
The Sixteen Precepts

The sixteen precepts of the bodhisattva consist of **the three refuges, the three pure precepts,** and **the ten major precepts** (the ten *kai*).

The Three Refuges

The first set of three precepts consists of taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The meaning of "taking refuge" is to throw oneself into something without any reservation or hesitation, like someone who is not afraid to dive into water. In this case, "taking refuge" does not mean "fleeing from something to protect oneself," but rather to trust the Three Refuges, with confidence.

1. I take refuge in the Buddha,
2. I take refuge in the Dharma,
3. I take refuge in the Sangha.

Taking refuge in the Buddha

This means, of course, taking refuge in Shakyamuni and all the Masters of the transmission. In their awakening, they realized that all beings are Buddha, that all beings manifest the ultimate reality. Therefore, taking refuge in the Buddha means taking refuge in all beings, in other words, in our true nature, the nature of Buddha.

Taking refuge in the Dharma

This means taking refuge both in the Buddha's teaching and at the same time in all phenomena. All phenomena express the Dharma. And if we have this spirit of awakening, this spirit receptive to the truth that manifests itself in all phenomena, we can encounter the Dharma constantly, everywhere.

Taking refuge in the Sangha

The Sangha refers to the community of practitioners, our companions on the Path. The Sangha is, in a way, the presence of Buddha here and now, for he exists only through those who practice the Path he taught. Buddha manifests himself through practice.

The three pure precepts

1. Cease doing evil
2. Only do good
3. Do good for others

Seemingly very simple, these precepts cover the very essence of Dharma practice. Everyone understands them, but it is not so easy to practice them.

Stop doing evil

Evil is not something. It only exists when we practice it.
Doing evil generally means causing suffering to others or to oneself. But more fundamentally, it means separating oneself and others from their true Buddha nature. There are ten precepts for putting “not creating evil” into practice in daily life, so “not creating evil” means practicing the ten precepts.

Doing only good
Doing good for others

These precepts, like the precept of “not doing evil,” may require constant attention to our actions, while we strive to carry them out for the good of others. Little by little, through constant attention, we can eventually carry them out unconsciously and naturally. Because if we do good while being conscious of doing good: “I am good, I do good,” this good becomes a manifestation of the spirit of attachment and loses its ability to liberate all beings. If good is

The ten major precepts

Every moment of daily life is an opportunity to study the precepts, observe our mind and body, and see how we behave in relation to these precepts. For Buddha, the precepts are liberations, not a prohibition. They are only considered as prohibition by those who see them as a set of rules that prevent them from acting as their ego would like to act.
Furthermore, the application of the precepts depends on each situation; it is never absolute. Each precept always has two sides. The negative side corresponds to a forbidden action: “Don't do that,” “Don't kill.” The positive side is a source of values and meaning. For example, the positive side of “do not kill” is “to protect life.” Thus, paying attention to the precepts in our daily actions allows us to avoid doing evil and encourages us to do good.

1. Do not kill
2. Do not steal
3. Do not covet (no sex without love)
4. Do not lie
5. Do not intoxicate yourself (get drunk or take drugs)
6. Do not criticize
7. Do not admire yourself
8. Do not be greedy
9. Do not get angry
10. Do not slander the Three Treasures

Do not kill

"Do not kill" means protecting the lives of all sentient beings and not causing suffering, even indirectly, for example by producing weapons or consuming meat from intensive farming.

Do not steal

Stealing comes from greed and possessiveness. The misuse of natural resources can therefore also be regarded as a theft. But since – ultimately - nothing really belongs to us, we can directly abandon our greedy mind. The positive side of "do not steal" is "to practice giving."

Do not covet (no sexuality without love)

By sexuality without love, we mean egocentric sexuality, where each person is focused on his own pleasure without regard for the other, without respect or love for the other. Sexuality is not condemned, as it is the source of life, but it must be practiced with love and compassion.

Do not lie

Neither lie to others to gain an advantage, nor lie to yourself. With zazen, we learn to accept ourselves and not be afraid of the truth. Only those who accept the truth can evolve.

Do not intoxicate yourself (getting drunk or taking drugs)

This means not clouding your own mind, but also not encouraging others to do so. Losing control of oneself can lead to words and actions that one later will regret, or even to serious accidents. It is not only alcohol and drugs that disturb the mind, but also all kinds of illusions. Ultimately, not intoxicating oneself is the practice of awakening, of not cultivating illusion.

Do not criticize

Do not speak ill of others. Instead of denouncing the faults of others, it is better to help them not to commit them, in a friendly and respectful manner. If you want to criticize, ask yourself where this criticism comes from: is it to show off or to help the other person?

Do not admire yourself

Admiring yourself and putting yourself forward stems from the desire to distinguish yourself from others. Thinking that there is a difference between yourself and others and that you can belittle them is a symptom of a profound misunderstanding of the precepts.

Do not be stingy

The best remedy for stinginess is to practice generosity, not only in a material sense, but also by giving your attention, your time, or saying kind words. Ultimately, there is nothing to be stingy about, because nothing belongs to us.

Do not get angry

This refers to the anger that arises when we do not get what we want, the anger of a frustrated ego that can trigger violence. When anger arises, we must ask ourselves where it comes from. In all cases, compassion and wisdom must be brought into play. We also strive through kind actions and words not to provoke anger in others.

Do not slander the Three Treasures

The Three Treasures are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Not slandering them means respecting them, following them, understanding them, and living like a Buddha, an Enlightened One.

The precepts are there to awaken us, not just to correct evil and practice good.
Following the precepts does not mean condemning those who do not follow them, as this would be a lack of compassion. What is needed is to strive to enlighten people so that they may want to respect them, by striving to offer ourselves an inspiring example that makes others want to love and respect the precepts.

During ordinations, Master Deshimaru often said: “Here and now I transmit the precepts to you. Receive this little seed that will grow within you, unconsciously, naturally. It is the body that must understand, not our mind which is limited by moral, “bourgeois,” social or other categories.”