

Buddha's refugees¹

JĪVAKA'S REFUGE-GOING. It might seem puzzling to some that Jīvaka, at the close of the (Majjhima) Jīvaka Sutta (M 55), declares himself a lay follower as if for the first time when he has already attained stream-winning. Perhaps this is a means of reaffirming our commitment to the three jewels and is not restricted to our first going for refuge (*saraṇa, gamana*). Indeed, we would naturally burst into joy when touched by the Dharma, singing our refuge in the three jewels. We can do this as often as the Dharma touches us.

Such stock passages for refuge-going are joyful exclamations or exultations which may be said to be a declaration of faith in the three jewels, a sort of stock udana (*udāna*) or utterance of uplift. There are two broad categories of "refuge-going" udanas, that is, those uttered by an inspired person or congregation and by committed practitioners.

THE RITUAL REFUGE-GOING. This is the simplest level of refuge-going, by an individual or gathering listening to the Dharma. The brahmins householders of Veḷu, dvāra, as recorded in **the Veḷu, dvāreyya Sutta** (S 55.7), for example, exult with these words, joyfully approving of the Buddha's word:

"We go to master Gotama for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks. May master Gotama remember us as lay followers who have gone for refuge, from this day forth, for life." (S 55.-7,8), SD 1.5

Note that this is a group refuge-going, and so the syntax is plural. We also have an individual refuge-going, as in the case of the brahmin Jāṇussoṇi, who exults in refuge-going at least 12 times. In both such cases—the brahmin householders of Veḷu, dvāra and the brahmin Jāṇussoṇi -- they address the Buddha by name, as "master Gotama" (*bhavantaṃ gotamaṃ*).

The name symbolism here is a subtle yet real one. Our names link us to the world. If we know someone's name and use it, it means we are somehow connected with that person. The refuge-goers here connect with the Buddha by addressing him by his clan name. But this is still a worldly or social connection. After the Buddha leaves and moves on, they are likely to go about their own business, deeply respecting the Buddha, but not yet committed to full Buddhist discipleship. Hence, this is called the "provisional refuge-going."

THE TRUE REFUGE-GOING. In the second kind of refuge-going, we have the example of Jīvaka Komāra, bhacca himself, where, at the end of the Buddha's discourse, he exults: "I go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks. May the Blessed One remember me as a layman who has gone to him for refuge from this day forth for life."

Note that the **true refuge-going** is an individual endeavour, and Jīvaka, out of deep respect and devotion, does not address the Buddha by name, but in the third person, as "the Blessed One." Such a mode of address does not reflect status, but a reflection of a significant level of understanding and accepting the characteristic of non-self.

THE COMMITTED REFUGE-GOING. It is not the *person* that we take refuge in, but in the Buddha, our universal teacher and the vehicle for the Dharma. In the highest sense, we all (ordained or lay) go for only *one* refuge: the Dharma. Even the Buddha himself, as clear from **the Gārava Sutta** (S 6.2), takes refuge in the Dharma.² For without the Dharma, there is neither Buddha nor Sangha.³

¹ For the full text, see **(Majjhima) Jīvaka S** (M 55), SD 43.4 (4.2.3).

² S 6.2/1:138-140 = **Uruvelā S 1** (A 4.21/2:20 f), SD 12.3 (with additional paragraph): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/12.3-Garava-S-s6.2-piya.pdf>

³ See **The one true refuge**, SD 3.1 esp (3): The one refuge, <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/3.1-Refuge-1-The-one-true-refuge.pdf>

In fact, at the time of Jivaka's refuge-going, he is already a streamwinner. Jivaka does not address the Buddha by name. However, he still goes for refuge to the "order of monks," as in the ritual refuge-going. This is because he is a layman saint. Since he is committed or dedicated to practising the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, this is called a committed refuge-going.

THE TOTAL REFUGE-GOING. The best known of the refuge-going formulas amongst Buddhists today surely is the following: "To the Buddha for refuge I go. To the Dharma for refuge I go. To the Saṅgha for refuge I go. For the second time,... For the third time,..." (Vinaya 1:22)

This is the first form of institutionalized ordination methods, that is, the one done by the monks themselves as a legal person. When the number of candidates for renunciation grows large, the Buddha allows the monks in their localities, to themselves ordain the candidates.

The Buddha himself only admits those who have attained at least streamwinning. He uses no ritual, except for the words "Come O monk!" (*ehi bhikkhu*) or its plural form, "Come O monks!" (*etha bhikkhave*). The feminine version is *ehi bhikkhuni* ("Come, O nun!"), or more often the name is used. In other words, the institutionalized ordination, done by the sangha members, is to admit unawakened candidates as renunciants.

After the admission by refuge-going has been introduced, other methods follow, the most developed of which is "the act with the motion as the fourth" (*ñatti, catuttha kamma*) or the fourfold act ending with a motion (like a modern act of parliament). This is done by a full chapter of full-fledged monks in conclave.⁴ All these admission methods include one universal formula, that is, the above refuge-going formula.

We can call this "**the total refuge-going**" mainly because the monastic is a morally virtuous and Dharma-moved renunciant. Such monastics do not engage with the world in any way, except in the Dharma of moral virtue, meditation and wisdom. Otherwise, they have not really renounced.

The Gadraḅha Samaṇa Sutta (A 3.81) records how the Buddha describes a false monastic:

Suppose, bhikshus, an ass follows closely behind a herd of cows, thinking, "I'm one, too! I'm one, too!"

But his colour is not like that of the cows, nor is his sound like that of the cows, nor are his hoofs like those of the cows.

He merely follows closely behind a herd of cows, thinking, "I'm one, too! I'm one, too!"

Even so, bhikshus, here, a certain monk follows closely behind a community of monks, thinking, "I'm a monk, too! I'm a monk, too!"

But he has no keen desire to undertake the training in higher moral virtue, or in higher mind, or in higher wisdom, like some other monks.

He merely follows closely behind a community of monks, thinking, "I'm a monk, too! I'm a monk, too!"

Therefore, admonishes the Buddha, true monastics go for the higher training in moral virtue, in higher mind and in higher wisdom.⁵

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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⁴ A 2.300/1:99; V 1:317, 2:89, 91 f, 4:152.

⁵ A 3.81, abridged = SD 24.10b: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/24.10b-Gadraḅha-Samaṇa-S-a3.81-piya.pdf>