So the topic for today is, as a third talk in this refuge series, is refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha as the external refuge. Yesterday I talked about the internal refuge. Finding the Buddha, Dharma, the Sangha with those qualities represent in qualities within ourselves. And, but also, more classically in Buddhism, the conventional idea of refuge is in the Buddha himself, historical Buddha. And the Dharma which has a variety of meanings what that is but one meaning is the teachings and practices of the Buddha. And then Sangha refers sometimes to the monastic community, sometimes refers more essentially, to those people, monastic and lay, who have experienced some degree of awakening, some degree of becoming freer, some inner maturity, spiritual maturity. And here in the West, we tend to expand the meaning of a Sangha, sometimes to be everyone that we practice with and occasionally people in the West talk about all beings are a Sangha, which I think is a beautiful idea. And sometimes the external Sangha, external refuge, is one that is very strongly connected to two things. It can be very strongly connected to people's deep interfaith, a deep sense of inspiration, of trust, of confidence. It could also be related to, you start seeing in the world beyond one's self, examples of what makes the world and living in the world meaningful or gives it a sense of purpose, or gives it a kind of orientation. So we know what we're doing, where we're going. And so, I'll say more about that, but important part of this refuge is action. Buddha said our actions are our refuge. But to have a sense of what this life is about, what we can act on or do or choose, that leads to greater freedom and alleviation of suffering for ourselves and for others. So the external refuge. I imagine that if I met the Buddha, and you know, I was walking, you know, somehow he was alive today, that maybe I wouldn't use the word refuge because it's kind of a Buddhist word, especially before I became a Buddhist. I would have used words like if I met this person and saw this, you know, can feel what this person was about and heard those teachings, that it would have inspired a tremendous inspiration in me. A tremendous sense of recognition of here was something really valuable and good here was a goodness or, or an example of a possibility of how to live which is a worthwhile thing to pursue that
this Is something this is a person who represents how I would like to be, or how I would like to move towards and become like this. And I might say that I had a lot of trust in this person, I had a lot of faith in this person, I was inspired by this person. I might also say that I was, I saw that person is an example of what I could become. And, and in that there would be kind of a heartfeltness, or a joy in seeing this possibility in someone else. And so in the ancient world, people use the language of sarana, refuge, for all those feelings that might happen when they encounter the Buddha. And the most common description in the ancient suttas for people who met the Buddha and then heard his teachings and then decided to go for refuge was the statement here: magnificent, magnificent, Master Gautama, the Buddha. The dhamma has been made clear in many ways, by master Gautama as though he were turning upright what has been turned upside down, setting straight, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, holding up a lamp in the dark. For those with eyesight to see forms. We go for refuge in master Gautama and to the Dhamma and to the monastic community. Let master Gautama remember us as lay followers from today, from today, having gone for refuge for life. So it is a little bit of I mean, it's repeated over and over again in the suttas. So it's a little bit of a formulaic, someone kind of came up with this, but it's kind of inspiring this idea that, how the totality of it and the meaning, the impact it's had. In ancient India, at the time of the Buddha, people were already going for refuge, not in the Buddha, but before him. The ancient texts do talk about a triple refuge, and the triple refuge back then were three of the Brahminical or Indic gods of the time, Indra, Prajapati, and the God of Death. And somehow, this idea of refuge was, triple refuge was already there in India. So people are already predisposed. And so that's when they came to the Buddha that, you know, this is something that they were, you know, we're kind of the culture set up that this is what they do. And we have no examples anywhere that the Buddha instructed people to go for refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha. People did it in his presence. And he assented in silence. And that's a kind of a you know, how to read that silence. And what his relationship to all this is, is a little bit you know, interpretive, I suppose. But what we do find the Buddha emphasizing, as I've been saying these days, is the internal refuge, finding refuge in oneself anymore. And in the practice we do, in the practice of mindfulness, seeing that as a refuge. But he did in his silent ascent allow people to go for refuge. And so I guess he approved of it. But I think that for many of us, this idea of one of the ways that refuge works for many people, is that something inside of us is moved by these external refuge. Something inside recognizes the truth of it, or recognizes ourself in that, that somehow what the Buddha is, what the Dharma really is, with the Sangha is, the example of people who have practiced deeply, somehow resonates, moves, touches those things in ourselves. Sometimes we only see in the, we sometimes first see in the external world, a possibility for a different way of living. See it in the example of other people, or in teachings we read that really inspire us, and then we find it in ourselves. The first Buddhist book that I read was Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind by the Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki. And it was a remarkable experience to read this book because as I was reading it, I felt I was reading things that I knew but didn't know that I knew. There was like this deep recognition. Oh, yes, I know this, I know this. It some how touched some parts of me. And it was, you know, that book then set me on the course of doing Buddhist practice. I find it inspiring to look at the statues of the Buddha because, for me, the statues, the ones that are well done, represents the filling out of a possibility that I've recognized in small ways within myself. A possibility of being free, of being
peaceful, of being wise, of being compassionate. And I know that I could grow in this capacities. And to me, it's very meaningful to have met people and have the example of the Buddha. But I've met people in my life, who clearly have inspired me, that they they seem to have filled out this potential in a big way and important way. And really seeing examples of this has been, you know, I don't think I could have practiced as much as I did, without seeing them in a certain way trusting and having faith or without saying, using the word refuge, having refuge in these people, to showed me what's possible. Something inside of me resonated with that touch something or it pointed to something inside me, that it was my turn to open and grow and develop. And so it isn't so much that I go for refuge we go for refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha, in kind, some kind of blind allegiance or some kind of magical thinking that if I just kind of turn myself over to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and just trust them, kind of, completely, somehow I'll be taken care of. It's more like we recognize how valuable and how inspiring the Buddha, the example of the Buddha is. How inspiring the Dharma, the teachings are. And the Sangha, the other people we practice with, the other people who are maturing more than us and growing and freer than us, that this is like again, a mirror for ourselves. This is really right. And so over and over again, the refuge is coming back here to ourselves. But there can be emotional relationship of great value, of warmth, of heartfeltness, that comes in seeing it externally. And because we're human beings and we live in connectedness, we live in relationship to each other. And, of course, we're going to feel some kind of inspired feelings, everyone a different way. If we feel and see around us in the world, what we feel inside. And so for some people, it's just a, just the abstract possibility of freedom is inspiring. But at some point as we practice, the idea is to begin to really recognize something that's here for us, in us in our experience. And then, taking our peace, taking our refuge we have, then it's possible to begin gazing upon the world in a new way. And gazing upon the world, and seeing there's refuge in the world, seeing that there's much more goodness in the world, that it's possible to see if we see the world through our hate or greed or fear. And these are the kinds of things. Generally for all the horrible things people do to each other, there are more people that are trying to make a difference. And I think the current protests we see that are so inspiring around the country is that they're responding to brutality, that it's horrific to see. But there are many, many more people who are coming forth to protest the brutality, then are the people who are being brutal. To take refuge in all this goodness, all this courage and all this, that there is the refuge in the world. There is possibility to see the world in a new way. And this is not meant to be naive, but to find refuge in the world, whether it's in the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha, which are one of the great refuges. Or to start recognizing those qualities, not only in oneself, but to recognize some of these qualities in the world around us. So the world itself becomes kind of a refuge because it has the qualities of what Buddhists would call qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha. This is the possibility of what happens as we mature and develop in practice. And if we're able to see the refugees in the world, then even just seeing it begins to support that it's kind of like food. Our seeing and recognizing and appreciating what's in the world. What's good in the world, is is the fodder or food for the good in the world to grow as well. Not to deny the difficulties, but to hold them in a, I think, a valuable context. So I hope that for those of you who do have a strong heartfelt connection to the external refugees, Buddha, Dharma, the Sangha, that you continue to do so and but to really remember that external refuge is really not only pointing to ourselves inside, but also pointing that the
inside and outside don't have to be so separated, so that there is a continuity, there's an oozing out, there's a intermingling of the inner refuge and the outer refuge. And that meeting and connection of the two, I would like to pray today to represents with the hands coming down, and then bowing in refuge, out of refuge, with refuge for the welfare and happiness of all beings. May we all discover our close, intimate, caring connection with each other, and live in a world where we appreciate the mutual care and support that we can give each other. May all beings be free. May all beings know that they're cared for, respected, valued, and appreciated for their depth of their beauty and great value as human beings. Thank you.