



The object of refuge consists of the Three Jewels: namely, the teacher or enlightened one, the teaching of enlightenment, and the assembly of bodhisattvas who have undertaken to strive toward buddhahood. We have taken refuge in the Three Jewels if we have sincerely and formally resolved to rely on them as guides on the path.

We consider the Buddha our teacher or guide; his teachings as the instructions we will follow, the experience we hope for, and the realization we aspire to attain through right practice; and the Sangha as those spiritual friends who can help us move forward on the path. Regarding the Three Jewels as the source of inspiration and support in our practice, the manner of taking refuge is formally to recite the refuge formula three times.

The benefits of taking refuge are both that we receive directly the blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas in removing obstacles to spiritual attainments and that we are protected from all malignant beings (both human and nonhuman), untimely diseases, accidents, and the like. Additional benefits are knowing that we are on the right path and being receptive to the guidance of the Three Jewels.

Finally, there are certain instructions that attend the taking of refuge. Taking refuge in the Buddha means that you resolve and commit yourself to striving for buddhahood. This becomes your spiritual ideal, so it follows that your actions and spiritual efforts and practices will be directed toward that goal and not elsewhere. By taking refuge in the Dharma, you automatically undertake to give up harming others, since the essence of the doctrine is to promote the well-being of all living beings. By taking refuge in the Sangha, you undertake to disassociate yourself from beings whose actions are thoughtless, cruel, and harmful either to themselves or others. As a corollary, you undertake to associate as much as possible with spiritual friends who will promote your own and others' progress on the path.

Excerpt taken from *The Three Levels of Spiritual Perception* by Deshung Rinpoche