

Triratna Dharma Training Course for Mitras

Year Two

Module 5: What is the Sangha? – Exploring Spiritual Community

Introduction

This module aims to explore, in greater depth than the Foundation Year, the nature of the Sangha and how we can go for refuge to it. As is often the case, Sangharakshita has something distinctive to say about this fundamental aspect of Buddhism. His approach combines both an understanding of what the Buddhist tradition has to say about Sangha and an insight into what that might mean for Westerners in the modern day-and-age. After exploring the traditional forms of the Sangha, he considers what a group is, what a positive group is and what a ‘true individual’ might be. He also suggests a third order of consciousness above and beyond group and individual consciousness which arises when mature individuals operate in deep harmony with one another.

The module also explores the range of human relationships and gives much practical advice on how to deepen our experience of Sangha. There are sections on the role of a guru; the importance of friendship; and qualities such as fidelity and gratitude.

Primary study material

The primary study material for this term is the book by Sangharakshita, ‘*What is the Sangha?*’ (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579311):

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=494>

You will need to have a copy of this to use throughout the module and it will feature again in other parts of the course. The individual sections to be read are outlined for each unit below. Whilst there is not enough time in this module to study the whole book, I hope that you will find time to read it all as there are many other interesting topics contained within it.

Unit 1: Going for Refuge to the Sangha

Please read the 'Introduction' to ('Part 1' and 'Section 1') of Part 1 'The Sangha Jewel' i.e. pp. 9-22. This is a short section introducing the topic and placing the Sangha in its traditional context of 'Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels'.

1. On pages 15-16, Sangharakshita says that the Three Jewels come into being in a particular order and suggests that this is also how they have been adopted in the West. In what order did you become aware of the Three Jewels in your own life?
2. What relevance does the Buddha's advice to the Vajjians (pp. 18-19) have for your own participation in the Sangha?
3. *'The real significance of the deep individual-to-individual contact that Going for Refuge to the Sangha involves lies in a simple psychological fact: we get to know ourselves best in relation to other people'* (p.20).

To what extent is this your experience?

4. *'The heart of the Sangha is kalyāṇa mitratā Kalyāṇa mitratā is not half the spiritual life; it's the whole of it.'* (p. 19).

How do you respond to these statements?

5. *'There is no future for Buddhism without a truly united and committed spiritual community, dedicated to practising together.'* (p.22).

Do you agree with this statement? Why might it be true?

6. In practical terms, how do you go for refuge to the Sangha?

Unit 2: The Traditional Sangha and the History of the Spiritual Community

Please read *Sections 2 and 4* of Part 1, i.e. pp. 23-34 and 41-50. These sections paint a broad picture of the development of the Buddhist Sangha and of other spiritual communities through history.

1. The principle Buddhist festival dates that we celebrate within the Triratna Buddhist Community are Buddha Day (the full moon in May), Dharma Day (the full moon in July), Sangha Day (the full moon in November), Parinirvāṇa Day (15th February) and Padmasambhava Day (usually in September or October).

Have you made a connection with celebrating these Buddhist festivals? If you wanted to celebrate these festivals, how could you contribute to them?

2. *'It is very much a feature of modern Buddhist life that one tries to find ways of being a full-time practitioner whatever one's lifestyle. But lifestyle does make a difference.'* (p.24).

Do you think being a full-time Buddhist practitioner living 'in the world' can be as effective as a full-time monastic life? How does your lifestyle 'make a difference'?

3. *'Buddhism is essentially a spiritual community'* (p.47).

What would Buddhism be like without a Sangha?

4. *'It has to be said that the seeds of this degeneration were in Christianity from the beginning – as they are, perhaps, in all forms of monotheism.'* (p.48).

What might this statement mean?

5. What lessons can be learnt from Sangharakshita's brief sketch of the history of spiritual communities?

Unit 3: Individuality – the Essence of the Sangha

Please read *Section 3 of Part 1* and the *Introduction to Part 2*, i.e. pp. 35-40 and 87-93. (*Section 9 of Part 2* will be studied in the Year Four module on 'Evolutionary Buddhism').

Sangharakshita here introduces his key term of the 'True Individual'.

1. *'I have presented this idea that some people are radically more developed than others in rather stark terms, but it is absolutely fundamental to Buddhist thinking. It is vital that we appreciate how significant this distinction between the individual and the non-individual is.'* (p.35).

Why is it so vital to appreciate this distinction?

2. Do you have a sense of what the first three fetters mean in your own life? How do you work to overcome them?
3. What are the primary characteristics of the individual? Which of them strikes you most and why?

Unit 4: The Group, the Positive Group, and the Spiritual Community

Please read *Sections 5, 6 and 7 of Part 1*, i.e. pp.51-77. Following on from his exploration of individuality, Sangharakshita now explores the collective aspects of our life.

1. What are the primary characteristics of the group?
2. Which groups do you belong to?
3. What is the purpose of the spiritual community and how does it differ from the purpose of the group?
4. *'The spiritual community consists of individuals who are in deep personal contact with one another.'* (p.56).

To what extent do you feel that you have such deep personal contact in your own life?

5. What are your own associations with the term 'authority'? Where do they come from?
6. What is the difference between power and love/*mettā*?
7. What role does the positive group have in our spiritual development and how does it differ from the spiritual community?
8. Why do we need a new society and what is its role?
9. What is it that you really want from your association with the Triratna Buddhist Community?

Unit 5: Effective Going for Refuge and the Third Order of Consciousness

This unit explores the role of ordination in our Sangha as well as Sangharakshita's teaching on the 'third order of consciousness', which is not otherwise included in *'What is the Sangha'*?

Please read the following extract from Subhuti's book *'Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition'* (pp.116-128):

(Note that it has been slightly edited following our change of name to Triratna)

Ordination As the Expression of Effective Going for Refuge

'For Sangharakshita, 'ordination' is the formal expression of Effective Going for Refuge. Until Going for Refuge has become effective, there can be no ordination because there is, as yet, no effective commitment. One is not yet able to dedicate one's life to the Three Jewels. There is no need for further ordinations after Effective Going for Refuge because the act of Going for Refuge contains within it

all aspects of the spiritual path. There is no need for the Bodhisattva ordination because Going for Refuge has an altruistic dimension implicit within it. If one is actually Going for Refuge there must be a deepening element of concern for others. There is no need for Tantric initiation because Effective Going for Refuge is the activation of one's spiritual energies. If one puts one's Going for Refuge into effect, then, in time, all its different aspects and levels will be revealed.

In deepening one's Going for Refuge, one may wish to study and practise particular aspects of the path, take up new meditation practices, or observe a particular life-style, such as a monastic one. However, these do not require new ordinations. In effectively Going for Refuge one has already made the effective commitment to spiritual life that is now being worked out in detail. To undertake the visualisation of a particular Buddha or Bodhisattva does not need a new initiation. One has already made the crucial connection with all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in effectively Going for Refuge. A ceremony might mark becoming a monk but that ceremony would consist in taking certain vows, not a new ordination.

Ordination has two principal aspects: expression of Going for Refuge and acceptance into the spiritual community of those already Effectively Going for Refuge. The explicit expression of Going for Refuge is integral to spiritual growth. One needs to bring it into the public arena, to make it known, so that it can become part of one's own identity. It is not enough to 'know it in one's heart', it must be expressed to become effective. Ordination provides the opportunity for this expression. Sangharakshita is very critical of modern attitudes that devalue formal expression, since they reinforce an idea of the individual as isolated from all context. He upholds the basic psychological truth that, for the most part, until an inner change has been expressed it has not really taken place.

Ordination also marks one's acceptance into the effective spiritual community. One expresses one's commitment before a senior member of the sangha. He or she witnesses one's Going for Refuge and confirms that it coincides with his or her own Going for Refuge. In publicly witnessing one's Effective Going for Refuge, that senior member of the sangha acknowledges that one is now a member of the sangha too. Because he or she accepts that one is Going for Refuge effectively and sincerely, the sangha as a whole can do so too. From that point on, one enters into an entirely new relationship with all other members of the spiritual community.

According to Sangharakshita, entry into the spiritual community involves participation in a new mode of awareness, a special kind of consciousness common to, in a sense even shared by, a number of truly human individuals who follow the same spiritual disciplines and the same spiritual ideals, or who are engaged in the same creative activities. (*The Priceless Jewel*, p.155).

This 'collective' consciousness is very difficult to define, there being no suitable term in the English language, or indeed in any other European language, unless the Russian 'sobornost' comes near it to some extent. (*The Priceless Jewel*, p.155). It is, however, very different from the collective consciousness of the group and from individual consciousness, being a 'third order' of consciousness above and

beyond them both. Since this is one of Sangharakshita's most important teachings that has considerable practical consequence, we must explore it in more detail.

The Individual and the Group

We have already seen that Sangharakshita sees the total evolutionary process as consisting of two great phases: a Higher and a Lower. The fulcrum of evolution is the self-aware individual who stands at the summit of the Lower Evolution, as its final product, and at the threshold of the Higher, as its future subject. The subject of the Lower Evolution is the species, for individual organisms do not themselves evolve but simply participate in the evolution of the species to which they belong. The individual however 'is a whole species in himself' (*'Peace is a Fire'*, p.105) and may traverse the entire Higher Evolution by his own efforts. The human race as a whole straddles the Lower and Higher Evolutions. The great majority of its members are most of the time preoccupied with the concerns of the Lower Evolution; only a few seriously dedicate themselves to the task of further development as individuals. Although all human beings are capable of self-consciousness, most never develop it to any extent. Those who do not develop greater self-consciousness remain immersed in the human equivalent of the Lower Evolutionary species: the group. Sangharakshita has coined the terms 'statistical individuals' or 'social units' for individual human beings still immersed in the group, to distinguish them from the individual, in his special use of the term. (*'The True Individual, Mitrata 17'*, p.6).

In Sangharakshita's usage, the term 'group' acquires the specific meaning of the human Lower Evolutionary collectivity, bonded by ties that are 'usually more or less material'. (*'The True Individual, Mitrata 17'*, p.7). The group in the widest sense is made up of numerous greater or smaller groups, sometimes overlapping and sometimes antagonistic. Each of these groups is bound together by the ties of blood and kinship, of soil and culture, or of economic and political interest. They are united by mutual need, the need for security being an especially powerful and basic bonding agent.

'We can define the group as a collectivity organized for its own survival, in which the interests of the individual are subordinated to those of the collectivity. The group, or collectivity, is also a power-structure in which the ultimate sanction is force. The group did not just make survival possible for its members; in the case of humans, it made it possible for them to enjoy higher and higher levels of material prosperity and culture. It made possible the emergence of folk art and ethnic religion; it made possible the emergence of civilization. But there was a price to be paid by the proto-individual, and that price was conformity with the group. The individual was regarded as being essentially a member of the group. The individual had no existence separate from the group, or apart from the group. (*'New Currents in Western Buddhism'*, pp.21-22).

Groups tend to be conservative and conformist, granting their members little latitude for deviation from their norms, since deviation threatens their survival. The 'statistical individuals' who make up a group do not, even dare not, think for themselves. They derive their values and their outlook on life from the groups to

which they belong. If one is to evolve as an individual one must separate oneself from the group. One must learn to think and feel for oneself, accepting full responsibility for one's own life and future.

The Higher Evolution commences when the individual emerges from the group. The primary characteristic of the individual is self-awareness.

When one is aware of being aware, one is conscious of oneself as an individual, conscious of oneself as separate from the group. One is conscious of one's ability to think and feel and act differently from the group, even against the group. An individual of this type is a true individual. Such a person is not only self-aware but is emotionally positive, full of good will towards all living beings. He is also spontaneous and creative because he is not determined in his thinking, feeling, or acting, by previously existing mental, emotional, and psychological patterns – whether his own or those of other people. The true individual is also responsible, aware of his own needs, aware of others' needs, and prepared and willing to act accordingly. (*'New Currents in Western Buddhism'*, p.24).

Elsewhere Sangharakshita speaks of the individual as characterised by:

'emotional positivity, responsibility, intelligence, creativity, spontaneity, imagination, and insight'. (*'The Priceless Jewel'*, p.155)

Sangharakshita's use of the expression 'individual' has sometimes been misunderstood. One critic accused Sangharakshita and his new Buddhist movement of using 'modernist narratives' and of appearing to 'embrace enthusiastically the personalist understanding of religious significance which developed in liberal Protestantism'. (*P. A. Mellor, 'Protestant Buddhism', in Religion*, Lancaster University, January 1991, p.80.) Sangharakshita deals extensively with the assumptions underlying this interpretation in his *'The FWBO and Protestant Buddhism': An Affirmation and a Protest*. He makes it quite clear that he does not agree with 'modernist narratives of the self' or with 'the personalist understanding of religious significance':

'To me the idea that there exists a self which is pure, that this self is enslaved by socially imposed beliefs and customs, and that all one has to do in order to 'be oneself' and realize one's potentiality is to break free of them, is simply false.' (*'The FWBO and Protestant Buddhism'*, p.34).

The notion of 'the individual' must be seen within the overall context of his teaching and not interpreted in terms of modern individualism.

To make this point clear, Sangharakshita carefully distinguishes the individual from the individualist.

'The individualist still 'shares' the consciousness of the group.... The individualist has, we could say, a larger 'share' of this group consciousness

than other members of the group, and therefore asserts his or her own interests at the expense of others in the group. The individual is therefore alienated from the group in what we may call a vertical direction, while the individualist is alienated from the group horizontally. The individualist is a sort of broken-off fragment of the group, reacting, even rebelling, against the group; he is the group writ small, a sort of one-man group – which is really a contradiction in terms, like a one-man band. The individual, on the other hand, has passed, or begun to pass, beyond the group, beyond group consciousness; he is no longer limited by group consciousness.’ (*New Currents in Western Buddhism*, pp.40-41).

To be an individual does not simply mean being free of the group: it involves the attainment of definite qualities, among which are friendliness and goodwill towards others. Indeed, growth in individuality is far from growth in individualism – it is growth in selflessness. Moreover, the individual recognises the evolutionary necessity of the group. Without it, human beings would not survive to become individuals. Indeed, so long as the group allows those of its members who wish to become individuals to do so, the individual supports the group. Sangharakshita terms a group that does encourage transition to individuality, a ‘positive group’.

In using this language of the group and the individual, Sangharakshita is once again employing terms without precise equivalents in the canonical texts to communicate the essential meaning of terms that are certainly found in them. For instance, the basic teachings distinguish two kinds of self-conscious being.

‘Intelligent sentient beings are either āryas or anāryas. In the Scriptures the latter are generally referred to as pṛithagjanas (Pali, puthujjanas) or average men. As they outnumber the āryas by many millions to one the term bahujana or ‘many-folk’ may also be applied to them. An average man is one who, dominated by the delusion of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ identifies himself with, or imagines he possesses, form, feeling, conception, volition, and consciousness. He is the fool (bāla) described in the Dhammapada verse 62: “Sons are mine, wealth is mine”, thus the fool torments [himself]. Indeed he does not belong to himself. Whence sons? Whence wealth?’ Not knowing the true Dharma, he develops attachments to things which should be avoided. (*The Three Jewels*, p.151).

Clearly the pṛithagjana is the group member and the ārya corresponds to the true individual of Sangharakshita’s terminology. The term ‘individual’ itself in particular suggests a taking of personal responsibility for one’s own life, and especially for one’s own further development. The Buddha repeatedly stressed this quality and particularly refused to be seen as a personal saviour. He insisted that he ‘only showed the way’ and that the path could be followed by individual effort alone.

The Third Order of Consciousness

To become conscious of oneself as independent of the group is to become an individual. In Sangharakshita’s language, it is to move from the first to the second

order of consciousness: from group consciousness to individual consciousness. However, that is not the end of the matter. The individual experiences himself in relation to other individuals, and this experience brings into being the third order of consciousness: the 'collective' consciousness of the spiritual community. In participating in this order of consciousness there is no loss of individuality: 'It has no collective identity in which you lose your own, or in which you become submerged.' (*Human Enlightenment*, p.74). Each member is fully and completely aware of himself and there is no giving up of individual thoughts and feelings to the collective. Rather individual thoughts and feelings coincide, freely and spontaneously. Sharing a common commitment to the Three Jewels, members of the spiritual community base their lives upon the same ideals and values. They look at the world from the same perspective – although some, so to speak, view that same perspective from a greater altitude. The third order of consciousness is only 'collective' in this sense. There is, as Sangharakshita has it, a 'coincidence of wills'.

In so far as there is a coincidence of wills within the spiritual community, there is very great harmony and fellowship between its members. Each member finds others who understand and share his or her own most cherished aspirations. This is obviously deeply satisfying and inspiring. The more fully each goes for Refuge, the more profoundly he or she will share in this 'collective' consciousness. Ultimately, participation in the consciousness of the sangha is identical with the experience of the transcendental path. So close can one member of the spiritual community come to others that the notion of a separate self, isolated from all others, is dissolved. This 'third' kind of consciousness is so unfamiliar to us that we all too easily misunderstand it as loss of individuality and renewed immersion in the group. Sangharakshita has suggested the analogy of the orchestra, which 'is a spiritual community – at least while it is playing'. (*Peace is a Fire*, p.76). Each instrument in an orchestra has its own part to play but all are harmonised in the music they are together creating.

On a yet more lofty and imaginative plane, Sangharakshita has invoked the image of the archetypal Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, in his thousand-armed form, as embodying this third kind of consciousness. Avalokiteśvara symbolises transcendental compassion, a state that completely transcends all egoism. To draw out the active dimension of compassion, he is sometimes depicted with a thousand arms reaching out from his body in a great halo of compassionate activity, and eleven heads seeking out suffering in all the directions of space.

'The Order, and especially the unity of the Order, is symbolised by the figure of the eleven-headed and thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara. Each Order member represents one of those thousand arms and hands, joined on to the body of Avalokiteśvara. Each hand holds a single implement: a flower, wheel, vase, bow and arrow, and so on. Each instrument represents the particular activity of each individual Order member. They represent the particular talent or gift that each individual Order member makes to the Order, to the movement, to the world, as a whole. But all those symbols, all those implements, all those hands, all those arms, all those heads, are integrated into this one figure, the body of Avalokiteśvara, which is the Order.' (*Fifteen Points for New – and Old – Order Members*).

Each is separate and unique, yet each is joined to the one body of the Bodhisattva. Each is animated by the same Going for Refuge, of which the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara represents the altruistic dimension.

The ‘collective consciousness’ of the spiritual community naturally arises when individuals who go for Refuge are drawn together. It is a profound spiritual experience and therefore requires no practical justification. However, Sangharakshita points out that the sangha has important practical implications for the developing individual. In the first place, the spiritual community is likely to consist of individuals from many different backgrounds and of many different temperaments. Inevitably one will be thrust together with people with whom, in worldly terms, one might find it difficult to get on. Yet they are members of the same spiritual community: they too have Effectively Gone for Refuge. One cannot ignore them and one must learn to overcome the biases and prejudices of culture and character that divide one from them:

‘In this way, members of the spiritual community ... help one another to overcome purely subjective, purely personal limitations and learn how to relate on the basis of what is higher.’ (*Human Enlightenment*, p.81).

The spiritual community also provides a network of support and guidance to those struggling to become individuals and to follow the path of the Higher Evolution. That support is, in most cases, decisive: without it, few could complete the path. To understand this more clearly, we must look a little more closely at some of Sangharakshita’s ideas on the nature of the path. Until the point of Real Going for Refuge, spiritual life is always a struggle between the two fundamental tendencies of reality: the saṃsāric/cyclic/reactive and the nirvāṇic/spiral/creative. These tendencies are within one’s own heart and mind and are constantly battling for supremacy. Sangharakshita has spoken of these two trends as two ‘gravitational pulls’ that play upon the emerging individual. (*The Meaning of Conversion in Buddhism*, p.46) The gravitational pull of the Unconditioned draws us on to Enlightenment. It is that powerful attraction that leads us to go for Refuge. However, the Conditioned also exerts its gravitational pull.

Initially, one is almost entirely dominated by the very powerful attractions of the world and the group, which draw nascent individuality back into the undifferentiated darkness of the Lower Evolution. Though the Unconditioned does exert its influence at this stage, the pull of the Conditioned is much stronger. As one goes for Refuge more and more deeply, one gradually overcomes the pull of the Conditioned. At the point of Real Going for Refuge or Stream Entry, the pull of the Unconditioned, for the first time, outweighs the pull of the Conditioned. Attraction towards the Lower Evolution is still felt but the pull of the Higher is now dominant. In a sense, at this stage there is no longer any struggle between them – the struggle has been won.

The most difficult period of spiritual life, therefore, lies between Effective and Real Going for Refuge. Having effectively committed oneself, one must traverse the mundane path against the strong current sweeping one back towards the Conditioned. It is only a very rare few, the Buddha himself being the outstanding and perhaps only example, who can swim against that tide, alone and unaided. Not only is that pull

within one's own breast: its presence there is reinforced by its omnipresence in the world around one. The world is dominated by the group and the group is dominated by the gravitational pull of the Conditioned. One needs the help and support of others on the path: one needs the sangha. Members of the spiritual community 'support one another, encourage one another, inspire one another' (*Human Enlightenment*, p.81) in those times of crisis and despondency that inevitably come as they battle against the gravitational pull of the Conditioned. Since the spiritual community consists of individuals at different levels of development there is usually someone more developed than oneself, at least to some extent, who can help one forward on the path. At the very least, there are individuals on one's own level who can give one the sympathy and support that one needs. The help that members of the spiritual community give to one another enables them to continue Going for Refuge against the pull of the Conditioned.

When Sangharakshita started the Western Buddhist Order, he had had little personal experience of sangha throughout his years as a Buddhist. Not that he had been isolated or lonely in an ordinary sense: he had many friends and was clearly well liked by most people who met him. However, though he was in friendly contact with bhikkhus from many schools, he found no spiritual fellowship with them. On occasions of real spiritual need, in his early days in Kalimpong, he was alone. Later, he did experience deeper communication with one or two of his Tibetan teachers and in Lama Govinda he found a 'kindred spirit'. (*Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, p.269). However, he never participated in a broader spiritual community. Indeed, in 1978 he told a small group of disciples with whom he was on retreat that, for the first time, he felt himself to be a full participant in sangha. Before that, he had accepted that, though he might initiate a sangha for others, he would probably never experience himself, so to speak, as its beneficiary.

Although he had no real experience of sangha, Sangharakshita had plenty of experience of Buddhist organisations. Indeed, he had seen many problems and deficiencies in those organisations while he was in India – and he saw more when he came back to London. We have already explored his criticisms of the modern monastic sangha, but he found severe limitations in all the Buddhist groups with which he worked. A significant proportion of the governing body of the Maha Bodhi Society, the leading Buddhist organisation in India, was made up not of Buddhists but of Hindus, one member being notoriously anti-Buddhist. For this reason, Sangharakshita, while aiding the Society in its more constructive work, never became a member and made sure he was not identified with it. He found a similar situation in England, on his return in 1964.

The leading English Buddhist organisations were not run principally by Buddhists. They were societies, established on the model of learned societies, like the Pali Text Society, that had pioneered exploration of the wisdom of the East. Anyone could join who was prepared to pay a subscription, thereby acquiring the right to vote in the election of the governing body. Most members took little active interest in the organisation of these societies. However, some of those who did were people who enjoyed the modicum of power and prestige that went with being on the governing body. In India, in fact, the prestige could be quite considerable. Inevitably, under the control of such people, little could be achieved for Buddhism – although sometimes they managed to do some harm.

‘One thing was clear to me: Buddhist organizations could not be run by non-Buddhists. They could not be run simply by people who were good at running organizations, however efficient those people might be. They certainly could not be run by people who were after mere power or influence. Neither could they be run by those who had only an intellectual interest in Buddhism. It was clear that a Buddhist spiritual movement could be run only by those who were committed to Buddhism: those who were committed to the Dharma and actually practised the Buddha’s teachings. (Strange as it may seem, at the time this did not seem to be generally realized.)’ (*A Guide to the Buddhist Path*, p.109).

It was with this experience very much in mind that, in April 1968, he founded the Western Buddhist Order. (In India the Order is known as the ‘Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha’ – the ‘Buddhist Order of the Three Worlds’, though both are now known simply as the Triratna Buddhist Order). Its purpose was, he declared in a lecture given on the day of the first ordinations, to enable people to commit themselves more fully to the Buddhist way of life, to provide opportunities for spiritual fellowship, and to provide an ‘organizational’ base for the propagation of Buddhism. (*The History of My Going for Refuge*, p.88).

In many respects it represented a radical departure from Eastern Buddhism, although it was based firmly upon principles established by the Buddha himself. It was to be a genuine spiritual community, and not a society. One entered it by effectively Going for Refuge. Initially Sangharakshita had planned that there should be four grades of ordination: the upāsaka/upāsikā, mahā-upāsaka/upāsikā, Bodhisattva, and bhikkhu/bhikkhunī ordinations. However, as the Order unfolded, so did his thinking. He saw that further ordinations were neither necessary nor appropriate. There was really only one ordination in Buddhism and that consisted in the formal act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels and thereby acceptance into the spiritual community. The spiritual community comprised all those who Effectively went for Refuge, whatever their life-style and whatever the level of Going for Refuge they had attained beyond the Effective.

The first members of the Order were ordained as upāsakas (m.) and upāsikās (f.), the terms used in traditional Buddhism for lay Buddhists. However, Sangharakshita saw more and more clearly that Order members could not properly be classified as either lay or monastic, though some members of the Order lived at home with their families and some were leading what amounted to monastic lives. Before all else, members of the Order simply went for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The categories of lay and monastic were entirely secondary to that essential spiritual act. In 1982, Sangharakshita therefore suggested that the style of the ordination should be changed to ‘Dharmachari’ (m.) and ‘Dharmacharini’ (f.), which means ‘Dharma-farer’ or ‘practitioner of the Dharma’. (In India, because the Sanskrit word Dharma carries the connotation of Hindu caste duty, Order members are referred to by the Pali, Dhammacārī and Dhammacarini.) The term goes back to the Buddha himself, being found in the Dhammapada:

‘The Dhammacārī lives happily, (both) in this world and in the world beyond.’
(*Dhammapada*’ vv.168-169)

This title or ‘style’ thus emphasises both the Order’s discontinuity with the categories of modern oriental Buddhism and its continuity with the essential Buddhist tradition. Transcending the distinction between monks and laity, a distinction having its roots in ancient Indian society, allows members of the Western Buddhist Order a much broader range of life-styles. The greater flexibility of modern Western society permits a complete spectrum of social arrangements. Every way of life is possible, between the extremes of complete immersion in family life and immurement in a monastery. Thus, for instance, some men or women, while fully completing their family responsibilities, might spend some time in ‘semi-monastic’ residential communities. Others, while living most of the time a monastic life-style, might remain sexually active outside their residential community – that sexual activity, of course, being subjected always to ethical considerations. Many different life-styles are, even at this early stage, now represented within the Western Buddhist Order.

Unlike most traditional orders, the Western Buddhist Order consists of both men and women equally – although, as we shall see, men and women in the Order carry out many activities separately. Men and women

“receive the same ordination, engage in the same spiritual practices, and undertake the same organizational responsibilities.” (*Buddhism and the West*, p.19)

The Order also transcends the divisions of the modern Buddhist world and is not sectarian,

“in that it does not identify itself with any one form of Buddhism. Instead it rejoices in the riches of the whole Buddhist tradition and seeks to draw from those riches whatever is of value for its own practice of the Dharma.” (*Buddhism and the West*, p.19)

It crosses many national and cultural barriers, already having members from twenty-five or more nationalities. There are members from all over the developed world, as well as from India – where, at the time of writing, one quarter of the Order is to be found. This transcendence of so many of the divisions prevailing in the world, as well as those afflicting the world of Buddhism, is made possible by Sangharakshita’s insistence on the primacy of Going for Refuge.

“Let us do away with our divisions. Let us do away with the divisions between monastic and lay Buddhists, between men and women Buddhists, and between the followers of different sects and schools of Buddhism. Let us have an integrated Buddhism and an integrated Buddhist community. Let us base ourselves firmly and unmistakably upon our common Going for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.” (*Buddhism and the West*, p.20)

The Order founded by Sangharakshita does not fall in with the categories of oriental Buddhism, any more than it does with the religious categories of the West. It is therefore not easy to express what an Order member is. Order members are not bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, no more are they upāsakas and upāsikās. Members of the Order are not priests and have no sacerdotal role as intermediaries between the

transcendental and the world. They are not clergy in the sense of automatically having professional responsibility for the running of a Buddhist movement. They are simply individuals who are united in their common effective Going for Refuge. Indeed, the Order has no official organisational existence, being a purely spiritual body. Nonetheless, many, if not most, Order members do help with the running of the Triratna Buddhist Community)

The Triratna Buddhist Community is the organisational framework through which Order members teach the Dharma and provide the conditions for themselves and others to practise it. It is the bridge between the world and the Order, by means of which those who wish to may go for Refuge themselves. Groups of Order members in different locations establish various institutions, like public centres for the teaching of Buddhism, residential communities, and co-operative business ventures. These together form the basic matrix of the movement. Though most Order members choose to engage in this work, and many do so full-time, some have no formal or regular links with the institutions of Triratna. They might, for instance, be engaging in scholarly research or in artistic activities. There is no obligation on Order members to work for the Buddhist movement in any direct way. However, Effective Going for Refuge has an altruistic dimension integral to it. The activity of all Order members should, therefore, by definition be of benefit to others in some way.

Sangharakshita's vision of the Sangha as the expression of a third order of consciousness, arising out of the shared Going for Refuge of its members, is an important theme within the Triratna Buddhist Order. As we shall see, Sangharakshita has greatly stressed spiritual friendship and he has constantly emphasised the need for deeper and more effective communication between Order members. He has established the Order on very clear spiritual principles and has done what he can, through exhortation and example, to ensure they are expressed in practice. Sangharakshita has done everything he can to ensure that the Triratna Buddhist Order is not just an organisation but truly a Sangha, the embodiment of a new kind of consciousness. That new kind of consciousness, when it is fully realised, is transcendental. Indeed, Sangharakshita identifies it with the bodhicitta, that 'will to Enlightenment' that, in the Mahayana tradition, animates the Bodhisattva to work for the good of all beings.

"It seems that the bodhicitta is something more likely to arise within a community, within an order of people who are working to allow it to manifest.... It's much more like, in a way, the whole Order getting it – how, one just doesn't know at present, but it is certainly much more like that. It might be focused, as it were, in certain individuals, but it really concerns the Order, even the movement as a whole.... [The bodhicitta] is more likely to arise in the case of a number of people working hard together, and stimulating and sparking one another off, rather than in the solitary individual, in whose case it may tend to be more like an individual experience in the narrower sense. At the same time it's not a 'collective' thing in the sense of a product of mass psychology. We don't really have a word for it. It's more a matter of fellowship, or a manifestation of spiritual communion." (*The Endlessly Fascinating Cry*, p.27)

This is the aspiration that Sangharakshita has for the Order he has founded.

Questions

1. *'Sangharakshita is very critical of modern attitudes that devalue formal expression, since they reinforce an idea of the individual as isolated from all context.'*

What exactly is meant by 'the individual as isolated from all context'?

2. *'To me the idea that there exists a self which is pure, that this self is enslaved by socially imposed beliefs and customs, and that all one has to do in order to 'be oneself' and realize one's potentiality is to break free of them, is simply false.'*

Do you think such ideas have influenced you in any way? Do you agree with Sangharakshita's assertion that they are false?

3. What is the difference between an individual and an individualist? Can you see any individualistic behaviour in yourself?
4. To what extent does a 'coincidence of wills' describe your own experience of Sangha?
5. Can you relate to the third order of consciousness in any way?
6. What do you make of the 1000-armed Avalokiteśvara as a symbol for the Order?

Units 6 to 8

These units are from *Part 3* of the book and look at human relationships from the perspective of an important teaching of the Buddha's called the '*Sigālaka Sutta*'. If you have time, you may want to read the *Introduction to Part 3* to get the background on this.

Unit 6 – Is a Guru Necessary?

This unit explores the vertical dimension of the Sangha. It is based on a lecture that Sangharakshita gave in 1970 as part of a series entitled '*Aspects of the Higher Evolution of the Individual*'. Please read *Section 14 of Part 3*, i.e. pp.167-183.

1. Do you think a teacher is necessary? If so, what for?
2. *'Above all, the guru is one who stands on a higher level of being and consciousness than ourselves, who is more evolved, more developed, more – in a word – aware.'* (p.176).

Have you had any experience of a person like this?

3. What exactly does Sangharakshita mean when he says that “contact between the guru and the disciple should be ‘existential’”?
4. What is the difference between horizontal and vertical communication?
5. What sort of guru do we need and what sort of guru don't we need?

Unit 7 – The Meaning of Friendship

This unit explores the principles behind friendship as a spiritual practice. It builds on the material we explored in *Part 1, Week 10 of the Foundation Year*. Please read *Section 16 of Part 3*, i.e. pp.197-204.

1. *‘In the modern world, friendship is arguably the most neglected of all the primary human relationships.’* (p. 197)

Do you agree with this statement? Why (or why not)?

2. Which of the five duties we have to our friends seems most relevant to you and why?
3. *‘If you are practising friendliness you are not only practising the Dharma but communicating it.’* (p.199).

How can you relate this to your life?

4. In what way is spiritual friendship a training in unselfishness and egolessness?
5. How can you strengthen your practice of spiritual friendship?

Unit 8 – Fidelity and Gratitude

This unit explores two very important qualities in the development of the Sangha. Please read *Sections 15 and 19 of Part 3*, i.e. pp. 185-196 and 219-232.

1. How can you practise fidelity to yourself? Your ideals? Other people?
2. In what way is fidelity different from attachment?
3. What would be a neurotic form of sexual lifestyle and what would be a psychologically healthy form of sexual lifestyle?
4. Can you think of any other stories that illustrate the importance of fidelity?
5. *‘To the extent that one limits the continuity of one's relationships, to that extent one will not continue to grow as an individual.’* (p.190).

Why is it important to have continuity in our relationships for the development of our individuality?

6. Are you affected by any of the four main reasons for ingratitude? What could you do to change this?

7. *'So kataññutā means knowing and recognizing what has been done to one for one's benefit'* (p.222).

Use the following table to make a list of at least some of the things which have been done for you for your benefit by your parents, your teachers and your spiritual friends.

	Benefits Received From
Your Parents	
Your Teachers	
Your Spiritual Friends	

Projects

As usual, this module finishes with the opportunity for you to present a project on a theme arising out of the material you have been studying for the last 8 weeks. The purpose of the project is to give you a chance to reflect on a particular aspect of the material in more depth than is possible in the weekly groups, thus giving you more opportunity to develop the second level of wisdom – *cintā-mayī-prajñā*. Usually, you present a 20-minute project to your group. If you have any questions about this, please speak to your group leader.

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

- *'The Meaning of Spiritual Community' in 'Human Enlightenment'* (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766578) by Sangharakshita:

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=324>
(book)

<http://www.sangharakshita.org/bookshelf/human-enlightenment.pdf>
(free e-book)

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X14>
(audio series & transcripts of original talks)

A very good exploration of Sangha.

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

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

Part 3 is a much fuller exploration of the role of Sangha in the Buddhist tradition.

- *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 16, has the story about the Vajjians:*

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.16.1-6.vaji.html>

- Sangharakshita gave a talk on the first FWBO International Retreat entitled *'Growing the Spiritual Community'* (also known as *'The Growth and Prosperity of the Sangha'*).

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=LOC44>
(audio)

<http://www.videosangha.net/video/The-Growth-and-Prosperity-of>
(video)

It explores the advice that the Buddha gave in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta on the factors for the stability of the Order.

Unit 2

- *'The Bodhisattva Ideal'* by Sangharakshita (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579206) – Chapter 7 is on *'The Bodhisattva Hierarchy'*:

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=454>

- *The Axial Age* will be further explored in the module *'Evolutionary Buddhism'* in Year 4 of the Dharma Training Course for Mitras. It has recently received attention from Karen Armstrong in her book *'The Great Transformation'* (Knopf, ISBN 0375413170) in which she extends the Axial Age to include the rise of Christianity.
- For more on the nature of early Greek philosophy and spiritual communities, see Pierre Hadot's book *'Philosophy as a Way of Life'* (Wiley-Blackwell, 0631180338)
- For a different view on the traditional Sangha, Reginald Ray's book *'Buddhist Saints in India'* (Oxford University Press USA, 0195134834) is excellent. He argues for a three-tier model of traditional Buddhism, adding what he calls forest renunciants to the better-known categories of monk and lay people.

For a short background to his thinking, there is an interview with him in *'Issue 16 of Dharma Life'* called *'Yogi Spirit'* – you can find it at:

<http://www.dharmalife.com/issue16/reginaldray.html>

Unit 3

- *The three fetters* are explored in more depth in the lecture on *'The Taste of Freedom'* where Sangharakshita calls them *'habit, vagueness and superficiality'*.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=465>
(book)

<http://www.sangharakshita.org/bookshelf/taste-freedom.pdf>
(free e-book)

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=139>
(audio & transcript)

- *The four dimensions of awareness* that Sangharakshita mentions in regard to self-consciousness are treated in more depth in his seventh lecture on the *'Noble Eightfold Path – Perfect Awareness'*. (This is also studied in Year Two, Module 3 of the Dharma Training Course):

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=53>
(audio & transcript)

- For material on the lower and higher evolution, Ratnaprabha's out-of-print book 'The Evolving Mind' (Windhorse Publications, 0904766748) is probably the best introduction. It can be found at internet book stores.
- The Year Four module in the Dharma Training Course called 'Evolutionary Buddhism' will explore the idea of lower and higher evolution in more depth.

Unit 4

- *Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow* by Sangharakshita (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766837):

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=327>

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X16>
(original audio series & transcripts)

- Chapter 9 of Subhuti's book 'Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition' (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766683) explores the thinking behind a 'New Society' in depth:

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

Unit 5

- *The FWBO and Protestant Buddhism* by Sangharakshita (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766608):

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=355>

The section on 'The Burden of Self' (pp. 29–44) is good on the individuals relation to society and the notion of a pure self.

If you are interested in the term 'sobornost', Vladimir Lossky has written much about it from the perspective of Russian Orthodox Christianity. He defines it as 'the combination of freedom and unity of many persons on the basis of their common love for the same absolute values':

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sobornost>

Unit 6

- The ‘Sigālaka Sutta’ (or sometimes the ‘Sigalovada Sutta’) is the text from which the Buddha's teaching on the 6 different kinds of relationship is drawn:

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.nara.html>

- Sangharakshita describes his own relationship with his teachers in his book ‘Precious Teachers’ (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579788):

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=721>

- He also explores this area in a lecture called ‘My Eight Main Teachers’ on Free Buddhist Audio.com:

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=176>

- ‘My Relation to the Order’ by Sangharakshita (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766470):

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=378>

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=172>

(audio & transcript)

Here Sangharakshita gives his more up-to-date thinking about his role as a teacher and friend to the Order he has founded.

Unit 7

- ‘Buddhism and Friendship’ by Subhuti with Subhamati (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579621):

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=690>

This explores the whole area of friendship in much more depth.

Unit 8

- ‘Who is the Buddha?’ by Sangharakshita (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579516):

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=322>

Chapter 5 explores in more detail the incident in the Buddha's life when he looked around for something to worship.