

親近善知識

菩提比丘 著

鄭維儀 譯

有一部叫《大吉祥經》(Ma-hamangala Sutta)的巴利文經典，是最受歡迎的佛經之一，也是南傳佛教法會中必誦的。經文一開始說道，一位容貌殊勝的天人，在寂靜夜中，來到人間，至祇樹給孤獨園向佛陀請教得大吉祥的方法。佛陀回答的第一句話，說道：「離惡知識，近善知識。」因為經文接下來講的都是人在世俗和修行方面的種種吉祥，這第一句偈語顯然是在強調：在求法的路上，謹慎擇友是能不能成就的關鍵。

某些心理學理論認為，人心就像緊緊封閉的密室，裡面藏著一個永恆不變、不受生理或童年經驗影響的自我；事實並非如此。相反的，在人的一生中，心不斷在轉化，時時刻刻受著外在的影響。人際關係並不是建立在一個凝固、不變的自我上，與他人的接觸來往，會讓我們的心起作用，帶來轉化、成長的珍貴機會。就像細胞會不斷地與周遭其他細胞做生化溝通一般，我們的心也不斷地在傳達、接收種種訊息與建議，甚至在連自己也察覺不到的潛意識層裡產生轉化。

關乎修行成就甚巨的，是對朋友、共修夥伴的選擇，因為他們對我們有足以改變一生的影響力。佛陀洞察到我們的心總是輕易地隨著周遭人們搖擺，於是一再叮嚀，修行道上親近善知識是非常重要的。佛陀說，在所有因素中，惡知識最容易激起一個人的負面特質，而善知識最能激發一個人的正面特質。佛陀又說，在所有外緣中，惡知識的傷害力最劇烈，善知識的助益最豐饒。善知識的影響，足以引導人們踏上八正道，離苦得樂。

在佛家中，「親近善知識」指的不僅僅是跟重仁重義、志同道合的人來往，而是指親近有智慧、能給予善知良言的人。良師益友不只是能夠福禍同享、不離不棄，一個真正智悲雙運的朋友，要具有諒解心、同理心，卻又能不諱友過、直諫規錯，同時不忘諄諄勸善、勉友向上，了知友誼的最終目的是修行正法。在《法句經》中，佛陀很扼要地告誡弟子親近善知識的重要：「親近勸善規過的智者，如同緊跟尋寶的嚮導。」

在修行的路上，親近善知識異常重要，因為良師益友的典範和建言，往往能夠喚醒、滋潤我們那豐沛的靈性潛能。沒有修行的心變化萬端，可以墜落到自私、自我中心、貪婪的深淵，也可以飛躍到智慧、奉獻、慈悲的高峰。身為正法的追隨者，我們所面臨的挑戰在於如何控制負面潛能，並孕育覺知、自在、清淨的正面潛能。然而，我們的內在潛能不是憑空成熟或衰弱的，而是不斷受到外緣的影響，其中最有力的影響莫過於周遭的人，像是導師、顧問、朋友，他們以無聲的語言，與我們的內在潛能頻頻對話。在他們的影響之下，那些內在潛能可以被滋潤，也可以凋零。

因此，在正法修行的道上，選擇一位有著我們想要修習的正面特質的導師或修行夥伴，是十分重要的。「親近善知識」在正法修行之初更有舉足輕重的地位，因為那時對正法的信心仍然青嫩，很容易受到周遭不同理念的人所左右，對正法的

信心產生動搖。修行之初，我們的心猶如變色蜥蜴，會隨著周遭顏色而變。變色蜥蜴在青草地上會變成綠色，在黃土地上會變成黃色，我們的心也是如此，近惡知識則變惡，親善知識則變善。內在改變不是乍然發生，而是緩緩產生的，一點一滴的變化如此細微，可能自己也完全無法察覺，但這內在變化可能十分巨大，關係到我們的最終成就。

如果我們跟那些沈迷酒色、爭名逐利的人來往密切，就不要奢望自己的抗體夠強，永遠不受他們壞習性的影響。遲早，我們的心也會認同那些壞習性。要是跟那些品德不端、貪戀世俗享受的人交往，難免也會有墮落的一天。但，如果我們以最高理想的無上智慧、究竟解脫為目標，就必須親近擁有這些最高理想的人。就算福報不夠，沒能遇上證得無上成就的人，我們也要慶幸可以認識到一些理念相同、於正法修行精進不懈的同修道友。

如何分別善知識跟惡知識？佛陀給了很明確的答案。在《中尼柯耶·小滿月經》裡，佛陀解釋了惡人與好人的交友有什麼不同。惡人往往喜歡親近沒有正信、寡廉鮮恥、不思修行、懶散狂妄、昏庸愚昧的人，結果是傷人又傷己，下場淒涼。相反的，佛陀繼續說道，好人總會親近正信、品行良好、熟知正法、精進修行、正念分明、睿智的人，以他們的正面特質為榜樣，見賢思齊。因此，在追求自我解脫的同時，也成了他人的善知識，指引尚在黑暗中徬徨的人，給予輔導和建言。

ASSOCIATION WITH THE WISE

by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Chinese Translation by Dr. Wei-yi Cheng

The Mahamangala Sutta, the Great Discourse on Blessings, is one of the most popular Buddhist suttas, included in all the standard repertoires of Pali devotional chants. The sutta begins when a deity of stunning beauty, having descended to earth in the stillness of the night, approaches the Blessed One in the Jeta Grove and asks about the way to the highest blessings. In the very first stanza of his reply the Buddha states that the highest blessing comes from avoiding fools and associating with the wise (*//asevana ca balanam, panditanam ca sevana//*). Since the rest of the sutta goes on to sketch all the different aspects of human felicity, both mundane and spiritual, the assignment of association with the wise to the opening stanza serves to emphasize a key point: that progress along the path of the Dhamma hinges on making the right choices in our friendships.

Contrary to certain psychological theories, the human mind is not a hermetically sealed chamber enclosing a personality unalterably shaped by biology and infantile experience. Rather, throughout life it remains a highly malleable entity continually remolding itself in response to its social interactions. Far from coming to our personal

relationships with a fixed and immutable character, our regular and repeated social contacts implicate us in a constant process of psychological osmosis that offers precious opportunities for growth and transformation. Like living cells engaged in a chemical dialogue with their colleagues, our minds transmit and receive a steady barrage of messages and suggestions that may work profound changes even at levels below the threshold of awareness.

Particularly critical to our spiritual progress is our selection of friends and companions, who can have the most decisive impact upon our personal destiny. It is because he perceived how susceptible our minds can be to the influence of our companions that the Buddha repeatedly stressed the value of good friendship (*kalyanamittata*) in the spiritual life. The Buddha states that he sees no other thing that is so much responsible for the arising of unwholesome qualities in a person as bad friendship, nothing so helpful for the arising of wholesome qualities as good friendship (AN I.vii,10; I.viii,1). Again, he says that he sees no other external factor that leads to so much harm as bad friendship, and no other external factor that leads to so much benefit as good friendship (AN I.x,13,14). It is through the influence of a good friend that a disciple is led along the Noble Eightfold Path to release from all suffering (SN 45:2).

Good friendship, in Buddhism, means considerably more than associating with people that one finds amenable and who share one's interests. It means in effect seeking out wise companions to whom one can look for guidance and instruction. The task of the noble friend is not only to provide companionship in the treading of the way. The truly wise and compassionate friend is one who, with understanding and sympathy of heart, is ready to criticize and admonish, to point out one's faults, to exhort and encourage, perceiving that the final end of such friendship is growth in the Dhamma. The Buddha succinctly expresses the proper response of a disciple to such a good friend in a verse of the Dhammapada: "If one finds a person who points out one's faults and who reproves one, one should follow such a wise and sagacious counselor as one would a guide to hidden treasure" (Dhp. 76).

Association with the wise becomes so crucial to spiritual development because the example and advice of a noble-minded counselor is often the decisive factor that awakens and nurtures the unfolding of our own untapped spiritual potential. The uncultivated mind harbors a vast diversity of unrealized possibilities, ranging from the depths of selfishness, egotism and aggressivity to the heights of wisdom, self-sacrifice and compassion. The task confronting us, as followers of the Dhamma, is to keep the unwholesome tendencies in check and to foster the growth of the wholesome tendencies, the qualities that lead to awakening, to freedom and purification. However, our internal tendencies do not mature and decline in a vacuum. They are subject to the

constant impact of the broader environment, and among the most powerful of these influences is the company we keep, the people we look upon as teachers, advisors and friends. Such people silently speak to the hidden potentials of our own being, potentials that will either unfold or wither under their influence.

In our pursuit of the Dhamma it therefore becomes essential for us to choose as our guides and companions those who represent, at least in part, the noble qualities we seek to internalize by the practice of the Dhamma. This is especially necessary in the early stages of our spiritual development, when our virtuous aspirations are still fresh and tender, vulnerable to being under-mined by inward irresolution or by discouragement from acquaintances who do not share our ideals. In this early phase our mind resembles a chameleon, which alters its color according to its background. Just as this remarkable lizard turns green when in the grass and brown when on the ground, so we become fools when we associate with fools and sages when we associate with sages. Internal changes do not generally occur suddenly; but slowly, by increments so slight that we ourselves may not be aware of them, our characters undergo a metamorphosis that in the end may prove to be dramatically significant. If we associate closely with those who are addicted to the pursuit of sense pleasures, power, riches and fame, we should not imagine that we will remain immune from those addictions: in time our own minds will gradually incline to these same ends. If we associate closely with those who, while not given up to moral recklessness, live their lives comfortably adjusted to mundane routines, we too will remain stuck in the ruts of the commonplace. If we aspire for the highest -- for the peaks of transcendent wisdom and liberation -- then we must enter into association with those who represent the highest. Even if we are not so fortunate as to find companions who have already scaled the heights, we can well count ourselves blessed if we cross paths with a few spiritual friends who share our ideals and who make earnest efforts to nurture the noble qualities of the Dhamma in their hearts.

When we raise the question how to recognize good friends, how to distinguish good advisors from bad advisors, the Buddha offers us crystal-clear advice. In the Shorter Discourse on a Full-Moon Night (MN 110) he explains the difference between the companionship of the bad person and the companionship of the good person. The bad person chooses as friends and companions those who are without faith, whose conduct is marked by an absence of shame and moral dread, who have no knowledge of spiritual teachings, who are lazy and unmindful, and who are devoid of wisdom. As a consequence of choosing such bad friends as his advisors, the bad person plans and acts for his own harm, for the harm of others, and the harm of both, and he meets with sorrow and misery.

In contrast, the Buddha continues, the good person chooses as friends and companions

those who have faith, who exhibit a sense of shame and moral dread, who are learned in the Dhamma, energetic in cultivation of the mind, mindful, and possessed of wisdom. Resorting to such good friends, looking to them as mentors and guides, the good person pursues these same qualities as his own ideals and absorbs them into his character. Thus, while drawing ever closer to deliverance himself, he becomes in turn a beacon light for others. Such a one is able to offer those who still wander in the dark an inspiring model to emulate, and a wise friend to turn to for guidance and advice.

