

Introduction to Buddhism – Overview of course

Week 1 – What is Buddhism?

Week 2 – History: the Buddha and later developments
(hand-out with images of the Buddha comes as a separate pdf)

Week 3 – Basic teachings of the Buddha

Week 4 – Buddhist ethics

Week 5 – Sangha: the spiritual community

Week 6 – Symbolism and ritual in Buddhism

Suggested reading:

Buddhism: tools for living Vajragupta

An approachable guide to the Buddha's teachings and to living a Buddhist life that includes many practical suggestions and activities.

Introducing Buddhism Chris Pauling

A short introduction to the themes covered in this course.

Principles of Buddhism Kulananda

This book highlights and explains: the central ideas and beliefs of Buddhism, karma and rebirth, meditation, Buddhism in the world today.

The Triratna Story Vajragupta

An account of the movement, including its ups and downs, told in an engaging way – page turner!

Warrior of Peace Jinananda

A poetic account of the Buddha's life story, bringing together the historical fact, traditional oral legend and symbolic myth.

What is the Dharma? Sangharakshita

A thorough and thought-provoking account of the Buddha's teachings.

Who is the Buddha? Sangharakshita

An account of the life of the Buddha and his significance.

Gautama Buddha Vishvapani Blomfield

A biography of the Buddha based on the Pali Canon and modern research.

Week 1) What is Buddhism?

*To lead a **Buddhist life** we need, above all, four things:*

- a **vision** of the kind of person we could become;
- **practical methods** to help us to transform ourselves in the light of that vision;
- **friendship** to support and encourage us on the path;
- and a **society or culture** that supports us in our aspirations.

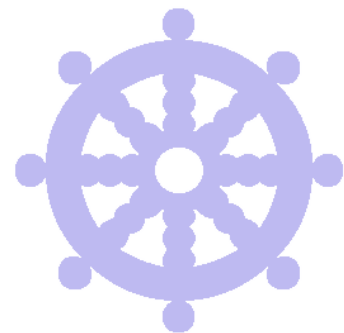
The Three Jewels:



The Buddha: symbol of Enlightenment, particularly as embodied in Siddhartha Gautama, the man who discovered the path to human perfection.



The Dharma: symbol of the Path itself: a host of insights and practical guidelines that help the individual to plot a course towards Enlightenment.



The Sangha: symbol of the fellowship enjoyed between those whose lives are based on the quest for Enlightenment.



Week 2) History: the Buddha and later developments

The Buddha's Life Story

- * Born into a life of luxury about 500 BCE
- * 4 Sights: Sickness, Old age, Death, Holy man
- * Leaving Home
- * Asceticism
- * Middle Way between luxurious living and asceticism
- * Enlightenment (Nirvana)
- * 45 Years of teaching
- * Parinirvana (death of physical body)

The Main Phases of Buddhist Development

| Approximate Era of Development | Yana (Way) | Sub-division | Ideal practitioner | Orientation | Geographical Region | Characteristics | Scriptural Language |
|--------------------------------|---|--|--------------------|--------------------------|---|---|---------------------|
| 500 BCE – 0 CE | Early Buddhism (also known as Hinayana) | Theravada, Sarvastivada etc. | Arahant | Ethical/ Psychological | Southern Asia (Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand etc.) | More individualistic, Monk-Lay split, Historical | Pali |
| 0– 500 CE | Mahayana | Zen, Pure Land, Madhyamika (Wisdom), Yogachara | Bodhi-sattva | Metaphysical/ Devotional | Northern Asia (China, Korea, Japan etc.) | More altruistic, Laity & women valued more, Universal | Sanskrit |
| 500 – 1000 CE | | Tantric/ Vajrayana | Siddha | Ritualistic/ Yogic | Tibet, Japan | Direct experience | |



Week 2) History of Buddhism extracts

Early Buddhism

Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind, and produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows even as the cartwheel follows the hoof of the ox.

Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind, and produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows like a shadow that never departs.

Those who entertain such thoughts as 'He abused me, he beat me, he conquered me, he robbed me,' will not still their hatred.

Those who do not entertain such thoughts as 'He abused me, he beat me, he conquered me, he robbed me,' will still their hatred.

Not by hatred are hatreds ever pacified here (in the world). They are pacified by love. This is the eternal law.

The Dhammapada

[The Buddha addressed the monks:]

Once upon a time, monks, a bamboo acrobat, setting himself upon his bamboo pole, addressed his assistant Medakathalika: "Come, my dear Medakathalika, and climbing up the bamboo pole, stand upon my shoulders."

"Okay, master" the assistant Medakathalika replied to the bamboo acrobat; and climbing up the bamboo pole she stood on the master's shoulders.

So then the bamboo acrobat said this to his assistant Medakathalika: "You look after me, my dear Medakathalika, and I'll look after you. Thus with us looking after one another, guarding one another, we'll show off our craft, receive some payment, and safely climb down the bamboo pole."

This being said, the assistant Medakathalika said this to the bamboo acrobat: "That will not do at all, master! You look after yourself, master, and I will look after myself. Thus with each of us looking after ourselves, we'll show off our craft, receive some payment, and safely climb down from the bamboo pole. That's the right way to do it!"

[The Buddha said:]

Just like the assistant Medakathalika said to her master: "I will look after myself," so should you, monks, practice the establishment of mindfulness. You should (also) practice the establishment of mindfulness (by saying) "I will look after others."

Looking after oneself, one looks after others. Looking after others, one looks after oneself.

And how does one look after others by looking after oneself? By practising (mindfulness), by developing (it), by doing (it) a lot. And how does one look after oneself by looking after others? By patience, by non-harming, by loving kindness, by caring (for others).

Sedaka Sutta – The Bamboo Acrobat

Mahayana

May I be a light for those in need of light. May I be a bed for those in need of rest. May I be a servant for those in need of service, for all embodied beings.

For embodied beings may I be the wish-fulfilling jewel, the pot of plenty, the spell that always works, the potent healing herb, the magical tree that grants every wish, and the milch-cow that supplies all wants. Just as earth and the other elements are profitable in many ways to the innumerable beings dwelling throughout space. So may I be sustenance of many kinds for the realm of beings throughout space, until all have attained release.

Santideva, The Bodhicaryāvatāra

Thus shall you think of all this fleeting world:
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;
A flash of lightening in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.

The Diamond Sutra

Vajrayana

The Human body at peace with itself,
Is more precious than the rarest gem.
Cherish your body, it is yours this one time only.
The human form is won with difficulty,
It is easy to lose.
All worldly things are brief,
Like lightning in the sky;
This life you must know
As a tiny splash of a raindrop;
A thing of beauty that disappears
Even as it comes into being.
Therefore set your goal
Make use of every day and night
To achieve it.

Tsongkapa.

Oh, Tara, holy liberator, swift-acting mother, we
pray and invoke your blessings;
Please watch over us, protect us, and hold us in
your loving embrace.

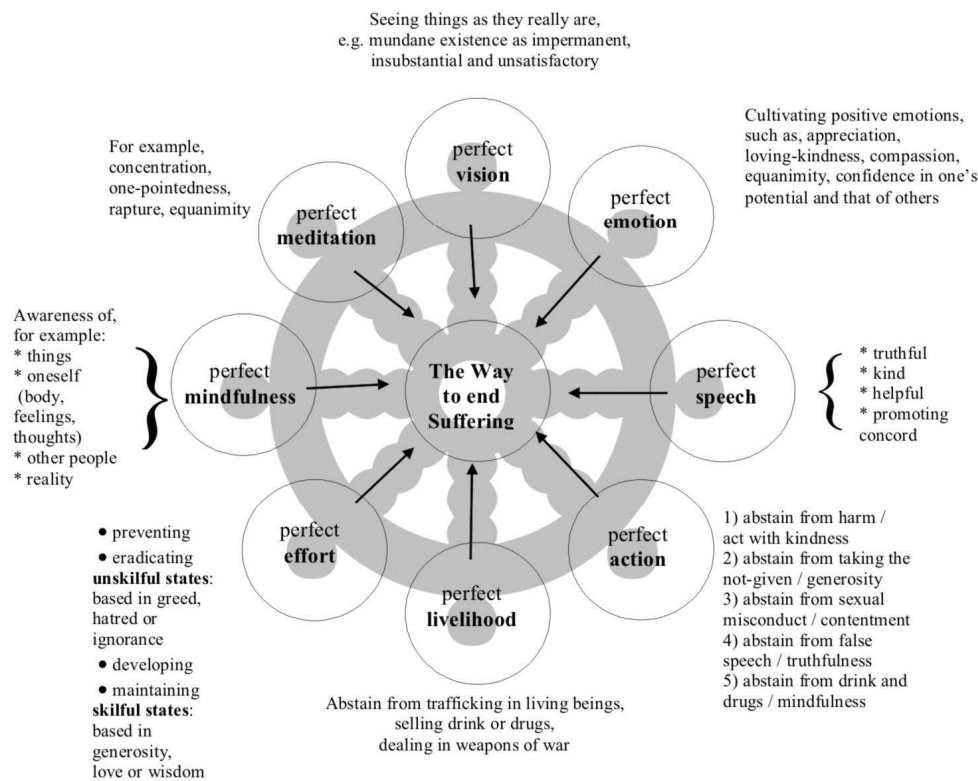
Traditional Tibetan prayer



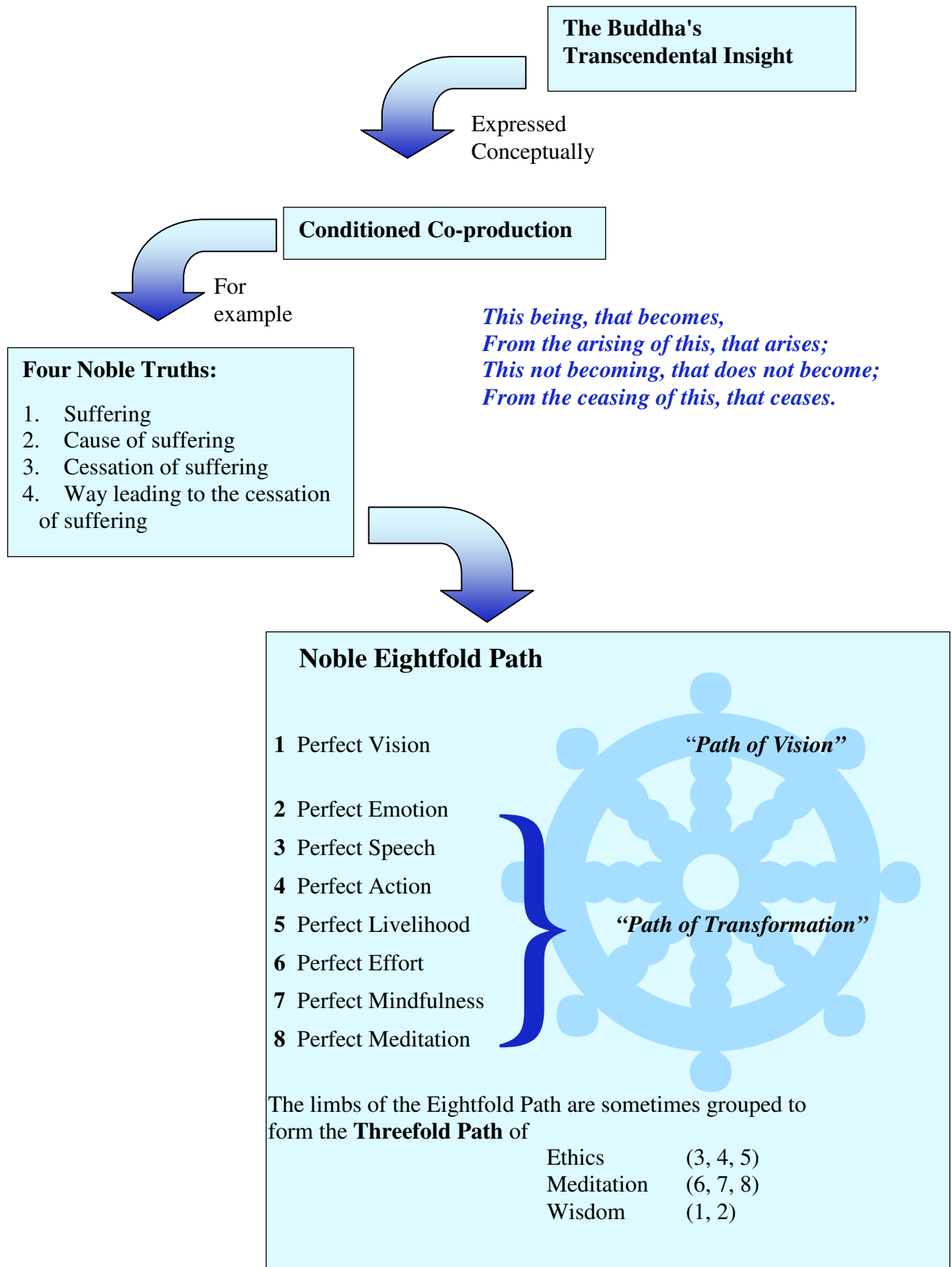
Week 3) The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path

(The fourth of the Four Noble Truths: Suffering, Cause, Ceasing, Way)

Note: the word 'perfect' translates the pali word *samma* which means something like 'whole', 'complete', 'integral' – because all the limbs are practised interdependently with each other.



Week 3) The Teaching of the Buddha



Week 4) Buddhist Ethics

Ideas for more ethical behaviour during this coming week

1 Abstaining from killing/ developing loving kindness

Write to a friend you haven't been in touch with for some time.

Be more patient with children one day.

Be vegetarian for a day.

Pick up a piece of rubbish from the street.

Say thank you and mean it.

Eat a bit more healthily.

Give permission to yourself to be human when noticing how you are feeling.

Buy a (birthday) present for someone.

2 Not taking the not given/ generosity

Reduce waste by recycling or reusing.

Walk or cycle rather than driving one day.

Give up the need to be right.

Give someone some time.

Give someone some space – listening to them.

Allow someone out in front of you either in a car or leaving a train.

Give some money to charity.

Acknowledge people, such as Big Issue sellers, who are asking for money even if you don't give any money.

3 No sexual misconduct/ developing stillness, simplicity and contentment

Meditate

Do something which feeds yourself, such as listening to refining music, sitting quietly.

Eat more frugally for a day.

Spend some time outside enjoying nature.

Avoid negativity, and instead notice what is good during a day.

Avoid looking through catalogues that encourage craving.

Don't follow the news for a day if you find that it encourages dissatisfaction in you.

4 Telling the truth

Avoid gossip.

Be honest in business dealings as far as you are able.

Be frank – kindly and usefully, when talking to a friend.

Be more truthful with yourself about how you are feeling.

Avoid exaggerating or minimising when telling someone what has happened to you.

Don't over-generalise, 'This is difficult – everything's such an effort'.

5 Avoid drugs and intoxicants/ becoming more mindful

When listening to someone, be more mindful of them rather than what you want to say next.

Do fewer things at once while waiting for a kettle to boil.

Use a mindfulness trigger, such as the phone ringing.

Before starting the car take a moment to be mindful of your body.

Observe the effect something has on you, for example reading the paper or watching a particular TV programme.

Take the time out to be mindful of the sensations of breathing for three breaths.

Be more aware of the body when going up or down stairs.

Focus on eating one mouthful of food without doing anything else at the same time.

Have a day without alcohol.

Week 4) Buddhist Ethics

The Five Precepts

Do not underestimate good thinking, 'It will not approach me.' A water-pot becomes full by the constant falling of drops of water. Similarly, the wise person little by little fills themselves with good.

The Buddha (from *The Dhammapada*)

| | |
|--|--|
| I undertake to abstain from taking life | With deeds of loving kindness, I purify my body |
| I undertake to abstain from taking the not-given | With open-handed generosity, I purify my body |
| I undertake to abstain from sexual misconduct | With stillness, simplicity and contentment, I purify my body |
| I undertake to abstain from false speech | With truthful communication, I purify my speech |
| I undertake to abstain from taking intoxicants | With mindfulness clear and radiant, I purify my mind |

*The rain has stopped, the clouds have drifted away,
and the weather is clear again.
If your heart is pure, then all things in your world are pure.
Abandon this fleeting world, abandon yourself,
Then the moon and flowers will guide you along the Way.*

RYOKAN

Week 5) Sangha – The Spiritual Community

The Triratna Buddhist Community

The Triratna Buddhist Order, which was founded by Sangharakshita in 1968, forms the heart of the Triratna Buddhist Community.

The Triratna Buddhist Community is open to all those who wish to practise Buddhism within it or who are sympathetic to its approach. Everyone who has contact with Triratna is considered a *friend*, however someone who wants to make a particular connection with the Triratna Buddhist Community and develop friendships with members of the Order can ask to become a *Mitra* ('friend' in Sanskrit).

Mitras

Becoming a Mitra marks a deepening of involvement. People ask to become a Mitra when they:

1. Consider that they are Buddhists.
2. Want to live in accordance with the five ethical precepts
3. Believe that the Triratna Buddhist Community is the appropriate spiritual community for them.

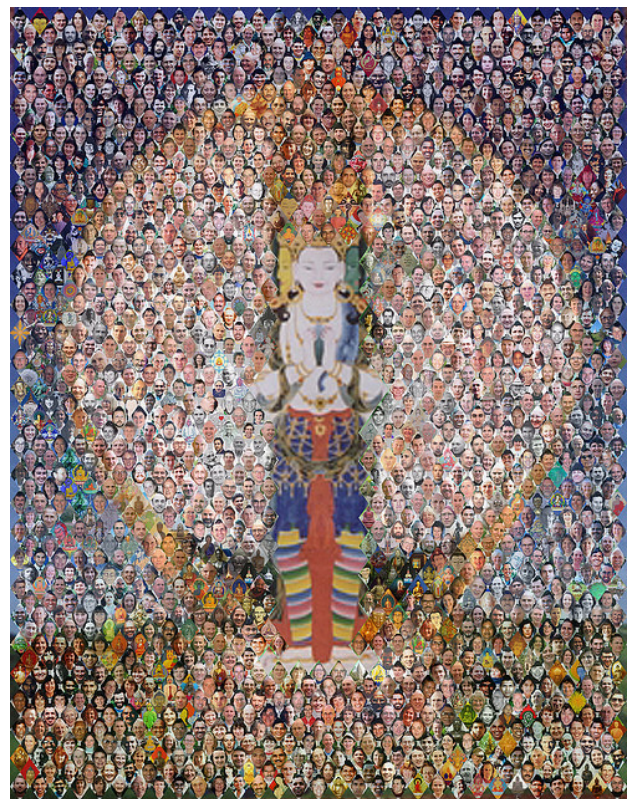
There is a simple ceremony to mark becoming a mitra. As far as possible, Order Members try to ensure that the spiritual needs of Mitras are met. There are special activities for mitras, including specific retreats, and study groups.

Order members

The Triratna Buddhist Order is a spiritual community of men and women who have pledged themselves to following the Buddhist path to Enlightenment. Every Order Member undertakes to practise a traditional set of ten ethical precepts. All Order Members take the same precepts, and practise on an equal basis.

The Triratna Buddhist Order is a radical alternative to most forms of Buddhism in Asia, where practitioners are either monastic or lay. Our Order is open to anyone – regardless of race or gender or lifestyle – who is sincerely and effectively committed to the Buddhist path. Order members try to lead a wholehearted Buddhist life, bringing a dharmic perspective to all aspects of their life. They are not monks or nuns. What matters is not the lifestyle that Order members adopt, but the spiritual commitment they have made: *commitment is primary, lifestyle is secondary*.

Anyone can ask to join the Order. There is ordination training that consists of retreats, study, developing friendships with Order members, and deepening one's personal practice.



Week 5) Sangha – The Spiritual Community

Triratna History and Distinctive Characteristics

Triratna is Sanskrit for 'Three Jewels' and refers to the Buddha, Dharma (his teaching) and Sangha (the spiritual community).

Chronology

- 1964 Sangharakshita, the founder of the movement, returns to England after 20 years in India practising Buddhism.
- 1967 Founding of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO)
- 1968 Founding of the Western Buddhist Order. 12 men and women ordained.
- 1978 Indian wing of the FWBO founded.
- 2000 Sangharakshita hands on the headship of the order to the College of Public Preceptors.
- 2004 The leadership of the movement devolves further and individual centres have greater autonomy.
- 2010 The name of the Order is changed to the Triratna Buddhist Order and the movement (FWBO) to the Triratna Buddhist Community.
- 2011 There are currently over 1730 order members spread over about 30 countries.

Distinctive characteristics

The movement is ecumenical. Triratna is not identified with any particular strand of Buddhism or Buddhist school, but draws inspiration from whatever seems appropriate to here and now.

The movement is unified. The Triratna Buddhist Order ordains men and women on an equal footing - unlike most traditional Buddhist schools. Single-sex activities are encouraged as important for spiritual growth, but men and women are considered equally able to practise and develop spiritually.

The act of Going for Refuge is central. Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels is what makes someone a Buddhist. So everyone in the Triratna Buddhist Community is encouraged to place the Three Jewels at the centre of their lives.

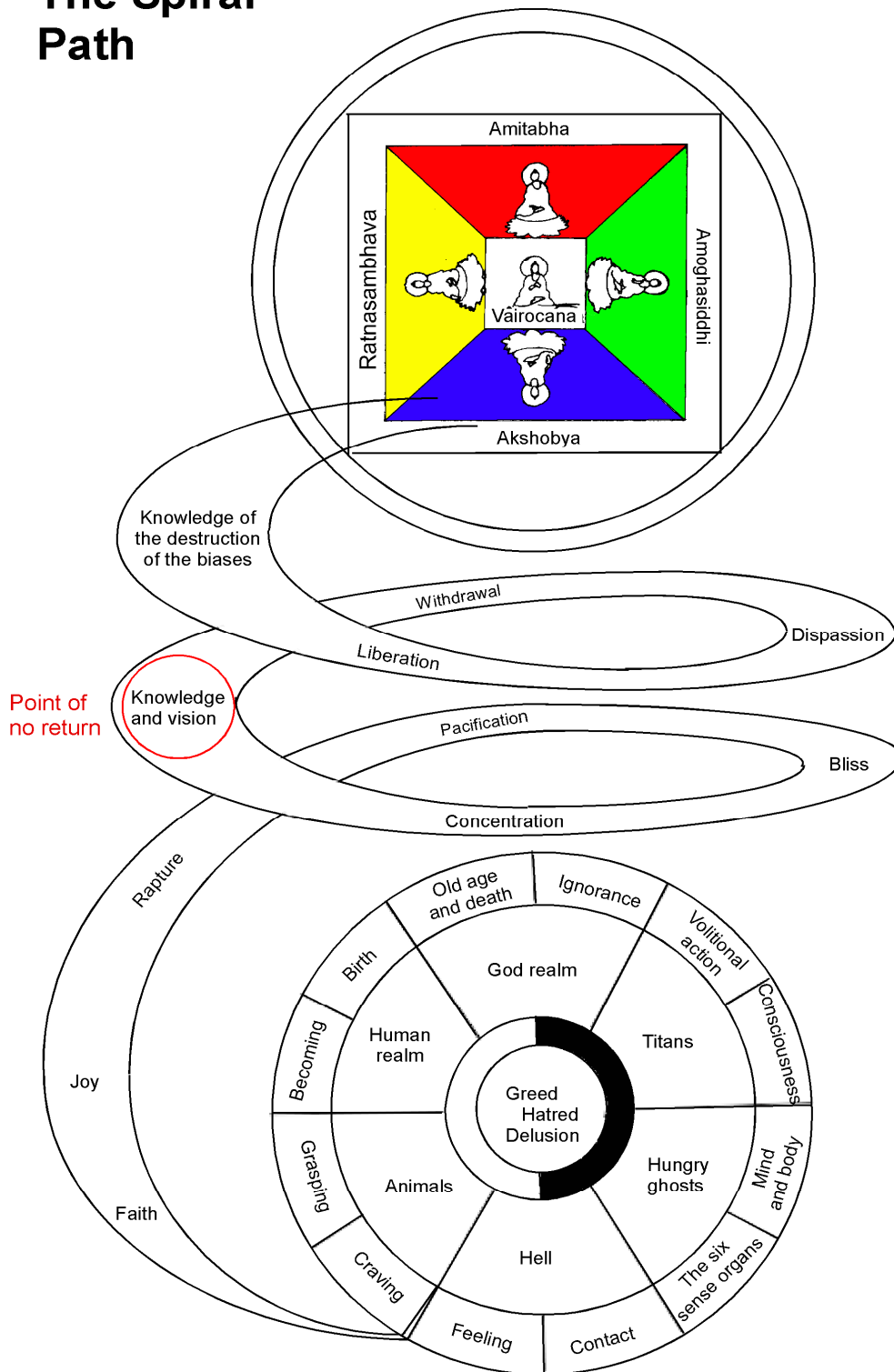
Spiritual friendship. Spiritual friendship is friendship based on our highest values - especially the *Three Jewels*. Spending as much time as possible with friends who share our highest ideals supports ethical living.

Team based right-livelihood. Working together in teams, in the spirit of generosity, and with a focus on ethics, is a transformative practice. Triratna has been a pioneer in the area of right-livelihood, operating a number of successful businesses.

Art. The arts help us to broaden our sympathies and to extend our experience; they enlarge our imaginations, they refine and direct our emotions. At their best and greatest they may be bearers of spiritual values, values which in principle are identical with those of the Dharma, values which can help us to transform our lives.

Week 6) Symbolism and Ritual in Buddhism

The Spiral Path



Week 6) Symbolism and Ritual in Buddhism



Week 6) Symbolism and Ritual in Buddhism

Transference of Merits

May the merit gained
In my acting thus
Go to the alleviation of the suffering of all beings.
My personality throughout my existences,
My possessions,
And my merit in all three ways,
I give up without regard to myself
For the benefit of all beings.

Just as the earth and other elements
Are serviceable in many ways
To the infinite number of beings
Inhabiting limitless space;
So may I become
That which maintains all beings
Situating throughout space,
So long as all have not attained
To peace.