

The Sixteen Buddhist Precepts

The purpose of Serene Reflection Meditation (Soto Zen) is to come to know and live from the Unborn, the Buddha Nature within ourselves and all things. All of us have an intuitive knowledge of Buddha Nature, therefore meditation is not a means to an end, but rather a harmonization of oneself with the source of compassion, love and wisdom that resides naturally within. Meditation is the foundation of our Buddhist practice. Hand in hand with this practice is the living of the Preceptual life. This is incorporating the Buddhist Precepts both in our outward interactions and service to others as well as in the inner practice of cleansing our own hearts. It is good to keep in mind that the Precepts are not commandments but are a description of enlightened actions that serve as guidelines for our daily activities. They are never imposed but taken on voluntarily by anyone who chooses to do so. Throughout the centuries, those who practice meditation have found that without preceptual living, meditation remains shallow and cannot fully blossom. For both the newest and the most experienced trainee, the Precepts continue to guide one's efforts and guard against self-deception.

The Three Refuges

I take refuge in the Buddha (the Source of the teaching).

I take refuge in the Dharma (the Buddha's teaching).

I take refuge in the Sangha (those who practice the teaching).

The Three Pure Precepts

1. Cease from evil. By refraining from that which causes harm, confusion and suffering, the Truth will shine of itself.

2. Do only good. Doing good arises naturally from ceasing from evil.

3. Do good for others. To train in Buddhism is to devote one's life to the good of all living things.

The Ten Great Precepts

We take refuge in the Buddha by trusting the wisdom born of the compassionate heart, and we also develop the humility to check our understanding with the Buddha's teaching (the Scriptures) and with the Sangha (the living community of those who follow the Buddha's Way). We are all human and even the greatest teacher can make a mistake; however when the Precepts are taken seriously, they provide necessary safeguards and guidance.

1. Do not kill.

I will do my best to learn to honor and respect all life.

2. Do not steal.

I will do my best to cultivate respect for others' property.

3. Do not covet.

I will do my best to learn to relinquish craving and grasping.

4. Do not say that which is not true.

I will do my best to cultivate that which respects Truth and speak accordingly.

5. Do not sell the wine of delusion.

I will do my best to learn to relinquish any form of intoxicating delusion.

(Whether drink, drugs or the emotional appeal of delusive thinking.)

6. Do not speak against others.

I will do my best to live in such a way that nurture respect for all beings and avoids gossip and frivolous speech.

7. Do not be proud of yourself and devalue others.

I will do my best to relinquish the mental habits of judgments and opinions.

8. Do not be miserly in giving either Dharma (teaching) or wealth.

I will do my best to nurture the practice of charity, generosity and selflessness.

9. Do not be angry.

I will do my best to learn to relinquish impatience, aversion, anger, disgust or hatred when it arises.

10. Do not defame The Three Treasures.

I will do my best to nurture reverence and respect for That which benefits all living things. I will not deny the Buddha within myself or in others.