

The Three Treasures: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha

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There are sixteen precepts and the first three are the Three Treasures. In the actual Jukai Ceremony, before receiving the Three Treasures, we chant:

Namo ji po Butsu

Namo ji po Ho

Namo ji po So

Namo honshi Shakyamuni Butsu

The first three lines are literally: be Buddha, be Dharma, be Sangha. Then *namo Honshi Shakyamuni Butsu*, be the original teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha. I translate this *namo* as “be.” Be one with Buddha or be Buddha. At Fusatsu, we also chant *namo* Past Seven Buddhas, *namo* Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, *namo* Maitreya Buddha. Normally that word is translated as “homage” - homage to Shakyamuni Buddha, homage to Dharma. We could translate it that way. It all depends on our understanding and what that word means. Definitely, if you have any feeling of dichotomy, that is the wrong translation. So paying homage to Buddha, if you’re separating yourself from Buddha, that’s wrong. Homage to Dharma, if you’re separating yourself from Dharma, that’s wrong. And homage to Sangha, if you think of Sangha as something to give homage to outside of yourself, that’s wrong. Seeing that and translating it as “be Buddha”, “be Dharma”, “be Sangha” is more specific.

What we are doing at the beginning of the Jukai Ceremony, and what we are doing in the Fusatsu Ceremony by chanting “*namo ji po Butsu / namo ji po Ho / namo ji po So*”, is inviting the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha to take part in this ceremony. How? By us becoming Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and being the ceremony. Fusatsu is the same thing: “*namo* Past Seven Buddhas.” We’re inviting the Past Seven Buddhas to take part in the Fusatsu. How? By being the Past Seven Buddhas.

That means when we chant, just fully be that. We’re not chanting to something else or to someone else. Just chant. Just be. If you are fully just chanting itself, right there Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha have joined. Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are right there manifesting. So when we chant: *namo ji po Butsu / namo ji po Ho*, that should be the feeling or attitude. It is not just chanting, but being chanting itself. So doing the whole ceremony of Jukai or the whole ceremony of Fusatsu is completely different because Buddha, Dharma, Sangha are present, are manifested. If it isn’t manifested, then you’ve ruined the invitation.

What about the Three Treasures? In a way, this is the most important. The Sixteen Precepts that we receive are all an expansion of these three. Really, it’s only an expansion of one, which is buddha. Be buddha, the first. If we fully understand what that is, what it means to be buddha, what is meant when Shakyamuni Buddha said: “How wonderful, how wonderful,” then we truly have Jukai. All sentient beings are nothing but Buddha. If we fully understand this, then we understand all the Precepts.

We start off with just this one and for, convenience of discussion, we divide this one into three called the Three Treasures: Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. And for convenience of exposition, we divide that into the Three Pure Precepts. And then for further convenience, we divide those three into the

next Ten Grave Precepts, so the remaining thirteen are nothing but aspects of these three or of this one. So in studying the Sixteen Precepts, essentially we're studying sixteen different ways of appreciating Buddha, appreciating the fact that we are buddha.

It always boils down to just seeing the one fact itself. In our everyday lives, what is that one fact? It's what's happening right here, right now, this very moment. This very moment, it's an absolute thing. It's exactly what's happening right here, right now, and it contains everything — the past, the present, the future — everything. It's so obvious. Just as obvious, we can discuss this very moment in millions and millions of ways. Any way we wish to discuss it eliminates the other ways. So any way we wish to discuss it is partial, can't be complete. There's no way to discuss this very moment in any complete manner. Whatever word we choose to use, whatever concepts we choose to use, whatever references we choose to use to discuss this very moment automatically leaves out the other references. So again, to realize what Buddha is, or to realize the Sixteen Precepts, is to realize what this moment is, what here and now means, what it is.

How do you realize it? In a way, you just see it. It's here and now. It's this moment. Just accept it. That's all there is. Anything else we want to say about it is not it. It can't be. It's a model, an image that's partial. So just accept this very moment without anything thrown on top of it. That's the very core. But because it's so hard to do, we break it up and start talking about it. In fact, that's what I'm going to do now. It seems silly. Why don't we just stop at this place? But it would be too short. So we'll confuse the issue by bringing up all this terminology.

The Three Treasures. *sambo*. “*Sam*” is “three” in Japanese and “*bo*” is “treasures.” We talk about Buddha, Dharma, Sangha in three different ways. What I'd like to do is briefly go through these three different ways. In koan study there are about a hundred koans on these Three Treasures, so about thirty-five koans on each of the three ways of looking at the Three Treasures. It is a very detailed study. And in a way, studying it in that kind of detail really summarizes what Buddhism is all about.

One Body Three Treasures. First: *itai sambo*. “*i*” is “one”, “*tai*” is “body,” like *tai ch'i*. “*Ch'i*” is “energy” and “*tai*” is “body” - “*itai*.” The Three Treasures of One Body. This is the usual way that we think about the Three Treasures. First, being Buddha; second, Dharma; third, Sangha. In this case, the implication of Buddha is Vairochana Buddha. It's dharmakaya, the world of emptiness, the state of equality, the state of oneness. Buddha. There are two types of mandalas, and in one of them, the center is Vairochana Buddha, the manifestation of equality, of emptiness, representing the sphere of the dharmakaya.

But going beyond the representation, what is it? What is the state of oneness, the state of equality, the world of emptiness? If we relate it to our very life at this very moment, what is the state of oneness? It's this very moment without any discrimination, without any dichotomizing. It's the absolute fact of this very moment, the world of emptiness. These are no ideas, no concepts put upon it. This very moment is nothing but Vairochana Buddha. This very moment is nothing but *mu*, nothing but counting the breath, nothing but *shikantaza*. Any discriminating at all, any thinking at all, any ideas, any concepts that come up take you out of this world of emptiness, out of this state of equality. That's the Buddha of One Body.

Dharma of One Body, that's all the phenomena. This very moment exists and consists of everything: of me talking, people listening, stick in my hand, book on this table, microphone, children playing outside, the whole world of phenomena existing right now, happening right now. That's the dharma. Every single thing different, happening right now.

So the mandala expands: Vairochana Buddha in the center, but multitudes of things all around. That's the Dharma of One Body. The Sangha of One Body is harmony. That's the harmony that exists between Buddha and Dharma. Being one thing, this very moment, Buddha and Dharma can't be different. Vairochana Buddha and the multitudes of bodhisattvas and buddhas and sentient beings can't be different. The world of emptiness and the world of form can't be different. The world of equality and the world of differences can't be different. It's just this very moment itself. So harmony, the intertwining of the Buddha and Dharma, is the intertwining of equality and differences, of form and emptiness. That harmony is the most intimate kind of harmony that can exist because it's not the harmony of two different things. It's the harmony of one thing, being seen or looked at in two different ways. That's the Sangha of One Body.

Manifested or Realized Three Treasures. The next way of looking at these Three Treasures is as the "manifested" or "realized" Three Treasures. In this case Buddha is Shakyamuni Buddha. Who is Shakyamuni Buddha? We have to realize the state of equality, the state of phenomena. We have to realize what Buddha is, what Dharma is, what Sangha is, ourselves. We have to experience it. And if so, we become realized buddhas. Shakyamuni Buddha did exactly that. Not realizing it, we are still Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, but we aren't the Realized Buddha. We have to experience it ourselves and not take the word of anyone else. Then the manifested or realized dharma becomes the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha — the sutras, discourses — the form of the Realized Buddha. The Sangha becomes those disciples of Buddha who realize the Way.

Maintained or Abiding Three Treasures. Last is the "maintained" Three Treasures. This very moment is nothing but the Three Treasures, yet we have to realize it and manifest it, and it has to be maintained. It has to be transmitted from generation to generation. In the Jukai Ceremony, Roshi will say: "These Precepts were handed down from Shakyamuni Buddha generation after generation, up to myself. And now I hand them down to you." This lineage is extremely important, the Maintained Three Treasures. The buddha is all the images, all the iconography that we have. The Dharma is the teachings and the texts of those who have realized the way from generation to generation. The Sangha is the students and disciples who have transmitted the Way from generation to generation.

All of these three ways of looking at the Three Treasures have to be there. One Body - that's this very moment itself. If we don't realize it, if we don't realize what this very moment is, we can't say that we are the Three Treasures even though we are the Three Treasures. Even saying it, we can't accept it. So we have to experience it, and this has happened from generation to generation. It becomes the most vital function of those who realize the way — to maintain it so that it continues from generation to generation even though from generation to generation, we are still nothing but the Three Treasures itself.

QUESTION: Why is it the dharma sometimes means phenomena and sometimes means teaching? Is there a way to kind of tie it together, a reason why one word means those two?

SENSEI: Well, again, there are these three ways of looking at it, of talking about the Three Treasures. First, the One Body; there it's the world of phenomena. It's all the things that are happening right now. This first way of looking at it, the Three Treasures of One Body — since we're talking about this very moment, it includes everything, whether you realize it or not. This is the state that Shakyamuni Buddha is talking about when he says: "How wonderful, how wonderful, all sentient beings are the Buddha!" Shakyamuni is realizing it, so he is in that second category - Realized Buddha - and he's talking about all sentient beings in this first category. Whether you realize it or not, you are Buddha. Whether you realize it or not, all phenomena are nothing but the Dharma.

When you realize it, then what you say becomes the teaching. It's still phenomena. But it's the actions and the speech and the written word of someone who has realized it, so it becomes the teaching. That's what this second category is talking about, the realized Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Not really seeing this has led to some confusion. So people say, "Well, everything is Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and so everything I say, that's the same thing as the teachings of the Buddha." You can say that if you want, but you're talking about the state in this first category of One Body. There's a difference between those kind of teachings and those of somebody who has realized what it is all about. That's the second phase. That's really important. While we're all the Buddha, we have to realize it, and, having realized it, there is a difference. The last one is appreciating what it means to maintain it. That's the meaning of all these images, of all these talks. It has a tremendous value so we can study and appreciate what it means to maintain it.

There is a difference between the teachings of Buddha and every phenomena being a teaching. In the second, the Dharma is the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, and in the third, it's the teachings of the whole lineage. What's being said here is that all three are different. A lot of times we combine everything into one. That's our usual way of doing things. Everything's the teachings; everything is buddha. Okay, looking at it in these three ways, we should explore what are the differences. What are the differences between the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha and the teachings of the Sixth Patriarch? What is the difference between the teachings of Maezumi Roshi and the teachings of anyone else? That's what is being asked here when we study it in these three ways. It's splitting it up. Of course, it all boils down to one, this very moment. And from there, we're dividing it so we can study the intricacies of the differences.

In all of these, if you want to really put yourself into it, take the Buddha the three ways. First, One Body, it's Vairochana Buddha, the world of emptiness or equality; second, Shakyamuni Buddha; third, the images, that's Manjusri Bodhisattva up there on the altar, that image. All three are ways of looking at Buddha, which means that they're all the same, and again that they all boil down to this very moment. Yet they're split up and studied in these three different ways, so what are the differences? By splitting it up, it means to see that there are differences, and what are those differences?

That's why in the beginning, I said it will make it a little bit more confusing because it's easier to just look at this very moment and say that it's all here now and this is what's happening. Then when we start studying the detailed differences, it tends to make it sound complicated, but when we grasp those complications, then our understanding of this very moment becomes clearer. And the same with the Sangha. There are three ways of looking at that: the harmony, the immediate disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha, and the students of the Way. Now what are the differences?

QUESTION: I was wondering if it's necessary to understand all three of those stages before you receive the Precepts.

SENSEI: No, it's impossible. Receiving the Precepts, having the Jukai Ceremony, is another form of maintaining the Three Treasures, whether we understand it or not. To really understand it implies the second category of these Three Treasures — realizing. To really realize it. So it's very rare that we take the Precepts after having this full realization. Usually it's the other way around. The Sixth Patriarch would be an example of somebody who realized the Way and then later on took the Precepts. Usually it works the other way around. Usually we have that feeling of strong commitment way before we're fully realizing what it's all about. In koan study, it's left for the very end of koan study to explore these Precepts. We deal with about a hundred koans, as I mentioned, on the Three Treasures, and then another hundred koans on the rest of the Precepts. But receiving the Pre-

cepts itself is a form of maintaining the Three Treasures. The last gatha in the Jukai Ceremony is saying essentially that having taken these Precepts, you now are nothing but buddha itself. ■

The Benefits of the Three Treasures *from Jiun Sonja Hogoshu*

Translated by Taizan Maezumi with John Daishin Buksbazen

Reprinted from *On Zen Practice: Body, Breath, and Mind*

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Appendix III

If you don't receive the Three Treasures, you may fall into the three unfortunate realms of re-birth: the hells, the realms of hungry ghosts, and the realm of animals. Having received them, even if your faith in them is shallow, you will receive the benefits of the human realm. When your faith in them is deep, you will receive the benefits of heaven. Having true faith in them, you will receive the benefit of *sravakas* [of the Dharma] and *pratyekabuddhas* [realizers of truth]. Having complete, fully realized faith in the Three Treasures, you will attain bodhisattvahood and buddhahood. The distinction among these degrees of faith depends upon the shallowness or profundity of your faith in the Three Treasures.

When you have faith in the Buddha, casting away your body and mind, there is no mind aside from the Buddha, and no Buddha aside from the mind; there are no beings aside from Buddha, and no Buddha aside from beings; there is no land apart from Buddha, and no Buddha apart from land. This is what is meant by having faith in the Buddha. When you really penetrate this, you may attain great enlightenment even before you arise from your seat.

When you have faith in the Dharma, casting away your body and mind, there is no Dharma aside from your body, and aside from your body, no Dharma; there are no beings aside from Dharma and no Dharma aside from beings; there are no mountains, rivers, and the great earth aside from Dharma, and no Dharma aside from mountains, rivers, and the great earth. This is what is meant by having faith in the Dharma. When you really penetrate this, you may attain great enlightenment even before you arise from your seat.

When you have faith in the Sangha, casting away your body and mind, there is no Sangha aside from yourself, and no self aside from Sangha; there are no beings aside from Sangha, and no Sangha aside from beings; there are no phenomena aside from the Sangha, and no Sangha aside from phenomena. This is what is meant by having faith in the Sangha. When you really penetrate this, you may attain great enlightenment even before you arise from your seat. ■