

## **The sixteen Bodhisattva precepts**

The sixteen Bodhisattva precepts begin with taking refuge in the three treasures: The Buddha, The Dharma, and The Sangha.

### **The Three Treasures**

#### **I take refuge in the Buddha**

The fundamental teaching of Buddhism is rooted in an understanding that everyone is endowed with Buddha nature, or true self. And so to take refuge in the Buddha means to trust that which is inherent. That which is beyond arising and vanishing, beyond birth and death. Wisdom and right action flow out of a realization that all things are of interdependent origination.

#### **I take refuge in The Dharma**

The Dharma reflects the inviolable law of all things, which is the self-organizing principle of the universe. It is not subjected to circumstances and conditions, or to our own personal opinions. It is simply the way suchness manifests through diversity. All Buddhist teachings originate out of this unbreakable truth. And so to take refuge in the Dharma means to merge with the higher intelligence of the universe rather than to oppose it.

#### **I take refuge in The Sangha**

The Sangha is a manifestation of harmony. It is us, a group of people who get together to uphold the practice, and to help and support each other through the highs and lows of life. It is a way to create a small scale Dharma-based communities. Instead of waiting for the world to start acting in a sane way, we take the initiative to create a loving, cooperative, and supportive environment. A Gandhi said: "Be the change you want to see in the world". A Bodhisattva is the one who takes the first step.

And so to take refuge in the Sangha means to inspire, encourage, and nurture each other's practice, and to do all we can to maintain the vitality of the Sangha so it does not fall apart.

### **The Three Pure Precepts**

#### **I vow to not create harm.**

The first of the Pure Precepts is to not create harm. This means to take on the responsibility to think, speak and act in ways that do not cause harm or suffering.

#### **I vow to practice good.**

The second of the Pure Precepts is to practice goodness. This means to be in the world as a vehicle for goodness in all circumstances and at all times. To do good just for the sake of doing good, without expecting any rewards or recognitions.

## **I vow to actualize good for others.**

The third Pure Precept is to actualize good for others. This means to transcend the small sphere of our personal lives, bridge the gap between self and other, and dedicate our lives for the well being of all creation. It is to become a force of goodness and consciously act in ways that benefit others. By letting go of the small self, living a life of service for others becomes as simple as scratching your nose.

## **The ten grave precepts**

Next come the ten grave precepts, which outline the way we actualize the three pure precepts in everyday life. As practitioners we take on the responsibility to intercept the habitual patters by paying close attention and becoming fully engaged while functioning as human beings in a society.

### **1) I vow to Nurture Life. I will not kill.**

The First of the Grave Precepts is to affirm life, to not kill. To actualize non-harming means nurturing and supporting life in a non-discriminating way. This means to deeply appreciate the net of creation with its infinite life and energy that co-create our precious earth and universe.

### **2) I vow to be giving; I will not steal.**

The second of the grave precepts is to be giving, to not steal, to examine the mind of desire and greed, and to give up one's covetousness. This means to realize inherent completion of all things, and to recognize a sense of lack is illusory.

### **3) I vow to honor the body. I will not misuse sexuality.**

The third grave precept is to honor the body, to not misuse sexuality. Recognizing our physical desires and impulses, we commit to working with these energies in ways that do not create harm to ourselves and others. Understanding the sexual nature of our bodies, we vow to be responsible for the way we express it, and cultivate respect and dignity in all relationships.

### **4) I vow to manifest truth. I will not lie.**

The Fourth Grave Precept is to manifest truth, to not lie. To understand the Dharma is to realize that everything is completely exposed and all things are of the same nature. So we devote ourselves to deeply examine the desire to lie, and we learn to courageously own up to our thoughts words and actions, while standing firmly on the Dharma ground. Being rooted in practice we vow to speak from the heart and to listen wholeheartedly.

**5) I vow to cultivate clarity. I will not cloud the mind.**

The Fifth Grave Precept is to cultivate clarity, to not cloud the mind. This precept sheds light on our propensity to act in ways that originate in ignorance. Not appreciating the preciousness of life, we poison our minds with intoxicants that drive us to speak and act in harmful and hurtful ways. Through cultivating clarity of mind we recognize and work through our own pain instead of clouding ourselves with intoxicants. The Buddha mind is originally pure and clear, do not let it become clouded.

**6) I vow to realize equality. I will not speak of others' errors and faults.**

The sixth grave precept is to see the inherent perfection, and to not speak of others errors and faults. The faith of mind says: "One has many kinds, two have no duality". To realize equality is to recognize that while appearances vary, we are all of the same origin. Our unexamined fears and insecurities drive us to speak of other's errors and faults, which lead to the discrimination, hatred, violence, and conflict we experience in the world.

**7) I vow to practice humility. I will not elevate the self and blame others.**

The Seventh Grave Precept is to recognize the illusory nature of separate existence, and to realize that self and other are not two. To elevate oneself is to operate under the falsehood of a grasping self that seeks self-preservation through some form of tyranny. By practicing humility and embracing not-knowing, we realize that there is no self to elevate, and no other to belittle.

**8) I will share generously. I will not be withholding.**

The Eighth Grave Precept is to share generously, to not cultivate a possessive mind. To recognize no fixed self is to realize that no one can grasp, and nothing can be grasped. This realization opens up the door to acts of generosity that are essentially traceless and self fulfilling. When self and other are dropped, generosity is boundless.

**9) I will cultivate patience. I will not be angry.**

The Ninth Grave Precept is to to cultivate patience as an antidote to anger. It means to actualize harmony by cultivating kindness. This is a commitment to being in the world as an expression of loving-kindness, that is seeking and cultivating harmony in the midst of diversity and differences. This is a commitment to observe the arising of anger and to mindfully transform it to compassionate action. Every day we are presented with many opportunities to face our own intense emotions, process them in the light of wisdom, and transmute the impurities into healing words and actions. To not BE angry does not mean to nor experience anger. It is a

commitment to not identify with the arising emotion, and thus, allow the possibility for transmutation.

**10) I vow devotion to the practice. I will not defile the Three Treasures**

The Tenth Grave Precept is to vow devotion to the practice. To not defile the Three Treasures.

When we fully devote ourselves to the practice, we develop an experiential and intimate understanding of why Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are considered treasures. Here we encounter again the practice of appreciation as we dive deeply into our true nature, the essential teachings, and our supportive community. Through devotion to daily Zazen and all other aspects of our practice, we become a living embodiment of our wisdom tradition.