

Minutes of Women's Mitra Convenors Gathering at Taraloka (March 2022)

PRESENT:

Amarapuspa (**Chair** - Brixton), Viryanaya (**Team** - Buddhafield), Garavavati (**Team** - LBC), Darsavini (**Team** - North London), Kusalasara (**Team** - LBC), Amarachandra (Cambridge), Vimalavajri (Bristol), Annavaja (Colchester), Muditalila (Cardiff), Amalavasini (Cardiff), Karunatarata (Manchester), Maitrisiddhi (North Wales), Suryaka (Manchester), Kalyanatarata (Southampton), Khemasiri (Nottingham), Prajnanita (North London), Danasamudra (Adhisthana and environs), Maitreyi (**Kalyana Mitra** to Gathering)

1. Minutes of December 2021 Gathering adopted.

Matters Arising:

Online Study: Amarapuspa followed up on consulting with Candradasssa about the Mitra Convenor survey. Agreed it indicates that online study requests have been largely met by centres and groups. At present no funding for an outlying Mitra Convenor. Amarapuspa was made administrator to the Mitra Support group on BCO. Is looking for a volunteer to take on engaging with Mitras in this context.

Amarapuspa also explored making resources on our BCO group more easily accessible or having the resources in a dedicated space. Candradassa suggested the best way to fund materials is to scroll through the Archive section of the group. Maitrisiddhi offers a dedicated space on the Taraloka web site. Hurrah!

ACTION: Amarapuspa to provide Taraloka and Mitra Convenors with an index of resources available to Mitra Convenors.

1. *Ethics Kula Request:* Amarapuspa reports back about a request from the Ethics kula to consider the following recommendations after reviewing an incident where a study leader got sexually involved with a person in their group:

i Creating and issuing guidelines to Mitra study leaders about the importance of not entering into sexual relationships with mitras in their group. This could be stated as a principle at the formation of mitra study groups.

ii Ensure that at the outset of retreats, it is made explicit that sexual activity is not appropriate in that context

- iii Ensure regular reviews are conducted by Mitra conveners with Mitra study leaders every six months, incorporating feedback where possible from co-leaders or supporters, to ensure problems or uncertainties can be explored before they become issues
- iv Ensure a clear procedure exists and is made known to all mitras for handling complaints. This should include a clear point of contact and support for the person raising the issue.

Discussion:

Amarapuspa provided Punyamala with the Suggested Guidelines for Study Leaders agreed by both wings of the Mitra Conveners Gathering (annexed as attachment “A”). Mitra Conveners are referred to the safeguarding guidelines in their centres. Therefore, no need for further complaints procedures. Could add a sentence to Areas to to explore with a woman asking to become a Mitra making clear what Mitra Convenor role is and advise that safeguarding systems are in place on Triratna.

ACTION: Amarachandra to draft a sentence to be added.

Some centres already have study leader reviews (Manchester, Bristol) and find them helpful others do this informally (LBC, N. London, Cambridge). Smaller groups only have Mitra Conveners leading study groups (eg Brixton, Cardiff).

CARRY FORWARD: Does the Gathering want to make a recommendation of 6 monthly study leader reviews as suggested by the Ethics Kula?

1. *Tiratnaloka has asked Mitra Conveners to consider the following:*

“Ordination requests: we have had some people coming to Tiratnaloka who would be better off not training for ordination, at least for now.

- It might be that they already have another path, Buddhist group or another religious affiliation that they are following
- They don’t really have time to follow up the commitment ordination training requires because of their other responsibilities eg work and family
- They have mental health problems that mean they are unable to engage with the Order and Movement appropriately.

We were wondering if we could discuss with mitra conveners how they talk to mitras about requesting ordination, and whether they have to always accept that request.” (Message from Vajratara)

To be discussed with Kalyacitta when she visits the Gathering from 21st to 23rd March.

1. *Revision of Mitra Study course*

Darsavini proposes that it be communicated that Year One material be urgently revised. Many issues arising in North London and other Centres/groups around sexist language and

language offensive to people of gender diverse background. The third precept material in the Ethics module is particularly challenging. Amarapuspa agrees with this but points out many still find the material beneficial.

Undertaking revision is a huge undertaking. Amarapuspa has been in dialogue with the Sikkha Project about revising the course (Vajrasura). The women's Gathering had agreed to turn over revision of the DTCM material to the Sikkha Project. She had passed on suggested amendments from a Mitra. However, Vajrasura told her the last time she spoke to him that the Project was too stretched to undertake revision at that time. He also told her that the Men's Gathering didn't agree to the Sikkha Project revising the material and wanted to retain an overseeing role.

AGREED: the Gathering make a request that the Year One material be revised as a matter of urgency.

ACTION: Darsavani to draft the request and Amarapuspa to find out who currently oversees revision and forward request to them. Amarapuspa to also confirm with the Men's Gathering that they want to retain an overseeing role. If so do the women want to revisit this? Viryanaya and Darsavini might be willing to undertake drafting some suggested revisions.

1. *Unedited Seminar Transcripts*

Darsavini raises issue of need for a disclaimer about crude misogynistic language in generally accessible seminar material. She says this is doing Triratna's reputation much damage without a disclaimer or contextualising filter. One Mitra she knew withdrew her ordination request as a result of the un-disclaimed offensive language. She points out that the Adhithana website has an excellent landing page with a disclaimer about "views not currently held" about the material. However, the material is still accessible through other channels without any contextualising filters. Danasamudra suggests that a filter should be there for all seminar material like a cookie button to click on before material can be accessed further.

ACTION: Danasamudra to create contextualising filters wherever the archive material can be accessed.

1. *Meeting with Kalyacitta*

Kalyacitta says Tiratanaloka Team now focusing on more joined up communication between Tiratanaloka, Mitra Convenors and Mitras. Mitra Convenors are at the centre of a two way communication between Mitras and Order Members. Have had more Mitra Convenors supporting retreats. There has been more sharing of ideas and practice. Tiratanaloka is also offering weekends for Order Members aimed at supporting them to take a more active role in ordination training process. There is also a week long retreat coming up for Order Members in the nissaya period. This retreat is not exclusive. Other Order Members can join.

Asking for ordination:

The Gathering discussed areas to consider around a person's readiness to train for ordination (see 3. above). It was agreed/clarified:

- a Mitra can ask any Order Member for ordination including writing to the ordination team. It is still the practice ask local Order Members in person and that the Mitra Convenor should be informed.
- The college of Public Preceptors state that a request for ordination should always be accepted. However, , if possible, capacity for training for ordination should be explored with the Mitra prior to them asking for ordination including areas outlined above. Are there steps the Mitra needs to take first before training? Training is not just about going to Tiratanaloka. Suggest going to Taraloka first, deepening local friendships and engagement with Centre activities. Ask for feedback from Taraloka Team.

New retreat Centre

- looking for 70 plus places (plus 12 for team) building/grounds. Hoping to find location to offer a range activities including possible three month retreats. Currently looking for property in Shrewsbury, Hereford, Buxton, Ely and Swindon and 40 mile vicinity of those areas.
- asked Vajrasara to come up with a name for fundraising appeal: "Tiratanaloka Unlimited" suggested. They like it.
- Subhadramati heading fundraising. Looking to raise £1.7 million on top of money from sale of Tiratanaloka.

Gender Diverse retreatants

- Tiratnaloka will consider accepting non binary and trans women on their retreats. They still identify as a women's centred retreat centre. Like Taraloka, they ask people to get in touch with team if that person doesn't fully classify as a biological woman but wants to come on retreat with them.

- Legally still allowed to be single sex but need to justify. A person who has gone through gender transformation operation and is legally recognised as a woman can't be excluded.
- The team needs to work with a whole range of sensitivities in this area.

Other Areas

- Kalyacitta stresses the benefits of coming on an in person retreat as opposed to online. People get a sense of living in a community.
- Educating Mitras as to who and when to ask someone to become their private preceptor is quite a sensitive area. Kulas could recommend when they think a Mitra is ready to ask someone to become their private preceptor. Amarapuspa has sent out Satyaraja's points around asking someone to become their private preceptor. She will include this in the Index of Resources to be set up on Taraloka's web site.
- There has been discussion in the team at TRL about whether the term "TFO" would be more appropriate than "GFR" but given that the mens wing continue to use this there hasn't been a definite change. Kalyacitta will take this back to the team to discuss and perhaps ask for a college discussion. Kalyacitta mentioned that abbreviating terms is also an issue - for instance Order members saying "our GFR's" or "our TFO's". Mitras sometimes refer to their GFR group as "our GFR" and Mitra study group as "mitra" as in I was at mitra last night". Mitra means friend, so that doesn't makes sense.

1. *Study/work shops/personal talks on tantric rites and Mitra Convening*

Personal talks and talks by Maitreyi audio recorded and to be made available. Agreed this is a very beneficial and rich area to explore and carry forward in some form at future Gatherings,

1. Next Gatherings

We are waiting for dates from Tiratanaloka for Spring 2023. The team has agreed to meet at Taraloka for our Autumn 2023 Gathering.

The next 2022 Gathering will be held at Adhithana from **9th to 14th October 2022**.