

A Guide to the Dharma Training Course for Mitras



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Foreword

to the first edition of the Dharma Training Course for Mitras

Since the earliest days of the FWBO (now the Triratna Buddhist Community) I have been concerned that men and women who attend our centres should be able to gain a proper understanding of the Dharma. I am therefore delighted that the new Dharma Training Course for Mitras is now available.

The aim of the Course is to provide Mitras – those wishing to practise the Dharma within the context of the Triratna Buddhist Community – with what amounts to a basic education in Buddhism. The four-year course (the first year of which is a foundation year) includes modules on the principle Buddhist teachings, both practical and theoretical, as well as on some of the more important scriptures and philosophical schools. There are modules on the Bodhisattva Ideal; on the nature of the Sangha or spiritual community; on faith, symbols, and the imagination; on ethics and the environment; on Buddhist psychology; and on the history of the Triratna Buddhist Community. Though the new Dharma Training Course draws on the old Mitra Study Course, there is also much that is new, some of it specially written for the course. Moreover, there is a greater emphasis on the importance of putting what one learns into practice.

A great deal of thought has gone into the preparation of the new Dharma Training Course, and a great deal of work, and I congratulate all those who were involved in its production. The course should be available at every Triratna centre, and I hope that all Mitras who wish to extend and deepen their knowledge of the Dharma will take full advantage of it.

- Sangharakshita

Introduction

Written by Saccanama, updated by Vajrashura

Now that you have become a Mitra, you may well be wondering how you can extend and deepen your practice of the Dharma and what facilities and support there is for your Dharma practice within Triratna. Obviously you can continue to take advantage of all the courses, classes, festivals and events at your local Centre. If your situation allows, we would recommend that you go to one of the many Triratna retreats that are offered by the various retreat centres.

But you may also want a more systematic, wide-ranging and ever-deepening exploration of the Dharma which you can fit in to the schedule of your daily life. This course aims to provide you with that opportunity, helping you to turn your growing interest in the Dharma into a more and more effective practice of the Dharma.

The course is available online:

<https://thebuddhistcentre.com/mitra>

Training in the Dharma

The word for training in Pāli is *sikkhā* (śikṣā in Sanskrit) and it is most usually used in conjunction with the ethical precepts e.g. *pānātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi*. But in its personal form – *sekha* - the term is used more widely in the Pāli tradition to designate anyone who is not yet Enlightened but who is training in the Dharma. It implies both a willingness to learn and someone from whom one learns.

So this course is called a Dharma Training Course in order to draw attention to the need in all of us to train in the Dharma – to be open to the need to learn how to practise the Dharma and to be open to those who can help us train in that practice.

Aims of the Course

The principal aims of the course are as follows:

1. To give you a thorough and systematic training in the principles and practice of the Dharma, particularly as taught within the Triratna Buddhist Community.
2. To create a meaningful Sangha context in which you can explore the Dharma. The Mitra group in which you will be exploring the course materials provides a great opportunity for developing both peer friendships and connections with the Order members leading the group, particularly if you are able to stay in a group for the duration of the course.

3. To provide support for a deepening of your own meditation practice. Whilst the course does provide specific input on meditation, this also assumes that you will be meditating regularly through the course and attending meditation retreats from time to time.
4. To give you the skills you need to study and reflect upon the Dharma.
5. To provide, through contact with a wide range of Dharma teachings and texts, inspiration for your practice of the Dharma.

Format for the Course

The usual format for the course is a weekly group meeting for which you do some reading and preparation beforehand. So you will need to be able to commit to one evening a week (although some groups do meet fortnightly) and also to make time to read and reflect on the material beforehand. Obviously the more thoroughly you can prepare, the more you will get from the course, but a minimum commitment would probably be an hour or so each week outside of the group meeting.

Generally the amount of preparation needed in *Year One* is relatively light whereas some of the modules in *Year Two*, *Year Three* and *Year Four* will require more of you. With the meditation modules, you will need to make time for extra meditation or to do a different daily meditation appropriate to the module.

The groups will usually consist of between four and eight Mitras and one or two Order members who will be leading it. The group leader will choose the format for the evening, which may vary over time.

Structure of the Course

In the structure of the course, there is a balance between a core element that everyone will study and optional elements that give some choice as to what people wish to explore. There is *Year One* which everyone should study and then three subsequent years all with an optional element.

Each of *Years 2 to 4* consists of a number of modules, some of which are 'core' and should be completed. These core modules comprise material that is fundamental to Sangharakshita's exposition of the Dharma and are, as such, not optional. Your study leader can then decide how many of the other modules should be studied and in what order. Your group does not have to do all the core modules in each year straight away, but generally the arrangement of the modules in each year is in a progressive sequence.

Obviously, if you have the time and interest, you can take all the modules in a year or you can come back and take some extra modules once you have completed the four years. Some groups may decide to do every module, and other groups may want to push ahead to later modules.

Student Online Support Space

Please check out the online group for Mitras in the Triratna Buddhist Community! This is a space for Mitra support generally, as well as a hub for those taking part in the Dharma Training Course for Mitras to get resources, and discuss and give feedback on the course.

<https://thebuddhistcentre.com/mitra-support>

You'll need to join the group (click **+follow**) to see the content, post things, and access the notes and resources.

Once you have finished a course module, come to this group to discuss it. You can also leave any comments and suggestions for the module. Start a new discussion anytime by choosing **+discussion** from the posting bar. You can see a list of all discussions under the discussions menu. You can also use the filter button to see specific kinds of resources (videos, talks, etc.). If you need to search, just use the main site search top right of any page.

We'd really encourage you to share what worked well for you for each module, as well as any challenges you encountered. Please don't use this space to promote your own Dharma teaching or share general resources that are off-topic - this is an intentional space where we can genuinely connect with each other and specifically with the material in the course. If you have something to share, please make sure it's on the basis of your own practice and is relevant to the topic under discussion. For more general Dharma sharing, you can use Triratna's main Facebook page, which has an open sharing policy.
<https://www.facebook.com/thebuddhistcentre/>

Please review our Community Guidelines to get a feel for the spirit we'd like to foster in this space.
<https://thebuddhistcentre.com/text/community-guidelines>

Note

The original *Dharma Training Course for Mitras* was compiled by Saccanama in 2008/2009, and in 2015 and 2016 the course was reviewed and modified by Vajrashura, Subhadramati, Vadanya and Padmavajri, on behalf of the UK and Ireland Men and Women Mitra Convenors.

Year One Overview

Year One is structured, broadly speaking, around the Three Declarations that you make in becoming a Mitra i.e. that you are a Buddhist, that you are making an attempt to put the Buddha's teaching into practice and that you are happy with the Triratna Buddhist Community as your spiritual context. The year has five parts to it as follows.

Part One: Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

Ten weeks

After an introductory week exploring the purpose of *Dharma-kathā* or 'talking about the Dharma', there is material on Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels followed by four weeks on the nature of the Buddha, two weeks on the Dharma and two weeks looking at the Sangha.

Part Two: Ethics

Six weeks

Taking the *Threefold Path* of Ethics, Meditation and Wisdom as the basis for Parts Two to Four, this section looks in more depth at the practice of ethics. An introduction to Buddhist ethics is followed by a week looking at each of the five precepts in turn, focusing particularly on their practical application.

Part Three: Meditation

Six week.

This looks at the second great aspect of the path – that of meditation. After an excerpt from the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* that places meditation in its traditional spiritual context, there is a look at Sangharakshita's System of Meditation. This is followed by a more practical look at the five hindrances to meditation; the dhyānas; and a week on each of the two fundamental practices of mettā bhāvanā and mindfulness of breathing.

Part Four: Wisdom

Six weeks

Here we look at the third great aspect of the path – the development of wisdom. There is material on conditionality; on karma and rebirth; on the conditioned and the unconditioned; and on the Bodhicitta. The rich symbolism of the Wheel of Life is also introduced.

Part Five: Buddhism and Triratna, Ritual and Devotion.

Eight weeks

This part presents an overview of the Buddhist tradition and the place of the Triratna Buddhist Community and Order within that tradition, as well as some of Triratna's distinctive emphases. Finally there is material on the nature and purpose of devotional practice before an exploration of the particular devotional texts that we use within Triratna: the Tiratana Vandana, the Threefold and Sevenfold Pūjās and the Dedication Ceremony.

Year Two Overview

In *Year Two* there are seven modules, of which the following are core:

- Module 1: The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path.
- Module 6: What is the Sangha? Exploring Spiritual Community.

Module 1: The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path

Compiled by Saccanama, updated by Vajrashura and Vadanya. Eight weeks. Core module.

According to the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, traditionally the Buddha's first teaching, the *Noble Eightfold Path* is the way to the cessation of suffering. As with so much of the Buddha's teaching, in looking at this one formulation of it, you end up exploring the whole path. This module is based on Sangharakshita's book *The Buddha's Eightfold Path*. This is a brilliant survey of the Buddha's teaching that particularly brings out the need for whatever vision we may have to effect transformation in all aspects of our lives. It also provides a thorough introduction to the teachings of what Sangharakshita has called 'Basic Buddhism'.

Module 2: *Pratītya-Samutpāda*: The Nature of Existence

Compiled by Subhadramati and Vajrashura. Eight weeks.

This module explores the central teaching of the Dharma – in Sanskrit *pratītya-samutpāda* (in Pāli, *paṭicca-samuppāda*) or 'dependent arising', which is generally rendered in Triratna simply as 'conditionality'. This is the central concept through which the Buddha communicated his insight into the nature of existence. Here you will be exploring this teaching, especially through Sangharakshita's particular presentation of it, and the aim is to go deeply into the significance of conditionality and its central place in Triratna's system of Dharma practice. The module draws on the lectures by Subhuti and Sangharakshita exploring the cyclic and spiral aspects of conditionality, as well as their paper *Revering and Relying Upon the Dharma*, with extra inserts from some of their other papers as well.

Module 3: The Five Aspects of the Dharma Life

Compiled by Subhadramati. Eight weeks.

This module aims to explore the five great aspects of the Dharma Life. Sangharakshita and Subhuti have been clarifying the Triratna system of Dharma practice and this module explores the results of that clarification. The module explores the aspects of: integration, positive emotion, spiritual death, spiritual rebirth, and spontaneous compassionate activity as both *stages* and *aspects* of the Dharma Life. It also explores the quality of spiritual receptivity or Dharmic responsiveness and how that has to be present at every stage. The primary study material will be Maitreyabandhu's book *The Journey and the Guide: A Practical Course in Enlightenment*.

Module 4: Turning the Mind to the Dharma

Compiled by Saccanama, lightly updated by Vajrashura. Six weeks.

This module explores in greater depth than the Foundation Year the central Buddhist teaching of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. By looking at what in the Tibetan tradition are called the Four Reminders or Four Preliminary Practices, this module helps us to distinguish what are called the false refuges from the true refuges. The main part of the module is based on a series of five talks given by the women's ordination team at Tiratana. These talks explore, in a practical way, the importance of these reflections in turning us away from *samsāra* and towards *nirvāṇa*. The Four Reminders are:

1. This precious human opportunity.
2. Death and impermanence
3. Karma and rebirth
4. The dangers and defects of *samsāra*

During the group sessions, you will be encouraged to reflect on these four topics using set verses and also to develop your own reflections on the themes. The module concludes with an excerpt from Subhuti's book *Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition* that looks at the levels and dimensions of Going for Refuge.

Module 5: The Way of Mindfulness

Compiled by Vidyamala. Eight weeks.

To be fully present and fully heedful is the aim of the Buddhist life, but it's not an easy thing to achieve, even for Buddhists. This module will help you to practise the Buddha's teaching of mindfulness effectively, using his original instruction from the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.

Module 6: What is the Sangha? Exploring Spiritual Community

Compiled by Saccanama, updated by Vajrashura and Padmavajri. Eight weeks. Core module

This module builds on the introduction to the Sangha Jewel that was presented in *Year One*. As well as giving an overview of the traditional Buddhist Sangha, there is material on the importance of spiritual communities in human history. This is followed by a more detailed exploration of Sangharakshita's teachings on the group, the positive group, the true individual and the so-called 'third order of consciousness'. There is also material on the nature of a guru, on the meaning of spiritual friendship and on the importance of gratitude and fidelity for the development of Sangha. The core material for this module is Sangharakshita's book *What is the Sangha?*

Module 7: A Living Tradition: Sangharakshita and the Story of Triratna

Compiled by Saccanama, updated by Vajrashura. Five weeks.

This module is different in nature to the other modules in that its aim is just to give you the opportunity to explore the history of the spiritual community that you are involved with. There are no particular learning outcomes from this module but I hope it will give you a richer appreciation of Triratna and its founder, Sangharakshita.

Every spiritual community arises in particular historical circumstances and is conditioned by them and the Triratna Buddhist Community (or FWBO as it was then) is no different. So using Suryaprabha's four DVD films of the early history of the Movement (covering the mid-1960s to 1980), you will have a chance to explore the particular conditions out of which Triratna has arisen. The films also introduce you to many of what you might call the founding generation of the FWBO i.e. people ordained in the late 1960s and 1970s who helped turn Sangharakshita's nascent vision of a new spiritual movement into some kind of reality. A key aspect of this

history is that the FWBO might not have survived those early days and it is only through the dedicated efforts of a relatively small group of people that we have a Movement to be involved in at all.

Alongside Suryaprabha's DVDs, the other key text will be a newly published booklet by Dharmachari Vajragupta exploring our own history and telling some of the stories involved in it. This will bring the story more up to date and help you to see the point at which you are getting involved in this unfolding story of the Triratna Buddhist Community. There will also be the opportunity to follow up other references to Sangharakshita and the history of the Triratna e.g. Sangharakshita's photo archives; other video footage; various DVDs of Sangharakshita in question-and-answer sessions or giving lectures; and Sangharakshita's memoirs and poetry which give an insight into different sides of the founder of the Triratna. Finally, there will be an opportunity to focus on the history of your local Sangha which will have its own story to tell as well as its own heroes and heroines to rejoice in.

Year Three Overview

In *Year Three* there are seven modules, of which the following are core:

- Module 1: Selected Suttas from the Pali Canon.
- Module 5: The Bodhisattva Ideal.

Module 1: Selected Suttas from the Pāli Canon

Compiled by Vadanya. Eight weeks. Core module.

The module gives an introduction to the earliest strata of the Buddhist scriptures – the Pāli Canon. These texts give us a sense of the Buddha in his own words; a sense of the Dharma from the mouth of the Teacher himself; and a sense of the Sangha through seeing the very first Buddhist Sangha and how it lived. The eight Pāli *suttas* chosen are ones that have played a role in highlighting important aspects of Sangharakshita’s elucidation of the Dharma. The *suttas* are organised on the basis of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and include such texts as the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*, the *Kālāma Sutta*, the *Karaniyamettā Sutta* and the *Cūḷagosinga Sutta*.

Module 2: *Letters of Gold, Letters of Fire*: Living with the Dhammapada

Compiled by Sacchanama. Eight weeks.

In this module, we will explore one of the best known of all Buddhist scriptures – the *Dhammapada* or *Way of Truth*. It is a compilation of short verses on topics central to the Buddha’s teaching and it lends itself to being read aloud and even memorised. The title of the module comes from Sangharakshita’s aphorism “The teachings contained in the *Dhammapada* are literal truth, and deserve to be engraved on our hearts in letters of gold – or fire”.

Based on a series of five talks by Padmavajra as well as excerpts from a seminar by Sangharakshita, the module will also encourage you to read parts of the text on a daily basis and use it as a focus for your own practice of the Dharma. The recommended translation is that by Sangharakshita but you may wish to compare this with some of the many other translations available.

Module 3: Towards Insight, Reflection and Meditation

Compiled by Ratnaguna. Six weeks.

The three levels of wisdom – listening, reflecting and meditating – give us an important guide as to how we can develop a true understanding of how things are. The Dharma Training Course as a whole aims to support a practice of all three levels but this module focuses specifically on the practice of the second two.

Learning to think clearly and reflect deeply is not something we are often taught how to do but based on his own experience of more than thirty years, Ratnaguna here shares his reflections on how we can develop our understanding and insights into the Dharma. Examples are given

of how we can reflect on our actions as well as on Buddhist topics and texts. The module concludes by showing how we can contemplate the nature of the Buddha and reflect on the central Buddhist teaching of impermanence. The primary study material will be Ratnaguna's book *The Art of Reflection*.

Module 4: In Search of the Middle Way: Mahāyāna Perspectives

Compiled by Vadanya. Six weeks.

This module will look at various maps or models of reality found in the later Buddhist tradition. We will explore the key teaching of *sūnyatā* through the *Perfection of Wisdom* teachings and the philosophy of the Madhyamaka School and then move on to look at the Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha doctrines. We will also look at Sangharakshita's advice on how we can use these teachings to enrich our worldview and give inspiration to our practice, without falling into the unhelpful extremes of nihilism or eternalism.

Module 5: The Bodhisattva Ideal

Compiled by Vajrashura. Eight weeks. Core module.

If *The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path* module in Year Two and *Selected Suttas from The Pāli Canon* module in Year Three present the key teachings of 'Basic Buddhism', this module presents a wide-ranging introduction to the Mahāyāna tradition of Buddhism with its distinctive emphasis on altruism and compassion. After exploring the origins of the Bodhisattva Ideal within the life of the Buddha himself, the module looks at the development of the Bodhicitta or 'will to Enlightenment' and the subsequent practice of the six perfections that are the most prominent formulation of the path in Mahāyāna Buddhism. It concludes with material on the Bodhisattva hierarchy and a mysterious exploration of the relationship between eternity and time. The module is based on Sangharakshita's lecture series *The Bodhisattva Ideal*.

Module 6: The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment: The White Lotus Sūtra

Compiled by Vadanya. Eight weeks.

The White Lotus Sūtra, or *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, is one of the key texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Originating in India, it went on to strongly influence the development of East Asian Buddhism, i.e. in China, Korea and Japan. In contrast to the *Perfection of Wisdom* teachings' use of conceptual language, the *White Lotus Sūtra* is famous for its parables and myths.

This module uses Sangharakshita's book *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment – Parables, Myths and Symbols from the White Lotus Sūtra*, which is based upon his series of talks on the *White Lotus Sūtra*. Additionally an accessible abridgement of the *Sūtra* is provided for use in the module.

Module 7: Faith, Symbols and the Imagination

Compiled by Vadanya. Eight weeks.

Śraddhā is a central quality in Buddhism and its cultivation is crucial to successful spiritual development. Often translated as 'faith', it more poetically means 'to place the heart upon'. Sangharakshita has suggested that our *śraddhā* represents 'what is ultimate in us responding to what is ultimate in the universe'. *Śraddhā* can be awakened through the use of the spiritual imagination, through contact with beauty, and through our response to symbols, archetypes and myth. In this module we will be exploring these areas through a combination of texts and experiential exercises, with the aim of consciously bringing about a stronger sense of *śraddhā* in our lives.

Year Four Overview

In *Year Four* there are seven modules, of which the following are core:

- Module 1: The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa.
- Module 7: The Bodhicaryāvatāra.

Module 1: *The Inconceivable Emancipation: The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*

Compiled by Saccanama, updated by Vajrashura. Eight weeks. Core module.

Entering into the world of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, you will be encouraged to enter into the expanded world of a Mahāyāna *sūtra* through study of Sangharakshita's great lecture series on the *sūtra*. *The Inconceivable Emancipation*, as Sangharakshita chose to call his lectures on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, covers such topics as *Building the Buddha-land*; *On Being all Things to all Men*; *the Transcendental Critique of Religion*; and *the Four Great Reliances – Criteria for Spiritual Life* – all of which are very important lectures for the Triratna system of Dharma life. The lectures also introduce us to Vimalakīrti himself, one of the great figures of Buddhist literature.

Module 2: Twenty-First Century Bodhisattva

Compiled by Akuppa. Eight weeks.

In this module, we're going to be exploring what it might mean to live as a Bodhisattva in today's world. The world has changed very much since this ideal arose around 2,500 years ago when the Buddha was alive in India. Is it still possible to be liberated from the world while choosing to work for its good? And is it really possible to live in a state of bliss while keeping alive a deep sense of loving solidarity with other living beings?

The Bodhisattva ideal provides us with a myth to live by. But we will need to take account of ourselves, with all our strengths and weaknesses. In this module, we'll be focusing on starting where we are. In the main, we'll be focusing on the *mettā bhāvanā* and the precepts. We'll be taking a look at some aspects of the twenty-first century world, and bringing our meditation and ethical practice to bear on it.

Module 3: The Brahmavihāras

Compiled by Vajrashura. Five weeks.

The Four Brahmavihāras – or 'divine abodes' – are *mettā* or loving kindness; *karuṇā* or compassion; *muditā* or sympathetic joy; and *upekkhā* or equanimity. The *mettā bhāvanā* is a practice that we are all familiar with and the development of the other Brahmavihāras starts with *mettā*. Alongside *śraddhā* (or faith), they represent the key positive emotions in the Buddhist tradition and their development is seen as crucial to the unfolding of a balanced spiritual life. Indeed, in later Buddhist tradition, they are seen as the necessary basis for the development of the Bodhicitta or 'heart of Enlightenment'.

The module begins with an exploration of positive emotion, as outlined by Subhuti. It then goes on to explore, through meditation guidance and practice, how we can deepen our *mettā* practice. It then explores how we can turn *mettā* into the other Brahmavihāras through contemplating suffering, joy and the finely woven balance of the two that characterises our life and the lives of others. They are powerful practices that often shed a light on our own emotional states.

To gain the most from this module, you will need to make sure you have time to meditate on a regular basis during the course of its five weeks. The module will also provide a very good basis for going on a Brahmavihāras meditation retreat, and if you are able to do that in close proximity to the module itself, it will add greatly to your experience of these powerful positive emotions.

Module 4: *Transforming Self and World: The Sūtra of Golden Light*

Compiled by Saccanama, updated by Vajrashura. Eight weeks. Core module.

In this module you will be encouraged to enter into the expanded world of a Mahāyāna *Sūtra* through study of Sangharakshita's great lecture series on the *Sūtra of Golden Light*.

Transforming Self and World, the title of Sangharakshita's lectures on the *Sūtra of Golden Light*, focuses on the Buddhist practice of confession and purification (the transformation of self) followed by transformation of all the different worldly activities through their contact with the Golden Light of the transcendental. Sangharakshita does a wonderful job of teasing out the underlying meanings of this rich and amorphous *sūtra*, discriminating the essential spiritual principles from the Indian cultural form in which they are presented.

Module 5: Mind in Harmony

Compiled by Vajrashura. Ten weeks.

The purpose of this module is to describe the mind from the Buddhist point of view, and then to use this description as a tool for transforming the mind so that it becomes more ethical, finds greater fulfilment, and ultimately attains liberation.

The text is Subhuti's book *Mind in Harmony*, which will provide a handbook for transforming the mind through systematic training, and is especially useful for working in the ethical arena of our Dharma lives. The main focus will be on the ethical and practical implications of Buddhist psychology. Subhuti's aim in writing the book is to help people to recognise their mental states for what they really are, to be able to label them accurately, and understand their ethical significance – to know your mind, in essence.

Module 6: Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism

Compiled by Saccanama. Eight weeks.

Like the modules *The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path in Year Two* and *The Bodhisattva Ideal in Year Three*, this module explores a particular approach to the Buddhist path, in this case the Vajrayāna or Tantric approach.

However, instead of taking a traditional approach that looks at the preliminary practices and the subsequent different levels of Tantric practice, Sangharakshita chooses to focus on what he calls the Creative Symbols of the Tantric Path to Enlightenment. In doing so, he explores many of the key symbols and practices of Tantric Buddhism, particularly emphasising their ability to transform our depths. Topics covered include the Wheel of Life; the Vajra; the Stūpa; the Refuge Tree; the Mandala of the Five Buddhas and the significance of colours and mantric

sound. The key text for this module is Sangharakshita's lectures published in book form as *Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism*.

Module 7: The Bodhicaryāvatāra

Compiled by Vadanya. Eight weeks. Core module.

This module focuses on one of the most inspiring and challenging of all Buddhist texts – *the Bodhicaryāvatāra*, or *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is particularly revered in the Tibetan tradition and it was the first text that Sangharakshita led study on back in 1973 whilst our own Sevenfold Pūjā is taken from Chapters Two and Three of the text. In this module you will be reading a condensed version of the text, and exploring its key teachings on the development of the Bodhicitta and the practice of the six *pāramitās* or 'perfections'. As you do so you will come across Śāntideva's beautiful images and his unique poetry. You will also meet his uncompromising assertion that the real source of our suffering is our deep-rooted attachment to our own selves, and that the only way to go beyond that suffering is to develop altruistic compassion – i.e. to become a trainee Bodhisattva.

Module 8: Evolutionary Buddhism

Compiled by Ratnaprabha. Six weeks.

How do new things appear in the world? Religion and science are thought of as giving conflicting answers – divine intervention (creation), and evolution respectively. But science seems to have rediscovered an insight already present in Buddhism. This module will look at the claim that Buddhism offers an intrinsically evolutionary perspective, and that spiritual development itself is a 'higher evolution', to use the term adopted by Sangharakshita. It will utilise both Buddhist and Western approaches to explore the evolution of human-type consciousness in our ancestors, the evolution of culture (including religion), and the 'evolution' of expanded and insightful mental states in the individual. The Western concept of evolution can make Buddhist ideas accessible among scientifically educated people; perhaps Buddhism can shed light on our understanding of evolution, too.

Module 9: Transcending Views

Compiled by Jnanaketu. Eight weeks.

The main aim of this module is to explore effective ways of working with views. The Buddha taught that if we want to become awakened, or even to make progress towards greater wisdom and compassion, we need to deal with our wrong views. Otherwise, our attempts to make progress will be frustrated. We need to develop and nurture right views – those views that will support our practice on the path. But that's not enough, because we can so easily become attached to our right views, and that attachment cannot but hinder our progress. This module explores ways of working with – and transcending – our wrong views and right views.

Sangharakshita speaks very much to the point in a series of excerpts from *Know Your Mind* which explore the five kinds of wrong view. The Buddha's voice is heard here, and several other voices illuminate his essential message. Discussions of the ways that the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism dealt with views show how the Buddha's message was developed and re-emphasised. You'll not only be encouraged to identify and think clearly about your own views, but also to reflect effectively on right view.

The Course Materials

The course materials will be made available on the internet at thebuddhistcentre.com/Mitra

Each module will have a notes document that you will download from this site and the Guide will give you all the information you need. The notes document will usually include the following:

1. An introduction to the module.
2. Information about how to access the primary material for the module (the primary material is that which you need to read – or listen to – before attending your group). For some modules, the primary texts are included in the Student Guide but for others you will need to purchase the relevant book. Often there will be an option to listen to a version of the primary material using mp3 recordings of talks, guided meditations etc.
3. Suggested questions for each unit of the module. These are as they say i.e. suggested questions, not obligatory ones. In trials of the material, many people have found them helpful as a way of exploring the material and highlighting the key elements of the text. Many of them encourage you to reflect on the application of a particular teaching to your own life. If, however, you don't find them helpful or wish to explore something not touched on in the suggested questions, that is fine.
4. References and suggestions for further exploration of the material. Whilst you are not expected to read anything other than the primary material to complete the course, there may well be times when you wish to follow up a particular topic and these suggestions will point you to various resources available either in book form or on the internet. You may find that these references will help your project or they could be something you return to in the future.

Projects

Each module concludes with the opportunity to present a project to your group. This usually takes the form of a 20 minute presentation but its actual content can vary widely depending on the nature of the material you have been exploring and your particular interests. The purpose of the projects is to give you the opportunity to take your reflection on a particular topic further than might have been possible in the group sessions. As such, there is no right or wrong way to do the projects and different people will do them in different ways. If they deepen your appreciation and understanding of a Dharma theme, they will have fulfilled their purpose.

Suggested Background Reading for the Whole Course

Whilst each module will have both primary material and suggested further reading, the following four books will make very good background reading for the whole course.

Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition, Subhuti, Windhorse Publications. This is a wonderfully lucid exposition of Sangharakshita's teachings in the light of the Buddhist tradition as a whole. It shows how his key teachings on such topics as the unity of Buddhism, the centrality of Going for Refuge, and the importance of a supportive new society for spiritual practice are radical in the true sense i.e. a return to the roots of the tradition as a whole. It also shows how Sangharakshita's own thinking on these topics has developed over time.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/sangharakshita-a-new-voice-in-the-buddhist-tradition/>

A Survey of Buddhism, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. Whilst some people do find this book hard-going because of its very precise use of language, it remains Sangharakshita's *magnum opus* and essential reading if you wish to understand his approach to the Dharma.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-survey-of-buddhism/>

Buddhist Meditation: Tranquillity, Imagination and Insight, Kamalashila, Windhorse Publications. This makes a handy reference for meditation practice within the Triratna Buddhist Community and Buddhism generally. As well as exploring the principles of Buddhist meditation, it also includes much practical advice for your meditation practice.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/buddhist-meditation-tranquillity-imagination-and-insight/>

A Concise History of Buddhism, Andrew Skilton, Windhorse Publications. A readable exploration of the history of the whole Buddhist tradition.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-concise-history-of-buddhism/>