

What Is The Order?

Study material for your retreat at Tiratanaloka

Study area 1. The Group and The Individual

Study area 2. Ordination and Spiritual Death

Study area 3. The Significance of the Private Ordination

Study area 4. The Significance of the Public Ordination

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 **What Is The Order** retreat at Tiratanaloka.

Before this handbook was produced, we asked people to do some background reading for the retreat and then provided specific material to study in the form of talks during the retreat itself. The advantage of that approach was that we were able to incorporate current issues and thinking into our talks and discussion groups. However we also realised that this approach didn't give retreatants the chance to consider the material in depth before they came, and it put those who don't have English as their first language at a considerable disadvantage.

In this handbook we give you material to study for each area we'll be studying on the retreat. For each topic ask you to read the summary of each topic we will explore on the retreat. These are found in this handbook. Further reading is shown at the start of each of the four topics of study. Some of the further study 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! Other material can be found in the 'Seven Papers' by Sangharakshita and Subhuti that can be found on Subhuti's website www.subhuti.info,

on thebuddhistcentre.com:

https://thebuddhistcentre.com/system/files/groups/files/seven_papers_by_subhuti_with_sangharakshita_-_version_2_with_index.pdf

or as a book from lulu.com

<https://www.lulu.com/shop/subhuti-and-sangharakshita/seven-papers/paperback/product-1k9kg956.html?page=1&pageSize=4>

We'd ask you to study this material, reflect on it and come prepared with questions 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. 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. The Group and The Individual

Summary and Reading

The first topic we will be studying on this retreat is Sangharakshita's teaching on the Group, the Individual and the Spiritual Community.

The information below consists of extracts taken from talks given by the team at Tiratanaloka and provides a summary of the main areas we'll be looking at, as well as some questions we'd like you to consider.

Further reading

If you have completed Year 2 module 6 of the Mitra Study course 'What is the Sangha? Exploring Spiritual Community', you might like to re-read weeks 4 and 5 on 'Individuality' and 'The group, the positive group and the spiritual community'. This also refers you to the relevant chapters of 'What Is The Sangha?' by Sangharakshita. This can be found in 'The Complete Works, volume 3: The Three Jewels 2'.

Parts 1 & 2 of 'What is the Sangha?' are particularly relevant to this section.

If you'd prefer to **listen to talks on Free Buddhist Audio** then the following talks by Sangharashita will be helpful:-

- The Individual and the Spiritual Community (1970)
- The Individual, The Group and the Community (1971)
- The Meaning of Spiritual Community (1975)
- The Individual and the World Today (1979)

The Group, the Individual and the Spiritual Community

Relationship to the Order

Sangharakshita places a lot of importance on the development of the individual, of the need for us as followers of the Dharma to become more and more aware, independent and creative. He writes and speaks about the individual and the group in many different places. Indeed, he uses the term True Individual to describe one who has entered the stream - in whom irreversible Insight has arisen. This gives us a sense of how our development in this respect is crucial for the Dharma life.

In many ways, it's also a practical issue that arises when we look at our relationship to the Sangha and to the Order. Sooner or later we are in relationship between ourselves and a group of people with whom we have chosen to practise. We'll look

here at the areas of what the group is and how we relate to it, the importance of the positive group, and how we can transform the group into a true spiritual community.

The Group

We could say that a group is a collection of people united by certain ties and needing the support of one another for their views and feelings. Groups may be bonded by family, work, hobbies or political views. The group often defines itself in opposition to other groups, e.g one nationality vs another, men vs women, right-wing vs left-wing, gay vs straight. It gives us a sense of identity. Members need to conform in a certain way or hold certain views or do certain things or even own certain things, in order to continue to be part of the group. Some we are born into, others we choose to join. We may identify strongly or not so strongly with a group. The groups we belong to to a greater or lesser extent affect what we think and how we behave. What we believe is deeply dependent on our group conditioning - what we believe the world is like, others are like and we are like. Recognising the groups we belong to and how we are within them is important in helping us to change and become more individual.

Q. What groups do you belong to and what do you get from them?

Sangharakshita has identified a number of characteristics of the group:-

- A community of non-individuals (pṛthagjanas) or 'ordinary folk'
- Each member's thoughts and feelings are conditioned by the group. The collective spirit of the group can take over and you can become submerged in the group identity despite your own thoughts and wishes.
- Members need the support of others for their views and feelings.
- It is united by ties of blood, ties of soil, ties of money or ties of fear.
- Those into which we are born tend to be more group-like than those which we join voluntarily
- Within it, deep feelings of group loyalty can turn fanatical if the group is challenged.
- It requires conformity and fears individuality. It bonds together by fear of disapproval by the group and desire for approval. Rules are created to hold group norms. A group tries to produce good group members.
- It is based on power: physical, intellectual or economic. The strong impose their will on the weak for their own purposes. It consists of those who wield power as well as those who give it to them.

However, it's important that we don't use the word 'group' in a pejorative way - we are used to groups and we've all been and are part of them. As Sangharakshita

says, “All this may make it seem as if the group is the villain of the piece. It isn’t really. We just need to be clear about what it is and keep it in its rightful place. The desire to belong to a group is a basic human need which cannot simply be by-passed.”¹

The problem is that the development of the individual can be limited by the will of the group. Conformity is upheld by power – strong over weak, rich over poor, educated over the uneducated. Within the group there is no room for growth or change. Groups don’t cope well with any kind of difference or ambiguities outside of the common norms of the group: you’re either in or you’re out. If you’re out, it can be very painful to be rejected by the group and in some cases be a threat to your very survival.

The Positive Group

There is another possibility however, whereby a group, rather than ossifying, can allow individual development to be possible. Sangharakshita draws the distinction between the ‘group’ and the ‘positive group’. Buddhist centres and team-based right livelihood businesses are examples of how a positive group can operate.

Here are some characteristics of the positive group:

- It is still a group, it still has a set of norms and values and members probably experience a certain amount of desire to fit in with others even on superficial matters (for example, clothes, diet, tv-watching habits) and fear disapproval or exclusion.
- Within it, individual development is encouraged.
- It’s open to all who want to take part and is not defined by nationality, race, caste.

When we come across the Movement and Order, we’ll probably see them in this way - a group of people who share values and a vision that we can resonate with, and of course we’ll want to be part of that. But we may also have a sense that there’s something a bit different about it - about the people who make up that group. We might find they don’t fit very tidily into categories that we usually use to define people.

The more we practise, the more we can come to appreciate the positive group. In fact, it’s essential for spiritual growth. Why is this? Because it shows people a different possibility and provides encouragement and support, especially through

¹ Sangharakshita, *What is the Sangha?*, Windhorse, Birmingham 2000, p61

friendship. It can help us increase our ethical sensitivity and give us a context in which to grow.

We might find ourselves within the positive group trying to work out what the 'rules' are - do we have to drink herbal tea, listen to certain sorts of music and wear particular types of clothes? Within the positive group there's still a danger that we can stifle people's growth by thinking we know what's best for them. Sangharakshita says the first precept is about respecting the individuality of others and not hindering their development² - we may find this a bit surprising. In what ways might we hinder the development of others? Perhaps we might consider some of the following: not taking others seriously, patronising them, giving inappropriate advice, trying to get the upper hand, not being open to new ideas, not acknowledging what we've been given, not taking ourselves seriously when others do, not seeing where we can help because we think we're not good enough.

Despite its limitations, it is out of the positive group that the individual can emerge. Becoming an individual may be difficult. We want to belong but realise we have to work things out for ourselves. As part of this process, we may start to become aware of two trends in the way we define ourselves in relationship to the group - ***the conformist tendency and the individualist tendency***. We'll look at these in a bit more detail.

The Conformist Tendency

How do you know when this tendency is in play?

- You quickly want to find out the rules, accepted norms, behaviour of the group, and you adopt them more or less unquestioningly. E.g. arriving in a new retreat centre and wondering, "Am I allowed to put my mug here?", "What are people wearing?", "What do I need to do to get ordained?". We can become quite literal, seeing ordination as a specific number of retreats and a specific set of study we need to complete before we will be invited.
- You find yourself very susceptible to praise and blame, fearing disapproval from the group and wanting to please others.
- You may find you get very easily confused or angry if people don't conform to the group themselves. You want a reciprocal relationship – "if I do this, I expect this in return. If I conform, you conform". This can lead to blame, resentment and high expectations.

² Sangharakshita, *Yogi's Joy*

- This attitude can be related to being an eternalist so you may discover a sort of “If I’m good, good things will happen to me” way of thinking.
- It can be difficult to know what you think or believe independently.
- You may tell yourself you can’t be part of the Order because you’re not good enough or don’t know enough.

The positive side of a tendency to conform is that you can value working cooperatively with others, be receptive to feedback and find it easy to trust others.

What do you need to do to work on this tendency?

- Learn to be able to be on your own, physically (for example on solitary retreat), mentally (to think for yourself), and in relation to the world (to become aware of and work with the worldly winds).
- Take responsibility for your own actions. Perhaps you might take up a confession practice - not because you are afraid you’ve upset someone but because you believe you have done something unskillful. Conformists can want to keep their inner experience closed because they think people won’t like them and develop a tendency to slyness-concealment³, so it’s about being transparent and open. You may need to learn to be open also about the good things, your merits and qualities.
- Learn to speak up and express what you think and believe, even at risk of offending others.

The Individualist Tendency

How do you know when this tendency is in play?

- You quickly want to find out the rules, accepted norms, so you can break them. You don’t need to break them, you just want to show that you can. There’s an attitude of ‘rules are made to be broken’.
- You don’t want to do the same as anyone else – if someone else is doing it, you don’t want to. You want to be sure you’re being ‘authentic’ and fear being ‘one of the crowd’ and you can get upset if you think others are unquestioningly accepting authority.
- You might experience mistrust of the sangha, or be cynical about the Dharma. You might notice a fear of being ‘brainwashed’ that makes you stand outside.

³ For more about mraṅka or ‘slyness-concealment’ see Sangharakshita, *Know Your Mind*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1998, pp209-212

- You don't engage in real communication because you don't trust the motivations of others, and you don't want to need others. You might care more about being respected than being liked. This attitude can be related to nihilism - thinking that it doesn't matter anyway, people let you down.
- You don't like to be labelled - don't want to be part of an Order, or a Buddhist, or a disciple of Sangharakshita. It may be that secretly you do want to belong, but fear rejection.
- You may tell yourself you can't join the Order because you're too different, too unique.

The positive side of the individualist is the ability to think for yourself, not being afraid of being unpopular or standing alone and not being afraid to initiate and take responsibility.

What do you need to do to work on this tendency?

- Let go of likes and dislikes even as an experiment! Learn to say yes. This isn't saying we should accept group norms and behaviour just for the sake of it, denying our own thoughts and feelings. Working in teams can be a good context for trying this out.
- Keep in dialogue, don't dismiss things just for the sake of it. Let other people in, trust and respect others. Don't dismiss those who agree with others and work in the institutions as 'conformists' or 'nice' - they may have chosen to do what they do as individuals!

The crucial point here is that to the extent that these tendencies are in play, we're not free to do what we want - our reactions are determined by what others are doing. It may be helpful to think less in terms of being an individual and more in terms of having an ability to be individual. The latter implies that conditions will play a part in how much we manifest one or other - or even both - of these two trends.

Q. It can be very helpful to look at our own tendencies around groups - what do you think yours are? Do you tend towards individualism or conformism?

Q: Do you have a sense of your own motivations in seeking ordination?

The Spiritual Community

As our practice deepens, we start moving away from group norms and increasingly think things through for ourselves. Moving towards becoming a true individual can at

times be uncomfortable for us with friends, family, partners and work colleagues, who may have some investment in us remaining as we are.

Q: From your understanding of Sangharakshita's writings, what are the qualities of the true individual? Which are the qualities that attract you the most?

The process of becoming more of an individual starts to give us a sense of what the spiritual community is. It consists of individuals who recognise their own uniqueness and also that of others and yet who are united by their Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, specifically, for us, in the context of Sangharakshita's teachings. The difference between this and the group is that the group is based on us remaining unchanged, while members of the spiritual community are committed to helping one another develop and change, wherever that might lead us. Within the spiritual community some people may be more individual than others, but they use that to help others develop, not to dominate.

Some characteristics of the spiritual community are:-

- It's a free association of individuals, whose purpose is to help one another to develop spiritually and to help others outside the community to develop their individuality.
- It encourages freedom of thought and freedom to grow.
- It exemplifies Kalyana Mitrata - spiritual friendship. People are in deep personal contact with one another with genuine spiritual exchange including challenging one another. 'A vital mutual responsiveness on the basis of a common ideal and a common principle'⁴.
- It holds a common spiritual framework within which all are trying to develop -there's a common ideal and a common means of realising that ideal.
- At its best it will include at least some people who are more developed than the others who can provide some direction.

Q. Have you had experience of the Triratna Buddhist Community operating as a spiritual community in this way?

⁴ Sangharakshita, *Going for Refuge*, lecture 1965

Study area 2. Ordination and Spiritual Death

Summary and Reading

The next topic we will be looking at is Spiritual Death, specifically in relation to ordination. This will look more deeply at what Spiritual Death means as we move towards ordination, and suggests areas in which we might work on this aspect of the System of Practice in our everyday lives. There is suggested reading material below, plus extracts of talks given on the subject by the team at Tiratanaloka.

Further Reading

Please read Subhuti's paper **Initiation Into a New Life**. You can download this paper in PDF format from Subhuti's website at <http://subhuti.info/essays>. This 2011 paper is the result of a series of discussions between Sangharakshita and Subhuti on the nature of ordination. We'd particularly point you to the section "Revisioning the Ordination Ceremony".

Chapter 2 of Sangharakshita's **Living Wisely** puts forward some interesting perspectives on spiritual death and gives a good summary of Sangharakshita's approach to the topic.

The extracts from talks below refer to a talk given by Sangharakshita called **The Path of Regular Steps and the Path of Irregular Steps**. This can be found on www.freebuddhistaudio.com

Spiritual Death

Spiritual Death and Ordination

We have already talked about becoming more of an individual in preparation for ordination. This involves the development of both integration and positive emotion. However, becoming more of an individual doesn't go far enough. We have to move towards being a True Individual or stream entrant. In Sangharakshita's words: 'The happy healthy individual which you now are, or were, must die!'⁵ The individual has to move into something greater and more mysterious.

In Subhuti's paper 'Initiation into a New Life' he says 'what is distinctive about this commitment [i.e. the commitment made in the ordination ceremony] is its implicit taking up of the practice of Spiritual Death and Spiritual Rebirth in an effective way'.

⁵ Sangharakshita, *System of Meditation*, lecture 1978

So how do we define Spiritual Death? One way of looking at it is this: 'above all, Spiritual Death means dying, in the sense of loosening our illusions about ourselves and giving up our self-oriented clinging – recognising that such clinging is psychologically counter-productive, ethically compromised, and, most fundamentally, existentially deluded'.⁶

So the point at which we join the Order needs to be one at which we have the right conditions - both internal and external - to make regular progress from Effective Going for Refuge towards what Sangharakshita calls Real Going for Refuge - a level of Spiritual Death that allows us to decisively go beyond ego-clinging. And this means dying to our old selves.

Q. What is our response to the idea of spiritual death?

Spiritual Death and the Path of Regular Steps

So, from where we are now, how do we start to engage with Spiritual Death in this more effective and systematic way?

One way of approaching this question is by looking at what Sangharakshita calls 'the Path of regular and irregular steps'⁷. He talks about a tendency or attitude we can have to try and appropriate knowledge - we can think we have 'got' the Dharma because we understand the concepts. We want to 'master' the Dharma. "We set up an idea of the *arya-pariyesena* [The Noble Quest], an idea of the spiral, and then we try to grasp it by means of an intellect powered by the energy of craving"⁸.

In our effort to master Buddhism, we can pick and choose the bits of Buddhist practices and teachings we like and disregard those we don't. So we might, for example, find ourselves dispensing with devotional practice and focusing on particular types of meditation and particular texts that we feel fit our own approach better. This isn't to say that we should have a 'one size fits all' approach to practice - naturally we will all respond differently to particular teachings and practices. But we need to watch out for an attitude that is more about grabbing the parts of the Dharma we want, rather than growing with the Dharma as a whole. If we are not careful, our practice can become part of our fixed sense of identity. Even wanting to join the Order, or choosing a preceptor can have this flavour of grasping an identity, even a more positive one. One way we can notice that we are grasping the Dharma is that we start criticising others who don't have the same approach as us, or even ourselves for not meeting our own high standards.

⁶ Subhuti, *Initiation into a New Life*

⁷ Sangharakshita, *Path of Regular and Irregular Steps*, lecture 1974

⁸ Sangharakshita, *Reflections on Going Forth*, lecture 1997

Sooner or later we will reach points in our practice where our approach no longer seems to work and we realise we cannot, indeed, 'master' the Dharma at all. These could also be points at which we are practising more wholeheartedly and we start having real experiences of seeing beyond self-clinging. In mythical terms it is said that at these crucial points Mara starts to fight back. Loosening our illusions about ourselves can be scary, and it may be that we meet parts of ourselves that cling onto old ways of being. When this happens it is easy to find a way to step back from practice: we fall in love, get disappointed, stop practising or switch to another form of Buddhism. This is what Sangharakshita refers to as the path of 'irregular steps'.

What Sangharakshita says we need is the path of regular steps. The path of irregular steps is still a path, we do see changes in ourselves, but it is not sustainable, we stop after a while. If we want to continue we need to make a radical transition, we have to let go of control, let go of trying to 'have' Enlightenment, and instead surrender to the Dharma. We have to really allow change to happen. Paradoxically, in this way we become more truly ourselves, and yet at the same time more spontaneous and flexible in our responses. The bit that 'dies' is our conceit or grasping after a fixed identity.

Spiritual Death and Aspects of Practice

This quality of surrender is not easy, and it might mean something different for each person. We can look for it in all areas of our practice, such as those outlined below:

Ethics: spiritual death in the area of ethics means understanding that we are using ethics as a way of changing, not of berating others or ourselves for not being good enough. We could look at ethics as something we are 'growing', or that ethical sensitivity is always having a sense of what is most alive to us in our ethical practice at any given time: a cutting edge. For example, we might notice that what we need to do most at a particular time is work on the speech precepts. Confession is the main practice that enables us to surrender to the Dharma and being willing to be transparent is a practice of spiritual death.

Meditation: watch for meditation becoming something 'I' try and 'make' happen, or have. When we meditate we are 'watering the roots'. It's not about enjoying nice meditations but rather of seeing each sit as an adventure; we won't come out of it the same as we went in. What we are really looking for is a deeper understanding of our own mind and an intensification of Going for Refuge. In this way, there is no such thing as a 'bad' meditation. We may identify a tendency to want more and more exciting different sorts of meditation - this is what Sangharakshita calls 'pseudo spiritual technism'⁹: attaching exaggerated importance to particular methods of meditation. We think that if we can find the one right method it will automatically give

⁹ Sangharakshita, *Enlightenment as Experience and Non-experience*, lecture 1975

us the experience we want. We then think that other methods are worthless. In fact Buddhism has many proven methods, all of which work provided one practises them.

Friendship: we start to see this as engaging with, rather than having friendships. We take on the duties of friendship, rather than perhaps having an unhappy feeling that others aren't providing the sort of friendship we need. We have to build friendships over time, remaining open to our friend just as much as expecting them to be open to us. Aristotle said 'The desire for friendship comes quickly. Friendship does not'¹⁰. We can learn to be open to feedback, finding out what our friends think of us, and noticing how we feel about them too. Real friendships are honest rather than collusive.

Study: in terms of study, this is about letting the Dharma change us, not about knowing the 'right' answers, or picking and choosing the bits of Buddhism that fit in with how we already think and are. It involves really thinking things through. Study with others is a key to this, it should become a dialectical process which involves transparency and interest.

Retreats: when we go on retreat we might find ourselves having to share a room, eat other people's choice of food and work with others without a clear management structure - not surprisingly, we can feel out of our comfort zone! It's important to notice our responses to this situation - we can feel competitive, start to compare ourselves negatively with others, feel critical of the team, or fall in love with someone as a desire to go back to old habits and avoid our experience as we loosen up our sense of self grasping.

Home and family: It can be easy to feel that our spiritual life and our family are separate. Can we talk about our practice of ethics to our family? Have they met our sangha friends? The long-term commitments in families can often bring up deeper samskaras that we don't usually notice in the sangha. Can we see our attachments and dependencies and learn how to work with them? How do we work with tensions between sangha and family around limited resources such as money and time?

Work: For many of us this might be the place we spend more time in our lives, so it's important that we are able to see it as a place of spiritual practice. How do we deal with conflicts at work? Can we feel equal metta for our colleagues and managers as for our clients? It's easy to fall into workplace gossip, unkind humour and negative speech when times are tough. How do we work with the pull of the 'group' in these situations? To what extent are we able to be open about our Buddhist practice in the workplace?

The ordination process: Even 'asking' for ordination is a betrayal of self in a sense. There are no clear boxes to tick. Ordination is not something you 'get', it is work, -

¹⁰ See Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford 1980, book 8 for his discussion on friendship.

getting to know people who can be our kalyana mitras or be in our kulas, and then be willing to get into real communication with them: disagreeing with what they say, or taking it on (perhaps going back to the question of whether you are a conformist or individualist). It's about not rushing the ordination training process and it's important to see Order members as potential friends rather than just potential kula members or preceptors.

Ordination itself: When we say the **4 lines of acceptance** in our public ordination ceremony what in a sense we're saying is "I'm going to try and do this, no matter how difficult it turns out to be". Ordination is a responsibility we take on, not a group we join, or a thing we receive. Really it's not about 'getting' anything – status, security, approval or love, though of course we will find ourselves wanting these at times

Q. Do we recognise our own views, attitudes or behaviours in any of the above areas? What's our own experience of spiritual death?

Each of these experiences can become a '**death**' if we let it, if we take the approach of surrender and use each - perhaps uncomfortable - experience as a spiritual death practice in itself. How do we bring in the perspective of spiritual death into all areas of our lives? Looking at Sangharakshita's teachings on spiritual death, he outlines two ways into spiritual death as a practice:

Spiritual Death as reflection:

Simply put, we reflect on the teachings of the Dharma, but this means we have to know the Dharma. We have to be able to bring teachings to mind easily. It doesn't mean we have to know any particularly complex Dharma teachings or do a degree in Buddhist Philosophy. The Dharma has many simple teachings such as the Three Lakshanas or the Four Noble Truths. We can learn these simple lists, or learn simple texts by heart.

The practice is to retain some teachings of the Dharma and reflect on them when it matters most. When it matters is when our sense of self-clinging is challenged. It is easy to reflect on impermanence in relation to the setting sun, but it won't necessarily challenge our basic sense of self-clinging. When we react or suffer, when our self-clinging is at its most acute - betrayal, disharmony, disappointment, failure - do we bring the Dharma in then? Can we make it an opportunity for practice? We can tend to make a painful experience into a difficulty that we try to solve on its own level and in its own terms: like a game of chess. Alternatively we can make it into a real spiritual problem, and transcend the consciousness that created the problem in the first place.¹¹ At the same time we need to make sure that we don't simply use Dharma teachings to bypass the difficult emotions we may experience at such times.

¹¹ Sangharakshita, *Transforming Self and World*

This is why a commitment to the stages of integration and positive emotion must go side by side with a commitment to spiritual death.

Q: What Dharma teachings do we reflect on, particularly in difficult times?

Spiritual Death as expansion

Sangharakshita talks about the ego as a way of functioning, not a thing in itself¹². It is not that there is a self you have to get rid of, rather there is a way of operating that has to be transformed. We move from a tight ball of self interest to an expansion of awareness and metta without a centre. This expansion is something we are always aiming to cultivate in our spiritual lives, not something we 'have done'. Looked at in this way, Buddhahood itself is an infinite expansion of creativity.

We could consider spiritual death as 'openness in the direction of ultimate reality, not holding back on the progress of expansion; not opening up so far - that is to say opening up as regards to positive emotion - but then refusing to open up any further¹³. It is our self-clinging, our small and calculating mind, that puts a limit on our expansion.

This being so, how do we really know that we have gained some insight? The only really cogent evidence that someone has some degree of insight is that they, in ordinary everyday life, in ordinary everyday terms, behave less selfishly than usual¹⁴.

Spiritual death in this sense is really about overcoming our root selfishness through a path of responsibility and a deeper love. Sangharakshita talks about spiritual death as overcoming the dichotomy between self and other. To do that, we can either look deeply into the nature of 'self', or into the nature of 'other'. Looking deeply into the nature of self can reinforce our self-clinging, so he recommends also concentrating on responding to the needs of 'other' by serving the Three Jewels¹⁵. The important part of this is to realise that spiritual death is not a solitary practice- we let go of grasping our self identity in relationship with other people and the world. It cannot be any other way.

Commitment and Surrender

When we begin to get a glimpse of expansion, of *śūnyatā* or emptiness of self-clinging, we can react and want to regain control, or we can surrender to the Dharma. Surrender in this sense is a commitment, or 'effective' Going for Refuge - Going for Refuge that affects all of our life, with no safe places, no private or secret

¹² Sangharakshita, *Living Wisely*, Ch2

¹³ Sangharakshita, *Seminar on The Precious Garland*

¹⁴ Sangharakshita, *Seminar on A Survey of Buddhism*

¹⁵ Sangharakshita, *Seminar on The Precious Garland*

times. This is what is meant by the word *samvara* or binding, usually used to denote ordination.

So why do we make a commitment to Spiritual Death? Because commitment brings depth, while keeping our options open uses energy and keeps us at a shallow level of understanding. We might start to notice our fears or feelings of restriction; realise that the small self, the 'me first', self important ego is actually the cause of all our suffering. It is brittle, scared of expanding beyond itself into love or commitment. We might find that hanging onto the small self is comfortably familiar but also boring.

Sangharakshita says: 'Realizing the truth of egolessness simply means being truly and deeply unselfish. To contemplate the principle of egolessness as some special principle that is somehow separate from our actual behaviour will leave it as far away as ever. If we find it difficult to realize the ultimate emptiness of the self, the solution is to try to be a little less selfish. The understanding comes after the experience, not before.'¹⁶

We could look at the areas outlined above as putting ourselves in conditions that challenge our habitual views and self-clinging, that allow us to become more truly selfless, ready to move into rebirth into the family of the Buddha.

Q. How could I give the area of Spiritual Death more focus in my own practice?

¹⁶ Sangharakshita, *Living with Kindness*, Windhorse, Birmingham 2004, p134

Study area 3. The Significance of the Private Ordination

Summary and Reading

The next topic looks at the significance of the private ordination ceremony. This will cover the areas of Going for Refuge and Going Forth in a ritual context, the taking of the ten Dharmacharini precepts, the relationship with one's private preceptor and the significance of receiving a new name.

Further Reading

You may find it helpful to have read Subhuti's earlier papers **Initiation into a New Life** and **Re-imagining the Buddha**. Please also read **What is the Western Buddhist Order?** Which is also part of the Seven Papers.

The Significance of the Private Ordination

Reaching the point of Ordination

'Then Aññata Kondañña, who had seen and reached and found and penetrated the Dhamma, whose uncertainties were left behind, whose doubts had vanished, who had gained perfect confidence and become independent of others in the Teacher's Dispensation, said to the Blessed One: "Lord, I wish to go forth under the Blessed One and to receive the full admission."

"Come, bhikkhu," the Blessed One said: "The Dhamma is well proclaimed. Live the holy life for the complete ending of suffering." And that was his full admission.¹⁷

This is a description of ordination at the time of the Buddha. Perhaps you're thinking to yourself that it's not so simple now! We have to study, go on retreat, get to know others and let them get to know us. But in this description we have the sense that ordination is the culmination of a long process for Aññata Kondañña too. He has 'reached and found and penetrated the Dhamma' and become 'independent of others' just as we work to become individuals. We too have had a journey of spiritual discovery and development from our first glimmerings of interest, moving to a real involvement when we became a mitra, then to real commitment, recognised by the rest of the Order at the point of ordination.

¹⁷ Vin. Mv. 1:6 or see Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, Buddhist Publication Society 1992, p46

So readiness for ordination has these two aspects - one's own Going for Refuge being effective, and that effectiveness being recognised by Order members who know you.

It's important to remember that the ordination ceremony whereby one joins the Triratna Buddhist Order is one ordination with two parts - the private and the public ordination. It's not until we've had our public ordination that we have joined the Order and both parts are equally significant. One could say - simplistically - that the private ordination is concerned more immediately with transformation of the self, and the public ordination with transformation of the relationship between self and other, although in practice transformation of self and other are not separate.

Q. Are you most drawn to one aspect of ordination - the private or the public? Why might this be?

What is it that happens during the private ordination? You make a commitment to go for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha and for that to become increasingly central in your life. The strength of this commitment means you feel that you would follow this path even if no-one else was doing so. You commit yourself to becoming a Dharmacharini: a Dharma-farer, and by doing so also commit yourself to the practice of the 10 Dharmachari/ini precepts as an expression of that Going for Refuge. Your commitment witnessed by your private preceptor

Within the ceremony you take on a practice - your sādhana- which for you will embody the aspects of Spiritual Death and Spiritual rebirth. This may or may not involve visualisation of a particular Buddha or Bodhisattva figure which embodies the spiritual qualities and expression of Enlightenment you are most drawn to. And of course you receive a new name which also communicates particular spiritual qualities.

Let's look at these areas in more detail:-

Going for Refuge

In 'A History of my Going for Refuge' Sangharakshita says "I had not realised that Going for Refuge was the central and decisive, indeed the definitive act of the Buddhist life. One did not Go for Refuge because one was a Buddhist, but one was a Buddhist because one went for Refuge".¹⁸ The centrality of Going for Refuge is the most fundamental principle of our Order and Movement and Sangharakshita's understanding of it has shaped our whole ordination. He has drawn out levels of going for refuge - cultural, provisional, effective, real and ultimate¹⁹. He talks of effective Going for Refuge as being the point where one is ready to join the Order. What distinctively marks effective Going for Refuge is a commitment to and active

¹⁸ Sangharakshita, *The History of my Going for Refuge*

¹⁹ Please read the section called 'stages of commitment' in Subhuti's paper *Initiation into a New Life* for more detail on these levels. Also listen to Sangharakshita, *Going for Refuge*, lecture 1978

work on the stages of Spiritual Death and Spiritual Rebirth, to allow the Dharma to radically change us. At this point the Dharma is not part of our life, it is our life. We are sufficiently integrated to understand what conditions we need to put in place to continue to deepen our spiritual practice - conditions both internal and external. So within the private ordination ceremony, it is this effective Going for Refuge that is witnessed.

The ritual environment in which this witnessing takes place is intensified by the *kalyāṇa mitratā* between you and your preceptor. Your own intense Going for Refuge is witnessed by someone else who is also Going for Refuge - your preceptor's Going for Refuge activates and inspires your own Going for Refuge.

So here two strands come together: your Going for Refuge is effective in your life, and therefore others can see it, it is visible. Your process of deepening spiritual practice is recognised by your kula, by local Order Members, by your private preceptor and by the kula of women public preceptors.

Going Forth

We could say that the private ordination ceremony emphasises individuality. Mythically, it's a going forth from 'the group'. Historically of course, as in the Buddha's invitation to Aññata Kondañña, it was a going forth from home into homelessness. The Buddha and his disciples left home and family and possessions and went forth into the wandering life and the monastic life.

At the time of his own going forth, Sangharakshita says: "I had not realised that Going Forth, far from being simply a matter of renouncing the household life, in fact consisted of the emergence of the individual - the self aware, emotionally positive, responsible human being from the matrix of the group".²⁰ Until then Sangharakshita had still been identifying Going Forth with becoming a monk, with a particular lifestyle. He then says, "I had not realised that Going Forth and becoming a monk were spiritually of significance and value only to the extent that they were expressions of one's Going For Refuge"²¹.

One goes forth in the private ordination ceremony as an individual, symbolised by leaving one's fellow retreatants and walking alone to meet one's Preceptor. It can be easy to misread this and there's a very seductive near enemy to positive individuality: a sort of romantic notion of 'going it alone' which just feeds a wrong view of separate self-hood. Sangharakshita has said that there are probably very few people who could do this if they really were totally alone in doing so, but it gives a flavour of the resolve that one feels and points to the importance of it being an individual decision. At this point, we are not asking to be privately ordained to belong, or for acceptance, or for approval, for status, or security. We are doing it

²⁰ Sangharakshita, *The History of my Going for Refuge*, Windhorse, Glasgow 1998 p26

²¹ *ibid*

because for us it's the most important thing - what most embodies and expresses our values.

Q: What do you need to 'go forth' from in order to join the Order?

Taking on a Sādhana Practice

Another way of breaking out of this old view of ourselves is to take up a contemplation practice (sādhana) that represents spiritual death and rebirth, and that you undertake daily. The broader application of the Sanskrit word 'sādhana' means 'leads straight to the goal'. Our sādhana is our link with the Transcendental, our true potential. It is usually based around a visualization of a particular figure and mantra that Bhante received from one of his teachers, but it may not be. Before ordination you will have ongoing discussion with your private preceptor about which practice you can commit to daily and how you bring an explicit aspect of Spiritual Death and Spiritual Rebirth into it.

This practice should take you beyond just refining the self (me, but a bit kinder and more aware) into a radical imagining of Transcendental spiritual rebirth. We imagine the qualities of Enlightenment, and what we dwell on, what we love, that we become. We identify ourselves with a myth that we live out. "The goal must be embodied in our imaginations, our deepest energies gathered in an image of what we are trying to move towards"²².

Sangharakshita has said that one of the three principal reasons why Order Members drift away from the movement is that they discontinue their daily meditation, especially the sādhana they received at the time of ordination²³. So we need to connect every day with a new vision of ourselves that is rooted in our Going for Refuge, and the witnessing of that Going for Refuge that happens at ordination.

Receiving a New Name

In the private ordination ceremony you are given a new name, one that symbolises your new being, so that you are not identified with your old habits and your family conditioning, but with your potential. It will be a big name, and it should feel a bit too big!

"Sanskrit and Pali Buddhist names do not appeal to members of the FWBO because they are exotic... Sanskrit names appeal to members of the FWBO because they embody Buddhist principles or Buddhist precepts, or because they are the names of historical or mythical Buddhist personages, so that as often as we use those names we are reminded of those principles, precepts, or personages and of our own connection with them."²⁴

²² Subhuti, *Re-Imagining the Buddha*

²³ Sangharakshita, *My Relation to the Order*, lecture 1990

²⁴ Sangharakshita, *The FWBO and 'Protestant Buddhism'*

Here Sangharakshita is making an important point - we identify ourselves with this bundle of habits, and this sphere of experience, but in reality we are so much more. These old identities limit us. We achieve irreversible insight when we realise how profoundly we can change and we stop settling for superficial change. To do that we have to stop identifying and attaching ourselves to these habits and start relating to our potential – to Buddhist principles, precepts and persons.

We don't need to get too precious about it - it's not just a new identity based on a refined 'me'. Sangharakshita recounts that he was originally given the name Dhammarakshita at ordination, until it was pointed out to his preceptor that there was already a monk with that name. "Oh well" said our preceptor, dismissing all this fuss and bother about names with a gesture of good humoured impatience, "let him be Sangharakshita!"²⁵.

Receiving a new name can feel very significant and after the private ordination you don't hear your old name for the rest of the time you remain on retreat. It may take time to grow into your name - or even like it - but that's all part of the process of ordination.

The Relationship with one's Private Preceptor - Discipleship and taking on the 10 Precepts

We've talked a lot about aloneness, but of course we aren't alone. We go to the kuti and there we find our private preceptor. This relationship can be difficult to define - they don't need to be our best friend but will be someone we trust to be Going for Refuge and to be able to affirm and witness our own Going for Refuge. And of course the preceptor is so called because they witness your taking of the 10 Dharmacharini precepts. Practising the precepts is the expression of our Going for Refuge in the world.

There are four speech precepts rather than one and we also take on the three mind precepts of abandoning covetousness for tranquillity, changing hatred into compassion and transforming ignorance into wisdom.

With the mind precepts, we practise ethics in a way that is more clearly leading us in the direction of Insight - this is drawn out more fully on our ethics retreat where we look at how our practice of ethics is not about being 'good', but rather about benefiting beings and gaining Insight.

These 10 precepts are a strong commitment and can be hugely transforming if we make the effort (as can the 5 precepts).

One could say that as we practise the precepts more and more, we come into relationship with a preceptor. It is our practice of the precepts that attracts the

²⁵ Sangharakshita, *The Rainbow Road*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1997, pp400-401

preceptor to us! So a preceptor is someone from whom we feel we can 'take' the precepts. We have a sense of trust in their Going for Refuge and their ethical practice.

This basis for the relationship allows for *apatrāpya* - respect for wise opinion - to be present. The positive mental states of *hrī*, ethical remorse, and *apatrāpya* are known as the 2 *lokapālas* - 'the guardians of the world'²⁶.

Hrī is a sense that we have been unskilful, a positive sense of shame, and *apatrāpya* is a concern that our spiritual friends will be troubled on our behalf because unskilfulness leads to suffering. You could say that because of your *apatrāpya* in relation to them, your preceptor can ordain you. And also because of that relationship of *apatrāpya* your preceptor is more sensitive to their own breaches of the precepts, so it's a mutually beneficial relationship

So a preceptor is someone for whom we have respect and receptivity. They may become a closer friend in other respects or they may not, but there is a deep connection from that shared ritual.

Traditionally one lives for 5 years with one's preceptor in a period of what's known as 'nissaya' but for us this is not often possible (*nissaya* means 'reliance or support'). For us this period of *nissaya* is where the new Order member remains spiritually supported by their preceptors for a period of 5 years. They have commitment to you, but you also have a commitment to them to stay in dialogue. Subhuti describes this as a commitment to "be in regular and close contact... consulting them on all major decisions before they take them, and especially keeping in touch concerning the progress of spiritual practice, obtaining their Preceptor's consent before making significant changes to the pattern."²⁷

Sangharakshita has talked about the relationship with one's preceptor thus: "People who I have ordained should, as a matter of courtesy, consult me before going to another teacher – or they should consult their own preceptors, if I did not ordain them. That is the traditional thing to do. In a very few cases, people have consulted me, but I am a little surprised that most have not... However, even when people have come to see me about going to another teacher or taking up a practice or teaching I have not taught, very rarely are they asking me in the spirit of being prepared to follow whatever I say, whether it be 'yes' or 'no'. Very often, they are really seeking approval for what they have already more or less decided to do."²⁸

Q: How do you feel about asking your private preceptor's opinions and going to them with major life decisions?

²⁶ Sangharakshita, *Know Your Mind*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1998 pp125-129

²⁷ Subhuti, *Initiation into a New Life*

²⁸ Sangharakshita, *What is the Western Buddhist Order?*

In 'What is the Western Buddhist Order?' Sangharakshita defined the Order as "the community of my disciples and the disciples of my disciples, and the disciples of my disciples' disciples and so on"²⁹. Realising that 'disciple' is not a term to which everyone has a positive response, he wrote a postscript to the earlier paper in which he says:

"In 'What is the Western Buddhist Order?', I used the term 'disciple' to denote the relationship of Order members to me, and I know that many find the word resonant and meaningful. I encourage those who find the term helpful to continue to regard their relationship with me in this way; and I invite others to engage with me in the full sense of what this term implies. It is necessary for all Buddhists that we feel an emotional connection with and a sense of gratitude towards those from whom we have learned the Dharma teachings we follow. This is more especially the case in relation to those whose understanding is the basis of the Sangha to which we belong. It is therefore important that all Order members feel such a relationship with me as well as, in the case of those I have not ordained personally, their own preceptors. Indeed, I know that there are many who feel devotion and gratitude to me even though they have never seen me.

At the same time, I know that there are Order members who also share and accept my understanding of Going for Refuge and the Dharma in the way I have described for whom the term 'disciple' implies an unrealistically intimate, uncritical, or reverential view of me. Therefore, taking account of such differences, I have come to think that no single term, including the term 'disciple', can adequately define all those who share my understanding of the Dharma and follow practices that flow from that understanding".

Q: How do you respond to the idea of being a disciple?

The private ordination doesn't end there. Because it is not a thing we 'get' but rather a responsibility we take on. This is signified in the fact that the private ordination is followed by the public ordination. If we are effectively Going for Refuge that will find expression in wanting to join with a community of others also Going for Refuge, and in wanting to transform the world. 'Without the idea of transforming world as well as self, our Going for Refuge is in danger of becoming an individualistic affair, and to that extent, in danger of being not truly a Going for Refuge at all.'³⁰

There is still further to go. Effective Going for Refuge is recognised, but at ordination the responsibility we take on is to make it real Going for Refuge - stream entry, or irreversible Insight. We take on to become a hand of Avalokiteśvara. This shifts from being an inspiring image to becoming a real possibility, in a sense of what the Order actually is, at least in potential.

²⁹ ibid

³⁰ Sangharakshita, *My Relation to the Order*

Study area 4. The Significance of the Public Ordination

Summary and Reading

The final topic we'll be looking at on this retreat is the significance of the public ordination. This will cover the areas of the Order as a living spiritual community, the radical nature of the Triratna Buddhist Order, the four lines of acceptance we say at the public ordination and the three duties of an Order member.

Context of Going for Refuge	Higher evolutionary	Social or communal	Cosmic
Duty of an Order Member	To your own spiritual practice... to deepen your Going for Refuge	To the Order... to inspire each other's Going for Refuge	To the world...to benefit the Going for Refuge of all beings
Lines of Acceptance	For the attainment of Enlightenment	With loyalty to my teachers In harmony with friends and companions	For the benefit of all beings
Symbolised by...	The spiral path	The Bodhicitta arising in the collective	The Bodhisattva Ideal
Dhardo Rimpoche's motto	Cherish the Doctrine	Live united	Radiate love
Avalokitesvara	Wish fulfilling jewel	United body	1000 arms

Further Study

Growing the Spiritual Community - a talk given by Sangharakshita in 2008 in which he discusses seven points for the survival and prosperity of the Sangha. Available on www.freebuddhistaudio.com.

The study material below refers to a talk given by Sangharakshita called **Enlightenment as Experience and Non-Experience**. This can also be found on www.freebuddhistaudio.com

The Significance of the Public Ordination

Two Parts of the Ordination Ceremony

As outlined before, the ordination ceremony by which one becomes part of the Triratna Buddhist Order has two distinct parts - the private ordination and the public ordination. It is during the public ordination, when the kesa is given by the public preceptor, that one actually becomes a member of the Order.

“The private ordination signifies your individual commitment to the 3 jewels – that is why it is a private ceremony. It signifies the fact that you have made up your mind to go for Refuge quite independently of any pressure or influence. You are in a state of mind in which you don’t, in a sense, care if nobody else in the world is Going for Refuge. The private ordination signifies that sort of resolution – your determination, if it should ever be necessary, to go it alone.....The Public Ordination represents the fact that, although you are prepared to lead the spiritual life alone, you are not alone. You have become a member of a community of spiritually committed individuals, a member of the Order.”³¹

You could say that the two parts of the ordination ceremony enact two of the most profound of Dharmic truths: that change and transformation of the individual is possible - there is no fixed self - and that we are fundamentally connected with all beings.

The public ordination is essential – without the bigger context, our private ordination would be limited by our self clinging. Our practice needs to take place in a context that is bigger than our own personal life, or it stays a limited, personal project. From the point of view of ordination, spiritual rebirth is rebirth in relation to our own higher potential, our relationships in the Order and with our positive influence on the people we come into contact with..

The significance of the public ordination could be epitomised in this statement by Sangharakshita from his seminar on ‘The Precious Garland’. He uses the term ‘the bi-tendential nature of Being’ to describe the way our experience - it has both a subjective and an objective content (bi-tendential = two tendencies). He says, "Since our overwhelming tendency is to practise from the perspective of self, it is spiritually crucial that we emphasise the perspective of 'other'. It's not possible to gain Being [i.e.Reality] if we come mainly from the perspective of self. 'You' cannot gain Enlightenment; it's only you plus others who can".³² ‘You plus others’ is the spiritual community.

When you ask people why they want to join the Order, the answer often is, 'to have, or to be, in a more supportive context for my practice' - which is probably the initial motivation for a lot of us. It's a good motivation on its own level, but there's a sense of 'my' practice in the centre and the supportive context around me. Sangharakshita's statement, "You' cannot gain Enlightenment; it is only you plus

³¹ Sangharakshita, *Nucleus of a New Society*, lecture 1976

³² Sangharakshita, *Mind in Buddhist Psychology*, seminar, Padmaloka 1976

others who can', seems to imply a much more intensive engagement than this. You could say that our personal or individual practice is part of the mutual creation of spiritual community, of the creation of Sangha. Instead of 'me' in the centre surrounded by others, we become like the traditional image of Sangha: one jewel in a net of jewels mutually reflecting each other.

The Order as Radical Community

It's difficult for us to realise quite what a radical step it was that Sangharakshita took in setting up an Order that was neither a lay nor a monastic body. He had seen the limitations of both - the lay 'Buddhist society' in which one paid a membership fee but didn't necessarily practise the Dharma personally, and the monastic Order in which, in his experience at the time, far too much emphasis was placed on the formal monastic lifestyle and far too little on Going for Refuge. So he set up an Order that is neither exclusively monastic nor exclusively lay, and in which commitment is primary and lifestyle secondary. We all know this but do we really understand what it means? It's not a compromise, nor a balance, nor a bit of this and a bit of that. It's a transcendence of two poles - in this case the poles of formalistic monasticism and lax laicism.

In this context, the Order being neither lay nor monastic means that one does not put a limitation on one's practice or vision, whatever one's lifestyle. We want to practise intensively, to make our effective Going for Refuge into real Going for Refuge, and we need to be honest as to whether our current lifestyle is giving us helpful conditions for that, taking into account any family, or other responsibilities we may already have.

Q. What conditions do you need in your life to support effective Going for Refuge? What could you do to set them up? What conditions aren't currently conducive? How could you change them?

The second way in which our Order is a radical community is that it is based on going for refuge to the Three Jewels, not on likes, dislikes, or on pleasure. "One's Buddhist friends may be good company, they may be helpful, they may provide positive support and advice, one may trust them - but to have faith in spiritual friends involves an attitude towards them which is qualitatively different from the appreciative pleasure one takes in them as friends. If the positive group revolves around pleasure at some more or less refined level, the spiritual community by contrast revolves around faith."³³_{xxxvii}

So chapter meetings may not always be a pleasure; we may go through periods when they're not a pleasure at all, but that is no reason not to go. If we have faith in

³³ Sangharakshita, *Know Your Mind*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1998, p232

each others' Going for Refuge, something or someone will break through - into an opportunity for deeper communication and understanding.

It is that faith in each others' Going for Refuge - how we recognise all Order members as Order members - which is crucial. Crucial in the Order being set up as a radical community, and crucial in its continuance. This is why it is said you should never question another Order member's Going for Refuge - question their behaviour, their actions if you like, but trust in their Going for Refuge. It's this trust that enables us to manifest the vision of the Order, and also to work with conflict. If I'm having conflicts with another Order member, I can trust that we will both work with it in our practice - will put each other in our mettā practice in whatever way.

The Four Lines of Acceptance

The commitment and responsibility that one has in relation to the Sangha is encapsulated in the 'four lines of acceptance' that we collectively recite towards the end of the public ordination ceremony. Then one spends the rest of our life in the Order understanding more and more fully what they imply! The four lines of acceptance are:

- With loyalty to my teachers, I accept this ordination
- In harmony with friends and companions, I accept this ordination
- For the attainment of Enlightenment, I accept this ordination
- For the benefit of all beings, I accept this ordination

There's a lot that could be said about these lines, but these are just a few main points.

“With loyalty to my teachers, I accept this ordination”

What does it mean to be loyal to a teacher or teachers? This is not something 'personal' or sentimental. It's not just about sticking by that person whatever happens, supporting each other whatever misfortune may occur, though of course that is an important aspect of friendship. Here, 'loyalty to my teachers' is about the conditions needed for one's own spiritual life and practice. We are loyal to our teachers by putting into practice what they have taught us, having fidelity to what they have shared with us.

Loyalty to our teachers is about us being able to make progress spiritually, both individually and collectively but going deeper in our own tradition. In his paper 'What is the Western Buddhist Order?' Sangharakshita says:

"My approach stems from the nature of spiritual life itself. It is only through intensity

of commitment and practice that you achieve any results. For commitment to be strong, it has, in a sense, to be narrow. You will not achieve that intensity if you try to follow different teachers and their different teachings and practices at the same time. It's a question of being wholehearted about following and practising a teaching. 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. And you must have confidence in that teacher and his teaching, otherwise you will not be able to apply yourself consistently and successfully."³⁴

We undertake to practise and make available to others the fourfold lineage of teachings, practices, responsibility and inspiration which has come from Sangharakshita and through him to our own preceptors. That is his Adhiṣṭhāna, his blessing - to us, and continuing the lineages is the main way we can remain loyal to our teachers.

Q. Do we see Sangharakshita as our main teacher?

Q. How have we experienced the four lineages in our own experience, and in what are we grateful for?

“In harmony with friends and companions, I accept this ordination”

The Order is a practice because it has to be continually brought into being. The Order only exists to the extent that Order members continue to effectively Go for Refuge and continue to be in active relationship with one another. The Order exists whenever several Order members come together and are acting from their Going for Refuge. If a hundred Order members come together and are in strife and disharmony, have fallen away from their effective Going for Refuge, the Order doesn't exist amongst them - or only in name. So the responsibility of each Order member, ongoingly, is to bring the Order into being.

We have Order Convenors and others who hold particular responsibilities, who bring the Order together and help in times of difficulty - but we ourselves have to understand the principles on which the Order is based more and more deeply, we ourselves have to put the teachings, the Dharma, into practice.

In order to change, we need the experiences of coming up against our differences, recognising our own reactivity, likes and dislikes, preferences, and how our self-clinging asserts itself. If our lives are organised to avoid intensive interactions and difficulties, we will lack these opportunities. Of course, life and death will irrupt into our lives, however comfortable our conditions, but we can't depend on that, we need to experience ourselves outside our comfort zones in more intensive contexts. It's

³⁴ Sangharakshita, *What is the Western Buddhist Order?*

important that we seek out these contexts for ourselves. Any kind of team work, GFR group, Chapter, confession group, shared project, retreat, maybe even a leap into community living and team based right livelihood, will give us some of that more intensive contact that opens us up to the perspective of others.

Because all Order members have undertaken to seriously try and practise the precepts, we have a common basis from which to communicate at those times where we find ourselves in difficulty or disharmony with others. And, as members of the Order, it's our duty to try and reach a level of true harmony. Sangharakshita said that what caused him the most pain was hearing of disharmony in the Order, so this gives an idea of the importance he placed on this. At the same time, harmony is not to be achieved simply by agreeing with other people, a 'shrinking to opposites'³⁵. It is the result of being able to be honest about what we are thinking and feeling, and, at the same time, being able to listen and respond to other people's experience. It is based on real and honest communication, the fruit of which is the transformation of everyone's perspective.

Q. Where do we experience intensity in our Dharma life?

Q. What is our experience of moving from disharmony to harmony in the Sangha?

These first two lines of acceptance could be said to relate to the second duty of an Order Member - the duty towards the Order or seeing oneself in relation to spiritual friends. Building and maintaining an effective Sangha is a creative practice. We need contexts for that practice from one to one meetings to Chapters, working together at classes and retreats, to 'large gatherings' such as Order weekends and conventions. We need contexts where we get to actually meet other Order members - including those with whom we may disagree - and relate to them in a different way. Some of this can be online, but our main context of building friendships is better in person.

All the institutions of the Order and Movement are methods of growing *kalyāṇa mitratā*. Team situations, centre work, regional and national gatherings are all contexts in which we can intensify our practice, and we need to take up the opportunity of those collective Order contexts when we can.

“For the attainment of Enlightenment, I accept this ordination”

We can't Go for Refuge effectively unless we have an aspiration to some extent to really Go for Refuge - to see things as they really are, to develop wisdom and compassion, to enter the stream of the Dharma. It's not enough to have effective Going for Refuge or becoming an Order member as our ultimate aim; that would be

³⁵ Denise Levertov, *A Vision*

another expression of grasping an identity and would lack the aspect of spiritual death. Grasping ordination as an end in itself is a desire for status, security or self worth; or seeing the Order as an alternative career path. This amounts to going for refuge to the Order, not to the Three Jewels. Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels doesn't stop at ordination. The duty of the Order Member is to make effective Going for Refuge real – to set up conditions for transcendental Insight to arise, or to let dhamma niyāma processes become the decisive influence in our lives. Otherwise we can slip back.

Sangharakshita suggests that although Enlightenment can be thought of as 'the experience to end all experiences', it's actually better to think of Enlightenment as 'non-experience' - as growth, work and duty³⁶. Using those words imply a different approach to the Dharma as ways of responding to our responsibilities beyond our usual self concerns, responsibilities to our own development, to the world and to each other. We may not usually think of the Dharma life in those terms, but in traditional Buddhism, meditation is called '??' which literally means 'place of work'³⁷.

This line of acceptance could be said to correspond to the first duty of an Order Member - duty to one's own practice.

Q: How do we respond to thinking of Enlightenment as 'work, growth and duty'. What are the benefits and dangers of thinking of Enlightenment in this way?

“For the benefit of all beings, I accept this ordination”

This line of acceptance, taken together with the previous one, is the implicit 'Bodhisattva Vow' of our Order - we accept our ordination for the attainment of Enlightenment, and in harmony with the Sangha, so we may benefit all beings. This is where the Order as our common, or cosmic, project begins to really reveal itself.

We are practising not for ourselves but for the benefit of all beings - which includes ourselves. It is so easy to appropriate our efforts, to add them on to our sense of ourselves, whether as successes or failures. We need to serve something bigger than ourselves, the Dharma itself. We need to recognise that we can't go it alone, that we need others in the Sangha, not simply to support our own practice, but to deepen our own practice in order to be able to participate more and more fully in this extraordinary shared project.

“We..call it an Order because it seeks to create a reservoir of spiritual energy on which all may draw and from which all may benefit”³⁸. This is what we can best offer

³⁶ Sangharakshita, *Enlightenment as Experience and Non-experience*, lecture 1975

³⁷ See Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, Ch1.17

³⁸ Sangharakshita, *Path of Regular and Irregular Steps*, lecture 1974

to the world: a reservoir of spiritual energy. From this perspective we can see that joining the Order is about being ready to take on the responsibility to contribute to the collective creation of that spiritual energy, and to helping people benefit from it.

This process doesn't just start at ordination. Though our sphere of influence isn't as large as our sphere of concern, we should not underestimate what effect we're having on those we meet. We might not always see it, but our positive influence can continue even long after our life has ended. How much more so the influence of the collective. As an Order our collective efforts are magnified and passed onto others for generations to come.

Q. Do we have a sense of wanting to influence the world in some way as a result of our Dharma practice?

Finally

It takes courage to take on the lines of acceptance at ordination and to live out the duties to ourselves, our friends and the world. It also takes confidence in the Order itself that it can enable us to fulfil those duties. But we are not alone, not in isolation trying to save all beings. We are part of something much bigger, bigger than you, bigger than even the Order, bigger than the whole world...

At ordination we're undertaking to join an Order that is not going to 'support' our practice, it is going to be our practice! To some extent, all our other practice is simply to enable us to be a part of the Order. We need the new name, the *sadhāna* practice, the new context just to support us to do that.

So it's good to question whether you really want to join this Order. Whether you're willing to make that commitment to be loyal to Sangharakshita's teachings, to be in communication with the Sangha, to create intense enough conditions to make steps towards going beyond self-clinging and to place no limits on what you are prepared to do for other beings. For it's this commitment that is what we truly celebrate at the public ordination.

Some final words from Sangharakshita: "It is up to you. I need hardly say how much the world needs the Dharma, needs such an Order, such a movement as ours. I have done what I can. I have started the Order, started the movement. The future of the Order, of the movement is in your hands."³⁹

³⁹ Sangharakshita, *Looking Ahead a Little Way*, lecture 1999