



commonality

A community
needs a high
degree of
commonality of
practice to
make progress
together on the
path.

Sangharakshita

What is the Western Buddhist Order

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, as he reached the end of his life, Bhante began a series of conversations with senior Order members, clarifying the fundamental principles of Triratna.

The first of these conversations was published as *What is the Western Buddhist Order?* The most fundamental point he made in that paper, perhaps, was that the unity of the Order and Movement depends on

making sure that there is a high degree of commonality about the practices that all Order members are engaged in. If everybody is doing different practices it becomes harder and harder to have a sense that we are one Order.. We are a united spiritual community and so we need to keep a common body of practice...

In 2013 a discussion document was circulated by the College, asking a number of questions:

How do we maintain that high degree of commonality, whilst remaining open to the development and evolution of our overall system?

How do we make sure that any new approaches are faithful to the spirit of the Order and have some kind of collective acceptance, whilst allowing for creative and useful innovation and development?

How do we retain a sense of community through the views that we hold and the practices that we do, whilst giving space for individual spiritual flowering?

The paper was circulated to all Order members, as well as to groups who held specific responsibilities, asking them to consider the principles and strategies set out in the paper. On the basis of the feedback from that consultation, the 2014 International Council meeting agreed a proposal, outlined in the following pages, for how we might answer some of those questions, and set up the conditions for a 'high degree of commonality' in our shared practice.

Dhammarati,

Convenor,
Triratna International Council
Adhithana, May 2020



two principles

There are two key principles in establishing commonality of practice in Triratna

1 / RIGHT VIEW

The first principle is that teaching and practice in Triratna should be based in right view: in accordance with the dharma, and, to create a shared framework, a 'lineage' of teaching and practice, in accordance with Bhante's presentation of the Dharma.



10

2 / KALYANAMITRATA

The second principle is that discussion of teaching and practice in the Order and Movement happens in a culture of *kalyanamitrata*, within the network of friendships in our sangha; creating a culture of communication about practice, especially among those teaching in Triratna; and developing a teaching culture that responds to the spiritual needs of people at different levels of experience.



11

A HIGH DEGREE OF COMMONALITY

developments of teaching and practice



Order members from
Dublin and Berlin centres
discuss practice and
teaching at the LBC

Most developments of teaching and practice will happen in the context of our ordinary Order lives and friendships.

One of the key principles of commonality is encouraging and supporting an easy, friendly culture of communication about practice, especially among those training and teaching in Triratna.

Most discussion about practice and teaching happen quite naturally, between Order members and the people they practice with; in chapters; and with our kalyana mitras and preceptors. Order members teaching at centres will talk to other Order members teaching there.

Whenever an Order member has found something useful in their personal practice, or that they think would be useful to share more widely, they will naturally talk about it in these contexts, as part of natural communication about practice.

Some developments will be significant enough to need discussion in more depth.

In extraordinary cases, some developments will be significant enough to need discussion in more depth. In those cases, we need a process for discussing and evaluating them.

a process

‘If it seems that a particular meditation that we don't already practice may be of use, then let a small group of senior and experienced Order members try it and see what the results are. The exact mechanisms for this the Public Preceptors will have to decide upon, no doubt in consultation with the Chairmen or others.’

Bhante, *What is the Western Buddhist Order*

20

21

In *What is the Western Buddhist Order*, Bhante described that his approach to practice ‘always emphasised going more deeply into what one has... What we've already got is, broadly speaking, sufficient... One must admit, however, that sometimes these practices are perhaps not presented in a sufficiently imaginative or inspired way’.

It should be possible for our body of teachings to evolve as circumstances change and experience deepens. New teachings and practices, and new ways of presenting existing practices, can be adopted where there is a clear case for them. In the paper, Bhante asked the Public Preceptors to ‘come up with some way of sorting out what is valuable from what is not’, and asked other Order members to support them in that.

Although the College has responsibility for this, in most cases evaluation of any new practice would include Order members with relevant experience from all three strands of the Triratna community.

GATHERING INFORMATION

The College, in consultation with others, would form a ‘teaching kula’ a working group of order members with the appropriate experience. The first task of such a kula would be to gather information. In dialogue with the Order members proposing the practice and others, they’d explore the practice and it’s implications. What’s being

proposed? Is there a clear spiritual benefit from the particular teaching being adopted? How does it fit in our existing system of practice?

MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

The working group will make recommendations to the College and International Council Steering Group, and their conclusions will be communicated to the Order and Movement.

IMPLEMENTATION

To create this culture of shared practice will need those who hold various responsibilities in the Order and movement – Public and Private Preceptors, Presidents, Order convenors and chapter convenors, mitra convenors, centre chairs, those involved in teaching – to put the principles of commonality into practice in their own areas of responsibility.

But institutional responsibilities are only part of the story. The responsibility for maintaining a culture of commonality rests with each Order member. We hope that every Order member will be part of creating this shared lineage of teaching and practice that unifies us.





**Triratna
International Council**



Adhithana
Ledbury
HR8 1JL
UK



funded by
FutureDharma donors