

Introduction to Triratna

Buddhism for the modern world

The Triratna Buddhist Community is an international network dedicated to communicating Buddhist truths in ways appropriate to the modern world. Originally known as the FWBO (Friends of the Western Buddhist Order), it was founded in London in 1968 by Sangharakshita. Having originally taken ordination as a Theravadin Bhikkhu in India, during his twenty years practicing Buddhism on the Indo-Tibetan border he went on to take initiations from a number of the Lamas escaping the Chinese occupation of Tibet. When he returned to England, he experienced first-hand the limited context in which Westerners had to practice the Dharma and his response was to found a new Buddhist movement.

Bringing Buddhism into an entirely new culture implied to Sangharakshita that we needed to go back to basics — to look at the principles underlying all forms of Buddhism and work out how best to apply them in this new context. So Triratna is based on the principle of ‘critical ecumenicalism’: aligned to no one traditional school, but drawing on the whole stream of Buddhist inspiration.

Now that Buddhism has come to the West, Westerners are faced with the task of creating new and viable Buddhist traditions for the modern world. Triratna has pioneered new structures that allow people to live out Buddhist teachings as an authentic Buddhist way of life in the 21st century: team-based right livelihood businesses, communities, socially engaged fundraising projects such as the Karuna Trust, and more. Over the last forty years the Triratna Buddhist Community has grown to be one of the largest Buddhist movements in the West, with centres and activities in many cities around the world including India.

According to Sangharakshita, **Triratna has six distinctive features**, which constitute its particular individuality – an individuality which has developed as a result of practicing the Dharma under the conditions of modern, industrialised, urbanised, secularised, living; conditions which are fast becoming worldwide.

First, the Triratna Buddhist Community is an ecumenical movement, signifying that in principle it accepts the whole Buddhist tradition as it has developed over the centuries in the East. Specifically it bases itself upon the principle of critical ecumenicalism, trying to understand what the various texts and traditions really mean – and to apply that meaning to the living of our lives as Buddhists.

Secondly, it is a unified movement in the sense that membership of Triratna is open to all regardless of nationality, race, colour, education, class or caste, cultural background, gender, sexual orientation, or age: it seeks to welcome and value all as individuals. More specifically, the Triratna Buddhist Order is open to both men and women on fully equal terms: this is revolutionary compared to traditional Eastern Buddhism, where ordination (or its equivalent) is generally not open to women.

Thirdly, it holds the act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels (the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) to be the central and definitive act of a Buddhist.

Fourthly, Triratna places great emphasis on spiritual friendship or kalyana mitrata, and fifthly, on team based right livelihood, where it has been a pioneer in the field. Sixthly and lastly, it emphasises the importance of the Arts for the spiritual life, seeing them as potentially bearers of spiritual values, which can help people to transform their lives.

In the last 40 years the Triratna Buddhist Community has grown into a movement with dozens of centres all over the world. And not only in the West — Triratna has a substantial presence in India, as well as Dharma activities in other developing countries.

Sangharakshita has now handed-on responsibility for the Triratna Buddhist Community and Order's spiritual vitality to his followers. Triratna is entering a new phase of growth and consolidation, learning from, and building upon its history, and developing into a broad-based, mature and experienced spiritual community. It is playing a significant role in bringing Buddhism to the West.

In India Triratna is known as the Triratna Bauddha Mahasangha, where it has been established for some 30 years. The work in India has two aspects: firstly providing facilities for teaching the Dharma among Buddhists from the communities formerly known as 'untouchable', and secondly running social work projects to contribute to the betterment of those communities. Much of this is funded by the Karuna Trust and other Triratna projects in the West.

[Source: Resource Pack 2 for newcomers to Triratna Centres](#)