



This precious human life is a wealth of resources and opportunities. We are surrounded by the Dharma teachings, teachers, and communities of practice. We have the leisure and freedom to spend time learning and cultivating the Dharma. We have all the supports and capacities that we need.

Everything changes, nothing stays the same. This means we can't ultimately hold on to anything we hold dear, but it also means any obstacles and difficulties are also temporary.

The truth of karma means every thing, every phenomena, and every experience arises due to causes and conditions. Our intentions and actions are major factors in how we experience what arises. We can cultivate the causes and conditions in our life and that is wonderfully good news.

The faults and futility of samsara are daunting, but remember that samsara is not a place, but a confused way of experiencing and acting. Underneath the confusion and habituated patterns is our inalienable buddha nature of clear awareness and responsive compassion. We can take refuge and use the Four Thoughts as a way out of samsara.

We take refuge in the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The Three Jewels have many qualities, outer and inner and deeply hidden from ordinary view. We start where we are and over time we deepen our understanding of the Three Jewels, and in our confidence and reliance upon them.

Along with taking refuge we also generate the spirit of awakening (bodhicitta). Relative bodhicitta is compassion for ourselves and others -- for all sentient beings who suffer. Ultimate bodhicitta is the wisdom that knows the empty open nature of interdependent existence. We also start exactly where we are with compassion and wisdom, and let them effort and understanding grow over time.

Reflect on the taking of refuge and the generating of bodhicitta as often as you can. The traditional Mahayana teachings suggest three times every day and three times every night. Here is Dekeling's version of Atisha's prayers for refuge and bodhicitta and four immeasurables:

SANG GYE CHO DANG TSOK KYI CHOK NAM LA
JANG CHUB BAR DU DAK NI KYAP SU CHI
DAK GI JIN SOK GYI PE SÖ NAM KYI
DRO LA PEN CHIR SANG GYE DRUP PAR SHOK

**Until enlightenment, I go for refuge
In the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Noble Sangha.
By the merit of generosity and other virtues,
May I attain buddhahood for the benefit of beings.**

SEM CHEN TAM CHE DE WA DANG DE WE GYU DANG DEN PAR GYUR CHIK
DUK NGAL DANG DUK NGAL GYI GYU DANG DRAL WAR GYUR CHIK
DUK NGAL ME PE DE WA DAM PA DANG MI DRAL WAR GYUR CHIK
NYE RING CHAK DANG NYI DANG DRAL WAR TANG NYOM CHEN PO LA NE PAR GYUR CHIK

**May all sentient beings have happiness and the causes of happiness.
May we be free of suffering and the causes of suffering.
May we never be separate from the highest bliss, which is free from suffering.
May we abide in great equanimity, free from attachment and aversion.**