

Taking Stock

Summary Report of the March 2024 International Council Meeting Plenaries

Day 1: Mixed IC Area/Strand Groupings

If you could magically change 3 things about Triratna - what would those changes be, and why?

Summary:

- 1) **more financial resources and abundance** (6 comments)
- 2) **more harmony & ways to address conflict within the Order** (5 comments)
- 3) **more young people are involved and joining the Order** (4 comments)
- 4) **more situations of intensity where people live and/or work together** (4 comments)
- 5) **more pioneering - outreach and starting new centres** (4 comments)
- 6) **revival and/or renewal of the vision of a new society** (3 comments)
- 7) **resolve issues that exist around the single sex approach** (3 comments)
- 8) **more diversity** (2 comments)
- 9) **miscellaneous** (21 comments)

Summary headings with underpinning comments:

1. more financial resources and abundance

- We have sufficient resources to support people taking responsibility
- Financial abundance (with funds flowing into FutureDharma) to enable more things
- a massive increase in income
- Wish we had lots of money - relieve tension with too many institutions chasing too little money
- Financial support for senior order members (so that they are not struggling)
- There would be enough money for everyone to do all their bodhisattva work

2. More harmony & ways to address conflict within the Order

- Every Order member knowing how to navigate conflict / opposing views well

- To learn and to change the way we communicate – we tend to polarise – to learn the difference between actions and people. Mixing that up tends to turn into conflict
- Order Harmony: keep an open mind as we hear someone's experience, as a whole story in itself. Creative, constructive responses
- Polarisation between getting on with their practice, institutions are boring vs. those who do work in institutions - mutual respect and understanding all are practising
- Wish we could be more respectful of each other in our disagreements

3. More young people are involved and joining the Order

- Many many more young people are joining the Order
- A far greater number of young people involved in Triratna (without the Order getting progressively older)
- Also attract more young people
- Younger people in the Order. (US, Canada, Europe)

4. More situations of intensity where people live and/or work together

- More community living, TBRL and projects so younger people can be supported to live a full dharma life
- People spending more time together around the Dharma - more collective living
- Buddhist villages
- More institutions of intensity - with people living and working together - more three 'Cs'

5. More pioneering - outreach and starting new centres

- More and more people hear the dharma, join the Order and spread the dharma, especially in India
- In India (more) reaching out again the the lower castes and working classes
- More emphasis / more enthusiasm for starting up new centres - seeing it as a spiritual practice and resources for this
- limiting the number of order members at any particular centre - send them off to somewhere else!

6. Revival and renewal of the vision of a new society

- A total transformation of society in line with the vision of the Buddha, Dr Ambedkar and Bhante
- Reviving the vision of the new society and changing the world
- A new alternative to living / 'New Society reloaded'

7. Resolve issues that exist around the single sex approach

- That we have a situation where mixed gender is the norm with single gender activities happening around that (he says this with regret)
- Clear outcome about what we are doing about our single sex approach (not that workable with current generation)
- Routes for non binary folk

8. More diversity

- The Order is much more diverse in every way
- More diversity

9. Miscellaneous

- In India there be economic and social improvement to enable people to go for refuge
- The Order taking more responsibility for the running of the movement
- (In India) Dharmacharinis taking more lead and initiative
- More examples of 'monastic life' in the sense of living a simple life and viharas
- That there are good channels of quality communication in the Order (fragmented present state of communications is challenging)
- That there is energy for creativity and initiative in Triratna
- That everything structurally is clear i.e. who is taking which decisions about what and in which way
- Everyone understands that GFR has an altruistic dimension and they express it (transformation of self as well as well as transformation of world)

- Take Bhante's teaching more seriously
- All centres flourish like Aryaloka is at the moment
- More mentoring culture
- Don't want to lose the personal, individual emphasis, edge of challenging worldly views, situations of spiritual intensity. Hold ideals alongside lived reality
- OMs continue to have same level of enthusiasm as they did in ordination process
- More OMs involved in Valencia
- Ordination process shorter
- We can join to have more collective activities and practice so people can all participate (money).
- I wish that we were all enlightened
- Love for everyone in Triratna and beyond to appreciate Sangharakshita and what he has done
- All Oms could appreciate the amazing institution that we have. With that it could flower into something even greater
- (Triratna is the people.) wish all to need less materially and share more
- Learn how to respond creatively to arising social issues

Day 2: Area Discussions

a) What changes have you noticed in your Area (and possibly in Triratna more widely) over the past 10 years? What has been their impact?

b) What current changes or emerging trends are you noticing in your Area (and possibly in Triratna more widely)? What is their impact?

c) Ideally, what needs to happen within your Area (and possibly Triratna more widely) to respond appropriately to these changes and emerging trends?

Oceania:

- a)
- NZ - loss of innocence; Christchurch mosque shooting
 - Covid
 - Vitriol against women

- Handing on of flame to the next generation; older generations have moved on; retirement & ageing & death; new order members as chairs; thin on ground at Sydney centre; people don't want to move into positions of responsibility? why?
- Awareness of race – what it's like not to be white; positive change; Awareness is Revolutionary course
- Single-sex practice; First non-binary ordination, Cittamaya; they had to choose; Dharmafarer (very naughty) ?? Growing discussion around how we meet that; we are not getting any better at it; always push back against mixed events; not making any headway there; everything they do is something written by a man; transman in Auckland; I'd like to have some mixed GFR stuff
- Lack of depth of engagement between the men

b)

- Revolution – we are going to change the world approach has changed - it's become very individual rather than society-focused
- Why don't people want to take resp - don't believe in this
- We live in a cynical, nihilistic age
- We don't know what to believe - used to be more of a sense of trust in media

c)

- Revivifying a conviction in the transformative power of the 3 jewels
- New myth for Triratna
- Turning towards suffering
- Responsibility
- More resources to support people - what would be possible if we had more funding?

India:

a)

- More and more preceptors
- 4 more public preceptors
- Lots more centres (or men?)
- Not attracting so many young people
- Study developed, with Subhuti and other OMs input, including online
- Effect of Bhante's passing, emotionally, feel his absence, issue around him (?)

- Bhante's literature translated but more needed
- Bhante's history available online so younger generation can read first
- FCRA badly affected India, but gave chance to increase donations from within India
- Covid led to online initiative, still going on
- Abhayaratna Trust have helped considerably during Covid
- Increasing problem with jobs, less gov jobs with good leave, private jobs have less leave, so shorter retreats, affects youth particularly

b)

- Online activities still going on
- Trying to get more youths
- Non-residential GFR training
- Most Centres have some disharmony and no way of helping with this; need help, workshops etc

c)

- Lack understanding/harmony between 3 strands
- Lots of initiatives for youth
- Rural and slum areas need attention; need different methods for teaching Dhamma, more options needed, very traditional
- Need help from Ethics Convenor - some issues can't be dealt with by Public Preceptors who can be seen as biased
- Rise in income sources needed
- Need training in leadership

UK & Ireland:

- Vision of New Society not as clear as it was, perhaps need to communicate/clarity/embody that
- What is our USP now that there are more options for people?
- How do we communicate the indefinable spirit of the Order and to what extent are OMs inspired by this?
- Some have collective/cohesive vision, others not, not so homogenous; there needs to be a cohering force
- Tension between diversity and commonality
- Less living communally, how do we express a model of radical simple total Dharma life?
- OMs don't stand out in the way we used to

- People join the order with more life experience, so more diverse; there are idealistic people out there, as well as dispirited (sometimes same people), so how do we offer context for their inspiration?
- Impact of all things internet on consciousness, on samadhi/samatha, how do we use technology wisely, maybe need precepts for life online, maybe a version of Bhante's tantric precepts; people don't need to go anyway to connect but means more siloed lives; guarding the gates because so much distraction
- Proliferation of views/opinions/sources of truth; communicating value of physically lived Sangha, embodied rather than virtual
- Welcome stronger leadership from College, for them to be blessed to do that,
- Perhaps need for more cohesive communication (against background of internet, ageing and climate change, so many different sources of communication coming; how to get sense that we're in this together
- End of Windhorse Trading, end of an era, a gap of intense and money-making and international training context
- Adhithana, growth of teaching community, pilgrimage place; mixed effects of online
- Greatly improved ordination process, well prepared
- Bhante's death and loss of a final authority; new need for leadership
- Hard to have sense of whole Order, people stay local, not wanting to go to large Order gatherings
- Greater ethical accountability for OMs, teachers, but lot of work to encompass it
- Non-binary and looking for ways for our structures to not get in the way (no answers)
- Wish for greater engagement; revision New Society, myth of the Order

Mainland Europe:

- Many more ordinations recently
- Conventions/chairs meetings have given Area sense of ourselves
- Ordination process developing in different places
- Translations work and sub-titling work going well
- Few have experience of community living/TBRL
- Less ongoing contact, so less co-creating and less radical
- Older Order; less willing to travel to international events, less energy
- Triratna more secular/Protestant
- Less emphasis on Mahayana, puja, more body-based, satipatthana

- Death of Bhante not strong effect, less had personal connection with him
- Perhaps; shift to online events
- Less depth of connection; we need hubs of intensity in the movement. Like particularly vibrant centres, projects etc. to still impart that sense of excitement and intensity. Some of our main centres feel more vibrant – but their activities are often more internal-looking. Could they connect more across the area to cooperate with smaller centres or regions with less order members? E.g the women's convention in Berlin
- Young Buddhist convention. We need good offers for younger people. Preferably in our area, so that we don't "lose" them
- With quite a bit more money we could get larger centres (Finland) or retreat centres (Berlin) off the ground. We could enable some very talented people to work for the movement rather than in their ordinary jobs

US/Canada:

Non-binary and gender diversity exploration - very personal and diverse responses to this issue

Latin America:

- Name change
- Growth of Order in Mexico
- More Centres, private and public preceptors
- Need for deepening Order practice
- Need projects to help new generation eg TBRLs
- Need for translations
- International contact
- New skilful ways to deal with conflicts
- Young people

Day 3 (Part 1): Strand Discussions

a) What changes have you noticed in your Strand (and possibly in Triratna more widely) over the past 10 years? What has been their impact?

b) What current changes or emerging trends are you noticing in your Strand (and possibly in Triratna more widely)? What is their impact?

Movement:

a)

- More online activities
- More young people coming along
- Less 'total' involvement - mostly just at Centre
- Only 1 of the 3 C's
- People coming along with prior experience of meditation or Buddhism
- More yoga (and its hindu heritage)
- Online apps used
- Learning different types of meditation so may find it hard to do just metta/mindfulness
- Study has increased
- Other Buddhist organisations in India have developed so competition now
- Not so many young people - busy with jobs
- Public talks don't attract like they used to
- OMs lack skills/confidence to lead study - esp if distant from the UK where there is no continuous Order training. They lack confidence in teaching the Dharma -sometimes lack of training and talking to people with previous experience - need for confidence
- Going to other teachers weakens confidence in our own tradition
- Alot of continuity over past 10-20 years
- Sangha nights are now vital
- Main work hasn't changed much
- Succession issues - getting old - who is going to replace us?
- Clarified role of centre employees
- Bhante's heritage and his passing

b)

- Things cost a lot more
- TBRL declined
- Cost of supporting people higher
- Broader range of people taking responsibility
- Higher support costs, rent, energy etc
- Seems harder to take responsibility
- More statutory requirements
- Income generation has declined
- Emerging young new Chairs
- More interested in having a nice comfortable life; pressure to prioritise job/income esp young people
- Less of a poverty mentality? Tension between those who want to model a simple life and others who don't think that's practical (Maybe look at support principle - there are people who have cash/assets)
- More diversity
- Single-sex can make us look less appealing
- Global insecurity (Russia)

College:

- Lots of public preceptors retired, new ones, very positive
- Ordination teams thriving/active
- In India there is competition to join the ordination team, can be tricky; devolved to kulas, responsibility shared which is good
- In India more OMs coming on GFR retreats
- Europe - not able to get on GFR retreats?
- Private preceptors numbers good
- College meeting good - engaged and know what the issues are
- More equipped with safeguarding now
- Increasing profile in movement - College chair letters
- More leadership (eg new teaching/trainings)
- Increasing dissent to College decisions in last 5 years or so - partly because more transparent about the decisions

- A lot of retirement - will be more every year
- More OMs who weren't ordained by Bhante - don't know what effect that will be
- Full team of women PP's in India now - true also in Mexico
- Since covid, the way deputies work with the Chair changed - was more backseat but now deputies work more closely with the Chair -won't go back, will be more of a team
- Bhante passing away a huge change - College especially have looked to Bhante - something settled on shoulders of College
- Now almost 1 in 10 OMs are private preceptors - maturity of the Order
- Changes but what we're here to do doesn't change - provide context for people to GFR etc.

Order:

- Internationality/diversity - how to stay connected and maintain commonality
- How to more deeply understand Bhante's principles - Adhithana teaching team has role to play
- Order metta
- Ageing Order - how to care for each other and who will take responsibility?
- Increasing number of deaths
- Need for more resources (time, emotional support etc) in local situations we will lose significant OMs who have a voice and are well known
- How to develop the next generations? Order conventions could be used to develop promising speakers etc; IC may have a role; mentorship needed - maybe less about individuals more about grouping
- Greater diversity in how OMs practice - genuine wish to deepen, but have we integrated things like fetters work sufficiently? Is there enough common ground to be able to talk to each other?
- Difficult to meet - less willing to travel; emergence of longer Order retreats including online ones
- Grappled more successfully with bhante's sexual life - Adhithana Kula report etc
- Younger OMs seem capable and fearless
- Effect of online gathering - mixed experience
- Some chapters gone online that would have met in person
- New OMs in Mexico but not many experienced ones to mentor them - Who mentors the mentors?
- Sandwich generation, not sexy new ones nor original generation
- Different areas have different approach to oversight of guidance of new OMs
- Growing awareness of diversity - race/gender (Could explore one's conditioning within affinity groups)

- Finding ways to express the Dharma that recognise oneself more fully

Day 3 (Part 2): Strand Discussions

- a) What are the two most important or urgent issues to be addressed within the next few years within your strand?
- b) Who (specifically) is responsible for addressing this/these issues?
- c) How should these issues be addressed?

Movement:

- Ageing OMs
- Succession
- Confidence in system of practice
- New OMs expect better support
- Mentorship used to be by living/working alongside but how will that work now?
- Dharma life course at Adhithana
- Sikkha
- Allowing mitras to teach so when ordained can get involved immediately in teaching etc
- Older OMs who can't teach can meet 1:1 with mitras etc
- Who is responsible?
- Chapters need to be holder of Triratna tradition
- System of practice needs teaching at all levels
- In India, sense of wanting to have knowledge without actually practising it
- OMs/preceptors need their own strong practice in order to encourage others
- Young people most urgent (mentoring, gender div, money, depth of understanding Bhante's teaching were differing priorities)
- Exemplification
- Mental health big issue
- Centre councils should prioritise young people
- How to communicate Dharma in a way that meets young people's concerns
- Radical is attractive - how would people know we're radical (exemplification)?

- Online activities - some see opportunities and others see threats
- How well is the dharma communicated online? (The dharma is “of the nature of a personal invitation... to be understood by the wise”. Does that happen online? Not enough time, but some really useful aspects of online comms - IC meetings, forums, allows global connection; being able to see each other allows for more respect than written word. Some might stop at online stuff, at the expense of deeper experience if embodied; some might never have contact without online entry.)

College:

- We became PPs because we wanted to ordain people but have a whole load of other responsibilities - ethical issues, Bhante issues etc. These two different roles are not necessarily complementary. Who is responsible? Mahamati?
- Race/diversity
- Focus on genders - whose responsibility to address? Everyone, because it affects everyone, but at some point the College will have to say something about gender diversity in relation to the Order by coming to some shared understanding of the values and what is being asked, building some agreement. We don't have that yet. How? Already in conversation, need more years of talking, maybe 30 years!, More listening, more awareness. Lots of questions will be raised. Nothing else like this that we have considered in the past

Order:

- Depth of leadership that unites behind Bhante's presentation
- Commonality - strong vision - common myth (like New Society used to)
- Passionate - connected issues, one is people, one is content
- Who is responsible for depth of leadership? Some part of College, some of IC steering group, order convenors, ordination teams? How?
- Culture of mentorship - training contexts, give emerging leaders a platform
- Creating more harmony
- Growing confidence that OMs have depth of practice
- Less problem-focused; convenors responsible to get coherent message out
- All to do with communication
- Polarisation - particularly around more inclusive culture

- All OMs (certainly convenors) should take responsibility
- Conflict probably inevitable but possible to avoid in unhealthy way by ignoring it, some training in having difficult conversations needed, and just keep it current - Mexican OMs have been doing stuff around this; online gathering
- Reduction in in-person meeting - many chapters online (Mexico) - need both formats; People to communicate & be listened to
- Growth of Order (especially Latin America)
- New OMs need context and training
- Lots of young OMs
- Context for practice - ongoing mentoring in teaching, need senior OMs to stay visiting, also support the middle generation
- Divergence in areas between how much oversight there is with new OMs teaching
- Growing awareness of diversity - gender, racial etc - affinity groups with common experiences explore shared conditioning - diversity of teachers, trying to find ways to express Dharma - recognise ourselves more fully
- Online - not being face to face can lead to polarisation - although polarised people are engaged!
- Order convenors should put energy into face to face events - make them attractive
- Talked about succession again - experienced people passing on principles and depth of practice, newer OMs being brought up to speed about Triratna institutions
- Contexts for depth for OMs - fewness of them without flying internationally or being online
- Succession also about passing on depth of practice

For individual feedback on this event please see the link below to the results of the online poll:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1h6hvNjRhRNgn3r7QyzF2-4gksefspzYa8o_R8Njxfok/edit#gid=1142374372