



fifty years fifty voices

An introduction, an invitation, and a kit

Introduction

The Triratna Buddhist Order turns 50 on 7 April 2018. The Dharma is alive amongst its 2,000+ Order Members across the globe, in many forms. But what does that *really* look like, feel like, ‘taste like’? Triratna is founded on a radically traditional vision, but what does that mean *in practice*? This fiftieth birthday is an ideal time to start to bring together a diversity of voices to reflect on the often messy, vibrant reality of living a Dharma-life and co-creating a new Buddhist tradition. ‘Fifty Years, Fifty Voices’ is recording conversations with a range of Order Members for a display at Adhithana and an on-line presentation in 2018. Perhaps, like the songs of the early followers of the Buddha, this gathering of voices will be an inspiration to practitioners in future times.

Fifty years of Testing Sangharakshita’s Teachings in the ‘Fire’ of our Experience

For the last 50 years, members of the Order have been testing Sangharakshita’s teachings, just as the Buddha taught - ‘as a goldsmith tests gold in the fire’ – in their *lived* experience. Sangharakshita’s understanding of the Dharma is profound, multi-dimensional and, from some perspectives, simple. This doesn’t make it easy to fully understand or to practise. While the *Sangharakshita Complete Works* will ensure that what he actually *said* is preserved and contextualised, the ‘Fifty Years, Fifty Voices’ project is a kind of ‘living analogue’ or counterpart to that. It can record (and enable reflection upon) the lived experience of those who have devoted their lives to putting Sangharakshita’s teachings into practice.

A ‘hologram’ of the Order: The ‘Centrality of Going for Refuge’ is a distinctive emphasis of Triratna and pivotal for the Order. In practice, Order Members approach this ‘centre’ as if from a 360 degree circumference, starting from very different places, with different conditioning and different strengths. If we can gather a range of ‘voices’ from around that circumference, we might evoke a kind-of ‘living-hologram’ of the Order in the middle.

Reflecting on conditionality in our collective experience: As Vessantara noted in his ‘Fifty Years, Fifty Voices’ interview: “...the more of people’s early experiences of Triratna we gather, the more we’ll understand the conditioning forces which have formed Triratna which are still playing out in different ways.” ‘Reflecting on conditioned co-production in our experience,’ is a practice Sangharakshita has recommended many times..

A Crucial Time

We're living at a precious time when we have the majority of the founding members of the Order still alive. They've had substantial direct contact with Sangharakshita and have been practising for decades. And they won't be around forever. We've lost Anjali, Vajragita, Alaya, Mallika, Surana and Jinananda, to name a few. We can't afford to hang about! If we want to capture the experiences and perspectives of our first generation of 'elders', we need to act.

We need to record the voices of the younger generations of the Order and the 'not so well known voices' as well. Satyalila crowd-sourced suggestions for the 50 voices for this project and a repeated request was to hear those of 'quiet unsung Order Members just getting on with their practice'. You probably know some of those... so

The invitation

If you've a friend whose voice and perspective you think needs adding to the collective story (be they an 'elder', younger, quiet or noisy friend!) please do take the initiative and see if they'd record a conversation with *you*. It could be an 'interview' or you could have a more two-way conversation like the BBC Listening Project. A phone is fine for recording and we've a list of sample questions and technical tips below.

(And if you'd like to be the one to speak – just ask a friend to record *you*.)

We need:

An audio recording (see recording tips below)

A photograph of those recorded – as high resolution as possible.

A copy of the 'annals' (timeline) for the those recorded (see below)

Fifty Voices is just the start...

A longer-term aspiration is that this project might set in motion a new 'habit' in the Order. A positive habit of recording and reflecting *collectively* on the years (and decades) of Dharma practice we have done. For this to happen we need to activate the network of the Order start recording conversations with each other - not just with our elders, before it's too late, but also with our peers. So please do respond to the invitation above if you can.

The BBC Listening Project has been one inspiration for the project. This captures 'conversations that matter'. And we can do the same. With the 'Listening Project', the full-length recording is archived in the British Library for posterity and extracts are broadcast. We also have the potential to archive these conversations, and keep adding to the web of voices and themes which the 'Fifty Years, Fifty Voices' will start to weave this year.

How the project came about & who's involved

The idea crystallised in the Colwall Coffee lounge when Satyalila and Lokeshvara met in February 2017. Since then the Triratna (Order Office) Trust and Adhithana Trustees have decided to support the project. Part of the money is from a legacy by Dhivati. There's an Editorial Board of Lokeshvara, Nagabodhi and Vidyamala. Satyalila is being supported for about 4 months to coordinate the project and Candradasa is the Technical Director.

Some (optional) questions for starters...

1. What started it, for you? (ie 'What was the 'call'? 'What's your longing?')
2. Who was the first Order Member you really met? (ie not just in passing). What happened?
3. Ordination – how did you come to ask? Experience of Ordination retreat? Effect?
4. Would you like to talk about:
 - your name and what it means to you, your relationship with it over time?
 - Your yidam?
 - Preceptors/KMs?
 - Bhante?
5. [What's it like, being a Private Preceptor/Public Preceptor? How has that changed you?]
6. What does Dharma practice/Going for Refuge look like in your day-to-day, week-to-week life?
7. Looking back at the landscape of your life and practice, what *matters*? What seems significant from the perspective of where you are now?
8. Looking forwards, if you were able to hand on something (a message, a terma teaching or an image, maybe) for future Dharma-farers, what might that be?
9. What does the Centrality of Going for Refuge mean to you? Has that changed over time?

It would be helpful to have a good number of perspectives from different Order Members on the themes above. At the same time it's important that folk get to talk about 'what's live' – so if it's possible to incorporate some of the above questions *and* also cover topics you both want to, that would be ideal!

Sound recording – main tips for 'Fifty Years, Fifty Voices' from Candradasa

1. Please do a quick check on the sound level before you get going. You may need to put the recording device nearer than you think.
2. While you're recording, try not to knock the recorder or rustle papers etc near it (or clink tea cups!). If you're outside, check how loud the wind is on the test recording.
3. If you have an option of different sound formats on your phone/recording device, please choose .wav or .aiff (full cd quality) if you can and it can be converted to MP3 later - the quality is much better that way. Try and avoid 'compressed formats'. If you can't record as full wav or aiff files then mp4 is fine - best not to convert to mp3 after as that's a further level of quality loss. (If it's a voice recorder with multiple options for setting choose wav44.1khz/16 bit.)

For more information please contact satyalila@gmail.com

'Annals' to accompany interviews/conversation recordings

Our aim with the project is to bring together 50 different 'voices' from the Triratna Buddhist Order across the world. Many listeners won't know the speakers. So, as a complement to the sound recordings, we thought it would be helpful to give a flavour of the diversity of the Order by gathering a decade-by-decade snapshot of their lives in one side of A4. So we'd be really grateful if you'd fill this in! Please return to satyalila@gmail.com. (Just typing this info into the body of an email is fine.)

My name is:

In 1968 I was.....

In 1978 I was.....

In 1988 I was.....

In 1998 I was....

In 2008 I was

In 2018 ...