



## Instructions on the Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer

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Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is the foundation of the entire path, the basis of all vows, the source of all qualities, and the key point of distinction between buddhists and non-buddhists. Generating bodhicitta is the essential foundation for attaining complete Buddhahood, and the source of all the excellent qualities of both saṃsāra and liberation. I will explain both of these teachings.

### 1. Taking Refuge

This has three sections:

- First, the objects of taking refuge.
- Second, the duration of taking refuge.
- Third, the actual practice of taking refuge.

#### First, the Objects of Taking Refuge

1. The perfect Buddha, who is the unsurpassable teacher.
2. The sacred Dharma, which is the unsurpassable protection.
3. The noble sangha, who are the unsurpassable guides.

The Buddha is the one endowed with the four kāyas and five wisdoms.

The four kāyas are:

1. The svābhāvikakāya, which is the nature of phenomenal reality, free from all obscurations.
2. The dharmakāya, which is the unceasing aspect of wisdom.
3. The sambhogakāya, which is the self-appearing enjoyment body, adorned with major and minor marks.
4. The nirmāṇakāya, which is the emanation body that appears in the world to teach and benefit sentient beings.

The five wisdoms are:

1. The dharmadhātu wisdom, which is the intrinsic purity of absolute space.
2. The mirror-like wisdom, which is the unceasing clarity aspect of wisdom.
3. The equalizing wisdom, which is the absence of attachment and aversion towards anyone, near or far.
4. The discriminating wisdom, which perceives objects clearly without confusion
5. The all-accomplishing wisdom, which effortlessly brings about the welfare of others.

The Dharma is identified as scripture and realization. The Dharma of scripture is contained in three collections:

1. The Vinaya collection, which tames the disturbing emotions in one's mind-stream.
2. The Sūtra collection of summarizing texts in which points are arranged in categories.
3. The Abhidharma collection for generating the wisdom that clearly realizes the way things are.

The Dharma of realization is the threefold higher training:

1. The training in higher discipline is taught in the Vinaya collection.
2. The training in higher meditation is taught in the Sūtra collection.
3. The training in higher wisdom is taught in the Abhidharma collection.

By practicing the Three Trainings, one experiences the two truths of cessation and the path. As abandonment and realization develop through the five paths and ten bhūmis, the truth of cessation becomes perfect abandonment and the truth of the path manifests as perfect realization.

The sangha is the non-returning sangha of bodhisattvas. These are the bodhisattvas on the ten bhūmis, who will not return to saṃsāra, because they have realized emptiness directly through their wisdom, and who do not fall into the extreme of peacefulness, because in their compassion they care for beings with the love of a mother for her only child.

## Second, the Duration of Taking Refuge

The prayer says “until I attain enlightenment”. In this context, at the mahāyāna level of taking refuge, there are three qualities that make it special.

### Difference in terms of the Objects of Refuge

The hīnayāna tradition takes Shakyamuni Buddha, the supreme nirmāṇakāya, as the main object of refuge. They do not accept the dharmakāya or the sambhogakāya. They also believe that once the nirmāṇakāya has passed beyond this world, it no longer continues to benefit beings.

The hīnayāna sangha believes that the Dharma refers only to the state of nirvaṇa, which is the truth of cessation. They describe this as peace and freedom from attachment. The hīnayāna sangha is considered the supreme of all assemblies. It consists of the noble śāravakas and pratyekabuddhas who have entered the path to liberation, including once-returners, non-returners and arhats. In the mahāyāna, on the other hand, it is as I have explained above.

### Difference in terms of Duration of Refuge

The followers of the hīnayāna take refuge temporarily for as long as they are alive, and ultimately only until they attain their own personal liberation.

## Difference in terms of Motivation of Refuge

The followers of the hīnayāna take refuge with an attitude of renunciation, wishing to be free from all the sufferings of samsara for themselves alone. The followers of the mahāyāna take refuge with bodhicitta, wishing that all sentient beings may attain buddhahood.

## Third, the Actual Practice of Taking Refuge

In the prayer it says “I take refuge”. At this point, visualize that in every atom there appear Buddhas as numerous as all the atoms in existence, each surrounded by an assembly of bodhisattvas. Consider that the enlightened minds of all these victorious buddhas and their bodhisattva sons and daughters are filled with the sacred Dharma of scripture and realization.

They all remain present before you as great guides, ready to care for you and all sentient beings with their vast qualities of wisdom, love and power. You remain before them, together with all other sentient beings, with palms joined, and you think as follows: “From this moment on, until the essence of enlightenment is achieved, I rely upon you, The Three Jewels, as my object of refuge. I make offerings to you. You are my only practice. Apart from you, I have no refuge or hope.” Then with total trust and heartfelt conviction, take refuge.

## The Precepts of Taking Refuge

In this, there are six specific precepts and five general ones. Among the six specific precepts, there are three things to avoid and three things to do.

### Three Things to Avoid:

1. Having taken refuge in the Buddha, one should not worship worldly powers as one’s ultimate source of protection.
2. Having taken refuge in the Dharma, one should not harm any sentient being.
3. Having taken refuge in the Sangha, one should not associate closely with negative influences that lead one away from the path.

### Three Things to Do:

1. Practice according to the words of the Buddha, without forgetting them, cultivate faith and devotion, and show respect even to broken pieces of statues and images of the Buddha.
2. Engage wholeheartedly in studying, reflecting and meditating on the sacred Dharma. Show respect even for torn or damaged scriptures that represent the Dharma.
3. Respect the Sangha, who are followers of the Buddha. Associate with virtuous friends, and treat even small pieces of yellow cloth as objects worthy of reverence.

### The Five General Precepts:

1. Never abandon the Three Jewels, even at the cost of life.
2. Follow the path, do not rely on other methods, even in important matters.
3. Maintain your daily practice without interruption.
4. Encourage yourself and others to take refuge.
5. Pay homage to the Buddha wherever you go.

## 2. Generating Bodhicitta

Generally there are two levels of bodhicitta: relative and ultimate. Relative bodhicitta is the mind that aspires to attain perfect enlightenment for the sake of others. Ultimate bodhicitta is the wisdom that directly realizes emptiness. Relative bodhicitta can be further divided into aspirational bodhicitta, which is like wishing to go somewhere, and bodhicitta of application, which is like actually making the journey.

In both cases, bodhicitta is generated through formal practice, and is therefore known as “coarse bodhicitta arising from signs”. Ultimate bodhicitta arises only through the power of meditative realization on the path, and is thus called “subtle bodhicitta, which directly realizes the true nature of reality”.

Relative bodhicitta has two points or aspects: compassion, which is focused on sentient beings, and wisdom, which is directed towards perfect enlightenment. If either of these two aspects is lacking, it is not complete Mahāyāna Bodhicitta, so it is important that they are both complete. Here in the present context, the generation of aspirational bodhicitta alone has two aspects: focusing on merit, which is the cause, and aspiring towards perfect enlightenment, which is the result.

The first is expressed in the prayer, “practicing generosity and so on.” All virtuous actions can be categorized into the three bases for creating merit: creating merit through generosity, creating merit through discipline and creating merit through meditation. When we relate these to the six pāramitās, the first two correspond to the pāramitās of the same name, and the creation of merit through meditation relates to the cultivation of patience, concentration and wisdom. Diligence supports them all.

These six pāramitās are also based on specific states of mind:

1. Generosity is an attitude of giving.
2. Discipline is an attitude of renunciation.
3. Patience is an attitude of being undisturbed.
4. Diligence is an attitude of enthusiastic effort.
5. Concentration is the state of non-distraction.
6. Wisdom is the precise discernment of phenomena.

The second aspect of aspiring towards the result of perfect enlightenment is expressed in the prayer, “May I attain buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.” This prayer expresses the actual bodhicitta with the two points or aspects. “For the benefit of all beings” is the thought of whom we are practicing for and focuses our mind on sentient beings with compassion. “May I attain buddhahood” is what we are aspiring toward and is the wisdom directed toward complete enlightenment. It is therefore the aspirational bodhicitta, which is the thought: “Through all the sources of my virtue, may I attain buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings, who are as infinite as space!”

### The Precepts of Aspirational Bodhicitta:

In addition, there are the five precepts of aspirational bodhicitta, which are as follows:

1. Never give up on any sentient being.
2. Continually reflect on the benefits of bodhicitta.
3. Apply yourself diligently to the methods for accumulating merit.
4. Practice and train continually in bodhicitta.
5. Adopt four wholesome actions and abandon four unwholesome actions.

Giving up on even a single sentient being, causes the lose of aspirational bodhicitta completely, so develop the wish to benefit all beings. Reflect on the benefits of bodhicitta, which will inspire enthusiasm and help you to arouse and maintain bodhicitta, so reflect continually on the benefits of it. Gathering the accumulations increases the strength of bodhicitta, so accumulate merit and wisdom in various ways, such as through the seven-branch practice.

The training in bodhicitta has three parts:

1. Training in the cause, by meditating on the four immeasurables.
2. Training in the actual bodhicitta, by renewing the bodhicitta vow three times during the day and three times at night.
3. Training in the precepts, through practices such as taking others as equal to yourself, exchanging yourself with others, and considering others as more important than yourself.

The four immeasurables are:

1. Love, the wish that all beings who are unhappy may find happiness.
2. Compassion, the wish that all beings who are suffering may be freed from suffering.
3. Sympathetic joy, the wish that those who are happy may never be separated from their happiness.
4. Equanimity, the wish that all beings overcome attachment and aversion and view everyone with an equal heart.

The actual training in bodhicitta is to take the bodhisattva vow six times, day and night—at dawn, mid-morning, noon, afternoon, dusk and midnight—using any form of *sādhanā*, whether long or short.

- “Taking others as equal to yourself” means seeing yourself and others as fundamentally equal and wishing them to find happiness and be free from suffering.
- “Exchanging yourself with others” is giving your own happiness to others and taking their suffering upon yourself.
- “Considering others as more important than yourself” means putting aside your own benefit and working to bring benefit to others.

The eight wholesome and unwholesome actions consist of four wholesome actions to adopt and four unwholesome actions to abandon.

The four unwholesome actions are:

1. Deceiving anyone worthy of respect.
2. Feeling misplaced regret.
3. Abusing a holy person.
4. Cheating others.

The four wholesome actions are:

1. Always avoiding lies, even if it risks your life.
2. Guiding everyone on the path to enlightenment.
3. Treating bodhisattvas with the same respect as the Buddha.
4. Being honest with all beings.

If you apply yourself to these practices, you will never forget the mind of bodhicitta in all your future lives, and all the qualities of the *bhūmis* and paths will develop and increase like the full moon. Virtue!