

19 December 2024

31 participants from five countries participated: the UK, New Zealand, Costa Rica, Canada, and the USA.

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

Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology – The group discussed the controversial issue of abortion. Based on an [article](#) in *Tricycle* magazine by Katy Butler, they explored how abortion relates to the first precept of "refraining from taking life".

The Open Investigation of Secular Buddhism – The group discussed a video by Josh Cohen, who has written a new [book](#) on anger. They considered various views on the role and meaning of anger in the context of a secular Buddhist path.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism – Continuing the discussion from last month on hope, the group focused on how to lessen reactivity, which is an obstacle to wise hope. They identified three essential tools in this respect: therapy/self-reflection, meditation, and appropriate actions to respond to social and political problems.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism – The group explored different interpretations of the key Buddhist notion of not-self, and its relationship to impermanence. An important value of not-self is the cultivation of non-identification with thoughts.

21 November 2024

25 participants from five countries participated: the UK, New Zealand, Costa Rica, Canada, and the USA.

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

Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology – The group discussed the notion of attachment in Buddhism and western psychology. Participants focused on different meanings of attachment and the importance of discerning the difference between skillful/healthy and unskillful attachments.

The Open Investigation of Secular Buddhism – The group explored how communication is distorted by propaganda and whether democracy is still working in contemporary societies.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism – The group focused on the role of what Joan Halifax calls 'wise hope' as a response to the political crises that we are

facing. Wise hope, which recognizes the complex and difficult situation that we're in, calls for appropriate action and being in community with others.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism – The group explored equanimity and identified a spectrum of attitudes and virtues, including the link between equanimity and compassion.

24 October 2024

26 participants from six countries participated: the UK, New Zealand, Germany, Costa Rica, Canada, and the USA.

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

Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology – The group discussed different interpretations of the Buddhist concept of the self and the close relationship between Buddhist psychology and cognitive therapies in Western psychology.

The Open Investigation of Secular Buddhism – The group explored notions of the truth in Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Vattimo. They discussed the need to move from 'objective' or absolute truth to small 't', truths.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism – The group continued to discuss the dangers of authoritarian movements, including MAGA/Trump in the U.S. How should secular Buddhists respond to these movements? Can we retain some sense of hope while facing difficult political challenges?

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism – The group explored several key links in the dependent origination chain --> craving-->clinging-->becoming. Rather than see the chain as an expression of literal rebirths, the group focused on how we are reborn psychologically each moment.

19 September 2024

28 participants from six countries participated: the UK, New Zealand, Croatia, Germany, Canada, and the USA.

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

Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology – The group continued to explore the nature of Buddhist psychology. One participant suggested that the Four Noble Truths and

the Eightfold Path provide the basic structure for Buddhist psychology. The group recognized, however, that there are different trends within Buddhist psychology, as there are in Western psychology. We need to be specific in terms of which trend we are talking about.

The Open Investigation of Secular Buddhism – The group reflected on the role of rationality in ethics, exploring different notions of rationality. At the same time, there is a non-rational, affective component to ethics that must also be recognized and valued.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism – The group continued to discuss the challenge of being compassionate to all people, even those who have caused us great harm. The group discussed how compassion needs to be a key component of our activities and speech around the upcoming elections in the USA.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism – The group explored the basic concept of impermanence (anicca in Pali) in Buddhism. The challenge is to go beyond a mere conceptual understanding of impermanence to a deeply embodied grasp of how impermanence is a crucial aspect of our experience.

15 August 2024

25 participants from six countries participated: the UK, New Zealand, Croatia, Germany, Canada, and the USA.

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

Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology – The group explored how Buddhist and western theories of psychology can be applied to our personal lives.

The Open Investigation of Secular Buddhism – Reflecting on an article called *The Dark Side of Morality*, the group focused on different notions of morality and their relevance for contemporary life. They also explored whether western Buddhism inevitably entails cherry-picking only certain elements of the Buddhist tradition or whether western Buddhism is a natural expression of the evolution of Buddhism.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism – The focus of the discussion was on the challenge of being compassionate to all people, even those who have caused us great harm. The group discussed how compassion needs to be a key component of our activities and speech around the upcoming elections in the USA.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism – The group explored various aspect of mindfulness. A key part of the discussion was comparing secular mindfulness programs

such as MBSR to the role of mindfulness in secular Buddhism and traditional forms of Buddhism.

18 July 2024

27 participants from five countries participated: the UK, Canada, Croatia, Costa Rica, and the U.S.

At this month's meeting, the Open Investigation of Secular Buddhism subgroup did a presentation on four forms of dialogue, as developed by different theorists. Group members made a presentation on each form and then we had breakout groups to discuss the four forms. The four forms discussed were:

1. Habermas' Discourse Ethics - A form of discussion or communicative rationality which seeks to establish common ground and rational consensus on ethical norms.
2. Bohmian Dialogue - Deep listening aimed at achieving mutual understanding and transformation of both parties.
3. Argumentative Theory of Reasoning - The use of persuasion and social interaction to establish and agreed-upon approach.
4. Deliberative Democracy - Public deliberation through citizen assemblies which emphasizes democratic decision-making through inclusive debate.

We had a stimulating discussion on these forms of dialogue, with the objective of learning from each other and becoming more skilled in communicating mindfully, truthfully, and compassionately.

20 June 2024

25 participants from four countries participated: the UK, New Zealand, Germany, and the USA.

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

Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology – The group explored their varied experiences in therapy and how Buddhist psychology differs from Western psychology. Two key differences: Buddhist psychology includes an ethical stance and focuses less on the causes and content of psychological problems.

The Open Investigation of Secular Buddhism – The group focused on the nature of the illusory self and the kind of biases that result. They also explored how group dynamics reflect different ways of enacting the self.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism – The focus of the discussion was the threat of the MAGA movement and a second Trump administration. How do secular Buddhists respond to this threat to our democracy? How do we communicate with those who support Trump and his policies? What can we do to respond to those who have disengaged from politics?

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism – The group explored several questions: the differences between secular and traditional forms of Buddhism; the role of faith (if any) in a secular dharma practice; and the positive benefits of secular Buddhism for having a flourishing life.

16 May 2024

27 participants from five countries participated: the UK, New Zealand, Croatia, Costa Rica, and the USA.

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

Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology – The group discussed how secular Buddhism and Western psychology help us deal with life's problems. How do they work together? What are the core beliefs of each? In terms of core beliefs, the group explored the notion of self in psychology and not-self in Buddhism.

The Open Investigation of Secular Buddhism – The group focused on the nature and role of mindful communication, particularly the importance of listening with one's whole being.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism – The group discussed the recent student protests in the USA and other countries regarding Israel/Gaza/Palestine. How should we respond to these protests and engage mindfully and compassionately in this issue? And what should be the role of engaged, secular Buddhists in the upcoming elections in the USA?

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism – The group explored the eightfold path (the fourth of the Four Noble Truths), which Stephen Batchelor has reinterpreted as the fourth task in his notion of the four tasks: **Actualize** a path which leads to human flourishing. Participants discussed which of the folds or elements of the path are most relevant in their lives.

18 April 2024

31 participants from five countries participated: the UK, Canada, Croatia, Costa Rica, and the U.S.

At this month's meeting, the Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology subgroup did a presentation on the five precepts and their relevance in the contemporary world. Bero Nizic, Ira Rifkin, and Kate Curtis-McLane each offered their perspective on this issue and then Sharon Tobias facilitated a whole group discussion.

A common theme in the presentations and the subsequent discussion was the need to see the precepts as guides to creative, responsive, and ethical action, rather than as rigid rules.

21 March 2024

27 participants from five countries participated: the UK, Canada, Croatia, Costa Rica, and the U.S.

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

Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology – The group discussed the meaning and role of the five precepts in a secular approach to the dharma.

The Open Investigation of Secular Buddhism – Although secular Buddhists are skeptical of metaphysical claims which provide absolute Truths, are there ‘sacred values’ in secular Buddhism? And is there still a role for metaphysics in a secular approach to the dharma?

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism – The group discussed the rise of global authoritarianism and the growing threat of ‘strong men’ in politics. What should be the response of secular Buddhists to this trend? What role should we play in movements to fight authoritarianism?

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism – Like the Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology group, this group explored the five precepts. If the precepts are not prohibitions on sinful actions, how should we relate to them? And what is the role of equanimity in bolstering the precepts?

15 February 2024

27 participants from five countries participated: the UK, Canada, Croatia, Costa Rica, and the U.S.

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

Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology – The group used the meeting to identify topics for upcoming meetings. They will focus on connections between secular Buddhism and various forms of Western psychology, including psychodynamic perspectives, mindfulness-based therapies, and other approaches.

The Open Investigation of Secular Buddhism – The group focused on a question posed by Martine Batchelor in a recent talk: How can we make the sangha a key part of the path? They came to a consensus that a secular Buddhist sangha should be a safe space in which practitioners can challenge each other in a respectful and compassionate way as part of the open investigation of dharma issues. Open investigation is the essence of secular Buddhism.

Political Action and Secular, Socially Engaged Buddhism – The group discussed a reflection by Luis-Daniel Gonzalez on the issue of suffering and the need for political engagement. While some suffering is unavoidable (sickness, aging, death, etc.), the suffering due to social institutions can be reduced through mindful political engagement. The group discussed various political projects that can have a meaningful impact in challenging and transforming social institutions.

Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism – The group explored the second of the Four Noble Truths, that craving is the source of suffering. Participants discussed the role of equanimity as an antidote to craving and the need for experienced practitioners to serve as a model for younger people.

18 January 2024

29 participants from five countries participated: the UK, Canada, Croatia, Costa Rica, and the U.S.

This month we started a new format for the meeting, which we will do every three months. Instead of having breakout groups for our four sub-groups - **Secular Buddhism Meets Western Psychology, The Open Investigation of Secular Buddhism, Socially Engaged/Political Action, and Exploring Key Concepts in Secular Buddhism** – one of the subgroups facilitated a presentation of an issue and the whole group discussed it.

For the January meeting, the Socially Engaged/Political Action subgroup offered a presentation on 1) how we apply our secular Buddhist principles and practices to engaging socially and politically in the world and 2) how we can practice right speech in the context of the Israel/Gaza crisis.

The presentation and the subsequent discussion was rich and informative, particularly regarding the issue of practicing right speech in this complex and difficult situation. While the participants had a range of political views, we all agreed on the need to speak with mindfulness, receptiveness, and compassion when we talk to those we agree and disagree with about this crisis.

