

ETHICS IN THE ORDER, A GOOD PLACE TO START by Khemasuri

Audio available at: <http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC706>

Hello everyone and thanks for the chance to talk about something I'm enthusiastic about!

This talk has emerged over the last couple of years. It is a coming together of several strands of my thinking, and has 'matured over time, and hopefully will continue to do so. So this talk is more 'work in progress' rather than anything definitive.

The strands are:

- Talk given by Bhante in 1971 called 'Evolution or extinction, a Buddhist view of world problems' In this Talk Bhante talks about the spiritual community as an agent of change in the world. I talked to Bhante about the themes in the talk and he said that he still stood by his understandings and would also encourage me to take them out into the movement more.
- My interest in Pratitya Samutpada as the core teaching of the Buddha. And the traditional formulations of this truth as the very structure of reality. A truth that is always present, it is just that we don't see it.
- The change in the scientific community's understanding of the world. A paradigm shift that has taken place over the last 50-60 years. This can be seen in many disciplines, cybernetics, biology, physics and mathematics, but also the 'softer sciences', ecology, economics, the understanding of consciousness and organisational theory. In its widest scope it is known as general systems theory or 'systems thinking'.
- The importance of promoting the ethics of non-harm and the positive value of skilful action. For me acting ethically is no longer a idealistic option but a necessity for our global survival.
- Lastly my enthusiasm for the Order. The way it has been set up by Bhante, and as a potential force for good in the world. It's ability to function for the benefit of all beings. I suppose it's potential to embody the hands of Avelokiteshvara!

So I will begin with the word of the Buddha.

The fundamental experience of the Buddha upon his Enlightenment was what he later referred to as, 'pratitya samutpada', variously defined as 'conditioned co-production', 'conditioned arising' or 'dependent arising'. This spiritual insight had nothing to do with any kind of conceptual construction. It was a particular way of experiencing the world, which in the Buddha's time it was simply known as 'the way things are'. The Buddha later went on to teach various formulations of this insight in terms comprehensible to the intellect, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Nidana Chain. These formulas were embedded in the understandings of an Indian culture of over two thousand years ago. The Four Noble Truths, for example were based on a well-known contemporary method of diagnosing and treating ill health by looking at the problem (suffering), the cause of the problem (the cause of suffering), the possibility of a cure (the cessation of suffering) and the prescribed course of treatment, the conditions necessary for the cessation of suffering. (the Eight Fold Path).

It can be argued that the doctrine of pratitya samutpada is not just one Buddhist doctrine amongst others, but is *the* Buddhist doctrine; it is what makes Buddhism, 'Buddhism'. It cuts

across all Buddhist schools, the present Dali Lama calls it 'The Buddha's slogan'. It is not dependant on man, it is not human being based; it is more like a natural law operative on all levels of existence, from physical matter to culture and consciousness. The most famous expression of pratitya samutpada is:

When this is, that becomes; from the arising of this, that arises. This not being, that becomes not; from the ceasing of this, that ceases. (Majjhima-Nikaya 11.32).

Although this looks like a simple sentence, it is difficult to comprehend in all its richness and implications. Ananda, who was the Buddha's attendant for much of his life, says to the Buddha;

'It is wonderful lord, it is marvelous how profound this pratitya samutpada is, how deep it appears. And yet it appears to me as clear as clear' The Buddha responds;

'Do not say this Ananda, do not say this! This pratitya samutpada is profound and appears profound. It is through not understanding, not penetrating that this generation has become like a tangled ball of string.....' (Samyutta-nikaya 11 92)

So Ananda's understanding can be seen as merely conceptual, he does not see Pratitya Samutpada in the full sense of enlightenment, does not penetrate the reality of it. It is important to remember that understanding pratitya samutpada conceptually is not the same as *knowing* it through direct experience.

The Buddha's teaching of pratitya samutpada also points the way to the possibility of something quite new arising, qualities that have not existed before can emerge under certain conditions. These are known as emergent properties, and are quite new. When the conditions are appropriate they simply appear, for something to exist in the present it is not necessary for it to have existed in the past. Most of the time when we experience suffering we also experience craving. Sometimes it is craving for a situation to continue; sometimes it is craving for a situation to come to an end. But when the conditions are appropriate, from suffering we will experience faith, faith in the doctrine, faith in the Buddha and his teaching. This is known as an emergent property, and is the true beginning of the spiritual life. It can be seen as a paradigm shift, a perspective that offers new horizons, new possibilities within ourselves. The conditions for faith to arise could be seen as not only suffering, but also an awareness of that suffering, a discomfort with our ordinary way of being and also 'a forth sight' something that shows us an alternative way or vision. Every one of us in this room will have experienced this in some way!

The conditions prevailing in our globalised, 21st Century Society are very different to those in the Buddha's day. It was a different time and a very different culture. It can be difficult for us to relate to the traditional doctrinal explanations of pratitya samutpada. Buddhism, in its 2,500 year history, has spread very widely. It has done so in a spirit of adaptation and assimilation. In 'The Survey of Buddhism' Sangharakshita, talking about the rapid expansion of Buddhism through different races and cultures says, *'the Dharma, while remaining essentially changeless, was capable of assuming a thousand forms, because it is in principle simply the means to enlightenment.'*

The Buddha, in discussion with his Aunt, Mahapajapati, defined his teaching in positive terms as *"...whatever is conducive to dispassion, not to passion detachment, not to*

attachment, leads to a decrease in worldly gains, frugality, contentment, energy, delight in the good, and solitude. This is the norm; this is the discipline; this is the Master's message." (Vinaya 11. 10 Anguttara-nikaya 8. 53). The Buddha was asking us to decide what is helpful to us as practicing Buddhists in the light of our own experience, and his teaching of the qualities, the conditions, that lead to enlightenment.

In this spirit, we can also gain understanding from contemporary sources. For me one of the most useful models to have emerged in recent decades is that of general systems theory. Systems theory can deepen our understanding of how we set up conditions for change and the implications for how we need to act. It is a world-view with a much greater overlap with traditional Buddhist teachings than previous mainstream scientific models.

General systems theory is a conceptual construction of *our* time, and *our* culture, which has grown out of scientific understanding. I believe it can help bring us closer to understanding conditionality, the essence of the Buddha's teaching.

With this in mind I want to begin by looking at the difference between causality and conditionality; because these two ways of looking at the world have very different implications in terms of the way we understand the world and how we act within it.

Causality was expounded by Descartes, Newton and others, and it is often known as 'Cartesian thinking'. This approach moved from a holistic understanding of the world to a mechanistic one, in which there is direct cause and effect. So, A causes B. You chop down a tree; you process it and you get paper at the other end. Cartesian thinking sees the world as being machine-like; there is a direct relationship between input and outcome. This model led to a view that we could control the world 'from the outside'; that we were in charge and that we were separate from the world. As superior beings, we could dominate the world through our intellect. The world was there for Man to have dominion over. It is important to understand causality as it is the dominant world view of the westernised world, a world view we subscribe to without being aware of it.

Systems theory looks at the interplay of conditions which make up the world we live in. So in a straightforward materialistic sense, you can chop down a tree and process it to make newspaper. But chopping down the tree also destroys the habitats of living beings; it uses chemicals that have an effect on the environment; it uses water, which decreases the flow in the river, by which agriculture is affected, it produces waste products – and so on. This complexity of conditions can be seen not only in the material world but also in culture, society and in our consciousness. It means that we cannot see ourselves as isolated or separate from the world around us.

Systems theory has a very particular way of looking at the world, based on the concepts of non-linear dynamics. Very simply systems theory says that there are many causes and many effects in any given situation. This complex interplay of conditions can look chaotic and confused but in fact they have patterns of interaction. It talks about 'open systems' and how they work. A 'closed system' is an isolated system having no interaction with an environment, and is very rare in the natural world. All open systems are wholes in themselves, and all open systems fit into larger systems. For instance, I am composed of atoms, which make up molecules, which make up my cells, which make up my organs. The organs of my body make up 'me', I am part of a system known as my family, and my family is part of a society. All of these are systems within themselves, which are connected to other systems, and cannot be understood in isolation. All 'open systems' have self-

generated goals; my body has a self generated goal to maintain a constant body temperature of approximately 98.6F despite the temperature of the environment. All systems have 'feedback mechanisms' which act to increase or decrease a derivation from the goal at the centre of that system. So, in a hot environment, my body sends a signal to my brain via my spinal cord to say the body is overheating; the brain then sends a signal back down the spinal cord and tells the body to cool itself by perspiration. In cold weather, the body senses the lower temperature and our brain tells my body to start to shiver to warm up. These are both known as self-stabilising feedback systems, which decrease the deviation from the goal of my thermoregulation system, the goal of keeping my temperature stable. There is also self-changing feedback, if my body overheats due to infection and cannot cool down I may end up with a fever. The thermoregulation system breaks down and produces change, illness. There are times when the self changing feedback causes a system to collapse, as when a fever cannot be overcome and the person dies.

Systems that work well, that are 'alive' and evolving or changing to meet new situations are connected and depend on the free flow of information, they cannot grow or change in isolation. Self changing feedback is at all levels change-producing and exists at a point of *instability* within a system. On a personal level it is how we learn, in terms of species it can be seen to trigger evolution. Systems can have what are known as 'emergent properties', which are dependent on the conditions and the relationships between them. For instance, the wetness of water cannot be predicted by the qualities of oxygen, gas with inflammable properties and hydrogen, a gas which is lighter than air. When oxygen and hydrogen come together, the water they produce is something completely different. So, these emergent properties can be reliable and at the same time unpredictable. Systems are not reducible to parts. They are more than the sum of their parts. Things do not happen in isolation. Life is unpredictable!

The difference between a Cartesian and a systems way of seeing the world and interacting with it, has repercussions for how we act. The two models lead us to very different perspectives.

- We see our place in the world differently
- We have the opportunity to behave differently.
- We would have to evaluate the effect of our actions differently.

This has been a bit of a revelation to me! We have all been brought up with a Cartesian way of looking at the world, and it is just SO different from an understanding of conditionality. This has been very important to me, to have a clearer understanding of conditionality, it has really changed the way I approach my life. It has meant that I feel like I am 'walking closer to the truth', that I'm more aligned to reality. That I'm more able to live out my commitment to the 3 jewels.

So I just want to be a bit clearer as to the differences between these world views.

- Cartesian model.
 - When we do something it will be because we want a particular outcome. We will expect the outcome to be the one we desire. We will be **goal orientated**.
 - With think that with knowledge we can **dominate our environment**.
 - We will consider the **means as justifying the ends**.

- We would always be **looking to the future** when we can have what we want.
 - Regard ourselves as acting in opposition to others who may take what we want from us. **We will be competitive.** Win-lose game.
 - We will see ourselves as **individuals (ego centric) and isolated**
 - Because we see ourselves as being on our own and in competition with others we will become polarised, divide ourselves from others and the world around us. **Leading to judgment and blame.**
 - If we don't get what we want we will experience, disappointment and disempowerment. We will **see ourselves as 'not good enough'** and have low self esteem.
 - This is largely the pattern of thinking in dominant cultures today.
- Systems approach.
 - Nothing can be seen in isolation. For a system to be 'alive' and functioning it needs the **free flow of information and connection.**
 - This is a process involving synergy, a system being more than the sum of its parts, it is not a win/lose game but a win/win lose/lose game. It is **collective and co-operative.**
 - We are all responsible for the way the world is. **The world we live in is 'Mind made'.** As it is the results of our actions and thoughts it is important to have as much clarity and awareness as we can manage.
 - We have to act without understanding the outcome of our actions. We would act in knowledge that we cannot but have an effect. (all actions have consequences), **we will not know the outcome of our actions.**
 - We can't know everything **Not only is the world complex but it is also unpredictable.**
 - **We never act in isolation** Regarding ourselves as isolated individuals is not practical. Neither is competition or polarisation.
 - All systems can adapt and grow, evolve and learn. Change is constant, **whatever we do we are contributing to change or stability**
 - We will understand that the **means is just as important as the ends.** The means is the end. How we do something is as important as what we do.
 - Not only do our actions, including speech, or written word always have an effect, and this is not always proportionate. **Actions may be small but they may have huge effects.** (small acts of kindness save lives).
 - If you want change don't conform. Think 'outside the box'. **Live Creatively.**
 - We are not on our own; we need to make connections and friendships with people of common intentions. **Change and stability are not brought about by individuals in isolation, community is vital.**

Thinking about the difference between causality and conditionality has been very helpful to me. For me systems thinking is a helpful, provisional understanding, or 'operational concept' so that I can make choices more in line with reality, more in line with conditionality, more in line with pratitya samutpada. Like Ananda, I do have to bear in mind that systems thinking is not pratitya samutpada, and that real understanding will only come with insight.

Anyway I'm going to leave all this for the time being and talk about Bhante's lecture, 'Evolution or Extinction' a very succinct version is at the back of the book 'What is the Sangha'. In this lecture Bhante talks about the kinds of problems the world faces,

economic, political, commercial, social, racial, and I would add after 30 years, global and ecological and he talks about promoting change, he talks about spiritual development and the spiritual community being essential to this process of promoting change.

'But what is new now ... (is) the size of the groups involved and the extent of their power, their material power, especially their power of mutual destruction, this is what is new. So though the problems have been with us since the beginning, at least in a rudimentary form, what has happened now, what has happened in the last one or two decades is that they have become increasingly urgent, even perhaps catastrophically urgent, so that we have, in a sense, to solve them or even perish.'

'In my view, at this very highly critical juncture of human history, every thinking human being can and should do four things - four things, so what are these four things? First of all he should he should develop himself. Secondly, join a spiritual community. Thirdly, withdraw his support from all anti-spiritual forces i.e. all groups, and four, exert whatever influence for good he can in any group to which he unavoidably does belong'

It seems to me more and more that promotion of change, in its most radical sense can only come from the promotion of awareness and the promotion of ethics. For me this is of vital importance. It also undercuts the values of our westernised society as it has the power to undermine greed, hatred and delusion, the root causes of suffering and destruction.

This is what the Order is strong on! But I think we don't always see it in this way, we don't always have this perspective.

So if ethics is one of the strengths of the order, what can we do to set up the conditions for change, for the promotion of ethics? Here I want to look at the four things that Bhante says that every human being can do, and the conditions within the Order that can support ethical change. I am going to use 'systems thinking' as a way of understanding the conditions needed within the Order to do this.

Firstly I want to look at how the Order supports individual development, individual ethical sensitivity. We can only change ourselves, our ethical practice is our responsibility, no one can do it for us. In the Order we are committed to helping each other become more and more ethical. So in the Order individual ethics have a collective dimension. So how does this happen?

- Ethics within the order are an expression of our GFR. As order members we have a particular level of understanding and desire to refine our ethical life as a way of living closer to 'the way things are'. To do this we need to:
- Be transparent, have a desire to open up to others
- Trust in others i.e. Other OM having our interests at heart, being able to see our blind spots, and communicate sensitively.
- Have a place where a review of our behaviour can happen. Often the chapter, for me sometimes when on retreat
- Confessional practice, where these conditions come together.
- Hri and Apatrapya, the emotional discomfort that creates the desire to change.
- Consistent and kindly support of OM sisters and brothers to support individual change.

So what would systems thinking have to say about individual change? What would it say about the conditions necessary for Individual change and learning to take place?

- There has to be a living network or system, exchanging information and energy freely. **Transparency and trust.**
- In our confessional practice there is a **free flow of information**
- There would need to be an event triggering process, something to start the process of change. In this case it would be something that was brought to a **confessional practice or questioning i.e. change producing feedback** from another OM.
- The event has to be perceived in a way that it is meaningful, cannot be ignored or adjusted to. **Taken seriously.**
- The individual chooses to be disturbed, **Hri and Apatrapya.**
- Information is then circulated about this disturbance to meaning/value. **Discussion or feedback taken seriously.**
- The individual/ community cannot absorb the event/disturbance and instability in the system starts. The instability cannot be integrated and leads to confusion. This is very uncomfortable, strong emotions, self doubt, and pain. Here is where change happens, which in systems terms takes place at the **point of instability** within a system, here the discomfort of the individual. This is why confession cannot really take place without shame.
- This painfulness is recognised and support given by others in the system. **Spiritual Friendship.**
- Out of this there is either a breakdown of the system, or a breakthrough. Something has to give'. If there is a breakthrough this leads to creativity, and change. Changes in understanding, behaviour or values. **Ethical sensibility is strengthened.**

So these can be seen at the conditions needed for ethics to remain at the forefront of our spiritual lives, for it to be supported by the Order, to be expressed by the individual OM. As Saddhanandi said in a talk at the last NOWE, that we were in the Order to experience the 'heat' of our practice. We need feedback from our friends in the Order. She said that this can be both uncomfortable and powerful. We are in the Order to learn and develop.

So this is the process of ethical change within the individual supported by the Order. But we also need to remember that these changes can also be seen within the Order as a whole. I came into the Order after the Madeleine Bunting article and Yashomitra's article. I was aware of them, but was not aware of their impact on the order until some time later. This was information that disturbed many people. The order responded with transparency and openness, it was not hidden or denied. I remember it being discussed in the little class I was attending in Llangollen. What could be seen as the 'self changing feedback' within the system of the order was taken seriously. Many of the OM at the time were uncomfortable for a long time, there was no desire for a 'quick fix', and OM tried to support each other though the network of friendships. For some OM the system was 'broken', could not be sustained and a number of people left the order. For the rest of the order a new stability was created, a more mature understanding of the issues and safeguards came about. Probably this process continues in the desire for more openness and exchange within the Order.

In his talk Bhante said that the second thing that needed to be done to promote change was to join a spiritual community. How can this help promote ethical change, what conditions would be helpful? Is the WBO in a good place to do this?

I'm going to look at this in a bit of a different way. I'm going to look at the way systems thinking looks at organisations and their 'health' I'm going to look at what systems thinking says about organisations that are strong enough to promote change and if the Order has the conditions necessary to promote ethics in the wider society.

Here I'm going to draw on the work of Fritjof Capra, Donella Meadows and Margaret Wheatley, all are systems thinkers. They all talk about the kind of social systems that can be adaptive to new situations and respond creatively and promote change.

I think this way of looking at the promotion of change is interesting as it would give us guidelines for how the order both maintains its internal ethical integrity, and can work to promote ethical change in the wider society, of which it is part.

Firstly I want to look at the internal 'health' of the order; what makes it strong, resilient and creative. Bhante's emphasis on creativity is fundamental his understanding of the spiritual life, in 'Mind reactive and creative' he says,

The creative person, as one in whom the creative mind manifests may be termed, is not only more aware than the reactive person but possessed of far greater vitality. This vitality is not just animal high spirits or emotional exuberance, much less still the mere intellectual energy or the compulsive urgency of egotistical volition. Were such expressions permissible, one might say it is the Spirit of life itself rising like a fountain from the infinite depths of existence, and vivifying, through the creative person, all with whom it comes into contact.

So how do we keep this creativity alive, how do we set up the conditions for the creativity within the Order to influence 'all with whom it comes into contact', in effect the wider society. Systems thinkers talk about "communities of purpose' (I like this phrase, for me it describes the Order, and why we are here), and talk about the qualities they need, the conditions they need to promote their meaning and purpose as:

- Sense of community/collective identity. Common GFR, the Order itself.
- Common context meaning. Spiritual development the path to enlightenment.
- Generating communication. Personal transparency, NOWE, Shabda, conventions. Chapters.
- Shared knowledge. The Dharma.
- Shared rules of conduct. Precepts, Vows of acceptance on Ordination..
- Collective identity. Kesas! The Order.
- Recognisable bonds. Practice, mediation, ethics and ritual and so on.
- Rooted in tradition and identity. The Refuge Tree, common ordination.
- Flexible working local groups. Coalition grassroots movements. Chapters, regions, TBRL, Communities, Buddhafield etc.

So in terms of setting up the conditions for the promotion of ethics we have them already, not always working perfectly, they are there for us to develop and strengthen.

An effective community of purpose would treat its members in a particular way it would optimise the creativity and energy of its members by:

- People have freedom to make mistakes. Can't tell each other what to do? Not held together by rules but by principles.

- Enhances dignity and the humanity of individuals. Recognition of individuality, the importance of the 'true individual' treating people well and kindly.
- No sacrifice of dignity of individuals to goals of the organisation. The love mode working rather than the power mode.
- Be an open system, which values diversity,. As Bhante said,
-

Buddhism can be understood and practiced anywhere in the world, because Buddhism addresses it self to the individual human being regardless of race, nationality, caste, sex or age.....

- Diversity leads to a learning culture, questioning is Ok, innovation and creativity In the spiritual life encouraged (Quote to B's aunt) (?Oregon)
- Support and encouragement through 'pain' of change, spiritual friendship seeing each other though crisis and discomfort, which leads to change and development. Encouragement and support, the importance of the Sangha in the FWBO
- Direct frank emotionally charged discourse. Speech in the order more likely to be truthful, kindly helpful and harmonious. Fierce friendship.
- Sharing your knowledge, talents, abilities, skills within the sp community. Teach others and learn from others, promote innovation and creativity.

Again this is the order at its best, encouraging change, individuality and creativity.

So how does the order use these strengths in its interactions with the outside world, what needs to be set in place for this vitality to have an effect beyond the order? To be influential systems thinking would say that there would need to be openness to the outside world. The Order would:

- Nurture networks communication, realise their importance, perhaps seeing our practice as an interface with the world. In the Sutra of golden light we have this idea. Bhante says in his commentary on the Sutra of Golden Light that we need a much stronger emphasis on spiritual values in our relationship with the world, or civilisation will collapse and mankind will destroy itself. In another 'Evolution or Extinction' he puts it even more strongly. *"...an attitude of withdrawal from public concerns into purely personal ones is one that is not worthy of a human being. It represents an abdication of responsibility"*.
- Flexible working local groups. Chapters, sadly not as strong as they have been in the past, I do think they hold a key to the Order being able to hold both diversity and cohesion.
 - Skilful use of global communication. E-mail, blogs, FWBO news etc. What retreat website etc.
 - Ability to use symbols and cultural codes effectively for framing discourse. We have the Buddha! Such a strong image, could say it is the central symbol in the B tradition. We see someone calm and unperturbed, steady and solid, balanced, dependable and immovable. We see someone who is very much complete in themselves, not needing anything to be happy, contented. We do take this out as a movement all the time. Sensitivity needed, Ireland started with stupa, effective use symbols.

If we are looking for change in the wider society, if we are looking to take our ethics out into the world effectively to have an influence we also need to bear in mind two other conditions.

- That our ethics are largely based on the rejection of society dominant values, Buddhism has own underlying values. This is a strength and we need to remember to be clear about this. . Bhante has concerns about this, in a recent interview he talked about mindfulness being seen as a psychological process rather than a path to enlightenment. Bhante does not want to see the Dharma or the Order's authenticity watered down.
- Part of our strength as an order is that we are not part of traditional institutions; we are not part of any established part of civil society. This is important it gives us a chance to 'think outside the box' of conventional society. We have to remember and honour the fact that we have a distinct and relevant alternative way of looking at the world. It is important that we are not absorbed into mainstream society. (particularly in India)

So these can be seen as some of the conditions necessary for the Order to promote change, promote ethics in the wider world. This is why Bhante said that to promote change joining a spiritual community is necessary. So what might this look like, what can we do as an Order? We can:

- Join with other 'communities of purpose' to promote skilful change, peace groups, go to the climate change camps, join Friends of the Earth, Transition town movements, Network, but take your Buddhist values and principles with you.
- Help the Sangha step out into the world, interact with the world, promote its values and vision, and challenge cultural norms. Teach the Dharma at centres and in tents, (me meditation to theatre group) anywhere to anyone!
- Create situations where the Dharma can be promoted through service to others through the FWBO's interface with wider society. Breathworks, carer's projects, Drug dependency work, arts projects, Clear Vision.
- Join with other Buddhists, as in the Buddhist Recovery Network and Anguilamala the prison chaplaincy organisation, to promote values and principals
- Use Global communication to promote the Dharma, Centre web sites, 'going on retreat' 'Wildmind' all excellent at reaching people.

So I now want to come back to Bhante's talk he said there were four things that an individual could do,

Thirdly, withdraw his support from all anti-spiritual forces, and four, exert whatever influence for good he can in any group to which he unavoidably does belong'

And I'd like to take these together. Our actions, our bodily actions, speech and thoughts all have repercussions. Pratitya Samutpada means that we never act in isolation, and that we contribute to the state of the world continuously if not consciously. In systems terms we constantly contribute to either change or stability.

So, withdraw support for all anti-spiritual groups. Do not contribute to the strength of groups that act or hold beliefs contrary to the Dharma. I remember doing this, many years ago, it was a turning point of my practice. I did it for the sake of personal development, and at the time it was very painful. I was a branch delegate to the regional Labour party. In a hot and

very stuffy upstairs room in a pub in Acrafair, when I suddenly decided to quit the labour party. (tell story re animosity and ill will and anger, another way of promoting change, withdrew to work on this). In some way my joining the order was part of this 'other way'.

And as Bhante says, when you cannot but be a member of a 'group' '*exert whatever influence for good you can*'

What might this mean?

- Exemplify. Remember that you can be 'the forth sight' for others, someone who is doing things a bit differently. (my family and vegetarianism).....
- Speak out. (2 ½ years ago, intention from a retreat, changed my life! Here today, courage, authenticity, validation.....'that's interesting I see it a bit differently', ...challenge assumptions, me at work and 'the less deserving', the unkind, angry, and hated)
- Be of service, Funerals/other ceremonies, (me and Cath) become part of the lives of others from standing on your own ground of practice.
- Share what you know, your knowledge, talents, abilities, skills. Share the Dharma, help others change too.

Remember that what you does not have to be big or important, Systems thinking says that the conditions for change are not proportional, that small actions, a kind word, or listening to someone in a painful situation can bring about big changes.

Also remember that you may never see the results of your actions. Do not be over focused on outcome. Promote ethics for their intrinsic value, knowing that they will have an effect, cannot but have an effect in the world. Our actions will have consequences; we just may never know what they are. We are in this for 'the long haul'.

I just want to end by thanking you for the opportunity to say all this. For the opportunity to talk about my understanding of conditionality informed by systems theory, which is the nearest I have come across in contemporary thinking of how Pratitya Samutpada might work. It is a mundane understanding of conditionality, but one that I find helpful.

Bhante's talk 'Evolution or Extinction' talks about individual spiritual development and the spiritual community being essential to promoting change. Looking at the Order in terms of systems thinking can help us look at how we might promote change through ethical practice, what would help us to do this. It helps us ask the question what would be the conditions in the Order which would enable us to promote ethics in the wider society.

I am just so encouraged by the Order, encouraged by the conditions set in place by Bhante, conditions held in the structure (or lack of it!) and principles of the Order by Bhante. In systems terms the Order is internally alive, vibrant, developing, learning, supportive to members, interconnected and effective in promoting meaning and purpose.

We really are a good place to promote ethics. We just don't know our own strength!