

Creating the Three Jewels (the practice of teaching)

This is a guide for teachers/prospective teachers produced some years ago at the LBC. The emphasis is very much on the connection with the Three Jewels needed to teach effectively. It could make a helpful guide for Centre's discussions about who can teach, but also a good basis for more general discussion on good teaching.

Creating Sangha

One of your aims as a teacher is to help create Sangha in the class. This means:

1. Helping to create an atmosphere of friendliness, co-operation and hospitality. This is important whether you are teaching or on a team. It means going out to newer people, trying not to just stick to people you know or those in your team.
2. You cannot teach effectively if you do not feel friendly to people. Bhante makes the point that you cannot effectively communicate unless you feel well disposed and sympathetic to those you are trying to teach. This includes, he says, any classroom situation. You'll need to make sure you are in a good enough state to do this.
3. Creating an atmosphere of mutual exploration, learning and sharing. When you lead a class make sure you allow time and space for questions, discussion and exploration. 'Chalking and talking' if it goes on for too long creates passivity. But if discussion goes on too long it can easily become rather rambling and dominated by a few people. Emphasize listening and sharing experience if you are on a team – do not use every conversation as a chance to teach!
4. Working harmoniously with others. The team needs to want to support the teacher/class leaders. If you are teaching you need to work co-operatively with other order members and the team: this is sangha in action.

Key phase: help create a harmonious environment where people can explore their experience and, when appropriate, learn from yours.

Creating Dharma

As Bhante once said there is 'no Sangha without dharma'. But the opposite is also true: you cannot really explore the dharma until there is the right atmosphere of exploration and receptivity. Creating dharma means:

1. Being in touch with the dharma as a living presence in your life i.e. not merely something you have read about and want to talk about. This means being in touch with your own practice of the dharma and having a live thread of reflections based on dharmic principles, which can feed and illuminate your teaching. No amount of knowledge will make up for this if it is absent. It especially means being in touch with śraddhā and teaching from that basis.
2. Being true to the dharma. Finding the right kind of tension between teaching from your own inspiration and experience and at the same time honoring the practices, the Buddhist tradition and the path illuminated by Bhante. Public classes are not a place for casual experimentation. If you do experiment make sure you get feedback from other teachers, team and class members. Partly what is important here is making sure that you have in mind the spiritual needs of those who come along e.g. for a coherent set of practices and teachings which they can share with others coming to the centre.
3. Preparing your material. Make sure you have prepared for the class. This preparation includes:

- a. Being clear about the topic you are teaching, and thinking creatively how best to put it across i.e. explaining, exploring and experiencing. Creating the dharma usually means giving more time to preparation.
- b. Preparing yourself i.e. not rushing in straight from work and being stressed out, or overly tired. Give yourself some time to rest beforehand. Part of the work of a team is helping with all the practical details so that the teacher can be in the best possible state to teach.
- c. Preparing the teaching environment. Make sure you have everything you need e.g. flip charts, pens that work, and so on. Also prepare the space in terms of atmosphere, e.g. lighting, candles, incense, and so on. If you are teaching this is your responsibility.

4. Studying the Dharma. Make sure you have some kind of study practice. It is often clear when people have not thought recently about what it is they are teaching but are simply using stock teachings, anecdotes and metaphors.

5. Being reliable. The greatest boon to a teacher is a reliable team member: someone who shows up when they say they will, and who does what is needed. This is the greatest support you can offer a teacher. If you have taken on to teach, this means you have a responsibility to see it through – it is no longer a matter of whether you feel like it or not.

6. Broadly in sympathy with Bhante's vision of the dharma. If you are teaching and perhaps even supporting classes within the FWBO, it is important that you feel in sympathy with Bhante's elucidation of the Buddhist path. This is not to say that you would not have questions or doubts, but that overall you feel that Bhante is your spiritual teacher and guide.

Key phase: Know what you are talking about, be in touch with what you are talking about, and don't talk too much!

Creating Buddha

This means actually practicing what, hopefully, you don't preach. It means exemplification, especially in the ethical sense. What people need is someone who is genuinely trying to explore the dharma for themselves and genuinely trying to put it into practice. People coming to classes do not need a Buddha, they need a Buddhist. When you are at a class, whether you are on the team or teaching, you are modeling for people what being a Buddhist means – this is a spiritual responsibility. It means:

1. Meditation. You need to have a regular meditation practice which, looked at broadly with its ups and downs, is effective. The more you are in touch with that the better. An important aspect of this is that you are doing the practices you teach and that you actually meditate in the teaching situation – not just 'directing' it. The depths of your meditation practice in the class effects the atmosphere. This is especially true of the teacher but also of the team.

2. Teaching as a spiritual practice. This means keeping in touch with the spiritual issues that teaching brings up and working with them. By this I mean issues such as: becoming intoxicated with yourself, not being in touch with what you are teaching, tending to flirt etc - whatever the moral and spiritual issues that the teaching situation brings up for you. It means revealing these things to your friends and trying to teach from a more purely altruistic basis.

3. Integrity. What has the strongest positive effect on people is your integrity. This means your overall moral character: that people feel that you are genuine, that they can trust you, at least in a reasonable way, that you are concerned for others and so forth. Make sure that the whole teaching experience is not too much about you but has the flavor of real concern for others. This is not really something you can do, it is only something you can be. It is a result of an engaged spiritual practice and all that that means – including friendship, confession, study and meditation.

4. Confession Also confession needs to be an aspect of teaching. When you teach you are often more in touch with your ideal and, at the same time, showing off a bit – both call forth confession. It is especially good if you can work with a friend who you can confess to and explore the issues of teaching.

5. Looking for informed, sympathetic feedback. Ask for feedback. To teach learning and exploration, you yourself need to be learning and exploring.

Key phase: Make sure you are teaching, as much as possible, out of a real sense of the value of the dharma and a concern for the welfare of others

Note on Mitras Teaching:

Our tradition has always been that meditation teaching arises first and foremost out of commitment to the Dharma, (and is an expression of that commitment). This commitment is ritually and publicly acknowledged in the private and public ordination ceremony. Teaching meditation is not primarily about teaching a ‘technique’, neither can it be completely separated from Buddhism. So, in the FWBO/WBO mitras do not, as a rule, teach. Though for instance mitras have always taught in ‘outlying areas’ where there is no order presence. However there is a need to train mitras to teach and to involve mitras more dynamically in the work of the centre. Also it is important to encourage mitras to think in terms of teaching in the future (when they are ordained) and to train those who do teach.

Mitras who are teaching need to:

1. Have asked for ordination, and be actively seeking ordination
2. Have a regular meditation practice
3. Be in harmony with the movement and the order, and with Bhante’s elucidation of the Dharma
4. Be trained and reviewed by an order member appointed by the Dharma Activities Committee (D.A.C.)
5. Work in harmony with a team where possible
6. Have a order member who is their meditation mentor and willing to watch them teach as well as talk about their personal practice
7. Be agreed by D.A.C.

The ‘Cardinal Sins’ of Teaching:

The below are ‘cardinal sins’ that do happen or at least have happened:

1. Being consistently out of touch with the three jewels / śraddhā. E.g. a longer-term lack of inspiration, or an alienation or conflict with others in the sangha (so that you are teaching as an isolated individual...and thus not exemplifying sangha). Most people feel out of touch from time to time, but if this continues for a long time it is probably not appropriate to teach.
2. Not meditating. If you are teaching meditation and you are not actually meditating regularly yourself – you are being hypocritical.
3. Being late for your own class. This is irresponsible and usually means you start the class in a rushed and anxious state. It also creates an unsafe ‘vibe’ for people coming to the class.
4. Lecturing and hectoring people. Even if this is from enthusiasm. It is fairly easy to browbeat people with the dharma or with what you think.
5. Over-leading meditation. It is fairly common for Order Members teaching to over-lead meditation sessions i.e. talk too much during the practice. This makes it very difficult for

someone to meditation. The most that should be said are one or two guiding comments at each stage.

6. Using the class as an opportunity to chat people up. Enough said!

7. Not preparing.