Regarding this point, Buddhism throws the weight to the spiritual friend or *Kalyāṇa-mittatā* to practice meditation and get an advance of the practice as said in *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimaggā)* that if a man wishes to bring out concentration, he, at first, should approach a pre-eminent friend. Why? If, at first, when a *yogin* wishes to accomplish excellent concentration, he dwells apart from a good friend, he will not acquire steadfastness. It is comparable to a man who sets out alone on a distant journey. None guides him. When a man sets out alone, he is like an elephant that is not guided by the goad. If, when a *yogin* practises, he listens to the discourses and instructions of a good friend, he is able to remove many his difficulties and get into the right method and practice. If he strenuously endeavors and strictly trains himself, then he is able to acquire excellent concentration.⁵

The Quality of Spiritual Friend *Kalyāṇa-mittatā*

Buddhism explains the quality of the spiritual friend that a good friend who may be likened to a wealthy chief of merchants honored by all, to a kind good-hearted person, to a dearly loved parent, steadies one, as the chain to the elephant. A good friend on whom one relies and accomplishes all meritorious activities is like a mahout who causes (the elephant) to go backwards and forwards, is like a good road on which a man can take a yoke

⁴ S 45.49/5:29 f.

⁵ Arahan Upatissa, *Path of Freedom Vimuttimagg* (Colombo: Balcombe House, 1961), pp. 48-49.

of oxen, like a physician who cures diseases and removes pain, like the rain from heaven which moistens everything, like a mother who nurses her child, like a father who guides his son, like parents who ward their children from perils and like a teacher who instructs (his pupils).⁶

Besides, according to Buddhism, a spiritual friend is called 'pre-eminent good friend' because of understanding of the *Sutta*, *Abhidhamma* and *Vinaya* which is called 'fulfillment of acquisition' in other ways.⁷ He is also understands *kamma* and is endowed with beneficent worldly knowledge. One knows the Four Noble Truths; this is call 'merit-fulfillers'. Moreover, the spiritual friend must fulfill with seven qualities; namely, Loveableness, esteemableness, venerableness, the ability to counsel well, patience (in listening), the ability to deliver deep discourses, and the not applying oneself to useless ends.⁸

'Lovableness': it Led by two kinds of practice, a man preaches well: dwelling together happily, having come to a mutual understanding and not abusing one another.

'Esteemableness' means that one is tranquillized through the action of virtue, fulfills the protection of mindfulness, is not over-desirous and does not speak much.

'Venerableness' means that one is endowed with the merit of much learning and appreciates well the value of meditation.

'The ability to counsel well' means that one considers thus: "Let my speech be lovable, esteemable, venerable and fruitful", and benefits others and esteems the truth.

'Patience (in listening)' means that one is like a saint, understands well, never hesitates in one's speech and does not flatter.

'The ability to deliver deep discourses' means that one well understands....

⁶ Arahan Upatissa, *Path of Freedom*, p. 48.

⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

⁸ Ibid.

'The not applying oneself to useless ends' means that he understands well the place of *kamma*.⁹

The Role of the Master, Spiritual Friend or Teacher

This teacher is not a god or an incarnation of the divine; he is essentially an elder friend and guide; the guidance he gives along with the path to be travelled steams entirely from his superior wisdom gained through personal experience. Even Buddha does not give more than indicate the path; the rest depends on the effort of the aspirant.

As knowledge of how to attain the *Jhana* has been transmitted through lineage of teacher, each teacher passes his store of accumulated knowledge and experiences on to his successor pupils. A prospective meditator is advised to avail himself of living heritage of practice by placing himself under the care of a qualified teacher. By teaching, the teacher will assign him a subject of meditation appropriate for his temperament, instruct him in the methods of developing it, and guide him the step along the path.

As for the ancient teachers of the *Theravāda* tradition, they recognized six principle character types (*Carita*) in to which prospective meditators can be classified; there are, greedy temperament (*ragacarita*), the hating temperament (*dosacarita*), the deluded temperament (*mohacarita*), the faithful temperament (*saddhacarita*), the intelligent temperament (*Buddhicarita*), and the speculative temperament (*vitakkacarita*).¹⁰ By these temperaments of the pupil, the teacher will know by either of power of penetrating others' mind, or by personal observation, or by questioning. Then, he will select a meditative subject for him appropriating to his temperament.

The Role of the Prospective Meditator

After learning the qualified teacher, the prospective meditator should approach him and take up residence in his monastery. Actually, he should not ask the meditative subject immediately upon arriving, but should perform the duty of a pupil towards the teacher. He should pay homage to the teacher in the evening and leave when dismissed. Then, after ten days or

⁹ Arahan Upatissa, *Path of Freedom*, p. 48

¹⁰ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *Visuddhimagga (The path of purification)* (Colombo: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010), p. 99.

two weeks have passed, he should create an opportunity to see the teacher. When all conditions are favorable, he can explain the reason for his coming and should dedicate himself the Buddha and to the teacher; then, ask for a subject of meditation with a sincere inclination and resolution.

Whether Buddha is Guru or Not

We always chant to pay homage to Buddha as follow:

“Iti pi so Bhagavā-Araham Sammā-sambuddho. Vijjā-carana sampanno Sugato Lokavidū Anuttarro Purisa-damma-sārathi Satthā deva-manussānam Buddho Bhagavāti”

(Thus indeed, is that Blessed One: He is the Holy One, fully enlightened, endowed with clear vision and virtuous conduct, sublime, the Knower of the worlds, the incomparable leader of men to be tamed, the teacher of gods and men, enlightened and blessed).¹¹

The *Pali* term, *Satthā deva-manussānam* (the teacher of gods and men), signifies that Buddha is personally praised by Buddhists as a teacher; the teacher of gods and human beings. After getting enlightenment, Buddha had been travelling to teach whether Divines or human beings what he had enlightened. However, what Buddha called himself is “awaken”. However, Buddhists call Him as “Teacher” in some respect owning that He got the routine duties of teaching are: (1) in the forenoon session, He surveys the world with His Divine Eye to see whom he could help;¹² (2) in the afternoon session, He takes a seat in the monastery and the *Bhikkhus* assemble to listen to His exposition of the *Dhamma*;¹³ (3) at the first watch, the period of the night extends from 6 to 10 p.m., it was exclusively reserved for instruction to *Bhikkhus*;¹⁴ (4) at the middle watch, which extends from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., Devas and Brahmas approach the Buddha to question Him on the *Dhamma*;¹⁵ (5) at the last watch, which is the small hours of the morning extending from 2 to 6 a.m. – it is divided into four parts. The first is spent in pacing up and down (*cankamana*), His mild physical exercise; the second

¹¹ A.III.285; M.I.37; quoted in Phra Rajavaramuni, *Dictionary of Buddhism* (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1985), pp. 264-65.

¹² Nārada, *The Buddha and His Teachings* (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1998), p. 226.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

from 3 to 4 a.m. is spent to mindfully sleeps on His right side; the third, from 4 to 5 a.m. is spent to attain the state of Arahantship and experience *Nibbānic* bliss; the fourth, from 5 to 6 a.m., is spent for attaining the great compassion and radiates thoughts of loving-kindness towards all beings and softens their hearts and surveys the whole world with His Buddha-eye to see whether He could give a service to any.¹⁶

Conclusion

In Buddhism, the terms “Guru” seems not to be used for calling those who teach meditation and other instructions for getting mind trained, rather, the term “spiritual friend, *Kalyāṇa-mittatā* is mostly used. However, both Guru and Spiritual friend play the most important role as the teacher for those who want to get their mind trained in the high level. Anyways, those who can be called ‘*Kalyāṇa-mittatā*’ must endow with understanding of *Sutta*, *Abhidhamma* and *Vinaya*. Besides, they must clearly understand the *kamma* and are endowed with beneficent worldly knowledge and the Four Noble Truths. More significantly, they must fulfill with seven qualities; namely, Loveableness, esteemableness, venerableness, the ability to counsel well, patience (in listening), the ability to deliver deep discourses, and the not applying oneself to useless ends.

¹⁶ Nārada, *The Buddha and His Teaching*, p. 231.

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