

The Bodhisattva Path Reader

Study material for your retreat at Tiratanaloka

For the delight and inspiration of those on the Bodhisattva Path retreat

Introduction to the Handbook

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Introduction to the Handbook

What is the purpose of a Buddhist Order? What is the purpose of the Triratna Buddhist Order? We could say it is to help each other deepen our practice towards the goal of Enlightenment. We could say it enables us to share our Dharma life in the context of real and vibrant friendships. However, the vision Sangharakshita had of the potential of the Triratna Buddhist Order went far further than that. He thought that the Triratna Buddhist Order could become a Bodhisattva in the world.

Did he found the Order with this vision in mind, or did it clarify over time? What we do know is that he was inspired by the image of the Bodhisattva from his first encounters with Buddhism, and that on more than one occasion called the Bodhisattva Ideal ‘One of the sublimest ideals mankind has ever seen’.

“The truth was that I was thrilled, exhilarated, uplifted, and inspired by the bodhisattva ideal, and my feeling for it found expression in some of the poems and articles I wrote during this period, as well as in chapter 4 of *A Survey of Buddhism*. There were two reasons for my being so strongly affected. In the first place, there was the sheer unrivalled sublimity of the bodhisattva ideal – the ideal of dedicating oneself, for innumerable lifetimes, to the attainment of Supreme Enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings. In the second, there was the fact that, as enjoined by my teacher Kashyapji, I was ‘working for the good of Buddhism’, and that I could not do this without strong spiritual support, the more especially since I received very little real help or co-operation from those who were supposedly working with me. This spiritual support I found in the bodhisattva ideal, which provided me with an example, on the grandest possible scale, of what I was myself trying to do within my own infinitely smaller sphere and on an infinitely lower level.”¹

In 1962 he took the Bodhisattva Precepts from his friend and teacher Dardho Rimpoche, and it was Dardho Rimpoche who encouraged him to go back to the UK to help spread the Dharma. One could even say that founding the Triratna Buddhist Order was a manifestation of his Bodhisattva vows.

On this retreat we will explore the Bodhisattva Path through Bhante's own words, largely from seminars that he gave in the 1960's and 70's. It is hoped that through using this format, we will be able to explore the implications of the Bodhisattva path in an informal way, seeing Sangharakshita relaxed and spontaneous, thinking through the significance of the arising of the Bodhicitta, how the Bodhicitta arises in a community, and how a community can undertake the work of the Bodhisattva. Exploring the themes in this way guards against literalism, which is essential when exploring a topic that is, by its definition, beyond our usual framework of conceiving. Sangharakshita defines literalism as, ‘*Grasping an idea of the āryaparyesana [The Noble Quest] with the intellect powered by the energy of Craving.*’ We shall have to remain vigilant against grasping an idea of the Bodhisattva path that suits our ‘intellect powered by the energy of craving’, and not reduce it to what we know already, or what it suits us for it to be. In other words, drop your preconceptions and let yourself be surprised and galvanised. The Order is much more than we think it is, and we are much more than we think we are.

In putting together this handbook, I recommend you listen, if you haven't already, to Sangharakshita's talks on *The Bodhisattva Ideal* given in 1968, or read the book of the same name that was compiled from those talks and seminar extracts. It is included, along with Sangharakshita's seminar on the *Bodhicaryavatara*, in *The Complete Works, Volume 4* The Bodhisattva Ideal. It is also important to

¹ Sangharakshita, *The History of My Going for Refuge*, Extract from *The Complete Works, Volume 2*

read Subhuti's paper A Supra-Personal Force. This can be downloaded from his website or found in the book *The Seven Papers*².

The retreat itself covers three main themes: the Bodhicitta, the Order as ideal conditions for the manifestation of the Bodhicitta, and the Order as the Bodhisattva manifested in the world. These are all lofty aspirations for us to bring into being in our Order life. They correspond to the three duties of an Order Member: to our own practice, to the Order itself, and to the world. As Dardho Rinpoche explained, 'Cherish the Doctrine, Live United, Radiate Love'. During the retreat we will delve deeper and deeper into the myth of the Bodhisattva, how that manifests in the Order, and what that means for our own, individual lives. Each of us is unique and has our own contribution to make to the Bodhisattva manifesting in the world. The most important basis for that contribution is to be inspired by the beauty and sublimity of the Bodhisattva, and to let that inform the way we live our lives. This retreat, I hope, will enable that process to emerge as we collectively set out on the Bodhisattva path.

Context of Going for Refuge	Higher Evolutionary	Social or Communal	Cosmic
Duty of an Order Member	To your own spiritual practice... to deepen your Going for Refuge	To the Order... to inspire each other's Going for Refuge	To the world...to benefit the Going for Refuge of all beings
Lines of acceptance in the Public Ordination Ceremony	'For the attainment of Enlightenment...'	'With loyalty to my teachers...' 'In harmony with friends and companions...'	'For the benefit of all beings...'
Symbolised by...	The spiral path and the arising of the Bodhicitta	Bodhicitta as the Third order of consciousness Sanghakaya	Bodhisattva activity in the world
Dhardo Rinpoche's motto	Cherish the Doctrine	Live United	Radiate Love
Avalokitesvara	Cintamani held to the heart	United body	1000 arms

How to use the handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to give you the opportunity to look in depth at the material that we will be studying on the **The Bodhisattva Path** retreat at Tiratanaloka.

In this handbook we give you material to study for each area we'll be studying on the retreat. For each topic there is some reading we would ask you to do before you come and some questions to reflect on. All are introductions to Sangharaskhita's unique perspective on the Bodhisattva Path and the 'altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge'. We will also have some talks on the retreat itself where the team will bring out their own personal reflections on the topics covered.

² www.subhuti.com or www.lulu.com

Required reading is Subhuti's paper *A Supra-Personal Force*. **Optional extra study material** is also included in each study area. Some of the optional material is in the form of talks that can be downloaded from the Free Buddhist Audio website at www.freebuddhistaudio.com. These aren't by any means exhaustive - Free Buddhist Audio is growing and changing all the time so you may find other material equally relevant!

We'd ask you to study this material, reflect on it and come prepared with questions and areas you would like to discuss as this will help you to get the most out of your retreat. You might even want to study the material with some of your friends. Throughout the material we've included questions about how the material relates to your own practice that we'd like you to think about in preparation for the discussion groups on the retreat.

It's important that you let us know if you have problems accessing any of the material we've asked you to read, as we'll be assuming that you have had a chance to look at it before you come. When you come to Tiratanaloka we have a unique opportunity to go forth from technology, so please print it out in advance.

All of us on the team at Tiratanaloka look forward to studying the material with you when you come here.

Study area 1. The Bodhicitta

Summary and Reading

The first topic we will be studying on this retreat is Sangharakshita's teaching on the Bodhicitta.

Required reading

We ask you to read Subhuti's paper *A Supra-Personal Force*.

Optional study material

The following talks that are available on Free Buddhist Audio may also be helpful to listen to if you have time:

- The Arising of the Bodhicitta (Sangharakshita 1965)
- Great Compassion Penetrates into the Marrow of the Bones (Dhammadinna 2009)
- The Buddha, The Bodhicitta and Sangharakshita (Vajratara 2015)

The Bodhicitta

The first extract from Sangharakshita is taken from a seminar he gave in 1973 on *The Bodhicaryavatara*. After living and working for the Dharma in the UK for a decade, and in that time setting up the Triratna Buddhist Order and Movement, Sangharakshita had been on a year's sabbatical and retreat in Cornwall. The seminar was his first extended contact with the Triratna Sangha (or Friends of the Western Buddhist Order as it then was) since his sabbatical started, apart from a brief seminar in the Summer. He was now ready to re-engage and share his reflections with this new Buddhist Movement he had started. The mood, he said, as he approached the study group, was one 'of pleasant excitement.'

The seminar started with the topic of the Bodhicitta. In the simplest sense, Sangharakshita translates the Bodhicitta as the 'Awakened (Bodhi) heart or mind (citta)'. It is the arising of the Bodhicitta that gives rise to the Bodhisattva, the being or even hero of Awakening. He defines the Bodhicitta not as a reified entity we can possess or own, but as a '*non-egoistic stream of spiritual energy directed for the benefit of all beings*'. That non-egoistic stream of energy is directed, but there is no one who directs it. It transcends personal motivation. It is easy to misunderstand the Bodhicitta, to reify it into a static entity that we can 'have' or 'not have'. In this way we either make it a far distant goal, or in an attempt to make it more relatable, bring it down to too mundane an experience. Sangharakshita avoids either of those extremes by talking about it more as myth than fact, a symbol rather than an entity, dynamic rather than static:

"SANGHARAKSHITA: One mustn't think of the bodhicitta in the highest sense as a sort of thing, and use it as a philosophical concept, or treat it as a philosophical doctrine. In any case the Madhyamaka doesn't recognize the existence of entities in the ultimate sense on any level. One should take the bodhicitta as a symbol, a myth, and regard it as having the truth of a symbol, the truth of a myth. It's not that symbols and myths are untrue, but rather that they have a different kind of truth – if you like, a higher spiritual truth. As a symbol, as a myth, the bodhicitta has very great value, and it is in this sense that Śāntideva champions it."³

³ Sangharakshita, *Endlessly Fascinating Cry*, extracted from *The Complete Works, Volume 4*

What difference does it make to regard the bodhicitta as a myth rather than an attainment or reified goal? How has that myth been felt in your life? What has attracted you towards it?

At the same time as being clear that the Bodhicitta, as a myth, is not to be theorised or taken too literally, Sangharakshita gives us a hint, an evocation of what it may be:

“SANGHARAKSHITA: This passage gives the impression that the Thought of Enlightenment is a sort of individual experience and that it's you as an individual in the empirical sense who decides as it were to save all beings, which of course is an unthinkable task. But it isn't really like that. I've touched on this before in connection with the bodhisattva ordination, when I've said that it isn't really an individual affair, and in the same way the bodhicitta, or the arising of the bodhicitta, isn't an individual affair. This is quite clearly brought out in Nāgārjuna's little work on the transcendentality of the bodhicitta which is quoted at length in Suzuki's *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (chapter 11). Here the bodhicitta, which is usually translated as 'Thought of Enlightenment', is said to be 'not included in the categories of the five skandhas, the twelve āyatanas, and the eighteen dhātus,' so clearly it isn't a thought that arises in somebody's mind. You may, of course, have a thought of the bodhicitta, or a thought of Enlightenment, but that is not bodhicitta in this sense. I usually render it 'will to Enlightenment', which is a bit better, but even this isn't free from misunderstanding, because it isn't anybody's personal will. The bodhicitta is much more like a sort of higher power – the power of Enlightenment, if you like – which works through you when you are open and receptive. It's not 'yours' in the ordinary sense – not your thought, your idea, your will. In a sense – though even this can be misunderstood – it's something that takes you over when you are sufficiently ready for that or sufficiently open to that and which as it were works through you: this is the bodhicitta.

In one of my lectures I compared – though such comparisons have many weaknesses and are unsatisfactory in other ways – the arising of the bodhicitta to a Christian parallel, the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles. It's more something of that sort. It's not the thought of some pious Buddhist who thinks, 'Oh how wonderful! I'd like to become a Buddha and help all those poor people.' Such an aspiration can be quite genuine, but it's not the bodhicitta and it isn't the bodhisattva vow. The arising of the bodhicitta is when something breaks through your ordinary conscious mind and personality from a much, much deeper level – not just deeper in a Jungian psychological sense, but in a spiritual sense – and takes over and transforms your whole empirical personality, just as the Apostles were transformed when the fire of the Holy Ghost descended on them: it's more that sort of thing. There is sometimes a suggestion, when we talk about the bodhicitta, that it represents something that 'we' as we now are decide to do, that it is a thought or an aspiration that 'we' have. It's true that it starts like that, that this is a provisional basis for its emergence, but the real thing goes far beyond that. It's more like when you are really happily functioning and don't feel that 'you' are making the effort, when you feel in fact that 'you' are not doing it. Well, in a sense you are, but you don't really feel that you are. It's as though it's all being done through you. The bodhicitta, as well as the whole bodhisattva career, is much more like that. We really do have to watch our language here.”⁴

How do you respond to the myth of the Bodhicitta? Does the myth of the Bodhicitta move or inspire you, or do you find it hard to connect with?

Sangharakshita brings out the mysterious impersonal, or 'supra-personal' quality of the bodhicitta, but that raises the question of whether it is experienced personally at all:

⁴ *ibid*

“It’s ‘you’ and it’s not ‘you’ – a great paradox. Indeed, when you first come upon it, it’s more like ‘not you’. You’ve got so far away from yourself, as it were, that you can’t recognize yourself when you see it. But it is ‘you’, though another, vaster dimension of ‘you’, which ‘you’ have to get used to. Does anyone have anything to say on that? It’s quite straightforward, in a way, though very difficult to assimilate.”⁵

So who does experience it?

“It’s clear from all this that, as we saw at the beginning, Śāntideva’s great subject is the bodhisattva – whoever, whatever, the bodhisattva may be – and that this is the heart and centre of the whole of the Mahāyāna. I feel this more and more: that if you’ve understood what the bodhisattva is, then you’ve understood practically everything. I think one can speak of the Mahāyāna in terms of the Buddha, the bodhisattva, and the bodhicitta. There’s only really one Buddha, with all the different aspects and archetypal forms of the one Buddha nature just to make it clearer and richer. In the same way there’s only really one bodhisattva in whom different human beings as it were participate in varying degrees. There is one bodhisattva spirit and also one bodhicitta which descends upon, or manifests through, different receptive individuals in different degrees and in different ways. We shouldn’t take it that there are literally so many individual bodhisattvas in the same sense that you have individual people. Though the different bodhisattvas are, in a way, independent ‘entities’, they are also all aspects, as it were, of the bodhisattva, which you could say is the Buddha nature under the form of time, or at work in the temporal process.”

Are there any Bodhisattva figures, archetypal or historical, you are particularly drawn to and why?

In this extract Sangharakshita puts the bodhicitta and the bodhisattva into a unified perspective of spiritual development. The ideals of the bodhicitta and the bodhisattva show us what is possible in this conditioned reality. It is possible for a human being to enter into the spiral path, to align themselves with an active force for good in the world and to reach liberation or Enlightenment. This process he calls ‘the higher evolution’. It is another way of looking at Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, which he describes as the ‘central and definitive act of the spiritual life’. One goes for refuge to a higher vision of development that leads us beyond our fixed and separate identity where we become an aspect of the Bodhisattva. Elsewhere he unifies the bodhicitta and the bodhisattva with the ideals of stream entry and Arahantship into aspects of the same profound and dynamic act. Subhuti gives a good summary in his paper ‘The Supra-personal Force’, and it is worth exploring in some depth each of the terms he uses:

“We can then see the relationship between various key terms. The **Dharma** is, in its most important meaning, the way things truly are as a dynamic cosmic principle; the **Dharma-niyāma** is the kind of conditionality that comes into play when one sees the Dharma directly for oneself, especially by breaking free of the illusion of a separate selfhood; the **Stream of the Dharma** is that flow of Dharmic conditionality conceived as a spontaneous non-egoic force that carries one who has decisively broken the self illusion further and further into selflessness; the person who enters that stream is a **Stream Entrant**; **Bodhicitta** refers to the flow of ever-increasingly selfless mental states that arise in dependence on the Dharmic kind of conditionality; the **Bodhisattva** is one in whom bodhicitta has become the dominant force and who therefore responds selflessly to the deepest needs of others. **Insight** or *vipaśyanā* marks entry into the Stream of the Dharma and also, in this revised schema, bodhicitta becoming **Irreversible** – although, of course, the way this and other terms from the bodhisattva path are used here does not correspond in some important respects to their

⁵ *ibid*

usages in developed Mahayana since the different systems of thought have evolved in different circumstances and cannot be correlated in an entirely satisfactory or consistent way.”⁶

How, then, might we experience that ‘dynamic cosmic principle’, in our lived experience? And **how might we, and individuals, go about being receptive to it?**

“Yet important as it is, this making of offerings to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and dedicating oneself, surrendering oneself, is only the very beginning of the spiritual life. In a way it is an anticipation of the arising of the bodhicitta – because at this stage, of course, you’ve not been taken possession of by these higher spiritual forces, but you want to be, so you say to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, at least in your own mind, ‘Take me over. Instead of doing the things that I want to do, from now onwards I’ll do the things that you want me to do.’ It’s still this dualistic kind of dialogue, which is the only way you can put things at this stage; but when the bodhicitta arises then you are actually taken over – you’re taken at your word, as it were, and then, of course, there’s no question of ‘Shall I? Shall I not?’ That’s that. You’re functioning in a way as an instrument – though that’s a rather mechanical way of putting it – of the arisen bodhicitta. At this stage, however, you are asking for that to happen, or making yourself receptive to it happening, or even trying to help make it happen by giving, first of all flowers and incense and lights, in imagination, and then offering up yourself, saying, ‘Take me over. Let me be directed by the will to Enlightenment. Let that motivate me, let that carry me along, not just my own egoistic will.’ In this way puja becomes very, very important, even the making of offerings and giving of oneself in this purely symbolical and mental and ritual way. Puja is quite demanding, in fact, even at the very beginning. What Śāntideva says also suggests the importance of this kind of simple, maybe mental act of puja and dedicating of oneself. Perhaps one could use the word ‘dedication’ for this earlier, more dualistic stage, and ‘commitment’ for the stage when you’re actually taken over, as it were.”⁷

Puja is a very important bodhicitta practice, but do we always see it like that? **In what spirit do we undertake puja in our everyday life? If we took it seriously as a ‘dualistic dialogue’ between ourselves and the bodhicitta, would it effect the way we participated in pujas?**

Sangharakshita also describes the same process as bodhicitta as arising with the coming together of two very powerful forces that we cultivate in our spiritual life: wisdom and compassion. Wisdom enables us to step back and realise the reality of the way things are, and compassion enables us to step in to help other people realise that reality. If we want the bodhicitta to arise, our Dharma life has to be an intensification of those two forces until somehow the bodhicitta can break through:

“The will to Enlightenment is said to arise as a result of the coalescence of two trends of experience which are generally considered to be contradictory, since in ordinary experience they cannot both be pursued simultaneously. We might call these the trend of withdrawal from the world and the trend of involvement in the world.

The first of these trends represents renunciation in the extreme sense, a withdrawal from worldly activities, worldly thoughts, and secular associations. This withdrawal is aided by a particular practice, that of reflection on the faults or imperfections of conditioned existence. You reflect that life in this world, whirling round and round in the wheel of life, is profoundly unsatisfactory, involving as it does all sorts of disagreeable experiences. You experience physical pain and discomfort, you don’t get what you want, you’re separated from people you like, you have to do things you don’t want to do. There’s the whole wretched business of having to earn a living, doing your daily chores, taking care of your body – feeding it, clothing

⁶ Subhuti, *A Supra Personal Force*.

⁷ Sangharakshita, *Endlessly Fascinating Cry*. Extracted from *The Complete Works, Volume 4*

it, housing it, looking after it when it gets sick – not to mention taking responsibility for looking after your dependants. It all seems too much. All you want to do is get away from it all, away from the fluctuations, vicissitudes, and distractions of mundane life into the peace of the perfection of the Unconditioned, the unchanging rest of Nirvāṇa.

The second trend in our experience – involvement – represents concern for living beings. You reflect, ‘Well, it would be all right for me to opt out and withdraw from it all – I’d like that – but what about other people? What will happen to them? There are people who have a much harder time in this world than I do, who can stand it even less than I can. How will they ever get free if I abandon them?’ This trend of involvement is aided by the practice of reflection on the sufferings of sentient beings. In the trend of withdrawal, you reflect on the sufferings and imperfections of conditioned existence only in so far as they affect you, but here you reflect on them as they affect other living beings. You just look around at all the people you know, your friends and acquaintances, all the people you meet, and you reflect on all their troubles and difficulties. Perhaps one or two have lost their jobs, another’s marriage has broken up, yet another may have had a nervous breakdown, and there may well be someone who has recently been bereaved. If you think it over, there is not a single person you know who is not suffering in some way. Even if they seem comparatively happy in the ordinary sense, there are still things that they have to bear: separation or illness, the weakness and tiredness of old age, and finally death, which they almost certainly don’t want.

Then, when you cast your gaze further afield, there is so much suffering in so many parts of the world: wars, catastrophes of various kinds, floods and famines, people dying in horrible ways. You can even think of animals and how they suffer, not only at the teeth and claws of other animals but at the hands of human beings. The whole world of living beings is involved in suffering. And when you reflect on this, you ask yourself, ‘How can I possibly think simply in terms of getting out of it all on my own? How can I possibly think of getting away by myself to some private Nirvāṇa, some private spiritual experience, which may be very satisfactory to me but is of no help to others?’

So there is a conflict, if you are big enough and rich enough in your nature to embrace the possibilities of such a conflict. On one hand you want to get out; on the other you want to stay here. Of course, the easy solution is simply to choose between them. There are some people who withdraw into spiritual individualism, private spiritual experience, while others remain in the world without much of a spiritual outlook at all. But although these trends are contradictory, both of them must be developed in the course of the spiritual life. The trend of withdrawal may be said to embody the wisdom aspect of the spiritual life, while the trend of involvement embodies the compassion aspect.

These two practices – reflecting on the faults of conditioned existence and reflecting on the sufferings of sentient beings – form part of a traditional method of creating the conditions in dependence upon which the bodhicitta can arise.”⁸

Where do you recognise this tension in your own life? How could you work with it?

How do we then translate those reflections into practical realities? How can we make sure we intensify both wisdom and compassion in our lives? Sangharakshita refers to wisdom as the more psychological side of Dharma practice, and compassion to the more ethical side of practice. In the following extract he highlights the importance of correcting our drift towards self interest and the psychological side by ethical action for the benefit of others. We need to focus on the ‘trend of engagement’ to focus on the reality of other living beings, the ‘other’, not just ‘the self’ in our experience:

⁸ Sangharakshita, *The Arising of the Bodhicitta*. Extracted from *The Complete Works 2*

"I was thinking about that phrase of Guenther's: I don't know what Sanskrit or Tibetan term it translates, but it's what he calls, or something that he calls, Bi-tendential value of Being, with a capital B. What do you think he means by that?

Q: Going two ways?

SANGHARAKSHITA: Yes, that's pretty good, going two ways.

Q: Wisdom and Compassion?

SANGHARAKSHITA: Yes, right, wisdom and compassion. That is, or rather those are, the Bi-tendential value of Being. How exactly do they come in? It's as though the psychological has reference to oneself, the ethical to another; not that the two are completely exclusive because you also come into the picture when there is a reference to another. But why is it even that we think and speak in terms of self and other, subject and object? It's because of this basic and original, so far as ordinary experience goes, irreducible dichotomy of self and other, of subject and object. It's within this framework, within the framework of this dichotomy that the whole of our experience and the whole of our thought takes place. But according to Buddhist thought, according to Buddhist philosophy for want of a better term, especially according to the Mahayana philosophy, there is what Guenther calls Being. In the realm of Ultimate Reality there is no subject/object division. I think that is commonly or generally understood.

It's as though on the level of empirical reality, on the level of ordinary experience, you need a double approach. Reality has bifurcated into subject and object, so you are to approach Reality not only via the subject, but via the object. In fact, the best way to approach the bi-tendential Reality is via the object rather than via the subject, because to do things via the subject is your natural one-sided tendency. Even if you approach what you consider to be Being, it is still just you approaching - the approach still takes place within the basic subject/object dichotomy: you are still doing something for yourself, which is a contradiction in terms. So therefore the altruistic approach is as necessary as the self-regarding approach. You are making a two-pronged attack on Being. You have to gain Being not only for yourself, but for others, otherwise 'you' do not gain Being at all, because 'you' cannot. It is only you plus others who can. So when you plus others attain Being, that is the bi-tendential value of Being which has been realized: *prajñā* representing 'your' attainment, and *karuṇā* representing 'their' attainment. If you approach the non-dual Being from the standpoint of subject your experience culminates in *prajñā*. If you approach from the standpoint of other, your experience culminates in *karuṇā*. And these two coalesce: they form one value of Ultimate Reality; hence the bi-tendential value of Being.

To put it very simply and practically, it is not enough to just sit there in your meditation feeling all nice and unselfish. You've actually got to go out and act unselfishly, which brings in the ethical, the other-orientated dimension. It is that only which will break down the barrier between subject and object. This is why Śāntideva speaks in terms of the exchange between self and the other. You have to treat the other as the self, because what is the difference between them? You quite literally cannot realize Being by yourself: that isn't even a possibility. That is what the Bodhisattva sees when he 'gives up' the idea of individual Nirvana. There is no Nirvana for 'me' as distinct from Nirvana for 'them'.

Q: And there's no possibility of going it alone?

SANGHARAKSHITA: No. No.

Q: Or going on your six month solitary retreat and realizing Being?

SANGHARAKSHITA: A solitary retreat can certainly help you in the direction of Being, but not if you think that you are doing it just for the sake of yourself; hence the dedication of merits at the end of every spiritual act. If we think in terms of doing it all for my sake, my development, my spiritual life, we are not really breaking down that basic dichotomy between subject and object, which is all that really stands in our way. We are just refining and refining one side of the dichotomy. So this is what the Bodhisattva Ideal is all about. If we are not careful, if we give too much value to what I call the psychological and not enough to the ethical, or the other-regarding, the spiritual life becomes a sort of refined experience just for your own sake. You might even become resentful of other people intervening and interfering with your enjoyment of, or devotion to, these refined experiences.

Q: Where will that eventually lead that person?

SANGHARAKSHITA: It doesn't lead anywhere, except to this increasingly refined pseudo-spiritual aestheticism. I think that we have to be really careful about this. This is why the objective, other-regarding aspect of work and activity is so good for people. Even if you don't like doing it particularly, well, never mind!

Q: Putting that in the context of study, perhaps you should study only to help other people to give other people the value of what you have learned?

SANGHARAKSHITA: Yes, one could say that. But yourself *and* others. The Bodhisattva Ideal always has to do with self *and* others. You don't altogether leave yourself out, because you are also a person, a sentient being. So self *and* others. That is how we experience things anyway, so all right; it's honest to speak in these sorts of terms. Whatever you do, do it for the sake of self and others."⁹

Sangharakshita refers here to Śāntideva's meditation on 'exchanging self for others'. This finds its fullest expression in what the Yogacara calls the great 'turning about' or 'parāvṛtti'. We start that process in the metta bhavana meditation with imaginative identification with other living beings, seeing that we are all part of life itself, and just as I want to be happy and well, free from suffering, and have the capacity for spiritual progress, so do others. If we need to, in some way, redress the balance, and concentrate on the needs of other people, the objective pole to our experience, more than ourselves, what do we do about the subjective pole to our experience? Does this mean that we abandon the psychological approach altogether? Sangharakshita sees it as important to have a healthy, positive, functioning sense of self before we can go beyond it. We could also look at it in terms of needing integration and positive emotion before we let go into spiritual death. Sangharakshita developed the 'System of Meditation' where he describes integration, positive emotion, spiritual receptivity, spiritual death and spiritual rebirth in 1978, but here's what he said in 1973:

"Q: What is the difference, if any, between the ego in the psychological sense and the ego in the Buddhist sense?

SANGHARAKSHITA: In a way, not much difference at all. Paradoxically, you can't get rid of the ego until you've got an ego to get rid of. It's as though the individual consciousness is the next stage up from the pre-individual consciousness, but from the individual consciousness the next stage up is to what we can only describe as not even the higher dhyāna

⁹ Sangharakshita, *Bi-tentential Value of Being*. Extracted from *Mind in Buddhist Psychology Seminar*, Padmaloka 1976

consciousness but the 'transcendental' consciousness, as I call it in one of the lectures, and that comes about by way of the negation of the individual consciousness as a self-contained entity, complete and sufficient in itself. It's not that that particular structure of consciousness is broken down, but rather that a different sort of energy now works through it: it's no longer working under its own steam. But so long as you are an embodied being you've got to have the structure there for the higher energy to work through, as it were. Otherwise you just couldn't function. Consequently it's a healthy, positive thing for that psychological ego, i.e. that ego-structure, to be there, but not for it to be trying to function under its own steam. When it's trying to function under its own steam, that's the metaphysical ego [i.e. the ego wrongly conceived as a real entity rather than as a provisional psychic structure, not the ego as an actual metaphysical existent], but the psychic apparatus or ego-apparatus being there – in other words, the psychological ego being there – that's all right. All we have to do is to make sure that the higher consciousness – the transcendental consciousness – functions through it. Even after his Enlightenment the Buddha still functioned, apparently, as an ordinary human being. The ego-structure remained intact, but the Enlightenment experience was functioning through it, was taking it over, just as in the case of the body. After Enlightenment, the body's still there, but it becomes an instrument for Enlightenment. Similarly with the ego-structure, it thinks, forms ideas, philosophizes, etc., but all under the direction and inspiration of the Enlightened consciousness. You are not out to smash the ego in that sense. All you are out to do is to change its present state of functioning under its own energy, its own power. Hence, paradoxically, you have first of all got to build up your ego and then go beyond it."¹⁰

Sangharakshita also recognised the importance of having some periods of retreat as well as working for the benefit of others. The 'trend of withdrawal' comes about by focusing for some time on meditation and reflection, primarily by going on retreat. We can get in contact with the sources of our inspiration and find new energy for our life in the midst of the Sangha. If we don't take this time, we run the risk of keeping up activity "for the sake of activity", even activity in the Sangha, and it becomes alienated from our real inspiration. In extreme cases, our activity becomes motivated by a fear of what will arise in ourselves if we slow down. As Sangharakshita puts it, "A lot of exhausted people, flogging themselves as it were, and having to force themselves to take classes, are not going to do much good anyway." In this case, it is worth remembering Sangharakshita's emphasis that we have some periods of solitude:

"SANGHARAKSHITA: Well, the last sentence of the paragraph says, 'Isolation for limited periods appears to be always desirable.' Even when one is engaged in highly worthwhile general spiritual activities, and engaged in them in the right spirit, an occasional bout of solitude for purposes of refreshment, or for a periodic check-up on one's motives, I think is necessary. The orthodox ideal is for the monk to wander about from place to place for the greater part of the year, doing his daily practice, begging his food and also preaching to people. But for the rainy season he just holes up somewhere and stays in one place, and that is often treated as a sort of special retreat: extra practice, extra self-examination, no contact with people. There is this sort of pattern. In the case of an Order member engaged in full-time Dharmaduta activities (this is the correct term, Dharmaduta meaning 'messenger of the Dharma'), if they are so engaged for nine months of the year and kept fairly busy – even if it is with conducting retreats for other people – then ideally three months should be spent for their own personal, private retreat in relative solitude. I don't mean that absolute physical isolation is necessary. It could be in the same building with a couple of other people, provided it was quiet, and you didn't have to have contact with the other people, or do very much in connection with them. For the average Order member that would be the correct proportion, I think: nine months of activity and three months of retreat. After all, even though one starts off with the best of motives, and the best of intentions, one gets very subtly involved. In the case

¹⁰ Sangharakshita, *Endlessly Fascinating Cry*. Extracted from *The Complete Works, Volume 4*

of the poor householder, well, he should just get away whenever he can: maybe for the odd weekend or week. Otherwise, modern life being what it is, if he is sincere in his practice and has a full-time job at the same time, without these occasional retreats he can hardly keep his head above water spiritually speaking.

We all know that. Even when you are engaged in so “called spiritual activities – especially when it is in connection with other people, and there are lots of practical things to be done that sometimes results in a bit of wear and tear on you, even though you are working with the best of motives and what you are doing is a genuinely good and positive thing. Consequently you need that period of retreat and relaxation – spiritually speaking. Just doing nothing. Maybe a little quiet study, your own meditation, and so on. Just giving yourself time to breathe.”¹¹

How often do you go on retreat every year, and what is your experience of retreats? Have you been on a solitary retreat?

¹¹ *ibid*

Study area 2. Spiritual Friendship and the Third Order of Consciousness

Summary and Reading

The second topic we will be studying on this retreat is Sangharakshita's teaching on spiritual friendship and what he calls 'the third order of consciousness'.

Required reading

The main text, as before, is Subhuti's paper '**A Supra-Personal Force**'.

Optional study material

There is an essay called *The Good Friend* in Sangharakshita's book *Crossing the Stream*, found in *The Complete Works, Volume 7*¹².

If you prefer talks, the following talks available on Free Buddhist Audio may also be helpful to listen to:

- The Meaning of Friendship in Buddhism (Sangharakshita 1992)
- How to be a Friend (Vajratara 2011)

Spiritual Friendship

In the last section we looked at how the Bodhicitta arises on the basis of expanding beyond our narrow self concern, responding to the welfare of others as well as ourselves, and a receptivity to 'a supra-personal force'. The main forum where we practise these areas is in our personal relationships with the people we are close to: with our friends. Gampopa, when talking about Bodhicitta practice said:

"At the beginning of our spiritual career it is impossible to be in touch with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, we have to meet with ordinary human beings as spiritual friends... so our greatest benefactor in the early stages of our spiritual life are our ordinary human relationships".

It is important to see the altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge as our everyday interactions with the people we know, not only as helping strangers in need. It is spiritual friendship, Sangharakshita says, that takes our practice of 'anatman' or 'no fixed and separate selfhood' from an intellectual to an emotional plane. Because we care for our friends, we feel moved to respond to their needs and desires, even sometimes at the expense of our own. He says we could see our practice of spiritual friendship as a practice of higher and higher levels of selflessness, starting with simple acts of kindness, helpfulness and generosity and eventually becoming a Bodhisattva prepared to give whatever we can for the welfare of our friend and aiding their Enlightenment.

"The good friend becomes by insensible degrees the trusted counsellor, the trusted counsellor the spiritual guide or guru, the guru the Bodhisattva, and the Bodhisattva the Buddha, just as among the colours of the rainbow red merges imperceptibly into orange, orange into yellow, yellow into green and so on."

Sangharakshita thinks that the bodhicitta is more likely to arise within the collective, within the Sangha. This is (as far as I am aware), unique to Sangharakshita's thinking, but it does have echoes

¹² Sangharakshita, *The Good Friend*. Extract from *The Complete Works, Volume 7*

in the stories of early Buddhism, many of which talk about communities of people Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels and becoming stream entrants and beyond. In the seminar on *The Endlessly Fascinating Cry* in 1973 we can see his thoughts emerging. Originally the Western Buddhist Order had lay ordination, (Upāsikā or Upāsika), which could be followed up by more monastic ordination (Brahmacaryā or Brahmacarya). If people were able to follow a more altruistic path, then they could take up the Bodhisattva ordination. However, even in 1973, he was having misgivings about having such separate ordinations. A simple life and a life devoted to the welfare of others were all aspects of the same, central act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. In 1982, he changed the whole structure by ordaining people simply as 'Dharmacharinis/ Dharmacharis'.¹³

“SANGHARAKSHITA: This in a way corresponds to what is usually called bodhisattva ordination, though unfortunately in many parts of the Mahāyāna world the latter has just become a ceremony with no real arising of the bodhicitta at that time, or before, or perhaps even afterwards, at all. This isn't the sort of thing that is to be encouraged. There's no really meaningful bodhisattva ordination unless the bodhicitta has already arisen. In most Mahāyāna countries, the bodhisattva ordination is an individual affair, but if the bodhicitta isn't individual in that sense one can query whether the bodhisattva ordination itself can be an individual affair – in the sense, that is to say, that the upāsaka ordination or even bhikṣu ordination is an individual affair. 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 and where it has, perhaps, even begun to manifest in a small way already. Thus it's almost as though the bodhisattva ordination becomes something 'collective', but I think that's something we'll have to watch and wait for – and also work for. Not just that Upāsaka A or Upāsaka B gets bodhisattva ordination. 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. In a way, the Movement embodies the bodhicitta, or at least is an embodiment or manifestation of the bodhicitta. If there's no bodhicitta in the Movement, then it's just another organization. So to the extent that there is a sort of bodhicitta at work in the Movement, to that extent it's a real 'Buddhist', spiritual, 'Mahāyāna' movement. Otherwise not. That's really why we have our Sevenfold Puja: the Sevenfold Puja is working up towards the bodhicitta, as is suggested right at the end. If you do the puja often enough, and with sufficient sincerity, sooner or later, for all those who do it, the bodhicitta 'descends' or 'arises' – whatever you like to call it. But I think it's 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 a 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 manifestation of spiritual communion.”¹⁴

Sangharakhita developed his thinking in 1976 when he talked about the Sangha becoming a 'spiritual body', something that is experienced by the individual, but as more than any one individual. The term 'Sanghakaya', emerged during the 2013 International Convention at Bodhgaya, but is hinted at in Sangharakshita's seminar on 'The Precious Garland'. Sanghakaya means a 'body of Sangha' and indicates a spiritual reality that arises on the basis of harmonious communication by the spiritually committed or true individuals. It can provide for us a 'transcendental object': something beyond us that we're strongly attracted to, that takes us beyond the self and other dichotomy, but in which we can also participate. The Buddha hinted at this himself in a mysterious episode where he said that he himself could also revere the Sangha 'once the Sangha attained to greatness'¹⁵.

¹³ See Sangharakshita, *The History of My Going for Refuge. The Complete Works, Volume 2*

¹⁴ Sangharakshita, *Endlessly Fascinating Cry*. Extracted from *The Complete Works, Volume 4*

¹⁵ AN 4.21

“SANGHARAKSHITA: I tend to think - I don't know whether there's any sort of support for this in Buddhist literature but I tend to think that the Bodhicitta is more likely to arise through the interaction of a number of dedicated individuals. You could say that when spiritually committed individuals are in intense communication, spiritual communication, then the Bodhicitta is that higher third that arises. When you get a number of spiritually committed individuals, and when the spiritual communication between them reaches a certain pitch of intensity, there is the Bodhicitta in the midst of them. It isn't anybody's individual possession, but it, as it were, hovers over the heads of all of them and creates a sort of higher kind of unity, which is even greater than the unity of the spiritual community. The spiritual community becomes a sort of spiritual body, you could say. Or the spiritual community itself becomes, 'collectively', inverted commas of course, a Bodhisattva. This is why I sometimes say that the figure of the eleven headed and thousand armed Avalokitesvara is a symbol of the Order.

Q: Do you think that it's premature to think something like that, perhaps of a much more diluted nature, exists already?

SANGHARAKSHITA: Hmmm, probably it isn't premature to think that. But what I was going to say was one shouldn't think in terms of 'I shall become a Bodhisattva' but 'we shall become a Bodhisattva'.

I think it's the sort of thing that develops when a number of people have worked together spiritually for some time. That is the next level of development when a sort of higher power, if you like, arises within them and to which they all are sensitive, and which, as it were, guides them. You could say it's their common sense, (chuckles) or their common spirit. It's as though it's not separate from them. It's not the sum total of them, but at the same time it's not apart from them, in the sense of imposing itself on them from outside. It doesn't belong to anybody, it belongs to everybody, or you could say it belongs to everybody without belonging to anybody. It doesn't belong to each one individually, separately; it doesn't belong to all of them together collectively. It's another category, another mode altogether.”¹⁶

Bringing the Sanghakaya into being requires intensive interaction between spiritual friends who are committed to common ideals and principles and the realisation of those ideals in the world. For Order Members this means engaging intensively in the life of the Order in whatever way possible. When that happens, something else emerges which has the flavour of the Sanghakaya, which we could call the third order of consciousness or even bodhicitta.

Sangharakshita talks about the collective arising of the Bodhicitta in terms of the arising of different levels of consciousness. The following seminar extract may be confusing as it indicates more than the three levels of consciousness that Subhuti refers to, and which Sangharakshita also sometimes referred to. As with all things, it is good not to take these levels of consciousness too literally. Sangharakshita worked out his understanding of the different levels of consciousness over time. The principle is still the same: the movement of lower to higher levels of consciousness as one practices according to the karma and dharma niyāma processes. In this extract he describes this process in a more expanded way than when he talks about three distinct levels:

Q: I think that you said that the Bodhicitta is more likely to arise collectively within a Spiritual community: why is this, and how would this manifest?

¹⁶ Sangharakshita, *The Precious Garland Seminar*, Padmaloka 1976

S: Well, we've already seen that one can regard Stream Entry and the Bodhicitta as different aspects of the same experience. So if one says that the Bodhicitta is more likely to arise within the spiritual community, I think one also has to say that one is more likely to attain Stream Entry within the Spiritual Community. So why is that? I think the reason is pretty obvious, because a spiritual community represents a situation of intense mutual spiritual friendship wherein you encourage one another in your efforts. So if you have a situation in which you are all encouraging one another in your spiritual efforts as on, say, or as in a spiritual community, you're much more likely to achieve that sort of breakthrough, whether in terms of Stream Entry, or in terms of the arising of the Bodhicitta, than if you were simply on your own. This is not to say that you can't do it on your own, and certainly many people have done it on their own: but I think for the majority of people the spiritual community is a much more favourable context for that sort of experience.

I must say, though, that, speaking in terms of the Bodhicitta, I was going somewhat further than that even, in a way that isn't quite applicable in connection with Stream Entry. I spoke of the Bodhicitta as representing the idea of working for the salvation or emancipation of all beings, but at the same time realising that there were no beings to be saved or emancipated. So in much the same way, what one is trying to do is to suggest something which is, as it were, supra-individual, but which is not collective - and this is very, very difficult.

It's as though you've got a number of stages: you've got first of all the sub-individual, that's stage one, where there's no individuality, where there is as it were only membership of the species, membership of the group. Then you've got a second level, you might say an intermediate level where you have got the individual: perhaps in opposition to the group. Sometimes two kinds of individuals are distinguished here: the individual as dominated by the group, and the individual as dominating the group. But then there's another stage still, a third stage, where the individual as it were stands free from the group altogether, and is just an individual. But then, beyond that, you've got another stage where the individual enters into free association with other individuals, and this is what we call the spiritual community. And time and again, of course, we've insisted that this is not the same as a group: a free association of real individuals is not a group, it's a spiritual community. It's a Sangha. But you can envisage something even beyond that - we don't have any word, even, for that - we don't have a word, even, for spiritual community: but if you can envisage what happens as a result of the intensive interaction of individuals, real individuals, one might say even transcendental individuals, well, what results, one might say, is the Bodhicitta.

It's not an individual thing, in the same way that the individual is an individual - it's another level beyond that. At the same time it isn't something collective which all those individuals possess in common. I think some of the language that I've used in this particular lecture might give that impression, but that was not my intention.

So one has got really these four different levels. But one speaks of the arising of the Bodhicitta rather than of stream entry because the Bodhicitta, perhaps for more historical reasons, has this other-regarding reference which stream-entry doesn't. Stream entry has, so to speak, a self-regarding reference, even though in the case of Stream Entry there's no self, just as in the case of the Bodhicitta, there are no others, in an ultimate physical sense.

But of course one is not to take this expression, 'within the spiritual community' too literally - not that within this particular closed circle of people. What it is really trying to convey is that it is another level of development beyond even individuality, perhaps even transcendental individuality, as we usually understand it. The spiritual community is not necessarily that which is located in a particular place occupying certain physical bodies.

Just as you could be on your own, you could be on solitary retreat, but in a sense you could be in contact with other members of the spiritual community, in the sense that you would be very aware of them, and they would be aware of you. One mustn't think too much in terms of actual physical contact, though obviously one has to do so at first, and one certainly shouldn't use the fact that you are, or are supposed to be, in contact on another level as an excuse for neglecting contact on the level on which you are actually operative. But nonetheless it is the... well, in a sense the non-physical contact which is important - even though that is mediated through the physical body, because we are identified, or we identify ourselves, with the physical body to such an extent.

One could say it is a question of a higher level of consciousness, or experience, arising in the sense of a number of individuals, that is to say, real individuals, especially what I've called transcendental individuals, then, in dependence upon those individuals taken as it were collectively, what is the next stage that arises? Well, that next stage is what we call the Bodhicitta.

In other words the Bodhicitta is not to be thought of as somebody's individual achievement or individual possession; it is not, at the same time, that it is not your individual achievement or your individual possession. It is not that it belongs to the spiritual community instead of belonging to an individual. The concept of belonging, hopefully, is transcended altogether.”¹⁷

Again we come back to the bodhicitta not being an individual possession or attainment. It is what arises out of real friendship, *kalyāṇa mitratā* in its fullest sense. He talks about the bodhicitta arising in collective puja, or more likely, when we work together. Why would it arise when working together? When we work with other members of the Sangha, whether for a day retreat or a team based right livelihood, our old patterns come into relationship with more in-depth communication based on our experience of daily interactions. At the same time we have to give ourselves to a greater vision of what we are collectively bringing into being. We collectively serve the arising of the bodhicitta. That intensity transforms us in ways we may not always anticipate. Even towards the end of his life, Sangharakshita stressed the profound importance of spiritual friendship, and its mysterious potential, “It is not easy to plumb the depths of what the Buddha meant when we said that spiritual friendship was the whole of the spiritual life, but still we do try to do that.”¹⁸

“Years ago I was very struck by the passage in the Pāli scriptures in which Ānanda comes to the Buddha and says, ‘Lord, I’ve been reflecting, and I truly believe that friendship is half the spiritual life.’ And the Buddha replies, ‘No, Ānanda. Spiritual friendship is not half the spiritual life. Spiritual friendship is the whole of the spiritual life.’ The first time I read that and really understood it, my hair almost stood on end. It seemed an extraordinary statement, but there it was in the Pāli scriptures. No Buddhist tradition that I’m aware of, in the course of the last 2,500 years, has ever taken that extraordinary utterance of the Buddha seriously. It’s that teaching that we try to explore. What did the Buddha mean? In what way is spiritual friendship the whole of the spiritual life? The short answer is that in the course of spiritual friendship the ego gets gradually worn away. You rub up against one another, challenge one another, encourage one another. You try to get beyond your petty needs and desires, your selfishness, your egotism. This is one of the benefits of living in a residential community too. You can’t always have things your own way. When you live on your own, you don’t have to consider anybody else, and that can encourage individualism, but spiritual friendship is the enemy of individualism, the enemy of egotism. This is why in the FWBO spiritual friendship is very highly valued, and so is the sangha in the broadest sense, spiritual association with others who have the same Buddhist ideals as oneself.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Sangharakshita, *Q & A Bodhisattva Ideal*, Tuscany 1984

¹⁸ Sangharakshita, *Forty Years On - The Six Distinctive Emphases of the FWBO*, Lecture 2008

¹⁹ Sangharakshita, *The Six Distinctive Emphases*, excerpt from *The Complete Works, Volume 12*.

How does friendship help cultivate the conditions for bodhicitta?

What is our experience of friendship in the Sangha, and where in the Sangha do we feel closest to people?

What is our experience of puja and working with our friends in the Sangha?

What are our patterns and working grounds in friendship?

We may find a friendship quite easy at first, but if we carry on developing a relationship with the other person, we will come up against moments when differences and difficulties arise. How do we steer through this tension, which is essentially the tension between self and other? It is important that we see these times not as a failure or that we are doing something wrong, but more as part of the practice of friendship itself. How else will we get to know ourselves and our friend, and how else will we transcend the dichotomy between self and other? Sangharakshita talks about communication within friendship as 'mutual responsiveness across a chasm'²⁰ - sometimes there is a journey to make, and that requires knowing ourselves, as well as making the effort to empathise with our friend. This is not an easy area and it is easy to fall back into old patterns. We have a choice: do we deny our own needs or do we stick with our own needs and deny the needs of our friend? Do we come to a superficial compromise where neither person's needs are met and the underlying issue isn't resolved, or do we fully commit to open communication?

What can help in cultivating friendship in the Sangha is the realisation that we are both working towards the same myth or vision. This myth, the myth of the bodhicitta, can be seen as a thread running in our life, as well as the life of our friend. Together we are bringing that myth into being, or, as Sangharakshita says, bodying forth that myth, in a collective context. We are much more than we appear to be, and together we are part of a Movement that is much more than it appears to be. The individual myth of the bodhicitta is part of a much greater myth. That will help us gain a perspective and a motivation to work through differences and to work together to bring something greater into being:

"I have spoken of the Bodhicitta arising within the context of a spiritual community. One could even think of that in a poetic rather than a precise doctrinal sense as constituting their myth. One could speak of the Bodhicitta as constituting the myth of the Movement. Actually what one sees as the Movement, materially, is only a tiny fraction of what is happening. Something else is happening on some other level, on some other plane, which is infinitely vaster. What one sees of the Movement that we call the [Triratna Buddhist Community] is just a tiny part, a very limited manifestation, of that: a working out of that 'myth' on a particular level, at a particular time, in a particular set of historical circumstances.

The Movement has its existence or its being on this other level which we call the mythical or, if you like, the archetypal or the symbolic, and is a bodying forth of that. If it merely existed on the material plane, then it would probably wither away pretty quickly. It needs to have really deep roots – roots so to speak, in the sky – if it is to survive at all.

Thus one needs to have one's roots in the sky instead of in the earth; and when one speaks of the myth of the [Triratna Buddhist Community], one means something like this, that it has its roots in the sky, so one can't really understand it without reference to the sky.

If one can feel oneself as a member of the [Triratna Buddhist Community] working out that myth, that will give one a much truer idea of what is actually happening or what one is actually involved in. It has to emerge as different people start becoming aware that the Movement is

²⁰ Sangharakshita, *Yogi's Joy*, found in *The Complete Works Volume 18*

more than it appears to be. And that will only happen when they start becoming aware that *they* are more than they appear to be. They will become aware that they are playing a part in that myth and that their physical activity is only a bodying forth of that. Then they will see that other people with whom they are connected are doing the same and in that way they will begin to appreciate the myth behind the [Triratna Buddhist Community] as a whole.”²¹

It is only if we are all deepening our Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels and acting together in harmony that we can bring into being the bodhicitta in the world. This is the myth of the Order. As the Movement and Order grew, over time Sangharakshita could see that it could be literally a Bodhisattva in the world. This he compared to the 1000 Armed Avalokitesvara:

“So far I’ve spoken of opposition coming from outside, but there is another kind of opposition to be faced, an even greater danger that may come from within. That danger is, in a word, disharmony. It’s not enough for the Order to be unified. It has to be united in its common commitment to the Three Jewels. Human beings being what they are, there will always be differences of opinion and personality clashes, but these should be resolved as soon as they arise. Resolving them should be an absolute priority. That doesn’t necessarily mean that we should just go on talking about them. That sometimes merely prolongs the conflict. Sometimes it is best simply to intensify our practice of the Dharma and leave the problem to look after itself. As Order members you are making an effort to rise from effective Going for Refuge to real Going for Refuge, and that is the real solution to the problem. If a sufficient number of Order members achieve real Going for Refuge, or make a genuine effort to achieve it, there will be harmony in the Order. If Order members are in harmony, if you are in harmony, the Order will be harmony in the Order. If Order members are in harmony, if you are in harmony, the Order will be strong, and able to resist both the dangers from without and the dangers from within.

More than that, if the Order is spiritually united, if it is in harmony, then a truly wonderful thing will happen. The Order will become the locus for the manifestation of the bodhicitta. As you all know, we sometimes liken the Order to the eleven-headed and thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara. This is not just a manner of speaking, a figure of speech. We should take it very seriously, even literally. Let us go back for a moment to the four levels of Going for Refuge. Order members go for Refuge effectively, that is, they’re making a wholehearted effort to achieve real Going for Refuge, to achieve Stream Entry. When that happens, a radical transformation in the nature of the Going for Refuge takes place. The Going for Refuge ceases to be ‘my’ Going for Refuge. ‘I’ cease Going for Refuge. Something else takes over, at least to an extent. In Mahāyāna terms this something else is the real bodhicitta.

There are four levels of the arising of the bodhicitta, corresponding to the four levels of Going for Refuge. In the first place, there’s an ethnic or cultural arising. This is not really an arising at all. It just consists in the formal acceptance of the bodhisattva ideal as part of one’s Mahāyāna Buddhist cultural heritage. Secondly, there’s a provisional arising of the bodhicitta. This occurs when you try to act in accordance with the bodhisattva ideal, to act altruistically, even if only very intermittently. And thirdly, there’s the effective arising. Here you are wholeheartedly committed to acting in accordance with the bodhisattva ideal and you make a serious effort to practise the six pāramitās, but there’s still the possibility of backsliding, and you may even give up the bodhicitta altogether. Fourthly, there’s the real arising of the bodhicitta. Here you have achieved at least a degree of real wisdom and you are therefore practising this and the other pāramitās as pāramitās. Your practice of them is a transcendental practice and there is no possibility of falling back.

²¹ Sangharakshita, *Q&A Bodhisattva Ideal, Seminar, Tuscany 1984*

I have spoken in the past of the arising of the bodhicitta as the altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge. Strictly speaking, this applies only to the first three levels of the arising. In the case of the real arising, the distinction between self and others has begun to be seriously eroded. The real bodhicitta is therefore neither individualistic nor altruistic, so there is no question of the arising of the real bodhicitta being 'my' arising. 'I' do not develop the real bodhicitta, 'I' am not a bodhisattva, any more than it is 'I' who really go for Refuge, or 'I' who gain Stream Entry. In both cases, what we can only describe as a non-egoistic stream of spiritual energy, and perhaps even consciousness, has begun to take over. Early Buddhism does not have much to say about this. Perhaps the Buddha himself did not have much to say about it; perhaps he was content simply to demonstrate it in his life. But the Mahāyāna sūtras have a great deal to say about it, especially in their teaching about the bodhisattva ideal.

I won't say anything more about this now. I have talked about it elsewhere, for instance in my 1969 lectures on the bodhisattva ideal, which will soon be appearing in book form. Now I want to focus on what happens when a number of people achieve this non-egoistic Going for Refuge, this non-egoistic arising of the bodhicitta, when this stream of non-egoistic spiritual energy starts manifesting through a number of people simultaneously. Those people will be literally hands or arms, or even faces, of Avalokiteśvara. There will be no question of any conflict between them. They will function in perfect harmony. They will be something for which we have no expression in English. It will be a true sangha, an Āryasaṅgha. Our Order has a future only to the extent that it is such a sangha, or contains such a sangha as its nucleus. It is therefore imperative that each and every one of you should seek to transform your effective Going for Refuge into a real Going for Refuge, should seek to attain Stream Entry or the arising of the real bodhicitta. It is up to you. The future of the Order, of the Movement, is in your hands."²²

How do we envision making our own altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge from provisional to effective, and from effective to real? How can we help our friends to make that journey?

²² Sangharakshita, *Looking Ahead A Little Way*, 1999. Excerpt from *The Complete Works*, Volume 12

Study area 3. The Altruistic Dimension

Summary and Reading

The third topic we will be studying on this retreat is Sangharakshita's teaching on acting as a Bodhisattva in the world and building the 'Buddha Land', or, we could say, the 'Dharma Revolution'.

Required reading

The main text, as before, is Subhuti's paper '**A Supra-Personal Force**'.

Optional study material

It would be helpful if you were to read Sangharakshita's original teachings on *The New Society* and *Blueprint for a New World*, which are part of his series *Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow*. These are found in *The Complete Works, Volume 11*. You can also listen to the talks on Free Buddhist Audio. Please note that they were given in 1976, long before a lot of the institutions we are familiar with were set up.

In the material, the talk *Buddhism, World Peace and Nuclear War* is also referred to. You can find this on Free Buddhist Audio, or *The Complete Works, Volume 12*. Vajratara gave a talk in 2023 exploring this seminal talk of Sangharakshita's, called *An Example of Sanity and Compassion in the World*. It can be found on Free Buddhist Audio.

Subhuti's essay *The Dharma Revolution and the New Society* can be found on his website www.subhuti.info

The Altruistic Dimension

We have looked at how we might open up to the Bodhicitta, both individually and collectively. However, the Bodhisattva path does not end at our friends. Our sphere of awareness has to include the wider world. As we become aware of the true nature of *pratītya samutpāda* we see how painful the cyclical aspect of conditionality can be, and we also see how creative conditionality, the spiral path, is possible. We become aware of the spiritual potential of ourselves and others and we long to make that a reality in whatever way we can.

So the Bodhisattva has a task, a task to build the *Buddhakṣetra* or Buddha Land. Another way of putting it is that as the project of self construction is abandoned, the Buddha land project is undertaken. The Bodhisattva makes a vow to build a land where people can realise Enlightenment for themselves. As the *Vimalakīrtinīrdeśa* explains, the Buddha Land is only a Buddha Land to the extent that living beings are developed, realise Buddha wisdom and increase their spiritual faculties. This involves relieving external suffering and creating good conditions for people to follow the Dharma, as well as making available the teachings themselves:

"To lead a Buddhist life we need, above all, four things:
A vision of the kind of person we could become;
Practical methods to help us transform ourselves in the light of that vision;
Friendship to support and encourage us on the path;
And a society or culture that supports us in our aspirations."²³

²³ Sangharakshita, *Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow*.

The Bodhisattva path involves helping to create conditions where the Dharma can flourish.

“SANGHARAKSHITA: In this passage Śāntideva is looking at the ideal of the bodhisattva from a slightly different point of view. Going back to what Mary was saying a short while ago, it's as though the bodhisattva sees this enormous cloud of suffering, which is the suffering of all (perhaps even including his own), and he can't go on sitting there happily while it is impinging on him. It isn't his suffering. In a way he doesn't feel it; but also, in a way, he does. There's a line in Tennyson which refers to 'a painless sympathy with pain'. It's rather like that. He can't be completely happy, or completely undisturbed by suffering, so long as that cloud is there; so even in his own interest – his own interest in the long run – he works on that cloud. Most of that cloud is emitted by other people (maybe just a bit of it by him), but in order to get rid of any egoistic feelings he may have he works on that part of the cloud which belongs to other people, not on that part of it which belongs to himself. In this way, with the help of many bodhisattvas, the cloud is eventually dissolved. There's no question of the bodhisattva being able to sit somewhere and never be touched by that cloud. According to tradition, Avalokiteśvara, on the threshold of Enlightenment, hears in the distance a confused medley of sounds and cries. He turns round and listens, and it's the cries of all the beings who are suffering in the world. Moved by compassion, he turns his back, as it were, on Nirvāṇa, and remaining on the 'plateau' – as Dr Matics calls it – between the conditioned and the Unconditioned, saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa, continues to work on that cloud of suffering. If all sentient beings are interconnected, then existence is like a vast spider's web. You can't sit comfortably in your own little corner if, on the other side of the universe, someone else is uncomfortable in theirs. A little tremor will come along the filaments, and that will, in a way, disturb you. Not that it will disturb you in the usual way, of course, but because you can feel it your peace and tranquillity will not be absolutely complete. Even in your own interest, therefore – your own interest narrowly considered – you have to work on that cloud and help others. This is very much the Mahāyāna attitude. Strictly speaking, there's no such thing as individual liberation, individual happiness: you either all have it together, or you don't have it at all. You can say that you're fairly happy, fairly contented, but you can't say that you're completely happy until everyone's happy.

Q: Because the process of becoming individually happier is also one of becoming more sensitive, and so you can't escape.

SANGHARAKSHITA: Right. The more sensitive you become, the more open you are to other people's feelings, other people's sufferings. Paradoxically, if you go off to a cave and meditate, you become even more sensitive to the suffering of others, and feel like doing something about it. Either you come back into the world, therefore, or, if you are able, you do something on a purely mental level – telepathically, as it were – even if it's just carrying on with your own meditation so powerfully that the meditation itself becomes a cloud – a positive cloud – acting on that negative cloud.”²⁴

The bodhisattva path involves becoming even more sensitive to the suffering of others, but also the distinction between 'self' and 'others' starts to be transcended. We find that in responding to others, we are also responding to ourselves. There becomes a simple flow of beneficial activity between ourselves and others:

“SANGHARAKSHITA: We often have to speak in terms of self-development – in terms of controlling your own mind, devoting yourself to your own good, etc., but this is only a manner of speaking. If you really and genuinely do that, you are benefiting others too. Similarly, if you

²⁴ Sangharakshita, *Endlessly Fascinating Cry*. Extracted from *The Complete Works, Volume 4*

really and genuinely devote yourself to helping others, you also benefit yourself. As you progress in the spiritual life, you are less and less able truly to discriminate between the two. Suppose you spend the morning in your room, meditating for your 'own' benefit. Well, when you go out and meet others you are in a much more positive state of mind, and this affects them positively, so that indirectly your meditation benefits them too. On the other hand, if you sacrifice your own time and convenience in order to do things for other people, then, if you do it in the right spirit, it benefits you as well. At least you've overcome sloth and torpor. At least you've been active and busy in some good cause.

There is this very strong sense, in the Mahāyāna, of devoting oneself to the promotion of good, and getting rid of sorrow and suffering, without so much of the personal reference. In a way it doesn't matter whether you call it mine or yours: there is this mass of suffering to be got rid of, and this mass of joy which can be brought into existence. We are all affected by the 'cloud of suffering', so let's all get rid of it, without bothering too much which bit is 'mine' and which bit is 'yours'. In the same way with the cloud of joy, and even with the cloud of Enlightenment, just try to bring it into existence. I might do a bit more than you, or you might do a bit more than me, but we all benefit in the end: we all share it; we all enjoy it. There's a little story in this connection about Śāriputra. He had been meditating in the forest one day, and when he came out his friend Maudgalyāyana asked him how it was that his face was shining with such unusual radiance. Śāriputra replied, 'All day I've been meditating in the forest, but there never came to me the thought "I am meditating".' It's a bit like that. In this little episode there's a bit of the 'Mahāyāna' spirit. Meditation is brought into existence, but it isn't anybody's property. It's just as much yours as mine. 'A higher state of consciousness has been brought into existence. I'm not saying it's mine: it's yours too.' That's the spirit of the bodhisattva also. 'Some good is being brought into existence – some higher states of being, some happiness, some joy. It's not mine – it's everybody's.' That's the attitude behind the bodhisattva's so-called 'renunciation' of a personal Nirvāṇa. He knows it isn't 'his', anyway. It's there to be shared by all, so to speak."²⁵

What is the 'right spirit' to sacrifice our time and convenience for other people?

What are the near enemies of that 'right spirit': the attitudes that can look like we are embodying the bodhisattva spirit, but are actually harmful to ourselves and others?

Do we have to wait for the 'right spirit' in order to help others? We can get a taste of this from a later seminar of Sangharakshita's where he opens out the whole idea of 'us' helping 'the world'. Instead of individually taking on the cosmic function of a Bodhisattva, we collectively assist in the work of the Bodhisattva:

"SANGHARAKSHITA: Does the Bodhisattva seem like a person in any recognizable sense? Can one really imagine, can one actually think of someone who stays for a limitless time in the world, and seeks the limitless qualities of Enlightenment for limitless embodied beings, and performs virtuous actions without limit? It really baffles the mind doesn't it? So therefore what sort of impression does one get about the Bodhisattva?

Q: Beyond man?

SANGHARAKSHITA: Beyond man. And not only beyond man but, beyond, even individuality as we usually recognize it. It's almost as though the Bodhisattva is a sort of impersonal spiritual energy. So when the Mahayana describes the Bodhisattva, it's as though it isn't describing an individual at all and therefore it's not expecting us to behave like that literally. It's as though the Mahayana is trying to depict in the figure of the Bodhisattva this spiritual energy, this spiritual force, which is at work in the universe, and of which we can get just a

²⁵ *ibid*

sort of glimpse every now and then. So it is not very realistic for us to be a Bodhisattva like this, we can't really think of it, but what we can do is at least be open to the ideal and hope that to some extent at least the Bodhisattva, or that sort of spiritual energy will be able to manifest through us. That seems more realistic as it were, and in a way more true.

But if you take the words of the Mahayana scriptures very literally, then you have to say that "I am going to become a Bodhisattva, I am going to perform infinite good deeds, I'm going to establish a Buddhaland, I'm going to liberate an infinite number of beings", but does one feel that one really is in a position to even aspire to this? Can one imagine oneself as an individual actually doing all this? So it seems that it would be more practical if we take the Bodhisattva as representing this universal if you like, or even omnipresent, spiritual energy which is at work in the universe, tending to the good, tending to the emancipation, tending to the enlightenment of all living beings, and we can to be a channel of that within our own particular sphere, within our own particular context, our own particular life.

It is not that you as an individual are going to be a Bodhisattva in this sort of cosmic sense, but that there is a Bodhisattva, or the Bodhisattva, at work, and one will assist and co-operate in that work, make oneself a channel for that sort of energy. You can't appropriate to yourself as an individual the attributes and qualities, and activities and vows, of the Bodhisattva.

So it's as though just as the Samboghakaya Buddha represents the ideal of Enlightenment outside any historical context, outside space and outside time. In the same way the Bodhisattva represents not a particular individual Bodhisattva, but rather represents what we can call perhaps the spirit of enlightenment at work in the world.

Q: Do you see it in terms of a certain attitude?

SANGHARAKSHITA: The Bodhisattva takes a vow to pursue his career for three unthinkable aeons, and to practice each paramita for so many millions of years, well can one quite realistically and honestly make those sort of vows? One can perhaps think in terms of the Bodhisattva spirit at work in the universe, not limited by time, not limited by space and then one's own task is just, to manifest that Bodhisattva spirit within one's own life and within one's own sphere of influence. That would seem to be more realistic and more true, and even in a way more honest. I think one has to stick very close to one's actual situation and not get lost in what are rather unrealistic aspirations.

In a way the Theravada is much more sober, and much closer to the actual facts of the situation, but the Mahayana gives very well the spirit of the whole thing, the spirit of the whole process, within a wider, even a cosmic context. In a way you have to take the two together, take the Theravada as a guide for here and now, day by day practice, and take the Mahayana as a guide to the ideal as it exists outside space and outside time, and independently of one's own rather pathetic efforts.

What I'm trying to do in effect is to make a distinction between an ideal as it exists independent of any concrete situation and the attempt to embody the ideal in the concrete situation. The Bodhisattva as described in the Mahayana scripture corresponds to the Samboghakaya Buddha. He's the ideal as it exists outside space and outside time. Not the ideal as realized, which the Buddha represents, but the ideal in process of realization. You could say that therefore the Bodhisattva is the spirit of the higher evolution, but no one situation, no one individual, aspiring to that ideal, can fully express it.

Take the figure of Avalokitesvara with a thousand arms and eleven heads. The Bodhisattva is so many sided, so omnipresent, doing so much, but it wouldn't be possible for any one person, in any one given historical situation to do all those things. So the Bodhisattva, as an ideal, doesn't represent something to be copied by each individual. That is quite impossible,

that would be a contradiction in terms. But an individual is to imbibe the spirit of that, and express it in his own way within his own life and his own immediate situation. So therefore you mustn't take too literally the Bodhisattva's vows about delivering all beings, or throughout the universe, because here it is the Bodhisattva spirit speaking. You will do your bit by delivering those beings who fall within your particular sphere of influence, you will aspire to be just one of the thousand arms of Avalokitesvara. The arm belongs to Avalokitesvara, Avalokitesvara does not belong to the arm. If you think that you have to be the Bodhisattva, well it's like the arm thinking it's got to be Avalokitesvara, or that Avalokitesvara belongs to the arm, whereas in fact it's the other way round - you've got to be an arm of Avalokitesvara.

Otherwise you get into all sorts of contradictory situations if you take some of the things that the Mahayana sutras say literally. Let's say that there are lots of people, thousands of people, all aspiring to be Bodhisattvas and to deliver all beings, won't they get in one another's way? (laughter) So what does that mean? There can only be one Bodhisattva, So there is one Bodhisattva spirit working throughout space and throughout time, and individuals who accept that ideal do their bit within their own particular sphere, but the idea of each one, as an individual aspiring to that cosmic function, that is ridiculous.

One mustn't think of the Bodhicitta as a thing; even to think of it as a force isn't quite right, but it's better than as a thing, because a force is in movement, a force changes, a force is process, a force is dynamic.

The best that you can say is 'let me be a vehicle of that cosmic Bodhisattva; and let at least a fraction of one of those vows be fulfilled through me.' And that is the more realistic attitude. Otherwise you suffer from, if you're not careful, not only from a spiritual indigestion, but tremendous spiritual inflation. Not that it's a blind, impersonal, force. It's not a force which is personal in any sense that we understand it. It's supra-personal."²⁶

How can we, as a community, best assist and co-operate in the work of the Bodhisattva?

Sangharakshita developed his thinking about how the Sangha could best participate in the work of the Bodhisattva as the Triratna Buddhist Movement grew and developed. New opportunities emerged as new team based right livelihoods developed, Buddhist Centres grew and residential Buddhist communities were established. The structure of his thinking can be found in the series of talks he gave in 1976 called *Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow*. In these talks he outlined a vision of what our community can give to both the wider world and to each other. He talked about this vision as his 'Four Gifts': a method of personal development, a vision of human existence, a nucleus of a new society and a blueprint for a new world. This is an extract from his last talk, where he brings together the gifts as an offering to a new world:

"If we do find the idea of a new world attractive, this is presumably for the same reason that we find the idea of anything new attractive: because we are not really satisfied with the old model. However, when we say that we are dissatisfied with the old world, what exactly do we mean? Are we dissatisfied with the earth, with the flowers or the trees? Well, no. When we say that we are dissatisfied with the world, we generally mean that we are dissatisfied with certain aspects of corporate human existence, with certain social, economic, and political arrangements, even with the quality of human life. We are, all of us, in one way or another, dissatisfied with the world in this sense. The real question to ask ourselves is: are we dissatisfied enough? Does our dissatisfaction go deep enough? Or is it like the motorist's dissatisfaction with their car? Yes, one would like a quieter and more powerful engine, power-assisted steering, air bags, more leg-room in the back, and so on. But to what extent is one dissatisfied with that mode of transport as such? To what extent is one really dissatisfied

²⁶ Sangharakshita, extract from '*The Precious Garland Seminar*', Padmaloka 1976

with polluting the air with exhaust fumes or with a way of life that obliges one to spend hours hunched over the wheel instead of walking?

We may be dissatisfied with the amount of money we earn, but our dissatisfaction does not extend so readily to the very idea of working for a wage. We may be dissatisfied with our personal relationships, but do we ever get round to being dissatisfied with the emotional dependence on which those relationships are usually based? We tend to be more dissatisfied with the economic and political status of the country we belong to than we are with nationalism and the whole concept of the sovereign national state. We may be dissatisfied with wars and conflicts all over the globe, but not with those things for which people go to war.

What I'm suggesting is that we do not really want a new world at all; we only want an improved version, perhaps merely a slightly improved version, of the old world. The world that I have in mind, however, is an entirely new world, a world radically different from the old one. This new world will be a world in which we relate to one another as individuals, a world in which we are free to develop to the utmost of our potential, and in which the social, economic, and political structures will help us to do that. The new world will be, in short, a spiritual community – a spiritual community writ large. Our aim, therefore, must be to transform the present world into a spiritual community. This is the only new world that is worth having, the only new world worth working for.

But how are we to bring about this transformation? How are we even to begin? First of all, we must reconcile two apparently divergent views as to how best to go about instituting the kind of radical change I am envisaging. The first view says we must change the system. People are basically all right as they are; they are simply unlucky enough to live under the wrong system. All we need to do, therefore, is replace the wrong system with the right one, and we shall then have a new world in which everybody will be happy. The second view says that change must come from the bottom up; that it is simply up to the individual, as the basic unit of society, to change. Those who hold this view may go so far as to think that the individual human being is greedy, selfish, and stupid, and that all the world's troubles are due to this simple fact. Wars occur because people feel hatred, economic crises occur because people are greedy. It follows that to change the world we must change ourselves: we must become contented, unselfish, generous, and wise. The first view, that we must change the system, is generally regarded as the secular view, and the second, which is a sort of moral appeal – sometimes a vehement moral appeal – to the ordinary individual, is generally regarded as the spiritual view.

In fact these views are not mutually exclusive. Spiritual movements, especially those that trace their descent from 'the wisdom of the East', are generally expected to adopt the spiritual view, but if this is so, the FWBO is an exception. Yes, the development of the individual is fundamental in transforming the world; but at the same time it is important to recognize that external conditions can help or hinder us in our development. Whatever the external conditions, we have to want to develop and we will always have to exert ourselves. But we must also acknowledge that if we live under the right system, it is easier to develop, and if we live under the wrong system, it is more difficult.

Having said that, some people depend less on external conditions than others; in other words, some are more truly individual than others. There are those who will develop no matter how unfavourable the external conditions may be; they will somehow find a way through despite all obstacles. Others, by contrast, will find it almost impossible to develop even if conditions are highly favourable, while still others, of course, simply won't be interested in development at all. But for most people external conditions are important. With the right conditions they will develop, and with the wrong conditions they will not. It's as simple as that."

This becomes clear on a retreat. A retreat involves a number of people going to a beautiful, quiet place in the country for a weekend, or a week, or a month. (Retreats come in all shapes and sizes.) Except for taking turns at cooking, washing dishes, or perhaps some gardening, the participants do not work. Instead they meditate perhaps three or four times a day, they chant together, they take part in pujas, they listen to talks, and they have discussions or study Buddhist texts. In other words, for a time the conditions under which people live are changed; they are provided with conditions that are more conducive to personal development. And in these improved conditions, people change. One can see this happening literally before one's eyes. Sometimes people change dramatically, even after just a few days. They might arrive on the retreat feeling worried, harried, anxious, tired, and irritable – but gradually they become more relaxed, they cheer up, they begin to smile and laugh and seem glad to be alive. They become more aware of themselves, of one another, of their surroundings, of nature, more aware that they are living and breathing on this earth. They also become more free and spontaneous, more themselves. Although I have seen this happen many times, each time the change occurs it seems almost magical.

Unfortunately, however, the retreat must end, and everyone has to go back to wherever they came from. And it is noticeable that people who have experienced a retreat for the first time can be quite reluctant to leave. They can even become tearful at the prospect of going back to less helpful conditions. Indeed, because we generally have to return to a boring or otherwise stressful job, to a noisy crowded city, or to a difficult domestic situation, the change in us does not always last. Nevertheless there is one lasting benefit: we have seen that it is possible to change, that – given the right conditions – we can develop.

It is, therefore, not altogether true after all to say that to offer a blueprint for a new world is to dream of something that does not exist. On retreat we experience, at least to a small extent and for a short time, what the new world could be like. We can even say that on a small scale a retreat is a new world. It shows us that the idea of transforming the world into a spiritual community is more than a mere hypothesis. It shows us that the new world need not exist only in the imagination; it is not just a dream.

So, to come back to our original question, how do we go about transforming the world into a spiritual community? How do we begin? Usually people who want to change the world do two things. First they draw up a detailed, comprehensive plan, and then “they try to get everybody to adopt it – by force if necessary. Of course some people choose to do only one of these two things. Either they think it is enough to create the plan and leave others to accept it or reject it as they wish, or else they try to seize power in the conviction that once they attain it they will know what to do with it.

From the Buddhist point of view neither of these two courses of action is satisfactory. To begin with, Buddhists distrust abstract theories, theories not directly related to the needs of the concrete human situation. Buddhism delineates general principles but leaves the specific application of those principles to the individual. Take ethics, for example. Buddhism teaches the principle of non-violence, or love, and says that we should do no harm to other living beings. It teaches the principle of generosity and says that we should not take what is not given. In both cases Buddhist tradition indicates some of the more obvious applications of these principles, but it leaves us to understand and enact the principles within the context of our own lives. It is the same in connection with the projection of an ideal world. Buddhist texts describe such a world, but the descriptions are general and inspirational rather than specific; again, we are left to work out the details for ourselves.

As for changing the world by first seizing power and only then developing a plan for an ideal society, this sort of scheme, pragmatic as it may be, is even less suited to Buddhist principles. The spiritual community is not a power structure. It is not based on coercion, or on the

authority of one person over another. The spiritual community cannot be created by the exercise of power; only persuasion, through words or through personal example, can bring it into existence. Otherwise, the new world would only be a variant of the old one, with all the old problems.

So what are we to do? The answer is really quite simple. If we want to build a new world, we must expand the nucleus of a new society into the old world. This expansion represents the activity of the spiritual community; it is not just the individual actions of individual committed Buddhists, but rather the actions of teams of committed Buddhists. Such teamwork can radically transform two fundamental aspects of our lives: what we do to earn a living, and where we live.”²⁷

Sangharakshita asks us here to see beyond an inertia where we seek to make our experience a little more comfortable without any real changes for ourselves and others. **How do we take our sense of dissatisfaction with the old world deeper? Do we imagine an improved old world, or a radical change in society? Do we think a radical change is possible?**

The two methods to change the world are also explored: changing the system or changing ourselves. **Which method do we usually lean towards, and how does that influence our thinking?** For example, we might think that going on protests is more efficacious than going to the Buddhist Centre, and meditation is somewhat self absorbed, or we might think that protests never change anything and the best thing to do is develop mettā. **How can we unite both perspectives?**

Sangharakshita’s vision is that we can change ourselves, as well as influencing wider society. In fact, in changing ourselves, we are changing the world. He also highlights that we don’t change the world on our own, but as ‘teams of committed Buddhists’. He sees the potential of the Sangha to offer a new vision of how society can operate, particularly in the areas of working and living. **What might teams of committed Buddhists look like and what influence can they have? Do we have initiatives in our own Centres that we can participate in? Does it mean we need to change the way we live and work?**

In 1992, Bhante gave a lecture in which he talked about the duties of friendship, and how we don’t need to spread the Dharma in a heavy-handed way that imposes Buddhism on others against their will. To spread the Dharma, to change the world, is simply to be a friend to others. I wanted to end on this extract because it gives us a way we can all make a difference to the world, and that difference is profound and far reaching. In his seminal talk *Buddhism World Peace and Nuclear War*, Sangharakshita talks about how we can help avert war and other social problems:

“One must set an example (setting an example indeed is the best way of taking the initiative, or of giving a lead), and in the present instance the example that is set has to be a very lofty one. It has to be an example of impartiality and detachment, an example of love for humanity as a whole, an example of genuine devotion to the achievement of world peace by non-violent means. It has to be an example of sanity and compassion.”²⁸

If we are able to be impartial, and to love humanity as a whole:

“We shall be a voice of sanity and compassion in the world. We shall be able to appeal to reason. We shall be able to remind humanity, in its own name, what things are of greater value and what of less. We may even be able to remind it what is the most valuable thing of all.”²⁹

²⁷ Sangharakshita, *Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow*. Extract from *The Complete Works, Volume 11*

²⁸ Sangharakshita, *Buddhism World Peace and Nuclear War*. Extract from *The Complete Works, Volume 11*

²⁹ *Ibid*

We have to be, in other words, a friend to the world, a 'lokamitra', which is another word for a Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva offers the gift of the Dharma, the greatest gift of all gifts, simply as a friend. The gift of true friendship, of sanity and compassion, is the gift of the Dharma, and it is the Dharma that can change the world:

"The first four of these duties between friend and friend [in the Sigālaka Sutta, DN31] are identical with another well-known set of categories, one that occupies an important place, especially in Mahāyāna Buddhism. These are the four saṃgraha-vastus or 'elements of conversion', and they are significant in that they also appear as part of what is called upāya pāramitā or the perfection of skilful means. The perfections, or pāramitās, are ten in number and the bodhisattva practises them all so as to pass through ten stages of development. Since upāya is the seventh of the ten perfections, the fact that the four saṃgraha-vastus are called the 'elements of conversion' is quite noteworthy. It suggests that the most skilful means of converting someone, or winning them over, is simply by being a friend to them.

It's not uncommon to find people trying to convert us to their point of view, especially to their religion. They might knock on our door to ask if we have heard 'the Word' (whatever the Word might be). Quite a few people have tried to convert me in that way and I'm glad to tell you they didn't succeed. In Buddhism, by contrast, bringing pressure to bear on others, sometimes almost forcibly, is not the right path. In Buddhism we convert people – if that is even the right word – simply by being friendly. We just make friends, and there's no need to preach to them. So if you want to win someone over, just be a friend. Be generous, share with them whatever you have, and speak kindly and affectionately, show concern for their welfare, especially their spiritual welfare, keep your word to them, and treat them in the same way that you treat yourself. These five things in themselves communicate the Dharma. In fact you could even go so far as to say that friendship actually is the Dharma. Just as William Blake, the great English artist and mystic, says in one place that 'Brotherhood is Religion'.³⁰

³⁰ Sangharakshita, *The Meaning of Friendship in Buddhism, lecture, 1992*. Extract from *The Complete Works, Volume 11*.