

Emphasis 6: A Unified Order: Re-emphasis the centrality of going for refuge (10 mins)

We have looked at Triratna as a new buddhist tradition that is based on an ecumenical understanding of Buddhism, deeply rooting us in rich understanding of what it is to go for refuge to the three jewels of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. How spiritual friendship, arts and culture, the way we skilfully spend large periods of our time in Right Livelihood help us dissolve that layers of wrong views we have that create a sense of us being separate from other. so that we can see how transient life, our thoughts, emotions, views and attachments really are. And on that basis, we can see how easily we fall into false refuges, and how positive it can feel to go for refuge to the there the refuges. And so we come to the emphasis a Unified Order where we use this understanding to help us go beyond even our societal labels of race, gender, economic class , disability, and age. This is important because they are labels that in certain conditions can lead to our crating not only false ceiling for our potential for ourselves but also each other.

At the heart of the Triratna, as a Buddhist Community, is the Triratna Buddhist Order. From your course notes you will have read that within the order, no distinction is made on upon the gender, race, nationality, disability, class, caste, age, or sexual orientation of someone as regard to their acceptance into the order. The emphasis is on the second one that we explored in this course, the emphasis of the centrality of going for refuge to the three jewels throughout all the aspects of a person's life. Trust me, when I say that no stone left un-turned. And this is with good reason. In the course, we already looked at friendship, how we spend large portions of our time, and our cultural influences shape how we see and act in the world. We have explored how when used in a spiritual context, they can also help us dissolve wrong views that shape our relationships with ourselves and others. And so with this emphasis of the unified order we have an opportunity to explore the influences of our social labels, see through them in time more clearly, as to how they inhabit and inhibit us.

(With my own mixed heritage background this emphasis is of interest to me. My father was Indian of the Brahmin caste, son of a headmaster and landowner, so at the top of the old caste system, my mum was a daughter of a painter & decorator and a small corner shop-keeper so very different :) Which do I identify with, neither and both. What I was held in were the values and principles that both family backgrounds operated in and taught. Being of service to the local community, respect, loyalty and kindness. I'm actually dead proud of my english grand-parents, in the 1960's where racial tension was high in this country, they took my dad on as their own son and his gratitude for that made his well up with tears all his life. Of course it was not all plain sailing, I'm sure you can imagine the inherent difficulties in two culture coming together. But they rose above the differences and focussed on the common values and vision. And in essence that is what we are trying to all the time the moment we start to interact with someone else. in spiritual friendship and that i shwat we are trying to do as a Buddhist Movement and Order.)

From his 20 years in India, Sangharakshita witnessed the different lifestyles of discipline and inequality amongst the different schools of Buddhism he himself studied and became ordained within.

- Women were and are largely still not allowed full ordination.
- And the poorest in the community called the Dalits, were / are socially imprisoned in the work that is essential to society and yet deemed so unsavoury that many in this class are not allowed education, access to religious temples, or the burial rites of everyone else in their community.

- Here, in the UK, we tend to talk more of gender inequality and social class. Respect, in the shape of access to the same opportunities for work & social status and, air space for communication.

As Arthavardin shared last week, Sangharakshita became clear that it is the costumes of robes, or monastic vows, or waft of incense, or the rocking in mantra's that express the meaning of Buddhism, or our individual commitment to it, but how much to the core of our everyday actions, choice and communication to we allow the Buddha, his teaching and his community of disciples to influence us in adaptive, healthy, positive ways.

So on this basis, men and women are ordained with complete equal status within the Triratna Buddhist Order. We are one of only three buddhist schools to have ordained women ordaining other women, again with equal status to the men's ordination team. In a religious world that largely falls in with higher roles for men and subservient roles for women, Triranta provides a positive radical influence. Simple examples are in Thailand there are roughly 300,000 monks, home to one of the highest concentrations of Buddhists on the planet, yet only 100 are women, those who are ordained are often shunned as shameful. In the catholic church, there believed to be If my research on the internet is right: 150 women to date: 414,313 male priests. In Triranta, we have andare women.

So what are the other areas that we work with to create a sense of unity:

Order members have families, while at the other end of the spectrum some are celibate monastics known as anagarikas.

Others may live and work in Triratna's residential communities and team-based working situations. Sharing one's living or working life with other Buddhists can create very supportive conditions for spiritual practice.

The crucial thing is the spiritual commitment Order members have made, not the lifestyle they follow. Above all they try to share their spiritual lives, and co-operate in practising and spreading the Dharma.

In the UK we tend to talk more about the gender divides and how to transcend them with our common values as expressed in our five or ten precepts. We are continually exploring and evaluating how best to communicate that incorporate those values and yet embraces the diversity of ethnicity, economic circumstances and cultural inheritance. We were the first Buddhist school to allow women to ordain other women in a Buddhist culture where largely men ordain women, but the ordination is consider of lesser status than the mens. This is so culturally accepted in places like Thailand that the few women who do get ordained are often treated with shame by their local communities. So Triranta has and is, having a positive radical influence in the world.

Another example is in India, where the work of an economist called Dr Ambedkhar brought the social imprisonment of the poorest in Indian society to the social consciousness of the world. The caste system kept these people called the untouchable in the work of removing faeces and dead bodies form the house and streets of there communities. By supporting them to convert to Buddhist break free from their social class labels and social-spiritual liberation. To this day, Triratna supports this work and so the Order in India now consist of men and women from all the classification of the caste system and all are treated equally.

Again you can imagine the works and friendship and clarity of Dharma understanding the this entails.

SO this emphasis, is not about getting it right, or having perfect relationships with each it is about retuning again and again to the centrality of going to refuge to the three jewels as using that as the core of our communication and how we relate to each other, rather than any other labels or status.

But this is This is radical positive influence in the world where still today there are debates across the internet platform as to why Buddhist nuns from some Tibetan and Theravadin schools in the east are expected to 'bow' to the male monk counterparts. 'Bow' refers to 8 particular precepts that buddhist nuns are expected to take in order to achieve full ordination. In response to what he witnessed during his own ordination training and practice in India, Sangharakshita decided to return to the example of the Buddha who himself ordained men and women on an equal basis. And we have gone one step further by creating the opportunity for women to ordain other women. I may be out of date but I think we are still one of only three buddhist schools who facilitate this. In the other schools, it is always men who ordain women and therefore there is an implied power balance. Sangharakshita has always been clear that where one person imposes their will on another, that this is not befitting of a Buddhist.

And so we, begin to see the importance of the need to make all the other socially accepted categories.

Over half of our sangha and Order are in India so we have need to recognise that if we are to be unified order we have to go beyond culture, beyond, race, and beyond socio-economic difference. We see things like this happening in our everyday lives.

Gender and Religion: Last modified on Tuesday 1 November 2016 22:00 GMT
[Pope Francis](#) has ruled out a woman ever serving as a priest in the Roman Catholic church.

On 12 March 1994, the first 32 women were ordained as Church of England priests. The service was officiated by Bishop **Barry Rogerson** in Bristol Cathedral.

Feb 2017: A Roman Catholic church ordained a 70-year-old woman a priest in Louisville, Kentucky.

About 150 women from all over the world have been ordained by the Roman Catholic Church even though the church bans them from becoming priests.

Similarly: There are roughly 300,000 monks in Thailand, home to one of the highest concentrations of Buddhists on the planet. Yet only 100 are women. They're scattered among small temples that the traditional order views as insolent.