

Open Sangha Foundation (OSF) Dhamma Teacher Training:

A dhamma teacher (dhammācariya) is a guide who illuminates the path to enlightenment. According to the Buddha, a dhamma teacher should possess qualities like deep understanding of the teachings, ethical conduct, and compassion. The teacher serves as a conduit, transmitting the Buddha's wisdom. The dhamma is often likened to a raft; while it can help one cross the river of suffering, it is the teacher who helps one navigate the waters.

Teachers are important, students are important, friendship and generosity are important.

The word "sangha" in the Pali language means community... a place for friends, a place for comrades, and a place for companions... a place for people who are interested in something in common to come together.

The whole concept of OSF is that we learn from one another. In the beginning, when we have people from all over the world, each individual knows a little bit, but together, we know a lot. We're a community, we're friends, and we are here to support each other.

Here's what we're all about. You have probably heard many of my Dhamma talks and various Dhamma teachings, but I would like to point out that not everything that I say is in the suttas. Some of it is my own experiences and my own wording, and some of it is based upon how I understand the teachings of the Buddha. I am not a translator or a Pali scholar, but I do have a strong practice and a lot of practical understanding of what the Buddha taught.

What I'm interested in doing is teaching Dhamma as practical knowledge so that everyone can understand it and benefit from it. We are not getting into the scholastic level. If someone wants to be a Pali scholar, that's great, but this is not the place for it. Here, we are interested in the actual teachings of the Buddha and how we can practically apply them in our daily lives.

Now, let's talk about the organization itself. This is not a political organization; it is not a religious organization. It is nothing like that. It is a community of friends interested in the teachings of the Buddha. OSF is what it is because that's the way we have decided to operate it. It's that simple.

As we grow this organization, the primary thing is friendship. We need to connect with each other. So far, we have done this through Skype, emails, and whatever means we have had available. It is important for all of us to connect and become friends in Dhamma, to help one another develop our practice and to help others do the same.

We all know how difficult it is to find a teacher (dhammācariya) and how important a teacher is. When I first met my own teacher, Acharn Thawee, I thought I had struck gold, I was so lucky to find him. I also recognized that not everyone can have such a good teacher. So, what we are

doing is building an organization that facilitates connections between teachers and students, between good friends.

This way, teachers who have strong practices and understand the Dhamma well, can connect with students who are interested in having strong practices and understanding the Dhamma well. Students can find teachers they can learn from, teachers who can help them develop their practice and understanding. It's all about building relationships and friendships based on the teachings of the Buddha.

So, OSF is about creating connections and a sense of community. Let's build a network where we can find good teachers and good students, and we can help each other grow on this path of Dhamma. Let's build friendships that are based on Dhamma. Let's learn from each other and support each other in our practice. That is the vision of the Open Sangha Foundation.

Now, let's talk about the idea of teaching. Teaching is a skill, just like playing the piano. You can't become a good pianist without practice, and similarly, you can't become a good teacher without practice. You can't just gather information about teaching and expect to be able to teach effectively. You have to practice teaching, and the best way to do that is through direct experience.

At Winthrop University, for example, they have a teacher training program where new teachers are observed by experienced senior teachers. This kind of direct observation and feedback is invaluable for a new teacher's growth and development. Even on Zoom, we can start a similar practice. In our teacher training program at the Open Sangha Foundation, we would have teachers take turns giving talks while others listen and provide feedback. This way, teachers can improve and become more effective in their teaching.

The goal is to encourage teachers to focus on quality rather than quantity. Instead of seeking a large number of students, we should encourage teachers to work with a smaller group of students at a time. This allows for more meaningful connections and better teaching outcomes.

In the broader context, we envision creating a network of teachers who are available for students to connect with. Students can visit the Open Sangha Foundation's website and find a teacher based on their preferences and location. This way, they can reach out to a teacher, set up a meeting, and begin building their own sangha.

In the Western world, there's often a competitive mentality among teachers, where they measure success by the number of students they have. However, we want to shift the focus to friendship and community. Just like having friends, the more, the merrier! Instead of being jealous or possessive of students, teachers can encourage students to explore different teachers and learn from multiple sources.

This is the essence of OSF. It's not just about the monastic sangha; it's about creating a broader

sangha of laypeople as well. As interest in Buddhism grows, we anticipate millions of people wanting to learn about the Dharma. By facilitating connections and friendships, we can create a strong and supportive network of Dhamma practitioners.

Imagine someone living down the street who's interested in the Dharma but doesn't know anyone else nearby who shares their interest. With the Open Sangha Foundation's platform, they can discover other like-minded individuals in their vicinity and form real-world connections. It's about fostering a sense of friendship and community around the teachings of the Buddha.

The goal is to create a network where teachers, beginners, and students can find each other easily and form connections. We can break down the barriers that separate teachers and students, beginners and experienced practitioners. By fostering a sense of friendship and community, we can support each other on this noble path.

In the Western context, Buddhism often gets compartmentalized into various schools or traditions. However, we want to transcend these divisions and recognize that there's only one Buddhism—the teachings of the Buddha. We can learn from each other, regardless of the specific tradition we follow, and come together as a unified sangha.

It's about creating a space for shared learning and mutual growth. We can let go of clinging to rigid identities and be open to learning from different perspectives. This is the essence of the Open Sangha Foundation, a space for friendship, connection, and learning on the path of Dhamma.

Let's talk about the process of learning and how it applies to teaching. Learning to teach is like learning to play an instrument. You can't become a skilled musician without practice. Similarly, you can't become a good teacher without practicing the art of teaching. It's not enough to just gather information about teaching; you have to put that knowledge into practice.

In a teacher training program at Winthrop University, for example, student teachers are observed by experienced senior teachers. This kind of supervised practice is invaluable for a new teacher's growth and improvement. Even on Zoom, we can create a similar setup where teachers take turns giving talks while being monitored by other teachers.

At the Open Sangha Foundation, we envision incorporating such a practice into our teacher training program. Each teacher would give talks, and the other teachers would listen and provide feedback. This way, teachers can refine their teaching skills and become more effective in conveying the Dhamma.

The idea is to encourage teachers to start small and focus on the quality of their teaching rather than the quantity of students. We want to emphasize the importance of direct connections and interactions between teachers and students.

In the broader context of the Open Sangha Foundation, we want to facilitate connections between teachers and students. We can have a system where teachers provide their information on the website, and students can reach out to them directly to connect. This way, students can choose a teacher based on their preferences and build their own sangha.

There can sometimes be a competitive mindset among teachers wherein they measure their success by the number of students they have. We want to abandon this wrong perception and bring our attention to giving rise to wholesome causes and conditions that allow us to cultivate friendship and support. It's not about having the most students but about creating meaningful connections between each and every member of the sangha.

OSF promotes a culture of friendship and community (sangha) among Dhamma practitioners. We want to break down the walls of competition and jealousy that sometimes exist amongst teachers. We encourage and promote that teachers be open to having their students explore other teachers and teachings.

Ultimately, our goal is to grow and nourish strong networks of communities that support each other. This is about building connections, fostering friendships, and growing together towards freedom.

In the West, we often hear about different schools or traditions of Buddhism. We emphasize that there is only one Buddhism—the teachings of the Buddha. While cultural influences may shape how Buddhism is practiced in different regions, the core teachings remain the same.

OSF seeks to transcend these discriminations and promote unity among practitioners. Instead of focusing on labels and identities, we encourage practitioners to come together as a unified sangha.

Like a big university with various departments, Buddhism has different expressions, forms, and practices, but they are all part of the broader university of the Buddha, Dhamma, and sangha... The Triple Gem.

For instance, we had the opportunity to teach the Dhamma to the Dalai Lama. This kind of interaction breaks down the barriers between different Buddhist traditions and emphasizes the common ground—the teachings of the Buddha.

At Wat Suan Mokkh in Thailand, we had visitors from various traditions, including Zen practitioners. All lived and practiced together harmoniously, recognizing the shared essence of the Dhamma.

In Vietnam, after the war, the government decided not to make distinctions between different Buddhist traditions. This led to a beautiful blending of practices and a sense of unity among practitioners.

OSF can be one space where these divisions are transcended, where practitioners from different traditions come together in harmony. It's about creating a shared space for learning, practicing, and supporting each other.

"We must practice in such a way that our method of cultivating mindfulness and concentration—whether it is in the form of sitting meditation, walking meditation, chanting sutras, or invoking the name or image of a great being—serves to bring about calmness, peace, and joy. Otherwise, no matter how long or hard we practice, it will be of little or no benefit."
—Thich Nhat Hahn

Approaching sangha building as described above, ensuring it is seen as the vital part of our practice that it is, we know how to calm these divisions.

In the future, artificial intelligence (AI) and technology may play a role in supporting the Dhamma community. While AI may never fully replace human teachers, it can assist in spreading the teachings more widely and effectively. With the help of AI, we can have virtual Dhamma teachers, allowing people to access teachings and guidance from experienced practitioners.

However, AI can never fully replace the value of human connection and the support of a real sangha. The power of personal interaction and direct guidance from experienced teachers can never be replicated by machines.

OSF's vision is to bring practitioners together, creating a supportive and interconnected community. By fostering friendships and genuine connections, we can support each other on the path to awakening.

Finally, let's proceed to "chunk 5":

1) During the discussion, we have emphasized the importance of friendship and community. It's truly a pleasure to be here with all of you, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to connect with fellow practitioners like Anna and others.

2) As we move forward, we hope to establish women's groups within OSF. Anna and I have already started chatting and communicating, which is a great start. It's wonderful to see the community forming and connections being made.

3) The idea is to create a space where practitioners can come together and support each other in their practice. We can transcend the barriers that separate us and recognize the common ground—the teachings of the Buddha.

4) Let's remember that Buddhism is about transformation and growth. It's about recognizing our own potential for happiness and liberation. We don't have to be victims of our circumstances; we can actively cultivate happiness and well-being in our lives.

5) The world is constantly changing and evolving, and we have the opportunity to grow and

develop alongside it. By embracing the teachings of the Buddha and supporting each other as a community, we can create a brighter and happier world.

Together, let's create a network of practitioners who support and uplift each other in order to give rise to the awakened mind.

We do not allow the buying and selling of the Dhamma to be the status quo, the Dhamma is priceless and cannot be bought or sold... only gifted from friend to friend time and again.

Thank you all for joining me and taking your time to read this. If anyone has any questions or thoughts, feel free to share them. We are looking forward to seeing OSF continue to grow and flourish as a space of friendship, connection, and learning in the Dhamma.