
Precept Taking Practice

For New Years Day, 1st of the Month, & Buddha's Birthday (Vesak)

by Larry Reside

Updated December 20, 2011



In Buddhist countries, the first day of every month, including the first day of the year, is a time to review our negative actions of the past time period, experience regret for these actions, and promise to try not to do them again. Then the practice is to re-take any of the preset vows for good behaviour that we have taken before. (Lay People's vows, Bodhisattva vows, Tantric vows, or Monk's or Nun's vows). This practice is also performed on Vesak, celebrating the day of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing away. This is celebrated on the full moon day of May or around the 8th of May. In general, we will celebrate it the weekend after the first full week of May. First we start with a listing of the 10 virtues in Buddhism.

- 1 - Instead of Taking Life, I promise to Protect life.
- 2 - Instead of Stealing or Cheating, I promise to be Generous and Giving.
- 3 - Instead of Causing Divisions, I promise to always Respect Others' Relationships.
- 4 - Instead of Lying and Deceiving, I promise to speak accurately and truthfully.
- 5 - Instead of Insulting others, I promise to always encourage them.
- 6 - Instead of Speaking badly of others, I promise to speak of their good qualities.
- 7 - Instead of Talking without purpose, I promise to try to use meaningful speech.
- 8 - Instead of being greedy and unsatisfied, I promise to develop contentment.
- 9 - Instead of being angry and frustrated, I promise to practice patience.
- 10 - Instead of looking at things in the world as permanent, a source of lasting satisfaction, independent and Ultimate, I promise to try to recognize that the world is Temporary, unable to provide lasting satisfaction, Interconnected, and Relative.



The next stage of this practice is to review our negative Karmas and apply the 4 opponent powers:

- Think of your current problems and what the possible internal causes of those would be.
- Think of the negative results that have come from thought, speech and action full of longing, that have been done with attachment, that have been done with a mind full of fear or anger, or that have arisen out of doubt or confusion.
- Feel Regret for the vows and promises that you've made & since broken.
- Feel sadness for those who cause harm for themselves and others.

Then repeat the prayer of the 4 opponent powers that follows:

Thought, speech, and action full of longing & attachment, fear & anger,
Pride & Jealousy, and doubt & confusion,
Create suffering or perpetuate suffering.

I regret any actions that I have done under the influence of these tainted emotions,
And I promise to try not to commit these actions from now on.





This is followed by thinking about the positive things that we've done in this last year (or whatever period of time you have chosen) and thinking about the good things that others have done for us and then rejoicing in these actions.

- ◆ Rejoice at your thought, speech and action done from contentment, done with renunciation, combined with patience, done out of compassion, that increase confidence, and that reflect a Complete View of reality.
- ◆ Think of how we now have many resources at our disposal to help us with our goal of Spiritual Development. Some of us have intelligence, and health, enough time and freedom from the struggle for survival, and enough leisure to contemplate and work on the issue of eliminating suffering and finding lasting happiness. We have exposure to books and teachings on these subjects, and we have other people who can help us to understand and work with these instructions. So some of us have the great fortune to have all sorts of circumstances and resources that allow us to devote some of our time to these kind of pursuits. We also need to remind ourselves often how fortunate we are and what a tremendous opportunity these circumstances provide.
- ◆ Rejoice at the good that has come from keeping the vows and promises that you have made.
- ◆ Think of the good deeds, kindness and merits of others and be glad that they are creating merit too.
- ◆ Think of using this merit for the benefit of all beings, then repeat this:

I rejoice in all thought, speech, and action done by myself & others
Arising from Contentment & Renunciation, done with Patience & Compassion,
And that increase Confidence & Understanding
And I promise to try and do more of these actions from now on.





We then review the Lay Precepts, the Bodhisattva Precepts, and, if we are Tantric practitioners, the Vajrayana Precepts and then we decide, in our own minds, which ones we will try to follow.

THE FIVE LAY PRECEPTS

- 1) - I promise not to needlessly take the life of any living thing.
- 2) - I promise not to steal or to take what is not given to me.
- 3) - I promise not to act immorally but to respect others' relationships.
- 4) - I promise not to lie but to be truthful and honest.
- 5) - Because it leads to other kinds of misbehaviour, I promise not to become intoxicated using alcohol or drugs.



THE 18 MAIN BODHISATTVA VOWS

(A Bodhisattva is someone who promises to always work towards Buddhahood in order to be able to help others become free from suffering.)

- 1) - I promise not to praise myself or belittle others, but to admit my own faults and praise others' good qualities.
- 2) - I promise not to be miserly or keep things to myself, but to share with others, especially those who are suffering, by giving them physical help, emotional comfort, and sharing my knowledge.
- 3) - I promise not to hold a grudge for those who have harmed me, but to forgive them if they admit their offence and ask for forgiveness.
- 4) - I promise not to condemn or distort the Buddha's teachings.
- 5) - I promise not to hoard for myself anything that is offered to the Buddha, his Teachings or the Spiritual Community.
- 6) - I promise not to belittle beginning level spiritual teachings, especially the Hinayana or "Lesser Vehicle" teachings of the Three Baskets (Tripitaka) which are the basic teachings on Morality, Concentration, and Wisdom.
- 7) - I promise to forgive members of the Spiritual Community and not reject them, if they break their vows and then ask for forgiveness.
- 8) - I promise to avoid the 5 most serious crimes which are 1) - killing our mother, 2) - killing our father, 3) - killing a Spiritually Accomplished Person (an Arhat), 4) - Harming a Buddha, or 5) - causing a division in the Spiritual Community (Sangha).
- 9) - I promise to work to abandon views contrary to the Buddha's teachings such as disbelief in the value of spiritual practice, denying the benefits of the Buddha's example, his teaching, and being a part of a Spiritual Community, or denying the truth of the teachings on Dependent Arising (Karma).



- 10) - I promise not to destroy any place by any means whatsoever, such as fire, bombs, or pollution.
- 11) - I promise to avoid teaching about Voidness to those who are not ready to understand it.
- 12) - I promise not to discourage people from helping others and I promise not to try to convince people to ignore others needs and work only for their own benefit.
- 13) - I promise to not to try to encourage others to abandon their vows of moral conduct.
- 14) - I promise not to cause others to view other spiritual traditions as unbeneficial.
- 15) - I promise not to practice, support, or teach the Buddha's Teachings for the sake of Profit or Fame.
- 16) - I promise not to boast about my understanding, attainments, or realizations.
- 17) - I promise to avoid encouraging others to give me gifts that were originally intended for the Spiritual Community (the Buddha, His Teachings, or the Community itself)
- 18) - I promise not to take anything that belongs to another Buddhist Practitioner and give it to others, even if I believe that they are not using it.





THE 14 ROOT TANTRIC VOWS

- 1) - I promise not to harm or slander a teacher from whom I have received a Tantric Empowerment.
- 2) - I promise not to denigrate Buddhist teachings.
- 3) - I promise not to hold on to anger or jealousy towards my vajra brothers and sisters.
- 4) - I promise never to abandon loving kindness and compassion for any sentient being.
- 5) - I promise never to abandon the aspiration and resolve to work towards Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.
- 6) - I promise not to criticize other Buddhist traditions.
- 7) - I promise not to reveal Tantric secrets to those who are not ready.
- 8) - I promise never to mistreat my body or mind.
- 9) - I promise never to forget the void nature of reality.
- 10) - I promise not to keep company with those who would try to corrupt my vows.
- 11) - I promise to always remember to reflect on Voidness.
- 12) - I promise not to discourage those who have faith in the teachings.
- 13) - I promise to always observe my tantric vows and commitments.
- 14) - Because they are the embodiment of Wisdom, I promise never to insult or mistreat women.
- (male equivalent) - Because they are the embodiment of Skillful Method, I promise never to insult or mistreat men.





*Option - add the Vajrasattva Mantra here for purification.

OM, Vajrasattva, Samayam anupalaya.
Vajrasattva, teno patishta.
Dhridho me bhava, Sutoshyo me bhava,
Suposhyo me bhava, Anurakto me bhava.

Sarva siddhi me prayaccha.
Sarva Karma succha me chittam Shriyam
Kuru

HUM!
Ha Ha Ha Ha Ho!

Bhagavan,
Sarva Tathagatha Vajra
Ma me muncha,
Vajra bhava,
Maha samaya sattva.
AH HUM PHAT

O Vajrasattva, Guard my commitments.
Vajrasattva, help me be strong.
Support me, be satisfied with me, be
favourable to me, nourish me.

Grant me all sublime Attainments.
Indicator of all Karma, make my mind
glorious.

Hum!
[Delighting in the Five Buddha Wisdoms*]
I'm laughing with Joy

Blessed One,
Diamond of all the Tathagathas,
Never abandon me,
Make me Diamond,
Great Embodiment of the Commitments.
Purify, Bless, Transcend.

* The 5 Buddha Wisdoms are: Intelligence,
Balance, Curiosity, Creativity, & Awareness





Follow this with the Dedication of Merit:

May all benefits of these exertions
Be dedicated to the cause of universal good
Let the sorrows of all beings be removed
May they come to full and perfect Wisdom
Not a single one left behind.

May I become a joy to all beings
Through great works of Compassion
So that throughout the six realms
Buddhahood will prevail.

Let this be my vow until the stones themselves
Attain highest perfect Spiritual Awakening
Therefore I must, no matter what happens
Become a Buddha
Quickly, quickly
For the sake of all beings,
My Mothers.

Then follow this by the blessing of the meal and then eat.



PRAYERS SAID BEFORE MEALS

We must first think of all of the things that contributed to making this food available. The earth, sun & rain helped this food grow. Someone needed to work to grow the foods that we are eating and raise the animals who eventually gave up their lives for us to eat. Others had to purchase, transport, unload, stock, display, sell and prepare this food. With this in mind, we visualize a white OM, a red AH, and a blue HUM in the space above the food.

As we say OM AH HUM the first time, we imagine that the blue syllable HUM descends on the food completely purifying it of all negative energies, contaminations, or other impurities.

As we say OM AH HUM a second time, we imagine the red AH descending on the food changing it into Nectar fit for Heavenly Beings, Buddhas & Bodhisattvas.

Finally, we imagine the white OM descending on the food magnifying the quantity so that it becomes inexhaustible.

OM AH HUM (3 times)

Then we repeat the following prayers:

We offer these foods consisting of a hundred different tastes,
to the Victorious Buddhas and their Bodhisattva heirs.
Offering these with faith and devotion in the path to Buddhahood,
May all beings be nourished by the fruits of Spiritual Attainment.





OFFERINGS AFTER MEALS TO THE HUNGRY GHOSTS

Hungry Ghosts are spirits who are constantly unsatisfied and cannot find satisfaction anywhere. To make a food offering to satisfy these hungry spirits, we take a piece of bread and squeeze it in the left hand, so that ridges form along the bread. Also, squeeze the ends of the bread with the right thumb and middle finger to form ridges at the end. If you plan to eat after this offering, fashion a small tail at the end of the bread near the little finger on your left hand.

Then drop the bread on the table in front of you, snap your fingers, and repeat the following Mantra:

OM AH TZENDA BENDZA ASHI BHEYI SOHA

Then say the following prayer:

Through great generosity, for the sake of all living beings,
May I attain the state of the spontaneously arisen Buddha
So that the great number of sentient beings
who have not crossed over from The Cycle of Suffering* may be liberated.

*samsara in sanskrit

