



Friendship as the future of Buddhism

Munisha
Triratna Buddhist Order
and Community



EBU event:
Buddhism in Action
Rigpa Centre
Berlin 1.4.2016

Introduction

- I have been a Buddhist, with Triratna, since 1993
- Joined the Triratna Buddhist Order 2003
- Now responsible for Triratna's relations with other Buddhists in Europe
- Today I am speaking personally.

Introduction

- 14 years living a British Buddhist community house
- Now I live in Stockholm with my partner, who is also ordained.
- Triratna Buddhist Order
- Triratna Buddhist Community
- www.thebuddhistcentre.com
- Google 'A Buddhist Manifesto' and
- 'The Triratna Story'

What I will talk about today

- Why *my* Buddhism is the best
- (That's a joke.)
- Want to share the way Buddhist friendship changed my life
- What I mean by 'Buddhist friendship'
- Why I think Buddhist friendship is essential to the future of Buddhism

Two core Triratna teachings



1. A Buddhist is someone who Goes for Refuge to the Three Jewels - including Sangha
2. *Kalyanamitrata* – the importance of spiritual friendship

1 Going for Refuge to the Sangha

- To go for refuge to the Three Jewels includes going for refuge to the **Sangha**.
- Only the aryasangha is a *true* refuge
- but our fellow Buddhists are the sangha most available to us every day.
- In Triratna we practise commitment to friendship with other Buddhists.

2. *Kalyanamitrata*

The Buddha told Ananda that *kalyanamitrata* was the whole of the spiritual life.

Kalyana=beautiful

Mitrata=friendship

In Triratna we interpret *kalyanamitrata* as 'spiritual friendship'.

We take this extremely seriously.

Our lives are organised around friendship.

Two kinds of *kalyanamitrata*

- **Vertical *kalyanamitrata***
 - with Buddhists **more** experienced
 - with those **less** experienced
- **Horizontal *kalyanamitrata***
 - Friendship with those of similar experience

Kalyanamitrata

- Informal *kalyanamitrata*
- Formal *kalyanamitra* ceremonies for marking committed friendship between two Order members and someone training for ordination
- No ceremony for marriage.
- (We don't marry anyone, straight or gay-equality!)

Ordination

The Triratna Buddhist Order is not lay or monastic.

We are not priests, nuns, monks, roshis, lamas...

We are a worldwide community of friends who Go For Refuge to the Three Jewels.

(Some celibate, most have partners.)

Whether ordained or not we are Buddhist friends at different levels of experience, commitment, insight – and therefore, responsibility

Triratna Order statistics

January 2016

Trirana Order worldwide 2,000 women and men
including

ca. 500 women and 680 men in Europe.

Ordination

- We are not ordained as teachers but as members of an Order, a community of friends.
- We do not have 'students' or 'teachers'
- Some of us don't teach at all, or only informally through friendship.
- To become a member of this Order you need to have personal friendships with existing members of the Order.

Friendship as strength

Triratna Order friendships span incredibly different cultures; for example

- Indian Dalits (formerly Untouchables) with
- highly educated middle class Americans and Europeans

Our friendships are our greatest strength.

Enables us to survive difficulties Christians struggle with.

India's 'New Buddhists'



1956 Dr BR Ambedkar converted to Buddhism along with 380,000 other Untouchables (Dalits)

Mass conversions continue to this day.

Many of these New Buddhists are in Tiratna.

Vast peaceful social revolution – especially for Dalit women.

My history of Buddhist friendship 1

- Trained for ordination 1995-2003
 - study groups
 - meditation
 - retreats with other trainees from around the world
 - friendships with Order members
 - Including the woman who ordained me

My history of Buddhist friendship 2

Since 1993

- 17 years working within Manchester Buddhist Centre's sangha (UK)
- at the Clear Vision Trust: Buddhist video project www.clear-vision.org
- Other Buddhist businesses in same building
- Lived 14 years with 6 Buddhist friends
- Many, many retreats and Order gatherings
- The last 13 years in a weekly Order chapter

A life in community

So, my entire Buddhist life has taken place

- in a worldwide context
- in connectedness with others

With many people very different from me

It is not private.

It's challenging.

It is fun!

How?

- 3-year study groups
- 4-month training courses for young Buddhists
- 3-4 month ordination retreats
- Shops
- Cafés
- Centre teams
- Karuna Trust fundraising appeals
www.karuna.org
- Buddhist Action Month (www.nbo.org.uk)

Why? 1

Metta Bhavana (Loving kindness meditation)
and Metta Sutta

teach us to extend lovingkindness beyond
family , partners, 'people like us'

This takes us out of our 'comfort zone'
to cultivate warmth for people who are different
from us and people we don't like.

Why? 2

- **Intensity**
- Requires more than a weekly class or retreat to 'cook' the ego!
- Living and/or working together creates opportunities to stop hiding our vulnerability
- To allow ourselves to love and be loved.
- (Also, it's fun!)

Triratna's European Chairs' Assembly



The friends I work for



- The ECA does business as friends.
- Spending time together is as important as getting the business done.
- Example: name change 2010
- Business meetings of Buddhists who do not know each other well are very different in tone.
- Trust is the key.

Why is this important?

- Danger of individualism in western Buddhism, 'my' practice?
- Narrow definition of 'practice' as meditation.
- Others give encouragement and feedback.
- Others kindly point out my unskillfulness towards myself and others.
- Others will test my patience and ethics.
- My life has been changed by the kindness of my Buddhist friends.

Why is this important?

- Isolation among Buddhist leaders/teachers is dangerous.
- They need peers for support and feedback.
- Often they go astray because they had no close Buddhist peers to challenge them.
- Challenge requires trust.
- Trust is built on loving commitment.

Why is this important?

- Mindfulness and compassion-based interventions are a very important Buddhist contribution to world happiness.
- But they are not Buddhism; not a complete teaching.
- Mindfulness is a (personal?) practice leading to wellbeing
- Wellbeing is very important but it is not Enlightenment, Insight.

What will distinguish the mindfulness
movement from Buddhism is

the community and friendship
of those helping each other develop
Perfect Vision.

