
Blue Lotus Buddhist Temple

Precepts Ceremony Guidelines Manual

Commitment to Your Spiritual Path



*May you be well, happy and
peaceful!*

www.bluelotustemple.org

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The Buddhist journey begins by your being able to accept yourself the way you are, both good and bad. When you are able to accept yourself, you can trust and believe in yourself as a Dharma agent for change. When you can trust yourself, then you can help yourself and wake yourself up. If you can wake yourself up, then you can help and wake up others.

In the process, 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. They are helpful and responsible 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.

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

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 (the teachings of the Buddha) 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 (the collected people of Buddhism) 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, 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, 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 also 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.

What are the precepts?

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.

Who can observe precepts in the Blue Lotus Buddhist Temple?

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

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. Therefore, in order 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. The first precept 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 that the rest of the five precepts are already present within the first precept in spirit. We must renounce violence in our life in order to build a peaceful and enlightened society.

This is 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.
 - To 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, we will be offering the Eight Lifetime Precepts at several of the retreats this year. The precepts are as follows:

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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

We all have Bodhichitta (Buddha nature). How do we plant those qualities in our minds and become Bodhisattvas ?

The term *Bodhisattva* (Pāli language) 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.
—Ariyapariyesana Sutta

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 bodhisattas: the *paccekabodhisattva* who will attain Paccekabuddhahood, and the *savakabodhisattva* who will attain enlightenment as a disciple of a Buddha.

The Ten Perfections: Ten Qualities Leading to Buddhahood:

Generosity (dana)

This can be characterized by 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 those acquisitive impulses that ultimately lead to further suffering.

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 perturbation by the passions like greed and selfishness, which are common in the world today. Sila refers to overall (principles of) ethical behavior.

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" or "freedom from lust, craving and desires." In Buddhism's Noble Eightfold Path, nekkhamma is the second practice associated with "Right Intention". In the Theravada list of ten perfections, nekkhamma is the third practice of "perfection."

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.

Energy/Strength (viriya) - 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.

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.

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 in order to become a Buddha.

Resolution/Determination (adhitthana)

Adhitthana (Pāli; from adhi meaning "higher" or "best" plus stha meaning "standing") 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.

Lovingkindness (metta)

Metta (Pāli) or maitri (Sanskrit) has been translated as "loving-kindness," "friendliness," "benevolence," "amity," "friendship," "good will," "kindness," "love," "sympathy" 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. The metta bhavana ("cultivation of metta") is a popular form of meditation in Buddhism.

The object of metta meditation is loving kindness (love without attachment). Traditionally, the practice begins with the meditator cultivating loving kindness towards themselves, then their loved ones, friends, teachers, strangers, enemies, and finally towards all sentient beings. Commonly, it can be used as a greeting or closing to a letter or note.

Buddhists believe that those who cultivate metta will be at ease because they see no need to harbour ill will or hostility. Buddhist teachers may even recommend meditation on metta as an antidote to insomnia and nightmares. It is generally felt that those around a metta-ful person will

feel more comfortable and happy, too. Radiating metta is thought to contribute to a world of love, peace and happiness.

Metta meditation is considered a good way to calm down a distraught mind by people who consider it to be an antidote to anger. According to them, someone who has cultivated metta will not be easily angered and can quickly subdue anger that arises, being more caring, more loving, and more likely to love unconditionally.

Equanimity (upekkha)

American Buddhist monk Bhikkhu Bodhi wrote:

"The real meaning of upekkha is equanimity, not indifference in the sense of unconcern for others. 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. Upekkha is freedom from all points of self-reference; it is indifference only to the demands of the ego-self with its craving for pleasure and position, not to the well-being of one's fellow human beings. True equanimity is the pinnacle of the four social attitudes that the Buddhist texts call the 'divine abodes': boundless loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity. The last does not override and negate the preceding three, but perfects and consummates them."

Pāli Chant for undertaking Bodhisattva Qualities

Danam parami Dhammam Addittami

I undertake the quality of Generosity

Silam parami Dhammam Addittami

I undertake the quality of Virtue

Nekkhamam parami Dhammam Addittami

I undertake the quality of Renunciation

Pañña parami Dhammam Addittami

I undertake the quality of Wisdom

Viriyam parami Dhammam Addittami

I undertake the quality of Energy/Strength

Khantti parami Dhammam Addittami

I undertake the quality of Patience

Saccam parami Dhammam Addittami

I undertake the quality of Truthfulness

Adittanam parami Dhammam Addittami

I undertake the quality of Determination

Metta parami Dhammam Addittami

I undertake the quality of Lovingkindness

Upekkha parami Dhammam Addittami

I undertake the quality of Equanimity

Before taking the precepts, participants will take the three refuges: refuge in the Buddha, refuge in the Dharma (the teachings), and refuge in the Sangha (those individuals who have attained enlightenment)

using these teachings). Traditionally, this is considered the action that makes one officially a Buddhist practitioner.

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. Sooner or later they need to realize the importance of precepts.

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 . . ."

The precept operates like the light touch of a whip that reminds the horse to stay on course, like the beep of a horn to remind a driver to stay in his lane. Some people say, "What good would this be to me? I don't like following these external rules. My life is all right the way it is." But their lives are not all right. If they were, they wouldn't need to engage in lying, stealing, gossiping or speaking harshly. Instead of spending their energy breaking the precepts, they would be better off using it in wholesome activities.

If we habitually break the precepts, we will have great difficulty when we try to stop. We are addicted. We constantly get ourselves in trouble. Not just through stealing or sexual misconduct, but also by lying, participating in gossip and speaking harshly.

Here are some words from the Buddha that remind us of the importance of precepts:

Every fool who is born
Has an axe within his mouth
With which he cuts himself
When he uses wrong speech
Sn. 657

One should utter only words
Which do no harm to oneself
And cause no harm for others
That is truly beautiful speech.
Sn. 451

Speak kind words, words
Rejoiced at and welcomed
Words that bear ill-will to none;
Always speak kindly to others.
Sn. 452

The worse of the two is he
Who, when abused retaliates.
One who does not retaliate
Wins a battle hard to win.
S. I. 162

The fool thinks he has won a battle
When he bullies with harsh speech
But knowing how to be forbearing
Alone makes one victorious.

S. I. 163

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.

People addicted to alcohol or drugs or gambling, or some other unwholesome activity, have a very hard time deciding to stop. They drag their feet and come up with many excuses. But once they have made the commitment to stop and have maintained that commitment for a period of time, suddenly they find they are thinking clearly, eating well, saving money, and developing good relations with their families and other people. Then they are grateful and congratulate themselves for taking this step.

Giving up an addiction is very difficult; a person may make many attempts that fall short of the goal. But if his aspiration remains strong, eventually he will succeed. In the same way, 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.

Who can take the eight lifetime precepts?

People who took the five precepts earlier can have the eight lifetime precepts.

Who can take the Bodhisattva Vow?

People who took the five and eight precepts earlier can have the Bodhisattva vows.

Precept Taking Preparation

Please go to the link below to listen to the precepts.

[Precepts Chanting](#)

Dress code for precepts

Men taking precepts are required to wear blue pants and a white shirt. Women should wear the same unless they choose to wear a white dress. Short pants, short skirts and sleeveless items are not appropriate

Dress code for Bodhisattva Vows

Men and women who take Bodhisattva vows have to wear full white dress. White is representative of the principles of purity but it is also considered the color of knowledge and longevity and symbolizes the purity of the Buddha's Teaching and the liberation it brings.

Syllabus for candidates

Please Read these books:

What the Buddha Taught
Mindfulness in Plain English

Chanting of the Three Refuges

Those taking the Precepts are required to recite the Three Refuges out loud in Pāli. You have to have practiced it. Chanting the Three Refuges regularly with devotion will help you embrace the great tradition of the Three Jewels now taking root in the West and help you maintain calmness, peace and clarity in your everyday life.

Three Refuges (Ti Sarana)

(Pāli)

Buddham Saranam Gacchami
Dhammam Saranam Gacchami
Sangham Saranam Gacchami

Pāli Five precepts

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.

Pāli Eight lifetime precepts

- 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.
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- 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.

Renewing the 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 in spite of 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.

Dana (Offerings) Suggestions

Dana is a major practice in Buddhist teachings. Friends who observe precepts should make an offering to the temple of **\$50.00** or more. This serves to maintain the temple and is also part of practice. Dana 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.

Pāli Buddhist Name and Certificate

All participants get a Pāli name and certificate. A Pāli name has a deep meaning, so you have to live according to your new name. It will become part of your daily practice.

Dhamma Gift

All participants will receive a Dhamma gift after the ceremony.

May you be well, happy and peaceful!
