



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

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Taking Refuge
2nd Chapter, Stanza 26



BA2_26: Taking Refuge. 2nd Chapter, Stanza 26.

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So, now we come to stanza 26 of the second chapter and this is about refuge. There are different kinds of refuge: the worldly refuge and transcendental refuge.

The worldly refuge is going for refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, but, with the motivation of intention to get worldly benefits. That's worldly refuge, [getting worldly benefits] like long-life, prosperity, something good in this life.

Then there is the transcendental refuge and that is also divided into Sravakayana – Hinayana - refuge and Mahayana refuge. Sravakayana refuge is that I may be free from all the sufferings of the samsara. In order to do that I go to refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. And then the Mahayana refuge: the Mahayana refuge can also be divided into two. Sometimes we call it causal refuge and result or ultimate refuge. The causal refuge is that I wish myself and all the sentient beings to be free from samsara. In order to do that, I go refuge to the

Buddha - the guide; Dharma - the teaching; Sangha - the people that have experienced that dharma and who have the experience of dharma and who have attained certain levels of freedom from samsara. But here the Buddha, Buddha Shakyamuni and all the enlightened Buddhas, I take them as my guides, as my heroes, as my examples, as my inspiration and the dharma that I would like to practise and the sangha to help me.

And then the ultimate refuge is that I need to transform - there is a possibility to transform - not only that I need to transform myself, but I also wish and commit that to help all sentient beings to be transformed. So therefore, we all need to attain the highest level of wisdom and compassion: that's Buddhahood. Therefore, I must do it, I promise, I decide to work towards my own enlightenment, my own lasting peace and happiness and that's why I go refuge to the Buddha. I go refuge to the Buddha, not the Buddha outside there, but I make a promise to myself that I will attain the Buddhahood. And in order to do that, I have to practise dharma so I need to understand the dharma and to learn the dharma and I need to experience it and use it. So I make a promise to myself that I will study dharma and practise dharma, that's going refuge to the Dharma. And in order to do that then I need the positive influence and the teachings of the sangha, help of the sangha, I go refuge to the Sangha.

So, this is what we call the ultimate refuge or the refuge as the result. Here in the Bodhicharyavatara is, of course, Mahayana refuge. Therefore, it says:

“Until the essence of enlightenment is reached,

I go for refuge to the Buddhas.

Also I take refuge in the Dharma

And in all the host of Bodhisattvas.”

Until I attain Buddhahood, in order that I attain Buddhahood, and not only that I attain Buddhahood, but in order that I bring all the sentient beings to Buddhahood, I go refuge to the Buddha, to the Dharma and to the Sangha.

What is actually a Buddha? The Buddha is, in essence, the enlightened nature, the freedom - there is nothing we need to do about the true nature of the pure, naturally pure, and naturally

enlightened, naturally perfect state of my original kind of primordial nature of my consciousness or the mind. To experience that, to understand that - that's Buddhahood.

But then in order that we will have that experience - will have what we call the natural quality of compassion, natural quality of wisdom, natural quality of the power to help and heal other being - the one that has that quality is within me, so I need to bring that out. Therefore, I am determined, I'm decided towards that. All the enlightened beings of the past who have gone through that experience, who are already enlightened are also taken as my inspiration, as my guide and as my example. And then dharma is the experience of that, the Buddha experience, the cessation and the path, we call it. The cessation is the cessation of the suffering, the complete experience of a Buddha. That is dharma. But also the way, the different stages on the paths that lead to that experience, is also dharma.

Therefore, that dharma I take as my path and my experience and the sangha are those who have different stages of liberation. That is sangha, who have the experience of the dharma, different stages of clarity, so I take refuge in the Buddha, in the Dharma *and* in the Sangha.

So when I say , "*I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha,*" I make a commitment that I will work towards that goal, that I attain, that I transform myself completely, I attain that experience that is naturally the qualities, undiscovered innate quality of my consciousness, the liberated state of my mind. I need to work on that, I need to bring that out in order that I will be able to help all the beings to be free from suffering: I will work on that.

Therefore, nothing is the most important solution to me. Usually we think that to make myself happy, maybe the wealth, power, popularity, pleasure, all these things we go after, we run after them. By knowing they're not the solution for my ultimate happiness and ultimate freedom from suffering, the only thing that can completely give my complete freedom from suffering and final and ultimate happiness is that experience of my natural state, the Buddhahood. Therefore, that's my final goal.

In order to get there, then I need to use the dharma. In some sense, Buddha is the only refuge because that's what I really want. The others are the methods to get there. From that point of

view, Buddha is the only refuge. But, in another way, dharma is the most important one because, actually, how to get there? How to get that experience? There's only one way and that's through the practice of dharma through learning how to tread the path and actually use those methods and use those skilful means on myself, then I can bring the experience of enlightenment. Therefore, dharma is also, in many senses, the actual refuge because I need to take the dharma seriously, I need to use the dharma seriously, and I need to practise dharma.

Therefore, in order to get my understanding of the dharma then I need the sangha. Dharma is that I make a promise to myself that I study dharma and I know dharma and I really use dharma: I integrate myself with the dharma practice. That's refuge to the Dharma and in order to take refuge in the Dharma then I need sangha because I can't just get dharma because, most of the people, why we are not enlightened? Why we are not free from suffering? It is because we don't know how to. Not because we do not make enough effort but because we don't know how to. Therefore, we need to learn the dharma, the path, the way: and that can only be through the sangha who knows. Therefore, I need to take the influence of the sangha, I need to take the guidance of the sangha and I need to let myself be positively influenced by the sangha in a positive way.

Therefore, going to refuge becomes not something I take refuge and finished; taking refuge or going to refuge is the practice of dharma, is the work for me. Therefore, in some senses, the whole of Buddhism is taking refuge. That's why sometimes it is explained that taking refuge or going on refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is the whole of Buddha's teachings. That's why when Atisha Dipamkara came to Tibet he used to teach refuge, he used to teach refuge everywhere, all the time he used to teach refuge. And then, sometimes people said, "*Please teach something else other than refuge because people are starting to call you 'refuge lama' because you teach only refuge. You're the refuge lama; you don't know anything else but the refuge.*"

When Atisha Dipamkara heard this he was very happy. He said, "*That's really great if the people call me 'refuge lama' or the lama who talks about refuge only. That's great because actually in Buddhism there's nothing else. If you really understand refuge and if you really practise refuge and if you really use refuge, that's it. If you understand Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, that's it! There's nothing more than that. That's the most important thing. Therefore, if I'm called 'refuge lama'*

that's very good."

Therefore, refuge is a practice, refuge *is* the practice, refuge is the practice of all. So, everything is in a way included in the refuge. Therefore, we start with refuge and we try to remember refuge and we try to use the refuge again and again.

By taking refuge, then you try to observe some of the rules of the refuge. By taking refuge in the Buddha they say you don't go refuge to the worldly things, worldly deities. By taking refuge in the Dharma you try not to harm beings because non-violence is the essence of the dharma. By taking refuge in the Sangha you try to be influenced in a positive way, not influenced in a negative way. You abandon the negative company.

So these are some of the kinds of things that you do remembering them. And then, also to remember the refuge and to take these understandings to your heart and there are many things that you can do and which you can read in the book. I don't need to explain.

Therefore, if you have the refuge in the right way then it kind of makes the basis for all the other practices because you have a kind of purpose and you have a path. You can take all the other precepts like Vinaya, Bodhisattva vow, Vajrayana. Without the refuge all these things don't sit, then it's like trying to build a house without the foundations. Therefore, the refuge makes the right direction, gives the decision to go in the right direction. Then if that ground of the refuge is there all other things can naturally come and then everything goes right. So, refuge is very, very important.

So I'll stop here.

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