



Open Heart, Clear Mind

An Introduction to the Buddha's Teachings

Thubten Chodron

Foreword by
His Holiness the Dalai Lama

"Presents a clear and complete survey of the teachings of the Buddha. . . .
Will help many on the open path of meditation and in dealing with the
challenges of everyday life." — Thich Nhat Hanh

STUDY GUIDE

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OPEN HEART, CLEAR MIND

INTRODUCTION

This study guide is based on notes from an introductory course on Buddhism taught by Venerable Thubten Chodron. All referenced readings are from *Open Heart, Clear Mind* by Ven. Chodron, published by Snow Lion. The book and study guide offer a foundational understanding of Buddhism in an accessible style. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama states in the 'Forward' to the book: *These teachings are both subtle and profound, but it is very important that they are made accessible in a way that people can actually put them into practice and derive real benefit from them. I am sure this book will... prove helpful to general readers, especially those who have little previous acquaintance with Buddhism.*

I. MEDITATION AND THE BUDDHIST APPROACH

Reading: *Open Heart, Clear Mind*: I and V, 6

To develop to our fullest potential and help others most effectively, we must identify and subdue our own shortcomings, recognize and nourish our good qualities--that is, to develop our compassion, wisdom and skill, and become a fully enlightened Buddha. For this reason, we will meditate.

To receive full benefit from these teachings, you may wish to recite and contemplate some prayers to prepare your mind and to cultivate an attitude of love and compassion for others. Try to meditate each day, preferably at the same time. Set aside a quiet and tidy area in your home for meditation. The morning is better because the mind is fresher, but some people prefer the evening. Just as nourishing our body every day is important and we take time to eat, nourishing ourselves spiritually is also essential. Consistency is important, and on the days when you feel lazy or rushed, some self-discipline may be necessary. Make your sessions moderate in length, so that when you end, you feel refreshed. You can gradually extend them. Sit in the meditation position as described on page 169. If you are uncomfortable sitting cross-legged, you may sit in a chair.

Cultivate love and compassion for others

Begin each session by contemplating the Four Immeasurables and an altruistic intention:

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.

Shakyamuni Buddha mantra

You may also wish to chant the Buddha's mantra a few times to settle the mind:

Tayata om muni muni maha muniye soha.

Mindfulness of breathing

The breathing meditation quiets the mind and develops concentration. Breathe normally and naturally, without forcing the breath. Focus at either:

1. The tip of the nose and upper lip. Observe the sensation of the air as it goes in and out.
2. The abdomen. Observe its rising and falling with each inhalation and exhalation.

Choose one of these points to focus your attention. Do not alternate between them. At the beginning, some people find it useful to count each cycle of the breath, going from one to ten. Other people find this distracting. See which is best for you.

Gradually expand your awareness to be mindful of not only the sensation of the breath, but also:

- The stages of the breath. Be aware of what it feels like when you're about to inhale, while you're inhaling, and when the inhalation is finishing. Be aware of when you're about to exhale, while you're exhaling and when the exhalation is finishing. Be in the present, with the breath.
- The different kinds of breath. Notice when your breaths are long or short, when they are coarse or fine, when they are rough or smooth.
- The relationship between the breath and your body. Is your body more or less comfortable and relaxed when the breath is long or short, etc.?
- The relationship between the breath and your mental and emotional states. How do the feeling tones of the mind differ when the breath is long or short, etc.? Do certain breathing patterns correspond to specific emotions? How do the breath and various emotions and feelings of happiness/unhappiness affect each other?
- The changing nature or impermanence of the breath.
- Whether or not there is a solid, independent person who is breathing or who is controlling the breath.

If your attention becomes either lax or agitated, apply the antidotes as described on pages 171-2.

Analytical or discerning meditation

Next, you may want to do one of the checking or analytic meditations based on the 'Points for contemplation and discussion' contained in this study guide. When you have experience of or strong feeling for the meaning of the meditation, concentrate on that feeling, so that it becomes integrated with your mind.

Dedication

At the end of the session, dedicate the merit accumulated to imprint your positive actions in your mind:

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

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

Points for contemplation and discussion

1. Why are you interested in Buddhism? What are you looking for? What are you hoping to get by following a spiritual path? What are examples of realistic and unrealistic spiritual aspirations?
2. Do some parts of you resemble the three pots (p. 21)? What are some ways you can work with these?

II. WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH EMOTIONS

Reading: *Open Heart, Clear Mind*: II, 1-3

Where Is Happiness? Mind is the Source of Happiness and Pain

1. Remember a disturbing situation in your life. Recall what you were thinking and feeling. Examine how your attitudes created your perception and experience.
2. Examine how your attitude affected what you said and did in the situation.
3. Was your attitude realistic? Was it seeing all sides of the situation or was it viewing things through the eyes of "me, I, my, and mine?"
4. Think of how else you could have viewed the situation and how that would have changed your experience of it.

Conclusion: Determine to be aware of how you're interpreting things that happen in your life and to cultivate beneficial and realistic ways of looking at things.

All disturbing attitudes are based upon the innate assumption that happiness and pain come from outside of us. However, the disturbing attitudes aren't an intrinsic part of us. As our wisdom and compassion increase, the disturbing attitudes diminish. The main disturbing attitudes are:

1. Attachment: an attitude which exaggerates or projects positive qualities on an object or person and then grasps and clings on to it.
2. Anger: an attitude which exaggerates or projects negative qualities on an object or person and, being unable to bear it, wishes to run away or strike back at what disturbs us.
3. Pride: an attitude holding onto an inflated image of oneself.
4. Ignorance: a deluded state of unknowing which is unclear about the nature of things such as the four noble truths, actions and their results, emptiness, etc.
5. Deluded doubt: an indecisive attitude inclined towards incorrect conclusions regarding important points.
6. Distorted views: either a deluded intelligence which grasps at an inherently existent self or one which grasps at other mistaken conceptions.

Taking the Ache Out of Attachment

By reflecting on your own life, examine:

1. What things, people, ideas, etc. am I attached to?
2. How does that person or thing appear to me? Does he/she/it really have all the qualities I'm perceiving and attributing?
3. Do I develop unreal expectations of the person or thing, thinking that he/she/it will always be there, will continuously make me happy, etc.?
4. How does my attachment make me act? For example, do I disregard my ethical standards to get what I'm attached to? Do I get into dysfunctional relationships?
5. Look at the person or thing in a more balanced way. Recognize that he/she/it and your relationship is transient. With clarity and kindness, recognize its faults and weaknesses. Recognize his/her/its natural limits to bring you happiness. Meditating like this doesn't leave you feeling sad or disappointed, but balanced, realistic, free to enjoy without getting stuck.

Points for contemplation and discussion: Attachment to approval

1. Why do we seek approval from others? Why is others' approval so important to us? How do we feel when we get it? What do we do in order to get others' approval?
2. How do we feel and act when we don't get others' approval? What is the relationship between attachment to approval and anger?
3. How does attachment to approval relate to self-esteem?
4. What is the difference between seeking feedback and seeking approval?

Anger and Other Disturbing Attitudes

Reading: *Open Heart, Clear Mind: II*, 4-8

Working with anger

Anger (or aversion) can arise towards people, objects or our own suffering (e.g. when we're sick). It arises due to exaggerating the negative qualities of a person, object or situation, or by superimposing negative qualities that aren't there. Anger then wants to harm the source of the unhappiness. Anger (aversion) is a generic term which includes being irritated, annoyed, critical, judgmental, self-righteous, belligerent and hostile.

Patience is the ability to remain undisturbed in confront of harm or suffering. Being patient does not mean being passive. Rather, it gives the clarity of mind necessary to act or not act.

Points for contemplation and discussion: Is anger destructive or useful?

1. Am I happy when I'm angry?
2. Do I communicate with others effectively when I'm angry?
3. How do I act when I'm angry? What is the effect of my actions on others?
4. Later when I'm calm, do I feel good about what I said and did when I was angry? Or, is there a sense of shame or remorse?
5. How do I appear in others' eyes when I'm angry? Does anger promote mutual respect, harmony, and friendship?

Transforming anger

1. Usually we look at a situation from the viewpoint of our own needs and interests and believe how the situation appears to us is how it objectively exists. Now put yourself in the other's shoes and ask, "What are my (i.e. the other's) needs and interests?" See how the situation appears in the other's eyes.
2. Look at how your "old" self appears in the eyes of the other. We can sometimes understand why others react to us the way they do and how we unwittingly increase the conflict.
3. Remember that the other person is unhappy. Their wish to be happy is what motivates them to do whatever it is that disturbs us. We know what it's like to be unhappy: try to develop compassion for this person who is unhappy, but who is exactly like us in wanting happiness and avoiding pain.

Points for contemplation and discussion: Forgiving and apologizing

1. What does it mean to forgive someone? Must we condone someone's action to forgive them? Must someone apologize to us for us to forgive them?
2. Who benefits when we forgive? Who is harmed when we hold grudges?
3. What does it mean to apologize to someone? Do we sometimes fear losing power or respect by apologizing? Is that necessarily the case?

4. Must someone accept our apology for us to feel better? What can we think or do when someone doesn't?

Self-Centeredness

Reading: *Open Heart, Clear Mind*: II, 8-9

Reflecting on the kindness of others

1. Thinking of people you know and people you don't, of people you like and people you don't, reflect that all of them want to be happy and to avoid pain with the same intensity that you do.
2. Remember the benefits you've received from:
 - Friends: their support and gifts,
 - Strangers: the jobs that they've done and the benefits you've received from their efforts simply because we live in an interdependent society,
 - People you don't get along with: they show us our buttons and what we need to work on; they give us the opportunity to develop patience in the confront of harm.

Disadvantages of self-centeredness and advantages of cherishing others

1. How do we feel and act when we're self-centered? Do we act hypocritically or ignore our ethical principles?
2. Does acting out our self-centeredness bring the happiness we're seeking? Does it contribute to creating a harmonious family or society in which we wish to live?
3. How do we feel when others care for us? How would they feel when we care for them?
4. How do we feel about ourselves when our heart is open to others?
5. When we act with a heart that genuinely cares for others, how does it enhance our own and others' happiness, now and in the future?

Points for contemplation and discussion

1. Do you ever feel guilty for not caring for others or obliged to care for them? What attitudes underlie that? Is it really caring for others if you help out of obligation, fear or attachment? How else can you look at the situation so that those attitudes don't arise?
2. What does it really mean to help someone? Does it mean doing everything they want? What if they want something harmful?

III. OUR CURRENT SITUATION

Rebirth, Karma, and Cyclic Existence

Reading: *Open Heart, Clear Mind*: III, 1-3

Rebirth

1. Get a sense of the continuity of mind by progressively remembering events in your past. Are the same person now as you were at age 5? Are you totally different? Will you be the same person when you're 80? What we call "mind" is a composite of various factors, all of which are constantly changing.
2. Think about the logical reasons for rebirth: our body and mind arise from causes. The body comes from a continuity of physical material, our mind from a continuity of moments of mind.
3. Contemplate the stories of people who remember previous lives
4. "Try on" accepting rebirth. What other things could it help explain?
5. Since our body, the life form we're born into, is a reflection of our mental states, think of how it's possible to be born in other bodies.

Karma

Karma is intentional action. Such actions leave imprints on our mindstreams that influence what we will experience in the future. Reflect on the general aspects:

1. Karma is definite. Happiness always come from constructive actions and pain from destructive ones.
2. Karma is expandable. A small cause can lead to a large result.
3. If the cause hasn't been created, the result won't be experienced.
4. Karmic imprints don't get lost.

Reflect on the results of karma and how our present actions influence our future experiences. Make examples from your life of these:

1. maturation result: the body and mind we take in our future lives
2. the result similar to the cause
 - in terms of our experience
 - in terms of our actions: habitual actions
3. the effect on the environment

Points for contemplation and discussion

1. Does rebirth make sense to you? What specific things give you difficulty?
2. Could rebirth and karma explain things that previously didn't make sense to you, such as why nice people had horrible things happen to them?

3. What impact would believing in rebirth and karma have on how you looked at life and how you interrelated with the world?

The causes of cyclic existence

Disturbing attitudes and the actions created under their influence cause us to remain in a cycle of constantly recurring problems. The main disturbing attitudes were listed previously and are repeated here to help us make the connection between them and cyclic existence:

1. Attachment: an attitude which exaggerates or projects positive qualities on an object or person and then grasps and clings on to it.
2. Anger: an attitude which exaggerates or projects negative qualities on an object or person and, being unable to bear it, wishes to run away or strike back at what disturbs us.
3. Pride: an attitude holding onto an inflated image of oneself.
4. Ignorance: a deluded state of unknowing which is unclear about the nature of things such as the four noble truths, actions and their results, emptiness, etc.
5. Deluded doubt: an indecisive attitude inclined towards incorrect conclusions regarding important points.
6. Distorted views: either a deluded intelligence which grasps at an inherently existent self or one which grasps at other mistaken conceptions.

Factors that stimulate the arisal of disturbing attitudes

1. Predispositions of the disturbing attitudes: Do you have the seed or potential to generate disturbing attitudes although they may not be manifest in your mind now?
2. Contact with the object: What objects or people trigger the arisal of the disturbing attitudes in you? Are you mindful when you are around them?
3. Detrimental influences such as wrong friends: Are you strongly influenced by friends or relatives who act unethically or who distract you from the spiritual path?
4. Verbal stimuli from media, books, TV, etc.: How much does the media shape what you believe and your self-image? How much time do you spend listening to or watching media?
5. Habit: What emotional habits or patterns do you have?
6. Inappropriate attention: Do you pay attention to negative aspects only? Do you have many biases? Are you quick to jump to conclusions or be judgmental? What steps can you take to remedy these tendencies?

Conclusion: Understand the disadvantages of the disturbing attitudes, determine to abandon them.

IV. OUR POTENTIAL FOR GROWTH

Buddha Nature and Precious Human Life

Reading: *Open Heart, Clear Mind*: IV, 1-2

The nature of mind

The mind has two qualities:

1. Clarity: it is formless. Also, it allows for objects to arise in it.
2. Awareness: it can engage with objects.

Calm your mind by observing the breath, then turn your attention to the mind itself, to what is meditating, experiencing, feeling, i.e. to the subject, not object of the meditation. Observe:

1. Does your mind have shape? color? Where is it?
2. Try to get a sense of the clarity and awareness of what is perceiving, feeling, experiencing. Focus on that alone.
3. If thoughts arise, observe: Where do they come from? Where are they? Where do they disappear to?

Precious human life

Check if we have certain conditions which are conducive for spiritual practice. Consider the advantage of each quality, rejoice if you have it, think of how to gain it if you don't.

1. Are we free from unfortunate states? Do we have a human body and human intelligence?
2. Are our sense and mental faculties healthy and complete?
3. Do we live at a time when a Buddha has appeared and given teachings? Do those teachings still exist in a pure form? Do we live in a place where we have access to them?
4. Have we committed any of the five heinous actions which obscure the mind and make practice difficult?
5. Are we naturally interested in spiritual practice? Do we have instinctive belief in things worthy of respect, such as ethics, the path to enlightenment, the Dharma?
6. Do we have a supportive group of spiritual friends who encourage our practice and who act as good examples to us? Do we live near a sangha community of monks and nuns?
7. Do we have the material conditions for practice - food, clothes, etc.?
8. Do we have access to qualified spiritual teachers who can guide us along the correct path?

Conclusion: Feel like a beggar who just won the lottery, i.e. feel joyful and enthusiastic about everything you have going for you in your life.

Points for contemplation and discussion

1. Do you believe human beings are inherently bad or evil? Why or why not?
2. How can an awareness of every beings' Buddha nature help you to be more tolerant and patient with yourself and others?
3. What things in your life do you usually take for granted? How can they be useful in your spiritual practice?

V. THE PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT

The Four Noble Truths

Reading: *Open Heart, Clear Mind: V, 1*

These four truths describe our current situation as well as our potential:

1. We experience suffering, difficulties and problems
2. These have causes: ignorance, attachment and anger
3. It is possible to cease these completely
4. There is a path to do so

To get a better sense of the unsatisfactory conditions of our present situation and thus to motivate us to remedy the situation, consider the difficulties we human beings experience:

1. Birth
2. Aging
3. Sickness
4. Death
5. Being separated from what we like
6. Meeting with what we don't like
7. Not obtaining the things we like even though we try so hard to get them
8. Having a body and mind under the control of disturbing attitudes and karma

Points for contemplation and discussion

1. Birth: Is it a pleasant, comfortable process?
2. Aging: How do you feel about aging? Is it frightening? Consoling? Both? What benefits and disadvantages do you see with aging? What aspects of aging give you the most difficulty? How does this relate to attachment?
3. What is your experience of illness? How does physical sickness affect your mind and emotions? How does your mental state affect your health?
4. How do you feel about death? Do you feel your life has been complete? Do you feel ready for death when it comes?

Make examples from your life of the next three:

5. Not obtaining the things we like even though we try so hard to get them
6. Being separated from what we like
7. Meeting with what we don't like

8. Finally, consider that due to having a body and mind under the control of disturbing attitudes and karma, the above seven unsatisfactory experiences occur. How much control do we have over these difficult experiences? Can we stop our body from sickness, aging, and death? How hard is it to control strong emotions and how do they influence our minds? How can we look at these difficult experiences so that they help us on the path?

The Determination to Be Free

Reading: *Open Heart, Clear Mind*: V, 2

The eight worldly concerns

Examine how the following attitudes operate in your life. Do they make you happy or confused? Do they help you to grow or do they keep you in prison?

Attachment to...	Aversion to...
(1) receiving material possessions	(2) not receiving material possessions or being separated from them
(3) praise or approval	(4) blame or disapproval
(5) a good reputation (having a good image, others thinking well of you),	(6) a bad reputation
(7) pleasures of the 5 senses	(8) unpleasant experiences

Conclusion: Feel like you don't want to continue living your life "on automatic" and that you want to change the attitudes that cause you to have problems.

Points for contemplation and discussion

1. Sometimes it initially may seem that without attachment and aversion, there's no way to be happy. Is that true? Are there different types of happiness? How does happiness from sense pleasures rank?
2. Having compassion for ourselves is very important. What does this really mean? From a Buddhist perspective, making a determination to be free from cyclic existence is considered having compassion for ourselves. Do you agree?

Developing the courage to free ourselves from a bad situation

The eight worldly concerns dominate our lives, cause us problems, and make us waste our potential. They arise easily when we think only of the happiness of this life. Reflecting on impermanence and death enlarges our perspective and helps us set our priorities wisely. This, in turn, enables us to turn our attention away from the eight worldly concerns to more important activities, such as cultivating compassion and wisdom.

Meditation on impermanence is discussed on page 138. In addition, the following meditations may help you clarify your priorities so that you make your life most worthwhile and meaningful.

The nine point death meditation

1. Death is inevitable, definite
 - a. Nothing can prevent our eventually dying
 - b. Our life span can't be extended when it is time for us to die and with each passing moment we approach death.
 - c. We will die even if we have not had time to practice Dharma.

Conclusion: We must practice the Dharma

2. The time of death is uncertain
 - a. In general there is no certainty of lifespan in our world
 - b. There are more chances of dying and less of remaining alive
 - c. Our body is extremely fragile

Conclusion: We will practice Dharma continually beginning now.

3. Nothing else can help at the time of death except the Dharma
 - a. Wealth is of no help.
 - b. Friends and relatives are of no help.
 - c. Not even our body is of any help.

Conclusion: We will practice purely.

Imagining our death meditation

1. Imagine your death: Where you were, how you were dying, your feelings, the reactions of friends and family.
2. Ask yourself, "What do I feel good about having done in my life? What has been worthwhile? What do I have regrets about?"
3. Also ask yourself, "Given that I will die one day, what is important in my life? What do I want to do and to avoid doing while I'm alive? What can I do to prepare for death?"

Conclusion: Have a sense of the certainty of your death and the importance of making your life meaningful. Make specific conclusions about what you want to do and to avoid doing from now on.

Ethics

Reading: *Open Heart, Clear Mind*: V, 3

The ten destructive actions

Reflect on which destructive actions you have done. Understand how you got involved in them, what their immediate and long-term results are. Although we may regret many things we've done, these can be purified and a sense of relief arises from being honest with ourselves.

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. killing | 6. harsh words |
| 2. stealing | 7. idle talk |
| 3. unwise sexual behavior | 8. coveting others' things |
| 4. lying | 9. maliciousness |
| 5. divisive speech | 10. wrong views |

Conclusion: Be aware of your inner potential and how you've abused or ignored it in the past. Resolve to put your energy in constructive directions and to avoid acting in ways that harm yourself and others.

Four opponent powers for purification

Being aware of the results of your destructive actions, develop a strong wish to purify them by the four opponent powers:

1. Regret (not guilt!) Not rationalizing or denying our mistakes, but being honest with ourselves in the presence of the Buddhas.
2. Repairing the relationship: taking refuge and generating altruism
3. Determining not to do that action again in the future
4. Remedial behavior: community service, spiritual practice, etc.

Doing these repeatedly can purify the karmic imprints of our destructive actions and can relieve the psychological heaviness of guilt.

Points for contemplation and discussion

1. What is guilt? Where does it come from?
2. What is the difference between regret and guilt?
3. How can we free ourselves from guilt?

Nurturing Altruism: Developing a Kind Heart

Reading: *Open Heart, Clear Mind*: V, 4

The kindness of others

To develop our sense of being interconnected with all others and being the recipient of much kindness from them, contemplate:

1. All beings have been our parents and dear ones. We've had strong, close relationships with all others at some time during our infinite previous lives.
2. As our parents or close friends, they've been extremely kind to us. Think specifically about the kindness of those who took care of you as a child.
3. We've received incalculable benefit and help from others in this lifetime. Contemplate:
 - the help we've received from friends and relatives: education, care when we were young or sick, encouragement and support, constructive criticism, etc.
 - the help received from strangers: the food, clothing, buildings, roads--all the things we use and enjoy--were made by people we don't know. Without their efforts in society, we wouldn't be able to survive.
 - the benefit received from people we don't get along with: they show us what we need to work on and point out our weaknesses so that we can improve. They give us the opportunity to develop patience, tolerance and compassion.

Conclusion: Recognizing all you've received from others, open your heart to feel gratitude for them. With an attitude that holds others dear, wish to benefit them in return.

Loving-kindness

1. Beginning with yourself, think, "May I be well and happy." Thinking of all the various types of happiness--worldly and spiritual--wish yourself well. Let this become a feeling in your heart.
2. Spread this to others by first thinking, "May my friends and dear ones be well and happy."
3. Think, "May all the beings I don't know personally be well and happy."
4. Finally, wish all those who have harmed you or whom you dislike or are afraid of to be well and happy. In all these steps, contemplate this thought so that it becomes a heart-felt feeling.

Points for contemplation and discussion

1. Is it difficult or easy to wish yourself well? How can you forgive yourself and let go of judgmental or perfectionist attitudes?
2. What does it mean to accept ourselves? How can we do this?

The Wisdom That Realizes Reality

Reading: *Open Heart, Clear Mind: V, 5*

Dependent arising

All phenomena depend on other things for their existence. They are dependent in three ways:

1. All the functioning things in our world arise depending on causes. Pick any object and reflect on all the causes and conditions that went into its existence. For example, a house exists because of so many non-house things that existed before it: the building materials, the designers and construction workers, etc.
2. Things exist depending on parts. Mentally dissect a thing to discover all of the different parts which compose it. Each of these parts is again made of parts. For example, our body is made of many non-body things: the limbs, organs, etc. Each of these is composed of molecules, atoms, sub-atomic particles.
3. Things exist depending on being conceived and given a name. For example, Tenzin Gyatso is the Dalai Lama because people conceived of that position and gave him that title.
4. Because all people and things exist dependently, they are empty of independent or inherent existence.

Taking Refuge

Reading: *Open Heart, Clear Mind: V, 7*

Refuge: its meaning, causes, objects

1. Refuge means to entrust your spiritual guidance to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. This doesn't mean they will magically "save" you, but they will show you the ways and guide you along the path to transform your own mind.
2. The causes of refuge. Cultivating these deepens your refuge.
 - A sense of dread or caution about the possibility of experiencing suffering in the future.
 - Confidence in the ability of the Three Jewels to guide you from this potential suffering and the confusion which causes it.
 - Compassion for others who are in the same boat.
3. Objects. Knowing their qualities enriches our faith and confidence.
 - Buddha - one who has eliminated all defilements and developed all good qualities completely.
 - Dharma - the cessation of all difficulties and the paths leading to it.
 - Sangha - those who have direct perception of reality
4. Analogy: we samsaric beings are like sick people. The Buddha is the doctor, the Dharma is the medicine and the Sangha are the nurses. We can be liberated from misery by taking the medicine they prescribe.

Conclusion: With a sense of caution regarding suffering and confidence in the ability of the Three Jewels, turn to them for guidance from your heart.

Points for contemplation and discussion

1. Do we need spiritual guidance or can we do it alone?
2. How do we relate to our objects of refuge? Can they magically save us? What is the balance between self-reliance and relying on the Three Jewels? Contemplating the analogy of The Three Jewels as doctor, medicine and nurses may be helpful here.
3. What is faith or confidence? Is it necessary or beneficial? Are there healthy and unhealthy types of "faith"? How can we cultivate the healthy types?
4. How do we feel about the religion we learned as a child? Have we made peace with it? Are we reacting to it with a negative feeling? Can we see its positive qualities and respect those who follow it, even though we may not follow that religion now?



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