

Buddhist Teachings on the Precepts

Pali Canon: Five Precepts as Gifts

(Anguttara Nikaya 8:39; IV 245-47)

“There are, O monks, eight streams of merit, streams of the wholesome, nourishments of happiness, that are heavenly, ripening in happiness conducive to heaven, and that lead to whatever is wished for, loved, and agreeable, to one’s welfare and happiness. What are the eight?”

“Here, monks, a noble disciple has gone for refuge to the Buddha. This is the first stream of merit, stream of the wholesome, nourishment of happiness, that is heavenly, ripening in happiness, conducive to heaven, and that leads to whatever is wished for, loved, and agreeable, to one’s welfare and happiness.

“Further, a noble disciple has gone for refuge to the Dhamma. This is the second stream of merit...that leads to whatever is wished for, loved, and agreeable, to one’s welfare and happiness.

“Further, a noble disciple has gone for refuge to the Sangha. This is the third stream of merit...that leads to whatever is wished for, loved, and agreeable, to one’s welfare and happiness.

“There are further, monks, these five gifts—pristine, of long standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated and never before adulterated, that are not being adulterated and that will not be adulterated, not despised by wise ascetics and brahmins. What are these five gifts?”

“Here, monks, a noble disciple gives up the destruction of life and abstains from it. By abstaining from the destruction of life, the noble disciple gives to immeasurable beings freedom from fear, hostility, and oppression. By giving to immeasurable beings freedom from fear, hostility and oppression, he himself will enjoy immeasurable freedom from fear, hostility, and oppression. This is the first of those great gifts and the fourth stream of merit.

“Further, monks, a noble disciple gives up the taking of what is not given and abstains from it. By abstaining from taking what is not given, the noble disciple gives to immeasurable beings freedom from fear, hostility, and oppression. By giving to immeasurable beings freedom from fear, hostility

and oppression, he himself will enjoy immeasurable freedom from fear, hostility, and oppression. This is the second of those great gifts and the fifth stream of merit.

“Further, monks, a noble disciple gives up sexual misconduct and abstains from it. By abstaining from sexual misconduct, the noble disciple gives to immeasurable beings freedom from fear, hostility, and oppression. By giving to immeasurable beings freedom from fear, hostility and oppression, he himself will enjoy immeasurable freedom from fear, hostility, and oppression. This is the third of those great gifts and the sixth stream of merit.

“Further, monks, a noble disciple gives up false speech and abstains from it. By abstaining from false speech, the noble disciple gives to immeasurable beings freedom from fear, hostility, and oppression. By giving to immeasurable beings freedom from fear, hostility and oppression, he himself will enjoy immeasurable freedom from fear, hostility, and oppression. This is the fourth of those great gifts and the seventh stream of merit.

“Further, monks, a noble disciple gives up wines, liquors, and intoxicants, the basis for negligence, and abstains from them. By abstaining from wines, liquors, and intoxicants, the noble disciple gives to immeasurable beings freedom from fear, hostility, and oppression. By giving to immeasurable beings freedom from fear, hostility, and oppression, he himself will enjoy immeasurable freedom from fear, hostility, and oppression. This is the fifth of those great gifts and the eighth stream of merit.

“These, monks, are the eight streams of merit, streams of the wholesome, nourishments of happiness, which are heavenly, ripening in happiness, conducive to heaven, and which lead to whatever is wished for, loved, and agreeable, to one’s welfare and happiness.

Traditional Buddhist Precepts

A disciple of buddha does not kill
A disciple of buddha does not take what is not given
A disciple of buddha does not misuse sexuality
A disciple of buddha does not lie
A disciple of buddha does not intoxicate mind or body of self or others
A disciple of buddha does not speak of the faults of others
A disciple of buddha does not praise self at the expense of others
A disciple of buddha is not possessive of anything, especially the dharma
A disciple of buddha does not harbor ill will
A disciple of buddha does not disparage the Triple Treasure

From the Brahma-Net (Mahayana) Sutra

The Ten Major Precepts

The Buddhas said to his disciples, "There are ten major Bodhisattva precepts. If one receives the precepts but fails to recite them, he is not a Bodhisattva, nor is he a seed of Buddhahood. I, too, recite these precepts.

"All Bodhisattvas have studied them in the past, will study in the future, and are studying them now. I have explained the main characteristics of the Bodhisattva precepts. You should study and observe them with all your heart."

The Buddha continued:

1. First Major Precept

On Killing

A disciple of the Buddha shall not himself kill, encourage others to kill, kill by expedient means, praise killing, rejoice at witnessing killing, or kill through incantation or deviant mantras. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of killing, and shall not intentionally kill any living creature.

As a Buddha's disciple, he ought to nurture a mind of compassion and filial piety, always devising expedient means to rescue and protect all beings. If instead, he fails to restrain himself and kills sentient beings without mercy, he commits a Parajika (major) offense.

2. Second Major Precept

On Stealing

A disciple of the Buddha must not himself steal or

Diane Rizzetto's Precepts

I take up the way of speaking truthfully
I take up the way of speaking of others with openness and possibility
I take up the way of meeting others on equal ground
I take up the way of cultivating a clear mind
I take up the way of taking only what is freely given and giving freely all that I can
I take up the way of engaging in sexual intimacy respectfully and with an open heart
I take up the way of letting go of anger
I take up the way of supporting life

encourage others to steal, steal by expedient means, steal by means of incantation or deviant mantras. He should not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of stealing. No valuables or possessions, even those belonging to ghosts and spirits or thieves and robbers, be they as small as a needle or blade of grass, may be stolen.

As a Buddha's disciple, he ought to have a mind of mercy, compassion, and filial piety – always helping people earn merits and achieve happiness. If instead, he steals the possessions of others, he commits a Parajika offense. (26)

3. Third Major Precept

On Sexual Misconduct

A disciple of the Buddha must not engage in licentious acts or encourage others to do so. [As a monk] he should not have sexual relations with any female – be she a human, animal, deity or spirit – nor create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of such misconduct. Indeed, he must not engage in improper sexual conduct with anyone.

A Buddha's disciple ought to have a mind of filial piety – rescuing all sentient beings and instructing them in the Dharma of purity and chastity. If instead, he lacks compassion and encourages others to engage in sexual relations promiscuously, including with animals and even their mothers, daughters, sisters, or other close relatives, he commits a Parajika offense.

4. Fourth Major Precept

On Lying and False Speech

A disciple of the Buddha must not himself use false words and speech, or encourage others to lie or lie by expedient means. He should not involve himself in the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of lying, saying that he has seen what he has not seen or vice-versa, or lying implicitly through physical or mental means.

As a Buddha's disciple, he ought to maintain Right Speech and Right Views always, and lead all others to maintain them as well. If instead, he causes wrong speech, wrong views or evil karma in others, he commits a Parajika offense.

5. Fifth Major Precept

On Selling Alcoholic Beverages

A disciple of the Buddha must not trade in alcoholic beverages or encourage others to do so. He should not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of selling any intoxicant whatsoever, for intoxicants are the causes and conditions of all kinds of offenses.

As a Buddha's disciple, he ought to help all sentient beings achieve clear wisdom. If instead, he causes them to have upside-down, topsy-turvy thinking, he commits a Parajika offense.

6. Sixth Major Precept

On Broadcasting the Faults of the Assembly

A disciple of the Buddha must not himself broadcast the misdeeds or infractions of Bodhisattva-clerics or Bodhisattva-laypersons, or of [ordinary] monks and nuns – nor encourage others to do so. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of discussing the offenses of the assembly.

As a Buddha's disciple, whenever he hears evil persons, externalists or followers of the Two Vehicles speak of practices contrary to the Dharma or contrary to the precepts within the Buddhist community, he should instruct them with a compassionate mind and lead them to develop wholesome faith in the Mahayana.

If instead, he discusses the faults and misdeeds that occur within the assembly, he commits a Parajika offense.

7. Seventh Major Precept

On Praising Oneself and Disparaging Others

A disciple of the Buddha shall not praise himself and speak ill of others, or encourage others to do so. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of praising himself and disparaging others.

As a disciple of the Buddha, he should be willing to

stand in for all sentient beings and endure humiliation and slander – accepting blame and letting sentient beings have all the glory. If instead, he displays his own virtues and conceals the good points of others, thus causing them to suffer slander, he commits a Parajika offense.

8. Eighth Major Precept

On Stinginess and Abuse

A disciple of the Buddha must not be stingy or encourage others to be stingy. He should not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of stinginess. As a Bodhisattva, whenever a destitute person comes for help, he should give that person what he needs. If instead, out of anger and resentment, he denies all assistance – refusing to help with even a penny, a needle, a blade of grass, even a single sentence or verse or a phrase of Dharma, but instead scolds and abuses that person – he commits a Parajika offense.

9. Ninth Major Precept

On Anger and Resentment

A disciple of the Buddha shall not harbor anger or encourage others to be angry. He should not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of anger. As a disciple of the Buddha, he ought to be compassionate and filial, helping all sentient beings develop the good roots of non-contention. If instead, he insults and abuses sentient beings, or even transformation beings [such as deities and spirits], with harsh words, hitting them with his fists or feet, or attacking them with a knife or club – or harbors grudges even when the victim confesses his mistakes and humbly seeks forgiveness in a soft, conciliatory voice – the disciple commits a Parajika offense.

10. Tenth Major Precept

On Slandering the Triple Jewel

A Buddha's disciple shall not himself speak ill of the Triple Jewel or encourage others to do so. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of slander. If a disciple hears but a single word of slander against the Buddha from externalists or evil beings, he experiences a pain similar to that of three hundred spears piercing his heart. How then could he possibly slander the Triple Jewel himself? Hence, if a disciple lacks faith and filial piety towards the Triple Jewel, and even assists evil persons or those of aberrant views to slander the Triple Jewel, he commits a Parajika offense.

3 Versions of the Zen Precepts

By Zoketsu Norman Fischer | June 3, 2009

Summary: Here are three versions of the Bodhisattva precepts. The first is Norman Fischer's version of the 16 precepts, from his book, *Taking our Places: A Buddhist Guide to Truly Growing Up*. The second version is the 16 precepts from the Everyday Zen Wedding Ceremony. The third is a version of the 10 grave precepts, with commentary by Bodhidharma & Dogen Zenji.

THE SIXTEEN BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS

Norman Fischer's version

The Threefold Refuge

I take refuge in Buddha (the principle of enlightenment within).

I take refuge in dharma (the enlightened way of understanding and living).

I take refuge in sangha (the community of beings).

Pure Precepts

I vow to avoid all action that creates suffering. I vow to do all action that creates true happiness. I vow to act with others always in mind.

Grave Precepts

Not to kill but to nurture life.

Not to steal but to receive what is offered as a gift.

Not to misuse sexuality but to be caring and faithful in intimate relationships.

Not to lie but to be truthful.

Not to intoxicate with substances or doctrines but to promote clarity and awareness.

Not to speak of others' faults but to speak out of loving-kindness.

Not to praise self at the expense of others but to be modest.

Not to be possessive of anything but to be generous.

Not to harbor anger but to forgive.

Not to do anything to diminish the Triple Treasure but to support and nurture it.

THE SIXTEEN BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS

from the Everyday Zen Wedding Ceremony

The Threefold Refuge

I take refuge in Buddha.

This is the stillness, the clarity, the kindness that is the real nature of all life.

I take refuge in Dharma.

This is the way of life, day by day, that accords with Buddha.

I take refuge in Sangha.

This is the community of all being that is our refuge and support.

The Three Boundless Precepts

I vow to refrain from all action that increases suffering.

This is the intention to always practice a wise restraint.

I vow to perform all action that increases awareness.

This is the intention to actually do what occurs to us that can make ourselves and others truly happy.

I vow to live for and with all being.

This is the intention to always try to see everything with an unselfish eye.

The Ten Clear Mind Precepts

A follower of the way cultivates and encourages life, does not take life.

One who is committed to following the way lives with awareness. Such a person can never knowingly harm a single thing.

A follower of the way honors the gift not yet given, does not steal.

Everything belongs to us and nothing belongs to us; but we don't take anything unless it is offered to us as a gift.

A follower of the way remains faithful in relationships, does not misuse sexuality.

There is no way to remain deeply in relationship without complete honesty and openness.

A follower of the way communicates truth, does not lie.

Our speech must be true and accurate and kind. We make and destroy worlds with our words.

A follower of the way polishes clarity, dispelling delusion, does not intoxicate self or others.

To share spirits moderately with friends may be all right; but intoxication as a way to relax or cope, whether it be with substances or doctrines, creates confusion and unhappiness.

A follower of the way creates wisdom from ignorance, does not criticize others mindlessly.

This precept is very important in marriage. We make an effort to be thoughtful and caring in our speech about others. In this way we can love and be loved.

A follower of the way maintains modesty, praises others, not self.

This precept is also very important in marriage. Please let each other know, frequently, how much you love and respect each other and why.

A follower of the way shares freely, is not stingy. *Since there is nothing we can possess, especially others, we approach the world and each other with open hands.*

A follower of the way dwells in equanimity, does not harbor anger or ill will.

When there is anger, see it as anger; respect it but don't keep it close; try as much as you can to let it go. Try not to let a single day end with ill will between you. There is no justification for resentment. Remember this.

A follower of the way respects the Buddha, unfolds the Dharma, nourishes the Sangha.

With the taking of these precepts we express our vow to live a life that is in accord with the sacred nature of all that is.

THE 10 GRAVE PRECEPTS

with commentary by Bodhidharma & Dogen Zenji

The First Grave Precept: Not Killing

Bodhidharma said, "Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the everlasting Dharma, not giving rise to concepts of killing is called the Precept of Not Killing."

Dogen Zenji said, "The Buddha-seed grows in accordance with not taking life. Transmit the life of Buddha's wisdom and do not kill."

The Second Grave Precept: Not Stealing

Bodhidharma said, "Self-nature is subtle and

mysterious. In the realm of the unattainable Dharma, not having thoughts of gaining is called the Precept of Not Stealing."

Dogen Zenji said, "The self and the things of the world are just as they are. The gate of emancipation is open."

The Third Grave Precept: Not Misusing Sex

Bodhidharma said, "Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the ungilded Dharma, not creating a veneer of attachment is called the Precept of Not Misusing Sex."

Dogen Zenji said, "The Three Wheels are pure and clear. When you have nothing to desire, you follow the way of all Buddhas."

The Fourth Grave Precept: Not Lying

Bodhidharma said, "Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the inexplicable Dharma, not preaching a single word is called the Precept of Not Lying."

Dogen Zenji said, "The Dharma wheel turns from the beginning. There is neither surplus nor lack. The whole universe is moistened with nectar, and the truth is ready to harvest."

The Fifth Grave Precept: Not Giving or Taking Drugs

Bodhidharma said "Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the intrinsically pure Dharma, not giving rise to delusions is called the Precept of Not Giving or Taking Drugs."

Dogen Zenji said, "Drugs are not brought in yet. Don't let them invade. That is the great light."

The Sixth Grave Precept: Not Discussing Faults of Others

Bodhidharma said, "Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the flawless Dharma, not expounding upon error is called the Precept of Not Speaking of Faults of Others."

Dogen Zenji said, "In the Buddha Dharma, there is one path, one Dharma, one realization, one practice. Don't permit fault-finding. Don't permit haphazard talk."

The Seventh Grave Precept: Not Praising Yourself While Abusing Others

Bodhidharma said, "Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the equitable Dharma, not dwelling upon I against you is called the Precept of Not Praising Yourself While Abusing Others."

Dogen Zenji said, "Buddhas and Ancestral Teachers realize the empty sky and the great earth. When they manifest the noble body, there is neither inside nor outside in emptiness. When they manifest the Dharma body there is not even a bit of earth on the ground."

The Eighth Grave Precept: Not Sparing the Dharma Assets

Bodhidharma said, "Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the genuine, all-pervading Dharma, not being stingy about a single thing is called the Precept of Not Sparing the Dharma Assets."

Dogen Zenji said, "One phrase, one verse - that is the ten thousand things and one hundred grasses; one dharma, one realization - that is all Buddhas and Ancestral Teachers. Therefore, from the beginning, there has been no stinginess at all."

The Ninth Grave Precept: Not Indulging in Anger

Bodhidharma said, "Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the selfless Dharma, not contriving reality for the self is called the Precept of Not Indulging in Anger."

Dogen Zenji said, "Not advancing, not retreating, not real, not empty. There is an ocean of bright clouds. There is an ocean of solemn clouds."

The Tenth Grave Precept: Not Defaming the Three Treasures

Bodhidharma said, "Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the One, not holding dualistic concepts of ordinary beings and sages is called the Precept of Not Defaming the Three Treasures."

Dogen Zenji said, "The teisho of the actual body is the harbor and the weir. This is the most important thing in the world. Its virtue finds its home in the ocean of essential nature. It is beyond explanation. We just accept it with respect and gratitude."

The Precepts as taught by Cheri Huber

Not only the sudden perception of truth, but also an unexpected experience of spontaneous goodness, can liberate you from the shell of your little ego, and transport you from the stuffy realm of concepts and categories to the beyond. Whenever goodness flows, uncontaminated by the ideas of duty and sanction, there is Zen.

John C. H. Wu, *The Golden Age of Zen*

1. Not to lead a harmful life nor encourage others to do so.

- Inspiration: There is no separate self.
- Prohibition: No killing.
- Aspiration: To live in harmony with all life and the environment that sustains it.
- Key: Gratitude
- Vow: I take up the way of supporting life.

2. Not to take what is not given.

- Inspiration: There is no scarcity of resources.
- Prohibition: Not stealing.
- Aspiration: To freely give, ask for, and accept what is needed.
- Key: Generosity
- Vow: I take up the way of taking only what is freely given and giving freely all that I can

3. Not to commit or participate in unchaste conduct.

- Inspiration: There is no scarcity of love.
- Prohibition: Not misusing sexuality.
- Aspiration: To give and accept affection and friendship without clinging.
- Key: Love
- Vow: I take up the way of engaging in sexual intimacy respectfully and with an open heart

4. Not to tell lies nor practice believing the fantasies of authority.

- Inspiration: There is no need to hide the truth.
- Prohibition: Not lying or deceiving others.
- Aspiration: To see and act in accordance with what is.
- Key: Honesty.
- Vow: I take up the way of speaking truthfully

5. Not to use intoxicating drinks or narcotics, nor

assist others to do so.

- Inspiration: There is no need to hide from the truth.
- Prohibition: No clouding.
- Aspiration: To embrace all experience directly
- Key: Awareness. Vow: I take up the way of cultivating a clear mind.

6. Not to publish other people's faults.

- Inspiration: There are no victims or perpetrators.
- Prohibition: Not blaming or criticizing.
- Aspiration: To acknowledge responsibility for everything in my life.
- Key: Kindness.
- Vow: I take up the way of speaking of others with openness and possibility

7. Not to extol oneself and slander others.

- Inspiration: There are no winners or losers
- Prohibition: Not competing or coveting.
- Aspiration: To give my best effort and accept the results.
- Key: Humility
- Vow: I take up the way of meeting others on equal ground.

8. Not to be angry.

- Inspiration: There are no mistakes.
- Prohibition: Not to rage, resent, or seek revenge.
- Aspiration: To see everything as an opportunity.
- Key: Acceptance
- Vow: I take up the way of letting go of anger.

Resources: *Good Life: A Zen Precepts Retreat With Cheri Huber*, ed. Sara Jenkins. Present Perfect Books (NC), 1997

Waking Up to What You Do: A Zen Practice for Meeting Every Situation with Intelligence and Compassion. Diane Eshin Rizzetto. Shambhala (London) 2005