

TAKING PRECEPTS

The Kwan Um School of Zen offers precepts to those who feel a genuine commitment to Buddhist practice. The Buddha taught that the precepts provide a foundation for happiness.

Zen Master Soeng Hyang, the School Zen Master, reflects on the precepts:

The Buddha taught us that we already have a balanced nature. We are, each one of us, already perfect and complete. As we endeavor to wake up to the compassionate and wise state, we must see what hinders us.

The instructions are so simple: Avoid evil and do good. Why can't we just write that in large letters over our beds and make sure we read it before we put our feet on the floor each morning? Then, as Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "just do it"? Avoid evil and do good, moment to moment to moment.

The precepts spell out the major hindrances. It's so obvious what these hindrances are and so helpful to be reminded of them. Read them and be honest with yourself; ask yourself to deepen your understanding of what it means to not take what is not given. What does it mean when it says to always tell the truth? Did we "kill" anything today? Were we destructive? How intimately familiar can we become with the precepts so that we can put our feet on the floor in the morning and not have to think of dichotomies such as good and evil? The precepts become, "How may I help you?"

As our practice matures, as we shed our accumulated fears and mistrust, we do realize that being compassionately awake is our natural state. We can take the sign off our bedroom wall and give it to a brother or sister who might still need the reminder.

As members of our Zen Center and of our larger sangha, we recognize and support each other's efforts. When we make our direction and vow clear together, we not only help each other, we also inspire our extended community around the world.

ZEN MASTER SOENG HYANG

INFORMATION FOR ALL PRECEPTS CATEGORIES

-Precepts are taken in a formal ceremony.

-**Membership:** If you are not already a member of your Zen Center, it is appropriate to formalize your support for it by becoming a member at the time you take the precepts. Membership in good standing is mandatory for the other precepts categories).

-**Precepts Teacher:** Precepts can be given by any Zen Master or Ji Do Poep Sa Nim.

-**Teacher's Gift:** It is a traditional custom to express gratitude to the teacher leading the precepts ceremony (who may or may not be your guiding teacher) with a small gift of money. At the time of the ceremony, you may leave an envelope containing a donation on the altar, with the name of the precepts teacher on it (and your own if you would like to). A personal note or card is always welcome along with the gift.

-Precepts Burn: During the precepts ceremony, you will receive a small burn on the inside of your forearm. This is a traditional Buddhist custom from China, modified in Korea. The burn itself is very small and relatively painless; the significance of this custom is expressed in the repentance ritual: "May all my offenses, accumulated during hundreds of kalpas, now be totally consumed, in an instant, as fire burns dry grass, extinguishing all things until nothing remains." The "instant" when fire touches skin is an all-consuming moment in which all opinions and ideas disappear, and only the direct experience of burning sensation remains. Our practice is to return again and again to each moment of direct experience. In experiencing totally what is in each moment, all our transgressions and elements are extinguished. The chain of karmic residue is broken.

-Robe and Kasa: you have to obtain your own Kasa (5 precepts) and long robe and bowls (Dharma Teacher) for the ceremony. will be sent to the Zen Center hosting the ceremony and each participant will be informed of the price when sign up to take precepts.

FIVE PRECEPTS

I vow to abstain from taking life.

I vow to abstain from taking things not given.

I vow to abstain from misconduct done in lust.

I vow to abstain from lying.

I vow to abstain from intoxicants, taken to induce heedlessness.

-Everybody can take the five precepts.

-When you take five precepts, you will receive a Buddhist name.

-Taking the five precepts means recognizing the importance of practicing, and making it part of your everyday life. It means joining a family of other people who have made the same decision, practicing with them when you can. If you live near a Zen Center, you can frequently join others in formal meditation and will find great support practicing within a community of other Zen students. If you live at a distance from a Zen Center, you will find it helpful to come to intensive retreats periodically.

-In order to take the five precepts, you must usually be at least eighteen years of age and have participated in at least four days of retreat in the Kwan Um School of Zen.

-If you don't already have your own short gray bowing robe, you must obtain one when you take five precepts. You will also need a kasa, an elaborately sewn cloth which is worn over your robe. These can be purchased from the Kwan Um School of Zen

For more information about the rest of precepts, please
contact the Zen center in:

boricentrozen@hotmail.com