

Hi everybody

I was listening to a talk by Subhuti that he gave in 2013 titled 'Adhisthana and the Four Lineages' - I wanted to hear more about the lineage of responsibility from him. He begins the talk by recounting Bhante's diary entry, 7th of April 1968. It's an entry about the first ordinations and in that entry Bhante writes that he went with the shrine gear to the hall, he set up the shrine, he arranged the flowers, he set out the candles, he put out the incense, he got the teacups out of the cupboard, he made the tea, he welcomed everybody, then he conducted the ordinations and then he washed up, he put the cups away, he took the shrine down and he went home. Subhuti says in his talk Bhante did it all - all responsibility was with him for the first years of the order, that was the case. Bhante was a first everything - centre chair, preceptor, order convener, mitra convener and of course that changed over time as Bhante shared and handed on responsibility to order members, eventually handing on the headship of the order in 2000. Structures evolved over time too as the Order and movement grew and more coordination was needed. Chapters had chapter conveners, chairs began to have meetings, Order convening evolved and precepting was widened out and this helped make the areas of responsibility more clear and shared. The international Council also arrived in our community from a need identified by Bhante in 'What is the Western Buddhist Order?' published in May 2009 - I'm just going to read a little bit from that. "The public preceptors because of their spiritual responsibilities have the key position in the architecture of the Order and movement but there are various groupings of senior Order members who have overlapping responsibilities that between them cover the whole Order and movement - public preceptors, private preceptors, chairman and chairwomen, presidents, Order conveners, Mitra conveners, chapter conveners - there needs to be some liaison between them between them all so that they are not each going their own separate ways or coming into some sort of conflict. We definitely need such a structure to be effective."

So the institutions have been created to facilitate coordination and communication but by making responsibility one of the four lineages Bhante is pointing to responsibility as something much more than organisational structure - he's pointing to responsibility as a spiritual practice, perhaps to responsibility as an opportunity for effective practice. Subhuti says in his talk "if you think of responsibility as a lineage it changes your perspective" which makes me ask the question - how does thinking about responsibility as a lineage change my relationship to it?

Bhante shared some of his responsibilities with the Order and then handed them on entirely. Handing responsibilities on means that there's someone on the other end of that handing on to receive it, someone else takes the responsibility up, it's an active

acceptance of the responsibility being handed on. So here we are as some of the main key holders of responsibility in Triratna, having actively taken responsibility on and gathering here as the International Council to do that collectively. In taking responsibility within Triratna we enter into this lineage of our spiritual community as handed down by Bhante and therefore we enter into the Adhithana that comes from that the blessings or the spirit of our community is somehow transmitted from each of us to the other as we take up these significant positions of responsibility. An example for myself is the lineage of Order convening that I entered into through our consultation process that gave me the support of the whole Order for this particular responsibility. So I have been keenly aware of the lineage I am partaking in, from Bhante as the first Order convener, to Aloka, Vessantara, Subhuti, Mahamati, Lokesvara and Dayanandi and from Dayanandi to Parami who handed on to me. In doing that she created a new tradition handing to me a beautiful Avalokitesvara rupa that was blessed by Bhante just before he died. The process of taking up that rupa was made really explicit in my case and helped me feel the lineage and feel the confidence coming through that fine line of OMs to me and I may not have them completely correctly in order, so apologies if that's not the case.

I think this handover is really significant for taking up responsibility and having others witness it and my favourite example of this was after my first six months in the Cambridge Evolution shop in 2001. So Shantasiddhi handed on the manager role to Tejasvini with a beautiful hand-crafted hat made out of bubble wrap, wind chimes and glitter - it was the perfect handover and perfect symbol of shop life and we all rejoiced on that occasion. So Subhuti says in his talk that Adhithana is an experience that transcends the ego, it's entering into a sense of something beyond ourselves, entering into community, into Sangha, the character of Adhithana is to take you beyond yourself and therefore the blessing is not personal, it's something that transforms you and that you want to pass on. He also talks about Adhithana as sustaining power.

Adhithana can be one kind of sustaining power but that's at quite lofty or ideal end of what it might mean to take responsibility in Triratna although I think it's an important foundation to continue to connect to and to remember that the taking of responsibility is an expression of our going for refuge and has the potential to transform us - for the good of course. But now I'm going to bring it a bit down to earth and look at more the personal, pragmatic and spiritual challenges and opportunities of taking responsibility.

I've been working in Triratna now for 23 years. I've stayed working in this context for this long because it gave me the opportunity to live a full Dharma life. Early on I had time and energy to give to Triratna and then as I gained experience in team-based right livelihood I began to take on roles of responsibility within it. These roles have increased

in the amount of responsibility I've taken and so it's been quite a part of regular steps for me - it's also being a continual stretch in my own practice with unforeseen challenges, deeper understandings and new competencies.

The first thing that enabled me to take responsibility was working in a team. I managed the Cambridge Evolution shop in a triumvirate, a three-person management team. The three of us co-managed and therefore we had to really collaborate and work with each other's strengths and weaknesses. It also meant sharing the problems and difficulties so I didn't feel personally burdened by them. I wasn't ready to be a manager on my own, as much as I wanted to be, it really showed me where the gaps in my capabilities were and gave me the way to build skills with the help of others. We were informally mentored by the Dharmacharinis in the situation who'd been part of the Evolution shop before us and they gave us loads of time and worked on the methods of 'caught not taught', so I imbibed a lot but sometimes I wish we had more practical help with management skills or specific coaching. I think we could have also used some more direct feedback on working with our samskaras that arose as part of our work as practice

Training was a really important part of the Windhorse experience - we had lots of training days and explore all types of models from jungian archetypes in leadership to non-violent communication. We also shared best practice in shop delegate days and had area managers who came and gave more individual support to the shops - looking back it was a really supportive environment

And within that and in various responsibilities I had loads of autonomy. I've often had to make my own sense of boundaries and ways to measure how the work was going. It's meant I've had to be very self-motivated and it's given me time to be creative. I often used to feel grateful for the trust put in me - that was especially when I was retail director of Windhorse and I used to say that I had no manager kind of 'breathing down my neck' and that gave me a certain kind of freedom. I had people senior to me that I could go to for help but the autonomy was motivating, it was something that I liked being able to give others so that they could really own the job that they were doing, there was often a good balance of boundaries and autonomy. So that autonomy has also meant that I've had to make my own mistakes, often shared with the management team thank goodness, but I've learned the hard way, which means that those mistakes have been a bit more hardwired into my body and the learning, yeah it's more in my body and learning the humility of having to acknowledge something could have been done differently or better has been really learned, so I'm not as afraid of making them, in fact they've made me more robust because I have actually survived those mistakes and learned from them

Work has definitely been the tantric guru for me and taking responsibility has been a real step-up in that practice. I remember a specific time when I decided that I was conflict-averse, or maybe noticed rather than decided, and I needed to overcome that. I was also experiencing a lot of fear in my meditation practice at that time so I began to step into difficult situations rather than be shy of them and developed a resilience to have difficult conversations. I had the help of the Windhorse personnel team in that, they were advisors and coaches in the difficult conversations that were needed

So I've done this over the last 23 years, I've done it for the love not the money! So living on 'support' is another tantric practice it's made me question what is a want and what is a need and look at the sense of lack or craving that I may be hooking on to as well as what I really need to support me. And that can change in both directions as I've taken more and more responsibility - sometimes I've needed something to support me financially and other times my life has become simpler as those responsibilities increased. Ratnaghosa offered to mentor me at one point when I was having difficulty living on support and that step towards me was what was really needed more than money. Engagement and appreciation is often more of an incentive than salary increases, so say the management models and my experience of working in Evolution. Our managers at Evolution could have earned a little more money working with other retailers but they love the ethical environment, the emphasis on teamwork, having autonomy in their shop and the sense of contributing to a bigger picture, so we gave lots of appreciation to them we were there, when they needed support and we listened to their ideas, we also shared best practice through shop. So many of the managers in the shops had worked with us for seven to ten years when we closed, I think having loyal a loyal team is also helpful when you're leading a situation, when a team is constantly turning over you lose continuity, so investing in that long-term engagement is really worth it

Probably the best training I had at Windhorse was how to make decisions, how to make the best decisions for the situation and the bigger picture, not necessarily the comfortable choice for myself. So there was a lot of emphasis on consensus decision making and decisions made on principle. Many of the principles were drawn from the aims of Windhorse - for example like us being an ethical trader and employer so we might need to figure out the details in any individual situation but I felt confident in knowing why the decision was being made and what the principle was. Maybe sometimes there were competing principles so it was good to be able to know what the hierarchy of those were in any particular situation

One of the peak experiences for me was in being part of the team making the decision to close Windhorse. There was a crux point - the next big shipment order of products to

get through the Christmas period and into the new year. We worked on lots of different scenarios for how to manage the stock and stay afloat - the risk was that it would push us into administration and closure which would mean a very quick closure that was out of our hands and handled by administrators. It was Vajraketu who really pointed out that they were favourable circumstances for not making that order, to opt for closure and to do that in an ethical manner. We could then pay suppliers, give staff redundancies and close the business in an ethical way. Put that way, it was very easy to get behind the closure of the business that had been so dear to all of us and such a boon to the Triratna community over the previous 30 years and as a strategy the staff all got on board to help us close ethically - it was truly an amazing experience

All the training I had at Windhorse, from managing the Cambridge shop to becoming the retail director and being part of the management team there, was great training for stepping into my current role. I knew that there were skills and qualities that I could bring to the International Order convening role and I was keenly aware of stepping into many things in which I'd be out of my depth so it's been a steep learning curve and I've built relationship and knowledge over the last five years. I now feel competent in my role, it can take a long time to build that confidence and it requires a lot of kshanti. I'm really enjoying that now but also beginning to succession plan. Right now I'm focused on creating the conditions that will hopefully give more guidance and boundaries to some of the most difficult work in this role and hopefully give the next people a clearer foundation to work from. I'd also like to gather key information that it took me quite a bit of time to figure out so as the work has spread either so many areas of the Order so that's what I'm hoping to leave for the next people in these roles

I haven't said a lot about spiritual challenges but I can say that I have worked on integrating myself on deeper and deeper levels as the responsibility increased. I've needed the steadiness of meditation and the inspiration of my yidam, I've come into closer contact with the worldly winds of praise and blame, in particular. Responsibility for me is a path because it is a practice. I recommend taking regular breaks to reset and revive inspiration or just relax, the more responsibility I have taken makes a new challenge of what it is and what I need to unwind and recharge

I think creating the networks of those taking significant responsibility is kind of really missing right now. I'm keenly aware of it as only Ratnadharani as College chair and I myself as International Order convener are office bearers living here at Adhithana that don't actually work on the Adhithana project - in the past there was a Future Dharma Fund we're here, the international Council coordinator and staff were here, the Order Office staff were here, I think it makes it more difficult to have the day-to-day contact that helps for collaboration

You know there are also ways to collaborate and support one another that I think could be fruitfully used to do that. I think many of us are tired of too many meetings and no real action and I've been using 'coaching action learning sets' and peer supervision models to help with both practical and spiritual challenges that have outcomes and next steps, so I think we could support each other more like the old Windhorse delegates days of old, so we may also need more clarity on the principles and some kind of maybe even handbook for the principles that we are working towards, so we're not constantly reinventing the wheel

More clarity in terms of what responsibility sits where and - where they are shared - how we can collaborate to make the decisions needed in a particular area.

I've seen things that go unaddressed for years because it's not clear where the responsibility lies which can mean having the same conversations over and over again which is really tedious and has a sense of stuck energy I think the energy could be freed up by clearer thinking maybe even critical thinking I think there's a need for us to train more in critical thinking, to face the difficulties of polarization in different issues that is a feature of our Order and our world right now - sometimes I feel that quite acutely

When I took on the International Order convening role I asked Parami what qualities she thought I most needed she said confidence. I've just actually been in India where the Dharmacharinis have asked for training in leadership and responsibility so I organized a panel discussion and I did some workshops there on the theme and I think that advice applies to many of those women too and those of us taking positions of responsibility we all need confidence and I think just airing the issues can have the effect of finding the next steps forward and that gives confidence Getting clearer on principles and clarity about what responsibilities sit wear can take some of the stress out of dealing with the difficult issues but can also give clear direction for the positive projects and the the direction, positive directions of a situation So just a final thought that I came across in Yuval Harare's '21 Lessons for the 21st Century'

He cites modern educators and the four key skills that have been identified that that kids need these days at school to survive in the 21st century - so they are critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication - so they're often called the four C's so I think we could look at these skills for Triratna surviving in the 21st century and how we could support those taking responsibility in those areas

This is version 5 of my talk, there's so much I haven't been able to say but I hope there are enough sparks in there for discussions, debates and reflections that we will have and share on this IC meeting so to end I'll just quote Subhuti again - "if you think of responsibility as a lineage it changes your perspective"

So I'm looking forward to our discussions around this topic