

The Spirit of the Ten Tzu Chi Precepts

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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[[Master's Teachings](#)]

Editor's Note: *There are ten precepts that Tzu Chi members follow. The first five are based on the traditional Five Buddhist Precepts; the latter five were added by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in response to the circumstances in modern society. These precepts serve as a moral code for Tzu Chi members. While the ten precepts are often rendered very directly for Tzu Chi members as prohibitions such as "No killing" or "Do not kill", Dharma Master Cheng Yen wants us to know that the purpose of the precepts is not to restrict us but to protect us, keeping us from harm. In that spirit, we have conveyed the precepts in a fuller form, based on talks that Dharma Master Cheng Yen has given. We hope this can better help everyone to touch the spirit behind them and practice them in daily life.*

The First Precept

Understanding that life is sacred and that all living creatures share the same desire to live, we will not take life. Out of respect for life, we will strive to protect the lives of all living beings.

The Second Precept

Understanding that it is not right to take anything that does not belong to us, we will respect what belongs to others and not steal. Knowing that there are so many people who have so much less than us, we vow to practice generosity and give what we can to help people in need.

The Third Precept

Understanding that sexual misconduct can cause great harm and suffering, destroying our lives and the lives of others, we will not have sexual relations outside of marriage or engage in other forms of sexual immorality. Knowing that the integrity of the family is vital for the nurturing of ethics, morality, and a sound and healthy society, we will try to promote wholesome family values by practicing these values ourselves and making ours a model family.

The Fourth Precept

Understanding that our integrity rests vitally on the trustworthiness of our word, we will not tell lies or speak to deceive. As our words can hurt others tremendously, we will also strive not to speak abusively, hatefully, or harshly; and refrain from speaking insincere words of flattery, gossiping, or bearing tales, which creates division. We will instead cultivate loving and compassionate speech, so our words can help comfort, encourage, heal, and inspire others.

The Fifth Precept

Understanding that using alcohol impairs our judgment and may cause us to take actions that can harm ourselves and others, we will not touch alcohol. We hope our example can also influence others to refrain from alcohol, fostering a safer society.

The Sixth Precept

Understanding that smoking, using narcotics, and chewing betel nuts harm our health and

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create addictions that disrupt our lives, we will keep away from these products and develop a wholesome, healthy lifestyle.

The Seventh Precept

Understanding that gambling is to profit at others' expense and that it can destroy our lives and our family, we will not gamble or get involved in speculation, such as playing the stock market or engaging in other high-risk or get-rich-quick schemes. We will earn money in a honest way, through hard work. We know this will give our lives a solid foundation and true security.

The Eighth Precept

Understanding how deeply indebted we are to our parents—for giving us life, raising and nurturing us, and toiling away to give us what opportunities they could—we will strive to show our gratitude by being filial and good to them. We will be considerate of their feelings, try to fulfill their needs, and genuinely care about their physical and psychological wellbeing. Where we have differences in views, we will try to be understanding of where they are coming from and use only gentle, loving words to convey our views. We will always treat them in a loving manner and with a positive attitude, while also learning to treat others in such a manner.

The Ninth Precept

Understanding that not following traffic regulations can cause accidents and create suffering for others and ourselves, we will always drive mindfully, in accordance with the law. Knowing that to keep everyone safe, we need all citizens to abide by traffic laws, we will try to encourage this by setting an example through our own actions.

The Tenth Precept

Understanding that demonstrations have the potential to cause greater division, unrest, and conflict in society, we will not take part in them. We will dedicate ourselves to constructive actions that help foster love between people and peace and harmony in our society. Knowing that Tzu Chi can carry out its work only if it remains politically neutral—focusing only on truly and practically relieving the suffering of ordinary citizens—we will not be involved in political activities or engage in any actions that could cause Tzu Chi to be turned into a political instrument.

**A traditional rendering of the Ten Tzu Chi Precepts*

1. Do not kill
2. Do not steal
3. Do not fornicate
4. Do not lie
5. Do not drink alcohol
6. Do not smoke, use drugs, or chew betel nuts
7. Do not gamble or speculate
8. Be filial to your parents and be moderate in speech and attitude
9. Abide by traffic laws
10. Do not participate in politics or demonstrations

Written by the Jing Si Abode English Editorial Team

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Based on Dharma Master Cheng Yen's teachings in Chinese