

The practice of taking refuge is an age old practice that was taught by the Buddha. I have adapted it to be an aid to process thoughts and feelings that arise in us, in particular the more difficult and uncomfortable ones.

1. Taking Refuge in Amida Buddha

Step one - Bring to mind a compassionate and loving presence. For Pure Land Buddhists, this presence is called Amida.

Step two - Breathe in the air that is filled with this love and compassion and imagine it entering your nose and your body. Breathe out the feelings that you are in touch with, and say that these thoughts and feelings are not mine. I am not these thoughts and feelings. Whatever you are thinking or feeling is received and welcomed and accepted by Amida Buddha. Whatever we are feeling, even if it is shame or guilt, embarrassment or disappointment in ourselves, as we breathe in and take refuge, we can imagine that the voice of compassion is saying, 'it's okay, there is nothing wrong with you, you are still loved.'

2. Taking Refuge in the Buddha

Step three - Bring to mind the teachings of the Buddha. There are many different teachings, but the main ones are that I am not my thoughts and feelings, and this too shall pass.

Step four - Imagine yourself as a plant and that the feelings or thoughts are like rain that will provide the water that you need to grow. Whatever feelings or thoughts you are having, allow them to be there by saying, may I accept that I am feeling Or thinking And that they are raining down on the plant and then going into the ground and say to yourself, 'I am okay and these thoughts or feelings will pass.'

3. Taking Refuge in the Dharma

Step five - Feel the contact between you and the support under you, whether it is a chair, or cushion and the ground under your feet. Notice how you are holding your body.

Step six - Relax your body and allow yourself to feel your weight as you relax some more, sinking into the chair or cushion and imagining that the weight that you are carrying is now going into that support.

4. Taking Refuge in the Sangha

Step seven - Think of someone you know. Imagine that they have been through something difficult and challenging, are feeling and thinking negative thoughts about themselves and are feeling sad and upset.

Step eight - Take some time to think what the compassionate and loving voice would say to them. Now imagine that they are saying the same thing to you and are wishing that you may be well and free from suffering.

5. Taking Refuge in the Pure Land

Step nine - Imagine a place that is peaceful, calm, and welcoming. Imagine that there are others there who are warm and kind to you.

Step ten - Imagine that they are saying that you are accepted just as you are and they also experience the same thoughts and feelings as you. Imagine that they have brought you all the things that you wish you had, whether it be qualities such as patience, joy, equanimity, or compassion, or food and shelter.