

Loyalty

What is loyalty?
What meaning does it have in life?
What loyalty challenges are there in your life?
What does it have to do with happiness?

Loyalty can be described as the glue that provides constancy in an ever-changing world. It can be thought of, as the lifeline that helps us feel safe and supported, allowing us to remain stable and connected.

When we think of loyalty, we think of devotion, civility, oaths, faithfulness, and responsibility. Loyalty calls us to put the benefit of others ahead of ourselves. What makes us care enough to speak or stand up to someone else no matter what? This call to action comes from something deep inside. If we don't respond in some way to those we are loyal to, we die a little. Our spirit fades. We have the instinct that happiness begins when we can consider the welfare of others to be as important as our own.

Taking responsibility for each other is the key to survival in both the human and the animal realms. It is a sign of growth and maturity, when we can demonstrate concern for the well being of others through acting with loyalty.

It is logical to feel loyal toward the people we feel close to, but can this feeling of loyalty be extended to those outside our inner circle to the larger community, and ultimately toward all of humanity? Role models such as Aung San Suu Kyi, who spent 17 years under house arrest because of her loyalty to the Burmese Democratic National League, exemplify the conviction that "there is great merit in sacrificing for others, so that we may live a full life". She was unable to see her children grow up or be with her husband when he died of cancer.

It is no surprise that loyalty is a guideline related to our relationship. We cannot experience loyalty in a void. Loyalty is expressed in the context of relationship, this relationship being to a person, a family, a group, a community, a principle or an ideal.

In responding to inquiry about the nature of loyalty, Ken McLeod, says that there are three different aspects: 1) Close affiliation: which implies close connection and affection based on a shared aim or emotional relationship, 2) Obedience to a higher authority: meaning recognition of an authority higher than oneself. He identifies the possible risk in ceding authority to another and 3) A higher motivation or intention: which means that we live for more than our individual selves, and from that affiliation, a sense of purpose arises. Given the nature of the teacher/student relationship in Buddhism, what implications may there be in shifting loyalties to different teachers as one evolves through their journey with Buddhism?

In navigating the terrain of relationships, we are frequently presented with loyalty dilemmas. We are called to make difficult choices in prioritizing our loyalties, which may collide when one loyalty to a person, ideal or principle is challenged by the loyalty to another. One example of this is when a couple marries and the loyalty may shift from the extended family to the nuclear family they are creating.

One cannot examine loyalty without calling to mind the opposite, which is of course, disloyalty and betrayal. Who among us has not experienced the suffering of betrayal when someone close to us betrays our loyalty and trust? When we can not rely on loyalty, there is anxiety, insecurity and heartbreak.

In our fast changing world, loyalties are frequently shifting. Which loyalties are strengthened and which are weakened over time? As bonds of friendship and community become more tenuous, we find loyalty more difficult to attain. In the book, Why Loyalty Matters, Kirsensham and Aksoy speak to how loyalty has become out of fashion, and has almost been perceived as a character flaw. We have only to look to our tabloid journalism to see the harsh face of disloyalty where former, friends, lovers, and staff sell unflattering stories and pictures to the media, which serves to make a handsome profit by exploiting betrayal. The book explores how as a culture and a society we have become less loyal, to our families, our friends, our workplaces, our communities and our culture as a whole.

And so, we must examine loyalty to understand how to preserve it and honor its importance in our relationships. We must cultivate discernment to be able to differentiate enlightened loyalty from blind loyalty, Loyalty helps us to create a deep level of trust. When we have loyalty, we are able to relate to one another in an open, relaxed and transparent way. This sets forth a tone of safety and ease, acknowledging the interconnectedness of all beings. Beyond feeling or thoughts, loyalty commands action.

(Excerpted and adapted by Mary McManus and Geoffry White from: The 16 Guidelines)

Loyalty Quotes

A man is not an orange. You can't eat the fruit and throw the peel away.

Aruthur Miller, Death of A Salesman

Faithless is he who says farewell when the road darkens. J.R.R. Toliken

The scholar does not consider gold and jade to be precious treasures, but loyalty and good faith. Confucius

Loyalty is dead the experts claim, and the statistics seem to bear them out. US. Corporations lose half their customers in five years, half their employees in four, and half their investors in one. Frederick Reichfield, The Loyalty Effect

Whenever there is a grain of loyalty there is a glimpse of freedom.

Algernone Charles Swineburne

The strength of a family, like the strength of an army, is in its loyalty to each other.

Mario Puzo, The Family

The game is my life. It demands responsibility and loyalty and it gives me back fulfillment and peace. Michael Jordan

Our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class and our nation: this means we must develop a world perspective. Martin Luther King, Jr.