

Week 3 – Introducing the Sevenfold Puja

Buddhism Level 2 – Ritual & Devotion

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Refuges & precepts translation handout
Sevenfold puja handout
Stages of puja prewritten on board, as below

LEARNING OUTCOMES

gain an understanding of the context of the Sevenfold puja, and how to approach it.
Start connecting with the first 3 verses
Gain some familiarity with chanting the Refuges & Precepts & begin to understand its meaning, and significance as a unificatory ritual
Understand significance of Going for Refuge

MEDITATION (10 MINS)

INTRODUCTION TO SESSION

Going to start looking at the sevenfold puja, and perform it for the first time at end of session.
Main “liturgy” or ritual that we perform in FWBO. Many rituals use it as a skeleton.
And zoom in especially on commitment & faith aspect of it.

Previous class Review

Difficult area – get into 3s, talk about how you found it.
How do you relate to the Buddha/Bodhisattva figures?
How have you found the rituals so far?
Feedback

INTRODUCTION TO SEVENFOLD PUJA

Sangharakshita’s extract from Bodhicaryavatara, 8th century CE
One of great classics of world spiritual literature
Tell story of Shantideva
Evoking the Bodhisattva Ideal – highest Ideal known to man. (more in final week)
Each stage tries to evoke a particular spiritual emotion. Will deal with them over following weeks: [prewritten on board]
This week - Worship, salutation, Going for Refuge

Week 4 - Confession of Faults, Rejoicing in Merit

Week 5 - entreaty & supplication

Week 6 - transference of merit & self surrender

Read through

Read v 1 – 3, stopping before Refuges & Precepts

This is written by someone in a spiritual fervour; when we say the words ourselves we may not feel the same!

Discussion in small Groups

Each group take one section.

Note anything that needs explaining

Put yourself in the place of someone who really means what is being said – how would they feel? What is the mood that they're evoking?

Plenary

Relationship between s 1-3

Supposing you're travelling and you see a beautiful mountain peak in the distance and you admire it for its beauty; you look up to it, enjoy it and delight in it. This corresponds to worship [puja]. But it doesn't occur to you at this stage that you could possibly climb that peak. Then you start to think: 'That mountain is so much higher than I am. To climb it would be very difficult'. Becoming aware of where you are in relation to the mountain in this way corresponds to the Salutation [vandana]. And having absorbed that situation, you decide, "All right, nonetheless, I'm going to climb that mountain", and you start walking towards it. That is Going for Refuge.

Ritual and Devotion in Buddhism, Sangharakshita, p 67

REFUGES & PRECEPTS

Hand out the table of R&P with translated words.

Chanted all over Buddhist world – GFR is central unifying action of all Buddhists (Bhante).

Leader reads through R&P in Pali, with someone else doing simultaneous translation from Puja book.

TEA BREAK

GOING FOR REFUGE

What do people understand by GFR? Brainstorm

- Practical priorities – where do your time, energy, money flow?
- Existential security – what gives you a sense of meaning, Okness, a place in the world, sense of security?

Don't always coincide – for example, because of your life situation you may happily put a lot of time, energy, money into raising kids, because that's the needs of your situation and still find go for Refuge to the 3 J at the existential level – but it's hard, and we need to be honest with ourselves.

- Commitment – what are we really committed to?

How do we go for Refuge to the Three Jewels more deeply? Need to develop faith / confidence, sraddha, ever further.

How do we develop sraddha / confidence?

- Need to be convinced of truth of Dharma & efficacy of the practice. This requires study, practice, reflection, discussion.
- Discuss any areas of unclarity or doubt that you come across, especially if it feels undermining of your efforts.
- Practice puja – can work as a “saddha bhavana” practice. Like metta bhavana, try to look for a sense of sincerity, however feeble or vague, behind the words you’re saying.

Remember the iceberg example:

Maybe you could say that faith is mostly below the waterline. When it surfaces, you see it as clear thinking in terms of the Dharma (cognition), action in line with the Dharma (ie as volition), and as inspiration (emotion).

We can learn to have confidence in our confidence(!) even when it doesn’t seem to surface very much. Performing puja can sometimes put us in touch with it.

MANTRA

Brief explanation of mantra

RITUAL: SEVENFOLD PUJA

Now we’ll perform the puja

Clear away “teaching accoutrements” – flipchart etc, make transition into ritual space.

Do stages 1-3 inc R&P, and final stage (transference) – with mantra after “worship” & opportunity to make incense offerings.

NB R&Ps what we chant during mitra ceremonies & ordinations – affirms commitment to 3 J & following precepts. Can chant it at our own level of commitment & understanding without worrying that we’re saying something we shouldn’t. But don’t have to if really don’t want to.

mantra – tune in to others as youre doing it.

HOME PRACTICE

Next week we will be “rejoicing in the merits” of each other. It may help to spend a little time reflecting on the others in the group; what qualities do you appreciate about them?

Reflect on what you feel are your refuges. Filling in the worksheet may help you. And reflect on any doubts that you feel may hold you back from Dharma practice.

FURTHER READING

Ritual & Devotion in Buddhism, Sangharakshita, ch. 3 & 4