

Week 6 – The Sangha

Buddhism Level 2 – What makes you a Buddhist?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Realise the mini Sangha that's been formed in the group, and appreciate its benefits

Understand some of the ways that Sangha & spiritual friendship are important to Dharma practice

Realise that there are practical ways to GFR to the Sangha

MEDITATION

Do metta for group, one-by-one

REVIEW OF LAST WEEK

Exercise: discuss home practice

IMPORTANCE OF THE SANGHA

Exercise - brainstorm

Discuss: What have you got out of having other people on the course with you?

Plenary

- Variety of different views
- Human element – friendship – spiritual friendship
- Opportunity to talk things through
- Don't feel alone with difficulties

Draw out difference in having people with similar values to discuss with

What is Sangha?

Many levels:

- Cambridge Sangha (just FWBO) or all traditions
- Broader FWBO Sangha – national / international
- Any Buddhist community
- Specifically theravadin sense: the monastic sangha.
- Ultimate sense: all beings of past & present who've attained irreversible spiritual insight. – they are the only ones we can really GFR to – can't ultimately rely on any communities or traditions. Can't rely on FWBO, but hope it's helpful
- Most simply: collection of all those who're GFR to 3 Jewels – common denominator

Each sangha has its own flavour – different FWBO centres have own flavour, but within FWBO particular flavour wrt other Buddhist movements. In particular, great emphasis on Sangha, on peer friendship, on organic networks rather than formal teacher-disciple relationships.

Benefits of Sangha – brainstorm up on board & add own

Guard against Dharma practice becoming too dry, abstract, isolated – brings in the human element of relatedness.

Spiritual friendship is a vital practice and support on the path.

I do not see any other single condition by means of which the Noble Eightfold Path can arise and can be perfected except by this spiritual friendship AN1.72

Support us emotionally, while knowing the kind of support that's needed.

Give us encouragement when we're feeling out of touch with faith or enthusiasm.

Help develop positive emotions – can't really develop friendliness without people to be friendly to. Easier to be open to people you can trust.

Prevent us getting too blind to our own habits – importance of giving each other feedback to keep us on the middle way. Reflect back to ourselves, help us know ourselves better

Choose to be influenced by people you respect & with whom share values & common commitment. Bring out the best in us.

HOW DO YOU GFR TO THE SANGHA?

Try to create Sangha. It doesn't happen by itself.

Value it, put energy into it.

Be open to Spiritual friends

"Use it or lose it"

Befriend people in the Sangha, especially new people coming through

JOINING SANGHA

Trad Theravadin circles, Sangha is monks – lay person's Sangha practice is to feed them & pay respects.

In Buddha's time, more overlap: Enlightened lay followers

Sangharakshita took things back to basics: removed distinction between monk & lay, replaced it with criterion of commitment, or GFR to 3J:

Commitment is primary, lifestyle secondary

If you want to make that commitment, you can join

Provisional commitment -> mitra

If want to place 3J at centre of life, fully committed, then join WBO

It's not just for other people!

PERSONAL INPUT ON SANGHA

Two team members talk of their experience of Sangha

Exercise

How important to you is the Sangha aspect of Buddhism?

Of the three Jewels, which do you find most inspiring or important?

FINAL WORDS

Module summary

Week 1: Faith / sraddha

Not blind, there's grounds for faith; looked at lots of quotes to talk about eg. relationship to doubt

Week 2: Going for Refuge:

existential approach to why we GFR; what refuges work better than others; 3 J as best refuges to a Buddhist so commit to placing them nearer to centre of life mandala – drew our own GFR mandala

Week 3: Enlightenment:

Looked at GFR to Buddha as having qualities of Enlt as values we hold to and move towards; looked poetically & in terms of 5 skandhas

Week 4: Dharma as truth teaching:

Buddha trying to express his view – finger pointing to moon; parable of raft; attitudes that are helpful; metaphysically reticent; 2nd noble truth; being realistic

Week 5: Dharma as method

Looked at toolkit of practices; broadly under 3fold path; need to find ways to practice in our life, become Dharma chef;

Week 6: Sangha

Different meanings of Sangha; the supportive value of Sangha; need to put energy into it to keep it alive; possibilities of joining FWBO Sangha, and the distinctions from bhikkhu Sangha.

Dana

Housekeeping for next module

HOME PRACTICE

Find some way of speaking with someone about your spiritual / developmental aspirations, or any concerns / difficulties you're having. Try to talk about the place that Buddhism / Buddhist Centre takes in your life at the moment. You may have to make a date with a friend, someone on the course, someone you meet in the Centre; a sympathetic friend etc. Notice how you feel about having the conversation.

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

Introducing Buddhism, Chris Pauling, chapter 3 (brief outline)

A Concise History of Buddhism, Andrew Skilton (more in-depth & scholastic)

Introducing the FWBO, Vishvapani