**How to be a good human or a good Buddhist?**

* Basically, it is by seeking refuge in the Triple Gem, observing the five precepts, practising meditation, studying the Dhamma and following the Buddha’s advice as advocated in the Sigālovāda sutta (DN31), Mettā sutta and Mahāmangala sutta of Sutta-Nipāta, and the Four Brahma Vihāra.
* In Candala sutta (AN5 : 175), Buddha states the qualities of a good Buddhist:

1) Have confidence and faith in the Triple Gem.

2) Well trained in moral conduct.

3) Have faith in kamma (one’s actions).

4) Never in superstition such as protective charms and rituals.

5) Not to seek “field of merits” outside the Buddha’s teachings.

* + The first two steps to become a lay disciple of the Buddha are:

1) Taking refuge (saraņa gamana)

* One knowingly makes the commitment with serious conviction to accept the Triple Gem (tisaraņa) as the guiding ideals of one’s life.
* Taking refuge is the entrance to the dispensation of the Buddha, Dhamma and the entire practice of the Buddhist spiritual path.

2) The undertaking of the five precepts (pañca síla samadana)

* One is determined to bring one’s actions in harmony with others through right conduct.

**What is meant by taking refuge?**

* + A refuge is a person, place or thing giving protection from harm and danger.
  + Taking refuge (saraņam) in the Triple Gem by engaging oneself in wholesome state and deterring from unwholesome state will eliminate our fear and protect us from danger.
  + By prostrating to the Triple Gem is not idolatry, but to pay respect, to strengthen one’s faith and to lower one’s ego.

**Function of taking refuge**

* Buddha explains that it is difficult to be born in a fortunate state, just like a blind turtle surfacing from the sea every hundred years. Therefore, to avoid rebirth in a woeful, unfortunate state, we need protection and guidance from the Dhamma to free us from craving (taņhā) and ignorance (avijjā).
* Refuge is not pure if it is undertaken with defiled motivation such as out of desire for recognition, pride or fear of blame. It should be taken with confidence and reverence directed towards the Triple Gem.
* A person who has sincerely taken refuge in the Triple Gem but is not capable of higher practices, he still lays the foundation of spiritual progress in future lives. It will function as a kammic link to connect him with the Buddha’s dispensation in future lives, thereby aiding his chances for further progress.
* As soon as there arises in one’s mind an act of consciousness that takes the Triple Gem as one guiding ideal, that person has gone for refuge in the Triple Gem and become the Buddha lay disciple (upāsaka or upāsikā). Hereafter, taking refuge should be undertaken regularly, repeated and renewed every day as part of one’s daily routine.

**Objects of refuge**

Buddha

* + When we take refuge in the Buddha, we go to him as the supreme embodiment of purity, wisdom and compassion; the peerless teacher who can guide us to safety out of the perilous ocean of samsāra.
  + The Buddha is not a saviour who can bestow salvation through the agency of his person. He is primarily a teacher, an expounder of the path who points out the way. We have to walk the path with our own energy and intelligence.
  + “By oneself is wrong done, by oneself is one defiled;   
    by oneself wrong is not done, by oneself is one cleansed.  
    One cannot purify another; purity and impurity are in oneself.” Dhammapada 165

Dhamma

* + The Dhamma signifies the teaching of the Buddha. It is essentially a map, a body of instructions and guidelines.
  + In Mahāparanibbāna sutta (DN16), the Buddha advises Ânanda to hold fast to the Dhamma as a refuge - “for what I have taught and explained to you as Dhamma and Vinaya will, at my passing away, be your teacher.”

Sangha

* + The Buddha’s dispensation possesses a twofold character:-

1) A path of practice leading to liberation from suffering

2) A distinct set of doctrine embedded in scriptures expounding the details of this path

* + The Sangha bears the responsibility for maintaining both aspects of the dispensation.
  + The Sangha has served as the custodian of the Dhamma and fulfils an indispensable role in the preservation and perpetuation of the Buddha’s dispensation by:-
* Seeing to it that the scriptures are taught and transmitted to posterity free from distortion and misinterpretation;
* Continuing the tradition of practice and to show that the goal can be realized and deliverance attained.
  + The Sangha who serves as refuge is not an institutional body but an unchartered spiritual community comprising of all those who have achieved penetration of the innermost meaning of the Buddha’s teachings. They are known as Ariyan Sangha, the noble community, made up of eight types of persons who unite into four pairs:-
* 1st Pair – the person on the path of stream-entry and the stream-enterer who has entered the way to deliverance and will attain the goal in a maximum of seven lives;
* 2nd Pair – the person on the path of once-returner and the once-returner who will return to the human world only one more time before reaching the goal;
* 3rd Pair – the person on the path of non-returner and the non-returner who will not return to the human world but will take rebirth in a pure heavenly world where he will reach the final goal;
* 4th Pair – the person on the path of arahatship and the arahant, who has eliminated all defilements and cut off the ten fetters that are causing bondage to samsara.
  + These eight types of person have directly understood the essential of the Buddha’s teachings. The teachings have taken root in them to the extent that they no longer depend on others to bring any unfinished work to completion.
  + By virtue of this inner mastery, these eight individuals possess the qualifications needed to guide others towards the goal.

**The similes of the Refuges**

(1) The first simile compares the Buddha to the sun:

His appearance in the world is likened the sun rising over the horizon; the Dhamma is likened the net of the sun’s rays spreading over the earth, dispelling the darkness and cold night, giving warmth and light to all beings; the Sangha is likened the beings having dispelled the darkness of night, going about enjoying the warmth and radiance of the sun.

(2) The second simile compares the Buddha to a lotus flower, the paragon of beauty and purity:

Just as a lotus in a muddy lake, it rises above the water and stands in full splendour unsoiled by the mud, so the Buddha, having grown up in the world, overcomes the world and abides in its midst untainted by its impurities; the Dhamma is likened the sweet perfumed fragrance emitted by the lotus flower, giving delight to all; the Sangha is likened the host of bees collecting and carrying the pollen to their hives to transform it into honey.

(3) The third simile compares the Buddha to the physician:

Buddha is likened a physician who can find out the cause of our illness and show us the way to cure it; the Dhamma is likened the medicine that cures our afflictions; and the Sangha is likened the attendants who will help us take the medicine.