

ARTICLE

The Five Diamond Points: The Third Point

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The following is a transcription of a Dharma Talk that was recently offered to the community at Lions Gate by Rev. Master Koten. It is the fourth part in a series on “The Five Diamond Points That Penetrate to the Very Heart of the Matter.” Transcribed by Pierre Kohl and edited by Rev. Aurelian, with minor revisions made for ease of reading.

Homage to the Buddha

Homage to the Dharma

Homage to the Sangha

The Third Diamond Point that penetrates all the way to the centre is faith, refuge in the Three Treasures. Sometimes, “sradha” or faith is translated as “confidence,” but I actually prefer the translation of “faith,” because confidence can mean any number of things. One can have confidence in oneself in a very egocentric manner, and yet faith is about something bigger than oneself.

We take refuge in the Buddha because he taught a way of training. We take refuge in the Dharma, the way of training; and we take refuge in the Sangha, the people who train with us.

We take refuge in the Buddha, and to take refuge in the Buddha means to have some level of trust or confidence that what the Buddha taught is relevant to us.

Taking refuge in the Dharma means to actually explore this and not simply stand on the outside looking in. To explore it means to study it — but also to study it with living people who are actually practicing it. It is quite different from practicing it on one’s own or from reading about it.

Taking refuge in the Sangha means that we go to people who teach the Dharma and learn from them. Although it can have broader implications and meanings. To take refuge in the Sangha

means to learn from people who are practicing, to learn from people who have more experience in practice than we do.

Faith within Buddhist practice is not a belief in something. A belief can be mistaken. A belief can be a temporary way of looking at something, upon which we can hang ideas and concepts; but faith means to actually take up something, practice it, go deeply into it, and not withhold oneself from the practice. What the Buddha taught is not capable of being understood separate from practicing it. This is a point that cannot be over-emphasized. The Buddhadharma is about practice. It is not about a view of the universe, because then again we are dealing with a particular view. How do we know that our view or our idea or our understanding of what we have read is true or — more importantly — useful to us? We can only know this by practicing it. And faith is not in any way divorced from practice. Buddhism does not usually go about proselytizing, because it isn't a case whereby a belief leads to salvation. Buddhists do not spend time thinking about how it would be nice if all the people in Africa were Buddhist. This is actually a waste of time. People who are called Buddhist or call themselves Buddhist come in all shapes, sizes and inclinations, just like every other religion. The proof in Buddhism is to practice it, to taste and see for oneself. However, many people take the admonition to “taste and see for oneself,” and then they stay outside of it, waiting until it comes to them. But in fact we have to plunge into it ourselves.

We begin this by taking the Refuges, but we begin the meaning of practice by paying attention to what we are doing. This is not the same as an idea of gliding through one's daily existence on a cloud. It means to pay attention to what one is doing, to pay attention to what is going through one's mind. It is not at all about gliding along as if on a blissful cloud. Buddhist practice is very hard work. It is about undoing old habits, undoing old ideas and opinions. If one seeks to practice the Buddha's way and yet hold back from questioning one's ideas and opinions, one will not get very far.

When entering the gate of practice, everything is up in the air. One may discover that one has been totally wrong about something. This is usually the case. One may discover that one was right about things that were only half-formed in one's mind.

And then again, as one goes on, this may be turned completely upside down and inside out.

The developing of a soft and flexible mind is of essential importance here. This is the third of the Diamond Points that penetrate all the way to the centre. The first one is initial humility of First

Mind. The second one is grasping the will and turning one's life around. And the third one is faith, as I have described.

Homage to all the Buddhas in all worlds
Homage to all the Bodhisattvas in all worlds
Homage to the Scripture of Great Wisdom.