

## International Chairs Course – week 3 – *Preparation for Council Meetings*

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*These notes are rough only and intended to accompany the video of the session which you'll find on YouTube [here](#).*

### Preparation for Council meetings

last week general principles

Please 'customise' according to your situation

Some things I say might not be necessary or possible in your situation

Preparation is crucial to an effective & harmonious & meeting

more likely to be able to move to a coincidence of strategy / plan of action

as chair you need to make time for this

not an hour before the meeting

don't want to be prescriptive – trial and error

but certainly - don't leave it to the last minute

crystalise your reflections

they might have been going on all the time

need to take the time to reflect

just do that, nothing else

working on an agenda gives your thought some shape

how am I going to present this?

Can do Individually or in dialogue with trusted friend

Allow for your temperament

A little bit like writing a talk

This might be a new skill for you!

What we are going to look at:

- 1 looking over the minutes
- 2 collecting items
- 3 reflecting on each item
- 4 ordering the items
- 5 allotting time for each item
- 6 checking in with absent council members
- 7 sending out the agenda

### 1. looking over the minutes

of the last meeting

action points

any you need to complete?

any you need to remind others to complete?

accept the present situation

I would often feel frustration at this point

Wish I had done more – feel regret / guilt about it

clarify what you need to report back on from action points

are further decisions needed? if so what are they?

Two options:

1) Report back as part of looking over minutes *or*

2) include as an agenda item

Report on actions usually is first point

If its complex it's better to include it as an agenda item

You have more control over timing that way

Can start with something and get bogged down in it before you've even got into the agenda

Anything to add to the agenda?

left over things that need you didn't have time for last time that need to be picked up

## 2. collecting items

= clarifying what needs to be talked about

are there longer term strategic things you'd like to bring in?

start with an open space

could start with an open question - *what do we most need to talk about?*

start with a white sheet of paper

metaphorically speaking

what is important but maybe not urgent

be proactive as opposed to merely reactive to circumstance

has anything that has surfaced since the last meeting?

does the item need to be talked about *at the council?*

time is *always* limited

need to make the most of it

so difficult to get people together

*The good is very often the enemy of the best*

Sangharakshita, Peace is a Fire p 87

Is this the *best* thing we could be talking about?

can the decision be delegated

to centre team / manager / some other team / etc

can you decide yourself?

from time to time you might need to clarify which decisions the council need to be involved in and which it doesn't

as the situation evolves

e.g. DBC new types of events, new teachers

Is there a change of policy? (Policy not necessarily enshrined in a document)

It's also important to ask council members if there are things they that would like to talk about [I should have included this point in the session but didn't think of it at the time]

### 3. reflecting on each item

what information will your council need to make an informed decision?

the more important the item is the more information they will need, the more time they'll need to digest

e.g. the Auckland Buddhist Centre buying a new centre

what's the best way to give it to them?

tell them at the meeting

handout

slide / whiteboard

in advance

make sure they will have enough time to read it

what will you do if not everybody has read it?

what questions are likely to be asked?

Helps you deepen your thought

have answers to hand

what do you think yourself about the item?

what decision would you like to see made?

by considering the above you might already know

don't be attached to particular outcomes

something may emerge that is better than what you came up with

however it is good to have a sense of how things might work out

I used to find that if I hadn't thought about an item it wouldn't go well

*might* need to postpone discussing an item until you are clearer about it yourself

or until you've done more background work

where would you *like* to get to?

where do you *need* to get to?

What is the bare minimum?

are you pressured for time?

can it be raised at this meeting and then finalised at a later meeting?

do you need to let your council members know in advance what the item is and what the issues are?

potential pitfall: you don't want to ambush people if you can avoid it

*e.g. 'this is really important and we need to decide **now!**'*

sometime unavoidable

Last week – most people need time and space for conviction to arise

anybody you need to speak to?

for information, or for perspective

e.g. experienced friend, another chair

someone who might have been in a similar situation before

e.g. Centre President

Consult with your President about significant item

When spiritual principles are at stake

Skill – knowing when and how to talk to others

Another skill :

Judging when to keep your own counsel - when to discuss

you can't think aloud in the same way you might have been able to before becoming chair

Bhante - 'a centre chair needs to keep their own counsel'

How much he kept his own counsel

can be lonely

can't talk freely in order contexts

talk to others outside situation

it's okay to not know the answers

you can use our council – that's what they are for!

council of elders

what *can* you get clear about?

define the terms of the issue or problem

#### 4. ordering the items

do the most important first

tempting to start with the most straightforward item

can get in expectedly bogged down

is there a natural progression of the different topics?

some items might depend on outcomes from other items

e.g. need to find out that state of the finances before making a decision that will involve spending money

#### 5. allotting time for each item

a rough plan

make sure that everything important is covered

time is precious

so difficult to get people together

very difficult to predict

I could never get right

items I thought would be straightforward weren't

items I thought would be complex were straightforward

what items can you leave till next time if some run over?

## 6. checking in with absent council members

for pragmatic reasons sometimes you'll need to consult

if there is an important decision

to take everyone along with you

better to err on the side of checking things out

balance against what time and energy you have

creative tension

*their* responsibility to attend

and catch up if they can't attend – for a genuine reason

if you run around people too much they won't come!

you can't run around people if they can't commit to coming along

shouldn't be ongoingly compensating for council members lack of commitment

## 7. Sending the agenda out

*when* to send it

far enough away that people have time to prepare if necessary

orientate their mind towards it

close enough that it will be fresh in people's mind

ask your council members for feedback

generally a good idea to ask for feedback about the process you employ

how much detail do you need to include?

a creative tension: informing people vs overwhelming them with detail

Big question → what does leadership mean in the absence of the power mode?

Our three spiritual qualities:

Love

Clarity

Determination

→ **clarity** crucial

You can't lead with power → have to lead with clarity

It has its own persuasive force

Other people are receptive to it

Preparation in a nutshell:

→ establish as much clarity in your own mind as you can

Questions:

Q. How do you prepare for council meetings?

Q. Is there an important aspect of preparation that wasn't mentioned?

Q. Did you hear anything that you'd like to include in your preparation?

## Working at different levels

when I was writing the piece earlier

it doesn't capture the meeting entirely

there is more going on

Order meetings happen at different levels

Vajrayana levels of symbolism

e.g. Khatvanga

its Padmasambhava Day

<b>Vishvavajra</b>	earth base	earth	
<b>&amp; Twelve prongs</b>	4 main & 8 sub continents	-	
<b>vase</b>	Mt Meru	water	
<b>Freshly sev. head</b>	kamaloka / desire god realms	fire	nirmanakaya
<b>decaying head</b>	rupaloka	wind	sambhogakaya
<b>Skull</b>	arupaloka	space	Dharmakaya



biography of illustrious Buddhists

outer, inner, secret

sometimes very secret

what we've looked at earlier far is the outer level

not about employing a clever management technique

not paint by numbers

it's an art not a science

potentially creative & fun!

people who are extremely capable at the outer level can struggle

have held very high level jobs can struggle in this environment

we are all part of the same order – shouldn't it be easier?

we meet on different levels

not just a job

not a job at all

having spoken about the *outer* level I now want to about what I'm loosely calling the *inner* and *secret* levels

### **Preparation at Inner Level**

talk about it in terms of the ethical & psychological aspects

about: training our mind / training our behaviour

meeting with Order members is an aspect of our total training

### **Think of the meeting as a spiritual practice**

think of council meeting as a spiritual practice

think of it as a kind of sadhana

not aware of traditional teachings on this practice

stimulus for this course:

what are the relevant Dharmic principle – how can we apply them?

Like sweeping the shrine & arranging the flowers

when preparing for meditation

part of the total mandala of what we are creating

not just a means to an end

Consider the people in the meeting in relation to what you are going to discuss

See them in the round

are there any likely triggers for you or the other council members?

an issue that Order member x gets very upset about

that you get upset about!

can you present things in a way that will help it go more smoothly?

would it be wise to forewarn the person that a certain issue is coming up?

be careful not to work around people too much

overly manage people's reactivity

people have to take responsibility for their own mental states

at the same time one needs to be pragmatic

get a decision made!

Encourage the strengths of your council members

Invite them to speak to an issue that they are particularly strong

Duke Ellington

Part for players not for their instrument

Do what you can to be in a good state of mind

accept the amount of preparation that you have done

can't do anything about it now!

knowing that point when you've prepared enough

you can overwork it

you can *always* do more preparation

now it's about being in a good state

that moment of peace

it will be what it will be

most important to relax

arrive early

not rushed or harried

have practical things prepared

papers printed out, etc

room set up

in a pleasing way

(working) whiteboard markers found

preparation at the outer level enables you to engage effectively with the other levels

#### make the time & space to welcome

kettle boiled

room cooled or warmed

nice things to eat perhaps

a sense of ceremony

endeavour to make the meetings *enjoyable*

even at the sensory level!

#### Bring a precept with you into the meeting

just one!

Application of one of the 10 Precepts

Particularly Speech precepts:

Truthful

Kindly

Helpful

Harmonious

e.g. not talk to one person only

*'these are my friends'*

### **Preparation at Secret level**

transcendental

something indefinable happening

Jnanavaca

Q. *What do you do to prepare for council meetings?*

A. *I pray!*

establishing faith - *shraddha*

even more fundamental than love, clarity and determination

*... [faith] is the response[...], of what is ultimate in us to what is ultimate in the Universe.*

Lecture 34: The Stages of the Spiritual Path (1966)  
Quoted in Peace is a Fire p.85

*Faith is one's emotional response to something higher than oneself. And because it is higher one cannot possibly understand it.*

Seminar on The Door of Liberation  
Peace is a Fire p85

allowing there to be space for something *new* to emerge

*that you don't know about yet*

letting go of the need to know exactly what the outcome will be

start with something useless

question - should you report in?

can waste a lot of time

depends

can just ask: *'anybody got anything they need to say?'*

an emblem for that indefinable something

something non-utilitarian

e.g.

salute shrine

Refuges & Precepts

a short verse

a mantra

sit in silence

transference of merits and self-surrender at the end