Tiratanaloka Handbook

The Eight Guidelines

The Eight Guidelines: Introduction

Introduction

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 The Eight Guidelines retreat at Tiratanaloka. In this handbook we give you material to study 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.

Front Image: Qian Xuan Eight Flowers, National Palace Museum, detail.

Eight Guidelines are a useful series of reflections, designed to help you reflect on your Dharma practice and your relationship to ordination into the Tiratana Buddhist Order. They aim to enable you to enter into a deeper dialogue with your kalyana mitras, study leaders and potential preceptors. They are not a checklist or imposition onto your experience. Naturally everyone experiences their Dharma life individually and we all have our own path to follow. At the same time, we practise as part of a community with certain principles and a particular approach to the Dharma. In practising as part of that Sangha, there are common themes that emerge that we can usefully explore together. The Eight Guidelines are not a checklist to tick off if you are ready for ordination, they are a series of guidelines for reflection and focussed communication that are useful for Mitras and Order Members alike.

As well as the study material in this handbook, it would be helpful if you could read Sangharakshita and Subhuti's paper 'What is the Western Buddhist Order'. You can download this in PDF format from Subhuti's website at http://subhuti.info/essays.
You can also download as a PDF or buy a book with all their 'Seven Papers' together. This will be useful for all our retreats at Tiratanaloka.: www.lulu.com

There is some optional extra study material at the beginning of each section. Some of the optional material is in the form of talks that can be downloaded from the Free Buddhist Audio website at www.freebuddhistaudio.com. These aren't by any means exhaustive - Free Buddhist Audio is growing and changing all the time so you may find other material equally relevant!

We'd ask you to study this material, 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.

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.

Reflection Questions

Am I going for refuge sincerely?

How has my understanding of going for refuge to the Three Jewels deepened?
What false refuges still hinder my going for refuge? How?
Are other motives confused with my request for ordination, such as looking for approval, joining a group or status? How do these impact on my practice?

Am I going for refuge effectively?

What steps have I taken to create conditions to better support my going for refuge?
In which circumstances or situations do I lose sight of the Refuges? Why?
In what ways am I going forth?
What still holds me back? For instance: psychological factors, objective circumstances, limited refuges, wrong views, ethics?

Further Study Material

Sangharakshita gave a talk in 1965, lecture 9, on Going for Refuge, which is part of his series on 'The Meaning of Conversion in Buddhism'. The whole series can be downloaded from www.freebuddhistaudio.com
You may also want to listen to a talk Sangharakshita gave about motivations for practice in 1966, lecture 26. It is called Nirvana and can be downloaded in audio or text from www.free-buddhistaudio.com.
Subhuti's paper Initiation into a New Life also goes into the levels of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. You can find this at www.subhuti.info

Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

text purpose written by Vajratara and Kalyacitta

> *'Many people, out of fear, flee for refuge to*
> *Sacred hills, woods, groves, trees, and shrines.*
> *In reality this is not a safe refuge.*
> *In reality this is not the best refuge.*
> *Fleeing to such a refuge*
> *One is not released from all suffering.*

Those who go for refuge to the Enlightened One,
To the Truth, and to the Spiritual Community,
For them, this is a safe refuge.
For them, this is the best refuge.
Having gone to such a refuge,
One is released from all suffering.'[1]

Sincerity of Going for Refuge

Why did we ask for ordination? There are as many reasons as there are individuals, but for all of us there is a general theme of turning away from the things that do not make us happy, the ways of living that leave us feeling cramped and confined, towards the ideals that we hold closest to our hearts, towards an openness and freedom. There is a sincere and tender wish to go for refuge to the ultimate refuges: the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. This sincere wish wants to be lived out in a whole life that reflects our ideals, and becoming an Triratna Buddhist Order Member symbolises to us the kind of life we wish to live. We may not feel ready for ordination, we may think we have a lot of work to do before ordination, we may not even fully know what joining the Order means, but we have a glimpse of where we are heading, and we want to honour that.

It's hard to say exactly what sincerely going for refuge to the Three Jewels of Buddhism actually looks like in practice. One way of describing it is that the Refuges are no longer simply attractive jewels that interest us emotionally and intellectually, but actual refuges in our lives. Turning the jewels into refuges means that we look to the Three Jewels for sustenance and support. Instead of fitting the Three Jewels around our lives, whenever we have some time free, we arrange our lives around the Three Jewels.

The Buddha is no longer an interesting historical teacher who has some wise things to say. He is our teacher and guide, and we refer to his life and teachings, and the lives and teachings of his disciples to make sense of the experiences in our lives. More than that, He is a vision of who we want to become, a glimpse of our own potential, and the potential of those around us. We have a growing sense that Enlightenment is possible.

The Dharma is more than some interesting ideas and practices that we read about and enjoy reflecting on. We put those ideas into practice and we see how they are changing us. We reflect on the Dharma teachings not just as general truths, but as specifically relevant to us. We have a glimpse of the truths they are referring to. Those glimpses of the Dharma sustain us throughout our lives.

The Sangha is no longer a community of practitioners that are putting the teachings into practice who we feel inspired by, we are part of that community. As part of that community we want to enter into real and alive communication, not just as a means to further our practice, but more because we see that it is an essential dimension of the spiritual life itself. By its nature, practice has to be shared. Sangharakshita calls this communication *'A vital mutual responsiveness on the basis of a common ideal and a common principle: a shared exploration of the spiritual world between people who are in a relationship of complete honesty and harmony.'*[2]. It is a challenge to create conditions for this kind of communication, and sometimes is challenging to be a

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[1] Dhammapada v188-192

[2] Sangharakshita, *Going for Refuge,* www.freebuddhistaudio.com, 1966

part of the communication when it happens. However when we do experience it, it gives joy and meaning to our lives and we want to be part of an Order that is ongoingly bringing about the conditions for this quality of communication.

Q: How has my understanding of going for refuge to the Three Jewels deepened?

Sincerity also implies some sense of urgency and wonder and wonder in relation the Three Jewels. The Pali for urgency is 'samvega'. Samvega means the kind of thrill we experience when in touch with our spiritual values. It is a quality we might find on pilgrimage or when confronted with death or suffering. We know how important the Three Refuges are, we are convinced of their importance in our life, and we long to realise them. This is akin to śraddhā: knowing, lucid and longing faith. So it's not just an urgency in a theoretical sense; there's a cognitive, deep knowing that Three Jewels are our refuge, an emotional feeling, even love for the Refuges, and also a volitional response to act in line with our knowing. Our sense of urgency manifests in a desire to be part of an Order that is together with us in our response to the Three Jewels. To be with others who feel about them as we do and are making a sincere effort to live them out in their lives. We realise we cannot undertake this journey alone.

Mixed Motives

While we may have a sincere response to the Three Jewels and a sincere desire to be part of an Order going for refuge to the Three Jewels, that response may be caught up in other motivations. If we lack confidence, we may want to be an Order Member to give ourselves status over others. If we get our sense of self esteem through approval, we may want to be ordained in order to join a supportive group. It was an important part of my own journey towards ordination to realise my sincere desire for ordination was mixed with a sense of wanting to be someone different, to leave behind my own self and replace it with something new and better. I realised that before ordination, I had to learn to love myself for who I was and allow ordination to reflect the best in myself, not just replace my old self with an improved one.

All of these motivations are based in the delusion that ordination is something we can have as an addition or alternative to our self identity. We resist giving ourselves up to a process of radical change. We want to 'have' ordination as another possession we can own, rather than 'become' a Dharmacharini. It is worth remembering that Dharmacharini can be translated as a 'wayfarer of the Dharma', someone who travels in the Dharma, which implies movement and change. The person who sets out on the Dharma is not the same as the person who arrives at the end of the journey.

In developing sincerity, we become more deeply aware of ourselves. We learn to drop our fronts, our masks, that we might have developed over years. We drop our our personas. That's quite a challenging thing to do, because what happens if we start to drop our mask, our persona, the way we have operated for years in order to get approval and security, is that a lot of other things emerge. In more psychological terms, we hit our shadow. What emerges may be positive, and there may be lots of repressed positivity and there may also be negative, unskilful aspects. But we have to just see all that. It happens when we start to meditate and we realise we are not the person we thought we were. We have all sorts of emotions we just have not experienced or felt able to express before.

The truth is that we don't know who we will be at the point of ordination, and where it will take us. It won't turn out like we expect at all, so the best thing to do is just set up the conditions for practice and let the Dharma do its work.

Q: Are other motives confused with my request for ordination, such as looking for approval, joining a group or status? How do these impact on my practice?

Effective Going For Refuge

If we allow the Dharma to be a force for change in our lives, we will move from provisional to effective Going for Refuge. Provisional Going for Refuge is the point of becoming a mitra. We provisionally commit to a path of Buddhist practice, putting the precepts into practice to some extent. We try being a bit more generous, even when we don't particularly feel like it, or maybe we put someone with whom we are having difficulties in the fourth stage of the mettā bhavanā. In doing this, we find that these practices do work - they have a positive effect on us and those around us, so we're encouraged to go a bit further in putting theory into practice. Gradually it will becomes more natural to behave in this way at least some of the time.

At the point of ordination, we are effectively Going for Refuge. As our faith and commitment to the Three Jewels grows it is expressed in the way that we live our life, and the deeper that faith and commitment becomes, the more tangibly it is played out in our actions of body speech and mind, so that eventually there is a congruency between our conviction in the Dharma and the way that we live. With a deepening faith there is a sense of integration around the Three Jewels: our life becomes a playing out of our core values, and our life increasingly expresses the principles of the Dharma. We have a glimpse of the truth behind the expressions of the Dharma and those glimpses become more sustained so that we feel that in effectively Going for Refuge, we are aiming for real Going for Refuge, or transcendent insight. Going for Refuge doesn't settle down at any particular point, it is dynamic and moving.

Although we may be sincere in our Going for Refuge, we may not yet be effective. There may be obstacles that prevent our sincere motivation from being the decisive force in our lives. Our lives may not be congruent with our conviction. We could look at this in terms of the power that false refuges have over us, or anything that holds us back that we need to go forth from.

False refuges are those things that we seek sustenance and satisfaction from, even though they cannot give us satisfaction. This could be because they are actively harmful, such as addictive cycles of drink, drugs and sex, or because they are limited in some way, such as seeking refuge in a career or romantic partners. What we are looking for is an ideal that we can follow, a path and a community to join, but we look for those in the wrong places. In doing so we can cause ourselves and others suffering, or we can just waste time.

Q: What false refuges still hinder my going for refuge? How?

False refuges are an inevitable part of life until a certain stage of spiritual progress. However, we can be aware of them and why we get so caught up with them. We can take an honest appraisal of what really gives us satisfaction in this life. Most of all, we can encourage a sense of satisfaction and joy in the Dharma life, so that in the end, the Three Jewels become so compelling and attractive that false refuges loose their power.

In an honest appraisal, we do have to look at what in our lives is holding us back from making our sincere Going for Refuge real. What are the external and internal factors that get in the way of actualising our ideal? In that appraisal, what might we need to go forth from? Are there some things we can't directly give up, but we can influence?

Our outer world

Living situation

We come to the Three Jewels from all walks of life, in a multitude of life situations. Some lifestyles are objectively simpler than others and will support our Dharma practice more easily. Is our living situation supportive of our ethical values? We might live with other Buddhists who support us in our practice. We might live alone and without dependents our choices have less of an impact on others. If we are living in a family situation we will find that we need to involve our family members in the changes that we want to make. We may not be supported in our aspirations when at home. Will it be acceptable to others when we no longer want to eat meat and fish? Or do we live around people who take drugs, play loud music at unsociable times, or are just unfriendly?

Livelihood

Our work situation may be conducive to a Buddhist lifestyle. We may already be in a job that supports ethical values and a healthy work/life balance, but for some this might not be the case. We may have been in a career for a long time and be very established in our job. Sometimes when we get more involved in Buddhism we start to realise that our job doesn't support us in the way that we want to live. We earn a living, so we are supported in this sense, but the lifestyle we live as a result of our job may start to conflict with our aspirations. This can put us in a painful dilemma. We may be required to perform tasks that compromise our ethical values, or the hours that we put in to our work mean that we have little time and energy left over to get to the Buddhist centre regularly, keep up a daily meditation practice or go away on retreat. Or perhaps our job causes us so much stress that we find it difficult to maintain positive states of mind.

Relationships

We will probably come to the Dharma with a network of existing relationships - family relationships, friendships and often a sexual/romantic relationship. As our commitment to Dharma practice grows we may find that we begin to see the nature of those relationships more clearly. Only a Buddha will be completely skilful in relation to others, so we will undoubtedly see attachment and selfishness as well as love, kindness and generosity. As we become more self aware we start to see where those unskilful tendencies arise and will want to develop our relationships in the light of the Dharma. Sometimes this can be painful if the other person, whether it be a family member, friend or partner likes things the way they are and finds it difficult to accept change. We need to bring kindness and understanding to those people in our lives who are naturally affected by our practice of the Dharma. Some people will be more able to accommodate the Dharma in our life than others.

Q: What steps have I taken to create conditions to better support my going for refuge?

Our inner world

Some people get involved in Buddhism knowing themselves to some extent, others find that whilst they thought they knew themselves, they discover new things about themselves. As we develop awareness, practice meditation, the five precepts and make friends with others in the Sangha, we begin to notice the tendencies that are present in our interactions with people, or the reactions that arise in a particular situation. We might start to see traits that get in the way of straightforward communication, or that cause us to fall into negative mental states. Developing awareness in this way is an important part of Dharma practice as it helps us to take responsibility for ourselves and be creative in our dealings with the world and other people,

rather than falling into reactivity and habitual unskilful patterns. We talk about this as developing more individuality, breaking out of our attachment to the group, standing alone, confident to be who we are rather than colluding or polarising with others.

Most people find it helpful to look at their past conditioning and get a sense of what has made them who they are in the present. Alongside positive habits and qualities there may be tendencies, *saṃskāras*, and views, *diṭṭhi*, that have been in operation for a very long time which don't serve us well now. Shining the light of awareness will help us to see those tendencies more clearly and find a way of acting creatively with them. Studying together in a mitra group and going on study retreats will also help us uncover views about ourselves and world that we probably didn't even know we had. Those tendencies and views that are less positive can hinder us in deepening our Going for Refuge, so it is important that we know what they are. There will be numerous ways in which we have been conditioned to be who we are in the present. Below are some questions to help you reflect on your own conditioning.

General childhood conditioning: *What were your family expectations and values? How have they influenced the way you live?*
Cultural conditioning: *What are the views within the culture you were born into or ethnic background? How do they effect your practice of the Dharma?*
Religious conditioning: *Were you brought up in a particular faith group? What effect did this have? Did your family have strong views about religion?*
Sexual conditioning: *What are your views about sex and sexual preference? Have you noticed particular tendencies in sexual relationships?*
Gender conditioning: *How do you feel about your gender? Do you notice habitual ways of relating to other genders?*
Money: *Do you notice views about yours/others financial status? How do you relate to money?*
Guilt: *Do you notice a feeling of guilt in relation to any of the above? Where in your life do you experience guilt generally?*

Once we become aware of whatever is holding us back we can find ways of overcoming those obstacles, whether they are circumstances in our outer world or particular tendencies within us. Some things we cannot change completely, but we can let the Dharma influence all the areas of our lives: inner and outer, in ways we couldn't have ever imagined. We could look at it as letting Three Jewels perfume our lives. Some things we will also have to go forth from and we may have made big changes in our lives already, as well as small victories. It is our friends who can help us in that journey.

Q: In which circumstances or situations do I lose sight of the Refuges? Why?
Q: In what ways am I going forth?
Q: What still holds me back? For instance: psychological factors, objective circumstances, limited refuges, wrong views, ethics?

Setting up good conditions
Part of effective Going for Refuge is a deep understanding of the importance of conditions. Effective Going for Refuge is only Going for Refuge under most conditions, and we can fall back from our sincere motivation. It may be humiliating to realise that our Going for Refuge is less effective in some situations that others. We may find that we Go for Refuge very intensively on retreat, and we feel the benefit of that, but when we are with our family, friends or colleagues we forget to practice the precepts and meditation is a distant memory! As Milarepa says *'It's*

very hard to find someone who can complete the Dharma practice[3]*'*. If we are to sustain our Dharma life, we need to put into place good conditions. For most people this will mean ensuring certain factors are in place:

Regular contact with spiritual friends
A consistent and deepening meditation practice
A lifestyle that supports the maintenance of positive mental states
Regular nourishment from sources of inspiration - Dharma study, nature, the arts, going on retreat etc

We have to know ourselves and know what conditions sustain us, and what conditions undermine us, and what we can do about that. We have to be able to allow our sincere motivation to become effective: to be channelled into all the areas of our life, and eventually to lead us towards ordination and beyond.

[3] Sangharakshita, *Milarepa and Discipleship 2*, Complete Works ???

Reflection Questions

What aspects of the ethical precepts are currently alive in my daily life?
What is my understanding of the basis of Buddhist ethics + the principle of karma?
To what extent do I recognise my unskilful behaviour/mental states? What changes have I made?
How am I cultivating the positive speech precepts in my daily life (including in electronic communication)?
Are there significant ethical breaches that I have not confessed or resolved?
What is my understanding and experience of confession practice? Do I apologise and make amends where necessary? Have I shown the capacity for forgiveness?

Further Study Material

We look at ethics in more detail on our 'Ethics' retreat at Tiratanaloka. In preparation for that we will ask you to read The Ten Pillars, found in Sangharakshita's Complete Works Vol. 2.
For more about confession, read Subhuti, Remorse and Confession in the Spiritual Community found at www.freebuddhistaudio.com

Ethical Practice

Text purpose written by Candraprabha

> "Going for Refuge, or commitment to the Three Jewels, is one's life blood as a Buddhist. Observance of the Precepts represents the circulation of that blood through every fibre of one's being. By its very nature blood must circulate. If it does not circulate this means that the organism to which it belongs is dead, and that the blood itself, stagnating, will soon cease to be blood. Similarly, by its very nature the Going for Refuge must find expression in its observance of the Precepts. If it does not find such expression this means that as a Buddhist one is virtually dead and the Going for Refuge itself, becoming more and more mechanical, will soon cease to be effectively such."[4]

This quote from a talk given by Sangharakshita on the sixteenth anniversary of the founding of the Triratna Buddhist Order, outlines the deep significance of the 10 precepts taken at ordination and their crucial relationship with the act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. As aspiring and existing members of the Order, we're constantly working on deepening our direct un-

[4] Sangharakshita, The Ten Pillars of Buddhism, found in Complete Works vol 2, Windhorse Publications

derstanding of Going for Refuge and so it follows that our practice of the precepts too will change, deepen, broaden and find new ways of sustaining and transforming us.

Sangharakshita describes the 10 precepts taken at ordination in 3 ways; as ethical principles - *kuśala-dharmas*, rules of training - *śikṣāpadas* - and ordination vows, *Mūla-Prāṭimokṣa*.[5]

What are the 10 precepts as opposed to the 5 which we recite on becoming a mitra and in other rituals? Firstly, the fourth precept is expanded into four precepts relating to speech. In addition to undertaking to abstain from false speech, we also undertake to abstain from speech that is harsh, speech that is frivolous or unhelpful and speech that causes disharmony. In their positive forms this means communicating in ways that are truthful, kindly, helpful and harmonising.

The second difference in the two sets of precepts is that the 5th precept by which we undertake to abstain from taking intoxicants - *surāmeraya maja pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṁ samādiyāmi* - is expanded into 3 precepts concerned with abandoning those mental states that cloud our minds - the poisons of covetousness, hatred and mistaken views that prevent us from seeing things as they really are.

In considering our understanding of the significance of ethical practice, we're invited within the framework of the Eight Guidelines to reflect on a number of questions which we'll look at in turn.

What is my understanding of the basis of Buddhist ethics + the principle of karma?
One formulation of the Buddhist path is the Threefold Way of ethics, meditation, and wisdom. This formulation implies that our behaviour, our states of mind and our ability to see the truth of conditioned arising are all intrinsically linked. We are invited to examine how our ethical practice both informs and is informed by our ability to transform our consciousness. Buddhist ethics, or as Bhante terms it, 'natural morality', isn't just about making the world or the spiritual community a better place, nor is it about getting some reward in the future, nor, of course, is it about having to toe the line until you get ordained, at which point you can do what you like - though that can be tempting thought!

So what is it about? Here are some words that may be familiar to you - the opening lines from the Dhammapāda.

> *'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 cartwheel 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."*[6]

These lines define a fundamental aspect of Buddhist ethical practice - it's the mental state behind the action that determines if that action is skilful, *kusala*, or unskilful *akusala*, and whether

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[5] ibid

[6] Dhammapāda, v1-2. Translation Sangharakshita, Complete Works vol. 15, Windhorse Publications

it's going to create happiness or suffering, going to lead us to freedom or towards further bondage, going to help us see the way things are more clearly or just deepen our delusion. And this is challenging! Why? It's challenging because it makes it hard to have simple 'rules' about what outward behaviour is skilful, because the onus is on us to examine the mental states behind our actions and our communication.

These lines from the Dhammapāda also tell us that our actions will have consequences for us, producing either suffering or happiness and this is a straightforward statement about the law of karma. In the Abhidharma, there is a whole category of wrong view regarding not understanding actions and their consequences including "the wilful refusal to recognise that one's relationship with others, as well as with oneself, has an ethical dimension. Our actions affect others, and they affect us too, not only in the immediate future, but with respect to future lives as well."[7] You may have come across the image of the Wheel of Life which shows how our actions in one moment, one life or several lives modify our experiences and can lead to freedom or further bondage.

One of the important distinctions we have to learn to make is between volitional action, karma, and the fruit of action, *karma-vipāka*. There is a difference between experiences or feelings that arise as a result of past actions, and our actions themselves that are conditioning our future feelings and experiences. We can distinguish between 'experiencing', and 'doing'. This can help us understand more clearly where we can change or modify our behaviour and where we are simply experiencing the fruits of past actions. The fruits of past actions may be deeply felt as pleasant or unpleasant, but they are karmically neutral. Distinguishing between action and the fruit of action is by no means a straightforward process at times and often needs honest yet kindly examination of our experiences and actions.

Q: What is the difference between karma and karma-vipāka, and how do we distinguish between them in our experience?

The law of karma though is not a straightforward matter of causation nor is it the only level on which conditionality operates. There are other non-karmic relationships within conditioned processes which give rise to certain experiences and these are defined by Sangharakshita as the *niyāmas*. The *niyāmas* are described in detail by Subhuti who calls them *"the five different classes or orders of regularities by which conditioned is bound to conditions"*.[8]

Having looked at the principles behind Buddhist ethics, we'll now look at the other reflection points and some practical ways in which we can bring our practice of the precepts into more focus as part of preparing to join the Order.

How are the precepts alive in my daily life?

One of the most obvious ways of considering how the precepts are alive in daily life is to start to notice more and more the ways in which we act in both creatively and reactively and to investigate, with interest, the mental states behind those actions. Meditation can be a good starting

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[7] Sangharakshita, Know Your Mind Chapter 8. Found in Complete Works vol.17, Windhorse Publications

[8] Subhuti, Revering and Relying upon the Dharma. www.subhuti.info

point for noticing the emotional tone of our being and it's helpful to keep a diary so that particular patterns can become clearer.

One quote from Sangharakshita I really like is *"The intellect, the rational logical process, can clarify your thinking and give you a basis for reflection, but it cannot be ultimately decisive. What matters is the quality of your being, not the technical correctness of your thinking."*[9]

I think this can be helpful in getting a sense of how we can start to think about our ethical practice in day-to-day life. It shouldn't be a hard-edged reckoning of what is positive and what is negative - rather like depictions of the Last Judgement - but more a sense of our ability to be creative and connected as opposed to the dukkha of feeling isolated and oppositional.

When I first did an ethics retreat as a mitra at Tiratanaloka, I discovered, rather painfully, two attitudes or emotional responses to my own behaviour. On the one hand I felt quite confident that I understood ethics, I knew right from wrong, I wasn't too bad as I was and even if I wasn't perfect I was more ethical than lots of other people I knew. On the other hand, I realized when I came up against my own unskilfulness that I sometimes believed I was so deeply flawed that it was very hard to acknowledge what I'd done because it seemed so huge. I could be sum up these two attitudes as "I'm fine as I am" vs "I'm completely hopeless".

I realised at some point (with much help from my friends) that there needed to be a softening, more kindness around both these strongly emotional views in order to be able to change. I think that both attitudes were coming from a lack of real confidence - in the Dharma and in myself - and in a sense of 'me' as either 'good' or 'bad'. The answer to both these sorts of views is more deeply seeing ourselves as a process rather than a fixed point either higher or lower than others.

In a talk by Ratnaghosha he says *"We need to practise the precepts from the heart. And that means having a heart that is warmed by metta."* And he further describes self-metta as *" a realistic self-appraisal in a spirit of good will and in a context of development. Critical without being undermining, proud without being big-headed."*[10]

In the Dvedhāvitakka Sutta the Buddha says "Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisatta, it occurred to me: 'Suppose that I divide my thoughts into two classes. Then I set on one side thoughts of sensual desire, thoughts of ill will, and thoughts of cruelty, and I set on the other side thoughts of renunciation, thoughts of non-ill will, and thoughts of non-cruelty."[11] He seems to have been able to appraise his own mental states with a high degree of objectivity and positivity, even when encountering those which fell into the first category. It can be hard to do this when we are caught up in painful feelings and negative thoughts, but even these can come to be a starting point for fruitful investigations.

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[9] Sangharakshita, Milarepa and the Art of Discipleship, The Complete Works vol 18.

[10] Ratnaghosa, www.freebuddhistaudio.com

[11] Nanamoli, Bhikkhu, The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: New Translation. (Kindle Locations 3559-3562). Wisdom Publications. Kindle Edition.

To what extent do I recognise my unskilful behaviour/mental states? What changes have I made?

There can be various obstacles to our ability to recognise unskilful behaviour and mental states. Perhaps we feel overwhelmed by painful feelings and there isn't much space before this leads to a reactive response. Sometimes our unskilful responses are defensive and make us feel temporarily more secure, for example if we blame someone else for a difficult situation rather than acknowledging our own contribution. Sometimes there's just an enjoyment in the unskilfulness, such as when we gossip or speculate about someone else. And we can have views of which we're unaware that cloud our judgement about what is skilful or unskilful in the first place.

One thing that can be of help is to consider our own ethical conditioning, prior to coming across the Dharma. It's unlikely that you came to Buddhist ethics with no opinion or view about what is acceptable to do and what is not. Maybe you had an 'eat, drink and be merry' attitude to life - just get through it with as much enjoyment as possible. Perhaps you are an ex- Christian or come from a family or society with strong Christian values and that has coloured what feels right to you. Or you might be more at the humanist end of things - someone who just believes, for some intuitive reason, that we should act ethically in order to make the world a better place for ourselves and others. Those beliefs will affect our view of what Buddhist ethics really is. And it will also affect our ability, positively or negatively, to practice the precepts fully. It may be helpful for you to become more conscious what your ethical code of values has been, how it has played out in your life so far.

I think friendship is an indispensable part of helping us recognise the ethical areas that need our attention. We effect and are affected by others, and it's a great generosity to try and kindly reflect back those areas where we think our friends may be acting unskilfully. This in not always easy but it's good to try and develop confidence in this area - both giving and receiving helpful communication. Sometimes understanding others' lives more deeply, for example, by telling our life stories to one another, can really give a good context for this. If we meet in a group with others who have asked for ordination, we could also tell our 'ethical biographies', that is our life story in terms of our ethical behaviour and values.

Making changes to our behaviour can take time if we have deep-rooted tendencies or particularly painful psychological conditioning. Sometimes we might need other sorts of help to address these more directly.

As Bhante says *"The fact is that at certain key points in the spiritual life there will probably be a degree of discomfort, not least because having to undo long-established habits of body, speech and mind goes against the grain of human nature"*[12]

We also need to develop faith in practices such as the mettā bhāvana to transform mental states and we can also make efforts to practice the positive precepts. It's important to rejoice in those times where we keep the precepts and in the changes we see in our lives. Rejoicing in merits is a beautiful practice which can be a real antidote to despondency.

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[12] Sangharakshita, Living Ethically, The Complete Works vol 17. Windhorse Publications

How am I cultivating the positive speech precepts in my daily life (including in online communication)?

There is a huge amount one could say about the speech precepts and there is a lot of very helpful material available on the subject, for example Chapter 4 of Sangharakshita's Living Ethically. Here, I'm just going to open up the topic of online communication.

We're at a very particular time in the Triratna Buddhist Community. On the one hand, our community and Order are continuing to grow and expand. When I was ordained in 2002, it was 34 years since the founding of the Order and there were just 1000 OMs. In the years since then, that number has risen to over 2000 and there are over 1000 women who have asked for ordination outside of India and the same number within India. So our community and our Order is growing at a faster and faster rate.

The Order is so large that we no longer all know one another personally, and that is going to continue to be more and more the case as time goes on. One of the challenges we face is keeping some sense of coherence, a sense of what it means to be a member of this community. And so how we communicate, how we keep in touch with one another, is changing and will continue to change. One of the biggest changes that has come about in recent years is the need for online forums for people to be in touch.

We have The Buddhist Centre Online which is a fantastic resource for Triratna. There are also a number of FaceBook groups that are used to debate a variety of topics and no doubt the use of online forums will continue to grow. The use of online communication means that we are increasingly communicating with, or even just reading things by, people we don't personally know and I imagine this will be more and more the case as time goes on.

This all gives us many more opportunities to practise and to break the speech precepts. And I believe that our practice of the speech precepts is, and will continue to be, a vital part of the harmony, the prosperity and even the survival of the Sangha.

"Speech which has four characteristics is speech well spoken, blameless and not censured by the wise; namely, the speech of a monk who speaks only what is wholesome and not what is unwholesome, who speaks only what is worthy and not what is unworthy, who speaks only what is pleasant, and not what is unpleasant, who speaks only what is truthful and not what is untruthful"[13]

It's often said these days that we live in a 'post factual' or 'post-truth' world. Perhaps you've seen this in action, particularly in relation to the news. Something happens in the world. Then someone denies that it happened. People simply say "fake news". There is no shared sense of what the truth is - the debate is no longer about whether something was ethical or not, acceptable or not, but actually whether it happened or not. And when that happens, there is a sense of chaos, a sense that anything could happen, that society itself could break down. In the 10 Pillars Bhante says "in any human society in which untruthful speech predominates communication will break down. Without truthfulness society itself cannot exist" I used to think "Really?" when I read this, but I can see it happening and I think we need to be careful that this culture doesn't creep into our spiritual community too.

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[13] Sutta-Nipāta 3.3 Subhāsita Sutta. Trans H Saddhatissa

There's the disinhibiting effect of being online - we can find ourselves saying things we'd never say to someone face to face. There is an online culture which can be almost bullying - someone posts something online about something they are unhappy about and then everyone joins in. There's a phenomenon I have noticed that has crept into our culture; something happens that's difficult and then instead of getting into communication with the person we're upset with, we can post something online from our perspective, without asking them theirs, and it can be an invitation to others to join in criticizing the person, or group of people, who we're upset with. I've heard too comments that are sarcastic, a bit biting, that seem to be aimed at people who are seen or imagined to be the 'holders' of certain views.

It can be hard to speak up, can be hard to be open about our own inspiration if there is an atmosphere of negativity. We may find we don't want to be the 'positive' person in case we become the target of criticism ourselves. We can end up being a passive 'reader' of online debate but being unclear about our own views and fearing to make them known. If this is the case, I'd suggest checking things out with people we know and trust. I think situations can arise where people have 2 slightly separate Sanghas - the online one where we read and post about difficult issues, and a local one where we are more in touch with people directly. What could this mean for the future? It's hard to be sure.

On the other hand, kindly speech creates an atmosphere where it's ok to admit our failings. If someone has done something unskilful, calling them out online (or anywhere else) isn't going to make it easy for them to admit what they have done and change.

Kindly speech - *priyavādita* - is one of the *samgrahavastus*, the means of unification. It creates a certain sort of atmosphere, in ethical terms it creates a place where we can let our more "unacceptable" sides come out into the light and then start to change them.

Are there any significant ethical breaches that I have not confessed or resolved?
An ethics retreat at Tiratanaloka an be a helpful place to shed light on ethical breaches which we might find weighing on us. Having a sense that there is something 'hidden' from the past that others don't know about can create a sense of shame that can undermine both our confidence and our relationships with others. It may take quite a bit of time and kindness to shine a light on such areas and it may also take some reflection and discussion to really have a sense of what a significant ethical breach actually is, especially if we are prone to irrational guilt. As we approach ordination it can often be a time to reflect on whether there is anything we have not been able to share with our friends or our private preceptor and, if this is the case, to reflect on why that might be.

If it is an area of unskilfulness that we've not been able to come to terms with ourselves (or is ongoing) this can affect our friendships. "As long as there is this sacred area of one's life that is off-limits as far as one's friends are concerned, one is effectively closing oneself off from them. One becomes increasingly out of touch - not because of one's unskilful activity (otherwise we should all be out of touch with each other most of the time) but because one insists on holding back from communicating, to those who are supposed to be one's friends, something that is evidently a very pressing problem."[14]

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[14] Sangharakshita Know Your Mind, The Complete Works vol 17. Windhorse Publications

If there are areas where there are unresolved breaches of the precepts in relation to others within the sangha, then this can damage the harmonious working of the spiritual community and the Order and it is thus important to do what we can to acknowledge and repair these.

It's important to remember that we will break the precepts! Being ready for ordination doesn't mean being skilful all the time. It means having, and letting people see that you have, an ethical sensitivity and that you know what to do when you do break the precepts. So it's not "will I break the precepts?"but "what am I breaking and why?" We need to get away from guilt in order to have this sort of friendly enquiry.

What is my understanding and experience of confession practice?

People can often feel apprehensive about the practice of confession, especially if they have experienced it in another religious context in which there is fear around judgement and the consequences of wrong-doing. However in Buddhist terms, confession is a very ethically positive and skilful action which is based not on guilt and fear but on the positive Buddhist states of hrī (sometimes translated as self-respect or positive shame) and *apatrāpya* (respect for wise opinion). Confession involves sharing one's specific breaches of the 10 precepts to others in the spiritual community, who will ritually acknowledge your confession without collusion or judgement. Judgement is in fact often what we fear, but what we usually encounter is sympathy, understanding and respect.

A helpful summary of the significance and purpose of confession is here: *"In Buddhism one is encouraged to confess to someone who is able to receive the confession, this is important. That person should, at a minimum, understand the ethical precepts we follow, and ideally should have some experience in following them. The point of confession is to experience remorse, to reflect on the consequences of our actions, with the hope that it helps us to do something more creative ourselves in future. In practice this results in a sense of relief. Confession does not, and cannot absolve us from responsibility for our actions, the consequences of which will still manifest. If we're sincerely Going for Refuge then we're going to try to behave ethically. An important aspect of this is to acknowledge our failures and to learn from them. Confession is indispensable in this process."*[15]

You may be part of a group of others training for ordination in which confession is practised, or you may have a one-to-one confession practice with a good friend in the Sangha.

If you come on an ethics retreat at Tiratanaloka you'll have the opportunity to hear more about Buddhist confession and to try it out in the context of looking at the precepts in more detail. It can also help to study together with your friends something like Subhuti's paper on 'Remorse and Confession in the Spiritual Life'[16] before starting the practice.

Do I apologise and make amends where necessary? Am I capable of forgiving others?

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[15] Jayarava, Confession in Buddhism, an online post which can be found at jayarava.blogspot.com

[16] Subhuti, Remorse and Confession in the Spiritual Community found at www.freebuddhistaudio.com

In the Buddha's day there was a celebration within the Sangha at the end of each rainy season, the first part of which involved everybody asking for forgiveness from others. They accepted there would have been inevitable misunderstandings and tensions during their time together and each person - from the most senior to the most junior - would apologise to everyone else.

Perhaps this point doesn't require too much explanation. Apology and making amends are crucial elements of creating and sustaining harmony in the Sangha. They are also more than this - they are ways of loosening the 'tighter' sense of self that comes from unskilful action. One could say they are ways of letting go of any advantage we have gained by acting in the power mode[17]. Forgiveness too is a practice that works strongly against a sense of self. "After all, what is forgiveness? It is to let someone off the consequences of their actions in terms of one's own personal reaction to it. It is to say that in effect the matter is now closed, the slate is wiped clean. No vicious circle of action and reaction, offence and retaliation has been initiated"[18]

If one feels very let down or hurt by someone else's actions then it can take some time to get to the point of forgiveness and we might have to be careful not to come to a point of prematurely thinking we can do this. On the other hand, we can try not to let the unskilfulness of others be an occasion for ongoing unskilfulness in ourselves. It's important to see forgiveness as a creative act in which we have the initiative, otherwise there is the danger we can feel that we are somehow a victim, or powerless in the situation. Once can both acknowledge the effect of others' actions while still letting go of a reactive response.

Finally

At the time of ordination, in the kuti with our private preceptor, we will take the 10 precepts as ordination vows. At this point, our preceptor will feel confident that we can work effectively in our ethical practice and we will feel confident that we can take the precepts from her. We'll be undertaking not only to transform ourselves, but also to share that understanding with all other members of the Triratna Buddhist Order. The precepts give us a common language to communicate about our lives and about what is of most value to us. What could be more beautiful?

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[17] For more on this term 'power mode' see Sangharakshita's description of the first precept in The Ten Pillars of Buddhism, The Complete Works vol 2. Windhorse Publications

[18] Sangharakshita, Know Your Mind, The Complete Works vol 17 Windhorse Publications

Reflection Questions

What is my understanding of an effective meditation practice? Do I have one?
Have I attended a meditation retreat recently? Have I done a solitary retreat?
How do I work with my mind inside and outside meditation, including the cultivation of mindfulness and metta?
What is my understanding of shamatha and vipashyana? How do I practise them?
How do I work on cultivating and maintaining skilful mental states?
How do I work on preventing and transforming unskillful mental states?

Further Study Material

It would be helpful if you listened to Sangharakshita's original talk on 'A System of Meditation' given in 1978.
You could also listen to his talk 'What Meditation Really is' given in 1975.
These can be found on www.freebuddhistaudio.com
Subhuti's paper 'Initiation into a New Life' also goes into the aspects of the Dharma life. You can find this at www.subhuti.info

Effective Meditation and Mindtraining

Text purpose written by Vajratārā

Here perpetual incense burns;
The heart to meditation turns,
And all delights and passions spurns.

A thousand brilliant hues arise,
More lovely than the evening skies,
And pictures paint before our eyes.

All the spirit's storm and stress
Is stilled into a nothingness,
And healing powers descend and bless.

Refreshed, we rise and turn again
To mingle with this world of pain,
As on roses falls the rain. [19]

We join the Order when it's recognised by the Order that we are Going for Refuge effectively. That Going for Refuge is expressed in the systematic transformation of our actions of body, speech and mind. For most people that transformation will be enabled by meditating regularly and to some effect. However, simple though that sounds, meditation can be an area that raises a lot of questions as one deepens one's practice and moves towards Ordination. What is meditation? What is meditation for? What constitutes effective meditation? Do I need to get into the *dhyānas* to become an Order Member? How 'good' does my meditation have to be? What do I need to do to make my meditation effective? What meditation or *sadhāna* practice do I have to take up at Ordination? In this section I will attempt to answer these questions by setting out a few basic principles that we can explore further in our groups.

What is meditation?

Meditation has become a common household phrase and has come to mean many different things from practising mindfulness in every day activities, to entering into superconscious states. Sometimes these different ways of understanding what meditation is can bring confusion to even experienced meditators.

The most basic definition that Sangharakshita has given for meditation is 'the uninterrupted production of skilful mental states' [20]. This gives a much greater scope for meditation than just what we do on the cushion. We can always be producing skilful mental states in all our activities. From this perspective, meditation is a training for a general life approach. We can produce skilful mental states indirectly in activities such as daily mindfulness, being in nature, exercise, involving ourselves in the arts or creative activity. However, meditation is also a direct method on working on the mind itself and in meditation we are able to cultivate skilful mental states directly in a way that is more difficult outside of meditation.

Concentration, absorption and insight

Sangharakshita has also talked about meditation as a direct training of the mind towards progressively higher states of being and consciousness [21]. This might sound a bit abstract, but in the Buddhist tradition it is seen as a natural capacity of the mind. Sangharakshita calls these different ways of understanding the word meditation 'concentration, absorption and insight' [22].

Concentration is when we unify our energies around an object of concentration. Usually our interests are scattered and divided. Our attention moves to different mind-objects in quick succession: now the breath, now thoughts about work, now the pain in our foot and so on. When

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[19] Sangharakhista, 'Meditation' from 'Collected Poems'

[20] Sangharakshita, 'Peace is a Fire'

[21] Sangharakshita, 'What Meditation Really Is', lecture 1960

[22] ibid

we are concentrated, we unify our attention around a consistent object. This is not an enforcing of will, but a gathering of interest. Interestingly Sangharakshita says it is a matter of understanding:

'Concentration is much more a question of understanding. Not of exerting will-power, not of forcible fixation of attention, but of understanding; that is to say of understanding that we do have a multiplicity of interests; that some of these interests are in conflict, and that these sometimes conflicting interests share among them our psychic energy. It is for this reason that we are unable to concentrate for long upon any one thing, any one object, any one point.'[23]

This highlights the importance of becoming interested in the meditation. One way into that interest is to see meditation as a mythical space: the hearth of our Dharma practice, where we can engage directly with our deepest values, our heart's desire, rather than a chore demanded of us if we are to be a 'good Buddhist'. We could feel that in some way we are 'bringing the mind home', to a place that reflects who we most are and who we aspire to be. We could feel we are entering into a mysterious realm where 'perpetual incense burns' and we turn our heart towards that realm.

Q: What is your motivation to practice meditation? How do you think of/envision your practice?

As we turn our heart fully towards meditation, we begin to enter absorption. This is when we leave behind the hindrances and enter into *dhyāna*[24]. Consciousness becomes more subtle and refined, or as Sangharakshita says, 'absorption represents the unification of the mind on higher and ever higher levels of consciousness and being.'[25] The higher levels of consciousness and being can also be understood as moving from the *kāmaloka* to the rūpa and *arūpaloka*.

The *kāmaloka* is the world of sensuous experience and is defined as grasping at external sensory input to bring satisfaction. This is our ordinary state of consciousness. Our sensory experience is interpreted as something as we either want, or want to avoid. This can lead to tension, and it is the tension between our experience of ourselves as a subject and the world outside as object that characterises consciousness in the *kāmaloka*.

When we enter the *dhyānas*, our consciousness becomes more subtle, and we enter into the world of 'mental and spiritual form' or archetypes. There is still sensory experience, but it is of a more deeply significant nature, symbolic rather than literal. We access the *rūpaloka* through meditation, but also through art, literature, music, symbols, images and myth. Wherever the world of our sensory experience seems more alive, more colourful, something to be contemplated rather than grasped. We ourselves as perceived subject also seem more creative and responsive. We experience the joy of letting go of the tension between subject and object. Perhaps this is the meaning of Sangharakshita's poem when he says that

'A thousand brilliant hues arise,

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[23] Sangharakshita, 'Meditation Versus Psychotherapy', lecture, 1970

[24] Dhyāna literally means 'to think over' and means the states of absorption that can be reached in meditation. For more information see Sangharakshita, The Survey of Buddhism, Chapter 1, Section 17, contained in the Complete Works Vol.1, Windhorse Publications

[25] Sangharakshita, 'What Meditation Really Is', lecture, 1960

More lovely than the evening skies,
And pictures paint before our eyes.'

If pursued further, meditation can lead us to the mysterious *arūpaloka*, where our experience of subject and object are no longer in opposition. Our consciousness feels more expansive, and our experience of the world becomes formless.

''All the spirit's storm and stress
Is stilled into a nothingness,
And healing powers descend and bless.'

Meditation practices themselves help us move into those different realms and experience ourselves and our world very differently. We may not consider ourselves as necessarily familiar with all the dhyānas, but perhaps we can consider that we have experienced some of the 'flavours' of the different lokas. In meditation, we experience our mind changing, feeling more expansive, joyful and creative, less dependent on external stimulus for happiness. Through meditation our experience of our world changes. We see the world through different eyes. Our experience of the world becomes more vibrant and alive, no longer limited by a literal and utilitarian understanding. In this state of mind, the flower is not just a flower, but expressive of reality itself. Those experiences are not confined to meditation. We can glimpse the rūpaloka through the arts, nature and contemplation of images and symbols.

When our mind is more concentrated, open and expansive, even without going through all the dhyānas, we can contemplate reality more deeply. The potential of the mind is limitless, and we can see into the nature of things as they really are. Our mind can be liberated from greed, hatred and delusion. In reflecting on meditation in relation to ordination it is not that every Order Member should be in the dhyānas regularly (though it might be useful to reflect on whether we are or not), it is more that we have a sense of our mind and our relationship to our experience changing, and we are in touch with the limitless potential of consciousness.

Q: What is your experience of higher states of consciousness?

Meditation practices that helps us cultivate an absorbed mind are called *śamatha*, or meditations that help calm the mind. These practices prepare the mind, enabling our mind to become malleable and creative and able to concentrate more fully on a chosen object of reflection. Meditation practices that are more directed at reflecting on particular aspects of reality, such as the *laksanas*, are known as *vipaśyana*, or insight, meditations. In Buddhist meditation the point of meditation is not to have a more refined consciousness for its own sake, but to use that consciousness to reflect on reality.

In the Order we are moving from 'effective' to 'real' Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. This means having some direct awareness of the nature of Reality. This is reflected in our meditation practice which will have elements of concentration, absorption and insight.

What is an 'effective meditation practice'?

Looking at meditation in this way helps us to understand what meditation is for. It is to help us prepare our mind to reflect on reality itself. An effective meditation is one where we make

some movement towards a a deeper understanding of reality. Preparing our mind may not be that straightforward and we may not move through concentration, absorption and insight in a linear progression. What happens when we start to meditate is we glimpse both the potential of our mind, and also become more aware of mental states that are distracted, painful, dull or even shocking. It is important that we also engage with these states of mind rather than repressing them as getting in the way of a successful meditation. Difficult states of mind are also aspects of reality, and the purpose of meditation is to not simply become aware of our heights, but also our depths. The light and the shadow.

It is very common for people to say of themselves that they are 'not a good meditator', but when you actually ask them about their practice, they are exploring a very dynamic inner landscape, transforming sometimes difficult mental states and gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of mind. The view 'I am not a good meditator' seems to be the main thing that gets in the way . We need to be careful of setting ourselves an impossible standard that we cannot conform to. At the same time, we need to not place limits on our experience. Both are a manifestation of the hindrance of doubt: doubt that actions have consequences and that transformation of mental states are possible. In this regard it might be useful to reflect on the verse from the Dhammapāda:

> 'Do not underestimate good, thinking 'It will not approach me.' A water-pot becomes full by the constant falling of drops of water. Similarly the wise fill themselves with good.'[26]

Conversely, it might be that you are someone who finds it easier to enter into absorption and who is familiar with higher states of consciousness. Some people find themselves having visionary experiences of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. In that case one could ask oneself: 'What am I developing in meditation?' or 'How are these experiences changing me?'

Q: What are your views on your own ability to practice meditation? How helpful are any views you might have in this area? Do you have an effective meditation practice and what might that mean to you?

Meditation and Ordination

So what are we looking for in terms of joining the Order? Does everyone who joins the Order have to have an experience of the *dhyānas*? At this point it is important to say that not everyone's meditation will look the same. Within the Order, Order Members will be doing a variety of practices and their attitudes to meditation and what they experience within meditation will be different. Not all will experience the *dhyānas* readily, though I suspect most people at least would experience the *dhyāna* factors[27] from time to time, whether they think in those terms or not. What it is important to experience is an effective meditation practice which really means we are able to work with and transform our mind effectively, understand our mind more deeply and experience a glimpse of a more expansive and dynamic potential of consciousness.

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[26] Dhammapada v122

[27] The dhyāna factors are: one-pointedness (ekāgratā), happiness (sukha), rapture (prīti), thinking of (vitarka) and thinking about (vicāra). See Sangharakshita 'The Purpose and Practice of Buddhist Meditation' p238 and For more on the dhyāna factors, see Kamalashila's book 'Meditation: The Buddhist Way of Tranquillity and Insight'

Q: How do I work with my mind inside and outside meditation, including the cultivation of mindfulness and metta?

A 'System of Meditation'

We can most helpfully explore effective meditation practice in relation to each of the aspects of the 'System of Meditation', or the 'Five Aspects of the Dharma Life', as it has come to be called. Sangharakshita developed this system in 1978 when he gave a talk to an Order gathering outlining our approach to meditation[28]. Since then the ramifications of this system have been further unpacked in more detail by Sangharakshita and Subhuti in their paper 'Initiation into a New Life'[29]. In this paper the system of meditation is explained not only as a sequence of meditation practices, but as dimensions of our practice that we are undertaking all the time, both inside and outside meditation. What would an effective practice of each of these stages look like, particularly within meditation?

Integration

Integration can be seen as both horizontal or vertical. Horizontal integration means that we are able to unite all the disparate parts of ourselves into a common direction. Sangharakshita joked about our usual state of being that, 'We are usually just a bundle of conflicting desires and selves, both conscious and unconscious, loosely tied together with the thread of a name and address!'[30] In order to commit ourselves to anything, be it meditation or Ordination, we have to unite all those conflicting desires under a common banner, towards a unified goal. It is the practice of mindfulness that helps us to to do this: recollecting what we are doing in the present moment (*sati/ smrti*) and knowing where we are going: our continuity of purpose (*sampajañña/ saṃprajanya*). The most well known practice of mindfulness is the 'mindfulness of breathing' meditation, and there is also the practice of the Four Satipaṭṭhānas and the Four Dimensions of Awareness[31] which can be undertaken both in and out of meditation. Taraloka run very effective meditation retreats on these themes.

Integration is a whole life approach. When we unify our conflicting desires and selves, we are able to take responsibility for our actions and states of mind. Integration also means becoming a responsible, aware individual who does not blame others for their mental states, but is able to work with their mind themselves, inside and outside of meditation. Unifying and taking responsibility for our own mind means we are able to commit. We commit to our meditation practice whether it is going 'well' or not, whether we get into *dhyāna* easily or not. This is also what we look for in someone who is ready for Ordination: someone who is committed to meditation, which really means committing to transforming our being and consciousness to higher levels.

Q: Do you meditate every day? Can you keep up your meditation practice consistently? What gets in the way of your meditation practice, and what conditions help?

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[28] Sangharakshita, The System of Meditation, 1978,

[29] Subhuti, Initiation into a New Life,

[30] Sangharakshita, Levels of Awareness: Right Mindfulness lecture, 1968.

[31] ibid

As we become more integrated horizontally, we start to become aware of our depths and heights: mental states resurface that we were only semi conscious of before, and we become aware of the potential of our consciousness. We may have noticed that our idea of ourselves has changed dramatically since we started meditating. We suddenly become aware of the depths of our negative emotions, but also a sense of what is possible, that we are not confined to our old habits. We see how thoughts and emotions arise and fall like clouds in the sky; they do not have to define us, they are not 'me' or 'mine'. One of the signs of being ready for ordination is that we are in some ways more certain of who we are and where we are moving in our lives, but we also have a sense that our spiritual life is limitless and we are open to the possibility of a limitless consciousness. Integration in meditation will reflect this growing awareness of our limitless potential and meditation becomes a place where we can explore this potential directly.

Positive Emotion

To the extent we are able to be responsible for our mental states, we can also cultivate positive mental states. This is the stage of positive emotion, or what Subhuti sometimes calls 'skilful intention'. We learn how to distinguish in our experience between positive and negative or afflictive emotions, skilful and unskilful intentions, and we commit ourselves to cultivating the positive. Through that commitment, we become effective.

What are positive emotions or skilful intentions? At the most basic level, we could say that the positive emotions those that are associated with an expansive state of mind. These are the *brahma vihāras*: *mettā* (loving kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (sympathetic joy) and *uppekha* (equanimity). These can all be systematically cultivated through the brahma vihāra meditations, particularly the mettā bhāvana. Taraloka also run a meditation retreat on this theme. Through the brahma vihāras we develop a dynamic and heartfelt imaginative identification with other living beings. We feel the life and potential for growth within them, we resonate deeply with their lives and no longer prioritise our interests over theirs. Imaginative identification is the real, living and creative basis for an ethical practice. We wish to serve others, and the best way to serve them is to serve the Dharma as a force for goodness in the world that helps living beings grow towards their potential. Of course it is here that an ethical practice and the practice of meditation become inseparable. Our meditation practice informs our behaviour, and our behaviour informs our meditation.

According to Sangharakshita's elucidation of the Abhidharma, the quality underlying all positive emotions is faith (or "*sraddhā*"): *'faith is inherent in any positive mental state'*, and '*provides the basis for sustained interest, interest in turns supports the application of effort, and effort is what makes the development of other positive mental events possible'*[32]. If we have faith in the efficacy of meditation to align us with the mysterious potential of our consciousness, we can integrate ourselves around that faith. This integration around what is of deepest value to us gathers our disparate energies and galvanises our energies. Meditation is part of the overall pattern of our lives, an aspect or unfolding of our faith. This momentum carries us through the vacillations of our mental states and meditation experience and makes meditation a lifelong bond or 'samaya'. It is our faith that keeps us going, and in the end, that is all that can be asked of our meditation - that we keep going with it.

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[32] Sangharakshita, 'Know Your Mind' p119-125

Effective meditation means we are able to identify negative emotions in our experience and know how to not let them rule our lives. Negative emotions are sometimes called the kleśas or mental poisons or afflictive emotions: greed, hatred, delusion, conceit and envy; or the hindrances of sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and anxiety, and doubt. How we work with them will look different to different people at different times and it is useful to see meditation as a life long journey. There are many techniques that help cultivate skilful states of mind and work with the unskilful. What is useful to us will change. As Sangharakshita says, there isn't 'a yogic button'[33] that one can press that will enable us to be absorbed at any given time. In meditation the main quality that we bring is interest in becoming familiar with the workings of the mind itself, in all its myriad manifestations. From the basis of that awareness, we can set up helpful conditions that enable us to work in meditation. Sometimes awareness is enough to release the tensions inherent in unskilful states of mind, and to expand on the skilful states. As our investigation becomes more subtle, our awareness of 'skilful' and 'unskilful' becomes more subtle, to encompass all the movements of the mind in kind and interested awareness.

Q: How do I work on cultivating and maintaining skilful mental states?
Q: How do I work on preventing and transforming unskillful mental states?

As Order Members and future Order Members, we need to know ourselves and how our mind works, and what is most spiritually efficacious. As Chatrul Rimpoche says

> 'No matter where you stay, be it a busy place or a solitary retreat,
> The only things that you need to conquer are the mind's five poisons
> And your own true enemies, the eight worldly concerns,
> Nothing else.
> Whether it is by avoiding them, transforming them, taking them as the path, or looking into their very essence,
> Whichever method is best suited to your own capacity.'[34]

We need to be engaging our mind's transformation all the time, but it is on retreat we can give this exploration our full attention, inside and outside meditation. This is why we emphasise the importance of meditation retreats and solitary retreats in the ordination process and in the Order.

Q: What is your experience of meditation on retreat?

Spiritual Receptivity

Effective meditation is not simply about working with the mind in an active sense. There is also an aspect of letting go of willed effort and resting in awareness. This is the attitude we cultivate in the stage of spiritual receptivity, or 'dharmic responsiveness', as Subhuti calls it[35]. An integrated and positive mind is able to be open and receptive. Receptive to what? In principle we let whatever experiences arise be as they are. We could also say that we are receptive to *'kalyāna*' states of mind: beautiful, true and good. When we find what is kalyāna in our experience, we are

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[33] Sangharakshita, A Survey of Buddhism, The Complete Works vol 1. Windhorse Publications.

[34] Chatrul Rimpoche, Compassionate Action, Snow Lion Publications, New York, 2007

[35] See Subhuti, The Five Aspects of Dharma Life: Spiritual Receptivity. Lecture given at Padmaloka 2014

able to respond to it, to make it a guiding factor in our lives, leading us to what is *'gambhīra'*, which means deep, or subtle.

Responding to what is *kalyāna* in our lives is not a question of deciding in advance what is, or should be, beautiful in our experience. It is about learning how to respond to beauty, or truth, goodness or mystery in our lived experience. Responsiveness cannot be created by an effort of will in the same way that meditation experience in general cannot be created by will. It arises on the basis of conditions, and 'is not something which can be acquired forcibly or artificially by means of exercises or techniques'[36]. We have to learn to listen with our heart, to respond with our whole being beyond the intellect.

Perhaps the best way to experience this is on solitary retreat: when we are on our own we can listen deeply to our experience without wondering what other people are thinking about us. We learn to respond to our own interests in meditation rather than doing what we think we 'should'. A solitary retreat is an important part of our spiritual lives, it is a time when we can fully explore our own minds away from the influence of others and learn what it is we respond to.

Q: Have you done a solitary retreat? What was your experience?

The practice of 'just sitting' also helps us to be open to a dimension beyond the form of our meditation and notice what we find in that openness. To aid that openness, receptivity and responsiveness, alongside meditation it is important to have times built into the fabric of our day when we are not doing anything. Paradoxically, in training to take up the responsibility of becoming an Order Member we need to be able to sit and do nothing while remaining open to a deeper dimension of experience. All activity, including meditation, takes place within the sphere of dharmic-responsiveness.

Spiritual Death

If we are able to be responsive to our experience, we can reflect more deeply upon what that experience represents. This moves us from s*amatā*, or meditative calm and concentration, to *vipaśyana* or insight meditation. Spiritual death helps us to move beyond building up an integrated and positive sense of self, working on the level of *karma niyāma*, to seeing through our idea of fixed and separate selfhood altogether. This dynamic is one we face inside and outside meditation: working on our mental states to develop ourselves, and at the same time seeing that self-construction as illusory. Mental states, both positive and negative, are felt very vividly and have important consequences for ourselves and others, but they are not 'me' or 'mine'. They are impermanent and not to be relied on or identified with.

This practice of reflection can be undertaken in all daily life, particularly when we experience loss or when we react strongly to something, when, as Santideva says, 'life breaks its promises'. It is when we don't get what we want that we realise how large our sense of fixed and separate selfhood is and the depths of our own self-clinging. We polarise with other people and with life itself, we entrench ourselves in our own interests and feelings of separation. Sangharakshita explains that the illusion of self, attachment to our ego, is not attachment to a thing in itself, but

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[36] Sangharakshita, 'Entering the Stream', lecture, 1966

a way of functioning in the world that is closed, tight and inward-looking[37]. If, at that moment, we can reflect on the 3 *lakṣaṇas* (or 'marks of conditioned existence': unsatisfactoriness, impermanence and insubstantiality), we can move back into relation with others and see ourselves from a different, more open perspective. It is not that we have to annihilate our 'selves' or even let them die, but see through our illusions about who we are, allowing ourselves to function in a more expansive, connected way.

Reflections of this kind can be undertaken in meditation whichever practice we are doing. Sangharakshita's exploration of mindfulness practice in his book 'Living with Awareness' draws out the dharmic reflections we can apply to mindfulness, starting at the level of working with *karma niyāma* processes, through to working with *dharma niyāma* processes. His book 'Living with Kindness' does the same with the *mettā bhavāna* practice. His point is that we don't need new, higher meditation practices to explore spiritual death, but we need 'deeper understandings', a way of doing our practice from a new perspective. For example in the *mettā bhāvana* practice we can reflect that we are not separate from the other people we are bringing to mind; that to prioritise ourselves over them is delusion, that really we are part of the same cycle of existence, with the same potential for Buddhahood, with unique qualities and ways of being in the world. We are all impermanent, all 'wandering the roads of existence in search of happiness', not fixed or isolated. These kind of reflections open our awareness beyond self-clinging and free us from the 'gravitational pull of the self'[38].

The main practice we undertake for reflecting systematically on *'anātman'* or the illusion of fixed and separate self, is the 'Six Element Practice'. This is usually taken up around the time of ordination, particularly on the ordination retreat itself. However, some people may have had previous experience of it in a different context - during an intensive meditation retreat perhaps. It's important to realise that while you may have been introduced to this kind of practice in particularly conducive conditions, that does not mean that it's necessarily helpful to continue to try and practise it outside of those conditions. If you have learnt it in another context, you might want to talk to an Order Member who knows you well and ask if that is the right thing for you to do at home.

Spiritual Rebirth

To move beyond the illusion of a fixed and separate selfhood, we need a sense of what lies beyond that illusion. We could envision this as qualities such as compassion, love, freedom or wisdom. We could imagine those qualities embodied in personifications of Enlightenment: the Buddha, Bodhisattvas or the historical Ārya Sangha. However we envision the potential of spiritual, or transcendental, potential, we need to find a way that awakens our emotions and galvanises our energies so that we can give ourselves to that potential, allow it to be a living part of our spiritual practice. As Subhuti says *'The goal must be embodied in our imaginations, our deepest energies gathered in an image of what we are trying to move towards'*[39]

What is my understanding of shamatha and vipashyana? How do I practise them?

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[37] Sangharakshita, 'Living Wisely' , Chapter 2

[38] Sangharakshita, 'Living with Kindness'

[39] Subhuti, 'Re-Imagining the Buddha'

It is the elements of the system of practice that your Private Preceptor will explore with you when you are nearing Ordination. This can, or will, be a very rewarding exploration, but it is also challenging. It demands an ability to communicate the depth and subtlety of what goes on in your meditation, expressing the inexpressible but deeply-felt movements and processes of your inner work. The fruits of this will be that both of you can, at the time of Ordination, discuss which *sādhana* practice you will be taking up.

Q: How and in what contexts do you talk about your meditation practice?

Sādhanā

Sādhanā literally means a 'way of accomplishing something', in this case Enlightenment itself. In our Order it is a contemplation practice that embodies spiritual death and rebirth, and that we undertake to practise daily. Most people take up a contemplation practice of a Buddha/Bodhisattva at Private Ordination as a way to see their potential in a form they can connect with. These practices also connect us with Sangharakshita, who practised them under the guidance of his own teachers and has himself passed them on to many members of our Order, either directly, or indirectly through private preceptors. While Order Members take on the practices of different Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, depending on individual inspiration, there is a strong sense of unity in that all the practices are embodying different qualities of the Buddha and Enlightenment itself.

It may be that you find it difficult to 'visualise' a form as such, but one can still be aware of a certain presence of the Buddha or Bodhisattva through one's imaginative faculty. The practice is really about bringing to mind certain qualities or symbols that we have a strong and alive devotion towards. Sādhana takes us beyond just refining the self - even an integrated and positive self which is really just 'me', but a bit kinder and more aware - into a radical transformation leading to transcendental spiritual rebirth. We imagine the qualities of Enlightenment, and what we dwell on, we love, and what we love, we become. It becomes the myth we live out in our lives, what Sangharakshita calls 'the spearhead of a basic reorientation of one's whole being.[40]' Perhaps this is the meaning of the last verse in Sangharakshita's poem:

> 'Refreshed, we rise and turn again
> To mingle with this world of pain,
> As on roses falls the rain.'

We have changed. We are a transformed being with a transformed consciousness, able to interact with the world in a different way. The purpose of meditation is to go back into the world, to interact from the basis of integration, positive emotion, responsiveness, expansiveness and transformation of being.

Q: How do you envision your potential? Is there a particular Buddha or Bodhisattva figure you feel connected with?

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[40] Sangharakshita, 'Entering the Stream', lecture 1966

Conclusion

Meditation is working directly on the mind to transform consciousness into higher states of being, in order to break through into a deeper understanding of Reality itself. To do this we need to be open to the potential of our consciousness as being more than our current state of being; we need a sense of mystery and wonder about where we can go with our minds. We need a sense that our minds can take us into the heart of the mystery: Enlightenment itself. In fact we could say that Ordination is a commitment to realising the profound - the deep and subtle Dharma itself.

Meditation is part of a whole life approach. As Sangharakshita once pointed out 'If ninety-nine percent of your life is oriented in the direction of the mundane, it is no use just spending half an hour a day trying to orient it in a spiritual direction. That would be like taking an elastic band and pulling it taut - as soon as you release it, it snaps back.'[41] That whole-life approach is the cultivation of integration, positive emotion, spiritual receptivity, spiritual death and spiritual rebirth, which can be developed both within and outside of meditation. If we cultivate all five of these areas outside meditation, we provide the conditions for *dhyāna* to arise naturally, without an effort of will. We could see **dhyāna** as the natural state that we enter into when we are still and the obstacles are removed. In the seminar on the Sammaññaphāla Sutta, Sangharakshita defined *dhyāna* as *'not a state we are in but a way in which we organise our lives.'*

In this way we need not be despondent if we think we don't get into *dhyāna*, or we don't think of ourselves as a 'good' meditator. We also have a context in which to understand our visions and insight experiences. The purpose of meditation is the 'spiritual evolution of the whole being' and the main question to ask ourselves when meditating is: 'How am I growing?' and 'Am I moving towards Enlightenment?' Whether we are struggling with hindrances or soaring in the dhyānas, we can still commit ourselves to the practice of transformation and enjoy our meditation as a lifelong exploration of the possibilities of consciousness; a daily plunge into the mystery of existence.

[41] ibid

The Fourth Guideline: Grasp of the Dharma as Taught by Urgyen Sangharakshita

Reflection Questions

Am I participating in (or have I completed) the Triratna Dharma Training Course for Mitras?
What of Bhante's main teachings/writings have I studied recently? Are there important texts/teachings that I still need to study?
What do I understand as 'Basic Buddhism' (as described by Sangharakshita in Chapter 1 of *A Survey of Buddhism*)?
How do I understand and reflect on conditionality (*pratītya samutpāda*) and how it informs my life (for instance through karma and the Four Noble Truths)?
What appreciation do I have of the unity and diversity of Buddhism?
How do I identify and transform wrong views? How am I cultivating right view? How am I cultivating *Samyak Drishti* (Perfect Vision)?

Further Study Material

There is a list in this section of the books Sangharakshita asked all Order Members to read, so you may want to have a look to see if you have read them all. They are all found in The Complete Works, Windhorse Publications.
About study in general, Vajratara gave a short talk in 2014 called Study Groups as a Path to Insight, which can be downloaded from www.freebuddhistaudio.com or www.youtube.com

Grasp of the Dharma as Taught by Urgyen Sangharakshita

Text purpose written by Santavajri

Why study the Dharma as taught by Sangharakshita?

It may seem obvious that we need to know and understand the Dharma in order to be ready to join the Triratna Buddhist Order. After all, it's a Buddhist Order, so of course, we'll need to understand quite deeply what Buddhism is to be part of the Order. But why is this the case, exactly? Is it so that we are able to answer any questions that people coming along to a beginners' meditation class happen to ask? Or that we're able to take on a Mitra study group at our Centre?

Although we may well be called upon to do these things once we're ordained, this isn't the main reason we need a reasonable grasp of the Dharma in order to make our going for refuge effective. We need to understand the Dharma so that it can become a true refuge for us. It needs to

be the Dharma, more and more, that we turn to in order to make sense of our experience, to give us a sense of purpose and direction in life, and for practical guidance on how to overcome any difficulty we may face. If you like, we could say that, in order to become more and more like the Buddha, we need an ever-deepening understanding of his teachings so that we can see life increasingly as he saw it, and respond to our experience as he would have responded. It is through studying the Dharma that we do this, and our Going for Refuge becomes effective when our friends in the Order can see that we're turning to the Dharma and applying the teachings, reliably and consistently, and so able to transform our reactive tendencies into something more creative.

I'm imagining that many of you who come to Tiratanaloka already have some experience of the Dharma as becoming a transformative influence in your lives; something you can increasingly rely on when you're struggling in some way. I remember when it was that I realised I was a Buddhist. I'd taken up meditation because, although the external conditions of my life were 'good' (living in London, career, own flat, busy social life, etc), I'd reached a point where I knew I had to address the turbulent emotional states, and even despair, that I frequently experienced. I'd bought a copy of the Dhammapāda at the meditation course, and I was reading it on the top deck of the 149 bus into work. I was immediately struck by the first sentences: 'What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts create our life of tomorrow. Our lives are the creation of our minds.' Those words seemed to hit me in the pit of the stomach with the resonance of something I knew was true, although I couldn't have told you in what way.

It was through reading those first Dharma books, and hearing a series of talks on the Precepts at the London Buddhist Centre, that I knew I was a Buddhist. The Dharma was offering me a way of understanding my painful experiences, as well as tools to transform them, and I hadn't found this anywhere else. The Dharma felt like a refuge to me, a refuge from distress and confusion, and I could feel in my body the solace, clarity and hope it brought.

You could say that my first encounters with the Dharma helped me move from dukkha to faith, which might be a helpful way of thinking about the Dharma as a refuge: it helps us move from dukkha to faith, from reactivity to creativity, and we experience this tangibly, even physically, as a relaxation of tension or a release of energy, as well as clarifying our understanding of our experience.

Q: Can you recall a time when hearing or reading a Dharma teaching helped you move from dukkha to faith? If so, what was the teaching, and how did it affect you?

What is the Dharma?

I want to look a bit more closely at what we mean by the Dharma. Some of us might be attracted to Triratna because it is ecumenical, it isn't a traditional Asian Buddhist school with its own exclusive canon of teachings, outside of which parameters the faithful rarely stray. In fact, Sangharakshita has emphasised the importance of critical ecumenicalism, by which he means that we could take inspiration from any Buddhist source, regardless of which tradition it comes from, as long as the teaching is in line with Right View and enables us to move from 'lower' to 'higher', (or reactive to creative) mental states. He has also explicitly emphasised the importance of practising the Arts as a way of refining and raising one's sensibilities, even when their con-

tent is rooted in a non-Buddhist, Western tradition. This is something that has been striking me quite forcibly recently as I learn pages and pages of Rossini choral music for the choir I'm in, all in Latin and about sinners and lambs of God and believing in a holy Catholic Church! I wouldn't care, but I was brought up a Presbyterian! Yet I do find singing this music uplifting and inspiring, despite the words.

Q: What appreciation do I have of the unity and diversity of Buddhism?

And of course many of us find things like psychology, psychotherapy, and various other complementary therapies extremely helpful ways of getting to know ourselves and work with our tendencies - becoming more relaxed, more creative, and kinder in our responses to others. I, too, have found psychotherapy very helpful at particular points in my life (albeit with a therapist who's also an experienced Order Member). So why differentiate between such methods and the Dharma? Surely if something helps us become kinder and happier, it is the Dharma? Well, maybe, up to a point... but it's also possible that although whatever-it-is doesn't contradict the Dharma, it's limited in perspective. For example, I'm very keen on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as a framework for understanding personality types. I've seen it help a number of teams in the Movement come to a greater sense of harmony, mutual understanding and appreciation of difference. So, is that not the Dharma? In my view, it isn't quite. I don't see it as contradicting the Dharma in any sense, as it's not suggesting that those types are fixed and permanent. But just on its own, one could so easily use it to go more and more deeply into the fascinating minutiae of one's unique personality, or even use it to excuse one's weaknesses and ethical breaches ("I'm a 'J' - judging type - so I can't be flexible and take your needs into account"). However, if used within the perspective of the Dharma, in which one is able to grow and change with the help of ethical practice, it can be a helpful tool ("Even though I'm a 'J' and find it difficult when plans are changed at the last minute, I want to be helpful to you, so I'll hang loose to my preferences this time").

So some disciplines can be helpful if applied within a bigger context of the Dharma. Others, though, contain certain wrong views which means that they can't sit within the perspective of the Dharma. Their basic assumptions contradict the basic teachings of Buddhism. I had to face this in relation to the brand of feminism which I adhered to very strongly when I came into contact with the Movement. In those days, some feminists were claiming that all men were rapists. I think they meant potentially, not literally, but I remember the look of dismay on the face of a man friend when I unthinkingly, but dogmatically, asserted this - he was a man whose values and behaviour were so different from those that give rise to rape or any other act of violence. Although I've found it helpful to question gender stereotypes that limit and fix people, I've gradually moved away from an explicitly feminist way of seeing the world, and that's because I've found in the Dharma a non-polarised, more comprehensive vision of how I most deeply long to relate to myself and other beings, a vision which fulfils what I was looking for in Feminism and Socialism, but far vaster, and without their shortcomings.

Q: What disciplines do you practise, and what belief-systems do you hold, that it might be necessary to question in the light of the Dharma? If they're not supportive of your understanding and practice of the Dharma, where does that leave you in relation to them?

Q: What do I understand as 'Basic Buddhism' (as described by Sangharakshita in Chapter 1 of 'A Survey of Buddhism')?

The Dharma as taught by Sangharakshita

And what about 'the Dharma as taught by Sangharakshita'? Is that not somewhat exclusive, narrow, dogmatic? What's wrong with all those other excellent teachers like Joseph Goldstein and Pema Chodron? Are they not Buddhists, too, and does their teaching not help us go for refuge?

I think the main point to make here is that focusing on Sangharakshita's translation of the Dharma is for methodological and not doctrinal reasons. So it's not that we in the Order are saying "I believe in the one true faith, and any other teaching is heresy". That would be doctrinal. Following the teachings of one particular teacher is methodological - it's a way of getting to where you want to go. I heard a story from the Sufi tradition about this a couple of years ago, and I thought it put it well: imagine you're digging a hole down to the water table. If you start digging in one place, then after a bit you start another hole nearby, then another, you won't get very far. But if you stick to the one spot, you'll be successful in the end.

In 'What is the Western Buddhist Order?' Sangharakshita says:

> 'My approach stems from the nature of spiritual life itself. for commitment to be strong it has, in a sense, to be narrow. It is only through intensity of commitment and practice that you achieve any results.... You need to follow a particular set of teachings and practices within a particular framework under a particular teacher in order to experience any real progress.'

Later on in the same paper, Sangharakshita talks about the importance of us having a shared perspective on the Dharma and how to practise it if we are to be an effective Sangha:

> 'The Dharma needs to be made specific to a particular Sangha. It needs to hang together, doctrinally and methodologically, if it is to be the basis of a Sangha or and Order. Everybody needs to be following the same founding teacher, be guided by the same doctrinal understanding of the Dharma, and undertaking broadly the same set of practices. If they do not they will not have sufficient in common to be an effective Sangha and will not be able to make progress together on the Path'.[42]

At this point, you may think that all this makes sense, but you're not yet convinced that you want to prioritise either the Dharma over other ways of seeing the world, or Sangharakshita's teachings over other Buddhist teachers. If so, don't worry! We're exploring what it means to go for refuge effectively and be ready to enter the Order, but we don't expect that you'll have resolved all of your doubts and questions before you come on a training for ordination retreat. The training for ordination in Triratna is an opportunity to explore all of this, and to find out whether you are convinced and sustained by the Dharma as taught by Sangharakshita, and that you want to join an Order that is founded in his translation of the Dharma. It might take some time for you to get to that point, and some people arrive at a different conclusion and decide that the Order's not the best context for them. All this is fine from the point of view of the Tiratanaloka team, so do make sure you explore your questions quite openly!

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[42] Sangharakshita, What is the Western Buddhist Order? www.sangharakshita.org

However, in order to really know whether or not you want to have the Dharma as taught by Sangharakshita as the guiding principle in your life, you're going to have to become very familiar with it, really know and understand it deeply. There's quite a bit of it, so studying it is going to have to be a major focus, whether or not you choose to read other teachers at the same time.

If you feel daunted by this, and are wondering where to start, here's what Sangharakshita himself recommended that Order Members and Mitras training for Ordination study:
'The Ten Pillars'; 'The History of my Going for Refuge'; the first chapter of 'The Survey of Buddhism' (studied on the Transcendental Principle retreat at Tiratanaloka); 'The Three Jewels' and 'Ritual and Devotion'. He also recommends 'Who is the Buddha', 'What is the Dharma' and 'What is the Sangha' as lighter reading.

I'd also strongly encourage us all to read Sangharakshita's autobiographies, as well as dipping into his poetry, and the books he's written based on traditional Buddhist texts, like "Wisdom Beyond Words" and "Know Your Mind". You will also be reading Sangharakshita's work as part of the Triratna Dharma Training Course for Mitras.

Q: What of Bhante's main teachings/writings have I studied recently? Are there important texts/ teachings that I still need to study?

How to study the Dharma?
The first thing I want to point out here is that the word 'study' could be somewhat misleading. For many of us, 'study' has connotations of exams, vast quantities of reading, memorising things, and being assessed: passing or failing. If we don't think of ourselves as academic, this can be immensely off-putting. We need to hang loose to the term "study" - it can have a different sort of meaning to the one we may be familiar with. Imagine spending time really studying an object, like a flower or a beautiful picture. You really look at it, take it in, and let it affect you, allow it to change you. That's the way in which we need to study the Dharma.

Q: What is your conditioning around study, from school, etc? How is this reflected in your attitude to Dharma study? If it gets in the way, what could help?

There's a further aspect of Dharma study that doesn't fit with many of our pre-conceived ideas about studying. You might have had an experience like this: you go along to a study group at your local Centre for the first time. You have brought your copy of the text that you have assiduously prepared in advance, carefully looking up words, underlining things that strike you, and devising a few pertinent questions. After everyone has got the sort of tea they like, the group 'goes round' and everyone reports in on what's going on in their lives. Then you get out your text. Someone reads out the first paragraph, and the study leader pauses, and asks you what you make of it. There ensues a far-ranging discussion, starting with clarifying the points made in the paragraph, but branching out to include various other metaphysical, ethical and practical points, and ending with a discussion about how various people in the group are working in meditation. It looks like you may be ready to tackle paragraph two, but the group leader notices that time's up for this week. You leave feeling uplifted and stimulated, and yet baffled. Your discussion has certainly been related to the topic of the text, and it's also clearly been particularly helpful to a couple of people who were struggling with meditation, but in what sense was this

'study'? It would be more appropriate to call this a Dharma discussion, based around a particular text.

Study groups in Triratna vary, with some study leaders sticking more closely to the text than others, but all have a very strong flavour of mutual exploration or discussion. They will also all include a focus on the individuals involved, and how they translate what they're studying into their daily lives.

Apart from being a context for exploring the Dharma, Triratna study groups also have an esoteric function: they are one of the main places where people learn about, and practise, spiritual friendship and Sangha. It's no accident that, until recently, three of us on the team here at Tiratanaloka were in mitra study together for three years back in the 90s - in fact, we were even in a pre-mitra group before that - and that the others' being here was a strong incentive for me to want to come here. That's not to say that all ten of us in that study group were like one big happy family! There have been all sorts of dynamics, some more challenging than others, between various of us over the years. But the depth of connection and the degree to which we all feel we know each other is undeniable, and for me at least, extremely precious.

So if you're not already in a Mitra study group, I urge you to do all in your power to join one. Mitra Study groups put you into relationship with not only the Dharma, but also the Sangha, and through the Dharma, The Buddha.

Some people who live a long way from a Centre have managed to join an online study group, which is great. I hope there will be more of these available over the years. Some Order Members offer one-to-one study, which people have found very valuable. I'd urge you to do this in addition to study in a group rather than viewing it as a substitute for it, as it can't offer anything like the experience of Sangha that comes with a group. I'd also recommend in person groups if possible.

Q: Are you participating in (or have you completed) the Triratna Dharma Training Course for Mitras?

I think it can be quite common for people to drift a bit once their Mitra group finishes. It's great if we get a chance then to support a study group for newer Mitras - everyone benefits from that arrangement. When I lived in London, during times when I wasn't part of, or leading, a regular Dharma study group, I could feel a bit lacking in focus and spiritual stimulation. So I initiated a post-mitra study group which met for a number of years, and I benefitted enormously from having that sort of Dharma discussion with other practitioners on a regular basis. One doesn't have to be an Order Member to initiate a Dharma study group - any of you could do it, and invite different Dharmacharinis to come and lead study with you for a block of time.

Q: Do we find study groups enjoyable? If not, what might help?

I'm really emphasising the importance of studying in a group, but of course we also need to study on our own, and follow up our own interests in various areas of the Dharma. That will probably come more naturally to some of us than others: I love study, and I tend to do quite a bit of study on solitary retreat, for instance. Maybe it's not what immediately appeals to all of us as a way of spending our time, in which case I'd encourage you to follow your heart and study

what really appeals to you, then you can maybe tackle subjects that seem more daunting in a group context. And there are various study retreats you can attend, not least all of our retreats here at Tiratanaloka, but at Taraloka, Adhisthana and elsewhere, too.

Levels of Dharma Study/Reflection

You may be wondering how one goes for refuge to the Dharma, and how exactly one uses study as a way of transforming oneself? How does it work?

In studying the Dharma, you're bringing your consciousness into relationship with the consciousness of the Buddha, or the Enlightened mind, and inasmuch as 'your consciousness' is a flow of conditions and not something fixed, that contact with the teachings of the Enlightened mind is a condition upon which something more creative, clear and expansive can arise within 'your' consciousness. It can eventually give rise to transcendental Insight.
Traditionally, this process is said to have three stages.

The first is called *suta-mayā paññā* in Pali. This is literally means "hearing" the Dharma, or in our case, it also means reading it. The early monks and nuns generally weren't literate, but even for us in our highly literate culture, we can gain something from hearing the Dharma that can't be conveyed by the written word. So, you can go to hear talks at your local Centre, read Dharma books (especially those by Sangharakshita), and listen to talks on Free Buddhist Audio. It is worth listening to Sangharakshita's lectures on FBA: so much of him comes through in those lectures more immediately than in his writing, not least his dry and lively sense of humour.
Another thing that the early Buddhists did, which we do less and less of in our culture, is memorise the teachings. There is a lot to be said for doing this. I suppose that most of us at least know the Heart Sutra by heart? I remember doing lots of Sevenfold Pujas at the LBC's regulars class back in the early 90s, before I became a Mitra, and frankly, I didn't particularly relish them. In particular, the Heart Sutra seemed to me at first like a load of mumbo-jumbo. But then I had an interesting experience: my oldest friend's mother was dying, and I went to visit her in the hospice in County Durham. The atmosphere in the hospice was very positive, but serious, and it was clear that my friend's mother was close to death. It was a beautiful June day, and I went out into the garden for some air. The sun was shining, and the flowers were bobbing in the breeze, and then spontaneously I heard in my mind: "Form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form, Form is only emptiness, emptiness only form..." and intuitively, I understood it. That moment is still vivid in my memory and has the power to move me emotionally twenty years later - I suppose you could call it a small moment of insight - but it couldn't have come about if we hadn't recited the Heart Sutra from memory each week at that class.

Q: Which Dharma texts do we know by heart? Are there any we'd like to learn?

The Pali term for the second stage of studying the Dharma is *cintā-mayā paññā*. This is the stage of reflection. You can start with your experience in the moment, something that's troubling you or even puzzling you, and you can try to reflect on how it relates to the Dharma. What Dharma teaching is it an example of? Does it help to see it as an ethical issue - have you broken a precept? Or is it a metaphysical one - is it an example of the *viparyāsas*, like you're looking for conditioned existence to be satisfying, and it isn't? Or you might find yourself taking a teaching of the Dharma as your starting point, and looking at how it you experience it in your life. So we

can talk about conditionality, but where do we experience the truth of this in our lives? Can we give specific examples?

I think that it's really important to reflect in the both these ways. We can start our reflection on the basis of our personal experience, or on the basis of general Dharma teachings. We need the perspective of the Dharma to understand our experience so that we keep a bigger perspective. We also need to ensure we don't just stay at the level of abstractions and generalities without looking at how the Dharma applies to the particulars of our lives, enabling us to transform our responses to our experience.

We can reflect in this sort of way when we're alone, and it's important that we do so. Reflecting alone allows us to follow through a train of thought without getting too side- tracked. Ratnaguna's excellent book, The Art of Reflection is a great support for doing this. We can, though, also reflect with a friend, or even in a study group, which has the advantage of being shown something from an angle we hadn't thought of. As our friends get to know us, they can gently point out things we miss because of our blind-spots. And if we're trying to see the connection between our experience and the Dharma, we'll need to learn to think logically and clearly, otherwise we won't be able to make the connections, or others won't be able to follow our reasoning. Our prejudices, assumptions and wrong views will be exposed, which can be a bit humiliating, but also very liberating, when you consider how much suffering our wrong views cause us. So we need to accept that this exposing of our wrong views is part of the package of deepening our going for refuge, and at times, this might be very challenging, even excruciating. Sangharakshita talks about our wrong views as 'not just an untidy bundle in the corner of our minds; rather, 'we are our wrong views', we exude them, every aspect of our habitual behaviour gives expression to them. In particular, our wrong views are very emotionally charged for us - we're deeply attached to them. That's why having them challenged can be so painful. So Dharma study isn't a 'safe' activity, and that's why it helps to undertake it in the company of our Dharma friends, whose kindness can help us embrace the less palatable aspects of reality, but whose perspective can also encourage us to grow beyond our self-imposed limits and become much bigger than we could possibly imagine on our own.

Q: How do you identify and transform wrong views? How are you cultivating right view? How are you cultivating Samyak Drishti (Perfect Vision)?
Q: How do you tend to respond when your views or opinions are challenged? How easy do you find it to challenge others' views?

The third and final stage in the traditional formula of the three levels of wisdom is *bhāvanā-mayā paññā*, which means becoming the Dharma. I've usually heard this stage likened to a still pool into which you drop a pebble, which gently floats down to the bottom of the pool, and you just watch the ripples moving out. In meditation we can just drop in a word or an image connected with the Dharma, and let it have its effect, without reflecting on it conceptually as we would in the stage of *cintā-mayā paññā*. In this way, we have a direct experience of the truth of the Dharma, unmediated by the conceptual mind, which would falsify it, based as that mind is in the subject-object duality. Again, in order to do this, we need to have the central teachings of the Dharma at our fingertips in order to be able to drop them in when our mind is calm.

This is the traditional Buddhist 'method' for gaining transcendental insight. I must confess that, outside of meditation retreats, I rarely find myself still enough in meditation for long enough

periods to try this approach. Happily, Sangharakshita has affirmed that there are other contexts where insight might also arise: that what one needs is enough intensity of collective practice to give rise to a 'crucial situation' in which our habitual ways of relating to our experience fall away for a while, and we're able to see more deeply into a Dharma teaching. In a seminar Sangharakshita led for people working at Windhorse Trading in the 1990s, he said he could more easily imagine insight arising in the context of a team-based right livelihood situation than an intensive meditation retreat, because people tend to have more invested in their work situations, so when things didn't go the way they expect, they come up more strongly against their wrong views and have the chance to see the truth of the Dharma more definitively. I know that opportunities to work in team-based right livelihood are limited these days, but Sangharakshita's point is still valid - that we need intense contexts, and intense Sangha contexts in particular, where we're brought up against our views and habits in order to see through their limitations and surrender to the Dharma.

Q: How do you reflect on and understand conditionality (pratītya samutpāda) and how it informs your life (e.g. through karma and the Four Noble Truths)?

Although methods for moving towards Insight might vary, the principle remains the same: that, at this level, we are seeking to align our minds fully with the Dharma, with how things really are, so that, increasingly, our whole being becomes an expression of wisdom and compassion.

Reflection Questions

How do I express reverence for and receptivity towards the Three Jewels in my life?
How has my response to myth, images and symbols deepened?
What is my sense of and connection with the transcendental? How does this manifest? For instance, do I connect with a Buddha or bodhisattva? Do I have a sense of my innate potential for enlightenment?
In what ways do I engage with the practice of devotion and ritual (for instance, through pujas and the Going for Refuge and Prostration Practice)?

Further Study Material

It would be helpful if you listened to Sangharakshita's talk on 'Buddhism and the Language of Myth'. This can be found on www.freebuddhistaudio.com
You could also read 'Re-Imagining the Buddha' by Subhuti, which is part of the 'Seven Papers' found at www.lulu.com
Subhuti's paper 'Three Myths of the Spiritual Life' is helpful in exploring different approaches to the Dharma life. You can find this at www.madhayavani@fwbo.org, Jnanavaca and Maitreyabandhu followed this paper up in a series of talks at Adhisthana.

The Mythic Context

Text purpose written by Vajratārā

Myth, Images and Symbols

Why did you ask for ordination? On the one hand you could say that you asked because Buddhism makes sense and you could see the effect of putting the Buddhist teachings into practice in your life and the lives of others. However, this doesn't fully capture the full significance of what it means to join the Order. You are spending years of your life deepening your practice and entering into communication with the Order. A good idea wouldn't give you sufficient motivation to enter into that process. Literally the ordination ceremonies are short rituals, mainly in palī, which is a language you probably don't speak, in which you are given a foreign name and a bit of cloth, and water is poured onto your head from an old brass vase. However, people consistently say it's the most moving experience of their life. Why would this be the case? It is because our emotions are involved and the emotional significance of the event transcends the mechanics of what is physically taking place. Emotions are activated by the language of myth, images and symbols. We ask for ordination because we deeply desire it,

because we see it as part of the myth of our lives, and we are moved by the images and symbols of Buddhism which communicate more to us than words. If our emotions aren't activated, we will lack sufficient motivation to undertake the journey to joining the Order, and the motivation to live out our lives as Order Members. To activate our emotions, we need more than ideas. We need to feel ourselves as part of a bigger mythic context.

What is a myth? In his lecture on 'The Mythic Context', Subhuti says 'Myth is the story which gives meaning and purpose to one's life, it gives the fuel and energy with which one does great deeds.'[43] The Oxford Dictionary defines context as the 'circumstances that form the setting for an event and in terms of which it can be fully understood'. We may not think of ourselves as undertaking great deeds, but perhaps we are. Consider this: usually we think of the narrative of our lives as a journey stretching into the past and ongoing into the future. Within that journey we, at some point, have come across the Three Jewels. We look at the Three Jewels from the perspective of the trajectory of our lives. What if we reversed that perspective? What would our lives look like from the perspective of the Three Jewels? What if, instead of us looking at the broader significance of life, the significance of life looked at us?

From the Buddhist perspective, there are universes coming in and out of existence, with many beings (not just human) also coming in and out of existence. What we see is a great flux, impulses towards life and growth. We see that when the conditions are ripe, Buddhahood is possible. This is a marvellous and wonderful potential, unsurpassable, deep and profound. The pinnacle of existence can be reached. The forces of greed, hatred and delusion can be overcome. Within the flux of life, we too are setting up the conditions for Buddhahood. We too are conquering the forces of greed, hatred and delusion. What could be a greater deed than this?

In order to join the Order we have to see the mythic significance, or context, of our lives, and feel how the myth of our lives connects with the greater myth of the Order.

Personal Myth

The sense we have of our own myth can be supported by images and symbols. For example, we might be drawn to images of warriors and the symbol of the vajra when we are overcoming difficulties and are on a journey of transformation. We might be drawn to images of the moon on water and the symbol of the lotus when we feel our myth is one of waking up to the truth. The sense of what we understand as our personal myth changes over time. Before coming across the Dharma, I saw my myth as the myth of the lonely heroine overcoming difficulties. I was drawn to stories such as 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer', and images of vajras and skulls. Over time I was drawn to myths of friendship and I started to explore in more depth the friendships between the Buddha and his disciples.

Our personal myth could be understood in three broad categories: self-transcendence/development, self-discovery and self-surrender. Self-transcendence is the most common in Buddhism. This is the myth of the Buddha as the 'Jina', the conqueror, the hero, who overcomes the armies of greed, hatred and ignorance. If we undertake the same practices he undertook, through effort and dedication, we can leave behind our old unskilful ways of being and also become a Buddha.

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[43] Subhuti, The Mythic Context, Padmaloka Books, Surlingham, 1990

The myth of self-discovery is centred around realising that Buddhahood is within us, our own deepest nature, if only we would wake up to the fact. This is the myth of Tathāgatagarbha, roughly translated as the matrix or womb of such-ness, reality. There is no striving to attain something that isn't already ours, we just have to realise it. The symbol here is the lotus unfolding: 'This very place the lotus paradise, this very body, the Buddha'.[44]

The myth of self-surrender is when we invite Buddhahood to 'become us'. We may feel this as serving, or entrusting, something higher than us, even letting it take us over, while retaining our sense of autonomy and freedom. That 'something' could be envisioned as a Buddha or Bodhisattva, or the Bodhicitta. The myth of self-surrender is very important in Mahayāna and Pure Land Buddhism, but we also find it in the Pali texts such as, Pingya's Praises to the Way to the Beyond.[45] In the Vajrayāna we imagine ourselves suffused with light emanating from the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, bestowing on us purity, wisdom and compassion. We can evoke the myth of self-surrender in the purification stage of the 'Going for Refuge and Prostration Practice'.

Each of these myths has advantages and disadvantages, a 'front' and a 'back', and it is helpful for us to see what the limitations of each myth are. It may be that one is more helpful to us at different times during our Dharma lives. For example, when we first come to the Buddhist Centre, we may be dealing with difficult mental states and need to evoke the myth of transformation. However, eventually we find that we are becoming despondent, thinking that although we are making a great deal of effort, we still very far away from our goal. We never seem to feel we have transformed ourselves enough. We may need to evoke the myth of self-discovery to realise that Buddhahood is not 'out there' in an alternative version of ourselves, but something inherent in the nature of the way things are. We focus on directly perceiving reality in all our experience in the moment. However, in doing this, we keep coming up against a limitation: the limitation of our own self-orientation. The focus on our own direct experience in someways gives us confidence that we don't have to attain anything more than a deeper awareness of what is, and yet we feel that isn't quite enough as the perspective of our awareness itself is trapped in a 'self' and 'other' dichotomy and tension. We feel we need to surrender to something more than our experience, to feel our experience as part of something much bigger. We evoke the myth of self-surrender.

Q: How do the 3 myths manifest in our journey towards ordination? Which do we have a particular affinity for, and which do we find most problematic?

Whilst it is important to keep exploring our own personal myth, we have asked to join an Order, and that means our own myth becomes part of a bigger, collective myth. This means looking outside of ourselves, and seeing the totality of our lives in a much broader context of space and time. Sangharakshita compares this to unfurling a carpet. At the beginning we notice only part of the pattern - some lines, colours and shapes. Over time we see the whole, and we see how our pattern is part of a more universal pattern. Before we see the whole pattern we have a sense of what Sangharakshita calls the 'gestalt' - a sense of the whole as distinct from the parts, that exists outside of space and time, and we are attempting to express in the limitations of our

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[44] Hakuin, Song of Meditation,

[45] Sutta Nipāta

own lives. We need not take this too literally, as if there is something concrete existing outside of ourselves, but it describes an experience we may have when we come across the Order. We feel that our lives have a universal significance that is not just ours. When we find others attempting to live out a life that is also of universal significance, we feel a sense of relief and excitement that we are not on our own. The collective myth of the Order is embodied in the form of Avalokitesvāra. As an Order we are aiming to become Avalokitesvāra, the myth of compassion working itself out in the world. We join with others living out that myth.

The collective myth and the personal myth are connected because it is only by imagining ourselves as an individual as something bigger than we are now, that we can imagine the Order as something bigger than it is at present.

> 'If one can feel oneself as a member of the [Triratna Buddhist Community] working out that myth, that will give one a much truer idea of what is actually happening or what one is actually involved in. It has to emerge as different people start becoming aware that the Movement is more than it appears to be. And that will only happen when they start becoming aware that they are more than they appear to be. They will become aware that they are playing a part in that myth and that their physical activity is only a bodying forth of that. Then they will see that other people with whom they are connected are doing the same and in that way they will begin to appreciate the myth behind the [Triratna Buddhist Community] as a whole.'[46]

Q: How has my response to myth, images and symbols deepened?

Connection with the Transcendental

Whatever myth draws us, it has a culmination. The ultimate culmination of any positive myth, has to be what we might call the 'transcendental'. If it doesn't lead to the transcendental, it becomes simply a refinement of the self, a better self, but limited by a fundamental separation between self and other. What is the transcendental? Transcendental can be defined as 'going beyond usual human knowledge or experience'[47]. In Buddhism it is a translation of '*lokuttāra*' which literally means 'beyond the world'. It points to the Buddha's Enlightenment experience which, he said, is 'beyond the reach of reasoning', 'deep, hard to see, subtle, going against the stream'[48] Enlightenment, Bodhi, is not something that can be adequately described in language or reason, which is limited by a dualistic framework of knowledge. The Buddha had to use language to explain the path and the goal to his disciples, but the experience itself remained '*nisprapañca*', ineffable, not something that can be speculated about or formulated into words.

Although the Buddha's Enlightenment is beyond our common framework of understanding and experience, we can have a sense of it and connection to it. This can come about through a personification of the transcendental, the Buddha or Bodhisattvas, or as an imaginative identification with wisdom texts such as are found in the Prajñaparamitā literature, or an evocation of the transcendental such as the Bodhicitta as a 'supra-personal force', Bodhi or

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[46] Sangharakshita, Bodhisattva Ideal: Questions and Answers Tuscany 1984, part 3. www.freebuddhistaudio.com

[47] The Chambers Dictionary 12 edition, Chambers Harrap Publishers, London 2011

[48] Samyutta Nikāya, 6.1

Prajña itself. When we encounter these symbols, images and myths, it activates our *sraddhā*, a faculty of faith that unites our reason and emotion and is more than emotion and reason. Sangharakshita compares this to a violins resting side by side. When a string is struck on one violin, the strings on the other violin vibrate[49]. He says that *sraddhā* is 'the response of our total being, of to what is what is ultimate in us to what is ultimate in the universe.' [50] There is something in us that just knows what is possible, sings in tune with it, whether we can put that feeling into words or not. It is that sense of *sraddhā* that we are drawing upon and developing in the ordination process. It is as if we feel the transcendental to be both beyond us, and at the same time, ourselves in our deepest nature. It isn't just the Buddha's Enlightenment that is transcendental, that can't be adequately explained in language. We ourselves are *nisprapañca*, life itself cannot be fully explained in the limitations of language. It is essentially mysterious. Of course there is a danger of reifying 'the transcendental' into an identity or entity, but that shouldn't prevent us from forming a connection with a sense of something beyond our usual knowledge and experience, which is 'deep, hard to see, subtle, going against the stream'.

It might be helpful to bring in Sangharakshita's distinctions between psychological, spiritual and transcendental. Psychological states are those that 'pertain to ordinary human consciousness'[51], the psyche. In ordinary usage, the states that are referred to here are the ordinary states of mind we usually experience: love, hate, hope, fear, anxiety etc. At roots these states are impulses to avoid pain and pursue pleasure.

Spiritual states are those that pertain to something more than what we usually experience. A higher level of consciousness. Buddhism describes these states as those that we experience in the dhyānas or in the lower reaches of the spiral path: faith, joy, rapture, calm, bliss and concentration. Spiritual can also be used to describe states of mind that are skilful, characterised by mettā, wisdom and contentment.

Transcendental states are those that pertain to Nirvāna, the highest level of consciousness. These states are described in the words, symbols and images that evoke Enlightenment: the five Buddha mandala, the unfolding of compassion, wisdom and energy etc. Transcendental can also be the term used for states found in the higher reaches of the spiral path: knowledge and vision of things as they really are, withdrawal, disenchantment and liberation.

These definitions are helpful when we are reflecting on our relationship with the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. We can connect with the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas on the psychological, spiritual and transcendental level. For example Tārā. We can chant her mantra when we are frightened, feeling anxious or need some help. The effect of evoking Tārā at those times will be to calm us and steady our minds. Tārā is helping us with our psychological states.

We can focus on the figure of Tārā to help us develop skilful states of mind. Focusing on the colour green, and Tārā's form will lead us into states of *dhyāna*. We can look for the qualities of

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[49] Sangharakshita, Essential Sangharakshita, The Complete Works vol 6. Windhorse Publications

[50] Sangharakshita, The Psychology of Spiritual Development, 1967, www.freebuddhistaudio.com

[51] Sangharakshita, The Spiritual Significance of Confession, www.freebuddhistaudio.com. See also Sangharakshita, The Meaning of Spiritual Community, www.freebuddhistaudio.com

faith, joy, rapture, calm and bliss in the form of Tārā and evoke those qualities mirrored in ourselves. Tārā helps us develop spiritually.

The archetypal form Tārā is also an embodiment the qualities of Enlightenment, and she represents the union of compassion and wisdom. While meditating on Tārā we come closer to the Buddha's Enlightenment experience. We see how she arises out of the blue sky of śūnyatā and dissolves back into the blue sky. We reflect on how she represents boundless and limitless compassion, without subject or object. In one of his last papers Sangharakshita talks of Tārā being associated with the samādhi of Pure Beauty, which is also a gateway to liberation.[52] Through reflecting on the beauty of Tārā, she becomes the gateway to the transcendental.

In training for ordination, one's connection to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas expand to include all their facets: the help they bring psychologically, their ability to help us develop spiritual states of mind, and as a door way to the transcendental. There can be a danger of settling with a connection at a lower level, for example only calling on Tārā for psychological help, making her become more of a goddess figure. We need to remind ourselves to contemplate the deeper significance of the archetypal figure as a embodiment of Enlightenment in an imaginative form.

Q: What is my sense of and connection with the transcendental? How does this manifest? For instance, do I connect with a Buddha or bodhisattva? Do I have a sense of my innate potential for enlightenment?

Reverence and Receptivity to the Three Jewels

In fostering our connection with the myths, symbols, images and archetypal figures of Buddhism, we are bringing ourselves wholly in relationship to the Three Jewels. It is a whole response, because it involves our imagination and our emotional life. It enables us to aspire and respond to something beyond our everyday concerns and the sphere of our usual consciousness. This seems to be a fundamental part of human nature, to want to look up, to aspire, to have reverence and receptivity to something more than we are now. In the Garava Sutta[53], we are told that even the Buddha wanted to look up to something or someone, and to train with them. He went as far as to say we suffer if we don't 'dwell' in reverence and receptivity. There was no-one more accomplished than him ethics, meditation, wisdom, liberation and knowledge of liberation than him that he could look up to, but he realised he could look up the Dhamma itself.

Becoming an Order Member means that we accept that ours, and others, potential is further than our present state of being, and we are committed to realising that potential, and helping others reach theirs. That commitment expresses itself as reverence and receptivity. Reverence in Palī is garava, which can also translate as respect, it comes from a root which means 'weighty'. Receptivity is a translation of pattisā, which can also be translated as deference or promise, and comes from a root which means 'heard' through inspiration. Subhuti calls this

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[52] Sangharakshita, Green Tārā and the Fourth Lakśana, www.sangharakshita.org

[53] Samyutta Nikāya, 6.2. See Sangharakshita Some Reflections on the Garava Sutta, www.sangharakshita.org

'dharmic responsiveness'[54]. This gives us a fuller sense of what these qualities of respect and receptivity mean. We are inspired to listen and respond, even to promise ourselves to something more than we are, but that we know as weighty, we know as our potential. It is not a blind following or obedience, but an expression of our own sraddhā. It is also a joyful experience, because we are in touch with what is most important to us and living that out. To block reverence and receptivity to what is most important to us is suffering because there is nowhere to go, nothing to move towards. We are stuck where we are.

How reverence and receptivity are expressed will be different for different people at different times. Coming across the Three Jewels in Sangharakshita's presentation, I felt I had found something that I had always known, but taken further. I felt for the first time I was taken seriously in all my spiritual, even transcendental, potential by the Order Members I met, particularly at Tiratanaloka. I remember sitting in the lounge at Tiratanaloka with the team, and realising that there was something in them I could imagine myself becoming, that I aspired to become, in my own particular way. I remember just wanting to learn everything I could from them. I listened to and made notes on all of Sangharakshita's lectures as a kind of reverential exercise. Sometimes I found, I still find, myself with tears running down my face with joy at having found the Dharma and resonating with the truth of it. When I took up the Going for Refuge and Prostration Practice, I found it carrying on into my every day life. At that time I was at university, and there was a club night that used the image of Avalokiteśvāra on the flyers. I found myself going throughout the campus picking up all the flyers that were trodden into the ground and had been damaged. It became an exercise of reverence to the forces of compassion in the world, and represented my commitment to never let compassion become defiled or trodden on. I even found out the organisers of the club and asked them not to use Buddhist images on their flyers.

Q: How do I express reverence for and receptivity towards the Three Jewels in my life?

Devotion and Ritual

There are private expressions of reverence and receptivity, and these become even more powerful when they are expressed publicly in shared ritual and devotional practices. This where our personal myth becomes part of a public myth, a shared myth expressive of common ideals and principles. We can inspire and galvanise each other in the collective in a way that is more than just a sum total of the reverence and receptivity each individual brings to the ritual. Something mysterious and quite tangible is built up between us. This is why it is important to have some ritual and devotional practices that we share as an international Movement. These practices include: The Seven-fold and Three-fold Puja, The Tiratanavandanā, The Going for Refuge and Prostration Practice, amongst others.

Q: In what ways do I engage with the practice of devotion and ritual (for instance, through pujas and the Going for Refuge and Prostration Practice)?

This leaves the question open of what happens when you don't emotionally connect with the ritual and devotional practices we do in the Movement? What happens when you aren't sharing your personal inspiration and reverence through those practices? Not everyone will

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[54] Subhuti, Spiritual Receptivity, talk given at Padmaloka in 2013. www.freebuddhistaudio.com

feel emotionally moved at all times by the practices. However, there is still an advantage of taking part and having a shared ritual context. There is no one ritual or devotional practice that will suit everyone, yet at the same time we need to build up a shared body of rituals and practices that we can all draw from. We need a common myth to participate in, and that myth is expressed through a common liturgy.

Even when we don't feel strongly emotionally connected, we can bring as much of ourselves as we can into the practice. It might be enough to remain mindful and in a state of mettā towards everyone who is there. Things can change, our connection to different practices can change, and those practices can change us. We can look for a particular strength of experience from doing the practice, having an idea of what inspiration will look like. However, real inspiration may be quite subtle. It may be something we experience even after the shared ritual, something that arises out of the potent silence that is created after the ritual has ended. With a combination of receptivity and creative imagination, we find we can connect with practices that individually might not engage us, simply because we are doing them with other people. We find our inspiration lifted by the inspiration of others.

Q: How can I engage with creativity and receptivity within ritual, even when I am not enjoying it?

Reflection Questions

How am I developing meaningful friendships with Order Members, connections with Order Members outside my local Centre, Kalyāna Mitras or Order Members I look up to? How am I deepening peer friendships?
How do I engage with kalyāna mitratā as a path of transformation?
What are my patterns around conflict? How do I resolve conflicts when they arise?
Am I fully transparent with with my KMs and potential Preceptor? Do I have 'no-go' areas (things like sex, addictive tendencies, money, family...)?
What is my understanding of the significance of Urgyen Sangharakshita and the Triratna lineage? Do I have any unresolved issues with Bhante as a teacher and a person? If so, am I in dialogue with kalyana mitras or other Order Members about these?
How do I participate in Sangha activities, including festivals and mitra activities?

Further Study Material

In 1990 Sangharakshita gave a very important talk called, *My Relation to the Order* (lecture 172). He also gave a talk called *Is a Guru Necessary?* (lecture 90) in 1970 in which he outlined the ways we should, and should not, relate to vertical friendship. You can download both talks from www.freebuddhistaudio.com.
If you have time, you could listen to a series of talks Vajratara and Karunadhi gave as part of a joint Buddhafield/ Tiratanaloka ordination training retreat in 2019: Spiritual Friendship and the Tantric Rites. These can be found at www.freebuddhistaudio.com

Kalyāna Mitratā and Sangha

Text purpose written by Amritamati. Edited by Vajratārā

> 'Lord, this spiritual friendship, spiritual companionship and spiritual intimacy is no less than half of the spiritual life.' 'Say not so, Ānanda,' the Buddha replies. 'It is the whole, not the half of the spiritual life.'[55]

[55] Samyutta Nikāya 45.2

Anyone who has been around Triratna for any length of time will have heard this quote many times, but do we ever really consider what the Buddha meant by this? In the sutta, the Buddha goes on to say that 'when a monk has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that he will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path'. What struck me when I read this was the word 'expected'. It's not that it is hoped that one will develop the Noble Eightfold Path, but it is expected, it is the natural outcome of good friendship, it is simply what happens if one really has a good friend.

So friendship is the whole of the spiritual life, but do we actually see it as a path towards Insight and Enlightenment? Do we consider it as much a form of practice as meditation, study or retreats? This guideline asks about your friendships with Order Members, what does that mean and why is it so important?

Q: How do you respond to the ideal of friendship? What are your experiences of the benefits of friendship?

Sometimes on retreat people share what attracted them to Triratna on first coming along to a Centre, and it is inevitably the friendliness of those people they met there. For me it was experiencing the friendship I witnessed between Order members, their obvious love and enjoyment of each other, that drew me strongly to this Movement. It wasn't just about feeling the depth of understanding of the Dharma they had, but was much more about connection, love and warmth towards others, which to me seemed a practical expression of that understanding.

What is friendship?

It's worth looking at the qualities of friendship Aristotle described over 2000 years ago, as they are as pertinent now as they were then. He described three kinds of friendship[56]:

1. Friends who are primarily useful to each other, 'who love each other for their utility', maybe at work or involved in a project. If we take the unifying factor away, the friendship flounders.
2. Those who share a pleasurable activity 'who love for the sake of pleasure', whether football, gossiping or even meditating. Again, if we leave the activity or no longer find our shared activity pleasurable, the friendship finds it hard to continue, let alone grow.
3. Those who share the love of the good, who 'are good, and alike in virtue', who love each other for who they are in themselves and who 'wish well to their friends for their sake'. This is where true, enduring, spiritual friendship is to be found.

Nowadays the word friendship tends to be used quite loosely, and people call those they barely know friends, such as through social media, like Facebook. It's a safer way to connect for some, as it's a lot less intimate and hence a lot less challenging, but ultimately far less satisfying. Friendship isn't about acquiring as many friends as possible, but about finding depth in those we have. This is not possible if we have so many friends that we are unable to maintain meaningful communication with any of them. Sangharakshita talks about having (or doing) more and more of less and less as our spiritual practice deepens, and this could be applied to friendship. We need a handful of really close friends and then will have 'ever widening circles' of people we know less intimately.

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[56] Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics, 8.3

If we want to join the Triratna Buddhist Order, which is really a network of friendships of those who have effectively gone for refuge to the Three Jewels, rather than an organisation or legal body, then it's necessary to have friends in the Order before we join it. How else can we know what it is we're joining. How else can those inviting us to join the Order know us well enough to see the effectiveness of our practice?

Going back to Aristotle, it's not that a friendship created in one of his more utilitarian groups can't evolve into a truer friendship, but it's not a given. We need to be honest about what sort of friendship we have and how much time and energy we give it. It isn't that we should finish those friendships that are only pleasurable or utilitarian, unless of course they are unhealthy ones leading us into unskilful ways of being, but there is a need to prioritise friendships that share the love of the good. These will be mostly, though not exclusively, found in Sangha friendships. In friendships based in 'love of the good', we mutually support each other in our spiritual practice. Friendship need not be about what you get from your friendship, whether it be pleasure or utility, but just the simple act of being a friend, looking for the good in others, will mean something of positive benefit will arise from it. As the saying goes 'if you want a friend, then be a friend'.

Q: What is your experience of the difference between friendship in the ordinary sense and spiritual friendship? Is there indeed a difference?

What is spiritual friendship?

Sangharakshita says it is 'a relationship based on the effective pursuit of a common spiritual ideal – in our case the ideal of Enlightenment'. Straightforward enough, but we have to watch it doesn't fall into the first and second of Aristotle's groups, being based on a common interest, even if that interest is Enlightenment! The way we do this is by consciously practising friendship as a path to Insight for both our friends and ourselves; our own inner transformation affects the friendship positively, and that friendship deepening, in turn, affects our inner transformation. This transformation comes about through encouraging each other in our spiritual life, communicating meaningfully about what we most value, and occasionally through negotiating conflict. Sangharakshita calls communication in the Sangha 'a vital mutual responsiveness on the basis of a common ideal and principle'[57], but he also says that sometimes it is a 'mutual responsiveness across a cavern'![58] In communicating meaningfully with our friend sometimes we have to let go of our own preferences and open ourselves to their feedback and direction. Sometimes we have to let go of a desire to avoid conflict and become more honest, even at the risk of their disapproval. In all these dimensions of friendship we are expanding beyond our sense of separate and fixed selfhood. This is why Sangharakshita calls friendship the emotional counterpart to the doctrine of no-self or *anātman*[59].

Q: How do I engage with kalyāna mitratā as a path of transformation?

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[57] Sangharakshita, Going for Refuge, www.freebuddhistaudio.com

[58] Sangharakshita, Yogi's Joy, The Complete Works vol 18. Windhorse Publications

[59] Sangharakshita, Crossing the Stream, The Complete Works vol 7. Windhorse Publications.

It is also important to see friendship in terms of duties rather than rights, which amounts to being a friend rather than having a friend.

> 'The two ends, so to speak, of a human relationship are in fact as inseparable as the two ends of a stick. Just as we may run our hand either from the top to the bottom, or from the bottom to the top, of the stick, so in human relationships we may proceed either from ourselves to others, or from others to ourselves, considering either what is owed by us to them or by them to us. The first comprise what we call duties, the second we call rights. But the relationship nevertheless remains an indivisible whole'.[60]

Any object can be looked at from opposite ends. You could hold either end of a walking stick, but actually it's the handle that should be grasped. Approaching one's friendships by considering what might be our own duties towards our friends tends to be more conducive to building the spiritual community than thinking we have 'rights' in our relationships with others. If everyone acted from a sense of duty towards others then there'd be no need to think in terms of rights. Duties are about giving (dāna), rights are about getting. Sangharakshita describes duty as 'The sweet child of the realisation of emptiness – *śūnyatā* - within the depths of our own heart.'[61] We can find freedom and initiative by considering our duties towards our friend; at its highest level this can be an expression of spontaneous compassionate activity, which comes from a union of wisdom, *prajñā*, and compassion, *karunā*: ie. knowing what our friend needs and spontaneously giving it to them. Duties only depend on us, on our actions, but rights depend on the actions of others, which we usually have little control over, and so we can come into conflict with others, demanding we get what we believe we deserve, and unskilful action can easily follow. If we think in terms of what our own duty is, we can always be skilful, no matter what response we get. We can be assertive, but from the love mode not the power mode, as an act of compassion with an objective (other-regarding) orientation. Duties help us get our self out of the way, but rights strengthen our self-clinging; duties are in alignment with the bodhicitta, rights block its flow.

Q: How do you work with any expectations you might have of friendships? How might it be if you thought of your friendship in terms of being a friend rather than having a friend?

Projection in spiritual friendships

Sometimes spiritual friendship, perhaps especially with Dharmacharinis and others more experienced than ourselves, can throw up a lot of old conditioned patterns which we need to work with. When we aren't very conscious of this, projection can take place where we 'project' onto our friend qualities or motivations that are more to do with our own psyche than our friend's. Sometimes this projection can be positive, where we project onto them our own emerging qualities. For example, we want to be like our friend. The difficulty comes when that person does not live up to our expectations, or if we want an exclusive relationship. Disappointment and jealousy can arise. Projections can be negative, such as seeing our friend as an authority figure, and acting towards them as though they are in a power position over us. We can become angry

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[60] ibid

[61] ibid

and defensive. We can also project family dynamics onto our friends, casting friends in family roles such as our mother, father or sister.

It will often be our other friends or even that person themselves who might question whether you might be projecting onto them, and it is important to be able to hear and think about this. Maybe they are right, maybe they are wrong, but something is happening that warrants some investigation. This can be a very good opportunity to look at our conditioning and any buttons that are being pushed by our friendship with that person. Looking at our projections helps clarify what attitudes and patterns we're bringing to the friendship. The more we can own these, the deeper our friendship can go, with the help of honest reflection and communication.
If we find we are projecting onto someone it may be better to talk it through with a friend before talking about it to the person you are projecting onto. It can be very painful to be on the end of someone else's projections, just as it is painful to recognise we are projecting onto someone.

Q: What is your experience of projection in friendship? When it is helpful, and when is it unhelpful? How do we work with projection?

How can spiritual friends benefit us?
This may seem obvious to some of you, but not everyone feels the need for depth in friendships. However, the Buddhist tradition has plenty of examples of rich and dynamic friendships, from Sāriputta and Moggallāna to Milarepa and Rechungpa.

In the 'Jewel Ornament of Liberation' Gampopa says that *'The Enlightenment of a Buddha is obtained by serving spiritual friends,'* and that friends are essential for one's practice for three reasons. The first is 'scriptural authority' where we learn the Dharma from each other and explore our views and ideas together. The second is necessity, as Subhuti points out: '*A Dharma lifestyle that does not contain a significant degree of friendship based on the Dharma will be a lonely and difficult one – for most, one might say, almost impossible.'*[62]

Gampopa illustrates the third reason for needing spiritual friends with 3 similes:
1. They are like a guide when we travel in unknown territory. As we deepen our practice we enter the unknown territory of our minds, which we may have thought we knew, but more and more complexities and subtleties come into awareness over time, and this can be discomforting and sometimes scary. We can start to wonder who we actually are. Someone who has been there before us can be a source of encouragement and support and stop us going round and round in circles by sharing their own experience and also through questioning and mirroring us back, helping us find more clarity. It can be reassuring to know our experience isn't unique, and it can also counteract conceit if we think we're special! We need vertical friends as guides and horizontal friends as companions.

2. An escort when we pass through dangerous regions. What we come across in our practice can feel like danger, it's a threat to our idea of who we are: thieves and robbers, wild beasts and other noxious animals come to us as thoughts of judgement, anger, envy etc. A friend will help us fend these off, maybe by taming or befriending them, maybe by pointing out a differ-

[62] Subhuti, A Supra-Personal Force, Seven Papers, Lulu.

ent route so we no longer encounter them. Or if we lose track of our path and stray into unhelpful regions we find we're in danger of sliding back into a mundane existence and letting go of our practice altogether. A beautiful poppy field may look inviting to us (falling in love, the adventure of backpacking across stunning countries etc) but maybe it will simply send us to sleep before reaching our destination (for those of you who have watched, The Wizard of Oz). Friends who have been practising for longer than us, friends in the Order, can recognise the terrain and help guide us to the smoother path.

3. A ferryman when we cross a great river. Without a ferryman on our raft of practice we may think we're crossing the stream (of *samsāra*), but actually we're just floating along with the current, possibly heading for whirlpools where we'll drown. We need wise friends to help steer us in the right direction.

Q: Have you experienced any of these benefits of friendships in your relationships with Order Members and others in the Sangha?

The Goal of spiritual friendship

Ideally within friendship we'd reach a point when our actions are always appropriate and beneficial. A group of friends that became known as 'the Anuruddhas' are an inspiring example of communal living with deep friendship[63]. The three of them lived together in a grove, in the Gosinga Sal wood. At one time The Buddha visited them and enquires about their life there and how things are going, both their physical needs, their more psychological needs in terms of friendship, and their spiritual needs. Speaking for the three of them Anuruddha tells the Buddha how their harmony is achieved:

> 'As to this, Bhagavan, it occurred to me, "Indeed it is a gain for me, indeed it is well gotten by me, that I am living with such fellow Brahma-farers". And on account of this, for these venerable ones friendliness as to acts of body, speech, thought, whether openly or in private has risen up in me. Because of this, Bhagavan, it occurred to me, "Now suppose that I have surrendered my own mind, should live only according to the mind of these venerable ones", so I, having surrendered my own mind am living only according to the mind of these venerable ones. Bhagavan, we have diverse bodies but assuredly only one mind.'

So, these acts of body, speech and mind rise up spontaneously, whether expressed outwardly or not. There is just a continual positive energy between the three of them. This may be an ideal which is currently beyond us a lot of the time, but we need to have a vision of what is possible if we are to have faith in the unlimited nature of our friendships. Really our friendships are only as limited as we believe we are.

How to practise spiritual friendship

There are many references to friends and friendship throughout the Pāli Canon, and both Mahayāna and Vajrayāna texts, often on how to recognise or be a good friend. The Buddha's teaching about the *samgrahavastus* (the "means of attracting beings to the Sangha") are a list of the 'duties of friendship', or the ways to practise friendship:

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[63] Culagosingha Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 31

> 'Generosity, kind words, beneficial help, And consistency in the face of events,
> In line with what's appropriate in each case. These bonds of fellowship function in the world like the linchpin in a moving cart.' [64]

Generosity, ***dāna***. It's said that when you feel you just cannot practise the Dharma for whatever reason - maybe you don't want to meditate or study - you can at least always practice generosity. The giving of oneself, whether this is your time or your attention or your honest communication, is particularly valuable. If you don't feel like giving anything of yourself to your friend, is that really a friendship? Why are you holding yourself back? Why don't you want to trust that you can give of yourself? At the same time, it's not about feeling you should tell your friend everything, or even giving when you can see your friend is unable to receive at that time. It's 'in line with what's appropriate'. You might want to spend time with a friend, but maybe they are too stressed or tired or simply unable to be available. Generosity then would be to step back and give them some space, or put aside what is foremost in your mind and step in to take on some of their responsibilities. This requires the wisdom aspect of generosity, where we see what is truly needed within the friendship. In true friendship we can trust that our friend will also have our own best interests at heart, what Kant calls 'a generous reciprocity of love'.

Q: What do you give within friendship?

If we're honest with ourselves most of us will acknowledge that there are no-go areas in many of our friendships, areas we feel too wary to face up to, or that we don't want others to see or recognise, as we're unsure of the outcome.

Q: Am I fully transparent with with my KMs and potential Preceptor? Do I have 'no-go' areas (things like sex, addictive tendencies, money, family...)?

Kindly speech, ***priyavāditā***, is traditionally that which is truthful, affectionate, helpful and that promotes concord, harmony and unity. I remember being on a month long retreat at Akashavana, most of which was in silence. When we came out of silence I went for a stroll with a friend and we discussed how different our experience of ourselves was in silence and when speaking. We felt we experienced our depths more in the silence and I wanted to speak from my depths, from the place I had touched within the silence. However, once I was speaking I was coming from a more superficial level of myself and felt I wasn't truly expressing myself. This can be a common experience for a lot of us. My friend talked about taking time to breathe and speaking right from the soles of my feet. This allowed a gap between the thought and its immediate expression, the chance to speak from a place of meaning and deeper feeling.
Again it's important to remember the codicil of this verse: 'in line with what's appropriate'. Kind speech isn't necessarily easy to hear. It must also be truthful, affectionate, helpful, and promote concord, harmony and unity. Perhaps you recognise how important these qualities are in your experience of giving and receiving feedback. It can be tempting to avoid telling the truth or expressing ourselves fully in order to be liked or approved of. Sangharakshita talks about "honest collision" being preferable to "dishonest collusion".

Q: What are my patterns around conflict? How do I resolve conflicts when they arise?

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[64] Anguttara Nikaya 4.32

Are you willing to get into dialogue with Order members if you don't agree with or understand what they say, or are you frightened of rocking the boat and upsetting a perceived 'authority'? And how easy do you find it to listen to, and consider, perspectives which are different to yours?

Beneficial help, ***arthacaryā***. As kind words are generosity through speech, beneficial help is generosity through action. But we still need wisdom as well as compassion and a broad perspective when stepping forward to help : to be able to see beyond the immediate, and to consider the potential consequences of our actions. This isn't always easy, but we need to take the space before we act to think about it. Beneficial help in the Sangha is expressed through taking part - engaging with each other in the Centre and helping facilitate Sangha activities that others can participate in. Sangha activities enables friendships to grow and flourish by creating a context in which we can come together.

Q: How do I participate in Sangha activities, including festivals and mitra activities?

Consistency, ***samānārthata*** can be translated as exemplification, which means living up to our ideals, and the expression of our ideals, whatever the circumstances, particularly as an example to others. It is also translated as 'an action taken for the common benefit', 'co-operation' and 'treating others as yourself.' It means keeping our word and keeping a continuity between our speech and action, and being consistently skilful in our dealings with everyone we come into relationship with. To do this we need to be aware of our emotional and mental states, and we need a level of integration between our mind, speech and actions.

Q: Do I find myself behaving differently with different sets of friends?

Kalyāṇa mitratā and Preceptors

Kalyāṇa mitratā, friendship with the beautiful (*kalyāṇa*), is one of the Six Distinctive Emphases of Triratna. Sangharakshita has stressed the importance of developing spiritual friendships on both a horizontal and a vertical level. Those on a horizontal level are with people in the spiritual community who are roughly at the same level of commitment and understanding as us, our peer friends, maybe from our mitra study group, Going for Refuge group or those we work alongside in teams, whether in businesses or at classes or retreats we support. They encourage and support us, as we do them, and enjoy the pleasure of a deepening friendship as we progress along the path together.

Friends who we relate to on a more vertical level are those who have taken their practice deeper than us. In Triratna they would be mainly Order members, especially of our own gender identity, as they are probably the people who we will spend more time with, and who can best understand our gender conditioning. Many people say their initial attraction to Triratna was down to the example of the Order members they encountered when they first came to a centre - their exemplification of what it is to live a life committed to the Dharma and their general friendliness. Even when we're very new to the Dharma, something can resonate for us when we meet someone who has been practising for a long time, and this is an important aspect of vertical spiritual friendship: seeing our own potential more fully developed in someone else.

However, for some of us, it can feel hard to start to get to know Dharmacharinis when we're a mitra, as we can presume they're too busy to meet us, or we can let old views we have interfere,

such as not believing they'd want to give us any time, or not wanting to 'bow to authority' - projections again, in other words! Many Dharmacharinis have been through that process themselves when they were mitras, so it's important to remember that they can empathise with you and that they also want to encourage, support and guide people who wish to deepen their practice and join the Order. They (we!) are also human beings who appreciate and respond warmly to people who move towards them and offer them friendship! Often they will appreciate it if we offer to help them in a practical way, whether on a class team or helping at a festival day they're leading etc. If we're shy or reticent about asking to meet then working alongside each other can be a good way of connecting and gradually getting to know one another.

Over time we get to know Dharmacharinis at our centre or those we meet on retreat, and some of those friendships will grow until there may be a point where you decide you would like to ritualise the friendship with two of them with whom you have a particularly strong connections and enough opportunity to spend time together. You might then ask them to be your formal Kalyāṇa Mitras; two good friends who you trust will help you in any way they can to join the Order and support you settling into the Order once you're ordained. There follows a simple ritual, if they have felt able to say yes to your request, but its simplicity doesn't lessen the strength of such a commitment. Hopefully your friendships will continue to deepen as all three of you practise within the Order.

Your relationship with your Private Preceptor won't necessarily be as close as that with your Kalyāṇa Mitras, although that isn't always the case, but you will probably see more of your Kalyāṇa Mitras than your preceptor, who will relate to you primarily on the basis of your and their Going for Refuge, and the friendship might not feel as informal as with your Kalyāṇa Mitras. Sometimes people ask someone to be their Preceptor rather too early, before they know a number of Order Members deeply enough to be sure what they're doing. It's best to simply keep developing your friendships with the Order members you know and at some point someone will stand out as the person you'd like to ask. If you have Kalyāṇa Mitras then it's good to talk to them if you're thinking of asking someone, as they will know you well enough to know if it's an appropriate time to be considering asking someone to be your Preceptor. The most important thing is to build up the friendships you have, not to be on the lookout for a Preceptor prematurely!

Q: How am I developing meaningful friendships with Order Members, connections with Order Members outside my local Centre, Kalyāna Mitras or Order Members I look up to? How am I deepening peer friendships?

Relationship with Sangharakshita

It's important to reflect on your growing relationship with Sangharakshita, especially as, since his death, we no longer have the opportunity to actually meet him or hear him give a talk. He's the founder of our Order and Community and is therefore of real significance for us all, so we need to get a sense of him through his writings and recorded talks and interviews. In a way he is now on a more mythical or archetypal level, so how do we get to know who he was/is?

Sangharakshita has suggested that one of the best ways of getting to know him is through reading his poems, of which there are many, and each gives us a glimpse of Sangharakshita's inner world, which may not come through his prose in the same sort of way. Another way is to read all his autobiographies, and you could make it a practice to read them consecutively, as this

gives a strong sense of how his life has shaped him, and with him, the Triratna Order and Community. And, of course, more of his writings are being made available through The Complete Works project, with books on a vast range of areas of Buddhism, from ritual and devotion to ethics to the wisdom texts. Thanks to www.freebuddhistaudio.com we can listen to his early lectures, too, which helps us to feel in touch with him in a different way to simply reading his words.

If we have questions or concerns about Sangharakshita, including about some of the things we might have heard about his behaviour in the past, it's really important that we talk about these, and try to get to the bottom of our concerns. It may not be possible to get the answers we'd most like to hear, or even to ascertain whose version of past events is most accurate, but we should still persist with our exploration and reflection, in dialogue with a range of Order Members whose perspectives we have confidence in. We may not ever reach a full resolution of our concerns, but we need to have confidence in Sangharakshita as the founder of the Triratna Buddhist Order, and in his presentation of the Dharma, if we are to be able to commit our lives to practising in this context. Only when we can do this wholeheartedly will we be in a position to become a condition for the arising of the Bodhicitta among us, which is the ultimate aim and purpose of the Triratna Order and Community.

Q: What is my understanding of the significance of Urgyen Sangharakshita and the Triratna lineage? Do I have any unresolved issues with Bhante as a teacher and a person? If so, am I in dialogue with kalyana mitras or other Order Members about these?

Live United - friendship as the Path to Insight

Living united is one part of Dhardo Rimpoche's famous motto: "Cherish the Doctrine, Live United, Radiate Love". It is about living egolessly. As Sangharakshita said when explaining what 'living united' means:

> 'Friendship, I would say, is deep to the extent to which it incorporates the transcendental; or perhaps I should say it is deep to the extent that it is itself incorporated in the transcendental. It is deep to the extent that it is altruistic. It is deep to the extent that it is egoless. Somewhere I've spoken of communication as mutual awareness leading to mutual self-transcendence. Deep friendship can be spoken of in similar terms. We can really radiate love only to the extent that we live united. True friendship, we may say, is the efflorescence of egolessness.'[65]

Can we see spiritual friendship as a path to Insight, to Awakening? Let's keep celebrating our Sangha and our emphasis on spiritual friendship, but we must not rest on our laurels and think we're seeing friendship as the whole of the spiritual life, when actually we're seeing it as an accompaniment to it, or at best, as Ānanda said, half of the spiritual life. Bringing the Dharma to our friendships will benefit them by eventually helping us and our friends get to the point of Insight where, as the Anuruddhas experienced *'we have diverse bodies but only one mind'*. And if we really care for our friends we'll also want to help them set up the conditions for the arising of Insight, for Awakening.

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[65] Sangharakshita, The Message of Dardo Rimpoche.

The most powerful challenge to self-clinging is other people. Interaction with them is the major motive and most effective method for us to go beyond self-centredness. We can think we're free from self-clinging until we meet other people! The most vital Dharma practice we can engage in is a powerful interaction with each other. As Aristotle said, 'In loving their friend they love what is good for themselves. For the good person, in becoming a friend, becomes a good for the person to whom they become a friend'[66]. By creating Sangha we become the path for others to move towards Insight, and they for us, through love and faith and friendship.

[66] Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics.

The Seventh Guideline: Understanding the principles of the Triratna Order and Community

Reflection Questions

What is my understanding of the distinctive vision of the Triratna Buddhist Order and of its place in the Buddhist tradition?

How am I applying the Triratna System of Practice in my Dharma life?

What is my understanding of the significance of Urgyen Sangharakshita within the Order?

What awareness do I have of Triratna as a whole, beyond my local context? What other Triratna contexts have I visited?

Do I have an awareness of Triratna as an international community, including Triratna in India and the importance of Dr Ambedkar?

Further Study Material

All of the Seven Papers are relevant here, but particularly you might like to re-read, What is the Western Buddhist Order? Subhuti wrote another paper to follow up certain themes outlined in What is the Western Buddhist Order? called *Ensuring a High Degree of Commonality of Practices and Teachings*.

Subhuti has also written a paper called, A Buddhist Manifesto which outlines the principles of our Movement for the benefit of other Buddhists. They can all be found on his website www.-subhuti.info.

You might also like to listen to Sangharakshita's talk on the The Six Distinctive Emphases of the FWBO [Triratna Buddhist Community] that he gave in 2002. This can be found on www.free-buddhistaudio.com

Understanding the principles of the Triratna Order and Community

Text purpose written by Candraprabha

Introduction

'At 88 I am aware that I do not have much longer to live, and that the Triratna Buddhist Order, which I founded in 1968, will soon be without the benefit of my leadership and guidance.'[67]

[67] Sangharakshita, Foreword to Ensuring a High Degree of Commonality. 2014

Five years after writing this, Sangharakshita died. So now, more than ever, it seems to me crucially important that those of us who are, and who will be, in this Order, look at our understanding of the principles behind it, and by implication, the principles of 'the movement', the Triratna Buddhist Community.

When we reviewed our original set of talks on this theme, we realised that quite a few organisational things have changed. So, for example, a number of papers have been circulated which are the result of conversations Sangharakshita has had with Subhuti that have been an attempt to clarify just what the principles of Order and Movement actually are. The mitra criteria have changed, the College of Public Preceptors has been established and there are now what we call the 3 strands of decision making within the Order and movement. But, despite all these changes, two things struck me:

1. The actual principles of the Order and Movement themselves haven't changed at all - they've simply been clarified or made explicit

2. It can be quite difficult to tie down what those principles are - there are any number of ways in which we could talk about them. Sangharakshita himself says this 'There is something about the movement, the Order and even about me that is not easily definable. There is a touch of something that cannot be buttoned down, something that cannot in the end be defined. Even the desire to button it down or define it is a mistake – that was the mistake that the Theravada made in connection with its Vinaya. Everyone will need to take care of that rather mysterious, indefinable spirit that gives the movement life and energy.'[68]

The papers that have been distributed in recent years are as follows:
What is the Western Buddhist Order? (2009)
Revering and Relying upon the Dharma (2010)
Reimagining the Buddha (2010)
Initiation into a New Life and and A Supra-personal Force (2011)
A Buddhist Manifesto (2012)
Ensuring a High Degree of Commonality (2014)
Which are all available on Subhuti's personal website www.subhuti.info and in booklet form as The Seven Papers, which is available at www.lulu.com.

There's a lot in these papers and they reward some close study and discussion. It's certainly not going to be possible to summarise them here! In What is the Western Buddhist Order? Sangharakshita says

> 'One could also explore my particular presentation of the Dharma in terms of the Six Distinctive Emphases of the FWBO; to give their headings: Critical Ecumenicalism, Unity, Going for Refuge, Spiritual Friendship, the New Society, and Culture and the Arts. Of these, my emphasis on Going for Refuge is the most essential and probably the most distinctive. The others too are distinctive, for instance, the emphasis on the importance of spiritual friendship is certainly not explicitly taught by any other Buddhist school.

[68] Sangharakshita, What Is the Western Buddhist Order

> These teachings and emphases, together with the range of institutions I have established, between them create something not really definable: a certain atmosphere or attitude that is found within the FWBO and nowhere else. All of them are contained in a network of spiritual friendship and they are to be handed on faithfully from generation to generation in a chain of discipleship.'

There are quite a number of public talks Sangharakshita has given in which he's outlined these emphases so I thought I'd use them as a starting point.

The Six distinctive emphases (of the Triratna Buddhist Community)

1. Centrality of Going for Refuge

During his time in India and afterwards, Sangharakshita came to realise that Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels is what he calls the 'central and definitive Act of the Buddhist life' - you can read about the journey that led to this realisation in A History of my Going for Refuge. His understanding of what that actually meant continued to evolve after he had founded the Order and ordained the first dozen or so people into it. After a number of years saw that people were organising their lives round the Three Jewels to such an extent that those people couldn't fit into any of the traditional categories of Buddhist practitioners - monk/lay, novices or lay devotees. And from this working out came the aphorism that within the Order 'Commitment is primary, lifestyle secondary.'

Now this is not at all saying that lifestyle isn't important, but rather it's saying that commitment is. We don't take on a particular lifestyle at ordination, as was the Buddhist tradition. We're not required to renounce our families, our wealth, our careers and to literally go forth into the homeless life, but we are asked to make a strong commitment to Go for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and to let that commitment guide what we do in all areas of our lives. We don't have rules - a monastic vinaya - but we do have principles and in some cases guidelines.

Q: It might be interesting to ask ourselves do we want to have rules? [I notice that I generally don't want to have them for myself, but wouldn't mind other people following a few when I see them doing things I don't like!]

We can't fall back on doing certain things, e.g. being celibate or wearing robes for a sense of confidence. In Triratna, we have to work out for ourselves how to put those principles into action in our lives and how to keep going more deeply with them. We may lead a monastic or semi-monastic life for periods of time in our lives, or we may have family responsibilities and work outside the movement. But whatever the case, our lives have to become an expression of our Going for Refuge, not a balance with it. The challenge with this isn't that it limits what we can do, but that it doesn't do so! Those whom we practise alongside may take steps that we're not ready to take - perhaps they ask for ordination (though here we've all done that), or they ask people to become their Kalyāṇa Mitras, or they become vegan or they simplify their lives in particular ways. It's constantly challenging because there's no 'comfortable minimum' for us to reach. We can't find a point where we can rest or become complacent. This principle works against both spiritual ambition and spiritual complacency. There are no 'higher' ordinations to aspire too, neither are there any limits to the depth to which we can take our practice. In a way,

we're constantly having to ask ourselves 'could I take this further?' And that's not always easy. But the converse, reaching a sort of plateau with our practice where we're not encouraged to go further would be infinitely, infinitely worse! Somewhere, I think we all want to find out how far we can go - we want to push the limits, to reach our full potential as human beings.

Q: How do you relate to the phrase 'commitment is primary, lifestyle is secondary' in your own life? What are the advantages/ disadvantages of not having a prescribed lifestyle in the Order?

2. The Order is unified

The Order does not exclude anyone on grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation or background. More specifically, women and men have the same ordination and can become Chairs of Centres, Preceptors - both private and public - and so on. Women can have absolutely the same responsibilities as men within the Order. This is very radical in the Buddhist world - perhaps we take this opportunity for granted. If you look at the very old film of Sangharakshita carrying out the first ordinations, I think the first person ordained into the then WBO was a woman, or there was certainly a woman within those first few order members. So the Order is unified but we sometimes practise separately, sometimes together. One way this is supported is through the practice of single gendered activities - we could ask ourselves, do they help? More recently we have begun to explore what a unified Order means for those who identify as gender diverse, and Sangharakshita himself was very keen to support the LGBTQ community.

Q: What is your experience of single gendered activities?

As I've already mentioned, the Order is also unified in terms of being neither lay or monastic. As Sangharakshita points out, other Buddhist movements don't always know how to relate to us. At an international conferences, Ratnadharini said that they didn't know where to place her - with the monastic sangha or the lay sangha. It is not uncommon in Order situations to find that no one is 'in charge' in a way that allows them to impose their will on others. We don't, for example, file into the shrine room in order of seniority. When there are problems, we have to try and reach consensus rather that just look to someone else to sort out the problem. Any authority is based on personal qualities rather than position. This often involves us being in communication with one another to a depth that we might find uncomfortable, for example, when we see something happening at a Centre that we don't like, or we have a difference of opinion about what we should be doing in our GFR group or in our chapter. We can - and often should - ask others for advice, but ultimately no-one really has 'the last word'.

In terms of decision-making, some new structures have come into being in the Movement and Order in more recent years. You're all probably aware of the College of Public Preceptors to whom Sangharakshita handed on certain responsibilities in terms of deciding who enters the Order. Some years ago Order members in India suggested that the name of the Movement and Order should be changed. A long debate about this rumbled on for a time and was inconclusive, resulting in Sangharakshita himself re-naming both in response to a heartfelt plea from India. Following this, certain structures were set up to aid in future decision- making, to try and make sure that everyone had a voice and that those voices were heard. These structures centre around something called the International Council and are often referred to as the 3 strands - the College, the Order and the Movement. You can follow their activities and the kinds of things they discuss online on the project page 'Triratna International Council' on www.thebuddhistcentre.com.

Decision-making across the three "strands" in Triratna - the Order, Centres, and the ordination process - flows upwards from the "grassroots" level to the International Council, giving all Order Members the opportunity to have channels for their views to be heard and to influence the future direction of the Order and Movement.

The Order is also unified through following what are called the 'Four lineages': the lineage of teachings, practices, institutions (or responsibility) and inspiration, that have been given to us by Sangharakshita - about which I'm going to say more in a moment.

3. Ecumenical

The Order is ecumenical - it draws on teachings from different Buddhist traditions. But this is not the same as saying that anything from any tradition is part of Triratna - Sangharakshita qualified it by saying it was 'critical ecumenicalism': 'We find that teachers arise, they study whatever Dharma teachings are available in their time, they then give their own presentation and that attracts people, and that develops into a Sangha, into a school or a tradition'[69]. So the teachings he has drawn together form a particular presentation - they hang together as a whole.

Q: What is my understanding of the distinctive vision of the Triratna Buddhist Order and of its place in the Buddhist tradition?

I think it's important to reflect on the extent to which we have faith in Sangharakshita's teachings. We don't have the 'comfort' of belonging to a long-established tradition with maybe a sentimental view of what that means. We have to be honest with ourselves about whether teachings are working. Again, this throws us back on ourselves, on our own understanding.
So this brings me on the the topic of commonality of practice which is the subject of Subhuti's latest paper, Ensuring a High Degree of Commonality of Practices and Teachings, as well as being the basis of Sangharakshita's paper, What Is the Western Buddhist Order. The latest paper addresses the issue of how much the teachings can 'evolve' without becoming something different from what Sangharakshita passed on. It suggests that we need a high degree of commonality for 3 reasons:

1. It gives us a way of talking about our own practice with others, using the same language and making the implicit explicit. This gives us faith, and deepens our own practice in communication with others.

2. It allow us to see practice as a common endeavour, rather than just something 'I'm doing for myself'. This is very significant. There's something about collective practice that can actually bring something new into being when we experience something on a less conceptual level alongside others who are doing the same.

3. It gives us a way to pass on the teachings to others, to benefit the world, as we no doubt feel we have benefitted ourselves.

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[69] ibid

The paper suggests we need ways of discussing any changes or new practices with one another, to evaluate them and, if necessary, work out how to introduce them into the existing body of teachings and practices. And, once again, it's clear that this will involve a great deal of communication, of being prepared to open up to those who may not agree with us, to work together to try and keep the Order and the Movement both alive and coherent.

When this paper first came there were a range of responses to it. I remember talking to another Dharmacharini and we were both interested to find that whereas she feared it would mean a restriction on what she could do, I felt relieved that there was a way to actually start talking about practices that didn't come directly from Sangharakshita.

Q: How do you respond to the idea of deepening communication about the practices we do and evaluating their use in the context of the Order and Movement? Do you fear our practices will be restricted, or that they will lack commonality?

4. Team-Based Right Livelihood or The New Society

Sangharakshita talked about the 'possibilities for friendship and generosity' in the context of working together. He even talked about work as the tantric guru: 'In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition 'work' is seen as the Tantric Guru because when one is fully engaged in a task the mind cannot run elsewhere - in a way, you can't get away from what's going on. And when other people are thrown into the mix - well, you can find yourself just reflected back quite strongly'.[70]

In 1999 there were thirty one team based right livelihood businesses, with two hundred and thirty two full time and forty eight part-time workers between them. There aren't so many now. In 2015 Windhorse: Evolution, which over the years provided team based right livelihood experience for so many people, closed down. Those businesses were unique in the way they were based on a 'give what you can and take what you need' ethos.

There's a very interesting talk Ratnaghosha, who worked for Windhorse:Evolution, gave in 2010 called The Tantric Guru - dead or alive?[71] In this talk he quotes some things Sangharakshita has said over the years about co-ops and co-operation. Here is an example from a Q&A session in 1983.

> 'When you are working in a co-operative you are working together. As for 'working' everybody knows what that is, but 'together' is not me telling you what to do or you telling me what to do: in a co-operative you are all working together. To do anything together is very difficult indeed. Usually one person is the 'leader', the other the 'follower'. One person takes the initiative and the other person allows them to take the initiative..... You very rarely get actual co-operation.
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> Co-operation means you all put your cards on the table. You consider what is to be done, and what is the best way of doing it. You consider this person's suggestion and that person's suggestion, and having discussed the matter in this way and agreed on a certain line of action you all pool your energies and your ideas, your abilities and your skills and, be-

[70] Sangharakshita, source unknown.

[71] Ratnaghosa, The Tantric Guru - dead or alive?

> cause you have a common objective, you all work together. No-one is trying to order anyone around. No-one is shirking his or her share of responsibility. No-one is having to take more responsibility than they really should. This is a co-operative situation. In such a situation you are very aware of other people. You make no attempt to impose yourself upon them. There is no question of 'power'. A co-operative of any kind functions entirely in accordance with the love mode – and that isn't easy. In a genuine co-op situation you abdicate the power mode absolutely. Only the love mode is 'allowed' to operate, or to have effect. If you are working in this way, or relating to others in this way, there is a sort of abnegation of your individualism, your egoism.'

He goes on to say that some unhelpful trends evolved in team based right livelihood over the years based on a misunderstanding of this principle. This misunderstanding is summed up as people thinking that because there may not be 'power', that people shouldn't hold responsibility. This is a very interesting point, I think. It can be quite hard for us, often coming from a world of management structures, to have a sense of how decisions are made when we work in a team. It's not exactly a democracy, where everyone has an equal say and the majority preference is what goes. Nor is it an autocracy, where one person has the final say. But Ratnaghosha says that this doesn't mean that everyone has to be consulted on everything either. In situations what is often unacknowledged is that there are certain people who, for a variety of reasons, are more able or more prepared to take on responsibility and they will - and should - have more effect and influence on that situation.

He also pointed out a difference between retreat centres/ Centres which are charities and team based right livelihoods where people work alongside one another.

> 'It could be, then, that the future of Team Based Right Livelihood is more likely to evolve in non-profit making enterprises; Buddhist Centres, Retreat Centres and other charities. The main problem that I see with this is that it would be in danger of perpetuating the traditional split between full-timers who can't make a living without the financial support of a wider community and that wider community who rely on the full-timers to do too much on their behalf. Team Based Right Livelihood businesses overcome that split because Buddhists are both practising together and generating wealth.'

Tiratanaloka actually is a bit different, we are a charity but work as a unified team with no support team. I was someone who didn't work in a Buddhist-based team before I was ordained, but I'm a convert, I can tell you! I think though that there's a need to find a way to put ourselves into intense situations if we don't have team based right livelihood. Why? We need situations where we can't get away from the self/other dynamic - having to be honest, having to say what we think in order to make the situation work. Retreats can be very helpful, especially at Tiratanaloka. It's often now the only chance people get to live and practice intensely with others, and not just in silence.

If you get the chance to work in a team, then I suggest you take it! Even for a few months. Maybe try a Karuna appeal, for example, where you can benefit the world quite directly as well as yourself. There are also opportunities to work with other members of the Sangha on Centre projects such as festival days and setting up retreats.

Q: Where do you have an experience of working together intensively in Buddhist teams? What have you learned from doing so?

5. Arts/creativity

You can look at this emphasis from the point of view of keeping our inspiration and imagination alive. Art, poetry, music, literature, drama, nature can engage our emotions, touch us, move us. We need ways to bring beauty into our lives and to express the beauty we experience. I think we're very fortunate to have a teacher who encourages us to enjoy these sorts of pleasures.

You can also look at this from the point of view of an archetype - the Artist as a true individual. The true individual is not afraid to stand alone, to be unpopular, to choose truth over comfort. The artist strives to express what's of value, of meaning. Perhaps you could say we are our own best work of art.

Q: Where are you at your most creative? What are the benefits of the Triratna emphasis on the arts in your own experience?

6. Spiritual Friendship

It is easy to take this for granted as part of the Buddhist tradition, but some aspects of friendship are not emphasized in other traditions where the teacher/pupil relationship is the important one and teachings are handed down via direct transmission which gives the recipient the authority to teach. We've already talked about the importance of friendship as the third guideline.

Spiritual friendship, kalyāṇa mitratā, seems to me to be the only way in which the Order and movement will survive now Sangharakshita is dead. Without Sangharakshita here, we will have to communicate about things, we'll have to care enough about the Order and each other to keep in harmony, to overcome our differences, to keep it all together.

Q: What is my understanding of the significance of Urgyen Sangharakshita within the Order?

I recently heard Parami talk about the conversation cafe on an Order Convention - people were saying how glad they were to have come into communication through this exercise with others whom they'd had particular views about through reading Shabda.

We don't have authority, direct transmission. What we do have are Centres with their councils and teams, communities, TBRLs, GFR groups, chapters, retreat centres, the College of Public Preceptors, the consultation process for those becoming Preceptors, the ECA, chapter convenors, the International Council - structures that encourage us to communicate, to be honest about and work on our differences, to rejoice in our mutual growth and development and to reach out to the world.

Ultimately, the reason for all these things is not just to perpetuate an Order and Movement for the sake of it. It's about creating a living spiritual community that will help us to go beyond our limited selves - as Subhuti says to 'unfasten the bonds of self-clinging' through Dharma practice, Dharma lifestyle and Dharma service. Even if you don't want to study all the papers, you can

put yourself into the institutions wholeheartedly because they support principles that are based on moving towards liberation, for ourselves and others.

The Order is, potentially - and, I believe, actually - a great force for good in the world. It reaches out to those who have lived in poverty and discrimination in India, to those who live in the wastelands of a materialistic society in the West, to those who experience the dukkha of lack of real meaning in their perhaps otherwise comfortable lives. To the extent that we allow the teachings and practices we've received move us beyond self-clinging, we can bring about the end of suffering that the Buddha saw for himself when he gained Enlightenment. What better gift could we give to the world than to join such an Order?

Q: Do I identify with Triratna as a whole, beyond my local context? What other Triratna contexts have I visited?
Q: Do I have an awareness of Triratna as an international community, including Triratna in India and the importance of Dr Ambedkar?

The Eighth Guideline: Altruistic Dimension of Practice

Reflection Questions

What is my understanding of, and response to, the Bodhisattva ideal and its importance to the Triratna vision?
Do I aspire towards awakening for the benefit of all beings?
How is the altruistic dimension of going for refuge expressed in my daily life?
In what ways do I practise Dharma service? (for instance, helping Order members, my local centre, or through other projects)

Further Study Material

There is a lot you can read about Sangharakshita's understanding of the Bodhisattva Path. Most of this can be found in The Complete Works Vol 4. For the purposes of ordination training, however, you might want to make sure you listen to the series of talks Sangharakshita gave called Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow. These can be found at www.freebuddhistaudio.com and The Complete Works Vol 11.

Altruistic Dimension of Practice

Text purpose written by Karunadhi and Vandanajyoti

The Bodhisattva's vision

When you visit Tiratanaloka, as you come into the driveway, you will see a beautiful stupa with silver birch trees growing behind it. The stupa contains some of the ashes of Dhardo Rimpoche, one of Sangharakshita's main teachers who he considered to be a living Bodhisattva and who gave him the Bodhisattva Ordination. A Bodhisattva is one whose life is dedicated to Enlightenment, not just for his own sake, not just for his own emancipation, but for the Enlightenment of all sentient beings, for the whole of life. 'Bodhi' means awakening and 'sattva' means 'being', a being who is totally dedicated to Enlightenment, the full flowering of wisdom and compassion.

The great Bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshvara with 1000 arms and 11 heads is the symbol of the Triratna Order. He holds to his heart the wish fulfilling gem, a symbol of the Bodhicitta, the arising of the Will to Enlightenment which Sangharakshita describes as a non-egoic stream of energy directed for the benefit of all beings[72]. At Ordination, each Order Member commits themselves to the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha which, at its highest, manifests as Avalokiteshvara, a force for good in the world. We are connecting to a vision that reaches far beyond us and is in fact limitless, the Bodhisattva Ideal, expressing the altruistic dimension of our Going for Refuge and our highest aspiration.

The fourth and concluding line of acceptance in the public ordination ceremony is: 'For the benefit of all beings I accept this Ordination'. When we declare this intention to practise the Dharma for the benefit of all, we are entering the path of training in the Bodhisattva Ideal. As novice Bodhisattvas, we take on the Six Pāramitās, or the six perfections, as a path to Awakening for the benefit of ourselves and all beings. The Six Pāramitās are: generosity (dāna), ethics (sīla), energy (vīrya), patience (ksānti), meditation (samādhi) and wisdom (prajñā). In a sense, prajñā underlies all the previous five pāramitās, as all beneficial activity flows out of the wisdom of seeing things as they really are. Our highest aspiration is to grow and develop in the direction of Buddhahood, to become a Buddha. But how do we begin to move towards this vision or ideal? Generosity, the first of the six pāramitās, is the gateway to this path of Awakening.

Q: What is my understanding of, and response to, the Bodhisattva Ideal and its importance to the Triratna vision?

Generosity

In Buddhism, we come across the term *dāna* (generosity) in many contexts in addition to the six *pāramitās*. Sangharakshita describes dāna as being the basic Buddhist virtue[73]. He emphasises that dana consists not just in the act of giving but also in the feeling of wanting to give, of wanting to share what you have with other people. This feeling of wanting to give or share is often the first manifestation of the spiritual life.

Generosity helps us overcome our sense of separateness - even a small act of generosity can create connection. Generosity works against self-centredness and helps us to move towards empathy and awareness of others. We can see our calculating mind which seeks to protect our desires and to acquire what we think will make us feel more secure and content. Vessantara[74] describes the 'reciprocal relationship' between us, expressed when we receive or give, whether material goods, practical help or emotional support. Giving without expectation of something in return is a sign that craving and attachment have decreased to some extent.

Giving, or generosity, is above all else an open attitude of heart and of mind, the second of the five precepts, 'open-handed generosity'. In the negative form of the precept, we undertake to abstain from taking that which is not given, not to steal from others. We practise the ethical

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[72] Sangharakshita, The Awakening of the Bodhi Heart. www.freebuddhistaudio.com

[73] Sangharakshita, Reason and Emotion in the Spiritual Life: Right Resolve. www.freebuddhistaudio.com

[74] Vessantara Tales of freedom. Windhorse Publications. p70

precepts in order to align our behaviour with our values and in the positive formulation of the precept, we express the ethical intention to become more generous than we are at present.

Dāna as a spiritual practice leads to a changed relationship with the world in three ways. Firstly, we give because it simply makes us happier. Secondly we give out of empathy and a sense of connectedness with others and our environment. Skillful, generous acts in tune with our values, change us and help us to grow in open-heartedness. Acting on an impulse to give helps create a more abundant attitude to life rather than one of a poverty mentality. This starts to give us glimpses of the open-handed vision that lies beyond the clenched fist of self-clinging, the vision that takes us beyond karma niyāma processes, into another order of conditionality, the dharma niyāma processes. Thirdly, dāna pāramitā, the Perfection of Giving of the Bodhisattva, leads beyond the separation of self and other, beyond the notion of giver and receiver and even of the gift. Following this path, dana helps us to orientate ourselves in the direction of the Bodhisattva Ideal.

Q: In what ways do I show an open-handed attitude to others (dāna)? How am I cultivating an open-hearted attitude to life?

Altruistic contexts of practice

Sangharakshita highlights three contexts in which we can move towards the Altruistic Dimension, central to our Going for Refuge. Firstly, there is the context of our personal practice, secondly the social or communal context and thirdly the context of the world. As Order Members, these three contexts of practice are described as 3 duties; first, duty to our own practice, secondly duty to the Order and thirdly duty to the world.

1. Individual context - personal practice

The first, 'duty to our own practice', links with the 3rd line of acceptance at the public ordination ceremony; 'For the sake of enlightenment I accept this Ordination'.

In a seminar on the Bodhisattva Ideal in 1986, Sangharakshita[75] draws out that we need to work on ourselves before we can genuinely and usefully help others. If we don't practice generosity from a place of valuing ourselves and connection with our own needs, we risk over-giving or over-compensating out of guilt or a fear of being selfish. The practice of self mettā is particularly important in building a positive sense of self-worth from which we are able to give, to ask for help and to receive from others. Mettā itself is an act of mental generosity and it's just as important as physical and verbal generosity.

Our first duty is to our own practice. Deepening our practice of the mettā bhāvana increases ethical sensitivity and helps us to grow in self-reflective consciousness. We will experience tensions between our own needs and those of others at times but we can gain greater confidence as we cooperate with the law of karma, accepting that, like all things, we too are changing. You might have noticed a quality of aliveness, freedom, an easier, more natural flow of joy in life as you water the seeds of well-wishing, care and love that naturally extends to others through practice of the mettā bhāvana. To move towards Enlightenment, we need to find ways of cultiv-

[75] https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/text/seminartexts/SEM135_Bodhisattva_Ideal_-_Questions_and_Answers_with_Study_Leaders_1986.pdf

ating and acting on this open-hearted freedom and joy of response, the roots of the altruistic dimension in our own practice.

Sangharakshita says, 'There is in fact only one need of one's own that has to be fulfilled before one can preoccupy oneself effectively with the needs of others, and it is not a physical or material need, but simply a matter of emotional positivity and security. We need to appreciate our own worth and feel that it is appreciated by others, to love ourselves and feel that we are loved by others[76]'.

You might want to reflect on your views and assumptions about giving and receiving, bringing greater awareness to what might inhibit a very natural response.

Q: How do we cultivate a more spontaneous desire to give? Do you ever feel resentment at being asked to give? How does the mettā bhāvana practice support your actions of generosity to yourself and others?

2. Duty to the Order - the social or communal context

As our practice starts to become more effective, we see the possibility of expressing the altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge in the everyday contexts of our lives. We naturally desire deepening connection and communication with others who share our vision and spiritual ideals and with whom we can share our experience of practice. Sangharakshita calls this the social or communal context of our spiritual lives and it is these spiritual friendships that create the spiritual community, the Order and the Sangha.

Sangharakshita has described the richness of spiritual friendship as a 'vital mutual responsiveness on the basis of a common ideal and principle[77]'. We step into the tender but challenging area of deepening communication through skilful speech, talking about our ethical practice, sharing our values. We see ourselves as part of a living spiritual tradition sustained by responsive communication even when there is difference of opinion or conflict. The altruistic dimension in this broader sense is about relating to others and accepting our connection and duty to others.

Q: How are you moving out from the privacy of your own heart into the context of your relationship with other people? How can communication become a form of dāna?

We accept our ordination 'with loyalty to my teachers' and 'in harmony with friends and companions' (the first and second lines of acceptance) at our public ordination. Subhuti highlights that when people come together, who deeply share a common vision and purpose, their efforts combine in a momentum that draws them all onward, beyond themselves. If we are able to cooperate or participate in this flow, in this harmony, with openness and mutual trust, then something more than the sum of the individuals comes into play. We might have had glimpses of this on retreat, or in study groups, even in moments of communication together. The middle way between losing one's individuality, handing over one's responsibility and, on the other hand, individualism or self-sufficiency, is coming into real relationship and deeper communica-

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[76] Sangharakshita, Wisdom Beyond Words, page 83

[77] Sangharakshita, Going for Refuge. www.freebuddhistaudio.com

tion. When difficulties occur, we need mettā and patience to give each other the benefit of the doubt. True harmony is where self and other are seen as interdependent.

We have come across the four Samgrahavastus in the Pali tradition as the duties of friendship, and the Mahayāna tradition also refer to the samgrahavastus as the altruistic practice of the Bodhisattva, creating Sangha for the benefit of all. This means, in effect, that the way to become a Bodhisattva and create Sangha is to become a good friend. In this formulation of the Bodhisattva's activity, the first samgrahavastu is again dāna through which the Bodhisattva acts to build positive connections and spiritual friendship in the Sangha.

3. Duty to the world - the cosmic dimension

Our life is a rich network of relationships. This includes, family, friends, work contexts. As our practice deepens, in all these precious contexts and spheres of influence and concern we develop receptivity, integration and positive emotion. Here, imaginative empathy with all beings transcends our habitual self-concern and obsession. We move through spiritual death to spiritual rebirth, and we are able to act from our deeper values more reliably in our life. Our dāna practice begins at home, but it must not end there. We can expand our dāna practice to include more and more people. This is the third context of altruistic practice, the cosmic dimension of the whole world. In this context, the emphasis of our Bodhisattva practice is giving the gift of the Dharma to all those who can benefit from it.

After his Enlightenment, we are told the Buddha felt a reluctance to teach. Brahma Sahampati visited the Buddha saying that he must teach the Dharma[78] to alleviate suffering in the world and the Buddha agreed to teach. In the Dhammapada the Buddha says, 'The greatest of all gifts is the gift of the Dharma'[79]. Traditionally, the gift of the Dharma is most precious. It's greater than giving gifts of money or other material gifts. It's greater than the gift of fearlessness, or giving confidence. It's even greater than the gift of life and limb.

So why is the Dharma so important? Every human being wants to be fulfilled and to grow towards their own potential. We intuit that life has a deeper meaning, and we suffer when we cannot give expression to our intuition. Growth beyond a certain point means transforming our consciousness and without support, this can be difficult to achieve. The Dharma, the teachings of the Buddha and the companionship of Sangha offer the means to this transformation.

Q: Do I aspire towards awakening for the benefit of all beings?
Q: How does our practice as Buddhists in our everyday lives really help the world? Do we really see the Dharma as the answer to the world's needs?

Sangharakshita[80] draws out four things that we can individually do to support society and create a better world. Firstly, Sangharakshita says we must develop ourselves by unfolding our spiritual potential, what we have it in us to become. Secondly, we cannot do this alone so we will need to join the spiritual community. Sangharakshita talks about the spiritual community as

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[78] Samyutta Nikāya 6:1

[79] Dhammapada v 354

[80] Sangharakshita, Evolution or Extinction: A Buddhist View of Current World Problems. www.freebuddhistaudio.com

'the nucleus of a new society'[81]. In this context, we deepen our spiritual friendships through regular interaction with others who, like us, are trying to become 'true individuals'[82]. Together we can bring something much bigger into being. Thirdly, we will need to withdraw support from all anti-spiritual forces or groups where true individuality is not supported. Fourthly, one must do whatever one can to be an influence for the good. Sangharakshita makes a distinction between positive collective contexts where individuality is fostered as opposed to 'the group' where conformity to conventional morality and societal views overrides what the true individual may know to be skilful and ethical. Even in the face of opposition, we must speak up for what we know to be true and important, supporting potential true individuals to stand for their ideals against the pressure of 'the group'.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." - Margaret Mead[83].

Sangharakshita emphasised that world problems, are by their very nature, group problems. He states that what is new is the size and powerful influence of 'the group' to oppress the individual. However, problems arising from the group cannot be solved by an oppressive group. There are many humanitarian, ecological and environmental issues in the world which concern us; as I write, the 'Black Lives Matter' movement and 'Me Too' movements amongst others. What is needed is collective beneficial activity. Anything that helps alleviate suffering in the world is arthacārya, or beneficial activity, the third samgrahavastu.

Sangharakshita highlights that even if we could address all the world's problems, we would still have conditioned existence to deal with. Dr Ambedkar in India tried to create a path of transformation for society legally through India's constitution and his own political activism. Eventually, he found that effective evolution is an evolution in consciousness and the only way to effect this change was to begin on an individual level through study and practice of the Buddha Dharma. The Dharma offers the path. Following this path, we find ways forward in our desire to create a better world, a world that we aspire to for ourselves and generations to come. The ideal beneficial activity of a Bodhisattva encourages individual transformation and growth. This involves the creation of an environment where the growth and development of individuals is encouraged. The Sangha with its shared ideals and practices is this environment, essential for the flourishing of human potential at the level of the individual and the collective.

Sangharakshita's vision in founding this movement and Order was to create a spiritual community which could become a beacon of light in our suffering world. Individually, within our sphere of influence, we contribute to this vision of evolving consciousness. How we act, think and speak, can contribute to light being brought into the world. We co-operate with each other to create an environment of kalyāna mitratā where individuals can find their true potential, and flourish. We participate in the creating of this environment by working with our minds to develop right view in line with the teachings of the Dharma, understanding that our actions have consequences on many different levels, some beyond our ability to discern.

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[81] Sangharakshita, The Nucleus of a New Society. www.freebuddhistaudio.com

[82] For more about the group and the individual, see Sangharakshita The Complete Works vol 3. Windhorse Publications

[83] attributed to Margaret Mead

The word altruism comes from the Latin alter which means simply other. Altruism in Buddhism means conceiving of oneself not as an isolated individual but as existing in relationship to others. The practice of giving changes us. Even if it is a tiniest glimpse, a genuine taste of wisdom or freedom will open the heart so that you want to serve and give wherever you can. We can see the potential for altruistic activity at all levels of our Going for Refuge, expressed in actions of body speech and mind in our own practice, in the Order and in the world. This altruistic dimension has been described as the arising of the Bodhicitta.

Q: How is the altruistic dimension of going for refuge expressed in my daily life?

The Order as Avalokiteshvara in the world

Returning to the image of Avalokiteshvara, we see the 1000 armed form, 11 headed form, holding the wish fulfilling jewel, the Bodhicitta at his heart, the symbol of our spiritual community. Each of the arms of Avalokiteshvara represents an individual reaching out to help the world in their own particular way, holding different implements. All the arms are united by Avalokiteshvara's body, symbolised by the jewel held to his heart.

The Bodhicitta literally means the awakened heart-mind of Enlightenment. Sangharakshita described it poetically a force working through him founding the Order. The Buddhist community at its highest aspires to embody that Bodhisattva spirit, a force of good in the world. The invitation is not to be the Bodhisattva but to engage with others in Bodhisattva activity. The Bodhisattva creates the Buddha Land, that environment where beings can swiftly gain Buddhahood. Sangharakshita is clear that creating this Buddha Land is a joint creation. It is built by a number of people, practising and working together, inspired by the same ideal.

Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, embodies receptivity to the needs of others expressed through out stretched hands, holding different implements. It might be a mother caring for her child, or a person supporting a work colleague. Together we work to unleash this generous spirit, this force of open heartedness because the world really needs it.

Practising together, we ourselves are now forming and contributing to the vision of the Triratna Buddhist community and Order. Although we may share the same vision of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, we express it in our own particular way. As we grow and develop spiritually, our uniqueness and our individuality will become more manifest.

These days our breadth and range of individual skills in Triratna are vast; we work in many contexts as carers, teachers, counsellors, health workers, at centres and many other walks of life. It's important to consider how our skills and our energy can flow into this Bodhisattva work. No one person can do it all. And yet we each have something that we can uniquely bring. It's worth saying that Buddhists do not have a monopoly on beneficial activity or generosity, but as Buddhists, we can offer the Dharma or support the sharing of the Dharma.

Dharma service

We need to help where we can to make the Dharma available to people. For our Buddhist centres and our institutions to be sustainable we need to contribute. We can all make a difference and we don't do it alone! The four samgharavastus support the creation and unification of

the Sangha to help transform the world. All of us have something to give and contribute in developing the Sangha. It might be in practical or material ways: volunteering to set up a class, doing the washing up, giving a personal talk, or giving financially, encouraging others, taking responsibility where we can alongside our local Order Members. It might not seem a lot; however, for a Sangha to be sustainable, this spirit of generosity and responsibility is vital. Building Sangha means together, creating a context where people can flourish through hearing the Dharma.

Q: In what ways do I practise Dharma service? (for instance, helping Order members, my local centre, or through other projects)

As our practice becomes effective and we approach ordination, we glimpse more the interdependent relationships between ourselves, others and the world. We see how dependent we all are on conditions. We also see how much benefit we have received and that there is no such thing as a self-made person. Understanding conditionality more deeply, our actions start to spring or flow from gratitude, wanting to contribute and to support others to build the Buddha Land. We come more alive to our lineage, what has been shared and passed on to us, our shared practices. This insight manifests as wanting to serve the sangha, the spiritual community. Sangharakshita emphasises that the Bodhisattva Ideal doesn't represent altruism as opposed to individualism; it is the synthesis of the two - helping oneself and also helping others, our own development and that of others is conjoined in Wisdom and Compassion. Practising within the Order provides good conditions for the Bodhicitta to arise: 'If the Order is spiritually united, if it is in harmony, then a truly wonderful thing will happen. The Order then will be the locus for the manifestation of the Bodhicitta'[84].

To serve the Dharma we need to understand the Dharma's full significance as the truth about the way things are and as the dynamic principle that is ultimately the only way that suffering can be relieved. If we are going to offer the gift of the Dharma, we will need to be practising the Dharma and that includes working on our mind. If our minds are still clouded by self-preoccupation, to that extent our beneficial activity will be restricted. Joining with others to study and practise the Dharma will help us to find clarity of understanding and freedom from delusion, gifts which will not only benefit us but also others and the world.

It can be helpful to explore the different ways in which we give and express our support without falling into a sense of inadequacy or comparison. To help society as a whole effectively we will need to come together our own individuals hands conjoined with the body of Avalokitehsvara with our shared inspiration the Bodhicitta, for the benefit of all beings. We will need to participate in Sangha.

Conclusion

To conclude, going back to the start, Sangharakshita committed his life to Bodhisattva activity after receiving the Bodhisattva Ordination from Dhardo Rimpoche. He described a force of energy working through him, resulting in the founding of the Triratna Buddhist Movement and Order.

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[84] Sangharakshita, Looking Ahead A Little Way, www.freebuddhistaudio.com

Śāntideva's verse from the Bodhicāryavatāra describes the generosity of the Bodhisattva's outpouring of Bodhicitta: the great love that pours out of emptiness, the non-difference of self and other.

> 'This is the elixir of life, that puts an end to death.
> This is the priceless treasure, that ends all poverty on Earth.
> This is the supreme medicine, that cures the world's disease.
> This is the bridge to freedom, that leads from unhappy states.
> For the whole caravan of humanity travelling the roads of existence in search of happiness, this will give them joy'.[85]

We practise the Dharma and we accept our Ordination for the benefit of all beings. Dāna as a spiritual practice starts to undo the narrow reciprocal relationship which limits open-handed generosity. In gratitude for what we have received, we move towards the Bodhisattva's beneficial activity of dāna, where we aspire to become an arm or a hand of Avalokiteshvara. We participate in this Bodhisattva activity, practicing dana, giving spontaneously and freely. At the highest level, the boundaries between self and other are dissolved, prajñā joins with compassion and the Bodhisattva practises dāna paramitā.

In our everyday lives of practice, we begin to see more deeply into Reality, glimpses into our interdependent nature. Gratitude arises leading to wanting to serve the Dharma and therefore all living beings.

We can be confident that our actions make a difference, that our practice as part of the spiritual community will help bring about the conditions for the arising of the Bodhicitta, co-operating with karma *niyāma* processes so that dharma *niyāma* processes arise. We join the Order to work for the good of all beings including ourselves. We are pulled by an irresistible call to practise dana at higher and higher levels, to be part of the Sangha jewel, and together, we can create a Buddha Land in this world giving rise to the Bodhicitta, which is the ultimate altruistic dimension. The world is desperately in need of the Dharma, the real means to end suffering.

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[85] Śāntideva, The Bodhicāryavatāra. Translated by Andrew Skilton and Kate Crosby. Oxford World's Classics.