



How to Run a Gratitude and Giving Evening (GGE) in your Mitra study group

Introduction and overview

Purpose of a Gratitude and Giving Evening

To help Mitras recognise what the Dharma has given them, and inspire them to pass the benefits on to others around the world. Whether participants decide to give to FutureDharma Fund or not, a Gratitude and Giving Evening (GGE) is a valuable and moving experience for those involved.

Background

- ❑ GGEs were developed by Maitrinara at the London Buddhist Centre when he was a Mitra. He successfully raised £140 in monthly gifts in his own Mitra study group, which adds up to £6,700 over four years
- ❑ The evening went on to be piloted in 10 Mitra study groups in the UK
- ❑ It has now been endorsed by the European Mens and Womens Mitra Convenors for inclusion in the Mitra study syllabus
- ❑ The evening has recently been adapted for a Zoom format so that groups can run the evening during this period when they can't physically meet.

Structure

- ❑ GGEs take approximately 2 hours plus tea break.
- ❑ Most of the material is drawn from Sangharakshita's '*What is the Sangha?*', and Amalavajra's '*Money Awakening*' events.
- ❑ The format is a three step exploration of the FutureDharma slogan '**The world needs what you've been given. Pass it on!**'.

Preparing for the evening (all resources are on the Sikkha site resource page)

- ❑ Download the presenter notes
- ❑ Read through these notes to familiarise yourself with the basic structure of the evening.
- ❑ Watch the tutorial videos and make a note of anything that is helpful
- ❑ There is a timing for each section. Sketch out the timings for your evening on your presenter notes eg 7.30pm this, 7.50pm that, so that you are not left short for the important parts towards the end.
- ❑ At the end there is an ask for money. This may be uncomfortable for some presenters depending on their own relationship to money, but it is good to keep in mind that giving

money in this way is beneficial for both the giver (the Mitra being asked) and the receiver (those benefiting from the Dharma projects being funded). Therefore there's no need to be apologetic – this is a straightforward request for help to make these Dharma projects happen. At the same time it must be clear that a decision not to give is ok.

- ❑ Download the FDF promo video and kattanutta Bhavana meditation from the resource page onto your laptop

❑ **On the evening you'll just need your laptop**

All windows will need to be closed on your laptop *except*:

1. *One blank open writable document such as a google doc. Or word doc.*
2. *The downloaded FDF promo video*
3. *The downloaded Kattanutta Bhavana*

(All of which you will screen share during the evening)

Important note

- ❑ We ask that the GGE materials only be used in the context of Mitra study groups and not at other events (such as Sangha Night)

Maitrinara is happy to answer your questions on organising the evening, or presenting the material.

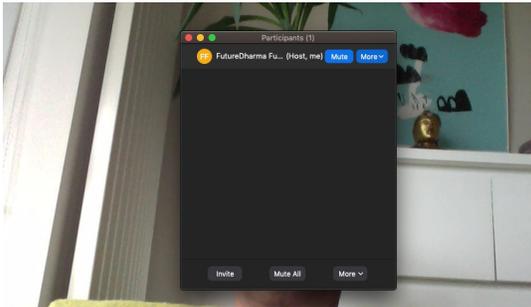
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GGE TEACHING NOTES

Setting up on the evening

- ❑ *If you are not the host of your Zoom meeting you will need to ask the host to make you a co-host (which automatically enables screen sharing). So it would be good to both arrive in the Zoom meeting 5-10 minutes before the start to do this.*
- ❑ *This is how they make you a co-host:
Click participants. This will give a list of participants. Hovering over your name will give them two options of 'mute' and 'more'. Click 'more' and select 'make co-host'. They can then close this window.*



Introducing the evening (5 mins)

- ❑ Welcome and thank you for participating.
- ❑ This will be an interactive evening exploring the FutureDharma tagline: 'The world needs what you've been given, pass it on'.
- ❑ *At the end I'll ask if you'd like to make a monthly gift to FutureDharma Fund. You aren't of course under any obligation to give. Whether you give or not you will hopefully find the evening enjoyable and inspiring, and you'll get a sense of our wider international movement.*
- ❑ During the evening we'll be discussing the questions
 1. 'What does the world need now?'
 2. 'What have we been given?'
 3. 'How do we pass it on?'

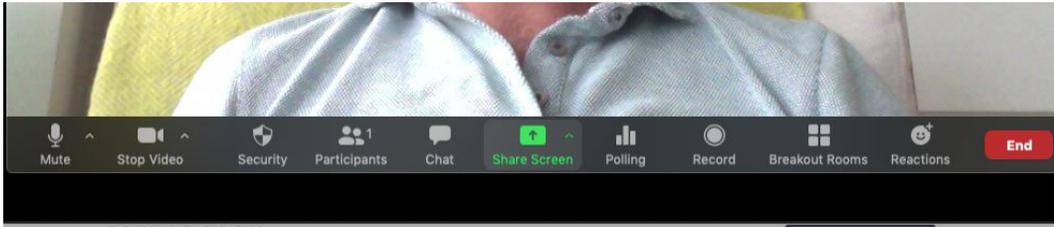
Section 1. What does the world need now?

1a. Led discussion on the world's problems (20 mins).

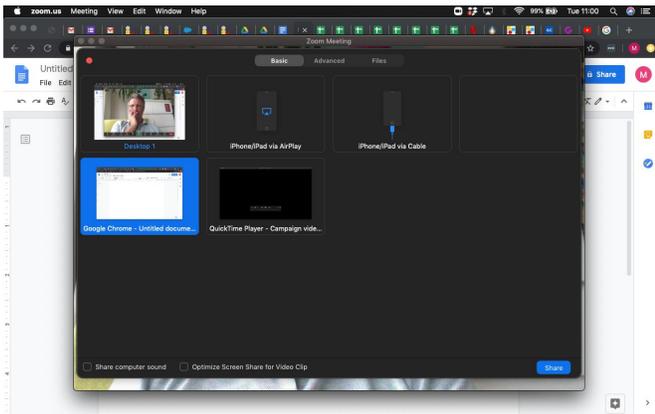
*[Aim: Connecting us to the world's problems,
Recognising our unhelpful responses]*

- *You will need one blank writable document such as a google doc. Or word doc. open on your laptop*

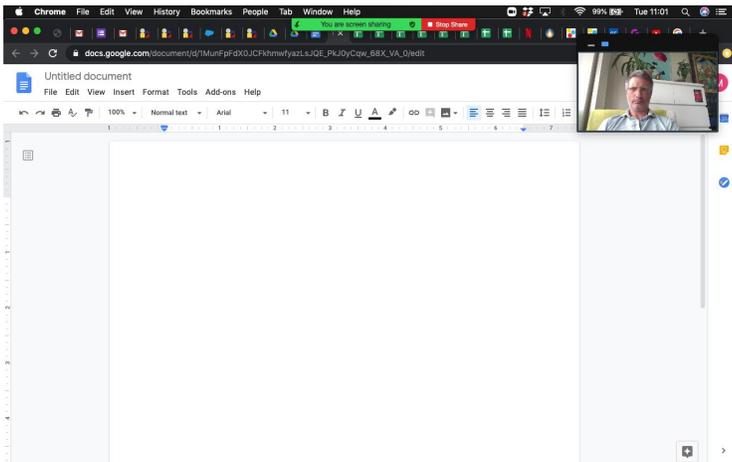
[Go to screen share]



Then select the open writable google or word doc. And click share.



It should then look something like this. With your study group in thumbnails along the side and the document open so you can write down what the group say during the discussion.



Introducing the discussion:

With a global news industry, we hear about world-scale problems that affect each of us.

Which of these problems bother us most individually?

[Create a heading on the document 'World problems we care about' - Write down their responses and fill in some extras from below - it does not need to be an exhaustive list]

- Increasing rates of mental illness and suicide
- Prejudice and hatred on the grounds of race, sexuality, colour or religion.
- Nationalism and war
- Climate change
- Overwork and personal stress
- Religious extremism and violence
- Consumerism and the dominance of materialistic beliefs
- Famine, disease, drought, starvation

What are some negative emotions/ unhelpful responses to the suffering of others you can experience?

[Create a new heading on the document 'negative emotions/ Unhelpful responses' - Ask in the group what our possible negative emotions/ unhelpful responses are to these issues – Write up their responses and fill in from the extras below]

- Outrage – righteous indignation
- Helplessness - overwhelm
- Horrified anxiety- inability to empathise past the personal anxiety
- Apathy - the withdrawal into personal concerns.

[summary and link to next section]

We can see from the list of world problems that suffering is endless and that this can elicit strong negative emotions / unhelpful responses. It's obvious that Buddhist practice can't resolve these problems, **but does Buddhist practice help us develop a more positive and effective response to suffering?**

[END SCREEN SHARE TO RETURN TO GALLERY VIEW]

1b Discussion on the effectiveness of being part of a spiritual community (25 min)

[Aim: Connecting to and drawing out personal stories of finding the Dharma/ Sangha

Drawing out reflections on how people have changed in the way they relate to themselves and others, and how this change might contribute to alleviation of suffering in the world

Depending on the size of your group you may not have time to get a response on each question from everyone]

Bhante's response to suffering is that we should **"develop as individuals in the context of an effective spiritual community, the development of which we then contribute to and support"** [repeat]

Let's explore for ourselves whether we believe this is true by looking at three questions :

[Brainstorming three questions – one question at a time- with the group]

Question 1: What brought you to the Dharma/Sangha?

Question 2: How has that changed the way you relate to yourselves and others?

[GO TO SCREEN SHARE - and back to your document with the heading 'world problems we care about']

Question 3: How might this contribute to the reduction of suffering in the world?

To get the ball rolling here you might need to draw out some examples:

- ❑ Our **ethical consumer choices** influence the whole chain of supply and demand, which includes Influencing: our friends and work colleagues, the physical methods of production and transportation, workers rights, government legislation
- ❑ Our **ethical choices and practice effect the environment** both socially and environmentally
- ❑ Improving **mental health**: Giving tools to people with depression, anxiety or addictions
- ❑ **Increasing positive emotion reduces hatred and prejudice** on grounds of race, sexuality, creed or colour and political polarisation in any context

[summary]

Suffering comes from physical and mental pain, and Buddhism promotes the alleviation of this wherever possible - But what Buddhism has specifically to offer is the perspective that suffering is mediated by the mind, and that by deepening this perspective we can:

Cultivate a more effective response to suffering in ourselves and others

Cultivate awareness and positive emotion, and support and encourage others to do the same

[END SCREEN SHARE TO RETURN TO GALLERY VIEW]

Section 2: What have we been given?

2a. Led discussion on gratitude (10 mins)

[Aim: Connecting with gratitude as defined by Buddhism

Recognising the blocks to gratitude and generosity]

Introducing the discussion

In the last section we explored how we have changed as a result of encountering the Dharma. So do we feel we have been given something?

The Buddhist word for gratitude is KATANNUTA (pronounced kat-ann-uta)

'Kata' meaning what has been done, especially for oneself

'Annuta' means knowing or recognising

So Katannuta is **knowing or recognising what has been done for our benefit.**

Includes both the **emotional response** (feeling) and **knowing** what has been done for us (which requires reflection).

[GO TO SCREEN SHARE - Create a heading on the document 'What's stopping us feeling gratitude?]

[Discuss the following question]

So what's stopping us feeling gratitude?

[Notice if the group suggestions cover the traditional list below; if not fill in the blanks]

1. **Failing to recognise a benefit as a benefit**
 - E.g we didn't enjoy school so we don't recognise the benefit of our education
2. **Recognising a benefit but taking it for granted.**
 - 'We were owed it , or We have a right to it'
3. **Not wanting to recognise other people's contributions**
 - Overvaluing self-sufficiency to the extent we ignore other people's contributions (i.e. the idea of being a self-made person)
 - Fear of indebtedness (the sense we will owe the other person something if we acknowledge they have given us something)
4. **Forgetfulness.**
 - With the passage of time gratitude can weaken and get crowded out by any of the above.

[END SCREEN SHARE TO RETURN TO GALLERY VIEW]

2b. Led Katannuta Bhavana on spiritual friendship (25 mins)

[Aim: Exploring what we have received through spiritual friendship.

Connecting to gratitude]

[You can choose either to:

- use the voice recording of Maitrinara leading a Katannuta Bhavana - To do this go to Screen share and click on the mp3 recording - share and then play the recording
- **OR** lead this yourself based on the text below - approximately 3-4 minutes per stages 1-5]

1. **Body scan** - getting in touch with the body, noticing the sensations of where we contact the floor and chair - connecting to the sensations/ emotion at the heart centre. Does it feel open/closed, tight/relaxed, warm/cool?

[During the next four stages invite receptivity to changing sensations/ Vedana in the chest/ heart centre (emotional responses). So that you are alternating between the reflection and the response]

2. **First contact with the dharma** - (beginning of stage) ...Bring to mind a friend that supported us when we were new to the centre, or a teacher that first taught us to meditate or first taught us the dharma. Recalling how their help encouraged us to engage and become more involved.

(end of stage).... Thanking them for their help

3. **A Kalyana Mitra-** (beginning of stage) ..Bring to mind someone that helps direct or supports our spiritual practice. Someone who has helped us to grow and develop through the Dharma, has passed on that gift to us. Recognising how that gift has transformed our lives, recalling what they have done for you

(end of stage) ... Thanking them for their help.

4. **Those who have created Sangha worldwide** - (beginning of stage) ..The Buddha, Bhante, his early disciples, and all the people that through their practice and efforts have developed the network of friendships which is the Triratna Sangha worldwide.

(end of stage) ...Thanking them for their help

5. **World/ All living beings** – (beginning of stage) ..bring to mind ourselves, parents, teachers, friends, and then everyone that supports our lives, travel infrastructure, food production, health services...We all have a huge network of support to our lives, people all around the world, vast interrelated networks.

(end of stage) ...Thanking them for their help

Finally - Just sitting – letting go of effort

[END SCREEN SHARE TO RETURN TO GALLERY VIEW]

[If there is time you can have a short discussion on ‘how the meditation went for us’]

*****TEA/ TOILET BREAK*****
(10 min - maybe need to return to presentation with tea depending on time)

Section 3. How can we pass it on?

3a. Presentation: Expressing gratitude (5 mins.)

[Aim: expressing gratitude by giving time and energy

Expressing gratitude by giving money - giving money as a practice]

In Buddhist thought it is important that we don't only feel grateful but that we express our gratitude for the gift of the Dharma in one of three ways.

1. First you can practice the Dharma as effectively and sincerely as you can.

Your own practice will affect others

2. Secondly you can support the collective effort of building Sangha through time/ energy

Sharing time, energy or skills with the collective institutions that create Sangha. Triratna depends upon support for its institutions. Such as volunteering on teams for classes, courses and retreats.

3. The practice of giving money

The growth and flourishing of Triratna Dharma projects require money and depend upon people in the Sangha giving money. Only Buddhists are likely to give to Buddhist projects, so that if we don't fund dharma projects then who else will?

Yet money is often hard to give. Being so transmutable, **money is a powerful symbol** for all that we yearn for: freedom, security, status, and even love. With this kind of significance perhaps it is no surprise that we are often unwilling to let go of our money.

Generous actions loosen self-attachment because they work directly against narrow self-interest, which is the basis of much of our dukkha and our painful sense of isolation from others. The act of giving is absolutely foundational in Buddhism – often being placed before ethics in the threefold path to make a *fourfold* path.

It's also important to remember that money is a traditional gift for the benefit of sangha building, *and is not unspiritual*, in fact quite the opposite, what we do with our assets and money is part of our ethical and dharma life.

3b. FutureDharma Fund (10 mins)

[Aim: Introducing and promoting FutureDharma Fund]

FutureDharma Fund is a charity which was launched in 2016 to seed and strengthen Triratna sanghas around the world. FutureDharma projects are selected by their Trustees, who are some of our most senior and responsible Order Members in the Triratna Buddhist order.

FutureDharma Fund projects which we all use weekly, such as:
The Buddhist centre online,
Free Buddhist Audio
Sikkha project (which is responsible for keeping Mitra study syllabus up to date)

During the lock-down we've been supporting centres worldwide (quite possibly your centre!) with financial advice, fundraising advice, and Webinars on best Dharma practice

As well as helping Mitras abroad by:
Funding translations of Bhantes Dharma books,
Funding youth projects in India and Australia
Providing bursaries to attend the Dharma life courses in Adhistana.

FDF is now the main giving portal for the Triratna worldwide movement.

[GO TO SCREEN SHARE - Click on the Video - share - play]

[END SCREEN SHARE]

3c. Presentation: To give or not to give. Including a meditative reflection (10 mins)

[Aim: Encourage people to give if they feel inspired to, but making it clear that it is a genuinely individual decision. So we shouldn't belittle the 'no' response, or over emphasise the benefit of the 'yes' response]

[The case for giving]

FDF is not a large faceless charity, but one that is run by a small number of committed Buddhists. FutureDharma Fund projects only happen if people like you give.

For example if 500 Mitras across the Triratna world who completed a Gratitude and Giving evening were to commit to giving £50/€57/\$65 per month then we'd have £300,000 each year to help even more people to find the Dharma.

This amount may seem like too much of a stretch at first hearing, but it can be useful to have a look at our finances and ask the questions:

- 'Is the way I spend my money always in line with my values?'
- 'What do I spend my money on that is not as important as this?' (For example buying snacks and drinks on the go, or maybe buying clothes which are branded/ unnecessary)

Another more radical initiative, which has been acted on by many, is the idea of **10% giving**. Which involves giving 10% of your take-home income, to the Dharma. It's interesting that despite Buddhism placing such a strong emphasis on generosity we don't have any official 'tithing' system like other religions, so we often base our levels of giving on very arbitrary and subjective criteria.

Making the donation

[Important]

Often if we're asked to give we say "I'll think about it" which usually ends up being a default "No" because life takes over and we lose touch with the generous impulse.

- However, I want to emphasise that it is fine to decide not to give to FutureDharma Fund, or if you really *do want to think about it*, but please make that a conscious decision.
- And please don't give for the sake of approval of others here – remember Bhante's teaching on being an Individual!

Giving reflection

We'll now do a short reflection now to help you to make a conscious decision one way or the other.

So, closing your eyes.....

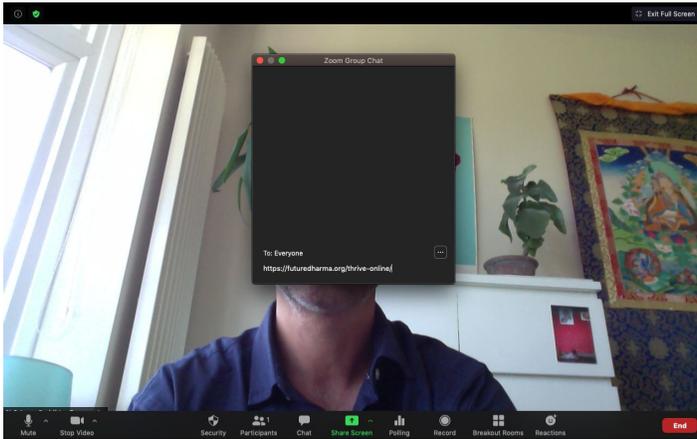
- Sit and see what thoughts and feelings or images arise in response to this request to give each month
- Observe any **Yes** response and how that feels
- Notice if there is a **No** and any associated thoughts such as 'I can't afford it right now', 'I give so much already', 'I'd rather give my money elsewhere'
- Go back to the **Yes**
- Now the **No**
- Hold both together and come to a decision

3d. Making the donation (5 min)

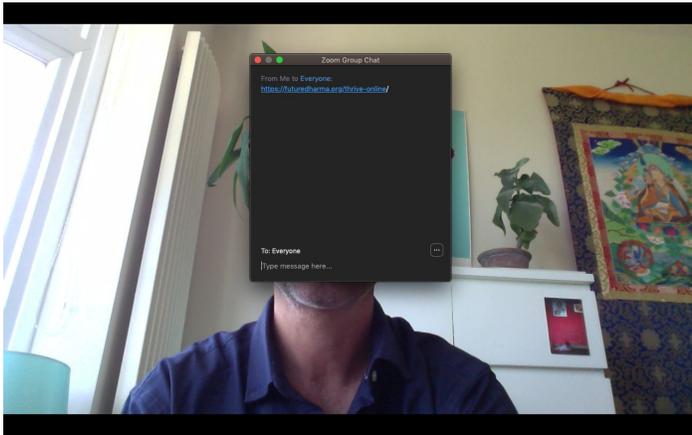
[Aim: that people who want to are given the link to the giving page]

Please direct participants in your group to go the FutureDharma fund appeal page at the end of the Zoom call

You can do this by typing the link <https://futuresdharma.org/thrive-online/> into the chat box, pressing Return,



and asking them to copy the link:



Once they have all had a chance to copy the link you can close this chat box

13e. Finishing the evening (5 min)

Thanking your fellow Mitras and study group leader for participating in the evening and allowing any comments or reflections on the evening.

13d. When the evening is over

Let us know how you got on:

Please download the feedback form from the resource page. Complete and email your feedback form to Maitrinara at Maitrinara@futuredharma.org and let him know how you got on.

THANK YOU!