**Ideas on Consensus as Practice in Council Meetings**

In June 2012, Mokshini put together a document entitled `Working Consensually'.  This was a detailed outline of how to work together as Trustees on the basis of consensus.

This much briefer paper is to provide a starting point for a discussion on how to put this into effect, quite practically.

What does consensus mean for us as Trustees within the Triratna Buddhist Order?

We could see our efforts at consensus as a practice; it's how we relate to each other when needing to make decisions as a group of Order members. Perhaps it could be seen as one of the Dharma Doors to Non Duality! It's a middle way between the extremes of relating to each other as group members exerting pressure, or feeling pressurised, to conform to someone's opinion, and at the other extreme, clinging on to one's own particular view, refusing to hear or entertain other views. As was pointed out in the first paper, it does not mean we cannot act if one person decides to stay outside the emerging agreement. There's plenty of scope for working with our likes and dislikes, and our attachments and views.

Working on the basis of consensus means: we seek full agreement from all concerned, and in the process be prepared to settle for `overwhelming agreement' that goes as far as possible to meet the interests of everyone.

I like the definition of consensus from [www.businessdictionary.com](http://www.businessdictionary.com/) :

Middle [ground](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/ground.html) in [decision making](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/decision-making.html), between total assent and total disagreement. Consensus depends on [participants](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/participant.html) having [shared values](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/shared-values.html) and [goals](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/goal.html), and on having broad [agreement](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/agreement.html) on specific [issues](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/issue.html) and overall direction. Consensus implies that everyone accepts and supports the [decision](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/decision.html), and understands the reasons for [making](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/maker.html) it.

Time needs to be given to clarify that we do indeed have shared values and goals as Trustees. How much can be taken for granted? Our Vision day showed, I thought, that broadly we do all have overall shared goals of wishing to communicate the Dharma and provide a place for practice, but that our approaches of how to do this differ.

There were many stages to achieving consensus outlined in the last paper.  Here is a shorter and simplified list of steps we could consider taking.

1. Outline the main points for discussion including possible differing points of view

How much time we will give to the discussion. How many meetings. When a decision is needed by.

   How we will proceed. Who is to be involved in making the decision

2. Decide on who is chairing/facilitating the discussion

   What we want to minute/record: steps in the decision or just the final action point?

   Do we need to consult others, outside the Council for further info etc.

3. Allot time, then give everyone `a fair opportunity' to express their point of view. Practise `listening' to each other, especially if there are differing opinions. If the estimated times on the agenda aren't long enough we could

a) collectively agree how much time to give this listening stage

b) amend timings, moving other items to later, or onto another meeting so people have time to speak

c) take responsibility for how much we need to put forward our point of view

d) postpone item to another meeting where it can be given a longer slot as needed

4. Ask: `Can anyone propose a way of proceeding that meets all the interests we have heard expressed so far?' Someone frames the proposal (Chair or person who brought item to meeting), having listened to all the views. Any improvements to the proposal?

5. Check everyone has been heard? Ask can we all support the decision? Be conscious about agreeing, not making assumptions even if general atmosphere is positive.

If there's not full support, can person not in agreement suggest what would make it more acceptable to them, whilst continuing to make it acceptable to others? If a differing view, decide on time to give exploring their views further.

If unresolved after this set time, ask if they are willing to go along with the proposal, even if they don't necessarily fully agree with it. If they still disagree, a decision may still need to be made. Minutes should show if anyone abstained from the decision. (Follow up may need to happen outside the meeting if the person feels out of harmony with others).

It might be that more time outside the meeting needs to be given to discussing topic, and item can be brought to a later meeting, if decision can be delayed.

6. Make sure agreements are recorded: record what was discussed and decided, including steps in the process (not necessarily just the action points) so that members can see the thread of our thinking and discussion.

8. Be clear who is going to take this forward. Action point.

*Padmavajri June 13*