

Wk 2 - Going for Refuge

Buddhism level 2 – What makes you a Buddhist?

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Copy of Dhammapada (could just use reading from handout, but would be good to introduce DhP as a book)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Gain a feeling for the experience of looking for a refuge from suffering

Identify some of one's own refuges

Understand how the 3 jewels can be seen to be true refuges.

INTRODUCTION

This week really a continuation of last week – Going for Refuge

Meditation

Within a mindfulness of breathing, notice what sort of distractions you have. Where is the mind dwelling? Past, present, future?

Notice how worlds of thought come into being, and then dissolve upon being abandoned

Review home practice

HISTORICAL EXPRESSION OF REFUGE

At time of Buddha, there was no Buddhism – just had a ragbag of followers. Buddha wasn't a Buddhist. People didn't declare themselves Buddhist; so what did they do?

Reading

For example, here's someone addressing the Buddha as "Master Gotama", having received a teaching

Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has Master Gotama -- through many lines of reasoning -- made the Dhamma clear. I go to Master Gotama for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Sangha of monks. May Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life.

In formulaic language we have recorded, they went to refuge to three jewels:

GFR as commitment

One way to translate GFR is as commitment.

Language communicates the illuminating, inspiring effect the Buddha had on him so he commits himself as a follower

GFR is central & definitive buddhist act (Bhante)

Bsm not foremost a belief system

It's a path of practice – to increasingly actualise the 3J in our life

Commitment to the path – to practising in ways that mean we become more like the Buddha, see the world and act in the world in ways according with the Dharma, and interact with others – especially fellow Buddhists – in ways conducive towards Sangha

So that's translated GFR into the language of commitment – but would be good to understand language of Refugees.

What are we taking refuge from?

In a word, suffering.

May remember Buddha saw 4 sights. What were they?

So Buddha's quest was to find refuge from old age, sickness & death – not just in this lifetime, but for infinite cycles of lifetimes.

We probably don't think in this way. What are we sheltering from?

In a way world was a more dangerous place than today in UK, sometimes did need to go running into hills

But in other ways it's as dangerous as ever:

Life has a 100% mortality rate

We're in a very precarious situation

Everything we set up will break, including our body & our friends & families bodies

Some of our refuges are ways to shelter from psychological pain, such as loneliness, despair, boredom, stress.

And more existential level– looking for refuge from meaninglessness. We act to give lives meaning. Deeply held values & drives give us an anchor in a sea without limits.

Where do we usually take refuge?

Existential flight precipitates us into absorption with the particular entities of the world. In this way we are able to divert ourselves from the uncanniness of life and death. We are free to concern ourselves with the much more manageable reality of well-defined things enclosed in limited situations.

Stephen Batchelor, in Flight, An Existential Conception of Buddhism

Brainstorm other ideas of typical refuges

success at work, accumulation of material goods and wealth, house security, job security, approval from friends & colleagues, romantic relationships, alcohol, drugs, tv, hobbies, friendships, ...

Absorption in these things could be mental or physical: ie could actually accumulate a lot of material goods, or just take a lot of mental space thinking about doing so.

For the moment, no value judgement about these – looking for refuge, gfr is a natural and healthy response to suffering or malaise or meaninglessness.

Exercise on looking at refuges

In threes: where do you think you find a sense of security?

Could be material or mental

Feedback from groups

tea break

TRUE & FALSE REFUGES

Earlier made no value judgement. But Buddha did make judgement:
Reading from Dhammapada v188-192 ("fleeing for refuge to sacred hills etc")

So some refuges work better than others at sheltering us from suffering.

Getting drunk probably isn't a great solution to suffering; having meaningful, loving relationships is probably better, tho still has pain built in, even only if cos they will die.

Dougies inhaler – banking crash – nuke war!

Stark language of "true & false" refuges – with shades in between

Saw 3J as ultimately the most true refuges

Ultimately 3J represent possibility of complete liberation from suffering.

Highest spiritual ideals

GOING FOR REFUGE TO THE THREE JEWELS

The 3 Jewels as refuges

In what way can the 3 Jewels be seen as true refuges?

Buddha – don't have access to Buddha now, except in imagination

But he does represent the ideal of Enlightenment, which is a true refuge from suffering, so we're told.

Dharma -

The experience of GFR to the 3 Jewels

[Nagavira]

Going forth, letting go, cf Buddha's leaving home

Returning to presence, letting go of mind-made worlds of past & future

Meditation as moment-to-moment GFR

Exercise in 3s

Have you made any changes since starting to meditate / becoming interested in Buddhism? Does this process fit within the understanding of Going for Refuge to the 3 Jewels, or going forth?

Home practice

Looking for our refuges

Look out for where we go for refuge.

What motivates us – being liked, wanting to do good in world, being admired?

Where does our mind go when we're in difficulty – blame? Distraction?

Where does our mind go when we're distracted, bored or idle? Eg in meditation, or walking along the street?

Reflect why we are doing what we're doing?

Information gathering exercise – not a beating us up exercise.

Draw them out on sheet of paper – mandala