

Blue Lotus Buddhist Temple and Meditation Center

**Precepts Ceremony Manual
Commitment to Your Spiritual Path**



May you be well, happy and peaceful!

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Message from Blue Lotus Temple Abbott, Most Venerable Bhante Sujatha

The Buddhist journey begins when you accept yourself the way you are, both good and bad. In this way, you trust and believe in yourself as a Dharma agent for change. When you trust yourself, you help yourself to awaken. When you are awake, you're able to help awaken others. You discover your Buddha nature and the Buddha nature of others and realize that we are an interdependent and interrelated whole.

Buddhists are happy people and peaceable beings because it is a joy to follow the path of non-violence and liberation. This is because they practice Dharma and observe precepts. They are called bodhisattvas, wisdom beings, because they cultivate a compassionate heart and serve people with a wisdom eye.

We take precepts to make our lives happy, not miserable. People have unhappy lives because they are not observing any discipline; they aren't following the normal guidelines or principles for a happy life.

Observing the precepts also improves meditation. When the mind is clear, the conscience is not pricking the mind, and there is no reason for remorse, concentration will be better. Taking the precepts is a reminder, a way of helping us to be mindful. When you begin an action that violates one of the precepts, your mind will say, "Stop! Remember?" and you will say, "Ah! I've vowed not to . . ."

You shouldn't be afraid to make the commitment to keep the precepts. You should be happy that you have determined to take steps to make your life happy. We may have difficulty making the commitment to abandon unwholesome behavior, but once we make the commitment and work at it consistently, we, too, will be very happy, very glad to have made a decision that brings such an improvement to our lives.

Throughout history, a small number of dedicated people have made a great difference in changing our society and reshaping the world community. It is my belief that although small in number, we Buddhists can make a world of difference and contribute to the creation of a global society that would preserve the ecological integrity of our universe.

The Three Refuges

The Three Refuges, also known as the Triple Gem or Three Jewels, are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, and are central to Buddhist faith and practice. They represent ideals that Buddhists strive to embody and are one of the oldest ways to express faith in Buddhism.

1. **I go for refuge to the Buddha and resolve that with all beings, I will realize The Great Way and develop a heart of enlightenment.**
2. **I go for refuge to the Dharma and resolve that with all beings I will penetrate the teachings and uncover wisdom as vast as the ocean.**
3. **I go for refuge to the Sangha and resolve that with all beings I will seek great peace and harmony, so that nothing will impede our progress towards enlightened society.**

The Three Jewels, as written above, offer us meaning and purpose.

- The first Jewel, **Buddha**, is one who is fully awake and wise, so we learn to direct ourselves to awakening, keeping a mindful attitude, being wise and compassionate in our everyday life.
- The second Jewel, **Dharma** (teachings of the Buddha), is universal truth, teaching and discipline, so we learn to direct ourselves over and over toward what is true and right and mold our life accordingly.
- The third Jewel, **Sangha** (collected people of Buddhism), is the community of ordained followers, who have taken up from the Buddha the responsibility of guiding others while guiding themselves in the path of liberation, if they are still unenlightened (*Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni Sangha*), the community of lay followers and non-followers and the community of human beings and non-human beings (the *universal sangha*). We learn to live in peace and harmony with all beings and dedicate ourselves to extending our loving kindness to all.

The Three Refuges and Five Precepts promote right livelihood and social responsibility. It is our aim to become living embodiments of the Three Jewels. To remind ourselves of this, we take the fourth refuge; I go to the Three Jewels within myself as my Refuge.

The Five Precepts

1. **Do not harm, but cherish all life.**
2. **Do not take what is not given, but respect the things of others.**
3. **Do not engage in sexual promiscuity, but practice purity of mind and self-restraint.**
4. **Do not lie, but only speak the truth.**
5. **Do not take part in the production and trading of firearms and chemical poisons that are injurious both to public health and safety, nor should you partake of drugs and liquors that confuse or weaken the mind.**

The Precepts are a form of ethical practice, they are like the ten commandments of Christianity, however, as with most Buddhist traditions, they are only recommendations and only suggested as something to strive for if it feels right to you. They are written in different ways, with different words by different interpreters, but the spirit of them is the same. The famous Vietnamese monk Thich Nath Hanh prefers to call them the Five Mindfulness Trainings. This is how he describes them:

1. First Training

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not

to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.

2. Second Training

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to cultivate loving kindness and learn ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am committed to practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

3. Third Training

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivate responsibility and learn ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of others, and myself, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

4. Fourth Training

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

5. Fifth Training

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I am committed to ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.

Why Take the Precepts?

It is important for us to understand human life. What is its meaning and purpose? What is our relationship to non-human beings and the physical environment? Is there an individual self that survives through the cycle of successive lives? Peace, love and happiness form the basis for the true meaning of human life. To make our lives meaningful and enriching we must discover peace, love and happiness in our everyday lives. The purpose of human life is to realize that all beings are an interconnected and interrelated whole, and to enter the non-dual gate of inconceivable liberation.

Traditional Buddhist practice points out a clear direction and provides guidance and support for those who set out on this journey of discovery. The Buddhist journey always begins by taking refuge in the Three Jewels and the Five Precepts. The Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) provide a spiritual focus while the Five Precepts furnish us with moral guidelines.

Most importantly, we need faith. Faith in Buddhism is very different from that of other religions. It is not a belief in God or in doctrines; instead, it is a belief in ourselves. In Buddhism we believe that we are all endowed with Buddha-nature and therefore, despite our habits and defilements, our original mind is pure, untainted and completely free from duality. In other words, Enlightenment and Liberation are inherent in us all. For this reason alone, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas among us constantly urge us to discover our true nature right now.

It is the Buddhist belief that we can always help ourselves spiritually, no matter what our life is like. The only reason why we don't is not our past karmic hindrances or past difficulties, but our lack of trust in ourselves. We do not believe that we are originally Buddhas. It is as though we question the existence of the sun on a cloudy day, because we cannot see the sunlight. Once the clouds scatter, we realize that the sunshine and blue mountains have always been there. Likewise, once we gain wisdom, we know that we have been Buddhas all along.

Often people do not take precepts because they may break them later. Nevertheless, Buddhist teachers urge them to take precepts. The reason is because there is a difference between people who commit wrongdoings after taking precepts and those who do so without taking precepts. People who commit wrongdoings after taking precepts are more aware of their mistakes and know to renew their precepts and start again. For those who commit wrongdoings without taking precepts there is no such awareness. Often, they don't even think about their wrongdoings and continue to harm themselves and others.

People who are afraid or reluctant to take five or eight precepts can initially take the first precept only. This is Ahimsa or non-violence. You renounce violence and all harmful and abusive acts. If you adhere to the spirit of the first precept and learn to be skillful you will find the rest are already present within the first precept in spirit. We must renounce violence in our life to build a peaceful and enlightened society.

Message from the Buddha...

Morality currently tends to have a negative connotation - perhaps in a reaction to earlier repressive approaches. The popular inclination is usually toward minimizing restraints rather than deliberately taking them on and rules and regulations are best thought of as being avoided. To appreciate the usefulness of basic precepts, try imagining a society without any rules at all.

How would it be if people drove on any side of the road they liked; stole what they could get away with, etc.? Under what conditions might anarchy work?

There are two main reasons for establishing precepts:

- To provide a stable, habitable environment; this is **social order**.
- Sustain a mind free from remorse; this is **individual peace**.

Venerable Ananda went to the Blessed One and on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side and asked, "What is the purpose of skillful virtues? What is their reward?"

Freedom from remorse, Ananda. And of freedom from remorse? Joy, Ananda.

And of joy? Rapture, Ananda. And rapture?

Tranquility, Ananda. And of tranquility? Happiness, Ananda. And of happiness?

Concentration, Ananda. And of concentration?

Knowledge and vision of things as they actually are, Ananda. And of knowledge & vision of things as they actually are?

Disenchantment, turning away and detachment, Ananda. And of disenchantment, turning away and detachment?

This has knowledge and vision of release as its purpose, its reward. In this way, Ananda, skillful virtues lead step-by-step to the consummation of enlightenment.

We can reflect here on the difference between guilt and remorse.

Guilt is the feeling that one is responsible for committing an offense, often connected with a sense of public wrong and impending punishment [explore definitions of sin].

Remorse involves a sense of deep regret, often connected with a personal sense of conscience, shame and sorrow. Guilt invokes fear, remorse solicits repentance. Guilt has no part to play in the Buddhist path.

Eight Lifetime Precepts

For those who wish to increase their commitment to their practice, after taking the five precepts, you could sign up to take the Eight Lifetime Precepts:

1. **Abstain from killing**
2. **Abstain from stealing**
3. **Abstain from sexual misconduct**
4. **Abstain from false speech**
5. **Abstain from malicious speech**
6. **Abstain from harsh speech**
7. **Abstain from useless speech**
8. **Abstain from engaging in wrong livelihood**

The Bodhisattva Vows

We all have Bodhichitta (Buddha nature). How do we plant those qualities in our minds and become Bodhisattvas? The term Bodhisattva was used by the Buddha in the Pāli Canon to refer to himself both in his previous lives and as a young man in his current life, prior to his enlightenment, in the period during which he was working towards his own liberation. When, during his discourses, he recounts his experiences as a young aspirant, he regularly uses the phrase, "When I was an unenlightened Bodhisattva..." The term therefore connotes a being who is "bound for enlightenment," in other words, a person whose aim is to become fully enlightened. In the Pāli Canon, the Bodhisattva is also described as someone who is still subject to birth, illness, death, sorrow, defilement and delusion. Some of the previous lives of the Buddha as a bodhisattva are featured in the Jataka Tales.

In the Pāli Canon, the Bodhisattva Siddhartha Gotama is described as thus:

- *Before my Awakening, when I was an unawakened bodhisattva, being subject myself to birth, sought what was likewise subject to birth. Being subject myself to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, I sought [happiness in] what was likewise subject to illness... death... sorrow... defilement.*

While Maitreya (Pāli: Metteya) is mentioned in the Pāli Canon, he is not referred to as a bodhisattva, but simply the next fully-awakened Buddha to come into existence long after the current teachings of the Buddha are lost.

In later Theravada literature, the term *bodhisattva* is used fairly frequently in the sense of someone on the path to liberation. The later tradition of commentary also recognizes the existence of two additional types of bodhisattvas: the *paccekabodhisattva* who will attain Paccekabuddhahood, and the *savakabodhisattva* who will attain enlightenment as a disciple of a Buddha.

When taking your Bodhisattva vows, you are vowing to live a life following the Ten Perfections, or the ten qualities leading to Buddhahood:

1. Generosity (dana)

This refers to unattached and unconditional generosity, giving and letting go. Giving leads to being reborn in happy states and material wealth. Alternatively, lack of giving leads to unhappy states and poverty. The exquisite paradox in Buddhism is that the more we give - and the more we give without seeking something in return - the wealthier (in the broadest sense of the word) we will become. By giving we destroy the impulses that ultimately lead to further suffering.

2. Morality (sila)-virtue, integrity

It is an action that is an intentional effort. It refers to moral purity of thought, word, and deed. The four conditions of sila are chastity, calmness, quiet, and extinguishment, i.e. no longer being susceptible to passions like greed and selfishness, which are so common in the world today. Sila refers to the principles of ethical behavior.

3. Renunciation (nekkhamma)

Nekkhamma is a Pāli word generally translated as "renunciation" while also conveying more specifically "giving up the world and leading a holy life." In Buddhism's Noble Eightfold Path, nekkhamma is the second practice associated with "Right Intention."

4. Wisdom (pañña)

Prajña (Sanskrit) or pañña (Pāli) has been translated as "wisdom," "understanding," "discernment," "cognitive acuity," or "know-how." In some sects of Buddhism, it especially refers to the wisdom that is based on the direct realization of the Four Noble Truths, impermanence, interdependent origination, non-self, emptiness, etc. Prajña is the wisdom that is able to extinguish afflictions and bring about enlightenment.

5. Energy/Strength (virīya) - effort

It stands for strenuous and sustained effort to overcome unskillful ways, such as indulging in sensuality, ill will and harmfulness. It stands for the right endeavor to attain dhyana. Virya does not stand for physical strength. It signifies strength of character and the persistent effort for the well-being of others. In the absence of sustained efforts in practicing meditation, craving creeps in and the meditator comes under its influence. Right effort known as viryabala is, thus, required to overcome unskillful mental factors and deviation from dhyana.

6. Patience (khanti)

Khanti (Pāli) has been translated as patience, forbearance and forgiveness. It is the practice of exercising patience toward behavior or situations that might not necessarily deserve it. It is seen as a conscious choice to actively give patience as if a gift, rather than being in a state of oppression in which one feels obligated to act in such a way.

7. Truthfulness (sacca)

Sacca is a Pāli word meaning "real" or "true." In early Buddhist literature, sacca is often found in the context of the "Four Noble Truths", a crystallization of Buddhist wisdom. In addition, sacca is

one of the ten paramis or perfections that a bodhisatta must develop to become a Buddha.

8. Resolution/Determination (adhitthana)

Adhitthana (Pāli) has been translated as "decision," "resolution," "self-determination," "will" and "resolute determination." In the late canonical literature of Theravada Buddhism, adhitthana is one of the ten "perfections" (dasa paramiyo), exemplified by the bodhisattva's resolve to become fully awakened.

9. Lovingkindness (metta)

Metta (Pāli) or maitri (Sanskrit) has been translated as "loving-kindness," "friendliness," "benevolence," "amity," "good will," and "active interest in others." It is one of the ten paramitas of the Theravada school of Buddhism, and the first of the four Brahmaviharas. Lovingkindness is a popular form of meditation in Buddhism. Radiating metta is thought to contribute to a world of love, peace and happiness.

10. Equanimity (upekkha)

American Buddhist monk Bhikkhu Bodhi wrote: "As a spiritual virtue, upekkha means equanimity in the face of the fluctuations of worldly fortune. It is evenness of mind, unshakeable freedom of mind, a state of inner equipoise that cannot be upset by gain and loss, honor and dishonor, praise and blame, pleasure and pain."

Who Can Take Precepts in the Blue Lotus Buddhist Temple?

• Who can take the Five Precepts?

Any friend in the Blue Lotus Temple who practices more than six months can take the five precepts. Those with fewer than six months of practice must have the approval of their Dharma teacher. Please talk with Venerable Bhante Sujatha.

• Who can take the Eight Precepts?

Any friend in the Blue Lotus Temple who has already taken the five precepts can take the eight lifetime precepts.

• Who can take the Bodhisattva Vow?

Any friend in the Blue Lotus Temple who has already taken the eight precepts can take the Bodhisattva vows.

Renewing Precepts

The precepts are not commandments but self-help rules and voluntary commitments. You are not expected, upon taking the precepts, to lead a perfect life. In the light of one's karma (the effect of past wrongful deeds) you are bound to repeat mistakes despite your good intentions and commitment. Nevertheless, undaunted, you renew yourself and rededicate yourself to the way of Buddha and the

precepts over and over again, much like a person who, having stumbled on the road, gets up and moves forward again. There are no secrets and no easy solutions aside from your constant resolve. For this reason, Buddhists regularly renew their precepts to recommit themselves.

Once you have taken precepts at the Blue Lotus Temple, sign up to renew them as often as you'd like.

Precept Taking Preparation

In addition to having an established meditation practice, it is important that you are gaining knowledge of the Dharma, learning how to live a mindful life, and making a commitment to support the Blue Lotus Temple and the Sangha as much as you are able. We recommend that you read to enhance your understanding of the Dharma and develop noble friendships to support your practice. Anyone interested in taking precepts at the Blue Lotus will be required to attend a series of classes to ensure they acquire the proper knowledge, focus, and understanding of the true meaning of precepts and what happens during the Precept Ceremony.

Please consider bringing a bouquet of flowers to place on the altar as an offering on the day of your precept ceremony. Many participants invite their loved ones to witness this important ceremony, all are welcome at the Blue Lotus Temple.

Dress Code for Taking Precepts

White represents purity and is the color of knowledge and longevity. It symbolizes the purity of the Buddha's Teaching and the liberation it brings. Please wear an all-white or light toned outfit (khaki or blue pants are okay). Shorts, short skirts, and sleeveless shirts are not appropriate.

If you have a **Khata** (white silk scarf), please bring it to wear during the ceremony. We have some available at the Temple if you don't have one.

Important Reading for Those Interested in Taking Precepts

In preparation for taking your precepts, here is our recommended reading list:

- *What the Buddha Taught (Walpola Rahula)*
- *Mindfulness in Plain English (Bhante Gunaratana)*
- *Buddhism Plain and Simple (Steve Hagen)*
- *The Mindfulness Survival Kit (Thich Nhat Hanh)*
- *Sitting on the Toolbox (Venerable Bhante Sujatha and Stacey Stern)*

Chanting as Part of the Precepts Ceremony

- If you are interested in listening to these chants, please click on this link: [Precepts Chanting](#)

Those taking the Precepts are required to recite the Three Refuges and their chosen Precepts aloud in the Pāli language. It is important that you have practiced beforehand to understand the true meaning and to feel comfortable with the proper pronunciation.

Chanting the Three Refuges in the Pali Language

Buddham Saranam Gacchami - Dhammam Saranam Gacchami - Sangham Saranam Gacchami

Chanting the Five Precepts in the Pali Language

1. **Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.** *I take the precept to give up killing.*
2. **Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.** *I take the precept to give up stealing.*
3. **Kamesumicchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.** *I take the precept to give up sexual misconduct.*
4. **Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.** *I take the precept to give up lying.*
5. **Surameraya majjapamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.** *I take the precept to give up drinking liquor and taking substances which lead to infatuation and carelessness.*

Chanting the Eight Precepts in the Pali Language

1. **Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.** *I take the precept to give up killing.*
2. **Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.** *I take the precept to give up stealing.*
3. **Kamesumicchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.** *I take the precept to give up sexual misconduct.*
4. **Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.** *I take the precept to give up lying.*
5. **Pisunavacha veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.** *I take the precept to abstain from malicious speech.*
6. **Parusavacha veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.** *I take the precept to abstain from harsh speech.*
7. **Sampapalapa vearamani sikkhapadam samadiyami.** *I take the precept to abstain from useless speech.*

8. **Michcha ajeevam veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.** *I take the precept to abstain from engaging in wrong livelihood.*

Chanting the Bodhisattva Vows in the Pali Language

1. **Danam parami Dhammam Addittami.** *I undertake the quality of Generosity.*
2. **Silam parami Dhammam Addittami.** *I undertake the quality of Virtue.*
3. **Nekkhamam parami Dhammam Addittami.** *I undertake the quality of Renunciation.*
4. **Pañña parami Dhammam Addittami.** *I undertake the quality of Wisdom.*
5. **Viriyam parami Dhammam Addittami.** *I undertake the quality of Energy/Strength.*
6. **Khantti parami Dhammam Addittami.** *I undertake the quality of Patience.*
7. **Saccam parami Dhammam Addittami.** *I undertake the quality of Truthfulness.*
8. **Adittanam parami Dhammam Addittami.** *I undertake the quality of Determination*
9. **Metta parami Dhammam Addittami.** *I undertake the quality of Lovingkindness*
10. **Upekkha parami Dhammam Addittami.** *I undertake the quality of Equanimity*

Dana (Offerings) Suggestions

Dana is a major practice in Buddhist teachings, it is a way of giving help, showing kindness, and practicing non-attachment. It is also a way of returning to the temple the good energy and direction that you have acquired. We ask that all precept takers become financial supporters by signing up for our monthly pledging program. Or that you make a one-time donation of \$75 or more. This generosity helps to support the Blue Lotus Temple and ensures that we can keep our doors open offering hundreds of free guided meditation sessions and many classes, workshops and wellness events throughout each year.

**If you are interested in taking the precepts but are unable to make a donation, please speak to office staff or email us at office@bluelotustemple.org.*

Pāli Buddhist Name and Certificate

All participants taking precepts will be given a Pāli language name and a certificate documenting and honoring their precept commitment. This name has a deep meaning, so please work diligently to live according to this given name. It will become part of your daily practice.