

Shoyo Sensei's Dharma Message:

Buddha-Dharma: Introduction - 3

Question (1):

What does it mean to “live as a Buddhist”?

Answer:

The Buddhist way of living means to live our day-to-day life positively, happily and wholesomely in the midst of various difficulties and troubles of life. We call it to live our life based on Buddha-Dharma. A transformation from a negative way of living into a positive way of living is possible by understanding Buddha-Dharma (i.e., the principle of Causal Conditionality). This shift can be referred to as the shift from physical sickness to recovery. Medical professionals activate this shift by using various methods of treatments available today in modern science. Buddhists activate this positive transformation by utilizing the Causal Conditionality in our day-to-day experiences. It is no wonder, therefore, that in 2003 several neuroscientists in the U.S. unanimously came to the same conclusion that Buddhists are happy, calm and serene people, at least according to their brain scans, says a report from London.

Question (2):

Buddhists take the Three Treasures when they come in front of the Buddha. What are the Three Treasures?

Answer:

When a person becomes a Buddhist, he or she pays homage to the Buddha, the Exalted One, the Enlightened One, the Supremely Awakened One. The Buddha is the Great Master who discovered and taught the theory and the practice of Dharma, the principle of Causal Conditionality.

A person also pays homage to the Dharma: the knowledge and conduct that help anyone to fully understand why and how things work and thereby, leads a person to the total freedom from suffering and troubles in life. The Buddha taught Dharma as the Path to become a Buddha, a supreme positive being.

A person also pays homage to the Sangha. Sangha, originally, meant the community of men, women, and children who followed the Path and set us the example that anyone who follows the teachings will be able to gradually reach the ultimate Goal. (*The original definition of *Sangha* died out during the transmission of Buddhism. Today it casually means the monastic community or Buddhists community in general.)

Buddha, Dharma and *Sangha* are “The Three Treasures” or “The Threefold Refuge.” The formula of taking the Three Treasures does as follows:

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasa Buddhassa

(Homage to Him, the Exalted One, The Enlightened One, the Supremely Awakened One)

Buddham Saranam Gacchami (I go to the Buddha as Refuge.)

Dhammam Saranam Gacchami (I go to the Dharma as Refuge.)

Sangham Saranam Gacchami (I go to the Sangha as Refuge.)

(*Sometimes, the above is repeated for three times.)

Question (3):

What does encountering Buddhism mean?

Answer:

Encountering Buddhism, in the sense of the true meaning of the language, is taking “The Threefold Refuge” or “Taking the Three Treasures.” There are many different paths in encountering and taking “The Threefold Refuge.” Each path is the result of successful meetings of many numbers of causes and conditions.

Look at each child of the Dharma School, for example. Most probably, he or she began to come to Dharma School every Sunday and recite “The Three Treasures,” brought there by their mother, father, grandmother, or grandfather, who themselves were also brought by their own parents or grandparents. But, if he or she did not want to come here, it could never happen. Not only that, the existence of this temple at a particular spot is also one of those happy causes and conditionings.

This is especially true when a person is newly exposed to Dharma, when he or she has tasted Dharma, and when he or she becomes interested in hearing and learning more and more Dharma. Again, to have this encountering, many inconceivable causes and conditions should exist.

Therefore, each different path of encountering and taking the Three Treasures is extremely precious and valuable. We can only appreciate to this reality that became possible by all of the inconceivable numbers of causes and conditions, part of which is definitely we ourselves.

Question (4):

What is the significance of taking “The Threefold Refuge”?

Answer:

The Buddha explained the significance of taking “The Threefold Refuge” in the *Dhammapada*:

Driven only by fear, people go for refuge to many places -- to hills, woods, groves, trees and shrines.

Such, indeed, is no safe refuge; such is not the refuge supreme. Not by resorting to such a refuge is one released from all suffering.

A person who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, penetrates with transcendental wisdom, the Four Noble Truths -- suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the Noble Eightfold Path leading to the cessation of suffering.

This indeed is the safe refuge, this is the refuge supreme. Having gone to such a refuge, one is released from all suffering. (*Dhammapada*, 188-191)

The Buddha said that this Refuge is the Supreme Refuge, for it can release us from all suffering, from small and personal to large and global. That is why the term “Treasure,” “Gem” or “Jewel” is used to designate the Buddha, Dharma, and the Sangha. These three are Treasures, Jewels and Gems that are extremely valuable, inestimable and rarely seen. It induces, brings, produces and increases incomparable delight and enjoyment for beings.

Question (5):

What is the value of the taking “The Threefold Refuge”?

Answer:

Suppose a person who had a shipwreck in the middle of the ocean, and suddenly saw a lighthouse knows that she or he will definitely reach the shore if he or she strives hard to swim towards this lighthouse. Now, he or she must not lose the sight of the lighthouse because that is his or her only hope for saving their life. A person meeting “The Three Refuge” is the same situation as someone spotting the Light House. It is a definite guide for his or her to get out of the ocean of suffering, the ocean of *samsara*, the cycle of life and death.

Taking refuge in “The Three Treasures” is a result of seeing the validity of the teachings of the Buddha. While learning more, the person investigates it more. Eventually this person begins to develop a confidence in the theory and practice of Dharma. As a Seeker, he or she compares the teachings of the Buddha with the teachings of many other great teachings available. In the end, the seeker without doubt determines that the teachings of the Buddha

is the definite Path for his or her life, the definite path of liberation from all suffering, pain, stresses, frustration, anxiety, worry, fear, or dissatisfaction.

“Taking Refuge” is a person’s declaration to oneself that one is committed to the study and practice of Dharma. It is extremely delightful that a person takes “The Threefold Refuge” in front of the Amida Buddha. It is a confirmation that a person enjoys Buddha-Dharma, practice Buddha-Dharma, and wishes to practice more Buddha-Dharma.

When all the necessary and wholesome causes and conditions successfully meet together, a person decides to take “The Triple Gems,” “The Threefold Refuge,” as his or her light house.

Question (6):

Is there a person born as a Buddhist?

Answer:

No one is born as a Buddhist. We all become a Buddhist. Even after becoming a Buddhist, we all continuously try to become a Buddhist every moment. This is the true meaning in our taking of “The Threefold Refuge” as our light house every Sunday, or every day.

Question (7):

Why do we take “The Three Treasures” on every Sunday services?

Answer:

We take “The Threefold Refuge” many times for the purpose of not losing sight of this guiding light that is getting us out of suffering. Refuge is not taken by blind faith, but it is caused by well-grounded confidence in the Three Refuge. In other words, those who take Refuge already have a great clarity of Dharma taught by the Buddha and followed by many members of Sangha of the past.