

Ethics

Study material for your retreat at Tiratanaloka

Study area 1. The purpose and potential of ethics

Study area 2. The body precepts

Study area 3. Confession

Study area 4. The speech precepts

Study area 5. The mind precepts

Introduction to the Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to give you the opportunity to look in depth at the material that we will be studying on the 'Ethics to Insight' retreat at Tiratanaloka.

In this handbook we give you reflection questions for each area we'll be studying on the retreat. We will also have some talks on the retreat itself where the team will bring out their own personal reflections on the topics covered.

Reading

The main text we will use for the retreat will be **Sangharakshita's book 'The Ten Pillars of Buddhism'**. You can buy a copy of the book from windhorsepublications.com as a separate book or as part of the Complete Works Volume 2. Alternatively it can be downloaded for free in audio or text form from freebuddhistaudio.com.

We'd ask you to study this book, reflect on it and come prepared with questions and areas you would like to discuss as this will help you to get the most out of your retreat. You might even want to study the material with some of your friends or talk about it with local Order Members. Throughout the material we've included questions about how the material relates to your own practice that we'd like you to think about in preparation for the discussion groups on the retreat.

There are also some very good companion books we ask you to read as supplementary material:

- Sangharakshita's books 'Living Ethically' and 'Know Your Mind' are very helpful. They can both be found in Sangharakshita's Complete Works Volume 17.
- Subhadramati's book 'Not About Being Good: A Practical Guide to Buddhist Ethics' is a very good overview of the principles behind the practice of ethics and the individual precepts. We particularly would like you to read chapter six on the practice of confession.
- Subhuti's book 'Mind in Harmony: The Psychology of Buddhist Ethics' is also a very good book to have as a reference book.

All the books can be purchased from windhorsepublications.com, or from the Tiratanaloka bookshop.

It's important that you let us know if you have problems accessing any of the material we've asked you to read, as we'll be assuming that you have had a chance to look at it before you come.

All of us on the team at Tiratanaloka look forward to studying the material with you when you come here.

The Purpose and Potential of Ethics

Reading

For this section please read part 1 of 'The Ten Pillars of Buddhism' by Sangharakshita. You can buy a copy of the book from windhorsepublications.com as a separate book or as part of the Complete Works Volume 2. Alternatively it can be downloaded for free in audio or text form from freebuddhistaudio.com.

Please also read the introduction from Vajratara which summarises the first part of 'The Ten Pillars of Buddhism' and introduces the retreat.

We have asked you to read Chapter 6 of Subhadramati's book 'Not About Being Good: A Practical Guide to Buddhist Ethics', but don't limit yourself to just Chapter 6. The whole book is a very good introduction to Ethics and was originally conceived as a series of talks on an ordination retreat, so it is very helpful for those in the ordination process.

You may also want to read Subhuti's paper 'Revering and Relying on the Dharma' for more information on the *niyāmas*. This can be found on his website subhuti.info, or in the book 'The Seven Papers'. Subhadramati also goes into the *niyāmas* in 'Not About Being Good.' Sangharakshita gave a talk 'Living with Ethics' in 2009 in which introduces 'Living Ethically' and he talks about ethics in terms of imagination. This can be found on freebuddhistaudio.com

Questions for Reflection

1. How do we relate to ethics in general? What is our conditioning around ethics?
2. Why do we practise ethics?
3. What is our measure as to whether something is ethical or not? Is it ethical because other people are happier? I am happier? I become a better person? The world is a better place?

The Purpose and Potential of Ethics

None of us come to Buddhist ethics without some conditioning around ethics. Perhaps we have grown up seeing ethics as constraint: *"Not doing what we want to do, and doing what we do not want to do, because – for reasons we do not understand – we have been told to by someone in whose existence we no longer believe."*¹

We can feel quite judgemental of ourselves or others, or rebel to break free, or alternate between the two. We might look for the rules to follow, or the rules to break. Perhaps we didn't have many boundaries growing up, perhaps we wish we had more boundaries, perhaps we value spontaneity over discipline. Whatever our conditioning is, it is worth reflecting on our conditioning and sharing it with our friends. Sometimes we do 'ethical biographies' in Going for Refuge groups or Chapters, and it can provoke some life changing reflections when we do.

¹ Sangharakshita, *The Noble Eightfold Path*

My own conditioning around ethics comes from my parents and my Christian conditioning. This led me to value integrity and truth as more important than anything else: wealth, pleasure, worldly success or even health and life. It also gave me a deep feeling for injustice. Oscar Wilde's children's stories were a huge influence on my early life. In the stories Wilde holds love as the greatest value, as more important than life and death, and he evokes a feeling for social justice as an aesthetic value beyond worldly beauty. 'So the swallow flew over the great city, and saw the rich making merry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at their gates.'² I learned to associate ethics with a sort of tragic and melancholy beauty, serving a love greater than self interest.

We all come to Buddhist ethics with our own conditioning, and when we come to Buddhism, we might be attracted by the ethical system, but it also takes some effort to really explore what makes Buddhist ethics distinctive. We tend to project our conditioning around ethics onto ethics in Buddhism. This is reflected in the title of Subhadramati's book: 'Not About Being Good'. There are some misunderstandings particular to Buddhism that invite us to project our ethical conditioning onto Buddhism. For example, because of the emphasis on the Bodhisattva Ideal, it is easy to make the mistake of thinking Buddhist ethics is about what makes other people happy and reduces their suffering. However, in Buddhism everything starts with the mind. It is the mental state that an action emerges from that determines its ethical status.

'Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind and produced by mind.

If one speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows even as the cart-wheel follows the hoof of the ox (drawing the cart).

Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind and produced by mind.

If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows like a shadow that never departs.'³

What is an impure mind? A mind characterised by greed, hatred and delusion. What is a pure mind? A mind characterised by tranquillity, love and wisdom. The mind of tranquillity, love and wisdom won't automatically ensure no one gets hurt, but it will tend towards certain actions of body and speech.

*'Actions proclaim from the rooftops of action what has already been committed in the secret and silent chambers of the heart.'*⁴ After all, ethics are not just about our minds. Ethics involve outward

expressions in body and speech of positive mental states that particularly relate to our relationships with other people. These actions of body, speech and mind are reflected in the ten precepts.

Sangharakshita gives us an in depth exploration of the significance of precepts in the introduction to the 'Ten Pillars of Buddhism'. Please read it! He outlines the basis of why we take the ten precepts at ordination, which is the heart of the ordination ceremony, so it is important you understand that before your ordination. These are the main points he makes:

Ethical precepts are central to one's life as a Buddhist

*'Going for Refuge, or commitment to the Three Jewels, is one's lifeblood as a Buddhist. Observance of the Precepts represents the circulation of that blood through every fibre of one's being.'*⁵

True Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels of Buddhism leads us to a reorganisation of behaviour, of the lives we lead. The converse is also true: if we are not practising the precepts or changing our behaviour, we are not Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels of Buddhism, and by Sangharakshita's definition, therefore not a Buddhist. This is what attracted Dr Ambedkar to Buddhism. He said of Buddhism that it is not possible to take ethics out of Buddhism so that it doesn't matter who we are in relationship to, whether they are of the same religion to us or not, ethics (or morality) is central to what Buddhism actually is.

² Oscar Wilde, *The Happy Prince*

³ Sangharakshita translation, *Dhammapada* v1&2

⁴ Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*

⁵ Sangharakshita, *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*

*'The religion of Buddha is morality. It is embedded in religion. Buddhist religion is nothing if not morality. It is true that in Buddhism there is no God. In place of God there is morality. What God is to other religions, morality is to Buddhism...'*⁶

Ethical precepts are central to Ordination

When setting up the Order and deciding what precepts to take up at ordination, Sangharakshita looked at all the monastic rules of training in all the Buddhist schools, the *prāṭimokṣa*, which has around over two hundred rules. He realised that ten precepts were more comprehensive in scope than all the seven different *prāṭimokṣa* combined. This is because the ten precepts address the whole person: body, speech and mind. He called them the *fundamental prāṭimokṣa* or *mūla-prāṭimokṣa*.

Previously the number of precepts one takes at ordination divides the Buddhist Sangha between different schools and different levels of ordination. *'Since there is only one set of precepts... there is only one ordination.'*⁷ What unites the Order becomes the precepts, as opposed to any particular lifestyle or differentiated sets of rules. This was very radical for its time. He is placing renewed emphasis on the fundamentals of Buddhist practice, transformation of being, as opposed to lifestyle.

Ethical precepts are about principles not rules.

A principle is a fundamental truth, and the attitude derived from that, that governs conduct. What this means is that Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels of Buddhism as the fundamental truth informs the way we live our life, and governs our behaviour. Every aspect of our being is transformed in the light of Going for Refuge: our body, speech and mind. This is not about following rules or obeying an external authority. It is not about conforming, or rebelling, but it's about living out the ideals that we ourselves have chosen, the fundamental truth that gives shape to our attitude towards life and the way we live it. What we do with our lives remains our responsibility. As Dr Ambedkar pointed out:

*'Religion must mainly be a matter of principles only. It cannot be a matter of rules. The moment it degenerates into rules it ceases to be religion, as it kills responsibility, which is the essence of a truly religious act.'*⁸

We are responsible for our actions, and for saying 'yes' to the principles, truths and values that form the basis of our actions and are expressed in the precepts. We are responsible for reflecting on how those principles are expressed in our lives. Often our discourse about ethics can get lost in an abstract situation relying on an ill-defined external authority: - "What if you were on a desert island with only a chicken, would you eat it?" as if there were a Buddhist authority waiting to catch us out and if we were to break the precept in one hypothetical situation, we would be breaking it in all situations. We are living in a society with probably the greatest choice of food in the entire history of humanity so this hypothetical situation is unlikely to occur, but even if it did, it would be up to us to reflect on how we would best apply our deepest values and what we know to be true in that situation. We would work out for ourselves how best to apply the precepts on a desert island with a chicken.

The need for training principles

The principles of Going for Refuge are expressed as the path of training *sikkhāpada*, *pada* meaning footstep, and *sikkha* meaning to be able or training. You walk in line with your training. It is not an absolute system of ethics: you either do it perfectly or you don't and are irredeemable. It is more that Going for Refuge is a journey and the precepts are the guide. The precepts reflect the ideal

⁶ Dr Ambedkar, *Buddha and the Future of His Religion*

⁷ Sangharakshita, *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*

⁸ Dr Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*

behaviour in body, speech and mind that we are moving towards and can apply at ever deeper levels in our life. Amongst the precepts, the mind precepts are the most fundamental because behaviour of body and speech flow out of our mind. The journey is about transforming our behaviour, but more importantly it is a transformation of consciousness.

Ethics take you all the way to Enlightenment

The precepts also reflect deeper truths about the nature of Reality. If we really understood the way things are, we would act in line with the precepts. So from this point of view, the precepts reflect how Buddhas act in the world. If we act as the Buddha acts, we will find ourselves moving towards the experience that expresses itself in those actions, we will move towards the mind of the Buddha that expresses itself in the precepts. Sangharakshita compares ethics to the words of a poem *'Morality is, as it were, the words of that most perfect of all poems, the holy life, the language which makes intelligent the secrets of spirituality. Meditation and Wisdom... are its rhythm and its imagery'*.⁹ If we follow the words, follow the training principles, we will understand the meaning behind them.

It may be that we wonder why we have to practise ethics to gain Insight, why can't we transform our mind through meditation, and ethics will follow when we see the more the way things are? After all, if I glimpse the nature of mind, I will see it as luminous and pure, and will be spontaneously ethical. Isn't this what we need to focus on?

To understand the process by which Insight emerges, we can go back to the teaching on the *niyāmas* that Subhuti outlines in 'Revering and Relying on the Dharma'. In this system, conditionality is examined as a process of evolution of consciousness. When the right conditions arise within each *niyāma*, processes under the next *niyāma* emerge.

Starting with the *mano-niyāma* processes, instinctual intelligence or consciousness separates our experience into 'self' and 'other', 'grasper' and 'grasped'. Self-reflexive consciousness, *karma-niyāma* emerges in dependence on *mano-niyāma*. We are able to form an idea of ourselves as responsible for action and consequence. We can work with *karma-niyāma* processes as 're-imagining' our relationship with the world, by reaching out to others and becoming less identified solely with our own self interest. This enables us to move beyond self clinging and become increasingly attuned to the way things are. Our mind becomes malleable and energetic, there is less duality and clinging to 'me' and 'mine', 'grasper' and 'grasped', and we can finally transcend dichotomy altogether: the *dhamma-niyāma* spontaneously unfolds. The way the Buddha talks about it is that it is 'the clean cloth (ethical action) that takes the dye (of wisdom)'.

In other words, we can't separate wisdom from *punya* merit, or skilful action. This is depicted in some images of Bodhisattvas who have two auras: the wisdom aura around the head and the merit wisdom around the body. There is a flow between them, wisdom flowing outwards into skilful action and merit flowing inwards towards wisdom.

Ethical practice is a path that leads us into ever more subtle realms of consciousness, into a deeper understanding of Reality. We start off with a fairly crude attitude to ethics, which changes as we deepen our Going for Refuge and keep practising the path of ethics, meditation and wisdom. This path roughly corresponds to the different levels of Going for Refuge.

Deepening your ethical practice

1. Conventional ethical practice – 'I'm ethical because that's what's expected'

⁹ Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*

Buddhism distinguishes between conventional morality which is rooted in custom and tradition and not related to specific mental states, and natural morality which is directly related to skilful/unskillful states of mind. Conventional morality runs on a code that keeps society operating in line with its traditional customs. It governs cultural norms around marriage, sexual practice, property, speech and so on and those cultural norms are different for different cultures.

Conventional morality can also be the spirit in which we undertake ethics, whether our ethical practice is underpinned by fear of disapproval or punishment by the group, or desire for praise and acceptance from the group. This can be a powerful force because we are dependent on the group for our survival, and with group mentality you are either in the group or out of it, depending if you uphold the group's conventions.

However, conventional morality can give you a very sound basis for an ethical life. There are very positive customs, for example Islam and Christianity's emphasis on giving help to the poor. Conventional morality can be a useful way to begin ethical practice. You learn that, for example, you just don't shoplift, or disrespect the Buddha. You just do give money to charity. You don't need to reason why you don't do or do certain things. For example, many of us became vegetarian because everyone else at the Buddhist Centre was doing it and we thought maybe there was something in it. I know for myself I had a confused mind that was looking for order. I saw Buddhists I respected behave in certain ways and I thought it was a good idea to follow them. But it is not enough. Conventional morality sooner or later leads to rebellion or condemnation because it is based on group behaviour.

2. Self-interested discipline - 'I'm ethical because it leads to my own and other's welfare'

This is the first of the three successive levels of understanding of ethics that Sangharakshita refers to in 'Wisdom Beyond Words':

'You start off with the common sense approach to ethical behaviour based on a perception of yourself and others as distinctive and palpable egos.'

Subhuti calls this stage 'rational self interest'¹⁰. We recognise the workings of *karma*: that actions have consequences for myself and others. On this level, an event happens, thoughts and emotions arise in our mind, and we choose how we respond. How we respond creates who we become, but also has an impact on others. Using the example of vegetarianism, we don't want to be the kind of person who participates in the death of animals for our benefit. We see the environmental impact of eating meat and dairy. We want to make ourselves into a better person with a better relationship to the world and we see others suffer just as you do, and we don't want another to suffer. So even if we crave meat, we choose not to eat it.

This may, at times, feel like a battle. As Subhuti says:

*'Progress under the kamma-niyāma requires the conscious subordination to ethical awareness of instincts belonging to the mano-niyāma.'*¹¹

We are working against lifetimes of habit, instinct, our biological urge to violence, power and sex. This requires great compassion and understanding – particularly of how conditioned we all are, and the immense gravitational pull of *samsāra*. We have to trust that making an effort does have an effect. We are creating ourselves into our own work of art, gradually, brush stroke by brush stroke. However, sooner or later we come up against the fact that we can never perfect ourselves by an effort of will. We need a new dimension to our ethical practice.

3. Empathy – 'I'm ethical because it's beautiful'

¹⁰ Subhuti, *Re-Imagining the Buddha*

¹¹ *ibid*

The second level is to see all beings as Dharmas:

'Next you refine your view of things so that you see them all as mere composites of dharmas'¹².

Dharmas are not fixed or separate. Seeing this means that Reality becomes much more open and undefined. There is less distinction between self and other: we are just all part of life. When we feel like this we want to benefit life, why would we damage that life in any way? At this stage, we feel ethical sensitivity without having to reason it: *'Ethics is really to do with feeling solidarity with all life... one simply resonates with the life in another person or animal.'*¹³

For example, we become a vegetarian because we respond to the life of an animal. We resonate with it. We see into an animal's life, we feel their desire for life, we feel their fear of losing their life. We feel an urge to protect and cherish them. We couldn't willingly take that life for our own satisfaction.

Sangharakshita talks about rediscovering this natural empathy, a sensitivity to life that we sometimes have as children but lose as we get older. As he says in his poem 'Life is King': *'Life does not belong to us, we belong to life.'* This spontaneous and natural ethical responsiveness is more akin to imagination than reason, what Sangharakshita calls the *divya cakṣu* or divine eye¹⁴. We are able to put ourselves in another person's place and respond creatively in a way that enables us to rise above our habitual reactions.

This is the kind of ethical sensitivity we find at the level of ordination. Order Members aren't always ethically perfect, as we may have discovered for ourselves, but they are engaged in a process of ethical transformation that is built on a natural empathy for life. The practice of an Order Member is to stay in touch with that natural empathy.

From this point of view, Reality is inherently ethical, not because there is an overarching cosmic consciousness that makes it so, but more because in reality, we are not fixed or separate, we are all connected, all part of this mystery of existence. Sangharakshita talks about how wisdom, or *vidya*, really means we stop seeing things in terms of what we can get out of them, and instead we see them in terms of beauty and respond to them with love. This is ethics as it moves from *śīla* as discipline to *śīla* as aesthetic sense, and the effort we make to be ethical is being 'aesthetically active'¹⁵. We are ethical because it is beautiful, and to be unethical is ugly.

So far ethics has been the path of self development or transformation. Here we move into ethics as the path of 'self surrender' and 'self-discovery'.¹⁶ In the path of self-surrender we let what is highest, what is ultimate in us, the profound wisdom and compassion of the Buddhas, take us over and we live from that, so that the gravitational pull of *Nirvāna* becomes stronger than the gravitational pull of *Samsāra*. This is the attitude of Śāntideva in the *Bodhicaryavatāra*:

'I give my entire self wholly to the conquerors... Take possession of me, sublime beings; out of devotion I am your servant. You take possession of me. I become fearless. I act for the benefit of beings. I leave behind previous wrongdoing completely; never again shall I do another wrong.'

This may sound impossible, but we can feel like we are being filled or shaped, taken over with a force not against our will, but not produced by it either. We tune into a greater love and we act from that, or it acts through us. Sometimes it seems that skilful action seems beyond us, and all we can do is put ourselves in the service of Tārā.

¹² Sangharakshita, *Wisdom Beyond Words*

¹³ Subhuti, *Re-Imagining the Buddha*

¹⁴ Sangharakshita, *Living With Ethics*, lecture given at Birmingham Buddhist Centre 2009

¹⁵ Sangharakshita, *The Noble Eightfold Path*, perfect effort.

¹⁶ See Jnanavaca and Maitreyabandhu's talks on 'Three Myths' on the Adhithana YouTube channel.

In the path of self-discovery we tune into that greater love not outside us, but woven into the very nature of consciousness itself. We see that the nature of mind is naturally loving, naturally responsive to ourselves and others, and we act from that. To hurt someone, to act from a mind of greed, hatred and ignorance, is to add something adventitious and incidental to the luminous mind, like inviting a stranger into our home.

4. Spontaneous – ‘Who is there to be ethical?’

‘But finally this ... gives way to a mode of behaving and functioning skillfully that is quite spontaneous, based on no conceptual rationale whatever... it is a coursing in the Perfection of Wisdom which may manifest as śīla, but all the time you see only sunyatā.’¹⁷

The Buddha did not need to practise ethics consciously. He was *asekha*, one beyond training. He was naturally ethical, without any identification of being ethical. He didn’t need to identify with ‘my ethics’ or ‘be ethical’. Unskillful actions and skillful actions ‘cease without remainder’.

‘That Enlightened One whose sphere is endless, whose victory is irreversible, and after whose victory no defilements remain to be conquered, by what track will you lead him astray, the Trackless One?’¹⁸

This is a mysterious state, a spontaneous outpouring of compassion with no self-reference.

‘Just as a circle that has expanded to infinity is not really a circle any more, having gone beyond any distinguishable shape, so the mind that has expanded to embrace all beings has gone beyond definition. Forgetting the self as a reference point, no longer asking what any given situation means for you alone, you can go indefinitely and happily expanding the breadth and depth of your interest and positivity. The self is replaced by a creative orientation of becoming.’¹⁹

We can glimpse this state only by its outward expression, and by embodying the Buddha’s actions. Ethical actions, the actions of a Buddha, guide us to the Buddha’s state. To become a Buddha, we start by acting like one. The secrets of spirituality will be revealed.

Conclusion

Ethics is a subtle and deep practice which takes you all the way to Enlightenment. There is no limit to the practice of ethics. It is a journey, of deepening understanding, of transforming one’s whole being. It is a path of radical responsibility, looking into the principles that ethical precepts express, which, as we will see, really amount to the principle of love. In that journey there are a lot of wrong views we have to discard: a belief in external authority and absolute system of ethics, ethics as rules, ethics as imagined scenarios. It is a journey towards living out of our own ideals, towards what is beautiful, or *kalyāna*. It is an increasingly subtle response to the world around us.

‘Externally, one should look upon the precepts as one looks upon one’s lord, one’s parents, and one’s best friend. Internally, one should look upon the precepts as one’s eyes, one’s heart, one’s life itself. Secretly, one should look upon the precepts as one’s tutelary deity. Therefore, one must never be dishonest, deceitful or cunning through the gates of body, speech and mind.’²⁰

¹⁷ Sangharakshita, *Wisdom Beyond Words*

¹⁸ Dhammapada v179

¹⁹ Sangharakshita,, *Living Ethically*

²⁰ Yeshe Tsogyal, *Mother of Knowledge*

The Body Precepts

Reading

For this section please read and make summaries on the first three precepts in part 2 of 'The Ten Pillars of Buddhism' by Sangharakshita. You can buy a copy of the book from windhorsepublications.com as a separate book or as part of the Complete Works Volume 2. Alternatively it can be downloaded for free in audio or text form from freebuddhistaudio.com.

If you can, please also read the first 3 chapters of 'Living Ethically' by Sangharakshita. You can buy a copy of the book from windhorsepublications.com as a separate book or as part of the Complete Works Volume 17.

Sangharakshita's exploration of the third precept in the 'Ten Pillars of Buddhism' may be a surprise to some. We might have expected more practical advice on how to practise sexual ethics, whereas Sangharakshita focuses more on gender and polarisation.

There are a number of reasons why he might have done this. The first is that what a society understands as sexual misconduct differs across cultures and at different times. For this reason he wanted to focus on the principle behind the precept and leave us to work out its specific applications. The principle here is to go beyond all kinds of projection and polarisation with 'the other' and develop harmony, relaxation and contentment within ourselves and within our relationships.

Another is that he wanted to give us a sense of what lies beyond sexual desire and gender identification (including non-binary) all together. In meditation we go beyond all identifications and enter a state that is open to the direct unfolding of experience as it is. It is worth noting that in the text he recommends a path of gradual transcendence of identifications: 'Here as elsewhere in the spiritual life what is needed is not negation but transformation, not evasion but progression.'

You can discuss in your groups about whether or not you think single-sex situations are helpful on the path to reaching higher states of consciousness or transcending polarisation. It is an open question, but one that is best discussed on the basis of an enquiry into your own and others' direct experience.

If you would like to read more about the practice of the third precept that you can apply to your own sexual behaviour and development of contentment, you can read chapter 3 of 'Living Ethically' and Subhadramati's exploration in 'Not About Being Good'. If you want to read about an exploration of how we practise the third precept online, read chapter 2 of Prajnaketu's book 'Cyberloka: A Buddhist Guide to Digital Life', which is available from windhorsepublications.com

Questions for Reflection

1. What is the love mode? What are examples of the love mode?
2. What is the power mode? What are examples of the power mode?
3. How do you practise the love mode in terms of what you eat? Are you a vegetarian or vegan? What are your next steps in cultivating a diet based on the love mode?
4. How is 'the love mode stronger than the power mode and capable of overcoming it in all its forms'?
5. What holds you back from generosity?

6. How can the Sangha practice generosity towards each other? What are the duties of the Sangha to each other?
7. How can we encourage gratitude in ourselves and work with resentment?

8. How do we practise the third precept in our lives?
9. 'Since a state of sexual dimorphism is a state of polarisation, tension and projection, it is also a state of discontent'. Is that true in your experience?
10. What do you value about single sex situations?
11. How could you 'move towards brahmacharya'?

Confession

Reading

For this section please read Chapter 6 from Subhadramati's book 'Not About Being Good'.

You may also want to listen to Sangharakshita's talk 'The Spiritual Significance of Confession'. This can be found on freebuddhistaudio.com

If you want more information on the mental states of hrī and apatrāpya, or āhrīkya/ anapatrāpya, there is more in 'Know Your Mind' by Sangharakshita. You can buy a copy of the book from windhorsepublications.com as a separate book or as part of the Complete Works Volume 17.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are your associations with confession?
2. How do we distinguish between irrational guilt and hrī/ apatrāpya in our experience?
3. Why do we confess? How does it feel to confess and apologise?
4. How do we set up the best conditions for Buddhist confession?
5. How do we receive confession?
6. What holds us back from confession?
7. What helps us to forgive?

Some Practical Guidance on How to Practise Confession

*"It is growth in the Noble One's Discipline when one sees one's transgressions as such and makes amends in accordance with the Dhamma by undertaking restraint for the future."*²¹

On this retreat we will have space for confession practice in our groups. That involves all 4 stages of confession: exploring feelings of remorse, making confession, exploring how to make amends and exploring how to prevent unskillfulness in the future.

This is a voluntary practice, and there is no pressure to take part. If you would like to take part, we will undertake the practice in the most mutually respectful way possible and will support you to make the most of the opportunity. We ask everyone to take part in making the group a respectful and loving space for confession.

The four stages of confession outlined by the Buddha

Remorse:

- The practice of confession starts with being sensitive to feelings of remorse, or hrī.
- Only confess if you really do feel remorse for something you've done. You don't need to feel under any pressure to confess.

²¹ Baddali Sutta

- Confess from the basis of your own remorse, not from a desire to tell others about other people's unskilfulness.
- Clarify which precept/s you've broken.
- Take some time to explore whether you have actually acted unskilfully (or are just feeling irrational guilt, or have made a genuine mistake - your group or confession buddy can help with this).

Confession

- Be specific about the action (of body, speech or mind) for which you feel remorse - don't confess a general tendency. Use the precepts to base your confession on.
- We can confess to a shrine, either by writing it on paper and offering it, or speaking it aloud
- We can confess to other people - GFR group, confession buddy, etc - more challenging practice when we confess to other people, but also more effective.
- Choose who you confess to carefully - needs to be someone who has committed themselves to practising same precepts as you and understands practice of confession - probably an Order Member or mitra who's asked for ordination.
- Be as honest and open as you can.
- Be wary of confessing to the person who has been, or could be, harmed by your action (eg. telling someone you've been feeling ill-will or sexual craving towards them). Instead, confess to a third party, and then apologise for your behaviour to the person you've behaved unskilfully towards, if you think that would be helpful to you both.

'Making amends in accordance with the Dhamma'

- Explore whether you need to take any action to make amends for what you've done, (e.g. replace something you've taken, or apologise to someone you've spoken to harshly).

'Undertaking restraint for the future'

- Explore what conditions you need to put in place to help you avoid repeating the behaviour you've confessed.
- Follow through on your resolve!

Some final points:

- You can confess omitting to do something skilful (eg. not being generous when there was a clear opportunity to do so).
- Rejoicing in precepts you've kept, or progress you've made in a particular area, is as important as confessing where you've fallen short.
- If you're aware of something you've done that you feel uncomfortable about, but don't feel ready to take responsibility for it fully and do your best to change it in future, or aren't yet clear exactly what you want to confess, it can help to acknowledge it to others and accept that it's "work in progress".
- Once you've made your confession, going through the four stages outlined above, and had it accepted, let it go! Chanting Vajrasattva mantra can help with this.

Receiving someone else's confession:

- It's usually best just to listen to the person, saying the minimum yourself.
- Sometimes they may need help to go through the four stages mentioned above, or to clarify which precept they've broken.

- Avoid going off on a tangent - keep the focus on the person's confession till everyone feels it is "complete"
- Avoid collusion, telling your story about how you did something similar, justifying their unskilful action or telling them it's not a big thing. You also don't need to give your opinion on the weightiness of the action: telling them it's an awful thing either! They will need to work out the weightiness of the action themselves.
- You may want to clarify that you've understood which precept they've broken, and how they're going to make amends, etc, before you're ready to accept the confession.
- It can often be helpful to the person confessing if their confession is accepted ritually by all who hear it, eg: "I hear and accept your confession". This can provide a sense of closure and enable the person to move on.

The Speech Precepts

Reading

For this section please read and make summaries on the speech precepts in part 2 of 'The Ten Pillars of Buddhism' by Sangharakshita. You can buy a copy of the book from windhorsepublications.com as a separate book or as part of the Complete Works Volume 2. Alternatively it can be downloaded for free in audio or text form from freebuddhistaudio.com.

If you can, please also read chapter 4 of 'Living Ethically' by Sangharakshita. You can buy a copy of the book from windhorsepublications.com as a separate book or as part of the Complete Works Volume 17.

Since presenting 'The Ten Pillars of Buddhism' in 1984, the medium of speech has diversified in its forms and now includes not only printed writing and recordings, but communication on the internet: particularly emails and on social media. Our speech is no longer confined to who we are directly speaking to, but can be shared all over the world in an instant to people we have no other contact with. We find ourselves communicating to abstract ideas of people, and not to actual individuals physically present. The accessibility to what we communicate, and the speed at which speech can be shared has changed dramatically and this has presented new challenges and new potentials. It is important to take this into account when studying Sangharakshita's exploration of the speech precepts, and apply what he says not only to our verbal communication, but to what we write and what we post online. Again, Prajnaketu's book 'Cyberloka: A Buddhist Guide to Digital Life' is very helpful on this area. You can buy a copy from windhorsepublications.com.

Questions for Reflection

1. Are you the type who needs to speak more, become less inhibited; or do you need to reflect before you speak/ write?
2. Which speech precept do you need most to work on?
3. Do you find yourself expressing yourself differently online than in-person? How? What are the conditions where you are most able to keep the speech precepts?
4. Do we see truthfulness as a vehicle for building a cohesive society/world and how is that reflected in our actual experience?
5. Should we always speak the truth?
6. What might prevent you from staying with the facts of a situation in your communication?
7. What supports us to rejoice in merits?
8. Is it necessarily bad to swear? If we do swear, what is behind it?
9. How can we give critical feedback appropriately?

The Mind Precepts

Reading

For this section please read and make summaries on the mind precepts in part 2 of 'The Ten Pillars of Buddhism' by Sangharakshita. You can buy a copy of the book from windhorsepublications.com as a separate book or as part of the Complete Works Volume 2. Alternatively it can be downloaded for free in audio or text form from freebuddhistaudio.com.

If you can, please also read chapter 5 and 6 of 'Living Ethically' by Sangharakshita. You can buy a copy of the book from windhorsepublications.com as a separate book or as part of the Complete Works Volume 17.

Questions for Reflection

1. What kind of things do we covet and why? For example things, ideas, opinions, people, power or projects?
2. How can we engage more fully in the practice of gratitude?
3. Have you found meaningful ways to simplify and practice letting go?
4. Where do we find pleasure in the Dharma life?
5. How do you experience particular aspects of hatred in your own experience?
6. How do you work with these mental states? What antidotes do you employ?
7. Is hatred ever justified?
8. How do we examine our views and develop right view? How can we move towards no view?