

# 2003-11-02 Spiritual Friends

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

community, buddha, practice, life, spiritual, support, people, sangha, grateful, redwood city, path, living, engage, supportive, wider community, commitment, mind, buddhist, friends, meditation

## SPEAKERS

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There's a famous story of a time when Ananda and Buddha were together and under was the cousin of the Buddha, he became a monk and was for about 20 years was the Buddha's closest attendant followed him along and said to her at a very good memory, and so, he memorized mostly a lot of the teachings of the Buddha gave and was one of the people responsible for preserving them down through the time. So they were very close. And, and, and now now you can see proceed is a very, very intimate disciple of the Buddha. And one point they find they found themselves alone in some setting and the Ananda set to the Buddha. I think that half of the holy life half of spiritual life is association with his, his friendship with his good spiritual friends, is Associate his friendship with what is beautiful. And the Buddha said, Oh, don't say that. He said the entire spiritual life that holds the entire holy life is association with good spiritual friends association with his friendship with that which is beautiful. And there's some ambiguity in the words. That's why translated in two different ways. But it's usually taken to be the first way that he said half his spiritual life, his association with good spiritual friends. And the Buddha said, No, it's the entire entire life. And it's quite a powerful statement to me to be made about the role of community, the role of other people in our spiritual life. The word it's being used here is Kalia namita and kalyana meter means friend, and colleague Ghana means lovely, beautiful that which is good, wonderful. And it's usually taken to be a synonym for kind of spiritual or spiritual life which is considered to be the ultimate beautiful thing. And so it puts a very strong emphasis on the role of community of friendship, at least with other people who are practicing other people who are developing themselves good qualities. And it might come as a surprise to many people that Buddha spirituality puts such a strong emphasis on practicing together with others and having good spiritual friends. But that idea is also in shrined. And maybe in the idea of the triple refuge, and the idea that the one of the central spiritual movements or steps or commitments of Buddhist is to what's called the triple gem gems are the three treasures. And that's the Buddha Dharma and the Sangha. And it could be, if you asked, you know, what, what is a Buddhist life? One thing is to say what you know, what is Buddhist beliefs. But Buddhists are less interested in beliefs and then in how we live our lives. And so the question more appropriately would be what is a Buddhist life? And one answer to that question is

many answers many aspects to it. One is that it's a committed life to life that's committed in some way. And the question is, what is it committed to, and the classic framework is committed to the Buddha Dharma and the Sangha. And the Buddha here is, certainly means the Buddha as a person is awakening. But that doesn't have much real meaning in terms of spiritual life, unless we somehow understand that it's for us to become awakened ourselves. For us to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha follow the path that he set down and somehow does over our own potential, to liberate ourselves and liberate our hearts liberate our minds, become more compassionate and loving, and more free. And so the first commitment then is to the Buddha, to this freedom of hearts, freedom of mind, this liberation from all the things that the fears and the hates and the greed, the ambition, the confusion, which keeps the luminosity of our inner life, our heart from shining. And the second is the Dharma. And the Dharma is conventionally called the teachings of the Buddha. But again, the teachings of the Buddha are pointing towards something. And so it's the that which is being pointed towards which is really the Dharma. It's pointing towards a path of practice. It's pointing to towards a path of practice, and those transformations that occur to the psyche as people engage in that path. And so, the so that the, that's the Dharma, that kind of The truth, the truth of the path, the truth that are attained in living the path and being transformed and changed. And so there's a commitment by Buddhists then towards that transformation that path. And then the final refuge is that are the Sangha. And Sangha means like an association it's a basically Sanskrit or Pali word. That means, some people translated to just simply word means association or society. And I think the insight meditation society, the first retreat center we have in the East Coast, my guess is they chose the word society, because it was a English translation of Sangha. So, the best way to communicate our society in association of people and as a refuge the Sangha is that is this association with those people who are also engaged in waking up and being mindful living a compassionate life trying to dedicated to the first To these two refuges, who somehow the awakened mind, and the path to awakening mind is the, you know, is the commitment to people living by. And so there's a commitment then in a sense to the community, of being living with a community, engaging the community life, and sharing one's own life with wider community. My first motivation to live in community, in a spiritual community kind of living together with or living or being close to was after I've been practicing meditation, Buddhist meditation for a couple of years. I found I needed. I felt a strong urge, almost like a need to be able to practice together with other people who are also practicing. Because when I was practicing together with my community, I was living in my friends and people who I loved and very dear to me. I felt that somehow that there was a disharmony within myself. in relationship to them, in that they couldn't support me in or couldn't be supported in their context in allowing the inner transformation that was happening to me to unfold in a way it was unfolding. And in almost all my old friends were kind of keeping me as the old girl while I was becoming a new deal. And so I wanted to be around some people who could kind of support this new possibility that there was emerging inside of me. And I noticed that when I went to the San Francisco Zen Center, that when I when I acted or behaved through my old self, playing my usual mind game games and trips about, you know, building up myself being someone being that, that it wasn't met by anything, you know, that talked to these people there and, and I felt more like anything like their mirrors, it was mirrored back to me. And I said, Oh, you know, I could see what I was doing so much more clearly. And I love that I just love that to this idea of having people around me who are

mirroring me in some way and helping me become a better person. And so that was my first motivation was to live in community was to have that mirroring of people. And then many years after being involved in various Buddhist communities, it really dawned on me in retrospect, how essential it had been to been connected, not necessarily just to community, but but been connected to other practitioners and other practitioners who were further along, in a sense in their practice than I was myself. And how, you know, I don't think I could have practiced the years of practice without that supportive community I couldn't have been as dedicated and as committed as involved and just would have been maybe frightened at times from engaging of what the path was calling on. Calling fourth. I might have been not so motivated because it's hot. Artists motivated on one's own. But having a community of people around me that were motivated and supportive, was really essential. And people I could talk to about my practice and talk about their practice, and, and to learn also for me, that my own life, my own spiritual life or practice life was so intimately connected to, to the practice in life of other people, that somehow my own practice was that I was doing it not just for myself, but it's also doing it in a sense for the wider community for myself, and the wider community for my friends and people I was practicing with. And I realized in retrospect, that all these reasons, were really essential for me being able, being able to engage in that in that path of practice. So I'm very, very grateful for my experience of community. And in the years that I've been part of this community, I find myself incredibly grateful for this community that It's I feel this community also has been a support for me to practice. In a sense now since I've been more and more here on the peninsula, this has become my primary source of primary spiritual community. And I am very much impressed and all inspired by the commitment and the practice and involvement of so many people who come here and practice here in so many different ways. People who some people who come new, you know, come to the introductory class and they listen with big ears, big eyes, and take it in and they go home and they practice it. I couldn't believe it. Sometimes. I say these things that they follow your breath, they come home the next week, and they follow their breath and, and it's pretty amazing. And I'm so impressed, you know, that people you know, in the busy life people leave live, that they take the time and the interest to engage in the practice they do. Then there are people who've been doing As you know, very seriously, for a long time, people in our community have gone off to Asia to practice or to IMS to practice long periods of time and people who've dedicated their, their practice in ways to support this community here. We have I was sent recently a list of called who does what in this community? And so I wanted to know how many volunteers and so I was curious how many volunteers we have. So I try to count, it's a little bit tricky because there's no double triple names and different slots, but you can kind of keep track a little bit, and I easily got 275. And then I told it as this and he's another not everyone's on that list. And I was amazed 75 plus people who are volunteering to you know, offering their goodness of their heart their involvement, and I feel very, you know, I feel like in terms of our practice, together to feel very supportive, that the practice opportunities we have are here because people are offering their labor and time to support to make it happen. And so I get Boyd, I get inspired, I get supported from everybody in this community in wonderful ways. And I'm very grateful for it. So it's a kind of a double mailing list of, you know, two things on my mind today about community. One is the very important way, ways in which living in community living, being in community, sharing some way with community, our life, is very supportive in all directions. We support others through our practice and other support

us. And the second thing on my mind, is that a way in which I'm so grateful for that, and that through the gratitude of having a community of people who practice and meditate to sit together who are engaged in this kind of way I think it's a, it's a path of practice, which is not always very easy. And so to have the support, I think is very helpful. And I think of since we came here to Redwood City and I, and I seen the growth of our community and all this wonderful activity of people engaged and in all the different ways they are, I had this kind of sense of this. It's kind of like this, like bright light in Redwood City that's shining around. And I'm sure there's lots of other bright lights in Redwood City. But I just this is the one I know and I'm very, very happy and very grateful to be part of it. And I hope that it's something that our community in some way in a way that interests you. So supportive view and your engagement in meditation or spiritual life or Buddhist life and that I have a little hope that also it's a place that cultivates gratitude in people's hearts, because I think it's such a beautiful quality to be able to feel grateful and For our lives and support our lives gets. The last thing I'll say about our community is very fond that this building has seven doors in it. And most of the doors are locked but that's besides the point. The point is that symbolically seven doors means to me that we're reports are kind of like open to the wider community. And, and part of that means that people come through whatever door they want, symbolically and come here and use use the place in whatever way that's appropriate for their lives. And really realize how much you know how wonderful it is to have a community Meditation Center that's in an urban community, where people who live such diverse lives in urban lives different, you know, work and family and all kinds of situations. They can come freely through any of the seven doors in a sense, freely come and go and to use What we have to offer in ways that are supportive for them and in all the diversity of ways that people can be supported. So, I express my gratitude to all of you and appreciation for this morning, you know, sit together and for all the food that's been brought for the potluck and they all love you. Enjoy your food and enjoy the company of fellow meditators. Thank you