

Notes and Quotes for April 3, 2022 Dharma Reflections:

Taking Refuge / The Three Treasures [Jewels]: Overview

In the introduction—to Chapter 3, “Heartfelt Connection to the Three Jewels,” in *Following in the Buddha’s Footsteps* [vol.3 of *The Library of Wisdom and Compassion* by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and hubten Chodron, pp.79ff.)—to the first section, “Formally Taking Refuge,” we are reminded:

“...we identified the Three Jewels and learned their qualities. Reflecting on these moves the heart. First, we are assured that we are not alone on our spiritual journey, that millions of people have followed the path before us and attained the results of a tried-and-true path. We can trust their guidance.

“Second, we have a vision of the spiritual journey we will take and the destination we will arrive at as a result of correct practices. We are not inherently limited beings, but like the Buddha, who was once a sentient being and later became an awakened one, we too can follow that path and attain that result. This knowledge transforms our attitude about life into one with great purpose and a long-term perspective that brings reliance in the face of life’s vacillations.

Then, in the body of the chapter,

“...Participating in a ceremony is not necessary. What is important is that we have reflected on the qualities of the Three Jewels, the reasons for taking refuge in them, and the meaning of doing so. Having done that, entrusting ourselves from our hearts to the Three Jewels for spiritual guidance because we recognize them as reliable objects of refuge is the real meaning of taking refuge.

“...From my point of view, different levels of refuge in the Three Jewels exist, and people may enter at a level that is comfortable and appropriate for them at the present. This helps them on their spiritual path and encourages them to continue to learn and practice Buddha’s teachings.

“...You can practice the teachings that help you in your life and for the moment leave to the side the ones that you do not agree with or do not understand. You do not need to accept everything.

“Taking refuge through a ceremony, while optional, can strengthen our feeling of connection to the Three Jewels. This feeling of connection must be consciously and continually cultivated afterward to reap the benefits of taking refuge. Taking refuge is not something we do once and then forget about. Rather, we begin every meditation session by taking refuge and cultivating a bodhicitta motivation. In this way, over time our refuge in the

Three Jewels will deepen and become a tremendous source of inner strength, enabling us to greet whatever life brings with confidence, optimism, and purpose.

“Studying and practicing the following guidelines will help you increase your mindfulness and deepen your refuge:

“*General Guidelines*

“In his *Compendium of Determinations... Asanga recommends:*

- In analogy to taking refuge in the Buddha, commit yourself wholeheartedly to a qualified spiritual mentor. It may take time to find such a spiritual mentor. Don't rush: remember the Buddha is our fundamental teacher.
- In analogy to taking refuge in the Dharma, listen to and study the teachings as well as put them into practice in your daily life.
- In analogy to taking refuge in the Sangha, respect the Sangha members as your spiritual companions and follow the good examples they set.
- Avoid being rough and arrogant, running after any desirable object you see.
- Avoid criticizing whatever meets with your disapproval.
- Be friendly and kind to others and be concerned more with correcting your own faults than with pointing out those of others.
- As much as possible avoid the ten non-virtues and take and keep the eight one-day precepts.
- Have a compassionate and sympathetic heart toward all sentient beings.
- Make offerings to the Three Jewels on Buddhist festival days, such as new- and full-moon days, Vesak...and other special holidays.”

“**Three Treasures or Jewels (Skt., *triratna*, J., *sambo*):** The foundation of Buddhism is the Three Treasures, without trust in which and reverence for there can be no Buddhist religious life. In the Mahayana these are conceived broadly as 1) the Unified Three Treasures (J., *ittai sambo*; literally ‘one body, three treasures’), 2) the Manifested Three Treasures (J., *genzen sambo*), and 3) the Abiding Three Treasures (J., *juji sambo*).

“For convenience of exposition these are subdivided, though in reality they are inseparable. Thus the Unified Three Treasures are the Buddha Vairochana, representing the realization of the world of Emptiness, of Buddha-nature, of unconditioned Equality; second the Dharma, that is, the law of beginningless and endless becoming, to which all phenomena are subject according to causes and conditions; and third, the harmonious fusion of the preceding two, which constitutes total reality as experienced by the enlightened....

“The first of the Manifested Three Treasures is the historic Buddha Shakyamuni, who through his perfect enlightenment realized in himself the truth of *ittai sambo*. The second is the Dharma, which comprises the spoken words and sermons of Shakyamuni Buddha wherein he elucidated

the significance of the *ittai sambo* and the way to its realization. The third includes the immediate disciples of the Buddha Shakyamuni and other followers of his day who heard, believed, and made real in their own bodies the *ittai sambo* that he taught.

“Of the Abiding Three Treasures the first is the iconography of Buddhas which have come down to us; the next is the written sermons and discourses of Buddhas (that is, fully enlightened beings) as found in the sutras and other Buddhist texts still extant; while the third consists of contemporary disciples who practice and realize the saving truth of the *ittai sambo* that was first revealed by Shakyamuni Buddha.

“The Three Treasures are mutually related and interdependent. One unrealized in the *ittai sambo* can neither comprehend in depth the import of Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment nor appreciate the infinite preciousness of his teachings nor cherish as living realities images and pictures of Buddhas. Again, the *ittai sambo* would be unknown had not it been made manifest by Shakyamuni in his own body and mind and the Way to its realization expounded by him. Lastly, without enlightened followers of the Buddha’s Way in our own time to inspire and lead others along this Path to Self-realization, the *ittai sambo* would be a remote ideal, the saga of Shakyamuni’s life desiccated history, and the Buddha’s words lifeless abstractions. More, as each of us embodies the *ittai sambo*, the foundation of the Three Treasures is none other than one’s own self.”

- *The Three Pillars of Zen – Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, 35th Anniversary Edition, 2000, Anchor Books, pp. 423-424.

The Three Treasures

I take refuge in Buddha,

and resolve that with all beings

I will understand the Great Way

whereby the Buddha seed may forever thrive.

I take refuge in Dharma

and resolve that with all beings

I will enter deeply into the sutra-treasure

whereby my wisdom may grow vast as the ocean.

I take refuge in Sangha,

and in its wisdom, example, and never-failing help,

and resolve to live in harmony with all sentient beings.

- **Chants & Recitations, Rochester Zen Center, 2005.**

“And in the *Sutra of the Play of Manjushri*, we read:

Your parents are not your refuge,
Neither are your relatives or friends.
They will abandon you
And depart wherever they please.
Today, take refuge in those who clear away
The fears of beings who are afraid,
Who protect those who are protectorless—
The Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, the supreme assembly,
One who goes for refuge in these,
Rather than in gods, *gandharvas*, or humans,
Will be delivered from all fears
And find happiness without difficulty.”
p.227

“Now, with regard to the individuals taking refuge, imagine that on your right is your present father, on your left is your mother, in front of you are your enemies, and behind you are your friends and relatives. All around are the totality of beings with no particular feelings toward you, who are neither your adversaries nor your friends, disposed like dust on the surface of the earth. With yourself leading the chant, they join in as you show respect physically by kneeling and folding your hands. Verbally you all express your respects through the sonorous, heartfelt recitation of the words of the refuge prayer. And mentally you express your respect by intense longing and devotion, thinking, ‘Whatever happens to me, favorable or unfavorable, pleasant or painful, good or bad, I have no one to rely on but you. Whatever happens, you know best. I beg you immediately to protect me and all sentient beings, my mothers, from all suffering and danger—the danger in general of the sufferings of cyclic existence, the danger in particular of the lower vehicles’ concern for one’s own welfare alone, and the danger especially of ordinary deluded grasping.’ In this manner, recite the refuge prayer, accumulating the numbers—a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, one hundred thousand times, or more:

“NAMO In the sugatas of the ten directions and the three times,
and their bodhisattva children,
From now until we attain enlightenment,
I and all beings as numerous as the sky is vast, without exception,
Constantly take refuge with respect in body, speech, and mind.”
p. 251

- *A Chariot to Freedom – Guidance from the Masters on the Vajrayana Preliminary Practices*, Shechen Gyaltsap, Trans. by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2022.

“For all Buddhists, receiving the three refuges is the first and most elemental act on the Buddhist path.... Some people think that the three refuges are simply a profession of faith and should not be considered precepts. In fact, the three refuges also are precepts. One of the characteristics of a Buddhist precept is that it carries a sense of prohibition, or restraint. Restraint is indeed an attribute of the refuges. When one takes refuge in the Buddha, one vows for the rest of one’s life not to seek or resort to depraved or demonic spiritual ideals. The Buddha is one’s ideal of perfection. In taking refuge in the Dharma, one vows for the rest of one’s life to avoid wayward paths and false teachings. The Dharma is the true path. In taking refuge in the sangha, one vows for the rest of one’s life not to rely on followers of wayward or false paths. As such, taking refuge in the Three Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sanga entails a very basic sense of restraint—commitment to proper spiritual ideals and attitudes, as defined by Buddhist tradition.”

- *Hoofprint of the Ox – Principles of the Chan Buddhist Path as Taught by a Modern Chinese Master*, Master Sheng-Yen with Dan Stevenson, Oxford, 2001, p. 54.

“The way we use the word *refuge* is taken from the Japanese term *kie-ei*. *Kie-ei* consists of two characters. *Kie* means “to unreservedly throw oneself into,” no holding back, no way out, no safety net, harness, or rope. That is the way you work with a koan—unreservedly. That is the way a parent rescues a child who is in danger. The parent does not think about himself or herself. The parent does not hesitate for a second. The second character, *ei*, literally means “to rely upon,” in the way that a child leaps into a parent’s arms, trusting unequivocally.” P.43

“The karma of taking refuge, of making the vow to save all sentient beings, vowing to realize oneself, to practice zazen, to nurture the mountains and rivers, to work in the garden—all of it is part of the legacy that has come down to us for twenty-five hundred years and, it is hoped, will continue twenty-five hundred years into the future. If it does, it is because of how we take care of it.” P. 47

“Taking refuge is not a matter of casual encounter. This is a whole body-and-mind vow, whole body-and-mind unity, whole body-and-mind commitment. Those who give that much, realize it. Those who do not, do not realize it. Some may realize it, some may not. Either way is okay. It is up to us. Nobody can do it for us. Buddha could not do it for us, if he were here. Only we have the power to take advantage of the personal karma that has placed us in this time and place. It is a unique opportunity, and how we use it is totally in our hands.” P. 49

- *The Heart of Being – Moral and Ethical Teachings of Zen Buddhism*, John Daido Looi, Tuttle, 1996.

“So if we are already Buddha, why do we have to receive Buddha’s precepts? Because we are Buddha! To receive means to transmit, and to transmit means to make something. When you receive Buddha’s precepts, your body is made by Buddha, and you become Buddha, In other words, your human life becomes Buddha’s life. Your life is Buddha, and Buddha occupies every inch of your life. At that time you become Buddha. Is this possible?

“If you ask if it’s possible, your Zen teacher will scold you and say you are a coward, because you are ignoring the fact that you are already a great mature fruit. So before you ask, you have to stand up straight, keep yourself in check, and come to a stop in this truth of the great mature life that everyone has.”

- *The Light That Shines Through Infinity – Zen and the Energy of Life*, Dainin Katagiri, Shambhala, 2017, p.176.

“Clearly, in the Western Heavens and the Eastern Lands, what the Buddhist patriarchs have authentically transmitted is reverence for Buddha, Dharma, and Samgha. If we do not take refuge in them, we do not revere them; and if we do not revere them, we do not take refuge in them. We accomplish the merit of this taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Samgha whenever sympathetic communication of the truth (nb *KANNO-DOKO*, means mystical communication between buddhas and living beings, or between the Universe and living beings) takes place. Whether we are in the heavens above, the human world, hell, or states of demons or animals, if sympathetic communication of truth occurs, we take refuge without fail. Once we have taken refuge, we develop [merit] in every life, in every age, in every location, and at every place; we pile up merit and heap up virtue, and we accomplish [the truth of] annutara-samyak-sambodhi. P.175

“Truly, the ocean of the merit of the Three Treasures is immeasurable and infinite.... By taking refuge in these, we also will gain the kind of merit described above.” P.184

- *Master Dogen’s Shobogenzo – Book 4*, Translated by Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross, Windbell, 1999.

Possible Discussion Starting Points

1. On the first page, HH The Dalai Lama points out, “We are not inherently limited beings.” What is the source of that freedom? What are some implications (as to intention, karma, free will, vow, carelessness,...) of this state of not being limited?

2. Roshi Kapleau and Roshi Kjolhede have often said that one may “take the precepts” i.e., go for refuge, any number of times. Are you considering taking them? What do you remember from your first ceremony that still moves you? How were subsequent ones different, or deeper, or....?
3. How are you receiving the homespun wisdom of Asanga on p.2 (e.g., “Commit yourself wholeheartedly to a qualified spiritual mentor.... Avoid being rough and arrogant)?
4. Roshi Kapleau’s tutorial on the Three Treasures (starting on p 2) is packed with information about these Jewels and their qualities. Did you find it helpful?
5. Spend a few moments conjuring up all sentient beings to be immediately surrounding you, as suggested by Shechen Gyaltsap on p.3., and making a prayer or setting an intention together with, and for, them. Pretty cool?
6. The two passages on p.5 convey the intensity of purpose that can accompany the taking of refuge. Do you sometimes feel at this level with respect to the Three Jewels?
7. Why do you suppose Dogen Zenji (see p.6) practiced the recitation of the Three Refuges, circumambulating a pillar, as his final activity as he died?
8. Roshi Kapleau said (p.3), “...the foundation of the Three Treasures is none other than one’s own self.” Katagiri Rosho said, “When you receive Buddha’s precepts, your body is made by Buddha, and you become Buddha.” How might taking refuge in the Three Treasures also be taking refuge in one’s own being?