



A Gift of Liberation

Course Four—Learning to Be Quiet

Homework Master, Class Five: The Nectar of Purity

1) One of the most fundamental ideas in Buddhism is that of refuge: seeking shelter in a place that we can trust. What are the two classic reasons for taking refuge, and how can there be a third?

[The first of the two classic reasons for seeking shelter is that we are afraid. We are afraid of the cycle of suffering life in general, and more specifically the sufferings of every form of life, and every occupation of life, which we find here.

The second reason is that we believe that the Three Jewels do possess the power to protect us from these sufferings.

Pabongka Rinpoche notes that there is a third reason which is possible: there is a form of taking refuge which is unique to the greater way, and this is where—on top of the preceding two reasons—we go for shelter because of our deep love and concern for others, for the way in which they must suffer here in the cycle.]

2) When we visualize ourselves taking refuge at this point in the practice, how do we see ourselves relative to other people in our life, such as our parents? How does this relate to the idea of an example, and bodhichitta, in the third of the four steps of a karmic path?

[There is a beautiful detail in the Refuge Visualization where we imagine—as we recite the prayer for this act of refuge—that we are sitting on a great plain before the places of shelter, sitting at the very front of millions of beings and leading them in the prayer. Right behind

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us, in the vanguard of this massive crowd of suffering beings, are our parents.

The idea is that we are committing to become an example for all of these beings. We will show them how to take refuge; we will *become* a shelter for each of them, an example of how they should practice.

This relates to the third of the four steps of a karmic path, meaning the four steps that make a karma complete: powerful and quick. These four are found in the *Treasure House of Higher Knowledge* (the *Abhidharmakosha*), written by Master Vasubandhu about 17 centuries ago.

The first of these steps is to define what it is that we want, in a single sentence. It could be, for example, “I want to meditate better.” The second step is to identify another person who wants what we want: find someone else who wants to improve their meditation, and make a plan for helping them.

The third step is to actually go and help them—for example, by giving them tips about how to further their meditation, such as learning to recognize that being kind to others plants the seeds for great meditation.

The fourth step is what we call Coffee Meditation: as we lay down to go to sleep at night, we take joy in the goodness we have done today, especially with planning to and then actually helping another person with their meditation.

There is a trick we can use to make the third step infinitely more powerful. As we actually help the other person, we try to maintain an awareness of what will happen if we succeed in this new system: of getting things that we hope for, by helping someone else to get them.

If we do succeed wildly (which we will, if we follow the four steps), then naturally other people will start to imitate us. Everyone who wants to improve their meditation will seek out other people who need help

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improving their own meditation. That is, we become an example for others to follow—an example of the new system.

We change the world by being an example for millions of other people to follow. And then the Refuge Visualization, you see, has come true: we really are sitting at the very front of a massive crowd of the world's people, helping them along the path.]

3) What is the basic visualization for the practice known as the “shower of cleansing nectar”? Please describe some of what the nectar does to us.

[Pabongka Rinpoche relates this especially beautiful and powerful visualization to reciting the refuge prayers a single time on a rosary of a hundred beads. During the first 50 beads, we picture nectar descending to clean us of our negative seeds. And then during the second 50 beads we picture that we are gaining positive qualities.

During the first 50 we imagine the nectar in the form of rainbow light, of five different colors—except that the white color is predominant. This light drops into the bodies and minds of all of us, all the millions of beings taking shelter. It cleans us of all the bad deeds and obstacles that we have collected for time with no beginning; especially anything negative that we have ever said, done, or even thought towards our Lama.

During the second 50, rainbow light again descends into us—but this time with the yellow, the gold, predominant. This nectar imparts to all of us the high qualities of our Lama: the way they speak, act, and think.]

4) As a Buddhist, we by tradition seek shelter in the Three Jewels. As we do so, we try to purify any negative deeds we may have committed towards each of these three. How does this purification already reflect the deepest meaning of seeking shelter, or refuge?

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[The monastic textbooks on the Perfection of Wisdom are especially eloquent on the subject of seeking shelter. They describe an apparent shelter, or Three Jewels; and then an actual shelter, the same three seen from a higher viewpoint.

The apparent Buddha Jewel would be for example statues or other images of enlightened beings. The apparent Dharma Jewel would be books or similar media, and the information they convey. The apparent Sangha Jewel would be male or female persons who are ordained.

The actual three are quite different. The actual Buddha Jewel consists of the three bodies of an enlightened being, and more specifically the Reality Body: the fact that the physical and mental parts of a Buddha are coming from seeds they have planted before, and from nowhere else (this last is the meaning of emptiness). We already possess this part of a Buddha ourselves, because there is nothing about us that is coming from anywhere other than seeds.

The actual Dharma is the direct perception of the same emptiness, and the actual Sangha is the community of people who have had the direct experience of emptiness.

Now if we have committed any negative actions towards either of these two versions of the Three Jewels, they will have no power to help us, because they are empty; that is, their power to help us is coming from ourselves, from how we honor and practice the essence of these Three Jewels.

And so trying to purify ourselves of bad seeds created around these three is already a recognition of the fact that they *come* from us, and from nowhere else. This emptiness of the Three Jewels is in fact the highest form of the Three Jewels, and the only weapon they have to protect us.

If for example we recognize that our yelling boss is actually coming from seeds we collected by yelling at someone else last week, and not from their own side, then we will automatically not want to yell back at the

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boss. And then we have created a real and lasting shelter that protects us from yelling bosses.]

5) The historical Buddha is no longer present, so it would seem difficult for us to make any mistakes towards him. What though are five different actions that Pabongka Rinpoche mentions in this regard?

[Pabongka Rinpoche makes a quick (and decidedly only a partial) list of negative actions which we might have committed towards the Buddha Jewel, and which we must purify with the nectar rain.

(1) The first of these is called “drawing blood, out of malice, from the holy body of an enlightened being.” (“Out of malice” means it would be alright to take a blood sample for medical reasons, if that were possibly ever needed!) Traditionally it is said that we can no longer commit this particular negative action toward the historical Buddha, since he is no longer in this world. We could of course though take an action which might cause some harm to our Lama, which would be worse.

(2) The second is criticizing an image of an enlightened being. We may properly say that “the artist was not so skilled,” but we should never express it as “this Buddha doesn’t look so beautiful,” or something like that.

(3) The third is to use images as collateral for loans, etc: to treat them as capital.

(4) The fourth is to consider images of holy beings simply as objects of art that we can buy and sell.

(5) The fifth is to destroy an altar or temple out of malice. (We could though, for example, demolish an old temple in order to build a new one on the same site.)]

6) What are four negative actions towards the Dharma which we should be careful to avoid? Please give detail on the first of these.

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[The four actions which Pabongka Rinpoche mentions (and there are countless more) are:

(1) “Giving up the Holy Dharma,” which as we have seen before refers to not only to abandoning teachings we have been granted, but also very importantly to criticizing the spiritual beliefs of others. It is acceptable, when the circumstances are appropriate, to point out inconsistencies and so on in order to help a person; but it is not alright to do so in a disrespectful or hurtful way.

(2) Using Dharma books and similar teachings merely as objects to be bought and sold.

(3) Disrespecting the sacred word; for example by placing scriptures on the bare ground, licking our fingers before we turn a page, or not putting holy books in a special place in our home, separated from common articles.

(4) Using the money from selling Dharma books etc for our own personal gain.]

Coffee shop assignment: Please meet with at least one other person—or better, a group of people—whom you didn’t know well before this teaching; do your homework together and discuss together any questions you have. Please write here where, when, and with whom you did your homework:

Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, practicing in meditation having the rainbow lights of purification and attainment pour into our body. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations.