

# 2018-06-24 Spiritual Friends

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

buddha, monastic, practice, mind, thoughts, people, friends, modesty, meditation, kinds, retreat, talks, impermanence, quality, spend, enlightened, inspired, states, grove, dharma, meghiya

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

I want to recount a win this ancient suttas discourses of the Buddha that has a little bit to do with spiritual friendship. And maybe it was partly inspired by the idea we're having a picnic and some of us will come together in friendship with each other and get to know each other more. And, in this particular text, ends with a poem.

So I'll start, I'll start with a poem. So it has more impact at the beginning. and end the poem uses the word heart for some of the but it's going to say, and the word could that's the ancient word could easily be translated into mind. And so you can if it's, if you want, you can translate it to mind to for yourself if it's more meaningful for you, or if not, you can just keep this in your heart. Little thoughts suck. thoughts. When followed, stir up the heart, not understanding the thoughts of the heart, one runs here and there, the mind out of control. But understanding the thoughts of the heart, one who is ardent, mindful restrains them. When follow they steer up the heart. One who is awakened, lets them go without a trace. So way of being with thoughts, either having them stir you up and agitate the mind or just let them pass through and let go of them. And they do that they like to go and they don't leave a trace. They don't agitate at all and there's no remnant not sticky in any way and doesn't create a you know, a chain reaction of one thought leading to the next to the next to the next. Sometimes in exciting ways for the mind. So this, this is the kind of the kind of the concluding poem or summing up this text, this story. And so it's a story about a monk who is having trouble with his thoughts in meditation. He's, I think they're, I think they were they were languages, he says assailed by thoughts of sensual pleasure of all kinds. Thoughts of ill will, resentment and thoughts of hostility. So he's, you know, he's troubled by these things. And, and he is surprised by this. And the way I just love the way that he reflects on his surprise. He said, he says, Well, this translation it goes how amazing. I love it. How amazing If my mind is out of control, I mean has such a nice feeling as opposed to as opposed to Oh shit. You know, oh, you know not not again, you know, I'm a meditation failure, I hope no one, I hope, I hope no one notices and you know just like rather than being discouraged he said how amazing and then he goes to the Buddha and he says the Buddha how amazing rather than being embarrassed he says how amazing because that Buddha to get some support, I suppose and help. So you know, it's not like he's amazed and just gonna let it keep going. But he says how amazing Buddha Let me tell you, but this is the story. So the monks name is Meghiya. And I think he's a relatively new monk, young monk and In the morning, it was time for Meghiya. Meghiya was the only one with the Buddha at that time, and his story whole kind of kind of, I think it kind of comes alive with more if you think of the Buddha, as an old man by now, you know he died when he was 80. And the two of them are dwelling alone someplace in the woods. And Meghiya asked permission to go off in the morning for alms, because the only way the monastics will have food every day, is that they go to town with their bowl, and people offer food nibble and they go home, go back to the forest and they eat it. And so Meghiya is to go off to alms. And my assumption is that the Buddha doesn't go to alms because Meghiya is kind of the Buddha's attendant,

and he's probably planning to get enough for both of them. Buddha maybe he's an old man, he's not going to go so much and so Meghiya is helping out.

So Meghiya, he goes to town gets alms now on the way back he sees on the side of the river at delightful mango grove. Mango groves are big kind of luscious leaves, wonderful canopy, they create wonderful shade, the great kind of coolness underneath them because of their transpiration. And by the river, just delightful location. And Meghiya says Wow, this is a great place to meditate. What if I come from spend the rest of the day here meditating. So he goes to the Buddha and guess they have their meal. And then Meghiya says to the Buddha, I found this great spot to meditate. May I go there and spend the day meditating? And the Buddha says, Please wait until an other monk comes to be with me. So clearly, the Buddha has a need for an attendant, but we don't know why. Maybe I guess I said, maybe he's old . And so he says, please wait until the other other monk comes to be with me.

And Meghiya says this, you Buddha have nothing further to do. And nothing further to add to what has been done, meaning you're already fully enlightened. So you don't have to go off and practice anymore in this way, so you have nothing further to do. I however, have something further to do, and something further to add to what I have done. If the Buddha gives me permission, I would like to go to the mango grove to exert myself in meditation. So the first time you just ask, you know, so I so he just asked could I go? And Buddha says no and second time he explains more. And the Buddhists for the second time the Buddha says, as long as I'm still alone, stay here until another monk comes. But then a third time Meghiya said to the Buddha, you have nothing further to do and nothing further to add to what has been done. I however, have something further to do. And something further to add to what I've done. If the Buddha gives me permission, I would like to go to the mango grove to exert myself and meditation that seems in this ancient times, when you ask someone three times that's something that's a big deal. And so you got it, you know, you kind of so the Buddha says, As you are talking about exertion, as you're talking about applying yourself in meditation, what can I say? You know, I'm going to go off and practice what you need, of course, what can I do? How can I stop you? Do what you think is now time to do. So he said, Well, if you really think this is what's important for you, and you've heard me, you know, twice, say no, please stay, you must have something clearly in mind. You must know something or something. So who am I to stop you Please go. So then Meghiya went to that mango grove. On arrival, having gone deep into the grove, he sat down at the foot of a certain tree for his days meditation. Nice huh? Well, I'll go to the park up the street and sit At the foot of a tree and then the day meditating or talking to each other. Now, while Meghiya was staying in the mango grove, he was for the most part, assailed by three kinds of unskillful thoughts, essential thoughts, thoughts of ill will and thoughts of doing harm. That thought occurred to him. How amazing how awesome even though it was through faith that I went forth from home to the homeless life. Still, I'm empowered, overpowered by these three kinds of unskillful thoughts. So his amazement, I think, is something that many meditators can be amazed that people can have tremendous dedication to want to practice that this is the time to do it. Sit down, some people go on retreat. They you know, spend months and months and months planning To go on retreat, arranging to go on their treat, inspired to go and recreate the term and to really apply themselves, they get to the retreat. And they finally get to the retreat, and they're really finally here to practice. And their mind gets pulled into thoughts about anything but the retreat, you know, like three, three, it's almost like their retreat doesn't exist for them because the mind spins off and thinking about plans and memories and resentments and desires of all kinds. And, and so like, Wow, so no one's ever come to me and said, Gil, how amazing I was so inspired to come on retreat, but my mind is spinning and agitated and all these different things. How amazing. And so he explains this to the Buddha, because he saw he saw he saw so that he's amazed. And, and then in the late afternoon, he left us Place of meditation and went back to the Buddha. And he explained to the Buddha how

amazing even though I went back and forth and went to practice with lots of faith and lots of inspiration, I was still assailed by all these thoughts.

And then the Buddha's response, this is I think kind of compassionate. He doesn't say, you know, I told you not to go. But what he does do is, he explains how having good spiritual friends is beneficial for this process of practice. So he's the he for that day, he's Meghiya has good spiritual friend, he's the companion he's a sangha member. And so he's kind of saying indirectly, well, you had this opportunity here. And for people who are still not mature in their practice, it's really good to have five, five things. And the first one is this good spiritual friends but then they'll come back and he'll go into more more detail about this. So with one's practice is still immature, five qualities bring it to maturity having admirable people as friends, companions and comrades, having good friends, as friends, companions and combat comrades. This is the first quality that brings the mind to maturity. Furthermore, a monk is virtuous, a monastic is virtuous. The monastic dwells restrained according to the monastic rules and is careful in his or her behavior and sphere of activity. He or she trains themselves having undertaken the training rules, seeing danger in the slightest faults This is the second quality that brings it brings one to maturity. Furthermore, they get to hear at will easily and without difficulty talk that is truly inspiring and conducive to the opening of awareness is great. So be able to hear talks, Dharma talks and his interesting that the topics he's going to give, these are the important topics. So, I should take note of this. And, and they're done kind of in in sequence, and they kind of build on each other and like once more, more kind of the foundation for the next than the foundation for the next and so forth. So the so one of the good qualities of support is to be able to hear talks Dharma talks that are inspiring and conducive to the opening of awareness. Talk on modesty contentment seclusion, which means going on retreat, non entanglement arousing effort, virtue, concentration, wisdom, release and the knowledge of business knowledge and vision of release. So because it's not so quiet quality modesty, not sure you know this is the best translation but but it has a has a nice, you know, has kind of a nice feeling to it to not be too arrogant or too conceited in our approach to practice and perhaps one of the problems Meghiya had is that maybe is enthusiasm to practice it. That's a good place to practice. I'm going to do it by golly, this is my chance, you know, I'm capable and I can, you know, go do it. You probably know that probably said it enough times, but there's a story of young, capable, smart, six aristocratic man who's usually used to accomplishing things and getting what he wants and he decides to go off to the monastery as he gets enlightened. And so he shows up and Babbitt welcomes him. Before he really wants to get started, the young man says to the abbot, well, if I practice here, practice hard. How long will it take before I get enlightened? that habit says 10 10 years 10 years? Well, that's like a bit long for this man who's used to getting what he wants. And so he says, Well, you know, I'm capable and smart and can make good effort and really apply myself and stay up late. You know, really try and do the engage, you know, 110% you know, how long will it take? And the answer is, oh, well, in that case, it'll take 20 years.

So the idea of modesty or not being so conceded or a kind of a certain kind of humility or humbleness, maybe that's a healthy form of humbleness or humility, maybe, and the contentment, to be discontented. There's a time and place to be discontented. It's very helpful for Buddhists to be discontented about their suffering. If you're contented with your suffering, then you know, just just keep suffering but but to be agitated by your you know, discontented by your number of possessions you have the number of smartphones you have, you don't have enough for something or the number of all you know, you know, discontented with worldly affairs. And that's what keeps you agitated. That's not really so conducive. For what this translation calls the opening up awareness or the settling of awareness or doing this practice so it has some contentment with with life, one's life. In the monastic world, monastics are supposed to be content with just basically just the clothes they have on they supposed to be contained to have just enough clothes to keep them selves warm and, and a little bit

protected from the insects. But you know, just so most monastics will have maybe one or two sets of robes and not more content with the food that you're given, is whatever is given that day be content whether that be content for the housing that you're given. So if you're given a housing you've been, you know, if you're given some place to sleep, just be content with whatever it is, and, and then content with the medicines that you have take care of your health. And those are the four requisites for primary things monastics are starting to post a need. And from our point of view of, you know, modern Western, you know, especially fairly affluent lifestyles. The monastic lifestyle would be seen to be ascetic, but the Buddha clearly designed the monastic life to not be ascetic, but to be just enough to be to be comfortable in that time in place, but not anymore. Not a lot of extra stuff take care of and pursuits and things like that. So contentment, and then seclusion. seclusion, generally in this tradition of here what it means is, don't go be a hermit exactly, but spend time maybe alone, being on retreat and spend time on retreat secluded from worldly affairs worldly events. And so in our tradition, here we go and retreats often and it's secluded from the outside world. than usual affairs we have to be involved in and that allows for a deepening of the practice having that kind of withdrawal from ordinary life for a while. And then non entanglement I love non entanglement. Some of you probably some of you are probably more entangled with things than you wish and then a rousing effort to virtue concentration discernment, so this is a third quality that brings one to maturity.

Further, monastics keep their persistence aroused for abandoning unskillful mental states and for taking on skillful mental states. They are steadfast solid in their effort, not shirking their duties with regard to cultivating skillful qualities. Well, things like modesty, contentment, non entanglement, effort, virtue, these are all kind of mental states and so To develop development to kind of avoid the opposite of those, and develop and develop those states and there's a lot of other states, but to have some some ability to track your own mind, to be attentive to the quality of your heart quality of your mind, and be able to have to guide it to direct it, to use the maybe the rudder in the mind to move you towards the skillful states, the beneficial states of mind the healthy states of mind, and use the rudder of the mind to steer you away from the unhealthy ones. And there might be activities might way ways of thinking, there might be particular ways that you are that tend to bring you into frustration, stress, resentment, anger, greed, lust and all kinds of things that keep you agitated. And if you want to be settled in your mind, that's not the place to go. And there are other ways other states of mind are there ways of thinking other activities that You do ways of being that helps settle the mind that clarify the mind that brings clarity and non agitation. So that he has to have a clear sense of the direction the mind can take or how different quality of mind that we can have. And be the be the custodian of that be the caretaker of this, not just be the recipient of whatever state of mind that you're given each day, you know, as if you know, you're a passive passenger in your own car all the time, you know, you're not to be a passenger in your own mind, is your mind after all. So you know, you can be a little bit in the passenger seat or if you don't want to feel like you're too much in control, you can just think of the mind not as a car but as a boat and just, you know, be careful what direction the rider is, is, is aiming and then the fifth one is further More than monastics are just are wise in doubt endowed with a wisdom, of impermanence of arising and passing. So to have a deep wise, discernment, wise, sensitivity wise perspective on the impermanent nature of our life, how things check all kinds of levels, I think it's useful. There's a level of just birth and death, you know, how long are you going to live? You know, if you knew you're going to die next month, tomorrow, today, how would you live? What would you do with your precious life, but if you're going to live forever, you can just kind of coast along and go shopping for more TVs, for something. But the and then the impermanence of the changing, you know, circumstances of the day, from the time you wake up To go to sleep, all the different changes that come through and to kind of serve and be sensitive to changes in the coming and going of things, rather than being caught up in the middle of the drama of the moment to see it all as coming and going. And then to be sensitive to the moment to moment, changeableness of the mind or perception of, of this world that we're in. It's a kind of psychedelic world

we live in, if we kind of can stop being so caught up in our thoughts and tune into the constant flow and change of this river of life that goes on here all the time. And this is one of the directions that Buddhist Dharma is pointing towards, is their real sensitivity, a wise sensitivity to impermanence and change. So these are the five qualities that support the maturity of the minds, mature maturation of a practitioner, the Buddha teaches maggia but then he goes to fix this, this is a kind of the main point for today. They were one of their thing but having good this translation cause admirable people as friends, some people's kalyana meter, sometimes people call it good spiritual friends. When a monastic as admirable people as friends, companions and comrades, it is to be expected that they will be virtuous.

Okay, it's nice. So if you have if you have a lot of good fuel, really admire your friends, respect them. They're, they're kind of spiritual friends, they're, they're inspiring in their practice themselves. Generally that you're not going to go around and tell you know, and be stealing and killing and lying around them. I mean, they would kind of look at you and say, what, you know, what are you doing, you know, are they they could they kind of wince. You know, if you're spending a lot of time lying and you bring out the Whiskey and you start you know down and yet and start swaying as you walk. You know, your friends are not your good spiritual friends are kind of like, you know, really, you don't really want it you know, they support you they stand to support people to have the best and people do what's best in people tend to come out. And so spend time with people that brings out the best in you. Don't don't spend time with people that bring out the worst in you. And then the Buddha says, When monastics have admirable people as friends, companions and comrades, it is expected that they will get to hear at will easily and without difficulty. Talk that is truly inspiring and conducive to the opening of awareness that is taught on modesty, contentment, seclusion, non entanglement arousing persistence, virtue concentration to discernment, release in the knowledge and vision of release. So, you know, if you have good spiritual friends, people in the Dharma who are your buddies and spend time with chances are fairly you know, good that from time to time, you'll have Dharma talks, you'll share a little bit about your practice when inspires your your questions, and you'll be able to have be able to talk about some of these topics, you know, and some of you might go home to your spend time at the picnic maybe or somewhere and say, you know, Gil talks about modesty I've never thought about it before. And then you can have a conversation about modesty. You know, you you could instead to have a conversation about the World Cup You know, that's also exciting these days. But you know, which which which is most conducive to you for you know, settling the mind opening awareness. And then, when monastics have admirable people as friends, companions and comrades It is to be expected, they they will keep their persistence aroused for the abandoning of unskillful qualities, mental states and for the taking on of skillful mental states. So here also, you know, when you're around people, there are people who bring out the best in you. And so you'll tend to kind of kind of veer away from these unhealthy states of mind. And you don't have complete control over it. But you know, we tend not to support them feed them as much when we're around people who inspire us and new kind of examples of the opposite. And we're more likely to call on those qualities for us and to live that way and be that way. I think is one of the great benefits that I had from spending about 10 years of my life in, in monastic settings, Buddhist monastic settings, and sort of 24 hours a day I was around other practitioners and admirable friends and even the people who were not so inspiring to be with, they were there practicing. They were doing their best they were trying just to be around people who are doing our best trying to find a way with their minds and themselves were inspired me and supported me in my efforts to do so. And then and when a monastic has admirable people as friends, companions and comrades, it is to be expected that they will be wise, endowed with wisdom, of arising and passing away wisdom of impermanence. So there's something about having, you know, good spiritual friends, at least in the Dharma. They're tuned into impermanence and change. It's like, you know, this is one of the fundamental kind of perspective so we have kind of recognizing, oh, you know, it could be as simple as recognize, oh, you see, you're having a hard time but maybe just have it years having One of those kinds of days. Oh, that's Oh, yeah, I guess



it's, I guess it's a drag, but it's only one of those kinds of days. You know, some of you know Jack Kornfield likes to ask the question, I don't know if it works, how well it works for everyone.

But well, he asks, you know, can you think of the, like, you know, the worst day of your life, hopefully, it's not today, the worst day of your life and then where is it today and somehow that, that, you know, that things change and they come and go and, and so, we learn to hold things lightly, and not be weighed down by what happens partly because, you know, things will change and are moving all the time. So good spiritual friends. So Meghiya had have had one of the best spiritual friends he could have had the Buddha right there. And it would have been easy to hang out with a Buddha and, and, and receive some of the benefits that the Buddha talks about. Having good friends and perhaps he wasn't ready to go off and do, you know, intensive practice alone, he needed to mature in these other ways that that we come from being in community with each other. And so, one of the wonderful opportunities about here at IMC is the opportunity of being practicing together with others in community. And it's a pretty special opportunity. There are other places we could go for this bay area is kind of the mecca for Buddhism. So, you know, you can look around and see if find, find find a place that you like, but there are lots of people around the world. We get a lot of reports when people listen to these talks and audio dharma. We don't have community they're off you know, someplace where they're kind of the only person meditating and only Buddhist and they kind of pretty pretty. I don't know, I don't want to say They envious, but, you know, pretty appreciative that they here. You know, there's so many people who practice and people practice for a long time. So, to take the opportunity to get to know other practitioners, be buddies with them and be able to have conversations sometimes having tea with people is a wonderful way to support practice and to grow in it. And we probably don't hear it IMC do enough to support the building of community, the building of connections between people. It's easy enough to come Sunday morning and sit in, you know, the outer Hall someplace and back row for you. And, and you come and go and not have a conversation with anyone. And it's a little unfortunate that we don't have more ways of breaking the ice. But we do it occasionally. And we do today. So for those of you who come to the picnic, this is your chance to be with Spiritual friends for a little while, and so you're all welcome to come. And you're all welcome not to come. It's all good.

So thank you all. So why don't you say hello to maybe one or two people and ...