

Meditation Outline for the Ngondro Practice of Taking Refuge

Extensive Visualization from the *Jor Cho Puja*

Before me amidst an ocean of Samantabhadra offerings, in the middle of a spacious throne of precious gems, is a (smaller) radiant, jeweled throne. On cushions of variegated lotus, sun and moon is my root spiritual mentor in the aspect of Shakyamuni Buddha. His body is of pure gold radiant light and is adorned with a crown protrusion. The Buddha's left hand is in the gesture of meditation and his right hand in the earth-touching gesture. He sits in the vajra cross-legged position, wearing the three brilliant saffron robes. Rays brighter than the sun radiate from his body in the ten directions. Eyes never tire of his resplendent form with its perfect, vivid signs and marks. Ears never tire of his enchanting speech with its sixty melodies. His vast and profound mind is a treasure of knowledge and love whose depth is beyond measure. Free from all stains of imperfection, he is the consummation of all good qualities. The mere recollection of the Buddha dispels the anxieties of cyclic existence and self-complacent peace. He displays manifold amazing powers, like the twelve deeds, to tame beings in countless worlds.

In the space to his right sit Maitreya surrounded by the spiritual mentors of the lineage of extensive deeds. In the space to his left sit Manjushri and the spiritual mentors of the lineage of the profound view. In front of Buddha Shakyamuni is my own root spiritual mentor in the aspect of giving teachings, surrounded by the spiritual mentors with whom I have a Dharma connection, seated upon cushions of lotus, sun and moon.

In the space behind Buddha Shakyamuni, sit Vajradhara, victorious lord of myriad tantras, surrounded by the lineage of spiritual mentors of the blessing of the practice. Beyond these are the meditational deities, Buddhas, bodhisattvas, hearer arhats and solitary-realizer arhats, dakas, dakinis, Dharma protectors, and the four directional protectors in innumerable peaceful and forceful aspects on their respective seats.

On either side of the lineage spiritual mentors who conferred empowerment, teaching and instructions of the Vinaya, Sutra and Abhidharma are splendid stands with their teachings of the holy Dharma, represented by brilliantly radiant texts. Thus all space is filled with objects of refuge.

Surrounding me are gathered all beings of the six realms, overwhelmed by the various difficulties and sufferings of samsara. In the face of such constantly recurring problems, we seek the protection and guidance of the spiritual mentors and the Three Jewels.

Simple Visualization

Visualize Shakyamuni Buddha in the center, surrounded by all the spiritual mentors, deities, Buddhas (1000 Buddhas of the fortunate eon, 7 Medicine Buddhas, 35 confession Buddhas, etc.), bodhisattva, arhats, dakas and dakinis, and protectors. Or, simply imagine Shakyamuni Buddha. See the Buddha as the embodiment of all the spiritual mentors, all the Buddhas, all the Dharma, all the Sangha. Or think Shakyamuni Buddha's body is the Sangha, his speech is the Dharma, and his mind is all the Buddhas.

Refuge

Namo Gurubhya.

Namo Buddhaya.

Namo Dharmaya.

Namo Sanghaya. (3x)

Refuge and Bodhicitta

I take refuge until I have awakened in the Buddhas, the Dharma and the Sangha. By the merit I create by engaging in generosity and the other far-reaching practices, I will attain Buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings. (3x)

The Four Immeasurables

May all sentient beings have happiness and its causes.

May all sentient beings be free of suffering and its causes.

May all sentient beings not be separated from sorrowless bliss.

May all sentient beings abide in equanimity, free of bias, attachment and anger.

Seven Limb Prayer

Reverently I prostrate with my body, speech and mind,

And present clouds of every type of offering, actual and mentally transformed.

I confess all my destructive actions accumulated since beginningless time,

And rejoice in the virtues of all holy and ordinary beings.

Please remain until cyclic existence ends,

And turn the wheel of Dharma for sentient beings.

I dedicate all the virtues of myself and others to the great awakening.

Mandala Offering

This ground, anointed with perfume, flowers strewn,

Mount Meru, four lands, sun and moon,

Imagined as a Buddha land and offered to you.

May all beings enjoy this pure land.

The objects of attachment, aversion and ignorance – friends, enemies and strangers, my body, wealth and enjoyments – I offer these without any sense of loss. Please accept them with pleasure, and inspire me and others to be free from the three poisonous attitudes.

Idam guru ratna mandala kam nirya tayami

Mantra Recitation

To do the Ngondro practice: Recite the refuge formula—*Namo Gurubhya. Namō Buddhaya, Namō Dharmaya, Namō Sanghaya*—111,111 times. You can recite all four in sequence, but it's recommended to complete one refuge object at a time, for example completing 111,111 *Namō Buddhaya* before moving onto *Namō Dharmaya*, etc. Ven. Chodron recommends reciting *Namō Gurubhya* last.

If you choose to recite the mantra for one refuge object at a time, conclude your recitation by reciting all four. If you do a complete mala (108) and you can add these to your mantra count.

As a daily practice: Recite the refuge formula as many times as you wish.

Absorption

Visualize that all the objects of the merit field dissolve into light and absorb into the central figure of the Buddha. The Buddha then comes to crown of your head, melts into light and dissolves into you. Your body, speech, and mind become inseparable from those of the Buddha. (Meditate)

Dedication of Merit

Due to this merit may we soon
Attain the awakened state of Guru Buddha,
That we may be able to liberate
All sentient beings from their sufferings.

May the precious bodhi mind
Not yet born arise and grow.
May that born have no decline,
But increase forever more.

**

Mantra Recitation Visualization

In the following visualizations, the flowing of the light and nectar and the purification are similar. First focus on white light flowing into you and others, purifying all negativities. Then visualize yellow light flowing into you and others, bringing the inspiration, blessings and qualities of that particular refuge object. Feel that you have come under the protection and guidance of that refuge object.

There are different ways to visualize the flow of light and nectar from the holy body into you:

1. There is a pipe made of light and nectar flows through it
2. There is a wire made of light and the drops of nectar run along it
3. There is a rain of light and nectar.

Namo Gurubhya. I take refuge in the spiritual mentors (gurus).

Reciting this as many times as possible, imagine the blessings and inspiration of the spiritual mentors' body, speech, mind and enlightening influence flowing from Shakyamuni Buddha and the spiritual mentors around him in the aspect of five-colored light and nectar. These enter the body and mind of yourself and all others. All negativities created since beginningless time, particularly those of endangering the life of your spiritual mentors, disregarding their instructions and advice, disturbing their minds, criticizing them, misappropriating their belongings, getting angry at them, speaking harshly to them—in short all negativities committed in relation to the spiritual mentors as well as resultant sicknesses and harms leave from your orifices and pores in the form of filthy liquid. Imagine that they fall into the upturned open mouth of the lord of death who is then completely satisfied. His mouth is sealed by a double vajra and he returns to his place beneath the earth. Feel that you and all others come under the protection of the spiritual mentors.

Namo Buddhaya. I take refuge in the Buddhas.

While reciting this, imagine radiant light and nectar flowing from the bodies of all the Buddhas and meditational deities into you and all others. Thus all negativities committed since beginningless time, particularly those of criticizing the Buddhas, taking refuge in worldly gods, seeing paintings and statues just as material objects, putting them on the floor, putting things on top of statues, destroying Buddha statues and stupas, selling statues simply for business, stealing offerings made to the Buddha, and criticizing the Buddha or the Buddha's body (rather than the artistry that depicts it)—in short, all negativities committed in relation to the Buddha are discharged from your orifices and pores in the

form of filthy liquid. This enters the wide-open mouth of the lord of death and he is satisfied. Think that you and all beings come under the protection of the Buddhas.

Namo Dharmaya. I take refuge in the Dharma.

While saying this, imagine radiant light and nectar flowing from the Dharma (in the form of the texts on the stands near each spiritual mentor) and entering the body and mind of yourself and all beings. Thus all negative actions committed since beginningless time, particularly those of wrong views, abandoning the Dharma, criticizing Buddha's teachings or other Buddhist traditions, buying and selling scriptures simply for business, disrespecting the texts (for example, putting them in low or dirty places, putting things on top of them, putting them on the floor), throwing Dharma materials in the garbage (burn or recycle printed material instead)— in short, all negativities committed in relation to the Dharma that could result in sickness, harm and obstacles are discharged from your orifices and pores in the form of filthy liquid. They go into the gapping mouth of the lord of death and he is completely satisfied. Think that you and all others come under the protection of the Dharma.

Namo Sanghaya. I take refuge in the Sangha.

While reciting this, imagine radiant light and nectar flowing from the bodhisattvas, arhats, dakas, dakinis and Dharma protectors into the body and mind of you and all beings. All negative actions committed since beginningless time, particularly misbehavior related to the Sangha such as criticizing them, causing disunity amongst the sangha, misappropriating donations, using sangha property without asking permission, stealing sangha property, giving sangha property to personal friends without permission, not using donations to the sangha for the purpose intended by the donor, discouraging people from offering to the sangha when they have already decided to do so, slandering the sangha, spitting or littering in a monastery or temple—in short, all negativities created in relation to the sangha come out from your orifices and pores in the form of filthy liquid. This enters the mouth of the lord of death and satisfies him. You and all beings come under the protection of the Sangha.

Things to Think About While Reciting the Refuge

What does taking refuge mean? What is the relationship between taking refuge and trusting something/someone? Does refuge entail joining a religious institution?

Why are you taking refuge? What is it that motivates you?

What are you taking refuge in? What are Buddha, Dharma, Sangha? Why are they worthy objects of refuge? What are the causal and resultant refuges?

What did you take refuge in before? What is the difference between taking refuge in material possessions, friends, image, status, etc. and taking refuge in the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha?

What are the advantages of taking refuge? How does it help you grow?

What is the purpose of having spiritual mentors? How do you choose them? How can you use the relationship with your teachers to enrich your practice? What does it mean to have a good relationship with them, and how can you create and enhance this? What are some beneficial ways of handling difficulties that may arise in your relationship with your mentors?

What would your life be like if you had not met the Dharma? What effect would that have had on how you died and your future life? How has meeting the Dharma enriched your present life and created positive potential for your future lives? How has meeting the Dharma affected your ability to be liberated from cyclic existence and to become fully enlightened? How have spiritual mentors, the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha influenced and helped you?

How does taking refuge change the way you feel about your spiritual practice? your life? your goals and purpose? your priorities?

What effect does reciting the refuge over and over again have on you?

Is there anything you feel uncomfortable with when taking refuge? If so, try to identify what the doubts are and where they come from.

How do you feel about the religion or values you were taught when you were young? How did they help you? What things do you now disagree with? What are some ways you can make peace with your religious upbringing?

Do you feel comfortable talking to other people—Buddhists and non-Buddhists—about your refuge and choice of spiritual paths? What causes those feelings of comfort or discomfort?

How does taking refuge change your attitudes and your behavior in daily life? How do you want to practice now? What can help you practice in this way?

How can you deepen your refuge?

Suggested reading: the section on refuge in the lamrim books. Also, you may want to discuss some of these questions with Dharma friends and share perspectives on refuge.