

What Meghiya Needed to Learn

Theme: The importance of friendship in making spiritual progress

This is what we have been told. Once, a long time ago, when the Buddha was staying on a hill at Calika, his main companion was a very worthy and holy man called Meghiya. And one day Meghia noticed a pleasant grove of Mango trees on the bank of the Kimikala River, near the village of Jantu. 'That grove of Mango trees,' he thought to himself, 'Looks like a really good place for some-one like me to go and mediate quietly by myself. I'm sure that if I went there I should be able to relax my mind and achieve wisdom.'

So he went up the Buddha and asked permission to leave him for a while in order to go and meditate in the Mango grove on the bank of the Kimikala River. However, the Buddha replied: 'Meghiya, at the moment we are all alone; why don't you wait until some of the others arrive?'

Meghiya was disappointed. He said, 'For you, Reverend Sir, nothing is needed at this moment. But for me, I really need to go and meditate in that Mango grove of the banks of the Kimikala River. I'm sure it would be good for me.' Again the Buddha protested, and again Meghiya insisted. But when Meghiya asked him a third time, the Buddha said, 'All right, since you are convinced it would be good for you, go and do what you think you need to do.'

So off went Meghiya to the Mango grove to meditate, leaving the Buddha all alone. But to his surprise, when Meghiya tried to meditate, there in the Mango grove on the bank of the Kimikala River, he found he couldn't relax his mind at all. He found that he couldn't stop thinking about all the things he wanted but didn't have, and he couldn't stop feeling irritated at people who had done things he didn't like. So after trying for several hours he gave up, left the Mango grove and went back to the Buddha.

He went up to the Buddha, bowed low and said, 'Reverend Sir, I think I need help. I thought that grove of Mango trees was so quiet and pleasant that I would easily be able to meditate there and achieve wisdom. But when I sat down I found that I couldn't stop thinking about all the things I wanted but didn't have, and I couldn't stop feeling irritated at people who had done things I didn't like. What shall I do? What is wrong?'

'Ah,' said the Buddha, 'When you find that your mind is filled up with thoughts and feelings like that, there are five things that you need to remember.

'The first is that you need to remember how helpful it is to have the support of good friends and companions – your Sangha – if you are to make progress.

The second is that being with good friends and companions will help you to remember the basic rules for treating others well – acting kindly, acting generously, being contented, speaking with truth and kindness, and remaining calm and clear-headed – and to follow these rules even in small ways.

The third is that your conversations and discussions with good friends and companions will help you to make progress in developing kindness, generosity, contentment, peacefulness, wisdom, and so on.

The fourth is that being with good friends and companions will give you the energy you need to leave behind those unhelpful thoughts and feelings you described and to focus on tranquillity and kindness.

And the fifth is that in this way you will start to understand that nothing lasts for ever, that all things arise and pass away. This is the wisdom that brings happiness.

'And when you reach that point, you will also start to understand four more things.

Firstly, that none of the things we think we really want turns out to be quite as perfect as we expect.

Secondly, the importance of feeling loving-kindness towards all people.

Thirdly, that simply being aware of your breathing in and out can help you calm your thoughts and feelings.

And fourthly, that you as an individual person are not really all that important. Everything in the world is continually changing and you are not the centre; you are just one small part. That, Meghiya, is the most important thing of all: that is the beginning and the end of Nirvana – the greatest wisdom and the greatest happiness.'

So Meghiya went away and thought long and hard about what the Buddha had said.

Questions

1. Do you think that Meghiya was right in wanting to go off and meditate straight away instead of waiting?
2. Why do you think the Buddha wanted him to wait?
3. Do you agree with the Buddha that your friends are very helpful to you in acting kindly and generously?
4. How do you feel about the Buddha's teaching that we must keep remembering that nothing lasts for ever and that we as individuals are not important?

Dharma Issues:

- *The importance of the sangha (spiritual community)*
- *The power of the 'hindrances' – mental and emotional distractions during meditation*
- *The teaching of impermanence*
- *The importance of metta (loving kindness)*
- *The importance of overcoming a self-important sense of one's own ego*

Based on the Meghiya Sutta, from The Udana, Buddhist Publication Society, 1997, Sutta 4.1