

CHAPTER 14

The Characteristics of the Refuges

XIV. CHAPTER 14: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE [THREE] REFUGES

A. DISTINCTIONS REGARDING MATERIAL GIVING VERSUS DHARMA GIVING

The giving of material wealth and the giving of Dharma were already explained above. Now, we shall make further distinctions in this regard:

The “white-robed ones,” the householders,²⁰⁶ should extensively practice the giving of material wealth. The dharmas associated with the rest of the good practices shall now be explained as well.

1. LAITY EXCEL AT MATERIAL GIVING & MONASTICS EXCEL AT DHARMA GIVING

Of these two types of giving, the householder should practice the giving of material wealth. Those who have left the home life should practice the giving of Dharma. Why is this? It is because, in the giving of Dharma, the layperson is unable to match those who have left the home life. This is because those who listen to and accept the Dharma have only shallow and scant faith in a householder’s [ability to teach Dharma].

2. MONASTICS ARE BETTER TRAINED TO PRACTICE DHARMA GIVING

Moreover, whereas the householders possess greater resources of material wealth, it is the monastics who have studied, recited, and deeply understood the dharmas of the sutras to the point that, in the midst of assemblies, they are fearless in explaining them for others. The householders are unable to match them in this. Additionally, they do not match the monastics’ ability to inspire a reverential frame of mind in the listener. Also, in instances where one might wish, through expounding the Dharma, to overcome [doubts in] the minds of others, [the householders] are unable to match the monastics. This is as described [in this verse]:

If one first cultivates the Dharma oneself
and then later engages in the teaching of others.
Then and only then can one utter these words:
“You should accord with what I myself practice.”

This is an endeavor that is fitting for those who have left the home life. It is not something that the householder carries out in practice. It is also said that:

If one personally practices what is not good,
how can one influence others to engage in goodness?

If one personally fails to attain quiescence,
how can one cause others to attain quiescence?

Hence, if one personally practices goodness,
one can influence others to practice goodness.

If one personally attains quiescence,
one can cause others to attain quiescence.

Good dharmas and quiescence are matters that should be practiced by those who have left the home life. Also, monastics have a superior ability to inspire reverence in those who listen to the Dharma.

3. THE HAZARDS TO MONASTICS OF DEVOTION TO MATERIAL GIVING

Furthermore, if those who have left the home life practice the giving of material wealth, then this prevents their own development of the other forms of goodness. They are also thus prevented from practicing renunciation in a forest hermitage where they dwell off in a wilderness forest or marshland. If those who have left the home life take pleasure in the giving of material wealth, that will completely interfere with their pursuit of such cultivation.

It is the nature of these sorts of endeavors that, if one practices the giving of material wealth, one must certainly go into the villages and involve oneself in the endeavors of the layperson. In such instances, there will be much talk.²⁰⁷

If one does not take up such work, then there will be no means by which one can obtain such material wealth. If one is involved in coming and going from the villages, then one will be exposed to seeing and hearing the sights and sounds therein. Thus one's sense faculties will become difficult to restrain and one will become prone to give rise to the three poisons.²⁰⁸

Moreover, one's mind will become only shallowly engaged in the practice of moral virtue, patience, vigor, *dhyāna* absorption, and wisdom.²⁰⁹

Also, when one takes up the endeavors of the laity, defilements arise in relation to offerings and support that entail the production of afflictions such as craving, anger, miserliness, and jealousy. It is solely by resort to the power of contemplative practice that one is able to restrain such mental inclinations. [Absent the power of such contemplative practice], those who are weak may fail to restrain themselves and may then go so far as to encounter death itself or a painful calamity comparable to death.

“Death” refers here to becoming so covetously attached to the objects of the five types of desire that one relinquishes the moral precepts and returns to the lay life. Or one may find one is even able to allow oneself to transgress the moral precepts and incur numerous grave offenses. This is what is meant by “encountering a painful calamity comparable to death.”²¹⁰

It is for these reasons that one praises the giving of Dharma as the province of those who have left the home life while praising the giving of material wealth as the province of the householder. This being so, there are extensive discussions of the householder bodhisattva’s practice of giving material wealth.

B. TAKING REFUGE IN THE THREE JEWELS

The other sorts of good conduct should now be discussed. The bodhisattva who has brought forth the resolve [to attain buddhahood] should first take refuge in the Buddha, take refuge in the Dharma, and take refuge in the Sangha. The merit that is gained from taking the Three Refuges should then all be dedicated to the realization of *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*. Additionally:

Taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha is a matter that the bodhisattva should comprehend.

The bodhisattva should understand well and in accordance with reality this matter of taking refuge in the Buddha, taking refuge in the Dharma, and taking refuge in the Sangha.

1. Q: WHAT IS MEANT BY TAKING REFUGE IN THE BUDDHA?

Question: What is meant by taking refuge in the Buddha?

2. A: THE PRIMARY ASPECTS OF TAKING REFUGE IN THE BUDDHA

Response:

Do not relinquish the resolve to attain bodhi,
do not damage the Dharma that one has received,
do not abandon the mind of great compassion,
and do not covet other vehicles [to liberation].

If one acts in this fashion, then this is what is meant by taking refuge in the Buddha in accordance with reality.

“The resolve to attain bodhi” refers to bringing forth the determination to seek buddhahood without ever desisting from it, without ever letting it cease, and without ever relinquishing this determination.

As for “do not damage the Dharma that one has received,” this refers to the fact that the bodhisattvas have each taken on the practice of the moral precepts as components of the dharmas of goodness

that they delight in. Consequently, there are circumstances where one particular practice should be taken up whereas yet another practice should be avoided. Thus, if a particular practice corresponds to any of the *pāramitās*, to any of the four bases of meritorious qualities,²¹¹ or to any of the many other different sorts of good dharmas such as these, for the sake of benefiting beings, one accepts and upholds it, cultivates it, and does not allow it to deteriorate or to become deficient.

As for “the mind of great compassion,” one wishes to liberate beings who are afflicted by suffering. In order to pursue the attainment of buddhahood, even in a dream, one never abandons the great compassion.

As for “do not covet other vehicles [to liberation],” because one possesses a deep resolute faith in the path to buddhahood, one does seek to take up the vehicles of *śrāvaka* disciples or *pratyekabuddhas*.

One should realize that it is through the possession of dharmas such as these that one “takes refuge in the Buddha in accordance with reality.”

3. Q: WHAT IS MEANT BY TAKING REFUGE IN THE DHARMA?

Question: What is meant by taking refuge in the Dharma?

4. A: THE PRIMARY ASPECTS OF TAKING REFUGE IN THE DHARMA

Response:

Draw close to those who speak the Dharma.

Single-mindedly listen to and accept the Dharma.

Be mindful of it, uphold it, and then expound upon it.

This is what is meant by taking refuge in the Dharma.

“Those who speak the Dharma” refers to those who explain, set forth, and proclaim the profound Dharma of the Buddha, offering instruction as to what is good and what is evil while also cutting away all one’s doubts. One always repeatedly draws near to them, going forth to wherever they may dwell, making offerings and displaying reverential respect as one single-mindedly listens to and accepts [the Dharma]. One uses the power of memory to retain it and does not forget it. One reflects upon it, assesses it, and accords with its import.

Afterward, one expounds upon it for others, doing so in a manner that accords with the way one has been led to understand it. Then one dedicates the merit arising from this gift of Dharma to the attainment of buddhahood. This is what is meant by “taking refuge in the Dharma.”

5. Q: WHAT IS MEANT BY TAKING REFUGE IN THE SANGHA?

Question: What is meant by taking refuge in the Sangha?

6. A: THE PRIMARY ASPECTS OF TAKING REFUGE IN THE SANGHA

Response:

In the case of *śrāvaka* disciple practitioners who have not yet entered the Dharma position,²¹² influence them to bring forth the unsurpassable resolve by which they are caused to acquire the ten powers of a buddha.

One first uses the giving of material resources to attract them and afterward resorts to the giving of Dharma.

One maintains deep faith in the Sangha that attains four fruitions²¹³ and does not discriminate among members of that noble community.

One may strive to gain the *śrāvaka* disciples' meritorious qualities while still not opting for realization of their liberation.

This is the meaning of taking refuge in the Sangha.

Moreover, one should maintain mindfulness of three matters.²¹⁴

"*Śrāvaka* disciple practitioners" refers to those who achieve success in the Śrāvaka Disciple Vehicle. "Who have not yet entered the Dharma position" refers to those who have not yet reached the stage of absolute irreversibility on the *śrāvaka* disciple path. One may still influence such persons to bring forth the resolve to attain buddhahood so that they will then be able to acquire the ten powers.

In the case of those who have already entered the Dharma position, one can never influence them to bring forth the unsurpassable resolve. Even supposing that some of these were to be caused to bring forth such an aspiration, they would still not succeed [in bringing it to realization].

This is as stated by the venerable Subhūti in the [*Mahā*] *prajñāpāramitā* [*Sūtra*] where he said, "Those who have already entered the "right Dharma position" are unable to bring forth the unsurpassable resolve. Why is this the case? Such persons have already created an obstacle to further transmigration in *saṃsāra*."²¹⁵ Thus they will never again come and go within *saṃsāra*.

[To influence those who have not yet entered the Dharma position] "to bring forth the unsurpassable resolve," "one first uses the giving of material resources." "To attract them," refers to bestowing the requisites of robes, food-and-drink, bedding, and medicine to attract them.

In the case of those who have left the home life, one attracts them by giving them robes, food-and-drink, bedding, medicines, and various incenses including unguent incenses. As for householders, one uses means of attraction that cause them to feel a sense of close friendship through which they tend to trust and accept one's words. Afterward,

one engages in Dharma giving that causes them to gain the fruits of bringing forth the unsurpassable resolve.

"Sangha" refers to those who have gained the four preliminary stages as well as those who have actually attained the four corresponding fruits [of the path].

"Community" refers to those who have taken on the characteristic features of the monastic in accordance with the Buddha's Dharma. They completely uphold the moral precepts, yet may not have attained the fruits [of the path] or the corresponding preliminary stages. One does not make discriminating distinctions among members of the Sangha such as these.

It is because they have abandoned the bondage of sensual desire that they are known as "noble" members of the Sangha. They maintain resolute belief in emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness while still not indulging in conceptual elaboration rooted in the making of discriminating distinctions. When one relies on members of the Sangha of this sort, this is what is meant by "taking refuge in the Sangha."

As for "One may strive to gain the meritorious qualities of the *śrāvaka* disciples while still not opting for realization of their liberation," one knows that these members of the Sangha are accomplished in the upholding of the moral precepts, that they are accomplished in the *dhyāna* absorptions, that they are accomplished in wisdom, that they are accomplished in liberation, that they are accomplished in the knowledge and vision of liberation, that they possess the three clear knowledges and six superknowledges, that their minds have gained sovereign mastery, that they possess great awe-inspiring qualities, and that that they have forsaken the pleasures of the world and have escaped Māra's realms.²¹⁶

One knows that they do not experience joy due to attaining profit, fine reputation, praise, or pleasure and that they do not experience distress due to loss, disrepute, derision, or pain.²¹⁷ One knows they always practice six kinds of equanimity²¹⁸ and knows that they have gained the eight liberations in accordance with the Buddha's instructions.

One knows that there are those who practice the path, that there are those who have achieved liberation, that there are those who practice the singular path, that they have demolished the two kinds of afflictions,²¹⁹ that they well understand the three realms of existence, that they have a well-developed penetrating understanding of the four truths, that they have thoroughly done away with the five hindrances,²²⁰ that they have come to peacefully abide in the six dharmas of harmony and respect, that they have become accomplished in seven dharmas of non-retreat,²²¹ that they possess the eight realizations of great men,

that they have abandoned the nine types of fetters, and that they have gained the ten powers of the *śrāvaka* disciples.

It is those who have perfected meritorious qualities such as these who are referred to as the Buddha's *śrāvaka* disciple sangha. One may strive to acquire meritorious qualities such as these even as one still does not seek to attain their type of liberation. Why? This is because one maintains deep-seated aspirations and resolute belief²²² in the unimpeded liberation of the Buddha.

This [preceding discussion explains] what is meant by “taking refuge in the Sangha.”

Then again, if on hearing the passages, sentences and words of the Dharma, one immediately brings to mind the dharma of the true character [of dharmas],²²³ this is what is meant by “taking refuge in the Dharma.”

If upon seeing a member of the *śrāvaka*-disciple sangha, one immediately brings to mind the community of all bodhisattvas who have brought forth the resolve to attain bodhi, this is what is meant by “taking refuge in the Sangha.”

If on viewing an image of the Buddha, one immediately becomes mindful of the true Buddha, this is what is meant by “taking refuge in the Buddha.”²²⁴

7. THE MEANING OF MINDFULNESS OF THE BUDDHA, DHARMA, AND SANGHA

a. THE MEANING OF MINDFULNESS OF THE BUDDHA

1) Q: WHAT IS MEANT BY “MINDFULNESS OF THE TRUE BUDDHA”?

Question: What is meant by “mindfulness of the true Buddha”?

2) A: “MINDFULNESS OF THE TRUE BUDDHA” AS SET FORTH IN A SUTRA

Response: This corresponds to the discussion of the meaning of the mindfulness-of-the-Buddha *samādhi* as found in the *Akṣayamati Bodhisattva Sutra* wherein it states:²²⁵

As for “mindfulness of the true Buddha,” it is not based on physical form, is not based on characteristic signs, is not based on birth, is not based on caste,²²⁶ is not based on clan, is not based on the past, future, or present, and is not based on the five aggregates, twelve sense bases, or eighteen sense realms.

It is not based on seeing, hearing, sensing, or cognizing,²²⁷ is not based on the mind or mind consciousness, is not based in practice associated with conceptual elaboration, is not based on production, extinction, or abiding, is not based on either grasping or relinquishing, is not based on bearing in mind discriminating distinctions, is not based on dharma characteristics, is not based on individual characteristics, is not based on a unitary characteristic, and is not based on differentiating characteristics.

It is not based on the mental factors associated with the mind's cognition of objective phenomena,²²⁸ is not based on what is either inward or outward, is not based on any seizing on characteristics by either primary ideation (*vitarka*), or mental discursion (*vicāra*), is not based on either what is taken in or what is produced, is not based on physical appearances, is not based on any aspects of deportment that one might cultivate, is not based on moral precepts, *dhyāna* absorption, wisdom, liberation, or the knowledge and vision of liberation, and is not based on the ten powers, four fearlessnesses, or any other dharmas of the Buddha.

As for "mindfulness of the Buddha that accords with reality," it is immeasurable, is inconceivable, has no practice, has no knowing, has no self or anything belonging to a self, has no recollection, and has nothing it bears in mind. It does not engage in discriminations regarding the five aggregates, twelve sense bases, or eighteen sense realms. It has no shape, is unobstructed, and has no initiation, no abiding, and no non-abiding. It does not abide in forms, and does not abide in feelings, perceptions, formative factors, or consciousness.

It does not abide in the eye or visual forms and does not abide in eye consciousness. It does not abide in the ear or sounds and does not abide in ear consciousness. It does not abide in the nose or fragrances and does not abide in olfactory consciousness. It does not abide in the tongue or flavors and does not abide in gustatory consciousness. It does not abide in the body or touchables and does not abide in tactile consciousness. It does not abide in the mind faculty or dharmas and does not abide in mind consciousness.

It does not abide in any objective conditions. It does not give rise to any characteristic signs. It does not involve the production of any movement of mind, of any recollective thought, of any discriminations, or of any other such phenomena. Nor does it involve the production of any seeing, hearing, sensing, or cognition.

It accords in its practice with all the characteristic features of right liberation. It does not involve any continuity of thought but does involve the cessation of all mental discriminations. It demolishes all forms of affection and anger.

It confutes (lit. "ruins") all normative characteristics of causality. It does away with [conceptions of what is temporally] past, future, or intermediate. It perceives with utter clarity the nonexistence of any [duality of] object and subject.

Because it is motionless, it is free of [any attraction to] joyfulness. Because it declines to indulge the delectable, it is free of [any attraction to] bliss.²²⁹

Because its fundamental character is that of quiescence, it remains free of the heat [of mental agitation].

Because the mind has no endeavors in which it is involved, it is liberated.

Because appearances are devoid of any existent form, there is no body. Because one does not indulge them, there are no feelings. Because there are no perceptions, there are no fetters. Because there are no actions, there is nothing that one does. Because there is no knowing, there is no consciousness.²³⁰

Because there is no grasping, there is no engagement in actions. Because there is no relinquishing, it is not the case that one does not act.

Because there is no dwelling [in any dharma], there is no abiding. Because it is empty [of inherent existence], there is no coming. Because there is no arising, there is no departing.

Because one does not covet, does not become attached to, does not seize upon, does not indulge, does not “ignite,” and does not extinguish any recollective thought, any mental dharmas or any other sort of dharmas, from the very beginning on forward to the present, there has never been any production [of dharmas] nor have there ever been any marks of their production. They are all entirely subsumed within the nature of dharmas that extends beyond the path [defined by the duality of] the eye, visual forms, and [their intervening] empty space.

Characteristics such as these define what is meant by “true mindfulness of the Buddha.”

b. THE MEANING OF “MINDFULNESS OF THE DHARMA”

Also, as for mindfulness of the Dharma, the Dharma of the Buddha is well spoken. One gains results from it in this very life. [Its benefits] are not limited to some fixed time. This is amenable to one’s own contemplation and investigation. It is excellent in its ability to lead one to attainment of the path. It is such that the wise can inwardly realize. It is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end. Its words are good. Its meaning is good. It is completely pure in its goodness and free of any admixture [with anything not good]. It is perfect in its purity.

It is able to cut off covetousness, able to cut off hatred, able to cut off delusion, able to do away with prideful thoughts, able to do away with all [erroneous] views, able to do away with doubt and regret, able to do away with arrogance, and able to do away with all craving.

It breaks [one’s attachment to] whatever one is inclined to take refuge in. It cuts short the path of continuance [in *saṃsāra*]. It puts an end

to craving, leads to the abandonment of sensual desires, and leads to quiescence and nirvāṇa.

Characteristics such as these illustrate what is meant by “mindfulness of the Dharma.” [It is characterized] by emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness. It is unproduced and undestroyed, ultimately quiescent, incomparable, and devoid of any [phenomenal] manifestation. These ideas are just as set forth in the discussion of the meaning of “mindfulness of the Buddha.”²³¹

Additionally, “mindfulness of the Dharma” is of three types. The descriptions from “the Dharma of the Buddha is well spoken” to “it is completely pure in its goodness” are all references to the path. From “it is able to cut off covetousness” to “it leads to quiescence and nirvāṇa” are all references to nirvāṇa. From “emptiness” and so forth on up to “incomparable, and devoid of any [phenomenal] manifestation,” is all a reference to the very essence of the Dharma.

C. THE MEANING OF MINDFULNESS OF THE SANGHA

Also, regarding “mindfulness of the Sangha,” this is as explained earlier in the discussion of the meritorious qualities of the Sangha.

C. A CONCLUDING STATEMENT ON THE THREE REFUGES

In one's mindfulness of these Three Jewels, one develops a definite resolve. When one uses such mindfulness as one strives to attain buddhahood and then takes up the practice of giving, this is what is meant by “taking refuge in the Buddha.”

When one endeavors to preserve and protect the Dharma and thus takes up the practice of giving, this is what is meant by “taking refuge in the Dharma.”

When, based on this practice of giving, one dedicates the merit, resolving that, once one has realized buddhahood, one will bring together a sangha community consisting of both bodhisattvas and *śrāvaka* disciples, this is what is meant by “taking refuge in the Sangha.”