

# Kalyāṇa (2 of 5) The Beauty of Virtue

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This morning, I'd like to continue with the theme of beauty – the beautiful – within the teachings of the Buddha. The word that I introduced yesterday is *kalyāṇa*. There are other words that are used, but the one I'm focusing on is *kalyāṇa*. One of the things that the Buddha referred to as beautiful is the Dharma. He expressed the idea that it's possible to become established in the beauty of the Dharma.

So what is the Dharma? What is this Dharma that is beautiful in the beginning, the middle, and the end? It's many things. One of the many meanings of Dharma, which becomes deeper as we practice, is action – how we behave and what we do. To be established in the Dharma is to be established in good, ethical, and virtuous behavior – beautiful behavior. Some people are inspired by words like goodness, ethics, and virtue, and

some people are not. Some people hesitate around these words for maybe good reasons. But, to see them as synonymous with beauty and beautiful places the idea of ethics, virtue, and goodness often in a very interesting context or different situation.

Someone is established in beauty or in what's beautiful if they are living by the five precepts – if they don't kill, steal, engage in sexual misconduct, lie, or become involved in intoxication. The Buddha referred to that as a beautiful thing. Part of that beauty is it's a beautiful thing to see someone in the world who is truthful and harmless – not wanting to harm and taking care to not cause harm. I've met many people like that, and I find myself still to this day very inspired by this. It's like I'm nourished by seeing this goodness or dedication to harmlessness and truth that some people have. It's beautiful to see that and to be that way.

The Buddha has this very interesting expression: “beauty that transcends beauty.” It's more beautiful than the beautiful. The beauty that transcends beauty is establishing others in the five precepts. I have to be careful about the word “establishing,” so that we're not obligating, pushing, or demanding that people do it. Rather it's supporting other people to bring forth from inside of themselves that place of goodness and ability to act for the welfare and the happiness of others. To not cause harm – let that come to the forefront and be

recognized, and be an operating principle for their lives. It's also supporting people in having the settledness, connectedness, and sense of self-awareness that allows them to come from that place deep inside that wants to live that way. To do that is the beauty that transcends beauty.

There's a very interesting little story in the suttas of a person who comes to the Buddha and wants to define what a great person is. The first thing the person says is that a great person is someone who has done a lot of study, has learned a lot, and understands the inner meaning of what they're learned. That is a great person. The Buddha says: "Not quite. I have a different understanding of what a great person is." Then the Buddha says, "A great person is someone who is concerned for the welfare and happiness of others, and who establishes others in the beauty and wholesomeness of the Dharma. That is a great person."

We see over and over again that the Buddha's emphasis for a wise and great person is someone who is concerned for the welfare of others. He clearly doesn't obligate a person to be a great person. But in the Buddha's estimation, he sees a wonderful, great person as someone who is in fact concerned for the welfare and happiness of others. And one of the ways to be concerned for the welfare of others is to establish them in the beauty and wholesomeness of the Dharma.

I said earlier that one of the meanings of Dharma is action. Another meaning of Dharma is qualities of mind – the inner qualities of goodness or truth that are here, which transcends or is beyond Buddhism even. This is why practices like mindfulness – to really connect us to what’s here and be attentive – we say, connect us to the Dharma, but it’s not a Dharma that is someone else’s religion or even belongs to a religion. It’s a Dharma that belongs to the heart and to what we discover inside. It’s a deep trusting and valuing of the capacity of the heart to act well and to work for and be concerned for the welfare of others.

One of the many things people associate with the word *kalyāṇa* is the term *kalyāṇa mitra* (good spiritual friend). *Mitra* means friend, and *kalyāṇa* is what’s translated as “good spiritual.” The most literal meaning of the word is beautiful. It’s to have a beautiful friend, a good spiritual friend, but the fact is that the person is beautiful. Certainly the person would be beautiful in their ethics and how they behave, but more importantly, the inner qualities from which they act and how they are in the world would be beautiful. We recognize something beautiful in them.

When we use the word “spiritual,” it’s not really a Buddhist word. It’s a Western word. Speaking in English, we often assume that we all know what it

means. It's a fairly vague word. I didn't use it for many, many years. I was ordained as a Zen priest in the early 1980s. I had a friend who sometimes got mad at me because here I was a priest, a very religious person, and I never used the word spiritual. It seemed like it was incongruous to not use it. But it wasn't really part of my worldview to use that word, and so I didn't use it much. Now I tend to use it more often. I'm very aware that it's kind of a vague word. It doesn't really specify something unless you explain it.

But in terms of a good spiritual friend, I like to use the word spiritual. It's the fullest aspect of the human heart where ethics, awakening, freedom from suffering, and caring for others come together in the same experience. So when these beautiful, wonderful abilities and qualities get integrated into our being or at the place that they're integrated in the heart, that's what I'd like to consider in my definition of spiritual. So a good spiritual friend is someone who has experience or knows something about this integration of virtue, goodness, care, harmlessness, freedom, awakening, and caring for others. They really have a sense that this is who they are. It's well integrated into their persona and personality.

In Buddhism, one of the valuable things about *kalyāṇa mitra* (good spiritual or beautiful friend), which the Buddha talked about, is that they support one in

becoming established in the Eightfold Path. I think that this is quite profound. The Eightfold Path is eight actions for how we live our lives. They are not beliefs or tenets that we have to believe or import from someone else. They're actually practices of what we do. If we do these things, orient ourselves in this way, then we'll get very quickly – hopefully – the results of them. We'll see for ourselves that they're beneficial. We'll see for ourselves the ways in which they bring forth something precious and valuable inside. Maybe we'll see for ourselves that we too have the capacity to act in beautiful, good ways that bring benefit to the world.

Over and over again, as we develop our inner life in beautiful ways, settle ourselves, connect to ourselves, purify ourselves, work through some of the difficulties and challenges that we have, we'll see that the direction we're going is to be free, open, and sensitive enough so that our care and interest is for the welfare and happiness of all beings – the welfare and happiness of ourselves and the welfare and happiness of others.

I'll end with one of my favorite quotes lately from the suttas. It's a little similar to the earlier one. The Buddha described a wise person – Buddhism is often associated with wisdom – as someone who is concerned for the welfare of themselves, someone who is concerned for the welfare of others, someone who is concerned for the

welfare of self and others, and someone who is concerned for the welfare of the whole world.

All those different categories refer to something a little different. Self-care – being concerned for one’s own welfare – is completely valid, important, and crucial so that we know and are in touch with what is the greatest benefit for others. If we know that for ourselves, the more we can practice and discover for ourselves the greatest benefit, joy, and happiness, then we understand what’s possible for others. Caring for others and not being self-centered – clearly seeing another person and supporting and helping them – is important.

And then caring for self and others. I don’t know – maybe we don’t know what the Buddha actually meant. But I love the interpretation that self and others mean us together (we). That somehow in the relationship, we care for the welfare of that relationship as well – not just the other person, not just ourselves.

And the whole world means the whole collective: society; how we all work together; the whole; the mutually supportive, interactive, interdependent world that we live in. We’re also concerned for all of that – not just “my people, my tribe, my family, my friends.” We care for the whole world.

So that's a wise person, and to repeat this idea of beauty and beautiful, this is something quite beautiful. To call it beauty brings it all into an aesthetic, felt sense, emotional reference point that can be inspiring, delightful, joyful, and pleasing. It's a great thing to have beauty in our lives.

May we become beautiful people. May we live beautifully. May we act beautifully, and may we speak beautifully for the welfare and happiness of all beings. Thank you.