



Gratitude and Giving Evenings

for Online Mitra study groups

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

What is a Gratitude and Giving evening?

The evening is an interactive series of workshops presented by a Mitra (or two Mitras) for their own study group. The workshops explore the statement “the world needs what you've been given. Pass it on”, and are based on material from Sangharakshita's *What is the Sangha?*, and Amalavajra's *Money Awakening* events. The evening takes approximately 2 hours, plus tea break.

Why run a Gratitude and Giving Evening?

To help Mitras explore what their involvement with Triratna has given them, and to connect them to the wider International Triratna community.

When to run a GGE in your study group?

In the Mitra study syllabus it's recommended that a GGE follows on from the *What is the Sangha?* module, as it builds on the content of that core module. But really a GGE can be run anytime after the start of the second year until the end of the fourth year of study. Usually study group leaders will decide to position them between modules.

Why are Mitras asked to give at the end of the evening?

An international Buddhist movement like Triratna needs to be resourced financially by those who are benefitting from it. Asking fellow Mitras to give may be uncomfortable for some presenters but it is good to keep in mind that giving money in this way is beneficial to both the giver (the Mitra friends being asked) and the receiver (the Dharma projects being funded). Most people really appreciate having the opportunity to support something they are passionate about. Therefore there's no need to be apologetic — this is a straightforward request for money in order to make Dharma projects happen all over the World. At the same time it must be clear that a decision not to give is also ok.

How to prepare for the evening?

The Mitra/s who will be presenting the evening can access the GGE support page at <https://sikkha.online/fundraising-training-registration/> . It's recommended that you then:

- Download these presenter notes and read these through to familiarise yourself with the basic structure of the evening.
- Watch the video tutorials — make a note of anything that is helpful.
- Familiarise yourselves with the timings for each section so that you are not left short for the important parts towards the end.
- Contact Varabandhu (*Fundraiser and GGE Lead for FutureDharma*) and arrange a short meeting on Zoom. Varabandhu will help you prepare for the evening and answer any questions.

Email: Varabandhu@futuresharma.org

Phone/ Whatsapp: +353-87-6833021 (Varabandhu works remotely from Dublin, Ireland)

What you'll need to have on your laptop for the evening

- A blank Google doc. or Word doc. open on your browser.
- The MP3 of Maitrinara leading the Kattanuta Bhavana download (if you have chosen to use the recorded meditation in section 2b).
- The projects video download.
- The FutureDharma giving link ready to copy/paste onto the Zoom chat.
- Your presenter notes (**For ease of use it's better to have these printed out!**).

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).

GGE PRESENTER 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. (You might feel more confident if you have a test run of Zoom beforehand if you have not used it as a host before)

Introducing the evening (5 mins)

- Welcome.
- This will be an interactive evening exploring the statement, "the world needs what you've been given, pass it on".
- During the evening we'll be discussing the questions
 - "What does the world need now?"
 - "What have we been given? "
 - "How do we pass it on?"
- At the end I'll ask if you'd like to make a monthly gift to enable Triratna Dharma projects. You aren't under any obligation to give. Whether you give or not we can still look forward to an enjoyable and inspiring evening together.

Section 1. What does the world need now?

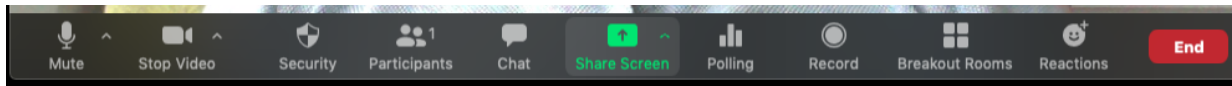
1a. Led discussion on the issues we care about in the world (20 mins).

Aim

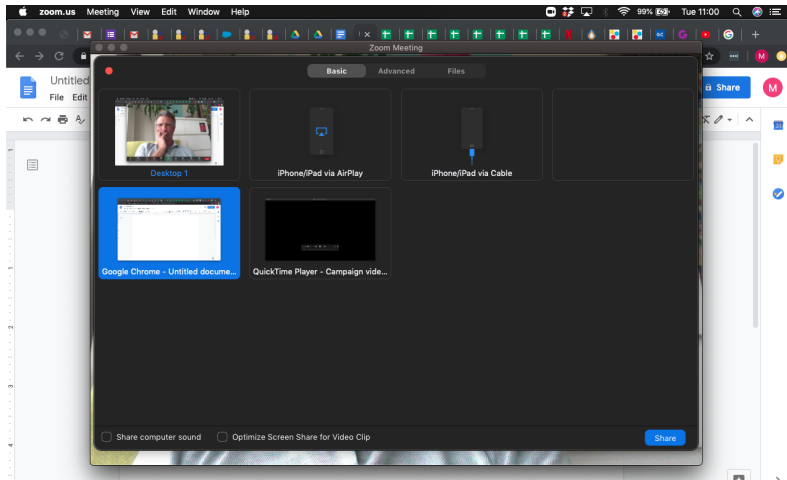
- Connecting us to the issues we care about.
- Recognising how easy it is to fall into habitual negative responses.

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

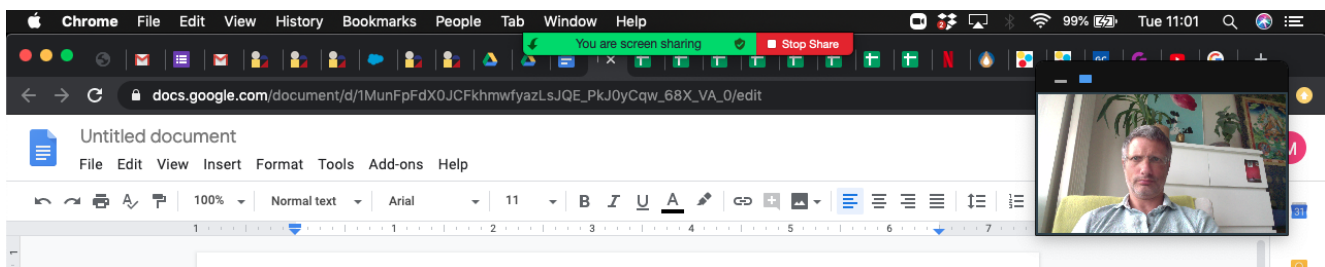
[GO TO SCREEN SHARE]



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



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 says during the discussion.



Create a heading on the document 'World problems we care about'.

Introducing the discussion

Q: "With a global information industry (such as 24hr news, social media etc), we are probably more aware of world-scale problems than people have been at any other point in history. Which of these problems concern us most individually?"

Write the answers given onto the document. Some of the most common answers are given below — you might decide to add some from this list yourself.

Issues we care about

- 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.

Q. “What are our potential negative/unhelpful responses to these issues?”

Create a new heading ‘ Unhelpful responses to these issues’. Write the answers given onto the document. – the most common answers are given below. Make sure they are included on your list.

Possible negative / unhelpful responses:

- Outrage / anger.
- Righteous indignation.
- Helplessness / overwhelm.
- Horrified anxiety.
- Apathy.

Q. “We can see from the list of global problems that suffering is endless and that they can elicit strong negative / unhelpful responses. It’s obvious that Buddhist practice alone can’t resolve these problems; but can Buddhist practice help us develop a more positive and helpful response to suffering?”

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

Aim

- Connecting to what brought us to the Dharma / Sangha and how we’ve changed as a result.

- Assessing how our responses to suffering in the world has changed
- Exploring whether our practice makes any impact on the issues we care about.

“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’. Let’s explore for ourselves whether we believe this is true by answering four questions.”

Taking one question at a time: ask people to reflect on the question for 1 minute. Then go around the group asking for a summary of no more than one minute.

- Question 1: What brought you to the Dharma / sangha?
- Question 2: How have you changed in the way you relate to yourself and others?

For the final two questions, brainstorm as a group.

[GO TO SCREEN SHARE AND SELECT YOUR DOCUMENT]

- Question 3: Have these changes helped us to develop more positive / helpful responses to suffering?
(Reference the negative responses to suffering on the document)
- Question 4: How does Buddhist ethical practice actually impact these issues we care about?
(Reference the issues we care about listed on the document)

In regards to question 4 “impacting the issues” you may need to draw out some global effects which people may not have thought of, for example:

- *Challenging consumerism and the dominance of materialistic beliefs.*
Ethical consumer choices influence consumer patterns (e.g. vegetarianism and veganism).
- *Climate change.*
Our ethical choices affect the environment, both by our own personal use of resources and in influencing organisations environmental practices.
- *Increasing rates of mental illness and suicide / over work and personal stress*
Our practices of meditation and friendship help address the mental health epidemic — providing tools which help people with their mental health, depression, anxiety or addictions, and a supportive context.
- *Prejudice and hatred on the grounds of race, sexuality, colour or religion / nationalism and war / religious extremism and violence.*
Practices of friendship, open communication and building an inclusive community can help reduce hatred and prejudice on grounds of race, sexuality, creed or colour and political polarisation.

In summary you might want to comment that: “The Buddhist perspective helps us understand that suffering comes predominantly from the mind. From this exercise we can see that by working on our minds through Dharma practice we have developed more skilful and effective responses to suffering”.

[END SCREEN SHARE TO RETURN TO GALLERY VIEW]

Section 2. What have we been given?

2a. Led discussion on gratitude (10mins)

Aim

- Understanding & connecting with gratitude.
- Recognising potential blocks to gratitude and generosity.

Introducing the discussion

Q. “We’ve explored how we have changed as a result of encountering the Dharma. So do we feel we have actually been given something valuable?”

The Buddhist word for gratitude is *katannuta* (pronounced kat-ann-uta) *kata* meaning what has been done, especially for oneself, and *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).

Q. “So does anything get in the way of us feeling gratitude for what we’ve been given?”

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Create a new heading on the document ‘What gets in the way of us feeling gratitude?’

Write the group's responses on the document. You can fill in any blanks from the traditional list below.

- **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.

- **Recognising a benefit but taking it for granted.**

E.g. "We were owed it", or "we have a right to it".

- **Not wanting to recognise other people's contributions.**

E.g. Overvaluing self-sufficiency to the extent we ignore other people's contributions (e.g. "I'm a self-made person").

E.g. Fear of indebtedness (the sense we will owe the other person something if we acknowledge they have given us something).

- **Forgetfulness.**

E.g. Time can weaken gratitude.

[END SCREEN SHARE TO RETURN TO GALLERY VIEW]

2b. Led Katannuta Bhavana on spiritual friendship (20 mins)

Aim

- Exploring what we have received through spiritual friendship. Connecting to gratitude.
- You can either choose to use the voice recording of Maitrinara leading a Katannuta Bhavana, which is available on the online resource page (To do this go to Screen share and click on the mp3 recording - share and then play the recording) , or you can lead this yourself based on the text below.

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?

Lead into the four stages, inviting receptivity to changing sensations / *vedana* in the chest / heart centre (emotional responses). So alternating between the reflection and the response.

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

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.

Those who have created Sangha worldwide (beginning of stage): The Buddha, his disciples through the ages, Bhantes teachers, Bhante, his early disciples, and their disciples, all the people that through their practice and efforts have developed the international network of friendships which is Sangha.

(End of stage) ...thanking them for their help.

Finally: just sitting – letting go of effort.

[IF YOU USED THE MP3 RECORDING THEN STOP SCREEN SHARE NOW AND RETURN TO GALLERY VIEW]

If there is time you can have a short discussion on “how the meditation went for us”, in pairs or in an open group.

TEA BREAK

(10 min - you might 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

- Exploring the different ways of expressing gratitude
- Giving time and energy and 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 **practise** 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 Triratna Buddhists are likely to give to Triratna Buddhist projects, so if **we** don’t fund these 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. Our Western culture also often encourages us to be quite secretive about our money and our spending. 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. We have probably all had that experience of feeling lighter and happier after giving to a cause, or person, that we care about.

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 (20 mins)

Aim

Introducing and promoting FutureDharma Fund.

“FutureDharma Fund is a charity which was launched in 2016 to pioneer 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 supports projects which we all use weekly, such as The Buddhist Centre Online, Free Buddhist Audio and The Sikkha Project, — which is responsible for keeping the Mitra Study syllabus up to date. FutureDharma also supports a whole host of other projects such as funding translations of Bhante’s Dharma books, funding youth projects in India and Australia, supporting outlying centres in places like Mexico and Venezuela. Any project worldwide which can demonstrate a broadening or deepening of Sangha can apply for a FutureDharma grant. FutureDharma is now the main giving portal for the Triratna worldwide movement”.

You can now show the projects video (downloaded from the online support page).

[GO TO SCREEN SHARE - CLICK ON THE VIDEO - SHARE - PLAY]

[WHEN THE VIDEO IS FINISHED 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 make 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.

Making the case for giving

“FutureDharma Fund is not a large faceless charity, but one that is run by a small number of committed Buddhists just like me and you. We are all working together to build our Sangha and make the Dharma available to more and more people. The reality is that Triratna Dharma projects only happen if people like you give.

If 500 Mitras across the Triratna world who completed a Gratitude and Giving evening were to commit to giving £50 - or the equivalent of 2 hours of their wages - per month then we'd raise up to £300,000 each year to help spread the Dharma.

Giving this amount may seem like too much of a stretch at first hearing, but you could ask yourself the questions

- “Is how I spend my money in line with my deeper values?”
- “What do I spend my money on that is not as important as this?”
- “Could I give the equivalent of 2 hours wages or £50 per week to help spread the Dharma?”

Making the pledge

[Important]

- Often when 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, 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.
- 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...

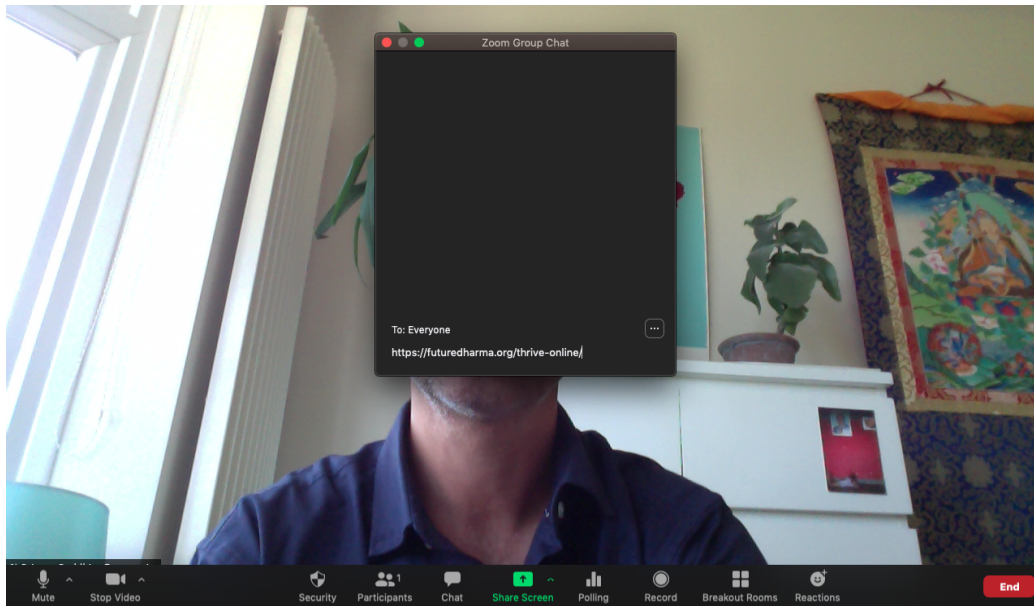
- Sit and see what thoughts and feelings or images arise in response to this request to give each month.
- Observe any 'Yes' response and how that feels.
- Notice if there is a 'No' and any associated thoughts e.g. 'I can't afford it right now', 'I give so much already', 'the money won't be used effectively'.
- Go back to the 'Yes'.
- Now the 'No'.
- Hold both together and come to a decision.”

3d. Facilitating donations (5 min)

Aim

- To help people who want to give to make a donation.

Paste a link to [General Donations 2022 | Future Dharma](https://futuresharma.org/general-donations-2022/) into the chat for your Mitra friends to set up their monthly gift when the Zoom call has ended. You can do this by selecting the chat box icon at the bottom of your screen:



Then paste <https://futuresharma.org/general-donations-2022/> into the chat box, press return, and ask everyone to copy the link.

Once they have all had a chance to copy the link onto their browser you can close this chat box by pressing the red dot at the top left of the chat box.

Suggest to your friends that they follow through on their decision straight after you've all said your goodbyes and finished the Zoom session!

Thanking your fellow Mitras and study group leader.

At this point your study group leader may want to get feedback from people in the group about their response to the evening , and hear from you about how it was preparing and delivering the GGE.

When the evening is over ...

Let us know how you got on

Please contact Varabandhu (Varabandhu@futuresharma.org) and let him know how you got on.

THANK YOU!