

15 Points for Friendship

by Paramabandhu

Audio available at: <http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=OM491>

Talk given at Padmaloka Retreat Centre, May 2001

When Priyavadita asked me to give this talk, at first I was very pleased, I think primarily because I like thinking about the practicalities of the spiritual life. I find it quite hard to bend my mind towards the theory of it unless there is a definite practical relevance to that theory. So at first I thought: 'Oh, great, I'll be very pleased to do this talk.'

And then I had second thoughts about it. Not because I think friendship is unimportant – I feel very strongly that friendship is very important – but, in terms of friendship, in terms of that aspect of the spiritual life, it is not something that I tend to think about in terms of *how* you do friendship. I have certainly given a lot of thought to 'how do you meditate', or 'how do I practice the Dharma when I'm in the workplace', but 'how do you do friendship' is not something that I've really thought about.

It almost didn't feel right to think about it, from a certain point of view, because there is the irony that trying to think about 'how do you do friendship; what are the nuts and bolts of friendship?' seemed to make it sound all rather mechanistic. I think of friendship much more as a flower that may bloom given the right conditions, perhaps; something that is organic, not something that you can mechanically 'do' or make happen. So it somehow didn't feel quite right for a moment to talk about 'how to do friendship'.

Anyway, having accepted the talk, I felt I must just go ahead and do it! So I have come up with 15 points. It's not a recipe for friendship; it's certainly not a prescription for friendship. It's not meant to be dogmatic. It is perhaps some guidelines; some suggestions. And it's certainly not exhaustive either. I just hope there will be some pointers to think about and reflect on in terms of moving towards developing and sustaining friendships.

So, I've got 15 points. I'll read them first of all and then go through them one by one:

1. Take the initiative, and take an interest.
2. Don't expect friendship.
3. If you like someone, make friends with them.
4. If you don't like someone, make friends with them.
5. Friendship – or at least spiritual friendship – is not based on the romantic ideal.
6. Work together.

7. Go on retreat together.
8. Live together.
9. Eyeballing is not the whole story.
10. Help your friend.
11. Be faithful.
12. Befriend their family.
13. Try to understand your friend from the inside.
14. Be prompt to resolve conflicts.
15. Base your friendship on common spiritual ideals.

I'll go through those one by one. The first few are mostly to do with how one goes about starting friendship; the ones after that are more about developing and maintaining friendship.

1. Take the initiative, and take an interest

It seems to me that it is very important that we take initiative if we want to be effective in terms of developing friendship. I remember in my pre-Buddhist days, in my first year at university, I was particularly drawn to a group of people in my year in the college, where one person in particular was a guy called Jeremy who I was attracted to – he seemed a very talented person. So I just kept going along and hanging out with that group of people and taking an interest in some of those people, including Jeremy.

And in the second year I remember Jeremy made a comment about the fact that he was a friend of mine, and we were friends – and I was surprised, because I hadn't expected it. It was what I wanted, but I almost hadn't dared hope that he and I would become friends. He seemed much more talented and charismatic; he seemed to have lots of qualities that I didn't have, and it just seemed unlikely that we would become friends.

But it seemed to me, reflecting back on it, that it had largely come about simply because I had wanted to become a friend of his and I had taken the initiative – I just kept taking an interest in him.

I think it is unlikely that you are going to develop friendship if you don't take initiative. It is insufficient to wait around for other people to come and make friends with you – you have to do the running. Perhaps especially with Order members, you need to do the

running.

So, even if you are a shy person – a lot of people feel shy, they lack self-confidence – it is terribly important to try and overcome that in whatever way you can, and take some initiative. This is true for everything. It's our life – if we want something, we have to do it. If we wait for things to be provided for us, we will probably just end up feeling resentful. This is certainly the case with friendship; we need to go out to other people.

And again, in the case of Order members, very occasionally you can be an Order member and get the experience of feeling that you are seen as a sort of friendship-providing machine, but actually we're just human beings trying to go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha – just as you are trying to go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. So we need to take the initiative, particularly by taking an interest.

If you don't take an interest in the other person I don't think friendship is going to happen. I don't know if you have had the experience of being with someone where you feel they are not really interested in you, and you think, 'I'd quite like to have a little cardboard cut-out I could just park here and I'll come back later...' – so we need to try and take an interest in the other person.

2. Don't expect friendship

My second point, 'don't expect friendship', is sort of a counterpart to 'taking the initiative'.

When I was thinking about this talk I was reminded of a poem about compassion, by Bhante. The poem is called, *'The Unseen Flower'*, and although it is about compassion I think it applies very much to friendship, in a way:

'Compassion is far more than emotion. It is something that springs up in the emptiness which is when you yourself are not there, so that you do not know anything about it. Nobody, in fact, knows anything about it. If they knew it, it would not be compassion. But they can only smell the scent of the unseen flower that blooms in the heart of the void.'

I think friendship is a bit like that. If you go trying to grasp after it you won't find it. It is something that blooms mysteriously if you are not actually looking for it.

So we need to take initiative, we need to take an interest in the other person, but not expect anything back – certainly not expect that friendship is going to happen. It may well happen, and in my experience it often does happen, but we can't necessarily expect it to happen, and if there is a very strong 'wanting friendship', that will tend to put people off. All we can do is set up the conditions in which friendship may bloom, but it is a bit like when you are growing something – you can't keep pulling the thing up to see if the roots are growing; it just doesn't work.

A related thing to that is that friendship takes time. Friendship is really the work of years

rather than weeks or months. It takes a long time, I think, for friendship to really mature. One can think of friendship as 'prolonged mutual metta'. We can start developing metta right away, we can start being friendly to people right away, but it needs to be prolonged, and mutual, before friendship can really bloom, really happen.

So we have to have a balance between these first two points: on the one hand taking initiative, taking an interest in other people; but on the other hand not expecting friendship necessarily to happen. Taking the initiative, but holding that lightly. I sometimes feel that my general motto about things is 'hold them lightly'. It's certainly true in terms of pursuing friendship.

My next two points are a pair that I borrowed and adapted from Ratnaguna's talk on '15 points for Dharma study'...

3. If you like someone, make friends with them

Often we feel attraction to people: it may be because we have a similar background to them, we have a similar interest with them, we have similar life experience, or we may be attracted to their appearance, their personality, their qualities, their virtues.

I suggest we make use of that attraction. It is good glue to get us going. Real friendship is so rare in this world, it is good to use anything that can help. Any sort of attraction, if it brings you into relationship with someone, well, use it.

Eventually you will need to go beyond it, because real friendship is not just based simply on that attraction, except perhaps a mutual attraction for real virtue – we could see that as an attraction that is a real basis for friendship – but most of our likes are really quite superficial in terms of attraction. But we can use them, so let's use them as a starter, even though we must eventually go beyond them.

4. If you don't like someone, make friends with them

Just as our likes of people are often quite superficial, quite often our dislikes of people are relatively superficial too. Someone in the group was giving me a nice story of how he disliked someone because he was a bit balder than he was. He eventually realised that. And it is quite often on that level that we dislike people – just because of some little habit or appearance or things like that.

And, clearly, one of the things we need to do in the spiritual life is go beyond our likes and dislikes. Someone once said about practicing the Dharma: *'The great way is easy if we don't pick and choose'*. Practicing the Dharma is easy if we don't pick and choose, if we don't just go with our likes and dislikes.

Moreover, I think it is very valuable to have a range of friends so that we don't just

reinforce particular limiting aspects of ourselves. If we are not careful, we can just reinforce particular limited worldviews or particular images of ourselves. For example, if we think, 'I identify with the underdogs' and we just have around us people who identify with the underdogs, that will just reinforce a limiting view.

One of the things I quite like about living in communities is the fact that I have got to live with people who I would never have chosen to live with. There you are – you're living together, so you have to try and do something as best you can. So it is very helpful to try and go beyond our dislikes, to develop a range of friends.

Another aspect of it is that sometimes what can happen is that we don't like somebody because they remind us of something we don't like about ourselves. So, actually, getting to know that person can mean that we get to know ourselves, in a way. We start to face this side of ourself that we don't like. It can be quite illuminating from that point of view.

And then sometimes people who we dislike can actually end up being very good friends. Maitreyabandhu is famous, dare I say it, for disliking people at first who later become very good friends... I am a living example! For some strange reason, when we met, Maitreyabandhu disliked me. As I remember, I think it was principally because I was a doctor and was going to become a psychiatrist, and as he had a nursing background, on principle he disliked me!

From my point of view, I immediately liked him, and because of my own egoism I couldn't understand – it somehow wasn't part of my world view – that somebody could dislike me if I liked them. If I liked somebody, then of course they would like me! That was probably a useful view at the time, even though I have been disabused of it subsequently!

So: if we don't like someone, try and make friends with them.

5. Friendship – or at least spiritual friendship – is not based on the romantic ideal

This is something that Maitreyabandhu touched a bit on last night.

I think it is an easy mistake to make, to try and base our friendship on the romantic ideal. Whether we are gay or straight, it doesn't matter. And it is easy not to be aware that that is what is going on.

I think partly this is because the romantic ideal is so strong in the West – the sexo-romantic relationship is so heavily emphasised – and I think that is partly because there has been such a decline in friendship, as far as one can tell. Certainly, in the West there has been a decline in other relationships in terms of the reduction of the extended family into a nuclear family, so whereas in the past there would have been much more variety of relationships, now the main one (certainly in all the movies) is this sexo-romantic relationship.

So that ends up being our main model for a significant relationship. If we think in terms of this significant relationship, we tend to think of a sexo-romantic relationship, whereas we have very few models out there of platonic friendship. So it is then very easy to use the romantic model as our basis. It's certainly something I've done.

What that can then lead to is that various expectations can get set up: for example, you may expect there to be lots of strong feelings and drama. You can find that you become jealous of your friend; jealous of your friend having other friends... 'He's MY friend.'

Certainly I can look back in shame at some of my behaviour. I can think of one friend in particular where I was doing my best to elbow any other of his friends out of the way, so that, you know, he was MY friend!

And another thing – if you are unfortunate enough to fall into the romantic type of model with your friendship – is that you can start having this painful awareness of where they are all the time. I remember being on retreat with this same friend, and I always knew where he was and who he was talking to. I couldn't quite let him go; let him be an individual, be himself.

And then if our friend lets us down – if we are using this romantic model – it is easy for us to feel terribly hurt or disappointed by it. Again, it is this particular type of relationship.

I think it very easily happens. If there is an element there, I don't think it needs to be a problem – it can start as a sort of 'gluing together'. But we need to become aware of it, and we need to go beyond that sort of conditional romantic relationship. Metta is primarily about a concern for other people; it is not about what we can get back – and the romantic relationship is very much about 'getting something back'; this 'special person for me', as it were.

So we need to go beyond that. We need to really be concerned about them, and let them be an individual in their own right.

Also we need to let go of us 'being important to them', which is the other thing. Sometimes we can be terribly concerned with another person but it is because we want to make ourselves really important to them. So we need to be able to let go of that 'being important to them'.

It has been interesting living with a number of friends in my community. If you're not careful, you get the whole business of who is best friends with whom, and feeling excluded or not in a particular friendship. It is very good to work through all of that and allow our friends to have their friends in the plurality.

...This brings me on to my next three points which are really about developing friendship and spending time together. Clearly it is not always possible: depending on one's

particular circumstances, one can't always do all these things. But what I am advocating is that, if you can, take the opportunity – and if you have the opportunity, make the most of it – because it is a very good way for developing friendship.

So the next three points are about working together, going on retreat together, and living together...

6. Work together

I think if you work together you get to see a different side of someone from, you know, just meeting together for cappuccinos. And that can really fill out a friendship, by working in that way and seeing this other side of them. And I particularly think that it's good if you can work in a Team-Based Right Livelihood business. I don't, because I have worked mostly in the NHS, but I have really seen the value of it to people who have, and the odd days that I have wandered in (particularly recently, as Mitra Convenor), I really get a sense of the value of working together in a situation where your ideals are right there in front of you, and you can really address them and orientate yourself towards them.

But even if you can't work together I still think there are things you can do. For example, you can both support a course or a class together. One of the things that Maitreyabandhu has done is get groups of guys together to support him on courses, and I think that has been a very useful way of helping people to start to develop friendships.

Having a common project together is a very good way, I think, of developing friendship. When Maitreyabandhu and I set up our current community, in a way that was us having a project together – something to do together – because we moved out of this big community where there were lots of Order members, and we were the relatively junior Order members and had comparatively little responsibility, and began setting up this new community where we had the main responsibility for it.

And what was a surprise for us both was what a good effect it had on our friendship. It took our friendship a whole stage further by having this thing in common that we were at times enjoying and at times struggling to bring to fruition.

7. Go on retreat together

This is a similar sort of thing. You go on retreat together and you see other sides of people. But I also think that when we are on retreat we often can be at our best. We are in ideal conditions; we can be more emotionally positive; and we can start to really see each others' virtues, appreciate our friends and see their best qualities – and I think this is a lovely way of taking our friendship further.

Under this heading I would include going on holiday together as well. I have found that

to be a very good way of moving on some of my friendships. For one thing it is another way of having just a bit more time. Sometimes, particularly if you live in an urban centre, time can get very chopped up into little bits, whereas when you're on holiday time just opens out. You can be around each other in a much more relaxed way, and go deeper in your friendship.

8. Live together

I think it is Aristotle who said: *'The essence of friendship is living together'*. It is the same principle as just having more time around each other; more ways of overlapping.

Living in a community together, I think, is particularly helpful. Certainly most (though not all, by any means) of my closest friends I either do live with or have lived with at some point in the past, and one of the things that I really value about practicing the Dharma in this context is the sense that I am really sharing my life with other people. For me it is very important that I am sharing my life with other people; that I am sharing what is most important to me with other people.

I very much have that sense, living together in my current community, that we are sharing our mutual ups and downs in our lives, in our struggles, and in our spiritual life.

9. Eyeballing is not the whole story

There is something of a tradition in the FWBO for meeting up in pairs; whether that is going off for walks or going to the local cafe. And, of course, that is very good if you have a cafe like the Wild Cherry or Earth Cafe or the Gallery Cafe – it keeps them in business! – so it's certainly valuable. And I think it clearly is valuable to spend time in that sort of way.

But I do think it is important that we don't think that is all there is to friendship, because sometimes you can get a sense that people think that is what it means to do friendship. If our friendship is just limited to those meetings we can miss quite important elements in what it means to really know another person. It can even get a bit utilitarian – you know: 'have I had my friendship contact for the week?', as it were.

And also something that I have seen over the years is that sometimes it can even get into something of a rut – you know, you have the 'Monday lunchtime meeting with X' and you go for your lunch together and it can all just get a bit low energy and there's a sense of not going anywhere and it's ultimately a bit meaningless.

So, clearly it is valuable to meet up in that way, but I think we have to watch out for the limitations of that as well.

10. Help your friend

If eyeballing is not the whole story, something that *is* much closer to the whole story is 'helping your friend'. I think helping your friend is much nearer to what it means to be a friend than eyeballing them over focaccia. It shouldn't really need saying, should it, that we need to help our friends? If you don't help your friend, you can hardly be called a friend.

So I think we need to be on the look out for any opportunities we get to help our friends, whether that is simply washing and cleaning, if we're living together... One of the things I was quite touched by recently was when I had come back a bit late and I was downing my meal and then was going to go off to iron my shirt for work the next day before going to the mitra study group I was leading that evening... so *****[Rossy??]***** kindly volunteered to do my ironing for me. It was just really nice, because people don't usually do my ironing! And it was just that he saw that that should make quite a difference, because it meant I could eat my meal slowly and not be in such a frenetic state.

So I felt that he had actually seen me, seen the situation I was in, and saw how he could help me, to make quite a difference to me at that point in time.

Another day I came home and found that Ciaran had mended my bike puncture, which again made me feel 'wow' – it was just really nice to see that, without him having been asked.

When our friends are ill, we can do our best to look after them. Or, for example, we can drive our friends to retreat. And we need also sometimes to ask for help as well.

Some of us are rather shy at asking for help, but if we don't ask for help then we stop our friends from being as much of a friend as perhaps they would like to be towards us.

I was reminded of the 'Spanner Story', which is about this guy whose car breaks down. It is the middle of the night and he needs a spanner to change his wheel, and he looks round and thinks: it's the middle of the night, what is he going to do?

And then he notices off in the far distance there is a house with a light on, or at least a light outside. So he goes towards it, and as he is going along he thinks, 'oh, I don't know if I can ask this person – it's three in the morning, can I really get somebody out of bed to give me a spanner?' He gets more and more worked up and anxious about it.

He eventually comes to the door, rings the bell, and gets even more anxious. A guy comes down in his pyjamas... and the guy whose car has broken down says, 'I never wanted your spanner anyway!'

...So I think it can be a bit like that – we can decide beforehand the response that we're going to get to our request.

...I must admit I did have a little experience of that only a few weeks ago. I spent ages thinking, 'Can I ask my friends to get up at four thirty in the morning to take me to a retreat – to take me to the airport?' And I spent ages thinking, 'oh no, you could get a taxi!' and 'no, no, your friends might like to do it!' etc. So eventually I did ask, and Jnanavaca, who hates getting up in the morning, absolutely very happily said yes, I'll do that.

So I had been very close to not asking anyone to do that, but actually both he and somebody else were very happy to do it.

It's those little things that are like little wee building blocks of friendship, in a way.

And we can use money to help our friends: we can give things to our friends. It is lovely coming back from a retreat – certainly in my community, and I think in quite a lot of communities – you come back to a whole shower of flowers and cards and chocolates, and it is just lovely. You feel really welcomed when you get back, and really cared for.

When I was thinking about this I was reminded of Al Ghazali, an eleventh century Islamic philosopher who talks about the '*three degrees of friendship*': first of all that you give to your friend from your surplus; secondly that you share equally what you have got with your friend; and thirdly, the highest degree is where you put your friend before yourself – you give to your friend before yourself.

I think that is a very nice, inspiring path to move towards, of progressive generosity, until one can eventually put one's friend before oneself.

11. Be faithful

If friendship is to mean anything we need to stick to our friends through thick and thin; to not give up on them when the first glow of friendship has waned.

Sometimes it can be very exciting when you first get to know somebody – it is like meeting this whole new universe, and that can be quite stimulating, but then after a while you get used to it and then it may be a bit harder to sustain the friendship, or you may give up if they are going through a hard time, if they're depressed or something like that. They can perhaps be quite hard to be around when they are depressed, so you want to give up.

Or it may be that the friendship was forged in the dramas of them going through a difficult time, and when they get back onto an even keel it's *then* that you want to give up. I have certainly seen that happen.

Real friendship means staying with the person through whatever is happening to them. And through the vicissitudes of... you know – if we are both practicing the Dharma, they may be forging ahead and being more devoted to the Dharma than we are, or being less

devoted and seemingly (or actually) going off in a different direction – and, again, if we are a real friend we will do our best to maintain that friendship.

Part of that is keeping them in mind when we are not there: writing to them if they are not physically with us; rejoicing in their merits to other people if we get the chance. And another part of this which is very important is not taking our friend for granted – it is so easy to do that after a while. We just get used to friends.

Something struck me very much, a year ago, when I went off travelling for a few months to Australia and New Zealand. It really highlighted, being away from my friends, just what strong connections I had – in London particularly – how deeply embedded I was in a whole network of friendship, which is just really delightful, but in a way so easy to just... well, you know, it's like the air that you breathe, so you don't notice it.

So I think we do really need to not take our friends for granted. And also, coming back again to this idea of Bhante's poem, *'The Unseen Flower'* – sometimes I think we can look for friendship in the wrong place, or there is actually a really good friend right next to us and we don't notice it; we don't notice their acts of friendship towards us.

12. Befriend their family

It is really interesting meeting our friends' families. I always find it interesting to meet my friends' parents – you often get a bigger picture of your friend by meeting their parents.

But, more simply, if something is important to our friend then it should be important to us, and particularly people who are important to our friend should be important to us.

I think it is really important that we take an interest in their parents; in their siblings; in their spouse or partner; in their children if they've got children. And I think again it can make a real difference.

Quite a number of years ago my brother, who lives in Germany, had asked me to get something for him in London. He was just passing through London, and I was away at the time, so I left it in the community for him to collect. So he came to the community and rang the bell... and he was just left on the street – they eventually found the thing that he was there for and sort of came down and just gave it to him on the street. And he was left with a feeling of, 'what an unfriendly bunch of Buddhists they were in this community that I was staying in!' – and I felt quite ashamed afterwards, actually. I thought, 'well, here we are trying to practice metta and they can't even do it to my brother!'

And yet, by comparison, I was on solitary last month in Ireland and whilst I was there my mother rang up the community because my dad had gone into hospital and she wanted to contact me, and I hadn't given her the address. I hadn't actually given the address to my

community mates either! So Jnanavaca had to go rooting round through my belongings to try and work out where on earth I'd gone off to.

But what my mother said was that she was really impressed by the friendliness and helpfulness of Jnanavaca and Maitreyabandhu, who both had a number of telephone conversations with her when she was clearly in an anxious state because of my dad's health.

And, you know, what a difference that makes, to be met by that. I was really grateful that my friends had responded so kindly to my mother in that way.

So, let's try and befriend the family of our friends.

13. Try to understand your friend from the inside

Inevitably we see the world from 'in here', as it were. We see the world from ourselves, and we inevitably think of ourselves as the centre of the universe. That's quite natural really – that's just how it is. You could say that our consciousness starts from 'in here'. So, it's very easy to assume that other people are like us, and we can have all sorts of subtle assumptions about how people are.

Again, if I may borrow Maitreyabandhu... he kept looking for my – I'm not quite sure how he would put it, but – sort of looking for my pain, my psychic knots and difficulties, for many years before we were ordained. And whilst not claiming to be the model of psychological health, in a way I just have a different psyche, a sort of more even-keeled psyche than Maitreyabandhu... so Maitreyabandhu would tend to read my even-keeled psyche as meaning that I'm hiding or concealing something, which he tried to root out and find! But there really wasn't anything very much there to find, I'm afraid! – in that way.

So I think it is very easy to assume... it's the same going in the reverse way, with myself with Maitreyabandhu – I personally really don't like people disagreeing with me! Whereas Maitreyabandhu would have the appearance that he liked people to agree with him, but actually what he really likes is when someone says, 'well, I don't think that IS the case.' I don't mean they would say that in an unpleasant way, but when they would actually say, 'well I don't think that's right.' And I think in the early part of our friendship I was a bit of a yes man, which Maitreyabandhu didn't like – and I couldn't understand why he wouldn't like that, because that's what I like!

So we easily make these quite unconscious assumptions about other people, based on how we are... because how we are is the universe, after all!

So, somewhere we need to start going beyond that, until eventually we get to the stage where Maitreyabandhu finally says: 'Will you stop disagreeing with me, and start agreeing with me like you used to!'

So we want to try and find out what it is really like to be that other person... I remember somebody telling me about how they tried doing each others' habits for the day: they put on each others' clothes for the day, and they ate each others' favourite foods for the day, which I think was quite a challenging experience – you know, eating Marmite when you hate it, or eating jam when you hate it! It can be quite interesting, I think, to do a little experiment like that, even if it just makes you realise how different other people are from you.

Coming back to the thing about getting to know their family... if you have that opportunity, that can be very helpful to understand them. And then life stories – life stories are a great way of really getting a sense of somebody from the inside.

14. Be prompt to resolve conflicts

I think perhaps especially the English are very good at letting things go unsaid... Sometimes there can be an expectation for others to read our mind, or to pick up the subtle messages that we may give off. But they are not always read – or if they are, they can be ignored.

And sometimes one gets conflict emerging that can be quite 'in your face' and unpleasant, but also another kind of conflict is that you can just gradually drift into a 'cold war' with a rather understated but nevertheless undermining quality of conflict.

If that starts to happen, we need to have the courage to speak out. If we just let the conflict stay, it will tend to grow and to fester, so we need to try and resolve any conflicts as quickly as we can.

Part of that is that we need to be quick to forgive. If we don't forgive our friends then our heart will just tend to harden, and a hardened heart is very hard to open.

The thing is that if we *are* half-serious about practicing the Dharma, and about developing friendships, then we *will* hurt each other, because, you know, we're not perfect – at least probably most of us aren't perfect. We are bound to make mistakes; we are bound to hurt each other; and we need to forgive. We need to forgive again and again and again. The only way we can avoid that is by staying out of relationship... and that isn't the path of the Dharma.

15. Base your friendship on common ideals

I think it is common ideals, or common spiritual ideals, that make friendship into spiritual friendship, and I think we need to keep our ideals at the forefront of our friendship.

One of the ways of doing that is through confession – you know, when we do something

that is unskilful, particularly in relation to our friend, to just say, 'that's what I did'. Making that confession helps to resolve conflict as well as helping to deepen the friendship.

Priyavadita, in his introduction, mentioned the talk I gave about meditation... A few years ago Maitreyabandhu and I started meeting up twice – more latterly once – a week, to talk about our meditation. What we would do is often we'd start simply by confessing things, and then talking about other things that were pressing in our minds, before we eventually got on to talking about our meditation.

Of itself it was very useful to talk about meditation – I learned a lot about meditation through talking about it with Maitreyabandhu – but also I learned a lot about him, because meditation is quite an intimate, personal side of ourselves, so to talk about that in some detail with a friend is, again, to get to know our friend in another way, and in quite a depth.

And the thing that, again, was a bit of a surprise was just how much those meetings deepened our friendship. It took our friendship onto a whole other level than before.

I think the thing about talking about meditation was that it meant that even if we weren't talking about our meditation, we knew that that was part of the deal, and it framed the discussion. It framed the discussion with the context of our spiritual ideals; the context of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

So it meant that even if it wasn't explicitly said, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha – the Three Jewels – were right there with us in our communication at that point in time, and that had a deepening effect on the interaction that went on between us.

Conclusion

I'm just going to repeat the fifteen points again and then make a few concluding remarks:

1. Take the initiative, and take an interest.
2. Don't expect friendship.
3. If you like someone, make friends with them.
4. If you don't like someone, make friends with them.
5. Friendship – or at least spiritual friendship – is not based on the romantic ideal.
6. Work together.
7. Go on retreat together.

8. Live together.
9. Eyeballing is not the whole story.
10. Help your friend.
11. Be faithful.
12. Befriend their family.
13. Try to understand your friend from the inside.
14. Be prompt to resolve conflicts.
15. Base your friendship on common ideals.

I think, of those 15 points, the first two and the last one are probably the most important. We need to take the initiative, but we need to do that in a light way that doesn't expect something back; and we need to keep our ideals to the forefront, because that is really what makes friendship.

Like much of the spiritual life – or a number of aspects of the spiritual life – there is quite a paradox in friendship. Friendship is very important; friendship is one of the Three Jewels. The Sangha Jewel, essentially, is friendship. So we need to strive, and we need to develop, and we need to be diligent to develop and maintain our friendships... but at the same time we need not to grasp. If we grasp, it won't happen, or we will destroy any friendships.

Coming back to Al Ghazali: he talks about friendship as being like a pair of hands where one hand washes the other. So they work together. They can't work separately. One hand can't wash itself, whereas two hands can wash each other.

And it made me think, well, that is actually a very beautiful metaphor, of friendship being like two hands. If you look at a hand, it is a really incredible organ – it is amazing what a hand can do – it can do so much, if you think of all the things we do, even in terms of the gestures that we make.

And when I was writing this talk I was reminded of a sculpture by Rodin, a very lovely sculpture called *The Cathedral* which is basically two hands... it was sort of like this... [demonstrating]... if you imagine that this one was somebody else's hand, and it was their right hands together... so you've got these two hands together forming what Rodin calls *The Cathedral*... It's a stunningly beautiful piece of sculpture, very, very expressive, just highlighting how expressive the hands are.

I hope you find some of the points I've made helpful. I hope you are able to put them into

practice. And just to reiterate what I said in the beginning: they are just guidelines, just suggestions... and it is really important not to lose sight of the beauty, the delight, and the wonder of friendship.