Last week, I gave a talk on the Four Noble Truths. And the Four Noble Truths describe kind of the core perspective of Buddhism on the path of practice. And it calls for not just a belief, but rather as an orientation to understand our life. And then a practice to engage with our life kind of offers a path of practice and engagement. And, and separate from that is people kind of emotional, heartfelt relationship to the Four Noble Truths or the Eightfold Path with the practice of Buddhism, what the Buddha had to teach. And for Buddhists down through the ages, it's not uncommon people have a very deep heartfelt connection to these teachings into the path and practice that's offered. And in fact that heartfelt connection to is a very important part because it often fuels people's motivation in practice, and inspiration, and so it's not just meant to be a kind of a dry, you know, description of a path, but rather, it's also meant to be something that actually inspires people. And in that as inspiration, there was a good my more heartfelt engagement in this work we're talking about. And that sense of heartfelt inspiration or the relationship that Buddhists will often have, is sometimes described as going for refuge. And so today, what I'd like to do is talk a little bit about the notion of refuge, some different aspects of it, as it appears in Buddhism. And, you know, in down through the centuries has been a very important aspect of Buddhist spirituality, the idea of refuge so rich turn Observe which idea in the Dhammapada. There's verses here that tie together the Four Noble Truths and refuges. The classic formulation of the refuges, which I'll describe with refuges in a minute, but it's a refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. So, the Dhammapada says, but when someone going through the whole thing, people threatened by fear. Go to many refuges mountains, forests, parks, trees and shrines. None of these is a secure refuge. None is a supreme refuge. Not by going to such a refuge is one released from all suffering. But when someone going for refuge to the Buddha Dharma Sangha. But when someone going for refuge in the Buddha Dharma Sangha sees, with right insight, the Four Noble Truths, suffering, the arising of suffering, the overcoming of suffering, and the Eightfold Path, leading to the ending of suffering. This is the secure refuge. This is the supreme refuge, by going to such a refuge when it's released from all suffering. So one of the interesting ideas here is it's contrasting what is a secure and what's an insecure refuge. And many people will take refuge or depend on things which may be in some ultimate way, not dependable. So some people take refuge in the bank. So if people take refuge in the government, people take refuge in their intelligence or their capacity. There's many things people depend on.
And in a sense, there's nothing wrong about relying or utilizing these things when they're healthy and appropriate. But it can be a shock when people discover that they weren't ultimately dependable, when something occurs that takes it away. People whose health for example suddenly takes dramatic, you know, from one day to the next shift, and people know what happened, and I can't, you know, can't depend on this anymore or the, you know, the bank suddenly decide that your money is worthless, which has happened when I was living in Burma. At the bank, the government decided that all the currency that people had all the main currency that people had overnight was considered worthless. So imagine US government saying, sorry, you guys. And that'd be okay. Because if you had money in the bank, then it was okay. It was money was still considered good. But in Burma, no one trusted the banks, so they had lots of cash under the mattresses at home, and all that cash just its value, vanished overnight. And it's kind of course paper so you couldn't really use it. Paper even. So. So it doesn't take a lot of kind of evoking this idea that people will go for refuge and things which maybe are not ultimately a refuge. So here he's talking about going to the mountains, forests, parks, trees and shrines. And sometimes, some people run away from the city or urban life, try to find refuge or safety someplace else. And shrines, it's not uncommon for people to go to religions as a kind of refuge and attendance, that somehow their religion is going to somehow provide the solution. And in the same way with Buddhism, I think there's sometimes quite unhelpful ways of taking refuge in Buddhism, or Buddhist practice. Sometimes people hold on to it like a lifesaver, and they hold on to the rituals of it, they hold on to a doctrine, hold on to the community, hold on to teachers, in a way that's not ultimately dependable. Those things can somehow shift and change. And here in this passage then what it's saying what's for someone who is taking refuge in the Buddha Dharma Sangha. If there is understanding deep understanding the Four Noble Truths, then this is a secure refuge. So, they do the Four Noble Truths, providing a very deep refuge for us. So the refuge is an interesting term. The it has a connotations or alternative translations of the word sarena include protection, or safety. It's sometimes a refuge is likened to that of being in a secure cave. I guess you know, in the back in the old days, a cave was a secure good place to be protected from the forces around you. The so it has this idea of something a place of protection and support or safety but it might lend itself at a refuge A video kind of passive dependence, that kind of passivity to which you can just kind of relax. And somehow you'll be taking care of that, you know, oh, you know, I'm connected now to one of the great world religions and everything will be okay for me. I just have to be connected to it kind of hold on to it. Or somehow the Buddha take refuge in the Buddha, the Buddha somewhere in some ethereal realm is going to somehow watch over me and make sure that I'm okay. The idea of refuge in Theravada Buddhism does not imply something passive. Something, you know something if you kind of, kind of just float on and relax, it implies something that we enter into. And it has three connotations, the refuge, it has the idea of, of a choice that we make. So it intentionality or termination, orientation of choice, direction for life. So I can it implies a understanding It comes with a certain understanding and sometimes video refuge in the, in the, in the later Caribbean tradition is supposed to be synonymous with understanding. And the third is that it involves a degree of heartfeltness or emotional connectedness. Some people would like to use the word faith, perhaps some of that, but it kind of an emotional kind of inspiration or movement within us.

And as a determination or a choice, it I like to think of refuge in the Buddha Dharma Sangha is the Buddha Dharma Sangha is resonating with something inside of us that has meaning. So it's not that the Buddha Dharma Sangha is something out there as much as it represents. It's symbolic, of something that we recognize come to recognize in ourselves. Nothing else has a potential so Example of the Buddha, the Buddha, certainly it's nice to, to be inspired in some ways. Think about the Buddha as his as a wonderful teacher and go to his teachings for, for help in our spiritual life. And some people take refuge in the Buddha and that, in that capacity, there's a whole other thing to take refuge in the Buddha not as a person, but as an exemplar of someone who has discovered a degree of peace and
awakening and liberation, which is our potential as well. The Theravada tradition, very adamantly, we’ll say the Buddha was not a god. The Buddha was a human being, later and other forms of Buddhism. Sometimes the Buddha takes on kind of godlike qualities. But in his early tradition, the Buddha was like us, maybe unusually bright, spiritual object or something, but still, he was like us, and in that like being like us, whatever. He discovered in terms of freedom, and liberation and love and compassion is something that we can discover as well. So take refuge in the Buddha, also implies is taking refuge in this, recognizing this is something in me as well. This is a potential that I have to take refuge in the Dharma has also the sense that something external can have. It's the Buddhist teachings. It's the practices that he taught to put those teachings into place. And it's also the realizations that come when we do those practices. So the Dharma here is three meanings, the teachings and putting them into practice, and the result of putting him into practice. And then, and that's his fourth kind of the teachings are kind of external. But putting them into practice and discovering for ourselves and Dharma in ourselves is the internal refuge discovering in ourselves. So going for refuge doesn't imply just something external, but also something that happens within us and then the community implies a little bit of same thing as well, the community is that those people who have somehow tasted the results of the practice, somehow some taste, you know, some seen some results of practicing their life. But then also taking refuge to the internal Sangha is taking refuge in the, the good qualities within ourselves with the potential in ourselves that we see in the external sun or the external community of practitioners. So, there's internal and external movement that goes on. So it has to be the sense of recognizing in ourselves, something that we kind of also recognize outside there's a resonance that happens. And then there's a choice to make this essential orientation for one's life. Generally, for people take refuge. This recognition This is really important. This is acknowledging something that's really important for me, a direction from my life orientation at ground From which my life is going to be lived. So, in a sense, what the refuge represents for Buddhists, it represents that the world that we live in is given given a certain meaning. It's given a certain sense of purpose, what life is about. Many people will encounter in their life, lots of suffering, a lot of difficulties, and a lot of confusion. There's a lot of choices we have to make in life and how to live our lives. And, and it can be quite overwhelming for some people, replace life circumstances. And there can be a lack of essential meaning, what's his purpose in this life? What am I doing? Where am I going? What's happening here? And the refuge is in some way is the idea of your own just world I live in now has meaning. Maybe not meaning because it's external meaning you can go read meaning and you know, you know some, you know, someplace externally, perhaps, but rather you have a sense of I choose now I'm making a choice, that now I'm going to make my life has this meaning, meaning it says For this purpose, and this purpose is that a spiritual life to us kind of colloquial, kind of generic language, perhaps an ecumenical language, that my life now has a spiritual basis spiritual purpose or spiritual meaning. In the Buddhist context, it means, you could say a little bit more refined, you could say, my life now has a Buddhist meaning, or Buddhist purpose. Some people are allergic to that kind of language, to be a little bit more refined, even still and more to the point that my life now is, is oriented or given meaning around the movement from freedom from suffering, movement to liberation to and whether it's for oneself, or for others, or for both, that somehow that movement is making sense of this world. Yes, there is an ultimate purpose here. There's purpose to be liberated from suffering. The end result of that liberation is an experience of peace, unbounded, boundless peace and love. And that's, that's something that is important for me. And this is kind of, I'm going to make this the orientation. That's really important. Some people will do with 100%. They make their whole life that orientation. Some people, in a sense, it's the primary orientation, but it really infuses other things they do, you know, go off and become a monk or nun or a full time practitioner or something, but rather they have other things to do as well. But underneath it all is that background are that the meat that supporting that is the idea that there is a path
I'm on here, there is a direction that I can take this life. And now let me see how the other things I do, can support that direction of that path like going there.

Sometimes a sense of refuge is most important for people when life is most difficult. So that when there's some kind of crisis in our life, could be health crisis or someone's gonna die, someone's dying or dead in their family or close one or their social disruption or all kinds of, you know, processes that can occur. And for some people, that's a time when refuge has the most meaning, because rather than succumbing to chaos or succumbing to hopelessness, there's some sense that there is hope there is a possibility as a path or something I can orient myself towards, something I can rely on. I can rely on this path this, this engagement in practice that other people have done, I've known other people who've done it, and so I could do it too. It gives meaning and sense of purpose to what I'm doing here. And I've known people, a lot of people who have found themselves in tremendous crisis in their lives. And but because of their trying to be mindful and present and explore the path find the path of practice through it, clarify their own attachments, their own fears, find Where the peace and liberation is in those situations, at the end of that crisis have grown dramatically. It's really it's been one of the best sometimes occasions has been doing the best things that happened in their lives, even though we never wished it on them. But it really kind of propelled them into a new place. And I've also known people who had no sense of a path, no sense of possibility, no sense of somehow some orientation which to understand their crisis. And they kind of drain them and kind of, you know, they kind of were snowed over or snowed under by it, by that experience. So for a Buddhist lady Of Refuge is particularly important, you know, in terms of crisis. Part of that one form of crisis is not an external crisis, you know, but rather, is a crisis in our own mind. Not everyone's minds, all the time is a benign friendly environment. Sometimes, our mind See, it can you know can sometimes appear for some people to be their worst enemy. Sometimes our minds prompt us to do things that later we famously regret. All I have to do is read the newspapers to, you know, read all kinds of accounts of things that people probably later regretted having done. And sometimes aside from kind of what their mind gets us to do that later, we regret we regret. Our minds also can be very harsh and very critical to ourselves. And it can have certain tendencies, powerful addictive tendencies and neurotic tendencies or all kinds of things are gone. They're mine. They make it very hard. Sometimes the sense of trying to control things controller life is you know, in hyperactive mode, sometimes, it's the opposite that said, hyperactive mode is just kind of giving up since a hopelessness, my mind just hopeless. I just can't get out of the sense of hopelessness. and here also the idea of refuge can be very important. The idea here, the idea Maybe there is something besides your neurotic mind, that you can depend on. Many people, sometimes people have neurotic minds without thinking of it necessarily, or taking refuge in their minds, taking refuge in those thoughts taking refuge or depending on relying on these heavy judgments or aversive thoughts or addictions that go on, as if you know, the this is really what I have to do with my life. So sometimes the refuge has tremendous meaning as an alternative to being caught up in our own mind, or alternative to thinking that it's up to me, when every attempt I make, to try to find a way out of my predicament. I just seem to kind of digging my grave deeper, more and more. And so the idea of refuges of some people's way of stepping out realizing out of their kind of normal kind of way of engaging the world and relaxing and realizing perhaps there's no other way, besides being the one in control the one in charge Some people, they have an external Buddha, Dharma Sangha, it's helpful for that deep relaxation, for other people. It's more the internal sense that there's some kind of self healing, self regulating, self liberating possibility in the mind itself. If we just get out of the way, don't try so hard, that there is a process of liberation that's innate and who we are. And we don't necessarily have to always kind of be riding up close. But we can relax a little bit and let something else kind of carry us and hold us. So the refuge has this idea that something else besides our small self, perhaps or egotistical self, can support and help us along in this way. So what aspects of refuges is kind of making
a choice or an orientation This is what's important for me. And I think probably anybody involved in any spiritual tradition whatsoever. Some point comes some point comes
to a place where they make a choice. This is important for me, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to follow this sometimes spiritual reality can hit you from the back through the back door, you realize what, you know, what hit you just suddenly there's a radical change or shift or opening or something that happens. And, but even that kind of situation is often a kind of a choice that's made, oh, yes, this is important. And I think I'll go along with this. Or there can be a choice not to go along with it, you know, hold it, you know, please, later, or spiritualities, very quiet, doesn't come into the back doors, a big shock, but rather kind of slowly, slowly kind of seeps in, you hardly notice a change. But then at some point, you realize this has become a really important part of my life. And there could be a change, or a recognition of, Oh, this is what I'm making my orientation. This is what I'm making the perspective that I've been holding my my life in. The second aspect of refuge is that of knowing there's an aspect of knowing and refuge are understanding the understanding or insight as part of it. So here Very important so you don't think that refuge or some kind of blind faith, blind adherence or blind belief to some, you know the Buddha Dharma externally. But rather, it's a deeper knowing or understanding. But something about the process of transformation, the POS process of change that our life is about. It's a deeper knowing about the potential or possibility of an alternative to being caught in the cycles of suffering or caught in the cycles of neurosis are caught in the cycles of fear. And so they have some sense of Unknowing a path to that, knowing a way to get there to know how to the importance of mindfulness, to know the importance of, of loving kindness, perhaps, to know the importance of community of practice with there's a lot of things you could know. But at the heart is to know something like the Four Noble Truths, to somehow really understand the Four Noble Truths is not some kind of creed, but rather it's describing a process of interchange. That is accessible to all of us if we just continue in that direction. So understanding that means part of refuge, I go for refuge in the Buddha Dharma Sangha also means then I go for refuge in what I most deeply know, what I most deeply know. And it's easy to forget that you can really deeply know something you have a deep experience. You can have a deep understanding a deep practice that you have access to know about. But in times of crisis, it might not be, you might forget about it or you might not feel all you know, you know, just seem so far away. Going for refuge as a reminder about something hopefully the person knows and hopefully knows, you know, that what you know is most deeply What do you know, take refuge in that. Rely on that depend on that, be inspired by that. Then the third form of refuge is that of aspect of refuge is that of The kind of emotional connection to this. So this is going to be quite a heartfelt kind of a heart is into it. So it's not not a not a sense of duty, it's not a sense of obligation. Maybe it's not even, you know, so serious. I like to think when I was living in the Buddhist monastery for several years, I went up to the teacher there and said, You know, I don't really take anything that seriously anymore. But it was actually an expression of the freedom that was the I was beginning to feel. And I wasn't someone who was, quote, blowing things off and didn't care about things. Actually, I cared about things more after my years of practice, but I held a much more likely than I had before. So that sense of lightness and so hopefully the sense of the Four Noble Truths the sense of refuge brings us a Lightness of Being to us rather than heaviness. But also can bring a sense of joy and happiness and warmth within us, to the City of Refuge also a sense of warmth or happiness or gladness, a close knit gladdens, the heart and the mind. So when Buddhists go for refuge, and we do like the refuge ceremony or chant the refuges, they're also connecting to something that's emotional within them. And so that emotionality sometimes is evoked, sometimes the emotional aspect if it's the only thing that's evoked, can be kind of kind of blind devotion or unhealthy kind of devotional ism. But if you understand that emotional quality, being evoked together with
a choice of orientation, or taking responsibility for our lives and saying, This is what I'm going to do, and a sense of a deep understanding, then I think it really the emotional aspect gives a lot of warmth. Joy to the other aspects of the path. So, Buddha Dharma and the Sangha taking refuge in these things, the word refuge hears talking about it, because in the Buddhist tradition has, it's a very rich concept. And so to give you a sense of the richness of it, so maybe you can have a sense of how you would like to know, in a somewhat quiet, little bit, kind of think of it maybe quiet back water areas of Buddhism, in the places where the Buddha taught the teachings of the Buddha, they often have noticed, kind of slipped it in a little bit like a footnote. And a little bit in the footnote in the tradition, this is down to the centuries. In the Theravada tradition, there's also the notion of a fourth refuge. So there's most mostly people talk about three refuges, but there is sometimes a fourth one which is mentioned. And in some of the non tariff on traditions like a Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The fourth refuge is the guru. And some in some Tibetan traditions where the Guru is the refuge, there is a very clearly a sense of surrendering your own choice, your own will. And the Guru is going to decide things for you. You're going to marry with practice you can do, you know, just kind of surrender, surrender, surrender as part of that. Because you see, the Guru is kind of like the Buddha, all knowing all wise Buddha, whatever they say and do is great. In a terrifying tradition, there is no sense of a guru. Like this, what they're a teacher in the terrible tradition is called Kellyanne Anita. And actually, one of the terms other terms too, but one of the ideas is that Kellyanne, Anita, and Kellyanne Amita is a Pali word, which means good spiritual friend. And the important word is the word friend Mita. And so rather than someone who's your guru, the teacher, someone just meant meant to be your friend. And part of the reason for that is that the path of practice in Tibetan Buddhism is something you have to undertake for yourself. You have to walk yourself. The Buddha's own, the teachers only point the way and encourage you and mentor you and support you, as you do something. Basically, maybe we're in Theravada tradition, teachers are coaches. You know, now we have executive coaches, all kinds of coaches. And so we're kind of like coaches because you have to do the work. So we're kind of friends, that is more friends for people, rather than someone who kind of hierarchy who hierarchically higher above is telling you what to do. Now, so the fourth refuge is not the teacher, the guru, in tera, vaada tradition, the fourth refuge is yourself. A nice Since you have to walk the path yourself, there has to be some sense of reliance, some sense of dependence on yourself, that you can fall back on yourself that somehow that, that you have the qualities you have the potential for liberation, the potential for walking the path can be found in yourself is found in yourself and has to be found in yourself and yourself is something that's really beautiful and important. The Theravada tradition has this wonderful, the confusing teachings where you are the ultimate revenue your you could be a refuge for yourself. And this teaching was not so nice to hold that. And, but the teaching of not so there's not supposed to be a teaching that you don't exist and therefore, you can't make any movement or effort on your own. It's rather than teaching them not Self is all the movements that you take all the movements of practice you take, don't identify it with it so tightly. Don't take it as that this is who you really are. There's nothing you can take as being this is who you really are. But there still is and kind of a colloquial sense. me here. Generally, no one else feeds you, we feed ourselves right? Even the people who understand that there's nothing qualifies to sell, feed themselves, generally. So there is a way in which you kind of take refuge in ourselves. As someone who’s capable of walking the path someone has a dignity to walk the path, someone who has the path can be found within us, because the Buddhist path is not an external path.

You will not find the Buddhist path at IMC. They won't be found here ever. So you'll never come back now. Now that we've met not met. We met Now that we've confessed it, and you will not find it at spirit rock, not finding Zen center, you will not find it at any Buddhist center anywhere in the world. The only place you'll find the Buddhist path is in your own heart, seeing yourself. So, take refuge itself is take refuge in once. This is where it's found. This is where it's discovered. This is where it's created. This is where we walk it within ourselves. So to a route we're taking refuge is not such an active dependence,
childlike dependence on some religious ideal or some religious community of some religious leader. It's rather a movement towards adults like responsibility, kind of a movement into kind of growing up. Growing up rather than becoming a child in that growing up, as we grow up or fully is a beautiful thing that happens is that we are self consciousness begins to fall away. And as our self consciousness falls away, then the sense of self gets more and more transparent and empty. And, and we get to empty and then we become the Buddha, we become Buddha like. So, ultimately when you treat, when you treat the refuges in Buddha Dharma Sangha, as something external to you, if you take refuge in then, conventionally people sometimes are called, they are now Buddhists. If you take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma Sangha that's within yourself, then you become a Buddha. Then you become it difference between being being a Buddhist versus being Buddhist. You know, take three important take that a away. Because if you are a Buddhist, then it's implies perhaps the idea that you have an identity. This is who I am. I'm a Buddhist and one among all those different kinds of Buddhists. Whereas if you say, I am Buddhist, from my mind and implies that the inner qualities of a Buddha, the inner qualities of freedom, inner qualities of love and compassion and caring, the inner qualities of mindfulness, that those are becoming more and more part of who we are, as opposed to who we are, to take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha and understand that in doing that, that we also can take refuge in ourselves. And so don't take it too seriously. Ready to still be the most serious thing. So thank you very much.