

Introduction To Buddhism Series

Lecture 2 – Three Refuges, Four Reliance Principles, & Three Dharma Seals



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□ A quick review

➤ Topic One : General Introduction

- ➔ Buddhism is an **education**, not a religion or a philosophy.
 - An education on how to recover our wisdom and Buddha nature.
 - An education on how to solve our problems by wisdom – an art of living.
- ➔ The **law of causality** governs everything in the universe, including the universe itself. Buddhas cannot be away from the it, either.
- ➔ All sentient beings possess the **same Buddha nature**.
 - Our Buddha nature is temporarily **lost** due to **delusion**.
 - Our lost Buddha nature can be recovered **only** via **cultivation**.
- ➔ Karma refers to an action and its retribution under the law of causality.
 - Good and bad karmas **do not offset** – prevailing ones function first.
 - Karmas accumulate over time, good or bad, and **do not disappear**.
 - **When bad karma retributions come together, they form disasters.**
- ➔ **Cultivation** means to stop planting the bad seeds and conditions and to begin planting the good seeds and nurturing good conditions, and finally recover our ultimate wisdom and attain Buddha-hood.

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❑ What is a refuge? (Merriam Webster Dictionary)

- A place that provides shelter or protection.
- Something to which one has recourse in difficulty.

❑ What are the Triple Gems? (explained in the *Platform Sutra*)

- Buddha (佛)
 - ➔ Enlightenment (覺) – Awakening.
 - ➔ Culmination of merit and wisdom (Punya 福 and Prajna 慧) (二足尊).
- Dharma (法)
 - ➔ Right (正) – Proper understanding.
 - ➔ The best way to get rid of craving mind (離欲尊).
- Sangha (僧)
 - ➔ Purity and clarity (淨)
 - ➔ The noblest quality of humankind (眾中尊).
- They are within ourselves – the essence of our mind, self-nature.

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□ What does taking refuge in the Buddha mean (皈依佛)?

- Returning to and relying on awakening of our own Buddha nature.
- It is **within ourselves**.
- Eliminating evil and delusive ideas (邪迷不生).
- Reducing desire and finding contentment (少欲知足).
- Eliminating greed (能離財色).
- Buddha nature represents the culmination of **Merit and Wisdom** (Punya and Prajna) (名二足尊—指福慧圓滿).

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□ What does taking refuge in the Dharma mean (皈依法)?

- Returning to and relying on our ability of proper understanding. (正知正見).
- The ability is found **within ourselves**.
- Eliminating wrong views (念念無邪見).
- No egotism, arrogance, craving, & attachments (無人我貢高、貪愛執著).
 - ➔ True equality.
- Be able to accord with true reality.
- Is the best way to get rid of desire. (名離欲尊).

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□ What does taking refuge in the Sangha mean (皈依僧)?

- Sangha represents purity, clarity, and harmony.
- Returning to and relying on the purity and clarity of our mind.
- Purity and clarity are found **within ourselves**.
 - ➔ Patriarch Hui Neng: “Our bodhi nature is fundamentally pure, clear, and tranquil.”
- Not influenced by any daily wearisome affairs, lust & craving (一切塵勞愛欲境界皆不染著).
- Purity and clarity reflects the noblest quality of humankind. (名眾中尊).

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□ What does taking the Three Refuges mean (三皈依)?

- **Accepting** the Triple Gems as the guidance for self-cultivation.
 - ➔ Internally – controlling and adjusting our minds. (內調心性)
 - ➔ Externally – respecting others. (外敬他人)
 - ➔ Eliminating minds that are evil, jealous, flattering and dishonest, egotistical, deceitful, contemptuous, snobbish, fallacious, and arrogant.
(不善心、嫉妒心、嬌慢心、吾我心、誑妄心、輕人心、慢人心、邪見心、貢高心、及一切時中不善之行)
- The Triple Gems guidance arises from **within** ourselves,
- A ceremony is held:
 - ➔ To formally accept the Triple Gems guidance for self-cultivation.
 - ➔ To formally accept Buddha Sakyamuni as your ultimate teacher and formally declare that you are his student and will abide by his teachings.

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□ What does taking the Three Refuges mean (三皈依)? (Cont'd)

- A ceremony is held: (cont'd)
 - ➔ The person who conducts the ceremony will explain the teachings to us.
 - ➔ The ceremony is performed before the Buddha's image.
- The monk or nun conducting the ceremony serves as a **witness** to your acceptance of the Three Refuges.
 - ➔ You are **not** returning to and relying on him/her.
 - ➔ You are returning to your own triple gems within.
- Under the circumstances where there is **truly** no monk or nun available,
 - ➔ A learned precedent can witness for you.
 - ➔ Or, you can even self-witness before the image of a Buddha.
 - ➔ **The certificate shall be signed and issued by member of a Sangha group.**

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❑ Why accept the Four Reliance Principles and where are they recorded? (四依法)

- Requested by the students of the Buddha before his entering Nirvana.
- Provided his students, present and future, with guidelines to authenticate a Dharma teaching not given by the Buddha himself.
- Recorded in the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* as well as in other sutras. (大般涅槃經、大集經等)

❑ What are they?

- Rely on the Dharma, not on the people who expound it.
(依法，不依人)
- Rely on the meaning, not just on the words.
(依義，不依語)
- Rely on the wisdom, not on the conscious and perception.
(依智，不依識)
- Rely on the sutras that lead us to enlightenment, not on those that do not.
(依了義經，不依不了義經)

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□ What does “Rely on the Dharma, not on the people who expound it” mean?

- Dharma represents our self-nature.
 - ➔ Unchanging, neither doing nor not doing.
 - ➔ Neither attaching to nor detaching from anything.
 - ➔ Makes no distinction among anything.
 - ➔ Sees that everything has the same Dharma nature.
 - ➔ **Sutras represent the Dharma – they are what we should base everything on.**
- The individuals can be faulty.
 - ➔ They may be affected by personal opinions of others.
 - ➔ They may even have selfish reasons.
- **Bottom Line – Don't be confused and misled by fame.**
 - ➔ **People who are famous or popular may not always be good or trustworthy teachers.**
 - ➔ **All teachings shall be based on the sutras – recorded Dharma teaching by Buddha Sakyamuni.**

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❑ What does “Rely on the meaning, not just on the words” mean?

- The Buddha used many different ways and terms to explain and help us understand the Dharma.
 - ➔ Our capabilities and conditions to accept Dharma are different.
 - ➔ His teachings demonstrated examples of not attaching to the words being used.
 - ➔ There can be many translations of one sutra.
 - ➔ Buddha also gave us examples of teachings that should not be followed.
- The semantics of the sutras returns to the perfection of Dharma. It is what we want to rely on.
- Nevertheless, we should not misuse or misinterpret the meaning of this reliance.
 - ➔ Changing the sutra’s wording is a **VERY SERIOUS MATTER** and **DEFINITELY NOT ACCEPTABLE** because it does change its meaning.

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❑ What does “Rely on the wisdom, not on the conscious and perception” mean?

➤ Wisdom – Prajna Paramita (般若波羅密多)

➔ Fundamentally pure, clear, and tranquil (菩提自性，本自清淨)

(Patriarch Hui Neng – *The Platform Sutra* 六祖壇經)

➔ Neither conditioned, conditioning, nor attaching to or detaching from any form

➔ No anticipation of anything

➔ **Reflective, therefore, there is no limitation, either space or time; for example, like a perfect mirror.**

➤ Perception or Conscious

➔ **Dwell** on aggregates – Matter (色), Sensation (受), Perception (想), Mental Formation (形), and Consciousness (識).

➔ Severely influenced by conditions, thoughts, and distinctions.

➔ **Bound by knowledge and affliction (klesha).** (所知障、煩惱障)

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□ What does “Rely on the sutras that lead us to enlightenment, not on those that do not” mean?

- Relative to individual’s goals: Shravaka (聲聞), Pratyekabuddha (圓覺), Bodhisattava (菩薩), . . .
- Therefore, at different stages of cultivation, there may be different sutras that can help us advance.
- Master Chin Kung’s explanation: “One is to follow the sutras from which one can benefit immediately.”
- **Ultimately, the teachings recorded in the sutras should lead us to perfect enlightenment – Buddha-hood.**

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□ The Three Dharma Seals (三法印)

- Taught by Buddha in *Agama Sutra* family (雜阿含經)
- Elaborated by patriarchs and masters from Buddha's teaching to form the "seals", for example, Nagarjuna Bodhisattva (龍樹菩薩)
- To authenticate the Dharma teachings not given by the Buddha himself.
- "Seal" represents authenticity.
 - ➔ That means, any Dharma teaching **must** reflect the essence in the Three Dharma Seals before it can be recognized as a correct Dharma teaching.
- What are the three seals, then?
 - ➔ All dharma and their functions are impermanent in nature (諸行無常).
 - ➔ All dharma existence are void of self-existence (諸法無我).
 - ➔ Nirvana is the ultimate moksha (涅槃寂滅) – liberation from all sufferings including samsara.

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□ All dharma and their functions are **impermanent** in nature

(一切行無常)

- Everything is a result of the convergence of the seed and the maturing conditions.
- Converging conditions are ever changing, moment-by-moment
- Therefore, the object is changing, too – no permanency.
- We erroneously think objects can be permanent and hold ourselves to them – causing suffering and self-despair.
- The most severe attachments are to **me** and to **what I have**, causing selfishness manifested in the form of greed, anger, and ignorance, and reflected in our behaviors, body, speech, and mind.
- Buddha taught us to constantly reflect on this fact and depart from sufferings.

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❑ All dharma are **void of self-existence** (一切法無我)

- Objects are mutually dependent or dependently arisen (pratitya samutpada 緣起、緣生); they are **falsely existent**.
- The existence of an object is a phenomenon, a form, or an illusion.
- Within the false existence, there is **NOT** a governing body which
 - ➔ Is permanent
 - ➔ Owns the object
 - ➔ Controls the object
- While in the false existence, the object **does** have its function.

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□ Nirvarna is the ultimate Moksha (涅槃寂滅)

- Moksha (解脫，滅) – ultimate liberation from suffering
- Nirvarna is the ultimate tranquility
 - ➔ Our mind is away from greed, anger, and ignorance.
 - ➔ We no longer commit to body, speech, or mind karmas.
 - ➔ All the causes, conditions, and results that produce sufferings are stopped.
 - ➔ The cyclic dependent arising is thus stopped, so are sufferings.
- Prajna (般若) is recovered
 - ➔ Ultimate wisdom
- Dharmakaya (法身) is recovered
 - ➔ No birth and no death

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□ One Truth Reality Dharma Seal (一實相印)

- Buddha taught us in *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* (大般涅槃經).
- “The core nature has no dichotomy; it is the true reality” (無二之性即是實性)
 - ➔ Every dharma has “body”, “form”, and “function.”
 - ➔ They have the same core – emptiness (Shunyata); it is one, and not two or many.
- Forms do falsely exist when converged seeds and matured conditions continue; **the cores are empty in nature.** (相有體空、緣起性空)
 - ➔ Since the cores are empty, there is no birth, and hence no death.
- **This is the ultimate message Buddha wanted to deliver.**
- **Based on skill-in-means, Buddha taught us thousands of methods to help us understand, recognize, and finally witness the One Truth Reality.**