

1 - What is a Centre Chair?

We first need to understand what a chair is

understand the particular task that a chair undertakes

Q. what does a chair do that other order members don't do?

I asked Surata about this during a walk at Padmaloka

I was thinking about becoming chair of the Dublin Buddhist Centre

what does a chair do?

Answer he gave is obvious:

→ the Chair chairs council meetings

But *why do we have a council?*

Have to ask that question first

What do they call it here?

you might call it something different in your situation:

'management committee', 'board', 'trustee body'

group of order members responsible for running the activities of your Buddhist Centre

for ease I'm going to use the term – 'council'

need to go back a bit to answer that question

We hear about the Dharma, meet a Buddhist, read a book, see a YouTube clip

something touches us

something that feels as if it comes from somewhere else

somewhere untouched by the up and downs of life

'unconditioned' / 'transcendent'

embodied by the Three Jewels

like a lamp brought into a dark place

we commit ourselves to that

we pursue it

we step onto the path

we Go for Refuge to Three Jewels

This Going for Refuge brings us into relationship with others who are Going for Refuge

Sangha comes into being

Sangha of committed Buddhists like our Order has been described by Bhante 'coincidence of wills'

different individuals independently come to hold the same ideals / values

share the same commitment

'like-minded'

in the sense of like-minded about fundamental matters

e.g. potential in human life for developing awareness which leads to Awakening

there may be disagreement about relatively trivial matters

we share this deep affinity

& commonality of vision & practice

with no coercion or force

each person participates of their own volition

spirit of *ahimsa* / non-violence

we freely associate

'In essence, a spiritual community is a free association of individuals'.

What is the Sangha? p 55

spiritual community is a unique and precious thing

Sangha

a *context* for our Going for Refuge

a *context* for the *expression* of our Going for Refuge

the primary expression of Going for Refuge is love / metta / maitri

Going for Refuge, or commitment to the Three Jewels, is one's life-blood as a Buddhist. Observance of the Precepts represents the circulation of that blood through every fibre of one's being.

from 'The Ten Pillars' - The Ten Precepts Collectively, 1 The Relation Between Refuges & Precepts

first precept

the most fundamental precept and

most fundamental expression of our Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

maitri / love – unfolds as compassion / karuna when it meets suffering

and what a lot of it there is

we look around the world and we see suffering

we see people who could benefit from the Three Jewels

potential that is not being realised

a world needs to be transformed

we want to *do* something

we want to express the altruistic dimension of our Going for Refuge

integral aspect of our ordination:

for the benefit of all beings I accept this ordination

individual by individual

the most effective way of doing that is with others who share our commitment

other members of our Spiritual Community – the Triratna Buddhist Order

for many of us something that we will have been participating in right from the outset of our involvement in Triratna

→ collective endeavour

Needs some shape – institutions to support this activity

→ a Buddhist centre

Instrumental value – to help people

→ needs people to take responsibility for its running

In essence this is what a Buddhist Centre Council is

to answer my question – *Why do we have a council?*

→ a group of order members who come together to help others meet the Three Jewels, to go deeper with them, through the vehicle of a Buddhist centre

an expression of metta

circulation of the life-blood of our Going for Refuge

→ how are we going to do that?

to be effective there is a need for co-ordination / co-operation

you and your fellow Order members have this aspiration → *it needs to be made specific*

things need to be done in a *particular way*

something needs to be done

somewhere

somehow

can't do it every way

→ the key function of the chair is to create the conditions for that to happen

bring people together

to enable those conversations to happen

so that decisions can be made

its means chairing meetings!

But it is also broader than that

move from a *coincidence of wills* – to a *coincidence of strategy*

strategy = a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim [OED]

general to the particular

e.g. doing this Dharma class, in this particular evening of the week, in this particular way, with these particular people

a whole host of challenges & opportunities arise from that

talk about them in the coming days

Bhante

'The Chair has to draw all the threads together'

→ doesn't mean that you are the Boss

We'll see over the coming days why that approach doesn't work

Key qualities

I'm talking about spiritual qualities

they relate explicitly to the Dharma

it's not a job, or a role, in the ordinary sense

it's a spiritual responsibility

→ love, clarity, determination

Love / Maitri

...no mere flabby sentiment but the vigorous expression of an imaginative identification with other living beings.

from Ten Pillars

love for whom?

for the people you want to help

people who could come along

for the people that are doing the helping

your fellow Order members

and Mitras
 need environments to grow and develop
 who you are working with
 you set the atmosphere for your Sangha
 at the core

... it is a cherishing, protecting, maturing love which has the same kind of effect on the spiritual being of others as the light and heat of the sun have on their physical being.

create context where people can become friends

a touchstone for everything that you do

if what you are doing a chair is not an expression of metta then what is it?

Self-aggrandisement?

Q. who is this helping?

you will encounter difficulty

friends might become difficult!

you will not be successful if you don't have this

so gratifying to see people grow

respond to the Dharma

clarity

What you are trying to do and how you might do it

going back to the Dharma again and again and again

in particular Bhante's presentation of it

Principles communicated by Dr Ambedkar

what are the principles and what do they mean in this particular situation?

keep enlarging your perspective

refreshing right view

it can get knocked over!

determination / energy

energy in pursuit of the good

good for self & good for the world

interrelation

might be coming from one side or the other

kusala – the skilful

not just energy in a general sense

not just good in a general sense

also, continuity of purpose

decide on a particular strategy

staying true to strategy

remember what is it is and why you are doing it

particular responsibility of the chair

In the life of Dr Ambedkar and Bhante

Maitri

Clarity

Determination

See them also embodied in the Bodhisattvas

Avalokiteshvara

1000 armed, 11 headed symbol for our order

Manjughosha

Vajrapani

three family protectors

none of these are fixed and final

commitment to an ongoing *process*

something transcendental

Bodhicitta

can't do it only as yourself

heroic qualities

The Bodhisattvas at the Ajanta caves

refinement *and* strength

force of character

also subtlety