

Tuere Sala

February 1, 2017

“Taking Refuge to Develop a Capacity for Trust”



Hello. My name is Tuere Sala. I am a co-guiding teacher at Seattle Insight Meditation Society. This talk today is about taking refuge and how that refuge can help us develop a foundation for a capacity to trust in these uncertain times.

I've been practicing insight meditation for over 25 years. I came to the dharma in the midst of a lot of personal suffering. It seemed that everything in my life and in the world around me was falling apart. It was the early nineties. The country was in a financial crisis. There were wars and rumors of wars all over the world, and I had just found out that I had failed the bar exam for the second time. I was a single mother of two children, unemployed, and near bankrupt.

I remember sitting in a bookstore, a place where I would go to just get away, not really to buy anything but just to sit there and read through the books. I could sit in that bookstore and read for hours. And on this particular day I remember sitting reading through books in the religious section, and I started reading some books on Buddhism. The words seemed to jump off the page at me. It seemed that everything that was being said pointed to someone just like me, pointed to someone whose life and circumstances were just like mine.

So a question came to me that day, and I've been practicing with that question my entire life: is it possible to be truly happy, to have a sense of safety and deep joy in the midst of difficulty, problems, pain, and suffering?

Over the years I've come to understand that this is the nature of a practitioner who is following the path to awakening in the midst of samsara. *Samsara* is the Pali word for the nature of human existence with all of its passions, desires, and disappointments. I have, over the years, come to develop an enduring trust—in the dharma and in my practice—that will support me no matter what situation I encounter, no matter what comes before me.

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This trust did not come from someone else telling me what to do or someone else telling me how to believe. This trust came out of my own practice, my own working with the practice in my everyday life. It's called taking refuge in the dharma, the Buddha, and the sangha. It's this refuge that we take when we apply these teachings to our own life.

Taking refuge in the Buddha means hearing the Buddha's teachings. We go to evening talks. We go to retreats. We read books and download information and talks from the web. We take all of these teachings into our lives in whatever form best supports us to hear the practice and hear the teachings.

I've been hearing the Buddha's teachings for many years. His teachings on suffering and the end of suffering will resonate well with people who have grown tired of the everyday suffering in their lives, for those of us who have grown weary of the constant striving to try to gain, get, and have something. But for those who have much or rely on the material world for their happiness, teachings on renunciation and non-harm aren't necessarily appealing. So for those of you who have grown tired or weary or are trapped in this world of suffering, these teachings, when you begin to take refuge in those teachings and to listen to those teachings, can give you a sense of confidence and direction.

But it's not enough to simply hear the teachings even if they resonate in every fiber of your body. We need to live these teachings in our everyday life. We take refuge, then, in the dharma by applying the teachings to our actual lived situation. It means investigating the nature and the essence of our difficulties. Even the challenges that come from injustices, racism, cruelty or isolation—regardless of the stimulus, we investigate. This does not mean that we begin to question the *validity* of our suffering. Nor is it about denying that our suffering exists, or thinking that there's some particular way that we have to be with our suffering. This is about simply looking into the nature of our suffering to see where that cause lies, to see clearly the nature of it.

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I'm an urban practitioner. I've been an urban practitioner my entire life. I'm also a retired prosecutor. I would look for the dharma and apply the teachings in the midst of a difficult trial. Or when I'm riding the bus to and from work, running out to get lunch in a hectic day, or working with my kids and struggling with being a parent. The dharma became a part of my ordinary, everyday existence.

And, finally, we take refuge in the sangha. We get together with other practitioners who are also walking this path towards awakening. We sit with each other and we sit for each other. We share our difficulties and learn new ways of looking at handling our problems or situations that arise. I personally belong to several sanghas in Seattle: a small neighborhood sangha, a people of color sangha, and a large urban center, primarily white sangha.

A single sangha does not necessarily meet all my needs, but the important thing is to be in communion with a community of like believers and those with intention. This simple process of hearing the teachings, applying them to our real life everyday situations, and sharing these experiences with others develops a trust and a level of courage and confidence that I did not know existed. I offer this for your reflection.