



Summary of themes and discussions ECA September 2016

From 28 August to 6 September 2016 the Adhisthana community hosted yet again, with their usual warmth, generosity and

attentiveness, the summer meeting of the European Chairs Assembly.

Around 35 chairs from 6 countries met for the biannual mix of deepening friendships, collective dharma practice and doing business. The chairs have been exploring the theme of 'Our Culture in Triratna Centres' over the last four meetings and this again was the overarching theme. This time we explored the theme of 'The impact of Worldly Values' on our Triratna culture.

The meeting started with a day reporting in in small groups

As always the presentations, discussion and business were set in the context of developing and deepening friendships, and the sharing of the joys, inspirations and challenges of running a Triratna Centre or project. Each day is also set around with meditation in the morning and a puja or a led sadhana practice in the evening.



A highlight of the meeting and appreciated by many chairs were the **Sadhana practices** led by members of the College of Public Preceptors:

With **Ratnadarini**, and **Mahamati** leading the Manjughosha stuti sadhana; Saddhaloka the Avalokiteshvara sadhana and **Padmavajra** the Padmasambhavana sadhana.



On our last evening but one we enjoyed an 'International' Puja during which puja books from European countries, in their different languages,

Dhammamegha informed us on a consultation on syllabus and training spearheaded by The International Council.

The Sikkha Project

is a response to a call for resources and teacher training. Her presentation involved presenting the background and rationale to project and who's involved; and give an indication how we are doing it and where it's at - what are next steps?



The first phase of the project involves finding out

- Which practices are taught?
- What is taught most effectively at all levels?
- Identify and fill any gaps
- Create resources for dharma and meditation teaching

Exploring Sadhana with Ratnadarini

Day 2 of the meeting continued with a day of dharma practice with welcome input from Ratnadarini on the topic of sadhana.

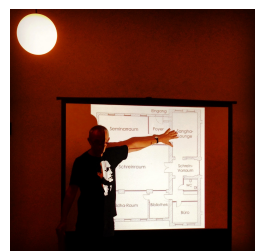
Sadhana had been a key theme at the recent College meeting - Ratnadarini's talk was partly a potted history how our understanding of sadhana has developed in the order - that is, 'how we got back to almost where we started'; and partly a recap of suggestions from Subhuti on the practice and understanding of sadhana. This was summed up in **five key elements in a visualization practice** -

nisarana and mahakaruna - a turning away from the faults of conditioned existence and developing great compassion; *shunyata* the mantra and blue sky; *living the maya way*; and exploring the *illuminated image* and *transcendental devotion*.



We watched two Centre Presentations:

Manchester and Buddhistisches Tor Berlin - sadhu to both!



We listened to a report from the Young Buddhist Coordinator **Prajnaketu** who introduced and launched his document - **Vision, Energy and Action**:

A bold imaginative *vision*: straight from Bhante

energy from people engaging in meaningful activity is very attractive - lively, engaged, challenging and dynamic!

tangible action: let's not JUST offer meditation, listening to talks, study and cups of tea Offer involvement in building shrines, publicity, helping run a course!



Our Triratna Centres – the impact of worldly views and values:

These talks seemed to lie at the heart of the meeting; new issues were raised that are likely to be followed up in future chairs assemblies.

Vassika reflected on the themes of the true individual and the group; the societal model of the couple, and the impact of modern technology. Buddhist Centres are a meeting point between worldliness and spiritual values, the meeting ground of the values of the true individual and the group. We are inviting people into our community as individuals and to transform themselves and the world – important to remember this context. Buddhist Centres are a place where worldlings can meet our values so it is essential to be clear of what they are



Jnanavaca exhorted us to strive for more of a lineage of **inspiration**. He drew a distinction between leadership and management: *“Leadership is about culture and vision not strategy and marketing”* and we need more of the former and less of the latter: Leadership energizes and inspires people, *“it gives them something to believe in”*. As chair we are the guardians of our culture. And we need our leaders to ‘bless’ what we do. *“We talk a lot about coherence but an essential function of coherence to ‘bless’ and we need this role when Bhante is no longer with us.”*



He referred to **three areas of wider issues of internal threats** to our Triratna culture:

Anti-hierarchy – **‘anti-Buddha’**: the more you consult does not necessarily mean better results (eg. brexit!). Let’s uphold spiritual hierarchy.

Anti religion/secularization, the dharma seen as adjustment therapy – **‘anti-dharma’** – let’s have temples, enormous rupas, be serious about us as a Buddhist movement! Gives confidence. *“Imagine Bhante having been a secular mindfulness teacher called Dennis”*.

Individualism – **‘Anti-Sangha’**: Let’s ask about the relationship between Insight and altruism, emphasize the bodhisattva spirit.

We enjoyed a range of ‘pop up’ presentations

Dharmasri invited us to start to **See Croydon With Fresh Eyes** Upekshamati reflected on **22 years of ECA meetings** Arthavadin sharing the **Core Quadrant Analysis tool** by Daniel Ofman Jayaraja offered order members and mitras the **opportunity to work as a team** together under the auspices of a Buddhafield event ... Shantiprabha talked about the **Birmingham Carers Project ...** and more

Maitreyi very eloquently evoked the quality of retreats at the time she got involved in dharma practice and challenged the **use of Internet on retreat**. In the past our strong culture of silence and practice on retreats, no contact with the outside world on solitaires, etc. encouraged depth and a sense of adventure; also an existential sense of aloneness – a truly new space, and experience of being in a bardo out of which new possibilities and new insights may emerge. Are we in danger of losing that with the increasing use of mobiles and internet, which can fill up all space even on retreat?



Padmavajra talked about the other side to the impact of worldly values: *“We tend to ignore the fact that the Buddha was a celibate, renunciant homeless wanderer and he gained enlightenment on that basis – so renunciation is an issue for all of us. This renunciation needs to be coming out of an intense desire for the unborn, the transcendental, that what is beyond, and outside samsaric structures”... We need to have a feel for the transcendental; it is a uncompromising presentation for the **only** motive of practice and for being involved in Triratna – the taste of liberation, nirvana. When we are discussing anything it has to be in relation to this, it has to have this transcendental dimension.”*



And of course we listened to, reflected on and discussed reports, updates and briefings:

Future Dharma update, *Amalavajra*
Development Fund and budget discussion, *Nandavajra*
A report from the College, *Saddhaloka*
Ethical Guidelines, *Munisha*
Presentation from the buddhistcentre online via video from *Rijupatha*
Triratna Translations board, *Suvannavira*
A report from the International Council *Jnanacandra and Jnanadhara*
Dr Ambedkar celebration *Carunalaka* (IDT) and *Priyananda* (Complete Works)
Bhante funeral arrangements, *Lokeshvara*
ECA membership
50th anniversary celebrations April 2017,
Invitation to run a LOCAL urban retreat and report on BAM 2016 - *Mokshini*

report compiled by Mokshini September 2016

questions/requests for further information to mokshini@triratnadevelopment.org please