

Lecture 137: Levels of Going for Refuge
Delivered to an audience of Order Members at the Order Convention in 1978
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Upasikas and Upasakas,

When you first heard the title of this lecture, or when perhaps you first read it in your copy of the April Shabda, you might have wondered why - I almost said why on earth - I'd happened to choose this particular subject on which to speak tonight - Going for Refuge. It isn't of course that the subject isn't appropriate; the subject is very appropriate indeed. One might even say, at a Convention of Order members, what subject could there be more appropriate than Going for Refuge? because, after all, it's because we've gone for Refuge, it's because we **do** go for Refuge, **shall** go for Refuge, that we're here on this occasion at all.

But we have heard quite a lot about this subject before, and the human mind is such that it delights in variety and change. Variety, we are told, is the spice of life, and no doubt it's the spice of Conventions too. You might have thought that you know already very well what Going for Refuge means. After all you know about it not just from books, not just from hearsay; you know about it, to some extent at least, from your own practical experience. So the thought **might** have crossed your minds that it wasn't **really** necessary for Bhante to go over this same old ground again! You might even have thought that perhaps he was stuck for a lecture! *[Laughter]* and was producing an old one to fill the gap!

Now, it's true that there's no need to go over the same old ground again, even though reminders are always useful, especially reminders about so important a subject as Going for Refuge. However, let me assure you, I'm not going over the same old ground tonight, however justified I might have been in so doing. I'm going to speak tonight about an aspect of Going for Refuge about which I've more recently been thinking quite a lot, turning over in my mind quite a lot, but about which I've so far not communicated, so far as I recollect, anything to anybody. I've certainly not mentioned this particular aspect in the course of any lecture, not even in the course of any book review.

And the title of the talk should **really** be not so much just Going for Refuge in a more general sort of way; it should really be something more like '**Levels of Going for Refuge**', because it's about the levels of Going for Refuge that I'm going to talk. In fact it's going to be a talk rather than a lecture, and it may be quite short.

I shall also have something to say, in connection with the third of the different levels of Going for Refuge, I shall also have something to say about the three so-called esoteric refuges. But first, by way of sort of winding into the main body of the talk, let me indulge in a few personal reminiscences; reminiscences of one kind or another of my own experience of Going for Refuge, that is to say my own experience of Going for Refuge in the more formal sense, that is to say in the sense of reciting the words of the Three Refuges and the five or ten precepts in Pali - either reciting them after somebody and myself taking them or myself reciting them and somebody repeating them after me and therefore myself giving them.

So my first reminiscence. This goes back quite a long way, and I must confess that the reminiscence isn't very clear, it's distinctly hazy, as one's reminiscences sometimes are. Just a **few** things, just a few points, almost like a few points of colour, stand out. And in this reminiscence I'm in England, and it's before I went out to India, and I'm in Central London, and I'm in a hotel in the - I'm not quite sure, it might be the Victoria area, might be the Bloomsbury area, but one of those two - in a room, a fairly large room, not quite as large as this, in a hotel. And the year is 1943 or 1944 - I haven't been able quite to work it out, but it's definitely either one of those years. And in my reminiscence I see in this room in the hotel, a short, fat, dark little man with rather thick horn-rimmed spectacles, and he's wearing orange robes. There this part of the reminiscence stops. I can't get any further. I'm not sure what he's doing, I'm not sure what he's saying, but I have another recollection. I have a recollection that as I entered this room in the hotel, as we entered the room, we were handed little cards, little white cards which were called 'pansil cards', in other words panca sila cards, because on these little cards there were printed the Refuges and the precepts in Pali. And I've a reminiscence that on this occasion we recited the Refuges and the precepts reading from these little cards. I can't remember how many of us there were. I'm very hazy about the occasion. It was probably a Wesak celebration. I can't really account for the fact that it all made so little impression on me, in a way. *[Laughter]* But one thing I **do** remember, one thing stood out quite sharply, and I still remember this. That was I was looking at this card and I was seeing the Pali words which we pronounce as Dutiyampi, Tatiyampi, and as I read them, not knowing anything of Pali,

it didn't seem that they sounded at all like that - it was more like 'Dut e yam pee' or 'Tat e yam pee' or something like that, and I heard them pronounce *Dutiyampi*, *Tatiyampi*, and this really struck me. [Laughter] I suppose it's my literary turn of mind. [Laughter] So that I remember. This all part of this same reminiscence.

So we recited the Refuges and we recited the precepts. But I remember that there was no attempt on this occasion to explain the meaning of what we did. There was this short, fat, plump little man in the orange robes; there were all these people and we had our pansil cards and we were repeating, reciting, refuges, precepts with perfect Pali pronunciation apparently, but there was no attempt on anybody's part to explain what we were doing and what it all meant and what it all signified. Apparently holding little pansil cards and reciting from them in this way were just something that Buddhists did! And, looking back at that particular experience, entertaining this particular reminiscence, it strikes me now as rather odd that at that time it didn't, as far as I remember, really occur to me to wonder why it was that so little - in fact hardly anything - was explained; certainly not the meaning of what we were doing when we chanted those Pali words and took, as I suppose one can say, the Refuges and precepts. So that's my first reminiscence, rather vague and rather unsatisfactory from a strict Buddhist point of view, you must admit.

And then, second reminiscence. Well, this time we're in India. It's some years later. The scene of the reminiscence is a vihara, a little vihara, sort of monastery cum temple, in a place called Kusinara in North Eastern India. In other words it's the place where, centuries upon centuries earlier, the Buddha had attained what Buddhists call Parinirvana. And of course I'm there. I'm crouched in a sort of squatting position in front of a very old monk, with my elbows on my knees and my hands together like this, and I'm repeating the Refuges and the ten sramanera precepts after this old monk, and I'm being ordained as a sramanera. I'm wearing real orange robes, and the old monk is very insistent about my getting the correct pronunciation of the Refuges. At this ordination ceremony, one has to repeat them both according to the Pali and according to the Sanskrit pronunciation - I won't go into the reason for all that now. So I was finding it quite difficult. I was having great difficulty with my aspirated consonants, I remember. I couldn't Buddham as I can now. I was saying 'Buddung' and I was saying 'Dummung', and the old monk was saying, no it's Dhammam, it's Dhammam. [Laughter] So he was coaching me and I was just wanting to get ordained as a sramanera and here I was having a lesson in Pali and Sanskrit phonetics in the course of the ceremony! And he was saying it's Saranama, it's not saranam, it's saranama. [Laughter] So I was having great difficulty, but anyway he coached me and eventually I got it absolutely correct, every sound, every aspirated consonant, every nasalization, every nasal 'n', absolutely correct, and he was satisfied and I was ordained. **But** there was no explanation on that occasion of what Going for Refuge really meant! I had this thorough, not to say wonderful, lesson in Pali and Sanskrit phonetics, but the significance, the **import** of what I was actually doing, the importance of the step I was taking, basically, from a spiritual point of view, was not explained. I must admit, in justice, the precepts were explained - what it meant to abstain from violence, what it meant not to take the not given - this was all explained - but the real significance of the Going for Refuge was not explained at all on this occasion when I became a sramanera. I just had a vague, though still quite strong, sense that I'd arrived, that I'd joined the Buddhist community, that I was now, as it were, a member of it. So that's my second reminiscence.

So, third reminiscence. Another vihara, a very small one, somewhere in Nepal, some weeks later. I'm sitting in this vihara near the shrine, near the image, and around me, kneeling on the floor, are several dozen Nepalese, that is to say Newar, Buddhists, mostly women; and they've come to the vihara for a special purpose - they ask to be 'given', as it's called, the Refuges and the precepts. But being a very new sramanera I've never had the opportunity of 'giving' anybody the Refuges and the precepts before, and I didn't know what to do, so I had to ask them. I had to learn how to do it - that I recited it and then they recited it after me and I gave a blessing at the end and the little 'sermon' I suppose I have to call it, a little discourse - I had to learn all this, and I did it, and these good people, these good ladies mostly, used to come along every morning, all the time that I was there in that little vihara and they'd 'take' the Refuges and precepts, and this made them very very happy. Because in a way they knew the meaning of it, that 'Buddham Saranam Gacchami' meant 'to the Buddha for Refuge I go', they knew so much. That 'Dhammam Saranam Gacchami' meant 'to the Dharma for Refuge I go' - they knew this. They knew what the meaning of the words was, but they clearly didn't think about it too much. They didn't understand, or they didn't want to understand, the real significance - what it really meant to **go** for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. They were perfectly happy just to recite the holy words after me and leave it at that. The recitation showed that they were Buddhists; that they belonged to the Buddhist community; that they were Newars; that they were tradespeople; that they belonged to a Buddhist social group; that they were not Hindus or Muslims or anything like that - they were Buddhists. So this is my third reminiscence.

Now my fourth reminiscence is, I must confess, a sort of non-reminiscence. I suppose I **ought** to remember reciting the Refuges and precepts, but especially the Refuges at the time of my ordination as a bhikshu which came about two years later in 1950, but I must confess I've no such recollection whatever! *[Laughter]* I suppose I did recite the Refuges on the occasion of my bhikshu ordination, but they must have made no impression at all on me, and that means that they could not have been considered, at the time, very important; and this is a very significant fact, as we shall see later on. So my fourth reminiscence, I'm sorry to say, is a non-reminiscence.

All right, reminiscence number five. Reminiscence number five is not just one reminiscence - it's a whole group of reminiscences extending over a period of several years, and embracing all sorts of places in many different parts of India. And especially this reminiscence embraces hundreds upon hundreds of meetings - public meetings, Buddhist meetings - many of them with thousands of people present. And most of these meetings were held, rather reluctantly so far as I was concerned, quite late at night, and they were held mostly in the open air, sometimes with a cold wind cutting through the place. And at these meetings, these late night, open air meetings, I was called upon, sometimes at one o'clock, sometimes at two o'clock in the morning - after I'd had a cup of tea to keep myself awake - called upon to 'give' the Refuges and precepts to thousands of ex-untouchable - I was going to say Buddhists, but no, they just became Buddhists at that moment - ex-untouchable Mahars, mostly, of Maharashtra. And in this way they were converted, so to speak, to Buddhism. By this time, of course - here we've come to, say, the late 50s, early 60s - by this time I had some idea of my own as to what Going for Refuge really meant. But nobody had ever told me. I'd worked it out for myself, more or less, with some help from some at least of the ancient Buddhist texts. And in the course of the talk - which I used to give in these big, late at night, open air meetings where all these ex-untouchables were converted to Buddhism; where they were given the Refuges and precepts - in the course of my talk I used to try to explain to these new Buddhists what the Going for Refuge really meant, what it meant to be a Buddhist. And usually, though it was late and though they were tired, 'though they'd been working hard all day, they used to listen quite patiently, and to try to understand. But one could see that quite a lot of them were not really interested in understanding what Going for Refuge really meant in the deeper and more fundamental sense. So far as they were concerned, Going for Refuge or conversion to Buddhism meant simply, at least to begin with, getting out of the clutches of orthodox Hinduism. It meant escape from the iniquities, one might say, of the Hindu caste system, at the very bottom of which, of course, they were, oppressed by everybody else. And I must say after having had quite a bit of contact with these people, having seen the way in which they used to live, the way in which they were treated by the orthodox Hindus, the caste Hindus, I can't blame them at all for wanting to use Buddhism in this way, and even seeing conversion to Buddhism in this way. But clearly that wasn't enough.

All right, sixth and last reminiscence. We're moving on rather rapidly, you notice. I'm back in London now, after twenty years in India, and it's 1964, and, believe it or not, it's Wesak Day, not very long after my return. And the scene is a scene with which some of you might be familiar - it's the Caxton Hall, Westminster, and there is Bhante on the platform with Mr Christmas Humphreys and other British Buddhist dignitaries whose names I've forgotten. *[Laughter]* And at a certain stage of the proceedings - and Wesak celebrations of that sort in those days used to last exactly an hour, not a minute longer! - at a certain stage in the proceedings I was asked to recite pansil, that is to say the Refuges and precepts, and when I say recite I mean recite. I was not asked to lead it, I was asked to recite it. The idea being that we should all recite it together - that nobody should give it to anybody else - and I gather that at the bottom of this rather strange practice there was some sort of pseudo-democratic or pseudo-egalitarian idea. So I raised some feeble objection *[Laughter]* and I pointed out that this wasn't the custom in Buddhist countries. In Buddhist countries the bhikkhu or whoever else officiated led in the recitation of the precepts and others repeated after him, and this produced a rather pleasant antiphonal kind of effect. *[Laughter]* But this didn't go down at all well. My objections were brushed aside and Mr. Christmas Humphreys said 'we've done it this way for forty years and we're not going to change now!'. So I just recited, I just recited and the people present - there must have been up to a hundred people - they tried to recite with me. They came straggling along in fact rather in the rear. Very few of them actually knew the Refuges and precepts by heart and on this occasion - I don't know why - there were no pansil cards. So the results were not very good. The results were rather ragged to say the least. In fact, to tell the truth, the results were quite appalling. *[Laughter]* And I realised, if I hadn't realised it before, having been by that time some months in England, that something was seriously wrong with British Buddhism.

Well, these are just some of my experiences of Going for Refuge, at least before the WBO was founded. Some of my experiences. Not all. There are others - some of them of a more positive and inspiring nature. But you will have noticed at least one thing about the experiences which are the subject of my reminiscences tonight. You will have appreciated that real appreciation of the significance of the Going for Refuge is rather lacking nowadays. At least that should have been pretty obvious. Appreciation of

the real significance of the Going for Refuge is certainly lacking in Buddhist circles in the East, and lacking, even, in some of the corresponding circles in the West. Both in the East and in the West, more often than not, the Refuges are simply something that you recite, usually in Pali, at least in South-east Asia. The Refuges are something that show, or the recitation of the Refuges is something that shows, in some way, that you are a Buddhist, that you belong to the Buddhist community in a social sense. One might even say that the Refuges and the precepts, in these circles, in these areas of the Buddhist world, are just a sort of flag that you wave on important occasions. You go to the temple on Wesak Day - you recite the Refuges. If there's a wedding, somebody gets married - you recite the Refuges. A baby is born and when it's a few days old it's given a name - you recite the Refuges. The grandfather dies, there's an after death ceremony - you recite the Refuges. There's a public meeting, say ratepayers association, but they're all Buddhists, so - they recite the Refuges. And this reciting of the Refuges shows that you're a decent, respectable, law-abiding, person. This is the sort of significance it has nowadays, usually in the East.

Now there's nothing wrong with **reciting**. Reciting is a wonderful thing. We ourselves enjoy it very much. Let's recite the Refuges, let's chant the Refuges every day, every morning, every evening. Let's recite them three times a day. Let's recite them every hour. That would be fine if we could do that. Let's go on reciting them all day, chanting them all day. Far from there being anything wrong with that - that's highly desirable. I can think of a lot worse things for us to do in the course of the day! *[Laughter]* But the trouble is, nowadays in the East, that though they recite, which is a good thing, people generally do nothing but recite the Refuges. They don't think about the meaning. In my own personal experience, it's only the Tibetans, only the Tibetan Buddhists, who have some appreciation, sometimes a very deep appreciation, of what Going for Refuge really means, what it really implies in spiritual terms, deeply and fundamentally. It's only the Tibetans who've got some realisation of the tremendous **importance** of the Going for Refuge, indeed of its central and basic importance in and for the Buddhist life. But elsewhere in the Buddhist world, whether it's Ceylon or Burma or Thailand or Japan, they just seem to have forgotten - almost entirely forgotten. People recite the Refuges - yes they do recite them frequently and loudly - they recite the Refuges but they hardly ever really **go for Refuge**, and this is really surprising when one thinks about it. Because the significance of the Going for Refuge as distinct from merely reciting the words of the Going for Refuge formula, the significance of the Going for Refuge as the central act of the Buddhist life, is clear enough from the scriptures, especially clear enough from the Pali scriptures. There are references to it, I was going to say, almost on every page. It wouldn't be too much of an exaggeration perhaps to say even that.

So let's look at the Pali scriptures, let's look at some of these pages, many of these pages, and what do we find? There's a little group of people somewhere, maybe in the forest, maybe in the village, and the Buddha is giving a teaching. The Buddha is speaking. He may be giving this teaching to some non-Buddhist wanderer, maybe to a naked ascetic. He may be giving the teaching to a Brahmin priest or to a king or a householder of some kind, a merchant or a sweeper - almost anybody - a housewife, a fisherman. I say the Buddha is giving a teaching but perhaps I should say the Buddha just talks in the pages of the scriptures. He just talks. He just communicates with the people whom he happens to meet, who come his way. The Buddha is just himself. One might say he's just his own Enlightened self in relation to whoever it is that he happens to meet. And he just talks. He may give quite a lengthy talk, quite a lengthy discourse, or he may say just a very few words. Usually he speaks in prose of course, that being more normal, even in India, but occasionally, according to the Pali scriptures, he bursts into verse, even poetry, when he has something of special importance to impart, to communicate, something which he feels particularly deeply, as when he utters an '*Udana*', when he 'breathe's forth' some inspired utterance. And sometimes when he talks, when he communicates, whether in prose or verse, at length or in brief, he gives a profound philosophical exposition, and sometimes he just tells a story - what we usually call a parable but really it's just a story, a story with a meaning. But whatever he does, whatever he says, whatever and however he communicates - at length or in brief, in prose or in poetry, profoundly or simply, howsoever he does it - according to the scriptures the effect is usually tremendous, not to say shattering. Usually - not always - because human beings are free. Human beings are free not to be impressed, even by the Buddha if they don't wish to be. They have that freedom. But usually, in the pages of the scriptures, they are impressed, very deeply, very profoundly impressed by what the Buddha has to say. In fact the Buddha's words, the Buddha's inspired speech, the Buddha's communication, is just like a revelation to them. What he says opens up to them a completely new world. They see their own life in a completely new light - see, stretching before their feet - a new path, a path that stretches to infinity. And so hearing, so seeing, they feel their whole being, as it were, shaken to its foundations. This is the effect of the Buddha's utterance. The scriptures say that sometimes their hair stands on end with the shock. They even shed tears, they are so emotionally moved. When they try to speak they find that their voice simply chokes; they can hardly speak for emotion. But when they **do** manage to speak, when they **do** manage to bring out a few words, what do they say? And in passage after passage, episode

after episode, we get these same words, and we mustn't allow the fact of these words being repeated so many times to deaden or weaken their impact for us. So what do they say? What are the words that they manage to get out at last, with their hair standing on end and the tears in their eyes? They say, 'it's amazing', 'it's amazing, Lord, it's wonderful'. This is their reaction. This is the first thing that they say. Their reaction or their response is this. It's a reaction of awe, of wonder, of astonishment, of amazement. This reminds me of Plato's statement that 'philosophy begins with wonder'. So here too we say wonder and amazement, but in, we may say, a much more intense form. And then having stammered out these words, having expressed their awe, wonder, astonishment and amazement, they try to describe what has happened. They try to describe their experience, and usually they give four comparisons; and you notice that at this point, this sort of psychological point, this crucial moment, when they're as it were on the brink of eternity spiritually speaking, suspended in mid air perhaps and haven't yet come down and haven't yet started flying up, they have recourse to poetry. They speak in comparisons, not in terms of psychological or metaphysical analysis; and the first thing they say is, 'Lord, it's just as though something which had been overthrown, cast down, had been set upright', just like a great pillar that had been lying in the dust. You take it and you haul it up and you set it upright so it's straight up, standing up.

So they feel absolutely uplifted, stable, strong, secure, firm, erect, after having been downcast and overthrown. That's how they feel. And then they feel as though something which had been hidden had been revealed, made known. It was there all the time, but it was hidden but now it's brought to light and they see it clearly. That's also how they feel. And then they feel as though the way had been pointed out to someone who had gone astray. They see their path clearly now. They know which way to go. There's no doubt, no hesitation, no confusion, no uncertainty. The way is clear. And then, fourthly and lastly, they say it's just as though a great light, a brilliant light, brighter even than the light of the sun, had shone forth in the midst of the darkness, and we can see now, we couldn't see before, we were in darkness before. We couldn't see before but now we can see. This light has shone forth. We can all see. So this is what they say. These are the comparisons they give. This is the poetry which they speak expressing their feeling, expressing their experience, communicating their experience.

So this is what people say when they feel the impact of the Buddha's words, the impact of the Dharma. And then what is it that they do - after feeling the impact of the Buddha's words, after hearing the Dharma? They say 'I go for Refuge', or as one should say, if one translates strictly, 'For Refuge I go'. I go for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. This is what they say at that moment, and clearly it's not just a question of the recitation of a formula. It's the heartfelt response of one's total being to the impact of the truth, even the impact of Reality. One commits oneself to the truth, one surrenders to the truth, one wants to devote one's whole life to the truth. So, more often than not, those who've heard the Buddha's words, those who've **felt** the impact of the Dharma in this way, go forth. For them Going for Refuge means going forth. They go forth from the group, go forth from the household life, go forth just as a single, solitary individual. And sooner or later they're accepted into the spiritual community of others who have gone forth as single solitary individuals. They're accepted into the spiritual community of what I've called sometimes the full-timers.

So this is what used to happen. This is what Going for Refuge used to mean, and still really means, according to the scriptures. Now I've spoken of **hearing** the Dharma as having a tremendous impact, as leading to the Going for Refuge, but **seeing the Buddha** can have just the same effect, or seeing the Sangha, the spiritual community. There's the well known example of the Buddha's cousin and disciple Ananda. Ananda, according at least to the *Surangama Sutra*, was not converted, to use that term by hearing the Dharma. How then was Ananda converted? He was converted simply by seeing the Buddha. He didn't hear the Dharma, he just saw the Buddha, and more specifically the *Surangamasamadhi Sutra* says he was converted by seeing the beauty of the Buddha. He saw the Buddha in the distance. He saw his noble, majestic appearance, his golden complexion, his kindly gaze, the light that seemed to radiate from his form, from his features; and Ananda thought, Ananda felt, that he hadn't ever seen anything, any one, so beautiful as this, so beautiful as the Buddha, and this had a tremendous effect. Just the beauty of the Buddha, without even hearing the Dharma, without even hearing this beautiful Buddha say anything at all. And as a result of that effect of seeing the Buddha, seeing the beauty of the Buddha, Ananda was drawn forth from the household life. He became for many years the faithful attendant of the Buddha, looking after him, introducing people to him, running errands; and eventually, after the Buddha's *parinirvana*, Ananda gained Enlightenment.

So we should not forget **this** aspect. Beauty may or may not be truth, but truth, we may say, is certainly beauty. And beauty, spiritual beauty, undoubtedly has a tremendous attractive power, a tremendous power of fascination, and this is why, in later Buddhist art, later Buddhist iconography, the Bodhisattvas, unlike the Arahants, the Bodhisattvas are depicted as beautiful young princes. And what does this fact

represent? It represents the fact that Enlightenment - and the Bodhisattvas are, after all, Enlightened, or they're personifications or embodiments of Enlightenment or of this or that aspect of Enlightenment - Enlightenment is eternally, everlastingly, young, because it's always new, always fresh, never grows old. And Enlightenment is supremely attractive. So the Bodhisattvas are represented as beautiful **young** princes.

And then there's not only seeing the Buddha, seeing the beauty of the Buddha, there's also seeing the Sangha. There's not only a Dharma and the Buddha or a Buddha and the Dharma, there's a Sangha. Seeing the Sangha too, seeing the spiritual community, can have a tremendous effect. This also can lead one to go for Refuge, and there are many examples of this too. You may remember some of them - one or two of them I've mentioned already. You may recollect the story of that king in the Buddha's own day - Ajatasatru - and what had this king done? What had he done to gain the throne? He'd done a very terrible thing. He'd murdered his own father and shut up his own mother in prison, and his mind was very uneasy on this account. And he consulted with his friend, Jivaka the physician, and Jivaka said you'd better go and see the Buddha. He said I'll take you to see the Buddha. So they went forth one night, all of them, the whole court, mounted on elephants - five hundred elephants - most of them carrying the ladies of the harem. So they went into the forest, the king and Jivaka, the courtiers and all these women, and at the edge of the forest they dismounted, and Jivaka was leading the king deeper and deeper and deeper into the forest, and it was a very dark night, and in any case the branches of the trees were thickly interlaced above their heads. And the king with his guilty mind became very suspicious, very afraid, and he said, 'Jivaka, you are not leading me into a trap, are you?' *[Laughter]* Jivaka said, 'No, your majesty, no. We haven't very far to go. It's just a little way further on.' So they went a little more deeply into the forest. It got darker and darker and quieter and quieter, and the king got very very suspicious again and he said, 'Jivaka, didn't you tell me that the Buddha was staying in this forest with twelve hundred and fifty monks?' He said, 'I can't hear a sound. Surely there would be some sound with all those monks. You're not leading me into a trap?' Jivaka says, 'No, no, your majesty. It's only a little way further and you'll soon see', and in fact within a matter of minutes the king saw. There was a little clearing. A single lamp was burning, and there were the monks sitting in the moonlight all around the Buddha, twelve hundred and fifty of them and the Buddha in the middle, in complete silence, because it was a full moon night. And just then the moon came out from behind the cloud and the king saw the whole assembly - twelve hundred and fifty bhikkhus all seated around the Buddha in this great clearing, just meditating in the middle of the night, and not a sound, not a cough! *[Laughter]* No one even blew his nose! *[Laughter]* Bhikkhus don't have handkerchiefs! So the king was so impressed by this sight, the sight of the Sangha. The sight of the Sangha, not just the Buddha, the Sangha, and he hadn't heard the Dharma - not yet - he just saw the Sangha. And he was so impressed, and he had a son called Udaya and he said to Jivaka, 'I only wish that my son, Udaya, could know joy, this same peace of mind that these monks enjoy, that this Sangha enjoys.' He knew that to hope for peace of mind for himself was impossible because he'd committed such a terrible crime, but he wished it for his son. So he was so deeply impressed, so deeply **moved**, even this murderous suspicious king, by the sight of the Order, the spiritual community.

There is another famous example. This time from China, from the T'ang Dynasty. Apparently there was a famous Chinese scholar or poet of the T'ang Dynasty who wasn't a Buddhist. It seems he was rather strict Confucian, and one day he went to visit a Ch'an monastery - that is to say a Zen monastery - and the monks there were so beautifully disciplined. They wore their robes so neatly. They walked about so sedately. They ate in such a refined, mindful fashion. They spoke to each other so politely. They were so aware. They moved about so beautifully that this strict Confucianist, this scholar, this poet, was deeply impressed, and exclaimed - I'm not quite sure if I've quoted it correctly but this is the substance of it - he said in words which have become quite famous in Chinese Buddhist history, 'Ah, the etiquette of the Three Dynasties is surely embodied here.' He was impressed in this way. Etiquette being a very very great thing, a very important thing for the Confucianists, so to speak in this way - that the etiquette of the Three Dynasties was concentrated there in that monastery, there in that Sangha - coming from a Confucianist, that was the highest possible praise. So he was very favourably impressed by Buddhism after that.

There are examples of the same sort of thing, we may say, even nearer home, on a more ordinary level. I have known instances when visitors to Sukhavati have been very impressed by the way in which the Order members and Mitras there just worked. Talking about work again I'm afraid! Didn't know anything about the Dharma, hadn't come to hear the Dharma certainly, and so far there's no Buddha in the shrine, but they saw people working together, and they were impressed. And the same thing happened, perhaps in an even more striking manner when I remember, I think it was last year, a team of six people went out from Sukhavati to Norwich to help build the centre there and little echoes and little rumours reached me, and I heard that people had been very very impressed by the way in which these

six people worked together. They not only worked smoothly, not only worked efficiently, not only worked very quickly, which was astonishing enough for most people, but they worked as a team, they related to one another very very well, very positively, almost creatively, in the course of the work. And this fact very strongly, even strikingly, impressed a number of people who came along just to have a look and see what they were doing.

So it's very important to remember this. It's very important to remember that more often than not, ordinary people, which means the general public, the great British public in our case, will not see the Buddha, not even the image of the Buddha. They won't hear the Dharma, won't even read a book on Buddhism perhaps, but they may see the Sangha. In other words, they may see **you!** They may see how you behave, how you work, how you relate to one another; whether you are positive or negative; inspiring, good to be with or depressing and drab. So a great responsibility rests on you. **You**, the individual Order member, are the public's first point of contact with the whole movement, the whole Buddhist tradition. Just you! *[Laughter]* I remember that when I was staying at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara - I think this was in 1965/66 - someone came to see me, someone who'd never been to the vihara before and had no contact, no previous contact with Buddhism. I didn't think too much of this because people were always coming to see me in that sort of way. But there was another person staying at the vihara - someone who was spending a few weeks there; he was a Buddhist, an English Buddhist - and he happened just to open the door for this visitor of mine, and he afterwards became friendly with this particular visitor who became a regular frequenter of the vihara; and the visitor who became the regular frequenter told the person who had opened the door one day when they were talking, that 'do you know? When you opened the vihara door, that was the first time I'd ever seen a Buddhist.' And the person who opened the door related this to me afterwards and he said when this person told him that he was staggered. He said, 'I realised my responsibility. That when I opened the door to this new person, this visitor, I was the first Buddhist he'd ever seen', and he said, 'I couldn't help wondering what sort of impression I made on him.' So remember this - you may be the first Buddhist that somebody, even a whole lot of people, have ever seen, and they're going to take a good look at you. It's almost like seeing some strange new creature in the zoo. *[Laughter]* They're going to take a really good hard look. What you look like. Whether you're intelligent or stupid, dull or bright, absent-minded or on-the-ball, friendly or unfriendly, warm or distant, or cool and not very interested, or couldn't care less *[Laughter]* or why don't you go away and not waste my time! *[Laughter]* I've got better things to do! Yes. They're going to take all this in. So you've got a tremendous responsibility. Yes. *[Laughter]*

We've seen now how important the Going for Refuge is, whether as a result of seeing the Buddha, hearing the Dharma, or seeing the Sangha, the spiritual community. And we've also seen how the importance of Going for Refuge is very clear from the scriptures, even though the greater part of the Buddhist world does seem to have forgotten that significance. It's time now that we came on to the levels of Going for Refuge, and there are altogether six of these, though the sixth one is not, strictly speaking, really a level.

The first two levels are lower levels than the level of Going for Refuge which is generally described in the scriptures. That is to say the one with which we've just been dealing, about which we've just been talking. The third level corresponds to the type of Going for Refuge with which we have just been dealing. The fourth and fifth go further. The sixth is difficult to classify in this way, but we'll look into that when we come to it.

The Six Levels of Going for Refuge are:

First of all what we may call the **Cultural Going for Refuge**.

Two, the **Provisional Going for Refuge**.

Three, the **Effective Going for Refuge**.

Four, the **Real Going for Refuge**.

Five, the **Ultimate Going for Refuge**, and

Six, the **Cosmic Going for Refuge**.

These terms are not very satisfactory, I fully realise, and they may have to be changed later on. Not later on in this lecture - that might be rather confusing - *[Laughter]* but when I've had time to think about the matter a little more.

These six do not correspond to any traditional set or any traditional classification. Some of them do, though, but not all. I should perhaps correlate them systematically with Buddhist tradition some other time. Meanwhile I want to say just a few words on each of these levels of Going for Refuge in turn, and this will give you some idea of what they are all about.

First of all what I've called the **Cultural Going for Refuge**. We could call this the 'formal' Going for Refuge or even the 'ethnic' Going for Refuge. Take a look at history as we did the other evening. If we take a look at history we see that in the course of a thousand, fifteen hundred and more years, Buddhism spread from India all over Asia, and in some parts of Asia, Buddhism has been well, thoroughly, deeply established for more than fifteen hundred years. And the result, one of the results of this fact is, that practically the entire culture of those areas is Buddhist, and practically the entire population of those areas, at least up to the time of Communism, is Buddhist. The population of those areas, we may say, is or at least until very recently was as much Buddhist as the population of Europe is Christian, and in much the same way. Generally in these areas, in these Buddhist countries, people don't actually follow Buddhism as a spiritual teaching, though they may be influenced by it in a highly positive manner on the social level, or even on the ethical level, but nonetheless they make no conscious effort to evolve individually. They don't follow Buddhism as a spiritual path, the majority. But nonetheless they are very proud of their Buddhism. It's part of their cultural heritage. More often than not, it's the most important part; even, one might say, practically the whole of their cultural heritage, because before Buddhism, in some cases, they virtually had no culture. Culture came with Buddhism. They've got very little except Buddhism on the cultural level, so they're very proud of Buddhism. They're proud of it not only as part of their cultural heritage but even as part of their **national** heritage in those areas where, under Western influence, nationalism has become a strong force. And these people consider themselves as Buddhists, that is to say as what we would call 'ethnic' Buddhist, which is really a contradiction in terms. And what I've come to call the cultural Going for Refuge is the Going for Refuge of such people. They recite the Refuges in Pali or some other language as an affirmation of cultural and national identity. I've met quite a few of these people, mostly on pilgrimage in India, and they'll often tell you, rather proudly, that 'I'm a born Buddhist'. They're very proud of the fact that they're born Buddhists, and they think, very often, that someone who has merely been **converted** to Buddhism is a rather inferior kind of Buddhist. The **real** Buddhist is the born Buddhist, the person whose mother and father, grandfather and grandmother, were Buddhists through birth. I used to take, I must confess, rather a strong line with such people. I used to say that it's completely unbuddhistic to say that you're a born Buddhist. I used to say, 'Ah, but what did the Buddha say to the Brahmins? The Buddha criticised the Brahmins for claiming to be Brahmins by birth. The Buddha said, "you cannot be born a Brahmin, you cannot be a Brahmin by birth. You are a Brahmin only if you possess certain **qualities** of a Brahmin." In the same way', I said, 'you can't be a Buddhist by birth just because your mother was a Buddhist or your father was a Buddhist. You are Buddhist only if you follow the spiritual path shown by the Buddha, if you practise Buddhism.' But I found it usually very very difficult to convince them. They really did think, or they really did feel, that Buddhism was in their blood, and some of them even seemed to think that because they were born Buddhists and Buddhism was in their blood, they could understand it automatically without study, and whatever they told you about Buddhism, well, because they said it and they were born Buddhists, it must be correct.

And it must also be added that many **Hindus** think the same thing, even without being Buddhists. Just because they were born in India, and Buddhism of course, as everybody knows, came from India. So because they were born in India, the Buddha too came from India, they take it as axiomatic that they know **all** about Buddhism and can tell you whatever comes out of their mouth, that is Buddhism. They know it all! They don't have to study - they've **inherited** it! It's part of their cultural tradition, and this kind of conceit among those born Buddhists and also born Indians - Hindus - is very common indeed. Now I've even met Buddhists who believed that everyone should remain in the religion into which he was born. They used to tell me it was wrong for a Christian to become a Buddhist - a Christian ought to stay a Christian, a Buddhist ought to stay a Buddhist. So one can see how strangely things have developed in certain respects in the Buddhist parts of Asia.

Now in our own movement, in the FWBO, we of course don't have any cultural Going for Refuge because we've no born Buddhists, but we've something like it, something analogous to it when someone is attracted to the movement, thinking of the movement as, or seeing the movement as, a sort of positive group. So when people are drawn in in this way - attracted to the FWBO because it seems a positive group, because everyone seems happy and healthy and cheerful and friendly so they're drawn in; they don't bother much about the Buddhist part of it; that doesn't matter so much to them - but they will join in happily, they join in everything. If you ask them to meditate, they meditate. They don't mind, because they get a good chat afterwards, or they'll come along to a festival or they'll even help you organise a jumble sale. They'll just enjoy the friendliness of the group. And if you ask them to sit in on a puja and join in the Refuges and precepts, they'll join in quite happily. It's all part of the good group activity. So this is a sort of cultural activity. I'm not criticising it - it's all right as far as it goes - it just reaches a certain level and doesn't go any further than that. So this is what I call the Cultural Going for Refuge.

And then there's what I call the **Provisional Going for Refuge**. My term for this level is not at all satisfactory - Provisional Going for Refuge - but I'll try to explain what I mean. The provisional Going for Refuge goes beyond the Cultural Going for Refuge, but it falls short of the Effective Going for Refuge. Here, on this level, the level of the Provisional Going for Refuge, one may be born a Buddhist. One may be a born Buddhist, as one thinks. That is to say born into Buddhist surroundings, born into Buddhist society, Buddhist culture, **but** one starts taking Buddhism seriously to some extent, starts practising it to some extent; but one has not really committed oneself to it. One hasn't committed oneself to one's own personal, spiritual development. But one **is** aware of the **possibility** of so doing, even the desirability of so doing, and one may be thinking of actually committing oneself later on, even if it's only in the next life. Now in our own movement this level is represented by the Mitra. The Mitra is one who's had his Mitra ceremony. He regards himself as 'belonging', inverted commas, to the FWBO. He meditates fairly regularly. Helps out in various practical ways - sweeps the centre, maybe runs errands for the Order member in charge [*Laughter*]. Helps with the jumble sales, and maybe he's thinking about ordination. And of course when there's a puja he joins in the recitation of the Refuges and the five precepts. So this is what I call the Provisional Going for Refuge. I think you can see what I'm getting at here.

And then thirdly what I call - perhaps in this case more happily - the **Effective Going for Refuge**. This is the Going for Refuge described in the scriptures as we saw earlier on. Effective Going for Refuge means actually committing oneself to the Three Jewels, to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha with body, speech and mind, and surely I need not elaborate in this case, at this time, to you on what Effective Going for Refuge means. You all know very well from your own life, your own experience, what it means, because it corresponds to the Upasaka (Dharmachari) ordination or Upasika (Dharmacharini) ordination in the WBO. Or perhaps I should not even say Upasaka or Upasika ordination in the WBO. Perhaps I should simply say it corresponds to ordination or threefold commitment, because the traditional, socio-religious categories are becoming, it seems, less and less relevant to our situation and our needs.

Now Effective Going for Refuge is twofold. It's general and it's specific. General Going for Refuge has for its object the Three Jewels in the ordinary sense, which is extraordinary enough. The sense of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The specific Going for Refuge has for its object the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha in their esoteric forms, that is to say as Guru, Deva and Dakini, and these are what we call the **esoteric Refuges** and Kuladeva had something to say about them yesterday. I'm going to say a few words about each of them too, especially about the third, the third of these esoteric Refuges. Now why are they called esoteric? Why are they called secret - Guhya? Not because they've been deliberately hidden. Not because they're sort of artificially kept secret. They're secret because they're difficult to communicate, difficult to convey from one person to another. But why are they difficult to communicate? They are difficult to communicate because they are matters of experience, and experience is difficult to communicate. Ideas are easy to communicate. Concepts are easy to communicate, even philosophies, distinctive philosophies, but one's own deep individual, personal experience, which is so unique, so peculiar to oneself; which is, say, ineffable, is very difficult indeed to communicate, and the more something is a matter of experience, the more difficult it is to communicate and the more, therefore, it is secret. Not because you try to keep it a secret - you may **want** to communicate it very much, very deeply, but the fact that it is your **experience** and you're trying to communicate to somebody else with maybe a different kind of experience, a different outlook - even a different language - makes it very difficult to communicate, hence it's esoteric. Experience as such is esoteric, it's secret, it's guhya.

And as we know the esoteric Refuges occur within the context of the Vajrayana - the third of the three Yanas - and the Vajrayana is *par excellence* the Yana of experience. The other Yanas are Yanas of experience too in their way, but not so thoroughly, deeply or radically as the Vajrayana. And because it's the Yana of experience, the Vajrayana is also the Yana of practice because no experience without practice. The Vajrayana, in fact, is **all practice**. It has no theory, no philosophy of its own. It's all practice, all experience. So one may say that the esoteric Refuges are that aspect of the exoteric Refuges, that is to say the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, which one personally experiences, and that may be very little indeed. After all we don't see the Buddha. We don't see Gautama the Buddha, we don't see Sakyamuni. Where is he? We don't see him, we don't experience him. Not directly. Maybe indirectly to a limited extent. We read about him in the scriptures, we see the image, we see the (*unclear*), the icon, but we don't see the Buddha himself. We don't experience the Buddha himself. We'd have to have lived two thousand five hundred years ago to do that. So we've no experience of the Buddha at all. We say 'to the Buddha for Refuge I go', but what meaning has that? How can you go for Refuge to a Buddha that you have never seen? Do you go for Refuge to an idea? Do you go for Refuge to the image? Are you an idol worshipper as the Christians sometimes accuse us of being? So it's very difficult to go for Refuge to the Buddha, because you don't see the Buddha and therefore don't experience him. **But** you do see

the guru, you do experience the guru. So according to the Vajrayana, for practical purposes, the guru is the Refuge. If you get into difficulties, if you want some advice, if you want teachings specifically related to your needs, you don't go to the Buddha, you **can't** go to the Buddha. Even if you read the scriptures it's too general, too broad, even too vague. You go to the guru and he gives you exactly what you need for your particular situation, and this is what is meant when we say that the guru Refuge is the esoteric, and maybe we should say the experiential form of the Buddha Refuge.

And it's the same in the case of the Dharma. The Dharma is so vast. The Buddha-Dharma is just like an ocean, an infinite ocean. Sometimes we are told that it consists of an infinite number of teachings, an infinite number of sections, but in a more limited sense, traditionally, it's said to consist of eighty four thousand independent sections or teachings, or interdependent sections or teachings. And one of course may know, theoretically, quite a few hundred of these eighty four thousand *Dharma Skandhas* as they're called. One may even know a few thousand. But even if you know a few hundred or a few thousand, how many has one actually practised out of all those? And it's that that really counts.

So, it's the Dharma which we've actually **experienced**, it's that Dharma which is the Dharma to which we really go for Refuge. This is the esoteric Dharma Refuge, the Deva Refuge. We go for Refuge only to the Dharma we actually practise in any real, deep living sense, and for the Vajrayana this is primarily the chosen Buddha or Bodhisattva on whom we regularly meditate, because we've at least actually experienced him, or her, in our meditation. So the Deva Refuge is the esoteric form of the Dharma Refuge.

And then, the Sangha. We go for Refuge to the Sangha. But the Sangha consists of **millions** of individuals, both mundane and transcendental, past, present and future. We can't possibly have contact with all of them. We can't go for Refuge to the whole Sangha. That's impossible, incredible, inconceivable. We can have contact with only a very limited number of Sangha members. So therefore we go for Refuge, actually, in practice, in our own experience, only to a very limited number of members of the Sangha, the spiritual community. Perhaps only to two or three, or even one. One's the minimum, and this is the Dakini. The Dakini is that part of the Sangha with which we have a real living spiritual contact, and the Dakini Refuge is therefore the esoteric form of the Sangha Refuge. But, I must warn you here, there's some possibility - in some cases even actuality - of misunderstanding. The word 'Dakini' happens to be in the feminine gender and therefore Dakini or the concept of Dakini is sometimes interpreted as a sort of female partner, a sort of pseudo-spiritual girlfriend with whom one allegedly practises the Dharma. *[Laughter]* But it's not that at all! The Dakini, and there is a masculine form of this name - Daka - the Dakini is any member of the spiritual community with whom one is in close personal contact, who sparks one off spiritually, even inspires one. That's what is meant by Dakini. But there's another way of looking at Dakini, perhaps even more important and more profound. The Dakini, in any sense is not really even anyone outside one at all. After all, one should be able to spark **oneself** off. The committed person who's an integrated person should be able to do this. What the Dakini really represents is the higher, more refined emotional side of one's own being. That's what the beautiful figure of the Dakini represents. The Dakini represents friendliness, befriending. The Dakini is compassion. The Dakini is sympathetic joy. The Dakini is peace and tranquillity. The Dakini is faith and devotion. And all these, higher, more refined, more spiritual, positive emotions are to be developed **within oneself**. Does this then mean that the Sangha Refuge can be dispensed with? Does it mean that spiritual fellowship is unimportant, because you just go on sparking off yourself apparently? Does it mean that communication is unimportant? No, it doesn't mean that. It means that you cannot go for Refuge to the Sangha, to the Dakini, unless you have your own Dakini within. We may say that Dakini goes for Refuge to Dakini. We may say Dakini **communicates** with Dakini. In other words, within the context of the spiritual community, the spiritual fellowship, our communication with one another is through our own higher emotional natures, or with the help of our own higher emotional natures. We cannot communicate just with the intellect. You cannot really communicate just through ideas or through concepts, only through, or with the help of, your own higher, more spiritual, more refined, emotions. In other words only through your own personal - which means your integrated - Dakini, addressing as it were the Dakini of the other individual.

So Dakini more or less corresponds with what our own English William Blake calls the 'Emanation'. I don't remember Blake's exact words but he says something like that in the perfect state - perhaps in the state of eternity - individuals converse with one another through their emanations. And what does this mean? It means that without genuine spiritual emotion there is no communication. If you are merely intellectual, no communication. You may talk for ages, talk the hind legs off a donkey as we say, but there'll be no communication. You'll just be talking, and you'll feel very dry and barren and dusty, as it were, as though there was dust in your mouth at the end. If you only communicate through the medium of concepts, if you only talk philosophy in this dry, academic pseudo-intellectual way, there'll be no

communication. It's just the dry bones of concepts rubbing up against one another and generating, kindling, no spark, no warmth whatsoever, and leaving you rather dull and dry and dissatisfied afterwards. No. Genuine communication is only through or with the help of emotion, warmth, friendliness, and in the spiritual context - context of spiritual community - only with the help or through the higher, spiritual, emotions, and **this** is what is meant by the Dakini Refuge.

Now by emotion one doesn't mean anything soft or sloppy or sentimental. One means it more in the Abhidharma sense of positive mental events. But that's enough of the Effective Going for Refuge. Let's go on now more briefly to the next level.

The fourth, which is the level of the **Real Going for Refuge**. The Real Going for Refuge takes place when one develops Insight and Wisdom, and in that way enters upon the Transcendental Path; in other words, becomes a Stream Entrant. In traditional terms the Real Going for Refuge is the **Transcendental** Going for Refuge. The previous Refuges are all mundane - even the Effective Refuge is mundane, not transcendental - and this is quite a sobering thought, because until one has entered the Stream, until one has entered upon the Transcendental Path, one can fall back. You can go round and round and round in the Wheel of Life. You can be not only a man again, you can be a titan, you can be a beast, according to tradition. You can be a hungry ghost. If you haven't entered the Stream you can fall back. If you've only experienced Effective Going for Refuge you can fall back. You can leave the spiritual community, you can resign from the Order, if you haven't entered the Stream. You can't be sure, and for this reason we have to stress the importance of the positive, creative, spiritually supportive environment. This is of tremendous importance, indispensable importance at least until such time as one enters the Stream and cannot fall back, cannot fall out.

Well, I won't say anything more on this level of the Going for Refuge. In effect it's all covered by what I've said on Stream Entry in other lectures, so let's go onto the fifth level of Going for Refuge which is the **Ultimate Going for Refuge**. No need to say very much about this because this occurs only when one is Enlightened, and at this level one doesn't go to any Refuge outside oneself. One is one's own Refuge. In fact on this level there's no inside and no outside because there's no self and no other, and one cannot really say anything more than this.

So these are the different levels of Going for Refuge, and I hope I've been able to make them clear. I've been more concerned tonight with basic structure than with details or with specific applications. Let's just run through them again. There's first of all the Cultural or Formal or Ethnic Going for Refuge. Then second, there's the Provisional Going for Refuge. Thirdly, the Effective Going for Refuge. Fourthly, the Real Going for Refuge. Fifthly, the Ultimate Going for Refuge.

But there's still one more - yes. Though it's not exactly a level, as I remarked earlier on. So just a **few** words about this and then we must conclude.

Sixthly, and lastly, the **Cosmic Going for Refuge**. So what do we mean by this? It sounds rather grand, this word 'cosmic' is quite inspiring, but it's really quite simple. The Cosmic Going for Refuge refers to the evolutionary process, refers to the process of the lower evolution and also the Higher Evolution. Well let's recall our evolutionary studies, what comes first? The amoeba comes first, and then, some time later - of course I'm paraphrasing - comes the mollusc, then there's the fish, then the reptile, bird, mammal and then, finally, in all his glory - and misery - there comes man, *Homo sapiens*. And if one looks at this process, what does one see? Well, one sees a Going for Refuge, because each form of life aspires to develop into the higher form, the next highest form. It goes for Refuge, as it were, to the higher form. Now this may sound to some scientific people impossibly poetic, but this is in fact what one sees! In man the evolutionary process becomes conscious of itself, and this is what we call the Higher Evolution, and when the Higher Evolution becomes conscious of itself, that's the Going for Refuge in the sense of Effective Going for Refuge. So through the Going for Refuge, especially, in our case, through the Effective Going for Refuge, we're united with all living beings who also, in their own way, in their own degree, on their own level, in a sense, go for Refuge. All living beings go for Refuge. The flower goes for Refuge. The tree goes for Refuge. The bird goes for Refuge. I don't want to, as it were, sentimentalise - I feel we're perilously near that perhaps - so let's stop there and just say the cosmos goes for Refuge, and this is what I've called the Cosmic Going for Refuge.

So the Going for Refuge is not simply a particular devotional practice. It's not even just a threefold act of individual spiritual commitment. The Going for Refuge, we may say, is the key to the mystery of existence itself, and it's therefore most important that we understand, at all its levels, the meaning of Going for Refuge.

