



Starting and Sustaining a Buddhist Community

(Triratna Resource Pack #4)

Introduction

This pack aims to offer a selection of useful resources to anyone in the Triratna Buddhist Community who is thinking to start a community, or already living in one.

It includes practical advice, inspirational material and Dharma resources; also ideas that may help in times of difficulty. It's a collaborative effort between members of the Triratna Development team and people from the Young Triratna Buddhists Sangha. Thanks to all who've contributed.

This pack is part of a growing series of Triratna Resource packs, the others prepared so far are listed at the end. Please note that this document is envisaged to grow and improve over time, so please check out the latest version on the Triratna Centre Support website at triratna-centre-support.org. Finally, suggestions are welcome, please contact Lokabandhu at lokabandhu@triratnadevelopment.org.

Credits

Multiple thanks to - Alice from Sheffield, Knut from London, and Sally from Nottingham, plus Lokabandhu, Vajragupta, Jnanarakshita from the Triratna Development Team.





Hatthaka Sutta: The Sangravastus

Anguttara Nikaya 8.24 translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

On one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Alavi at the Aggalava Shrine. Then Hatthaka of Alavi, surrounded by approximately 500 [other] lay followers, went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there the Blessed One said to him, "Large is your following, Hatthaka. How have you won over this large following?"

"Lord, I have won over this large following through the four grounds for the bonds of fellowship taught by the Blessed One. When I know that, 'This person is to be won over by giving,' then I win him/her over by giving. When I know that, 'This person is to be won over by kind words,' then I win him/her over by kind words. When I know that, 'This person is to be won over by beneficial help,' then I win him/her over by beneficial help.^[1] When I know that, 'This person is to be won over by consistency,' then I win him/her over by consistency.^[2] Awed by the wealth of my family, they regard me as worth listening to, which would not be the case if I were poor."

"It's good, Hatthaka, it's very good that this is the means by which you have won over a large following. All those in the past who have won over a large following have done so by means of these four same grounds for the bonds

of fellowship. All those in the future who will win over a large following will do so by means of these four same grounds for the bonds of fellowship. All those at present who are winning over a large following do so by means of these four same grounds for the bonds of fellowship."

Then, having been instructed, urged, roused, & encouraged by the Blessed One with a talk on Dhamma, Hatthaka of Alavi got up from his seat, bowed down to the Blessed One, circled him — keeping him on his right — and left. Not long after he had left, the Blessed One said to the monks, "Monks, remember Hatthaka of Alavi as being endowed with eight amazing, astounding qualities. Which eight? Hatthaka of Alavi is endowed with conviction. He is virtuous. He has a sense of conscience. He has a sense of concern (for the results of unskillful actions). He is learned. He is generous. He is discerning. He is modest. Remember Hatthaka of Alavi as being endowed with these eight amazing, astounding qualities."

Translator's note: *The four grounds for the bonds of fellowship (see AN 4.32) appear in the early Mahayana sutras as guidelines for every aspiring bodhisattva — one of the few teachings that even the more radical Mahayana sutras adopt from the early canons. The following sutta, which maintains that these four qualities are required for developing any large following, may account for this fact.*

Contents

Introduction

Credits

The Story So Far

- Brief history of Triratna communities
- Present situation and trends
- Other community movements

Stories of community living

- Starting a community - Vajragupta
- Living in Community - Jnanarakshita
- Starting a community - Alice
- Benefits of living communally - Knut

The 'theory' of community living

- Subhuti's New Society talks

Starting a community

- Place
- People
- Practicalities
- Launching the community

Sustaining a community

- Good communication
- Integrating new people
- Maintaining depth
- Practice together
- Leadership
- Things to do:

- Community Nights

Reporting-in

Life Stories

Eating together

Clear bottom-line expectations

Clear practical arrangements

Links to a wider community

Trouble-shooting

- Conflict resolution - Jnanarakshita
- Officialdom

Resources/links

- Subhuti - New Society talks
- Community 'Ethos Statements'
- Sanghadevi's book
- Specimen Tenancy agreement
- Cost spreadsheet
- VideoSangha
- Canonical sources - readings
 - The Aniruddhas
 - The Sanghravastus
 - Gandhavyuha on Spiritual Friends
- Other Resource Packs
 - How to start a Triratna group
 - Fundraising
 - How to start a Young Buddhists group

Dharma texts



Taraloka community in its early days





The Story So Far

Communities have been an integral part of the Triratna Buddhist Community/FWBO since its very early days. At first many were in run-down squatted properties around the Archway centre; these have long since been demolished though Aryatara, an even older community in Croydon, remains. Tradition has it that the first ones emerged spontaneously through people on retreat discovering they simply didn't want to stop living together when the retreat ended: they squatted a property near the only FWBO Centre at the time, and the first community was born. Communities rapidly became central to the FWBO's distinctive way of doing things, which wsummed up as the 'three C's' - Centres, Co-ops, and Communities.

The early communities had very few role models to draw upon and much of their time and energy went into making mistakes - and learning from them! Subhuti describes this in 'Buddhism for Today', saying "*Nothing very systematic had been formulated about community living; they simply wanted to take their Buddhism a bit more seriously. The early years of this community were quite difficult as the basic principles of communities were discovered in the process of trial and error*".

He goes on to elaborate the principles that were discovered in this early phase, saying "*Two major lessons were learnt. Firstly that couples - whether married or not - tend to be divisive in a community... The second lesson was that a community needs a common purpose - a commitment to common ideals.*" Shortly after that, the 'single-sex principle' was discovered and that came to be the norm for most FWBO communities from then on. Subhuti describes it thus - "*One of the new communities squatting in a house a few doors from the Centre consisted, not by any design, only of men. The community members found that they liked it that way and it was very noticeable that the community prospered and functioned much more as a community than had any of the others. ...This practice, which is now basic to most FWBO communities, came about from experience and experimentation.*"



Padmaloka community in its early days

unpleasantness, having overcome pleasure and displeasure, with equanimity mindfulness purified and attained to, we abide in the fourth jhana. Venerable sir, overcoming that and above that, this is the distinctive knowledge we have attained and abide above human.

Good, Anuruddha, overcoming that and above it, is there any distinctive knowledge you attained to, abide above human? Venerable, sir, overcoming that and above that, this is the distinctive knowledge and vision we attained to, abide, above human. Venerable sir, we have not seen a more noble and a more exalted abiding above this.

Good, Anuruddha, there is no abiding more noble and more exalted than this. . .

Then the Blessed One advised, instructed, incited, and made the hearts light of the venerables

Anuruddha, Nandiya and Kimbila and, getting up from the seat, went away. When the Blessed One was going the three venerables Anuruddha, Nandiya and Kimbila followed after the Blessed One and stopped short.

Then venerables Nandiya and Kimbila asked venerable Anuruddha:

"What, did we tell you venerable Anuruddha, that we are gainers of those abidings and attainments that the venerable one told the Blessed One?"

"Not that the venerable ones told me about their abiding and attainments, yet we penetrated the minds of the venerable ones and knew that the venerable ones are gainers of those attainments. The gods too told me about this, and when the Blessed One questioned me about it I replied.





Venerable sir, in this manner we abide united like milk and water, friendly, without a dispute, seeing each other with friendly eyes.

Good, Anuruddha, do you live diligently?
Venerable sir, indeed we abide diligently.

Anuruddha, how do you abide diligently?
Venerable sir, whoever comes from the village first, after collecting morsel food, prepares the seats administers water for drinking and washing and places the spittoons. Whoever comes last from the village, partakes of what is left over if he desires, if he does not, throws it to a place where nothing grows, or puts into some water where there is no life. He puts away the seats, and the vessels of water, washes the spittoons and sweeps the refectory, Whoever sees the water vessels for drinking, washing or toilets empty, fills them up. If he finds it not in his capacity to carry it, would call another with the wave of the hand. Would not utter a word on account of it. On every fifth day we would sit throughout the night discussing a topic on the Teaching. Venerable sir, thus we abide diligently.

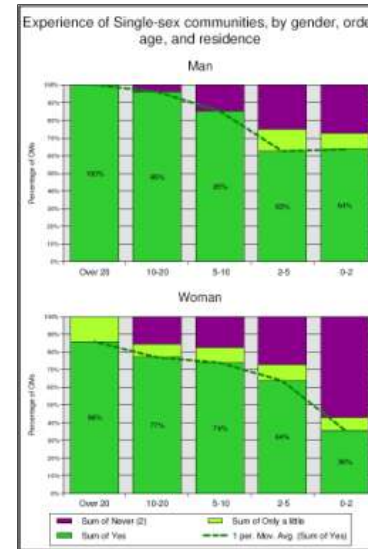
Good, Anuruddha, you abide diligently for dispelling. Have you attained any distinctive knowledge above human?

Why not venerable sir, Whenever we desire, seclude the mind from sensual thoughts and defiling thoughts and with joy and pleasantness born from seclusion attained to abide in the first jhana. Venerable sir, that is the distinctive knowledge we have attained above human.

Good, Anuruddha, overcoming that and above that, is there any distinctive knowledge you have attained and abide above human?
Why not venerable sir. Whenever we desire, overcoming thoughts and thought processes, the mind internally settled in one point, with joy and pleasantness born of concentration we attain to abide in the second jhana. Venerable sir, this is the distinctive knowledge we have attained and abide above human.

Good, Anuruddha, having overcome that and above that is there any distinctive knowledge you have attained to, abide above human.
Why not venerable sir? Whenever we desire, with equanimity and joy and detachment we abide mindful and aware experiencing pleasantness with the body, in the third jhana...

Good Anuruddha, having overcome that and above that is there any distinctive knowledge you attain to abide above human?
Why not venerable sir. Whenever we desire, dispelling pleasantness and



For many years almost everyone joining the Order had at least some experience of community living and the strong friendships it engendered. Indeed the 2007 Order Survey (freebuddhistaudio.com/ordersurvey) showed that 97% of Order Members ordained over 20 years had had lived for some time in communities - however this has dropped right down to under 50% for those newly-ordained; and now, only just over 1/3rd of new women order Members say they have ever had any experience of community life. Interestingly, it's still around 2/3rd for the men.

There's therefore been a big shift in Triratna's practice of community - on the positive side, a broadening-out of different 'pathways to ordination', on the other hand, a decrease in the intense bonds formed by living together. That said, the current edition of Triratna Contacts still lists 55 Triratna communities world-wide; mostly though not entirely in the UK; over a dozen women's, over forty men's and three mixed - plus the communities at all our retreat centres. So community life is still thriving at least in some quarters of Triratna.

The Triratna community has produced surprisingly little in the way of guides to community living - perhaps from a feeling that the best thing to do is to get on and do it! In the 1990's Subhuti gave a series of talks at Padmaloka entitled 'The New Society' which are probably our clearest exposition to date of the theory of community living (and Right Livelihood businesses and Buddhist Centres!). This was out of print for many years, but is now on-line at issuu.com/thebuddhistcentre/docs/newsociety_subhuti. Sanghadevi has also published 'Living Together', a small book blending her personal experience with more principal considerations and Dharma references.

Outside Triratna, a whole other communal-living scene has been going on for many decades now, made up of many "intentional communities" of different shapes and sizes and longevities, often linked to one or another part of the broad alternative-green-radical-eco-social movement. The best UK guide to these is probably Diggers and Dreamers (www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk) who for many years have





published an annual guide to communities in the UK. This is also a major resource for how to create and sustain a community. Other communities, though not Buddhist, share many of the same issues and have evolved a wealth of experience which we can draw upon.

Stories of community living

Here's a few stories from people who've lived in Triratna/FWBO communities, told in their own words. The next section goes on to look at a bit of the rationale and 'theory' behind community living. The stories are -

- Vajragupta - on starting a community in Worcester
- Jnanarakshita - on living in community (Windhorse and Birmingham)
- Alice - on setting up a community in Sheffield
- Knut - on the benefits of living communally (London Buddhist Centre)

Starting a community in Worcester - Vajragupta



About ten years ago Nibbhaya and I began running classes in Worcester. We were living in Birmingham, about 25 miles away, but every

Tuesday night we'd travel down to Worcester and run a class in hired rooms in the university. The classes slowly grew, but there were also certain limitations in not having our own place. Then one term the university needed our usual room for their own timetable; we were moved up to the second floor, five minutes walk from the car park, into a rather dreary room. It was quite a hassle carrying the mats and cushions all that way each week, the room lacked any atmosphere, and it was hard for new people to find. Numbers coming dropped dramatically.

But it turned out to be a blessing in disguise because it made us think about

how we could have our own place in Worcester. How could just a small sangha afford a property? We realised that one way to make it possible was to have a community – who paid rent to live in a property – and then hold the classes there too. I talked to Tom, a friend of mine, and a mitra in Worcester, and he and I decided we'd go for it. We then had an amazing stroke of luck in that Jo, another Worcester mitra, knew of a house that had just come up for rent. It was the perfect house for us, with a large room downstairs perfect for a shrine room.

Tom and I moved in at the start of 2009 and it also became what we called the "sangha house" – the place where we held our friends night, mitra study groups, and festivals. People could come round for meal before classes. We had a permanent shrine room and no more lugging cushions

The Aniruddhas

Majjhima Nikaya 31 Culagosinga Sutta - The Minor Discourse in the Gosinga Forest tipitaka.wikia.com/wiki/Culagosinga_Sutta

I heard thus. At one time the Blessed One was living in a brick house in Naadikaa. At that time venerables Anuruddha, Nandiya and Kimbila were abiding in the Gosinga Sala forest gifted by the king. The Blessed One getting up from his seclusion in the evening approached the Sala forest. The forest keeper saw the Blessed One coming in the distance and said, recluse, do not enter this forest. There are three sons of clansmen abiding here seeking their own good, do not inconvenience them. Venerable Anuruddha heard this conversation between the forest keeper and the Blessed One and told the forest keeper. Do not obstruct the Blessed One, he is our Teacher, the Blessed One.

Venerable Anuruddha addressed venerables Nandiya and Kimbila, come! Venerable ones, our Teacher has arrived. Then Venerables Anuruddha, Nandiya, and Kimbila approached the Blessed One, accepted bowl and robes from the Blessed One. One prepared a seat and another administered water to wash the feet. The Blessed One sat on the prepared seat and washed his feet. Those venerable ones worshipped the Blessed One and sat on a side.

The Blessed One addressed venerable Anuruddha: Anuruddha, are you

alright, do you have any fatigue owing to want of morsel food?
Venerable sir, we are alright, we have no fatigue owing to lack of morsel food.

Anuruddha, are you united and friendly without a dispute, like milk and water and do you abide seeing each other with friendly eyes?
Venerable sir, we are united like milk and water, friendly, without a dispute and abide seeing each other with friendly eyes.

Anuruddha, how do you abide united like milk and water, friendly, without a dispute seeing each other with friendly eyes?

Venerable sir, this thought occurs to me: it is gain for me that I live with such co-associates in the holy life. So I abide with bodily actions of loving kindness towards these venerable ones openly and secretly. With verbal actions of loving kindness towards these venerable ones openly and secretly. With mental actions of loving kindness towards these venerable ones openly and secretly. Sometimes it occurs to me what if I discard my thoughts and concede to the thoughts of these venerable ones. So I discard my thoughts and concede to the thoughts of these venerable ones.

Venerable sir, we are various in bodies, and one in mind.





Free from inflated ideas of my own worth;
With a mind like a street cleaner,
Getting rid of pride and conceit.

I will approach my friends
With a mind like a mountain range,
Impenetrable to all miseries;
With a mind like a good son,
Looking up to their countenance.

And I will grow in goodness
Like plants growing up a mountainside.
I will become a vessel of all the
Buddha-Teachings
As the ocean is of water.

I will purify my determination for
Enlightenment
As fire does gold.
I will rise above the world,
Like the polar mountain over the sea.

With my attitude toward my friends
Purified in this way,
Practising their instructions,

I will reject all bad actions
As the ocean throws up a corpse.

I will become unstained by the things
of the world,
Like a lotus in water.
I will increase in good qualities,
As the moon grows brighter as it
waxes.

All practices of the Bodhisattvas,
All their transcendent ways,
All their mystic knowledges and
spiritual powers,
All perfections
Of all attainments
Of all aspects
Of Buddhahood
Derive from spiritual friends,
Are rooted in spiritual friends,
Are fostered by spiritual friends,
Are caused by spiritual friends.

I will serve my friends with the highest
aim p348
Thereby growing like a lotus in water.

and shrines in and out each week. It was a big step forward.

A year later the house went on the market. At first we were disheartened, thinking we'd never find another house as good as this. But again, it was a blessing in disguise. We wondered about fundraising and thought that maybe – just maybe – we could raise enough for a deposit to get a mortgage. Thanks to a lot of people's generosity we've done that, and formed a Triratna charity that is buying the house. We've got another community member, Paul, moved in, and so there are now three of us. We get on well, and are all inspired and engaged in running the

Living in Community - Jnanarakshita



I've been living in shared living situations with other Buddhist men for the last 17 years, many of them associated with Windhorse: Evolution, and more recently in Bristol and Birmingham. I think most of those places would count as communities. At one end of the spectrum, some places were more like shared houses for guys who happened to all be Buddhists practising in the same movement. At the other end of the spectrum, we shared rooms, meditated together each morning, took it in turns to cook each evening, and had weekly community evenings (e.g. a meal, followed by business points, house cleaning then reporting-in or shrine room activity). In one place, we all contributed to a community bank account from which rent and bills were paid.

I guess my reason for wanting to join a community was similar to how it

classes and activities, and in making the sangha house a really welcoming place for those that come along.

One of the lessons of all this for me, is that you can start small. We started with just two of us, but that was fine. It has grown, and will continue to grow, from there. You can just start with who you've got and that will attract other like-minded people. Another aspect of this community that I like is that we're all into helping run the Centre. There is a project that engages and unites us – the community is about something bigger than itself. For me, that gives it an added dimension.

Vajragupta

apparently was for people in the early days of the movement. I went on my first retreat, enjoyed it, and thought "I'd like to live like this all the time". At their best, communities provide good conditions for deepening friendship. We get the opportunity to spend more time together and to share more of our lives together. Sharing resources is good for the planet. There's also a daily challenge to express our care for others. I've found a community can be a very supportive place to be when practice is going well, and also at times of bereavement or relationship break-up.

There's an old adage that where you get men's communities, you get men asking for ordination, and that has been my experience. One of Sangharakshita's assistants told me that as he and Bhante went around visiting different centres, he could tell which places had men's communities and which didn't. It was evidently the most decisive factor in a situation's spiritual vitality.





Of course I haven't always found it easy. Sometimes I've felt the need to point out that I prefer it if there isn't drunkenness or illegal drugs in the community, if someone's lover doesn't visit six nights in a row, if meat or fish isn't cooked there, and that you get a better atmosphere if everyone practises metta bhavana meditation regularly. Luckily I can tolerate a certain amount of untidiness. I know I haven't been the easiest person to be around at times, for example when I've been bad tempered or something of a frustrated idealist.

Setting up our Community - Alice Fowler



When I began to attend the Sheffield Buddhist Centre and became involved in the Sangha, I could clearly see the benefits gained by those living in the men's community situated above the Centre. I admired the close friendships between members, their intensity of practice and the positive effects of these on the wider Sangha. I wondered why there wasn't a womens community when it seemed such a beneficial, fun and inspiring way to live! After about a year of practice I committed to starting a community with Kate in around a year's time and Kate moved into my current shared house - I'd already agreed to remain there with another friend for a year. Living together in this way before starting the community was great as we really got to know each other and our friendship deepened. It was a very positive shared house, but the benefits of living within a spiritual community, with a

Like all our practices, communities require commitment. By not avoiding difficulties, you get the chance to work through them; sometimes you *have* to work through them. Whether it's difficult or not, by 'staying with it', I've made much stronger connections with a greater range of temperaments than I might otherwise have done. My experience is that communities work best if there are friendships alive within it, and when there's a degree of common understanding, common practice and even common project.

Jnanarakshita

shared vision and communal practice, were still longed for by us both.

Another member of the Sangha, K---, was also interested in community living so we all met up a couple of times to discuss our ideas and vision. We borrowed the Sheffield men's community protocol to help us with this. Before looking for a property to rent we sent emails out to the rest of the Sheffield Sangha and through the Order's Mitra Convenors to see if there were any others in the TBC who would be interested in joining us. We were contacted by Terry who had been living in Amsterdam and who wanted to move back to the UK for a year. She came to meet us and we had dinner together. We all got on well and so decided to look for a house for four people. Kate viewed properties and found a suitable place and we signed a year-long lease.

Between this point and the moving in date K--- decided she wanted to stay in the

Puja from the Gandhavyuha Sutra: Rejoicing in the merits of Spiritual Friends

It is hard to find p349
Even in hundreds of lifetimes
Such friends as these I have now met.
I will attend my friends as a servant. p341

They are valiant givers of fearlessness
Reliable caravan leaders
Guides who give me well-being -
With these thoughts I will serve my friends.

I will think of myself as sick, p326
And will think of my friends as physicians,
Of their instructions as medicines,
And of the practices as getting rid of disease.

I will think of myself as a traveller,
And will think of my friends as guides,
Of their instructions as the road,
And of the practices as going to my destination.

I will think of myself as a farmer,
And will think of my friends as water-spirits,
Of their instructions as rain,
And of the practices as the ripening of the crops.

I will think of myself as a prince,
And of my friends as the chief ministers of a spiritual king,
Of their instructions as the precepts of kingship,

And of the practices as putting on the turban of truth,
Adorned with the crest of knowledge.

Sustained by my spiritual friends, p325
I do not fall into bad ways.
Supported by my spiritual friends,
I do not fall away from the Great Vehicle.

Minded by my spiritual friends,
I do not overstep the Precepts.
Guarded by my spiritual friends,
I do not come under the sway of bad influences.

Developed by my spiritual friends,
I rise above the world.
Hidden by my spiritual friends,
I am unstained by mundane things.
Attended by my spiritual friends,
I become heedful and alert in all my practices.

Assisted by my spiritual friends,
I cannot be crushed by any demons.
Roused by my spiritual friends,
I do not give up my undertakings.
In association with my spiritual friends,
I develop all the elements of Enlightenment.

I will approach my friends p326
With a mind like the earth,
Bearing all burdens unbendingly;
With a mind like the full moon,
Appearing at the proper times.

I will approach my friends
With a mind like an apprentice,





Dharma texts

The [Buddhist canon](#) contains various material on sangha and community building. The classic story of the **Aniruddhas** can be found in the Culagosingha Sutta (MN no. 31) and online at tipitaka.wikia.com/wiki/Culagosinga_Sutta (curiously, not on the better-known Access to Insight). The **Sangrahavastus** also originate in the Pali Canon, e.g. The *Hatthaka Sutta* from the *Gradual Sayings of the Pali Canon* (online at www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an08/an08.023.than.html) Both are copied below.

The **Gandhavyuha Sutra** (part of the larger Avatamsaka) has a wonderful section on Spiritual Friends, reproduced below. Other parts of it have been compiled into a Puja by Lokabandhu one section of which, 'Rejoicing in the merits of Spiritual Friends', is also copied here.

Extract from the Gandhavyuha Sutra

"Oh son of noble family, kept back by friends in the good life, the Bodhisattvas do not fall into the pits of woeful existences; Surrounded by friends in the good life the Bodhisattvas do not turn away from the Great Career (Mahayana); Exhorted by friends in the good life the Bodhisattvas do not forsake the teachings of the Bodhisattvas; Guarded by friends in the good life the Bodhisattvas do not come under the power of bad friends; Protected by friends in the good life the Bodhisattvas do not lose the essential qualities of Bodhisattvas; Directed by friends in the good life the Bodhisattvas go beyond the world of ordinary men; Taught by friends in the good life the Bodhisattvas do not lower themselves to the level of Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas;

Shielded by friends in the good life the Bodhisattvas have risen above the world; Tended by friends in the good life the Bodhisattvas are not defiled by worldly things; Guarded by friends in the good life the Bodhisattvas are irreproachable as to their behaviour in all walks of life; Uplifted by friends in the good life the Bodhisattvas do not leave [unfinished] whatever [task] they have begun; Taught and guarded by friends in the good life the Bodhisattvas cannot be attacked by the defilements of selfish actions; Having gained their strength from friends in the good life the Bodhisattvas are invincible by all the armies of Mara; Relying on friends in the good life the Bodhisattvas increase in the [seven] characteristics of Enlightenment".

house she had been living in with friends. This left Kate, Terry and I to move in in July 2010. Since then we have been joined by Sally who moved to Sheffield as she wanted to live in a community, be further north and be a part of a larger Sangha with volunteering opportunities. My general advice for the setting up phase is to meet up regularly with those you want to live with, so you can talk about your vision and motivations for living in a community. It also really helped that we had a protocol from an existing and flourishing community to work from, and that we knew the members of that community. I'd recommend visiting other communities to see how they live and so you know a bit about how they do things.

Last year we went to meet Sangharakshita. This was very inspiring and I'd recommend it! He named our community Vajramandala, as Aksobya was present in each of our lives in one way or another when we moved in.

A clear benefit has been an experience of greater integration and an increase in my daily mindfulness levels. I used to be pretty disorganised, with a messy and chaotic room. I would get up, quickly get ready for work, and rush off to the Buddhist Centre for morning meditation. Once living in the community I experienced conflict between these habits and my aspiration to cultivate mindfulness and simplicity in daily life. It suddenly

seemed bizarre to rush off somewhere else to cultivate mindfulness whilst conditions at home were so cluttered! It's still a work in progress but I'm now much tidier and I find this is helpful, and necessary, when trying to sustain practice at home. It's become part of my practice to live more simply and to be more mindful – therefore leading to a feeling of integration.

Living with other people who have made as much of a commitment to spiritual practice as I have is very supportive and inspiring. My friendships with those I live with have deepened and our communication reflects this. When my practice brings positivity and pleasure we can rejoice together. When things are painful there is always someone there to give me a hug, a kind word and to talk things through with. It is also a great joy for me to be able to offer this same kind of support to those I live with.

I still experience a degree of tension between my commitment to my practice and other concerns, and my hindrances still try to assert themselves! However, my ability to work creatively with them is aided by the positive conditions of life in community – having made my commitment so explicit I am able to work with difficulties with more clarity and support, and my faith has strengthened.

Alice Fowler





The Benefits of Living Communally - Knut



These are some of the things that spring to mind about the wonderful community I live in at Samaggavasa, above the London Buddhist Centre.

For me the benefits of living communally are primarily the momentum of group practice and the opportunity to live with spiritual friends. With everybody meditating at a set time each morning, and a designated leader each week, I know all I have to do is set my alarm and get myself out of bed. Once I get there, others are there with me and the shrine is already set up. The leader leads the salutation of the shrine and then might chant the refuges + precepts, or read a poem, or lead the Ti Ratnavandana, or some mantra chanting. It eases you into the right frame of mind and then we have an hour's sit with the leader ringing the bell at 8am. I love the structure of this happening each day and I think it helped me enormously in the early days of my practice of meditation. It's really reliable and sometimes I go down there purely because if I don't know that with my schedule I won't meditate any other time in the day.

When people ask me about what living in a community is like I always mention meals. It is so pleasurable to come home to a cooked meal each night and when it is my turn to cook I really enjoy it because cooking for 8-12 people means I can get stuck into it and go all out with new recipes that would be a lot of effort for one or two people. We always have a

pudding and people tend to put effort in to please each other.

Community night is great too. We eat a meal in silence, have a dessert and tea together. Sometimes at this point we discuss any practical matters, then divide up the jobs and clean the house. After this we meet in the lounge and mostly check-in with each other. Sometimes we have people giving life stories, sometimes a ritual (esp. if we have someone leaving or arriving), and sometimes study. Mostly we check-in.

Birthdays are great and for somebody that doesn't like birthdays much I look forward to them whether they are mine or someone else's. We have a meal (in silence as usual on community night), then we all fetch our gifts and cards for the birthday boy. We pass around the gifts and cards and once this is all done we take it in turns to rejoice in their merits. It is such a fantastic thing to do. It allows you to turn the person over in your mind for a few days before hand and when you open up to their positive attributes they seem to grow and grow and you notice many many good qualities about them. I have been really moved by things people have said about each other and of course about me!

Other benefits revolve around support. For instance access to spiritual friendship on a daily ongoing basis. It's an opportunity to get to know people, to share a room with somebody. People get to know you and you develop your individuality. People are supportive and understanding of the challenges of

- Members of the community should be open about their health, both physical and mental, and should make people aware of any chronic ill health in their lives.
- The community is located close to the Buddhist Centre, and members should have an involvement with the Buddhist Centre. This may mean that they attend classes regularly or they may have a role in the life of the centre.
- Admission to the community – women become members by agreement of the existing community. We may introduce trial periods at a later date.
- Leaving the community – if someone ceases to follow the above criteria, after a period of discussion, they will be asked to leave with a notice period of 3 months.
- Partners will be allowed to stay overnight in the community, with the agreement of all other members. Members should be open to discussion over how often/how long partners stay for.

VideoSangha is a great resource but underused! There's a tab on it for videos on the theme of 'community', but it's currently empty. Lokabandhu is making a series of short videos of Triratna community members speaking about their community life so watch this space - videosangha.net/playlist/Communities. So far he's got footage from Guhyaloka, the LBC, and Sheffield.

Other Resource Packs

- [How to start a Triratna group](https://triratna-centre-support.org/growth/triratna-groups) is at triratna-centre-support.org/growth/triratna-groups
- [Fundraising](https://triratna-centre-support.org/fundraising) is at triratna-centre-support.org/fundraising
- Latest is '[How to start a Young Buddhists group](https://news.blogspot.com/resources/Starting_a_Young_Sangha_Group-v1.pdf)' by Knut from the LBC. It's at [fwbo-news.blogspot.com/resources/Starting_a_Young_Sangha_Group-v1.pdf](https://news.blogspot.com/resources/Starting_a_Young_Sangha_Group-v1.pdf)



Windhorse: Evolution community, early 1990s





Resources/links

Subhuti's **New Society** talks are at issuu.com/thebuddhistcentre/docs/newsociety_subhuti

Sanghadevi's book 'Living Together' is available from Triratna Centre bookshops or Windhorse Publications at windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=678. The blurb says - "Sanghadevi, a respected Buddhist teacher, suggests community living as a practical way to embody a vision of increasing generosity, kindness, and harmony. She encourages us to engage with the frequent challenges we will encounter and speaks from her own experience of the joys of sharing. *Living Together* explores the essential ingredients of community living, including friendliness, cooperation, meaningful communication, and mutual vision".

Specimen **Tenancy agreements** as used by the London Buddhist Centre communities are at triratna-centre-support.org/sangha/communities

The LBC and Sheffield communities have both created '**Ethos Statements**', available on-line at triratna-centre-support.org/sangha/communities. The LBC start theirs by saying "The main vision of the LBC Council of Trustees in relation to communities is, firstly, that they are *vital and effective as places of practice in the context of the FWBO*; and secondly, that they are *ongoing resources* for this practice."; Sheffield's is copied below.

Community Protocol - Sheffield Women's Community

- All who live in the community are dedicated to following the Dharma, particularly as interpreted by Sangharakshita and are dedicated to living together in such a way as to bring these teachings alive in each other.
- A prospective member should have been on a week's retreat at a Triratna retreat centre. Members should also be mitras.
- A prospective member should have connections with Dharmacharinis outside of the community. One Dharmacharini will be elected and asked to act as mediator for all members of the community.
- The community is vegetarian and it is required that there is no habitual alcohol or drug consumption or habitual TV watching (there will not be a communal TV).
- Everybody living in the community is open to discussion about their practice of ethics, meditation and wisdom.

spiritual life. We're allowed to make mistakes and friends can become inspirations and guides. I'm more plugged into what is happening around the Buddhist centre and in the movement - we get guests coming from other countries and centres too, which is great to see the diversity and spread of the Triratna community.

We have a dinner table in the centre of the community, which is in the kitchen where people are always coming and going. This creates a hub for the community and a place where we spend a lot of time talking to each other. The community is fresh and kept clean. People are keen to have nice things in the community and while this flies in the face of a more austere model I think it helps enormously. We have nice cutlery and plates, a dishwasher and good appliances, clean bathrooms, artwork on the walls and enough space for everyone. People buy flowers and plants for the community, there has been thought put into how it looks and feels and for me, this makes a world of difference.

We structure our life in community a lot. We create rituals around even the things we say and do on the most mundane of levels. For example; we always pass the

dessert around the table to the last person clockwise with everybody touching it. It is a silly thing that we place importance on. We have lots of these. I don't know exactly how but, when it comes to real practical matters we seem to have built up a trust that we can get things done simply and straightforwardly. If somebody has an idea we always tend to entertain it and hear them out. We seem to balance that by being strict with people and scolding people for insignificant things like passing the dessert wrongly rather than their genuine ideas and thoughts. It creates humour and lightness to the community which comes out of having structures and valuing them in the first place. People can relax amongst order but the trick comes with creating order in the love mode.

I can honestly say I have not experienced any significant 'trouble' since I have lived in the community. I have only been in community for 2 years and Maitreyabandhu and Paramabandhu are the people I feel most grateful to for the situation I am in. They committed to creating Samaggavasa 20-odd years ago and their effort and vision seems to be the bedrock, the foundation of our community.

Knut





The 'theory' of community living

The most comprehensive 'theoretical' resource for community living in Triratna is Subhuti's 'New Society' talks given to men preparing for Ordination at Padmaloka Retreat Centre in the 1990s. These covered Centres, Right Livelihood businesses, and Communities, and are available on-line at

issuu.com/thebuddhistcentre/docs/newsociety_subhuti. Highly recommended!

This is the contents list for the Communities talk:

TRANSLATING IDEALS INTO PRACTICE

the cutting edge of the Movement
the need for an ongoing situation
the need for intense contact

CREATING A COMMUNITY

the Order writ small
not easy to set up
the need for stability
the need for patience
the need for faith
no set patterns
different kinds of community
different levels of community
the need for maturity

PRINCIPLES FOR A FUNCTIONING COMMUNITY

the need for clarity about common purpose
ideally should be Going for Refuge

the need for more specific objectives
the danger of specific objectives taking over the need for communication
building a common vision
learning about each other
the need for commitment
coming together in various ways
making sure community is the emotional focus
the need for a caring attitude
real sensitivity to each other
living the angelic life

LIVING OUTSIDE A COMMUNITY

establishing a non-resident community
not a real substitute

Here's a number of quotations from Subhuti's talk, to whet your appetite:

- In a Centre you give people the opportunity to make contact with a new world: in a community you give them the opportunity to live in that new world.
- An effective community is a real gift to the world because it is an example of people living in a quite different way to that in which most people live

- Communities provide the intense atmosphere, the intensification of Going for Refuge and of contact on the basis of Going for Refuge, which will have a dynamising effect upon the whole Order and the whole Movement.
- You could almost talk of them as being spiritual laboratories, the things that are discovered and worked out in those

- Rejoice in others' merits.
- Ask yourself honestly if you accept in yourself those tendencies you find difficult in others.
- Learn the difference between a verifiable fact and a value judgement. Notice when you use each of them.
- Try to be open to the fact that people can change (that includes you!).
- Try to be open to changing your view of people (and that includes yourself too!). Try to be open to people being different to how you see them. Find out how others see things.
- Perform the forgiveness ceremony (each person takes it turn to say "Friends, please forgive me for anything I have or haven't said or done which has upset you or caused you difficulty." Everyone replies "We forgive you completely!").
- Reflect on what difference your community makes to the local Sangha.
- Regularly invite guests around to eat or stay over.
- Write a letter, completely uncensored, fully expressing your feelings about the conflict, then carefully burn it without showing it to anyone else.
- Cultivate gratitude and reflect on your inter-dependence.
- Focus on what is working (or has worked) well, and do more of it.
- If all else fails, ask someone who is respected by all the conflicting parties to come and mediate.

Officialdom

Not yet written!

This section is intended more for the benefit of Buddhist Centres who are landlords to Buddhist communities, and will include information on HMOs, fire regulations, and more...

Some material is already available at triratna-centre-support.org/legal/fire-safety





- Focus on what is working (or has worked) well, and do more of it.
- In your personal meditation practice, be sure to do the metta bhavana regularly and put community members in the different stages (and put everyone in the last stage!).
- Eat meals together. Take it in turns to cook for each other.
- Have silent meals occasionally (especially if mealtimes are usually quite lively).
- Talk at the meal table occasionally (especially if you usually eat in silence).
- Show an interest in others' well being, and ask them about things that concern or interest them.
- Look for common ground between you. Identify shared values and interests.
- Check that you're all clear and agreed about community rules, values, expectations. Review them every so often (e.g. when someone leaves or joins).
- In particular clarify expectations around duties, shared activities, visitors, and partners.
- Do your share (or slightly more) of the housework.
- Pay your rent and bills early or on time.
- Have regular community meetings (and don't just talk about "business" or practical points).
- Meditate and/or perform pujas together.
- Do a 'community metta bhavana practice' together.
- Spend time together in different settings outside the community building.
- Do 'useful' things together or take on a shared altruistic project (e.g. fundraising, or supporting classes at the local Buddhist centre)
- Do 'non-useful' things together (e.g. trips to local parks, concerts, art galleries, etc.)
- Go on retreat together.
- Give each other little gifts.
- Celebrate birthdays.
- Leave people cards and welcome them back if they've been away.
- Ceremonially mark occasions when people leave or join the community.
- Build trust by making realistic promises and agreements, and then keep them.
- Improve your ability to listen.
- Notice when you don't want to listen, or have already made up your mind.
- Take a chance and disclose more of yourself to others.
- Don't shut yourself away in your room too much. Invite others into your space.
- Admit your failings.
- Forgive others for their failings.
- Notice where (you and) others are making an effort to improve.

communities then become part of the Movement as a whole.

- What the community does is provide a way of bringing principles into practice, it is a way in which the high principles that we espouse in taking up the spiritual life are actualised, they are translated into everyday experience.
- What a community is all about, is bringing people together on the basis of Going for Refuge and putting them in as strong and open and vivid contact with each other as possible. And out of that extraordinary things happen.
- A community really needs stability in order to come to flower, it needs people to be committed and dedicated to bringing it about and staying there for quite a long time.
- New people joining a community in a sense start a new community and everybody must be prepared to re-evaluate the whole nature of the community and sort of link up again in quite new ways with the new people.
- Communities are very fragile and delicate and sensitive organisms that need nurturing
- A community only exists by the personal commitment of each individual within the community.
- I don't think that it is really possible to set out any rules for a community. It is certainly not possible to set out any set pattern whereby a community should exist.
- Very often people rush to a common life-style often before there has been a real attempt at a common understanding. This is why I am rather uneasy about the emphasis being placed

too much on particular details of how a community should live. I think it is more a question of the emphasis being placed on the development of common understanding and developing the framework out of that.

- I think it is a very good thing that the Movement is developing a wider age spread and as time goes on I am sure that it will be very good that in each community there will be two or three quite old people, even in the last part of their life, approaching death maybe. I think this will have a very positive effect upon communities.
- What you really need to be doing through your communication is developing a common understanding, a common vision, even you might say a common consciousness.
- The ultimate aim of that communication [is] to bring us into a kind of harmony where we understand each other so deeply that in a way we are parts of each other.
- If you are living in a community I think quite a lot of work needs to go into learning about each other, learning each other's histories for instance.
- There has to be a collective communication: the whole community has to work together at communicating.
- [You] need to create, allow, the structures to develop whereby effective communication can take place between you, and whereby your Going for Refuge can spark.
- You need to study together on occasions so that the Dharma informs your communication. You need to meditate together at least sometimes, do Puja together, where that dimension of





devotion is brought into your common activity.

- You need to play together. I think this is very important, otherwise the community can be the place where you work and you go off somewhere else to play (and you know where that usually is).
- If you don't make sure that your life is arranged around the community the community is not going to work.
- I think it is very important in communities that there are a lot of flowers and books given and cards and presents flying around in the community, a lot of care expressed.

- Once the community is really working this is what it will be exemplified by, this atmosphere of care and concern and mutual love and expression of appreciation and of rejoicing and of attentiveness to each other.
- That is what life is really about, that kind of interaction with other people, just bare, naked as it were, interaction with others just on the basis of common Going for Refuge, all the qualities just shining out in one blaze where there is no sense of competitiveness and trying to get one over each other, just a sense of sharing and common identity with uniqueness of each highlighted and accentuated.

Starting a community

So you're interested in starting a community? That's great! There's quite a bit to consider which we'll explore under the four headings of Purpose, People, Place, and Practicalities. Under the Buddha's law of Pratitya Samutpada (Conditioned Co-Arising), everything arises in dependence upon conditions - so here we're looking at the conditions most likely to facilitate the successful creation of a community. There'll be many others besides these, of course - one exercise you might like to try is to ask yourself (and others!) "What ARE the necessary conditions for this community to successfully arise?" And, after living in it for a bit you can repeat the exercise, asking "What ARE the necessary conditions for this community to successfully sustain itself?"!

Purpose

A Buddhist community isn't just a shared house. What unites people in Triratna communities is their shared commitment to Go for Refuge to the Three Jewels: and out of this, their more specific intentions - especially to practice together and to support one another through living together. Of course this can be spelled out in more or less detail, so it's worth getting really clear in advance what exactly you see the purpose of the community as being.

referred to in the 'purpose' section above, and it's likely that the senior members of the community will have to take the lead if things go wrong here. If they do, it's likely there are deeper currents going on which cause the 'surface troubles' and things are unlikely to go well until the underlying conflicts have been uncovered and addressed.

The community is more likely to stay alive and healthy if it's vitally connected to a wider community or Sangha. This allows energy to flow freely, both to and from the community. If the community is closely associated with a Buddhist Centre the wider sangha will be those connected to the Centre, if it's a retreat centre it's likely to be the retreatants. There'll always be a balance to be struck between the community's need for privacy and its openness to a wider sangha, this will be something to keep under review and adjust as it goes along.

Inevitably, after a while there will be people wanting to move out and hopefully others wanting to move in. These transitions can be tricky for a small or inexperienced community: when someone comes, or goes, everything changes! So it's well worth trying to create the conditions in advance so when the time of change inevitably comes, it happens as smoothly as possible. Anyone moving out should give notice, and the notice period should be clear in advance - ideally, as long as possible so the search for a new person isn't pressured. Two months is a minimum, three would be great.

Trouble~shooting

Conflict resolution

Jnanarakshita writes - "Conflict can vary in scale and seriousness. Prevention is probably better than cure. If, however, it does arise, usually the fastest way to end a conflict is to apologise for your part in it, to acknowledge your faults, and to offer some way of making amends or trying to work on yourself.

"Possible sources of conflict might include: lack of clarity over rules, values, expectations; temperamental differences and varying ways of going about things; competitiveness, envy, jealousy, etc; projection (unconsciously putting aspects of yourself that you're not fully aware of onto others); getting stuck in habits and fixed ways of relating; lack of trust and openness.

"Here's some suggestions for preventing and eradicating disharmony, as well as to promote, maintain and deepen harmony.





However good one's daily practice is, it's difficult to attain or maintain real depth in daily life, and if possible going on retreat will be a regular feature of community members' lives. That's an area in which community members can really encourage one another, also taking a real interest in what happened for those returning from retreat, helping them integrate any insights from the retreat and make changes in their lives. Community days together, or days spent together supporting a day retreat at the Buddhist Centre, will likely take some organising but are well worth the effort.

Leadership in a community is a tricky area, as pretty much everyone wants their home to be a home - somewhere they can relax and be 'off-duty' (as well as, of course, remaining a practitioner. This may especially be the case if they are playing a leading role at the local Buddhist Centre. However the fact is that those with longer experience will probably play a large part in setting the tone of the community and maintaining the daily routines. At different times this might be encouraging people to make more effort - or suggesting they let go of some excessive zeal and 'chill out' a bit! The parable of Sona the lute-player comes to mind - helping people find the middle way between too much effort and too little effort. Much leadership will come from the more experienced members simply being themselves, also from the quality of time and attention they're able to offer the newer members of the community. It's worth remembering that Sangha is built by the practice of the four Sanghavadus: Generosity, Kindly Speech, Helpfulness, and Exemplification: leadership, but very much in the love mode not the Power Mode.

Knut from London comments -

I think the key to this is the depth of practice of one or two people in the community. In Subhuti's paper on 'How to Meet as a Chapter' he talks about a chapter being as strong as its strongest practitioner, as opposed to the theory of a chain only being as strong as its weakest link. I think this principle applies to communities. As men we feed off the

depth of practice of our community members. We learn respect and hierarchy (in a good sense). If these people are outgoing and confident they are confident to lead activities and make community living structured and spiritual. Without the depth of practice of a few good people it would be hard to sustain I think.

There may however be a need to clarify (and insist upon) the community's 'bottom-line', ie the minimum expectations people have of each other, already

Linked to this will be the basic ground rules everyone is expected to abide by. These might cover things like -

- attending community nights
- paying rent on time
- vegetarianism
- maintaining a spiritual practice
- observance of the Precepts
- guest policy
- lovers' coming to stay policy
- notice period if moving out
- ... and so on. The fewer rules the better though!

All the above are of course primarily a matter for the residents to decide together, although if the community building is owned by the Buddhist Centre its Council may want to be sure a certain ethos will prevail no matter who moves in and out. With this in mind the London Buddhist Centre has drafted an 'Ethos Statement' for its communities; this can be found on the Triratna Centre Support website at triratna-centre-support.org/sangha/communities. The Sheffield communities also have 'Community Protocols' covering similar ground.

Most people would agree the fewer rules the better, so one option is to have the very minimum actual rules and alongside that, people's wishlists - the things we'd all like to see in the community but which can't really be made into rules - a clean environment, the absence of TV, no smoking, eco-friendly shopping, and so on. Drawing these up together might be a great way to get to know one another.

People

A community is nothing without the people! If you're starting a community you will be the founder members and therefore have a special responsibility (and unique opportunity) to get it off to a good start. Most likely the founding group will be just one or two people to start with and grow from there - there will therefore be some very significant decisions to make as to who is invited to join. In that process there's likely to be some tension between waiting until you find just the right people and getting a houseful together in time for moving-in day (and the first rent cheque due!) It's a real tension, and perhaps the most that can be said is - do what you can to 'manage' the tension so it doesn't drive you to make bad decisions. You'll be looking for people who'll be a real contribution to realising the purpose of the community - presumably, therefore, practitioners within the Triratna Buddhist Community. People will need to take their time deciding whether or not to join you - deciding to move is a big decision for anyone to make, and deciding to make a fundamental change in how to live is even bigger! For the individual concerned, quite likely it will involve a significant Going Forth and deepening of their Going for





Refuge. If the decision is hard for them to make, a trial period on both sides may ease the pressure.

Anyone joining will need to be the right gender (obvious if yours is a single-sex community, but relevant for mixed ones too, as there needs to be a balance maintained), and need to 'fit' with the others already on board. The chemistry is always going to be something of an unknown factor until you're actually living together - by which time it's a bit difficult if it isn't working. Time spent together before the move is therefore highly recommended! For some time there was (maybe still is) a 'Virtual Community' around the Cambridge Buddhist Centre, comprising people who met up each week as though they shared a community - while actually living in different places... Worth a try maybe?

Once the community is up and running there'll come a time when people will start moving out - and others will want to move in. That's a whole subject we'll look at in the next section, Sustaining a community.

Place

Sometimes people will appear first, sometimes the property. Under the laws of conditionality the characteristics of the house will have a strong conditioning effect on how it feels to inhabit it - and therefore on how it feels to live together in it. The size and shape of the communal areas, the layout of the bedrooms, the garden (or lack of one), the condition and colours of the rooms, and so on will all have significant if somewhat slightly subliminal effects. Most likely you'll be in a house built for a family or a previous social structure and this will have its own conditioning effect - the presence of master/children's bedrooms, for instance, or servants' quarters up in the attic - very different dynamics to a group of adults living together on equal terms. It's good to be conscious of this when looking for a house and anticipate as far as possible the difficulties you may encounter living in it as a community.

Ideally the property will be large enough to have a whole room set aside for a shrine room, plus other communal space for social use, plus enough bedrooms to go round - it's up to you whether these are single or shared. In the early days of communities shared rooms were the norm, these days it's single rooms - though the men's communities at the LBC still have many shared rooms. Quite a few communities (especially in Birmingham) with larger gardens have added insulated garden sheds as extra bedrooms, and these have been much loved by their occupants. Garden shed bedrooms are perfectly legal so long as they don't have independent cooking

Clarity about the common purpose – using the Sheffield men's community protocol and writing our own really helped with this

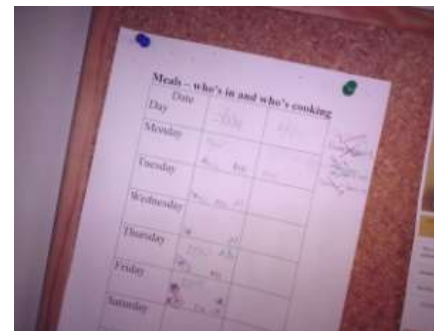
The need for communication – very beneficial to have time 1-to-1 with each member as well as all together

Coming together in various ways – food shopping, work, day-trips, festival days, going on retreats together, going to meet Bhante together (highly recommended!)

Alice

Some other things that could be added to the above list are -

Eating Together is likely to be a very important, even crucial part of community life.



. Most established communities have a cooking rota, and will see a healthy meal on the table pretty much every night, prepared by one or another of the community members. An evening meal provides a daily opportunity to come together and stay in touch on a very natural human practical level - just as important as (though very different to) the shared morning meditations. Some

communities eat in silence, some don't - some eat the first few minutes in silence and then talk.

One option for community nights, especially for new communities, or where there are new members, is Life Stories: over the course of a few weeks, community members, one by one, take the whole evening (longer if necessary) to tell his or her life story to the others. It's a powerful practice, a great way of learning about someone - especially why they are the way they are - and a gift to receive so much attention from interested listeners.

Integrating new people is really important, as is saying farewell to someone leaving. If you have a vacancy, the last thing you want is to be panicked into accepting the first person who comes along: this is one reason generous notice periods and a community bank account with a small surplus are good ideas. A trial period is common, though realistically it may be tricky for the new person to move in only on a trial basis: this will need to be talked through with them.





Metta Bhavana meditation. A useful way of connecting at a deeper level is an open eyed metta exercise where we cultivate metta towards somebody sitting opposite us and then open our eyes and send metta to the other person. We take in the person's face and receive their metta too. This exercise can have a very strong and inspiring effect. If practiced regularly our communication can become more empathetic and open. It also means that our communication is useful to others too. By deepening our desire to see others grow we slowly find more skilful ways of communicating.

Good communication takes **time** if we want to be true to ourselves and be kind to others. Explaining to others what you are trying to do and the areas that you may slip up in gives you permission to fail but become more relaxed as others will hopefully understand your aims even if you end up being unskilful in your speech.

Community living is **an intense practice** in skilful speech as there are so many opportunities (shopping, cleaning, community night, noise levels...) which can be very challenging but also exhilarating!

Sally Rosa

Buddhism says, 'Actions have consequences', and the actual tangible things you do together in community will be major conditioning factors on what sort of community it becomes. Here's some practical suggestions for what to do, from Alice in Sheffield:

Dedication ceremony – we had one with community members, but also one with the women's chapter of Sheffield, who came over one Sunday evening for a dedication ceremony. We finished the ceremony with a cleansing ritual - Vajrasattva mantra whilst walking around the house with incense ☺

we've got a bit more explicitly Dharmic by listening to extracts of The Ten Pillars on fba and discussing it afterwards! We still start by reporting in and finish with a ritual in the shrine room.

Conflict Resolution – we asked an order member we are all close to to be an official mediator. This helps so that if there's anything we need to discuss outside of the community we can all turn to someone we can trust and confide in, and she can also come to spend time with us as a group.

Practising together – it seems obvious to say but morning meditation really brings you together and strengthens bonds.

The need for patience – to allow for communal practices to emerge, for momentum to build and for relationships to deepen. It can't be rushed!!

Community Nights – at first we did mostly social things after having eaten together and reporting in. We decided what to do on the night, got to know each other better and usually finished with a ritual in our shrine room. After about 6 months

and washing facilities within them; if you're skilled in DIY they can be bought, erected, and insulated for as little as £1,500.

Practicalities

Fourthly, the practicalities. Here's some notes on a few practicalities that will be especially relevant when you're starting a community. The clearer and more transparent these can be to all concerned, the better. Here we'll look especially at the rental agreement and the budget.

To confirm your right to occupy the property you'll need to sign a tenancy agreement or other legal document defining your relations with the Landlord; a sample agreement, again from the LBC, is available at triratna-centre-support.org/sangha/communities. If you're renting privately the landlord or agent will no doubt have their own version of this and it's worth reading very carefully; among many other things it will define the rent that is payable, who pays the bills, your obligations to maintain the property, and how easy or difficult it is to sublet.

A fundamental decision that needs to be taken right at the start is who signs the agreement. The main options are the individuals, the group as a whole, or 'the community' as an entity in itself. In the latter two cases, the rent quoted will be the rent for the whole property and if it is the group as a whole that signs, the individuals will be "jointly and severally liable" for the whole of this even if some of the original signatories have left and are no longer paying. If it is 'the community' as an entity in itself who signs, the community must have some sort of existence as a community (at least a name and a bank account), and this must be acceptable to the landlord. Technically you will be an Unincorporated Association, and the individuals responsible will likely formally be 'Committee Members' or 'Trustees' though in practice they will, at least at the start, be residents too. And technically, the landlord will rent the whole property to the community as an entity in itself; and the community will then sub-let rooms to individuals.

This latter option (and potentially the middle one) has the great advantage that the group is then free to issue its own 'sub-tenancy' agreements to the individual residents. These 'sub-tenancy' agreements will quote the rent due from each individual, which can be calculated to allow a little extra money to accumulate in the community bank account to allow for the inevitable vacancies, minor repairs and improvements, gardening, and so on. It will also have a conditioning effect of strengthening the consciousness that "we are a group, jointly responsible for the success of the whole" as opposed to the very different mindset of a series of individuals renting bed-sits.





A community bank account into which individuals pay their rent and from which the community's bills can be paid is fairly easy to open. Banks will treat it as an 'Unincorporated Association' - a legal structure like many a village club (or even Triratna Buddhist Centre). They will ask for your ID, signatures, a copy of the Rules of the Association (generally a copy of the standard Triratna constitution will serve; this is available at triratna-centre-support.org/legal/constitutions) and some minutes of a Committee Meeting at which you resolved to open the account - all pretty straightforward if time-consuming and a bit fiddly. They may also want a 'business plan' for the community which they'll see as a business - this will be your budget.

So, whether for the bank or your own use, you'll need to prepare a budget for the community. At its simplest this will reflect a scenario where individuals pay individual rents covering room and all bills to the landlord and the only shared finances will be some sort of kitty for food. More likely however is a joint rent for the property as a whole and therefore the need to allow a small surplus to accumulate to cover bills, including Council Tax, minor repairs and improvements, and so on, plus an allowance for vacancies (voids). Once the budget has been created you will need some simple bookkeeping to track the money and progress against budget. Bills will inevitably have to be estimated in advance and only time will tell whether or not you're on track - a good treasurer will manage to accumulate a small surplus to be reserved for the inevitable rainy day! The figures in your budget, and its layout, will inevitably be fairly specific to your situation, but there is a sample spreadsheet available on Google Docs online that can be used to create a budget and do your bookkeeping. It's accessible via triratna-centre-support.org/sangha/communities: you can take a copy of it and enter your figures and generally adjust it to reflect your situation.

When the time comes to actually move in and launch the community, it's a great idea to involve the wider Sangha - maybe a house-warming party, with dedication ceremony, shared food, etc? A successful community won't be a self-enclosed isolated bubble, but connected to a wider Mandala and Sangha, with positive relations and appreciation flowing both ways. Apart from anything else, a house-warming party is a great opportunity for generosity: when Lokabandhu started the Glastonbury Buddhist Community he and the others all came from shared houses and possessed absolutely no kitchen or household goods between them. He borrowed a saucepan from his previous landlady, a neighbour brought a wooden spoon as a moving-in present: and hey presto! - they could make baked beans! And that was all. But on the first day, four separate Sangha members arrived in cars,

bringing tables, sofas, plates, cutlery, mugs, pictures, even mattresses. And within two weeks, the community was taking things to the local charity shops...

Sustaining a community

A new community is likely to start life riding on a wave of energy, enthusiasm, optimism and idealism. That's great - but there'll likely come a time when all that seems to wear off and the going gets tougher. Maybe some conflict arises between individuals, maybe people's personal preferences seem to override the community's shared life, maybe there's tension over partners or other guests, maybe life together just starts to feel a bit flat and people start thinking of moving out.

So a whole other area to consider is that of sustaining a community once it's been established. Under the laws of Pratitya Samutpada, things arise in dependence on conditions (see last section!) but last only so long as the conditions that support them remain in place. So here we're asking, "What are the necessary conditions to sustain a community?"

A good place to start is communication, and Sally from Nottingham writes:

Communication in community living needs to be based on honesty and loving kindness. In Triratna communities members will have at least a basic knowledge of Buddhism and will usually be trying to practice the 5 precepts (To practice with loving kindness, generosity, contentment, honest speech and mindfulness).

In my experience, living with others helps you become more honest as you notice your different tendencies and others can help you see these too. **Community evening** is a very useful place to share how you have been generally but also how you have been getting on with other members of the community. This can throw a lot of light on different ways of doing things (practical things in the

community and other things too) and also the reactions we may have when other don't do things in the same way we would! A useful tool for objectifying these sorts of conversations is the Myers-Brigg Type Indicator which is a personality test that shows sixteen different sorts of personality and how we can improve on our weaker areas without devaluing our differences.

However, honesty alone is not enough. By practicing the precept of honest communication we need to be practicing the first precept of **loving kindness**. It is not enough to point out other community members' areas for development. We need to be cultivating metta towards them too. In order to work towards more harmonious speech a useful tool is the

