

why we take refuge and in what, **Carrying Practice**: our 'job' is to recognize every experience which arises

[00:05:35] So first, you can hear? Can you understand? [laughter] ... We always begin our meditation with the refuge prayer. And it's good to remember and ponder the *reason*... why we always begin with the refuge prayer. And that's because... whether we are aware of it or not... we naturally and habitually go for refuge more or less continuously all day. ... You might say, whether we are awake or asleep, we are always looking for something better. Turning our minds to rely upon *myriad* of things that we can take refuge in. Lunch when we are hungry [laughs] and all the rest of it. Continuously all day all night. And as the great master Kalu Rinpoche once said...dead or alive. It's good to remember the teaching that our sense of being has no beginning. It does not have a starting place. We often talk about the starting place as maybe conception or birth or some other thing. But of course, if we think about it, there was *something* before that... that brought *that* about. And the next thing and so on.

[00:08:58] So, in this way if we ponder that for a moment... we can get a sense of how the flow of our experience and the flow of our presence in this body, in this room, in this city, with these people or with other people and so on. We hope that when we meet it will be a friendly meeting, which is a kind of refuge. *I hope the meeting will be friendly.* is a sense of going for refuge in the *hope* that it will be what we think it's going to be. And that of course, is a little bit of a problem. As we know by the time we are adults, hopefully, it doesn't always turn out the way we hoped. And then we're disappointed. And then we think bad thoughts, negative thoughts. And then maybe we also act negatively with our friends and family and other people who we never even met before. We just think about it by virtue of the way they are walking down the street. So the refuge prayer is the first opportunity... to say, to ourselves, to remind ourselves that, what we're doing when we sit down to meditate is *not* to continue the habitual patterns of wanting this and wanting that. And oh I didn't get that so now I have to do this, all those things. We have the opportunity to put all those things aside.

[00:11:26] And then if we do it with some bravado, let us say... we feel some relief. Maybe some opening. So we go for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Which are traditionally the 3 sources of refuge that are worthy of going to refuge for. Like our lunch is not worthy of it. Not worthy of our time, not worthy of almost anything. Our *relationships* with each other are completely worthy of refuge. But in order for us to *provide* refuge we have to go to refuge something more important than ourselves. And so we collect our awareness and go for refuge in the Buddha. Not in the sense of that human being that walked somewhere at some point... but, rather in the *teachings* that were given and that have been tested for so many centuries, so many millennia... that still today we do that. It should not be done strictly out of habit.

[00:13:00] When we turn our minds to refuge in the Buddha it should be a *conscious* turning. Where we literally remind ourselves why we're doing it. And maybe remind ourselves of what happens when we don't do it and, we don't pay attention. ... There are so many beings on the planet, humans and otherwise who continuously go for refuge, but it's not quite right and so it doesn't work. So in this case then we want to go for refuge *properly* so that we can give an example for others. So we'll leave the more in depth exploration of that for later and this evening we'll just begin with the recitation of refuge in the 3 jewels.

Sangha [00:14:18] reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer

[00:16:21] Now in the meditation that we call shamatha, or calm abiding... where the effort is to encourage our mind to... slow down for beginners. ... For beginnings, really, not for beginners, but for everyone. ... Many years ago in 1973, the great meditation master, Kalu Rinpoche was giving instructions on going for refuge. And he said, with a kind of wry smile on his face because... he had a kind of mischievous humor about things from time to time. And so he kind of corrected a misconception. That practicing calm abiding was meant to stop the mind. And of course, all of us felt like... suddenly we had been betrayed. [laughs] We thought that it was about stopping the mind. And then he said something remarkable. Remarkable! You cannot stop the mind. It's kind of like a... perpetual motion machine. It pumps out experiences day and night. And again, day and night, whether you are awake or asleep. And again, he added, dead or alive.

[00:19:00] That injunction is not really meant to be a belief. It is meant to be a view that is held. Where we notice our experiences through the lens of every experience that arises and then we rest our awareness on that experience. And understand that soon as that one is gone, there is another one to replace it. No wonder we can't sleep. [laughs] It's like not really possible to completely fall asleep. And through the view of... dead or alive, the meaning is clear. The experiences continually unfold. Whether in this body or another body or no body at all. And it's a very interesting view to hold. It changes our relationship with ourselves, with all of our friends and family, with all the people we meet randomly on the street. Everywhere we go, everything we do and say... if we do it through that view, everything changes.

[00:20:42] And if you add to that... the value... of lovingkindness... for yourself and for others. Joy, on behalf of others, an example that might be contagious. Equanimity. Like not having special friends that are better than others. Visiting your loving kindness and compassion on all beings, whether you like them or not. It's not necessary to like people, it's necessary to love them.

[00:21:49] So when we practice calm abiding, we can kind of, bring all of these things to bear by reminding ourselves... that the stream of our existence does not have a beginning and it does not have an end. It's kind of like swimming in an endless sea. Every time you move, you feel the water. And every time that we sit down to meditate, we feel so many things. We feel the cushion when we sit down. We feel the... coming of the recitation of the refuge prayer. And by virtue of putting our awareness on the experience as it arises of the coming of the refuge prayer or of just our own experience, comfortable or not, we learn something that is absolutely experiential. It cannot be learned any other way. And every time, that we stop to turn our minds to refuge and the jewel of the Buddha, we have the opportunity to recognize that we also contain that jewel. It's not necessarily easy, but we can prove it to ourselves... by engaging in the practice of refuge.

[00:24:01] We have, each one of us within us, the awakened mind already enlightened. Our chore is not to clean up the mind somehow, but to recognize its inherent purity. ... One might think that's easy. If I'm already pure, it should be not difficult... to recognize it. But those of us who have tried, it's hard. Especially when you're irritated. Especially when you get angry. Anything that is energetic... becomes difficult to overcome.

[00:25:03] So relaxing into all of the experiences that arise while we just sit... relatively still. And helpful with being surrounded by others. Who are, in a certain sense, having entirely different

experiences. But yet, in a certain way, all the same. You can feel a certain sense of... comradery. Nothing particularly mushy or gooey. Just... the fact that we are trying to do something simple, that if we could accomplish it even just a little, it would benefit us. And the benefit that we got would easily... be contagious with others.

[00:26:13] So resting our awareness... we sometimes begin with an object that we put in front of ourselves and rest our gaze on that thing. The very old tradition for that. And we have not put so much energy into the alternative, which also has a very old tradition. In the practice of calm abiding, we can also place our awareness on... each of the experiences that we have as we sit. Not by looking for an experience or trying to have one. Or changing our posture or something in order to have a different experience. But just to notice... any of the experiences we're having. And just to place our awareness on that experience.

[00:27:35] And we do that not in order to accomplish something. Not in order to discover the meaning of that experience or the value of that experience. Just to rest our awareness on the experience itself. And, of course... to some degree, it will be like trying to balance a marble on another marble. You can put your awareness there, but by the time it's there, it's gone. So it's kind of a futile process. But in time you can come to the place where you place your awareness on the experience, certain experiences do not vaporize instantly, like you have an itch. And your first response is, I hope it goes away quick. But it doesn't. So you put your awareness on that experience, which also has the experience of aversion. And you just rest your awareness on that. Put aside the desire for it to be otherwise and just rest your awareness on the itch. When the itch is gone, you have the desire for it to not return. So then you get a little more subtle. Place your awareness on the desire that it would not return.

[00:29:25] So in our lives, we have uncountable... experiences running continuously. We almost never see them. We almost never recognize the experiences, but they just run continuously. So let's say that our job is to recognize every experience which arises. With no intention to change it, to get rid of it, to speed it up in any way. Just. imagine that that experience is a jewel. ... A beautiful jewel. Precious jewel. The precious, of course, is not the experience. ... It's really the fact that you can experience it and know the experience.

[00:30:37] So sitting here this evening, take a shot at it. There's no dearth of experiences, *that's* for sure. You don't need to take them in any order. If an experience arises, see the experience, just see it. In a short time, in all likelihood, it will just disappear. ... In that space, after it disappears, do your best to put intention aside. Nothing you need to do. And rest, as clear as possible, just in awareness. Another experience will come. Without any particular judgment about it, like I like this one or not, just rest your awareness there, over and over again. Don't try to repeat the experience. Just take the one that is delivered. And like that, continue for the duration of your calm abiding experience this evening. So we'll take a half hour or so. Just do your best over and over, it's *not* possible to fail.

[00:32:15] *period of meditation*
Sangha [00:50:06] *dedicating the merit*