
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྡོད་པ་ལ་འདུག་པ་བལྟགས་སོ་

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As usual let us spend some time engaging in the meditation practice. [meditation]

We can now generate a positive motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings by removing them from all suffering and leading them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

REFUGE

In the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*, or *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, refuge is presented in four subdivisions. *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand*, however, adds a fifth subdivision. The four subdivisions of refuge are: the cause of going for refuge, identifying the objects of refuge, the manner of going for refuge and the commitments after having taken refuge. Lama Tsong Khapa's four-point presentation of the essentiality of refuge is very meticulous.

Having a good understanding of what refuge entails is essential. It is considered to be the doorway, or entrance, into the Buddha's doctrine. So refuge is the foundation of the Buddha's doctrine. As presented in the Buddha's teachings, it is also the basis on which one can receive the vows.

1. Causes of going for refuge¹

The causes of refuge can also be understood as the reasons for seeking refuge. As explained in the teachings there are two main causes, the first is to generate fear of the general sufferings of cyclic existence and in particular, the sufferings of the lower rebirths. The second cause is, having generated the fear of the sufferings of cyclic existence and lower rebirths, generating the confidence that the objects of refuge have the ability to liberate one from these fears. Thus one seeks refuge in the objects of refuge.

Refuge in the Three Jewels with these two causes intact will be a pure and stable refuge. Of course, one may initially have a general sense of refuge in the Three Jewels; however a pure and unflinching refuge is one which has these two causes intact. Having complete reliance on the Three Jewels means believing in them one hundred per cent, acknowledging from the depths of one's heart that the Three Jewels have the full capacity to free one from all fears and sufferings. The essential point here is to cultivate an unflinching and absolute reliance upon the Three Jewels.

The greater the fear and sense of reliance one has, the stronger the mind of renunciation one also develops. So we need to see how taking refuge and developing renunciation have a connection and are complementary.

If we are keen to practise the Dharma, then we cannot underestimate the value and essentiality of understanding and taking refuge properly. As explained in many teachings,

it is the very foundation of the Dharma. Generating a true sense of longing to be free from the general sufferings of cyclic existence, and the lower realms in particular, arises from contemplating the plight of having to experience these sufferings over and over again. Would you be able to bear the thought of having to repeatedly experience these sufferings, over and over again? When we really consider this plight, we will definitely generate a keen wish to be free from all suffering. Then, automatically, we will start to think about how best to free ourselves, and who can help us. It is at this point that we turn to the objects of refuge as the unmistakable source of help. The more we gain a deeper understanding of the qualities of the refuge, the greater our confidence and reliance in the objects of refuge will become.

When someone experiences the symptoms of a severe illness, they feel extremely uncomfortable and really long to be free from the sickness and their suffering. It is at the point when they keenly want to be free from their sickness that they seek a skilled and trusted doctor who can prescribe a treatment that will cure their illness. This is a very good analogy that illustrates the need and appropriateness of going for refuge to the Three Jewels.

Gyaltsab Rinpoche mentions in his *Commentary on the Uttaratantra* that an intelligent and sharp-minded trainee needs to have the realisation of emptiness if they are to take unmistakable refuge in the Three Jewels. Other texts also indicate, that even if one has not realised emptiness directly, one would, at the very least, have to have an unmistakable and correct understanding of emptiness that has been established through reasoning.

As mentioned previously, because strong refuge is dependent on developing a sense of renunciation, we need to reflect on the reason why we experience suffering. Suffering doesn't not come about randomly or arise spontaneously from nothing; rather, it is dependent on its own causes and conditions. So what are the causes and conditions of suffering? When we contemplate in this way we realise that it is as a result of negative karma that one created in the past that we experience suffering now.

Taking that further one can ask: why did one create such negative karma? It was because our intentions and actions were influenced by the delusions. When we look further into which specific delusion influences us to create negative karmas, we come to realise that the main delusion is the fundamental ignorance of grasping at the self. At this point one comes to the understanding that without applying the antidote to this fundamental root ignorance, there's no way that the inevitable consequence of suffering will cease. At this point one arrives at the understanding that the antidote for overcoming the ignorance of grasping at the self is none other than selflessness or emptiness. We can relate this to two of the four noble truths: that suffering is to be known, and the origination of suffering is to be abandoned.

When one thinks about the various types of suffering that one experiences, and the origin of that suffering, then an understanding of the need to abandon the causes of suffering will arise. Understanding this will definitely help us in daily life. Whenever we experience any kind of uncomfortable difficulties we can immediately reflect, 'Whatever uncomfortable feeling I am experiencing now has not come about randomly without causes and conditions. It has been caused by something!' So, contemplating in that way actually lessens our pain and suffering, and in this way helps us to cope and better deal with that difficulty or problem.

¹ Ed: These headings have been introduced to relate the teaching to the structure presented in the lam rim.

In summary, there are two main causes of going for refuge, and it is by contemplating those two causes that one develops that keen wish to rely upon an object of refuge to help free oneself from the causes of those fears. With this understanding we need to be able to come to the conclusion that we cannot develop a genuine and strong sense of refuge without reflecting on those two causes.

2. Identifying the objects of refuge

The definition of the **Buddha jewel** is the ultimate source of refuge having the eight qualities of being non-produced and so forth. The Buddha jewel has two subdivisions: the conventional Buddha jewel and the ultimate Buddha jewel.

Conventional Buddha jewel: Of the four bodies of the Buddha, the form body and the emanation body are examples of the conventional Buddha jewel.

Ultimate Buddha jewel: The remaining two bodies, the wisdom truth body and the nature truth body identify the ultimate Buddha jewel.

The definition of the **Dharma jewel** is a completely purified truth in the continuum of a superior being which has any one of the eight qualities, such as being inconceivable and so forth. The Dharma jewel is also sub-divided into two:

Conventional Dharma jewel: The twelve limbs of the Buddha's teachings are an example of a conventional Buddha jewel.

Ultimate Dharma jewel: the truth of cessation and the truth of path.

The definition of a **Sangha jewel** is a superior being possessing any of the eight good qualities of realisation and freedom. It is also subdivided into two main categories: the conventional Sangha jewel and the ultimate Sangha jewel.

Conventional Sangha jewel: This is an arya being i.e. a being who has gained the realisation of emptiness.

Ultimate Sangha jewel: The truth of cessation and truth of the path within the arya being's mental continuum. So it needs to be understood that the two truths can be related to both the Dharma jewel as well as the Sangha jewel.

If one wonders, 'Why do we need to have three jewels as objects of refuge?' then the answer lies in this prayer:

To the Buddha jewel, the unsurpassable supreme guide; the Dharma jewel, the unsurpassable supreme protector; and the Sangha jewel, the unsurpassable supreme companions;

To these Three Jewels that are objects of refuge, I make offerings.

This verse presents the reason for the identification of Three Jewels, which is that we need a supreme guide to guide us in the right direction on the path leading to liberation and enlightenment. So reliance on an unsurpassable supreme guide is most essential to gain the unmistakable method. We also need to have the ultimate protection, which is identified as the Dharma jewel. Likewise we need to rely upon unflinching and compassionate companions to help us along the path, which is the Sangha jewel. So in this way we can understand the need to rely on the Three Jewels.

Now again, if one wonders, since it is the Dharma jewel which is the actual protector, then why do we need to rely upon the Buddha jewel and the Sangha jewel? Doesn't that make them redundant? Are the Buddha jewel and Sangha jewel not protectors as well? The answer is that all three objects of refuge are equally supreme protectors. But the reason why the Dharma jewel is identified as the actual

protector is because ultimately the only way to liberate oneself from suffering is by practising and actualising the Dharma jewel within oneself.

Here we need to gain this very profound understanding that while the Buddha has unbiased and unlimited love and compassion for us, and the Sangha jewel are also completely dedicated and committed to assisting us and being our companions, they are however not able to liberate us just by themselves. Without applying the Dharma jewel within our own mental continuum and actualising it, the Buddha and the Sangha jewel cannot by themselves liberate us. If that were possible, then we would have been liberated long ago; we certainly would not be suffering in cyclic existence now!

The fact that we are still in cyclic existence and experiencing various sufferings is because we have not yet actualised the Dharma jewel within our mental continuum. To give a practical example, we can all identify the ten non-virtues and their opposites, the ten virtues. Making a commitment to avoid the ten non-virtues is the basis for morality, and it is this practice of ethics that will help to protect us from taking rebirth in the sufferings of the lower realms. We need to understand that taking the initiative to adopt the practice of avoiding the ten non-virtues and adopting the ten virtues has to be our own decision. It is by practising that commitment and actualising it in one's mental continuum that one actually establishes the protection that is necessary to avoid the sufferings of future unfortunate rebirths. That is how we need to understand how the Dharma jewel is the actual protector.

As the Buddha himself said, 'I have shown you the method and path to liberation. Now it's up to you to adopt it and put it into practice'. So the Buddha clearly mentioned that, while he presented the unmistakable methods and paths leading to liberation, the decision to actually get there lies with the individual themselves. Furthermore, the Buddha gave this very good analogy of how Dharma practice works: which is of a patient, the doctor and the treatment. When a patient comes to a doctor with certain symptoms, the skilled doctor will definitely prescribe the unmistakable treatment, which is giving, for example, the correct medicine. However if the patient refuses to take the medication or treatment, the patient cannot hope to be cured. Skilled doctors and kind nurses cannot help the patient if the patient is not willing to undertake the necessary treatment.

If someone practises the abandonment of the ten non-virtues, and then observes morality of abiding by the ten virtues then, because they are leading an ethical life, it will be a life that is relatively free of complications and problems. Most importantly, at the time of death, such a person will have a natural confidence that, having to the best of their ability practised avoiding the ten non-virtues and adopting the ten virtues, they will not go through an unfortunate rebirth in the next lifetime. That level of confidence can definitely manifest at that time. So to that extent we need to pay attention to this very crucial practice.

With all of this explanation we can come to another very profound understanding. While one regards, the Buddha jewel, the Dharma jewel and Sangha jewel as supreme and holy objects, one might however relate to them as having being holy from time immemorial, thinking that they have always existed as holy objects. That would be a completely wrong understanding. If we view them as some sort of primordial supreme being, then we might also develop a false belief that they can help or protect us without any effort on our part. So that would be the wrong conclusion.

The right profound understanding is that the supreme objects of refuge that we rely upon did not come about spontaneously without depending on causes and conditions. Rather, they reached that state as a result of practising avoiding every smallest misdeed, and by adopting every small virtue along the path. It was that practice along the path that led them to achieving the ultimate result. What that shows us is that this is exactly how we need to engage in our practice right now. We need to avoid the smallest misdeeds and adopt every single small virtue. Slowly accumulating small virtues is the way we create the causes and conditions for reaching the ultimate state of enlightenment. So this practical approach is actually a very profound level of understanding to adopt.

Here I have covered only the very basics of the objects of refuge. You can rely on the lam rim teachings for a more elaborate and complete explanation. Then, as we go through the text, covering refuge briefly, it will supplement the study you've already done.

EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER

3. REFUGE

Unlike most other subdivisions in his commentary, Gyaltsab Je's commentary on the Refuge section of the chapter does not begin by quoting the relevant verse from the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*. Rather it begins by explaining the meaning of refuge as follows:

The meaning of refuge is to mentally hold and verbally express the objects of reliance for liberating one from dangers and suffering.

Thus refuge carries two main causes. As explained here succinctly, *the meaning of refuge is to mentally hold*, refers to mentally holding that full confidence in the objects of refuge. With that full confidence in the objects of refuge, one expresses verbal refuge. These are *the objects of reliance for liberating one from the dangers of suffering*; this encompasses all suffering. That is the meaning of refuge as explained here.

Then Gyaltsab Je goes on to state:

There is causal refuge and resultant refuge. The first is to hold the Three Jewels that already exist as objects of reliance for liberation from dangers.

The causal refuge is a refuge *that already exists*, such as Buddha Shakyamuni and other enlightened beings who are already enlightened; as well as the Dharma jewel and Sangha jewel that are present now. Here *reliance* can be understood as relying on an unfailing friend, someone who will help us at any time; especially when faced with many difficulties. Thus the objects of refuge such as the Buddha are definitely unfailing friends who present us with so much inspiration, advice and so many teachings about how to overcome and uproot our misery and suffering. By relying on them we can definitely achieve *liberation from all dangers*.

Then Gyaltsab Je describes resultant refuge:

The second is to hold the Buddha jewel and Dharma Jewels that one is going to realise in one's own continuum, as objects of reliance for liberation.

This refers to the fact that one will develop Buddha jewel or Dharma jewel in one's continuum in the future.

Practically speaking, we normally take *causal refuge* in the Buddha jewel that already exists as an enlightened being that we relate to, and to whom we make offerings and salutations and so forth. We relate to this causal refuge as an entity that has already obtained the qualities of enlightenment. These supreme enlightened beings are an

object of our reliance because of their kindness to us and the unmistakable advice that they present to us. So one visualises the Buddha and the Dharma and the Sangha from whom one receives inspiration and kindness.

The *resultant refuge* relates to the future objects, where one actualises the Three Jewels; becoming an enlightened being, actualising the Dharma jewel and the Sangha jewel within oneself. Contemplating that is the resultant refuge.

Gyaltsab Je' commentary continues:

The causes for refuge, the refuge objects, and the four ways of going for refuge—by knowing the qualities, by knowing the differences, by acceptance, and by not asserting other refuges—as well as the advice of refuge and so forth one can know from the *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path of the Perfections* by the great lama. Hence I do not explain them here.

3. The manner of going for refuge

Here Gyaltsab Je presents the third subdivision of the topic of refuge with four further subdivisions:

- *by knowing the qualities* refers to knowing the particular qualities of the Buddha jewel, the particular qualities of Dharma jewel and Sangha jewel;
- *by knowing the differences*, which is explained in six categories in the lam rim
- *by acceptance*, and
- *by not asserting other refuges*,

4. The commitments of taking refuge

In stating *as well as the advice (or commitments) of refuge* and so forth, Gyaltsab Je is referring to the final subdivision of the topic of refuge. The addition of *and so forth* indicates the benefits of taking refuge. This is also explained extensively in the lam rim, as Gyaltsab Je himself mentions:

... one can know from the *Great Expositions of the Stages of the Path of the Perfections* by the great lama. Hence I do not explain them here.

Here, the text is explaining the four divisions of refuge exactly as I mentioned earlier in the overview of the topic of refuge.

Gyaltsab Je further mentions:

The refutation of the mistaken assertion that the truth of the path is never an ultimate refuge, the general presentation of refuge, the difference between ultimate and conventional refuge and so forth I have already explained in the *Commentary on the Uttaratantra*. Thus you can learn from that.

The refutation of the mistaken assertion that the truth of the path is never an ultimate refuge is presented in Gyaltsab Je's *Commentary on the Uttaratantra*. The truth of the path within the Buddha's continuum is explained as an ultimate refuge.

With *the difference between ultimate refuge and conventional refuge*, conventional refuge is understood as a *temporary source of refuge* while *ultimate refuge* is to be understood as a permanent refuge.

Thus far, the commentary is identifying the objects of refuge in terms of a general presentation that can apply to all the tenets of Buddhism. The presentation from this point onwards is based on specifically identifying the Mahayana refuge.

The difference between the common refuge and the uncommon refuge, which refers to the Mahayana refuge, can

be understood in the manner of how the refuge is taken. With common refuge, when one takes those vows of refuge the commitment is, 'I'll seek refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha until the end of my life'. So the commitment is only for the duration of this life. Whereas the uncommon or Mahayana refuge is taking refuge with intention to take refuge until one reaches the state of enlightenment.

The actual Buddha refuge in both the common refuge and uncommon refuge is the same object, the Buddha. However, when it comes to the Dharma jewel, the uncommon or Mahayana Dharma jewel relates to specifically the Mahayana truth of path and the Mahayana truth of cessation; while the Sangha jewel relates specifically to the Mahayana arya Sangha.

Different texts have slightly different presentations of causes of the uncommon Mahayana refuge. The commentary on the lam rim called *Manjushri's Words* indicates that by contemplating the qualities of the Three Jewels, one generates a reliance on them, specifically by thinking about how they have the full ability to liberate one.

In relation to the fear of suffering, one uses one's own wish of not wanting to experience suffering to understand how all other beings are exactly the same; they too do not wish to experience any kind of suffering and they also want to experience all happiness. So one generates a specific fear in relation to oneself, and extends that to all other beings who will also have to experience these various sufferings again and again. Extending that wishing to be free from suffering, as well as being free from those fears to all beings, is the particular cause for taking refuge.

The verse from the root text is placed at this point in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

26. *Until attaining the essence of enlightenment
I go for refuge to the buddhas;
Likewise, I go for refuge to the Dharma
And to the assembly of bodhisattvas.*

In addition to this verbal assertion of taking refuge one generates the motivational thought that, 'In order to liberate all beings from all suffering, I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I take refuge. Until I achieve enlightenment, I take refuge in the buddhas, the Dharma and the bodhisattvas.

In the Tibetan version the next lines in Gyaltsab Je's commentary are:

... by taking the Three Mahayana Jewels that already exist in the continuum of others, and the Three Jewels that will exist at one point in one's own continuum as the focal object, ...

So, as mentioned previously, this object of refuge is a causal refuge:

... from now until the attainment of the essence of highest enlightenment, when one manifests the dharmakaya at the foot of the bodhi tree,

This is indicating that one takes refuge until one achieves both the place and the state that one aspires to. Specifically the place is *at the foot* or *site of the Bodhi tree*, and the state is the dharmakaya body of a buddha. One achieves the dharmakaya body of a buddha at Bodhgaya, or in the *Akanista* buddha field where the sambhogakaya form of buddhas reside. So one goes for refuge until one is at the place of the seed of the bodhi tree which is in Bodhgaya, and until one achieves the dharmakaya or a buddha's truth Body.

Gyaltsab Je then further explains:

Until that time one takes refuge in the buddhas and likewise in the Mahayana Dharma jewel and takes refuge in the assembly of bodhisattvas, the superior bodhisattvas.

Again, this is identifying the specific objects of refuge: *until that time one takes refuge in the buddhas and likewise in the Mahayana Dharma jewel and the assembly of bodhisattvas, the superior bodhisattvas.*

Furthermore:

One takes the buddhas that are already established as guides of the path, the Dharma jewel that one will generate in one's own continuum as the actual refuge, and Mahayana superiors who have already achieved the Dharma jewel, as companions to achieve refuge.

This description of the way one takes refuge is exactly as I presented earlier.

Next week is the discussion night, so please engage in the discussion well. Following that is the exam, so try to do that well too. And the seminar is coming up, so it is also good to prepare for that and try to participate in it well.

The main thing is to utilise all of this study and practice as a way to ensure that your mind and heart becomes a bit more gentle and kind. That is the main purpose. If we ensure that whatever practice we do helps to reduce the unruly, negative states of mind that are so prevalent within us, then the more that unruly mind is tamed, the more a kind and more gentle mind is manifest and developed further. Then, not only this life, but also at the time of death and in all future lives, we will definitely experience a much more joyful and happier state of mind.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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