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great detail about taking the Refuge Vow including importance of confidence, use of visualization, power of intention, obstacle of postponing, the aspect of merit, meaning of the liturgy and dedication, omitted actually recitation and explanation of the Dharma names

[00:09:52] [Zopa's general intro to refuge and a period of meditation]

LMC [00:29:34] So, first of all, I wish to thank you all for coming and for your patience. ... So, of course, I would like to explain a little about the refuge ceremony. And... to begin with... there are individuals here who are taking the vow of refuge for the first time. And then there are people who are renewing their vow. Which is common tradition, that if you have taken the vow already, then you just keep taking it indefinitely. So, we will align ourselves in here so that it's convenient for us, that we can have both of those groups. Because you both have something slightly different to do.

[00:31:37] So... for those of you, especially who have not... taken the vow of refuge before... I'd like to say a few things that will... make you glad to be here. As opposed to... so scared you're ready to run. ... One thing is.... not everyone who gives the Vow of Refuge uses the word vow. And I'm also slightly inclined in that direction, but... still holding back. The word vow itself has a certain kind of ominous ring to it. Like, you break this vow... something so terrible is gonna happen... that you'll be sorry that you tried to take the vow in the first place. So, that is not the case with the Refuge Vow. In fact, Zopa and I were looking yesterday and just reviewing our own understanding of things and I realized that actually, we've never... heard someone say... that the Refuge Vow even *could* be broken. It's not quite clear that it could be broken. Even if you intentionally renounced it. Because... it's not the same as all other vows. In this case... it's something much easier than a vow and easier to maintain.

[00:33:45] So, first of all, I think we have accomplished what is the first thing to do, and that is to establish an inspiring environment. And the fact that all of you came for this and that we will indeed take the vow together. Those who have taken it already will renew it. And those who haven't will take it for the first time. And since many of you are in the same community, that is, you'll see each other regularly. Then you'll have conversations about it and you'll learn more and explore your experiences together. And in that way, over a period of time, then... many good things will come from that.

[00:35:00] In this particular tradition of Buddhism... we engage in meditation practices, which are of a category called the vajrayana. And there's two different vows that one can take. One for what is called the general Mahayana Vow and the other, which is called the Vajrayana Vow. You don't need to remember that. But... it's just slightly interesting... because it's a kind of an official cheat on it... that we can do something. And that is that... *all* of the meditation practices in this tradition, like in all Buddhist traditions, all of those practices are in essence *authorized*... by virtue of... some kind of a ceremony. And the point of that is... that it's important for *you* to feel confident that you actually *got* authorized. Because if you *didn't* get authorized... and you don't get the result that you *thought* you should get, which may or may not be what you should get... but if you thought that you didn't get what you *should* get, your confidence is lost. It's damaged at that point. That is... in this tradition and in most Buddhist traditions, the worst thing that can happen.

[00:36:46] It's almost like... you woke up in the morning and you couldn't remember who you were. And you go about the day uncertain of what it is you are doing and whether you even showed up for work at the right place or not. So, having done that, [laughter] it's important to understand that we will give the Vajrayana Vow. Even though... most of you, at this time, probably have no clue as to what the vajrayana is. Which is okay! Because the Vajrayana Vow is an umbrella vow. So, it covers both the mahayana and the vajrayana completely.

[00:37:38] And there's a slight downside... to the vajrayana, of course. [laughs] And that downside is, is that you will hear... about... practices that sound very strange. If they don't sound strange, there's probably something not quite right about you. [laughter] So, it's totally okay that we will cover all of these things. And in the process, you will hear... the names of things that don't yet make sense. And it's just totally okay. And if it doesn't feel okay, or it feels like maybe it's a risky thing that we're doing here, which it is not... but if you feel that way, just recall... that you cannot break this vow.

[00:38:40] In taking refuge, we are really... primarily focused upon ... the causes of suffering... for ourselves and all sentient beings. And not just... physical pain and mental pain, but really, quite *deep*... causes of suffering. So, generally, we could say all of the practices that we learn and do are about... alleviating and finally completely eliminating that suffering and its causes... completely. So, everything in the tradition is focused on that. But that doesn't mean, that in any given instance, you would have a relationship with that or know how that process worked. But, if we can remember that confidence *is* the single most important thing, because it is the *one* thing that can completely undermine your sense of your practice, your Dharma practice. You lose the confidence, it's like the wheels on your car have been taken. So, it's critical to do something if you feel like you're losing your confidence. And *especially* if you feel like, in a conversation or discussion with a friend or somebody, if you *feel* like you are playing a role in that person losing their confidence, you need to be very careful with that.

[00:40:31] So, confidence is a big deal. Not to say... that we will always have it. I've never known someone who didn't lose the whole thing... from time to time. Or, at the very least, just forgot to do anything about anything for a really long time. So, there are many ways in which these things are repaired and done and enhanced and moved. But we're really talking here... in the context of meditation, of crossing a line, a good line. A Good line.

[00:41:10] So, we play with meditation. And I can remember... fascinated by... the role of the teacher, who I had only complete fascination with and no devotion whatsoever. Kind of like... someone who didn't look quite human. And so, you tend to look at them with a sense of fascination. ... So, moving right along... the point is... to bring about a complete transformation... of our relationship with... our experiences. Not with our... bad behavior or our good behavior or any of those things, but our experiences. The ones that are pleasant. The ones that are unpleasant. Perhaps the... dysfunctional things we do to avoid displeasing things. The dysfunctional things we do in order to experience pleasant things. ... When I mentioned crossing the line, what I mean is, is that we are crossing a line into a place where we are going to take the meditation seriously. In order to take it seriously, we first have to have some confidence, again. Confidence that actually it's worth taking seriously. That there is something there to work with. That it's not just some... accidental... tradition... that may or may not bear positive fruit. ...It is not that.

[00:43:22] So, we need to gain a sense of appreciation, a sense of respect, a sense of confidence, again. And so, what we're doing today in the ceremony for taking refuge is... it's kind

of like meeting someone for the first time and somebody says, I'd like you to meet this person. I'm sure that your relationship will bear positive fruit. That is what we are doing, basically. ... But let's say that it's not... just *anybody* that you're going to meet. It's somebody who you already have an understanding of. You already know this person. Or you've heard of them. And you have an appreciation for them already, which is very *helpful* in this case. And so, we want to make the most out of that. So, we're going to introduce ourselves to that person... in a way... which fully acknowledges their present and future importance. So, in this tradition of Buddhism, this lineage of Buddhism, lineage of teachers and those who have fully accomplished these practices... and been of extraordinary help to so many people... there is a particular means by which we... sort of 'tie the knot' with them and make it so that it's easy to feel inspired regularly.

[00:45:28] So, the first thing that you need to do is something that we do a lot of in this tradition, but some of you may have never done any of it. And that is.... first of all, we visualize. This is a tradition of grand visualization. So, the first thing we do is we imagine... right here with us at this time... those individuals, first as human beings who have deeply accomplished the meditation practices of this tradition and by extension, really... *all* of the great Buddhist traditions... they have accomplished these things. So, we hold that in our mind that that has happened and that we are about to meet those individuals. In other words, we're about to cross a line. *We want to cross that line.* Because... crossing that line will be a support for what we want to do. And at the same time, we remember that... *you cannot break the vow.* So, there's no harm to happen here.

[00:46:47] In order to cross that line then, we need to acknowledge the presence of these great beings. So, if we just take a moment and imagine that in *this* situation... at a time when we feel ripe, at a time when we feel interested, at a time when we feel ready to really take our meditation practice seriously and our intention to benefit not only ourselves but all sentient beings, that is the time to meet these individuals. And those individuals we will not see in the flesh and blood. But... the common sense that... all of the great beings who have accomplished these practices are actually, in a way which we cannot ordinarily understand necessarily, but in time, through practice, that these beings are *present* by virtue of our *intention* and by virtue of our... *wish* to engage in these practices in order, again, to benefit all sentient beings.

[00:48:11] So, the first thing that you do... oh, let me ask this first. How many people are here to take refuge for the first time? That's it. The empty row? [laughter] [Zopa, 'The 2nd row] All right. So... that's that. So, there may be some of you here *also* who are renewing your refuge vow. Can I see how many of you there are? Okay. And I won't ask for the third empty category [laughter] of those who are here, but not really sure why you're here. You have a total right to be here and be unsure why you're here. It's okay.

[00:49:16] So, when we wish to meet... the progenitors of the Refuge Vow we make three special bows to them. So, first we imagine that these beings are actually here. That these are just part and parcel of coming together with the intention of taking the Refuge Vow. That's all it takes. And these beings are here. ... We imagine that they are here and we now, us, those individuals who are taking the vow for the first time will need to stand up. And you are going to, each of you, do three prostrations.

[00:51:08] You visualize that the presence of the Buddhas of the past and future as well as the present are here. And they are here *specifically* because we are requesting them to be here. So, requesting them actually does deliver the goods. It doesn't necessarily mean that we can... experience that fully, but we need to hold the view that... they deliver on it. They deliver on the promise. And so, they are here. And what we are going to do is...we are going to make three

prostrations *to them*. Not to me, but... really you can say... kind of to the shrines that are here. But even more important, to the *actual*... the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the great beings in the tradition. They are here. So, when you do prostrations to them, you think that you are making the prostrations and that the connection is actually happening.

[00:54:22] Part of this tradition is... you get a little bit of hair cut from your head. And, and that is really an important part of the tradition. Because the Buddha was renowned for being a very good looking fellow. And he had long hair that was also said to be very beautiful. Maybe shiny and all like whatever makes it beautiful. But... he was renowned for this. And grew up in a very wealthy family. And... in the process of things, his parents did not want him to leave the compound for fear that he would become interested in worldly things. And of course, the story goes, he did get out like everyone. He was probably like 17. You can't keep a 17 in a cage. So... he left. And the *first* thing he did when he got out was, he cut his hair. Because it was the thing about his body that he was most attached to. And so, he cut the hair to cut the attachment. So, we cut a little hair in the refuge ceremony as a symbol of that. It's quite small. So, just in case you haven't yet lost that attachment [laughter] it's okay. You don't need to do that here.

[00:56:16] There are many things in the refuge ceremony, like there are in the Dharma in general, that we will go over in detail in time. But this evening is really just to give you a sense... of what it is that we're doing. So, if we think about an explanation of the benefits of taking refuge, one of them would naturally be... a lessening of attachment. Especially to our bodies. Whether they're healthy or not. Of course, we're *attached* to being healthy, but we are not always healthy. So... actually, the things that's most... beneficial and precious to us... are the times when we are *not* healthy. When we *wish* to be healthy. But we don't have it. So, we practice giving up the attachment so that... when we actually don't have a choice... we're ready to work with it in a positive way.

[00:57:19] Also, we all know... anyone, I think, who's... over 20 has to have the sense that we gather unhealthy, not helpful habits. If you haven't done that, you can leave. [laughter] Because you must not need it. So, but... this is not the esoteric part of the tradition. This is what we all do. So, when we engage in the refuge practice and going for refuge, we enter into a place where we feel, let's say we expect... reasonably so, that there's going to be some change here. And we *want* that change. Even before we know what it is, we want that change. And that change really boils down to a lessening of attachment.... to things that we want. And a lessening of aversion to things that we'd like to be rid of but can't... get rid of.

[00:58:40] So, generally taking refuge... it results in removing conditioned patterns of behavior and beliefs and all sorts of things which are very helpful... all by themselves, even if we never did anything else. It's very helpful when you take refuge to have a clear, active commitment to engage in the practices for which you go for refuge. In other words, don't just leave them on the shelf somewhere. There is no law against it. And it won't, in and of itself, hurt you, but you also will not get around to getting the benefits unless you actually *work at these things*. And they can be extremely pleasant. So, let us put that on the table too. By virtue of taking refuge, the *possibility* of fulfilling your goals, from a spiritual perspective and just from a human perspective and from the... aspects of your own life that you wish would change, you are, in a sense, empowered to make those changes. Empowered partly, maybe most importantly, not by me or someone else, but... by virtue of your own intention and your willingness and inspiration to do something.

[01:00:10] We all inspire ourselves to do great things and then we don't get around to it. So, the biggest obstacle of all for a long time is... getting around to it. So, that's partly what a community like this is for. You can talk to people who will also say, I'm not getting around to it either. Maybe we could meet in this place and do it together sometime. Because then we'd both be embarrassed by not showing up. [laughter] So, it's just making use of the normal, really. By making use of that normal... we fulfill... let's just say, wholesome objectives. Objectives which are helpful for *us* practitioners in this tradition and helpful for others who are not necessarily practitioners in this tradition.

[01:01:19] There's a lot of talk in the tradition about merit. And merit is actually simple. Having been a Boy Scout with merit badges, I came to not like merit badges. I still have a problem with the word. And... I think that, it's actually not a big deal. Merit is really like an accumulation of something. So, when we do good things for others, we accumulate something. Like we *feel* good about what we did. Other people feel good that it was done *for* them. And so, the goodness kind of spreads in that way. ... There's many more. I want to just kind of give you a general sense here of things.

[01:02:25] So, in the, in the recitation... we are going to do a couple of recitations which are important from your side to acknowledge what it is you're doing. So, that when it's done, you know what you did. ... Continuing to visualize the sources of refuge that we did before you set down or shortly after you set down. Visualizing... an unlimited number of great beings who have accomplished these practices and continue to nurture them in their own stream of being and pass them on to others on a regular basis. So, we would like to connect with that... movement, with those individuals... and learn to do those things ourselves.

[01:04:58] So, the recitation... is specifically for the vajrayana, as I said, which some of you will no doubt become interested in, but it's not essential, but you are likely to do that. And so, way back in 1973, when some of us took refuge at that time from Kalu Rinpoche, then he always gave this particular Refuge Vow, because... at a future date... when you were interested in pursuing the vajrayana, you didn't have to find someone who could give you that vow before you could engage in those practices.

[01:05:40] So, I'm going to read this just shortly and then a little explanation and then we'll start the recitation. So, the recitation starts with 'I whose name is', 'I whose name is.' The 'I whose name is' it's you speaking, of course. And... if you have a Dharma name, which you will get in this ceremony, then you need to recite that name at the point where we get to 'I whose name is'. Then you say that. If you don't yet have a Dharma name, then you just say your given name. And by the end of the ceremony, you'll have the rest of it. So, it starts with 'I ask all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas abiding in the 10 directions to consider me'. So, now we are visualizing, or the very least, holding the view that these beings are present and they are here... *naturally*... in order to help individuals who are engaging in practice of the Dharma. So, going for refuge certainly qualifies for that. So, we start with, 'I ask all Buddhas and bodhisattvas abiding in the 10 directions to consider me.' 'I ask my teacher to consider me.' 'From the present moment...' I'm reading two sections here, so I'm going to have to go back and tell you a piece of it.

[01:07:48] 'I ask the Buddhas and bodhisattvas abiding in the 10 directions to consider me. I ask my teacher to consider me. From the present moment until I attain awakening, I whose name is...' and then you speak your given name. In this case, this is the first section of it, speak your given name. ... Having spoken the given name, we now recite the Vajrayana version of the Refuge Vow as it starts, and again just to recite it, so you know what it is in advance. 'I ask all

Buddhas and bodhisattvas abiding in the 10 directions to consider me. From the present moment until I attain awakening, I, whose name is...' and when we go through this, then when I say 'I, whose name is', if you have a Dharma name, you recite that name. If not, you say your given name. 'From the present moment, until I attain awakening, I whose name is.'

[01:09:05] 'I take refuge' and now these names, you need to just know... that this method of Buddhism is replete with a fairly large number of technical terms that reference the person who is reciting the material, reference the names of those who help to recite the material. There's a lot of layers here. So, not to go into that tonight, but just so that you know approximately what you're reading. So, we say 'From this present moment, until I attain awakening, I whose name is ...' and then we say the name, 'take refuge.' And then you say your refuge name if you have it or you say your given name. Otherwise... 'I take refuge in all the yidams and the assembly of deities of their mandalas.' A mandala is kind of like a group, like a circle. Could say a circle of friends almost. 'I take refuge in all the Buddhas, the fully awakened ones. I take refuge in the Holy Dharma. I take refuge in the noble Sangha.' Sangha... generally, it refers to the ordained sangha of monks and nuns who are... kind of working at that level. But we can say also that it refers to all of us who are part of a community of practitioners who work with these material[s] on a regular basis.

[01:10:45] So continuing, 'I take refuge in the Noble Sangha.' So, those are the enlightened Sangha and the individuals who are the most helpful to us in this world, aside from our teachers and other spiritual friends. 'I take refuge in all who possess the eye of pristine wisdom, the assembly of dakas, dakinis, protectors and guardians of the Dharma.' So, we will in time, cover these things in detail, of course. But for now, we're going to recite this together.

[01:11:24] *[deleted the logistics, actual recitation and the explanation of the Dharma names]*

[01:46:33] So, then at the end of the refuge ceremony, of course, we have to dedicate the ceremony and the refuge itself. ...

[01:48:12] Okay, just to close this one piece, I think it's a useful view to hold... the thing about dedication is... it's a big deal... throughout all Buddhist traditions. Dedication is almost as important as everything else put together sometimes. And there's a reason for that. After myself, having done dedications only because I felt like I was required to do them, for many years, it became very clear... that the teaching behind it is... is quite inspirational. The basis of it is a teaching that... when you engage in some kind of positive activity, it's good. It's something good. And some goodness flows from that event. However... if you *dedicate* that, it's kind of like rolling a ball down an infinite hill. It never stops giving. It just continues. But if you *do not* dedicate it, it comes to an end when the dedication is finished. Or if there is no dedication, when you've just done it, it's done.

[01:50:31] It's still good, but it doesn't... provide this kind of multiplicity of the goodness. You can see that in your own actions. When you are speaking with someone, for example, who is sad... and you manage to... bring their sadness into a place of joy or into some kind of understanding that is an inspiration... then you dedicate the merit of that having happened. And *you feel* that in your own mind stream. Because you *feel* that in your own mind stream, the next time you speak to that person or any other person... that same thing comes out, unintentionally. So, it just keeps rolling like that. So, we always dedicate and try never to forget even the smallest thing. Like you just, maybe there's someone you don't like. And in a moment, you suddenly... accidentally... felt

something positive for them. Then the next thing that you do is... you dedicate it. In other words, you try to make it *bigger* than it was before.

[01:52:31] In Tibet, this dedication, which is what we're really going to recite, it was done and grain was tossed on the refuge takers. And when it was done in India, flowers were tossed. Because there were so many flowers in India and not so many in Tibet. So, they tossed flowers. And so we embrace that. We have flowers. [laughs] It's really nice. So we'll recite this together.

[01:53:41] *dedicating the merit*

[01:58:53] It's an important thing and you can save yourself a lot of trouble if you just follow this small thing. When the Tibetan language was developed in Tibet, it became known as a sacred language because the primary writings were precious writings for the teachings of the Dharma. And in fact, that's why the language was developed. To incorporate those things into texts and all. And they did that. So, it was also expensive to make things one at a time with woodblocks and all of the, you know, old fashioned things that they used. And so, there is a tradition to not put texts on the floor where people walk. You could put them on a table. It's important not to step on them, not to sit on them. And even if that doesn't feel important, it is also the case that when we have an important guest, someone who is respected, appreciated, they feel really bad, if we step on those things. And so, even if we're not particularly personally sensitive, it's a good habit to get into. So, that when guests come, they feel like the tradition that they're bringing to us is actually being honored.

[02:00:45] So, I think we did it. [laughter] Thank you.