

15 December 2022

26 participants from six countries participated: the UK, Canada, Germany, Spain, Ireland, and the U.S.

Here are the key points of the discussions in the four breakout sessions:

Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology - The group focused on the problem of 'spiritual bypass' in our practice, our tendency to use spiritual explanations and processes to deny difficult emotion and psychological problems. While all practitioners engage in spiritual bypassing at one time or another, the challenge is to recognize it when it's happening and respond skillfully.

The Evolution of Secular Buddhism - [Lenore Lambert's recent article](#) in SBN, in which she asserts that secular Buddhism needs to become more defined and develop more of an organizational presence, was the main topic at this breakout session. While acknowledging our need for strong connections with others committed to this path, the group agreed that the current, looser network of secular Buddhists is more appropriate at this time.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism - The group continued to explore the notion of 'non-self' in relation to political activity. When we move away from an egoic-centered self, we are less likely to view our political opponents as enemies to be hated. The group also discussed how to bring our Buddhist practice into socially engaged activity.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism - The group explored two key notions in Buddhism: *sankharas* (the Pali term for mental formations or volitions) and the '*hungry ghost*', a metaphor in secular Buddhism for a state of unfulfilled desire based on an absence of goodness and connection. The group explored the suffering that arises from a lack of connection.



17 November 2022

30 participants from six countries participated: the UK, Costa Rica, Canada, Germany, Ireland, and the U.S.

Here are the key points of the discussions in the four breakout sessions:

Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology - The main topic for the discussion was an exploration of how the 'Hungry Ghost' in each of us creates suffering. In traditional Buddhist cosmology the Hungry Ghost is a being in one of the 'lower realms' who cannot satisfy his insatiable hunger and longing for food. Understood metaphorically, the Hungry Ghost represents our tendency to become attached and addicted to certain pleasures. The group discussed the various ways in which we experience this tendency and how we can respond skillfully to it through compassion practices and mindfulness.

The Evolution of Secular Buddhism - The group discussed the ways in which a secular approach differs from traditional forms of Buddhism and the common features of secular Buddhism. One key distinction is the secular emphasis on 'what works' for us in this life - the practical and ethical dimensions of spirituality - as opposed to traditional religions in which the focus is on adherence to a set of metaphysical beliefs.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism - The group explored the important notion of 'non-self' for political activity. When we move away from an egoic-centered self, we can be more open with others and less fixed in our views, both of which are necessary conditions for a mindful engagement in political actions.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism - The group explored the meaning of a secular approach in our lives. While there were different perspectives on this topic, there was a consensus that our focus should be on the practical applications of the dharma, reflected in the notion that 'Practice is life; life is practice.'



20 October 2022

28 participants from seven countries participated: the UK, Costa Rica, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Israel, and the U.S.

Here are the key points of the discussions in the four breakout sessions:

Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology - The main topic for the discussion was *attachment*. The group discussed the various ways in which we attach as part of the process of 'selfing'. They also considered the differences between how Buddhism and western psychological theories address this issue.

The Evolution of Secular Buddhism - With Thich Nhat Hanh's writings as the starting point, the group explored the key notions of nirvana and care from a secular perspective. They also discussed the value of joy, of embracing the good.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism - The group discussed the ways in which a secular or naturalistic approach to the dharma fits well with socially engaged Buddhism. The 'this-worldly' stance of secular Buddhism provides us with a better foundation to work toward social changes in our lives.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism - The group discussed the role and place of wisdom in the Eightfold Path. The group defined wisdom as experientially-based, as an appropriate response based on a sense of loving kindness or metta.



15 September 2022

30 participants from six countries participated: the UK, Costa Rica, Canada, Germany, Hungary, and the U.S.

Here are the key points of the discussions in the four breakout sessions:

Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology - The main topic for the discussion was the notion of dukkha. The group discussed the classical Buddhist understanding of suffering versus the Western psychological perspective. Recognizing that some element of dukkha will always be present in our lives, the key issue is how we respond.

The Evolution of Secular Buddhism - The group explored what secular Buddhist practices look like in comparison with those found in forms of traditional Buddhism. They also discussed the differences between skepticism and curiosity, as well as goals and intentions.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism - The group discussed the specific ways in which secular Buddhists can engage in political action. In that context, the group identified the need to analyze oppressive social structures and find a balance between meditative practices and political activity.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism - The group discussed a recent article in SBN by Carmel Shalev, on *Secular Dharma and Ethics*. The group focused on the ways in which ethics are relational rather than based on a set of absolute principles.



18 August 2022

27 participants from seven countries participated: the UK, Costa Rica, Canada, Germany, Hungary, Australia, and the U.S.

Here are the key points of the discussions in the four breakout sessions:

Secular Buddhism and Psychotherapy - The main topic for the discussion was the notion of the self, in particular, how we can move toward a less egoic self through dharma practice. The group members discussed how Buddhist mindfulness and psychotherapy can complement each other in efforts to reduce suffering and develop a more permeable, looser sense of the self.

The Evolution of Secular Buddhism - The group focused on the role of sangha in secular Buddhism. Rather than attempt to define an agenda or set of goals for secular sanghas, it's more fruitful to see sanghas as a place where we can connect as travelers along the path, helping each other to develop an understanding of a secular approach and practice.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism - The group discussed the implicit politics found in Buddhism based on an ethic of care and non-harm. That ethic or Buddhist sensibility enables us to enter the political arena in a fruitful way, but the specific modes of political action depend on other perspectives that we find useful.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism - The group discussed the notion of not-self in relation to human flourishing. Reflecting on Shantideva's and Stephen Batchelor's approach to this topic, the group members highlighted the way in which not-self is a form of interconnectedness.



21 July 2022

24 participants from four countries participated: the UK, Costa Rica, Canada, and the U.S.

Here are the key points of the discussions in the four breakout sessions:

Secular Buddhism and Psychotherapy - The group discussed Voice Dialogue, a form of therapy that allows one to access the 'vulnerable child'. This therapeutic modality has some similarities with a Buddhist approach and thus can be used by practitioners to become more mindful and less reactive.

The Evolution of Secular Buddhism - The group explored several questions: What does it mean to be a secular Buddhist? What is missing in secular Buddhism? What is it about secular Buddhism that 'bugs' traditional Buddhists?

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism - The group discussed an article by Bhikkhu Bodhi on how the Buddhist precept of non-harming applies to the current invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The group agreed that, while non-harming is the crucial starting point, we need to recognize other important factors to determine what should be the skillful role of secular Buddhists in this and other conflicts.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism - The group discussed what a secular approach to the 'Three Jewels' (the Buddha, dharma, and sangha) entails. How should we interpret the meaning and relevance of each jewel? If we don't approach the Three Jewels as a refuge, as monastics and many traditional Buddhists do, what is our relationship to them?



16 June 2022

27 participants from six countries participated: the UK, Australia, Costa Rica, Canada, Germany, and the U.S.

Here are the key points of the discussions in the four breakout sessions:

Secular Buddhism and Psychotherapy - The group focused on the role of difficult emotions in our day-to-day life experiences. They discussed how using 'RAIN' (the acronym for Recognize, Accept, Investigate, and Non-self) and self-compassion can help us discover the roots of our emotional distress

The Evolution of Secular Buddhism - The group explored to what extent a secular dharma needs to be rooted in Buddhism as a framework, as well as the role of teachers and facilitators in educating others about the core concepts of a secular approach.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism - The group discussed an article on secular Buddhist ethics which proposed that not-self and emptiness provide a metaphysical grounding for such an ethics. The group also discussed the five precepts as guidelines for responding skillfully.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism - The group discussed the various ways in which people 'numb out' to avoid their suffering. We need compassion and resilience to face life's challenges, as well as the ability to 'sit without knowing'.



19 May 2022

31 participants from eight countries participated: the UK, Ireland, Australia, Costa Rica, Canada, India, Germany, and the U.S.

Here are the key points of the discussions in the four breakout sessions:

Secular Buddhism and Psychotherapy - The group focused on the emotion of anger, in particular, its role in our day-to-day life experiences. They discussed how both Buddhism and psychotherapy can help us respond skillfully to this difficult emotion.

The Evolution of Secular Buddhism - The group agreed that an 'engaged' form of Buddhism does not necessarily entail political activism but encompasses a broader relationship to society. They also explored the need for secular Buddhists to engage with perspectives outside of Buddhism, including western philosophy and science.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism - The group discussed what secular Buddhism can provide to political activists to help sustain our activism and avoid 'burn out'. In this context, the notions of non-self and interconnection are key concepts in developing a secular Buddhist approach to political activism.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism - The group discussed and explored the role of hope in a secular approach to the dharma. A key question: How can individuals use hope in a skillful way to become models of generosity and kindness for others.



21 April 2022

30 participants from seven countries participated: the UK, Ireland, Australia, Canada, Colombia, Hungary, and the U.S.

Here are the key points of the discussions in the four breakout sessions:

Secular Buddhism and Psychotherapy - The group discussed some process issues and what topics the group will be working on. They decided to focus on how we can respond skillfully to difficult emotions.

The Evolution of Secular Buddhism - The group discussed what role the Secular Buddhist Network can have in the ongoing development of secular Buddhism. They agreed that SBN should continue to be a facilitator of discussion rather than a sangha and to help practitioners by curating or selecting valuable resources.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism - The group discussed two articles: Seth Segall's view of eudaimonic flourishing and David Loy's view that engaged Buddhists need to deal with plutocracy and socio-economic injustice as part of dealing with the climate crisis. They also shared their responses to the brutal invasion in the Ukraine.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism - The focus of the discussion was exploring the relevance and connection of the Four Noble Truths and Fourfold Task. In this context, the group members discussed the interactive relationship between craving and dukkha.



17 March 2022

29 participants from five countries participated: New Zealand, the UK, Australia, Canada, and the U.S.

Here are the key points of the discussions in the four breakout sessions:

Secular Buddhism and Psychotherapy - In addition to clarifying the mission of the group, the participants explored the human capacities for both good and evil, and the impact of our complex nature on developing a mindful, compassionate path in life.

The Evolution of Secular Buddhism - The group came to a consensus that we need to focus as much or more on what secular Buddhism *is* rather than on what secular Buddhism is *not*. They also agreed that, while some structure is necessary, it's important that secular Buddhist groups avoid top-down, rigid forms of structures in their internal functioning.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism - The group continued to discuss the revised version of an article written by Mike Slott, Katya de Kadt, and Karsten Struhl, [*The core life tasks and beliefs for a radically engaged Buddhist*](#). Participants discussed whether enlightenment has any role in secular, radically engaged perspective and explored the differences between reform and radical versions of social engagement.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism - In response to several quotations from Thich Nhat Hanh on social conflict and peace, the group discussed how we can apply Hanh's insights to the current crisis in the Ukraine. In addition, the group noted that, while the outpouring of sympathy and support for the Ukrainian people is laudable, the fact that there has been less support for people in other countries facing similar crises, including Somalia and Syria, may, in part, be due to racism.



17 February 2022

34 participants from six countries participated: Costa Rica, the UK, Australia, Germany, Canada, and the U.S.

Here are the key points of the discussions in the four breakout sessions:

Secular Buddhism and Psychotherapy - The group discussed the intersection of our daily lives, meditation, and therapy, with a focus on the specific practices which help us deal with the challenges of living.

The Evolution of Secular Buddhism - The group explored the relationship between individual practice and the need to make social changes. While a secular approach doesn't require that one be engaged in political movements, it is consistent with political action. Secular Buddhism allows us to act mindfully in whatever context we act.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism - The group discussed an article written by Mike Slott, Katya de Kadt, and Karsten Struhl, [*The core life tasks and beliefs for a radically engaged Buddhist*](#). Participants explored the relationship between flourishing and nirvana, as well as whether social engagement needs to challenge systemic systems of oppression and exploitation.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism - The group focused on the meaning and various forms of suffering in this world. Key questions that were discussed included: How can we embrace or be with suffering? How do we work to reduce suffering? How does Stephen Batchelor's fourfold task (ELSA) help us respond to suffering?



20 January 2022

33 participants from eight countries participated: Costa Rica, Colombia, the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, Canada, and the U.S.

Here are the key points of the discussions in the four breakout sessions:

Secular Buddhism and Psychotherapy - The group discussed how we can use meditation practice and Buddhist insights to deal with anxiety, which has become more widespread due to COVID and other social crises. However, to have more transformative effects, meditation practices need to be combined with an ethic of care and a recognition of the importance of community in our lives.

The Evolution of Secular Buddhism - The group explored the the practical impact of a secular approach to the dharma. Several other issues were discussed: defining what makes a good teacher, the role of online sanghas in secular Buddhism, and the value of study groups.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism - The group discussed two articles regarding Martin Hagglund's notions of secular faith and spiritual freedom in the context of our finite, limited existence. They also examined the difference between equanimity and detachment.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism - The group discussed our tendency to 'label' people as a form of reactivity which leads to personal and social divisions. The group then explored how to move from reactivity to a responsive approach based on discernment, not judgment.

