

Three Refuges

Insight Meditation South Bay

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Three Refuges

Key Ideas:

- These are also referred to in Buddhist scripture as Threefold Refuge, Three Jewels, Triple Treasure, Triple Gem, emphasizing that the refuges are precious, beautiful resources. It is a common practice to “take the Refuges” as part of many Buddhist ceremonies.
- The act of taking refuge in the three “jewels” is the traditional expression of one’s commitment to or one’s faith in the Buddhist path. Faith here operates in its affective mode, as a positive emotional response to someone or something one has heard or learned. It is confidence that there is a path leading to the cessation of suffering and that this path has been realized by the Buddha and his followers. This is significantly different from “belief,” which is a matter of intellectual assent to certain propositions or statements about the world, of which one does not, or cannot, have direct knowledge.

Refuges in English	Refuges in Pali	Notes
1. I go for refuge in the <i>Buddha</i> .	<i>Buddham saranam gacchāmi</i>	The Buddha is not seen as a deity whose presence provides refuge. Instead one finds inspiration in the fact that the Buddha, a human like ourselves, became enlightened by developing his own qualities. One may take refuge in following that same path. Refuge may be found when one observes the growth of wisdom and compassion that accompanies steady practice of the Buddha’s teachings. Refuge might also be found in the awakened mind, which arises from insight into reality. Taking refuge in the Buddha is taking refuge in the possibility of awakening.
2. I go for refuge in the <i>Dhamma</i> .	<i>Dhammam saranam gacchāmi</i>	<i>Dhamma</i> has many meanings, but often refers to the teachings of the Buddha. Understanding of <i>dhamma</i> comes from listening to talks, reading books, and attending retreats. <i>Dhamma</i> becomes a refuge when we direct our actions to accord with Buddha’s teachings and observe that our suffering lessens. <i>Dhamma</i> can also refer to reality, the way things are. A steady practice of the Buddha’s teachings enables one to see more clearly the reality underlying experience.
3. I go for refuge in the <i>Sangha</i> .	<i>Sangham saranam gacchāmi</i>	<i>Sangha</i> originally referred to the enlightened community of men and women awakened through the Buddha’s teachings. It is a term traditionally applied to communities devoted to living according to the Buddha’s teachings, both monastic and lay. Current usage enlarges the understanding of <i>sangha</i> to include all people who study the Buddha’s path and guide their lives by his teachings. Refuge can be found in the knowledge and support one finds among these teachers and fellow practitioners.