



DHARMA TEACHER ORDER

Buddhadharma Studies Institute



Phap Nguyen Temple- Pearland TX.

Student Manual 2025-2026

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Year 3 Buddhadharma Studies Institute 4-year Certificate Program

Table of Contents

Introduction and Welcome Letter from Most Ven. Thich Tri Hoang	3
The Buddhadharma Studies Institute	4
Background	4
The Principles of the Dharma Teacher Order	5
Course Description	6
Levels of Student Commitment	6
Audit Student	6
Expectations for Audit Students	6
Certificate Students	7
Expectations for Certificate Students	7
Class Flow for a Student	8
Presentation Guidelines	9
The Buddhadharma Studies Institute Class Calendar Year 3, 2025-2026	10
Exceptions, lateness, and absence	12
Paths to Dharma ordination	12
Tuition, Retreats, and Books	12
Class Structure and schedule	13
Class Breakdown	13
Class Etiquette:	13
Practice and Retreats	13
Opportunity for Dana (Practicing Gratitude & Generosity)	14
Appendix 1: Key Buddhist Concepts	15
Appendix 2: BSI Self-assessment Rubric	22
Appendix 3: Code of Ethics of the Buddhadharma Studies Institute of the DTO	23
Appendix 4: Reflections on Misconduct & Abuse in Buddhist Communities	26
Appendix 5: 2024-2025 Student Manual Change Log	33

Introduction and Welcome Letter from Most Ven. Thich Tri Hoang

The Dharma Teacher Order (DTO) is Buddhist organization founded by the Venerable Thich Tri Hoang, and it consists of a group of monastics and lay people who follow the Vietnamese Zen (Thien) tradition and are interested in learning the Dharma- the Buddha's teachings; developing a spiritual practice; and making the Dharma available to anyone wanting to learn it.

During its 23 years of existence the DTO has established Sanghas in New York, Connecticut, Florida, Missouri, and Texas with local regular meetings and classes. In the last 3 years, it organically developed a Virtual National Sangha and the web-based Buddhist Institute (TBI) now renamed: Buddhadharma Studies Institute (BSI). BSI started in the fall of 2022 offering a Dharma study class online. We are very fortunate to have the Venerable Thich Tri Hoang- our Thay- to guide our study and practice and who has supported and encouraged the BSI presence on the web. In an excerpt from a letter to students, our teacher welcomes all students and explains:

“People come to the Dharma Study and Training Course for many reasons. Some want to learn the history and philosophy of Buddhism. Some come out of a desire to learn to live a more satisfying life. Some see the turmoil and pain in the world and want to explore a spiritual way in which to help diminish that. Some hope to share the benefits of their study and practice with others.

Becoming a student in the Dharma Training Course means making a commitment to the program of study and learning how to live a more enlightened life. The path that you have undertaken is not always straight. Many of our students discover that commitment will change their views and behavior over time. Sometimes this can lead to questioning and even changing their old assumptions and conduct. Sometimes there is an internal resistance to these changes; sometimes there is resistance to them from the surrounding environment. Life sometimes presents its own challenges, and that may affect your ability to complete the full course of study. That, however, in no way diminishes either your own positive impulse, or the courage it takes to continue the Path, in or out of the classroom.

I encourage you to take your study and practice seriously. We found that those students who do so benefit most. A few of our students embarked on a monastic life because of their participation in class. Others went on to develop and operate Buddhism courses for the incarcerated. Some students organized their own Sanghas. Several of our students retained their original non-Buddhist religious affiliation but found that the course deepened their understanding and appreciation of that faith. The coursework, while challenging, can be completed by anyone who works at it. Besides the formal aspect of study, the course is designed to allow you to find your own voice to express your understanding of the Dharma.”

The Buddhadharma Studies Institute

The Buddhadharma Studies Institute of the Dharma Teacher Order is dedicated to supporting students in:

- integrating Buddhist insight, philosophy, and practice *through*
- learning by teaching *and*
- studying selected Buddhist Sutras, teachings by ancient Buddhist masters, and writings by modern Buddhist teachers.

Background

The Buddhadharma Studies Institute is an outgrowth of the Dharma Teacher Order (DTO) a non-profit organization led by ordained lay practitioners and monastics. It was founded in 2000 by the Venerable Thích Trí Hoàng (whom we address as Thay), of the 9th generation in the Liễu Quán Lineage and a member of the 43rd generation of the Lâm Tế (Linji) lineage of Vietnamese Zen. Thích Trí Hoàng received lamp transmission (Dharma transmission) in 1973 at the Hải Đức Temple in Nha Trang, Vietnam from His Holiness Thích Giác Nhiên, Second Supreme Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. He is currently Abbot of the Pháp Nguyên Temple in Pearland, Texas and continues to be the spiritual leader of the Dharma Teacher Order.

Since its founding, the DTO has and continues to develop Sanghas and Buddhist study groups in several states in the US. Through in-person instruction, the DTO conferred certificates to many individuals who successfully completed the four-year curriculum. After further studies and demonstrated practices, some have received ordination as [lay Dharma Teachers and Priests](#).

In keeping with Thay's commitment to "spread the Dharma in the West" to alleviate suffering, the Buddhadharma Studies Institute is now bringing these studies to an online community to:

- provide students with a solid and broad working knowledge of Buddhism;
- deepen student understandings of the Buddha's teachings; and
- support students' cultivation of insight and practices that ease suffering in themselves, the community, and society.

The Principles of the Dharma Teacher Order

1. Respect the teachings of all Buddhist traditions as your own.
2. As a manifestation of compassion, make efforts to become vegetarian.
3. Live the Precepts and the Bodhisattva Vows.
4. Knowledge should support practice, just as the left foot supports the right. Without practice, knowledge is hollow.
5. Make efforts to bring Dharma to those who are in need. Contribute time, energy, and material means to the Sangha.
6. Have gratitude and loyalty to the many generations of the teachers who have passed the Dharma to us.
7. Treat all people equally. A person's sex, sexual orientation, race, social status, political view, and faith do not affect their Buddha Nature.
8. Live a simple life; be a monk (male or female) at heart.
9. Do not waste time arguing about either politics or religion.
10. Meet anger with patience and a calm mind. Do not return anger for anger. Always remember to set an example as a Dharma Teacher.
11. To realize wisdom and compassion look deeply into suffering and happiness; one should consider the happiness of others as our own happiness and vice versa, and the suffering of others as our own suffering and vice versa.
12. Contemplate impermanence in order to value and enjoy the present.

Course Description

The curriculum consists of four years of study leading to a certificate. The content of the course consists of a sequential year-by-year set of materials. While students may enter the course in any year, they will receive a certificate after successfully completing all four years of the curriculum. The DTO-BSI believes that the best way to learn is to teach; therefore, students are strongly encouraged to make presentations based on one of the assigned readings at least once a year and with the support and guidance of Dharma advisors who are ordained lay Dharma teachers, priests, or monastics.

Buddhist literature (Dharma) is vast and varied. It includes the Theravada Pali Canon suttas and the Mahayana and Vajrayana sutras, as well as works by ancient, modern, and current Buddhist teachers of various traditions. They carefully crafted this curriculum for a broad exposure to the Buddhadharma. Highlights from each year include:

- **Year 1:** The life of the historical Buddha, his central teachings, and an introduction to the 3 main schools of Buddhism – Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana;
- **Year 2:** The Buddha's teachings on meditation practices found in the Anapanasati and Satipatthana Sutras, and other works;
- **Year 3:** The Buddhist Doctrine found in sutras in all 3 canons; and
- **Year 4:** Buddhist psychology and the Way of the Bodhisattva.

Levels of Student Commitment

To facilitate broader participation, the BSI offers commitment at two levels of participation: audit and certificate of Buddhist studies.

Audit Student

An audit student is enrolled in the class, pays tuition, has access to all class materials (including the Canvas classroom), is not expected to deliver presentations, and is not pursuing a 4-year certificate of Buddhist Studies. Audit students may be eligible to obtain credit toward the 4-year certificate if they have had full attendance during their audit status, they have met the expectations stated below, and are approved by the BSI after a review.

- For guidance to request change of audit to certificate status contact: BSI-Admin@Dharmateacherorder.org

Expectations for Audit Students

Audit students are encouraged to attend classes and other activities of the DTO-BSI. All students regardless of status must always keep their cameras on to promote participation and inspire engagement in the class. Full virtual class participation is expected.

Audit students are expected to complete the assigned readings but are exempt from delivering class presentations. However, they have the option to present if circumstances permit.

Certificate Students

A Certificate of Buddhist Studies is conferred by the Dharma Teacher Order after completion of the four year curriculum, and upon the recommendation of BSI senior leaders and the approval by Thay.

Expectations for Certificate Students

With gratitude for receiving the gift of the Dharma, a certificate student commits to the following:

- Attend all classes.
- Complete reading assignments prior to scheduled classes.
- Meet with a chosen Dharma advisor before and after their presentation. A list of Dharma advisors and contact information will be available in the Canvas classroom.
- Participate actively in class during the presentation via Zoom.
- Participate actively in the Virtual Classroom using the Canvas LMS (Learning Management System). Training will be provided.
- Take a quiz after the last presentation of each book. There will be a total of 10 quizzes for this year's class.
- Develop regular personal meditation practice.
- Demonstrate observance of [the DTO Guiding Principles](#) (page 5).

Preparation

All students are expected to read the assigned materials and come to class prepared to participate in the discussion, ask questions, and/or add insight into the topic presented.

Presentation

- Students will deliver at least one presentation from the current year's assigned book readings. Each student will sign up for at least one presentation during the orientation session. (See the schedule below.)
- Students will work with the Dharma advisor(s) of their choice. The presenting student will contact the Dharma advisor(s) to establish communication well in advance of the presentation.
- **Due to the limited number of presentations available, some students will sign up as co-presenters and work as a team with the Dharma advisor.**
- The presenter will follow the recommended *Presentation Guidelines* (page 9).
- Students are required to meet with the Dharma advisor at least one time before the presentation for preparation and one time after to exchange feedback, using the Self-reflections Rubric found in *Appendix 2* (page 22).
- To use additional media, students should discuss ideas with the Dharma advisor and coordinate a plan with the technology team well in advance of the presentation.

Class Flow for a Student

This is the expected class flow for a student:

- Read the assigned material prior to the class.
- Read the discussion questions when they're made available
 - The discussion questions for this class will become available on the Friday before the class date and will show up in the Modules listing and in the Discussions.
 - (Their file name will be 'C_ - Questions For Class & Post-Class Discussion', where the second character is the class number.)
 - Please read them before class and give them some thought. There will be a brief discussion of them during class.
 - At this point the discussion forum will be locked (i.e., you can read but not reply to the questions yet).
- Attend the class and participate in the Zoom discussion.
- Respond to the discussion questions.
 - Immediately after class the discussion forum will be opened for comments.
 - You will not be able to see anyone's comments until you make an initial reply to the prompt.
 - Follow the guidelines of Right Speech and speak from your heart.
 - Over the next week, please:
 - Respond to **all of the discussion questions** posed.
 - At minimum, read and reply to posts of at least two other people.
 - We only require that you speak from the heart, and with Right Speech. Other than that, what you say is not graded.
 - At the end of the week the teachers will make note of who completed the assignment.
 - The BSI administrators will actively monitor the discussions until the day prior to the next class.
 - Students may continue to post in the discussion for the remainder of the course (Note that BSI administrators are not necessarily monitoring the discussions at this point).
- At the end of each book there will be a quiz on the book. It will be:
 - On-line (in Canvas).
 - Open book.
 - Available starting at the end of the class in which the book was finished and due prior to the start of the next class (which is 13 days).

Presentation Guidelines

The following guidelines should be kept in mind when developing the presentation:

Context

1. What is the background of the book (e.g., when and where was the book written and/or translated? by whom?)?
2. How does the book fit into the overall curriculum theme of this class year? (Refer to the Course Description Section.) (page 6).
3. How does this book contribute to your understanding and practice of the Buddha's teachings?

Content

1. Explore doctrine, new concepts, teachings, and other aspects of the material that best resonate with you.
2. Provide a **summary** of the assigned reading **as a whole and avoid** a chapter-by-chapter presentation.
3. Explain up to three key teachings found in the reading.
4. Define up to three key terms found in the reading. (Refer to Appendix 1 *Key Buddhist Concepts*) (page 15).

Application

1. Briefly describe how this teaching is applied in your personal practice.
2. For class reflection and discussion, please reach out to your Dharma advisor to prepare three to five questions on the major concepts found in the readings.
3. Submit your **questions with your own answers (that demonstrate your preparation for the discussion)** by email to **BSI-Admin@Dharmateacherorder.org**, **no later than the Monday before class.**

The Buddhadharma Studies Institute Class Calendar

Year 3, 2025-2026

C# Date	Subject	Key Concepts to Explore
Orientation		
8/9/2025	Orientation	Student Manual
Dhammapada, online or Ananda Maitreya translation		
(C1) 9/13/2025	Single Presentation	Power of thought; overcoming negativity; the Path to liberation
Heart Sutra, “The Other Shore” TNH		
(C2) 9/27/2025	pp 9-59	Duality; Sunyata; liberation
(C3) 10/11/25	PP 60-123	Interbeing; No-self; Three Dharma Seals
Diamond Sutra, <u>A Buddhist Bible</u> Dwight Goddard, ed.		
(C4) 10/25/2025	Part1: pp 87-95 (Spanish 138)	Emptiness-Sunyata; non-attachment
(C5) 11/8/2025	Part 2: pp 95-107	Non-abiding; transcending dualism; prajna
Awakening of the Faith, <u>A Buddhist Bible</u> Dwight Goddard, ed.		
(C6) 11/22/2025	pp 357-404 (Spanish 395 to 441)	Mind consciousness; Tathagathagarbha-Buddha nature; Alayavijnana-Store Consciousness; Vasana(permeation)
Amitabha Sutra. “Finding Our True Home: Living in the Pure Land Here and Now” TNH		
(C7) 12/6/2025	Single Presentation	Pure Land here and now; cultivating the pure land; Buddha Nature

Sutra of Hui Neng, “A Buddhist Bible” Dwight Goddard, ed.		
(C8) 12/20/2025	pp 497-558 (Spanish 527-589)	Essence of mind; sudden enlightenment; wisdom-meditation and prajna; direct realization; compassion and action
Lotus Sutra, “Peaceful Action, Open Heart” TNH		
(C9) 1/3/2025	CH 1-11	Mindfulness of challenging phenomena; transforming suffering; openness to Dharma
(C10) 1/17/2025	CH 12-23	Perseverance, non-disparagement; Buddha Nature
(C11) 2/7/2026	CH 24-35	Inclusiveness and equality; Faith/practice; Bodhisattva Path
Vimalakirti Sutra: The Vimalakirti Sutra Burton Watson Translation		
(C12) 2/21/26	Single presentation	The Bodhisattva Ideal; Upaya-skillful means; One Vehicle; Altruistic compassion
Tao Te Ching “A Buddhist Bible” Dwight Goddard, ed.		
(C13) 3/7/26	pp 407-436 (Spanish 442-470)	The Tao (the way); Wu Wei-effortless action; The three treasures; Te-Virtue
The Universe in a Single Atom His Holiness the Dalai Lama		
(C14) 3/21/26	Ch 1-5	Science and spirituality; sentience, karma, logic
(C15) 4/4/26	Ch 6-conclusion	Quantum physics and Buddhist philosophy
End of Academic Year Retreat (required for certificate students)		
4/24/2026 - 4/26/2025		

Attendance

Students will make every effort to attend all classes as scheduled.

- Be on time. Admission to the virtual class will close five minutes after the scheduled start time.
- Students must always keep their cameras on to promote participation, encourage engagement, and establish presence in the class.

Exceptions, lateness, and absence

- An exception for the “camera on” requirement can be made when requested and based on need for an accommodation. Students who turn off their cameras without an approved exception will be considered absent.
- Lateness must be reported in advance to BSI-Admin@Dharmateacherorder.org
- Absences must be reported in advance to BSI-Admin@Dharmateacherorder.org
- Absent students are still required to view the Zoom recording and complete the regular class assignments. This includes participating in the Canvas classroom by responding to **all** discussion questions and supporting your responses with references to material from the primary or secondary readings.
- **PLEASE NOTE: Certificate students with more than two absences will only be eligible to receive credit as an auditing student.**

Paths to Dharma ordination

The Dharma Teacher Order offers a path to Dharma Teacher Ordination and a path to Lay Dharma Priest Ordination. These are sequential and are contingent upon successful completion of the 4-year certificate of Buddhist studies. Students interested in pursuing Dharma teacher ordination must speak with senior leadership to learn more about this and the lay Dharma priest paths.

Tuition, Retreats, and Books

- Tuition for all students (Certificate and Audit) is \$200.00 per year.
- Tuition can be paid in one or two payments.
- Tuition checks should be payable to The Dharma Teacher Order, with Dharma Study Class written on the memo, and should be mailed to:
**Dharma Teacher Order
C/O Fernando Camacho
34 Westminster Dr.
Croton-on-Hudson, NY 10520.**
- More information and payment methods, including online options, can be found at: <https://bsi.dharmateacherorder.org/tuition-payment/> .
- As noted below, retreat costs and related expenses are the students’ responsibility and should be factored in as part of the costs of the program.
- The cost of books is the students’ responsibility. Many books, but not all, are available at no cost online.

Class Structure and schedule

Classes last 2.5 hours, start promptly at 10 AM ET / 9 AM CT / 7 AM PT, and are held two Saturdays a month. *Please refer to the calendar for specific dates.*

Class Breakdown

- 30 minutes: Early Practice
- ~60 minutes: presentation
- 10 minutes: break
- ~40 minutes: discussion
- 10 minutes: Sharing the Merits & Announcements
- *NOTE: Presentation and discussion should have a combined time of 100 minutes.*

Class Etiquette:

General Principles:

- Whether in-person or virtually, be respectful of each other and the Sangha.
- Allow everyone the opportunity to share during the discussion by keeping your comments thoughtful and short.
- When wanting to share, join palms together and say, “**(name)-bowing in.**” When finished sharing, join palms together and say, “**(name)-bowing out.**”
- Use the class time to practice mindful speech: instead of criticism and debate, cultivate deep listening and loving speech.
- A mindfulness bell may be offered to bring us back to the present.

Online Etiquette:

When attending class on Zoom, act as if we were physically together in a meditation hall. Please:

- Sit upright in front of the camera.
- Abstain from carrying on side conversation with others either in or outside the virtual classroom.
- Avoid the use of cellphones while class is in session.
- Avoid engaging in activities like driving or walking while class is in session.
- Be conscious of classroom time when presenting or sharing feedback.
- Participants observed engaging in unacceptable behaviors will be removed from the virtual classroom and will be marked absent

Practice and Retreats

To derive full benefit from the examination of the Dharma, students are encouraged to practice meditation with a local sangha or temple.

The DTO hosts three silent retreats per year (usually in August, November, and February) and one End-of-the-Year Spring Retreat during the last weekend of April at [Mariandale Retreat Center](#) in Ossining, NY. All are encouraged to attend the silent retreats. However, **students**

seeking Dharma Teacher or lay priest ordination must, at a minimum, attend the End-of-the-Year retreat. Students are encouraged to factor in the cost of the Spring Retreat and related expenses as part of the cost of Tuition.

If the cost of attending the end-of-the-year retreat is a burden, certificate students can apply for a scholarship for retreat center expenses (this does not include transportation). Scholarships will be granted to students only (not guests) and are offered according to the DTO's financial capability and student participation. Scholarships are available on a first-come-first-served basis.

Opportunity for Dana (Practicing Gratitude & Generosity)

*“The gift of the Dhamma surpasses all other gifts,
the taste of the Dhamma surpasses all other tastes,
the love of the Dhamma surpasses all other loves,
destruction of craving overcomes all suffering.”*

- Dhammapada 354

Following the tradition of generosity taught by the Buddha, the Dharma Teacher Order is committed to making the Dharma available to all. We do this by training students who could be invited to become ordained lay teachers and priests. The Buddhadharma Studies Institute does its best to keep tuition costs low (currently \$200 per year), choose books that are available at lower costs (used, shared, online, or available at libraries), and support students through scholarships (based on available funds). The many skills and roles necessary to sustain the DTO efforts, from coordinating the Buddhadharma Studies Institute to organizing retreats, are also provided on a volunteer basis.

However, there are costs associated with maintaining this organization, such as our website and online classes. We also rely entirely on tuition and donations to provide financial aid to retreat attendees and to pay for the expenses of the monastics who attend our retreats.

Additionally, retreats are opportunities for practicing Dana offerings for attending monastics and for the retreat center kitchen and housekeeping staff.

With this in mind, we invite and encourage all students, members, and friends of the Dharma Teacher Order to consider practicing generosity by offering time, energy, expertise, and/or financial support. Your generosity honors the gift of the Dharma, whose value surpasses all gifts.

Appendix 1: Key Buddhist Concepts

Below are some key Buddhist concepts that students are expected to learn in this class. Students should use this list to guide their reading, study, and class presentations.

Attachment

upādāna (Skt.; Pāli). Clinging or grasping, an intensified form of craving (tṛṣṇā). It is said to have four forms: (1) clinging to pleasurable sensual experiences (kāma); (2) clinging to views and theories (dṛṣṭi); (3) clinging to rules and rituals (śīlavrata-parāmārśa); clinging to belief in a soul or self (ātma-vāda). In the series of twelve links in the doctrine of Dependent Origination (pratītya-samutpāda), upādāna is preceded by craving (tṛṣṇā) and succeeded by becoming (bhava), illustrating the connection between desire and rebirth. The same point is made in references to the five aggregates as objects of grasping when they are referred to as the 'aggregates of attachment' (upādāna-skandha). from *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, by Damien Keown

Bodhicitta

(Skt., thought of awakening). A key term in Mahayana Buddhism denoting the state of mind of a Bodhisattva. Two aspects are recognized: the relative aspect, or the mind (citta) of a Bodhisattva directed towards enlightenment (bodhi); and the absolute aspect or the mind whose intrinsic nature is enlightenment. The former relative aspect is also said to be twofold: the bodhicitta of aspiration (praṇidhāna), when one announces one's intention to pursue the Bodhisattva Path, and the bodhicitta of application, by which one engages in the path. from *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, by Damien Keown

Bodhisattva

bodhisattva [Sanskrit,=enlightenment-being], in early Buddhism the term used to refer to the Buddha before he attained supreme enlightenment; more generally, any being destined for enlightenment or intent on enlightenment. The spiritual path of the bodhisattva is the central teaching of Mahayana Buddhism. One becomes a bodhisattva by arousing the "mind of enlightenment," taking a vow to attain supreme enlightenment for the sake of all beings. The bodhisattva does not aspire to leave the round of birth-and-death (samsara) before all beings are saved; he is thus distinguished from the arahant of earlier Buddhism, who allegedly seeks nirvana only for himself and who, according to Mahayana teaching, has an inferior spiritual attainment. The practice of a bodhisattva consists of the six "perfections" or paramitas: charity (*dana*), morality (*sila*), forbearance (*ksanti*), diligence (*viryā*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and wisdom (*prajna*). Both laymen and monks may be regarded as bodhisattvas. from *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6th edition

Buddha

An epithet of those who successfully break the hold of ignorance, liberate themselves from cyclic existence, and teach others the path to liberation. Derived from the Sanskrit root budh, "to awaken," it refers to someone who attains nirvana through meditative practice and the cultivation of such qualities as wisdom, patience, and generosity. Such a person will never again be reborn within cyclic existence, as all the cognitive ties that bind ordinary beings to continued rebirth have been severed. Through their meditative practice, buddhas have eliminated all craving and defilements. the buddha of the present era is referred to as "Sakyamuni" ("Sage of the Sakyas").

He was born Siddhartha Gautama, a member of the Sakya clan. from *A Concise Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, by John Powers

Buddhanature

Buddha-nature (Skt., buddhatā); according to the Mahāyāna view, the true, immutable, and eternal nature of all beings. Since all beings possess buddha-nature, it is possible for them to attain enlightenment and become a buddha, regardless of what level of existence they occupy. The interpretation of the essence of buddha-nature varies from school to school; there is controversy over whether all beings and also inanimate entities actually possess buddha-nature. from *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*

Consciousness

viññāna (Skt.; Pāli, viññāna). Consciousness or awareness, in both its active, discriminative form of knowing, and its subliminal or unconscious bodily and psychic functions. It is important to realize that viññāna means more than the stream of mental awareness, which the English word ‘consciousness’ primarily denotes. For example, from the earliest times Buddhist sources have distinguished six forms of viññāna corresponding to the six senses, thus eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, taste-consciousness, touch-consciousness, bodily consciousness, and mental consciousness. Viññāna thus encompasses both the Western terms ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious’ and for that reason is difficult to translate by any single term. It is an important element in the Buddhist analysis of human nature as the last of the five aggregates (skandhas). In the scheme of Dependent Origination (pratītya-samutpāda) it forms the third link in the twelvefold series. from *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, by Damien Keown

Dharma

As doctrine, *Dharma* means the teachings of Buddha, and Buddhism in general. Dharma is a moral imperative for a Buddhist, for it is through observing the Buddha’s teachings that one can reach enlightenment and nirvana. By following the Dharma one will see immediate results; one will experience it at once, without lag. Dharma in this sense is a means toward salvation. This then is the religious imperative behind Buddhism as a whole. Dharma is what makes Buddhism relevant, today as well as in the past. The dharmas of existence: Early Buddhism used the idea of dharmas to mean elements of existence. The idea embraced all aspects of reality, including mind. Some schools also included unconditioned aspects of reality, such as those found in the state of NIRVANA, while other schools meant the term *dharmas* to apply to only the objects of consciousness. from *The Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, by Edward A. Irons

Emptiness

Emptiness was a concept fully developed by the Mahayana thinkers. However, its source no doubt lies in the earlier teachings on non-self, or *ANATMAN*. Both these terms are in turn related to the ZEN BUDDHISM concept of *WU* (in Japanese, *mu*), or nonbeing. *Sunyata* does not simply involve a denial of existence or nihilism. *Sunyata* means that the phenomena of existence, all dharmas, have no intrinsic identities. Every aspect of reality is, according to the principles of *PRATITYA-SAMUTPADA*, conditioned in some way. And sunyata is ultimately equal to another Buddhist concept, *TATHATA*, “suchness.” from *The Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, by Edward A. Irons

Five Hindrances

Many are the obstacles which block the road to spiritual progress, but there are five in particular which, under the name of hindrances (*nivarana*), are often mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures:

1. Sensual desire (*kamacchanda*),
2. Ill-will (*byapada*),
3. Sloth and torpor (*thina-middha*),
4. Restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*),
5. Skeptical doubt (*vicikiccha*).

They are called "hindrances" because they hinder and envelop the mind in many ways, obstructing its development (*bhavana*). According to the Buddhist teachings, spiritual development is twofold: through tranquility (*samatha-bhavana*) and through insight (*vipassana-bhavana*). Tranquility is gained by complete concentration of the mind during the meditative absorptions (*jhana*). For achieving these absorptions, the overcoming of the five hindrances, at least temporarily, is a preliminary condition. It is especially in the context of achieving the absorptions that the Buddha often mentions the five hindrances in his discourses. Nyanaponika Thera, *The Wheel*, Publication No. 26, Buddhist Publication Society

Five skandhas

The five components of the psycho-physical personality, and the factors on the basis of which ordinary beings impute the false notion of a "self" (atman): 1/ form (*rupa*); 2/ feelings (*vedana*); 3/ discrimination (*samjna*); 4/ compositional factors (*samskara*); and 5/ consciousness (*vijnana*). Because these components are constantly changing, beings who attempt to cling to the "self" are subject to suffering. These factors are often referred to as "aggregates of attachment" (*upadana-skandha*) because, although they are impermanent and changing, ordinary beings (that is, those who have not attained the awareness of arhats and buddhas) develop desire for them. from *A Concise Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, by John Powers

Four immeasurables/Four brahmaviharas

Four sublime states of mind have been taught by the Buddha:

- Love or Loving-kindness (*metta*)
- Compassion (*karuna*)
- Sympathetic Joy (*mudita*)
- Equanimity (*upekkha*)

In Pali, the language of the Buddhist scriptures, these four are known under the name of *Brahma-vihara*. This term may be rendered by: excellent, lofty or sublime states of mind; or alternatively, by: Brahma-like, god-like or divine abodes. These four attitudes are said to be *excellent* or *sublime* because they are the right or ideal way of conduct towards living beings (*sattesu samma patipatti*). They provide, in fact, the answer to all situations arising from social contact. They are the great removers of tension, the great peace-makers in social conflict, and the great healers of wounds suffered in the struggle of existence. They level social barriers, build harmonious communities, awaken slumbering magnanimity long forgotten, revive joy and hope long abandoned, and promote human brotherhood against the forces of egotism. Nyanaponika Thera, *The Wheel*, Publication No. 6, Buddhist Publication Society

Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths are a teaching tool. The Buddha's first sermon was presented to his five wandering ascetic friends at the Deer Park in Varanasi, near modern Sarnath. Here he first presented the idea of the Four Noble Truths (*catvari ariyasatyan*). The Four Noble Truths present the Buddha's fundamental understanding of reality. Suffering (*DUKKHA*) is part of life. Suffering is caused by desire (*TANHA*). There is a way (*MARGA*) [the Eightfold Path] to the cessation of suffering (*NIRODHA*). These ideas are found throughout Buddhist literature. It is

said the Buddha first decided to teach the Four Noble Truths because he felt the Twelve-fold Chain of Dependent Origination, his detailed explanation of *PRATITYA-SAMUTPADA* (codependent arising), would be too difficult for people to grasp. The Four Noble Truths are a way of helping people understand this concept. The Eightfold Path is often summarized by a threefold formula of *SILA* (morality), *SAMADHI* (concentration), and *PRAJNA* (wisdom), what some writers call the “threefold practice,” or the three “trainings.” Right view and right thought are associated with wisdom; right speech, right action, and right livelihood with morality; right mindfulness and right concentration with samadhi; and right effort with all three areas of practice. from *The Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, by Edward A. Irons

Interdependent origination

The term *pratitya-samutpada* (Pali, *paticca-samuppada*), "dependent origination" or "dependent arising," was first used by the Buddha to characterize the understanding of the nature of human existence that he had attained at his enlightenment. Essentially a doctrine of causality, this notion is so central to Buddhist thought that a proper understanding of *pratitya-samutpada* is often declared tantamount to enlightenment itself. In it, an entire complex of notions about moral responsibility, human freedom, the process of rebirth, and the path to liberation coalesce. from *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Lindsay Jones, ed. (entry by David Kalupahana)

Interpenetration

There is one particular feature of the world as seen by a Buddha which is repeatedly stressed and for which the Avatamsaka sutra is justly famous. This is interpenetration. In a world with no hard edges, the world of luminous flow without shadows, all things infinitely interpenetrate:

They...perceive that the fields full of assemblies, the being and aeons which are as many as all the dust particles, are all present in every particle of dust. They perceive that the many fields and assemblies and the beings and atoms are all reflected in each particle of dust. (Gomez 1967:lxxxviii)

The world as seen by the Buddhas, the dharmadhatu, the way things really are, is one of infinite inter-penetration. Inside everything is everything else. And yet not things are confused. As a description of the way things are in our unenlightened world this seems incredible. But the dharmadhatu is the world as seen by the Buddha wherein there is no question of the world (an objectively real world 'out there') as distinct from meditative vision. *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, by Paul Williams

Karma

Buddhist ethical theory is primarily concerned with volitional actions, that is, those actions that result from deliberate choice. Such actions set in motion a series of events that inevitably produce concordant results. These results may be either pleasant or unpleasant, depending on the original volition. In some cases the results of actions are experienced immediately, and in others they are only manifested at a later time. Some karmic results do not accrue until a future life. from *A Concise Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, by John Powers

Meditation

English word often used to translate a range of more specific indigenous terms denoting techniques and practices designed to concentrate and focus the mind. See *bhāvanā*; *samādhi*; *sādhana*; *vipaśyanā*; *śamatha*. from *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, by Damien Keown

Merit

Puṇya (Pāli *puñña*): The karmic result of the voluntary performance of virtuous actions. Such actions may include performance of pujas, prayer, or giving gifts to the monastic community (saṃgha). In Theravada countries, making merit is a central focus of the religious lives of laypeople, who are generally thought to be incapable of attaining the higher levels of meditative practice or nirvana. In early Buddhism, it appears that it was assumed that merit is non-transferable, but in Mahayana the doctrine of "transference of merit" became widespread, and is said to be one of the key virtues of a bodhisattva, who willingly gives away the karmic benefits of his/her good works for the benefit of others. from *A Concise Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, by John Powers

Mindfulness

smṛti (Skt.; Pāli, sati). Mindfulness or awareness. An alert state of mind that should be cultivated constantly as the foundation for understanding and insight (prajñā). Many meditational practices exist to help develop mindfulness, notably the four Foundations of Mindfulness (smṛti-upasthāna). Smṛti features in many formulations of virtues: it is the third of the Five Powers (bala), the first of the Factors of Awakening (bodhyaṅga), and the seventh of the eight factors of the Eightfold Path.

from *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, by Damien Keown

Nirvana

In Indian religious thought, the supreme goal of certain meditation disciplines. Although it occurs in the literatures of a number of ancient Indian traditions, the Sanskrit term *nirvana* is most commonly associated with Buddhism, in which it is the oldest and most common designation for the goal of the Buddhist path. It is used to refer to the extinction of desire, hatred, and ignorance and, ultimately, of suffering and rebirth. Literally, it means "blowing out" or "becoming extinguished," as when a flame is blown out or a fire burns out. ... Nirvana was not regarded as a place...but as a state of absence, notably the absence of suffering. Exactly what persisted in the state of nirvana has been the subject of considerable discussion over the history of the tradition, though it has been described as bliss—unchanging, secure, and unconditioned.

Buddhist thinkers have distinguished between "the nirvana with remainder," a state achieved prior to death, where "the remainder" refers to the mind and body of this final existence, and "the nirvana without remainder," which is achieved at death when the causes of all future existence have been extinguished and the chain of causation of both physical form and of consciousness have been finally terminated. These states were available to all who followed the Buddhist path to its conclusion. The Buddha himself is said to have realized nirvana when he achieved enlightenment at the age of 35. Although he destroyed the cause of future rebirth, he continued to live for another 45 years. When he died, he entered nirvana, never to be born again. from *Encyclopedia Britannica*, entry by Donald S. Lopez, Jr.

Paramitas/Paramis

The six (and sometimes ten) qualities that bodhisattvas cultivate on the path to buddhahood: 1/ generosity (dana); 2/ ethics (sila); 3/ patience (ksanti); 4/ effort (viryā); 5/ concentration (dhyāna); and 6/ wisdom (prajna). An additional four are often presented in texts that correlate their cultivation with attainment of the ten bodhisattva "levels" (bhūmi): 7/ skill in means (upāya-kausalya); 8/ aspiration (praṇidhāna); 9/ power (bala); and wisdom (jñāna). from *A Concise Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, by John Powers

Rebirth

The belief (also transmigration, metempsychosis, reincarnation, etc.) common in Eastern religions, that there is a continuity from one life to a next, either of a self or soul (ātman), or, in the case of Buddhism, of the process itself. Buddhism teaches a karmically controlled continuity of consciousnesses between lives but denies that there is an ātman or inherently existing self which is the bearer of these consciousnesses. There are six realms of rebirth: three are pleasant (peaceful deities [deva], wrathful deities [asura], and humans), and three are unpleasant (animals, hungry ghosts [preta], and hell-beings).

from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*

Samsara

The beginningless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth in which ordinary beings are trapped. According to Buddhism, the universe is beginningless and endless, and the beings who dwell within it transmigrate from life to life in dependence upon their volitional actions. Due to ignorance of the true nature of reality, they are generally predisposed toward actions and attitudes that lead to negative consequences. This process inevitably results in repeated suffering, disappointment, and death, and so the main goal of Buddhism is to extricate oneself from the cycle, which can only be done through religious practice that enables one to transform one's negative attitudes and proclivities and develop direct intuitive understanding of the nature of reality. This serves to break the cycle and can lead to full liberation. from *A Concise Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, by John Powers

Seven factors of awakening

bodhyaṅga (Pāli, bojjaṅga). A list of seven factors that lead to or constitute bodhi, or awakening. Often referred to as the seven 'limbs of enlightenment', the seven items are listed in Pāli sources as: (1) mind-fulness (sati); (2) investigation of the Dharma (dharma-vicaya); (3) energy (virīya); (4) joy (pīti); (5) tranquillity (passaddhi); (6) meditation (samādhi); (7) equanimity (upekkhā). The seven occur as the sixth of the 37 'factors of enlightenment' (bodhi-pāṅṣika-dharma).

from *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, by Damien Keown

Three (or Four) Dharma Seals

Buddhism is distinguished by four characteristics, or "seals." Actually, if all these four seals are found in a path or a philosophy, it doesn't matter whether you call it Buddhist or not. You can call it what you like; the words "Buddhist" or "Buddhism" are not important. The point is that if this path contains these four seals, it can be considered the path of the Buddha. Therefore, these four characteristics are called "the Four Seals of Dharma." They are:

- *All compounded things are impermanent.*
- *All emotions are painful.* This is something that only Buddhists would talk about. Many religions worship things like love with celebration and songs. Buddhists think, "This is all suffering."
- *All phenomena are empty; they are without inherent existence.* This is actually the ultimate view of Buddhism; the other three are grounded on this third seal.
- The fourth seal is that *nirvana is beyond extremes.* From *Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche*

Three Refuges and Precepts

triśaraṇa (Skt.; Pāli, tisaraṇa). The 'three refuges', namely the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, particularly when used as a profession of faith. The formal procedure by which a layman becomes a Buddhist is by 'taking refuge', which involves repeating three times the formula 'I

take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Saṃgha' (in Pali, Buddhāṃ saraṇam gacchāmi, Dhammaṃ saraṇam gacchāmi, Saṃghaṃ saraṇam gacchāmi). The utterance of this formula is followed by recital of the Five Precepts (panca-sila). In addition to the three refuges Tibetan forms of Buddhism, influenced by tantric Buddhism, have added the guru as an additional refuge to the formula, since access to the other three refuges is considered to be dependent upon the kindness of a teacher. The three refuges are also referred to as the 'three jewels' (triratna). from *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, by Damien Keown

Three root defilements/Three poisons

The unwholesome mental states are called *kilesas*. The word can be translated as afflictions because they bring suffering. It can also be translated as defilements because they defile and corrupt the mind. The Buddha has analyzed the nature of the defilements and has beautifully explained how they can all be traced to the three "root defilements" of greed, hatred, and delusion. Our task in following the Buddha's teaching, in practicing the Dhamma, is to overcome, to eliminate, to abandon the defilements of greed and hatred that give rise to many other branch defilements. But greed and hatred spring ultimately from delusion or ignorance. And thus to eliminate all the defilements, we have to eliminate ignorance. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *BPS Newsletter*, No. 55, 2006

Two truths

Two Truths (Skt., satya-dvaya). The two levels of truth or reality in Madhyamaka philosophy, known as relative truth (saṃvṛti-satya) and absolute truth (paramārtha-satya). In many forms of Buddhism, the concept of two levels of truth concerned the validity of epistemological experience but in some forms of Mahāyāna it was also applied to matters of ontology. This is especially so in later Madhyamaka where saṃvṛti-satya applies to the mundane reality of saṃsāra and paramārtha-satya to the transcendental reality of enlightenment and nirvāṇa. The apparent hiatus between these two levels of reality or truth led to serious soteriological difficulties which generated much debate in later Mahāyāna concerning the relationship between these two forms of truth or reality. from *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, by Damien Keown

Upaya

Upaya-kausalya (Pali upaya-kosalla): The ability to adapt Buddhist teachings and practices to the level of understanding of one's audience. This is particularly important in Mahayana, where it is said to be one of the most important abilities developed by bodhisattvas. It is the seventh in the tenfold list of perfections (paramita) and is cultivated on the seventh bodhisattva "level" (bhumi). from *A Concise Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, by John Powers

Wisdom

Prajñā (Pali panna): In general, this refers to the development of intuitive understanding of key Buddhist concepts. In Mahayana, the "perfection of wisdom" is the sixth of the "perfections" (paramita) that a bodhisattva cultivates on the path to buddhahood. In Mahayana it is associated with direct perception of emptiness (sunyata) and is attained on the sixth bodhisattva "level" (bhumi). Along with karuna (compassion), it is one of the two main qualities that bodhisattvas cultivate in pursuit of buddhahood.

Appendix 2: BSI Self-assessment Rubric

Please use this document with the Dharma advisor to prepare your presentation; to assess your understanding of how the content reflects the Buddha's teaching; and to reflect on your personal experience before, during, and after your presentation.

<i>Meeting with the Dharma advisor</i>		
1. Did you meet with the Dharma advisor <i>before</i> your presentation?	YES	NO
2. Did you meet with the Dharma advisor <i>after</i> your presentation?	YES	NO
<i>Presentation Content (based on the Assigned Reading)</i>		
3. Did you include the relevant background context of the text?	YES	NO
4. Did you provide a summary of the assigned reading?	YES	NO
5. Did you note how your assigned reading fits into the overall curriculum themes of this class year?	YES	NO
6. Did you share how the book contributes to your understanding of the Buddha's teachings?	YES	NO
7. Did you provide a list and explanation of at least three key teachings?	YES	NO
8. Did you define at least three key terms?	YES	NO
9. Did you describe how the teachings might influence your personal practice?	YES	NO
<i>Delivery</i>		
10. Did you feel comfortable with the pace of your presentation?	YES	NO
11. Did you choose a delivery style that supported your learning process and your creative expression?	YES	NO
12. Did you feel enthusiastic and interested in preparing for and presenting your topic?	YES	NO
<i>Discussion Questions</i>		
13. Did you submit three to five discussion questions and your answers by the required time?	YES	NO
14. Did your questions connect with the content of your assigned reading?	YES	NO
<i>Class Participation</i>		
15. Did you feel that you engaged with your audience effectively?	YES	NO
16. Do you feel that you answered participants' questions skillfully?	YES	NO

After completing the above assessment, please reflect on the following questions with the Dharma advisor:

1. How do you think the presentation went? Was there anything surprising or unexpected?
2. What are 1 or 2 things you would like to do differently in the future?
3. What did you learn from preparing for, facilitating, and reflecting on the presentation?
4. Are you willing to offer another presentation this year, if needed?

Appendix 3: Code of Ethics of the Buddhadharma Studies Institute of the DTO

The Dharma Teacher Order has adapted the Code of Ethics for teachers affiliated with the Insight Meditation Society, which can be found online at: <https://www.dharma.org/code-of-ethics-for-ims-teachers/> .

Code of Ethics of the Dharma Teacher Order (DTO) and the Buddhadharma Studies Institute(BSI)

As participants of the Dharma Teacher Order/the Buddhadharma Studies Institute, we recognize that the foundation of spiritual life rests upon our mindful and caring relationship to all the lives and life around us. For those of us who live a lay life, we acknowledge that without the support of monastic vows and customs from our Buddhist roots, we need clear guidelines that help ensure the wisest ethical conduct possible. This Code of Ethics does apply to all, and anyone connected to the DTO-BSI regardless of ordination or student level status.

In keeping with this understanding, and for the long-term benefit of ourselves and the community, we agree to uphold, at a minimum, the five lay training precepts. These are expanded below to make them explicitly appropriate in our role as teachers, students, and practitioners of the Dharma in our specific cultural setting. We agree to the following guidelines:

1. We undertake the precept of refraining from killing.

We agree to acknowledge the interconnection of all beings and our respect for all life. We agree to refine our understanding of not killing and non-harming in all our actions. We seek to understand the implication of this precept in such difficult areas as abortion, euthanasia, and the killing of pets. While some of us recommend vegetarianism, and others do not, we all commit ourselves to fulfilling this precept in the spirit of reverence for life.

2. We undertake the precept of refraining from stealing.

We agree to not take that which does not belong to us and to respect the property of others. We agree to bring consciousness to the use of all the earth's resources in a respectful and ecological way. We agree to be honest in our dealing with money and not to misappropriate money committed to Dharma projects. We agree to offer teachings without discrimination regarding any student's financial circumstances.

3. We undertake the precept of refraining from sexual misconduct.

We agree to avoid harming through sexuality, avoid sexual exploitation, and avoid relationships of a sexual nature that are outside the bounds of the commitments we have made to another. We will respect another person's vows made to someone else and will avoid interfering in those relationships.

DTO-BSI participants with vows of celibacy will live according to their vows. Those in committed relationships will honor their vows and refrain from adultery. Further, all ordained teachers and lay priests agree not to use their role to exploit their authority and position to pursue a sexual relationship with a student.

There is the potential that participants who are single may be inclined to develop partnership and marriages with former students. We recognize that such healthy relationships can be possible; however, great care and sensitivity are needed. The following crucial guidelines will apply to such cases:

- A sexual relationship is never appropriate between teachers or lay priests and current students.
- During retreats or formal teaching, any intimation of future student-teacher or lay priest romantic or sexual relationship is inappropriate and should be avoided.
- If interest in a genuine and committed relationship develops over time between a single teacher or lay priest and a student, the student-ordained person (teacher) relationship must clearly and consciously have ended, the student and ordained person (teacher or lay priest) must then consult with a senior teacher before any further development of a romantic relationship. Such a relationship must be approached with restraint and sensitivity – in no case should it occur immediately after retreat. A minimum lapse time of three months from their last formal teaching and a clear understanding from both parties that the student-teacher relationship has ended must be coupled with a conscious commitment to enter a relationship that brings no harm to either party or the Dharma community.

4. We undertake the precept of refraining from false speech.

We agree to speak that which is true and useful and to refrain from gossip in our community. We agree to hold in confidence what is explicitly told to us in confidence. We agree to cultivate conscious and clear communication, and to cultivate the quality of lovingkindness and honesty as the basis of our speech.

Specifically, we will not publish students' confidential information or conversations without their prior written consent, whether the students are named or anonymously referenced. Publications include, but are not limited to: talks, Dharma articles, books, interviews, and blogs, both in print and online. Conversations with ordained teachers, priests, and monastics may be recounted in Dharma talks, with prior verbal permission.

5. We undertake the precept of refraining from intoxicants that cause heedlessness or loss of awareness.

Substance abuse is the cause of tremendous suffering and is a behavioral health condition that requires professional treatment. We also agree that any person affected by substance use will be treated with compassion, understanding, and will be referred to professional services as needed. We further agree that use of intoxicants during retreats or while on retreat premises is absolutely prohibited. We agree not to abuse or misuse intoxicants at any time.

Unlawful Harassment

In addition to the precepts, DTO-BSI has a zero-tolerance policy against harassment and discrimination of any kind due to race, national origin, ethnic background, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, and/or disability.

To help uphold the standard of ethical behavior in all our relationships and activities the DTO Board of Directors will convene an Ad-Hoc Ethics committee when a situation merits one. The Committee will be comprised of board members and senior ordained lay people responsible for receiving and addressing complaints of unethical behavior by teachers, lay priests, students, or volunteers.

The committee can be contacted through the chair of the board of directors or their local/regional assigned representative.

Questions or complaints will be handled in a timely fashion and investigated as appropriate. Any violation of any part of this Code of Ethics – including inappropriate sexual conduct or breaches of confidentiality – may result in DTO-BSI severing its relationship with the involved party.

Appendix 4: Reflections on Misconduct & Abuse in Buddhist Communities

By Giac Vien (David Ketchum)
February 2025

One of the difficult realities we face is that Buddhists, including teachers and leaders, can and have acted in harmful and even abusive ways, and Buddhist communities can and have failed to act in ways that prevent, recognize, and heal abuse. This tragedy is intensified when Buddhist institutions and communities are complicit in ignoring, hiding, excusing, or even defending the abuse or the abusers. To this we can add all the layers of harm we find in our personal and collective experiences in various cultures, communities, families, and relationships. When abuse of all kinds is so common, it is inevitable that we bring these wounds and scars with us. Learning to listen deeply, understand, and act skillfully to prevent abuse and support healing is an ongoing practice that every Buddhist community needs to attend to, from a formal monastic sangha to an informal living room meditation group.

As an example of this, our Year 3 studies previously included *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Sogyal Rinpoche (the author) faced abuse allegations in 2017. This led to Rigpa (the organization Sogyal Rinpoche founded) “to commission an independent investigation into the allegations to enable witnesses to come forward, and be listened to in an open, impartial and sensitive way.” While not all allegations could be confirmed, this investigation did conclude that “some students of Sogyal Lakar ... have been subjected to serious physical, sexual and emotional abuse by him”. Further, “there were senior individuals within Rigpa who were aware of at least some of these issues and failed to address them, leaving others at risk.” (You can read the report at Rigpa’s website, [HERE](#).) Such misconduct impacts students, not only in the teacher’s tradition, but also all who encounter the teacher through books, articles, recordings, and other media. Part of the practice is responding to these circumstances with wisdom and compassion.

Gratefully, we have a strong foundation for this work. The training precepts and monastic codes are powerful examples and practices for cultivating cultures, communities, and relationships that are careful to avoid harmful and abusive behavior. Centering the precepts and Mindfulness Trainings remains a core practice our entire lives, as well as an integral part of the cultivation of insight: understanding how suffering arises and ceases, and then moving from that suffering to actions that develop wisdom and compassion, inclining to Awakening. Our attention to recognizing and transforming the Three Poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion complements our attention to recognizing, preventing, and healing harmful and abusive actions: recognizing and letting go of all unskillful, harmful actions, while understanding and cultivating skillful, wise, and compassionate actions. The cultivation of the paramis are further protective elements that normalize and provide pathways to learn and practice behaviors that transform unwholesome actions and bring about wellbeing.

An Example of the Buddha's Teachings About Abuse

From the Buddha's own time, he acknowledged the reality that spiritual leaders, teachers, and communities could act in harmful and abusive ways. In [the Appasādapavedanīya Sutta](#), for example, he taught that the lay community could "make a proclamation of no confidence in a mendicant" who acted in any of eight unskillful, harmful ways:

1. "They try to prevent the lay people from getting material things."
2. "They try to harm lay people."
3. "They insult and abuse lay people."
4. "They divide lay people against each other."
5. "They criticize the Buddha,
6. [They criticize] the teaching, and
7. [They criticized] the Saṅgha."
8. "They're seen at an inappropriate place for collecting alms."

The first admonition is related to what the Buddha called "fawning on families" in the Metta Sutta, using the sangha as an opportunity to exploit the generosity of the lay community to indulge greed. This type of financial control and abuse undermines the purpose of the monastic path and erodes the lay community's confidence in the sangha's worthiness. Rather than focusing on progress in practice, the monastic would be focused on the benefactor's prosperity, becoming happy when the supporter's wealth grew and dejected when it did not. This harmful behavior uses dishonest means, from flattery to false promises, to pressure the benefactor into giving gifts that satisfy greed for possessions, pleasure, or status.

The second and third admonitions include the types of unskillful physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional behaviors that we recognize as harmful and abusive. The fourth is especially related to actions that provoke conflicts and divisions. Here we must be careful to remember that abusive behavior often divides people into camps, taking sides. Whistleblowers and victims who speak up may also be accused of dividing the people. However, it is the harmful actions themselves, and not the people who expose them, that are the source of the divisions. This fourth category is especially related to the types of cultures that communities and institutions may develop that end up hiding, excusing, protecting, or even promoting the abuse and the abusers.

Disparaging the Triple Gem is not, strictly speaking, abusive in the same way as we understand abuse today. However, disparaging the Triple Gem can cut us off from understanding suffering and its cessation, and such disparagement also provides pockets to hide, justify, and protect abuse and abusers. Unethical teachers have been known, for example, to wave away the Buddha's emphasis on the precepts and monastic codes, making it less clear to the community how, when, and why unskillful actions are inappropriate and lead to suffering. Another expression of this kind of disparagement can be seen when teachers manipulate a Dharma teaching to justify abuse or to make an exception to an ethical rule, such as when a teacher makes sexual advances on a student. The eighth example, being "seen at an inappropriate place for collecting alms," is another aspect of this kind of disparagement, in the sense of undermining people's understanding of the Dharma and giving further justification for unskillful actions.

These types of unskillful, harmful, and even abusive actions, the Buddha emphasized, are grounds for speaking up. This “proclamation of no confidence” also helps us understand the community aspect when there is harm and abuse. It may be tempting to diminish, deny, ignore, repress, or suppress instances of harm or abuse, perhaps even in the name of protecting the community, but doing so ultimately undermines the community’s understanding of, confidence in, and practice of the Buddha’s teachings.

For a current example of why the Buddha gave this teaching, we can turn to the reflections on abuse in the Ehipassiko community in Belgium. [Ven. Vimala Bhikkhu*ñī pointed out](#) how tragic it is:

“to see how abuse, be it sexual, mental, spiritual or institutional, can be so very destructive to the health and wellbeing of so many people as well as destroy people’s faith in Buddhism and the Buddha’s teachings. If abuse is not addressed adequately and, like in so many cases, is denied, victims are blamed for ‘being angry’ and Dharma teachings are used for spiritual bypassing, how can healing ever take place? ... Often we look up to a teacher and although something might not feel right, we gloss over it and don’t pay much attention. Often this also has to do with our internalized patriarchy that we don’t always see how our perceptions, attitudes and behavior toward other people change based on their gender. But over a longer period of time this permeates the atmosphere of the organisation and several women reported a toxic atmosphere in Ehipassiko.”

All of this is a powerful reminder that Buddhist practitioners, monastics, teachers, and leaders are not immune to the potential to take advantage of and even abuse others. We are not immune to the social conditioning that makes sexism, racism, ableism, classism, gender and sexuality antagonisms, and other forms of discrimination and oppression normal in a culture and society. It is essential that we make mutual respect and care part of the practice, transforming our internalized oppression and dominance, so that we can all know the wonderful joy of finding a teacher, sangha, temple, and spiritual friends that we can truly trust. This is why the Buddha also emphasized that the community can “make a proclamation of confidence in a mendicant who has these eight [opposite] qualities,” free of harm and abuse. If you know this joy, please do your most to practice together and celebrate this gift.

Choosing Books and Other Teachings

A special consideration for educational settings is if, when, and how to use books and other resources by teachers who have acted unskillfully. This discernment is also part of the practice. In the case of the BSI, our curriculum was carefully developed by DTO's founder, the Most Venerable Thich Tri Hoang, who also guides us in any changes that need to be made in the program and book list. Under his direction, we consider multiple factors when updating the curriculum due to a teacher’s misconduct, including looking at the misconduct and its impact, the potential impact on students, and availability of other comparable teachings. Here are some sample reflective questions that support this discernment.

- ***Can a comparable resource be found that is offered by an ethical teacher?***

It is almost always preferable to choose a book or resource by a teacher who is also an example of skillful conduct. This is especially the case in languages like English, which now has access to the Dharma teachings of many very skillful translators, teachers, and teachings.

An example of this is in the removal of a book on the Eightfold Path by Sangharakshita from our primary book list, due to [his prolonged misconduct and abusive behavior](#).

- ***If there is not a suitable replacement, what needs to be communicated about the teacher's misconduct?***

The way we communicate about a teacher's misconduct both reflects and influences how we handle harmful actions. What do we want to communicate about our own principles and practices? How are we training our minds by how we talk about the misconduct?

In the case of *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, another comparable resource was not initially identified. BSI chose to continue to use this book alongside sharing this article and resources about Sogyal Rinpoche's actions, as well as the response by Rigpa. This response included a careful investigation, public release of that investigation, and follow up to heal the suffering of abuse and prevent further misconduct. This includes a [Code of Conduct](#), [Shared Values](#), and [Grievance Procedure](#), as well as a "[Safe Environment Advisory Team](#)" to continue to transform the culture and structure of Rigpa away from harm and towards wellbeing. All of these aspects become opportunities to reflect on and practice the Dharma.

NOTE: This book was replaced in the curriculum after continued discernment that included feedback from BSI teachers and students, and with the support of senior DTO teachers to locate a suitable alternative.

- ***How can these decisions be connected with skillful teachings and practices? How can we turn the reality of abusive behavior in Buddhist communities into a reminder to practice diligently?***

Following this, we can also explore opportunities to connect the way misconduct is prevented, recognized, and handled with the Buddha's teachings. The process of suffering that arises before and with misconduct is not outside of the Four Noble Truths. This is also an opportunity to be diligent in reflecting on how to cultivate healthy communities of practice, as well as how to translate teachings and practices across cultures. For example, we can contemplate the differences between privacy (which arises with trust, safety, healthy boundaries, and ethical

confidentiality) and secrecy (which arises with threat, deceit, fear, shame, and hiding information for the purpose of avoiding accountability).

The fact that someone like Sogyal Rinpoche, who displayed a great deal of wisdom, insight, and kindness in his teachings, could also commit physical, sexual, and emotional abuse against his students should be an invitation to personal reflection. Short of Awakening, none of us are immune to acting in harmful ways. As long as there are seeds of greed, hatred, and delusion within us, there is the potential of acting in harmful, even abusive ways. Further, we must be careful to never use this acknowledgement as an excuse to justify or accommodate harmful actions. Instead, we acknowledge this in order to return to our own practices and communities with the aspiration to practice well, to intentionally reflect on and act in ways that prevent harm and abuse, and to stop and heal it if it does occur.

The Buddha's advice in [the Kusināra Sutta](#) reminded the monastic sangha members to “check in themselves” when they want “to accuse another”. We can also use the Buddha's reflective questions to help us practice honest self-reflection:

1. “Is my bodily behavior pure? Do I have pure bodily behavior that is impeccable and irreproachable?”
2. “Is my verbal behavior pure? Do I have pure verbal behavior that is impeccable and irreproachable?”
3. “Is my heart established in love for my spiritual companions, without resentment?”
4. “Am I very learned, remembering and keeping what I've learned? These teachings are good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, meaningful and well-phrased, describing a spiritual practice that's entirely full and pure. Am I very learned in such teachings, remembering them, rehearsing them, mentally scrutinizing them, and comprehending them theoretically?”
5. “Have both monastic codes been passed down to me in detail, well analyzed, well mastered, and well evaluated in both the rules and accompanying material?”

Similarly, the Buddha encouraged the community to be diligent to cultivate five skills:

1. “I will speak at the right time, not at the wrong time.”
2. “I will speak truthfully, not falsely.”
3. “I will speak gently, not harshly.”
4. “I will speak beneficially, not harmfully.”
5. “I will speak lovingly, not from secret hate.”

When we practice in this way, both personally and collectively, we go a long way in creating a culture where we understand harmful and abusive acts, as well as skillful, compassionate, and wise acts. We know how to recognize abuse and harm, how to abstain from harmful actions, how to listen to one another when

there is a concern, and how to address those concerns with wisdom and compassion.

Creating Cultures & Practices to Prevent & Heal Abuse

It is the responsibility of leaders to help cultivate cultures and practices that prevent and heal harmful and abusive behaviors. A well-established best practice is to include a code of conduct that outlines skillful behaviors to develop and unskillful behaviors that must be abandoned. For many of us, the Five Mindfulness Trainings serve this purpose for the lay community, with further developed monastic codes supporting the sangha. Reciting and studying these teachings is a vital part of any healthy practice, both personally and collectively. Other practices, such as Beginning Anew, normalize recognizing, addressing, healing, and transforming conflict, which is essential for a community's health and a protective factor for preventing harmful and abusive behavior.

Where it is appropriate and possible, other best practices include developing policies, such as:

- anti-harassment policy;
- anti-discrimination policy;
- child protection policy;
- conflict of interest policy;
- whistleblower policy; and
- grievance policy.

Please also keep in mind that some of these policies will be mandatory for certain organizations or businesses. For example, nonprofits that work with children are often required to have a child protection policy.

In any case, the point of these practices and policies is supportive. They help us be mindful of preventing harm and abuse through offering clear guidelines of skillful and unskillful behavior. For organizations with employees or volunteers, these policies are included in their orientation, training, and ongoing organizational development. They require regular review and should be easily accessible to everyone. They should also be included in ongoing training for staff and volunteers. It is good to provide educational opportunities on these policies to anyone who participates in the community.

This includes clear guidance for how to report abuse and what will happen when misconduct is alleged. Clear policies and procedures are especially important when you consider the intense emotions that usually accompany misconduct and abuse. For this reason, organizations need clarity on when and how allegations will be handled within the organization, and when and how the organization will rely on the assistance of a third party. Similarly, communities need transparency about what and when updates and conclusions will be communicated with the community. Failure to do so further undermines trust and often creates ambiguity that favors a culture of abuse.

In the spirit of these teachings and practices, the Dharma Teacher Order has adapted the Code of Ethics for teachers affiliated with [the Insight Meditation Society](#), included in full below as an appendix. We encourage all students, members, and friends

of the DTO-BSI to be familiar with this code. Include its principles in your practice, both personally and in your community. Together, we can cultivate community that knows how to act skillfully, with wisdom and compassion, to prevent harm and abuse, and to recognize, heal, and transform it if it does occur.

RESOURCES

- Alliance for Buddhist Ethics: [Website](#) (archive), [YouTube channel](#)
- An Olive Branch: [Website](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube channel](#)
- Buddhist Healthy Boundaries: [Website](#)
- Buddhist Project Sunshine (on abuse in the Shambhala community): [Website](#)
- FaithTrust Institute: [Website](#), [YouTube channel](#), [Responding to Spiritual Leader Misconduct: A Handbook](#) (pdf)
- Rigpa Reports on Sogyal Rinpoche: [Website](#)

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Appendix 5: 2024-2025 Student Manual Change Log

As we go through the year, we will update this manual as needed. Those changes will be summarized in this change log.

Date	Description
August 6, 2024	Initial publication
August 19, 2024	Clarify wording that the tuition amount applies to both Certificate and Audit students.
March 4, 2025	Add 'Reflections on Misconduct & Abuse in Buddhist Communities' as appendix 4.
July 31, 2025	Updates for Year 3 completed
Sept. 9, 2025	Correct number of quizzes typo