



The purpose of this handbook is to give a brief outline of the current training 'process' for women who wish to be ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order and of the part we see Tiratanaloka Retreat Centre playing in that. We suggest that you discuss the handbook with your local Mitra Convenor, or other local Order Members.

Although in principle the process is the same worldwide, there will be some women who are unable to attend retreats here. However, even for those women who don't come to Tiratanaloka, we hope this handbook will give an idea of the sort of training that is likely to be helpful in your preparation for ordination. Some larger centres now have, in addition, their own guidelines for women who have asked for ordination which give details of what support is available locally.

Background to Tiratanaloka Retreat Centre

Tiratanaloka retreat centre for women was established in 1994 in order to meet a need in helping women prepare for ordination into the Triratna (then Western) Buddhist Order. The main role of Tiratanaloka is to run ordination training retreats. It is run by a resident team of experienced Dharmacharinis who lead the retreats and provide the practical support. This enables women who come here to build up an ongoing relationship with the team members who can then take an active part in helping their ordination process. They can also help by being in dialogue with Private and Public Preceptors and the local Order members as someone gets closer to ordination.

While it is recognised that not everyone can come to Tiratanaloka for practical reasons, we believe that, for many women, the retreats we run at Tiratanaloka continue to provide an important part of preparation for ordination. Retreats at Tiratanaloka offer a chance to explore community living, the principles of the Order and the Movement, and individual's own journey towards ordination. It is also a place in which to get to know women from outside local situations, from different countries - women who will eventually join the Order together and perhaps form lifelong friendships.

In the following section of this handbook, we outline what currently happens when a woman asks for ordination, the areas which we feel are important for ordination training and how these relate to our work here at Tiratanaloka.

We hope you find this information helpful. You can find more information about the team and our vision for Tiratanaloka on our website www.tiratanaloka.org.

Asking for ordination

If you decide you want to be ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order, you can make your request to any Order member, either in person or by letter, or by writing directly to Tiratanaloka. What happens next depends on where you are situated. Some larger centres, e.g. the London Buddhist Centre, Sheffield, Cambridge and Brighton, have their own local processes which might involve asking you to put your request in writing, inviting you to meet local Dharmacharinis or providing you with a copy of their local 'handbook'. Wherever you are situated, the person to whom you have made the request will also forward your details to us here at Tiratanaloka. This is because we hold the only central list of women who have asked for ordination. We are also responsible for putting a notice into Shabda, the confidential Order newsletter, to let all other Order members know of your request. When we receive your request, we'll send you a letter of acknowledgement, some information on how you might follow up your request and a copy of our retreat programme.

If you haven't already done so, we'd suggest you read Sangharakshita's paper entitled "What is the Western Buddhist Order [Triratna Buddhist Order]?" written in 2009, which outlines his vision and views about the nature of the Order. This can be found online at www.sangharakshita.org. You can also read other recent papers written by Subhuti outlining Sangharakshita's more recent thoughts, which amount to a re-emphasis of the key aspects of his teachings. These can be found online at www.subhuti.info. You can buy a book or download a PDF that contains all 'Seven Papers' at thebuddhistcentre.com. We will be drawing on all these papers on our retreats here and we are happy to discuss any questions or issues arising from these papers with you.

Training for ordination

Sangharakshita, the founder of the Triratna Buddhist Order and the Triratna Buddhist Community, has defined going for refuge to the Three Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha as being the central definitive act of the Buddhist life. He talks in terms of ever-deepening levels of going for refuge in this way. Becoming ready for ordination into the Order has two distinct parts –

- Deepening one's going for refuge to the Three Jewels to the point where it becomes effective, or is the principal guiding force in one's life

- Having a good enough understanding of the Triratna Buddhist Order to decide that it is the context in which you want to practise

These two aspects of practice are eventually reflected in the two parts of the ordination ceremony itself, in which we take the refuges and precepts from our Preceptor in the private ceremony and then formally join the Order in the public ceremony.

There are a number of specific areas of practice which have developed from Sangharakshita's teachings and which are likely to help develop and deepen one's going for refuge to the Three Jewels. In a sense, you could say that the whole path towards ordination is simply about allowing these to manifest more and more in one's life to the point where others can see and recognise them. These areas, and the retreat themes which most closely relate to them, are:

1. An effective Dharma practice in all areas of life. This practical and comprehensive look at what spiritual practice looks like is explored on 'The System of Practice' and 'Going for Refuge' retreats.
2. An effective practice of meditation. Taraloka run meditation retreats for women who have asked for ordination, we recommend you continue to attend retreats there as part of your ordination training. At Tiratanaloka the theme 'The Mythic Context' has more meditation and the opportunity for meditation reviews.
3. An understanding and practice of Buddhist ethics. This is explored on our 'Ethics to Insight' retreat.
4. A good knowledge of the Dharma as elucidated by Sangharakshita. This is explored on the retreat on which we study the first chapter of 'The Survey of Buddhism', called 'The Transcendental Principle' retreat.
5. An understanding of what it might mean to practise within the context of the Triratna Buddhist Order. This is explored on both the 'What is the Order?' and 'Six Guidelines' retreats.
6. An understanding of the altruistic dimensions of practice. This is explored on 'The Bodhisattva Path' retreat.
7. Becoming part of a network of friendships. All our retreats give a flavour of this, but we explore the theme of friendship explicitly on 'The Bodhisattva Path' and 'What is the Order?' retreats.
8. A sense of the larger, 'mythic' context for practice, explored on 'The Mythic Context' retreat.
9. The experience of going on solitary retreats is also a significant part of training for ordination. These are an important part of being able to work on our own minds, away from all other distractions. Perhaps more crucially, they can also allow us to develop individuality, by showing us what goes on for us internally when we are away from the demands of others, simply being ourselves.

We recommend 'The Six Guidelines' and weekend retreats as good first retreats at Tiratanaloka.

There are a variety of ways in which you might explore and develop these areas in your own life and these will take different forms for each person. It's important to recognise that there is no set 'time frame' for getting to the point of ordination – it's probably more helpful to think of setting up the best conditions for deepening one's practice and going for refuge to the Three Jewels, and bearing in mind that this process continues on and on beyond ordination.

Retreats at Tiratanaloka

Our retreats at Tiratanaloka are based around the areas outlined above, and we've shown which retreat explores each area directly. However, you'll probably find that each retreat has a taste of many different themes, for example, many people have a strong sense of Bhante's teaching through going deeply in the Going for Refuge and Prostration Practice on The Mythic Context retreat or experience a sense of what the Order is about through studying 'A Survey of Buddhism' on the Transcendental Principle.

On our retreats you will also experience what we sometimes refer to as a 'mandala of practices' associated with the themes – these include ritual, discussion, the Going for Refuge and Prostration Practice, working together, confession and silence.

Our retreats, all for women who have asked for ordination, have a particular depth because of the commitment of all the women who come on them. On most retreats, discussion groups are a central part of the programme, helping you to get to know both the team here and, very importantly, other women who will one day be in the Order with you. Many long-standing friendships are forged at Tiratanaloka! We ask you to come prepared for the discussion groups by reading the suggested reading material beforehand and coming to each group with discussion topics or questions you would like to explore with the group.

In our programme we say that 'The Mythic Context' or 'The Transcendental Principle' retreats are suitable for those who have previously attended, respectively, at least 1 or 2 retreats at Tiratanaloka. This suggestion is not related to what we see as someone's ability to study or meditate, but because we feel you'll benefit most from these particular retreats if you've already had experience of what it's like to study and practice with others here at Tiratanaloka. We therefore ask you contact us before booking on one of these retreats if you haven't been here before.

The mitra study course makes an excellent basis for coming on our retreats. As well as giving an understanding of basic Dharmic principles, the mitra study course covers Sangharakshita's particular exposition of the Dharma and will allow you to go deeper with the material studied in groups here.

All retreats at Tiratanaloka are run by members of our resident community, currently 8 of us. If you come on retreat regularly with us, you may well make connections with particular members of the team. Some, but not all, people like to keep in touch with the team members they make connections with. Please bear in mind that the team are often on retreat and keep up correspondence with a number of women, so we may not be able to reply as often as we would like. However, we do always read what you have written. We keep any correspondence you have with us (with your permission) so that we can get to know you and have a sense of your progression over time. We can also liaise with your Private Preceptor, when you have one, and it can be helpful to have a perspective on your practice from outside your local situation.

Most of our retreats at Tiratanaloka are two weeks long. This enables us to explore the theme in quite some depth, as well as having some silent days in which to reflect on what we have been discussing. It is also an opportunity to have an experience of living as a community, and going

beyond our 'comfort zones'. This is good preparation for your ordination retreat at Akasavana. We recommend you go on one (or possibly two) two week retreats a year if you can. However, we recognise that sometimes women cannot come for that long, and we provide some 9 day retreats. We also offer one 7 day retreat a year, particularly for mothers and carers who otherwise would not be able to come to Tiratanaloka. In addition there are also occasional weekend retreats.

Kulas

As you practise within the context of the Tiratana Community, you will very probably develop friendships with a number of order members who may – formally or informally - support you in your path to ordination. This support may involve those order members discussing your progress with you and, at the appropriate time, liaising with your Private Preceptor. Some centres have developed a 'kula' system (kula simply means 'family') in order to support people who have asked for ordination most effectively. If you are interested in developing a kula, talk to one of your local Dharmacharinis about who might be in it. The make up of the group, as well as how often it meets and how the meetings are structured, will change over time as you near ordination. It's worth noting that it's not necessary for someone to have an 'official' kula in order to become ordained. At smaller centres, for example, where there are only one or two women's chapters, it is likely to be clear who is involved in your ordination process without a specific kula being defined. It may be more helpful to think in terms of developing friendships rather than of having to set up a kula. A kula does not have to meet often, maybe once a year initially. It is just a way for you and your friends in the Order to identify collectively what your next steps may be.

Kalyana Mitras

It may be that you would like to ask two Order Members to be your 'Kalyana Mitras': spiritual friends who you respect and look up to, who are in regular contact with you and who know you well. These friends can guide and support you in your journey to ordination and beyond. It is not necessary to have Kalyana Mitras in order to get ordained, and some people never ask anyone to be their Kalyana Mitra, or they might ask ask after ordination. Potential Kalyana Mitras will consult with their chapter before they agree to your request, and the 'celebrant' who performs the ceremony will need to be confident they are suitable to be your Kalyana Mitras.

The Private Preceptor

As you are nearing ordination, it will become clear that a particular Dharmacharini could become your Private Preceptor. You can ask any Dharmacharini who has been in the Order at least 10 years to take on this responsibility in relation to your own ordination process. If the person you ask to be your Preceptor has not ordained anyone before, they will be asked to go through a 'consultation process' within the Order to ensure they are suitable to take on the responsibility. If they have already been agreed as a Private Preceptor then they can take on the responsibility, with the agreement of their chapter, if they feel able to do so.

There is nothing 'set in stone' about who should or should not become your Preceptor, but it is often helpful to wait until you have naturally developed a good connection with someone before

asking them, as it will be a very significant and lasting relationship. It is sometimes also the case that the circumstances of your relationship change over time and you may both agree that it is more appropriate for another Dharmacharini to be your Preceptor.

As with the kula and Kalyana Mitras, don't feel you have to decide on your own who to ask. Order Members at your local situation and at Tiratanaloka can help you make that decision.

When you and a Dharmacharini have agreed that she should become your Preceptor, then she will be responsible at some point for proposing you as being ready for ordination. This will probably involve gathering information from a number of people in the Order who know you and who also have a sense that your going for refuge is effective and you are ready to join the Order. When this happens, your Preceptor will pass the proposal to the College of Public Preceptors.

The Public Preceptor

The Public Preceptors are a worldwide body of senior Order Members who are responsible for overseeing the process of entry into the Order. Other responsibilities that they have include the appointing of Private and Public Preceptors and carrying out public ordinations.

When your Private Preceptor proposes that you are ready to be ordained, then someone within the College of Public Preceptors will undertake to be your Public Preceptor. You may well know this person, but it is unlikely that you will have as close a relationship with them as you do with your Private Preceptor. It may be that you meet them for the first time after they have agreed to be your Public Preceptor.

It is the Public Preceptor's responsibility to ensure that all relevant information has been checked and to follow up anything about which she is not clear in relation to readiness for ordination. Once she is satisfied that everything is complete, she will make a recommendation to other Public Preceptors in her kula, who all have to agree that you should join the Order.

Then at the time of your ordination, your Private Preceptor will witness your effective going for refuge and a Public Preceptor will welcome you into the Order. The Public Preceptor who performs the ceremony may well not be the Public Preceptor who recommended you to the kula of Public Preceptors and sent you the invitation to your ordination retreat. It depends on which ordination retreat you go on and whether they are able to attend. When a Public Preceptor conducts a public ordination, she is doing that on behalf of the whole college of Public Preceptors.

It's worth mentioning that there is no central funding for men or women carrying out the responsibilities of being Public or Private Preceptors. Those who live at retreat centres may receive some allowance from the retreat centre to cover, for example, the costs of attending Preceptors' training retreats or travel to and from ordination retreats. From time to time the College of Public Preceptors ask for donations from men and women who have asked for ordination to help fund their work.

The Ordination Retreat

Most women who join the Order do so in the context of a special ordination retreat. Sangharakshita has said that he believes longer ordination retreats are very helpful in creating the conditions to take this step. A longer retreat can provide you with a real sense of going forth from your 'ordinary' life that can be greatly supportive in starting your life in the Order. It also gives you a period of time in which to create strong connections with the women who will enter the Order with you.

The women's wing of the movement now has a retreat centre – Akashavana – in Spain where the first 3-month ordination retreat was held in 2007. As part of your preparation for ordination, your Private Preceptor will probably discuss with you if there is any reason you would not be able to attend such a retreat at Akashavana. Sometimes for health or other specific reasons, it is necessary to make provisions of a shorter or more local ordination retreat. This will all be discussed as you near readiness for ordination.

Going for Refuge groups

Many people who have asked for ordination find it very helpful to meet regularly with others locally who have also done so. They may form what is often referred to as a 'going for refuge group' and you may find that there is one or more such group around your centre. These groups can be very significant in helping to deepen friendships and an understanding of what going for refuge really is.

Another way of keeping in touch with other women who have asked for ordination is through the email newsletter Hridayavani. You can find out more about this by contacting hridayavani@hotmail.co.uk.

Other information

We hope that this information has provided a useful general background to training for ordination for women.

We'd like to emphasize that training for ordination does not take a 'fixed' form – it is likely to be different for every woman, depending on her individual circumstances, so it's important to recognise that the information in this handbook is not a definitive guide. For example, the situation of someone at a large centre such as the London Buddhist Centre, where there are many Order Members and mitras, will be very different from someone who is the only mitra somewhere a long way from any centre. People do get ordained when living in a huge variety of circumstances.

If you'd like more information on Tiratanaloka, Taraloka and the Tritatna Buddhist Community generally you may find the following websites helpful: -

www.tiratanaloka.org.uk website of Tiratanaloka retreat centre for women. On the Tiratanaloka website, you can sign up to receive email information about retreats from us. We also have a page on Facebook.

www.taraloka.org.uk website of Taraloka retreat centre for women

www.akashavana.org website of the women's ordination retreat centre in Spain

www.thebuddhistcentre.com the main Triratna Buddhist Community website
www.freebuddhistaudio.com an archive of audio recordings on Buddhism and meditation

Background reading regarding ordination within the Triratna Buddhist Order:

'The Seven Papers' *Sangharakshita and Subhuti*

'The Ten Pillars' *Sangharakshita*

'A History of my Going for Refuge' *Sangharakshita*

'Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow' *Sangharakshita*

'My Relation to the Order' *Sangharakshita*

'Teachers of Enlightenment' *Kulananda*

'The Triratna Story' *Vajragupta*

'Ordination' *Moksananda*

'Sangharakshita: A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition' *Subhuti*

