

Taking Refuge – Part 2 of 10 (lightly edited transcript)
by Ven. Thubten Chodron ©, at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle

Contents (click on any heading to view text)

- The Objects of Refuge
 - *The Ultimate and Conventional Refuge*
 - True Path and True Cessation
- The Four Bodies of a Buddha
- Causal Refuge and Resultant Refuge
- Why the Buddha is a Suitable Object of Refuge
 - *The Buddhas are free from all fears*
 - *The Buddhas have skillful and effective means to free others from all fear*
 - *The Buddhas have equal compassion for everybody*
 - *The Buddhas fulfill the aims of all beings, whether or not those beings have helped him*
- The Three Kinds of Confidence
- Review
- Question and Answer

Taking refuge is the natural consequence of having contemplated what our future could be like after death. If we continue messing around and don't purify our minds, if we create a lot of negative karma, then at the time of our death, that karma could ripen and we could fall to an unfortunate rebirth. We get concerned about that possibility, and that acts as a motivation for us to seek some refuge, to seek a method and a guide to free us from that threat.

The other cause of our taking refuge is our confidence in the Triple Gem—the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—and their ability to guide us. As we get deeper into the explanation about refuge, and we start understanding more what Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are all about, then the confidence increases because we've come to know what their qualities are.

The Objects of Refuge

The last time we started to identify the qualities of the Triple Gem, everybody got this incredible, puzzled look on their face. It was interesting. I was looking through some of the Lamrim texts that are out on the market now such as *Path to Bliss* and *Essence of Refined Gold* and they all go very quickly through this part. I could do that too, but I'm not going to [laughter]. But I won't go too slowly either.

The three jewels of refuge are terms that come up as you get deeper into the Dharma and I think it's good that you get exposed to them now because at some time or another you're going to have to understand them. Well, you don't have to, but they will come up, and so it's helpful to have a little bit of information about them now.

The Ultimate and Conventional Refuge

Let's do a quick review of what we talked about before. When we talk about the Buddha, we are referring to the ultimate and conventional Buddha Jewel. The truth body or the dharmakaya refers to the mental aspect of the Buddha, while the form body or the rupakaya refers to the physical manifestations. When somebody becomes a Buddha, they get both of them at the same time. Everything is achieved at the exact same time, because when you make that passage from being a sentient being to a Buddha, everything changes, and it changes all at the same time.

The truth body is the ultimate Buddha Jewel, while the form body is the conventional or the relative Buddha Jewel. The truth body has two branches: the nature body, which refers to the emptiness of inherent existence of a Buddha's mind and the cessations of all the defilements on a Buddha's mind. The other branch is called the wisdom truth body, which refers to the omniscience of the Buddha's mind—the Buddha's compassion, wisdom, and consciousness that perceives both relative truths and ultimate truths simultaneously.

Because we cannot communicate directly with the Buddha's mind—with the dharmakaya—the Buddhas, out of their compassion, manifest a physical aspect in a form body so that we can communicate with them. There are two kinds of form bodies that they manifest in according to the grossness or subtlety of our mind states and what we can communicate with. When we gain high-level realizations, when we become arya bodhisattvas, very high on the path to enlightenment, then the Buddhas manifest in what's called the enjoyment body, the subtle body of the Buddha made of light that abides in the pure lands. The pure lands are created out of the collection of positive potential of the Buddhas.

For grosser level beings like us who can't even understand impermanence, let alone realize bodhicitta, the Buddhas appear in even grosser aspects called emanation bodies, of which there are several kinds. One is the supreme emanation body, an example of which is Shakyamuni Buddha as he appeared on the earth. Another is an emanation body as an artisan, which is the way that the Buddha manifested to subdue different people's minds. Yet another way is as a personage such as Maitreya Buddha, who is now in Tushita pure land, waiting for the time to come to our universe to teach the Dharma.

True Path and True Cessation

Another way of looking at the two parts of the truth body is to say that the nature body is the ultimate true cessation, and the wisdom truth body is the ultimate true path.

The ultimate Dharma Jewel is the true path and the true cessation on an arya's mental continuum. The conventional Dharma Jewel is the teachings, the pronouncements, and the instructions of the Buddha that teach us how to attain the true cessation and the true path. We also come upon the true cessation and true path when we look at the Four Noble Truths.

When the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths—this was the basic and first teaching that he gave at Sarnath—he first pointed out the truth of undesirable experiences, often called the truth of suffering, in our lives. The second thing he said was that this whole unsatisfactory situation has causes, the causes being our ignorance, anger, and attachment. The third truth was that it's possible to cease the first two. In other words, it's possible to get rid of all the undesirable experiences and all of their causes, so that third truth is the true cessation, which is the stopping, the absence, and the elimination of the undesirable experiences and their causes. The fourth truth is that there's a path to follow. There are consciousnesses—remember that paths really mean consciousnesses—to develop within ourselves that can bring about the cessation of these undesirable experiences and their causes.

In the Four Noble Truths, true cessation and true path are the last two. Those are the two qualities that we want to develop. (If you look at the robes of a monastic, you'll see two pleats at the back, which represent the true suffering and true causes that are to be put behind one, and there are two pleats on the front that are the true path and true cessation that we want to go towards.)

There are different levels of true path and true cessation. When you attain direct perception of emptiness, you aren't yet a Buddha or an arhat: at that point you are an arya or a noble being or a superior being. When you have the consciousness that perceives emptiness directly, you're able to cease the artificial forms of all the defilements. Then, as you progress along the path, you begin to eliminate the innate forms of the defilements. You develop the true paths in the mind that then serve to eliminate the defilements, or the causes of the sufferings, and consequently the sufferings themselves. Each degree of elimination is called the true cessation. Those are the ultimate Dharma Jewel and also the ultimate Sangha Jewel, which together are the ultimate refuge. Those are the things that are the true protection.

When we develop the true path and true cessation in our own mind, then that's real security. If you're looking for security, that's security, because at that point, the sufferings, the problems, no longer come, because the causes have been eliminated. Up until that point, we never have real security. That's why they say the Dharma is the ultimate refuge.

The conventional Sangha Jewel is any being who has attained direct perception of emptiness. The symbolic Sangha is a community of four monks or nuns.

All this is to give you a little more of an idea of what it is we're taking refuge in, so when you say, "I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha," you have more information and your contemplation

becomes more complete. You know more about what you're doing. It becomes less of a rote thing and more something that's felt. It's done with knowledge and with understanding.

The Four Bodies of a Buddha

When we talk about the Buddha's four bodies, we should remember that the word "body" doesn't just mean physical body, it means corpus, or collection of qualities. Form bodies are achieved spontaneously and simultaneously with the truth bodies. All the grosser forms that the Buddhas take in order to communicate with us come about spontaneously. In other words, when you become a Buddha, you don't have to think about how to benefit others, but rather, because of your great accumulation of positive potential and the purity of your mind, you instinctively know how to benefit others and you can manifest in different forms that can communicate with different beings according to their different needs.

When you really think about this, it's quite remarkable. Compare it to how we are right now. To do anything, we have to sit down and think about it, and generate a motivation, and consider all the options, and go through this whole thing of planning and getting ourselves enthused, and then we finally go ahead and do it. And, when we meet obstacles, we fall apart.

It's actually possible for any of us to become a fully enlightened being, somebody who just knows spontaneously and instinctively how to benefit others and who has the ability, without thinking about it and without trying, to appear in whatever physical form is conducive to guiding someone else. It's truly remarkable that we have the ability to attain those kind of qualities and that there are beings alive who can do that kind of thing. We may be limited, but let's try not to have too much skepticism and doubt about the qualities that we can attain.

When somebody becomes a Buddha, their body, speech and mind are not three separate entities. Right now, our body, speech and mind are three different things: our body is here, our mind is at the shopping center, and our speech is mumbling commercial tunes. They're three completely different things. When one becomes a Buddha, those things all become one entity. The Buddha's form body is just an appearance of his mind. The mind is the mental side and the form body is the other side of the coin—the physical appearance of that mind. When someone is a Buddha, he or she can appear in countless different physical appearances in order to benefit us. Their bodies are reflections of their mental states, reflections that karmically correspond to what we're capable of benefiting from. The Buddhas' appearances are very much in tune with our karma and yet they're directly manifested from their own pure states of mind.

Although you may not have thought about this kind of thing before, and it might seem a little bit odd, I think it's good to stretch our minds and pull ourselves out of our narrow little boxes, because sometimes we get really stuck. All we know is our experience, so we think that's all there is. A person in an underdeveloped country, when they see a plane fly, might say, that can't happen, people can't fly in the sky, people can't land on the moon, that's completely impossible. Why? Because I've never experienced it.

Just that reason—that I've never experienced it, that I've never heard about it or thought about it—is not a good reason for tuning things out and saying that since I'll never understand them, well, they can't exist. It's good to try and expand our attitude and see the qualities that the holy beings have attained. Then we can gain some idea about what our own capabilities are, and we don't lock ourselves into our own little prison of who we think we are. We think we know who we are, and then we limit ourselves because of that thought.

Causal Refuge and Resultant Refuge

There's another way to talk about the objects of refuge, one that has two parts to it: the causal refuge and the resultant refuge. The causal refuge refers to other beings, people outside of ourselves, who have already done what we want to do. It refers to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha that already exist—all the different beings who are Buddhas, all the Dharma, the different realizations and cessations on their mind, all the beings who are already arya bodhisattvas with direct perception of emptiness. Because these beings have attained what we want to develop, they become reliable guides to show us

the way.

If you want to go to Delhi, it's good to talk to somebody who's been there, because they know exactly how to get there, what planes to catch, how to do it and what things you're going to bump into along the way. Because they've done it, we can really rely on them. So in the same way, the causal refuge are those who've already done what we want to do, who are instructing us through their own experience, and who are very reliable. At the beginning of your prayers, when you're doing the refuge—"I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha"—you can think in this way: all those beings, all the Dharma, and all the Sangha who are already there.

Another way of taking refuge is thinking about the resultant refuge. In other words, when we take refuge, we think of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha that we will become. We take our future Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha and we project it outside of us and we take refuge in that. The Buddha becomes the omniscient mind that we're going to attain, the continuity of our own present mind stream in its fully enlightened form. The Dharma becomes the true paths and true cessations that we're going to have on our mind stream when we follow the path and develop them. And the Sangha becomes the being that we will become who has direct perception of emptiness.

When we think about the resultant refuge, we're thinking about what we can become and really imagining it already there. That's our real refuge. With the resultant refuge, we're really taking refuge in our own ability, in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha that we will become.

It's very helpful, before you do refuge in the morning, to just sit and think about it in both these ways—the causal refuge and the resultant refuge. It makes your understanding much richer and deeper and it gives you enthusiasm for practicing the path. When you take refuge in the beings who've done it, it gives you inspiration, because you think if they can do it, I can do it. And when you take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha that you're going to become, you understand that these resultant beings are just me, further along on my mental continuum.

[In response to audience:] Right, right. When you say "I take refuge in my own mind stream," it doesn't mean my present mind stream, but the resultant one. Our own Buddha potential and the state of full enlightenment exist on a continuum. There's not this irrevocable gap between them. What we are today can purify and develop and become the truth body of the Buddha. As we gain some confidence in this thought and begin to look at our own feelings about ourselves, we realize how we put ourselves down and how we badmouth ourselves all the time. We think, "I'm just little old me. I can't do anything." But when you really start thinking about our mind and the truth body on the same continuum, and about the resultant refuge and that it is us, it becomes evident that we imprison ourselves by our own way of thinking, by our own self-image.

In tantra, we imagine ourselves as the Buddha, we dissolve ourselves into emptiness, we get rid of all our conceptions of who we are, and then we imagine ourselves appearing in the form of a Buddha. You begin to understand why this is a very profound method in the tantrayana. It completely cuts off all the badmouthing and the poor quality views that we have about ourselves, and we really imagine ourselves as the resultant refuge. When you're a little kid and you dress up in mom and dad's clothes and you pretend to be all these different things you pretend to be as a kid, then that puts the imprints in your mind to actually become like that. You gain the confidence to become like that, because you're sitting there playing, rehearsing it. That's the same kind of thing that happens in the Vajrayana practice.

So you see, all these different things on the path come up in different situations. When you understand them, you can bring them all together and arrive at a global view of how everything fits together.

Why the Buddha is a Suitable Object of Refuge

This section, where we talk about why the Buddha is a good object of refuge, is much less intellectual, and there are a lot of stories in it. Let's hope I can get the stories right, because I usually bungle them up. There are four qualities that make the Buddha a good object of refuge, a reliable object. It's important to choose a reliable object of refuge because we see what happens when people choose unreliable objects of refuge, the classic case being Jim Jones. By knowing the qualities of the Buddha and knowing why he's reliable, we gain confidence that we can really trust in what's happening.

1. The Buddhas are free from all fears

The first quality is that the Buddhas are free from all fears. This gives them the ability to help others overcome their fears. Now, what kind of fears are the Buddhas free of? There are two kinds of fears: the fear of samsara and the fear of nirvana. Now you're going to say, "Ok, samsara is cyclic existence, is all these constantly recurring problems, and I can understand being afraid of that. But how can I be afraid of nirvana? What do you mean—afraid of nirvana?" The fear of nirvana doesn't mean that you're terrified of nirvana itself. What it's referring to is the state of someone like an arhat, who has liberated his mind from cyclic existence and has a state of peace and calm that comes through wisdom, but is not yet a fully enlightened being. He hasn't yet generated the altruistic intention. He hasn't yet purified the subtle stains on the mind, so he is still limited in his ability to benefit others. A Buddha doesn't have any fear of getting caught in that state of self-complacent peace because a Buddha has the great compassion that motivates sentient beings to purify their minds and develop their qualities completely.

Self-complacent peace, or the peace of nirvana, isn't bad, because an arhat certainly has infinitely more good qualities than we ordinary beings do. But it is a limited state of realization. A Buddha isn't bound by that limitation, nor are the Buddhas caught in the cycle of existence. And that's important. If we're drowning, we want someone on dry land who can save us. If we're drowning, and the guy next to us is drowning, he can't help at all—he can't even save himself.

Similarly, if the guides we take refuge in aren't free of cyclic existence, how can they possibly show us the way? How can they really guide us? It's one drowning person trying to save another one. When you say the Buddha is free of the fear of samsara or nirvana, it means he's the person on dry land, the person who has crossed over to the other shore, who has that internal stability and security of spiritual realizations so that he can really help.

When we think about this, it gives us some confidence in the Buddha and we see also why it's necessary to have attained full enlightenment to be best able to benefit others. If we haven't gotten ourselves out of cyclic existence, we can't help ourselves, let alone help others. If we've only attained nirvana for ourselves alone, then we are still limited and can't help others.

2. The Buddhas have skillful and effective means to free others from all fear

The second quality of the Buddhas is that they have skillful and effective means to free others from all fear. Amchog Rinpoche told us that, even if you have wisdom and compassion, you still need to know the right method and technique to help others. The Buddhas have that. And, to use these techniques properly, the Buddhas have full knowledge of our karma and our dispositions. Because different beings have different dispositions, different beings are attracted to different things. Different people will respond better to different kinds of meditations. The Buddhas are able to tune in to that and to prescribe in a skillful way the techniques that are needed for that particular person. Without that skill, the Buddhas can't guide all other beings in accordance with those beings' own karmic tendencies and their own mental inclinations and dispositions.

In this line, there are stories in the scriptures about how the Buddha used his skill to guide different beings. I think these stories are effective antidotes for those times that we feel hopeless and sorry for ourselves. We can compare ourselves to these other beings, beings that the Buddha did really manage to lead to liberation, and we begin to think, "Oh, I'm not quite that bad, there's some hope for me."

Helping someone who is ignorant

There's a story about someone whose name was "Little Path," whose brother was named "Big Path." Little Path was really dumb. He just couldn't remember anything. His teacher would try and teach him the two syllables "Om Bam," and when he remembered "Om," he forgot "Bam," and when he remembered "Bam," he forgot "Om." His teacher eventually threw him out because he couldn't learn anything. His parents took care of him for a while, but eventually they died. And so he went to live with his older brother, who tried to teach him but couldn't get through to him at all. So his brother kicked him out.

He was sitting on the monastery steps crying because his teacher had kicked him out, his parents had died, and now his brother had kicked him out. He didn't know what to do. And the Buddha comes along, and Little Path explains the situation to the Buddha, and the Buddha says, "Don't worry. I'll help you."

So the Buddha gave him a broom and had him sweep the monks' shoes to clean them off. And he told him to say, "Remove dirt, remove stain." Slowly, by just cleaning the shoes, he purified his mind so that he could remember "Remove dirt, remove stain." Then the Buddha enlarged the scope of Little Path's cleaning job to include the whole courtyard and as he swept one side of the courtyard, he said "Clean the dirt, clean the stain," and then he swept the other side, still repeating the words the Buddha had taught him. When he got done sweeping that side, the first side was dirty again, so he went back to sweep the first side. When that was done, the second side was dirty again. He spent years going back and forth, cleaning the two sides of the courtyard, constantly saying "Clean the dirt, clean the stain."

Eventually, through offering service in this way, through the power of offering service and generating confidence in the Buddha, he began to realize that "clean the dirt" meant eliminate all of the ignorance, anger and attachment from the mind, eliminate all of the contaminated karma from the mind. And "clean the stain" meant eliminate all the subtle stains on the mind, eliminate the appearance of true existence, the subtle obscurations on the mind. And he began to realize what "clean the dirt, clean the stain" meant. By contemplating this more and more, he eventually attained liberation.

The Buddha had incredible skill to be able to lead somebody who is so dumb that he couldn't remember "Om Bam" to become an arhat. Now that gives me great confidence, because I can remember "Om Bam": I'm a little bit more advanced than this guy. There's some hope for me. And the Buddha has the skillful means to be able to do this.

Helping someone who is angry

There's another story, about a man named Angulimala. Talk about meeting up with wrong gurus! Angulimala started following a spiritual master who told him to go out and kill a thousand people and to take their thumb-bones and string them on a necklace. If he did that, said the master, he would attain liberation. So Angulimala started killing people, and he kept generating more and more anger and being terribly savage, and everybody was terrified of him. Eventually he killed 999 people. He needed one more. He was going to kill his own mother.

At this point, the Buddha stepped in. Angulimala saw him and said, "Ok, I'll kill this guy instead of my mother." He started walking after the Buddha, but the Buddha stayed just ahead of him. Soon Angulimala was running. The Buddha was still leisurely walking, yet Angulimala could not catch up with him. He shouted out to the Buddha, "Stop!" He didn't say, "I want to kill you," but "Stop!" The Buddha said, "I have stopped." And Angulimala asked, "What are you talking about?" The Buddha explained, "Well, I have stopped all my anger, attachment and ignorance. I'm free from the defilements and the suffering." In that way, the Buddha made Angulimala reflect on whether what he was doing was really the path to liberation or not, and he was able to subdue Angulimala's wrong conceptions and his great anger. After that, Angulimala did an intense purification practice and he eventually became an arhat.

If methods exist for somebody like Angulimala, then methods also exist to help us, who haven't killed 999 people.

Helping someone who is very attached

So far we've had an example of somebody who's ignorant and somebody who's angry. There's also an example of somebody who was very attached—the Buddha's own brother, Nanda. This is not Ananda, one of his chief disciples who took care of him. This is Nanda, his brother. Nanda was incredibly attached to his wife. Talk about a co-dependent relationship: this was really it. He couldn't stand to be away from his wife for even a second because he was so enamored of her beauty, so taken with it.

Nanda's mind was so overwhelmed by craving desire, there was no room for the Dharma. The Buddha, with his skillful method, took Nanda and showed him the upper realms—the god realms—full of beautiful goddesses, even more beautiful than his wife. Nanda wanted to know, "How can I get born in those realms?" And so the Buddha explained to him about the value of doing positive actions and creating good karma. Next the Buddha showed him a hell realm, and of course Nanda freaked out. "I don't want to be born here! What's the cause of being born here?" he cried. And the Buddha explained: great attachment. Then Nanda got the idea, and in that way he began to eliminate his attachment and he too eventually attained high realizations. So there is hope for us.

Helping someone with low self-esteem

There's another story about an orphan, an ugly and abandoned child who wandered around begging. He

was so ugly that nobody could stand to look at him or be around him. Talk about low self-esteem: this was really it. The Buddha, using his skillful method, manifested as somebody who was even uglier. When the orphan saw this other person who was even uglier than him, he began to feel a little bit better. You know how we are when we see somebody worse off than ourselves ... he began to feel better about himself. And the Buddha, still in this very ugly form, continued to hang around and they became good friends. The Buddha made him understand that the reason for being born like this was due to negative actions. In that way, he began to teach him about purification, about the Four Noble Truths, about nirvana, and so forth. And he too eventually practiced the path and gained realizations.

The Buddha has great skill in being able to know people's different dispositions and how to teach them. Understanding this gives us confidence in the Buddha as a reliable source of refuge. It also makes us think about how we can be skillful with other people, about what qualities we need to develop to be able to tune in to other people and help them according to their needs.

3. The Buddhas have equal compassion for everybody

The third quality of the Buddhas is that they have equal compassion for everybody. They don't consider some beings close and others distant. This is something to think about: just look at our minds. We have close friends whom we want to be around. These are the people we want to help: they are easy to help. Then there are all the other people—people who we think are distant—so who cares about them! Look at the partiality in our own mind: we help the people who are close, and we have warm feelings about them, and everybody else we just ignore and dismiss.

The Buddha is free from that kind of lopsided compassion. The Buddha has impartial compassion for every living being, no matter whether they're related to him or not, no matter whether they have faith in him or not. This quality makes the Buddha a reliable source of refuge. The Buddha won't play favorites. We don't want a spiritual guide that's going to play favorites, because if the spiritual teacher plays favorites, chances are we could get left out.

There's a story about Buddha's cousin, Devadatta. You think you have bad relatives; the Buddha had one, too. Devadatta was always out to kill Buddha, and he formed an alliance with one of the princes at that time, whose father, the king, was a follower of the Buddha. Both Devadatta and the prince wanted to eliminate anyone who had power over them and take that power for themselves.

Devadatta would roll a stone down a hill to try and crush the Buddha. Or he would release a mad elephant to charge the Buddha. The mad elephant, by the way, charged the Buddha, but by the power of Buddha's loving kindness, the elephant was completely overwhelmed and fell to its knees and bowed before the Buddha. The scene has been depicted in many pictures.

The point here is that the Buddha, from his side, had no ill feelings towards Devadatta. He wanted to help Devadatta attain enlightenment just as much as he wanted to help Shariputra and Moggallana, his two chief disciples. There was no favoritism. There was no "I'll help you because you're nice to me. But Devadatta, you're a creep. Get away!"

Through this story, we can also see that, although a Buddha might have equal compassion toward everyone and might try and help others equally, different beings have different abilities to take in the Buddha's teachings. Receiving guidance from the Buddha isn't just a question of the Buddha giving it. It's also a question of us receiving it. Even though the Buddha was trying to help Devadatta, Devadatta, by the power of his wrong conceptions, by the power of his closed-mindedness, was completely blocking out that positive influence. This is why we have to do a lot of purification: to remove what obscures us from being able to open up and receive the Buddha's influence. Having confidence in the Buddha's qualities helps us open up to receive their influence. It's important to generate faith or confidence. It makes us have an open state of mind that allows us to receive the Buddha's energy.

When we talk about receiving the blessings of the Buddha, rather than the word "blessing", it's better to use the word "inspiration." Receiving the blessings or the inspiration and having our mind be transformed depends not only on the Buddha, but also on us. When our minds are closed and shut down, nothing goes in. We can see that so clearly, can't we? When our own minds are peaceful and open, when there's a feeling of faith and reverence, then we're much more open and susceptible to other people's positive influence.

Our minds can be like upside-down pots. The sun might be shining everywhere, but the pot is upside down, so the plant underneath the pot doesn't get any light. From the sun's side, it's shining equally. From the plant's side, it's covered; it can't receive the light. In the same way, when we surround ourselves with negative actions, with our skepticism and hostility, with all of our wrong conceptions, with our poor self-image—when we have a pot over our head—we aren't letting the Buddha's influence get through to us. Understanding this gives us energy for purifying and for understanding why confidence is so important.

The Buddhas, from their side, they don't need our faith. Buddha, from his side, doesn't care whether we have faith in him or not. If you're a Buddha, you don't need anybody else to have faith in you. But the faith, the confidence, is something that benefits us in receiving the Buddha's influence.

4. The Buddhas fulfill the aims of all beings, whether or not those beings have helped him

The last quality that makes a Buddha a suitable guide is that the Buddha is able to fulfill the aims of all beings, whether or not those beings have helped him. There is no favoritism: whether we make offerings or not, whether we have faith or not, whether we're of a high and noble rank, or whether we're just a lousy nobody, it doesn't really matter. From the Buddha's side, how we act to him, whether we have good connections or not, whether he can use us to do something for him or not, has no bearing upon a Buddha's ability to guide us.

The Buddha does not lack the patience to stick with it. He does not teach us only if we are nice to him and then kick us out as soon as we become obnoxious. This is an important quality for us to look for in the guides we take. We can also see it's an important quality for us to develop in ourselves so that we become able to help others.

The Three Kinds of Confidence

As we think about these different qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, we want to try and develop a sense of confidence. The word "confidence"—"day-pa" in Tibetan—is sometimes translated as "faith," but that word suggests the quality of blind faith, and that's not what we are talking about here. A sense of confidence in the holy beings means something different. There are three kinds of confidence to develop.

The first kind of confidence is called pure confidence, or admirational confidence. We gain admirational confidence for the holy beings when we start studying the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and start understanding what they can do. We admire those qualities and, by admiring others' qualities, we create happiness in our own minds. Our minds become more receptive to their advice and their instructions.

The second type of faith is called aspirational confidence. We not only admire the qualities of the holy beings, but we aspire to become like them. Our minds are enthusiastic—we see our potential and want to develop that potential. It's an open and joyful state of mind that makes us willing to learn and willing to practice.

The third kind of confidence comes from conviction. This happens when we've really understood something and so have conviction in it. The more we have conviction in something, the more we have confidence in it. For example, the more we understand the Four Noble Truths and how they operate, the more we have conviction in them. We also have more conviction that we can, through developing the true path, attain the true cessations and become a Buddha. Another example is that, if we think about karma, we develop conviction that gives us the energy and the confidence to abandon negative actions. Similarly, if we develop conviction in emptiness, we can begin to see how it's possible to purify our own minds of stains. We gain confidence that there are beings that are Buddhas and Sangha and we also gain confidence that we can become like that. This convictional confidence comes from understanding, from knowing something and then thinking about it.

Faith, or confidence, is not something that is diametrically opposed to knowledge and understanding. In fact, they go hand-in-hand. The more you know about something, the more you admire it, the more you aspire to be like that, the more you're convinced about it. Being convinced, you have more faith or confidence in it. When you have more confidence, your mind is more open and subtle: you can

understand things easier. In turn, your wisdom, your knowledge, and your understanding increases.

Review

A short review of today's topics is in order. We talked about the two causes of refuge, the first of which is the sense of caution about the lower realms and the sense of caution about being born in cyclic existence. The second cause of refuge is confidence in the ability of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha to guide us. The more we generate those causes, the deeper our refuge is.

We also talked about the objects of refuge: the Three Jewels, and the ultimate and conventional Buddha Jewel, Dharma Jewel, and Sangha Jewel. We talked about the different bodies or kayas of the Buddha, which led us into some discussion of what a Buddha is and what a Buddha's ability is. A Buddha's body, speech, and mind aren't separate: the body is a reflection or manifestation of the wisdom consciousness. The Buddhas manifest these different bodies spontaneously and effortlessly, without a lot of thought, because of the purity of their mind and their compassion.

We talked about causal and resultant refuge, the causal refuge being the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha who've already done what we want to do, and therefore can guide us. The resultant refuge is the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha that we will become, which is our real refuge. When we do the refuge visualization at the beginning of our sessions, spend some time and think about this.

We also talked about the four qualities of a Buddha and why a Buddha is a reliable guide. The first quality is that the Buddhas are free from all fears of cyclic existence as well as self-complacent nirvana. Because they're out of the ocean, on the shore, they can throw us the life raft. They aren't just sleeping on the beach, being safe in their self-complacency, but they are there ready to throw the life raft.

The second quality is that they have the skill that's necessary to help us. There are stories about people overcome by attachment, anger, ignorance and low self-esteem, and how the Buddha managed to lead all of those beings to full enlightenment. Why? Because he has the skills, he has the tools, and he also has the ability to know the different karmic predispositions of people, and so can teach accordingly.

The third quality is that a Buddha has equal compassion towards everybody. A Buddha doesn't help somebody who is close and harm everybody else. A Buddha helps everyone whether or not that person has confidence or faith in the Buddha: that makes him a reliable guide.

The fourth quality is that the Buddhas don't show favoritism, and that they help us whether we help them or not. We don't have to bribe the Buddha in order to help us, but we do have to open our minds. We do have to take the pot off the plant so that the sunshine can come in. Gaining understanding of the path and freeing our minds from wrong conceptions are ways of opening ourselves up to the positive influence of the Buddha. That's what receiving the Buddha's blessing or inspiration means.

We also just talked briefly about the three different kinds of faith. The first one is pure confidence or admirational confidence, which implies that when we know the qualities of the holy beings, we admire them and our mind is happy. The second is aspiring confidence: when we aspire to become like them. The next is convictional confidence: when we really understand the path, we understand how it's possible to gain those qualities, and we're convinced through our own understanding and reasoning that we can attain those.

Question and Answer

[Audience:] It seems like we want to get rid of fantasized ways of existing. Imagining ourselves as a Buddha is a fantasy. So why are we doing it?

Is that a fantasy? Although we aren't Buddhas now, are we completely lacking in the ability to become one? [Audience: inaudible] Even if somebody is not a Buddha yet, that person can be along the path to Buddhahood. They have been generating the qualities of a Buddha, although those qualities aren't fully developed yet. So is it such a hallucination to imagine them being fully developed if they have developed part of them now?

[Audience: inaudible]

Right, right. When you sit there and you think, "I'm so dumb. I'm so stupid. I messed up everything." That's a fantasy. But we believe that one is true. When we sit there and we get angry, or we get depressed, and we say, "I can't do anything about this. This is my character. This is my nature. I can't pull myself out of this mood." That's a hallucination. We tell ourselves that all the time. And we believe it. [Audience: inaudible] Well, it affects our actions. So we're having an unrealistic hallucination that is affecting us detrimentally. And the effects it's producing are quite real even though it's a fantasy.

So here, when we're imagining ourselves as a Buddha, that's a very realistic possibility that we can become. Imagining that – taking refuge in the Buddha that we will become – affects us positively. [Audience: inaudible] It doesn't mean everything we imagine is true. There has to be a realistic basis of imputation for our imagination. If you imagine yourself as Meryl Streep, there's no basis of imputation there. If you imagine that you can become a photographer or if you imagine that you can become a Buddha, there's definitely a basis for that. [Audience: inaudible] Exactly. You're right, it's a negative aspiration, and that definitely pulls us down, and we become like that. [Audience: inaudible] Right. So let's choose to reinforce what's realistic and what's constructive. When I was teaching grade school, there was a little boy, his name was Tyron. He was convinced he couldn't learn how to read. I knew he could learn how to read. He didn't think so. He couldn't read because he didn't think he could learn how to read. You can see how those self-images influence what we become.

As you're going through this material, I really encourage you to express your doubts and say what you think. I think this kind of discussion and debate, and airing the things that are confusing, is quite beneficial. Please go home and think about everything. Please try and start, or continue, your daily practice, doing the prayers and some breathing meditation, and then thinking about the different teachings you've gotten so they go into the mind. When you think about them, sometimes more questions arise, your questions lead you to deeper investigation, which leads you to deeper understanding.

This teaching is based on the *Lamrim* or *The Gradual Path to Enlightenment*. Please refer to the following web-page for its outline and other transcripts or to listen to the audio recording of these talks: <http://www.thubtenchodron.org/GradualPathToEnlightenment/outline.html>