

皈依的意義

一、皈依佛懺罪增福

我們一個人為什麼要皈依三寶？皈依三寶有什麼好處？「皈依」兩個字怎麼講？三寶分別又是什麼意義？何者謂之三寶？三寶就是佛、法、僧，我們現在就是皈依佛法僧三寶。佛法僧為何稱之為「寶」呢？寶者尊貴義、光明義，又是清淨義。皈依佛，就是皈依釋迦佛、十方佛，佛為人天師、三界尊。皈依佛，令我們消罪障、增福慧，這是不是一個最無上的寶？佛諸惡已經不做，斷德清淨了，這不是清淨義嗎？我們皈依佛要向佛學，像這樣一位真善知識，是不是應該要學習呢？

二、皈依法明理修善

皈依法，法就是真理。什麼是真理？「因果」兩個字就是真理。你修善決定得快樂之果、造惡決定受苦報，有什麼因感什麼果，這是決定的。造惡業你還想受好報嗎？造了善業你還會受惡報嗎？不可能！沒有這樣的事情。或許你們有人會說：「某某人是個好人嘛！可是我看他的遭遇都不好；某某人是壞蛋嘛！怎麼他現在還那樣好？」皈依法寶要知道真理，真理講三世因果，不是講眼前，你講眼前，好多的事情講不通。你看到善的人遭遇不好，這是他過去世的惡業所感；好比他今天做了好事，但昨天做了壞事。惡人你看他享受得好，那也是他過去世的善業所感；好比他今天做了壞事，但昨天做了好事。

世間人哪，沒有百分百的惡人，也沒有百分百的善人。因為善人有惡業，有惡業就應該受惡報；惡人也有善業，有善業就應該受善報嘛！這不是很公平、很平等的嗎？我們對於真理要這樣明白，如果只看人一生，他現在雖然修善，但前生造了惡，你叫他怎麼會感善報呢？今生修善要到來世才享，好比農夫春天下種子，到秋天才收嘛！不會春天下種春天就收的，因果就是這個道理，這是很現前的事實。皈依法，就是皈依佛所說的法、佛所說的真理，你明白了真理，叫你作惡你也不會做的，不敢做嘛！不是不會做，你不敢做；叫你不要修善你也要修善，唯有修善自己才能得安樂，所以我們要皈依法。

三、皈依僧看護法身

皈依僧，佛陀在世時有千二百五十常隨眾代佛宣揚，但那是佛陀的時代，現在末法時代釋迦佛已入滅、彌勒菩薩還未降生到這世界來成佛，在這佛前佛後的時期，既然不能親耳聽到佛說法，那完全要依賴僧寶了，僧能替佛宣揚，人能弘道嘛！僧者又是眾中尊，所以我們要皈依僧。皈依佛、法、僧，固然我們身不要它受苦，其實身苦從那裡來的？還是心所造的嘛！因為這個心沒有智慧，盡造些受苦的事。心有病，佛就如同大醫王治我們的病。醫生治病，依方開藥，佛陀依這個因果真理來講因果，法就如同藥方，出家僧伽就好像看護，要我們什麼時候吃藥，吃藥應當要忌口，什麼東西不能吃，僧就是代替無上醫王擔任一分的工作，所以要皈依僧。

皈依佛法僧，做一個三寶的弟子，就應該一心勉力修善。修善好像我們要服藥，才能使身體健康、使身體長得好；但是不能作惡，作惡就好像你吃藥醫病卻不忌口，不忌口你雖然吃了好藥，身體也不會好嘛！一個人你雖然修善，卻還要造惡，惡業摻雜在善業裡頭，試問你這個福怎麼能享得好？有色香美味的微妙飲食，飲食是好啊！但筷子、碗不潔淨，有毒菌在裡頭，試問你吃了這個色香美味的飯，身體怎麼會好？可能吃了飯還中毒了！有的人皈依三寶修了善沒有得到感應，就說：「我修了善，菩薩怎麼不保佑我？」因為你不是純淨之善，裡頭還有惡業嘛！有病吃藥要忌口，修了善切記不能作惡，所謂要「諸惡莫作，眾善奉行」，這是皈依三寶的弟子所應該要守的，能這樣守，那你只有快樂，不會有苦報的。

四、浪子回頭喻皈依

以上所講的，就是講佛法僧三寶所具的功德。那麼「皈依」兩個字又怎樣說呢？皈—歸投、投誠、回歸，好像一個小孩子在家不聽父母話，亂跑跑到社會上去，在社會上飄蕩，甚至跑到黑社會裡頭去了；又好像一個學生不好好的上課，不聽老師話，離開了學校在外面鬼混，這樣一個小孩子多麼可憐！但在外面總是受苦，受了苦他就怕了，自自然然他就會想：「我家庭裡那麼好、那麼富有，父母又那麼慈愛，在學校裡老師同學都好，我怎麼跑到黑社會裡時時被人家欺、時時被人家罵、時時被人家打？」受苦受夠他就覺悟了，覺悟了才回家、才上學校。

我們凡夫在這個社會，社會是大染缸、是個污濁的世界，你同流就合污；同流不合污你站不住，因為社會上都是壞人多，你到壞人多的地方，「近朱者赤，近墨者黑」嘛！道理就是這樣。現在覺悟要回家了，這一回家，「心即佛，佛即心」嘛！我們現在雖然凡夫，但本有的佛性本體也是佛，佛才是真正的家，你們自己父母那個家，那是情感所有的、是顛倒想而來的，怎會快樂、怎會有所依呢？不究竟嘛！聞到真理了，現在回歸到佛教來，「歸」回就有「依」靠。

一個壞孩子，世間人要罵他：「這個人為非作歹，是世間的渣滓！」可是他的父母，所謂父母的心中沒有壞孩子，不管你在外面怎麼樣壞，父母還是望你回來，只要你回來就好了。佛陀大慈悲，超過父母的慈悲何止千千萬萬呢？不管我們凡夫造了什麼惡業，只要你回心懺悔，回來就好了，回來就為你懺悔罪業。就好像壞孩子在外面漂流，他一回家來了，哇！這個母親歡喜得不得了，那裡還會想到他壞？趕快煮飯給他吃飽、幫他身上洗得好好的、換衣服、理理髮，做父母的對兒女就是這樣子嘛！諸佛陀對諸眾生也是如此，只要大家回歸來，依佛法的教導來修持，就有所依靠，這就是「皈依」兩個字的意義。這樣子我們來皈依，是不是迷信呢？

世間一般無知之人，他說：「人只要心好就好了嘛！」他自命清高：「我什麼都不信，信我自己！」可是究竟你口說得那麼好，行動怎麼樣呢？心好，人當然要心好，心不好那怎麼叫做人？但心好要做好事，要做好事才是好人；你心好但不做好事，這就算好人嗎？那你這個好人於人有什麼利益？

無知之人就是這樣說，我們這些道理明白了，他來講你，你要教化他，使他慚愧一下，否則他總是看到人家學佛他就看不起，說人家迷信。所以我們道理要明白，大家要記得這道理，自己皈依三寶，將來再引導人皈依三寶--自學佛教人學佛，自己成佛也要大家成佛嘛！這是皈依三寶的意義。

五、修四弘願圓成佛

你們皈依三寶，以後要常親近三寶、依三寶修行。親近三寶要如何修持呢？有種大願，依著那四條路走就不會錯。

「眾生無邊誓願度」，大家不要怕了：「有無量的眾生，我要怎麼樣度法？」不是叫你一天就度了，今生度不了來世度嘛！一個一個的度，這有什麼難呢？好像七層寶塔，一步踏上去，那不是跌壞了？裡面有階梯，一階一階的上去嘛！我們度眾生先從我們父母要度，我們兄弟姊妹要度，我們兒女更要把他們教導好、度好。兒女不教導好，將來害社會；養兒要教，「養不教，父之過」嘛！佛弟子組個佛化家庭，把家裡要先做好了，這樣一個人學佛，一個家庭安樂；世間大家都學佛，國家不治而自安。

「煩惱無盡誓願斷」，什麼是煩惱？不合理的生活、不良的習慣，這都是煩惱，把這個惡因要斷掉。有了是非，「退一步海闊天空，忍一句煙消雲散」嘛！如果是非上你一定要辯清楚、一定要辯個曲直，那你不是自找麻煩、自尋苦吃？什麼事情要忍耐、忍讓，忍耐、忍讓就是大福德。有好些人自己對家裡父母都不能忍、對兒女都不能忍，盡是自己在家裡找苦，何必呢？這麼樣有緣做了父母子女、做了手足兄弟姊妹，大家只有親愛、只有好嘛！怎麼還像冤家聚會呢？學了佛，這些不好的性情要改變；不孝父母的你要孝父母、不慈悲兒女的要慈悲；做公婆的要把媳婦當作自己兒女一樣、做媳婦的要把公婆當作自己父母一樣，這樣子當然家庭就好了。要改變生活的習慣，不要搞煩惱。要想斷這些煩惱、要想成佛道，都有方法的，什麼方法呢？「法門無量誓願學」，學什麼？善要學著做，惡要學著把它遠離、要斷，斷惡修善都有方法，這都要好好的盡心學習。你把善惡之法學好了，「諸惡莫作，眾善奉行」，你到時候不成佛也成佛，功德圓滿就成佛了！

「佛道無上誓願成」！成佛有什麼難？你說難也是難，你這個法不學好了，惡業不斷、善業不做圓滿，永遠也成不了佛！本來我們是佛，等於一個木頭在那裡，你不把它雕個佛像出來，它就不會是個佛，沒人禮拜嘛！大家自己要尊敬自己、要愛護自己，好好的做人、好好的學佛，將來決定成佛。

The Meaning of Taking Refuge

Taking refuge in the Buddha to repent offenses and gain blessings

Why should we take refuge in the Three Treasures? What are the benefits of doing so? What does “Taking Refuge” entail? What do the Three Treasures represent? But, what are the Three Treasures? They are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The Three Treasures are what we are taking refuge in. Why are they considered “Treasures”? Because the word “Treasure” embodies the meanings of nobility, illumination, and purity.

Taking refuge in the Buddha means taking refuge in Shakyamuni Buddha and in the Buddhas of all Ten Directions. A Buddha is the teacher of all beings in the human and heavenly realms and is the World Honored One in the Three Realms. Taking refuge helps eliminate our karmic hindrances and enhances our blessings and wisdom; isn’t that an unsurpassed treasure? Buddhas refrain from unwholesome deeds and obtain the pure virtue of having severed all secular afflictions; isn’t that purity? We take refuge in the Buddha to learn from him; should we not learn from such a truly wise advisor?

Taking refuge in the Dharma to learn the truth and cultivate virtue

We take refuge in the Dharma—which is the truth. What is the truth? The Law of Cause and Effect! You will reap wholesome fruits if you cultivate wholesome deeds; however, if you commit unwholesome deeds, you will suffer the corresponding retribution. This is guaranteed! Will positive reward derive from wrongful deeds? Will you suffer retribution when you do good deeds? That is impossible! You may think, “Some honest and hardworking individuals seem to lead very hard lives; and others that perform bad deeds seem to live carefree. How is this fair?” Taking refuge in the Dharma requires you to seek understanding in the truth; the truth about the Law of Cause and Effect is that it spans through Three Periods (past, present, and future). When only looking at the present, many situations are inexplicable. Why would virtuous people live a difficult life? It is because of negative karma accumulated in past lives, which is no different from the results a person gets from having done good deeds today after having performed bad ones yesterday. How about wicked people who are able to live carefree today? They owe it to virtuous deeds they performed in past lives, just like someone who behaves badly today but behaved well yesterday.

No one is completely wicked or completely virtuous in this world. Even good people have some negative karma and, therefore, must pay their dues. Correspondingly, some misbehaved individuals have good karma and experience rewards. Isn’t this fair and non-discriminatory? We need to have a good understanding of the truth. If we confine our vision only to the present life, we would expect someone with good works in this life and with many offenses in their past lives

to be rewarded. One can cultivate good deeds now for future enjoyment, just as farmers sow seeds in the spring and harvest in the autumn. This is the austere truth of Cause and Effect.

Taking refuge in the Dharma is taking refuge in the teachings of the Buddha, which is the truth. When you understand the truth, you will no longer engage in bad behavior even when instructed to break the rules! Even if you have the capability of committing bad deeds; you will not have the audacity to do so. You will instinctively perform good deeds even when encouraged otherwise. Only by cultivating virtues can we obtain peacefulness and joy. Hence the importance of taking refuge in the Dharma.

Taking refuge in the Sangha to guard the Dharma Body

In Shakyamuni Buddha's time, there were twelve hundred and fifty Bhikshus accompanying the Buddha in spreading the Dharma. We are currently in the Dharma-Ending Age; Shakyamuni Buddha has entered Nirvana and Maitreya Bodhisattva has yet to descend into the Saha World to attain Buddhahood. Since we cannot hear the teachings directly from the Buddha, we must completely rely on the Sangha Treasure. The Sangha are able to preach the Buddhadharma on behalf of the Buddha. Because the general public honors and respects them, we must take refuge in the Sangha.

Naturally, we do not want our bodies to suffer. But where do these suffering come from? They come from the mind! Because we lack wisdom, our mind constantly creates suffering. Our mind is ill, and the Buddha is like a great doctor who treats our ailments, just as medical doctors prescribe the right medication to heal our specific ailments; Shakyamuni Buddha teaches the truth of Cause and Effect to help us eliminate evil and to cultivate goodness. The Dharma is the medicine and the Sangha is the nurse giving us instructions on how to apply the medication. They also give us teaching and guidance. The Sangha are representatives of the Buddha, in that they share his unsurpassed "medical advice" with us. We should, therefore, take refuge in the Sangha.

Once you have taken refuge you will be a disciple of the Three Treasures. Your next step will be to diligently cultivate good deeds in all areas of your life. Cultivating good deeds is similar to taking medicine to help our bodies remain healthy and strong. We also need to renounce all bad deeds, which is similar to abstaining from foods that interfere with our medication. If we fail to abstain, even if we take the best medication, we will be unable to recover from illness. When we produce a combination of good and bad deeds, our negative karma pollutes our good karma, making it impossible for us to enjoy our blessings in peace. Consider this: everyone enjoys delicious food; but if the dinnerware is unclean, how could it be healthy to consume the food? You might even get food poisoning! Those who have practiced goodness after taking refuge but have not received the expected results might say, "I have done good deeds, but why have the Bodhisattvas not blessed me?" It is because your virtues are impure; they are contaminated with

bad karma. You must remember the saying, “Do not engage in anything unwholesome; instead, try your best to do all kinds of good.” Disciples of the Three Treasures should adhere to this practice, for doing so will allow them to enjoy happiness and to be free from the suffering brought on by retribution.

Taking Refuge is starting anew

What we have discussed above are the intrinsic merits of the Three Treasures. Then what does “taking refuge” mean? It means finding a sanctuary or having a homecoming. Think of it as a child who does not listen to his parents, runs away from home, loiters in the community or even joins criminal gangs. It is also like a student who ignores his teachers’ warnings, skips classes, and wastes time playing during school hours. How pitiful he is! But eventually, he may come across a lot of hardships and in those times, he will think, “How nice would it be to be home! I have everything I need there and my parents love me so much. The teachers and classmates in my school are nice too! Why did I let myself be bullied and dragged into gangs?” Once the child has had enough suffering, he will be awakened and he will return home and continue his education.

Much like a big dye-pot, our society is turbid, and living in such an environment each person is influenced by one another. Once you step into society, you must either flow with the current or be rejected. There are more people in the world with troubled minds than peaceful, mentally healthy ones. It is said, “One who touches tar knows the dullness of black; one who touches vermilion knows the brilliance of red.” Once you are integrated into a group, you will inevitably be influenced by your surroundings; it is that simple. Once we become awakened, however, our instinct is to leave the group and go home. But, where is home? Well, it is said, “The mind is the Buddha, and the Buddha is the mind.” Currently, even as ordinary people, we still have the innate nature of the Buddha, and that Buddha nature is where we ultimately belong. The home provided by your parents is one derived from secular sentiments and delusions. How can it provide you with true happiness and a refuge? Your parents’ home is not your final destination! Now that you have heard the truth and are returning to your Buddha nature, you have found a permanent sanctuary in Buddhism.

People often condemn a defiant child as a burden to society. However, the child’s parents, like most parents, would never consider their child to be truly bad. Regardless of how you behave, your mom and dad will always want you to return home. The Buddha’s compassion is immeasurably greater than that of your parents. Regardless of the amount of negative karma accumulated, once you repent, the Buddha will not forsake you. Returning to your Buddha nature is like being a vagrant child who returns home to good, loving parents; good parents always embrace their offspring, take good care of them, and overlook all of their past wrongdoings. This is how parents care for their children and how Buddhas care for all sentient beings. As long as we return to the Buddhadharma and lead a life in accordance with the Buddha’s teachings, we will

have all that to rely on. This is what “taking refuge” means. Do you still think it is superstitious?

The ignorant often say, “Being kind-hearted is good enough!” They aloofly proclaim, “I hold no belief in anything other than myself!” But do their actions measure up to their words? Of course we need to be kind-hearted human beings, this is a basic requirement. But our actions need to match our ideals, and one actually has to perform good deeds to be considered a good person. If you claim to be kind-hearted but fail to perform wholesome deeds, are you actually a good person? Then would you, a so called “good person,” benefit others with your actions?

Once we understand the correct principles, we should teach these principles to the ignorant, to make them feel ashamed of their actions; otherwise, they will continue to look down upon Buddhist practitioners, claiming that Buddhism is superstitious nonsense. We need to understand and remember these principles, so that in addition to ourselves taking refuge in the Three Treasures, we will guide others to take refuge as well. As we practice, we also encourage others to practice. When our purpose is to attain Buddhahood, it is natural for us to wish that everyone else will attain Buddhahood as well! This is what it means to take refuge in the Three Treasures.

Follow Four Grand Vows to achieve Buddhahood

Having taken refuge in the Three Treasures, you should also stay close to them, and practice in accordance with their teachings from now on. How do we do that? There are Four Grand Vows to guide you, if you walk your Bodhi path and diligently abide by these vows, you will not go wrong.

“Living beings are countless; I vow to deliver them all!”

Do not be daunted by the innumerable sentient beings in need of liberation; you may ask, “How are we going to enlighten them all?” Not to worry! You do not have to save them all in one day. Whomever you are unable to save in your present life, you can save in your next one! Do it one person at a time. How difficult can this be? It is just like climbing a pagoda: you cannot reach the top in one step. There are stairs inside to allow you to ascend step by step. We start with our parents, our siblings, and our children. We especially need to educate our children well. If we fail to teach them well, they may end up harming society when they grow up. As the saying goes, “It is the parents’ fault when children are raised without instruction.” Buddhists should form families where Buddhist principles are taught to every family member, so that when one person learns Buddhism, he or she can lead the entire family to find happiness; and when every person in the world finds Buddhism, the whole earth will be peaceful and law enforcement will no longer be required.

“Afflictions are inexhaustible; I vow to eliminate them all!” Which are the afflictions that humans need to be delivered from? They consist of unhealthy lifestyles and bad habits; we have to

terminate these negative causes. When it comes to disputes or controversies, it is said, “compromise will make a conflict easier to resolve.” If you insist on debating all matters of who is right or wrong, are you not creating afflictions for yourself? Rather, you should be patient and tolerant in all matters; in so doing, you will cultivate great virtues. Some people are unable to be tolerant and patient even with their parents and children. Why create problems and distress in your own family? Whom does that benefit? It takes a lot of affinity from the past to become members of a family, and everyone should cherish these relationships and have only love for one another. Why end up as enemies? Since you are now a Buddhist, you should change your temperament, and if it hasn’t been the case so far, start by being good to your parents, showing compassion to your children, and treating your in-laws as if they were your own parents and children. Then you will naturally have a good family. Change your lifestyle and habits and stop creating afflictions!

“The Dharma teachings are boundless; I vow to practice them all.” What do we vow to practice? We vow to practice good deeds and to abstain from anything unwholesome. There are methods we can follow so we will perform only good deeds, stopping ourselves from carrying out the wrong ones; however, following these methods requires dedication and perseverance. When you have perfected these Dharma teachings and have fulfilled your merits and virtues, you will become a Buddha. But it isn’t easy.

“Buddhahood is unsurpassed, I vow to attain it.” Why is it difficult to attain Buddhahood? Difficulties arise when you fail to follow the methods that lead you to terminate unwholesome acts and to perform only good deeds, hindering you from attaining Buddhahood. We are all Buddhas by nature. Take a piece of wood for example. The representation of a Buddha will not appear unless a sculptor chisels an image of a Buddha out of the wood. Otherwise, it will stay as an ordinary piece of wood, lacking the necessary qualifications to receive others’ respect and homage. You should all respect, love, and support yourselves. Be a good person, and practice the Buddhadharma with dedication. This is the path to Buddhahood!