

*The Sixteen  
Bodhisattva  
Precepts*



## *Giving and Receiving the Teaching of the Precepts*

The great precepts of the buddhas are kept carefully by the buddhas. Buddhas give them to buddhas; dharma ancestors give them to dharma ancestors. The transmission of the precepts is beyond the three existences of past, present and future. Enlightenment ranges from time eternal, and *is* even now. Shakyamuni, the buddha of this world, transmitted the precepts to Makakasho, and he transmitted them to Ananda. Thus they have been transmitted down through the generations. This is the meaning of the transmission of living wisdom.

## *The Gateway of Contrition*

Because of their limitless compassion, the buddhas and dharma ancestors have flung wide the gates of compassion to all living things. Although karmic consequence is inevitable at some point in the three periods of time, contrition brings freedom and immaculacy. As this is so, let us be utterly contrite before the buddhas.

May the buddhas and ancestors have compassion upon us, help us see the obstacle of suffering we have inherited from the limitless past, and lead us in such a way that we share the merit that fills the universe. For they, in the past, were as we are now, and we will be as they in the future.

All my past and harmful karma,  
Born from beginningless greed, hate and delusion,  
Through body, speech, and mind,  
I now fully avow.

A contrite heart is open to the dharma, and finds the gateway to the precepts clear and unobstructed. Bearing this in mind, we should sit up straight in the presence of the buddha and make this act of contrition wholeheartedly.

## *Taking Refuge*

With a pure heart, we can take refuge in the three treasures. We should repeat with bowed heads, making gassho:

**I take refuge in the buddha,**

**I take refuge in the dharma,**

**I take refuge in the sangha.**

We take refuge in the buddha as our true teacher; we take refuge in the dharma as the medicine for all suffering; we take refuge in the sangha as its members are wise and compassionate.

In the three treasures there are three merits. The first is the true source of the three treasures; the second is their presence in the past, the foundation of our tradition; the third is their presence at the present time.

*At the source:* the highest truth is called the buddha treasure; immaculacy is called the dharma treasure; harmony is called the sangha treasure.

*In the past:* those who realized the truth completely are called the buddha treasure; the truth realized is called the dharma treasure; those who have transmitted this dharma are called the sangha treasure.

*In the present:* those who teach devas and humans in the sky and in the world are called the buddha treasure; that which appears in the world and in the scriptures, becoming good for others, is called the dharma treasure; they who release their suffering and embrace all beings are called the sangha treasure.

These three merits mean that when we are converted to the three treasures, we can have the precepts of the buddhas completely. This merit bears fruit whenever a trainee and the buddha are one. We should make the buddha our teacher, and not follow wrong ways.

***Having taken refuge, we can embrace the three pure precepts:***

**Cease from evil — release all self-attachment.**

This is the house of all the ways of buddha; this is the source of all the laws of buddhahood.

**Do only good — take selfless action.**

The dharma of the anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, perfect enlightenment, is the dharma of all existence, never apart from the present moment.

**Do good for others — embrace all things and conditions.**

Leap beyond the holy and the unholy. Let us rescue ourselves together with all beings.

***Having embraced the three pure precepts, we can commit to the ten grave precepts:***

**Do not kill — cultivate and encourage life.**

In the realm of the everlasting dharma, holding no thought of killing is the precept of not killing.

The life of buddha increases with life; no life can be cut off. Continue the life of buddha; do not kill buddha.

**Do not steal — honor the gift not yet given.**

In the realm of the unattainable dharma, holding no thought of gain is the precept of not stealing.

The self and the things of the world are just as they are; the mind and its object are one. The gateway to enlightenment stands open wide.

**Do not misuse sexuality — remain faithful in relationships.**

In the realm of the ungilded dharma, not coveting or creating a veneer of attachment is the precept of not misusing sexuality.

The three wheels are pure and clear. When there is nothing to desire, we follow the way of all buddhas.

**Do not speak dishonestly — communicate truthfully.**

In the realm of the inexplicable dharma, putting forth not one word is the precept of not speaking dishonestly.

The dharma wheel turns from the beginning. There is neither surplus nor lack. The sweet dew covers the earth, and within it lies the truth.

**Do not become intoxicated — polish clarity, dispel delusion.**

In the realm of the intrinsically pure dharma, not harboring delusions is the precept of not becoming intoxicated.

We are naturally pure; there is nothing to be deluded about. This is enlightenment itself. Understand this truly, and no intoxicants can be taken in.

**Do not dwell on past mistakes — create wisdom from ignorance.**

In the realm of the flawless dharma, not expounding upon error is the precept of not dwelling on past mistakes.

In the buddha dharma there is one path, one dharma, one realization, one practice. Do not engage in fault-finding. Do not condone haphazard talk.

**Do not praise self or blame others — maintain modesty, extol virtue.**

In the realm of the equitable dharma, not dwelling upon *I* versus *you* is the precept of not praising self or blaming others.

All buddhas and ancestors 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, not even a speck of dust is seen upon the ground.

**Do not be mean with dharma or wealth — share understanding, give freely of self.**

In the genuine, all-pervading dharma, being jealous of nothing is the precept of not being mean with dharma or wealth.

One phrase, one verse - that is the ten thousand things and one hundred grasses; one dharma, one realization - that is all buddhas and dharma ancestors. From the beginning, not one thing has been begrudged.

**Do not indulge anger — cultivate equanimity.**

In the realm of the selfless dharma, not contriving reality for the self is the precept of not indulging anger.

Not advancing, not retreating, not real, not empty. There is a brilliant sea of clouds. There is a dignified sea of clouds.

**Do not defame the three treasures.**

In the realm of the One, holding no concept of ordinary beings and sages is the precept of not defaming the three treasures.

To do something by ourselves, without copying others, is to become an example to the world, and the merit of this becomes the source of all wisdom. Criticize nothing; accept everything.

Respect the buddha. Unfold the dharma. Nourish the sangha.

Within these precepts dwell the buddhas, enfolding all things within their unparalleled wisdom. There is no distinction between subject and object for any who dwell herein. All things, earth,

trees, wooden posts, bricks, stones become buddhas once this refuge is taken. From these precepts come forth such a wind and fire that all are driven into enlightenment when the flames are fanned by the buddha's influence. This is the merit of non-action and non-seeking; the awakening to true wisdom.

These sixteen precepts are roughly thus. To be obedient to their teaching, accept them with bows.



This study sheet includes the Three Refuges, Three Pure Precepts, Ten Grave Precepts, and the Sange Verse with commentary by Bodhidharma, Dogen and Keizan. Sources drawn from include Keizan's "Kyojukaiman" and Dogen's "Shushogi" as translated by Roshi Jiyu Kennet; *The Mind of Clover*, by Robert Aitken Roshi; and the "Clear Mind Precepts" as presented by Kannon-do. Adapted for use at Dharma Rain Zen Center by Kyogen Carlson, with assistance from Gyokuko Carlson and Lay Disciples.