

The Three Refuges: A commitment to learn (Ti Sarana)

Thus, I have heard...

The recitation of the three refuges is the initial and ongoing commitment to learn and experience Buddhism as a thinking individual. It is the first step in 'becoming' a Buddhist. It is often a ceremony like a baptism, but the volition is our own and the locus of control is from us only.

Although the speaking of the three refuges occurs hundreds of times in our practice as it is a common initial chant for all Buddhists who are attending a ceremony or a workshop. You will commonly hear it in 'Pali', the oldest of languages that Buddhist scripture is in. Often the word refuge is replaced with teaching or guidance as it is more active to take guidance than refuge. Refuge means to be safe from pursuit, danger or trouble, a shelter. This is more of a commitment to learn.

It is not like you are promising to join a gang or team or something, it is a solemn oath to practice and really involve ourselves in this learning. We say it three times to really settle it. In many traditions of old religion three is a powerful number and saying anything three times meant it could not have been said by accident or just jokingly. Repetition also holds the following intentions: **request for refuge, intention to observe the refuges, acceptance of the vow to follow them.**

Buddham Saranam Gatchami...I go to the Buddha for guidance/teaching/refuge

Dhammam Saranam Gatchami...I go to the Dharma for guidance/teaching/refuge

Sangham Saranam Gatchami... I go to the Sangha for guidance/teaching/refuge

Dutiyampi Buddham Saranam Gatchami...A second time, I go to the Buddha for guidance/teaching/refuge

Dutiyampi Dhammam Saranam Gatchami...A second time, I go to the Dhamma for guidance/teaching/refuge

Dutiyampi Sangham Saranam Gatchami...A second time, I go to the Sangha for guidance/teaching/refuge

Tatiyampi Buddham Saranam Gatchami...A Third time, I go to the Buddha for guidance/teaching/refuge

Tatiyampi Dhammam Saranam Gatchami...A Third time, I go to the Dhamma for guidance/teaching/refuge

Tatiyampi Sangham Saranam Gatchami...A Third time, I go to the Sangha for guidance/teaching/refuge

What am I taking refuge in? This is called commonly the **Three Jewels** of Buddhism. There are deeper levels to this ceremonial practice as well. We can understand it a little better and deeper with this graph. In Tibetan or Vajrayana practice there is often a fourth refuge in your guru or specific teacher, Theravada, Hinayana, and Zen do not do this.

	The Buddha	The Dhamma (Dharma)	The Sangha
Externally (outer refuge)	The teacher	The way	The guides
Internal (inner refuge)	Awakening	Experiential understanding	Making use of experience
Direct experience (secret)	Emptiness	Clarity	Unrestricted experience

When you practice and study Buddhism as a philosophy, religion or spirituality you are taking refuge, in ceremony you are taking it out loud for the whole universe to realize. You are making a vow to wake up. Often in the ceremony it is lead by a monk or minister and you will receive a Dharma name. This is a reminder of your new promise to progress in this endeavor. It is related to the Bodhisattva Vows as well as the Eight-Fold Path, among others. The next step on the practice of Buddhism is taking the 5+ precepts...