

Minutes - The International Council Meeting No.1

August 22-27 2011, Padmaloka, UK

In attendance:

Steering Group - Dhammarati, Padmasuri, Saddhaloka, Parami, Mahamati (also College of Preceptors representative for Mainland Europe)

Preceptors' College - Satyaraja (UK/Ireland), Karunadevi (USA/Canada), Viradhamma (USA/Canada), Karunamaya (India), Yashosagar (India), Sanghadevi (South Pacific), Buddhadasa (South Pacific), Moksananda (Latin America/ Spain), Vajragita (Mainland Europe)

Order - Prajnagupta (UK/Ireland), Lokeshvara (UK/Ireland), Ashokashri (USA/Canada), Shantinayaka (USA/Canada), Amrutdeep (India), Aryaketu (India), Nagasuri (South Pacific), Guhyasiddhi (South Pacific), Vajranatha (Latin America/Spain), Saddhajoti (Latin America), Parina (Mainland Europe)

Movement - Vajragupta (UK/Ireland), Saddhanandi (UK/Ireland), Viriyalila (USA/Canada), Viveka (USA/Canada), Nagaketu (India), Abhayaraja (India), Sudaya (South Pacific), Upeksamati (Latin America), Amogharatna (Mainland Europe), Jnanacandra (Mainland Europe)

Organising Team - Maitrisara (facilitator), Jnanarakshita, Vidyatara

Guests - Bhante Sangharakshita (Day 1 evening only), Subhuti (Day 2 evening only)

Apologies:

Preceptors' College - Ratnadharini (UK/Ireland)

Movement - Chittaprabha (South Pacific)

Discussions and Actions:

1. Day 1 (22 August 2011) - Introduction and Blessings

On the evening of the arrival day Dhammarati welcomed Bhante Sangharakshita and the participants and gave a brief introduction on the background and purpose of the first International Council meeting.

Bhante then addressed the group and gave a clear message that while he would take an active interest in the Council and that he may not necessarily agree with all the Council recommendations and decisions, he saw it operating independently and in the interests of the Triratna Buddhist Order and Community. He ended his talk by giving the Council his full support and blessings.

2. Day 2 (23 August 2011) - Context and Agenda Setting

The morning session was opened by Dhammarati, who gave a presentation on the context for the establishment of the International Council, including the history of decision making processes in the Order and Movement, early thinking by Subhuti and Vishvapani about the future needs of the Order and Movement as regards coordination and decision making and the effect of Bhante's decision to hand over his responsibilities to the College of Preceptors. He also outlined the aims

of the International Council as set out in the paper 'A Co-ordinating Structure for the Triratna Buddhist Community'.

Following this talk, Viveka facilitated a workshop to assist the Council in collectively developing the Guiding Principles for the meeting. The following three statements were used to stimulate discussion, firstly in pairs, then in fours and finally in groups of eight:

'Coming together makes it possible to...

'I'm here because I care about...'

'May we work together...'

The resulting responses were then grouped and presented back to the Council as the Guiding Principles for the first International Council meeting.

The afternoon session involved workshops within Area groups including members of all 3 Strands (College, Order and Movement) to identify and discuss ideas that they would like to put forward for consideration and action by the full International Council. The Steering Group also met during this period.

Each Area brought forward three ideas (one from each Strand) plus a secondary list (for background information only), bringing the number of issues presented for consideration by the full International Council to 20 (three primary issues from each Area group, i.e. 18 plus two from the Steering Group).

Representatives from each Strand of each Area had 2 minutes (English-speaking) or 3 minutes (English as a second language) to 'pitch' their idea to the full meeting.

Based on these 'pitches', all members of the Council were then given three dots (representing Areas and Strands) to place on the written outline of the themes. Rules included only being able to place one dot per theme and not being able to place a dot on one's own theme.

On the basis of this exercise, three themes were of clear priority interest - with broad support not only within Areas but also within Strands.

In order of priority these were:

Developing a whole of life **Shared System of Training** for the Triratna tradition

Engaging the Order through the improvement of current communication channels and the development of new communication channels.

Funding the Order & Movement in an on-going, coordinated and sustainable way.

Those ideas or concerns that did not fall within the top three were collected for transcription and future reference.

This process also provided the foundation for agenda for the following two days:

Day 3: Collective workshop on the Shared System of Training

Day 4: Workshops on Engaging the Order and Funding the Order & Movement (people to choose which they would like to participate in)

The evening session involved a presentation by Subhuti on his thinking and discussions with Bhante about the development of a 'System of Spiritual Life' based on a new and expanded articulation of the System of Meditation: Integration, Skillful Intention (Positive Emotion),

Spiritual Death, Spiritual Rebirth, Spiritual Receptivity.

He also discussed the teaching of spiritual practice as a whole-of-life experience based on principles that work at all levels of practice (with a strong emphasis on spiritual death and rebirth and the move from the Karma to Dharma niyama), and the need to launch a collective process throughout the Movement to:

- gather information across the world about what practices are currently being done at all levels; and
- come to a broad flexible and collective agreement about what could be taught at every level in every Centre.

3. Day 3 (24 August 2011) - The Shared System of Training

Prior to the morning session a Communications Working Group comprising representatives from each Area - Vajranatha (Latin America/Spain), Jnanacandra (Mainland Europe), Karunadevi (USA/Canada), Nagasuri (South Pacific), Prajnagupta (UK/Ireland), Nagaketu (India) - met to explore how best to communicate the outcomes of the International Council meeting. The group decided to further consult their Area colleagues to get a sense of the needs of the different Strands before making any recommendations.

In the morning session the Council came together to firstly clarify some of the thinking around the Shared System of Training and then explored what it might look like.

The Council then split into six smaller groups to discuss and provide input based on the following proposals and questions:

DEVELOPING OUR SHARED SYSTEM OF PRACTICE TO BE ABLE TO TEACH AND COMMUNICATE IT EFFECTIVELY (Broader topic)

Includes cooperating on shared frameworks, shared resources and teacher development while considering a creative, effective balance of autonomy and coherence across the Movement.

How can we skillfully foster alignment between individual inspiration and efforts to freshly teach/communicate the Dharma within a shared framework true to Bhante's system of practice?

A SYSTEM OF TRAINING (More specific College proposal)

We've tended to teach the system of training in a linear way. After the 'Reimagining the Buddha' paper we suggest seeing each stage taught at every level of practice. We'd like to gather information on what is being taught worldwide, see what is effective, how it hangs together and work towards a more worked out system of training.

Small Group Questions:

1. *For the College proposal...*what in the proposal adds value? Please name the value that is added.
2. *For the College proposal...*what needs more thinking through and modification?
3. *For the broader topic...*Any other important, creative responses this Council could foster?

In the afternoon session the groups came together and had five minutes to share the main ideas in response to the proposals and questions.

One the basis of these responses a draft collective position on the Shared System of Training was developed as a starting point for further refinement and discussion by a Shared System of Training Working Group (to be established).

In the evening session participants met in their Strands to share experiences and discuss common issues.

4. Day 4 (25 August 2011) - Engaging the Order and Funding the Order & Movement

In the morning session, Vajragupta and Parami presented to the International Council.

Vajragupta focused on how the approach to fundraising and funding within the European Chairs Assembly has changed and some of the benefits of those changes.

Parami spoke about engaging the whole Order and in particular focused on two of the Aims of the International Council:

- to facilitate unity and harmony throughout the Triratna community so that everyone can have confidence that they share the same spiritual values, and
- to find a way to consult throughout the Triratna Buddhist Order and Movement, so decisions on those matters that concern all Order members can be made with the highest degree of participation and take into consideration the widest range of views.

Following the talks, the Council split into two groups.

The first, facilitated by Parami and Viveka, explored how to engage the Order through the process of looking at the most effective ways of communicating the Shared System of Training. The second group, facilitated by Vajragupta and Maitrisara, looked at how the Order and Movement can be more effective at fundraising and the ways in which fundraising efforts could be more effectively coordinated through better strategic decision-making.

In the afternoon session the two groups came together to share their thinking with the full Council.

To ensure everyone was clear about and supportive of the proposals being put forward by the Engaging the Order group, Viveka facilitated a 'spectrum check' - asking people to place themselves between two points at either end of the room - one representing strongly supportive and the other definitely not supportive - depending on their level of agreement. Those people who were positioned toward the not supportive end were then able to articulate their concerns resulting in further dialogue and clarification of proposals. This process continued until there was unanimous support to move forward.

In the evening session, the International Council met in Area groups to discuss any matters arising from the meeting so far and to provide feedback to their Communications Working Group representatives on how best to communicate the outcomes of the Council meeting.

Following that, people had the opportunity to participate in Heart Space - a personal sharing session.

5. Day 5 (26 August 2011) - Steering Group discussion and Working Groups

Prior to the morning session, the Communications Working Group met to agree their role and to develop a strategy for communicating the outcomes of the meeting to the Order and Movement.

The agreed role of the working group was to act only as facilitators of communication to the Order and Movement and then back from the Order and Movement to the International Council

Steering Committee.

The primary means of communication was seen as face-to-face - i.e. through Order meetings, Chapter meetings, Centre discussions etc. Centralised forms of communication - e.g. Shabda and the Order Information website were seen as being useful for reaching outlying Order members and those not engaged with any of the Order's institutions.

There was an agreement to recommend establishing an International Council website to allow members a space to communicate with each other and to access resources that they could use as part of the broader communications process. These resources needed to be in a form that could be edited/ translated to meet specific needs and priorities of each Area.

For the Council to be seen as truly international, it was considered important that initial communications of the meeting were undertaken by Area representatives and not through centralised channels.

The morning then started with a brief feedback session to review where things were up to and to agree the agenda for the remainder of the day. This was followed by a discussion facilitated by Viveka, which focused on agreeing the role and membership of the Steering group as proposed in the 'A Co-ordinating Structure for the Triratna Buddhist Community' paper:

1. Who is on the Steering group?
2. What is the process for selection?
3. What is the work that they will do?

The International Council has responsibility for bringing 3 Strands together and it was acknowledged that as a starting point there were already processes in place for selecting members for Steering group from the College and Order Strands - i.e. the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the College and the two International Order Convenors.

Two areas for further discussion were identified:

- How to best represent the Movement Strand ensuring more international representation on the Steering group (given the current UK bias created by the fact that the College Chair and deputies and the two International Order Convenors are all UK based); and
- Whether there was a need to have a further representative from the Order, who did not hold an institutional position - i.e. wasn't a Public Preceptor.

The Council agreed that to address the first issue the Steering group would be broadened out to include 3 Movement representatives - one representing the European Chairs Assembly, one representing India and one representing the Rest of the World. These 3 representatives would then 'buddy-up' with the other Areas - South Pacific and Latin America - to facilitate information flow.

It was further agreed that the Movement Strand would meet to nominate the 3 Movement representatives and that these nominations would be presented the Preceptors' College for approval as required by the International Council constitution.

The second issue was also referred to the Order Strand for further discussion, in particular, to look at what process could be used to nominate an additional Order representative.

The Steering group's role was seen as three-fold:

1. Monitor and coordinate and assist in the resourcing of the agreed workplan for the

- International Council in between meetings to ensure it is implemented and doesn't stall;
2. To plan for and manage the future full International Council meetings; and
 3. To make urgent decisions in relation to International Council business - when it is not possible to call the International Council together, and after consulting as many International Council members as possible. Decisions made in this way will be submitted for review at the subsequent meeting of the International Council.

The Steering group's authority was seen as coming from its members - i.e. it only has the influence its membership says it has. The Steering group has no leverage to impose a decision, therefore its influence comes from building consensus.

It was agreed that the Steering group would meet - either face-to-face and/or via Skype call - on a quarterly basis between International Council meetings. The possibility of one face-to-face meeting for all members during that period with travel and accommodation costs to be covered by the International Council, was also raised.

The Minutes and reports of the Steering group would be available to the full International Council and to the Order and Movement.

It was also proposed that the next full meeting of the International Council be held in 2013, possibly in conjunction with the combined International Convention in Bodhgaya. This will be confirmed at a later date.

Following this discussion, the Movement Strand and the Order Strand met to discuss their relevant issues and provide recommendations to the full Council for consideration.

The Movement Strand agreed to nominate 3 representatives for final approval by the Preceptors College - Viveka (USA/Canada and to 'buddy' with South Pacific and Latin America), Vajragupta (European Chairs' Assembly) and Nagaketu (India). Subsequent to the meeting there has been further discussion about the Indian representative, and the nominee for that position is yet to be confirmed by the Indian Area Council.

The Order Strand recommended that the proposal for an additional Order position on the Council and the process for the nomination of that position be the subject of further discussion within the Order before a formal recommendation is made to the International Council.

On the basis of these discussions the following membership of the Steering group was agreed:

Dhammarati, Padmasuri, Saddhaloka (Preceptors' College Strand)

Parami, Mahamati (Order Strand)

Viveka, Vajragupta, Nagaketu (Movement Strand, subject to agreement by the Preceptors' College and Indian Area Council confirmation)

The full International Council then expressed its full confidence in the proposed Steering group.

Actions arising:

The first meeting of the Steering group to be scheduled for November 2011.

Dhammarati to propose the Preceptors' College agree to an extra Movement position on the International Council and to support the nominations for the 3 positions and confirm this decision at the Steering group meeting.

The Steering group to confirm the timing and venue for the next full International Council meeting.

The afternoon session was used to identify the working groups and next steps for progressing the work on the three agreed themes.

The first part of the process Maitrisara facilitated a workshop that allowed all Council members to contribute suggestions under the following headings for each of the themes:

- criteria for membership of the Working Group;
- suggestions for members (here and not here) of Group; and
- tasks for the Working Group.

During the second part of the process, people chose which theme they were interested in developing and broke into those groups to further explore the potential membership, tasks and next steps for each Working Group.

The final part of the process involved a reporting-back recommendations to the full Council for further discussion and agreement

At the end of each report-back (the three themes groups plus the Communications working group), Viveka facilitated a 'spectrum check' to assess the level of support for the recommendations for progressing work on each of the themes. The International Council accepted all unanimously.

Actions arising:

Shared System of Training Working Group

Task 1: (Within one month)

Draft initial Triratna-wide share communication launch an invitation to engage in an exploration of our System of Training based on International Council action.

Task 2:

Draft plan with milestone timeline for:

- ***Pulling together an 'on-going content' group to develop our shared system of training principles/model***
- ***Engage 3 strands of Triratna in on-going evolution and implementation and learning (multiple-year process)***

Engaging the Order (Building Better Channels) Working Group

- ***Do a communication audit for the Order and Movement i.e. what communication channels (two way, multi way) there are, how they are working and what is missing, what would fill the gap.***

Funding the Order and the Movement Working Group

Task 1:

- ***To cover expenses for International Council and aspire to create funds for other projects.***
- ***Propose a "Fundraising Campaign" to help increase Order contributions to use in this fund. Remit to cover IC expenses this can be decided by Steering***

group, surplus funds to be discussed by IC.

Task 2:

- ***Research if its "necessary" to join up and co-ordinate movement wide fundraising projects - either as a "one pot" scheme or as a more joined up strategy conversation.***

Communications Working Group

Communicate through a range of resources (written, audio/visual etc):

- ***Stage 1 - The 'spirit' of this meeting (by September 30)***
- ***Stage 2 - The Minutes of this meeting***
- ***Stage 3 - More detail on the decisions from this meeting***

The evening session involved a Puja to celebrate Bhante's birthday.

6. Day 6 (27 August 2011) - Review and reporting out

The morning session started with a day-by-day review of the meeting facilitated by Viveka. People were then invited to write up and read out 'headlines' for each of the sessions.

Dhammarati closed the meeting by thanking the organisers, facilitators (in particular Maitrisara) and participants. The meeting finished with a reporting-out and a transference if merit.

Meeting closed: 11.00 am