

Buddhism101: Introduction to Buddhism

Lecture 2 – Three Refuges, Four Reliance Principles, & 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** – stronger 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

Buddhism101: Introduction to Buddhism

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



- ❑ 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 Jewels? (explained in the *Platform Sutra* 六祖壇經)
 - Buddha (佛)
 - ➔ Enlightenment (覺) – Awakening
 - The originally enlightened nature within ourselves
 - ➔ Culmination of merit and wisdom (Punya 福 and Prajna 慧) (二足尊).
 - Dharma (法)
 - ➔ Right (正) – Proper understanding
 - The originally possessed capability of proper understanding within ourselves
 - ➔ The best way to get rid of craving mind (離欲尊).
 - Sangha (僧)
 - ➔ Purity and clarity (淨)
 - The original State of mind being Pure and Clear within ourselves
 - ➔ The noblest quality of humankind (眾中尊).
 - From the image's perspective, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha represent the Triple Jewels

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



□ What are the Triple Jewels? (Cont'd)

- From the innate perspective, Enlightenment, Right or Proper, and Purity & Clarity are within ourselves; they are the essence of our mind, self-nature
 - ➔ In other words, they have never been away from us

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



- ❑ 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) about wealth and sex
 - Buddha nature represents the culmination of **Merit and Wisdom** (Punya and Prajna) (名二足尊 – 指福慧圓滿)

Buddhism101: Introduction to Buddhism

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



❑ 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
- Being able to accord with true reality
- This is the best way to get rid of desire (名離欲尊)

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



❑ 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”
(菩提自性，本自清淨。)
- 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 (眾中尊).

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



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

➤ **Accepting** the Triple Jewels as the guidance for self-cultivation

➔ Internally – controlling and adjusting our minds (內調心性)

➔ Externally – respecting others (外敬他人)

➔ Eliminating the 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-Jewel guidance arises from **within** ourselves,

➤ A ceremony is held:

➔ To formally accept the Triple-Jewel 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

➔ The person who conducts the ceremony will explain the teachings to us

➔ The ceremony is performed before the Buddha's image

➤ Normally, a monk or nun conducts the ceremony and serves as the formal **witness** to your acceptance of the Three Refuges

➔ You are **NOT** returning to and relying on the witness

➔ You are returning to your own Triple Jewels within

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



- ❑ What does taking the Three Refuges mean (三皈依)? (Cont'd)
 - Under special circumstances where there is **truly** no monk or nun available,
 - ➔ A learned precedent or senior practitioner 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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Lecture 2 – Three Refuges, Four Reliance Principles, & Dharma Seals



- ❑ **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)

Buddhism101: Introduction to Buddhism

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



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



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



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



- ❑ 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

Buddhism101: Introduction to Buddhism

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



❑ 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

Buddhism101: Introduction to Buddhism

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



- ❑ All dharma and their functions are **impermanent** in nature (諸行無常)
 - 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

Buddhism101: Introduction to Buddhism

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



□ All dharma are **void of self-existence** (諸法無我)

- 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

Buddhism101: Introduction to Buddhism

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



□ Nirvana is the ultimate Moksha (涅槃寂滅)

- Moksha (解脫, 滅) – ultimate liberation from suffering
- Nirvana 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

Buddhism101: Introduction to Buddhism

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



❑ 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” (體、相、用)
 - ➔ They have the same core – emptiness (Shunyata—性空); it is one, and not two or many
- Forms do falsely exist when seeds and matured conditions converge and the convergence continues; **the cores are empty in nature at all times** (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