Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

Study material for your retreat at Tiratnaloka
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Introduction to the Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to give you the opportunity to look in depth at the material that we will be studying on the Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels retreat at Tiratanaloka.

In this handbook we give you material to study for each area we’ll be studying on the retreat. We will also have some talks on the retreat itself where the team will bring out their own personal reflections on the topics covered.

As well as the study material in this handbook, it would be helpful if you could read Sangharakshita’s book *The History of My Going for Refuge*. You can buy this from Windhorse Publications.

There is also some optional extra study material at the beginning of each section. Some of the optional material is in the form of talks that can be downloaded from the Free Buddhist Audio website at [www.freebuddhistaudio.com](http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com). These aren't by any means exhaustive - Free Buddhist Audio is growing and changing all the time so you may find other material equally relevant! For example, at the time of writing, Vessantara has just completed a series of talks called ‘Aspects of Going for Refuge’ (2016) at Cambridge Buddhist Centre.

We’d ask you to study this material, reflect on it and come prepared with questions and areas you would like to discuss as this will help you to get the most out of your retreat. You might even want to study the material with some of your friends or talk about it with local Order Members. Throughout the material we’ve included questions about how the material relates to your own practice that we’d like you to think about in preparation for the discussion groups on the retreat.

It’s important that you let us know if you have problems accessing any of the material we’ve asked you to read, as we’ll be assuming that you have had a chance to look at it before you come.

All of us on the team at Tiratanaloka look forward to studying the material with you when you come here.
Study area 1. Centrality of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

Summary and Reading
The basis for Sangharakshita’s translation of the Dharma and the Buddhist Order he founded is his understanding of the importance and significance of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. This is the fundamental spiritual experience that unfolds into different aspects and depths. The first topic we will be studying is an overview of the centrality of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels in Sangharakshita’s understanding of the breadth and depth of the Buddhist tradition. This involves understanding the depth of this ‘central and definitive act’ in terms of the levels at which one can Go for Refuge, and the breadth in terms of the dimensions of how the act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels changes our lives and effects us in all areas.

Optional study material
In 1981 Sangharakshita gave a talk called ‘Dimensions of Going for Refuge’, lecture 154, in which he outlined the levels and dimensions of Going for Refuge. This can be downloaded from freebuddhistaudio.com or as an ebook called ‘Going for Refuge’ on his website www.sangharakshita.org.
You may also want to listen to his talk ‘Levels of Going for Refuge’, lecture 137, which he gave to the Order in 1978.
Subhuti goes into the levels of Going for Refuge in his paper ‘Initiation into a New Life’. This can be found on his website www.subhuti.info, or in the book ‘The Seven Papers’.

Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels
(Edited by Vajratara from a talk given by Candraprabha in 2015)

Introduction
There are many ways in which to talk about Going for Refuge - for example you may have come across the framework of the System of Practice which gives us a way of looking at the work we do in order to make our Going for Refuge more effective in terms of Integration, Positive Emotion, Receptivity, Spiritual Death and Spiritual Rebirth. Sometimes we talk about Going for Refuge in the context of spiritual friendship, ethics, or the central teaching of conditionality drawn out in Chapter 1 of Sangharakshita’s ‘A Survey of Buddhism’. And of course all of this is to help us understand more about what Going for Refuge is about.

On this retreat we are going to focus on Sangharakshita’s emphasis on Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels as the “central and definitive act of the Buddhist life” and draw out some of the implications of that. We will be looking at the place of the Three Jewels in our lives, our response to them, a sense of how our lives start to reorganise around them, and how we free ourselves from other identities and start seeing ourselves primarily as women who go for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

Throughout the retreat we’re going to try and get a feel of how our Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels affects the practical aspects of our life - in fact how it can turn our lives upside down and
move us in directions that we didn’t even know existed when we first learned to meditate or read our first Dharma book!

The Centrality of Going for Refuge and Lifestyle
If you have read ‘A History of my Going for Refuge’, you will know that, having taken ordinations in different traditions, and through what he calls ‘a process of discovery that follows a rather erratic course’, Sangharakshita eventually came to see that what united the different Buddhist traditions - what in fact made one a Buddhist - was the act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, and the reorganisation of one’s life around them. It’s easy to take this for granted, but the basis on which the Triratna Buddhist Order is founded is absolutely radical. Instead of dividing Buddhist practitioners into monks and laypeople, we have an Order in which there are no distinctions, no easy rules to limit the depths to which we can take our practice. There’s a lovely passage in ‘A History of my Going for Refuge’ where Sangharakshita talks about how, after he had initially created upāsaka/upāsikā ordinations i.e. lay-men and women, (there would also be maha-upāsaka, novice bodhisattva and bhikshu or monastic ordinations), he realised that those who had taken this ordination were doing more and had reorganised their lives to an extent that was far beyond what ‘lay’ practitioners in other traditions would be doing. So he changed the ordination and used the terms ‘Dharmachari’ and ‘Dharmacharini’ which, while they appear in traditional texts, weren’t used by any other Buddhist schools. It’s as if he started something off and then saw what it was becoming and that helped clarify his vision even further. At this point, the ordinations performed by Sangharakshita became separate from any particular sort of lifestyle. The principle behind our ordination became ‘commitment is primary, lifestyle secondary’.

The fact that the Movement and Order is founded on levels of commitment and not lifestyles can be challenging. It’s something we have to continually reflect on – no-one is going to tell you what to do, what to wear or what to chant. Many of us like that aspect of the Order, we like to make up our own minds about how to live. But the converse of this is that we sometimes WANT someone to tell us what to do - or to tell other people what to do if we don’t agree with them! So what we have in Sangharakshita is someone who gives us the principles, but also gives us the responsibility of working out how we individually live them out or in the case of Going for Refuge, how to realise them.

Q: How do you relate to the principles behind which the Order was founded? Would you find it easier to have more rules?

It is worth remembering that Sangharakshita was in a historically unique situation. He had access to all forms of Buddhism and needed to make sense of all the differing teachings, some of which actually contradicted each other. For example, in the Theravada school into which he was originally ordained, a Buddhist is defined by the number of precepts they take: lay followers taking 5, and monks taking many more. In the Mahayāna, Buddhists are divided into those who have taken the Bodhisattva vow, and those who haven’t. In Zen Buddhism it is meditation that is emphasised, and in Pure Land schools it is devotion. Looking at that array of lifestyles, spiritual ideals, teachings and practices, he asked himself what united them as Buddhists? For Sangharakshita, it is that central act of Going for Refuge that unites all Buddhists.
He also had an unprecedented understanding of how Buddhism had changed over time. He saw that when practitioners lost sight of the fundamental importance of Going for Refuge itself, different methods started to appear that re-emphasised different aspects of that central act. For example, originally followers of the Buddha were often wanderers who only met in large numbers when the moon was full or when they observed the rainy season retreat. Over time they became more settled and particular monastic practices became the focus over their Dharma practice: not eating after 12, how they wore their robes or keeping to a celibate lifestyle. These practices became ends in themselves, and the underlying commitment as to why they were undertaking them was lost. New teachings sprang up that re-emphasised altruism and the wandering lifestyle, using the example of the Buddha himself\(^\text{ii}\). It was thought they had found a higher teaching and that the Buddha had given different teachings for people with different capabilities. As the Bodhisattva path became more formulaic and lost its original vitality, new practices and lifestyles were developed, such as the Maha-siddhas and the emergence of the Tantra. Sangharakshita's perspective is that all these developments of Buddhism were a re-emphasis of different dimensions of Going for Refuge, different ways of deepening and exploring that essential act of moving towards the Going for Refuge as Buddhism ossifies towards formulaic practice. By identifying the levels of Going for Refuge and the dimensions in which it's experienced, Sangharakshita was able to unify disparate branches of the Buddha Dharma.

**Different aspects of Going for Refuge**

So what is Going for Refuge and how do we experience it?

Firstly, *Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels*. Sangharakshita calls this *‘the emotional and volitional aspect of this central Buddhist act’*\(^\text{iii}\). He says this is fundamentally a turning from a mundane way of life to a spiritual or transcendental way of life.\(^\text{iv}\) We find we have something in our lives that we want to move towards - a sense of something greater than ourselves, or even that we ourselves have the potential to be something greater than we thought.

What we do, in fact, when we Go for Refuge to the Three Jewels is to develop our ability to respond to higher values. The Three Jewels aren't something 'out there', actually existing and separate from us, even though when we are really struck by them that's what it feels like. The Three Jewels exist for us insofar as we are able to respond to something higher, something beyond ourselves - a sense of the qualities of the Buddha, the beauty and clarity of the Dharma or maybe the ethical practice of another person who is a bit further along the path than we are. Sangharakshita calls this a 'total response' in that it is deeply and emotionally felt, as well as feeling a sense of clarity and understanding. He quotes the stock phrase in the Pali Canon. When the Buddha has 'inspired, fired and delighted' someone who he is with, they are overwhelmed with feeling and they say:

> *It is amazing, Venerable Gotama, it is wonderful, Venerable Gotama! Just as if one might raise what has been overturned, or reveal what has been hidden, or point out the way to him who has been lost, or hold out a lamp in the dark so that those who have eyes may see; so likewise has the Truth been explained by Venerable Gotama in many ways. Therefore I go for refuge to him, his Dhamma and his Sangha. I wish to enter the homeless life and to receive ordination near the Venerable Gotama.*\(^*\)

}\(^\text{v}\)
Secondly, the *Opening of the Dharma Eye and Stream Entry*. Sangharakshita calls this ‘the unconditioned depth of the cognitive content’ of Going for Refuge, and the ‘permanent and far reaching nature of its effects’. This means how we actually experience the nature of reality, seeing truths such as impermanence more directly as we practise more intensively, and how that changes us. We experience ourselves and others as less fixed, and we experience less doubt and more clarity.

Thirdly, *Going Forth*. Sangharakshita calls this ‘the extent of reorganisation in the pattern of daily life’. Our forward momentum will involve a reorganisation in our lives, both internally and externally, and a move away from things that we realise can no longer fully satisfy us.

And finally the aspect of *Altruism*. This is the ‘other regarding attitude’ of Going for Refuge. Our Going for Refuge will involve a change in our relationship with the world, with other people and will become more based on mettā as we become more aware of what we can give, and as we become less and less self-orientated.

**Q: Which aspect of Going for Refuge do you feel most attracted to, and which one do you find most challenging?**

Levels of Going for Refuge
What Sangharakshita has also drawn out is that these aspects of Going for Refuge can be practised and experienced at deepening levels. The terms here are the ones that Subhuti used in his paper ‘Initiation into a New Life’.

So the 5 levels are *Cultural, Provisional, Effective, Real and Absolute*. Subhuti refers to them as levels of commitment. This implies Going for Refuge is not about us understanding enough, or being good enough, or doing enough - it’s about being able to commit ourselves more and more fully to this particular path in this particular Buddhist movement. It emphasises that ‘commitment is primary’, just as ‘lifestyle is secondary’.

*Cultural* Going for Refuge is not truly a commitment, but more of an allegiance to Buddhism as part of the social group to which one belongs. This is more obvious to see in ethnically Buddhist countries, but is also emerging in non-Buddhist countries as Buddhism becomes more popular amongst certain groups of people.

**Q: What does cultural Going for Refuge look like in the West?**

*Provisional* Going for Refuge is when we are attracted to the Three Jewels as ideals, we want to commit to Buddhism, we have moments of temporary inspiration or insight, but not yet enough weight to make that inspiration sustained. We may have other competing emotional and practical pulls in our lives, and we fit the Dharma around our lives. There may be areas in which we are aware we are holding back, and are not yet sufficiently sure to be wholehearted about our practice. This is the level at which we become a ‘mitra’.

Sometimes we can use the term ‘Going for Refuge’ as a sort of shorthand for ‘asking for ordination’ e.g. we say someone is a ‘Going for Refuge mitra’ meaning someone who has asked for
ordination. This can imply that people (including mitras) who haven’t asked for ordination aren’t Going for Refuge. It is worth reminding ourselves at this point that the levels of Going for Refuge describe the way that our Going for Refuge deepens as we deepen our commitment to the Three Jewels, it doesn’t start when one asks for ordination, nor is it confined to our Buddhist Movement.

**Effective** Going for Refuge is when, as Subhuti describes, we have a ‘compelling glimpse of what lies beyond self-clinging’*. This means we reorganise our lives so that we fit our lives around the Dharma, rather than the Dharma around our lives. We are sufficiently integrated psychologically to get our energy behind our Going for Refuge though we are still dependent on willed effort and conditions. Part of effective Going for Refuge is that we realise how much effort it will take and the conditions we need to progress. Shantideva says it still requires a lot of effort simply to stay still because we are always under the sway of the worldly winds:

‘Swinging back and forth like this in cyclic existence, now under the sway of errors, now under the sway of the Awakening Mind, it takes a long time to gain ground. Therefore I must diligently fulfil what I have promised. If I make no effort today I shall sink to lower and lower levels’*

Effective Going for Refuge is the level which is equated with ordination, so it’s important to understand what it means for us in our own lives.

**Q:** What does effective Going for Refuge look like? You may want to read Subhuti’s paper and listen to Sangharakshita’s talks to get a feel of it. What do you need to work on next to make your provisional Going for Refuge effective?

**Real** Going for Refuge is the level that is usually equated with the arising of irreversible Insight or stream entry. At this point Subhuti says we are co-operating with Dharma-niyāma processes which become more of a force in our lives than self-clinging. Before real Going for Refuge we can fall back, but at this point we are definitely moving towards Enlightenment, our practice is not dependent on external conditions. You could say at this point that we are less concerned with our progress for our own sake: our wellbeing is inextricably tied up with the wellbeing of others because we really see with our hearts that we are not separate from others. It is this broader perspective that guides our actions of body, speech and mind.

**Absolute** Going for Refuge is reached when we attain Enlightenment. We become part of a flow of non-egoistic volition. There is not much that can be said about this level because it transcends concepts. As Sangharakshita says ‘At this level one doesn’t go to any Refuge outside oneself. One is one’s own Refuge. In fact, on this level there’s no inside and no outside because there’s no self and no other, and one cannot really say any more than this.’\(^\text{ki}\)

It is important not to see these as real existing discrete levels. There is a continuum of commitment with a back and forth movement until we reach Real Going for Refuge at which point our momentum is irreversible: at that point we can’t help but go forward, however difficult that may be.

**Q:** Have we noticed our commitment deepen over time? What has helped? What are the areas where we notice ourselves holding back?
Use of the term Going for Refuge
You’ve probably found yourself and others at times talking about wanting to ‘deepen my Going for Refuge’. Talking in this way is second nature to us in Triratna - the idea that Going for Refuge is something that we’re constantly trying to take to deeper and deeper levels. It’s easy to forget that this concept is very much part of Sangharakshita’s particular presentation of the Dharma and we may notice that other writers on Buddhism don’t use this phrase. In other traditions they might talk about ‘realising the nature of mind’ or ‘developing bodhicitta’ or ‘understanding emptiness’ or ‘undertaking the path of purification’. In other traditions, Going for Refuge is seen as a preliminary practice or even something that is done at a relatively superficial level - reciting the refuges and precepts to show one is a Buddhist. But for us, practising within Triratna, we use the term Going for Refuge in a different way: the central act of a Buddhist that can be undertaken at ever deeper levels and that unfolds in different dimensions.

Working with the particular and the universal
Sangharakshita points out that Going for Refuge is twofold: general (or universal) and specific (or particular). When working towards effective Going for Refuge and beyond we need to understand ourselves: our habitual responses to things, our conditioning, the psychological makeup that causes us to see other people, situations and the world in the way we do. This is the specific or particular way in which we Go for Refuge.

Alongside this, we need to have a Dharmic framework for our experience as human beings, to understand in a wider context what our practice is for. We need what Sangharakshita calls ‘a context wider than the individual’s own personal life’. We need to understand what dukkha is, how we experience it in common with all other beings. We need to understand the significance of our own wish to go beyond dukkha and use the path that has been shown to us by the Buddha. This is the universal or general way in which we Go for Refuge.

**Q: Why is it important to look at our practice from both these perspectives - what we might call the particular and the universal perspectives?**

Taking the example of the mettā bhāvana practice, we might be tempted to push our real feelings away to try and force a connection with our ideals, our wish to feel positive and connected. This may work to a certain extent; we may bring in something more positive for a period of time than the feelings we started with. But the chances are that if we don’t recognise and sympathise and work with our real responses then they will come back, again and again. So we need to pay attention to the particular, the specific, and not leave ourselves out of the picture.

On the other hand, we might also go into an analysis of our mental states - tracing them back to what we think are the roots, wondering about our relationships with others that might have sparked off those feelings, indulging in some familiar stories about why we are the way we are. In this case, we can lose sight of what we’re actually trying to do in the practice - to go beyond a fixed and limited sense of self and to deeply empathise with other beings. So we might need to pay more attention to the universal - seeing the bigger picture in terms of the teachings of the Dharma and keeping a sense of the beauty of what we are doing.
There is a need to have a balance between understanding the particulars of our own character and seeing the universality of our experience as human beings that is quite key to the area of working to deepen our Going for Refuge generally, not just in meditation. If we focus too much on the universal, we can go a bit abstract and it’s hard to be specific enough to work on things in a way that really makes a difference. We need to work out what the Dharma means for us individually. On the other hand, if we concentrate too much on the details of our own psyche we can get stuck, see ourselves as nothing more than the product of our conditioning, and lose sight of the bigger context. In that case we need to reflect more deeply on what the significance of our experience is, using the framework of the Dharma.

Q: It might be interesting to look at whether we tend to communicate about our practice from the ‘particular’ aspect or the ‘universal’ aspect. Do we need to contact our own hearts more, or do we need to widen the context beyond our individual experience? How can we work with these tendencies?

Conclusion

We all know a lot about what it means to go for refuge because we’ve spent our entire lives going for refuge to one thing or another. The Buddha says in the Dhammapada: ‘Many people, out of fear, flee for refuge to sacred hills, woods, groves, trees and shrines. In reality this is not a safe refuge. In reality this is not the best refuge. Fleeing to such a refuge one is not released from all suffering. He who goes for refuge to the Enlightened One, to the Truth, and the Spiritual Community.... for him this is a safe refuge, for him this is the best refuge. Having gone to such a refuge, one is released from all suffering’\textsuperscript{10}. We believe - or perhaps even just hope - that there’s something that will give us satisfaction, will give us purpose, will shield us from all the instability and unpredictability of life in the human realm - it may not be hills, groves and trees for us, maybe for us it’s our job, family, partner, drugs, the perfect place to live.

If you read the stories of how and who the Buddha taught, over and over, he engaged with people from all walks of life - men, women, mothers, kings, farmers, prostitutes, businessmen - showing them how the Dharma could overcome the particular difficulties they experienced as a result of simply being human beings. In the seminar on the Bodhicaryāvatāra which was given in the very early days of the movement, Sangharakshita reflects on how Triratna (or The Friends as he calls it there) was developing along the same lines as the early Sangha. People with existential questions about life saw something that had a flavour of truth and freedom - often they saw it through seeing someone who seemed to be a bit different and getting into dialogue with them - and that was how their Going for Refuge started. So we’re all very different, we’ve got different questions and our connections to the Three Jewels will be very different. But I think we can often have a sense of something similar too - what the Buddha called the taste of freedom. And having Going for Refuge as the central act allows us to see clearly what we have in common and to work together towards that release from suffering for ourselves and others.
Study area 2. Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

Summary and Reading
The second topic we will be studying on this retreat is what the act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels looks and feels like in experience. This involves looking at the quest we undertake as we search for a true and enduring refuge, how we find a true refuge, and once found, how we commit to taking refuge there.

Optional study material
Sangharakshita gave a talk in 1965, lecture 9, on ‘Going for Refuge’, which is part of his series on ‘The Meaning of Conversion in Buddhism’. The whole series can be downloaded from freebuddhistaudio.com, or as an ebook from his website www.sangharakshita.org.

Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels
(Edited from a talk given by Vajratara in 2014)

The Quest
In the last section we looked at the basic momentum of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels as being a movement away from suffering towards liberation. So what are we moving away from? The most basic answer is that we are moving away from dukkha, or suffering, unsatisfactoriness. This can be experienced in terms of something going wrong in one’s life, for example a death or a separation, critical illness or loss in some form. It can also be experienced as a deeper sense of unsatisfactoriness: that things are okay on their own level, but they don’t go deep enough. One way we could examine this movement is to look at the life of the Buddha.

As a young man, the Buddha looked closely at his experience of his life, he thought deeply about it and he asked questions of it. We are told that he saw people struggling, in conflict, taking up arms against each other, struggling like fish in a pond fast drying out. He tells us that he was afraid when he saw these things, he shook with terror. He longed to find a place of shelter, but there is nothing in this world that is solid, not a part of it that is changeless\textsuperscript{xiv}.

We are told he saw sickness, ageing and death; sights that inspire in most people feelings of shock, humiliation and disgust. He saw that he too would get sick, old and die. It is said that the vanity of health, youth and life entirely left him\textsuperscript{xv}.

When the Buddha saw old age, sickness, death, conflict, he also saw that the reason for all this conflict and suffering is a thorn, lodged deep in the heart. And he saw that this thorn can be taken out\textsuperscript{xvi}.

He went on a quest, which in pali is ‘pariyesanā’, literally meaning to seek, search, look for, or desire. It is a strongly emotional and volitional word, not simply an intellectual idea. He longed to escape from what is incapable of giving lasting satisfaction, from what we may term a ‘false
refuge’, to find what might give him lasting satisfaction. This is what we might term a ‘true refuge’, something that, in his words, can offer ‘supreme security from bondage’ (yogakhema). The Buddha called the search for a true refuge ‘the noble quest’ (ariyapariyesanā) in contrast to the search for a false refuge, ‘the ignoble quest’ (anariyapariyesanā), in which we go in search of things that cannot satisfy, that are also subject to change, just as we are.

Q: Does the language of a ‘quest’ resonate with your own experience? How do you imagine your own spiritual journey?

Questing for the True Refuge

So how can we distinguish between a true and false refuge? What are we searching for in our noble quest? If we know what the basic criteria are, we will find it easier to know if we have found what we are truly looking for. What we are looking for is a refuge that is:

- **Permanent**: not that there is no movement, but that our refuge is beyond the reach of change, beyond the reach of death. Sometimes we catch a glimpse of this when we experience a great loss, for example someone dies, and our whole idea of our life is questioned. We are forced to ask what is of most value to us? What are the values not shaken by death – our own or others?

- **Limitless**: we need something, or some value, that is limitless. Otherwise we get to a point where we can’t go any further. People can often find this with different kinds of therapy. We can get to a certain point, perhaps finding the root of our health or psychological difficulties, but what next? Sometimes it is unclear what we do after we have reached that point, even of being a happy, healthy human being. So we need something that we can’t exhaust, that we can’t find the end of, that leads us beyond the known.

- **Satisfying**: Subhuti in his original talks on Going for Refuge calls this unlimited breadth. A true refuge must be able to take in the whole of our being. We can often feel like we have different parts of ourselves competing for attention. Sangharakshita talks about his experience of the conflict between Sangharakshita 1: the poet and the dreamer; and Sangharakshita 2: the philosopher monk. He said that if it wasn’t for Buddhism those two parts of himself would have split him apart, but Buddhism could take on both parts of himself.

- **Beautiful**: we must be powerfully attracted to the refuge, otherwise it can’t be a force in our lives, only a mild interest. It won’t be a refuge in the true sense of the term because we won’t turn towards it. I think the beauty comes in knowing the true refuge can satisfy our longing, our desire to transcend our current state of existence. It embodies values that we love. We want to become something beautiful, so we are attracted to beauty.

- **Universal**: the refuge can’t just be for Buddhists, it has to be true for everyone. This could be challenging to reflect on, but we need something that is unconditioned, that isn’t conditioned by time or by place, applying to some people at a particular time. We have to be able to glimpse the potential of that refuge everywhere: in literature, in the street, in every person, in every activity. The symbol for this in the Buddhist tradition is the ‘Pure Land’ where the Dharma is said to be singing from the wind and the movement of trees, in every sound from bird song to the rivers. Every sound is crying out the Truth.
The universality of refuge is better understood with reference to Sangharakshita’s vision of ‘cosmic Going for Refuge’. In this vision, he sees how all beings are on a quest, all ‘go for refuge’, in the sense that all beings long to transcend their current state of existence. He calls cosmic Going for Refuge the ‘key to the mystery of existence’xxix: all forms of life have an ‘inbuilt tendency to transcend’, which means we all have both the potential, and a conscious (or sub-conscious) desire to develop into a higher state of being, so that in some sense we can say we all go for refuge to a higher state of being. ‘Every living being wants to fulfil the law of its own nature, which is to develop. We want to actualize our own deepest potential, to become what we really are, to achieve in time what we are in eternity’xx. This vision of Sangharakshita’s echoes the Buddha’s vision of lotuses. After his Enlightenment, the Buddha stayed for a long time absorbing the experience, allowing it to unfold into many different dimensions of experience. He said that it was seeing that beings were like lotuses growing up out of the mud that prompted him to teach the Dharmaxxx. This means that central to the Buddha’s Enlightenment experience is a vision of growth: that all beings are moving towards the light in their own way. Sangharakshita says of cosmic Going for Refuge ‘This might sound impossibly poetic, but this is in fact what one sees.’xxxii

The longing to transcend our current state of being can make us restless, can even feel like a burden: here I am with my destiny in my hands, what do I do with it? We can feel a kind of nameless longing for we don’t exactly know what. The Buddha talked about it as a thirst, taṇhā (pali) or trṣṇa (sanskrit), and said that we cannot find a beginning to itxxxiii, it is simply there in all beings: ‘the flame of desire that burns unsatisfied from birth to birth until once and for all extinguished in the cool waters of Nirvāṇa.’xxxiv However, we do have a choice about what we do with that longing: to search for a true refuge that will truly satisfy us, or to try and reduce it to something external that we think we can own or have - a house, the latest iPhone, or the perfect partner. The other option is to try and solve that longing by blocking off from it. “Enough!” we think, “What’s the point? It’s all meaningless anyway”.

It is hard to stay with feelings of longing. In the midst of the demands of life, it is hard to maintain a feeling we are on ‘the noble quest’. Sometimes, I find I can watch my mind and I can see quite clearly how that longing arises. I can see I have a choice in every moment: I can either try to satisfy that longing by craving after false refuges, objects that cannot by their nature ultimately satisfy because they are always changing. I can stop the difficult feelings by seeking oblivion. Or I can stay with nameless longing - just a sense that I am not fulfilled and there is a possibility of fulfilment. Sometimes I am aware of a sense of potential, of movement in every moment, that urge to transcend. When I am aware of this movement, I can also see that it is not unique to me. Everyone experiences it in their own way. At these times a particular verse from a Sutra comes to mind:

‘Truly, O Manjusri, a tiny sparrow emerging from the membrane of an egg, without the shell fully broken, and without stepping out of the egg, utters just a sparrow’s cry. Even so, Manjusri, a Bodhisattva wrapped in the membrane of ignorance, without breaking the delusion of self, or stepping out of the triple world, utters the cry of a Buddha, the cry of śunyatā, unconditioned and unconfined.’xxxv
What do we find?

So, in our search for refuge, for transcendence, if we are lucky, we come across those things that can satisfy our search. We find something that can speak to us of that which is permanent, substantial, satisfying and beautiful. In Buddhism we would say that we have come across the Three Jewels.

It is important not to pin the Three Jewels down to being that we have to find ‘Buddhism’ in its most obvious forms. The quest needs an openness to the Three Jewels wherever we find them. It requires ‘spiritual receptivity’, otherwise we might just walk right past the thing we are searching for. Subhuti calls this receptivity Dharmic responsiveness, and talks about needing to see the Dharma in a much broader range of experience than traditional Buddhist activities\textsuperscript{xxvi}. We have to start with a real response, a visceral response of our whole being to what is of value to us, not an idea of what we should value. Subhuti says that mystery is the essence of this state. We can’t work out why it is important, it just is. He also says it is important that we identify that total response, that Dharmic responsiveness in our own life, otherwise our Dharma life will be built slightly apart from our inspiration.

**Q: Where did you first come into contact with the Three Jewels? Was it at a Buddhist Centre, or perhaps before when something really spoke to you of what is of true value in this life? What are the first experiences you can remember when you opened to what is good, true and beautiful?**

In the Buddhist tradition we have the legend of ‘the fourth sight’. It is said that the Buddha (or the Buddha Vipassi) went forth after seeing not a Buddha, but an ordinary wandering holy man, the sight of whom moved him to such a degree that he changed his whole life in response:

‘And as he was being driven to the pleasure park, the Prince saw a shaven headed man, one who had gone forth, wearing a yellow robe. And he said to the charioteer: “What is the matter with that man? His head is not like other men’s and his clothes are not like other men’s.”

“Prince, he is called one who has gone forth.”

“Why is he called one who has gone forth?”

“Prince, by one who has gone forth, we mean one who truly follows Dhamma, who truly lives in serenity, does good actions, performs meritorious deeds, is harmless and truly has compassion for living beings.”

Then the Prince said to the charioteer: “You take the carriage and drive back to the palace. But I shall stay here and shave off my hair and beard, put on yellow robes and go forth from the household life into homelessness.”\textsuperscript{xxvii}

**Q: What is or was your fourth sight?**

The significance of the Buddha’s experience is that he was willing to give himself totally, to respond wholeheartedly, to what he had seen, a process Sangharakshita describes in his talks on Going for Refuge:
‘Going for Refuge represents your possible emotional response, in fact your total response - to the spiritual ideal when that ideal is revealed to your spiritual vision. Such is its appeal that you cannot but give yourself to it… ‘You’ve seen the ‘Highest’ - it has been shown to you - so you needs must love it, needs must give yourself to it, needs must commit yourself to it.”

**Q: What holds you back or helps you to respond wholeheartedly to the ‘ideal revealed to your spiritual vision’?**

What can happen in practice is that this responsiveness comes and goes in flashes of inspiration, so our Dharma life becomes a process of deepening our response to our ideals. Sangharakshita talks about that process in his book the ‘Three Jewels’ as the three grounds of faith:

1. Faith starts with an **intuition** that here is something of value, which meets our longing for transcendence. Perhaps we feel a sense of beauty, that here is something that can really satisfy us, though we may not be able to put that into words.

2. On the basis of our intuition, we reflect on what we have found, making sure it accords with our own **reason**. To be a true refuge, it has to accord with our rational faculty. Dr Ambedkar said that he chose Buddhism because it accords with science, ‘**which is another word for reason**’. He wanted a religion to be a governing force of life, and how can something govern our and other’s life if it is open to ridicule, if we can’t believe it to be true?xxix.

3. We also need to test what we have found in our own **experience**, to step back and look around us, look into our own life and see that it works. This may take some time in order to see the change in ourselves and other people.

Our quest for Refuge eventually leads us to seeing the Three Jewels as the highest embodiments of what is of value: but they are expressions of deeper, universal truths or qualities beyond themselves, qualities that we respond to all the time. They point beyond themselves, being more than ‘Buddha, Dharma, Sangha’ in a formal sense:

**Buddha**

The Buddha is the vision of human potential, a vision of what we can become. Going for Refuge to the Buddha starts with looking for the Buddha in our own direct experience, which means looking for the vision of potential in people we know, people who are more developed than ourselves. This could be, for example, Sangharakshita, Order Members or other people who inspire us. Going for Refuge to the Buddha relates to apatāpya, respect for wise opinionxxx. Our relationship with those further along the spiritual path ignites our own Going for Refuge, and being in relation to them means relating to our own higher values that are reflected in them. It also means we can Go for Refuge to the Buddha in every moment of life, in reflecting what the people we look up to would do in this moment. One way I think of this is to listen for the voice of the Buddha calling out in every moment.

In early Buddhism we find many examples of people asking the Buddha “who is the ‘Great Man’, the ‘Supreme Sage’, the ‘Wise’, who is ‘worthy of offerings?’” The Buddha himself is the ultimate answer to the underlying question ‘who are we to become?’.
So we need to get a real feel for the Buddha in order to get a real feel for Enlightenment. We do this by reading the Suttas and Sutras. Through them we get to know the Buddha of history, but we also need to fill out the bones of those stories with our imaginations until the Buddha starts to become a living presence in our minds and hearts.

‘But there is a deeper issue, going to the heart of what it is to lead the Dharma life: unless we can truly imagine the Buddha and his Enlightenment in a way that stirs us deeply we cannot mobilise our energies to Go for Refuge to him. We can only imagine the Buddha wholeheartedly by discovering his image in our own minds, inspired and supported by the images around us.’xxxiii

Yet there is still further to go. Ultimately, we can’t Go for Refuge to the Buddha of our imagination because it is necessarily limited by our imagination. We can only ultimately Go for Refuge to the Buddha of Reality, what the Buddha really represents. This is Enlightenment itself, and you can only Go for Refuge to that when you can become it. Until then we have to keep alive the sense that the Buddha is beyond our capacity for understanding. He is ‘Anuttara’, incomparable with anything we can imagine, a mystery, ‘beyond us, yet ourselves’xxxiv.

Q: How do you experience the Buddha refuge in your life?

Dharma
The Dharma is both the truth about the way things are, and the way to realise that truth. Going for Refuge to the Dharma involves having a glimpse of the truth, perhaps embodied in certain teachings, which we take to heart and reflect on. One way of thinking of this is that if we can’t remember it, it’s not our teaching! If we bring it to mind, especially in a moment of difficulty, it is our refuge.

Going for Refuge to the Buddha-Dharma means that, although we gain inspiration from many other teachings, it is the Buddha’s Dharma we want to go deeper into, that we are convinced will take us all the way to Enlightenment. We see it as the primary means to Enlightenment, not just a good and interesting Eastern philosophy among many others.

Sangharakshita makes the point that to Go for Refuge to the Dharma we have to know what the Dharma is, which means we have to study it. ‘This, I am afraid is where many of us fall down.’xxxv We have to immerse ourselves in the ‘Sutra Treasure’xxxvi, but in doing that we find how vast, and sometimes contradictory, that treasure is. We need a translator for the modern age, which for us is Sangharakshita. So we also have to immerse ourselves in his teachings – we have asked to be Ordained into his Order, so we need to know how he understands the Dharma.

Q: What are the teachings we have taken to heart and reflect on? What do you read more - other teachers such as Pema Chodron or Thich Nhat Hanh, or Sangharakshita?

Sangha
The Sangha refuge represents the potential for communication. ‘A vital mutual responsiveness on the basis of a common ideal and a common principle: a shared exploration of the spiritual world between people who are in a relationship of complete honesty and harmony.’xxxv Sangharakshita’s
insight into the Sangha is that it is much more than being supportive conditions for our own growth, but it is intrinsic to the spiritual, if not human, life itself. We need to share ourselves, to give of ourselves, to be in communication and to feel we are not alone. Communication is both the expression and the deepening of one’s spiritual life. It challenges our sense of separateness and fixity. It is not even a practice, it is the ‘whole of the spiritual life’.

For us, perhaps the deepest communication we have is with people who are also committed to the same path as us, i.e. other sangha members. Even effective Going for Refuge is still dependent on conditions, so we cannot rely on other sangha members as a refuge entirely; they can still fall below their ideals, even in the Order, which can be painful and disappointing to experience. However, we can share our spiritual journey with them, feeling we are on the same path, which is a tremendously satisfying, and sometimes challenging, experience.

Sangha as a refuge ultimately means Going for Refuge to the men and women who have irreversible Insight into Reality. What does it mean to go for refuge to them? Are they perfect? We can go for refuge to them because they won’t turn back, they won’t give up on their Going for Refuge, so their Going for Refuge will be consistent enough to spark off our own. But they haven’t necessarily eliminated greed, or hatred or conceit, so we can’t expect them to always be what we want them to be!

Śraddhā

Through this whole and total response to the Three Jewels, they turn from something we see as valuable and precious, momentary glimpses, to a refuge. They become more than ideals and have practical implications for us. In the Tiratanavandana, we rejoice in the qualities of the Three Jewels, ending in: ‘All my life I go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. To all the Buddhas, Dharmas and Sanghas of the past, to all the Buddhas, Dharmas and Sanghas yet to be, to all the Buddhas, Dharmas and Sanghas that now are, my worship flows unceasingly. No other refuge than the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, refuge supreme is there for me. Oh by the virtue of this truth, may grace abound, and victory!’ The Three Jewels aren’t abstract qualities; they motivate and affect our life.

This response of moving from seeing the Three Jewels as inspiring values, to the governing force in everyday life, is the awakening of śraddhā, the most beautiful and profound quality that can be present in existence. It is not a special faculty given to you when you are a Buddhist, but a faculty inherent in humanity which unites head and heart in response to what we value, and we ‘place the heart upon’ that which we value. It is a response of our total being. Traditionally śraddhā has Three aspects:

1. Abhisampratyaya śraddhā: Trusting Faith. ‘A deep conviction about, and understanding of, truths and principles.’ This involves more than our intellect, it is a real knowing that ‘this is it’. You just know it is true ‘in your bones’. There is no use someone else telling you it is true, you have to know it’s true yourself. This is sometimes called the cognitive aspect of faith.

Q: What teachings do you have a deep conviction that you know to be true?
2. Cetasah prasāda śraddhā: Lucid Faith. Because we know it to be true in our bones, we feel for it, we even love it. Huan Tsang calls this aspect of faith: ‘a profound response to, and intense fondness for, all the pure qualities of the Three Jewels, its special activity consists in loving that which is good’. It is related to the aesthetic sense as we find the Three Jewels beautiful and our response to that is being ‘delighted, serene, clear, pure and bright’. It is compared to a water purifying gem – it clears and purifies our hearts and minds. Sangharakshita described faith as ‘The response of our total being of what is ultimate in us to what is ultimate in the universe’ and I think this gives a feel of this kind of faith. When the Buddha was asked what is the Dhamma, he replied, when it leads you to delight in what is pure and beautiful, you know it is the Dhamma.

Q: What do you love, or delight in, in the Three Jewels?

3. Abhilāsa śraddhā: Longing Faith. When we know the Three Jewels are true and we delight in them, we long for them to be realised, in ourselves and others. This aspect of faith is ‘The profound desire and aspiration to attain and realise good things, and the confidence in one’s ability to do so.’ Perhaps this goes back to cosmic Going for Refuge - the longing we all feel to transcend. Longing unites both the recognition that it is possible to manifest the Three Jewels in one’s life, and the realisation that they are completely mysterious and beyond us.

Q: Do you feel that it is possible to attain the Three Jewels?

Q: Which aspect of śraddhā is most present to you in your practice?

Conclusion
So, inherent in life is this urge to transcend. We, like the Buddha, long to find a place unscathed, a place of shelter, and perhaps in our long journey we might find that place, that island, the island of jewels. And if we find that island, I hope we trust, love and long for those Jewels, I hope we put them into practice in every moment of our lives.
Study area Three. Opening of the Dharma Eye and Stream Entry

Summary and Reading
In Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, we will find that we are transforming. We see things in a different way, and we change our behaviour and the way we live in the light of that vision. This is expressed by Sangharakshita as the dimensions of Going for Refuge that are ‘opening of the Dharma eye’ and ‘stream entry.’

Optional study material
Again, much of this study area is based on the talk Sangharakshita gave in 1981 called ‘Dimensions of Going for Refuge’, lecture 154, in which he outlined the levels and dimensions of Going for Refuge. This can be downloaded from freebuddhistaudio.com or as an ebook called ‘Going for Refuge’ on his website www.sangharakshita.org.

Insight is a topic much discussed in the Order. Vessantara has got some useful material in the ‘talks and articles’ page on his website www.vessantara.net. He particularly explores post-insight practice.

Opening of the Dharma Eye and Stream Entry
(Edited from a talk given by Vajratara in 2015)

In his talk ‘Going for Refuge’, Sangharakshita describes the experience as fundamentally a turning from a mundane way of life to a spiritual or transcendental way of life \[xlii\]. To the extent we do this, we open ourselves up to something more than the mundane, that we might even feel is somehow magical, or at least different to our ordinary every day consciousness. A new awareness opens up and we see things differently. Sangharakshita says that our inner spiritual eye or vision opens \[xliii\]. This is called traditionally the ‘opening of the Dharma Eye’ (dhamma cakkhu / dharma caksus) and the changes that take place on the basis of that seeing is ‘stream entry’ (srotâpanna). We could equate these to the stages of spiritual death and rebirth in ‘the five aspects of the spiritual life’. As we commit ourselves to the path, we have a new vision, we ‘die’ to our old way of seeing the world, and we are ‘reborn’ into a different way of life. We are transformed. This echoes the famous saying ‘The moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too’ \[xliii\]

We can see this process in many stories from the Buddhist tradition. For example, we have the story of Suppabuddha the leper \[xiv\]. Suppabuddha is searching for alms food and he sees a big crowd. He knows he won’t get any food, but he thinks he may as well listen to the Buddha while he is there. As Buddha surveys the crowd with the mind of a Buddha, he sees that Suppabuddha is capable of understanding the Dhamma, so for him the Buddha gives a talk on generosity (dāna), ethics (sīla) and renunciation (nekkhamma).

Suppabuddha’s mind, it is said, becomes ready, malleable, free from hindrances, purified and elated, so the Buddha teaches him the Dharma unique to the Buddhas: this is conditioned co-arising, especially applied to suffering, to dukkha i.e. the Four Noble Truths. The Sutta uses a
simile often repeated in the Pali Canon. Just as the clean cloth takes the dye: ‘there arose the stainless, un undefiled Dhamma vision that whatever is subject to origination is subject to cessation.’ The Dharma eye, or Dhamma cakkhu, is opened.

Arising in dependence on conditions
So how did this occur, and what were the conditions that led up to it? Suppabuddha was ready; he was in a fairly open state. He had just listened to a talk on generosity, ethics and renunciation. Sīla literally means ‘good character’ and denotes an upright quality, cultivating a sense of ethical responsibility and conscious behaviour. This is akin to the stage of integration. As a result of being inspired by those qualities, Suppabuddha was full of faith, his mind was purified and elated. He was feeling positive and uplifted, free from hindrances. This is akin to the stage of positive emotion. Suppabuddha had prepared his mind, and like a clean cloth, it took the dye.

In Suppabuddha’s case, the Buddha gave a discourse which inspired these qualities, but in other instances in the Pali Canon where the Dharma eye opened, such as in Sariputta, Moggallāna and Kondañña’s case, they were already living a lifestyle that encouraged the development of positive mental states and renunciation.

This state of ethics, positivity and integration makes the mind receptive. The receptive mind can hear the truth. And the truth comes, in this story, from a discourse of the Buddha, but it can also come from life itself. It could be an experience of impermanence or of dukkha, of life ‘breaking its promises’. The point is that, like Suppabuddha, we are listening. Instead of just responding with aversion or distraction, we reflect on a higher perspective or a Dharma teaching.

Another way of explaining this is that kamma niyāma processes lead to the arising of dhamma niyāma processes. If one practises in accordance with the kamma niyāma processes, dhamma niyāma processes unfold. This is because practising in accordance with the karmic order of conditionality is aligning your behaviour of body, speech and mind with the way things are: we are not separate or fixed and all beings have the potential for Buddhahood. To act ethically, with mettā, generosity, contentment, truthfulness and awareness, is to support our own growth and the growth of others. To act ethically is to resonate with all life, to develop a sensitivity to a broader awareness of life itself. To act unethically is to stunt ours and other’s growth, to come from a closed and cut off place that cannot see the life in others. Unethical actions are based in a deluded vision of reality that brings us further away from seeing into the way things are.

If we act ethically, our consciousness becomes more subtle and refined, we move away from self-clinging and circling around our self-orientated needs, and we become more sensitive to reality itself. We find this process in the traditional formulas of the Dhamma. For example, in the Three-Fold Path, sīla or ethical behaviour leads to samādhi, meditation, a higher, more sensitive and subtle consciousness that can perceive the truth that is paññā/ prajñā or wisdom.

This opening of the Dharma eye can be experienced in different ways by different people. For some it may happen suddenly and apparently ‘unannounced’. This is the sudden path, that Sangharakshita calls ‘shattering the Wheel [of life] at a single blow’. It can also happen gradually, so that it is only when we look back on our life that we realise we see things differently
and have a clarity of vision that has emerged over time. The opening of the Dharma eye is a slow unfolding. This is called the gradual path and Sangharakshita describes it as ‘progressively slowing the Wheel down, gently applying a brake to bring the whole thing slowly to a halt’\textsuperscript{xvi}. We could say that the Opening of the Dharma eye is sudden and gradual. It is gradual because it arises in dependence on karma niyāma processes that may take many years to develop, even if you can’t always see the fruits immediately. It is sudden because when it happens, it is beyond the karma niyāma processes and is experienced as a different order all together from ordinary consciousness. In a sense it doesn’t really matter how we experience the Dharma eye opening. The main thing is that we realise that, however it arises, it arises in dependence on conditions, and that we can both find a way to communicate our own experience and listen to others who may have a very different experience.

The content of the experience
What do we see when the Dharma eye opens? Sangharakshita calls this dimension the ‘unconditioned depth of its [Going for Refuge’s] cognitive content’. What is the cognitive content? The Pali texts usually use the phrase, ‘Whatever is subject to origination is subject to cessation.’ This is a very simple way of expressing the particular Insight that is seen when our Dharma eye opens. Sangharakshita’s definition also makes the point that seeing into that formula isn’t purely an intellectual, theoretical knowledge, but a real seeing into the depths, unconditioned depths, of what could otherwise be a dry formula.

The simple formula has different implications and can be applied in different ways. It is an expression of conditioned arising (pratityā samutpāda), and all formulas in the Dharma are expressions of that basic truth. For example, the three lakṣanās, the four Noble Truths, the nidāna chains are all expressions of pratityā samutpāda. The Dharma eye opens when we apply those formulas to our lives, moving from the ‘general’ or ‘universal’ truths of the Dharma, to our ‘specific’ and ‘particular’ experience. It also opens when we find the ‘universal’ truths of the Dharma right there in our ‘specific’ experience, when we see the overall significance of what we experience.

Sangharakshita describes what we see when the Dharma eye opens simply as seeing both impermanence, that everything changes, and that within that change, there is the possibility of transformation: that everyone can become Buddhas.\textsuperscript{xviii}

\textbf{Q: What Dharma teaching or formula do you reflect on most? How do you reflect?}

Stream Entry
When the Dharma eye opens, it changes you. As Sangharakshita says ‘something tremendous happens’\textsuperscript{lix}. Our whole being flows irrevocably towards Enlightenment. The momentum of our being is altered. We ‘enter the stream’ of the Dharma and become a śrātāpanna, a stream entrant.

Sangharakshita calls this dimension of Going for Refuge the: ‘permanent and far reaching nature of its effects’. He describes life as being a tension between the gravitational pull of the mundane, of sāṃsāra, and the gravitational pull of the transcendental, Nirvāṇa. At the point of stream entry, we are more under the influence of the gravitational pull of the transcendental.
Q: **What is the gravitational pull of the mundane that you are leaving behind?**

We could look at this in terms of the three fetters or bonds, saṃyojana.

1. **Sakkāyadiṭṭhi:** When we are bound by this fetter, we believe we have a real, existing, fixed, isolated self which is separate from the self of others. We identify with a set of old habits, which aren’t necessarily positive, as the real ‘me’. Sangharakshita calls this fetter ‘habit’

   When we begin to break through this fetter, we realise we can change, that we do not have a fixed core, and we become liberated from our own oppression that keeps us in a fixed and painful self identity. Sangharakshita says that to break this fetter, we need a sense of creativity, that we are constantly creating a new self, as if we are our own work of art. Dr Ambedkar says that when we break through self view, we stop chasing ‘baubles’ that can never satisfy the cravings of our human heart, and we open our eyes to the fact that we are a tiny part of the measureless whole.

2. **Sīlabbata-parāmāsa:** This means mechanical observances, going through the motions and keeping up external observances, the fetter of ‘dependence on moral rules and religious observances’. We may become happily busy, or feel we are part of a positive group, but somehow our heart is not in what we are doing. We feel that if we keep up appearances, everything will be okay, but really we are slipping into living a life alongside our real inspiration. We feel a lack of life in our Buddhist practice. Sangharakshita calls this the fetter of ‘superficiality’. Breaking this fetter means we act with the whole of ourselves to do what we love. We build our life on our real inspiration, whatever that inspiration may be, and we Go for Refuge to our own connection with the values that the Three Jewels represent, even if that means our spiritual life may look different from other people and we have different inspirations and enthusiasms.

3. **Vicikicchā:** This is the fetter of doubt. We doubt that the spiritual life is possible, and we each have our own particular version of why we can’t change. We become indecisive and deliberately vague, keeping our options open, we hesitate and rationalise so that we don’t have to get down to the real business of change. We could imagine it as taking a comfy seat by the exit. This is painful, because we are never really part of things and we never seem to get anywhere. When we break this fetter, we commit ourselves to change, we clarify our priorities and act on it. ‘Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it!’

Q: **Where is our real enthusiasm and inspiration? What would our Going for Refuge look like if we built our Dharma life on that?**

Q: **Where do you keep your options open? How could you bring clarity to that area?**

So those are the Three Fetters that you are leaving behind, but what are you are attracted to, what is the gravitational pull of the transcendental?
When the Buddha talked about stream entry he said that you know that you are a stream entrant when you have confirmed, or perfect (avecca) faith (pāsada) in the qualities of the Three Jewels that are elucidated in the Tiratanavandanā, and in your own ethical practice.

What does that mean? It means that we are clear and lucid about what is of value, we see the highest and ‘needs must love it.’ The Three Jewels and ethical practice are so attractive, so beautiful, like jewels, why would you not move towards them? Why would we not leave behind our old way of being? Using a Sufi analogy, we are compelled towards the transcendental in the same way a lover is drawn to the beloved. The Buddha said that this kind of faith is like water flowing from rain on the mountain, filling up gullies and creeks into pools, lakes, streams, rivers and finally the ocean. In the same way, faith in the Three Jewels and in the virtues dear to the Buddhas flow in the same way to Enlightenment itself.

We may think that stream entry seems very far away, or perhaps we think it is near, or that we have already got there. Maybe we ask ourselves what its importance is at all? The main thing is that we feel we are changing, that our Going For Refuge is transforming the way we see the world, and having ‘far reaching effects’. Sometimes we can see it in the change in the momentum of our lives. We are heading in a different direction, sometimes like the slow turning of a large tanker, or sometimes like a yacht on a windy day!

In the journey towards ordination, we are seeking to make our Going for Refuge effective. However, in the Order, we are seeking to make our Going for Refuge real. This is equivalent to stream entry, and shows that until that point we can fall back, so it is imperative that every Order Member is setting up the conditions for the Dharma eye to open and for stream entry to be reached.

**Q: How do we envisage stream entry? Do we find Ordination or stream entry a more helpful goal? How are we moving towards our goal?**

**Conclusion**

Though the theory is straight forward, what the actual practice of opening the Dharma eye and stream entry look like in the life of the individual can be confusing. From that point of view, it is important that we talk to others about what we are experiencing. From discussions I have had with practitioners over the years, here are some practical points about this area, a sort of ‘trouble shooting’ guide.

The opening of the Dharma eye and stream entry are part of the whole transformation of being that takes place when we Go for Refuge. We could look at the dimensions as beginning with volition, which changes our vision of reality, and transforms our being. That has an effect on how we live in the world (renunciation or going forth) and how we act towards others. In this way Going for Refuge has an effect on every part of who we are. We are transformed. From this point of view we have to be prepared to enter into the Dharma life for the long term. When told about some new courses for ‘Enlightenment in a Weekend’ in a TV interview, Sangharakshita said it wasn’t possible, not for the kind of whole transformation that Buddhism is talking about. Interestingly, when he said that, I
thought he looked rather sad, as if the magnificent transformation that the Buddhist path is
cconcerned with is little understood. Perhaps that is my projection, but I hope we don’t reduce
Buddhism to something easy and quick that demands little change in lifestyle or the way we are in
the world. Sangharakshita recently said that the further away we feel from the Buddha, the closer,
in fact, we are. If we think we are there already, we are only further away.

It is easy to get trapped in our own visions or experiences so that they become more important
than our current experience. Vessantara distinguishes between insights that we are in all the time,
that we can access when in the right conditions, or insights that we have on an occasion that then
become memories. Visions and big experiences are important, but they are important because
they change the momentum of our being towards Enlightenment. The general advice seems to be
to relax, to let our experience unfold without clinging to it. I remember a man who came to the
Sheffield Buddhist Centre who was always searching for a guru who could take him back to an
experience he had at an ashram. He spent vast amounts of money going to India on retreat, but
he refused to meditate or do any personal practice, and he used to pay a local boy to buy him wine
to drink in the evening! He couldn’t be with his experience now, but was always referring back to
old Insight, which became a memory. Memories can inspire us, they can even provide a sort of
touchstone that we can return to, but the point is to look into our current experience, not to try and
relive something that has gone.

Sometimes it is hard to communicate our experiences and review how we have changed. If we
can find someone we can be open with, with whom we can just start to open up, that can be
extremely helpful. We may need to find someone more experienced than ourselves because at
first it can be a bit tender and we don’t want to sound inflated or solidify our experience, nor do we
want our experience to be dismissed. In talking about how our Going for Refuge manifests in our
lives, we don’t necessarily need to classify our attainments. The Buddha suggested just talking
about the Dharma itself. He said that when we talk about the Dharma we get a sense of each
other’s understanding and wisdom, just as when we get a size of a fish when we watch it
swimming. Big fish make big bubbles\[^{vii}\]

Though we may feel we have experienced a deep transformation, we need to keep Going for
Refuge in all areas of our practice, particularly ethics, integration and positive emotion. It can be
tempting to think that now we have seen that everything is illusory, we don’t have to practice ethics
or ‘conventional Dharma’. We can see the Three Jewels are just stepping stones to an experience
we have reached. My experience tells me that even big insights don’t necessarily last as an
experience, they are glimpses, highly significant glimpses, that change our life, but we don’t remain
in those glimpses forever. It might be we can go back to that glimpse under certain conditions, but
at some point we have to go back to relative functioning, to the karma, not dharma, niyāma
processes. We have to live our insights out in our lives, let them transform our lives.
Sangharakshita described this as the path of vision and the path of transformation: one augments
the other. Padmasambhava said ‘Though my view is as spacious as the sky, my actions and
respect for cause and effect are as fine as grains of flour.’

We have to accept that even glimpses may be partial. The Three Jewels are not stepping stones.
The Buddha described the Three Jewels as strange and wonderful,\[^{viii}\] deep, subtle and profound.\[^{ix}\]
The sense we have from the Buddha is that there is still more to be explored, even at Buddhahood.
Even the Buddha revered and relied on the Dharma itself, and he revered the Sangha ‘when it attained to greatness’.lx There is always further to go.
Study area 4. Going Forth

Summary and Reading
We have seen that Going for Refuge is a total response to the qualities represented by the Three Jewels and that in Going for Refuge we see things differently and transform our way of being. This transformation will have an effect in the way we live our life, more specifically in what we choose to leave behind. Sangharakshita calls this aspect of Going for Refuge the ‘extent of reorganisation in the pattern of daily life’.

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<th>Optional study material</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sangharakshita gave a talk in 1997 on ‘Reflections on Going Forth’, lecture 189. You can download this from freebuddhistaudio.com.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maitripala gave a talk at Tiratanaloka about her perspective as a mother and daughter of going forth from the family. You can download the notes from this talk from the Tiratanaloka page on thebuddhistcentre.com.</td>
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<tr>
<td>For your own reflection practice, you might like to reflect on the ‘Dasadhamma Sutta’, Anguttara Nikaya 10.48, which can be found on the internet including on accesstoinsight.org.</td>
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Going Forth
(Text purpose written by Vajrasakhi)

“Going Forth into homelessness draws attention to the extent of the reorganisation which, regardless of whether or not one becomes a monk in the formal sense, the experience inevitably brings about in the pattern of one’s daily life.”

Going Forth can be quite difficult to talk about in our present culture of instant gratification. Getting what I want is highly valued, even linked with apparently good qualities like authenticity, assertiveness, power and initiative. It can be seen as an important goal for human life and associated with pleasure. However the Buddha is showing us another way of orienting our lives. I want to look at this as the difference between the pleasures of the spiritual path and the pleasures of the wheel of life. This can be a helpful way of understanding the process of reorganising the pattern of our daily life in line with our Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels.

There is a basic need for pleasure in human life, and this is also true of the spiritual life. We need an intelligent, sensitive movement from what Sangharakshita and Subhuti call the lower to higher pleasures. It’s crucial we don’t give up the lower pleasures until we are enjoying the higher, or we’ll get a kickback. For instance if we try taking a vow of celibacy before we are ready for it we may find ourselves suddenly assailed with desire for a partner.
**Sukha, or pleasant, vedanā**

But what does it mean to talk about ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ pleasure? In the Pali cannon the Buddha explains that vedanā (pleasant, painful or indifferent feelings) is either sāmisa or nirāmisa, worldly or un-worldly.

**Sāmisa sukha** vedanā means worldly pleasant vedanā, also translated as meaty or raw. They are feelings that are deeply connected to the underlying tendencies of craving, ill will and ignorance. They are tainted by the defilements or connected with what one translator calls ‘worldly baits’. Through habit they have become closely connected to patterns of self obsession through wanting and not wanting. So though the feeling is neither positive nor negative in itself, there is an almost instantaneous response of craving or hatred.

**Nirāmisa sukha** vedanā means un-worldly pleasant feelings (un-raw, un-meaty, or not of the flesh). This is pleasure that is independent of sensations or mental acts. It easily generates motivation for the path and stimulates mettā and faith. Ultimately this is the bliss and ease of Nibbāna, but we can also understand it as pointing to the kinds of pleasure that open us up beyond our self obsession. An example might be seeing a Buddha rūpa.

**Q: What are some examples of sāmisa and nirāmisa pleasures?**

The task of the spiritual life can be seen as having to detach feeling (vedanā) from craving (klesha). It is this detached attitude toward the world, not dependent on sense-desire and the self-clinging that is associated with it, that brings about true happiness. But the word ‘detached’ can sound cold, so what is the Buddha getting at? Anything that is a way of upholding my sense of a separate self, that I identify with, is a false refuge. This simply means that it will not give us the satisfaction that we expect from it. Sometimes we don’t realise this until we lose the object of our desire. This is what is meant by ‘pleasures of the circle (or wheel of life)’. They are the pleasures we get when craving or hatred is gratified. The pleasures of the circle are not evil or bad. The problem is simply that they are subject to the lakkhanas, or marks of existence, and therefore will eventually cause us pain.

**We are Going Forth from false refuges**

Subhuti has described the false refuges in terms of false Buddha, Dharma and Sangha refuges.

**The false Buddha refuge**

The Buddha refuge is a vision of Enlightenment for the sake of all beings as the highest potential of human life. Without this transcendental refuge we can imagine that the highest potential for human life is something like a career path or a positive social role.

Is career a false refuge? Yes, to the extent that we are identified with it. Our career and the status it brings us will reinforce our self-clinging, the source of our suffering. As our practice deepens, we may find the goals of our career path no longer make so much sense. Instead we might turn our energy and competence to our practice. Our ambition and drive can be directed to the goal of
attaining Enlightenment for the sake of all beings. We may want to find ways to live more simply or even to work for the sake of the Dharma.

**Q: In what ways might someone's career be a source of suffering for themselves or others?**

Other roles we may identify ourselves with can be closer to home. We may see ourselves as a good or worthwhile person because of our role as a mother, wife, friend, sister or daughter. Obviously these are good things to be, but as we practice we see how identifying strongly with any role will limit our aspirations and sense of our potential. We may even tie ourselves down practically by looking after everyone else. Can we really help others to fulfil their potential, if we are not?

These false Buddha refuges may include patterns of rescuing, over responsibility, or busyness, which will be as true for the businesswoman as for the home maker. Vessantara describes how having a 'project' of some kind in our life is a deep pull for us because of the strong sense it gives of having a 'project manager'.

**Q: Try spending time on this retreat without any 'project' at all. How does it feel?**

**Q: What roles do you identify with and how do they limit you?**

The false Dharma refuge

The Dharma refuge is the teachings and practices that help us reach this high potential. Without the transcendental teachings we are left with ordinary wrong views and assumptions. They will reinforce our self-clinging as well as shape our sense of what is good and bad in human existence. These views will limit our sense of who we can become and how we go about changing things. We have many views about ourselves that create our identity, some may be easy to spot and some hard. There are lots of ways to work with these.

Friendship with people who are different from us can be a helpful way to recognise our blind spots. Sometimes, though, we just find ways to avoid any differences of opinion with our friends, so it is important to have times when the intensity of a shared project will force us to confront each other and challenge our deeply held beliefs or opinions.

**Q: Where is there intensity in our Dharma lives? How has that intensity helped you examine your views?**

Sectarianism in all it's forms is a false Dharma refuge. We have to Go Forth from blame, resentment, criticising, or hating. We need to look at the views behind our idea that there are people who we think are bad or deserve punishment. We may have views about race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, age. Taking a thorough look at these views may be a long term project. We are unlikely to be able to change views that may be part of our cultural conditioning quickly. Travel and meeting spiritual practitioners from different cultures can help.
Even our understanding of the Dharma can become a false refuge if we hold Dharmic views in the wrong way. When we find ourselves getting angry or critical of other practitioners who hold different opinions it may be that we have made our views about the Dharma into part of our identity, our sense of ‘who I am’. However the Buddha tells us that the Dharma is not something to hold onto in this way. Like a snake we need to hold it correctly or it will bite us, and like a raft we must leave it behind after it has served its purpose

The false Sangha refuge

The true Sangha refuge is the network of spiritual friendships that form around us as we all support, inspire and challenge each other to grow towards Enlightenment. Without the ideal of the Spiritual Community we are left with ordinary human connections of work, pleasure and family. These will fall into the patterns of Group behaviour, as described by Sangharakshita in ‘What is the Sangha’, with associated issues of power, authority, conformism and individualism.

Is family a false refuge? The short answer is yes. So then what? We’re not going to just leave our families, Buddha or no Buddha. A friend of mine said after struggling with this for some time, she realised that she had to look at family through Going for Refuge spectacles! This means bringing our practice right into our family relationships. Particularly our ethical practice of course, but also insight into the nature of those relationships. We might realise, like Maitripala, whose paper on family is in the library at Tiratanaloka, that we can’t save those we love from dukkha. Seeing this freed up her relationships with her children and she could see them as separate people. We might begin to recognise that we cannot own anyone, not even our children.

Working on our relationship to our family might include inviting our Buddhist friends to meet our family members, and vice versa. We might try to notice where we rely on our family and learn to rely on others in that way too, so that when we have difficulties we can ask for help. We can look at how intimacy happens in our relationships and why? The Buddha in the Karaniya Mettā Sutta says that just as a mother loves her only child we can expand our love out to the whole world.

Is my relationship a false refuge? It is to the degree that it limits us to one special person. So then what? As above we need to bring ethics into the relationship, notice any ‘no go’ areas and find ways to talk about them. We might find we have a fear of being without a relationship and the security and status it can give us. Having a significant other can even make us feel that we are more real. We may have patterns of over dependence on men or male attention. Or we may have identified as lesbian in a way that deepens self clinging. It can be interesting to talk about these areas with our sangha friends and share life stories.

Is being ‘in love’ a false refuge? The difficulty is that although the first part of the experience can blow us open, we quickly close down to focus all our emotional energy onto that particular person. What can help is to look at patterns in the kinds of people we fall in love with - why him/her, what are the ideals and stories behind falling in love? What am I projecting out? How can I reclaim those projections for myself? Pema Chodron has suggested that if we can ‘unhook’ the stories from that person and just be in touch with the feeling of being in love, we can spread it out to the whole world.
**The group:** Sangharakshita has said that Going Forth is primarily Going Forth from the group, becoming more individual. Eventually we form the Spiritual Community together, the locus for the arising of the Bodhicitta.

**Q: What are the main areas in which we feel we need to go forth from our false refuges? How can we do that in a sustainable and helpful way?**

**False refuges on retreat**

We sometimes set up small eddies of craving in order to have the pleasure of satisfying it. What starts as a special treat becomes a daily habit, then becomes something we can’t do without. A retreat is a good time to notice craving in small ways: do we want a reward for hard work, or a relief from boredom? Is it just a feeling of restlessness, of what next?

Silence on a retreat is a strong going forth. We can feel quite uncomfortable without the normal chat that reassures us of our place in the group. We also go forth from phone, shopping, private space, TV, reading novels. It might be interesting to notice how this feels as the retreat progresses. What about ill will as a false refuge? Do we find ourselves constantly looking out for the things we can criticise about others or ourselves? As women we may have to go forth from not taking ourselves seriously, being small or feeling unseen in study groups, passive aggressive behaviour, or from culturally conditioned dependence on men.

**Q: How are we going forth on this retreat?**

**Ethics as Going Forth**

We begin to recognise that all our ethical practice involves going forth from our habitual patterns that reinforce self clinging. Sangharakshita describes this as moving from the power mode to the love mode. It is very useful to come on an Ethics retreat if you can, where we go into the precepts in more depth. When we join the Order we are taking the ten precepts as vows, which means that we are committing ourselves to looking deeply at the places where our practice is difficult. It can help to have a regular confession practice in place as you prepare for ordination, maybe in your ‘Going for Refuge group’ or with a spiritual friend.

**Levels of Going Forth**

Sangharakshita has pointed out that going forth, like Going for Refuge, happens on different levels. At the cultural level any ‘going forth’ is still a part of our identity. We are appropriating the forms of going forth to support our ego. When going forth becomes provisional we can give up worldly life for a short period, just to see what it’s like to be without all these things. This happens, to some extent, when you go on a long retreat, either a solitary retreat or a retreat with friends. Effective going forth is when you are making a sustained, systematic effort to give up worldly attitudes. And also when you do this with the help of at least a degree of external renunciation. Real going forth is the equivalent to Stream Entry. We are really seeing through and giving up on samsara.

**Q: What is your experience of solitary retreats?**
Near enemies of Going Forth

In his ‘Reflections on Going Forth’ Sangharakshita talks about horizontal and vertical Going Forth. When we experience uncomfortable changes in our lives we usually rebuild our ego again in the new circumstances. This is a going forth, but without Going for Refuge. It will have shaken us up, we can’t really believe in the false refuges as we used to, but we haven’t got a true refuge to move towards. Going forth ‘vertically’ means seeing through our identification with body, speech and mind, at least to some degree. There is a degree of spiritual death, which opens us up to spiritual values, Dharma niyāma processes. This means that there are situations when we can go forth without Going for Refuge, but we cannot Go for Refuge without Going Forth.

It’s helpful to look at some kinds of going forth as growing up rather than giving up. We need to watch out for going too fast, for example we may want to go forth from hating someone or from an eating issue, but these are very complex areas. We may see quite clearly that something is a false refuge, for instance, an unethical career or a difficult relationship, but be unable to even want to let go of it. Black and white thinking can leave us with the idea that we have to be perfect now. We can find ourselves feeling self righteous when we have changed a habit or guilt when we haven’t. We can even tip into mراكṣa (slyness/concealment) about some of our false refuges. It can be more helpful in these circumstances to ask: how am I moving towards wanting to change a false refuge? Are there small steps I can put into place - even just starting to talk about it will change our sense of identifying with a false refuge.

Consumerism and materialism are very strong in our culture, backed up by the forces of global finance. You are what you buy. How you spend your leisure is an indicator of your class or success. It is tempting to think of going forth as setting ourselves as above and distant from that culture. However going forth is not about doing with less, like a kind of poverty mentality or misplaced puritanism. We need to work on ourselves without unhelpful moralism about ‘lower’ pleasure - experienced by ourselves and others. The main thing is to have a sense of the process - where are my edges, where am I working? We are all working in different areas at different times.

Joy is crucial throughout the spiritual life. So going forth is not about doing with less pleasure now in order to have greater pleasure in the future. The image of a caterpillar can be helpful, it only lets go of one leaf when it is firmly attached to the next one. It moves slowly but without leaving any of itself behind. In the same way we can only go forth when we Go for Refuge.

In summary, false refuges are not bad but limited. It’s important to see practice not as ‘getting rid of the ego’, but expanding out to connect more and live more creatively. Going forth from false refuges should be freeing - we don’t have to worry about them anymore. We usually invest a huge amount of effort in trying to keep our false refuges in place. They are always threatening to fall apart - and then they do… Going forth from these old identities can leave us more potent and able to make truly individual choices. We will be less driven by inner compulsions or the views of our society or family.

Q: How do we relate to the language of going forth?
Q: What are our myths of going forth? There may be some images or stories of going forth that spark you off?
Pleasures of the path

In a sense, the primary going forth is going forth in respect of one’s mind. This is what gives life to our going forth in respect to our body and speech. Going forth is an inner attitude rather than external giving up of things. Fromm calls it the mode of ‘being’ rather than the mode of ‘having’. A kind of ‘being’ that can hang loose to identity and status.

Subhuti talks about the pleasure of the path in the ‘Rambles around Pleasure’ talks he gave at the LBC in 2009. He links the traditional concept of nirāmīsa sukha vedanā with aesthetic appreciation and the imaginal faculty. In ‘Reflections on Going Forth’ Sangharakshita describes this as moving from the karmaloka to rūpaloka. And in ‘Wisdom Beyond Words’ he talks about how we can gradually get a sense of living our lives within a greater mandala of aesthetic appreciation. We experience something of this greater mandala in activities like singing, being in nature or appreciating uplifting art, with our spiritual friends or when meditating or doing puja. The word ‘faith’ is pointing to this way of experiencing life, and our ethical behaviour; the kind of study that enables us to understand reality; living a life consonant with your ideals or being among beautiful things and surroundings, will support it.

Pleasures of the path can be less easy to talk about than those of the circle. For instance it is easier to tell friends about an enjoyable meal than to describe how good you felt after a strong meditation. However, they do feel qualitatively different. Anything that we are experiencing as a gratification of craving will give us anxiety and eventually pain. Whereas aesthetic or ethical pleasure does not pall or satiate, instead there is a sense of deeper joy that spreads out and gradually touches all aspects of our life - we don’t need to be afraid of having this kind of pleasure. Sangharakshita describes this as pleasure that is ‘augmentative’, that takes us up the spiral.

Vajratara was pointing out to me that of the figures on the refuge tree, it is the greatest renunciants - Milarepa and Kashyapa - who wrote the best poetry. We can be more in touch with beauty to the extent that we are letting go of our usual identity supports. We often experience this on retreat as things and people around us appear more vivid, more fully themselves and more beautiful.

\textit{Q: where do we find the two kinds of pleasure in our lives? Can we tell the difference?}

Dukkha of the path

However going forth is not always pleasant. Subhuti describes the dukkha of the path as well. As we become disillusioned with samsāra we can feel grief that our old refuges are no longer clearly satisfying. Old friendships may seem superficial or even painful as we change and we feel more uncomfortable with our unskilful or reactive habits. As we go forth from normal distractions and busyness we may find we become more deeply sensitive to the suffering in our own and other’s lives and this can be extremely painful. It’s important to recognise this dukkha in our spiritual lives. We will need to be deeply aware of the freedom, sense of aliveness and authenticity that practice brings in order to want to keep going in the face of these difficulties.
Ordination as a Going Forth.

“The first three sights turned the Buddha away from conditioned existence, but it was the sight of the beauty, so to speak, of that fourth sight, the Sadhu in his yellow robes - the wanderer - that moved him to go forth in the direction of Nirvāṇa - the unconditioned. So his going forth, his pabbajjā, to use the traditional term, was the movement away from conditioned things and towards Nirvana. It was a movement made possible by a shift in the emotional centre of his being.”

Ordination into the Triratna Buddhist Order is a Going Forth from the group. The private ordination symbolises this: we are committing ourselves to the spiritual path, as outlined by Sangharakshita, and saying that we would do it alone if necessary. The ordination retreat itself is a going forth: we may leave friends and family for three months and go up the mountain. We are given a new name, which has been chosen by someone else, and which means giving up the identity that our old name held. Together, the private and public ordinations signify that we have taken on weighty relationships with our preceptors and have committed ourselves to a connection with the whole Order.

Then we join a chapter and maybe teams of other Order members, some of whom we may not find easy to get on with. All this is a going forth from identity, role, self-sufficiency and personal ambition in your life. The Order functions on the basis of consensus and spiritual hierarchy and this is only possible if we are individual enough to know what we think and learn to express what we think, while remaining in good communication with others.

Q: What aspects of going forth at ordination do you find most exciting, and what aspects are you most apprehensive about?

The Anagarika precept

This is not a further ordination, but a deepening of our practice of the third precept. It is a vow to abstain from all sexual activity. There is an aspiration to go forth from possessions and to simplify one’s life. Order members who want to take this vow do so in consultation with their Kalyana Mitras and Preceptors and have been practising it for at least two years. They do so in the context of a simple ritual with other Order members, when they exchange their white kesa for a yellow one. Parami has said that she experiences being an Anagarika as freedom: the freedom to be born into something bigger.

Not settling down

As Triratna grows older, or as we grow older, there can be a desire to settle down a bit, to not go forth so strongly. However if we lose the contexts for intensity in our movement we won’t have an Order or movement in a few years. We’ll be sucked back into what Subhuti calls ‘the swamp of ordinary secular life.’

Sangharakshita reminds us of the continued importance of going forth. In reality there is nothing we can cling to or see as actually ‘ours’.

“We should not be satisfied with what I’m doing now - there is more to achieve in the spiritual sense, individually or collectively. We mustn’t sit on our laurels - even assuming we have any to sit
Going forth is essential, integral to our Going for Refuge, which we are trying to do all the time. We are going forth from our present mode of being to something greater, nearer to Enlightenment\textsuperscript{lxvi}.

**Absolute Going Forth**

Ultimately going forth is without a subject and without an object. Pure, blissful, radiant, non-dual awareness. At this level there is no samsāra and no Nirvāṇa, just spontaneous compassionate activity. In the Zen tradition there is the image of ‘going back to the market place with bliss bestowing hands’. The idea that we are trying to ‘leave’ samsara is a one sided version of Buddhism. We can balance this by emphasising the altruistic dimension of our Going for Refuge.
Study area 5. The Altruistic Dimension of Going for Refuge and Joining the Order

Summary and Reading
Going for Refuge does not stop with our own practice. The deeper we Go for Refuge, the more we see that all beings, in their own way, Go for Refuge and have the potential for Buddhahood. In this section we will look at the last dimension of Going for Refuge: it’s altruistic dimension.

Optional study material

Sangharakshita gave a seminal talk in 1999 called ‘Looking Ahead A Little Way’ (lecture 194) in which he talks about what Order Members can offer the world and where the Order is placed in history.

You could also listen to or read his series of talks on ‘Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow’ which can be found on freebuddhistaudio.com and on his website sangharakshita.org

Subhuti has written a paper called ‘The Dharma Revolution and The New Society’ in which he talks about the positive social revolution that Buddhism can encourage. You can download this at subhuti.info

The Altruistic Dimension of Going for Refuge and Joining the Order
(Edited by Vajrasakhi from a talk given by Vajratara in 2013)

A context for our practice
A question we may have asked ourselves is does Going for Refuge imply joining an Order? And why this Order? In fact we can’t go for refuge in isolation because we don’t exist in isolation from one another. The sense of a self is only in relationship to other.

Q: Why did we ask to join the Order, and has this changed?

Sangharakshita in his ‘History of my Going for Refuge’, makes the point that we do not Go for Refuge in isolation: we practice in three contexts - what he calls three directions or perspectives. These are the context of the higher evolution; the social or communal context; and the context of cosmic Going for Refuge. We need to express our Going for Refuge in all of those contexts as it becomes effective, and as Order members we describe this as having duties in each of those three directions. This is saying that our spiritual life is not just a private act, it takes place within different networks of relationships.
These three duties form a kind of tripod. A tripod is a very stable structure, but if one leg of the tripod is missing it falls down. We can look at our own practice and ask what it would be like if one of these three contexts is less developed?

It might be interesting to look at the question of why join the Order from the opposite angle - given that the Order exists, why would you not join it? In fact, joining an aspiring spiritual community is an expression of Going for Refuge.

In the following three sections of this article I will outline the three duties of an Order member and relate them to Dhardo Rimpöche’s motto and the 4 lines of acceptance.

The duty to your own spiritual practice
The first duty of an Order member is to continue to take our practice deeper, to make our Going for Refuge real. In ‘Looking Ahead a Little Way’ Sangharakshita defines effective Going for Refuge as ‘making a whole hearted effort to achieve real Going for Refuge’. If you are effectively Going for Refuge, you are moving towards real Going for Refuge. Going for Refuge is not a static state, so standing still is to be slipping back.

In Sangharakshita’s terms, you Go for Refuge in the context of the ‘higher evolution’. This is the state we find ourselves in when consciousness has become self aware. We can make choices in our life, and we choose skilful rather than unskilful actions, creative rather than reactive mental states. We have a sense of becoming more fully what we could be. In ‘Living Wisely’ Sangharakshita talks about having to expand our sense of self to include more and more others. This is a self-transcendence, going beyond self clinging.

This is what is witnessed by your Private Preceptor as you become ready to join the Order. In the private ordination ceremony she ritually witnesses your commitment to the path and your readiness to take on the 10 precepts as ordination vows. She can witness this because she has seen you working effectively on yourself.

In the public ordination we say: ‘for the attainment of Enlightenment I accept this ordination’ to signify that we are taking on this duty. This in one of the four Lines of Acceptance that we recite in the public ceremony, as part of joining the Order.

How can we understand this for ourselves? We can ask ourselves the question ‘is this enough?’ We keep the goal of insight into the nature of reality in mind, and look for our own cutting edge. This means having a real devotion to your potential. Dhardo Rimpöche expressed this in his motto: ‘Cherish the doctrine’.

For some of us the idea of a goal can backfire. We can see it as another way to be lacking or not good enough. We could use the traditional image of growth - growing towards our potential, unfolding, showing our true magnificence, or perfuming the world in our own way.

Q: Do we prefer the idea of a goal or of growing in our spiritual life?
We can’t force that growth by an effort of will. We have to set up the conditions to grow. The first duty means using the conditions available to help us grow. The Ordination process has been set up to provide conditions in which we can deepen our Going for Refuge: the retreats at TiratanaLoka, Going for Refuge groups, kalyana mitras (formal and informal), meditation retreats. You can use these to nourish you, and take you further. In the Order we have Chapters, Order Events, Shabda and our preceptors.

The duty to the Order
The second duty is to the Order itself, the sangha of all Order members and Mitras. Sangharakshita calls this the social or communal context of our spiritual lives. These are the people who know us well enough to help us change. We may feel that there are others who know us better than our sangha friends, our family or work colleagues for instance. But they will not share our spiritual practice, our understanding of ethics or our vision of Enlightenment as the potential for human life. Sangharakshita describes spiritual friendship as ‘a vital mutual responsiveness on the basis of a common ideal and principle’.

As we begin to experience the value of spiritual friendship we realise we can’t grow and develop spiritually in isolation, and why would we want to? It’s only when we realise that at last we can share what is most precious to us that it begins to make sense to join with others. Dhardo Rimpoché expressed this in his motto: ‘Live United’ and in the public ceremony we say: ‘With loyalty to my teachers I accept this Ordination; In harmony with friends and brethren I accept this Ordination’. By saying this we are expressing our commitment to the second duty of an Order member.

The kind of ‘harmony’ we mean here is a resonance, like an orchestra all playing different instruments but together creating a higher music, a deeper harmony. The word comes from Latin ‘to join together’. We are joining together to create a higher beauty. In ‘What is the Sangha’, Sangharakshita describes this as True Individuals coming together to create the Spiritual Community.

**Q: How have my spiritual friends helped me grow? How have I helped them?**

In the Spiritual Community we feel supported to be more of an individual, not less. This can feel challenging to our less developed parts. We may notice our ego feeling threatened by our spiritual friendships: we are helping each other to see our blind spots and sometimes this feedback is not easy to hear. We will need to feel confident in ourselves and able to trust that our friends are acting from the love mode in order to develop this level of harmony.

Being with people who share our aspirations means we can reveal them and share them. In doing so, we spark each other off. Sangharakshita talks of Ordination not as transmission or initiation, but as communication: it’s as if someone’s Going for Refuge is sparking off your Going for Refuge. ‘You hold your flame close to somebody and they ignite, they are sparked off, they are set on fire’.

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When we have ‘an intensive interaction based on a common purpose’ something happens - a higher consciousness is reached, that none of us can get to on our own. For instance a strong mitra study group, even if you are tired when you arrive, can leave you energised:

‘People explore together a spiritual dimension which neither could have explored on their own. Of course, beyond a certain point there is no question really of any sort of mutual relationship at all. In the process of communication and Going for Refuge to the Sangha, a dimension is eventually reached in which distinctions between the people involved no longer have any meaning – such distinctions have been transcended.’

It’s important to make sure we are in conditions where we have some of that intensive interaction based on common purpose. For instance teams, communities, projects at your Centres, retreats, Going for Refuge groups etc. In all those we are trying to bring something into being that is beyond us as separate entities. We can begin to build a depth of spiritual friendship that will enable us to go beyond our limited view of ourselves as a separate ego.

This vision of the creative potential of spiritual friendship is one of the distinctive emphases of Triratna. But we have examples of it throughout Buddhist history. The Buddha described himself practising intensely with his disciples lifetime after lifetime. In these stories Ananda, Sariputta, Moggallana and the Buddha are all reborn again and again together, practising in different ways together. In the Mahayana, the creative potential of spiritual friendship is expressed as the Bodhicitta. Sangharakshita has said that practising within the Order provides good conditions for the Bodhicitta to arise:

“If the Order is spiritually united, if it is in harmony, then a truly wonderful thing will happen. The Order then will be the locus for the manifestation of the Bodhicitta.”

The duty to the world

The third duty of an Order member is our duty to the world. Dhardo Rimpoché’s motto tells us that we should ‘radiate love.’ This is reflected in the Public Ordination when we accept Ordination ‘for the sake of all beings.’

This comes out of a vision of human existence as one where we are all essentially growing. The Buddha, when he surveyed the world on Brahma Sahampati’s request, had a vision of lotuses. We all have the urge to grow, ‘an inbuilt tendency to transcend ourselves.’ Sangharakshita has described this as a cosmic Going for Refuge: he sees it as a whole evolutionary process from simple physical states up to Enlightenment, all is growing, moving higher. In The History of my Going for Refuge, Sangharakshita says Going for Refuge is ‘the key to the mystery of existence’.

In a way our individual Going for Refuge is a reflection or manifestation of this cosmic trend of Going for Refuge, and the altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge means that you just want to aid that cosmic process, without being concerned about who does it. Being surrounded by others in the prostration practice symbolises that longing in all beings.

**Q: Have we ever felt that urge as a force in our own lives?**
As we try to reach out to help others we discover that we are actually helping ourselves. This may start out in small ways, for instance, as we are more ethical in our family we find they respond positively. Or talking to newcomers at a class we can find ourselves inspired and uplifted by sharing thoughts about our spiritual path.

In the Itivuttaka, the Buddha tells us "There are these two kinds of gifts: a gift of material things and a gift of the Dhamma. Of the two, this is supreme: a gift of the Dhamma.\textsuperscript{1} It may be helpful to think of what we can give the world in terms of the samgrahavastus, the traditional list of four ways to create Sangha: by generosity, kind speech, meaningful and beneficial activity and treating others as yourself.

\textbf{Q: Do you find one of these three duties more attractive? Is one less attractive?}

\textbf{Why have an Order?}

In a way these three duties define what it means to be an Order member, and help us clarify why we have an Order at all. It can seem obvious that once we are interested in Buddhism we will want to practice it for ourselves and so we undertake the first duty. Then as we see that our friends suffer in the same way that we used to, we want to share our understanding and practice with them, and so we take on the third duty, reaching out to the world. It’s only when we actually experience the effect of having committed spiritual friendships that we begin to be able to imagine the creative potential of the second duty, the duty to the Order.

This can take longer for some of us, particularly if we have difficulty trusting people for some reason. We may find it easy to trust peers but not people who seem further along the path. Or we might find ourselves naturally gravitating to friendships with people who seem like mentors, but feel competitive with or threatened by other mitras.

If we tend to be wary of authority it might be helpful to put ourselves in places where we are working alongside Order members who we see as having more power or status than us. If we are anxious around peers then we might start to challenge ourselves by sharing life stories with our Going for Refuge group, or taking your mitra study group on a weekend retreat somewhere, without the ‘leader’.

\textbf{Q: Is the idea of spiritual hierarchy helpful for you?}

The Order is not an umbrella organisation, in which we all practice in different ways. In the ritual of Ordination we commit ourselves to following Sangharakshita’s particular lineage, a shared language and body of teachings, practices and institutions. This is what allows a depth of communication between us, enabling us to help each other grow and develop spiritually. The Order is basically a network of friendships, and it is this depth of friendship that is the practice for us as Order members. Sangharakshita in the Noble Eight Fold Path has said that the task of the spiritual life is to find the emotional equivalents of our intellectual understanding of the Dharma. He says that friendship is this emotional equivalent to the intellectual understanding of anattā, or lack of fixed self.
The study groups at Tiratanaloka, at their best, can be an experience of meeting as a proto-
chapter. We are seeing each other as spiritual friends, listening deeply to each other and finding
ways to help each other grow by offering our care and inspiration. In this way we are practising
being part of a spiritual community, weaving ourselves into this precious Order.

The Bodhicitta
The arising of Bodhicitta is the traditional term for what Sangharakshita calls the altruistic
dimension of Going for Refuge. It is not a separate concept or higher practice. The Bodhicitta
cannot be someone’s personal possession or attainment. Rather, it is the point where we actually
stop identifying as a separate practitioner and allow a bigger process to work itself out through us.
Sangharakshita suggests that it is most likely to arise in the collective practice of the spiritual
community.

However, it’s important to keep the altruistic dimension of our Going for Refuge in mind at every
level of our spiritual career. One of the dangers of western Buddhism is that we can be influenced
by the attitude of individualistic consumerism fostered by global capitalism. Sangharakshita
suggests that “If we are not careful, if we give too much value to what I call the psychological and
not enough to the ethical, or the other-regarding, the spiritual life becomes a sort of refined
experience just for your own sake. You might even become resentful of other people intervening
and interfering with your enjoyment of, or devotion to, these refined experiences.

Q: Where will that eventually lead that person?
S: It doesn’t lead anywhere, except to this increasingly refined pseudo-spiritual aestheticism.”

This is not just a problem for westerners; in an article called: ‘The Buddha and the Future of His
Religion’, Dr Ambedkar criticised the Bhikkhu Sangha as ‘a huge army of idlers' spending time in
‘meditation and idleness’. In a personal letter to Sangharakshita, Dr Ambedkar said: ‘Great
responsibility lies on the shoulders of the Bhikkhus if this attempt at the revival of Buddhism is to
be a success. They must be more active than they have been. They must come out of their shell
and be in the first rank of the fighting forces. I am glad that you have started the YMBA at
Kalimpong. You should be more active than that.’

Levels of the Altruistic Dimension
Just as our Going for Refuge will change at the different levels of our spiritual lives, the altruistic
dimension is expressed in different ways at different levels of Going for Refuge:

At the ‘cultural’ level we may have an aspiration to be kind and to help others, particularly friends
and family members. We may be drawn to altruistic jobs where we are helping others and
alleviating suffering. However, as women we are often under pressure not to be selfish. We may
need to learn to see our own needs in the situation and ask for them to be met. For many of us our
self worth is based on what we can give. It may take time to learn to value our own truth.

At the ‘provisional’ level we learn to act skilfully and with empathy, at least in some situations. We
may become a vegetarian, and help out at our centre. We might be able to work more creatively
with our family relationships, partner or with difficult colleagues. We can start to be kinder to
ourselves, noticing harsh or critical internal stories, or patterns of over responsibility. We might begin to show our vulnerabilities to our friends.

An ‘effective’ altruistic dimension to our Going for Refuge would entail a wholehearted commitment to setting up the conditions for the arising of the Bodhicitta. This would mean taking the pāramitās and our ethics seriously in all areas of our lives, using confession and asking for help with blind spots or deeply help views and habits. We would be able to commit to creating and working on the spiritual friendships that form the Order, across differences of class or culture etc. Dealing with conflicts within the Order as a matter of urgency. And we would commit to working with other Order members to spread the Dharma in whatever ways we can.

Q: Are we drawn to the Bodhisattva path and why?

The shift from provisional to effective compassion could also be seen as a shift from empathy to wisdom. Empathy is important as we start to take on the Bodhisattva vow, but it is still from ‘self’ to ‘other’. We try to see beings as they are in themselves, and see what their needs are, rather than constantly looking to see how they can fulfil our needs. This is the essential revolution called for by the Bodhisattva Vow, but as we engage effectively with spiritual death there is an understanding as to why we suffer. It is because we do not understand the nature of Reality. We see that there is only impermanence, a flow of becoming and passing away. This has an effect of softening the sense of boundaries between oneself and others. Practicing for others is the same as practicing for me, and vice versa.

Q: How have we experienced this?

‘Real’ altruism means we act from this transcendental wisdom. There is no ‘I’ who acts and no ‘others’ to act for. No ‘my’ Going for Refuge as opposed to ‘yours’. Just a natural, spontaneous flow of Compassion. The paradox is that we ‘vow to save all beings’ but there is no-one to save them and no-one to save. We ‘save’ them from thinking that they have an unchanging self. This can be seen when a “non-egoistic stream of spiritual energy, and perhaps even consciousness, has begun to take over”\textsuperscript{101}.

The order as Avalokiteshvara

When a number of us act together from a level of effective Going for Refuge, we set up the conditions to become that stream of spiritual energy. In fact we will become Avalokiteshvara in the world.

This is the level of absolute Going for Refuge, when the Order will actually become the three Refuges. This is what people need: real spiritual friendships they can rely on. We can embody what happens if we practice wholeheartedly, acknowledging our difficulties and failings without despondency and our successes without pride or specialness. We will be able to communicate the Dharma from a real, lived perspective, and embody the path to some degree at least.

Ideally we embody the Sangha of people acting together who are ‘really’, in Sangharakshita’s sense, Going for Refuge. However we are not there yet. It can be helpful to see that we Go for Refuge with the Order, and not to the Order. The Order is manifestly not perfect, but as Aloka puts
it, we join the Order for what it will be in 500 years time. It will only become that if we put in the work now, deepening our Going for Refuge in every context of our lives. When we look at the Order in this way we can see the three duties symbolised in the representation of the thousand armed, eleven headed Avalokiteshvara. Our duty to our own practice is represented by the wish fulfilling Jewel, the Cintamani, held at his heart. The body of Avalokiteshvara represents our shared practice as an order, the second duty. And the third duty - to the world - is represented by the thousand arms that reach out, each holding different implements to help beings, and each with a wisdom eye in the palm of the hand.

This image of Avalokiteshvara suggests something that is beautiful, radiant, a unity of inner and outer activity. Sangharakshita encourages us to see Enlightenment in aesthetic, rather than purely ethical terms. We practice the Dharma, we Go for Refuge, because it is beautiful, not just because it is good. It is not just a great idea to make you a good person; it is an expression of the fundamental longing of the whole of existence. This is the longing to transcend our limited and confined experience of life, both our own and others. This is what Sangharakshita means by saying that Going for Refuge is the ‘Key to the mystery of existence’. To express this in our lives and to help others express it, is deeply attractive:

‘Not for our own sake, not even for the sake of others should we seek to attain the Divine, but simply and solely for its own irresistible sake.’

## Handbook History

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Sangharakshita, 'Looking Ahead A Little Way', 1999

Sangharakshita, Survey of Buddhism, 1.15