

# **Buddhism Beyond the Lists (2/5)**

## **Beautiful Friendship**

*The following talk was given by Diana Clark at the Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City, California on Sept 2, 2025.*

### **Guided Meditation: Sitting with Others**

#### **Introduction**

My heart is full. It's a beautiful thing to see the chats and to imagine all the people that are sitting with us. Not only the ones literally here on this live stream on YouTube, but around the world at this hour of the planet. So, we have this continent that's awake, but also Europe and that part of the continent that's awake. So it's fun to imagine how many people are practicing with us—maybe hundreds of people, thousands of people at this moment are engaged in Buddhist practice or meditation around the globe. I don't know what time it is in Asia right now, but I can imagine that if they're not practicing right now, that they have been or will be.

And then not only that, if we go back through time, everybody who's practicing and their teachers before them practiced, and their teachers' teachers, and their teachers' teachers' teachers, and all the way back, right? The tradition holds that it goes all the way back to the Buddha. There have been people who have been meditating or in Buddhist practice in some sort for thousands of years. I don't know why this touches me in some kind of way. We're part of this lineage. We're standing on the shoulders of people who went before us, who passed these teachings on down. First, it was just telling others, later writing them down.

#### **Feeling a Sense of Support**

As we begin this guided meditation, can you allow yourself to have that sense of support? There are so many of us here online on YouTube. It sounds kind of funny to say that, to be talking about Buddhist teachings and YouTube at the same time. Nevertheless, that's what's happening. So, can you allow yourself to have that sense of support or comradeship, not only of us literally here on this live stream, but other people in the world and through time? This has been passed down to us. We're not meditating alone. We might physically be alone in a physical space, but can we appreciate this circle of spiritual community within which we are practicing?

## **Settling in**

So settling and finding your way into a meditation posture if you haven't already. Giving yourself time to arrive. Finish arriving, so that all aspects of ourselves can be here.

Letting ourselves relax, letting go of any tension. I learned this from another teacher, which I'm finding is really helpful, and that is to let the jaw relax. Let it go slack just a little bit. Letting the shoulder blades slide down the back so that the shoulders are away from the ears. Is there a way that the chest can be open, in whatever way makes sense for you? Letting the belly soften.

And feeling the sitting surface beneath us. We're here, connected, grounded here.

And then becoming aware of the whole body in this posture, inhabiting the body, occupying the body in some kind of way. Taking a few relaxed, unhurried, full breaths. Letting the breath return to normal.

## **Resting attention on the sensations of breathing**

And then resting attention on the sensations of breathing, whether that's at the tip of the nose, whether that's the stretch that happens around the ribs and the chest with the inhales, or whether it's the movement of the belly going in and out as we breathe. Whichever of those locations feels comfortable. Just tuning into, noticing the sensations of breathing.

Whenever we wander off into thinking and stories, as the mind is apt to do, can we wake up to the sense of community? Coming back into a community that has been continuous for a long time. And at this very moment, there are unknown numbers of people also meditating. We allow ourselves to feel that support. For example, this YouTube community, the volunteers at IMC who help make all of this happen. Not to take it for granted, with a little bit of appreciation, maybe even awe.

Just very simply, gently hanging out with the sensations of breathing.

It makes me happy to consider all of us sitting together, supporting one another, even if that is not our intention. Just the fact of people sitting together, practicing together. It's easy to take this for granted.

## **Dharmette: Beautiful Friendship**

Okay, thank you. Thank you. I'm not ringing a bell this week, just for acoustic reasons. I really do appreciate practicing together.

## **The power of simple gestures to create connection**

So this morning, I'd like to start us off with a little story, something that happened to me, which is now—gosh, I can't believe it. When I think about it, it's actually decades ago. Like, wow.

So I was going to a meditation center, and I would go for the sit and then a dharma talk, which is pretty common, kind of what we're doing here this morning. And then as soon as the dharma talk was over, I would just leave the center. I didn't talk to anybody; I just left. Later, one of my friends termed this "being a dharma bolter"—somebody who just bolts at the end of the dharma talk. So I was one of those people.

But I don't remember what inspired me to do this in particular, but there was a time in which there would be an extended sitting and walking practice period, and then there would be a brown bag lunch, and it wouldn't be in silence. So, an opportunity to talk with others, including the teacher. And I was kind of shy, I guess. I don't know exactly why, but I was hesitant to do this. But I went, and with the brown bag lunch, I ended up talking with some lovely people. We had this lovely conversation. And I remember myself thinking, "Oh, this wasn't so bad. Maybe I should have done this earlier," or something like this.

Then at the end, when we were all cleaning up and packing up, getting ready to go, one of the people I had spoken to said, "Oh, it was nice talking with you. And what was your name again?" And just this small gesture—"What was your name again?"—somebody asking me who I was, made me feel like, "Oh, maybe I could belong here." And I didn't even know that that was what I was looking for or what I wanted or anything like that. But just this simple gesture, somebody asking me this simple question.

And I went back again and again and again, and I developed friendships, people that I knew. And then sometimes we would meet in coffee shops after dharma talks and talk about the dharma talk that we would hear. And then a number of them signed up for a residential retreat. I'd already done one retreat, and it was really hard for me. And I thought, "Oh, I'm not sure I want to do one." But honestly, it was a certain amount of peer pressure, like, "Okay, if they can do it, I can do it," kind of a feeling. They went off to the retreat. I didn't go to that particular one, but I went to another retreat, and wow, here I am decades later, sitting on this side of a camera giving a dharma talk.

So I'm often struck by how just somebody saying, "Oh, and what was your name?" planted the seed for me to just keep on coming back and to be part of a community. And this community really supported me so much. Tremendous. So much so that I've now dedicated my life to being with the dharma.

## Practicing in community

So I just want to say a few words about practicing in community. There's this way in which practicing with other people who are also practitioners supports some of the wholesome qualities, the helpful, skillful qualities that Buddhist practice is all about developing and cultivating. We model them to each other and maybe in some kind of way remind each other of their value. And I couldn't put my finger on it at that time, but something that struck me about these conversations that I had all these years ago is that we weren't gossiping. We weren't talking about, "Oh, that terrible thing that happened over there that so-and-so said," or something like this. Instead, we were talking about things that were meaningful and relevant and not being divisive and putting down other people or anything like this. And there's this way that this sense of safety that that created, knowing that they weren't going to say all kinds of bad things about me as soon as I walked away, really helped me to start to think less about other people that weren't there in that conversation and more about what my experience is. Can I listen to other people's experience? And can I listen to their ideas and what's important to them? This turned out to be so enormously helpful.

So there's this way in which when we practice with others, it really supports some of these wholesome, helpful, healthy qualities to show up in us. And there's this way that with others, we can find some encouragement to share how things really are when it's appropriate, right? We're not throwing out all social norms, but we're being sensitive to what's appropriate at the time, but finding some encouragement for practice to show up in an authentic way, maybe even in a vulnerable way. And also this way in which we can have some appreciative joy. When people are sharing some of their good things that are happening in their life, some of their victories, or maybe they got some good news from the doctor's office, or maybe somebody in their life is getting married to a partner that's really good for them, and we just feel so happy about this. Maybe we just got into a residential retreat. Maybe we got off the waitlist or got in through the lottery or something like this. We can help celebrate other people's joys and these small little triumphs or good news.

And to be sure, practicing with other people also brings to the surface perhaps some unwholesome tendencies we might have, some unhelpful, unskillful tendencies, which allows us to work with them. Maybe we have envy when we hear about other people's good fortune. And can we just notice, "Oh yeah, there's this pain of jealousy there." Or maybe we have some stinginess where we don't want to be generous. We don't want to share with others. This key teaching in the Buddhist teachings is to share generosity, whether it's resources or time or just giving people the benefit of the doubt. Maybe we discover, when we see other people be generous in whatever way they are—volunteering, whatever it might be—we realize, "Oh yeah, I'm not so generous."

And this also is some of the support of practicing in community. Because if we practice all by ourselves, it can be really helpful and supportive to practice by ourselves—I'm not saying that we shouldn't ever do it—but what can also happen is that it builds up these mistaken perceptions of, "I'm so powerful, I don't need anybody, I got it all figured out, I know how to do this, and all those other people, they're just annoying or troublesome or bothersome." Or maybe we have this mistaken perception, "Oh, I'm so broken. I can't do any of this right. Everybody else can, and I can't." Both of these perceptions, either end of the spectrum, are not accurate.

There's this way when we see ourselves reflected in the eyes of others, we understand ourselves better. We recognize, "Oh yeah, this is a human tendency." Some of the things that we do, when we see other people doing it, we realize, "Oh, it doesn't mean that I'm fantastic. It doesn't mean that I'm a failure. It just means that I'm human." And this is so important for us to recognize this common humanity and this connection we have with others, and to also see where the diamond could be polished a little bit on some of those edges.

Because when we ignore this importance of being connected, there's a way in which we are denying ourselves some of this support that is needed. Because let's be honest, sometimes being on this path of practice is not easy. Sometimes it feels barren, dry. Sometimes the self-understanding we're gaining is not good news, and we're seeing a part of ourselves that we hadn't seen before, and it feels like, "Ick." So there's this way in which we all encounter so many different things when we practice. But it doesn't have to be barren. We don't have to carry the burden all by ourselves. Connecting with others or practicing with others can be a tremendous support.

## **The Buddha recognized the importance of beautiful friendships**

And of course, the Buddha recognizes this. There's lots I could say from the suttas about the Buddha supporting friendships, beautiful friendships. In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*<sup>[^1]</sup>, there's this quote where the Buddha says, "I do not see a single thing that causes wholesome qualities to arise as much as good friendship." This word is *\*kalyāṇa-mitta\**<sup>[^2]</sup>. *\*Mitta\** being "friend." *\*Kalyāṇa\** is often translated as "good" or "spiritual," but it could also be translated as "beautiful"—beautiful friends.

So, the Buddha recognized that who we spend time with is so important. So what does it mean to have this beautiful friendship, this good spiritual friend? I want to be frank, it's not easy as adults to make friends with other people. But something that I appreciate very much is the Buddha talked about good spiritual friends, associates, and companions. He used three different words, like three different synonyms. And one way that I'm interpreting this is there are different levels of intimacy. It could just be sitting with others on YouTube right now. Maybe

you're not putting something in the chat, but just this recognition that others are there. Or maybe if I weren't here, or some teacher weren't here, you wouldn't be sitting now. So just to recognize that kind of support where maybe it's not so much that we're talking to one another, but we're just recognizing the presence.

## **Beautiful Friendships**

But to create friendships, good spiritual friendships, beautiful friendships, requires patience, some deliberate effort, having warmth, being a good listener, being authentic—not trying to be spiritual. That's annoying, right, when people are trying to do that? But showing up with some authenticity. And relationships grow with honesty.

And not only that, in some relationships, whether they're friendships that we spend time with or maybe more casual, it requires a willingness to be supported by others. Are we teachable, or do we somehow think that we know everything? Are we willing to learn from others? Can we be inspired by others instead of collapsing into envy, and just recognizing that all of our lives unfold the way they unfold? Other people's lives unfold differently than our own. Of course they do.

With spiritual friendships, can we receive feedback? Maybe a lot of it is indirect. Maybe we see our mindlessness when we see other people's mindfulness. Maybe we see how our speech is maybe not the best; we're slipping into some gossip or divisiveness or something that's not so helpful. Maybe we notice that when we notice that others aren't doing that. Or maybe our conceit about our meditation practice or our attainments may be softened when we spend time with other people who hold themselves lightly, right? Or maybe they just don't show any interest in how long we've been meditating or whatever attainments we've had.

And are we open to learning or being inspired by people who are different than us? Maybe they have a different life story, come from a different part of the world. Can we be inspired by them? Can we learn from them?

So beautiful friendship is such an important part of practice. There's this way that we practice not only for ourselves but with and for others, for community. So may we be companions on this path, encouraging one another directly or indirectly towards wisdom, compassion, and freedom.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

*This is an AI-generated transcript. It likely contains inaccuracies.*

## Notes

[^1]: **\*\*Āṅguttara Nikāya:\*\*** A collection of the Buddha's discourses in the Pāli Canon, organized by numerical themes.

[^2]: **\*\*Kalyāṇa-mitta:\*\*** A Pāli term for a "spiritual friend" or "beautiful friend." It refers to a virtuous and admirable friend who supports one's practice on the spiritual path.

## Links

Link for audio recordings of the guided meditation and Dharmette:

- <https://www.audiodharma.org/talks/23745>
- <https://www.audiodharma.org/talks/23747>

Link for the YouTube video

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69fOIYEMN20>

Link for Diana Clark

- [www.DianaClarkDharma.org](http://www.DianaClarkDharma.org)

Link for donations

- <https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/donate/> (you can add Diana Clark as the teacher)