

Lecture 154: Dimensions of Going for Refuge

Urgyen Sangharakshita

[Given on the 1982 Ordination Course at Il Convento di Santa Croce, Batignano, Tuscany, Italy. The talk is based on a lecture which was given at Theosophy Hall, Bombay, India, in December 1981]

[Transcriber's note: this talk was recorded on fairly primitive equipment in a stone room in Tuscany which has made it difficult for me to hear and transcribe every word with complete certainty, I hope that any possible omissions in the transcript do not interrupt your study.]

Everybody knows that not so very many months ago I was in India, and I think also everybody's aware that while I was in India, I was giving quite a number of talks, quite a number of public lectures. In fact that was my principal occupation for most of the time that I was there. Most of these talks were given to audiences of ex-untouchable Indian Buddhists. Sometimes there were five or six hundred of them present; sometimes five or six thousand sometimes even. Well once at least nine or ten thousand. Though I gave a few talks to other audiences. Smaller, in a way, more select or for less committed. And one of the groups of people that I addressed was a group of Theosophists in Bombay. These were very old friends of mine. They were a sort of breakaway branch of the main Theosophical movement which was centred at Pasadena(?). They are called the Theosophical Movement, or the United Lodge of Theosophists, and they had their headquarters in Bombay. And it was a wing of their organisation which was responsible for the original publication of 'A Survey of Buddhism'. In fact it was they who invited me to give, in the Bangalore Institute of Culture, the lectures which subsequently I wrote up and wrote out as the *Survey of Buddhism*.

So every time I happen to be in Bombay, they invite me to talk. So, as it were, for old time's sake, I always give them a lecture, and some of them, I must say, some of their members, are very good old friends of mine indeed; especially the present head of the United Lodge of Theosophy is a lady of French stock called Madame Sophia Wadia, who is quite a famous lady in India. At present she (*unclear*) which is why she can't last very much longer, but she's always been a very good friend of mine, and we always meet whenever I'm in Bombay, and she asked me to give this talk, which I'm going to give tonight. I should explain myself that this is not a new talk that you're going to get. Only a couple of weeks ago I finished writing it out, editing this from the transcripts of the original lecture given in Bombay for publication in India in English and Marathi. I thought tonight I would read you my edited version of the transcript of that talk. For two reasons: First of all, it will give you an idea of the sort of thing I say to audiences of this sort in India. And also, of course, the topic is of very certain significance and relevance today.

So you will be in a rather odd situation, I'm afraid, during the next hour. That is to say you will be the audience but **not** the audience. In fact perhaps it would be just as well if you forget all about Il Convento for an hour or so; forget all about Italy; forget all about Europe, and imagine that you're in Bombay. In Bombay, sitting in Theosophy Hall with this very old friend of mine sitting in the front row in her long white sari, listening very attentively to what I was saying, and other rather elderly people who (*unclear*) gathered around this rather nice hall on a rather sultry evening in Bombay. Or if you like, if you want to add an extra touch of verisimilitude to the scene you can imagine that poor Bhante has got a very sore throat [*Laughter*] (*unclear*) when I gave this talk. So just imagine, there you are, sitting in Theosophy Hall. Seven o'clock in the evening. Yes, it's seven thirty here - seven o'clock in the evening. It's really sultry and you've come to hear me give this talk on Going for Refuge. So just imagine yourself, take yourself, there. (*Unclear*)

So I begin in my usual way and I say.....

Madame Wadia and Friends,

I cannot begin my talk this evening without saying how glad I am to be back in Bombay. [*Laughter*] (The Indians like to hear this sort of thing!) [*Laughter*] And in any case I **was** quite glad [*Laughter*]. I'd almost said glad to be back **even** in Bombay. With its problems of pollution and overpopulation Bombay, one has to admit, is in some respects not the most attractive of cities, but it has its compensations, and, for me, the place has a special appeal. My associations with the city go back to 1944, when I had my first glimpse of the Bombay docks from the deck of a British troopship. Thereafter, I often had occasion to visit Bombay, and with every visit became better acquainted with the place. Though living in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas amidst beautiful and inspiring scenery, I came to look forward to my

annual winter visit to Bombay, even though I was a little saddened each time to see how the once lovely city had deteriorated. The people, however, never deteriorated. Each time I came down, I received a warmer welcome than ever from my friends.

Not the least of my associations in Bombay was with Theosophy Hall, where I spoke on a number of occasions. In fact, I think I have hardly ever visited Bombay, even for a short period, without speaking here at least once or twice. Last time I spoke here was, I believe, in the Winter of 1966, when I addressed you on the subject of Tibetan Buddhist Meditation.

Tonight I am speaking to you again, and this time my subject is Going for Refuge. In Pali *sarana-gamana*, in Sanskrit *sarana-gamana*. I am happy to have been invited to speak on this topic since it is one which for many years has been very close to my heart. However, I am going to approach it indirectly, via my experience of living and working for Buddhism in England. As some of you know, for twelve or thirteen years, my face was not seen in Bombay, or indeed in India. During that period I was busy with the creation and consolidation of an entirely new Buddhist movement in the West, beginning with England, and it is via my experience of that new Buddhist movement that I am going to approach the subject of Going for Refuge tonight.

At the various urban centres of this new Buddhist movement (known in England as the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, and in India as the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gana), we conduct a wide range of activities. These include lectures on Buddhism, as well as on literature and the fine arts; meditation classes, Hatha Yoga classes; and courses in human communication. From time to time day retreats are held. The latter involve spending the whole day at the centre engaged in meditation, study, discussion and human communication.

People come to hear about our activities in various ways. Some hear about them through our publicity, but more often they hear about them simply by word of mouth. One friend tells another that there is a place where you can meditate, or where you can learn about Buddhism, or practise Hatha Yoga. By one means or another people make contact with the local FWBO centre, and thus with our new Buddhist movement.

At first they may be interested simply in meditation, or Buddhist philosophy, or Hatha Yoga, and come to us just for that. Anyway, they start coming. Probably you know that nowadays in England, as in most Western countries, there are thousands of people who are engaged in 'sampling' all kinds of spiritual groups. They go along to one group for a while, then to another and so on. In this way they sample quite a number of groups. Some of the people who come to us are of this type. They come to us for a time, then leave to continue their search elsewhere. Some of them, however, remain with us because they like our approach and feel at home with us. They stay and get more deeply involved in our activities. One day it dawns on them that they would like to identify themselves with us and, in a word, 'belong'. When they reach that point they can become what we call a Mitra, which is simply the Sanskrit word for friend.

Here I should perhaps explain that in our new Buddhist movement, the FWBO or TBMSG, we have no membership in the ordinary sense. You cannot join simply by filling in a form and paying a subscription. In place of this system we have a different system, and it is this, in fact, which I am in the process of describing. When you reach the point of wanting to 'belong' to the FWBO and become a Mitra, you make your wishes known and, if your desire is genuine, and you have a real interest in the work of the FWBO, a simple public ceremony is held at which you offer flowers, a lighted candle and a stick of incense before an image of the Buddha. In this way you become a Mitra. Until then you have been a Friend with a capital 'F'. We have these categories, so to speak, of 'nonmember' membership. Anybody who comes along and participates in any of our activities to however small an extent, is regarded as a Friend. You don't have to 'join' in any formal sense and you are free to derive whatever benefit you can from the activities without incurring any obligation or responsibility. We are quite happy for you to do this. If you want to become more deeply involved, however, then you become a Mitra in the manner I have described.

The fact that you have become a Mitra means that your search for a spiritual group to which you can belong has now ended, and that henceforth your time, energy and interest will be devoted exclusively to the FWBO. A Mitra is expected:

- (1) To attend their local FWBO centre regularly and participate in its activities;
- (2) To keep up a daily meditation practice;
- (3) To maintain contact with the Order Members or Dharmacharis and Dharmacharinis who conduct all the centre activities and develop Kalyana Mitrata or 'spiritual

fellowship' with them, and
(4) To help the centre, and the Movement generally, in any practical way he or she can.

Thus we have Friends, Mitras and what we call Order Members or Dharmacharis and Dharmacharinis, about whom I shall be saying something in a minute. As a Mitra you will probably find yourself becoming increasingly involved with the movement and increasingly attracted to the beauty of the Buddhist spiritual Ideal - the Ideal of Human Enlightenment. You may find that your experience of meditation is becoming deeper, that your communication with other people is expanding and that psychological conditionings are being removed. Eventually, you may find that the centre of gravity of your whole existence has been subtly shifted, and that you now want to give up your old interests and activities and commit yourself wholly to Buddhism, to the Dharma, to the spiritual life. When that point is reached you start thinking in terms of 'joining the Order', or to put it more traditionally, in terms of Going for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. If the existing Order Members are convinced that your aspiration is genuine, and that you really are able to Go for Refuge - by no means an easy thing to do - then your 'application', inverted commas, is accepted and in due course the very beautiful ordination ceremony is held. You become a Dharmachari or Dharmacharini, one who Goes for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha and who, in addition, takes upon himself or herself the 'Ten *Silas*' or moral precepts by means of which body, speech and mind are progressively and systematically purified.

By this time you may be wondering where this 'Going for Refuge' has its origin, and why it seems to represent the culmination of one's involvement not only with our new Buddhist movement but even with Buddhism itself. After all, one **first** becomes a Friend, **then** a Mitra, and **finally** a Dharmachari or Dharmacharini as I have just explained. The tradition of Going for Refuge is however, a very ancient one. In order to understand where it had its origin and why it is of such tremendous importance we shall, therefore, have to go back a very long way to the Buddha's own lifetime and to certain incidents in his career.

As you know, after his Enlightenment the Buddha spent a great deal of time wandering from place to place making known the Dharma or Truth he had discovered, and the Way leading to its realisation. Much of what he said is preserved in the Pali scriptures, but although we have, in some cases, what may well be the Buddha's actual words, we probably do not appreciate how powerful was the effect of those words on the listener when spoken by the Enlightened One himself. What we usually find happening is that in the course of his wanderings the Buddha meets someone, whether a wealthy Brahmin, a fellow wanderer, or a young prince, and the two of them get into conversation. As the conversation deepens, the Buddha begins to speak from the depths of his spiritual experience. In other words, the Buddha expounds the Dharma: the Dharma **emerges**.

Sometimes, when reading the Buddhist scriptures, we get the impression that the Dharma is a matter of lists, the five of this and the six of that and so on - and that it is an excessively schematised and tabulated thing. But it certainly wasn't like that at the beginning. It was all fresh, all original, all creative. The Buddha would speak from the depths of his spiritual experience. He would expound the Truth. He would show the Way leading to Enlightenment, and the person to whom he was speaking would be absolutely astounded, absolutely overwhelmed. In some cases he might not be able to speak or to do more than stammer a few incoherent words. Something had been revealed to him. Something had burst upon him that was above and beyond his ordinary understanding. For an instant, at least, he had glimpsed the Truth, and the experience had staggered him. Time and again, on occasions of this sort, the scriptures tell us that the person concerned exclaimed, 'Excellent, lord, excellent! As if one should set up again that which had been overthrown or reveal that which had been hidden, or should disclose the road to someone that was astray, or should carry a lamp into darkness, saying, "They that have eyes will see!" even so hath the Truth been manifested by the Exalted One in many ways.' In this manner would he express himself. Then, out of the depth of his gratitude, such a person would fervently exclaim, '**Buddham saranam gacchami! Dhammam saranam gacchami! Sangham saranam gacchami! To the Buddha for refuge I go! To the Dharma for refuge I go! To the Sangha for refuge I go!**'

We can now see not only where the Going for Refuge had its origin but also something of its tremendous spiritual significance. The Going for Refuge represents your positive emotional reaction - in fact your total reaction, your total response - to the spiritual ideal when that ideal is revealed to your spiritual vision. Such is its appeal that you cannot but give yourself to it. As Tennyson says, 'We needs must love the Highest when we see it.' Going for Refuge is a bit like that. You've seen the 'Highest'. The 'Highest' has been shown to you - therefore you needs must love it, needs must give

yourself to it, needs must commit yourself to it. That commitment of yourself to the 'Highest' is the Going for Refuge.

Now the object of Refuge is threefold, i.e. the Triple Gem or Three Jewels. One goes for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. What then do these three things mean?

We can understand in a general way what the Going for Refuge means, can understand what this feeling of committing oneself to the Highest means, but what does it mean to Go for Refuge to the Buddha specifically? Or to the Dharma, or the Sangha specifically?

The Buddha is an Enlightened human being. He is not God nor an Avatara or messenger of God. He's a human being who, by his own efforts, has reached the summit of human perfection. He has gained the ineffable state which we designate Enlightenment, Nirvana, or Buddhahood. He is, indeed, not only a Buddha but a **samyak sambuddha**, a Fully and Perfectly Enlightened One. When we go for Refuge to the Buddha, we go for Refuge to the Buddha in **this** sense. Not that we just admire him from a distance. We admire him indeed, and certainly he is very distant at present, but great as the gap between the Buddha and ourselves may be, that gap can be closed. We can close it by following the path, by practising the Dharma. We too can become as the Buddha. We too can become Enlightened. That is the great message of Buddhism. Each and every human being who makes the effort, who follows the Eightfold Aryan Path to Enlightenment, can become even as the Buddha became. When, therefore, we go for Refuge to the Buddha, we go for Refuge to him as the living embodiment of a spiritual ideal which is a spiritual ideal for us, i.e. a spiritual ideal that we can actually real. When you go for Refuge to the Buddha it is as though we say, 'That is what I want to be. That is what I want to attain. I want to be Enlightened. I want to develop the fullness of Wisdom, the fullness of Compassion.' Going for Refuge to the Buddha means taking the Buddha - taking Buddhahood - as our personal spiritual ideal, or as something we ourselves can achieve.

The Dharma is the Path or Way. It is the path of what I have sometimes called the Higher Evolution of Man, a stage of purely spiritual development above and beyond ordinary biological evolution. As a Path, the Dharma exists in a number of different formulations. We speak of the Threefold Path: of morality (*sila*), meditation (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*prajna*), as well as the path of the Six Perfections (*paramitas*): of giving (*dana*), morality (*sila*), patience and forbearance (*kshanti*), vigour (*virya*), higher consciousness (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*prajna*) - the Path of the Bodhisattva.

Thus there are many different formulations, but although the formulations are many, the basic principle of the path is one and the same. The path is essentially the Path of the Higher Evolution. It is whatever helps us to develop. The Dharma, or the Path, is not to be identified with this or that particular teaching. According to the Buddha's own express declaration, the Dharma is whatever contributes to the spiritual development of the individual. When his maternal aunt and foster mother, Mahaprajapati the Gotamid, asked him for a criterion by means of which she could distinguish between what was his Dharma-Vinaya, and what was not, he replied,

Of whatsoever teachings, Gotamid, thou canst assure thyself thus: 'These doctrines conduce to passions, not to dispassion; to bondage, not to detachment; to increase of (worldly) gains, not to decrease of them; to covetousness, not to frugality; to discontent, and not content; to company, not solitude; to sluggishness, not energy; to delight in evil, not delight in good': of such teachings thou mayest with certainty affirm, Gotamid, 'This is not the Dharma. This is not the Vinaya. This is not the Master's Message.' But of whatsoever teachings thou canst assure thyself (that they are the opposite of those things I have told you), of such teachings thou mayest with certainty affirm: 'This is the Dharma. This is the Vinaya. This is the Master's Message.'

Such is the criterion. When we go for Refuge to the Dharma we, therefore, commit ourselves to the path of the Higher Evolution. We commit ourselves to whatever helps us develop spiritually - to whatever helps us to grow into Enlightenment, into Buddhahood.

Sangha means 'Spiritual Community'. Primarily this is the community of all those who are spiritually more advanced than we are: the great Bodhisattvas, the Arahants, the Stream Entrants, and so on. Together they form the Aryasangha, or the Spiritual Community in the highest sense. Secondly, it is the community of all Buddhists, i.e. all those who go for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. In the case of the Aryasangha, Going for Refuge to the Sangha means opening ourselves to the spiritual influence of the sublime beings of whom it consists. It means learning from them, being

inspired by them, reverencing them. In the case of the Sangha in the more ordinary sense - that of the community of all Buddhists - it means enjoying spiritual fellowship with one another and helping one another on the path. Sometimes you may not need a highly advanced Bodhisattva to help you. All you need is an ordinary human being who is a little more developed spiritually than you are, or even just a little bit more sensible. Only too often people are on the lookout for a great, highly developed, preferably God-incarnate, guru, but that is not what they really need, even if such a person was available. What they need is a helping hand **where they are now**, i.e. on the particular stage of the path which at present they occupy, and this an ordinary fellow Buddhist can generally give.

This, then, is what it means to go for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha specifically; and it is this threefold Going for Refuge - in the way that I have described - that makes one a Buddhist. Going for Refuge is therefore of crucial importance in the Buddhist life. But having said that one must sound a note of regret. Unfortunately, the Going for Refuge, despite its crucial importance, is often undervalued in the Buddhist countries of Asia. I shall have something to say about this in a minute. In our own new Buddhist movement it is certainly not undervalued. Some people might think we **overvalue** it, but I would say that is not possible. You **cannot** overvalue the Going for Refuge because the Going for Refuge is the basis of everything else. When in the FWBO or TBMSG we emphasise the importance of the Going for Refuge, we are trying to get back to the way things were in the Buddha's own time. We are trying to restore the original significance of the Going for Refuge.

Returning once more to the Buddha's own time, we find something else of great interest happening. Not only may someone be so impressed and thrilled by the Buddha's exposition of the Truth that he goes for Refuge but, even as he listens, actual Insight into that Truth may arise in his mind. In the language of the Buddhist scriptures, there arises for that person the pure and stainless eye of Truth (*dharma-caksus*) - a profound spiritual experience. This 'eye of Truth' is one of the five 'eyes' known to Buddhist tradition. Firstly, there is the 'eye of flesh' (*mamsa-caksus*). This is the eye with which I am now looking at you and you are looking at me. It is the organ of physical sight, by means of which material objects are perceived. Secondly, there is the 'divine eye' (*divya-caksus*). If you were able to see what was happening on the other side of Bombay, or what was happening in Pune or even in England, it would be this eye that you were using. Known in the West as the faculty of clairvoyance, it is one of the supernormal powers that may arise spontaneously in the course of meditation practice. Thirdly, there is the 'eye of Truth' (*dharma-caksus*), the eye with which we are concerned at the moment. This is the inner spiritual eye, or inner spiritual vision, with which you 'see' the truth of things. I shall say a few more words about it in a minute. Fourthly, there is the 'eye of Wisdom' (*prajna-caksus*). This eye, which 'sees' even further than the eye of Truth, arises only when one becomes an Arhant. Fifthly and lastly, there is the 'universal eye' (*samanta-caksus*), also known as the 'Buddha eye'. When this eye arises one is fully Enlightened and one's spiritual vision is total and absolute.

So let us look a little more closely into this 'eye of Truth', this Dharma eye or Dharma Vision. There is a formula in the Buddhist scriptures which gives succinct expression to the particular Insight which makes its content. This formula simply states that whatever arises - whatever comes into existence - must pass away. So simple, so straightforward, you might think you knew it already, but do you, in fact, know? What the eye of Truth represents is not a theoretical knowledge of the fact of universal impermanence or transitoriness, but a deep spiritual Insight into it, a real understanding. Now the fact that all things are impermanent - that you have to give up everything, lose everything in the end - may seem to some people a very terrible message indeed. Yet this is not really so, because impermanence implies not only change but also development and transformation. If things were **not** impermanent and did **not** change - if you were the same today as you were yesterday, and the same yesterday as you were the day before - **that** would be terrible indeed, for then you would not grow, would not develop. The law of impermanence guarantees the possibility of development.

This is what one sees when one's Dharma eye opens. One not only sees the fact of impermanence, not only sees that everything changes, one also sees the possibility of human growth and development. One sees the possibility of the transformation of ordinary humanity into Enlightened humanity or Buddhahood. When that kind of Insight is developed, and your Dharma eye opens, something tremendous happens. In the language of Buddhism 'you enter the stream' - the stream that leads directly to Nirvana. Your whole being now flows irreversibly in the direction of Enlightenment or Buddhahood. This is what we call the 'real' Going for Refuge, or, if you like, the 'Transcendental' Going for Refuge. By entering the stream, by Going for Refuge in this higher, transcendental way, you at once break three out of the Ten Fetters binding one to mundane existence. It is, indeed, by the breaking of these three fetters that you enter the stream, thus becoming what is known as a Stream

Entrant (*srotapanna*). Since they occupy an important place in Buddhist teaching, let me say a few words about each of the three fetters in turn.

The first fetter is that of 'Self-View' (*sakkaya-drsti*). When you are the victim of self-view your attitude is that what you experience as the self or ego is something fixed, irreducible, and ultimate. You think there is a core of selfhood in you which is never going to change, and which is the real 'you'. It is **this** kind of attitude that is self-view. Such an attitude blocks change and inhibits growth, because you think that you are you, and that as you are now so you will be for ever. It is very difficult to break this fetter, very difficult to imagine oneself as different from what one is now. But it can be done. If you are genuinely committed to the spiritual path the time will come when you will be able to look back and see that great changes **have** taken place. You will see that you **have** grown, even that you have been transformed. But so long as the fetter of self-view remains unbroken there is no real spiritual development, no Stream Entry.

The second fetter is that of 'Doubt' (*vicikitsa*), though it is not doubt in the intellectual sense, so much as indecision. In fact it is deliberate, culpable indecision. You actually **refuse** to make up your mind and commit yourself. Rather than give yourself wholeheartedly to something, you prefer to keep all your options open. So you make excuses, you wobble, you shilly-shally, you delay, you hesitate, you temporise, you rationalise. This is the fetter of Doubt. It is Doubt that prevents you from throwing yourself into the spiritual life - from plunging in at the deep end, as we say. Consequently you get nowhere with the spiritual life: you fail to make real spiritual progress.

The third fetter is that of 'Dependence on Moral Rules and Religious Observances' (*silavrata-paramarsa*). It could be paraphrased, I think, as the belief that 'going through the motions' will do. You go through the motions when your heart is not really in what you are doing. You think that if you keep up appearances externally, i.e. if you observe the moral rules because that is what society requires, and maintain the religious observances because that is what your co-religionists require, then everything will be all right. This kind of attitude is what is called 'dependence on moral rules and religious observances'. Here there is a split between the external observances and your inward state of being. Though the things you are doing may be good in themselves, your heart is not in them and your performance of them is therefore empty, mechanical, rigid, artificial. Hence they don't really help you to develop: they don't get you anywhere spiritually.

Such are the three fetters. When you enter the stream, they are broken; when they are broken, you enter the stream. When your Dharma eye is opened you see the truth of impermanence, including the truth of the possibility of total transformation, and it is that Insight, or higher spiritual vision, that causes the three fetters to break. Thus we have two things happening together. We have the (Transcendental) Going for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha and, at the same time, we have the opening of the Dharma Eye, or higher spiritual vision, leading to the breaking of the three fetters, leading to entering the Stream. Indeed, we have these two things, i.e. Transcendental Going for Refuge and Stream Entry, not just happening together, but as different aspects of one and the same spiritual experience or spiritual process.

Still remaining in the Buddha's own time, we can go a little further. Suppose someone hears the Buddha expound the Dharma. Suppose he is impressed and thrilled and goes for Refuge; suppose he gains Stream Entry. Yet there is still something else that may happen at this point, something else that he may do. He may leave home and become a bhikshu or bhikkhu. Not that this was invariably the case. Sometimes people went for Refuge and, at the same time, their Dharma eye opened, but they did not leave home. But sometimes, in fact very often, they did. In such cases we have not two but three things happening together at the same time: Going for Refuge, Stream Entry, and what subsequently became known as 'ordination', i.e. 'Going Forth' into homelessness and becoming a bhikshu or monk. This was the situation during the Buddha's lifetime.

After the Buddha's death, or what we call his *parinirvana*, many changes took place. Perhaps inevitably, a certain spiritual deterioration set in. Stream Entry became rarer and rarer, and as the centuries went by, the emphasis came increasingly to be placed on becoming a monk in the more formal sense, and the Going for Refuge gradually lost its significance as the central act of the Buddhist life. This happened especially in the Theravada countries of South-east Asia. Today, if you visit these countries or if you talk to a Theravada Buddhist, they will not say very much to you about the importance of Going for Refuge. They will be much more likely to speak in terms of becoming a monk in the more formal sense, i.e. shaving one's head and donning the yellow robe. This is the Theravada emphasis. For the Theravada there are two kinds of people: the monks and the lay people. On this side there are the monks, who are the 'real' Buddhists; on that side the lay people, who are the

'not-so-real' Buddhists. One could even speak of them as the first-class Buddhists and second-class Buddhists. Sometimes the difference seems to be almost as great as that.

Looking at things from a different point of view, however, and seeing them more as they were in the Buddha's day, one might say that though there certainly is a difference, it is of a different kind. The real difference is not between monks and lay people but between those who go for Refuge and those who do not go for Refuge. Whether you are a monk who goes for Refuge or a layman who goes for Refuge, a man who goes for Refuge or a woman who goes for Refuge, is of secondary importance. That you live in a certain kind of way, or follow a certain discipline, is of secondary importance. What is of overriding importance is your common spiritual commitment, your common Going for Refuge. This is why in the FWBO and the TBMSG we have a sort of saying, or slogan: 'Going for Refuge - or commitment - is primary; life-style is secondary.'

Now although in the Theravada countries the distinction between monk and layman was unnecessarily insisted upon, and the significance of the Going for Refuge lost sight of, this did not happen in the Mahayana countries to nearly so great an extent. As their designation itself suggests, the Mahayana countries followed the Mahayana - the Great Way. They followed the Bodhisattva Ideal. They stressed the ideal of attaining Enlightenment not just for one's own individual sake but for the sake of all. Ultimately, of course, the distinction between the two ideals falls to the ground. You cannot really gain Enlightenment for the benefit of others unless you are a person of considerable spiritual development yourself, and you cannot develop spiritually yourself unless you are at the same time, to some extent, mindful of the needs of other people. In the long run spiritual individualism and spiritual altruism coincide. But as a necessary corrective to the earlier, more individualistic approach of the Theravada, and of the Hinayana generally, the Mahayana stressed the Bodhisattva Ideal. The attitude of the Bodhisattva is: 'I don't want Enlightenment only for myself. If it's to be only for myself, in a sense I'm not interested. I want Enlightenment for all. I am therefore working for Enlightenment for all - including myself.' Not that the Bodhisattva leaves himself out. He **includes** himself, but only as one among many. His or her mission is to work for the spiritual progress, the ultimate Enlightenment, of all living beings.

Since the Mahayana adopted or developed the Bodhisattva Ideal, all lesser distinctions lost their significance. The Mahayana insisted that everybody should aim at Bodhisattvahood, everybody follow the Bodhisattva Ideal: be they monk or lay-person; literate or illiterate; rich or poor; spiritually developed or spiritually not so developed - all should aspire to Enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. On account of the presence of the Bodhisattva Ideal, therefore, we find that in the Mahayana there is less of a difference between monk and layman, or at least that the difference is less insisted upon.

But what is a Bodhisattva? And what does it mean to aim at Enlightenment for the sake of all? According to Mahayana tradition a Bodhisattva, in the real sense, is one in whom the Bodhichitta, or 'Will to Enlightenment' as I translate the term, has actually arisen as a vital spiritual experience. The Bodhichitta is not a mere pious aspiration, it is not a concept, or an abstract ideal; but when within the depths of your being there arises an immensely powerful impulse towards Enlightenment for the benefit of all, and when that impulse dominates your whole life, and becomes the master current of your existence, then that is the Bodhichitta.

Here an interesting question arises. What is the nature of the relation between, on the one hand the Bodhichitta, or the arising of the Bodhichitta, and on the other hand the Going for Refuge, the opening of the Dharma Eye, Stream Entry, and even Going Forth into homelessness and becoming a monk? The Bodhichitta or the arising of the Bodhichitta represents, we may say, the more altruistic dimension of these four other experiences. Or rather all five of them, including the Bodhichitta itself, represent the five different aspects of a single basic crucial and unique spiritual experience. The Going for Refuge draws attention to the emotional and volitional aspect of this experience; the opening of the Dharma Eye to the Unconditioned depths of its cognitive content; Stream Entry to the permanent and far-reaching nature of its effects whilst Going Forth into homelessness draws attention to the extent of the reorganization which, regardless of whether or not one becomes a monk in the formal sense, the experience inevitably brings about in the pattern of one's daily life. As for the Bodhichitta, it represents, as we've said, the altruistic or other-regarding aspect of the experience.

Perhaps we now have a better and broader conception of the Going for Refuge. Much more is implied by it than people usually think, and this is why it is so greatly emphasised in our FWBO and TBMSG. Incidentally, the use of the word 'Refuge' sometimes creates confusion, because it is associated in people's minds with 'refugee'. The expressions like 'taking Refuge' or 'Going for Refuge' have in

fact distinct connotations of running away from difficulties, taking the easy way out etc. From what I have said this evening it should be clear that Going for Refuge in the Buddhist sense has nothing to do with running away. However, in order to avoid the possibility of misunderstanding on the part of people who are unfamiliar with the expression, we often speak not of Going for Refuge but of commitment. Commitment is rather a favourite word in the West at the moment - an 'in' word, as we say. So often we speak not of Going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, but of **committing** oneself to the Buddha, **committing** oneself to the Dharma, **committing** oneself to the Sangha. Nor is that all: in the course of years we have come to distinguish four **levels** of Going for Refuge, four levels of commitment.

First of all, there is '**Provisional Going for Refuge**', sometimes called 'Ethnic Going for Refuge'. This consists in simply reciting the Refuge-going formula in Pali or some other language, just because it is part of your national culture. In Buddhist countries like Ceylon, Thailand and Burma, and even here in India, one often finds people reciting the Refuge-going formula - *Buddham Saranam Gacchami* etc. - without understanding its meaning. It is just part of their culture, and has no real spiritual significance for them. That one should recite the Refuge-going formula, even though without understanding, is by no means a bad thing, but it is certainly not sufficient. In much the same way one sometimes finds people in Buddhist countries of Asia and again even India, describing themselves as 'born Buddhists', but how can you be a born Buddhist? Do you issue from your mother's womb reciting *Buddham Saranam Gacchami*? A born Buddhist is a contradiction in terms. You can become a Buddhist only consciously and deliberately as the result of personal choice. You cannot possibly be born a Buddhist. The Buddha himself criticised the 'Brahmins', inverted commas, of his day for thinking that one could be **born** a Brahmin. You were a Brahmin, he insisted, only to the extent that you **acted** like one. If truth and righteousness were in you, **then** you could be called a Brahmin, not otherwise. Similarly you cannot be a Buddhist by birth. People in Buddhist countries who say they are Buddhists by birth are no better than the ancient Brahmins who said that they were Brahmins by birth. What it really means is that Buddhism - so called - has simply become Brahminism. This is a very important point. The Going for Refuge must be a real Going for Refuge. If you are a Buddhist it must be on account of your own individual, independent volition, your own understanding. Thus you cannot be a 'born Buddhist'. If you think you can, you are still on the level of Provisional Going for Refuge, the significance of which is cultural rather than genuinely spiritual.

Secondly, there is '**Effective Going for Refuge**'. This is wholehearted, conscious commitment to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Though such commitment is sincere and genuine, it is not powerful enough to break the Three Fetters and does not amount to Stream Entry. From Effective Going for Refuge you **can** fall away.

Thirdly, there is the '**Real Going for Refuge**'. This coincides with Stream Entry which occurs with the breaking of the Three Fetters. From this Going for Refuge, you cannot fall away.

Fourthly and lastly, there is '**Absolute Going for Refuge**'. On this level there is, in a sense, **no** Going for Refuge. Though you indeed go for Refuge to the Buddha, now that Enlightenment has been attained, you are yourself the Buddha. Here, the goal of your quest having been reached, the subject of Going for Refuge and the object of Going for Refuge are one and the same. Buddha goes for Refuge to Buddha.

Such are the four levels of Going for Refuge, or four levels of commitment, and it is very helpful to think of the Going for Refuge in this way. A little more might be said, however, in connection with the highest level, that of 'Absolute Going for Refuge'. In the Mahayana, it is sometimes stated that ultimately there is only one Refuge, and that is the Buddha. In a sense there is a Dharma Refuge and a Sangha Refuge, but again in a sense there is not. After all, the Dharma comes from the Buddha. It is the product, the creation, of the Buddha's Enlightenment experience; the means by which that experience is communicated to other human beings in such a way as to help them. Similarly the Sangha is the spiritual community of those who practise the Dharma. Just as the Dharma is dependent on the Buddha, the Sangha is dependent on the Dharma, so that the Sangha is also dependent on the Buddha. Thus there is only the Buddha, only the Buddha Refuge. Though we speak of three Refuges, ultimately the three are one Refuge. For the time being, however, it is helpful for us to think in terms of the three Refuges or the threefold Refuge.

So far I have spoken about the Going for Refuge more or less within the context of our new Buddhist movement in England. I want to conclude with a few words about the Buddhist movement in India, especially in Maharashtra. As some of you know, in the course of the last few decades, there has been a great expansion of the Buddhist movement in India, particularly here in Maharashtra, the expansion

associated with the name of the late Doctor Ambedkar. You may also know that at the time of the historic mass conversion of his followers to Buddhism on October 14th 1956 at Nagpur, Doctor Ambedkar emphasised the Going for Refuge very strongly indeed. All that he asked his followers to do in fact was to go for Refuge. They should go for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha as a means of all-round development for themselves and the society to which they belonged. It is significant that Doctor Ambedkar did not emphasise becoming a bhikkhu or bhikshu. He did not ask his followers to become monks. He simply asked them to go for Refuge. Now this fact is worth considering. Nor is that all. On more than one occasion Doctor Ambedkar went so far as to critic the bhikkhus of today. He even went so far as to say that the present day bhikshu Sangha was useless, i.e. useless for spreading the Dharma. A new kind of Sangha was needed, he declared, a new kind of Buddhist worker. This new kind of Sangha, this new kind of Buddhist worker, is what our new Buddhist movement has succeeded in creating in England in the course of the last twelve or thirteen years. At the heart of that movement, at the heart of the FWBO and the TBMSG, is the Order.

This Order is a spiritual community of people who have gone for Refuge, that is to say who have effectively gone for Refuge. Few of them, perhaps, if indeed any, have got so far as the **real** Going for Refuge, but at least they have got so far as the effective Going for Refuge. At least they've transcended the provisional Going for Refuge. What we have succeeded in creating in the course of the last so many years is this Order, this Sangha or spiritual community of people who go for Refuge, who make the act of Going for Refuge central in their lives and who place the emphasis there. Some of them live at home with their wives and families, some live in communities. There are communities for men and communities for women. A few of them are *anagarikas* wearing the yellow robe. These all live and work in India. As yet we have no anagarikas in the West. As I mentioned earlier on, all members of the Order observe the ten precepts. These are abstention: from injury to living beings; from taking what is not given; from sexual misconduct - in the case of the anagarikas from non-celibacy; from false speech; from frivolous, idle and useless speech; from speech which divides and disunites people; from craving, from hatred, and from wrong views. According to Buddhist tradition, bhikkhus or monks observe two hundred and twenty seven or two hundred and fifty precepts, but in the course of ages quite a few of these have been lost on the way, so to speak, and are nowadays honoured more in the breach than the observance. We therefore decided to have a short list of precepts that people would take and actually observe.

Thus we have this Order, this Sangha or spiritual community of people who have gone for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; people who actually practise the Dharma; who observe the ten precepts. Some of them have been members of the Order for eight or ten years or more, and are gathering experience all the time - from taking meditation classes, giving lectures and running our co-operative businesses. It is in fact this dedicated, committed core of people at the heart of the movement which is responsible for running everything. From this we can see more clearly, I hope, the vital importance, both for ourselves individually and the society to which we belong, of the Going for Refuge. It is my hope that just as we have been able to create in England - in fact in the West - a Sangha or spiritual community of those who have gone for Refuge, so we shall be able to create a similar Sangha or spiritual community here in India, and create it on an even larger scale. If we are able to do this, however, it can be only on the basis of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. It can only be on the basis of the Going for Refuge.

Checked June 2001