

Triratna Dharma Training Course for Mitras

Year Two

Module 1: Vision and Transformation – The Buddha’s Eightfold Path

Introduction

This module of the Dharma Training Course focuses on one of the most widely known formulations of the spiritual path found within Buddhism. In view of the fundamental and comprehensive content of its teachings, it provides a classic introduction to Buddhist thought and practice. Sangharakshita gave these lectures in 1968, in the very earliest days of the FWBO, and as such, they have had a significant impact on the development of the Movement. Whilst the Triratna Buddhist Community has grown significantly in the last 40 years, the key points in these lectures remain as relevant now as they were then. Where important developments have taken place e.g. in the area of Right Livelihood, I have added some references for further reading below.

Primary study material

The primary study material for this term – i.e. the core material that it is essential to read before your group meetings – is the series of lectures by Sangharakshita published in book-form as *‘The Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path’* (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579818). It comprises the following lectures:

1. The Nature of Existence: Perfect Vision
2. Reason and Emotion in the Spiritual Life: Perfect Emotion
3. The Ideal of Human Communication: Perfect Speech
4. The Principles of Ethics: Perfect Action
5. The Ideal Society: Perfect Livelihood
6. The Conscious Evolution of Man; Perfect Effort
7. Levels of Awareness: Perfect Awareness
8. The Higher Consciousness: Perfect Samādhi

‘The Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path (book)’:

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=722>

Mp3 audio recordings of the original lectures are available from *Free Buddhist Audio.com*. If you have the time, I would recommend listening to the lectures – something of Sangharakshita’s humour, energy and inspiration come across through listening to him in a way that you just can’t get from books.

'The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path' (audio):

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X07>

Background reading

The teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path appears in what is purportedly the Buddha's very first teaching – the *'Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta'* from the *Samyutta Nikāya* of the Pali Canon. After his Enlightenment, the Buddha wondered whom he might be able to communicate his new vision to and recalled his five former companions in ascetic practice. Finding them at the Deer Park at Sarnath, he gave them the following teaching on the Middle Way (here described as an ethical middle way between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-torment), the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

‘Thus I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Benares in the Deer Park at Isipatana (the Resort of Seers). There he addressed the bhikkhus of the group of five.

“Bhikkhus, these two extremes ought not to be cultivated by one gone forth from the house-life. What are the two? There is devotion to indulgence of pleasure in the objects of sensual desire, which is inferior, low, vulgar, ignoble, and leads to no good; and there is devotion to self-torment, which is painful, ignoble and leads to no good.

“The middle way discovered by a Perfect One avoids both these extremes; it gives vision, it gives knowledge, and it leads to peace, to direct acquaintance, to discovery, to nibbāna. And what is that middle way? It is simply the noble eightfold path, that is to say, right view, right intention; right speech, right action, right livelihood; right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. That is the middle way discovered by a Perfect One, which gives vision, which gives knowledge, and which leads to peace, to direct acquaintance, to discovery, to nibbāna.

“Suffering, as a noble truth, is this: Birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the loathed is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering — in short, suffering is the five categories of clinging objects.

“The origin of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is the craving that produces renewal of being accompanied by enjoyment and lust, and enjoying this and that; in other words, craving for sensual desires, craving for being, craving for non-being.

“Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is remainder-less fading and ceasing, giving up, relinquishing, letting go and rejecting, of that same craving.

“The way leading to cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is simply the noble eightfold path, that is to say, right view, right intention; right speech, right action, right livelihood; right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

“‘Suffering, as a noble truth’, is this. Such was the vision, the knowledge, the understanding, the finding, the light, that arose in regard to ideas not heard by me before. ‘This suffering, as a noble truth, can be diagnosed.’ Such was the vision, the knowledge, the understanding, the finding, the light, that arose in regard to ideas not heard by me before. ‘This suffering, as a noble truth, has been diagnosed.’ Such was the vision, the knowledge, the understanding, the finding, the light, that arose in regard to ideas not heard by me before.

“‘The origin of suffering, as a noble truth, is this.’ Such was the vision... ‘This origin of suffering, as a noble truth, can be abandoned.’ Such was the vision... ‘This origin of suffering, as a noble truth, has been abandoned.’ Such was the vision... in regard to ideas not heard by me before.

“‘Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this.’ Such was the vision... ‘This cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, can be verified.’ Such was the vision... ‘This cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, has been verified.’ Such was the vision... in regard to ideas not heard by me before.

“‘The way leading to cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this.’ Such was the vision... ‘This way leading to cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, can be developed.’ Such was the vision... ‘This way leading to the cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, has been developed.’ Such was the vision... in regard to ideas not heard by me before.

“‘As long as my knowing and seeing how things are, was not quite purified in these twelve aspects, in these three phases of each of the four noble truths, I did not claim in the world with its gods, its Māras and high divinities, in this generation with its monks and brahmins, with its princes and men to have discovered the full Awakening that is supreme. But as soon as my knowing and seeing how things are, was quite purified in these twelve aspects, in these three phases of each of the four noble truths, then I claimed in the world with its gods, its Māras and high divinities, in this generation with its monks and brahmins, its princes and men to have discovered the full Awakening that is supreme. Knowing and seeing arose in me thus: ‘My heart’s deliverance is unassailable. This is the last birth. Now there is no renewal of being.’”

That is what the Blessed One said. The bhikkhus of the group of five were glad, and they approved his words.

Now during this utterance, there arose in the venerable Kondañña the spotless, immaculate vision of the True Idea: “Whatever is subject to arising is all subject to cessation.”

When the Wheel of Truth had thus been set rolling by the Blessed One the earth gods raised the cry: “At Benares, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, the matchless Wheel of truth has been set rolling by the Blessed One, not to be stopped by monk or divine or god or death-angel or high divinity or anyone in the world.”

On hearing the earth-gods’ cry, all the gods in turn in the six paradises of the sensual sphere took up the cry till it reached beyond the Retinue of High Divinity in the sphere of pure form. And so indeed in that hour, at that moment, the cry soared up to the World of High Divinity, and this ten thousand-fold world-element shook and rocked and quaked, and a great measureless radiance surpassing the very nature of the gods was displayed in the world.

Then the Blessed One uttered the exclamation: “Kondañña knows! Kondañña knows!” and that is how that venerable one acquired the name, Añña-Kondañña — Kondañña who knows.’

(Translated by Nanamoli Thera)

Available from:

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.nymo.html>

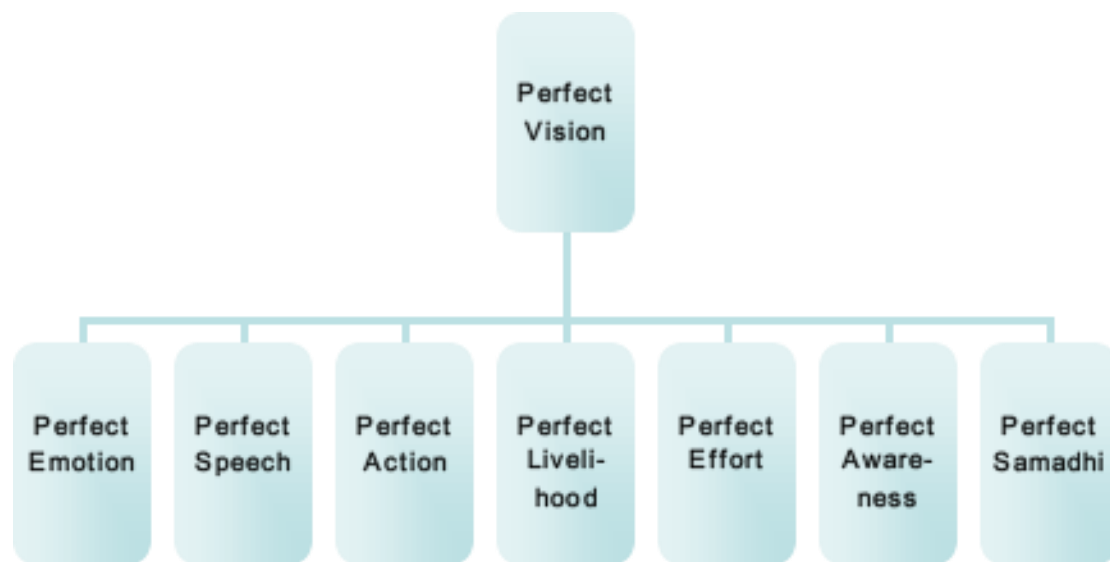
Different ways of looking at the Noble Eightfold Path

The limbs of the Eightfold Path can be categorised in different ways. According to the most basic division of the Path, they can be seen as follows:

- *Ethics* – comprises the limbs of *Speech*, *Action* and *Livelihood*.
- *Meditation* – comprises the limbs of *Effort*, *Mindfulness* and *Samādhi*.
- *Wisdom* – comprises the limbs of *Vision* and *Emotion*.

There is also the division between the Path of Vision and the Path of Transformation as follows:

- *Path of Vision* = the limb of *Vision*
- *Path of Transformation* = the other seven limbs of *Emotion*, *Speech*, *Action*, *Livelihood*, *Effort*, *Mindfulness* and *Samādhi*.



The distinction between the mundane and transcendental versions of the path leads to what amounts to a 16-fold version of the path:

The Mundane Path

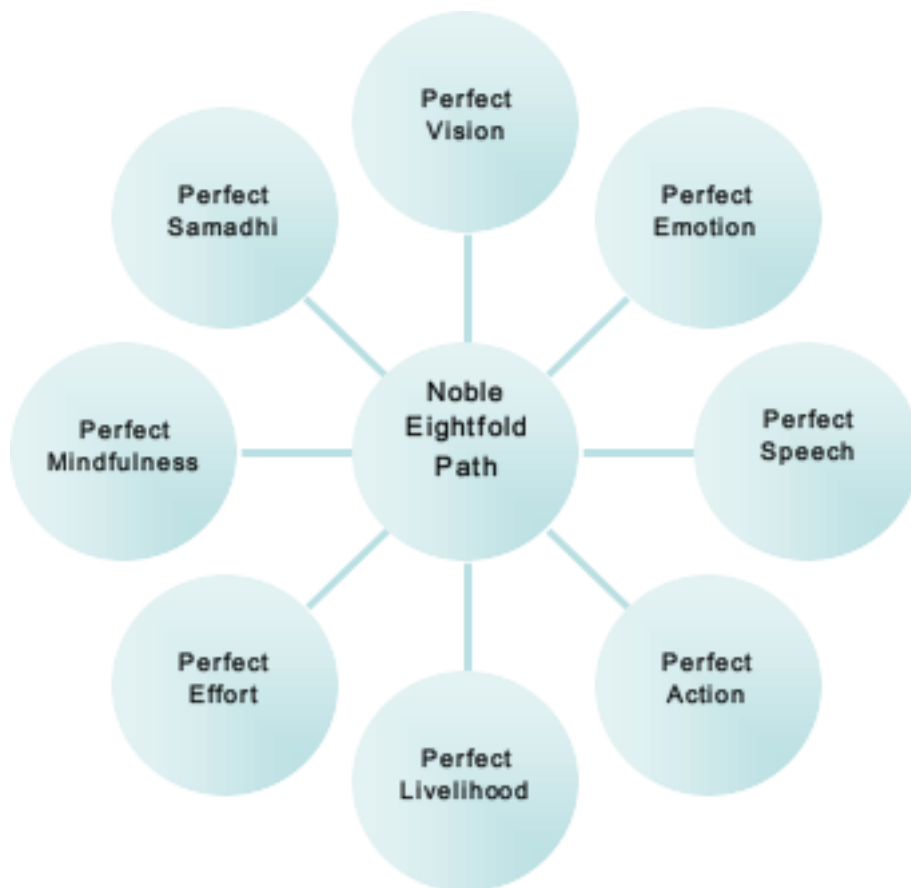
1. Right Vision
2. Right Emotion
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort

7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

The Transcendental Path

9. Perfect Vision
10. Perfect Emotion
11. Perfect Speech
12. Perfect Action
13. Perfect Livelihood
14. Perfect Effort
15. Perfect Mindfulness
16. Perfect Samādhi

There is also the path in terms of an image. Often it is seen as a series of steps, but it can equally be seen as the petals of a lotus or the spokes of a wheel.



8. Perfect Samādhi
7. Perfect Mindfulness
6. Perfect Effort
5. Perfect Livelihood
4. Perfect Action
3. Perfect Speech
2. Perfect Emotion
1. Perfect Vision

Study guide and questions

Each of the units for this module is relatively concise but even so, its spiritual scope is extensive, introducing a wide range of teachings from the Buddhist tradition. It does build on many of the themes found in the Foundation Year of the course and will introduce others that will be explored later in the course. Particular links to other parts of the course are made clear in the introductions to each unit and in the ‘Taking it Further’ section below.

As usual, make sure you set some time aside to prepare the material before your group meeting and it would be helpful if you can take some notes as you work your way through the primary material. This helps both with absorbing the material (avoiding any tendency to ‘go in one ear and out the other’!) and gives you a summary to refer to in the group and in the future.

The following questions are here to help you engage with the various topics covered in this module. They highlight some of the key themes in each chapter, and particularly focus on things that aren’t raised elsewhere in the course. If you have time, you may wish to write some notes to one or more of the questions before attending your group or you may just wish to reflect on one or two of them through the week. If there is a topic that is not covered by the questions that you wish to discuss in the group then do of course raise that too.

Unit 1: Perfect Vision

Here, Sangharakshita introduces some of the key distinctions for the module as a whole i.e. that between ‘view’ and ‘vision’ and between the ‘path of vision’ and the ‘path of transformation’. Many of the symbols and ideas he refers to have already been touched upon in the Foundation Year, e.g. the *Wheel of Life*, the *Four Noble Truths*, *Karma and Rebirth* and the *Three Marks of Conditioned Existence*, but the teaching of the four *śūnyatās* may be new to you.

1. Sangharakshita translates the term ‘*samyak*’ (or ‘*sammā*’) as ‘perfect’ rather than ‘right’ throughout this series. Why does he do this and what are the implications of using this translation?
2. What are the conditions that Sangharakshita suggests can give rise to Perfect Vision? What has been your own experience of Perfect Vision and what conditions gave rise to that experience?
3. What is the difference between right view and perfect vision? What are the implications of mistaking right view for perfect vision?
4. Describe the relationship between the first limb of the Eightfold Path and the other seven limbs.
5. Give a brief account of the four levels of *śūnyatā*.
6. What practical relevance does it have as a teaching?

Unit 2: Perfect Emotion

Moving from the Path of Vision to the Path of Transformation, Sangharakshita here explores the importance of emotion in spiritual life, a recurring theme in his teaching of the Dharma.

1. ‘*For most of us the central problem of the spiritual life is to find emotional equivalents for our intellectual understandings.*’

To what extent does this relate to your own experience?
2. What is the relationship between perfect vision, perfect emotion and the subsequent stages of the path?
3. How can you transform your emotional life? Give some examples from your own experience.
4. Why are the emotions so important in spiritual life?
5. Why do you think renunciation is important in spiritual life? What have you given up since you started practising Buddhism?

6. Give an account of two of the following spiritual emotions: generosity, devotion, gratitude, mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekṣā.
7. How does the Sevenfold Pūjā help to develop perfect emotion? What is your experience of practising it?

Unit 3: Perfect Speech

The speech precept of truthfulness has already been explored in *Part 2, Week 5 of the Foundation Year* but here Sangharakshita also looks at the other three speech precepts – of affectionateness, helpfulness and harmony.

1. Why do you think speech is a limb of the 8-fold path?
2. Do you think it is ever appropriate to lie? If so, when?
3. Give some examples of times when you have found it difficult to tell the truth and when telling the truth has had a positive effect.
4. Is criticism ever appropriate? If so, in what circumstances?
5. How can silence function as a spiritual practice? Do you find periods of silence helpful in your life?
6. Identify some examples of useless speech. How might they be transformed?
7. How do the speech precepts apply to written communication and emails?
8. What is the difference between gossip and taking an interest in someone's life?

Unit 4: Perfect Action

Looking again at the whole area of ethics, this unit discerns the underlying principles of Buddhist ethics as well as touching on the five precepts and other Buddhist ethical codes.

1. What makes something an ethical issue (as opposed to a matter of personal preference)?
2. 'If you do something and it makes you feel good, then that thing is right, at least for you.' What is the problem with this view?
3. How would you distinguish Buddhist ethics from the ethics of Christianity? What is the criterion of Buddhist ethics?

4. Sangharakshita outlines three levels or motives for ethical practice – what are they and how do they differ?
5. Sketch out some practical suggestions as to how you can increase your ethical sensitivity.
6. How would you distinguish between conventional and natural morality?
7. What do the Bhikkhu- and Bodhisattva- samvara-śīlas represent?
8. What is total action?

Unit 5: Perfect Livelihood

In many ways, the area of livelihood has seen the most development in the Triratna Buddhist Community since Sangharakshita gave these lectures. You may want to explore some of these developments in your group. However, the basic principles that are outlined in this unit do still apply, whatever your own work situation, and it may be helpful to really explore this area of how your work affects your spiritual practice. The table below could give you one way of doing this.

1. What are the three principle aspects of our collective existence? Why might the Buddha have emphasised livelihood at the expense of the other two?
2. Why is the transformation of society important for the individual?
3. How might you exert a positive influence on the socio-political sphere?
4. What benefits may be gained from working with other Buddhists?
5. What could you do to practice right livelihood more fully?
6. Is ethical investment relevant to a practice of right livelihood?
7. Give an account of some contemporary examples of wrong livelihood. Why are they wrong?
8. If you find it helpful, make an assessment of your own current livelihood using the following table:

<p>Ethics</p> <p>What are the implications of your livelihood for your practice of ethics?</p> <p>Does it enable you to keep the precepts?</p> <p>Is there a positive vocational aspect to your livelihood?</p>	
<p>Meditation</p> <p>What effect does your livelihood have on your meditation practice?</p> <p>Does it leave you time for meditation on a regular basis?</p> <p>Does it leave you too stressed and busy to meditate effectively?</p> <p>Are you able to get on retreat regularly?</p>	
<p>Wisdom</p> <p>Does your livelihood provide any specific opportunities for reflection on the nature of things e.g. impermanence?</p>	
<p>Friendship</p> <p>What are the quality of your relationships at work?</p> <p>Are you able to make friendships with like-minded people at work?</p>	
<p>Financial Needs</p> <p>Does your livelihood meet your financial needs?</p> <p>Does it enable you to give money to Buddhist and other good causes?</p> <p>Do you invest your money ethically?</p>	

Unit 6: Perfect Effort

This unit draws attention to the key role of effort in our spiritual lives. In other parts of the tradition, it is talked about in terms of ‘*vīrya*’ or ‘energy in pursuit of the good’ (see *Unit 5 of the Bodhisattva Ideal module*) but here, the traditional list of the four right efforts is used. Sangharakshita also introduces the terminology of the lower and higher evolution – another theme that recurs in his teaching. The module in Year Four of the course on Evolutionary Buddhism will explore this in some depth but if you want to explore it here, do bring it up in your group.

1. Why is it important to ‘know yourself’? How can you achieve this?
2. Give some practical suggestions about how you might prevent unskillful states from arising.
3. Expound, in your own words, the four antidotes to the hindrances. Which of them have you found most helpful?
4. How does Going for Refuge function as an antidote to the hindrances?
5. Why is it valuable to cultivate the dhyānas?
6. Give some practical suggestions about how you might maintain skillful states of mind.
7. Is it possible to make too much effort?
8. How can you intensify your volition/will/effort?
9. What is laziness in the context of spiritual life?

Unit 7: Perfect Awareness

In *Part 2, Week 6 of the Foundation Year*, Vadanya has already introduced Sangharakshita’s teaching on the ‘Four Levels of Awareness’ (alongside the three key terms for mindfulness – *sati*, *sampajañña* and *appamāda*) but this remains a classic lecture and one of great spiritual relevance. Asked recently (November 2008) what his main spiritual practice was, Sangharakshita very clearly stated that it was mindfulness.

1. What are the qualities of mindfulness and what are their opposites?
2. How does continuity of purpose foster integration? Give some examples from your experience.
3. How can looking at art help us to become more aware of things?
4. How can you become more aware of others?

5. Give some practical suggestions about how you might become more self-aware.
6. What does it mean to be aware of reality?
7. How does Sangharakshita's account of the Four Dimensions of Awareness relate to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness found in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya?
8. Sangharakshita says that '*psychologically speaking, awareness is the most powerful transforming agent that we know.*'

To what extent is this borne out in your own experience? Give some examples of how awareness has changed your mental state.

Unit 8: Perfect Samādhi

Sangharakshita here explores the area of meditation using a three-fold formula (of *śamatha*, *samāpatti* and *samādhi*) derived from Zen and Mahayana tradition, which he came across through his teacher Yogi Chen. You may want to contrast it with the 'System of Meditation' outlined in *Part 3, Week 2 of the Foundation Year*.

1. What is the difference between perfect samādhi and right concentration? Why is this distinction so important?
2. What is śamatha meditation? What is its purpose?
3. What is vipaśyanā meditation? What is its purpose?
4. What is meant by the term samāpatti?
5. Give a brief description of the imageless samādhi. How is it related to impermanence?
6. Give a brief description of the directionless samādhi. How does it relate to dukkha?
7. Give a brief description of the voidness samādhi. How does it relate to 'not-self'?
8. What is the relationship between samādhi and prajñā?

Projects

As with all the modules of the Dharma Training Course, this module concludes with the opportunity to present a project to your group on a topic arising from the

material you have been studying. You may wish to take one of the Suggested Questions and explore it in more detail than you have been able to in the weekly meetings or you may want to take up a theme or question of your own. Whichever you choose, the purpose of the projects is to give you the opportunity to practise the second level of wisdom more fully i.e. the level of reflection or *cintā-mayī-prajñā*. It is also a good way to share something of your experience with the group.

Taking it Further

If you have felt inspired or moved to explore any of the themes in this series further, you may find the following resources helpful. They may also be helpful for your project.

Background resources for the whole series

Unit 1

- *'Where Buddhism Begins and Why it Begins There' in 'Crossing the Stream' (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766780) by Sangharakshita:*

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=354>

This is a great little essay touching on 'dukkha' as the basic spur to spiritual practice and contrasting that with other religions and philosophies.

Unit 2

- *'Ritual and Devotion in Buddhism' by Sangharakshita (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766780) has a much fuller exploration of the Sevenfold Pūjā:*

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=351>

- *An audio version of 'Ritual and Devotion in Buddhism' is available here:*

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X05>

- *The Dharma Training Course module 'Freedom of Heart' in Year Three is a practical exploration of the four brahmā-vihāras.*

Unit 3

- *'The Ten Pillars of Buddhism' by Sangharakshita (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579214) has a much fuller exploration of the four speech precepts:*

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=326>

- *An audio version of 'The Ten Pillars of Buddhism' is available here:*

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=161>

- *The 'Abhaya' or 'Abhayarajakumara Sutta' (Sutta 58) from the 'Majjhima Nikāya' (Wisdom Publications, ISBN 086171072X) explores the Buddha's views on appropriate speech:*

Buy the 'Majjhima Nikaya' from Wisdom Publications:

<http://tinyurl.com/4fkg5ee>

Unit 4

- 'The Ten Pillars of Buddhism' by Sangharakshita is very good on the background to Buddhist ethics. (See above.)

Unit 5

- 'Western Buddhist Review 1' – 'Going Forth and Citizenship' by Subhuti:

<http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol1/citizenship.html>

Explores how Buddhists can participate in the social and political spheres.

- 'Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition' by Subhuti (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766683):

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=377>

Chapter 9 is a fuller exploration of the 'New Society'.

- 'Transforming Work – An Experiment in Right Livelihood' by Padmasuri (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579524):

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=683>

Takes a detailed look at windhorse:evolution, the most developed of the Triratna team-based right livelihood businesses.

- You can also find various resources for Right Livelihood at:

<http://fwbo-centre-support.org/team-based-right-livelihood/>

- The Dharma Training Course Module on 'Applied Buddhist Ethics' in Year Three will explore many of the issues raised in this unit in greater detail.

Unit 6

- 'Meditation, the Buddhist Way of Tranquillity and Insight' by Kamalashila (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579052):

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=342>
(book)

http://kamalashila.co.uk/Meditation_Web/index.htm (free web version)

The appendix is very good for ways of working with the five hindrances and there is also a section on working in dhyāna in Chapter 8.

Unit 7

- *'Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta', 'Majjhima Nikāya', 10 (see above, Unit 3).*
- *'Living with Awareness' by Sangharakshita (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579389):*

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=682>

A full exploration of Buddhist teachings on mindfulness in the form of a commentary on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta.

- *'Satipaṭṭhāna – The Direct Path to Realization' by Analayo (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579540):*

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=681>

A detailed but very helpful commentary on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta.

- *The Dharma Training Course module 'The Way of Mindfulness' in Year Two is a practical exploration of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta.*

Unit 8

- *'Meditation, the Buddhist Way of Tranquillity and Insight' by Kamalashila (see above, Unit 6)*

A very good background for this Unit.

- *'The Three Jewels' by Sangharakshita (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579060):*

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=332>

Chapter 14 has more on the 3 *'samādhis'* (referred to there as the three *'vimokṣa-mukhas'* or 'doorways to liberation').