



**An Extremely Abbreviated Overview of the Teachings of
Refuge, Bodhichitta, and Dedicating the Merit**

Traditionally, in all Buddhist lineages, practice begins with receiving refuge, calming the mind through Shamatha practice, and contemplation of the four thoughts that turn the mind toward the Dharma, which sets the foundation for a deep contemplation and subsequent realization of the Four Noble Truths of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Shakyamuni Buddha's Four Noble Truths:

- 1. The Truth of Suffering:** refers to any kind of suffering whether physical, emotional, or mental. This is the effect of samsara.
- 2. The Truth of the Root of Suffering:** refers to the actual reality that samsara is the effect of primordial ignorance, which is inherently a dualistic perception of reality.
- 3. The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering:** refers to the statement of Lord Buddha, that he had attained full and complete Enlightenment (Samyak Sambuddha) - the realization of vast opening space inseparable from luminous bliss/clarity of all phenomena.
- 4. The Truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering:** refers to the existence of the Path of the Noble Ones (that we and all the Buddha's follow), based on receiving refuge in the Three Jewels for ourselves and the of all sentient beings. This occurs on two levels: the physical level of action and the heartmind level of vows. We receive refuge from the Buddha, our peerless spiritual guide - the revealer of Refuge, via the Dharma - the method for liberation and Enlightenment, and within the Sangha, the Buddha's spiritual community - the sublime and ordinary beings who assist us on our path to Enlightenment. We thereby receive refuge in the Three Jewels.

Since refuge requires we believe in the Four Noble Truths, the door of refuge is opened by faith. This is not blind faith but rather faith that is the result of having tested the teachings.

Three Types of Faith:

- 1. Clear Faith:** When one meets a spiritual teacher, or sees a holy image and is overwhelmed with joy and wonder and great clarity and receptivity is realized.
- 2. Desire to Attain:** Wanting to attain the special qualities of the Bodhisattva's wisdom, love, and compassion; the wish to be free from the mental and physical sufferings of samsara (cyclic existence); the practice of virtue through the three

gates of activity of one's body, speech, and mind, and the renouncing of non-virtuous activity from the three gates of activity.

3. Confident Faith: The knowledge that the three jewels are beyond any doubt, are a true, reliable source of refuge that will lead oneself and all sentient beings to liberation and perfect enlightenment (Samyak Sambuddha). The stronger our faith, the deeper our realization, for we are then able to enter into all of the profound methods of spiritual practice. When faith is profound, profound calm abiding occurs when faith is profound, profound insight into the nature of all phenomena occurs.

Three Types of Refuge:

1. Small Capacity:

This is a practitioner that receives refuge in the three jewels from the depths of his heart, in order not to be reborn in the lower realms of great suffering, the hell, hungry ghost, and animal realms.

2. Middling Capacity:

This practitioner fears being born in the three lower realms and the three higher realms i.e. human, demigod, and god realms, and therefore receives refuge in the three jewels from the depth of his heart in order to be liberated from all of cyclic existence (samsara).

3. Great Capacity:

This practitioner is motivated by pure altruism, this is the path of the Bodhisattva. His motivation is to liberate all the beings in the six realms of cyclic existence. This is the path of the Mahayana and Vajrayana. This practitioner receives refuge in order to become enlightened for the sake of all sentient beings.

Once we have received refuge and the opportunity to board the boat to the far shore is truly in the palm of our hand, we will experience many obstacles as our negative karma is potentiated by the opportunity at hand. The primary common method of overcoming these obstacles is through rousing bodhichitta and engaging in the contemplation of the four thoughts that turn the mind toward the dharma.

The Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind Toward the Dharma:

1. The Preciousness of a Human Birth:

A human birth with all one's senses intact; a mother/father/caregiver who protects, cleans, feeds, educates, and loves us as an infant and a youth. Taking Birth in the land where the Dharma exists. Finding a qualified teacher. Leisure time to do spiritual practice. Disgust with cyclic existence (samsara). No object of the senses has any lasting satisfaction. These thoughts lay the foundation for the following:

2. Death and Impermanence:

Impermanence is the nature of all conditioned phenomena. Mountains, oceans, humans, animals all are subject to change and decay. We are always one breath away from death. Even in the protective environmental cocoon of our industrial techno-society, we are subject to air born viruses, automobile accidents, and a myriad of deadly internal and external conditions. Our rare and precious human birth can be destroyed at any moment. All of our pleasures and pains of our temporary conditions. These causes of suffering motivate us to practice Dharma. Why are we subject to this continuous fluctuation between pleasure and pain. This leads to the contemplation of accruing of positive and negative actions (karma) through our three gates of activity - Body, Speech, and Mind.

3. Karma (literally, action), the Law of Cause and Effect:

The Indian Pandita (learned scholar) Vasubandhu says: "From karmic actions the various states of cyclic existence arise." Lord Buddha was very adamant about karmic responsibility. There were many heterodox views being promulgated at the time of the Buddha; but the only heterodox view the Lord Buddha singled out for continuous polemic was the view denying the law of cause and effect of one's actions. The law of karma is based on the premise of volitional action of the sentient being. Karma makes it possible for the mind to be tamed, directed toward enlightened activity, and purified of its primordial ignorance. If there is no volitional activity, then Enlightenment is an impossible goal.

4. The Defects of Samsaric Existence (Suffering, Temporality, and Impermanence):

Suffering's root cause is primordial ignorance which creates the dualistic perception of self and other through the process of desire/attachment and anger aversion. This dualistic process is the nature of impermanence therefore the spiritual seeker cannot take refuge in the transitory nature of samsara. Attempting

to do so will cause intense suffering through the constant belief in the ability to have permanent happiness through satisfying the cravings of the self. Not only are these objects of so-called satisfaction impermanent and bound to change and cease, but the entire situation is false because the independently existing self that is craving is ultimately impermanent and nowhere to be found when we search for it through awareness. Samsara is an ocean of all-pervasive suffering. The possibility of further suffering is the ornament of all samsaric phenomena.

By embarking on the journey of faith and meandering through its three types, one comes to shore whereby a great opportunity called the four noble truths wells forth. As the four noble truths are seen, there appears a boat called refuge in the three jewels. In order to gain the courage to board the boat of refuge in the three jewels and receive the protection offered by the sublime ferryman, the Awakened One, we must first drum up the four immeasurable wishes for sentient beings. The four immeasurable wishes are encompassed by the notion of bodhichitta, the mind of enlightenment, which has both aspirational and applied stages. To board the boat, we must attain aspirational bodhichitta – the wish to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings without exception. To cross to the other shore, we must row. In order to manifest oars, we must attain applied bodhichitta and all its miraculous capabilities for benefiting sentient beings throughout all of space. Through rowing the boat according to the instructions of the Awakened ferryman, we cross to the far shore of enlightenment.

The Four Immeasurable Wishes:

- 1. May all sentient beings have happiness and its cause**
- 2. May all sentient beings be free from suffering and its cause**
- 3. May all sentient beings have bliss free from suffering**
- 4. May all sentient beings abide in equanimity, free from the two poles of attachment and aversion (which means free from ignorance).**

Accordingly, if one really looks into these four immeasurable wishes, one will realize the first three are encompassed by the fourth. In other words, the immeasurable wish is simply “May all sentient beings become fully enlightened Buddhas, who know reality and are never confused; who know the myriad ailments of samsara and its remedies.” Realizing the endless nature of this wish while simultaneously vowing to never cease to benefit sentient beings, but rather to remain indefinitely for their benefit, is the Bodhisattva Vow. In other words, never to stop rowing and to turn around once reaching the far shore, rather than remaining on the paradise island. Of course, the

paradise island is really in the heartmind and so once realized never parts from one's phenomenal continuum or mindstream.

Merit and Dedication of Merit:

Whenever we do something beneficial, whether a thought or an action, it has a positive effect. This is called merit. We dedicate the merit so the karmic effects of these causes are properly related to and stored in the network of karmic conditions conducive to enlightenment (the enlightening network of karmic causes and conditions is also generally called “merit”). The oceanic network of inexhaustible merit of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is automatically tapped into by the mind of enlightenment, bodhichitta, and this is where the miraculous capabilities of applied bodhichitta arise from. The most common dedication of merit is as follows:

***By this accumulation of merit, may I obtain all-seeing omniscience
and may all faults be defeated.***

***The whirling, turbulent waves of birth, aging, sickness
and death—from this ocean of samsara, may I liberate beings.***

(Translated by Dungsé Thinley Norbu Rinpoché)

The swift dedication of merit is: ***SARWA MANGALAM – May all be blessed.***

This concludes *The Extremely Abbreviated Overview of the Teachings of Refuge, Bodhichitta, and Dedicating the Merit*. Experiential guidance through these teachings can be found in ***“The Spontaneous Refuge and Bodhichitta Practice of Ngak'chang Karma Yeshe Namgyal Dorje Rinpoche that Tames the Windhorse Through Natural Splendor.”***

COLOPHON: This was quintessentialized from Ngak'chang Karma Yeshe Namgyal Dorje Rinpoche's 1994 book “Lungta Zilgnon” on February 5, 2022 in Marietta, GA by His student – E MA HO! Sarwa Mangalam.