



Resources for Triratna group leaders

A selection of useful resources to support those leading an outlying Triratna group, or teaching outlying classes. Suggestions are welcome - contact the Development Team at info@triratnadevelopment.org

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personal considerations

Why start a group?

There are many reasons people have given for starting (or wanting to start) a Triratna Group - others could no doubt be added. One reply would simply be “because some beings have but little dust in their eyes...”

- it's where I live!
- it makes the Dharma more integral to my life
- sharing the Dharma is wonderful/rewarding
- creation of Sangha
- it's a different angle to a Centre
- meditating with others
- it supports my practice and my faith
- people are interested - they want it
- it's inspiring to 'represent' and introduce others to Triratna

Keeping going...

Starting a group is likely to be exciting and inspiring - but keeping it going week after week a year or so later may be harder! Look out for what 'works' for you and make sure that's built-in to how the group works. Things that nourish you could include -

- Taking a break from time to time
- Actively 'bringing people on' in the group
- Inviting guest speakers
- Letting the wider Movement know what you're up to
- ... your answer here!

Leadership issues

If you're leading an outlying group you may well be the only Order Member people meet for months at a time. Inevitably your personal 'flavour' and style will affect the group, and therefore colour people's perceptions of the Dharma itself. Inevitably also people will project onto you for better or worse.

Take some time before starting anything to clarify your intentions - they may come back and bite you later! Of course you'll want to attract people - but if you're too 'open' and 'inclusive' people may be shocked later to discover you want it to be unambiguously Buddhist. Might be better to be a bit challenging at the start than have to try and introduce it later.



Look and feel of the group

A new group will quite quickly acquire a definite 'look and feel' of its own. It's important to put some thought into just how that's likely to come across to new people - it'll be the first thing they perceive and will likely make all the difference to whether they stick or go. Every little detail will play its part - things like:

- The quality of the lights in the room (soft and warm, hard and bright)
- How warm the room is
- Whether they can just walk in or have to ring the bell
- Whether someone meets them at the door
- Whether there's chairs to sit in when they arrive, or people have to stand up
- Whether you're busy or free to greet them
- Whether they are introduced to others
- Whether there's something to look at/read while they're waiting
- What sort of shrine if any is there, and/or Buddha image, candles, incense etc,

The more warm and welcoming all this can be, the better.

What's hard about running a group?

Personal challenges:

- need a certain amount of confidence to ask for help
- people are challenging!
- the commitment and responsibility involved
- how to meet requests from the group eg to explore other teachers
- time and energy management: avoiding over-stretching and considering the amount of driving/travelling involved

Objective challenges:

- practicalities of organising/booking rooms etc
- unfamiliarity with possible 'tools' eg Facebook
- low numbers coming
- lack of money/resources
- need to translate material
- difficulty creating a website

Growing pains:

- not always easy when another OM gets involved
- balancing periods of growth and consolidation
- financial stresses may arise
- not easy to delegate as things grow
- getting people connected with the wider Triratna
- hard to pass on the ethos when a solitary leader
- people dropping out, nostalgic for the 'old days' when it was small



- being available to group members for 1-to-1 talks
- not many role models available

Practical considerations

Suggestions for an evening program

There's no one 'right' program for an evening. Here's a couple of possibilities though:

7pm - doors open
 7.15 - class begins, welcome, introductions
 7.20 - refuges and precepts and meditate (led through if new people present)
 8.10 - tea
 8.30 - short Dharma talk/presentation followed by discussion
 9.15 - transference of merits and end
 9.30 - after-class chats with people as needed

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 8.30 - tea
 9 - short meditation
 9.30 - end
 9.45 - after-class chats with people as needed

Suggestions for weekly schedule/Dharma syllabus

There's no one 'right' way to structure the content of each week's classes. One decision will be whether or not the group is open to new people coming every week - or only on specific weeks. Here's a couple of ways:

A. Short 4-week courses

Week 1 - public talk introducing theme (newcomers welcome)

Week 2 - first week of new course (newcomers welcome)

Weeks 3-5 - remainder of course (group is closed)

This gives a group that is open for 2 weeks in every 5 (a good balance); and which explores a new topic starting every 5 weeks.

B. Open every week

New people can come every week and are introduced as needed to meditation and the course material so far.

Choosing a venue

Some very successful groups started in people's houses, eg Danapriya's small flat in Deal, Kent. Others rent a room eg in a local church hall or Friends Meeting House.

If you meet at someone's home there may come a time when planning permission may be an issue. When and if that becomes the case will most likely depend on the neighbours and the



type of street you are meeting in. It is unlikely to be a problem in the first couple of years of a group's existence. In the meantime meeting at home certainly reduces the cost!

Publicity

We're not all great graphic designers. However there might be someone in your Sangha who is - asking them to do posters might be a good way to get them more involved. There's some useful information available at -

<https://thebuddhistcentre.com/triratna-project-support/publicity-2011#>

Images for publicity can usually be found online but of course be careful about copyright.

Building your contacts list

Gather people's emails and mobile numbers and work out a way to stay in contact - one that works for you. Here's some ideas with comments from me:

- * the best option is thebuddhistcentre.com; this has the option to create your own 'project page' and local groups as part of it and we would like it to become the place for most people in Triratna to gather - your sangha included, of course! To create a new project email Candradasa (support@thebuddhistcentre.com), though you might want to read the '[how-to](#)' material first.
- * a text message list or WhatsApp groups on your mobile phone: fiddly to set up, easy to use, a pain when you switch phones. Good for short snappy bits of news, reminders, etc.
- * an email list on your email program - ditto. A more sophisticated version of this is to use MailMerge eg in Microsoft Office, allowing personalised emails. Good for longer updates, programmes, study material, etc.
- * a blog which your sangha subscribes to; they will then get emails every time you update it. This can be linked to -
- * a facebook page which your sangha then 'likes' and which you post updates to. Both good for general news and updates. It's not everyone's cup of tea, but LOTS of people use it and it can offer a nice balance between keeping up with your own friends and promoting your activities - it's a social network, after all! You can also integrate with wider Triratna activities - eg there's a Triratna Page there with 1,000+ 'fans' at www.facebook.com/triratnabuddhistcommunity . Most Triratna retreat centres have Facebook pages, and many Centres.
- * please bear in mind GDPR legislation that came into effect in 2018. If you google 'GDPR in a nutshell' you'll find plenty of info. Essentially we have to respect people's privacy and have their permission to store their contact details. Email newsletters need to have an opt-out facility etc

Once you've set something up, tell everyone and make use of it! Little but often is best - but make sure you have something significant to say each time, and don't post so much you annoy people.

Website

It's easy to create a webpage for your group. At a bare minimum you'll need three things -

1. a host (please use thebuddhistcentre.com - no longer free but good to support them and they know what they are doing)



2. a domain name eg. PontefractBuddhism.org - again thebuddhistcentre.com can advise - there is a small annual fee for this
3. your content - your actual text, images, timetable, etc.

Write to Candradasa (candradasa@thebuddhistcentre.com).

If you just want to use thebuddhistcentre for a space, rather than a stand-alone website the URL will be automatically provided and be something like www.thebuddhistcentre.com/yourtown; if you use another host then you will probably need to register your own using a company like domain monster (www.domainmonster.com).

If you want to take your website further, some useful (though slightly dated) articles by Satyadarshin [here](#): writing 'web-friendly' text, designing a website, search engine optimisation, linking to other websites, and more.

Sangha-building

Running a group *means* building up a Sangha, at least to some extent. These include -

- encouraging people to 'get involved'
- building up friendships
- keeping in touch with people who don't come regularly
- Introducing people to the wider Triratna Buddhist Community

Encouraging people to 'get involved' includes things as simple (and important) as making the tea, clearing up afterwards, bringing things for the shrine; contributing dana; putting up posters; and helping lead the class when you are away.

Building up friendships

What happens in the class has to 'spill out' into friendships between you and people in the group, and among them. It's important to build in time for this to the evening's meeting schedule, and look for other opportunities, eg -

- Invite people over for supper before the class
- Social events eg walks, concerts...
- Making time for it in your weekly schedule

Special occasions

The weekly class is likely to be the backbone of your programme, but there's a lot to be said for organising occasional special events - social and spiritual. Festivals, Film nights, day/weekend retreats, expeditions - whatever you like. They give people opportunities to come together and get to know one another in a different way, take responsibility, suggest ideas and make them happen...

Stickability

In general you're looking for ways to help people 'stick' to you and what you're doing. That leads into the whole territory of marketing tactics and strategic vision, not all of which we'd consider ethical! However there's a lot of valuable experience out there which we can judiciously draw on.



Keeping in touch with people who don't come regularly

Once you've been going for a while, most likely at best only half your 'regulars' will come each week. You'll want some way to keep in touch with everyone, reminding them what's on and making it clear they are welcome to come back any time. See above ("Building your contacts list") for some ideas on the technical side of keeping in touch.

Introducing people to the wider Triratna Buddhist Community

It's hard for people in a small local group to realise they are part of an international Buddhist movement. But if they *do* get it, it's very inspiring. Some ideas to help this along are -

- Tell stories of people, places, Bhante, our history...
- Seduce people into visiting you. Visiting Order Members can be invaluable - they are such tangible proof that the Sangha is bigger and more diverse than little old you...
- Show Triratna videos - you could start here: <https://vimeo.com/clearvisiontrust>
- Encourage people to visit the nearest big Triratna Centre. Make it a day's 'outing' for your group.
- Encourage people to go on retreat. Apart from anything else this will really deepen their practice... GoingonRetreat.com is a great resource...
- Participate in collective events like Urban Retreats, 6-week meditation challenge, events at Adhithana etc
- Let people know of the many Triratna Dharma resources that exist - [FreeBuddhistAudio](#); [ClearVision](#); [Triratna News](#); [Windhorse Publications](#); [Bhante's on-line books](#)... The more you can do to reveal something of the breadth and depth of the Order the better - that will also help defuse projections.

Safeguarding

As part of Sangha-building, it is essential to create a culture where people feel safe, especially more vulnerable people. Please do read and implement the advice given by our [Safeguarding Team](#).

Retreats

Day or weekend retreats are a great way to take the group - and their practice - deeper. A retreat takes energy to organise, attract bookings, and lead - but it'll pay off.

An easy option might be to book one of our Retreat centres for one of their spare weekends. Failing that you'll have to find your own place - and have the added jobs of shopping, creating a shrine, etc.

Integrating with the wider Triratna Buddhist Community

When you're reasonably sure the group is going to keep going, please do let the rest of Triratna know about it!. Specifically you can -

- Add yourself to the Triratna Address List and our main listings at thebuddhistcentre.com/contact (contact Development Team to arrange this)
- Celebrate your achievements in Shabda!

You might also want to consider participating in the Groups and Pioneers meetings which take place twice-a-year at Adhithana. Get in touch if you're interested.



Money and fund-raising

There are various ways of crowd-funding these days in order to raise money for particular projects. For example, in the UK, crowdfunder.co.uk

It is certainly essential to 'train' your Sangha in the attitude of dana from the very start and create a sense of a shared project where they are not just 'consumers' but are involved and contributing to the community.

where to find information

Triratna Resources on thebuddhistcentre.com

thebuddhistcentre.com/resources is maintained primarily by the Development Team and aims to be a repository for many aspects of running an Triratna Centre - and group. If there's things missing please contact info@triratnadevelopment.org and we'll try to help.

The default view is just a long list of posts, the newest at the top. But the best way to find things is to click on the '**archive of all resources**' tab (from the menu below the colourful header image) and then use the excellent search facility.

Details about Mitra System, ceremony, etc

You'll find an introduction to the Mitra system, including some suggestions for how to do a Mitra Ceremony, [here](#) (it's Order only) and a '[What is a Mitra](#)' booklet pdf

Some points from the Mitra Convenors:

- We'd like to encourage groups to contact the mitra convenors at their nearest centre. Maybe the MCs could visit and talk about becoming a mitra.
- Once MCs have this connection they could invite people in the group to events at their Centre. This would enable people in the group to connect up with a wider sangha, including other Order Members.
- We would prefer it if groups didn't make people mitras without involving a MC in some way; the MCs are trying to ensure a similar approach is taken by different centres (with room for flexibility depending on conditions) and we'd like to invite groups to share in this common approach. It will mean that mitras in groups are more closely part of the wider mitra sangha.
- If there are not enough people in the group for following the Dharma Training Programme for Mitras to be possible, or if people's circumstances prevent attendance, Suvarnagarbha (see below) offers worldwide English-language online study, on a dana basis.

Contact us if you need help: info@triratnadevelopment.org



What to do if someone requests ordination

If someone wants to ask for ordination they can make this request to any Order Member - however it is only formally logged and responded to once the requestee has written to Padmaloka or Tiratanaloka. You should therefore ask them to do this as soon as possible. The new requestee will then receive info from Padmaloka or Tiratanaloka. Please note: this is in UK only and may be different in European countries.

Triratna Address lists (and contact details for other group leaders)

Because of GDPR legislation, we have to be more careful about sharing people's personal contact details.

There is a general ['find us'](#) on thebuddhistcentre.com but it simply links to websites of those Centres. The Development Team hold lists for Centres, Chairs, etc which we don't generally share but you can always ask, especially for just one or two people's contact details: info@triratnadevelopment.org

Dharma

Triratna has an embarrassment of riches when it comes to Dharma material, both for teachers and students. This aims to show you where to look for the main collections.

For people in outlying regions keen to do Dharma study (including mitra study) Suvarnagarbha in Sheffield offers worldwide English-language study online and by phone on a dana basis - email suvarnagarbha@hotmail.co.uk

Meditation and Dharma course material

There's a rich collection of Dharma and Meditation teaching material available at <https://thebuddhistcentre.com/resources> - as mentioned earlier, use the 'archive of all resources' option and search...There's also basic texts, pujas, dedication ceremony etc

Other meditation resources

The Triratna meditation practices are outlined at thebuddhistcentre.com/text/why-meditate
A similar and more comprehensive introduction is on Wildmind wildmind.org.

Mitra Study (including teachers' notes)

The 'Dharma Training Course for Mitras' is here: thebuddhistcentre.com/mitra

The course runs over four years with the first year being a five-part Foundation Year suitable for newcomers; years 2-4 are the Mitra course proper with 21 modules.

The Course is also available as a set of four rather handsome hardback books, available at cost price via 'print-on-demand' from lulu.com/spotlight/thebuddhistcentre .



Bhante's lectures and seminars

These are all available on-line courtesy of FreeBuddhistAudio, at freebuddhistaudio.com/texts - don't forget to encourage anyone using the site to make a donation!

Bhante's Lectures are also available in two volumes via lulu at www.lulu.com/spotlight/thebuddhistcentre

Bhante's books

Bhante's books should be available via your Centre bookshop (actually, any bookshop); or the Windhorse Publications website windhorsepublications.com, or on-line via Bhante's website at sangharakshita.org/online_books.html

other

For a general introduction to Triratna for newcomers, have a browse here:

thebuddhistcentre.com/text/what-triratna-buddhist-community

Criticism of Triratna, the 'FWBO Files' etc

Of course Triratna has its critics and various documents online, periodic newspaper articles and a couple of TV programmes continue to upset people new to Triratna - especially if they stumble across them unexpectedly. This will often be after they have visited us, had a positive experience, and decided to find out more about us via the internet - and they discover the FWBO Files! For this reason, it's best if at all possible to take the initiative and forewarn people, as well as, of course, having clear, committed safeguarding practices in place.

For a brief overview, see thebuddhistcentre.com/text/safeguarding-triratna and

thebuddhistcentre.com/news/responding-triratna-controversy and in more

depth here: thebuddhistcentre.com/controversy

