

Common Guidelines for the Practice of Refuge – Part 10 of 10 (lightly edited transcript)
by Ven. Thubten Chodron© at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle. 1992

Contents (click on heading to view text)

- Common Guidelines for the Practice of Refuge
 - *Mindful of the qualities, skills and differences between the Three Jewels and other possible refuges, repeatedly taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha.*
 - *Remembering the kindness of the Triple Gem, making offerings to them, especially offering your food before eating, offering prostrations and so on.*
 - *Mindful of their compassion, then encourage others to take refuge in the Triple Gem.*
 - *Remembering the benefits of taking refuge, do so three times in the morning and three times in the evening.*
 - *Do all actions by entrusting ourselves to the Three Jewels.*
 - *Do not forsake our refuge at the cost of our life, or even as a joke.*
- More Guidelines
 - *In analogy to taking refuge in the Buddha, commit ourselves whole-heartedly to a qualified spiritual master.*
 - *In analogy to taking refuge in the Dharma, listen to and study the teachings as well as put them into practice in our daily life.*
 - *In analogy to taking refuge in the Sangha, respect the Sangha as our spiritual companions.*
 - *Train in accordance with the good examples that the Sangha set.*
 - *Avoid being rough and arrogant, running after any desirable object that we see and criticizing anything that meets with our disapproval. Be friendly and kind to others and be more concerned with correcting our own faults than with pointing out those of others.*
 - *As much as possible avoid the ten destructive actions, and take and keep precepts.*
 - *Have a compassionate and sympathetic heart towards all other sentient beings.*
 - *Make special offerings to the Three Jewels on Buddhist festival days.*
- Questions and answers

1. Mindful of the qualities, skills and differences between the Three Jewels and other possible refuges, repeatedly taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha.

We have reviewed the qualities and the skills of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Then we had a whole section on the differences between them, how to relate to each of them, and the special things that each one can give to us. We also had a whole section about the differences between the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha as objects of refuge and looking at other traditions, other teachings, other paths. The more we meditate on these, the greater the feeling of appreciation we have for having met the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. That leads us to spontaneously take refuge repeatedly. The refuge ceremony that helps us tap into the lineage of energy coming from the time of the Buddha can be done once or many times. But refuge is really a continuous growing process. We take refuge each morning, each evening, all the time during the day, and that increases our refuge throughout our life.

The more we contemplate the qualities and skills of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, the deeper our refuge gets. I took refuge in 1975. At the time I took it, it was a very intense experience; but when I look back now at what I understood then, I think, "Mama Mia!" [laughter] because the refuge changes over that time. As you learn more and practice more, you begin to see how refuge relates very much to your daily life. Then the refuge gets deeper. Your whole attitude changes. Refuge is done repeatedly in this way.

If that sounds funny to you, it might be helpful to remember that His Holiness also takes refuge. If you look at the qualities of people like His Holiness and some other great holy beings and think that they also take refuge, then we can get some idea of where some of their qualities come from. Their qualities don't come from outer space, and it wasn't like they were born with these qualities. These great leaders spent a lot of time cultivating the path. Why do you cultivate the path? It's because you have taken refuge. Refuge is making that decision to practice the path, to turn to the Triple Gem for guidance. Sometimes our egos don't like to look for guidance, but it's quite helpful to remember that the great leaders also do that.

2. Remembering the kindness of the Triple Gem, making offerings to them, especially offering your food before eating, offering prostrations and so on.

When we remember the kindness of the Triple Gem - in other words, what the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha do to benefit us - then spontaneously the wish to show our respect to them through prostrations and the wish to show our feeling of gratitude through making offering come about. Again, these things aren't done because the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha need them, but they are expressions of our own feelings towards the refuge. Now, it might seem that when we start to do prostrations, sometimes there is no feeling at all. Or you do your water bowls in the morning, there is no feeling at all. So you might say, "There is no feeling. Why should I continue to do this?" But sometimes just the process of doing it might help us to clear away some things in our mind so that we begin to understand better why we are doing it, and that spontaneous feeling of affection and attraction towards Buddha, Dharma, Sangha can come. It's not like I have to do these things because I am a Buddhist. We do these things because we feel this kind of attraction and faith; we want to do them. Even though we don't have the feelings right now, we know somehow by the process of doing this, it sets the stage for questioning in our mind to go on so that those feelings can begin to arise.

Also, the Triple Gem is a very good field of positive potential. Because of their qualities, any karma we create in terms of them becomes very powerful. By offering and showing respect to them, there will be a very strong impact on our mind. If you offer and show respect to rock stars, that has an impact on your mind, too, and it shows you where your mind is going. That is why we offer and show respect towards the Triple Gem, because it makes an impact on the mind and it shows us where we are going.

Offering Food

In terms of making offerings, it could be that you want to have a shrine at your home and offer water or fruit or light, or whatever things you want to offer there; or you might go to a temple and make offerings there. Especially before we eat, we can make offerings of our food. Since we eat all the time (we never forget that, we're never too busy to eat), then it's an excellent time to create some positive potential while we are at it. No excuses that we don't have time for it. Doing the offering prayer before we eat is really important. I think that really sets us apart in some way. It makes us much more mindful than how we usually are when we are on automatic. You watch how people normally are around food. They are usually wolfing it down and completely mindless. The mind is somewhere, who knows where, and they are just shoveling food into the mouth with no awareness of where the food came from or anything like that. Just the fact of sitting quietly and thinking a minute before you eat, I think, is very valuable in our life. It slows us down. It makes us think about where the food came from. We transform the food into beautiful wisdom nectar. We have a little Buddha made of light at our own heart, like our own fully actualized Buddha potential. We offer that nectar to the Buddha at our heart. When we eat, the light fills our body. It's like a whole meditation.

People talk about putting Dharma into daily life. This is one way to do it, because we are eating all the time. It's one very excellent way to put Dharma into daily life and it makes a big difference. I think it's nice to do it with our families also. One family that I stayed with on the tour had two little kids. Their son was five or six, and he would lead the offering prayer before dinner. It was a really neat thing, because the kids grow up with that tradition. They know the offering prayer and they lead it, and the whole family does it. I think it's really wonderful.

Even if you go out on a business lunch with people who aren't Buddhist, you can still offer your food. You don't need to sit there with your hands in prostration in the middle of the restaurant. You can just sit there with your eyes open and play with your napkin or your silverware, but inside you are offering your food. Nobody knows anything because you are playing with your napkin and silverware too, but your mind is doing something else. So there is always time to do this transformation thing.

I talked to one young woman who is just getting into the Dharma. When she gets up in the morning, she makes two cups of coffee. She puts one on the altar and she drinks the other cup. She thought of this all by herself. It's incredible, because this is what the Tibetans do. She thought of this because she really likes to have a cup of coffee in the morning. I thought it was so nice that she has this natural, spontaneous wish to connect in that way with Buddha, Dharma, Sangha.

Offering Prostrations

Another easy way to put Dharma into daily life is when you get up in the morning, get out of bed and make three prostrations. Then before you get into bed at night, again make three prostrations. It's a nice way to round out the whole day. In the morning, the first thought is of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, really showing respect. It's not respect to an external Buddha, Dharma, Sangha; it is respect to our own human potential in its fully actualized form. Before we go to bed, touching base again with that potential, even just for the thirty seconds it takes to make three prostrations, is very valuable. You can do this kind of thing a lot in your life: small offerings, small respect, etc.

3. Mindful of their compassion, then encourage others to take refuge in the Triple Gem.

When we are aware of the compassion of the Triple Gem, that the Buddha cares more about us than we care for ourselves, we can encourage others to take refuge. Buddha has more compassion for us than we have for ourselves. Being mindful of the whole spiritual support system we have in our life to rely on the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, we can help others to take refuge. We can help them to contact the Dharma.

Now, this doesn't mean that you go out on the street corner to convert people to Buddhism. We don't have to go door to door to push and coerce people, but I think that it's good if we share with others what we have learned and how we have been benefited. Some people become Buddhists and they become closet Buddhists. It's like, "I can't tell anybody," and, "What are they going to think?" They do it very secretly. Probably lots of other people could benefit, but these people, because they are so caught up in what other people are going to think about them, don't bother to share things that happened in their daily life. I don't think we need to go around advertising and coercing people, but I think when colleagues and friends ask, "Oh, where did you go during the weekend?" you don't need to stumble and play with your napkin. You can say, "Oh, I went on a Buddhist retreat," or something like that. Then people are often curious and they get into Dharma like that. It's very helpful. Often, like I have been saying, just by our example, how we act, people get interested. It's like, "Well, what are you doing? You are not freaking out at work today when everybody else is freaking out." They become interested just by our example. Just our way of being can interest people.

For example, when His Holiness is here you can encourage all your friends and relatives to come to hear him speak. I mean, His holiness is totally societally acceptable. You don't need to be ashamed. He's a Nobel peace prize winner. There is nothing really to do with Buddhism, so to speak, he's a Nobel peace prize winner. You bring them there, or you share your Dharma books. Things like that. It can really benefit a great number of people.

4. Remembering the benefits of taking refuge, do so three times in the morning and three times in the evening.

Last time we talked about the benefits of refuge: Refuge purifies negative karma. It accumulates good karma. It protects us from harm. It enables us to enter the gateway of the path. It helps us to attain enlightenment quickly. When we think about all these different benefits and spend some time in meditation thinking about them, then the wish to renew the refuge constantly comes, and so there is this practice of taking refuge three times in the morning and three times in the evening. This is a real nice way to round out your whole day. Instead of jumping out of bed and taking refuge in the refrigerator or the microwave or the telephone, we take refuge in the Triple Gem.

You can do it just by your own thought; or if you like to say prayers because prayers help you, then you can do even the short ones that we do at the beginning of teaching sessions here: Namō Gurubhaya, Namō Buddhaya, Namō Dharmaya, Namō Sanghaya. Or you can do the prayer starting with, "I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha until I am enlightened." You can do either of those. You just sit and do it three times in the morning when you get up and three times in the evening before you go to bed, to round out the day, to touch base. One of the big problems in our life is that we feel so scattered because we never sit down and stay still. We never touch base with our spiritual side. We just need to remember the benefits of doing that and a little bit of discipline. Then setting our mind to do it, and doing it. It doesn't take so long, and we definitely benefit from it.

5. Do all actions by entrusting ourselves to the Three Jewels.

Before we undertake projects or whatever, we can take refuge in the Three Jewels. Doing that makes us feel supported. It gives us a sense of confidence. Sometimes people call me because they have these incredible problems and they want me to help them with their problems. It's like, "Mommy Tara, help!" [laughter] Refuge really works at that time, when you want to help somebody but you don't know what to do. You take refuge, and something happens and you are able to do something. Or if you are in a frightening situation, you take refuge and that helps calm the fear, or it can even help avert the danger.

I was once on one of these twelve-seat prop jets flying over a storm going kerplunk, kerplunk, kerplunk. It is just amazing! It was like the Madderhorn at Disneyland. You just take refuge at that time. It helps greatly because you are putting your mind in a positive direction. Then if you live, great; if you don't live, you've made some preparation. Your mind is peaceful. [laughter] In all these situations, then, to try and constantly renew the refuge, to do everything we do by taking refuge. I think when we are in difficult situations, when we really want to help and we don't know what to do, or when we are afraid, or when we are really getting pushed to our limits, or when we are exhausted, or whatever it is, just doing refuge in our mind is very, very helpful.

6. Do not forsake our refuge at the cost of our life, or even as a joke.

If somebody is sitting there telling you that they are going to kill you unless you give up your refuge, you don't give up your refuge. You can say to that person anything you want to say, words are words; but in your heart, you don't give up your refuge. If you have this refuge and you give it up, what do you have then? What do you have and what can you rely on? It's like that part, that kernel, that core of you, that spiritual part of you that is so meaningful that gives you some sense of purpose in your life; if you give that up what are you going to have? Even if you live, what is the sense? We do not give up our refuge in a serious situation. We also do not give in up flippantly, like a joke. If we give up our refuge, our whole practice degenerates. You can see it very clearly. If you take refuge, you are entering into the door of the Dharma. You are going to do it. If you give up your refuge, you are exiting, and then what do we have left in our life? You still have the microwave and the refrigerator, but...no great meaning in that. [laughter]

More Guidelines

These aren't directly included in the lam-rim outline, but still they are quite useful.

1. In analogy to taking refuge in the Buddha, commit ourselves whole-heartedly to a qualified spiritual master.

If we trust the Buddha as a teacher, well, the Buddha is not around right now, so what are we going to do? In analogy to that, we are going to make contact with qualified spiritual teachers and entrust our spiritual guidance to their care. You can see how this fits in with taking refuge in the Buddha, because if we were alive at the time of the Buddha, the Buddha is going to be the one who tells us what to practice and what to abandon. Well, the Buddha isn't alive right now, at least not in that particular body, in that particular manifestation, so how are we going to get the teachings? We get them through our teacher. Like Amchog Rinpoche pointed out, even if Shakyamuni Buddha appeared on this earth, he wouldn't say anything different from what a qualified teacher would teach. In doing that, it helps to make our refuge in the Buddha quite solid.

2. In analogy to taking refuge in the Dharma, listen to and study the teachings as well as put them into practice in our daily life.

What are we going to do having taken refuge in the Dharma? Well, we have to learn it. We learn it by studying it, hearing it and discussing it with other people and, of course, by putting it into practice in our lives. Putting it into practice is what the whole thing is about. You might have a great doctor, great nurses and great medicine, but if you don't take the medicine, you don't get well. If we don't practice the Dharma, the mind doesn't change. This is why it keeps coming back to practice. That doesn't mean we need to be perfect, ideal Buddhists and have some kind of glorified image of how we would be if we were a perfect Buddhist. That is ridiculous. We probably all have that image (which, of course, we never

meet up with), but that is not the point. That is irrelevant. What we need to do is to try and put into practice whatever we have heard, and receive the benefit from it. Practicing the Dharma always helps, and by helping ourselves, then we can help other people better.

3. In analogy to taking refuge in the Sangha, respect the Sangha as our spiritual companions.

Here Sangha is referring specifically to the monks and nuns, although the term Sangha in the west is sometimes used in a very general way. When you read it in the text, it refers specifically to the monks and nuns. The reason for respecting ordained beings as our spiritual companions is not because they are on some kind of hierarchical trip, but because they have decided to devote more time to the practice than we have decided to devote to it. Now, whether any individual monk or nun practices well is a completely different ball game. But the Sangha in general is a group of people who have decided to devote a lot of time to practice. By looking at their example, looking at them as spiritual friends, then that helps our practice, because hopefully they are a little bit further on the path than us. They become like our big brothers and big sisters who can guide us. Paying respect isn't some kind of hierarchical trip. Rather, it's some way of deriving benefit from these people.

Then if you are going to broaden it, you can say Sangha also means the general Buddhist community. I keep emphasizing the importance of Dharma friendship and meeting with your Dharma friends and discussing the teachings together. It's incredibly important. We should look upon the other lay members of the community as our spiritual companions, because we are all learning, studying and doing things together. It's helpful to respect them for their efforts in the practice; to not compete with them, not get jealous of them and not compare ourselves to them, but to learn from their example, rejoice and be inspired by what they do. Similarly, if somebody is having a hard time, contact them and talk with them. If somebody hasn't come to teachings for a while, see what's going on. Really reach out and take care of each other.

It's funny, because we are all saying, "I want to slow down. I want to be more compassionate," and yet we fill our lives up with all sorts of stuff and when one of our Dharma friends is in trouble, we have no time for a five-minute phone call to see how they are. We just fill our lives up with so much stuff, running, running, running and then we get totally frazzled. I think a big thing in our life is to get our priorities very clear, very straight and live our lives according to what is important to us. We don't have to be like everybody else, running around from here to there. There is enough freedom in this country for us to schedule our own lives the way we want. If we fill up our calendar and make our lives hectic, we can't blame society. We are the ones who made that choice.

There is no big society with a capital 'S' that fills up our appointment book for us and makes us frazzled. We are the ones who get on the phone and make all the appointments and fill everything up, then complain afterwards. Really, there is a lot of freedom in this society. It is not a communist state where people make you work when you don't want to. We have some control over how much we work. You might say, "If I don't work, I will get fired." Well, maybe it's more important to have more time even if it means less money and less work. There is enough freedom here where we can try and arrange things, maybe not in a perfect way, but we do have some power. We don't have to be pushed along by the elements of the society.

[Audience: Inaudible]

The question is regarding parents who have to work outside of the home to support their kids, then come home and have household duties to do. What do they do in this case? I'm going to address it very generally here, because people have very different needs. Nowadays everybody needs to work, and everybody needs to work full-time because everybody needs more money. People think they need all this money to support their kids. They are busy working to earn more money, so the kids do not feel loved and they feel rejected. So then they'll have to use all the extra money they make to pay for their kids to go to a psychologist. I think sometimes we need to really see what it means to take care of a child? Is it giving your time and giving your love? Or is it making \$100 million and giving them yet another sweater, another pair of skates and other things? What's really important to give to our kids?

In single parent households, the parent definitely needs to work. You come home and sometimes you are a bit frazzled, but your kid needs some help. I think sometimes it can be helpful to get into a pattern with your child of what you do when you come home. We come home, sit and breathe for five minutes,

and then we do the housework. We pace ourselves instead of being in a frazzle to do so much as soon as we get home.

If you have very young children, you can get up a little earlier to do your meditation; or your child gets used to you meditating and they come and curl up with you when you are meditating. Little, small children can do that, but it helps to get the kids in that kind of habit, also. In terms of household duties, maybe engaging the kids in helping to do them, so that doing the household chores isn't just something you do to get it done, but it is something that we all do together so we spend time together. We can spend time together cleaning and we can play while we clean instead of, "Oh, God, I have to vacuum. Will you dust because I have to vacuum?" It's like "Well, we can do it together and we can talk," and it can be a time for human contact. It depends a lot on our attitude. Does that help at all?

Audience: [Inaudible]

I think there is always a choice. But if you want a certain living standard, maybe there isn't a choice. When you meet a tough situation, remember that a tough situation has many variable factors in it. Maybe we can look at it more globally and see what kind of variables we could change. As soon as we say "I have no choice and my life is berserk," and we repeat that mantra to ourselves over and over again, we will become berserk. But if we try and look at the situation and say, "OK. I am going through a difficult time. There is an economic problem so I have to work a lot. But I do have choice. I can come home and sit and hold my baby for five minutes. There are five minutes to hold the baby", or "There are ten minutes to talk to the teenager", or "There are fifteen minutes to play catch with your third grader." Or, you engage the kids in things around the home so that you are doing things together.

So I think a lot of it depends on our attitude. As soon as we get in a frazzled mental state... you see, it's a vicious circle. The environment being berserk makes us berserk, but as soon as we get berserk we make the environment more berserk. So we can try and break it somehow starting with ourselves. It takes effort, but it can be done, because if we get into this mentality that it can't be done, then, well, if it can't be done, why are you complaining? [laughter]

4. Train in accordance with the good examples that the Sangha set.

When we see people doing something great, see them as an example and rejoice in it, whether they are ordained monks or nuns, or other Dharma practitioners - whoever it is that we see. This is difficult for us in our culture because we are so used to competing with other people, so that when they do well we feel lousy. This is a call to completely change our attitude so that when other people do something well, we feel really inspired and rejoice. We try and act like that too, instead of getting into a mentality of feeling miserable when somebody else does something well, then trying to trip them up so that they fall flat on their face the next time.

Again, it is coming completely from the mind, isn't it? When somebody does something well, we can either be jealous or we can rejoice. It doesn't depend on the external situation, it depends totally on our own mental state. But as soon as we get jealous or we compete with other people, then look what we do to our environment. Look what we do to our relationships with those people and look what we do to our own mind. As soon as we start comparing ourselves with people and compete, we are never satisfied with what we do. There is no satisfaction in our own mind.

Whereas if people do something well, or people have some good fortune (be it in a worldly way or in this context we are talking about doing something well in a Dharma way) we can rejoice at it, feel happy, and see that person as a good example for us. Then we are happier. They are happier. The world is better because everybody is trying to improve himself or herself. It totally depends on the mind. Our habit of competing and comparing might be quite ingrown, we have to work on that; but again, this is why at the end of the day, we stop and we review what we did during the day. Then we can start to notice when we do that and start to counteract it.

5. Avoid being rough and arrogant, running after any desirable object that we see and criticizing anything that meets with our disapproval. Be friendly and kind to others and be more concerned with correcting our own faults than with pointing out those of others.

Definitely something to train in, isn't it? Incredible advice here. This mind that likes to be arrogant, that likes to compare ourselves with others, that likes to put down other people because we feel that if we put them down, then we must be good. How does putting somebody else down make us good? That mind is really something to be abandoned.

Similarly, the grasping, greedy mind that wants to get its fingers in every desirable object possible is to be abandoned. That is the mind that makes us slightly bananas because we are running after one thing after another thing after another thing. This guideline is saying we don't need to do that. Our whole society may do it, but we don't need to. We don't need to run after every desirable thing. We don't need to be the best dressed. We don't need to eat the most fantastic food. We don't need to always be best in the office. We don't need to always tell everybody how wonderful and glorious we are. Everybody else may be trying to do that or a great number of people in society may do that, but we don't have to do that. The Buddha is really challenging us.

It's amazing. In this land where everybody is so individualistic, there is an incredible emphasis on conforming. We don't have to be as individualistic; we don't have to conform either. We can choose how we want to be. Nobody else runs our mind.

6. As much as possible avoid the ten destructive actions, and take and keep precepts.

This is basically talking about how to get along well in society: abandon destructive actions. We are going to get along a lot better with other people if we don't criticize, gossip, lie and do things like that. In addition, to really increase our practice of ethics, it's helpful to take precepts. Either taking some or all of the five lay precepts or doing the Mahayana precepts for twenty-four hours. It is an incredible practice of mindfulness, very good for the mind. That is a real way to act our refuge and start putting the feet on the path.

7. Have a compassionate and sympathetic heart towards all other sentient beings.

This is the essence of the Dharma – to develop the compassionate, sympathetic heart, and to develop that whenever we can, sitting in traffic or wherever we go. I forget who it was, but somebody recently said they drive quite a bit to work. They are listening to Dharma tapes in the car; they are doing mantra; they are reflecting on the teachings; they really use the time in the car very wisely. I thought, "That's great."

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

8. Make special offerings to the Three Jewels on Buddhist festival days.

[Not recorded.]

Questions and answers

Audience: [Inaudible]

Well, if you are doing offerings before your altar, you would make prostrations first, then offer, and then you could sit down and do refuge. I do that on a daily basis. But even before I make offerings on the altar, when I first get up in the morning and before I get out of bed, I take refuge and generate a good motivation. Then when I turn on the light, I think that I am offering light to the Buddha. Then I get out of bed and immediately make three prostrations. So you can do these every morning. You can mix the order up. [laughter]

Audience: [Inaudible]

You might want to prostrate before you take the water bowls down, or maybe you don't. I prostrate periodically throughout the day, but the last thing I do before I go to bed is always to make three prostrations. Maybe you want to do it in a slightly different order. See what feels comfortable. You might, if you are doing prostrations, take the water bowls down and then do refuge. Or you might take the water bowls down and take refuge, then do prostrations and go to bed. Also, you can take your water bowls down at dusk time. You don't need to wait till just before bedtime.

[Audience:] Why do we offer water on the altar?

The idea of offering water is that since we are not attached to water, we can offer it wholeheartedly. It's not offered with a miserly mind. We can really give it because it is so plentiful. The tradition is to have seven offering bowls, although it doesn't really matter. There is this story about the meditator up in the mountains. All that he has is one bowl, so he offers water to the Buddha in it. Then when he has to drink tea, he asks the Buddha's permission to use the cup, and he throws the water out and has tea. So we can be flexible. [laughter]

It's a really nice ritual to get into. It takes me a while to wake up in the morning, so I can do this while I am still in the process of waking up. What you do is, you wipe the bowls out and stack them upside down. We don't put the bowls right side up on the altar because that is like somebody offering you an empty bowl. (It doesn't make our mind happy to be offered an empty bowl, so we don't put empty dishes on the altar.) You stack them upside down, then you hold them in your hand stacked up, and you put water in the top one. Then you pick up the top one and you pour almost all the water out, but not quite. Then you put that one down. That way it isn't empty when you are putting it on the altar. Then you go to the second bowl and you pour almost all of the water out but you keep some in and then you put that one down. You do this as you go along and then when you have all seven of them out, then you go back to the first bowl and you fill them up.

We keep the bowls a rice grain apart. In other words, we do not keep the cups too close or too far apart, and we keep them at some uniform distance apart. Also, not to fill them to overflowing and not to be chintzy with the water, but you fill them up to the level which is a rice grain distance from the top. It's a mindfulness practice, how we relate to physical objects. It makes us mindful of what we are doing.

Then when you offer the water bowls you say "OM AH HUNG" three times. That kind of consecrates it. Think that you are not just offering Seattle tap water, but mentally make it into blissful wisdom nectar. This beautiful, delicious, scrumptious nectar that you are offering to all the Buddhas in the ten directions, all the holy beings wherever they are. When you set them up, you set them up from your left to your right. When you take them down, you take them down from your right to your left. You pour the water back into the pitcher and turn the bowls upside down.

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>