

Notes on community guidelines and moderation: a request for engagement

This is a general editorial response focussed on the comment thread on this post. [You can also read our general response to complaints about the post itself.](#)

The Buddhist Centre Online is not Twitter. It is not Facebook. It is not just a news website. It shares some common functions with all of these, but it is also something else. It was built with love by members of the Triratna community, funded by donations from across the world, for us to discuss and share the Dharma with others. It is a space to exemplify the best of our community, and we hope that users can join us in living up to that vision.

The best of our community is kindness, empathy, connection, genuine curiosity, authentic, positively expressed experience rooted in the Dharma itself. We believe that here people might hold genuinely different, maybe even painfully different, views, and yet stand on something together that is bigger and deeper than all of that.

We hear that some people don't appreciate aspects of the original post or don't see sufficient Buddhist value in it to merit its place on our site. We are listening and will continue to try and meet you and understand your concerns and your perspective in a positive way, including finding ways to hear your own constructive vision of the Dharma.

We hear that some people are dismayed that others not only cannot appreciate the original post, but even wish it removed. We are listening and will continue to try and promote harmony around what we understand seems like a breach around core Buddhist values, at a time of great suffering for people of colour, and renewed momentum in society for people who wish to work against racism in their own lives.

We recognise that there is also much that is good in this exchange, even where it is challenging. And as to the bits that seem less positive, we don't have all the answers, by any means. We may have more to say (in public and in private) about those specific aspects of the thread over the coming days and weeks. In reflecting about all of it ourselves, as an editorial team we want first to offer a refresher in the rules of engagement on this site; and make a request that will help us all hold a difficult conversation perhaps a little better than it is currently being held.

Community Guidelines

Here are key excerpts from [our community content and moderation guidelines](#), which are designed to help create a positive environment for everyone:

1. Please be courteous at all times. If you're engaged in any kind of discussion, be as prepared to listen as you are to express yourself. Remember that there's always a real person behind a computer/device screen, and they are likely quite different from you.
2. Think twice before posting anything that's likely to give offence or be inflammatory. That doesn't promote good conversation. If you're upset at something you see here, perhaps let a little time pass before responding. Bear in mind this isn't a space to vent our views, it's about exploring respectfully with others what it means to be a Buddhist within our community and in the modern world generally.

3. We may remove posts or comments that are considered off-topic.

4. Everyone has off-moments, and we'll always try to be in friendly dialogue with you if a problem arises with one of your contributions. But we reserve the right to remove posts and comments (or even suspend user accounts) when we feel these guidelines are not observed.

Whatever you contribute, we very much encourage you to think about it in the light of the Buddhist ethical precepts around 'Right Speech'. These encourage communication that is: truthful, kindly and gracious, helpful and harmonious.

Moderation

We try to keep things light when it comes to moderation of posts and comments within this shared space. And we ask the community itself to lead with this. If you have seen something that concerns you, please feel free to contact us. However, we do ask that you bear in mind the following guidelines, which will help preserve a harmonious atmosphere throughout the site:

1. Remember there is always a person behind the post or comment you're objecting to. They may just be having a bad day... If you're upset, perhaps let a little time pass before responding to them or us.
2. Try contacting the person first in a spirit of open, courteous engagement to see if hearing their perspective changes your own view of things, or if hearing yours changes theirs.
3. Take care to make sure what you are asking us to look at is actually against the spirit of the group or the site itself, rather than simply a difference of view or of personal taste. If in doubt, ask a friend and/or the administrator of the group.

The most important thing about this is the first bit: *we ask the community to lead with this*. That means you. And it applies perhaps especially on public spaces. Which brings us back, finally, to this comment thread...

A sampling of complaints to our team about the comments on this thread (so far)

- This thread and the tone of some of the comments risks bringing the Order and Movement into disrepute in a public space.
- Some of the comments here make it seem like Triratna is racist or, at least, not a welcome space for people of colour.
- Some of the comments contain, effectively, *ad hominem* negativity towards the person who made the post, or the person to whom someone is responding.
- People's experience is being dismissed without any attempt at connection or empathy in the spirit of the Dharma.
- This thread has steadily moved "off-topic". What are you going to do about it?
- Some of the comparisons people are making about others they disagree with are inflammatory and, in some cases, actively offensive.
- Some of the comments here are attempting to shut down dialogue just because there is disagreement.
- This post has been hijacked and turned into a sounding board for other frustrations.

That's just some of them. How does it feel reading that list? It certainly doesn't make us happy here.

In theory, as an editorial team, we're supposed to weigh, assess, then take action wherever a possible breach of the community guidelines has occurred. Usually that involves first reaching

out personally to individuals (we've already done some of that and will do more); but in this case, to be honest, to do so in all the cases that require it would likely be far too onerous a process. Like you, no doubt, we're pretty busy. There's a *lot* on.

We also suspect that if we were to act within our "normal" duty as moderators on this thread, it would not necessarily cool the situation for some of you. So what to do?

A request from the editorial team

In light of all this, we will do our own work around this thread as sensitively as we can. In the meantime, please consider what changes you can make to your contributions that would better serve our community and Order online. You can edit comments. You can remove a comment and leave a blank to show that one was there before. You can replace a deleted comment in-place.

If you're part of an exchange where someone has done this, and your subsequent response now seems off, please consider re-working your own contribution.

There is a great opportunity for our community if we can figure out how to have this kind of conversation in a better way. The underlying issues won't disappear, it will still be messy; and we recognise that this is just the start of a different approach to engagement with the deep differences captured here. We'll check back in a few days, and look forward to seeing how things go.

Yours in the Dharma,

Candradasa (Director of The Buddhist Centre Online) and Parami (Chair of the Editorial Board)