

A Map of the Order, Movement and College

People sometimes ask “So how does it all work , how does Triratna work?” There is not an easy or quick answer. Over the years we have developed many institutions that work away quietly and effectively, but it is difficult to present the overall picture in a few sentences.

In the beginning there was just Bhante, Urgyen Sangharakshita, and an intimate circle of friends who all knew each other well. Now there are well over 2000 Order members and we have a world wide movement. The last fifty years have seen the evolution of numerous more formal structures, institutions and ways of working. It seems like a good point in time to take stock, and ask ourselves what works well, and what might we might need to look at improving or changing.

I have drawn up a visual map of our various institutions and have tried to indicate how they relate to each other. I also provide a brief commentary on each of the institutions... though I don't try to say everything that could be said.

I will be very interested to hear any comments or observations.

Commentary

Urgyen Sangharakshita (Bhante) is the founder and teacher of FWBO/Triratna. When he established the Order and Movement in 1967/68 he was very clear that he did not want to establish a Buddhist Society where every paid up member was entitled to vote and had an equal say in how things were run. He wanted to establish a spiritual community of men and women committed to the Buddhist Path, and a movement run by the spiritually committed.

In a community like ours, established on the lines laid out by Sangharakshita, there will be a creative tension between, on the one hand, respect for the guidance and leadership of the spiritually more experienced, and on the other, encouraging individuals to take full responsibility for their own lives and bring a flexibility and openness to their exploration of the path. We have to watch that the first does not tip over into unquestioning deference to perceived authority, and that the second does not see the Order fragment through a proliferation of teachings and practices.

At the heart of the Triratna Buddhist Order is the ordination ceremony. This has two parts, a private ceremony between ordinand and Private Preceptor, and a public ceremony performed by a Public Preceptor and witnessed publicly. To start with Sangharakshita decided who was ready to be ordained and performed both ceremonies himself. Soon he was consulting more experienced Order members about people's readiness. In time he

appointed Public Preceptors, who initially also performed both ceremonies. Further down the line the roles of Public and Private Preceptor were separated out.

College of Public Preceptors.

The original Public Preceptors were all appointed by Bhante. Nowadays new Public Preceptors are now put forward by the kula of the College responsible for the geographical area they will be working in, and the proposal agreed by the whole College. With this agreement they then go into a consultation process, where all Order members are invited to comment. Once the consultation is successfully completed the appointment is ratified by the whole College and made formally by the Chair of the College.

By the end of 2017 there will probably be 43 or 44 active Public Preceptors working around the world. As the Order and Movement grow, more Public Preceptors are needed. Also, a new generation of Preceptors is being brought in and trained up as many of the founding generation approach their 70s and are preparing to step back.

The College meets twice a year for 10 days at Adhithana. One of these will be a full international meeting. A very high proportion of College members attend most meetings.

There is a great deal of experience in the College. Some have been taking leading roles in the Order and movement, and meeting together, for 45 years. There are strong friendships and sense of shared vision and understanding.

The College has become too big to be an effective decision making body. It is a place for maintaining unity and common standards in ordination training around the world, and also for clarifying principles and deepening understanding and practice.

Ordination Training

The primary work of the College is overseeing ordination training. Public Preceptors work together in kulas to oversee training in different parts of the world, and for men and for women. .

In some areas there are dedicated Ordination Teams working with the Public Preceptors.

The Public Preceptors are also responsible for the appointment and training of Private Preceptors.

A mitra preparing for ordination can ask an Order member who has been ordained for at least 10 years to be their Private Preceptor. The Order member then needs to check with their chapter, kalyana mitras and preceptors. If it is felt to be appropriate they then enter a consultation process, with a Public Preceptor (or sometimes experienced Private Preceptor)

as Correspondent. If all goes well, they are then agreed and appointed by the kula of Public Preceptors connected with their Correspondent.

Close to 10% of the Order are serving, or have served, as Private Preceptors. There are annual retreats for Private Preceptors held in most geographical areas, and a strong sense of Public and Private Preceptors working closely together for the future of the Order.

Public Preceptors work closely together with Private Preceptors, ordination teams, mitra convenors and local Order members to help prepare men and women for ordination. There is wide and careful consultation as to anyone's readiness, with the final decision on ordination resting with the Public Preceptor, and agreed by a kula of at least four other Public Preceptors.

The Adhithana Kula formed spontaneously to meet a pressing need. It has become very clear that a similar body is needed that can function in a sustainable and ongoing way, able to deal promptly with day to day issues and with decisions that need to be made quickly, always in active liason with other Triratna bodies. I hope to see the Adhithana Kula transmute over the coming months into a Council overseen by the Chair of the College.

Adhithana

Adhithana was bought in 2011 and has been running events since summer 2012. It acts as a spiritual focus for Triratna, and as a physical headquarters. Sangharakshita lives there and will eventually be buried there. Meetings, events and retreats are held there, including a significant number of retreats for Order members. There are regular course of 3 to 5 months, and there are many visitors throughout the year.

There are about 25 men and women resident at Adhithana in 3 communities.

There are plans to develop Adhithana as a focus for study and teaching. It is the base for the Sikkha Project, an ambitious project overseen by the International Council, to review teaching and practice at every level throughout Triratna, and develop resources and teacher training.

Presidents Meeting

Ideally every Triratna centre will have a President, a senior Order member who acts as a kalyanamitra to the centre.

Presidents are appointed in dialogue between a centre and the Executive of the Presidents Meeting, with the Executive ratifying the appointment.

The presidents for the Movement outside of India meets once a year at Adhithana for 5 days.

There are about 36 presidents outside of India. About 15 of them are College members, though an increasing number are not Public Preceptors.

About two thirds of the presidents attend the annual meeting in any one year.

This meeting is quite stable in its membership as presidents are intentionally long serving; the original idea being that the presidents span should be longer than that of the Chair.

Mitra Convenors

Mitra Convenors are responsible for the training and spiritual welfare of mitras around a centre. They are strictly an Order appointment, but as they are often supported by centres their appointment is usually agreed between the centre in question in dialogue with the local Order.

There are regular meetings of Mitra Convenors in UK and Europe.

There are now also nominated Mitra Convenors attending the International Council Meeting.

The Order

Order members form chapters, which usually meet weekly.

Each chapter will appoint a Chapter Convenor. Chapter Convenors will meet and appoint Regional Convenors, who will then meet and appoint Area Convenors.

There are two International Order Convenors, a man and a woman, usually based now at Adhithana. Nominations for these posts are invited and agreed somewhere between the previous Order Convenors, the Area Convenors and the College. There is not yet a constitution that lays out a clearly defined procedure.

The Order Office offers administrative back-up to the Order Convenors and handles Order business.

There are regular Order weekends, for Regions and for Areas, and every three years an International Order convention, presently alternating between UK and India.

There are many retreats for Order members.

Shabda is a monthly Order newsletter to which Order members can contribute reports.

There is a Hindi Shabda in India.

There are an increasing number of internet forums for Order members.

The Movement

Each Triratna centre is a legally independent body, run by Order members. Their shared membership of the Triratna Buddhist Order is the key unifying factor.

A recent document produced by the International Council , 'What Is a Triratna Centre', clearly defines what makes a Triratna centre.

In UK and Europe there is a European Chairs Assembly that meets twice a year, for 6 full days in the winter and 8 or 9 full days in the summer.

There are 33 UK chairs and 20 Mainland Europe Chairs. Most will attend at least one ECA meeting each year.

Chairs are usually in office for around 5 to 10 years, so there is some regular turnover in the meeting.

The ECA has an Executive that meets four times a year outside of these meetings.

The ECA also supports a Development Team that carries forward initiatives such as Buddhist Action Month and the Young Triratna Project. The Executive and the Development Team have made the ECA a very effective meeting.

The ECA also invites College members to join its meetings.

The College and Order both have international gatherings. There is no international Movement body or meeting, though there are Movement representatives at the International Council meeting. There are moves to find funding for a Movement Convenor in India, and for an International Movement Convenor.

Centres are also connected by the Presidents Meeting and Mitra Convenors Meetings.

There are an increasing number of Triratna Groups, especially in the UK and Europe, some connected to a nearby centre, and some to the ECA Development Team, which runs events for them at Adhithana.

The International Council

The International Council is a fairly new body that brings together representatives of College, Order and Movement from around the world.

There is a full meeting every 18 months or two years.

There are about 39 members, though change in personnel between meetings can be as high as 30 -40 %, so continuity is an issue.

A Steering Group, with members from all 3 strands , meets every 2 or 3 months between the large face to face meetings, with the help of Skype.

The International Council, with its accompanying structure of Area Councils - which also meet regularly, allows for wide consultation and collation of feedback in a way not previously possible. Decisions can be made by the International Council where authority has been given to it by all the bodies represented in the Council.

Major achievements so far have been the 'What is a Triratna Centre' document and getting the Sikkha Project underway.

The International Council has a full time Convenor and a secretary, both usually resident at Adhithana.

Other bodies

There are a number of other bodies that play a significant part in the life of the Order and Movement.

- The Buddhist Centre Online
- Free Buddhist Audio
- Clear Vision
- The Karuna Trust
- FutureDharma Fund
- Windhorse Publications
- Windhorse Trust
- The Abhayaratna Trust