

# **Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels**

**Study material for your retreat at Tiratanaloka**

**Study Area 1. Centrality of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels**

**Study Area 2. Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels**

**Study Area 3. Opening of the Dharma Eye and Stream Entry**

**Study Area 4. Going Forth**

**Study Area 5. The Altruistic Dimension of Going for Refuge and  
Joining the Order**

## Introduction to the Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to give you the opportunity to look in depth at the material that we will be studying on the Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels retreat at Tiratanaloka.

In this handbook we give you material to study for each area we'll be studying on the retreat. We will also have some talks on the retreat itself where the team will bring out their own personal reflections on the topics covered.

As well as the study material in this handbook, it would be helpful if you could read Sangharakshita's book 'The History of My Going for Refuge'. You can buy this from Windhorse Publications as part of the 'Complete Works vol 2: The Three Jewels 1'.

There is also some optional extra study material at the beginning of each section. Some of the optional material is in the form of talks that can be downloaded from the Free Buddhist Audio website at [www.freebuddhistaudio.com](http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com). These aren't by any means exhaustive - Free Buddhist Audio is growing and changing all the time so you may find other material equally relevant! For example, at the time of writing, Vessantara has just completed a series of talks called 'Aspects of Going for Refuge' (2016) at Cambridge Buddhist Centre.

We'd ask you to study this material, reflect on it and come prepared with questions and areas you would like to discuss as this will help you to get the most out of your retreat. You might even want to study the material with some of your friends or talk about it with local Order Members. Throughout the material we've included questions about how the material relates to your own practice that we'd like you to think about in preparation for the discussion groups on the retreat.

It's important that you let us know if you have problems accessing any of the material we've asked you to read, as we'll be assuming that you have had a chance to look at it before you come.

All of us on the team at Tiratanaloka look forward to studying the material with you when you come here.

# Centrality of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

## Summary and Reading

The basis for Sangharakshita's translation of the Dharma and the Buddhist Order he founded is his understanding of the importance and significance of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. This is the fundamental spiritual experience that unfolds into different aspects and depths. The first topic we will be studying is an overview of the centrality of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels in Sangharakshita's understanding of the breadth and depth of the Buddhist tradition. This involves understanding the depth of this 'central and definitive act' in terms of the levels at which one can Go for Refuge, and the breadth in terms of the dimensions of how the act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels changes our lives and affects us in all areas.

In 1981 Sangharakshita gave a talk called 'Dimensions of Going for Refuge', lecture 154, in which he outlined the levels and dimensions of Going for Refuge. This can be downloaded from [freebuddhistaudio.com](http://freebuddhistaudio.com).

You may also want to listen to his talk 'Levels of Going for Refuge', lecture 137, which he gave to the Order in 1978.

Subhuti goes into the levels of Going for Refuge in his paper 'Initiation into a New Life'. This can be found on his website [www.subhuti.info](http://www.subhuti.info), or in the book 'The Seven Papers', which is available from lulu.com.

## Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

(Edited by Vajratara from a talk given by Candraprabha in 2015)

### Introduction

There are many ways in which to talk about Going for Refuge. For example you may have come across the framework of the System of Practice, which gives us a way of making our Going for Refuge more effective in terms of integration, positive Emotion, receptivity, spiritual death and spiritual rebirth. Sometimes we talk about Going for Refuge in the context of spiritual friendship, ethics, or the central teaching of conditionality drawn out in Chapter 1 of Sangharakshita's 'A Survey of Buddhism'. All of this is to help us understand more about what Going for Refuge is about.

On this retreat we are going to focus on Sangharakshita's emphasis on Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels as the 'central and definitive act of the Buddhist life' and draw out some of the implications of that. We will be looking at our response to the Three Jewels and their place in our lives, giving us a sense of how our lives start to reorganise around them.

Throughout the retreat we're going to try and get a feel of how our Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels affects the practical aspects of our life - in fact how it can turn our lives upside down and move us in directions that we didn't even know existed when we first learned to meditate or read our first Dharma book!

## The Centrality of Going for Refuge and Lifestyle

If you have read 'A History of my Going for Refuge', you will know that, having taken ordinations in different traditions, and through what he calls 'a process of discovery that follows a rather erratic course', Sangharakshita eventually came to see that what united the different Buddhist traditions - what in fact made one a Buddhist - was the act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, and the reorganisation of one's life around them. It's easy to take this for granted, but the basis on which the Triratna Buddhist Order is founded is absolutely radical. Instead of dividing Buddhist practitioners into monks and laypeople, we have a united Order based on a shared and deepening commitment, not lifestyle. There's a lovely passage in 'A History of my Going for Refuge' where Sangharakshita talks about how, after he had initially created upāsaka/upāsikā ordinations i.e. lay- men and women, (there would also be maha-upāsaka, novice bodhisattva and bhikshu or monastic ordinations), he realised that those who had taken this ordination were doing more and had reorganised their lives to an extent that was far beyond what 'lay' practitioners in other traditions would be doing. So he changed the ordination and used the terms 'Dharmachari' and 'Dharmacharini' which, while they appear in traditional texts, weren't used by any other Buddhist schools. He started the Order and then saw what it was becoming and that helped clarify his vision even further. At this point, the ordinations performed by Sangharakshita became separate from any particular sort of lifestyle. The principle behind our ordination became 'commitment is primary, lifestyle secondary'.

The fact that the Movement and Order is founded on levels of commitment and not lifestyles can be challenging. It's something we have to continually reflect on – no-one is going to tell you what to do, what to wear or what to chant. Many of us like that aspect of the Order, we like to make up our own minds about how to live. But the converse of this is that we sometimes want someone to tell us what to do - or to tell other people what to do if we don't agree with them! So what we have in Sangharakshita is someone who gives us the principles, but also gives us the responsibility of working out how we individually live them out or in the case of Going for Refuge, how to realise them.

**Q: How do you relate to the principles behind which the Order was founded? Would you find it easier to have more rules?**

It is worth remembering that Sangharakshita was in a historically unique situation. He had access to all forms of Buddhism and was making sense of all the differing teachings, some of which actually contradicted each other. For example, in the Theravada school into which he was originally ordained, a Buddhist is defined by the number of precepts they take: lay followers taking 5, and monks taking many more. In the Mahayāna, Buddhists are divided into those who have taken the Bodhisattva vow, and those who haven't. In Zen Buddhism it is meditation that is emphasised, and in Pure Land schools it is devotion. Looking at that array of lifestyles, spiritual ideals, teachings and practices, he asked himself what united them as Buddhists? For Sangharakshita, it is that central act of Going for Refuge that unites all Buddhists.

He also had an unprecedented understanding of how Buddhism had changed over time. He saw that when practitioners lost sight of the fundamental importance of Going for Refuge

itself, different methods started to appear that re-emphasised different aspects of that central act. For example, originally followers of the Buddha were often wanderers who only met in large numbers when the moon was full or when they observed the rainy season retreat. Over time they became more settled and particular monastic practices became the focus over their Dharma practice: not eating after midday, how they wore their robes or keeping to a celibate lifestyle. These practices could become ends in themselves, and the underlying commitment as to why they were undertaking could be lost. New teachings sprang up that re-emphasised altruism and the wandering lifestyle, using the example of the Buddha himself. This re-emphasis was presented as higher teachings and it was thought that the Buddha had given different teachings for people with different capabilities. As the Bodhisattva path became more formulaic and lost its original vitality, new practices and lifestyles were developed, such as those of the Mahasiddhas and the emergence of the Tantra. Sangharakshita's perspective is that all these developments of Buddhism were a re-emphasis of different dimensions of Going for Refuge, different ways of deepening and exploring that essential act of moving towards the Going for Refuge as Buddhism ossifies towards formulaic practice. By identifying the levels of Going for Refuge and the dimensions in which it's experienced, Sangharakshita was able to unify disparate branches of the Buddha Dharma.

## Different aspects of Going for Refuge

So what is Going for Refuge and how do we experience it?

Firstly, Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. Sangharakshita calls this 'the emotional and volitional aspect' of this central Buddhist act<sup>1</sup>. He says this is fundamentally a turning from a mundane way of life to a spiritual or transcendental way of life.<sup>2</sup> We find we have something in our lives that we want to move towards - a sense of something greater than ourselves, or even that we ourselves have the potential to be something greater than we thought.

What we do, in fact, when we Go for Refuge to the Three Jewels is to develop our ability to respond to higher values. The Three Jewels aren't something 'out there', actually existing and separate from us, even though when we are really struck by them that's what it feels like. The Three Jewels exist for us insofar as we are able to respond to something higher, something beyond ourselves - a sense of the qualities of the Buddha, the beauty and clarity of the Dharma or maybe the ethical practice of another person who is a bit further along the path than we are. Sangharakshita calls this a 'total response' in that it is deeply and emotionally felt, as well as a feeling of clarity and understanding. He quotes the stock phrase in the Pali Canon. When the Buddha has 'inspired, fired and delighted' someone who he is with, they are overwhelmed with feeling and they say:

"It is amazing, Venerable Gotama, it is wonderful, Venerable Gotama! Just as if one might raise what has been overturned, or reveal what has been hidden, or point out the way to him who has been lost, or hold out a lamp in the dark so that those who have eyes may see; so likewise has the Truth been explained by Venerable Gotama in many ways. Therefore I go

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<sup>1</sup> Sangharakshita, *Dimensions of Going for Refuge*, 1981

<sup>2</sup> Sangharakshita, *Going for Refuge*, 1966, part of the 'Meaning of Conversion in Buddhism' series

for refuge to him, his Dhamma and his Sangha. I wish to enter the homeless life and to receive ordination near the Venerable Gotama.”<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, the Opening of the Dharma Eye and Stream Entry. Sangharakshita calls this ‘the unconditioned depth of the cognitive content’<sup>4</sup> of Going for Refuge, and the ‘permanent and far reaching nature of its effects’. This means how we actually experience the nature of reality, seeing truths such as impermanence more directly as we practise more intensively, and how that changes us. We experience ourselves and others as less fixed, and we experience less doubt and more clarity.

Thirdly, Going Forth. Sangharakshita calls this ‘the extent of reorganisation in the pattern of daily life’<sup>5</sup>. Our forward momentum will involve a reorganisation in our lives, both internally and externally, and a move away from things that we realise can no longer fully satisfy us.

And finally the aspect of Altruism. This is the ‘other regarding attitude’<sup>6</sup> of Going for Refuge. Our Going for Refuge will involve a change in our relationship with the world and with other people. It will become more based on mettā as we become more aware of what we can give, and as we become less and less self-orientated.

**Q: Which aspect of Going for Refuge do we feel most attracted to, and which one do we find most challenging?**

## Levels of Going for Refuge

What Sangharakshita has also drawn out is that these aspects of Going for Refuge can be practised and experienced at deepening levels. The terms here are the ones that Subhuti used in his paper ‘Initiation into a New Life’.

So the 5 levels are Cultural, Provisional, Effective, Real and Absolute. Subhuti refers to them as levels of commitment. This implies Going for Refuge is a dynamic of being able to commit ourselves more and more fully to the Buddhist path, and in particular, this Buddhist movement. It emphasises that ‘commitment is primary’, just as ‘lifestyle is secondary’.

Cultural Going for Refuge is not truly a commitment, but more of an allegiance to Buddhism as part of social group to which one belongs. This is more obvious to see in ethnically Buddhist countries, but is also emerging in non-Buddhist countries as Buddhism becomes more popular amongst certain groups of people.

**Q: What does cultural Going for Refuge look like in your own culture and conditions?**

Provisional Going for Refuge is when we are attracted to the Three Jewels as ideals, we want to commit to Buddhism, we have moments of temporary inspiration or insight, but not yet enough weight to make that inspiration sustained. We may have other competing

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<sup>3</sup> Sangharakshita, *Dimensions of Going for Refuge*, 1981

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

emotional and practical pulls in our lives, and we fit the Dharma around our lives. There may be areas in which we are aware we are holding back, and are not yet sufficiently sure to be wholehearted about our practice. This is the level at which we become a 'mitra'.

Sometimes we can use the term 'Going for Refuge' as a sort of shorthand for 'asking for ordination' e.g. we say someone is a 'Going for Refuge mitra' meaning someone who has asked for ordination. This can imply that people (including mitras) who haven't asked for ordination aren't Going for Refuge. It is worth reminding ourselves at this point that the levels of Going for Refuge describe the way that our Going for Refuge deepens as we deepen our commitment to the Three Jewels, it doesn't start when one asks for ordination, nor is it confined to our Buddhist Movement.

Effective Going for Refuge is when, as Subhuti describes, we have a 'compelling glimpse of what lies beyond self-clinging'<sup>7</sup>. This means we reorganise our lives so that we fit our lives around the Dharma, rather than the Dharma around our lives. We are sufficiently integrated psychologically to get our energy behind our Going for Refuge though we are still dependent on willed effort and conditions. Part of effective Going for Refuge is that we realise how much effort it will take and the conditions we need to progress. Shantideva says it still requires a lot of effort simply to stay still because we are always under the sway of the worldly winds:

'Swinging back and forth like this in cyclic existence, now under the sway of errors, now under the sway of the Awakening Mind, it takes a long time to gain ground. Therefore I must diligently fulfil what I have promised. If I make no effort today I shall sink to lower and lower levels'<sup>8</sup>

Effective Going for Refuge is the level which is equated with ordination, so it's important to understand what it means for us in our own lives.

**Q: What does effective Going for Refuge look like?** You may want to read Subhuti's paper and listen to Sangharakshita's talks to get a feel of it. **What do you need to work on next to make your provisional Going for Refuge effective?**

Real Going for Refuge is the level that is usually equated with the arising of irreversible Insight or stream entry. At this point Subhuti says we are co-operating Dharma-niyāma processes which become more of a force in our lives than self-clinging. Before real Going for Refuge we can fall back, but at this point we are definitely moving towards Enlightenment, our practice is not dependent on external conditions. You could say at this point that we are less concerned with our progress for our own sake: our wellbeing is inextricably tied up with the wellbeing of others because we really see that we are not separate from others. It is this broader perspective that guides our actions of body, speech and mind.

Absolute Going for Refuge is reached when we attain Enlightenment. We become part of a flow of non-egoistic volition. There is not much that can be said about this level because it transcends concepts. As Sangharakshita says 'At this level one doesn't go to any Refuge

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<sup>7</sup> Subhuti, *Initiation into a New Life*

<sup>8</sup> Shantideva, *Bodhicaryavatara*, in the Chapter 'Vigilance regarding the Awakening Mind'

outside oneself. One is one's own Refuge. In fact, on this level there's no inside and no outside because there's no self and no other, and one cannot really say any more than this.'<sup>9</sup>

It is important not to see these as real existing discrete levels, there is a continuum of commitment with a back and forth movement until we reach Real Going for Refuge at which point our momentum is irreversible - at that point we can't help but go forward, however difficult that may be.

**Q: Have we noticed our commitment deepen over time? What has helped? What are the areas where we notice ourselves holding back?**

## **Use of the term Going for Refuge**

You've probably found yourself and others at times talking about wanting to 'deepen my Going for Refuge'. Talking in this way is second nature to us in Triratna - the idea that Going for Refuge is something that we're constantly trying to take to deeper and deeper levels. It's easy to forget that this concept is very much part of Sangharakshita's particular presentation of the Dharma and we may notice that other writers on Buddhism don't use this phrase. In other traditions they might talk about 'realising the nature of mind' or 'developing bodhicitta' or 'understanding emptiness' or 'undertaking the path of purification'. In other traditions, Going for Refuge is seen as a preliminary practice or even something that is done at a relatively superficial level - reciting the refuges and precepts to show one is a Buddhist. But for us, practising within Triratna, we use the term Going for Refuge in a different way: the central act of a Buddhist that can be undertaken at ever deeper levels and that unfolds in different dimensions.

## **Working with the particular and the universal**

Sangharakshita points out that Going for Refuge is twofold, general (or universal) and specific (or particular)<sup>10</sup>. When working towards effective Going for Refuge and beyond we need to understand ourselves: our habitual responses to things, our conditioning, the psychological makeup that causes us to see other people, situations and the world in the way we do. This is the specific or particular way in which we Go for Refuge.

Alongside this, we need to have a Dharmic framework for our experience as human beings, to understand in a wider context what our practice is for. We need what Sangharakshita calls 'a context wider than the individual's own personal life'. We need to understand what dukkha is, how we experience it in common with all other beings. We need to understand the significance of our own wish to go beyond dukkha and use the path that has been shown to us by the Buddha. This is the universal or general way in which we Go for Refuge.

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<sup>9</sup> Sangharakshita, 'Levels of Going for Refuge', 1978

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*



Why is it important to look at our practice from both these perspectives - what we might call the particular and the universal perspectives?

Taking the example of the *mettā bhāvana* practice, we might be tempted to push our real feelings away to try and force a connection with our ideals, our wish to feel positive and connected. This may work to a certain extent, we may bring in something more positive, for a period of time, than the feelings we started with. But the chances are that if we don't recognise and sympathise and work with our real responses then they will come back, again and again. So we need to pay attention to the particular, the specific, and not leave ourselves out of the picture.

On the other hand, we might also go into an analysis of our mental states - tracing them back to what we think are the roots, wondering about our relationships with others that might have sparked off those feelings, indulging in some familiar stories about why we are the way we are. In this case, we can lose sight of what we're actually trying to do in the practice - to go beyond a fixed and limited sense of self and to deeply empathise with other beings. So we might need to pay more attention to the universal - seeing the bigger picture in terms of the teachings of the Dharma and keeping a sense of the overall perspective of what we are doing.

There is a need to have a balance between understanding the particulars of our own character and seeing the universality of our experience as human beings that is quite key to the area of working to deepen our Going for Refuge generally, not just in meditation. If we focus too much on the universal, we can go a bit abstract and it's hard to be specific enough to work on things in a way that really makes a difference. We need to work out what the Dharma means for us individually. On the other hand, if we concentrate too much on the details of our own psyche we can get stuck, see ourselves as nothing more than the product of our conditioning, and lose sight of the bigger context. In that case we need to reflect more deeply on what the significance of our experience is, using the framework of the Dharma.

**Q: It might be interesting to look at whether we tend to communicate about our practice from the 'particular' aspect or the 'universal' aspect. Do we need to communicate our own experience more, or do we need to contextualise our individual experience in the light of the Dharma? How can we work with these tendencies?**

## Conclusion

We all know a lot about what it means to go for refuge because we've spent our entire lives going for refuge to one thing or another. The Buddha says in the Dhammapada:

'Many people, out of fear, flee for refuge to sacred hills, woods, groves, trees and shrines. In reality this is not a safe refuge. In reality this is not the best refuge. Fleeing to such a refuge one is not released from all suffering. He who goes for refuge to the Enlightened One, to the Truth, and the Spiritual Community.... for him this is a safe refuge, for him this is the best refuge. Having gone to such a refuge, one is released from all suffering'<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Dhammapada v188-192

We believe - or perhaps even just hope - that there's something that will give us satisfaction, will give us purpose, will shield us from all the instability and unpredictability of life in the human realm - it may not be hills, groves and trees for us, maybe for us it's our job, family, partner, drugs, the perfect place to live.

If you read the stories of how and who the Buddha taught, over and over, he engaged with people from all walks of life - men, women, mothers, kings, farmers, courtesans, businessmen - showing them how the Dharma could overcome the particular difficulties they experienced as a result of simply being human beings. In the seminar on the Bodhicaryāvatāra which was given in the very early days of the movement, Sangharakshita reflects on how Triratna (or The Friends as he calls it there) was developing along the same lines as the early Sangha. People with existential questions about life saw something that had a flavour of truth and freedom - often they saw it through encountering someone who seemed to be a bit different and getting into dialogue with them - and that was how their Going for Refuge started. So we're all very different, we've got different questions and our connections to the Three Jewels will be very different. But I think we can often have a sense of something similar too - what the Buddha called the taste of freedom. And having Going for Refuge as the central act allows us to see clearly what we have in common and to work together towards that release from suffering for ourselves and others.

# Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

## Summary and Reading

The second topic we will be studying on this retreat is what the act Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels looks and feels like in our experience. This involves looking at the quest we undertake as we search for a true and enduring refuge, how we find a true refuge, and once found, how we commit to taking refuge there.

Sangharakshita gave a talk in 1965, lecture 9, on 'Going for Refuge', which is part of his series on 'The Meaning of Conversion in Buddhism'. The whole series can be downloaded from [freebuddhistaudio.com](http://freebuddhistaudio.com), or it is found in 'The Complete Works Vol.2: The Three Jewels 1'

## Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

(Edited from a talk given by Vajratara in 2014)

### The Quest

In the last section we looked at the momentum of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels as being a movement towards liberation. So what are moving away from? The most immediate answer is that we are moving away from *dukkha*, or suffering, unsatisfactoriness. This can be experienced in terms of something going wrong in one's life, for example a death or a separation, critical illness or loss in some form. It can also be experienced as a deeper sense of unsatisfactoriness: that things are okay on their own level, but they don't go deep enough, they don't fulfil the deeper longings of the human heart. One way we could explore the movement away from *dukkha* and towards the Three Jewels is to look at the life of the Buddha.

As a young man, the Buddha looked closely at his experience, thinking deeply about his life and asking searching questions. Paradoxically, in order to free himself from suffering, he had to be fully aware and open of his, and other's, experience of suffering and reflect on it more deeply. We are told that he saw people struggling, in conflict, taking up arms against each other, thrashing about like fish in a pond fast drying out. He tells us that he was afraid when he saw these things, he shook with terror. He longed to find a place of shelter, but there is nothing in this world that is solid, not a part of it that is without change<sup>12</sup>.

We are told he saw sickness, ageing and death; sights that inspire in most people feelings of shock, humiliation and disgust. He saw that he too would get sick, old and die. It is said that the vanity of health, youth and life entirely left him<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Attadanda Sutta, Sutta Nipata 4.15

<sup>13</sup> Anguttara Nikaya 3, 3.8

While the Buddha saw the suffering of old age, sickness, death and conflict, he also saw the reason for it. He described the cause of suffering poetically, as a thorn, lodged deep in the heart. And he saw that this thorn can be taken out<sup>14</sup>.

He went on a quest, which in pali is *pariyesanā*, literally meaning to seek, search, look for, or desire. It is a strongly emotional and volitional word, not simply an intellectual idea. He longed to escape from what is incapable of giving lasting satisfaction, from what we may term a 'false refuge', to find what might give him lasting satisfaction. This is what we might term a 'true refuge', something that, in his words, can offer a 'supreme security from bondage'<sup>15</sup>, *yogakhema*. The Buddha called the search for a true refuge 'the noble quest', the *ariyāpariyesanā*, in contrast to the search for a false refuge, 'the ignoble quest', *anariyāpariyesana*, in which we go in search of things that cannot satisfy, that are also subject to change, just as we are.

**Q: Does the language of a 'quest' resonate with your own experience? How do you imagine your own spiritual journey?**

## Questing for the True Refuge

So how can we distinguish between a true and false refuge? What are we searching for in our noble quest? If we know what the basic criteria are, we will find it easier to know if we have found what we are truly looking for. What we are looking for is a refuge that is:

**Permanent:** not that there is no movement in a true refuge, but that our refuge is beyond the reach of change, beyond the reach of death. It is always true, always of value, despite the changing conditions that surround it. Sometimes we catch a glimpse of this when we experience a great loss, for example someone dies, and our whole idea of our life is questioned. We are forced to ask what is of most value to us? What are the values not shaken by death – our own or others?

**Limitless:** we need something, or some value, that is limitless. Otherwise we get to a point where we can't go any further. People can often find this with different kinds of therapy. We can get to a certain point, perhaps finding the root of our health or psychological difficulties, but what next? Sometimes it is unclear what we do after we have reached that point, even of being a happy, healthy human being. So we need something that we can't exhaust, that we can't find the end of, that leads us beyond the known.

**Satisfying:** Subhuti in his original talks on Going for Refuge calls this unlimited breadth. A true refuge must be able to take in the whole of our being. We can often feel like we have different parts of ourselves competing for attention. Sangharakshita talks about his experience of the conflict between Sangharakshita 1: the poet and the dreamer; and Sangharakshita 2: the philosopher monk<sup>16</sup>. He said that if it wasn't for Buddhism those two parts of himself would have split him apart, but Buddhism could include both parts of himself.

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<sup>14</sup> Attadanda Sutta, Sutta Nipata 4.15

<sup>15</sup> Aryapariyesana Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 26

<sup>16</sup> Sangharakshita, *The Rainbow Road*, Ch48

**Beautiful:** we must be powerfully attracted to the refuge, otherwise it can't be a force in our lives, only a mild interest. It won't be a refuge in the true sense of the term because we won't turn towards it. I think the beauty comes in knowing the true refuge can satisfy our longing, our desire to transcend our current state of existence. It embodies values that we love. We want to become something beautiful, so we are attracted to beauty.

**Universal:** the true refuge has to be true not only for 'Buddhists', it has to be true for everyone at all times. We need something that is unconditioned, that isn't conditioned by time or by place, applying only to particular people at a particular time. Another way of looking at it is that we have to be able to glimpse the truth of that refuge everywhere: in literature, in the street, in every person, in every activity. The symbol for this in the Buddhist tradition is the 'Pure Land' where the Dharma is said to be singing from the wind and the movement of trees, in every sound from bird song to the rivers. Every sound is crying out the Truth.

The universality of refuge is better understood with reference to Sangharakshita's vision of 'cosmic Going for Refuge'. In this vision, he sees how all beings are on a quest, all 'go for refuge', in the sense that all beings long to transcend their current state of existence. He calls cosmic Going for Refuge the 'key to the mystery of existence'<sup>17</sup>: all forms of life have 'inbuilt tendency to transcend', which means we all have both the potential, and a conscious (or subconscious) desire to develop into a higher state of being, so that in some sense we can say we all go for refuge to a higher state of being. 'Every living being wants to fulfil the law of its own nature, which is to develop. We want to actualize our own deepest potential, to become what we really are, to achieve in time what we are in eternity'<sup>18</sup>. This vision of Sangharakshita echoes the Buddha's vision of lotuses. After his Enlightenment, the Buddha stayed for a long time absorbing the experience, allowing it to unfold into many different dimensions of experience. He said that it was seeing that beings were like lotuses growing up out of the mud that prompted him to teach the Dharma<sup>19</sup>. This means that central to the Buddha's Enlightenment experience is a vision of growth: that all beings are moving towards the light in their own way. Sangharakshita says of cosmic Going for Refuge 'This might sound impossibly poetic, but this is in fact what one sees.'<sup>20</sup>

The longing to translate our current state of being can make us restless, can even feel like a burden: here I am with my destiny in my hands, what do I do with it? We can feel a kind of nameless longing for we don't exactly know what. The Buddha talked about it as a thirst, *taṇhā* (pali) or *trṣṇā* (sanskrit), and said that we cannot find a beginning to it<sup>21</sup>, it is simply there in all beings: 'the flame of desire that burns unsatisfied from birth to birth until once and for all extinguished in the cool waters of Nirvāṇa.'<sup>22</sup> However, we do have a choice about what we do with that longing: to search for a true refuge that will truly satisfy us, or to try and reduce it to something external that we think we can own or have - a house, the latest iphone, or the perfect partner. The other option is to try and solve that longing by blocking off from it. "Enough!" we think, "What's the point? It's all meaningless anyway".

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<sup>17</sup> Sangharakshita, *The History of My Going for Refuge*, Ch18

<sup>18</sup> Sangharakshita, *Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow*

<sup>19</sup> Aryapariyesana Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 26

<sup>20</sup> Sangharakshita, *The History of My Going for Refuge*, Ch18

<sup>21</sup> See Samyuttta Nikaya Ch15, also Sagaramati, *Three Cheers for Tanha*

<sup>22</sup> Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*

It is hard to stay with feelings of longing. In the midst of the demands of life, it is hard to maintain a feeling we are on 'the noble quest'. Sometimes, I find I can watch my mind and I can see quite clearly how that longing arises. I can see I have a choice in every moment: I can either try and satisfy that longing by craving after false refuges, objects that cannot by their nature ultimately satisfy because they are always changing. I can stop the difficult feelings by avoiding them or seeking an end to the experience. Or I can stay with nameless longing- a sense that I am not fulfilled and there is a possibility of fulfilment. Sometimes I am aware of a sense of potential, of movement in every moment, an urge to transcend. When I am aware of this movement, I can also see that it is not unique to me. Everyone experiences it in their own way. At these times a particular verse from a Sutra comes to mind:

'Truly, O Manjusri, a tiny sparrow emerging from the membrane of an egg, without the shell fully broken, and without stepping out of the egg, utters just a sparrow's cry. Even so, Manjusri, a Bodhisattva wrapt in the membrane of ignorance, without breaking the delusion of self, or stepping out of the triple world, utters the cry of a Buddha, the cry of śūnyatā, unconditioned and unconfined.'<sup>23</sup>

## What do we find?

In our search for refuge, for transcendence, if we are lucky, we come across those things that can satisfy our search. We find something that can speak to us of that which is permanent, substantial, satisfying and beautiful. In Buddhism we would say that we have come across the Three Jewels.

It is important not to over-identify the Three Jewels to 'Buddhism' in its most narrow forms. We start our quest with responding to higher values, which requires 'spiritual receptivity', or 'dharmic responsiveness': a response to beauty, or truth or spiritual qualities wherever we find them. We might find these qualities in a much broader range of experience than traditional Buddhist activities<sup>24</sup>, for example in the arts, nature or communication. We have to start with a real response, a visceral response of our whole being to what is of value to us, not an idea of what we should value. Subhuti says that mystery is the essence of this state. We can't work out why it is important, it just is. When we come across the Three Jewels as expressed in the Buddhist tradition, we will recognise them as being fuller expressions of the same values we have been responsive to in other things. This often gives rise to a sense of familiarity, as when Sangharakshita read his first Buddhist books and said that not only did he know he was a Buddhist, but he also knew he had always been one<sup>25</sup>.

**Q: What are the first experiences you can remember when you opened to what is good, true and beautiful? How did you first come into contact with the Three Jewels? When you came across Buddhism, did you have a sense of familiarity?**

In the Buddhist tradition we have the legend of 'the fourth sight'. It is said that the Buddha (or the Buddha Vipassi) went forth after seeing, not a Buddha, but an ordinary wandering holy man, the sight of whom moved him to such a degree that he changed his whole life in response:

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<sup>23</sup> Ratnakaranda Sutra (quoted in Shikshusamuchaya)

<sup>24</sup> Subhuti, *Spiritual Receptivity*, Padmaloka May 2013

<sup>25</sup> Sangharakshita, *The Rainbow Road*

'And as he was being driven to the pleasure park, the Prince saw a shaven headed man, one who had gone forth, wearing a yellow robe. And he said to the charioteer: "What is the matter with that man? His head is not like other men's and his clothes are not like other men's."

"Prince, he is called one who has gone forth"

"Why is he called one who has gone forth?"

"Prince, by one who has gone forth, we mean one who truly follows Dhamma, who truly lives in serenity, does good actions, performs meritorious deeds, is harmless and truly has compassion for living beings."...

Then the Prince said to the charioteer: "You take the carriage and drive back to the palace. But I shall stay here and shave off my hair and beard, put on yellow robes and go forth from the household life into homelessness."<sup>26</sup>

### **Q: What is or was your fourth sight?**

The significance of the Buddha's experience is that he was willing to give himself totally, to respond wholeheartedly, to what he had seen, a process Sangharakshita describes in his talks on Going for Refuge:

'Going for Refuge represents your possible emotional response, in fact your total response - to the spiritual ideal when that ideal is revealed to your spiritual vision. Such is its appeal that you cannot but give yourself to it... 'You've seen the 'Highest' - it has been shown to you - so you needs must love it, needs must give yourself to it, needs must commit yourself to it.'<sup>27</sup>

### **Q: What holds you back or helps you to respond wholeheartedly to the 'ideal revealed to your spiritual vision'?**

What can happen in practice is that this responsiveness comes and goes in flashes of inspiration, so our Dharma life becomes a process of deepening our response to our ideals. Sangharakshita talks about that process in his book the 'Three Jewels' as the three grounds of faith:

1. Faith starts with an intuition that there is something of value that meets our longing for transcendence. Perhaps we feel a sense of beauty, that here is something that can really satisfy us, though we may not be able to put that into words.
2. On the basis of our intuition, we reflect on what we have found, making sure it accords with our own reason. To be a true refuge, it has to accord with our rational faculty. Dr Ambedkar said that he chose Buddhism because it accords with science, 'which is another word for reason'. He saw religion as a governing force of life, and how can something govern ours and other's life if it is open to ridicule, if we can't believe it to be true?<sup>28</sup>.
3. We also need to test what we have found in our own experience, to step back and look around us, look into our own life and see that it works. This may take some time in order to see the change in ourselves and other people.

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<sup>26</sup> DN14

<sup>27</sup> Sangharakshita, *Going for Refuge*, 1981

<sup>28</sup> Dr Ambedkar, *Buddha and the Future of his Religion*

Our quest for Refuge eventually leads us to seeing the Three Jewels as the highest embodiments of what is of value, but they are expressions of deeper, universal truths or qualities beyond themselves, qualities that we respond to all the time. They point beyond themselves, being more than 'Buddha, Dharma, Sangha' in formal sense:

## Buddha

The Buddha is the vision of human potential, a vision of what we can become. Going for Refuge to the Buddha starts with looking for the Buddha in our own direct experience, which means looking for the vision of potential in people we know, people who are more developed than ourselves. This could be, for example, Sangharakshita, Order Members or other people who inspire us.

Going for Refuge to the Buddha relates to *apatrāpya*, respect for wise opinion<sup>29</sup>. Our relationship with those further along the spiritual path ignites our own Going for Refuge, and being in relation to them means relating to our own higher values that are reflected in them. It also means we can Go for Refuge to the Buddha in every moment of life, in reflecting what the people we look up to would do in this moment. One way I think of this is to listen for the voice of the Buddha calling out in every moment.

In early Buddhism we find many examples of people asking the Buddha who is the 'Great Man', the 'Supreme Sage', the 'Wise', who is 'worthy of offerings?' The Buddha himself is the ultimate answer to the underlying question 'who are we to become?'

So we need to get a real feel for the Buddha in order to get a real feel for Enlightenment. We do this by reading the Suttas and Sutras. Through them we get to know the Buddha of history, but we also need to fill out the bones of those stories with our imaginations until the Buddha starts to become a living presence in our minds and hearts.

'But there is a deeper issue, going to the heart of what it is to lead the Dharma life: unless we can truly imagine the Buddha and his Enlightenment in a way that stirs us deeply we cannot mobilise our energies to Go for Refuge to him. We can only imagine the Buddha wholeheartedly by discovering his image in our own minds, inspired and supported by the images around us.'<sup>30</sup>

Yet there is still further to go, ultimately we can't Go for Refuge to the Buddha of our imagination because it is necessarily limited by our imagination. We can only ultimately Go for Refuge to the Buddha of Reality, what the Buddha really represents. This is Enlightenment itself, and you can only Go for Refuge to that when you can become it. Until then we have to keep alive the sense that the Buddha is beyond our capacity for understanding. He is *Anuttara*, incomparable with anything we can imagine, a mystery, 'beyond us, yet ourselves'<sup>31</sup>.

### Q: How do you experience the Buddha refuge in your life?

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<sup>29</sup> See Sangharakshita, *Know Your Mind*

<sup>30</sup> Subhuti, *Re-Imagining the Buddha*

<sup>31</sup> Wallace Stevens, *The Blue Guitar*



## Dharma

The Dharma is both the truth about the way things are, and the way to realise that truth. Going for Refuge to the Dharma involves having a glimpse of the truth, perhaps embodied in certain teachings, which we take to heart and reflect on. One way of thinking of this is that if we can't remember it, it's not our teaching! If we bring it to mind, especially in a moment of difficulty, it is our refuge.

Going for Refuge to the Buddha-Dharma means that, although we gain inspiration from many other teachings, it is the Buddha's Dharma we want to go deeper into, that we are convinced will take us all the way to Enlightenment. We see it as the primary means to Enlightenment, not just a good and interesting Eastern philosophy among many others.

Sangharakshita makes the point that to Go for Refuge to the Dharma we have to know what the Dharma is, which means we have to study it. 'This, I am afraid, is where many of us fall down.'<sup>32</sup> We have to immerse ourselves in the 'Sutra Treasure'<sup>33</sup>, but in doing that we find how vast, and sometimes contradictory that treasure is. We need a translator for the modern age, which for us is Sangharakshita. So we also have to immerse ourselves in his teachings – we have asked to be Ordained into the Order he founded, so we need to know how he understands the Dharma.

**Q: What are the teachings we have taken to heart and reflect on? What do you read more, other teachers such as Pema Chodron or Thich Nhat Hanh, or Sangharakshita?**

## Sangha

The Sangha refuge represents the potential for communication. 'A vital mutual responsiveness on the basis of a common ideal and a common principle: a shared exploration of the spiritual world between people who are in a relationship of complete honesty and harmony.'<sup>34</sup> Sangharakshita's insight into the Sangha is that it is much more than being supportive conditions for our own growth, but it is intrinsic to the spiritual, if not human, life itself. We need to share ourselves, to give of ourselves, to be in communication and to feel we are not alone. Communication is both the expression and the deepening of one's spiritual life. It challenges our sense of separateness and fixity. It is not even a practice, it is, as the Buddha said, the 'whole of the spiritual life'<sup>35</sup>.

For us, perhaps the deepest communication we have is with people who are also committed to the same path as us, i.e. other Sangha members. Even effective Going for Refuge is still dependent on conditions, so we cannot rely on other Sangha members as a refuge entirely, they can still fall below their ideals, even in the Order, which can be painful and disappointing

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<sup>32</sup> Sangharakshita, *Going for Refuge*, 1966

<sup>33</sup> Avatamsaka Sutra

<sup>34</sup> Sangharakshita, *Going for Refuge* 1966

<sup>35</sup> Samyutta Nikaya 45.2

to experience. However, we can share our spiritual journey with them, feeling we are on the same path, which is a tremendously satisfying, and sometimes challenging, experience.

Sangha as a refuge ultimately means Going for Refuge to the men and women who have irreversible Insight into Reality. What does it mean to go for refuge to them? Are they perfect? We can go for refuge to them because they won't turn back, they won't give up on their Going for Refuge, so their Going for Refuge will be consistent enough to spark off our own. But they haven't necessarily eliminated greed, or hatred or conceit, so we can't expect them to always be what we want them to be!

## Śraddhā

Through this whole and total response to the Three Jewels, they turn from something we see as valuable and precious, momentary glimpses, to a refuge. They become more than ideals and have practical implications for us. In the Tiratanavandana we rejoice in the qualities of the Three Jewels, ending in the: 'All my life I go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. To all the Buddhas, Dharmas and Sanghas of the past, to all the Buddhas, Dharmas and Sanghas yet to be, to all the Buddhas, Dharmas and Sanghas that now are, my worship flows unceasingly. No other refuge than the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, refuge supreme is there for me. Oh by the virtue of this truth, may grace abound, and victory!' The Three Jewels aren't abstract qualities, they motivate and affect our life.

This response of moving from seeing the Three Jewels as inspiring values, to the governing force in everyday life, is the awakening of śraddhā, the most beautiful and profound quality that can be present in existence. It is not a special faculty given to you when you are a Buddhist, but a faculty inherent in humanity which unites head and heart in response to what we value, and we 'place the heart upon' that which we value. It is a response of our total being. Traditionally śraddhā has Three aspects:

**Abhisampratyaya śraddhā:** Trusting Faith. 'A deep conviction about, and understanding of, truths and principles.<sup>36</sup>' This involves more than our intellect, it is a real knowing that 'this is it'. You just know it is true 'in your bones'. There is no use someone else telling you it is true, you have to know it's true yourself. This is sometimes called the cognitive aspect of faith.

**Q: What teachings do you have a deep conviction that you know to be true?**

**Cetasah prasāda śraddhā:** Lucid Faith. Because we know it to be true in our bones, we feel for it, we even love it. Huan Tsang calls this aspect of faith: 'a profound response to, and intense fondness for, all the pure qualities of the Three Jewels, its special activity consists in loving that which is good'. It is related to the aesthetic sense as we find the Three Jewels beautiful and our response to that is being 'delighted, serene, clear, pure and bright'. It is compared to a water purifying gem – it clears and purifies our hearts and minds.

Sangharakshita described faith as 'The response of our total being of what is ultimate in us to what is ultimate in the universe.<sup>37</sup>' and I think this gives us a feeling of this kind of faith.

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<sup>36</sup> Sangharakshita, *Know Your Mind*

<sup>37</sup> Sangharakshita, *Psychology of Spiritual Development*

When the Buddha was asked what is the Dhamma, he replied, that when it leads you to delight in what is pure and beautiful, you know it is the Dhamma<sup>38</sup>.

**Q: What do you love, or delight in, in the Three Jewels?**

**Abhilāsa śraddhā:** Longing Faith. When we know the Three Jewels are true and we delight in them, we long for them to be realised, in ourselves and others. This aspect of faith is ‘The profound desire and aspiration to attain and realise good things, and the confidence in one’s ability to do so.’<sup>39</sup> We cultivate the volitional action to put the Three Jewels into effect in our lives. Perhaps this goes back to cosmic Going for Refuge - the longing we all feel to transcend. Longing unites both the recognition that it is possible to manifest the Three Jewels in one’s life, and the realisation that they are completely mysterious and beyond us.

**Q: Do you feel that it is possible to attain the Three Jewels?**

**Q: Which aspect of śraddhā is most present to you in your practice?**

## Conclusion

Inherent in life is the urge to transcend. We, like the Buddha, long to find a place unscathed, a place of shelter, and perhaps in our long journey we might find that place, that island, the island of jewels. And if we find that island, I hope we trust, love and long for those Jewels, I hope we put them into practice in every moment of our lives.

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<sup>38</sup> Gotami Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya 8.5

<sup>39</sup> See Sangharakshita, *Know Your Mind*

## Bringing the Three Jewels closer...

	Buddha	Dharma	Sangha
Ultimate	Buddha	Reality	Arya Sangha
Buddhist Tradition	Past Teachers	Buddhist tradition	Past Sangha
Triratna	Bhante Lineage of inspiration	Bhante's teaching Lineage of teaching and practices	Order and Movement Lineage of responsibility
Immediate environment (esoteric refuges)	Local Order Members Kalyana Mitras Preceptors (Hierarchy of kalyana mitrata) Guru	Practices Precepts Mitra study Retreats Yidam	Spiritual friends Local Sangha Chapter Dakini
Each moment/ situation	Goal – a vision of a different way of being or higher potential. Apatrāpya.	Path – a movement forward. The teachings I remember in that moment!	Possibility of communication.

# Opening of the Dharma Eye and Stream Entry

## Summary and Reading

In Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, we will find that we are transforming. We see things in a different way, and we change our behaviour and the way we live in the light of that vision. This is expressed by Sangharakshita as the dimensions of Going for Refuge that are 'opening of the Dharma eye' and 'stream entry.'

Again, much of this study area is based on the talk Sangharakshita gave in 1981 called 'Dimensions of Going for Refuge', lecture 154, in which he outlined the levels and dimensions of Going for Refuge. This can be downloaded from [freebuddhistaudio.com](http://freebuddhistaudio.com). Insight is a topic much discussed in the Order. Vessantara has some useful material in the 'talks and articles' page on his website [www.vessantara.net](http://www.vessantara.net). He particularly explores post-insight practice. Sangharakshita gave an important talk called 'Enlightenment as Experience and Non- Experience', and 'Taste of Freedom' which can be found on [freebuddhistaudio.com](http://freebuddhistaudio.com).

## Opening of the Dharma Eye and Stream Entry

(Edited from a talk given by Vajratara in 2015)

In his talk 'Going for Refuge', Sangharakshita describes the experience of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels as turning from a mundane way of life to a spiritual or transcendental way of life<sup>40</sup>. To the extent we do this, we open ourselves up to something more than the mundane that we might even feel is somehow magical, or at least different to our ordinary, everyday consciousness. A new awareness opens up and we see things differently. Sangharakshita says that our inner spiritual eye or vision opens<sup>41</sup>. This is called traditionally the 'opening of the Dharma Eye, *dhamma cakkhu*, and the changes that take place on the basis of that seeing is 'stream entry', *sotāpanna*. We could equate these to the stages of spiritual death and rebirth in 'the five aspects of the spiritual life'. As we commit ourselves to the path, we have a new vision, we 'die' to our old way of seeing the world, and we are 'reborn' into a different way of life. We are transformed. This echoes the famous saying 'The moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too'<sup>42</sup>

We can see this process in many stories from the Buddhist tradition. For example, we have the story of Suppabuddha who suffered from leprosy<sup>43</sup>. Suppabuddha is searching for alms food and he sees a big crowd. He knows he won't get any food, but he thinks he may as well listen to the Buddha while he is there. As Buddha surveys the crowd with the mind of a Buddha, he sees that Suppabuddha is capable of understanding the Dhamma, so for Suppabuddha's benefit, the Buddha gives a talk on generosity, *dāna*, ethics, *sīla*, and renunciation *nekkhamma*.

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<sup>40</sup> Sangharakshita, *Going for Refuge*

<sup>41</sup> Sangharakshita, *Dimensions of Going for Refuge*, 1981

<sup>42</sup> W H Murray, *The Scottish Himalaya Expedition*, but usually attributed to Goethe

<sup>43</sup> Udana, 5.3

Suppabuddha's mind, it is said, becomes ready, malleable, free from hindrances, purified and elated, so the Buddha teaches him the Dharma unique to the Buddhas: this is conditioned co-arising, especially applied to suffering, i.e. the Four Noble Truths. The Sutta uses a simile often repeated in the Pali Canon. Just as the clean cloth takes the dye: 'there arose the stainless, undefiled Dhamma vision that whatever is subject to origination is subject to cessation.' The Dharma eye, or *Dhamma cakku*, opens.

## Conditions for the opening of the Dharma Eye

So how did this occur, and what were the conditions that led up to it? Suppabuddha was ready, he was in a fairly open state. He had just listened to a talk on generosity, ethics and renunciation. *Sila* literally means 'good character' and denotes an upright quality, cultivating a sense of ethical responsibility and conscious behaviour. This is akin to the stage of integration. As a result of being inspired by those qualities, Suppabuddha was full of faith, his mind was purified and elated. He was feeling positive and uplifted, free from hindrances. This is akin to the stage of positive emotion. Suppabuddha had prepared his mind, and, like a clean cloth, it took the dye.

In Suppabuddha's case the Buddha gave a discourse which inspired these qualities, but in other instances in the Pali Canon where the Dharma eye opened, such as in Sariputta, Moggallāna and Kondañña's case, they were already living a lifestyle that encouraged the development of positive mental states and renunciation.

This state of ethics, positivity and integration makes the mind receptive. The receptive mind can hear the truth. And the truth comes, in this story from a discourse of the Buddha, but it can also come from life itself. It could be an experience of impermanence or of dukkha, of life, in the words of the Bodhicāryavatāra, 'breaking its promises'. The point is that, like Suppabuddha, we are listening. Instead of just responding with aversion or distraction, we reflect on a higher perspective or a Dharma teaching.

Another way of explaining this is that *karma niyāma* processes lead to the arising of *dharma niyāma* processes. If one practises in accordance with the *karma niyāma* processes, *dharma niyāma* processes unfold. This is because practising in accordance with the karmic order of conditionality is aligning your behaviour of body, speech and mind with the way things are: we are not separate or fixed and all human beings have the potential to Buddhahood. To act ethically, with mettā, generosity, contentment, truthfulness and awareness; is to support our own growth and the growth of others. To act ethically is to resonate with all life, to develop a sensitivity to a broader awareness of life itself. To act unethically is to stunt ours and other's growth, to come from a closed and cut off place that cannot see the life in others. Unethical actions are based in a deluded vision of reality that brings us further away from seeing into the way things are.

If we act ethically, our consciousness becomes more subtle and refined, we move away from self-clinging and circling around our self-orientated needs, and we become more sensitive to reality itself. We find this process in the traditional formulas of the Dhamma. For example, in the Three-Fold Path, ethical behaviour leads to *samādhi*, meditation, a higher, more

sensitive and subtle consciousness that can perceive the truth which is *paññā/ prajña* or wisdom<sup>44</sup>.

This opening of the Dharma eye can be experienced in different ways by different people. For some it may happen suddenly and apparently ‘unannounced’. This is the sudden path that Sangharakshita calls ‘shattering the Wheel [of life] at a single blow’<sup>45</sup>. It can also happen gradually, so that it is only when we look back on our life that we realise we see things differently and have a clarity of vision that has emerged over time. The opening of the Dharma eye is a slow unfolding. This is called the gradual path and Sangharakshita describes it as ‘progressively slowing the Wheel down, gently applying a brake to bring the whole thing slowly to a halt’<sup>46</sup>. We could say that the Opening of the Dharma eye is sudden and gradual. It is gradual because it arises on dependence on *karma niyāma* processes that may take many years to develop, even if you can’t always see the fruits immediately. It is sudden because when it happens, it is beyond the *karma niyāma* processes and is experienced as a different order altogether from ordinary consciousness. In a sense it doesn’t really matter how we experience the Dharma eye opening. The main thing is that we realise that however it arises, it arises on dependence on conditions, and that we can both find a way to communicate our own experience and listen to others who may have a very different experience.

## The content of the experience

What do we see when the Dharma eye opens? Sangharakshita calls this dimension the ‘unconditioned depth of its [Going for Refuge’s] cognitive content’ What is the cognitive content? The Pali texts usually use the phrase, ‘Whatever is subject to origination is subject to cessation.’ This is a very simple way of expressing the particular Insight that is seen when our Dharma eye opens. Sangharakshita’s definition also makes the point that seeing into the truth that is expressed as this formula isn’t purely an intellectual, theoretical knowledge, but a real seeing into the depths, unconditioned depths, of the Reality the formula is pointing to.

The simple formula has different implications and can be applied in different ways. It is an expression of conditioned arising, *paticca samuppāda*, and all formulas in the Dharma are expressions of that basic truth. For example, the three *lakkhanas*, the four Noble Truths, the *nidāna* chains are all expressions of *paticca samuppāda*. The Dharma eye opens when we apply those formulas to our lives, moving from the ‘general’ or ‘universal’ truths of the Dharma, to our ‘specific’ and ‘particular’ experience. It also opens when we find the ‘universal’ truths of the Dharma right there in our ‘specific’ experience, when we see the overall significance of what we are experiencing.

Sangharakshita describes what we see when the Dharma eye opens simply as seeing both impermanence, that everything changes, and that within that change, there is the possibility of transformation: that everyone can become Buddhas.<sup>47</sup>

## Q: What Dharma teaching or formula do you reflect on most? How do you reflect?

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<sup>44</sup> We can also see this in the positive *nidāna* chain, and in the Yogācāra model of the ‘storehouse consciousness’

<sup>45</sup> Sangharakshita, ‘Stream Entry’, 1966

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*

<sup>47</sup> Sangharakshita, *Dimensions of Going for Refuge*, 1981

## Stream Entry

When the Dharma eye opens, it changes you. As Sangharakshita says ‘something tremendous happens’<sup>48</sup>. Our whole being flows irreversibly towards Enlightenment. The momentum of our being is altered. We ‘enter the stream’ of the Dharma and become a *sotāpanna*, a stream entrant.

Sangharakshita calls this dimension of Going for Refuge the: ‘permanent and far reaching nature of its effects’. He describes life as being a tension between the gravitational pull of the mundane, of *saṃsāra*, and the gravitational pull of the transcendental, *Nibbāna*<sup>49</sup>. At the point of stream entry, we are more under the influence of the gravitational pull of the transcendental.

What is the gravitational pull of the mundane that you are leaving behind? We could look at this in terms of the three fetters or bonds, *saṃyojana*.

**1. Sakkāyaditthi:** When we are bound by this fetter, we believe we have a real, existing, fixed, isolated self which is separate from the self of others. We identify with a set of old habits, which aren’t necessarily positive, as the real ‘me’. Sangharakshita calls this fetter ‘habit’<sup>50</sup>. When we begin to break through this fetter, we realise we can change, we do not have a fixed core and we become liberated from our own oppression that keeps us in a fixed and painful self identity. Sangharakshita says that to break this fetter, we need a sense of creativity, that we are constantly creating a new self, as if we are our own work of art. Dr Ambedkar says that when we break through self view, we stop chasing ‘baubles’ that can never satisfy the cravings of our human heart, and we open our eyes to the fact that we are a tiny part of the measureless whole<sup>51</sup>.

**Q: When do we feel most creative and expansive, feeling we could be anyone we want to be?**

**2. Silabbata-parāmāsa:** This means mechanical observances, going through the motions and keeping up external observances, the fetter of ‘dependence on moral rules and religious observances’. We may become happily busy, or feel we are part of a positive group, but somehow our heart is not in what we are doing. We feel that if we keep up appearances, everything will be okay, but really we are slipping into living a life alongside our real inspiration. We feel a lack of life in our Buddhist practice. Sangharakshita calls this the fetter of ‘superficiality’<sup>52</sup>. Breaking this fetter means we act with the whole of ourselves to do what we love. We build our life on our real inspiration, whatever that inspiration may be, and we Go for Refuge with our own connection to the values that the Three Jewels represent, even if that means our spiritual life may look different from other people and we have different inspirations and enthusiasms.

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid*

<sup>49</sup> Sangharakshita, *Stream Entry: The Point of No Return* 1969, part of the series ‘The Higher Evolution’. See also *The Survey of Buddhism*.

<sup>50</sup> Sangharakshita, *Taste of Freedom*, 1979

<sup>51</sup> Dr Ambedkar, *Buddha or Karl Marx*

<sup>52</sup> Sangharakshita, *Taste of Freedom*, 1979



**Q: Where is our real enthusiasm and inspiration? What would our Going for Refuge look like if we built our Dharma life on that?**

**3. Vicikicchā:** This is the fetter of doubt. We doubt that spiritual life is possible, and we each have our own particular version of why we can't change. We become indecisive and deliberately vague, keeping our options open, we hesitate and rationalise so that we don't have to get down to the real business of change. We could imagine it as being at a dance, but taking a comfy seat by the exit watching other people get involved. This is painful, because we are never really part of things and we never seem to get anywhere. When we break this fetter, we commit ourselves to change, we clarify our priorities and act on it. 'Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it!'<sup>53</sup>, when we do decide to throw ourselves into the spiritual life, things happen in an almost mysterious way.

**Q: Where do you keep your options open? How could you bring clarity to that area?**

We leave behind the Three Fetters, but what are we attracted to, what is the gravitational pull of the transcendental?

When the Buddha talked about stream entry he said that you know that you are a stream entrant when you have confirmed, or perfect, *avecca*, faith, *pāsada*, in the qualities of the Three Jewels that are elucidated in the Tiratanavandanā, and also in your own ethical practice.

What does that mean? It means that we are clear and lucid about what is of value, we see the highest and 'needs must love it.' The Three Jewels and ethical practice are so attractive, so beautiful, like jewels, why would you not move towards them? Why would we not leave behind our old way of being? Using a Sufi analogy, we are compelled towards the transcendental in the same way a lover is drawn to the beloved. The Buddha said that this kind of faith is like water flowing from rain on the mountain, filling up gullies and creeks into pools, lakes, streams, rivers and finally the ocean. In the same way, faith in the Three Jewels and in the virtues dear to the Buddhas flow in the same way to Enlightenment itself<sup>54</sup>.

We may think that stream entry seems very far away, or perhaps we think it is near, or that we have already got there. Maybe we ask ourselves what its importance is at all? The main thing is that we feel we are changing, that our Going For Refuge is transforming the way we see the world, and having 'far reaching effects'. Sometimes we can see it in the change in the momentum of our lives. We are heading in a different direction, sometimes like the slow turning of a large tanker, or sometimes like a yacht on a windy day!

In the journey towards ordination, we are seeking to make our Going for Refuge effective. However, in the Order, we are seeking to make our Going for Refuge real. This is equivalent to stream entry, and until that point we can fall back, so it is imperative that every Order Member is setting up the conditions for the Dharma eye to open and for stream entry to be reached.

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<sup>53</sup> Goethe, *Faust*, translation John Anste

<sup>54</sup> Samyutta Nikaya

**Q: How do we envisage stream entry? Do we find Ordination or stream entry a more helpful goal? How are we moving towards our goal?**

## **Conclusion**

Though the theory is straightforward, what the actual practice of opening the Dharma eye and stream entry look like in the life of the individual can be confusing. From that point of view, it is important that we talk to others about what we are experiencing. From discussions I have had with practitioners over the years, here are some practical points about this area, a sort of 'trouble shooting' guide.

The opening of the Dharma eye and stream entry are part of the whole transformation of being that takes place when we Go for Refuge. Our quest, or volition (Going for Refuge), changes our vision of reality (opening of the Dharma Eye), and transforms our being (stream entry). That has an effect on how we live in the world (renunciation or going forth) and how we act towards others (altruism). In this way Going for Refuge has an effect on every part of who we are. We are wholly transformed. For this kind of transformation to occur, we have to be prepared to enter into the Dharma life for the long term. When told about an 'Enlightenment in a Weekend' course he had heard of, Sangharakshita said Enlightenment in a weekend wasn't possible, not for the kind of whole transformation that Buddhism is talking about<sup>55</sup>. Interestingly, when he said that, I thought he looked rather sad, as if the magnificent transformation that the Buddhist path is concerned with is reduced to a weekend hobby. Perhaps that is my projection, but I hope we don't reduce Buddhism to something easy and quick that demands little change in lifestyle or the way we are in the world.

The danger is that we stagnate in our Dharma life, when our own visions or spiritual experiences become more important than our current experience. Vessantara distinguishes between insights that we are in all the time, that we can access when in the right conditions, or insights that we have on an occasion that then become memories. Visions and other spiritual, or transcendental, experiences are important, but they are important because they change the momentum of our being towards Enlightenment. The general advice seems to be to relax, to let our experience unfold without clinging to it. I remember a man who came to the Sheffield Buddhist Centre who was always searching for a guru who could take him back to an experience he had at an ashram. He spent vast amounts of money going to India on retreat, but he refused to meditate or do any personal practice, and he used to pay a local boy to buy him wine to drink in the evening! He couldn't be with his present experience, but was always referring back to old Insight, which became a memory. Memories can inspire us, they can even provide a sort of touchstone that we can return to, but the point is to look into our current experience, not to try and relive something that has gone.

Sometimes it is hard to communicate our experiences and review how we have changed. If we can find someone we can be open with, that can be extremely helpful. We may need to find someone more experienced than ourselves because at first it can be a bit tender and we don't want to sound inflated or solidify our experience, nor do we want our experience to be dismissed. In talking about how our Going for Refuge manifests in our lives, we don't

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<sup>55</sup> Sangharakshita, 'Enlightened Englishman'

necessarily need to classify our attainments. The Buddha suggested just talking about the Dhamma itself. He said that when we talk about the Dhamma we get a sense of each other's understanding and wisdom, just as when we get a size of a fish when we watch it swimming. Big fish make big bubbles<sup>56</sup>!

Though we may feel we have experienced a deep transformation, we need to keep Going for Refuge in all areas of our practice, particularly ethics, integration and positive emotion. It can be tempting to think that now we have seen everything is illusory, we don't have to practise ethics or 'conventional Dharma'. We can see the Three Jewels as simply stepping stones to an experience we have reached. My experience tells me that even big insights don't necessarily last as an experience, they are glimpses, highly significant glimpses that change our life, but we don't necessarily remain in those glimpses forever. It might be that we can go back to that glimpse under certain conditions, but at some point we have to go back to relative functioning, to the *karma niyāma* processes. We have to live our insights out in our lives, let them transform our lives. Sangharakshita described this as the path of vision and the path transformation: one augments the other. Padmasambhava said 'Though my view is as spacious as the sky, my actions and respect for cause and effect are as fine as grains of flour.'

We have to accept that even glimpses may be partial. The Three Jewels are not stepping stones. The Buddha described the Three Jewels as strange and wonderful<sup>57</sup>, deep, subtle and profound<sup>58</sup>. The sense we have from the Buddha is that there is still more to be explored even at Buddhahood. Even the Buddha revered and relied on the Dharma itself, and he revered the Sangha 'when it attained to greatness'<sup>59</sup>. There is always further to go.

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<sup>56</sup> Thāṇa sutta, AN 4.192

<sup>57</sup> Udāna 5.5

<sup>58</sup> Aryapariyesana Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 26

<sup>59</sup> Anguttara Nikāya 4.21, Samyutta Nikāya 6.2

# Going Forth

## Summary and Reading

We have seen that Going for Refuge is a total response to the qualities represented by the Three Jewels and that in Going for Refuge we see things differently and transform our way of being. This transformation will have an effect in the way we live our life, more specifically in what we choose to leave behind. Sangharakshita calls this aspect of Going for Refuge the 'extent of reorganisation in the pattern of daily life'.

Sangharakshita gave a talk in 1997 called 'Reflections on Going Forth', lecture 189. You can download this from [freebuddhistaudio.com](http://freebuddhistaudio.com).

Maitripala gave a talk at Tiratanaloka about her perspective as a mother and daughter of going forth from the family. You can download the notes from this talk from the Tiratanaloka website.

For your own reflection practice, you might like to reflect on the 'Dasadhamma Sutta', Anguttara Nikaya 10.48, which can be found on the internet including on [accesstoinsight.org](http://accesstoinsight.org)

## Going Forth

(Text purpose written by Vajrasakhi)

"Going Forth into homelessness draws attention to the extent of the reorganisation which, regardless of whether or not one becomes a monk in the formal sense, the experience inevitably brings about in the pattern of one's daily life.<sup>60</sup>"

Going Forth can be quite difficult to talk about in our present culture of instant gratification. Getting what we want is highly valued, even linked with apparently good qualities like authenticity, assertiveness, power and initiative. Pleasure and gratification can be seen as an important goal for human life. However the Buddha is showing us another way of orienting our lives. We could look at this as enjoying the pleasures of the spiral path and going forth from the pleasures of the wheel of life. This can be a helpful way of understanding the process of reorganising the pattern of our daily life in line with our Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. 'It's a bit ironic to talk about giving up worldly pleasures when you take up the spiritual life. It's much more like giving up worldly miseries and taking up spiritual happiness.'<sup>61</sup>

The task of the spiritual life can be seen as experiencing feeling (*vedanā*) without falling into craving or aversion (*kleśa*). It is this detached (*nibbidā/ virāga*) attitude toward the world, not dependent on sense-desire and the self-clinging that is associated with it, that brings about

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<sup>60</sup> Sangharakshita, *Dimensions of Going for Refuge*, 1981

<sup>61</sup> Sangharakshita, *A Stream of Stars*

true happiness. But the word 'detached' can sound cold, so what is the Buddha getting at? The quality that the Buddha is not life denying, but rather an ability to be able to find contentment within oneself, to be independent of the vicissitudes of life, to be at peace. This is the quality of *viveka*.

**Q: How do you understand and experience the qualities of nibbidā (serene withdrawal), virāga (disenchantment) or viveka (solitude or independence of heart)?**

False refuges are those refuges that we turn to for refuge, but cannot truly satisfy us. They are associated with the wheel of life, at best keeping us in a limited way of being or at worst refuges that do us harm. Anything that we use as a way of upholding and identifying with a sense of a separate self, is a false refuge. They are associated with the pleasures we get when craving or aversion is gratified. False refuges are not necessarily evil or bad in themselves. The problem is simply that they are subject to the *lakkhanas*, or marks of existence, and therefore we cannot rely on them, they will change and are not ultimately satisfactory. They are limited.

## Going Forth from false refuges

Subhuti has described the false refuges in terms of false Buddha, Dharma and Sangha refuges. In our 'quest', what we are searching for are the Three Jewels, but often what we find on the way are things that look like the Three Jewels, but are not.

### The false Buddha refuge

The Buddha refuge is a vision of Enlightenment for the sake of all beings as the highest potential of human life. Without this transcendental refuge we can imagine that the highest potential for human life is something like a career path or a positive social role.

Is career a false refuge? It can be to the extent that we are identified with it. Our career and the status it brings us will reinforce our sense of fixed identity, which brings us suffering if it is challenged. As our practice deepens we may find the goals of our career path no longer makes so much sense. Instead we might turn our energy and competence to our practice. Our ambition and drive can be directed to the goal of attaining Enlightenment for the sake of all beings. We may want to find ways to live more simply or even to work for the sake of the Dharma.

**Q: In what ways might someone's career be a source of suffering for themselves or others?**

Other roles we may identify ourselves with can be closer to home. We may see ourselves as a good or worthwhile person because of our role as a mother, wife, friend, sister or daughter. Obviously these are good things to be, but as we practise we see how identifying strongly with any role will limit our aspirations and sense of our potential. We may even tie ourselves down practically by looking after everyone else. Can we really help others to fulfil their potential, if we are not?

These false Buddha refuges may include patterns of rescuing, over responsibility, or busyness which will be as true for those in a career as for the home maker. Vessantara describes how having a 'project' of some kind in our life is a deep pull for us because of the strong sense it gives of having a 'project manager'.

**Q: Try spending time on this retreat without any 'project' at all. How does it feel?**

**Q: What roles do you identify with and how do they limit you?**

## The false Dharma refuge

The Dharma refuge is the teachings and practices that help us reach Buddhahood. Without the transcendental teachings we are left with ordinary wrong views and assumptions. They will reinforce our self-clinging as well as shape our sense of what is of value in human existence. These views will limit our sense of who we can become and how we go about changing things. We have many views about ourselves that create our identity, some may be easy to spot and some hard.

Friendship with people who are different from us can be a helpful way to recognise our views. Sometimes, though, we just find ways to avoid any differences of opinion with our friends, so it is important to have times when the intensity of a shared project will force us to confront each other and challenge our deeply held beliefs or opinions.

**Q: Where is there intensity in our Dharma lives? How has that intensity helped you examine your views?**

Sectarianism, where we create a polarisation between 'us' and 'them', making a section of humanity the 'other', is a false Dharma refuge. We have to Go Forth from blame, resentment, criticising, or hating. We need to look at the views behind our idea that there are people who we think are bad or deserve punishment. We may have views about race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, age. Taking a thorough look at these views may be a long term project. We are unlikely to be able to change views that may be part of our cultural conditioning quickly. Travel and meeting spiritual practitioners from different cultures can help.

Even our understanding of the Dharma can become a false refuge if we hold Dharmic views in the wrong way. When we find ourselves getting angry or critical of ourselves, or other practitioners who hold different opinions, it may be that we have made our views about the Dharma into part of our identity, our sense of 'who I am'. However the Buddha tells us that the Dharma is not something to hold onto in this way. Like a snake we need to hold it correctly or it will bite us, and like a raft we must leave it behind after it has served its purpose<sup>62</sup>.

## The false Sangha refuge

Ultimately the true Sangha refuge is the Arya Sangha, or the Sangha of those with transcendental Insight. In our direct experience, it is the network of spiritual friendships that form around us as we all support, inspire and challenge each other to grow towards

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<sup>62</sup> Majjhima Nikaya 22

Enlightenment. Without the ideal of the Spiritual Community we are left with ordinary human connections of work, pleasure and family. These will fall into the patterns of Group behaviour, as described by Sangharakshita in 'What is the Sangha', with associated issues of power, authority, conformism and individualism.

Can family be a false refuge? It can be to the extent we identify with our family as 'ours' and try to fix ourselves and others in family roles. It may be more helpful to see that there are elements of false refuge in our family relationships, rather than that our families are themselves false refuges. Seeing the false refuge within family relationships does not mean we have to leave our families. A friend of mine said after struggling with this for some time, she realised that she had to look at family through Going for Refuge spectacles! This means bringing our practice right into our family relationships. Our ethical practice, of course, but also insight into the nature of those relationships. We might realise, like Maitripala, whose paper on family is in the library at Tiratanaloka, that we can't save those we love from *dukkha*. Seeing this freed up her relationships with her children and she could see them as separate people. We might begin to recognise that we cannot own anyone, not even our children.

Working on our relationship to our family might include inviting our Buddhist friends to meet our family members, and vice versa. We might try to notice where we rely on our family and learn to rely on others in that way too, so that when we have difficulties we can ask for help. We can look at how intimacy happens in our relationships and why? The Buddha in the Karaniya Mettā Sutta<sup>63</sup> says that just as a mother cares for her only child we can expand our care out to the whole world.

Is my relationship a false refuge? It is to the degree that it limits both of us and to the extent that it is 'neurotic' in the sense of expecting something from the relationship that the relationship cannot possibly fulfil. We can look to our partner to be our best friend, mentor, parental figure and other roles that cannot possibly be fulfilled by one person. We might find we have a fear of being without a relationship and the security and status it can give us. Having a significant other can even make us feel that we are more whole as a person. We may have patterns of over dependence on our partners or sexual attention. Or we may have identified with a particular sexual identity in a way that deepens self clinging. It can be interesting to talk about these areas with our Sangha friends and share life stories. Above all we need to bring ethics into the relationship, notice any 'no go' areas and find ways to talk about them and with them, and treat our partner as an independent human being.

Is being 'in love' a false refuge? The difficulty is that although the first part of the experience can enable us to feel the full range of our emotions more intensely, we quickly close down to focus all our emotional energy onto that particular person. What can help is to look at patterns in the kinds of people we fall in love with - why them? What are the ideals and stories behind falling in love? What am I projecting out? How can I reclaim those projections for myself? Pema Chodron has suggested that if we can 'unhook' the stories from that person and just be in touch with the feeling of being in love we can spread it out to the whole world.

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<sup>63</sup> Sutta Nipāta 1.8

The group: Sangharakshita has said that Going Forth is primarily Going Forth from the group and becoming more individual<sup>64</sup>. Eventually we form the Spiritual Community together, the locus for the arising of the Bodhicitta.

**Q: What are the main areas in which we feel we need to go forth from our false refuges? How can we do that in a sustainable and helpful way?**

### False refuges on retreat

We sometimes set up small cycles of craving in order to have the pleasure of satisfying it. What starts as a special treat becomes a daily habit, then becomes something we can't do without. A retreat is a good time to notice craving in small ways. Do we want rewards for hard work or a relief from boredom? Is it just a feeling of restlessness, of 'what next'?

Silence on a retreat is a strong going forth, we can feel quite uncomfortable without the normal chat that reassures us of our place in the group. We also go forth from our phone, shopping, private space, TV, and internet. It might be interesting to notice how this feels as the retreat progresses. What about ill will as a false refuge? Do we find ourselves constantly looking out for the things we can criticise about others or ourselves? We may also have to go forth from not taking ourselves seriously, being small or feeling unseen in study groups, passive aggressive behaviour, or from culturally conditioned dependence on others.

**Q: How are we going forth on this retreat?**

### Ethics as Going Forth

We begin to recognise that all our ethical practice involves going forth from our habitual patterns that reinforce self clinging. We go forth from what Sangharakshita calls the power mode to the love mode. It is very useful to come on an Ethics retreat if you can, where we go into the precepts in more depth. When we join the Order we are taking the ten precepts as vows, which means that we are committing ourselves to an ethical life. This means that we have to look deeply at the places where our practice is difficult. It can help to have a regular confession practice in place as you prepare for ordination, maybe in your 'Going for Refuge group' or with a spiritual friend.

### Levels of Going Forth

Sangharakshita has pointed out that going forth, like Going for Refuge, happens on different levels. At the cultural level any 'going forth' is still a part of our identity. We are appropriating the forms of going forth to support our ego. When going forth becomes provisional we can give up worldly life for a short period, just to see what it's like. This happens, to some extent, when you go on a long retreat, either a solitary retreat or a retreat with friends. Effective going forth is when you are making a sustained, systematic effort to give up worldly attitudes. And also when you do this with the help of at least a degree of external renunciation. Real going forth is the equivalent to Stream Entry. We are really seeing through and giving up on samsara.

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<sup>64</sup> Sangharakshita, *Reflections on Going Forth*, 1997



## Q: What is your experience of solitary retreats?

### Near enemies of Going Forth

In his 'Reflections on Going Forth' Sangharakshita talks about horizontal and vertical Going Forth. When we experience uncomfortable changes in our lives we usually re-create our false refuges in new circumstances. This is a going forth, but without Going for Refuge. It will have shaken us up, we can't really believe in the false refuges as we used to, but we haven't got a true refuge to move towards. Going forth 'vertically' means seeing through our self-clinging, at least to some degree. There is a degree of spiritual death which opens us up to spiritual values, to the *dharmā niyāma* processes. This means that there are situations when we can go forth without Going for Refuge, but we cannot Go for Refuge without Going Forth.

It's helpful to look at some kinds of going forth as growing up rather than giving up. We need to watch out for going too fast, for example we may want to go forth from hating someone who has done us great harm, or from an addiction, but these are very complex areas. We may see quite clearly that something is a false refuge, for instance an unethical career or a difficult relationship, but be unable to let go of it. This goes along with perfectionism, the idea that we have to be perfect now. We can find ourselves feeling self righteous when we have changed a habit or guilt when we haven't. We can even tip into *mraṅka* (slyness/concealment) about some of our false refuges. It can be more helpful in these circumstances to ask: how am I moving towards wanting to change a false refuge? Are there small steps I can put into place? Even just starting to talk about it in these terms will change our sense of identifying with a false refuge.

Consumerism and materialism are very strong in our culture, backed up by the forces of global finance. You are what you buy, how you spend your leisure is an indicator of your class or success. It is tempting to think of going forth as setting ourselves as above and distant from that culture. However going forth is not about doing with less, like a kind of poverty mentality or misplaced puritanism. We need to work on ourselves without unhelpful moralism about 'lower' pleasure - experienced by ourselves and others. The main thing is to have a sense of the process, where are my edges, where am I working? We are all working in different areas at different times.

Joy is crucial throughout the spiritual life. So going forth is not about doing with less pleasure now in order to have greater pleasure in the future. The image of a caterpillar can be helpful, it only lets go of one leaf when its front legs are firmly attached to the next one. It moves slowly but without leaving any of itself behind. In the same way we can only go forth when we Go for Refuge.

In summary, false refuges are not bad but limited. It's important to see practice not as 'getting rid of the ego', but expanding out to connect more and live more creatively. Going forth from false refuges should be freeing - we don't have to worry about them any more. We usually invest a huge amount of effort in trying to keep our false refuges in place, they are always threatening to fall apart - and then they do... Going forth from these old identities can leave us more potent and able to make truly individual choices. We will be less driven by inner compulsions or the views of our society or family.

**Q: How do we relate to the language of going forth?**

**Q: What images or stories of going forth inspire you?**

## Pleasures of the path

In a sense, the primary going forth is going forth in respect of one's mind. This is what gives life to our going forth in respect to our body and speech. Going forth is an inner attitude rather than external giving up things. Moving into the mode of 'being' rather than the mode of 'having'. A kind of 'being' that can hang loose to identity and status.

There is a basic need for pleasure in human life, and this is also true of our Dharma life. We need an intelligent, sensitive movement from what Sangharakshita calls the lower to higher pleasures. It's crucial we don't give up the lower pleasures until we are enjoying the higher, or we'll get a kickback. For instance if we try taking a vow of celibacy before we are ready for it we may find ourselves suddenly assailed with desire for a partner.

## Sukha, or pleasant, *vedanā*

But what does it mean to talk about 'higher' or 'lower' pleasure? In the Pali cannon the Buddha explains that *vedanā* (pleasant, painful or indifferent feelings) is either *sāmisa* or *nirāmisa*, worldly or un-worldly.

*Sāmisa sukha vedanā* means worldly pleasant *vedanā*, also translated as meaty or raw. This is pleasure that is deeply connected to the underlying tendencies of craving, ill will and ignorance. This pleasure is tainted by the defilements or connected with what one translator calls 'worldly baits'. Through habit they have become closely connected to patterns of self obsession through wanting and not wanting. So though the feeling is neither skilful or unskilful in itself, there is an almost instantaneous response of craving or hatred.

*Nirāmisa sukha vedanā* means un-worldly pleasant feelings (un-raw, un-meaty, or not of the flesh). This is pleasure that is associated with contentment, *mettā* and wisdom. It easily generates motivation for the path and stimulates faith. Ultimately this is the bliss and ease of *Nibbāna*, but we can also understand it as the kind of pleasure that opens us up beyond our self-clinging. An example might be the pleasure that arises on seeing a Buddha *rūpa* or meditating. We can experience this kind of pleasure as arising without any external stimulus at all.

**Q: What are some examples of *sāmisa* and *nirāmisa* pleasures?**

Subhuti talks about the pleasure of the path in the 'Rambles around Pleasure' he gave at the LBC in 2009. He links the traditional concept of *nirāmisa sukha vedanā* with aesthetic appreciation and the imaginal faculty. In 'Reflections on Going Forth' Sangharakshita describes this as moving from the *kamaloka* to the *rūpaloka*. And in 'Wisdom Beyond Words' he talks about how we can gradually get a sense of living our lives within a greater mandala of aesthetic appreciation. We experience something of this greater mandala in activities like singing, being in nature or appreciating uplifting art, with our spiritual friends or when meditating or doing puja. The word 'faith' is pointing to this way of experiencing life. It is supported by ethical behaviour; the kind of study that enables us to understand reality; living a life consonant with your ideals or being among beautiful things and surroundings.

Pleasures of the path can be less easy to talk about than those of the circle. For instance it is easier to tell friends about an enjoyable meal than to describe how good you felt after a strong meditation. However, they do feel qualitatively different. Anything that we are experiencing as a gratification of craving will give us anxiety and eventually pain. In contrast, aesthetic or ethical pleasure gives a sense of deeper joy that spreads out and gradually touches all aspects of our life - we find we don't need to be afraid of losing this kind of pleasure because it is 'augmentative', it takes us up the spiral.

Vajratara was pointing out to me that of the figures on the refuge tree it is the greatest renunciants - Milarepa and Kashyapa - who wrote the best poetry. In going forth from limited pleasures associated with craving, we can be more open to a greater beauty. We often experience this on retreat as things and people around us appear more vivid, more fully themselves and more beautiful.

**Q: Where do we find the two kinds of pleasure in our lives? Can we tell the difference?**

## **Dukkha of the path**

However going forth is not always pleasant. Subhuti describes the dukkha of the path as well. As we become disillusioned with saṃsāra we can feel grief that our old refuges are no longer clearly satisfying. Old friendships may seem superficial or even painful as we change and we feel more uncomfortable with our unskilful or reactive habits. As we go forth from normal distractions and busyness we may find we become more deeply sensitive to the suffering in our own and other's lives and this can be extremely painful. It's important to recognise this dukkha in our spiritual lives, we will need to be deeply aware of the freedom, sense of aliveness and authenticity that practice brings in order to want to keep going in the face of these difficulties.

## **Ordination as a Going Forth**

"The first three sights turned the Buddha away from conditioned existence, but it was the sight of the beauty, so to speak, of that fourth sight, the Sadhu in his yellow robes - the wanderer - that moved him to go forth in the direction of Nirvāna - the unconditioned. So his going forth, his pabbajjā, to use the traditional term, was the movement away from conditioned things and towards Nirvana. It was a movement made possible by a shift in the emotional centre of his being.<sup>65</sup>"

Ordination into the Triratna Buddhist Order is a Going Forth from the group. The private ordination symbolises this, we are committing ourselves to the spiritual path as outlined by Sangharakshita, and saying that we would do it alone if necessary. The ordination retreat itself is a going forth, we leave friends and family for up to 3 months and go 'up the mountain'. We are given a new name which has been chosen by someone else, which means giving up the identity that our old name held. Together the private and public

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<sup>65</sup> Sangharakshita, *Recollections and Reflections on My Going Forth*, 2007

ordinations signify that we have taken on weighty relationships with our preceptors and have committed ourselves to a connection with the whole Order.

Then we join a chapter and maybe teams of other Order members, some of whom we may not find easy to get on with. All this is a going forth from identity, role, self-sufficiency and personal ambition in your life. The Order functions on the basis of communication in the context of horizontal and vertical spiritual friendship, which is only possible if we are individual enough to know what we think and learn to express what we think, while remaining in true harmony with others.

**Q: What aspect of going forth at ordination do you find most exciting, and are you most apprehensive about?**

### The Anagarika precept

This is not a further ordination, but a deepening of our practice of the third precept. It is a vow to abstain from all sexual activity. There is an aspiration to go forth from possessions and to simplify one's life. Order members who want to take this vow do so in consultation with their Kalyana Mitras and Preceptors and have been practising it for at least two years. They do so in the context of a simple ritual with other Order members, when they exchange their white kesa for a yellow one. Parami has said that she experiences being an Anagarika as freedom: the freedom to be born into something bigger.

### Not settling down

As Triratna grows older, or as we grow older, there can be a desire to settle down a bit, to not go forth so strongly. However if we lose the contexts for intensity in our movement we won't have an Order or movement in a few years. We'll be sucked back into what Subhuti calls 'the swamp of ordinary secular life.'

Sangharakshita reminds us of the continued importance of going forth. In reality there is nothing we can cling to or see as actually 'ours'.

"We should not be satisfied with what I'm doing now - there is more to achieve in the spiritual sense, individually or collectively. We mustn't sit on our laurels - even assuming we have any to sit on. Going forth is essential, integral to our Going for Refuge, which we are trying to do all the time. We are going forth from our present mode of being to something greater, nearer to Enlightenment"<sup>66</sup>.

**Q: What gets in the way of our Going Forth?**

### Absolute Going Forth

Ultimately going forth is without a subject and without an object. Pure, blissful, radiant, non-dual awareness. At this level there is no samsāra and no Nirvāna, just spontaneous compassionate activity. In the Zen tradition there is the image of 'going back to the market place with bliss bestowing hands'. The idea that we are trying to 'leave' samsara is a one

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid*

sided version of Buddhism and we can balance this by emphasising the altruistic dimension of our Going for Refuge.

# The Altruistic Dimension of Going for Refuge and Joining the Order

## Summary and Reading

Going for Refuge does not stop with our own practice. The deeper we Go for Refuge, the more we see that all beings, in their own way, Go for Refuge and have the potential for Buddhahood. In this section we will look at the last dimension of Going for Refuge: the altruistic dimension.

Sangharakshita gave a seminal talk in 1999 called 'Looking Ahead A Little Way' (lecture 194) in which he talks about what Order Members can offer the world and where the Order is placed in history.

You could also listen or read his series of talks on 'Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow' which can be found on [freebuddhistaudio.com](http://freebuddhistaudio.com)

Subhuti has written a paper called 'The Dharma Revolution and The New Society' in which he talks about the positive social revolution that Buddhism can encourage. You can download this at [subhuti.info](http://subhuti.info)

## The Altruistic Dimension of Going for Refuge and Joining the Order

(Edited by Vajrasakhi from a talks given by the team)

### **A context for our practice**

A question we may have asked ourselves is does Going for Refuge imply joining an Order? And why this Order? The answer lies in the growing sense that we can't Go for Refuge in isolation because we don't exist in isolation from one another.

### **Q: Why did we ask to join the Order, and has this changed?**

Sangharakshita in his 'History of my Going for Refuge', makes the point that we do not Go for Refuge without reference to others, we practise in three contexts, what he calls three directions or perspectives. These are the context of the higher evolution of the individual, the social or communal context, and the context of all beings or cosmic Going for Refuge. We need to express our Going for Refuge in all of those contexts as it becomes effective, and as Order members we describe this as having duties in each of those three directions. This is saying that our spiritual life is not just a private act, it takes place within different networks of relationships.

Often we pay more attention to one aspect of our relationship to the world than others. For example, we might be very sincere in our own practice and in our desire to help all beings, but find it more difficult to come into relationship with our friends, colleagues and family.

It might be interesting to look at the question of why join the Order from the opposite angle - given that the Order exists, why would we not join it? In fact joining an aspiring spiritual community is an expression, a living out of our Going for Refuge.

In the following three sections of this article I will outline the three duties of an Order member and relate them to Dhardo Rimpoche's motto and the 4 lines of acceptance.

<b>Context of Going for Refuge</b>	Higher Evolutionary	Social or Communal	Cosmic
<b>Duty of an Order Member</b>	To your own spiritual practice... to deepen your Going for Refuge	To the Order... to inspire each other's Going for Refuge	To the world...to benefit the Going for Refuge of all beings
<b>Lines of acceptance in the Public Ordination Ceremony</b>	'For the attainment of Enlightenment...'	'With loyalty to my teachers...' 'In harmony with friends and companions...'	'For the benefit of all beings...'
<b>Symbolised by...</b>	The spiral path	Bodhicitta Third order of consciousness Sanghakaya	Bodhisattva Ideal
<b>Dhardo Rimpoche's motto</b>	Cherish the Doctrine	Live United	Radiate Love
<b>Avalokitesvara</b>	Cintamani held to the heart	United body	1000 arms

## The duty to our own spiritual practice

The first duty of an Order member is to continue to take our practice deeper, to make our Going for Refuge real. In 'Looking Ahead a Little Way' Sangharakshita defines effective Going for Refuge as 'making a whole-hearted effort to achieve real Going for Refuge'. If we are effectively Going for Refuge, we are moving towards real Going for Refuge. Going for Refuge is not a static state, so to feel we are standing still is in fact to be slipping back. Effective Going for Refuge is having a sense of our Going for Refuge as being limitless, and giving ourselves to that process indefinitely.

In Sangharakshita's terms, we Go for Refuge in the context of the 'higher evolution'. This is the state we find ourselves in when consciousness has become self aware. We can make choices in our life, and we choose skilful rather than unskilful actions, creative rather than reactive mental states. We have a sense of becoming more fully what we could be. In 'Living

Wisely' Sangharakshita talks about having to expand our sense of self to include others. This is a self-transcendence, going beyond self-clinging, and our Going for Refuge involves this movement beyond ourselves.

This is what is witnessed by your Private Preceptor as you become ready to join the Order. In the private ordination ceremony she ritually witnesses your commitment to the path and your readiness to take on the 10 precepts as ordination vows. She can witness this because she has seen you working effectively on yourself.

In the public ordination we say: 'for the attainment of Enlightenment, I accept this ordination' to signify that we are taking on this duty. This is one of the four Lines of Acceptance which we recite in the public ceremony, as part of joining the Order.

How can we understand this for ourselves? When we feel we are settling down, we can ask ourselves the question 'have I gone far enough?' We keep the goal of insight into the nature of reality in mind, and look for our own dynamic or innovative edge in our practice, where our practice is most alive. This means having a real devotion to your potential. Dharmo Rimpoché expressed this in his motto: 'Cherish the doctrine'.

For some of us the idea of a goal can be seen as another way to be lacking or not good enough. We could use the traditional image of growth - growing towards our potential or unfolding into our true magnificence, perfuming the world in our own way, like an opening lotus.

### **Q: Do we prefer the idea of a goal or of growing in our spiritual life?**

We can't force that growth by an effort of will, we have to set up the conditions. The first duty means using the conditions available to help us grow. The Ordination process has been set up to provide conditions in which we can deepen our Going for Refuge: the retreats at Tiratana-loka, Going for Refuge groups, kalyana mitras (formal and informal), meditation retreats. We can use these to nourish us, and take us further. In the Order we have Chapters, Order Events, Shabda and our preceptors.

### **The duty to the Order**

The second duty is to the Order itself, the sangha of all Order members and Mitras. Sangharakshita calls this the social or communal context of our spiritual lives. These are the people who know us well enough to help us change. We may feel that there are others who know us better than our sangha friends, our family or work colleagues for instance. But they will not share our spiritual practice, our understanding of ethics or our vision of Enlightenment as the potential for human life. Sangharakshita describes spiritual friendship as 'a vital mutual responsiveness on the basis of a common ideal and principle'<sup>67</sup>.

As we begin to experience the value of spiritual friendship we realise we can't grow and develop spiritually in isolation and why would we want to? It's only when we realise that at last we can share what is most precious to us that it begins to make sense to join with others. Dharmo Rimpoché expressed this in his motto: 'Live United' and in the public

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<sup>67</sup> Sangharakshita, *Going For Refuge*, 1966



ceremony we say: 'With loyalty to my teachers I accept this Ordination; In harmony with friends and companions, I accept this Ordination'. By saying this we are expressing our commitment to the second duty of an Order member.

The kind of 'harmony' we mean here is a resonance, like an orchestra all playing different instruments but together creating a higher music, a deeper harmony. The word comes from Latin 'to join together'. We are joining together to create a higher beauty. In 'What is the Sangha', Sangharakshita describes this as True Individuals coming together to create the Spiritual Community.

### **Q: How have my spiritual friends helped me grow? How have I helped them?**

In the Spiritual Community we feel supported to be more of an individual, not less. This can feel, at times, challenging. We may feel more comfortable fitting in with the group. We may even notice feeling threatened by our spiritual friendships: we are helping each other to see our blind spots and sometimes this feedback is not easy to hear. We will need to feel confident in ourselves and be able to trust that our friends are acting from the love mode in order to develop this level of harmony.

Being with people who share our aspirations means we can reveal ourselves fully and share sensitive parts of ourselves. In doing so, we inspire each other. Sangharakshita talks of Ordination not as transmission or initiation, but as communication, it's as if someone's Going for Refuge is sparking off your Going for Refuge. 'You hold your flame close to somebody and they ignite, they are sparked off, they are set on fire'<sup>68</sup>.

When we have an intensive interaction based on a common purpose something happens - a higher consciousness is reached, that none of us can get to on our own. For instance a strong mitra study group can leave you energised despite being tired when you arrive, 'People explore together a spiritual dimension which neither could have explored on their own. Of course, beyond a certain point there is no question really of any sort of mutual relationship at all. In the process of communication and Going for Refuge to the Sangha, a dimension is eventually reached in which distinctions between the people involved no longer have any meaning – such distinctions have been transcended.'<sup>69</sup>

It's important to make sure we are in conditions where we have some of that intensive interaction based on common purpose. For instance teams, communities, projects at your Centres, retreats, Going for Refuge groups etc. In all those we are trying to bring something into being that is beyond us as separate entities. We can begin to build a depth of spiritual friendship that will enable us to go beyond our limited view of ourselves as fixed and separate.

This vision of the creative potential of spiritual friendship is one of the distinctive emphasis of Triratna. But we have examples of it throughout Buddhist history. The Buddha described himself practising intensely with his disciples lifetime after lifetime. In these stories Ananda, Sariputta, Moggallana and the Buddha are all reborn again and again together, practising in different ways together. In the Mahayana, the creative potential of spiritual friendship is

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<sup>68</sup> Tantric Path Mitrata 4

<sup>69</sup> Sangharakshita, *Going for Refuge*, 1966

expressed as the Bodhicitta. Sangharakshita has said that practising within the Order provides good conditions for the Bodhicitta to arise because we are living out our Going for Refuge in relationship with each other.

Friendship and working with the spiritual community can, at times, be challenging. We may find it easy to trust peers but not people who seem further along the path. Or we might find ourselves naturally gravitating to friendships with people who seem like mentors, but feel competitive with other mitras.

If we tend to be wary of authority it might be helpful to put ourselves in places where we are working alongside Order members who we see as having more power or status than us. If we are anxious around peers then we might start to challenge ourselves by sharing life stories with our Going for Refuge group, or taking your mitra study group on a weekend retreat somewhere, without the 'leader'.

**Q: How can we work more effectively with our friends to benefit others? Have you had an experience of any challenges in this area and how you have worked with them?**

The Order is not an umbrella organisation, in which we all practice in different ways. In the ritual of Ordination we commit ourselves to following Sangharakshita's particular lineage, a shared language and body of teachings, practices and institutions. This is what allows a depth of communication between us, enabling us to help each other grow and develop spiritually. The Order is basically a network of friendships, and it is this depth of friendship that is the practice for us as Order members. Sangharakshita said that the task of the spiritual life is to find the emotional equivalents of our intellectual understanding of the Dharma. He says that friendship is this emotional equivalent to the intellectual understanding of anattā, or lack of fixed self.

The study groups at Tiratana, at their best, can be an experience of meeting as a proto-chapter. We are seeing each other as spiritual friends, listening deeply to each other and finding ways to help each other grow by offering our care and inspiration. In this way we are practising being part of a spiritual community, weaving ourselves into this precious Order.

## **The duty to the world**

The third duty of an Order member is our duty to the world. Dharma Rimpoche's motto tells us that we should 'radiate love'. It is reflected in Public Ordination when we accept Ordination 'for the sake of all beings.'

This comes out of a vision of human existence as one where we are all essentially growing. The Buddha, when he surveyed the world on Brahma Sahampati's request, had a vision of lotuses: a vision of how all beings grow from the mud of samsara towards the light. We all have the urge to grow, 'an inbuilt tendency to transcend ourselves'<sup>70</sup>.

Sangharakshita has described this as a cosmic Going for Refuge: he sees it as a whole evolutionary process from simple physical states up to Enlightenment, all is growing, moving

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<sup>70</sup> Sangharakshita, *History of My Going for Refuge*.

higher. In 'The History of my Going for Refuge' Sangharakshita says Going for Refuge is 'the key to the mystery of existence.'

In a way our individual Going for Refuge is a reflection or manifestation of this cosmic trend of Going for Refuge. This is symbolised by being surrounded by others in the prostration practice. The altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge means that you want to aid that cosmic process, without being concerned about who does it.

### **Q: Have we ever felt that urge as a force in our own lives?**

As we reach out to help others we take part in that process of growth, helping ourselves and others. This may start out in small ways, for instance as we are more ethical in our family we find they respond positively. Or talking to newcomers at a class we can find ourselves inspired and uplifted by sharing thoughts about our spiritual path.

In the Itivuttaka, the Buddha tells us "There are these two kinds of gifts: a gift of material things and a gift of the Dhamma. Of the two, this is supreme: a gift of the Dhamma."<sup>71</sup> It may be helpful to think of what we can give the world in terms of the *saṃgrahavastus*, the traditional list of four ways to create Sangha: by generosity, kind speech, meaningful and beneficial activity and treating others as yourself.

### **Q: How do we experience the altruistic dimension of our Going For Refuge? How can we aid universal Enlightenment?**

### **Q: Do you find one of these three duties more attractive? Is one less attractive?**

## **Why have an Order?**

These three duties define what it means to be an Order member, and help us clarify why we have an Order at all. It can seem obvious that once we are interested in Buddhism we will want to practise it for ourselves and so we undertake the first duty. When we actually experience the effect of having committed spiritual friendships, we begin to be able to imagine the creative potential of the second duty, the duty to the Order. Then we want to share our understanding and practice with other people, to help them benefit from what we have benefitted from, and so we take on the third duty, reaching out to the world. We realise we are more effective at helping others if we do so as a spiritual community. Our practice radiates out from ourselves, the Order, to all beings.

## **The Bodhicitta**

The arising of Bodhicitta is the traditional term for what Sangharakshita calls the altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge. It is not a separate concept or higher practice. The Bodhicitta cannot be someone's personal possession or attainment, it is the point where we actually stop identifying as a separate practitioner and allow a bigger process to work itself out through us. Sangharakshita suggests that it is most likely to arise in the collective practice of the spiritual community.

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<sup>71</sup> Itivuttaka 100

“If the Order is spiritually united, if it is in harmony, then a truly wonderful thing will happen. The Order then will be the locus for the manifestation of the Bodhicitta.”<sup>72</sup>

It is important to keep the altruistic dimension of our Going for Refuge in mind at every level of our spiritual career. One of the dangers of Buddhism is that we can be influenced by the attitude of individualistic consumerism fostered by global capitalism. This means we treat Buddhism as another self-help method to make our lives easier, rather than benefit society at large. Sangharakshita suggests that “If we are not careful, if we give too much value to what I call the psychological and not enough to the ethical, or the other-regarding, the spiritual life becomes a sort of refined experience just for your own sake. You might even become resentful of other people intervening and interfering with your enjoyment of, or devotion to, these refined experiences.” When asked where that will eventually lead, Sangharakshita replied, “It doesn’t lead anywhere, except to this increasingly refined pseudo-spiritual aestheticism.”<sup>73</sup>

In an article called: ‘The Buddha and the Future of His Religion’, Dr Ambedkar criticised the Bhikkhu Sangha as ‘a huge army of idlers’ spending time in ‘meditation and idleness’. He said that Buddhists ‘Must realize that the duty of a Buddhist is not merely to be a good Buddhist, his duty is to spread Buddhism. They must believe that to spread Buddhism is to serve mankind.’<sup>74</sup>

## **Q: How does Buddhism serve mankind?**

### **Levels of the Altruistic Dimension**

Just as our Going for Refuge will change at the different levels of our spiritual lives, the altruistic dimension is expressed in different ways at different levels of Going for Refuge:

At the ‘cultural’ level we may have an aspiration to be kind and to help others, particularly friends and family members. We may be drawn to altruistic jobs where we are helping others and alleviating suffering. However, we may feel under pressure by the wider society not to be ‘selfish’ in an unhelpful way that excludes our own needs and breeds resentment. We may need to learn to see our own needs as part of the situation and ask for them to be met. For many of us our self worth is based on what we can give. It may take time to learn to value our own truth.

At the ‘provisional’ level we learn to act skilfully and with empathy, at least in some situations. We may become a vegetarian, and help out at our local Buddhist Centre. We might be able to work more creatively with our family relationships, partner or with difficult colleagues. We can start to be kinder to ourselves, noticing harsh or critical internal stories, or patterns of over responsibility. We might begin to show our vulnerabilities to our friends.

An ‘effective’ altruistic dimension to our Going for Refuge entails a wholehearted commitment to setting up the conditions for the arising of the Bodhicitta. This means taking the *pāramitās*, and our ethics, seriously in all areas of our lives, using confession and asking for help with blind spots or deeply held views and habits. We commit to creating and working

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<sup>72</sup> Sangharakshita, *Looking Ahead a Little Way*, 1999

<sup>73</sup> Sangharakshita, *Mind in Buddhist Psychology seminar*, Padmaloka 1976

<sup>74</sup> Dr Ambedkars, *Buddha and the Future of His Religion*

with the spiritual friendships that form the Order, across differences of class or culture etc. We prioritise dealing with conflicts within the Order as a matter of urgency. And we commit to working with other Order members to spread the Dharma in whatever ways we can.

### **Q: Are we drawn to the Bodhisattva path and why?**

The shift from provisional to effective altruism could also be seen as enabling empathy to become wisdom. Empathy starts as an awareness of both 'self' to 'other' and how we all have similar needs and wants, hopes and fears. We try to see beings as they are in themselves, and see what their needs are, rather than constantly looking to see how they can fulfil our needs. This is the essential revolution called for by the Bodhisattva Vow, but as we engage effectively with spiritual death there is a softening of the sense of boundaries between oneself and others. We see that there is only impermanence, a flow of becoming and passing away, conditioned arising. This has the effect of being able to practise for others in the same way as practising for myself, and vice versa. There is no ultimate difference between 'self' and 'other'.

### **Q: How have we experienced our growing empathy for others?**

'Real' altruism means we act from this transcendental wisdom. There is no 'I' who acts and no 'others' to act for. No 'my' Going for Refuge as opposed to 'yours'. Just a natural, spontaneous flow of Compassion. The paradox is that we 'vow to save all beings' but there is no-one to save them and no-one to save. We 'save' them from thinking that they have an unchanging self. This can be seen when a "non-egoistic stream of spiritual energy, and perhaps even consciousness, has begun to take over"<sup>75</sup>.

## **The Order as Avalokiteshvara**

When a number of us act together from a level of effective Going for Refuge, we set up the conditions to become that stream of spiritual energy. In fact we will become Avalokiteshvara in the world. This is the level of absolute Going for Refuge, when the Order will actually become the three Refuges.

This is what people need: real spiritual friendships they can rely on. If we practise wholeheartedly, acknowledging our difficulties and failings without despondency and our successes without pride or specialness, we will be able to communicate the Dharma from a real, lived, perspective, and embody the path to some degree at least.

Ideally we embody the Sangha of people acting together who are 'really', in Sangharakshita's sense, Going for Refuge. However, we are not there yet. It can be helpful to see that we Go for Refuge with the Order, and not to the Order. The Order is manifestly not perfect, but perhaps it is helpful to think that we are joining the Order for what it will be, as well as what it is. It will only become that if we put in the work now, deepening our Going for Refuge in every context of our lives.

When we look at the Order in this way we can see the three duties symbolised in the representation of the thousand armed, eleven headed Avalokiteshvara. Our duty to our own

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<sup>75</sup> Sangharakshita, *Looking Ahead A Little Way*, 1999

practice is represented by the wish fulfilling Jewel, the Cintamani, held at his heart. The body of Avalokiteshvara represents our shared practice as an order, the second duty. And the third duty - to the world - is represented by the thousand arms which reach out, each holding different implements to help beings, and each with a wisdom eye in the palm of the hand.

This image of Avalokiteshvara suggests something that is beautiful, radiant, a unity of inner and outer activity. Sangharakshita encourages us to see Enlightenment in aesthetic, rather than purely ethical terms. We practise the Dharma, we Go for Refuge, because it is beautiful, not just because it is good. It is not just a great idea to make you a good person, it is an expression of the fundamental longing of the whole of existence. This is the longing to transcend our limited and confined experience of life, both our own and others'. This is what Sangharakshita means by saying that Going for Refuge is the 'Key to the mystery of existence'. To express this in our lives and to help others express it, is the meaning of existence itself:

'Not for our own sake, not even for the sake of others should we seek to attain the Divine, but simply and solely for its own irresistible sake'<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> Sangharakshita, Survey of Buddhism, 1.15