

## **A Note on 'Disciple': a Postscript to 'What is the Western Buddhist Order?'**

In the period since this interview was conducted in 2009, my use of the term 'disciple' as a description of a member of the Triratna Buddhist Order has given rise to considerable discussion.

The starting point for my reflections on this topic has been my understanding of the nature of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. This derives from my understanding of the Dharma and is connected, in turn, with the practices and institutions I have taught and encouraged as means of Going for Refuge more and more deeply, albeit these can evolve and develop further.

I established the Order by recognizing in the ordination ceremony that those I was ordaining were Going for Refuge in the sense that I understood it; and by encouraging them to continue Going for Refuge in the light of my understanding, which they do with the help of the practices I have taught and the institutions I have set up. All this is implied in the commitment that all Order members make in their ordinations, whether witnessed by me or by preceptors whose understanding of what Going for Refuge means derives from my own, either directly or via their own preceptors. The Triratna Buddhist Order is therefore a Sangha of those who share my understanding of the Dharma and follow practices that flow from that understanding.

In 'What is the Western Buddhist Order?', I used the term 'disciple' to denote the relationship of Order members to me, and I know that many find the word resonant and meaningful. I encourage those who find the term helpful to continue to regard their relationship with me in this way; and I invite others to engage with me in the full sense of what this term implies. It is necessary for all Buddhists that we feel an emotional connection with and a sense of gratitude towards those from whom we have learned the Dharma teachings we follow. This is more especially the case in relation to those whose understanding is the basis of the Sangha to which we belong. It is therefore important that all Order members feel such a relationship with me as well as, in the case of those I have not ordained personally, their own preceptors. Indeed, I know that there are many who feel devotion and gratitude to me even though they have never seen me.

At the same time, I know that there are Order members who also share and accept my understanding of Going for Refuge and the Dharma in the way I have described for whom the term 'disciple' implies an unrealistically intimate, uncritical, or reverential view of me. Therefore, taking account of such differences, I have come to think that no single term, including the term 'disciple', can adequately define all those who share my understanding of the Dharma and follow practices that flow from that understanding.

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