

FWBO Dharma Training Course for Mitras Year Two

Module 3: Turning the Mind to the Dharma

*The human body, at peace with itself,
Is more precious than the rarest gem.
Cherish your body, it is yours this one time only.
The human form is won with difficulty,
It is easy to lose.
All worldly things are brief,
Like lightning in the sky;
This life you must know
As the tiny splash of a raindrop;
A thing of beauty that disappears
Even as it comes into being.
Therefore set your goal and
Make use of every day and night
To achieve it.*

Tsongkhapa

This module looks at the central teaching and practice of Buddhism – that of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. It starts with an exploration of what are variously called the four reminders, the four mind-turning thoughts or the four ordinary preliminary practices (as against the four extraordinary preliminary practices or *mūla yogas* of Tibetan tradition). These are meant to focus our minds on the opportunities we have for spiritual practice as well as leading us to investigate the nature of what are called the false refuges. In coming to terms with impermanence more deeply, in acknowledging the inevitable effects of karma and by seeing through the dangers of *samsāra*, we can free ourselves more fully to turn towards the True Refuges, i.e. the Three Jewels.

The Four Mind-Turning Reflections are practised throughout the Tibetan Buddhist world but essentially comprise teachings that make up what Sangharakshita has called Basic Buddhism. Going for Refuge itself goes back to the very earliest days of Buddhism and is a practice acknowledged by all schools of Buddhism even if its true significance is not always appreciated.

Primary study material

The primary study material for this module is a series of five talks on the theme of the Four Mind-Turning Reflections. They were given by members of the Women's Ordination Team at Tiratanaloka on a retreat for women who were training for ordination. They have not been transcribed so you will need to be able to access them as mp3 files from Free Buddhist Audio.

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X25>

The talks are as follows:

1. *The Four Mind-Turning Reflections* by Dhammadinna.
2. *The Preciousness and Rarity of Human Life* by Dhammadinna.
3. *The Transitoriness of Life and the Certainty of Death* by Vajradarshini.
4. *Karma and the Consequences of Our Actions* by Ratnadharini.
5. *The Defects and Dangers of Saṃsāra* by Maitreyi.

The module concludes by looking at the levels and dimensions of Going for Refuge through an excerpt from Subhuti's book *Sangharakshita: A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition*.

Study guide and suggested questions

Unit 1: The Four Mind-Turning Reflections – An Introduction

This first talk is an introduction to the Four Mind-Turning Reflections as a whole, giving a background to their role and purpose as well as placing them in the context of Going for Refuge and a path of regular steps. Please listen to it and take some notes before your group meeting and if you can, find time to reflect on some of the following questions:

1. How are the four reflections connected with Going for Refuge?
2. How might these reflections help to establish you on a path of regular steps?
3. Nissarana – literally 'not going for refuge' – is the word often translated as renunciation. What are your own associations with the word 'renunciation'? And what are we renouncing or not going for refuge to?
4. What might be the benefits of reflecting on this precious human life? Why does Dhammadinna suggest we start with this reflection rather than the more usual reflection on death and impermanence?
5. What might be the benefits of keeping an awareness of death and impermanence alive in our hearts?

6. Dhammadinna emphasizes how these reflections can help us ‘give up craving without harmful side effects’ and the importance of not reacting between the extremes of giving things up and indulging ourselves in pleasure. What relevance might this have for your own spiritual practice?

Unit 2: The Preciousness and Rarity of Human Life

Dhammadinna here explores what it means to be human in terms of the traditional list of eight freedoms, ten endowments and three kinds of faith found in the Tibetan *Lam Rim* texts. Whilst some of these may seem strange to us, they provide a basis upon which we can build our own reflections on this theme. Dhammadinna refers to the six realms of the Wheel of Life which we have already met in Week 3 of Part 4 of the Foundation Year.

1. Dhammadinna suggests that as Westerner’s, we often have difficulty valuing our lives. Do you have a sense of the value of your own life? If so, what do you value about it?
2. What are the implications of the centrality of the human realm?
3. Which of the eight freedoms seems most relevant to your situation? Why do you think that is?
4. Which of the ten endowments seems most relevant to your situation? Why do you think that is?
5. Of the three kinds of faith, which do you think is strongest in you and which the least developed?
6. How do you relate to the notion of the rarity of human life?
7. In modern (i.e. non-traditional) terms, what freedoms and endowments do you have in your life?

The Eight Freedoms	The Ten Endowments	The Three Kinds of Faith
Freedom from birth as a hell-being.	Being born as a human being.	Faith in realities – trusting or confident faith. This is cognitive.
Freedom from birth as a hungry ghost.	Being born in a central land.	Faith in qualities – lucid or serene faith. This is emotional/affective.
Freedom from birth as an animal.	Being born with all sense faculties.	Faith in capacities – longing faith. This is volitional.
Freedom from birth as a long-lived god.	Being born without an extreme karmic burden.	
Freedom from being born in a border-tribe or a barbarian land.	Being born having faith in the Buddha's Teaching and confidence in the spiritual life.	
Freedom from being born with extreme wrong views that are inimical to the Dharma.	Being born where a Buddha has appeared.	
Freedom from being born as a senseless fool.	Being born where the Buddha has taught the Dharma.	
Freedom from being born in a place or time without a Buddha.	Being born at a time when the teachings survive and are not corrupted.	
	Being born when the Teachings are practised by a Sangha.	
	Being born when we have favourable conditions and support from friends and a teacher.	

Unit 3: The Transitoriness of Life and the Certainty of Death

The transitoriness of life – or impermanence – is one of the central teachings of Buddhism. In an interview for the magazine *Resurgence*, Sangharakshita was asked for a one-word description of Buddhism and replied with the answer “Impermanence!” We have already met the teaching of impermanence as one of the three lakṣaṇas (or marks of conditioned existence) in Week 5 of Part 4 of the Foundation Year and we will be meeting it again in other parts of the course. Here Vajradarshini shares some poetic and personal reflections on the topic as well as giving a three point structure for our reflection on this particular mind-turning thought.

1. Vajradarshini explores the Japanese imagery of dew, dew-frost and dew-drops as a metaphor for impermanence. Are there other artistic or poetic images for impermanence that have affected you?
2. Sabi is a kind of sadness – which is not unpleasant – at the fleetingness of life. Have you had any experience that is similar to this? If so what led to that experience?
3. ‘*Nothing beats real experience.*’ What have been the strongest experiences of death and impermanence in your own life?
4. How do you imagine your own death?
5. Have you made preparations for your own death, e.g. making a will, clarifying what sort of funeral you want, etc.?
6. Making plans whilst knowing they are provisional; making the most of life without hanging on to it; neither wasting time nor resisting the passing of time – what are your own responses to these ‘koans’ about death?

Unit 4: Karma and the Consequences of Our Actions

As with the previous two reflections, we have already encountered the teachings on karma and rebirth, this time in Week 2 of Part 4 of the Foundation Year. They are essential to a proper understanding of Buddhism and we will be exploring them at different points of the course in different ways. Here Ratnadharini explores the five niyamas, the relative priority of karma taking effect and the Yogācāra teaching of the four *ātma-kleśas*. She also looks at ways we can reflect upon these teachings in a practical way.

1. ‘*There is not much we can do about karma vipāka or pleasure and pain generally – the effects of something are non-karmic.*’ What are the implications of this for your practice?

2. We have an immediate response to our karma which is either a feeling of remorse or of a clear conscience. Have you had experience of this? If so, give some examples.
3. What is the immediate consequence for you if you respond to a situation with:
 - Anger.
 - Kindness.
 - Generosity.
 - Unmindfulness.
4. How have you changed as a result of your spiritual practice? You could discuss this with a good friend to get their perspective.
5. Spend some time each day this week asking the question, “What will be the future effects of my current mental state?”
6. What do you make of the Yogācāra teaching of the 4 ātma-kleśas? And of the gradual process of accumulating skilful actions until at some point a more fundamental shift in our consciousness takes place?
7. ‘*We have a huge responsibility to the world through understanding karma and its consequences.*’ What are your reflections on this?
8. Do you have any particular personal precepts that you could take in regard to this material?

Unit 5: The Defects and Dangers of Saṃsāra

This talk focuses more particularly on the *lakṣaṇa* of *duḥkha* or unsatisfactoriness. Maitreyi gives a thoughtful and stimulating account both of the traditional teachings on suffering as well as exploring themes such as guilt, blame and betrayal.

1. What are the implications of seeing saṃsāra as something we do – *samsarising* – rather than as a place?
2. Saṃsāra literally means ‘to circle or go round’ (or ‘perpetual wandering’ or ‘round of rebirth’ according to Nyanatiloka). Maitreyi suggests it is a repetitive cycle that always returns to the beginning; that nothing new comes from it; and that it is a vicious circle where our actions based on ignorance compound our sense of ignorance. Can you see this tendency and pattern in your own mind and patterns of behaviour?

3. Maitreyi suggests that we often equate suffering with blame and guilt (because of Christian conditioning). Is this something you are prone to? If so, how can you change this pattern?
4. To what extent do you think you are trying to fix saṃsāra and make it palatable?
5. What can you learn from James Hillman's thoughts on betrayal?
6. "The ability to be with one's suffering is the place of the spiritual warrior." (Pema Chodron) or, "The gap between feeling and craving is the battlefield of the spiritual life." (Sangharakshita). What do you make of these statements and of what relevance are they to you?
7. Renunciation of saṃsāra leads to freedom and compassion for others – do you have a sense of this in your own life?

Unit 6: The Levels and Aspects of Going for Refuge

This week, we move from the Four Mind-turning Reflections to Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. The purpose of the reflections is to turn our minds away from saṃsāra and towards the spiritual life and it is in Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels that we give positive expression to that which we are moving towards (rather than away from). Obviously we have already touched on this central Buddhist theme in the material for Part 1 of the Foundation Year, so what we will be exploring here are two important teachings of Sangharakshita that explore the nature of Going for Refuge from different perspectives. These are the levels and the aspects (sometimes also referred to as dimensions) of Going for Refuge. It concludes by placing Going for Refuge in the widest possible context of the Higher Evolution and what Sangharakshita has poetically referred to as 'Cosmic Going for Refuge'.

Please read the following extract from chapter four of *Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition* by Subhuti (the book is available from Windhorse Publications ISBN 0904766683).

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=377>

[Beginning of Extract]

Going for Refuge consists essentially in turning from the mundane to the transcendental. One first acknowledges that there is a higher reality, embodied in the Three Jewels. Recognizing that one can actually realize that reality oneself, one feels an overwhelming and intuitive response to it. One re-orientates one's whole being in its direction, gradually disentangling oneself from the motivations and interests that had previously driven one.

One goes for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha,— or, in more contemporary idiom, commits oneself to them,— when one decides that to attain Enlightenment is the most important thing in human life, and when one acts — or does one’s best to act — in accordance with that decision. This means organizing one’s entire life, in all its different aspects, in such a way as to subserve the attainment of Enlightenment.

Although we have spoken of a single act, it is not an act that is performed but once in an individual’s lifetime. At every stage of spiritual life one must turn more and more radically from the mundane to the transcendental. Thus Going for Refuge:

...takes place on different levels, passage from one to another of which constitutes one’s spiritual life as a Buddhist.

Furthermore, that act does not take place simply in one department of life. It is a total act involving every nerve and fibre of one’s being, having repercussions in all aspects of one’s experience and activity. That single act can then be seen from many different points of view, corresponding to the many different categories into which human life can be divided. Thus, there are different aspects or dimensions of Going for Refuge. The recognition that Going for Refuge has levels and dimensions allows us to see more of its real nature. Going for Refuge is dynamic in that it is repeated more and more wholeheartedly at every level of the path. It is comprehensive, in that it eventually must transform every aspect of human experience.

Levels of Going for Refuge

Sangharakshita has distinguished five levels of Going for Refuge: *Cultural*, *Provisional*, *Effective*, *Real*, and *Absolute*. Although this classification is his own, it has traditional precedent, for the Pāli texts distinguish the mundane from the transcendental Going for Refuge.

In Sangharakshita’s system, the lowest level is ‘Cultural’ Going for Refuge, which he sometimes also calls *Ethnic* or *Formal*. Here being a Buddhist is more or less nominal. It is not a matter of personal spiritual conviction but of group membership, and the formula of Going for Refuge is recited with little consciousness of its real significance.

[This is] the Going for Refuge of those Eastern Buddhists who [do] not actually follow Buddhism as a spiritual teaching (though they might be positively influenced by it on the social level), and who [make] no effort to evolve spiritually, but who [are] nonetheless very proud of Buddhism as part of their cultural heritage and who definitely [consider] themselves (ethnic) Buddhists. Such people [recite] the Refuges as an affirmation of their cultural and national identity and even [go] so far as to claim that they [are] ‘born Buddhists’, though in truth one could no more be born a Buddhist than one could (according to the Buddha) be born a brahmin.

In the West, this level consists of those who participate in a Buddhist group for predominantly social reasons. Spiritually limited as is this Cultural Going for Refuge, it is not without value. Such nominal Buddhists are at least influenced by the Dharma on the social and ethical level. Moreover, the Dharma is available to them as a positive ideal. Given sufficient opportunity and encouragement, they may move on to higher levels of Going for Refuge.

At the next level, 'Provisional' Going for Refuge, there is some definite response to the Three Jewels and some awareness of their true significance. One who goes for Refuge provisionally will experience strong feelings of devotion and reverence towards the ideal. He or she will acknowledge the worth of those who are fully committed to the spiritual path.

[He or she has] started taking Buddhism seriously to some extent, even started practising it to some extent, but [does] not really commit himself (or herself) either to Buddhism or to his (or her) own spiritual development. He (or she) might, however, be aware of the possibility, even the desirability, of committing oneself, and might be thinking of doing so later on.

Such a person might be the member of a traditional Buddhist culture who has begun to have some real understanding of what Going for Refuge means. In the Western context, they would be among those associated with a Buddhist movement, regularly attending classes in meditation and Dharma study. However, despite devotion to the Three Jewels and some understanding of the Dharma, they still have many other competing interests and ambitions. These do not, at this stage, allow effective dedication to the spiritual path.

By contrast, one who goes for Refuge *effectively* can put enough energy behind Going for Refuge to make it an effective act. Despite other competing interests and ambitions, they are sufficiently drawn to the Three Jewels to be able to commit themselves to making systematic steps towards them. It is really at this point of 'Effective' Going for Refuge that the spiritual life begins in earnest. Here, the decisive reorientation from the mundane towards the transcendental is made. However, success is not yet assured, even on reaching this stage. Although one has turned towards the transcendental, one has not yet made the transition to it: one has no direct experience of the Dharma. If one ceases in one's efforts one will be inexorably drawn away from the path. Indeed, Going for Refuge can only remain effective at this stage if the individual is surrounded by conditions that support his or her efforts. Such conditions include genuine spiritual friendship, real Dharmic guidance, even living and working situations that enhance rather than detract from the following of the spiritual path.

It is only with 'Real' Going for Refuge that one gains that transforming insight that brings one on to the transcendental path. So important is this transition that we must briefly explore its significance. In the Buddha's original teaching, the spiritual path is divided into two great halves: mundane and transcendental. When one first sets out on the path, one's essential view of things is still worldly. There

is intellectual understanding of the Dharma and emotional attraction to it, but one's deeper psyche is untransformed. One's Going for Refuge may be effective enough to keep one moving forward, but it is not yet real, so that one may still fall back if one relaxes one's efforts. This is the mundane path. In the course of Going for Refuge more and more effectively, one's intellectual understanding of the Dharma and emotional attraction to it are transformed into prajñā or Wisdom. Seeing things now as they really are, one cannot fall back into a mundane way of looking at things. From then on, one sees things from the point of view of Enlightenment, not of the world. One has gained the transcendental path. This is the point where the creative mind predominates over the reactive—although the reactive is not yet exhausted. It is the point on the path of the Higher Evolution where transcendental consciousness arises and one becomes a true individual. We will be exploring further Sangharakshita's views on this transition in later chapters.

Real Going for Refuge is the 'point of no-return' at which one cannot fall back from the path. One's whole outlook has been utterly transformed by a glimpse of the true nature of reality. So penetrating is this glimpse that one can no longer be drawn from a wholehearted quest for complete and full Enlightenment. One is now, indeed, assured of gaining Enlightenment because one cannot, so to speak, help making the effort that will bring one to it. This crucial transition is the first goal of spiritual life. Different Buddhist traditions speak of this transition in different ways: Stream Entry, Irreversibility from Full and Perfect Enlightenment, attaining the path of Vision, the seeing of the jñānasattva, the Opening of the Dharma Eye, etc. Since these different ways of speaking of this transition belong within different doctrinal systems, most are seen within their own systems as different experiences. However, Sangharakshita reconciles all these various ways of viewing the fundamental Buddhist act by referring them back to Going for Refuge. All refer to Real Going for Refuge.

'Absolute' or 'Ultimate' Going for Refuge is the point of full Enlightenment. Here, the cyclic trend of conditionality is completely exhausted and there is only a spontaneous unfolding of the spiral trend in unending creativity. Here even Going for Refuge is transcended, since one has oneself become the refuge. In fact, in so far as all dualistic thought has been left behind, there is no refuge to go to and no one to go to it. Once again, Sangharakshita is keen to guard against thinking of Absolute Going for Refuge as a fixed place, in which the Enlightened settle down. He points out that even the Buddha seemed to feel the need of some higher principle.

After his Enlightenment, the Buddha looked around the cosmos and saw that there was no being whom he could live worshipping and reverencing. It is as though the Buddha himself, even after his Enlightenment, felt this need to look up to something beyond. He eventually realized that there was the Dharma, there was that transcendental law in accordance with which he had realized the Truth and become the Buddha. So he resolved to live worshipping and revering that.

[This makes it clear that] we shouldn't think of Enlightenment as a sort of fixed, final, terminal state, lying literally at the end of a path. That is, up to a point, a helpful way of thinking, but you also need to think of Enlightenment as always, as it were, being there. You have to have both ideas at the same time, which is not a very easy thing to conceive of.

Aspects of Going for Refuge

In this way Sangharakshita identifies Going for Refuge as the act that characterizes every stage of the path. Indeed, the following of the path consists in deepening and ever deepening one's Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. He reconciles, in this single concept that all schools acknowledge, all the different conceptual maps employed by the various schools to chart the stages of the path. Not only are they reconciled in it but they each make their distinctive contribution to drawing out its full meaning and significance. Each approaches that fundamental act from a particular point of view, throwing into relief one or another aspect of it.

These are the conclusions I have come to in the course of the last twenty-five years or so. I have more and more seen everything as contained within the Going for Refuge. I don't see the arising of the bodhicitta or Tantric initiation, for instance, as going beyond the Going for Refuge, but only as revealing different aspects of it more fully and more clearly. At the very beginning, there were just the bare fundamentals, which were sufficient. As time went on, as so many people went for Refuge, people with so many different needs and so many different approaches, there was more and more elaboration, and that elaboration enriched the concept of Going for Refuge. But the different approaches ended up smothering and concealing the Going for Refuge, rather than revealing it.

Sangharakshita's idea of those approaches as dimensions of Going for Refuge once more reveals the true meaning of that act. His perspective does not negate later elaborations but shows them as enrichments of the central concept.

The language of the Bodhisattva Ideal is perhaps the best-known alternative to that of Going for Refuge. This speaks of the basic act in terms of the arising of the *bodhicitta*, the 'Will to Enlightenment', which is a deep urge to go forward on the path for the benefit of all beings. Clearly it draws out what Sangharakshita calls the 'altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge'. There cannot really be two separate paths, one individualistic and one altruistic, between which one can choose, as the popularized Mahāyāna may seem to suggest. The spiritual path is of its very nature altruistic, a growth in harmony, friendship, and compassion. Ultimately it completely transcends even the distinction between self and other. Going for Refuge means becoming more and more altruistic.

The arising of the *bodhicitta* became detached from Going for Refuge for the reasons we have already explored. There was a degeneration and narrowing of the original ideal. Since the Mahayanists did not have an idea of historical

development, they could not identify that narrowed ideal they inherited as a degeneration. They had to accept it as the direct teaching of the Buddha. They could only correct what they saw as the Hīnayāna's one-sided individualism by erecting a new and higher path on top of the old and narrowed one, recasting the spiritual path and its definitive act in terms of altruism. Modern Buddhists need not accept this stacking up of teachings. They must surely find a different way of relating the language of the Bodhisattva Ideal to the basic teachings of Buddhism. This can only be done by relating the Bodhisattva Ideal back to Going for Refuge and seeing it as an exploration of but one of its aspects. The arising of the bodhicitta and the Bodhisattva Ideal reveal the altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge.

Sangharakshita considers that the Bodhisattva Ideal in particular needs putting into perspective for urgent methodological reasons:

You can't even consider the description of the Bodhisattva [as working for inconceivable lifetimes to save all sentient beings] as applying to the ordinary practicing Buddhist. It is absolutely inconceivable. It has got out of all proportion as far as you personally and almost any other human being are concerned. Therefore, I see the Bodhisattva Ideal and the bodhicitta, presented in that way on that scale, as representing the archetype. We participate in that to the extent that we can, but we do not take it upon ourselves in its entirety. We, as ordinary human beings, can't possibly do that. In a way, the Bodhisattva Ideal and the arising of the bodhicitta in the Mahāyāna tradition have lost all connection with the individual practice of the individual Buddhist. Therefore I think it is all the more necessary to fall back on the Going for Refuge as the basic Buddhist act, not on the arising of the bodhicitta and becoming a Bodhisattva – which represent the archetype of Going for Refuge, on a cosmic scale.

Although Sangharakshita draws on and is greatly inspired by the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva Ideal, he thinks it should be taken as myth rather than as a practicable spiritual ideal for the individual. Although it should quickly be noted that to say it should be taken as myth, in Sangharakshita's thinking, does not mean that it should be dismissed or treated as a mere allegory. As we shall see later, he places great importance on archetype and myth. However, he thinks that one should be careful not to take myth literally. He does not think, for instance, that it is appropriate for individuals to take the vow of the Bodhisattva to save all sentient beings, as is commonly done in the Mahāyāna and as he did himself in 1964. He now considers that the Bodhisattva vow, dedicating oneself to the Enlightenment of all beings, can only be thought of in collective terms.

I see less and less the taking of Bodhisattva vows as an individual thing in the ordinary sense. The Bodhisattva vow goes beyond the framework of subject and object. It goes beyond the distinction between one's own individual development and helping other people to develop. So the vow cannot be taken by individuals. If you take some of these Bodhisattva vows seriously, you cannot, if you've got the least scrap of imagination, imagine

yourself as an individual ever carrying them out. Something different is clearly involved: a process in which you may participate but which is not anything that you as an individual can ever do. I have, therefore, tended to think that the Bodhisattva vow should be 'taken' by the Order as a whole. The Bodhisattva spirit, the bodhicitta, should pervade the Order as a whole and all its activities. This is why, from quite early on, I spoke of the Order as embodying the figure of the thousand-armed, eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara, with each Order member being one of those thousand arms or thousand hands, each bearing its particular implement or emblem.

Sangharakshita considers Tantric initiation too as an aspect of Going for Refuge:

I don't regard the Going for Refuge to be introductory to the arising of the bodhicitta, and the arising of the bodhicitta to be introductory to abhisheka or Tantric initiation. In the same way as the arising of the bodhicitta, I regard the abhisheka as an aspect of Going for Refuge, Going for Refuge is the fundamental, basic, definitive Buddhist act. It is all contained there. It has all grown out of that or been elaborated from that. You could say that the abhisheka represents the release of the tremendous energy inherent in the act of Going for Refuge itself. Your own Going for Refuge releases energy. Abhisheka is not something that you get given to you as an extra sort of goody, after you have Gone for Refuge.

Another aspect of Going for Refuge is drawn out by the language of 'Going Forth' into homelessness—the act of leaving behind all worldly ties and of renouncing the group. This act is represented in most Buddhist monastic traditions by the 'lower' or śrāmaṇera ordination. However, it has a much broader significance than this ceremony suggests. At every stage of the path one must leave behind the lower to move on to the higher. If one is to go for Refuge to the Three Jewels, one must Go Forth from mundane refuges. This is not merely an inward process of changing attitudes but has direct practical consequences. Going Forth, Sangharakshita notes:

Draws attention to the extent of the reorganization which, regardless of whether or not one becomes a monk in the formal sense, the experience [of Going for Refuge] inevitably brings about in the pattern of one's daily life.

Another term, Stream Entry, draws attention to the 'permanent and far-reaching effects' of the fundamental Buddhist act. Going for Refuge itself, while it is the primary term for that basic act, 'draws attention to the emotional and volitional aspect of this experience'.

Sangharakshita considers that the language of Going for Refuge provides the most helpful model of spiritual life. Even though ultimately all duality is transcended in Enlightenment, our conception of spiritual life cannot but be dualistic. We must think that there is a state we are now in and a state that we wish to attain. How we think about the relationship between those two states has major repercussions on our spiritual life. One can think of the state one wishes to attain either as

something outside one that one is opening oneself up to or as a potential one has within one that one is trying to reveal. Going for Refuge speaks the language of opening oneself to the higher. Some Buddhist, and some non-Buddhist, traditions speak the language of revealing one's potential. In so far as you are the Buddha potentially, then the Buddha is, it is said, already within you. The best-known example of this is the Zen saying that you are the Buddha already. While this has some metaphysical validity, Sangharakshita considers it methodologically unhelpful:

This language of potentiality is very, very dangerous – not in the sense that it's untrue, but that it can be misunderstood and misapplied. The danger is that you start thinking of these higher levels as potentialities of you [as you now are] as though you can attain them, achieve them, appropriate them, while remaining yourself unchanged. But you can't. The accent is so heavily on you that you can't really become that higher potential. For you to achieve that higher level, paradoxically you have to cease to exist: you have to die so it can take your place. It's much better to put it all the other way round, and to speak not of this higher potentiality belonging to you, but of yourself as belonging to that higher potentiality. It's not that you've got to appropriate it: you've got to surrender to it. You've got to go for Refuge to it. Otherwise the egotistical attitude remains unchanged and you just go on appropriating and appropriating.

The language of potentiality is quite common in Western Buddhist circles and Sangharakshita thinks it is often used for populist reasons: it flatters people to think that they are potential Buddhas—even more that they are the Buddha already. However, they do not then make the kind of radical change necessary really to become Buddhas. They do not go for Refuge to the Buddha. Thus, Going for Refuge is fundamental to Buddhism in another sense: there is no spiritual development without dying to what one now is so that one can be reborn as what one goes for Refuge to.

The context of Going for Refuge

Thus Sangharakshita reveals the true significance of Going for Refuge as the fundamental Buddhist act, repeated at every stage of spiritual life and including every aspect of experience. However, one should not think of Going for Refuge as an isolated act: it belongs in a wider context. In *The History of My Going for Refuge*, Sangharakshita shows first the social context of Going for Refuge. Although it is the act of an individual, many individuals may make it. By doing so, they come into a new and significant relationship with one another. Sharing as they do commitment to the spiritual path, there is a very deep connection between them. Those who genuinely and effectively go for Refuge share a harmony and empathy that amount to a new kind of consciousness. The nature of this new kind of consciousness is quite hard to understand and communicate, since it is neither of the group nor of the individual, but above and beyond them both. It combines the complete autonomy of the individual with complete harmony with others who share the same commitment to the path. It is:

...a special kind of consciousness common to, in a sense even shared by, a number of truly human individuals who follow the same spiritual disciplines and have the same spiritual ideals, or who are engaged in the same creative activities.

This new kind of consciousness characterizes the sangha or spiritual community. Thus, the social context of Going for Refuge is the sangha.

Going for Refuge belongs also within the context of the Higher Evolution. As we have seen, the Higher Evolution is that series of ever higher states of awareness through which, with conscious commitment and personal effort, the individual gradually ascends. Effective Going for Refuge is the act of commitment that the self-aware individual makes at the outset of his spiritual career, dedicating himself to the path. This is clearly illustrated in the teaching of the twelve positive *nidānas*. These are the links in the progressive order of conditionality that form the path, whether we talk of it as the creative Spiral or the Higher Evolution. The first *nidāna* or link is *duḥkha* or ‘suffering’: the inevitable experience of pain, frustration, and imperfection that comes from being bound up with the wheel of cyclic conditionality. As Sangharakshita says, what *duḥkha* really means is:

...in positive terms, that Nirvana alone is peace, and negatively that conditioned things are painful because we seek in them for that absolute bliss which only the Unconditioned can bestow and have, therefore, inevitably to experience disappointment and frustration.

Once one becomes aware that cyclic existence, the reactive mind, or the Lower Evolution are inherently unsatisfactory, then one can be open to the mind’s deeper creative potential. And so, in dependence on *duḥkha*, arises *śraddhā*. *Śraddhā* is often translated as ‘faith’, but this has, for many people in the post-Christian West, quite the wrong connotations:

Śraddhā is not faith in the sense of belief, or in the sense of believing to be true something which cannot be rationally demonstrated. If we want a definition of faith we may say that it is ‘the emotional response of what is ultimate in us to what is ultimate in the universe’. Faith is an intuitive, emotional, even mystical response to what is of ultimate value. For Buddhism, faith means specifically faith in the Three Jewels.

That response, when felt sufficiently deeply and strongly, will result in one’s committing oneself to the Three Jewels. That act of commitment is Effective Going for Refuge. Going for Refuge is therefore the active dimension of *śraddhā* or faith.

Although Going for Refuge first appears in a decisive form at the *nidāna* of *śraddhā*, it is present in every stage of the path. No step in the Spiral Path of the positive *nidānas* is really left behind. Each is taken up and transcended in the succeeding, higher stage. Thus the highest link in the positive chain includes all the other links, although it also passes beyond them. Going for Refuge is present at

each stage as that ever more radical turning towards the Three Jewels. It is Going for Refuge that drives one to leave behind what one has presently achieved and to seek yet greater heights. Going for Refuge therefore takes place within the context of the Higher Evolution, of which it is the vital fuel and spark.

While Sangharakshita identifies Going for Refuge as the dynamic of the Higher Evolution, he stresses that Going for Refuge is the expression within the context of Buddhism of a general principle: the principle of moving from the mundane to the transcendental, from the Conditioned to the Unconditioned. That principle is also expressed in non-Buddhist traditions, albeit often obscurely and distortedly:

At least for some people operating within some other religions, there is some movement from what we would call the Conditioned to the Unconditioned, buried underneath them. They don't have to be organized religions. One can even see some such movement in the works of great artists and writers - there is a movement from the mundane to the transcendental, at least for some of them. The general principle is the same. But often it is mixed with other things, and even if there is some faint reflection of the principle, it is often so obscured by these other factors as to be virtually valueless. For instance, you might think that you go from the Conditioned to the Unconditioned by believing in a personal God who is going to save you and transport you there. That would not be Going for Refuge in our sense.

This principle is not 'Buddhist' in the limited sense. It is part of the universe itself and simply finds particularly clear and powerful expression in the Buddhist concept of Going for Refuge. The Higher Evolutionary context is therefore universal.

The Higher Evolution itself, however, takes place within the context of the wider evolutionary process. Although the two halves of the total process are quite distinct with very different characteristics, nonetheless there is a single thread running through them. There is an 'upward movement of life and consciousness' that can be seen in both the Lower Evolution of species and the Higher Evolution of the individual, although in the Lower Evolution that upward movement is not the expression of a conscious intention, as it is in the Higher. Thus, there is:

...a parallel, or even a partial coincidence, between the process of spiritual development as depicted in traditional Buddhist teaching and the course of human [Lower] evolution as described by modern science.

That parallel or partial coincidence is not without basis in Buddhist tradition. The Bodhisattva, the Buddha-to-be, is often represented as having been born even as an animal in some of his previous lives. The term 'Bodhisattva' was originally applied to the Buddha from the time of his birth to the time of his Enlightenment when he became the Buddha. However, his struggle for Enlightenment came to be seen as spanning not merely one life but myriads of lives. There is a large class of literature, the *Jātakas*, which tells of the previous lives of the Buddha, showing

him perfecting the path over countless ages. Some of the Jātakas are contained in the canons of various schools; others are non-canonical, although they are among the best known and best loved literature of Buddhism. In the canonical Jātakas, the Bodhisattva appears as a famous seer or teacher or king. As Sangharakshita says, he is seen:

...taking the lead, whether in the sphere of ethical and religious life or in the sphere of political activity.

In the non-canonical stories he is depicted rather more broadly, and it is in these tales that he sometimes appears as an animal. In whatever form he appears, he is always the outstanding figure in the group in which he is found; he is always *taking the lead*, thus representing ‘the growing point of evolution within each class or group of beings’. At the same time, he is the Bodhisattva, the being who is totally dedicated to the pursuit of Enlightenment. In this way the non-canonical Jātakas signify that the Lower and Higher Evolutions are aspects of a single ‘upward movement of life and consciousness’. So Sangharakshita speaks of a single principle manifesting at every level of evolution, whether Lower or Higher. This principle is, for the Mahāyāna, the bodhicitta or ‘Will to Enlightenment’. Sangharakshita calls it the ‘Bodhisattva principle’ or the ‘Principle of perpetual self-transcendence’. It is this principle of self-transcendence that we have seen as the upward movement of life and consciousness, underlying both the Lower and Higher Evolutions. Always, at every stage and phase of the evolutionary process, the principle of perpetual self-transcendence manifests itself.

That upward surge of life and consciousness is, of course, within the context of the Higher Evolution, Going for Refuge. Going for Refuge can, however, be seen to be present not just in the Higher Evolution but at every stage of the evolutionary process because:

Looking at the process, what one in fact saw was a Going for Refuge. Each form of life aspired to develop into a higher form or, so to speak, went for Refuge to that higher form. This might sound impossibly poetic, but it was what one in fact saw.

In the Higher Evolution that aspiration to develop into a higher form becomes conscious of itself in and through the committed individual. When it does so it is Effective Going for Refuge. But Going for Refuge is present at every level and stage and is identical with the principle of self-transcendence, with the Bodhisattva principle, and with the bodhicitta. The language of the Bodhisattva principle and of the bodhicitta simply draws out its altruistic dimension. Considered as the universal principle that underlies the entire evolutionary process, Sangharakshita calls this the ‘Cosmic Going for Refuge’:

I have spoken of a Cosmic Going for Refuge. I have identified in Going for Refuge the whole principle of evolution. It is not just a little Buddhist practice. It is a reflection, within the context of Buddhism, of a principle that governs the whole of life and attains greater and greater clarity of expression until it gains its greatest clarity of expression in Going for

Refuge. Going for Refuge is at the centre of Buddhism because evolution is at the centre of life.

Sangharakshita has advanced his idea of the Cosmic Going for Refuge rather tentatively, and has never written systematically on the subject. Clearly there is a great deal of room for misunderstanding and for taking literally what is meant as a poetic metaphor:

When I spoke of the Cosmic Going for Refuge, which I did in a rash moment, I wasn't thinking in terms of a sort of collective Going for Refuge on the part of the whole cosmos. I was thinking that every individual thing in the cosmos might be said to have an inbuilt tendency to transcend itself. At least it has the possibility of transcending itself, given the right circumstances and conditions. I wasn't making an objectively, scientifically verifiable statement so much as speaking in more poetic and metaphorical terms.

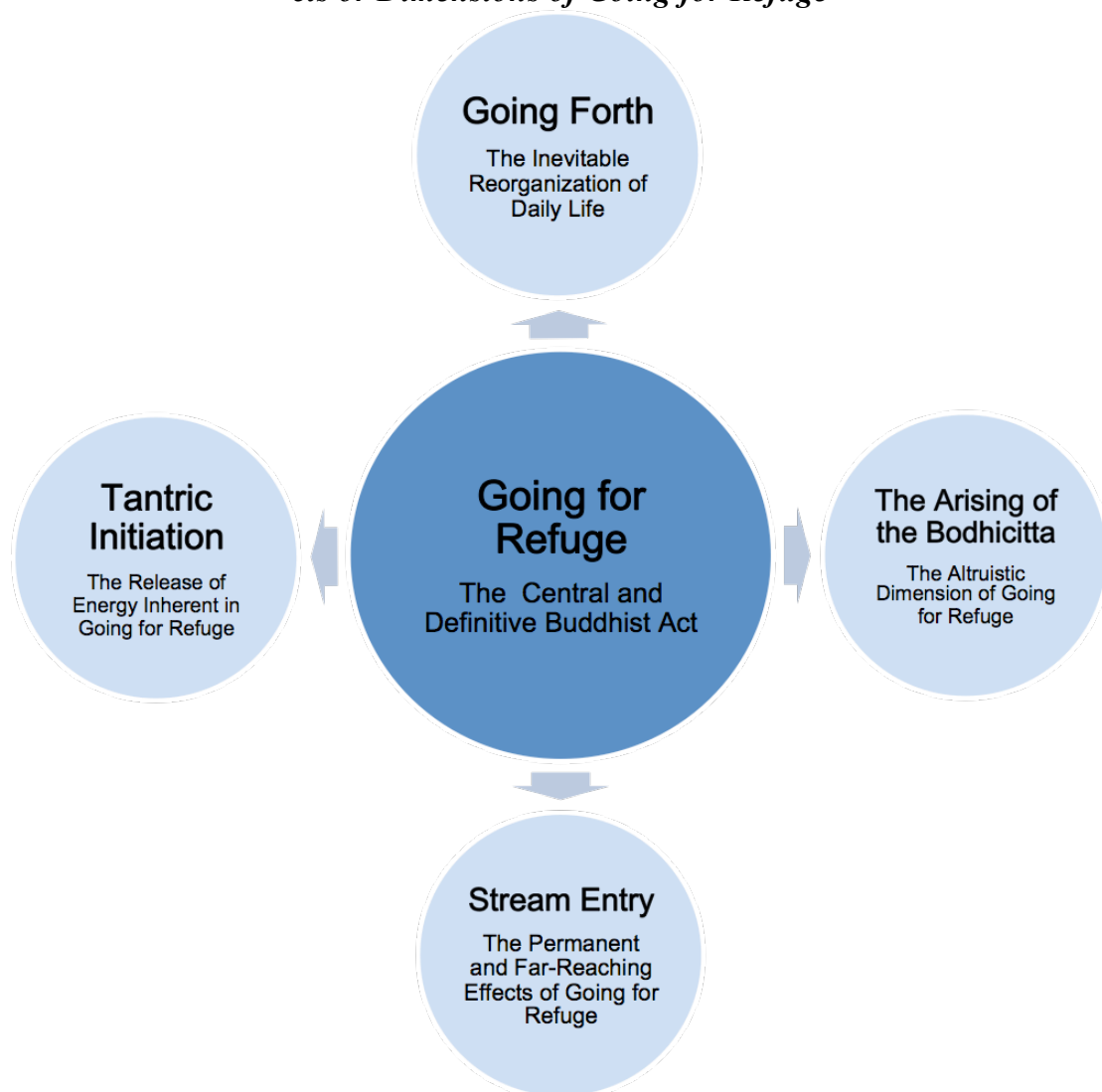
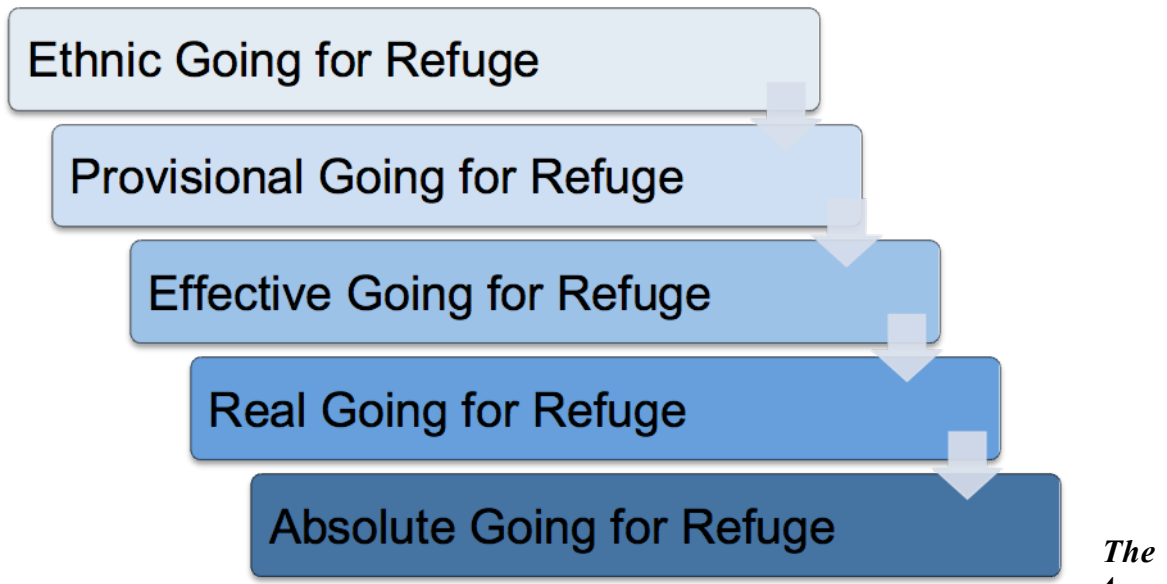
The point of this metaphor, Sangharakshita says, is to communicate that ultimately the cosmos has meaning and purpose. The universe is not simply a mechanism that has evolved human consciousness by a random process. Spiritual life, as we have already seen, necessarily involves us thinking dualistically: what we now are is different from what we are trying to become. It is the spiral path that connects the one to the other, and we ascend that path by Going for Refuge to what we are trying to become. The Higher Evolution is thus purposive, because we are consciously working towards a goal. But how are we to understand the Lower Evolution? How are we to resolve the gap between what we once were and what we now are? What has brought us to the point of Going for Refuge? We can either see that process as fortuitous or as itself having a purpose. Taken literally, both are equally untrue, since they are applying limited concepts drawn from our ordinary sense experience to the universe as a whole. However, from a spiritual point of view, the metaphor of the entire universe as having a purpose is far nearer the truth and far more helpful. It comes nearer to expressing the Buddha's insight into the essential interconnectedness of all things.

The individual's spiritual efforts are not merely the efforts of an individual entirely isolated from everything else: they take place within a vast context. The individual's efforts and the upward movement of life and consciousness that is their context are both manifestations of the single principle of the Cosmic Going for Refuge. They are therefore organically connected. The individual can reveal ever more of the significance of his or her own efforts because those efforts are interconnected with the entire context. Through those efforts, because of that interconnectedness, he or she reveals 'something of the nature and significance of the wider context itself'. Going for Refuge is then the key to evolution itself—a key in the sense of:

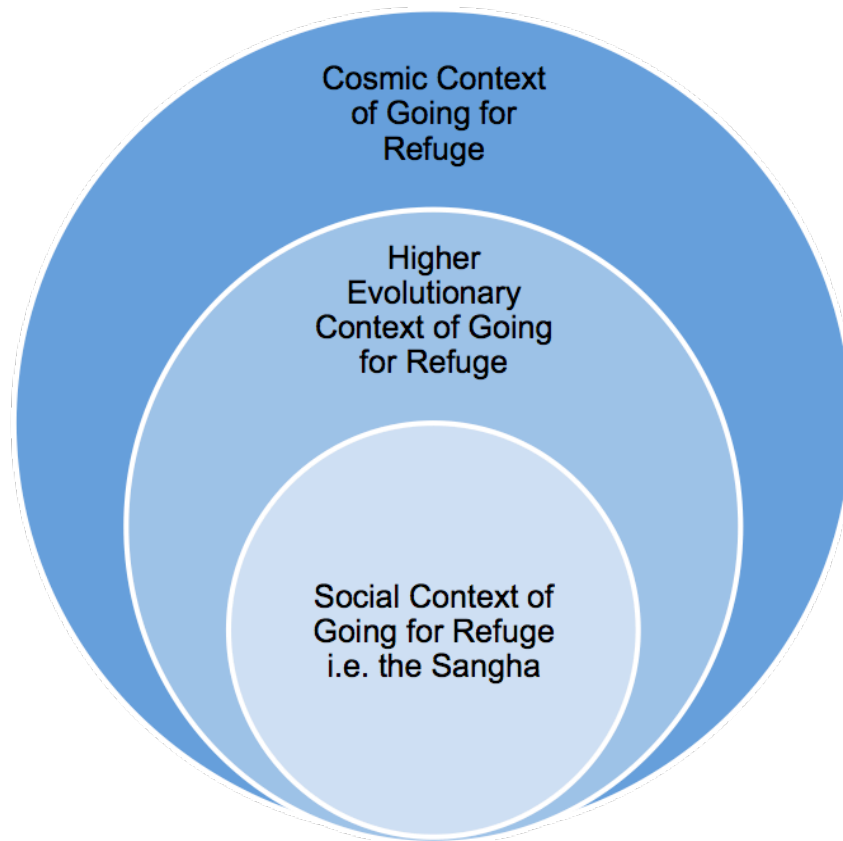
...a concept, or an image, in the light of which the whole process can not only be rendered more intelligible but brought within a wider, more 'cosmic' context.

Through our Going for Refuge we are united, as it were, with all living beings, who in their own way, and on their own level, in a sense also [go] for Refuge. Thus Going for Refuge [is] not simply a particular devotional practice or even a threefold act of commitment, but the key to the mystery of existence. [End of Extract]

The Levels of Going for Refuge



The Contexts of Going for Refuge



Suggested questions for week 6:

1. “Going for Refuge consists essentially in turning from the mundane to the transcendental. One first acknowledges that there is a higher reality, embodied in the Three Jewels. Recognizing that one can actually realize that reality oneself, one feels an overwhelming and intuitive response to it. One re-orientates one’s whole being in its direction, gradually disentangling oneself from the motivations and interests that had previously driven one.” (quote from p.91 of the book or the opening paragraph of the extract). Have you noticed this disentanglement from motivations and interests that have previously driven you?
2. “Going for Refuge takes place on different levels, passage from one to another of which constitutes one’s spiritual life as a Buddhist.” (quote from p.91 of the book or the second paragraph of the extract). Can you relate the deepening of your own spiritual life to these levels of Going for Refuge?
3. What do you think you need to do to make your Going for Refuge more effective?
4. What do you find most helpful about Sangharakshita’s exposition of the Dimensions of Going for Refuge?

5. Why do you think it is important to have a wider context for Going for Refuge?
6. What do you make of Sangharakshita's poetic use of the term 'Cosmic Going for Refuge'?

Projects

As with all the modules of the Dharma Training Course, this module concludes with the opportunity to present a project to your group on a topic arising from the material you have been studying. You may wish to take one of the Suggested Questions and explore it in more detail than you have been able to in the weekly meetings, or you may want to take up a theme or question of your own. One suggestion is that you could compile some readings on one of the reminders – i.e. poems and Dharma readings – and read them out to the group whilst you are meditating. Given that the reminders are dealing with universal themes, there are many readings which you could choose to illustrate them. Whatever you choose, the purpose of the projects is to give you the opportunity to practise the second level of wisdom more fully, i.e. the level of reflection or *Cintā-mayī-prajñā*. It is also a good way to share something of your experience with the group.

Taking it further

If you want to explore the material in this module further or you are looking for references for your project, the following list may be helpful.

Suggested further reading for the whole unit

The Jewel Ornament of Liberation by Gampopa, translated by H. Guenther (Shambhala).

<http://www.shambhala.com/html/catalog/items/isbn/978-1-57062-614-2.cfm>

This is one of the key texts in the development of the Tibetan Lam Rim teachings that Dhammadinna refers to. Gampopa was one of the two principle disciples of Milarepa. His works contain both the monastic Lam Rim approach of Atisha and the Mahamudra meditation teachings of Milarepa. Sangharakshita has led a number of seminars on various chapters from *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, including *The Working Basis* and *Instruction in the Transitoriness of the Composite* (i.e. this precious human life and death and impermanence).

Indestructible Truth by Reginald Ray (ISBN 1570629102). Chapter 10, *Hīnayāna: The View* explores the Four Reminders.

<http://www.shambhala.com/html/catalog/items/isbn/978-1-57062-910-5.cfm>

Themes from Gampopa's Jewel Ornament of Liberation by Padmavajra. This is a series of eight talks given by Padmavajra on a men's retreat at Padmaloka Retreat Centre exploring this key text of Tibetan Buddhism. The talks are available from Free Buddhist Audio:

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X39>

Unit 1

The Path of Regular Steps and the Path of Irregular Steps by Sangharakshita in *The Taste of Freedom* (ISBN 090476690X, Windhorse Publications). The audio is available from Free Buddhist Audio.

Dhammadinna refers to this important lecture of Sangharakshita's when talking about the need for good foundations for our spiritual life.

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=118>

http://www.sangharakshita.org/_books/taste-freedom.pdf

Pin̄giya's Praises of The Way to the Beyond in *The Sutta Nipāta* translated by Saddhatissa (Curzon Press). We have already come across Pin̄giya's praises in Week 6 of Part 1 of the Foundation Year. It is the source of the quote 'eroding desire without harmful side-effects' (in Saddhatissa's translation). Alternative translations are also linked here: via *Access to Insight*:

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.5.16.irel.html>

Saddhatissa's translation: <http://tinyurl.com/pavphs>

Unit 2

The Three Jewels by Sangharakshita (ISBN 1899579060, Windhorse Publications). Dhammadinna refers to chapter 12, *The Human Situation* when exploring the human realm as central to the five other realms of the Wheel of Life.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=332>

The Buddhist Vision by Subhuti (Windhorse Publications). Chapters 7 and 8 are very good on the six realms of the Wheel of Life.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=491>

Know Your Mind by Sangharakshita (ISBN 0904766799, Windhorse Publications). Pp. 119-125 explore the three kinds of faith in more detail. This is covered in some depth in the Year Four module of the course entitled 'Know Your Mind'.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=452>

Unit 3

Wabi-Sabi: for Artists, Designers, Poets and Philosophers by Leonard Koren (Stone Bridge Press). Vajradarshini considers this to be the only decent book on

the subject of Wabi-Sabi.

http://www.stonebridge.com/ordering_indiv_lib_sch.html

Preview here: <http://tinyurl.com/rdsrw9>

Unit 4

Who is the Buddha? by Sangharakshita (ISBN 0904766241, Windhorse Publications). Chapter 7 is a detailed exploration of the traditional teachings on karma and rebirth.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=322>

Exploring Karma and Rebirth by Nagapriya (ISBN1899579613, Windhorse Publications). A detailed exploration of the Buddhist teachings on karma and rebirth written from a modern, some would say sceptical, perspective. It is good for the Pāli sources on karma.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=689>

Talk on Rebirth at the Sheffield Buddhist Centre by Sangharakshita, July 8th 2008:

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=LOC110>

Here Sangharakshita offers some personal considerations (not proofs) for rebirth and concludes with an exhortation to think through more fully our views on this important aspect of Buddhist teaching.

Rambles Around the Yogācāra and Eight Verses for Training the Mind both by Subhuti. These are very good for the Yogācāra and the ātma-kleśas.

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X30>

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X29>

Old Souls by Tom Shroder (Simon and Schuster). Explores the scientific research of Ian Stephenson into cases of recall of previous lives.

Preview and purchase information: <http://tinyurl.com/ranm6g>

Unit 5

What is the Dharma? By Sangharakshita (ISBN 189957901X, Windhorse Publications). Pp 57-63 explore the different kinds of suffering, including Conze's four kinds of concealed suffering.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=382>

Betrayal by James Hillman in *Loose Ends* (Spring Publications).

In three parts here: <http://tinyurl.com/63ha2b>

When Things Fall Apart by Pema Chodron. (ISBN 1570623449) Referred to by Maitreyi in her talk.

Preview and purchase information: <http://tinyurl.com/r2fgby>

Unit 6

Sangharakshita has given two talks on Going for Refuge, one in 1978 entitled *Levels of Going for Refuge* and one in 1982 entitled *Dimensions of Going for Refuge*. They are both required listening if you wish to understand more deeply his thinking on the significance of Going for Refuge. You can access them both from Free Buddhist Audio.

Levels of Going for Refuge:

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=137>

Dimensions of Going for Refuge:

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=154>

The History of My Going for Refuge by Sangharakshita (ISBN 0904766330, Windhorse Publications) gives a more thorough and personal account of how Sangharakshita came to the realization that Going for Refuge is central to the Buddhist spiritual life. The earlier part of chapter 4 of *Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition*, from which the above extract is taken, also places Going for Refuge in the context of the wider Buddhist tradition.

http://www.sangharakshita.org/_books/history-refuge.pdf

Audio: <http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=171>

Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition:

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/CartV2/Details.asp?ProductID=377>