

# Refuge

## The causes for going for refuge

In general there are many causes, but for our purposes the following apply.

You cannot remain in this life, and soon you will die, and after death you will have no control over where you are reborn, for you are under the control of your karma.

Just as a flash of lightning in a dark cloud  
Momentarily illuminates the darkness of a black night,  
So too does there infrequently appear in the world, by a buddhas power,  
A few moments of intelligence to create virtue.

Thus virtue is always weak,  
and sin is fiercely powerful

-Shantideva

Since virtuous karma is so weak, and negative karma is so exceedingly powerful, if you contemplate how readily you fall into the miserable realms, you will be filled with fear and dread, and will resolve to seek a refuge.

Adrift in the bottomless ocean of cyclic existence,  
Devoured by fierce sea monsters --  
Attached and the like --  
To whom should I go for refuge today?

-Dignaga

In brief, the causes for going for refuge are twofold:

1. your fear of the miserable realms and the like
2. conviction that the three jewels can protect you from them

You must strive to realize these 2 causes, because if they remain just words, so will your refuge, but if they are strong and stable, your refuge will transform your mind.

## Based on that, the objects to which you go for

# refuge.

## a. Identifying the objects for which you go to refuge

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*The one in whom no fault  
Can ever exist,  
The one in whom all good qualities  
Always exist --  
If you are sensible,  
It is correct to go for refuge to such a person,  
To praise and honor him,  
And abide in his teachings.*

So, if you can distinguish what is a refuge from what is not a refuge, it is right to go for refuge to the Bhagavan Buddha, the true refuge. The same applies to the Dharma, and Sangha.

## b. The reason why they are worthy of refuge.

There are 4 reasons why the Buddha is worthy of refuge

1. **He has mastered himself and has attained the sublime state of fearlessness.** If he had not attained this, he would not be able to protect others from fear, just as a person who has fallen can not help someone else who has fallen down.
2. **He is in all ways skilled in the means of training disciples.** If he were not so, he would not be able to fulfill your needs, even if you went to him for refuge.
3. **He has great compassion.** If he did not have it, he would not protect you even if you went to him for refuge.
4. **He is pleased not by material offerings, but by offerings of practice.** If he were not, he would not act as a refuge for everyone, but would help only those who had previously helped him.

Only one who has these 4 qualities is worthy of being a refuge. Since only the Buddha has these qualities, he alone is the refuge. Therefore, his teaching and the community of his disciples are also worthy of being a refuge.

Thus, after you have ascertained these, entrust yourself to the 3 jewels with a single-pointed focus.

Develop this certainty from the depths of your heart, for, once you are able to do this, they cannot fail to protect you. This is because there are 2 causes of your being protected... an

internal and external. The teacher has already fully realized the external factor or cause, **but you suffer because you have not yet developed the internal factor, entrusting yourself to the refuge.**

Therefore, know that the Buddha moved by his great compassion, assists you even if you do not request his help; that he is not lazy at this; and that he, the unrivaled and auspicious refuge, abides as your personal protector. Recognizing this, go for him for refuge.

## The way you go for refuge

There are 4 aspects to going for refuge: 1. By knowing the good qualities 2. By knowing the distinctions 3. Through commitment 4. By refusing to acknowledge other refuges

### 1. Going for refuge by knowing the good qualities

Going for refuge in this way requires recalling the good qualities of the refuge... there are 3 subdivisions

1. good qualities of the Buddha
2. good qualities of the Dharma
3. good qualities of the Sangha

### Good qualities of the Buddha

There are 4 parts:

Good qualities of the Buddhas body, mind, speech, and enlightened activities.

**The good qualities of the Buddha's Body:** This entails recollection of the Buddha's auspicious signs and exemplary features. Recall them as they are taught in **Praise by Example**

You body, adorned with the signs,  
Is beautiful, and elixir for the eye;  
It's like a cloudless autumn sky  
Decorated with clusters of stars.

O golden Sage,  
Beautifully draped with religious robes--  
You are like a golden mountain peak  
Wrapped in the clouds of sunrise and sunset.

O protector, even the full moon  
Free of clouds cannot compare  
With the radiant orb of your face  
Free of the embellishment of jewelry.

Should a bee see  
The lotus of your face  
And a lotus opened by the sun,  
It would wonder which was the real lotus

Your white teeth beautify  
Your golden face  
Like pure moonbeams in autumn pouring through  
The gaps between golden mountains.

O one so worthy of worship, your right hand,  
Adorned with the sign of the wheel,  
Makes the gesture of relief  
To people terrified by cyclic existence.

O sage, when you walk,  
Your feet leave marks on this earth  
Like splendid lotuses--  
How can it be beautified by lotus gardens?

### **The good qualities of the Buddha's Speech:**

Reflect on the marvelous manner of the Buddha's speech. Even if every being in the universe asks him a different question at the same time, he comprehends them all with one instant of his wisdom. Then he answers all the question with a single word, whichh all beings understand in their own language.

Your face is so captivating;  
Listening to your pleasant speech  
Is like seeing nectar  
Flow from the moon.

Your speech, like a rain cloud,  
Settles the dust of attachment;  
Like a garuda,  
It expels the snake of hostility.

Again and again it is like a sun  
Dispelling the darkness of ignorance.  
Since it razes the mountain of pride,  
It is also like a vajra.

Because you see the truth, your speech never misleads;  
Since it is faultless, it is correct;  
Since it is well composed, it is easy to understand.  
Your words are well spoken.

At first your speech  
captivates the listeners minds;  
Then if they give it thought,  
It clears away attachment and delusion.

It relieves the destitute,  
Protects the unruly,  
And induces the reveler to renounce--  
Your speech accords with everyone's needs

It delights the learned,  
It improves the minds of the middling,  
And dispels the darkness of the lowly--  
This speech is medicine for all beings

- Praise in One Hundred and Fifty Verses

### **The good qualities of the Buddha's Mind:**

These are explained in terms of the good qualities of knowledge and good qualities of caring

- a. **Good qualities of the buddha's knowledge** - Without obstruction, the Buddha's knowledge contacts the real nature and diversity of all phenomena. The Sages knowledge comprehends all phenomena, whereas others limited knowledge cannot comprehend the vast objects that are to be known. You should reflect on this knowledge

as it is described here:

Only you sublime wisdom  
Comprehends all objects of knowledge;  
For everyone other than you  
There are objects yet to be known

and also:

O Bhagavan, the entire origination  
Of all types of phenomena throughout time  
Is within the range of your mind,  
Like an amabalan fruit in the palm of your hand.

Like the wind moving across the sky,  
Your mind is unimpeded  
With respect to the single and manifold  
Animate and inanimate phenomena

- Praise in Honor of One Worthy of Honor

- a. **The good qualities of caring** - In the same way that beings are bound inescapably by the afflictions, so is the sage bound by great compassion, which thus arises continuously as he beholds the suffering of living beings.

The afflictions bind all  
These being without exception.  
You in order, to release them from the afflictions,  
Are eternally bound by compassion.

Should I first make obeisance to you,  
Or to the great compassion that causes you  
To dwell for so long in cyclic existence  
Despite knowing its faults?

-Praise in One Hundred and Fifty Verses

The supreme sage feels great compassion  
When he sees being who's minds  
Are constantly obscured by the dark gloom of ignorance,  
Locked in the prison of cyclic existence.

-Chapter of the Truth Speaker

The Conqueror feels great compassion when he sees beings  
Who's minds are overwhelmed by attachment,  
Who have great craving and always long for sensory objects,  
And who have fallen in to the ocean of craving's attachment.

The one possessing the 10 powers feels compassion  
Which seeks to dispe all suffering  
When he sees the afflictions of beings  
Harmed by a multitude of illnesses and miseries.

The Sage's compassion arises constantly;  
It is impossible for it not to do so.

The Buddha is free of faults because he is concerned  
With the needs of all living beings.

-Chapter of the Truth Speaker

### **The good qualities of enlightened activities:**

The enlightened activities of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind, being both spontaneous and everlasting, help all living beings. If disciples are open to his guidance, the Sage will give them that which is excellent, and lead them out of trouble. Thus the Buddha's activities are certain to do everything that needs to be done. Reflect on this as follows:

You explain the destruction of afflictions,  
Reveal the deceitfulness of demons,  
Proclaim the terrifying nature of cyclic existence,  
And show the way of fearlessness.

O compassionate One, wishing to help,  
You act for the sake of living beings.  
How could there be something helpful  
Which you have not done?

-Praise in One Hundred and Fifty Verses

What trouble is there away from which  
You cannot lead living beings?  
What excellent thing is there  
That you cannot bestow on the world?

-Praise in Honor of One Worthy of Honor

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This is a brief summary on how you should reflect on the Buddha. If you reflect in a variety of ways, your faith will arise in a variety of ways. the more you reflect, the stronger and more enduring your faith all become. This same applies to the other 2 jewels.

When you have gained certainty by meditating in this way, you will understand that the scriptures and their commentaries are instructions, in that most of them teach the good qualities of the 3 jewels.

The more you practice these things, the more accustomed your mind will become to them, and the easier it will be to practice what you have initially found difficult to learn.

You will develop the spirit of enlightenment thinking "I, too, should obtain buddhahood, like the Buddha whom I recollect." You will have visions of the Buddha day and night. No matter how much you suffer at the time of death, you will not lose your recollection of the Buddha.



I instruct you  
And you should understand  
Peoples' minds become absorbed in something  
To the degree that they reflect on it

Therefor, recollect the Master of Sages as having a conquerer's  
Physical posture and sublime wisdom.  
If you constantly familiarize yourself with such a recollection,  
Your mind will become absorbed in it--

You will desire the wisdom of a holy being  
Whether you walk, sit, stand or recline.  
Because you yourself will want to become a supreme conqueror of the world,  
You will also make prayers aspiring to enlightenment.

- The king of Concentration Sutra

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*If you reflect on the buddha's good qualities again and again, you will receive blessings commensurate with the strength of your faith and purity of your mind. Because you have gained certainty about them, you will go for refuge from the depths of your heart and train yourself in the precepts of refuge. Then, everything you do will become a practice of the teachings.*

-> Bodowa

**Reflect again and again on the good qualities of the Buddha, and strive to attain certainty from the depths of your heart. Once you gain this, you reach the very core of the practice of going for refuge, you will gain certainty with respect to the teaching from which the Buddha arose, and the community that practices the teaching. Without this, there is no practice of going for refuge that transforms your mind, not to mention other paths.**

### **Good qualities of the Teachings**

Once you have made respect for the Buddha your primary cause, you should then recollect the teaching jewel as follows **"The Buddha possesses limitless good qualities, all of which arose from meditating on and realizing both the verbal teachings and the teachings as they are put into practice. That is, he actualized the true cessations, thereby eliminating faults, and meditated on the true paths, thereby giving rise to good qualities"**

These bhagavan buddhas possess infinite and limitless good qualities. Such qualities are born from the teaching, from the proper practice of the teaching. The teaching creates and governs them. They arise from the teaching and within the scope of the teaching. They depend upon the teaching, and the teaching produces them.

- The Compendium of the Teachings

##### Good qualities of the Community

Chief among the members of the community or those persons who are noble beings.  
\*\*Think of them in light of their mindfulness of the good qualities of the teaching and their proper practice of it.\*\*

Think, "The community teaches the teachings, practices it, and reflects on it. It is the teachings sphere. It upholds the teaching, entrusts itself to the teaching, worships the teaching, and conducts itself according to the teaching. It has the teaching as its sphere of activity, and is the most excellent practitioner of the teaching. It is naturally honest and pure. It is endowed with the quality of compassion, and has great compassion. It always has solitude as its field of activity, and is always absorbed in the teaching, and always practices virtue"

- Compendium of the Teachings ""

## 2. Going for Refuge by knowing the distinctions

According to the Compendium of Determinations, you go for refuge after understanding the distinctions among the 3 jewels.

1. **Distinction Bases on their defining Characteristics** - The Buddha jewels has the characteristics of full, perfect enlightenment. The teaching jewel has the characteristics of arising from the buddha jewel. The community jewel has the characteristic of correct practice by means of personal instructions.
2. **Distinction Bases on their activities** - Buddha gives sermons. Teaching focuses on the eradication of afflictions and suffering. Community has the activity of fostering enthusiasm.
3. **Distinction Bases on devotion** - You should appreciate the buddha as the one to venerate and serve. You should appreciate the teaching as that which is to be realized. You should appreciate those whom you should associate because they have attributes that are similar to your own.
4. **Their distinction based on practice** - You should worship and serve the buddha. You should become familiar with the teaching by applying yourself to yoga. You should

cultivate a relationship with the community through sharing the teaching and material goods

5. **The distinction based on recollection** - You should recollect the good qualities of the three jewels by reciting "Thus the Bhagavan...", etc.
6. **The distinction based on how they increase merit** - Supreme merit is increased through the influence of either persons or the teaching. The Buddha and the community are instances of the former. Also, you can increase merit in dependence on either a single person or many persons. The community is a case of the later, because it requires for monks.

### 3. Going for Refuge Through Commitment

Going for refuge through commitment means upholding the Buddha as the teacher of refuge, the teaching - nirvana -, as the actual refuge, and the community as those who assist us to attain refuge.

### 4. Going for Refuge Through Refusing to Acknowledge other refuges

First you have to understand the difference between Buddhist and non-buddhist teachers, teachings, and disciples, for then you will uphold only the 3 jewels as your refuge, and refuse teachers, teachings, and disciples that do not accord with them.

1. The distinction of the teacher - The Buddha is without fault and has perfected good qualities, but the teachers of other religions are the opposite of that
2. The destination of the teachings - The Conquerors teachings allow you to attain its goal of bliss through a joyful path. It stops the stream of cyclic existence, clears away the afflictions, does not mislead those who desire liberation, is completely virtuous and clears away faults.

## Patrul Notes

### Faith

Just as taking refuge opens the gateway to all teachings and practices, faith the gateway to taking refuge. As the first step in taking refuge, therefore, it is important to develop a lasting and stable faith. Faith itself if of 3 kinds:

1. **Vivid Faith** - This is the faith that is inspired us by thinking of the immense compassion of the Buddha's and great teachers. We may experience this after going to a great temple, or meeting a great teacher, etc.
2. **Eager Faith** - Our eagerness to be free of the suffering of the lower realms when we hear them described; our eagerness to enjoy the happiness of the higher realms and of liberation when we hear what they are. Our eagerness to engage in positive actions when

we hear their benefit; and avoid negative actions when we understand what harm they cause

3. **Confident Faith** - this is the faith in the three jewels that arises from the depths of our hearts when we understand their extraordinary qualities and the power of their blessings. It is the total trust in the 3 jewels along that comes from the knowledge that they are the only unfailing refuge, always and in all of our circumstances, whether we are happy, sad, ill, in pain, living, or dead.

The faith of total trust allows blessings to enter you.  
When the mind is free of doubt, whatever you wish can be achieved.

- Guru Rinpoche

In those who lack faith,  
Nothing positive will grow,  
Just as from a burnt seed  
No green shoot will ever sprout.

-Sutras

Of the seven noble riches faith is the most important. It is said:

The precious wheel of faith  
Rolls day and night along the road of virtue.

Faith is the most precious of all of our resources. It brings an inexhaustible supply of virtues, like a treasure. It carries us along the path of liberation like a pair of legs.

The compassion and blessings of the 3 jewels are inconceivable, but nevertheless their ability to reach into us depends entirely on our faith and devotion. If you have immense faith and devotion, the compassion and blessings you receive from your teacher will be immense. If moderate, it will be moderate, etc. If none there will be none. Even if you were to be a disciple of the Buddha, if you had no faith, it would be pointless.

For all who think of him with faith  
The Buddha is there in front of them  
And will give empowerments and blessings

For all men and women with faith in me, I Padmasambhava,  
Have never departed - I sleep by their door.  
For me, there is no such thing as death;  
Before each person with faith, there is a Padmasambhava.

-Guru Rinpoche

When one has confident faith, the Buddha's compassion can be present in anything.

It is upon faith alone that actual realizations of the absolute truth, the natural state, depends. It is said in the sutras:

O Sariputra, absolute truth is only realized through faith!

As you develop faith quite beyond the commonplace, by its power the blessings of the teacher and of the three jewels will enter you. Then true realizations will arise and you will see the natural state as it really is. When that happens, you will feel an even more extraordinary and irreversible faith and confidence in your teacher and 3 jewels. In this way, faith and the realization of the natural state depend on each other.

Our capacity to receive the compassion and blessings of the teacher and the three jewels, therefore, depends entirely on devotion and faith.

Once a disciple yelled out to Jowo Atisha "Jowo, give me your blessing!". "Lax disciple," Atisha responded ""give me you devotion!"

So, absolute unwavering trust, arising from extraordinary faith and devotion, is indispensable. It opens the door for taking refuge.

## Motivation

There are 3 different levels of motivation for taking refuge with this sort of faith

1. **Refuge of lesser beings** - Fear of the sufferings of the 3 lower realms -- motivates us to take refuge simply with the idea of obtaining happiness of gods and men.
2. **Refuge of middling beings** - The knowledge that in all realms of samsara - there is no freedom from suffering, so we take refuge in the 3 jewels just with the aim of attaining for ourselves the level of nirvana, peaceful and free from all of samsara's sufferings
3. **The refuge of great beings** - the sight of all beings plunged in the great ocean of samaras infinite sufferings and undergoing an unimaginable variety of torments motivates us to take refuge with the idea of establishing them all in the unsurpassable and omniscient state of perfect and complete buddhahood.

Out of these 3 levels, we should take the motivation of the third. Why strive to seek the happiness of the higher realms if it only lasts for a moment? The shravakas and pratyekabuddhas find true happiness, but just for themselves, so what?.. how can they enjoy that when they see their mothers burning in the hells.

So, to take refuge in the three jewels with the wish that all beings may attain Buddhahood, is therefore, the way of the great beings, and the gateway to infinite merit. That is the way to, we should adopt.

As there are infinite kinds of beings  
The Wish to help them is infinite too.

## How to Take Refuge