

The Six Guidelines
Study material for your retreat at Tiratanaloka

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Introduction to the Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to give you the opportunity to look in depth at the material that we will be studying on the **The Six 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.

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. <http://www.lulu.com/gb/en/shop/subhuti-and-sangharakshita/seven-papers/paperback/product-21746853.html>

There is also 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.

Study area 1. Sincerity of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

Summary and Reading

Are you sincerely Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, and what are the other motives mixed in with your request for Ordination?

We all have mixed motivations, but it helps to become aware of what they are and how you are working with them. You could think about these in terms of the worldly winds, for example wanting status or praise, or you could think about them in terms of your relationship to the 'group' (in Sangharakshita's understanding of the term) and whether you are relating to the Order as a group. Do you tend towards conformism and wanting to belong to or be accepted by the Order, or individualism and wanting to set yourself apart or above the Order?

It is also important to recognise your sincere Going for Refuge – your śraddhā that motivates you to turn towards the Three Jewels as the true Refuges and join the Triratna Buddhist Order as an expression of that śraddhā.

Optional study material

Year 2, Module 5 of the Dharma Training Course for Mitras is about 'the group and the individual'. You can download this from freebuddhistaudio.com.

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 freebuddhistaudio.com, or from his website www.sangharakshita.org.

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 freebuddhistaudio.com.

Dhammadinna mentions in her talk, two talks by Sangharakshita called 'The Buddha's Victory' (lecture 169, 1987) in which he talks about the Buddha overcoming different Maras, including spiritual ambition and complacency; and 'A Wreath of Blue Lotus' (lecture 153, 1983). It can also be downloaded from freebuddhistaudio.com or from www.sangharakshita.org in an ebook called 'The Buddha's Victory'.

Sincerity of Going for Refuge

(edited from a talk given by Dhammadinna at Tiratanaloka in 1992)

The first Guideline is, 'Is she, or am I, or are we, sincerely Going for Refuge? Are there other motives confused with her (or your) request for ordination such as wanting approval, acceptance, desire for status or group membership?' Then it concludes by saying, 'You may be sincere in your Going for Refuge to an extent, but not yet ready for ordination. But to the extent that you are sincere in your Going for Refuge that should be acknowledged, for the ordination process is intended to help you make your Going for Refuge more effective.'

So I am mainly going to look at sincerity and the whole question of mixed motives. Sincerity is an interesting word. In the dictionary, it is defined as 'Free from pretence or deceit; the same in reality as in seeming or profession; not assumed or put on; genuine, honest, and frank.' So that is what we are trying to be, in relation to our Going for Refuge, in relation to life, in relation to everything we do: to be sincere.

Intellectual versus emotional sincerity

In a book by John Macmurray called *Reason and Emotion*, he talks about 'intellectual' sincerity or honesty, and 'emotional' sincerity or honesty, and he makes a distinction between the two. What he says is quite interesting. He says that 'intellectual' sincerity is telling the truth, saying what you really think and believe, and that to be 'insincere' is to say what you don't think, and to not say what you do think, to dissimulate as it were, to refrain from saying what you really think and believe. 'Emotional' sincerity is the parallel in our emotional life, to say what we really feel. To be 'emotionally' insincere is to say what we do not feel, or not to say what we do feel. I think that when refraining from saying what we think and believe, or what we really feel, we are withholding information from somebody else, usually, to whom it is of interest, advantage and help.

He goes on to say that it is very difficult to be sincere. In our society in particular we tend to praise intellectual sincerity or factual accuracy. We are encouraged not to lie in that sense. But we are not particularly encouraged to be emotionally sincere by our conditioning. We get praised for concealing our feelings, and we get praised for pretending to feel what we do not feel. I think if we go back to our experience as children, this is often very confusing. It has very simple expressions, like getting a present from Auntie Mabel and you really hated it, but you have to write her a letter saying, 'Thank you very much, I really loved your present.' You are not encouraged to say what you really think, what you really feel, and that happens on all sorts of different levels.

Q: What is your conditioning in this area? How have you had to work with expressing what you really think or feel since becoming a Buddhist?

It has strong implications for our ability to Go for Refuge. He says if you trifle with the truth, in terms of factual accuracy, eventually you cannot distinguish fact from fiction. If you do that with emotional truth or sincerity, well, you end up not knowing what you really feel, you might even end up losing the capacity to know what you really feel, which destroys your inner integrity, and so you become unreal for yourself and others. This is the grim end of insincerity. It is important to know what we really think and what we really feel in relationship to our Going for Refuge, and to be able to express that, to feel the freedom to express that. That is why the word sincerity is in here, as the first thing in the first Guideline.

Sincerity really means that your inner and outer being are congruent, that what you think and what you feel are congruent, and that you can express that. In a way, it is a bit of a strange question to ask: 'Are you sincerely Going for Refuge?' It leaves open the question, can you insincerely Go for Refuge?

What Going for Refuge is, and how it relates to ordination

At this point, I should say what Going for Refuge is. 'Is she sincerely Going for Refuge?' So what is Going for Refuge? Going for Refuge implies that within your being there has been a turning around, a turning about, to some extent, a realisation that the mundane world, worldly life, samsara or whatever you like to call it, cannot offer you full satisfaction. So there is the beginning of a sense of disillusionment with life, as it seems to us, and perhaps the beginning of a sense that true meaning in life, true value in life, can only be found in a spiritual life, and eventually in the Three Jewels.

There is a correspondence with the first three links of the Spiral Path. We move from dukkha, unsatisfactoriness, an experience of suffering. Within that there is a glimmer of intuition that there must be something more than this, which leads us to faith, and that leads us to joy. So it's not just a seeing in an intellectual sense; there's an intellectual and an emotional dimension to Going for Refuge. You experience dukkha, that things are unsatisfactory, and that frees up your faith, it frees up your emotions, and you can move with your emotional momentum.

So there seem to be two questions in this first Guideline which I am going to explore: firstly, you may be sincere but not yet ready for ordination; and secondly, your request for ordination may have mixed motives.

Now there is obviously a difference between Going for Refuge and ordination. I think this is something we get confused about, or can get confused about. Going for Refuge, as we know, has several different levels, so we tend to talk about provisional Going for Refuge, effective Going for Refuge, real Going for Refuge, and absolute Going for Refuge. The point is that we do not ask to Go for Refuge. In a way, you cannot ask to Go for Refuge, you cannot say to someone, 'Please can I have an internal turning about, and withdraw from mundane life?' You can't ask to do it; it is your own inner experience, your own

existential situation, it happens to you on the basis of your own life experience, or it doesn't happen to you on the basis of your own life experience! And you do with that whatever you do with it. I think it's very important to remember that, and to come back to that, when things get confusing, when you're worrying about institutions and the Movement and all that sort of stuff; about what is you and what is other people; what is the group and what is individual; well, you have to come back to your own experience of Going for Refuge, what is it for you, what does it mean for you, what does it feel like for you. You can't ask permission to Go for Refuge.

What happens is that we experience Going for Refuge in some degree on some level, and we deepen and develop that through our practice, through our communication with other people. It's not *just* yourself, but it can only be experienced *within* yourself.

That momentum, that 'turning about' within yourself, that seeing the limitations of ordinary life, deepens to a certain point. It is as though your centre of gravity shifts enough, you are integrated enough, for that Going for Refuge to move from the provisional level to the effective level, and for that to be recognised by other people. At some point along the way, you may ask for ordination, because it does seem very important that you, we, express ourselves. We do not just keep it to ourselves as a very precious personal thing. There seems to be a momentum from having that experience within ourselves, that existential experience, to expressing it by asking for ordination. The asking helps us to actualise, helps us objectify, it helps our Going for Refuge to be met by others, and it makes it more conscious and therefore more effective. It does also seem that our individual aspiration finds its best expression in the broader context of the Order and the Sangha, so it's the basis of our relationship with others, and we create a Sangha, rather than just remain isolated, or in a group.

Q: What were the conditions that led to you asking for ordination? Do you see ordination mainly in terms of your aspirations as an individual, or as something broader/more collective?

So the two things are important, your own experience, the actualisation and expression of it, and that being met. Obviously Going for Refuge and ordination come together at a certain point. Often people get confused, and get caught up in the mixed motives of wanting ordination, and then realising that, say: 'I'm not going to think about ordination. I'm just going to concentrate on my Going for Refuge.' So you separate them out to a certain extent. That may be very helpful for a while, that may help you clarify, but at some point they should come together, and will come together, as effective Going for Refuge which is equivalent to ordination.

Q: Do you see any difference between Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels and ordination? To what extent do you personally need an Order to deepen your Going for Refuge?

So effective Going for Refuge is when we can make a wholehearted commitment to the Three Jewels. It is sincere, as defined, and it is genuine, it is sustainable, but it's not yet strong enough, it's not expected to be strong enough, to break the first three fetters. It is not yet real Going for Refuge.

Mixed motives, "having" and "being"

It may be that you are sincere in your Going for Refuge, but not yet ready for ordination. It may just not be deep enough, strong enough, sustainable enough as yet, although it's going in the right direction. It may be that there are mixed motives in your request for ordination, so that's what I'm going to explore, the mixed motives. I think that mixed motives confused with your request (such as approval, acceptance, desire for status or group membership) are to do with seeing the spiritual community as a group in some way or other. I think that's where they all come from. You are not seeing the spiritual community clearly. If we act in this way, then we are not developing our individuality in relationship to the spiritual community.

I think most of us, all of us, have mixed motives, and that's just a fact of life. It is not as though, after effective Going for Refuge, your motives are completely pure. If that was the case, all Order members would be Stream Entrants. So, before and after ordination, one's still working on purifying motives; although it may well be different after ordination.

Q: How do we find out what our motivations are?

I want to explore why we have mixed motives, and where they come from, and how to work with them, by using a particular model taken from Erich Fromm, and also from a book by Stephen Batchelor, in which he distinguishes between 'having' and 'being'. Both of them talk about the 'having mode' and the 'being mode'. Stephen Batchelor describes the 'having mode' as a horizontal plane. It stretches as far as we can see, imagine, and desire (that is why it is on the horizontal plane); it's never-ending. It is a distinct attitude towards life: one of having, owning, wanting, acquiring, adding on, in an ever-increasing way. Usually we want to own and have material things, people, ideas or knowledge, experiences, in order to give us protection, status, security, and a sense of our ego-identity.

He goes on to say that we operate in this mode, we flee to security in these things, because we are afraid of facing our own aloneness, our own death and our own mortality. So it's almost instinctual. It is very hard to acknowledge these things, and we rush to false refuges, to those things I have just mentioned as false refuges. We are continually looking for a sense of security, but in the wrong places. So in a sense we are going for refuge all the time. It is one of our human activities. But we go for refuge often to false refuges. It is not that there's anything wrong in those things in themselves, it is just that they are inadequate, they cannot give us the security we want. Eventually we discover that. It might

be a very long time before we discover it about something. Maybe someone has identified very strongly with their work, say, and that has given them a sense of security, a sense of identity, but they retire at 60, 65, and they are completely at sea. Work has not really given that person real security, a real sense of themselves, they feel lost. It has been OK, but eventually it is inadequate. And we can only find out if a refuge is inadequate through our own experience, and through reflection.

The other dimension is the dimension of 'being', which is seen as vertical, because it's to do with depth, it's to do with reality, it's about what we *are* rather than what we have or own or acquire. So it's a spiritual dimension. I think it's a dimension in which we do begin to see the limitations of mundane life, we do have a sense at least of our own mortality, our own aloneness, and it changes the way we relate to people. We relate from our own aloneness to their aloneness, from being to being, rather than using people to fulfil our security.

So in a sense Going for Refuge, or Going Forth, is moving from one dimension to the other. If you talk about provisional refuge, effective refuge, real refuge, you might get the sense there is just a smooth transition, which is true in one sense, it's one model, but from another point of view it's not like that. Really there is a radical change. So to Go Forth is to go from 'having' to 'being', or to Go for Refuge. We have to withdraw energy from those false refuges, and begin to put our energy into true refuges. I think the mark of a true refuge is that it keeps deepening, whereas you can come to the end of false refuges and they no longer work. While you are in touch with a true refuge you can 'hold' difficult and painful situations and emotions. A true refuge sustains you.

I use this model because it is not judgmental. It just says, well, this is the way things are, we do go for refuge to false refuges, and it's part of the human condition, we just have to be aware, and, when we do see that something is inadequate, to make changes in our life.

Q: What changes, or turning from false to true refuges, have you seen in your life since you became a Buddhist?

I think those desires, particularly for approval, acceptance, some sort of recognition, in a way are not bad either, they're very deep human needs. We do need a certain amount of acceptance. We need, as it says in the Guideline, our sincerity and our Going for Refuge met and acknowledged. So it is not as though these things are all bad. We need encouragement, we need inspiration. But I suppose the point is that we need to be not over-reliant on others for our feelings of self-worth, or on those things we're using as false refuges. If so, then we're not going to be able effectively to Go for Refuge.

So we all have mixed motives because we are all 'having' to some extent and we are also trying to change, trying to make this radical transformation into the depth mode. The point is we cannot add on ordination to the 'having' dimension. What is being questioned in this guideline is: is someone trying to do this? There is obviously going to be an element of

sincerity in someone's request for ordination, their Going for Refuge might be sincere. But maybe there is also a desire to *gain* ordination in some way, or to think it can be bestowed or conferred, and give a sense of identity, and so on. So there may be an acquisitive element to it which needs to be purified.

Sometimes people get feedback that they want ordination on their own terms. I don't know if anyone here has ever been given that feedback or heard it given to others. Someone feels that you want to be ordained, but that you do not really want to change radically, so it all ties up with this wanting something for a sense of security or ego-identity. It is very difficult and painful to look at these things, but those kind of motives need to be purified.

Q: Are there things that we expect to gain from ordination? How open are we to changing? Are there aspects of ourselves that we imagine can never change?

"The Group" versus the spiritual community; conformity and individualism versus individuality

I also want to look at our relationship to the group and mixed motives, using a slightly different model, to explore a tendency that again we all have - to be conformists or individualists. If we tend to be a conformist, or have a conformist aspect to our being, we tend to search for security in a group. Again we are perhaps not seeing the spiritual community clearly. Our desire is to find a group to be part of, and again that's a very deep human need. It goes back to the tribes and the cave, and the need for security. If that is the mode we are in, or that is the sort of person we are, we will want to identify with a group very strongly, to feel secure. We will tend to adopt group norms; we will tend to want to do the right thing, to be a good girl, be a good Mitra, be a good Buddhist, all those sort of things, in order to be accepted. We will tend to want to find someone to tell us what to do, because that would really make us feel secure. So a parental substitute would be wonderful, a guru figure who falls into that role would be fantastic.

So if we have that sort of tendency when we first come into contact with the spiritual community, then we might not recognise it as a spiritual community. Instead we will see it as a group which we can be part of. And we will be very, very happy because that is what we want, and we'll probably join in enthusiastically. We will do a million things: make the tea, support classes, and really help, really throw ourselves in. But if we've had the misfortune to meet a spiritual community rather than a group, we are going to get unstuck. We want to be accepted in a particular way, we want approval in a particular way, but that will not happen entirely in the way we want it - not if it is a spiritual community that we have become involved with. Before long we will probably feel resentful! - because we are not accepted as we would like to be, we are not getting all the approval and praise for doing all the things we are doing, and we don't really feel appreciated. We feel very resentful, we become rebellious, we withdraw, we take off.

The other pole is to be an individualist. Now the individualist tends to be very suspicious of

groups; doesn't want anything to do with groups; holds herself aloof. It may be for good reasons: maybe she has had contact with groups in the past which has not been very good. So there's often a distrustful element, or a cynical element, which usually reveals that underneath the individualist has very high ideals - the higher the idealist the greater the cynic, usually. But I think the individualist's response to what she perceives as a group (it still may be a spiritual community) is to tend to see shared ideals, genuinely shared ideals, as a 'party line'. People *may* be acting as group members, let's not forget that, but it is a lazy attitude, actually, if you just think, 'Oh, they're all doing that because it's just the party line.' You are not taking the trouble to think those issues through.

So for example you come along to the Buddhist Centre, and you discover single-sex activities: women live together in communities and work together in Right Livelihoods. You may think, 'They're all doing that because they've been told to do it, it's just a party line, I'm not going to do that.' You do not really think through the issue and ask yourself why that activity is happening. You do not really take the trouble to find out what each individual thinks. You do not see that a number of people may - through their own deep reflection, their own spiritual aspiration, their own communication - have decided to live together in a particular way. So it's a very lazy response (maybe that's something we can also look at more closely in the discussion groups), and may come from a fear of being swamped by the group.

Q: Do we recognise the tendencies towards conformism and individualism in our own conditioning? Have we experienced them playing out in relation to the Triratna Community, Order Members or the training for ordination?

Spiritual complacency and spiritual ambition

I have separated out these two attitudes quite extremely, but they are both present in all of us. We tend to swing from one pole to the other, being individualists in some aspects of our lives and conformists in others. It is much more complex than this very simple exposition, but you get the idea. I think they also tie up with spiritual complacency and spiritual ambition¹, which are interlinked. The person who wants some sort of spiritual leadership for status (and this again relates back to the 'having' mode), out of ambition, tends to be spiritually complacent. You want it to give you a sense of identity but you are not going to do the work to get it. Conversely if you are spiritually complacent, if you are lazy, in order to get out of the work, the real work, you want a position, in some sense or other. I think we can see that happens in our relationship to our spiritual life. We can go through the motions, it looks all right on the surface, but nothing is really happening on the inside. Again there is a desire for some sort of approval, status, security, if we behave like that. Sometimes with ordination you want people to be confident in their Going for Refuge, so you encourage them to be confident in their Going for Refuge, but sometimes that can overtip into 'I'm ready for ordination', and there is a fixity about it. It is not just confidence, it is as though they are giving up on the process at that point, they are not open to any more feedback. I don't know if that rings any bells but that is an example of this in our own lives.

Q: What is your experience of receiving feedback? Have you managed to respond to it creatively, or do you still have some work to do in this area?

Purifying our motives

So we need to purify our motives, and if we tend to be complacent or passive, or to think that ordination is something that can be withheld from us or bestowed upon us in that way, we really need to take responsibility for ourselves. We really need to take initiative for ourselves, we need to come back to that existential sense within ourselves, in our own experience, our own spiritual experience, our own experience of Going for Refuge. We need to be alone. The complacent person and the conformist (I think they relate) needs to take time out, needs to go on solitary retreats, needs to be alone, needs to reflect, needs to find out what is them and what is the group. So reflection and aloneness, I think, are the way of working with that. If we tend to be individualistic, I think what we need to do is make strong individual personal friendships, so then if you find that your friend is doing something that you think is 'the party line' (living in a women's community, for example), you can find out from them why they are doing it and all their reasons, thoughts, reflections, and experiences. If we are ambitious, if we are spiritually ambitious, and we demand ordination as some sort of right, we need to trust people. We need to be open to friendship, to take feedback in some way or other.

I think that one of the important talks that Sangharakshita has given on the purification of motive is 'A Wreath of Blue Lotus'. I know this is a controversial talk, and we may come to talk about that at some other point, but you might remember that he suggests that Mahaprajapati Gotami is presenting the Buddha with a *fait accompli* and using emotional blackmail. So she is accepted for ordination only when she takes the eight *gurudharmas*, the eight special rules, which she accepts. Now we may get stuck at that point, reading the lecture and not get any further, but if we read on we'll find out that Sangharakshita says that we all need to Go Forth for purely spiritual reasons, our motive needs to be pure, as pure as possible. The only reason to Go Forth is to gain Enlightenment. It is not for acceptance or desire for security or group approval. Part of our desire for ordination, our desire to Go Forth, is because we want to gain Insight. It is no good just doing 'the right thing'. It is doing the right thing for the right reason. I think that means exploring the six guidelines, or aspects of the six guidelines: involving ourselves deeply in Dharma study, meditation, spiritual friendship, the principles of the Movement, Right Livelihood, communities, so that they have an effect on us - not because it looks good or we are going to get approval.

If you don't do the right thing for the right reasons, it's not the right thing. That is the point, really. You always have to be asking yourself in a situation, 'What's my motive in doing this, is this really helping me to grow spiritually?' You have to take the initiative, you have to take responsibility for yourself in any situation. And that has to be ongoing.

So it is not to be involved in the externals, it's to be involved deeply with your own process of growth, in whatever you are doing externally. There is one particular comment that I heard from a Mitra who was a friend of somebody who had just got ordained, and she couldn't understand why she'd got ordained, and she said, 'All you've done for the last year is breast feed, watch the show jumping on the telly, and knit.' She had only seen the externals, she had not seen what was going on underneath. And there had obviously been a lot going on underneath because she'd Gone for Refuge.

Sangharakshita goes on to say in this lecture that we all need something like the eight *gurudharmas*, all the time, so that we can continually purify our motives and make sure that we do not settle into complacency or ambition, or want ordination for the wrong reasons. He suggests that we find this in our spiritual friends (a point which we're going to explore in Guideline 3), and particularly in criticism, feedback that comes from the heart, as well as from inspiration and encouragement. We all need help in purifying our motive because we all have blind spots.

Conclusion

In order to Go for Refuge sincerely we need to put as much of our energy as possible into our spiritual development, in a creative and initiating way, asking all the time: 'Why am I doing this? Is this helping me to grow and develop?' - always clarifying our purpose, as we do in meditation. We need to be open to the comments of our friends, or our Order member friends; and to accept that our motive is not always pure, and that is not a bad or evil thing, it is just how it is, but to be open to purifying it. And if we do that, then we'll find that our sincerity broadens and deepens.

In developing sincerity, we are having to go quite deeply into ourselves, we are having to drop our fronts, our masks, that we have put up for years, our personas. And that's quite a challenging thing to do, because what happens if you start to drop your mask, your persona, the way you have operated for years in order to get approval and security, is that a lot of other things emerge. In more psychological terms, you hit your shadow. Well, that may be positive, there may be lots of repressed positivity, because as a child you were conditioned not to feel what you really felt, and so on; there may be negative, unskilful aspects. But you have to just see all that. It happens when you start to meditate and you realise you are not the person you thought you were. You have all sorts of emotions you just have not experienced or felt able to express before.

***Q: Have unfamiliar/ neglected emotions emerged more since you started practising?
What shadows have you hit, and what brightness?***

So what we're trying to do (and again I'm using psychological terms rather than metaphysical ones) is contact a real self, an authentic self. And to do that, we have to break through a lot of injunctions from our parents and society about how we think we should be and what we think we should be like. And that is very much to do with leaving

the group, going forth from the group, both external and internal. And again that, if you remember, was one of the Buddha's victories. Not only did he leave the group externally, but more importantly, he left the group internally, he left behind all those injunctions that keep us as we think we should be.

If we leave the group internally, we are able to be our real self, we are able to take initiative, we are able to do what we really want to do. We are able to feel what we really want to feel, able to think for ourselves, express ourselves, and live our own lives. So in that sense we become more of an individual, rather than a conformist or an individualist. And that takes a lot of courage, that is a lot of the work we do on ourselves, and it is in that work that we do, I think, purify our motives. I think to be who we really are, feel free to experience our own experience in all its complexities, means not hiding behind rigid defences, or facades that we've built up maybe as protections. And I think this feels very threatening, often, because we have to let go of our desire for acceptance and approval. We will probably have to confront quite a lot of our early conditioning and those habitual personality patterns we've built up. That early conditioning comes from all sorts of factors - again there isn't time to go into all of them in detail, but there is family conditioning, Christian conditioning, social conditioning, cultural conditioning, conditioning as women, etc, all of which may conspire to develop a false self that we present to the world. And we cannot Go for Refuge with that false self, we have to deconstruct it, as it were, and get back to, or allow to blossom, our real self. And that is what is meant by sincerity in the first Guideline.

So once we are in contact with our real, authentic self, and we've begun to make this shift from wanting approval, security, and status, we begin to let go, to open up, to experience ourself more from a dimension of 'being', with less fear. And then we can die to that 'having' self, be reborn, and emerge as a Dharmacharini.

Study area 2. Effective Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

Summary and Reading

The second topic we will be studying on this retreat is Effective Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels.

You may have sincere motivation, but are you able to Go for Refuge effectively? Are you able to sustain your Going for Refuge under most circumstances – in different contexts and through time? How are you expressing your Going for Refuge in body, speech and mind, i.e. in your ethical practice?

What holds you back: psychological factors, objective circumstances (for example your family responsibilities, career or health), lifestyle or other conditions?

Optional study material

Sangharakshita gave a talk in 1982 in which he outlined the stages of Going for Refuge called 'Dimensions of Going for Refuge', lecture 154. This can be found at freebuddhistaudio.com.

Am I effectively Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels? (Text purpose written by Kalyacitta)

These six guidelines are a set of tools to help us think about Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, particularly in the context of training for ordination, though they can be usefully applied to both those training for ordination and those already ordained.

The second guideline can be explored by asking ourselves two sub-questions:

- 1. Are there objective circumstances holding us back (from effective Going for Refuge)?**
- 2. Are there psychological factors holding us back (from effective Going for Refuge)?**

Putting this in a more practical way we could ask: ***Do I have a sense of how my own conditioning and my objective life circumstances affect my ability to practise - both in a positive way and in a way that might hold me back?***

What does 'effectively Going for Refuge' mean?

You will probably have noticed that as you have got more involved in Buddhism and with the friends that you are making in the sangha, your practice of the Dharma has changed. For example, at first, you might have heard about the five ethical precepts and thought that they made sense and tried to put them into practice to some extent. You might have

thought about being a bit more generous, even when you didn't particularly feel like it, or maybe you put someone with whom you were having difficulties in the fourth stage of the mettā bhavana because you had read that this would have a positive effect. Then you found that those practices *did* work - they had a positive effect on you and those around you, so you were encouraged to go a bit further in putting theory into practice. Gradually it will have felt more natural to behave in this way at least some of the time.

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. This principle of integration around core values is described in the Buddha's teaching of the Noble Eight-fold Path, which Sangharakshita has translated in terms of the paths of Vision and Transformation. The Buddha embodies the vision of who we would like to become, and if we follow that vision our life transforms in accordance with it and in accordance with the Dharma. As we allow the Dharma to influence us we will live increasingly by the principles of mettā, mindfulness and the natural law of pratītya samutpāda (conditionality).

Q: What vision inspires us to change for the better?

Our life increasingly expresses Dharmic principles

As we take on the practice of mettā for ourselves, we start to embody the qualities of mettā. We value the qualities of kindness and friendliness; our interactions with others become less self-referential. Our friendships deepen and develop. We also take seriously the importance of self-mettā and practise kindness towards ourselves.

As our trust in the Dharma grows, our practice of mindfulness develops acuity and we put more effort into both general and specific mindfulness. We will take more seriously that our actions have consequences and start to take responsibility for ourselves as an ethical agent. We will become more sensitive to the effect our actions have on others and practise the precepts with more enthusiasm and focus, not just in how we behave outwardly but also in developing skilful intentions. We may feel drawn to confessing our breaches of the precepts, both in the present and the past as well.

As our mindfulness develops we will recognise the importance of the conditions we need in order to practise the Dharma: which conditions help and support our practice, which conditions hinder us. There will be a gradual shift in the orientation of our life in this respect. We may need to bring about some changes in our life circumstances to support our continued development in the Dharma.

Here we are moving into an awareness of pratītya samutpāda - the profound law of conditioned co-production that we can observe playing itself out through the universe. Once we have at least an intellectual understanding of this principle, we cannot mindfully act against it. We will begin to live with this understanding influencing our actions at least to some extent.

Q: How does our understanding of pratītya samutpāda have an influence on our life? Why do you think this might be an important part of training for ordination?

Karma and Dharma Niyāmas (modes of conditionality)

In his paper *The Dharma Revolution and the New Society*, Subhuti describes the progression from the karmic mode of conditionality through which we are working on purifying our actions of body speech and mind, to the dharmic mode of conditionality where the Dharma is in a sense working through us.

'The law or principle of karma is concerned with the operation of conditionality within the sphere of individualised consciousness and it states the dynamics of the interaction between a self-conscious individual and the external world.'

We can recognise the karma principle working in our own experience, as we notice that skilful action leads to a greater sense of fulfilment - we act more and more in accordance with moral principles, our own consciousnesses become more open, sensitive, and awake. In the same way, we can discover Dharmic conditionality at work, as we allow it to unfold within us, letting it move us, we might say, beyond ourselves. A new kind of motivation then takes over, as the Dharma emerges more and more fully within our experience. This is the Dharmic mode of conditionality, the Dharma niyāma, which gradually replaces the Karmic kind, expressing itself in increasingly compassionate activity and leading us towards Buddhahood.'

When we decide to set our sights on our vision of Buddhahood, we commit ourselves to re-orienting our mode of being, our behaviour, the way that we live our life, in terms of the Dharma. We practice on the level of karma (volitional action) by modifying our behaviour, which over time will result in us becoming more able to allow the Dharma to be expressed through us. This is what we are doing as we overcome the obstacles we face in deepening our Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels.

Q: Have we noticed changes in our behaviour since we became more committed to practising the Buddhist path? What has changed the most?

What holds us back from effective Going for Refuge?

As we become more self-aware, we start to see where there is dis-congruity between our vision of what we want to become and particular aspects of our life. In these areas we may

feel that we are not able to express Dharmic values as fully as we would wish. It might be that the external circumstances we find ourselves in make it difficult to practise the Dharma, or perhaps there are tendencies within us that trip us up in certain ways. This kind of realisation can be challenging as we realise that practising the Dharma has implications for the whole fabric of our life.

Our outer world

Living situation

We come to the Three Jewels from all walks of life, living in a multitude of different life situations. Some forms of lifestyle are objectively simpler than others and will support our Dharma practice more easily. If we live alone and without dependents we will be free to make choices which would have 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 - can we fit our meditation practice into a busy family schedule? Will it be acceptable to others when we no longer want to eat meat and fish? Is our living situation supportive of our ethical values? 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 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 recognise that there is attachment and selfishness in our relationships 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, while at the same time being clear about our

values. Some people will be more able to accommodate the Dharma in our life than others, and this can be challenging.

Q: Do we face challenges in any of the above areas? What would make our lifestyle more supportive of our Dharma practice?

Our inner world

Getting to know oneself

Some people get involved in Buddhism knowing themselves to some extent, whereas others find that whilst they thought they knew themselves, they really don't. Whatever our past experience, practising mindfulness helps us to see ourselves more clearly. As we develop awareness, practise meditation and 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 particular situations. 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 to be creative in our dealings with the world and other people, rather than falling into reactivity and habitual unskillful 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.

Conditioning

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. As we have just noted, alongside positive habits and qualities there may be tendencies, saṃskāras, and underlying 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 the 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 mores? How have they influenced the way you live?*

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?*

National/racial conditioning: *How has your own ethnic background affected the way that you behave and relate to others?*

Gender conditioning: *How do you feel about your gender? Do you notice habitual views and ways of relating to people with different gender identities/conditioning (men, non-binary people, etc)? How strongly do you identify with your gender? Have you had a strong desire to raise a family or not?*

Money: *Do you notice views about your/others' financial status? How do you relate to money?*

Guilt, resentment and shame: *Do you notice a feeling of guilt, resentment or shame in relation to any of the above? Where in your life can you experience these sorts of feelings 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. As we Go for Refuge to the Three Jewels more deeply we will be faced with continuous opportunities to change. This won't stop when we are effectively Going for Refuge and enter the Order, in fact it will intensify. With deepening faith and commitment comes a stronger desire to embrace the Dharma, and this throws up more awareness of the things we need to overcome. With continued intensification of practice our momentum of Going for Refuge builds up so that there is no question of doing anything else.

Q: Do we face challenges in any of the above areas? Which area is the area you think you need to explore most?

Q: How do they affect our practice of the Dharma?

Awareness of the conditions we need

Another important factor in effective Going for Refuge is an awareness of the conditions we need in order to sustain our practice. When we are Going for Refuge effectively we see that we are able to do so because of the conditions we are in. As far as possible we want to be in a situation where our lifestyle supports us in our aspirations whilst also working on unhelpful saṃskāras.

Can we sustain a momentum to practice over time and in different circumstances? We won't always find ourselves in ideal conditions. We or someone close to us might get ill, we may have changes at work or even lose our job. Life will throw unforeseen difficulties in our way and this will challenge our faith in ourselves and our practice. When we are severely challenged our less skilful tendencies can come to the surface. So it's important that we really value the conditions we have built up and don't take them for granted. And when we are faced with difficulties we can see such times as an opportunity to practise more intensively. Then more effort is required to call on our faith in the Three Jewels.

Q: To what extent are we able to keep up the momentum of our practice through time and in different circumstances? What do we need to support us in this endeavour?

Study area 3. Effective contact with Order Members

Summary and Reading

It is important to have enough contact with Order Members to have a sense of what you are joining and to develop sufficient links with the Order to be able to be an effective part of it.

How are you developing effective friendships and co-operation with others in the Sangha?

How are you developing effective friendships with Order Members?

How are you developing connections with Order Members outside your Centre?

Do you have any Kalyāṇa Mitras or Order Members you look up to?

Are you developing a positive connection with Sangharakshita and an appreciation of Sangharakshita's significance in the Order?

Optional 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 freebuddhistaudio.com.

Spiritual Friendship

(Text purpose-written by Amritamati, with some additions from Santavajri)

'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.'*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? The third guideline is asking “Is she in effective contact with Order members?” so what does that mean and why is it so important?

Q: How do we respond to the ideal of friendship? What are our 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.

The Buddha said that spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇa mitratā*) is the whole of the spiritual life, so how do we make the most of friendship to help ourselves and our friends to move towards greater freedom, creativity and joy? Why is it so emphasised in Triratna and one of the Six Guidelines? And how do we develop friendships with those in the Order?

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 friendship³:

- 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, which is not possible if we are spread too thin over many contacts. Sangharakshita talks about having (or doing) "more and more of less and less" as our spiritual practice deepens, and this could be applied to the current trend for overly networking. We need a handful of really close friends and then will have 'ever widening

circles' of people we know less intimately. 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 really joining, and how else can those inviting us to join 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, so 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 you 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 Sangha friends for the sake of your practice (and also theirs, as we support our friends in their practice, as much as they support us in ours). 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's "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 can be seen as a tension between what we might term the psychological, self-regarding desire for personal wisdom, or prajñā and the ethical, other-regarding desire for the well-being of others, or karunā.

Q: How do we give ourselves to others in friendship whilst needing time and energy for our own inner work? Do we experience friendship and inner work as different or are they the same? Do we experience this as a tension, or do we experience ourselves veering too far towards one pole or the other?

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.*⁴

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.'*⁵ 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.

Spiritual friendship is learning to love without expectation; it's about moving towards unconditional love and acceptance, both giving and receiving, what Sangharakshita calls 'a vital mutual responsiveness on the basis of a common ideal and a common principle'⁶, though he also adds that sometimes that can be 'a vital mutual responsiveness across a chasm'⁷

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 happening 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 that person and may even feel a bit in love with them. Or projections can be negative, such as seeing them as an authority figure, and acting towards them as though they are in a power position over us.

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, and 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.

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 Pāli Canon and the Mahayana sutras have plenty of examples, 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'* (which we can see as the language of duties) 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.'*⁸

Gampopa illustrates the third reason for needing spiritual friends with 3 similes:

a) **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 discomfiting 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.

b) **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 different 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.

c) **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. The Anuruddhas are an inspiring example of communal living with deep friendship⁹. The three of them lived together in a grove, in the Gosinga Sal wood. At one time The Buddha visits 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 Mahayana and Vajrayana 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 equivalent to a list of the 'duties of friendship', or the ways to practise friendship. For example, the Sangaha Sutta¹⁰ is a very short sutta which outlines the samgrahavastus as 'the bonds of fellowship':

*'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.'*

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 ear 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? What can you give to your friendships with Order Members and others more experienced than you?

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: Do you show all sides of yourself to friends, both vertical and horizontal, or do you want to present a particular picture of yourself?

Kindly speech, priyavādītā, 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 described my experience of myself when first speaking again as "becoming a pillock (idiot)"! I wanted to speak from my depths, from the place I had touched within the silence.

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: How do you deal with conflict with friends?

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, seems quite straightforward. As kind words are generosity through speech, beneficial help is generosity through action. But we still need to beware, remembering 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions'. We 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.

Q: How do we express beneficial action in our friendships, and how can we bring more wisdom into our actions?

Consistency, samānārthata can be translated as exemplification, which means living up to your ideals, and the expression of your 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 your word and keeping a continuity between your speech and action, and being consistently skilful in your dealings with everyone you 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 you find yourself behaving differently with different sets of friends?

Friendship biographies and life stories

Sometimes friends share their life stories with each other. Maybe we could share our friendship histories, too. You could see this as a working out of the central doctrine of conditionality in the arena of your friendships; what conditions led to your friendship coming into being and flowering, from a Buddhist centre being built, to our parents being born, to the transport that brought us to each other, to a friendly action on the part of one or other of you. Would it make a difference to how you are within that friendship, what you bring to it? I think a greater appreciation of the preciousness and also the fragility of a friendship can be heightened by this process, and this can bring more enjoyment of that friend, and also a more honest acceptance of everything that happens within that friendship, good or bad. It's all conditioned and constantly changing. Our friendships are not set in stone. We can bring curiosity to how our actions now are creating the future of our friendship, which means we'd maybe be more mindful of how we are within them, and more excited at the possibilities within them too. When there are difficulties between friends then awareness of conditionality can also encourage us to keep in communication and move towards resolution; things change.

Q: Have you ever given your friendship history? Would that be something you might like to do, perhaps in your GFR group, or with some Order Members who know you and who you would like to know better?

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 been practising the Dharma for longer than us or maybe have taken their practice deeper more quickly than us, even if they haven't been around for as long. In Triratna they would be mainly Order members, especially of our own gender, 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 are you getting to know Dharmacharinis?

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, on a more mythical or archetypal level, a kalyāṇa mitra to us all, 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, and thanks to freebuddhistaudio 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 air these, and try to get to the bottom of our concerns, as soon as we can. 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, until (and unless) we come to some resolution of whatever doubts or concerns we might have. 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.

Sangharakshita is unique in his relationship to the Triratna Buddhist Order, irreplaceable, but his astuteness in passing on the responsibility for the Order to the College of Public Preceptors showed remarkable foresight and a wise concern for the best possible future for all of us after his death.

Q: How are you getting to know Sangharakshita as a person and as the founder of the Movement? What is your relationship with him at present? Are there areas of doubt or concern regarding him that you need to work at resolving?

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.'*¹¹

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.

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'*. By creating sangha we become the path for others to move towards Insight, and they for us, through love and faith and friendship.

Study area 4. Understanding of the basic principles of the Order and Movement

Summary and Reading

The Order has a distinctive approach to leading the spiritual life in the modern world, based on certain fundamental principles. How have you examined and understood these – by reading and reflecting on Sangharakshita’s writings, Subhuti and Sangharakshita’s papers, and coming on retreat at Tiratanaloka? What do you think and feel about the Order’s approach? What do you agree with or are inspired by? What questions do you have or is there anything you don’t agree with?

Optional 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?’ This paper is 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.freebuddhistaudio.com

Understanding of the basic principles of the Order and Movement (Text purpose written by Candraprabha from a talk she gave on a previous retreat)

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.’¹²

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 the original set of talks on the six guidelines, we realised that quite a few organisational things have changed since this talk was given by Ratnadhari. So, for example, a number of papers have been circulated between 2009 and now 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. So I'm going to say a bit about these too.

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.'*¹³

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

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.

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.

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 6 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'. And 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 rest on our laurels or become complacent. This principle works against both spiritual ambition and spiritual complacency, which Dhammadinna mentions in her talk on sincerity. There are no 'higher' ordinations to aspire to, 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 there are two wings of the Order - the men's and the women's. We sometimes practise separately, sometimes together. One way this is supported is through the practice of single sex activities - we could ask ourselves, do they help?

Q: What is your experience of single sex 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 conference, Ratnadharini said that they didn't know where to place her - with the monastic sangha or the lay sangha.

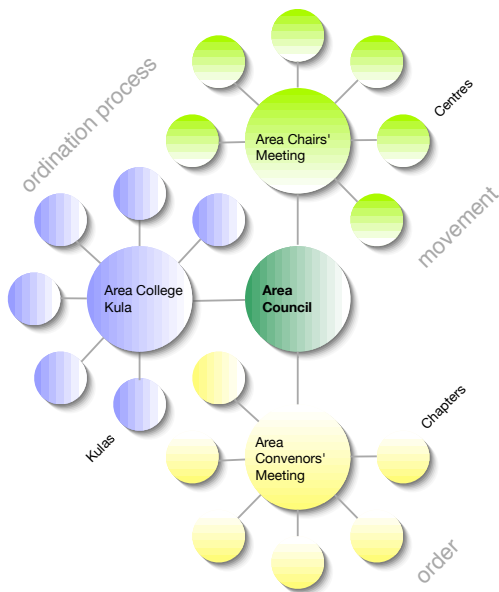
And very often in situations, we find that no one is 'in charge' in a way that allows them to impose their will on others. We don't, for example, file into the shrine room in order of seniority. When there are problems, we have to try and reach consensus rather than just look to someone else to sort 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.

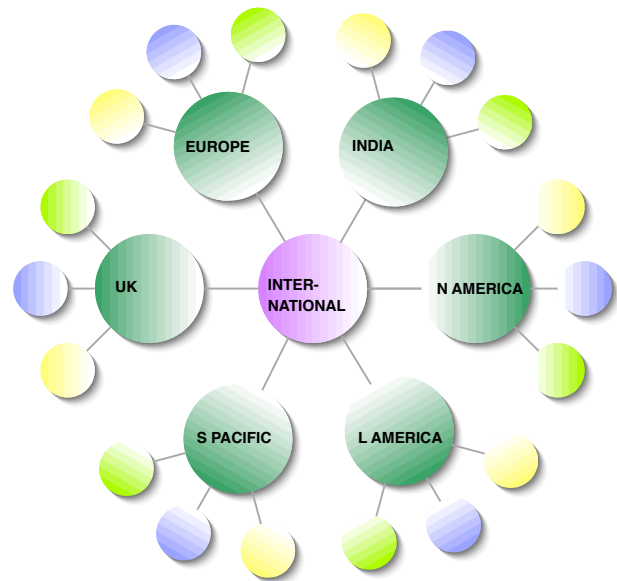
Some years ago Order members in India suggested that the name of the Movement and Order should be changed. A long debate about this rumbled on for a time and was inconclusive, resulting in Sangharakshita himself re-naming both in response to a heartfelt plea from India. Following this, certain structures 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.

Here is a diagram that shows how 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.



Area Councils

Co-ordinate the three strands in each area



International Council

Co-ordinates the three strands from all six area

The Order is also unified through following the teachings and practices 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'*¹⁴. So the teachings he has drawn together form a particular presentation - they hang together as a whole. 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 to 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.

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

Team work in businesses. Sangharakshita talked about the '*possibilities for friendship and generosity*' in this context and 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.*'

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 W:E, gave in 2010 called '*The Tantric Guru - dead or alive?*' 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.

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, because 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 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.

Q: Where do 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 somehow.

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?

Study area 5. A reasonable grasp of the Dharma as taught by Sangharakshita

Summary and Reading

The Order is founded upon Sangharakshita's teaching of the Dharma and therefore you cannot be an effective Order Member unless you know the basics of his teaching very thoroughly.

How far have you got in the Dharma Training Course for mitras?

Have you studied Sangharakshita's main lectures and writings?

How do you take your study practice deeper? How do you apply the Dharma in your life?

Optional study material

There is a list in this section of the books Sangharakshita would like all Order Members to have read, you might want to see which one you have read!

Sangharakshita gave a talk in 1970 called 'Meditation Versus Psychotherapy' (lecture 87) in which he talks about the relationship between Buddhism and modern therapeutic methods.

About study in general, Vajratara gave a short talk in 2014 called 'Study Groups as a Path to Insight' which can be downloaded on www.freebuddhistaudio.com

A Reasonable Grasp of the Dharma as Taught by 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 Dhammapada 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. But 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. So yes, 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?

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 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, which is explained in the previous section, 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 content 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.

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 samskaras - 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 a Dharmic perspective, 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 inherently, which means that they can't sit within a Dharmic perspective - 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?

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 Subhuti talk about this a couple of years ago, and I thought he 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 an 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'*.

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 really do experience the Dharma as taught by Sangharakshita as a true refuge; that you really know this in your bones. 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!

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".

Q: Do we tend to read (or listen to) mainly Sangharakshita's teachings, or those of other Buddhist teachers?

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. And yet, there are some people in our Order who can barely read and write, yet they are fully-functioning, effective Order Members. So 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.

But very importantly, 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 give you two refuges for the price of one - Dharma **and** Sangha! And of course, the Buddha did say: "One who sees the Dharma sees me", so let's call it a hat-trick!

Some people who live a long way from a Centre have managed to join a Skype mitra study group, which is great. I hope there will be more of these available over the years, although I find it hard to imagine being able to 'get in there' with each other via Skype in the way that a face-to-face meeting allows, so do opt for an 'in the flesh' group if at all possible. And I know that some Order Members offer one-to-one study, say of the three-year study course, which people have found very valuable. But 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 think it can be quite common for people to drift a bit once their Mitra group finishes the three-year course. 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 Dharmacarinis 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 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?

Well, you could say that in studying the Dharma, you're trying to bring 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. (Again, it's really 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. It wasn't mumbo-jumbo any more. 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 Dharmic principle 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 viparyayas, like you're looking for conditioned existence to be satisfying, and it isn't? Or you might find yourself taking a Dharmic principle 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 Dharmic truths. We need a Dharmic perspective on 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 sisters, 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 we tend to respond when our views or opinions are challenged? How easy do we 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, then 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, you 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 Dharmic teachings at our fingertips in order to be able to drop them in when your mind was calm enough.

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 a Dharmic truth. 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.

So, 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.

Study area 6. Effective meditation practice

Summary and Reading

To be an Order Member you must be Going for Refuge effectively in the sense of systematically working on yourself in body, speech and mind. For most people that will mean meditating regularly and to some effect.

How often do you meditate and for how long? How can you keep up your meditation practice consistently? What gets in the way of your meditation practice, and what conditions help?

How is your meditation practice helping you develop in the areas of integration, positive emotion, spiritual receptivity, spiritual death and spiritual rebirth?

How often do you go on retreat, solitary retreats as well as meditation retreats, and what are the effects of retreats in you life?

Optional 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

An Effective Meditation Practice (Text purpose-written by Vajratara)

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.¹⁵

You become an Order Member when it's recognised (by all the Order Members who know you) that you are Going for Refuge effectively in the sense of systematically working on yourself in body, speech and mind. For most people that will mean 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 a good 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 you can explore further in your groups.

What is meditation?

Meditation has become a common household phrase and has come to mean many different things from practising mindfulness on the bus to leaving awareness of the body and 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'¹⁶ This gives a much greater scope for meditation than just what we do on the cushion. From this perspective, meditation is a training for a general life approach, not an end in itself. We can produce skilful mental states indirectly in activities such as being in nature, exercise, involving ourselves in the arts or creative activity.

However, meditation is 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. Sangharakshita has also talked about meditation as a direct training of the mind towards progressively higher states of being and consciousness¹⁷. We could define this progression in terms of the dhyānas or, more simply, in terms of progression from the kāma to the rūpa to the arūpa loka, and eventually to Nirvāna itself. The kāmāloka is the world of sensuous experience and is defined as grasping at external sensory input to bring satisfaction. 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. Perhaps this is the meaning of Sangharakshita's poem when he says that

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

It is a realm of mind-created subtlety and brilliance, more exquisite than any external sensory stimulus. Wonderful though this realm is, if pursued further, meditation can lead us to the arūpāloka, where our consciousness becomes associated with the formless plane or world. Finally our consciousness becomes Transcendental or lokuttara, beyond any mundane sphere, however refined. Greed, hatred and delusion have been extinguished.

Concentration, absorption and insight

Looking at meditation in this way, as a progressive development of consciousness, we can see three basic ways in which meditation can be understood. Sangharakshita calls these different ways of understanding the word meditation concentration, absorption and insight¹⁸.

Concentration is when we unify our energies around an object of concentration. Usually our interests are scattered and divided. We are distracted by different things in quick succession: now the breath, now thoughts about work, now the pain in our foot and so on. When we are concentrated, we unify our energies around what we are actually doing. 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.’*¹⁹

This highlights the importance of becoming interested in the meditation. One way into that interest is to see meditation as a mythical space: one that speaks to of us of our deepest values, our heart’s desire, an important focus of our beloved Buddhist practice 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 long to turn our heart towards that realm.

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

If we are able to turn our heart fully towards meditation, we begin to enter absorption. This is when we leave behind the hindrances and enter into dhyāna. 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.’²⁰

An absorbed mind, a subtle consciousness, is more malleable and creative, is more able to concentrate on an aspect of reality, and is ready to perceive ‘things as they really are’. 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, to realise directly *pratitya samutpāda* (conditioned co-production).

What is a "good" meditation, or a "good" meditator?

Looking at meditation in this way helps us to understand what meditation is for. It is to help refine our being into states of higher being and consciousness and to use that refined consciousness to reflect on reality itself. A 'good' meditation is one where we make some movement towards a higher state of consciousness. Whether or not we enter into absorption proper, we can still feel ourselves leaving behind the world of the sensual experience defined by grasping, and enter into an inner world of vibrant colour, or even peace and stillness, where 'healing powers descend and bless'. As Sangharakshita points out: 'The object of meditation is to transform oneself, not to have good meditations.'²¹ In terms of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, a good meditation is one where we deepen our Going for Refuge from provisional to effective and from effective to real. That movement might be simply that we have made the effort, that we have turned up at all. That commitment in itself will have a transformative effect on our consciousness and the depth of our Going for Refuge.

Q: What standards you are setting yourself for 'a good' meditation? What would a good meditation look like for you?

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 very difficult mental states and refreshing their minds to re-engage with the rest of their lives. They are transforming themselves inch by inch. The view 'I am not a good meditator' seems to be the main thing that gets in their way and seems to stem from an impossible standard they set themselves that they cannot conform to. This is, in my experience, 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 Dhammapada:

*'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.'*²²

Conversely, it might be that you are someone who finds it easy to enter into absorption and who regularly dwells in the *rūpaloka*, perhaps having visions 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?

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. Even in 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, though I suspect most people at least would experience the dhyāna factors from time to time, whether they think in those terms or not²³. 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, experiencing a transformation of consciousness.

A 'System of Meditation'

We can most helpfully explore this by looking at how effective our meditation practice is 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. 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'. 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. As Sangharakshita once said: '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!'²⁴ 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 do this: recollecting what we are doing in the present moment (sati) and knowing where we are going: our continuity of purpose (sampajanna). The most helpful practice of mindfulness is the 'mindfulness of breathing' meditation, but there is also the practice of the Four Satipaṭṭhānas and the Four Dimensions of Awareness²⁵ 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?

As we become more integrated horizontally, we start to become aware of our depths and heights: mental states resurface that we had buried and we become aware of the potential of our consciousness. We start to undo our old idea of ourselves, positive and negative. 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 commit ourselves to cultivating positive states of mind, and 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 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 where you can learn all the brahma vihāras. 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. When we experience that imaginative identification we cease unskilful activity and we do all that we can to help their growth, which 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 positive emotion underlying all others is faith (or "sradha"): *'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'*²⁶. If we have faith, we can integrate ourselves around a goal beyond our own self-clinging. If we have faith, we are in touch with what is most truly meaningful and valuable to us, even if we can't quite put that meaning into words. This integration around what is of deepest value to us gathers our disparate energies and galvanises our energies towards Enlightenment. Meditation gains a different kind of momentum that comes from it being an aspect of our faith and devotion rather than faith and devotion aiding us in our meditation. This momentum carries us through the vacillations of our mental states and meditation experience and makes meditation a lifelong bond or 'samaya'.

This is why we undertake the 'Going for Refuge and Prostration Practice' on our Ordination training retreats. We bring the Refuge Tree to mind in a way that enables our ideals to be personified in archetypes, myths, colour and symbols. We see our ideals 'with our heart' rather than our eyes. This awakens our emotions through our imagination and we are able to enact our śradha through our body and speech as well as our mind. It may be useful to talk about your experience of this practice in your groups. When I do this practice I feel like my life suddenly falls into place, flows towards what I most truly and deeply value, and I somehow know what to do. In some mysterious way my life becomes an act of devotion towards the Three Jewels rather than a conscious deliberation about trying to be 'good'. Perhaps this is why it is inherent in any positive mental state.

Joining the Order means that we will experience, to some degree, that faith, which unifies our life and is the underlying meaning and purpose of all that we do. Sometimes we say that the Three Jewels are in the centre of our lives, and our lives are arranged around that centre. Our lives become perfumed by our faith. And just as our lives are perfumed by faith, they are perfumed by mettā and an ethical practice. This will look different for different people, but we could say one lives a life of service to the greater force of mettā, to the Dharma itself.

To live a life in the service of our faith, or our mettā, means we also have to know how to work with our negative emotions: the kleśas of greed, hatred, delusion, conceit and envy; or the hindrances of sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and anxiety, and doubt. We need to be able to identify them in our experience and know how to not let them rule our lives, how to let them pass and how to prevent them arising in the future. This process of cultivating and maintaining positive mental states and eradicating and preventing negative mental states are known as the 'Four Right Efforts' and can be seen as how we work both in and outside of meditation²⁷.

Q: How does your meditation practice help you develop śraddha and other positive mental states? Do you tend to view your meditation as being part of your bigger practice of developing skilful mental states, or developing skilful mental states such as śraddha as an aid to meditation?

Spiritual Receptivity

The next stage of the 'Going for Refuge and Prostration Practice' is to sit in the presence of the Refuge Tree and receive the blessings from the figures on the tree in the form of white light. This is the attitude we cultivate in the stage of spiritual receptivity, or 'dharmic responsiveness', as Subhuti calls it²⁸. An integrated and positive mind is able to be open and receptive. Receptive to what? Perhaps we could say receptive to what is higher, or even what is 'kalyāna': beautiful, true and good. When we find what is kalyāna in our experience, we are able to respond to it, to make it a guiding factor in our lives, leading us to what is 'gambhīra', or deep, unknown by our current level of consciousness. Finding 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 feeling that inspiration, experiencing that higher beauty wherever we find it, including in meditation. It is about learning how to respond to beauty, or truth, goodness or mystery in our lived experience. Responsiveness to beauty 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'²⁹. 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 projecting what we think we should be experiencing in the eyes of others. 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: How often do you go on retreat, solitary retreats as well as meditation retreats? What is your experience of meditation or solitary retreats?

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, has to be done within the 'greater mandala of aesthetic appreciation'³⁰ or 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. 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 a way of functioning in the world that is closed, tight and inward-looking³¹. 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'.³²

The main practice we undertake for reflecting systematically on 'anatman' 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.

Q: How do you bring in spiritual death into your meditation practice?

Spiritual Rebirth

To move beyond the illusion of a fixed and separate selfhood and to let go of self-clinging we need a sense of what lies beyond. 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. We could feel ourselves as part of the 'supra-personal force' for goodness in the world, a flow of dharma niyāma forces that emerge when we let go of self-clinging. 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'*³³

Q: How are you developing integration, positive emotion, spiritual receptivity, spiritual death and spiritual rebirth in your meditation practice?

It is the elements of spiritual receptivity, spiritual death and spiritual rebirth in your everyday meditation 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 sādhanā 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 was given them by his own teachers and has himself given them to many members of our Order, either directly, or indirectly through those he has ordained becoming preceptors. While Order

Members take on the practices of different Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, depending on individual inspiration, in terms of the qualities of Enlightenment the practices are not different, and there is a strong sense of unity in that all Order Members have the aspiration to eventually embody those qualities.

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. The main purpose of whatever practice we take up is that it is a contemplation of spiritual death in terms of letting go of limited self-view and self-clinging, and spiritual rebirth in terms of embodying the qualities of Enlightenment.

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.'³⁴ Perhaps this is the meaning of the last verse in Sangharakshita's poem: 'Refreshed, we rise and turn again' (to the world). 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?

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: from the realm of attachment to external sources for our satisfaction, to the realm of archetypal form and formless realm. 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 must also be 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.*'³⁵ 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 aren't 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.

Document History

version	date	changes
v2	April 2016	
v3	April 2019	updated following Bhante's death, typos, minor changes for readability (Santavajri)

- ¹ See Sangharakshita 'The Buddha's Victory', lecture, 1987
- ² Samyutta Nikaya 45.2
- ³ Aristotle, 'The Nicomachean Ethics', 8.3
- ⁴ Sangharakshita, 'Rights and Duties', from 'Crossing the Stream'
- ⁵ ibid
- ⁶ Sangharakshita, 'Going for Refuge', lecture, 1965
- ⁷ Sangharakshita, 'Yogi's Joy'
- ⁸ Subhuti, 'A Supra-personal Force'
- ⁹ Culagosingha Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya N 31
- ¹⁰ Anguttara Nikaya 4.32
- ¹¹ Sangharakshita, 'The Message of Dhardo Rimpoche'
- ¹² Sangharakshita: Foreword to 'Ensuring a High Degree of Commonality' 2014
- ¹³ Sangharakshita, 'What Is the Western Buddhist Order'
- ¹⁴ ibid
- ¹⁵ Sangharakshita, 'Meditation' from 'Collected Poems'
- ¹⁶ Sangharakshita, 'Peace is a Fire'
- ¹⁷ Sangharakshita, 'What Meditation Really Is', lecture 1960
- ¹⁸ ibid
- ¹⁹ Sangharakshita, 'Meditation Versus Psychotherapy', lecture, 1970
- ²⁰ Sangharakshita, 'What Meditation Really Is', lecture, 1960
- ²¹ Sangharakshita, 'Peace is a Fire'
- ²² Dhammapada v122
- ²³ 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.
- ²⁴ For more on the dhyāna factors, see Kamalashila's book 'Meditation: The Buddhist Way of Tranquillity and Insight'
- ²⁵ Sangharakshita, 'Levels of Awareness: Right Mindfulness' lecture, 1968. Also found in 'The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path'
- ²⁶ Sangharakshita, 'Know Your Mind' p119-125
- ²⁷ Sangharakshita, 'The Conscious Evolution of Man: Right Effort' lecture, 1968. Also found 'The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path'

- ²⁸ Subhuti, 'The Five Aspects of Dharma Life: Spiritual Receptivity' lecture given at Padmaloka 2014
- ²⁹ Sangharakshita, 'Entering the Stream', lecture, 1966
- ³⁰ Sangharakshita, 'Wisdom beyond Words'
- ³¹ Sangharakshita, 'Living Wisely', Chapter 2
- ³² Sangharakshita, 'Living with Kindness'
- ³³ Subhuti, 'Re-Imagining the Buddha'
- ³⁴ Sangharakshita, 'Entering the Stream', lecture 1966
- ³⁵ Sangharakshita, 'Entering the Stream', lecture 1966