

Brahma Net Sutra

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SUTRA:

THE BUDDHA TOLD ALL HIS DISCIPLES: "THERE ARE TEN MAJOR PRATIMOKSA PRECEPTS. IF ANYONE WHO HAS RECEIVED THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS FAILS TO RECITE THEM REGULARLY, HE IS NOT A BODHISATTVA, NOR DOES HE NURTURE THE SEED OF BUDDHAHOOD: HENCE, I TOO RECITE THESE PRECEPTS. ALL BODHISATTVAS HAVE STUDIED THEM IN THE PAST, WILL STUDY THEM IN THE FUTURE, AND NOW STUDY THEM AT THE PRESENT. AFTER THE FOLLOWING COMPREHENSIVE DISCUSSION OF THE GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS WITHIN THE BODHISATTVA PRATIMOKSA PRECEPTS, YOU SHOULD STUDY AND UPHOLD THEM RESPECTFULLY."

COMMENTARY:

THE BUDDHA TOLD ALL HIS DISCIPLES: "THERE ARE TEN MAJOR PRATIMOKSA PRECEPTS." There are ten major and forty-eight minor Bodhisattva precepts. These ten are the most important of the Bodhisattva precepts. Why are they called "Pratimoksa?" It is because if one violates any of these, one will forever be cast out of the sea of Buddhism. If one maintains them, then one is guaranteed to attain liberation;

- 1) The precept against killing;
- 2) the precept against stealing;
- 3) the precept against sexual misconduct;
- 4) the precept against false speech;
- 5) the precept against taking intoxicants;
- 6) the precept against speaking about the offenses of the great assembly;
- 7) the precept against disparaging others and praising oneself;
- 8) the precept against stinginess;
- 9) the precept against harboring anger;
- 10) the precept against slandering the Triple Jewel.

"IF ANYONE WHO HAS RECEIVED THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS FAILS TO RECITE THEM REGULARLY, HE IS NOT A BODHISATTVA, NOR DOES HE NURTURE THE SEED OF BUDDHAHOOD; HENCE, I TOO RECITE THESE PRECEPTS." If one violates any of these Pratimoksa codes, then one will be forever cast out of the sea of the Buddhadharmā. The Buddhadharmā is like a great sea which can contain anything. No matter how much rain falls, the sea can always take it in. But there's one thing that the sea rejects, and that is corpses. The sea will not hold dead bodies. Somehow the sea will wash a dead body back to the shore--it will reject it. By way of analogy, the Buddhadharmā is a great sea which can hold anything, but it will not hold people who violate precepts. If one maintains these precepts, then one is guaranteed to obtain liberation. This means that for sure one can go from the position of a common person to Sagehood. Upon receiving the precepts, one must recite them, because it is only through reciting them that one knows the difference between holding them and violating them.

In this world there are two types of healthy people. The first is a person who doesn't create offenses. The second is a person who, upon creating offenses, knows how to repent and reform. These two are considered healthy people, because there is no defilement on their Dharma bodies. Upon reciting precepts, one will also know whether one has committed light or heavy offenses. There are different ways to repent and reform for light and heavy offenses. One will also know how to protect and guard them well. If one doesn't recite, then eventually one will forget them; in the present life-time one will lose the position of a Bodhisattva, and in the future one will lose the seed of Buddhahood.

In this way, the Bodhisattva precepts are different from the Bhikshu or the Shramanera precepts. In the case of the Bhikshu or the Shramanera precepts, if one can't hold them, one can say, "Well, I give up; I retreat, because I can't hold them." But if one receives the Bodhisattva precepts, upon receiving them one can't retreat. Whether one is able to hold them or not, one can't just give up. Giving them up is equal to renouncing the fruit of Buddhahood--one forfeits one's opportunity to become a Buddha.

"ALL BODHISATTVAS HAVE STUDIED THEM IN THE PAST, WILL STUDY THEM IN THE FUTURE, AND NOW STUDY THEM AT THE PRESENT." If one doesn't violate them, that's so much the better, because now one is a Bodhisattva and in the future one will become a Buddha. So the Sutra text says, "AFTER THE FOLLOWING COMPREHENSIVE DISCUSSION OF THE GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS WITHIN THE BODHISATTVA PRATIMOKSA PRECEPTS, YOU SHOULD STUDY AND UPHOLD THEM RESPECTFULLY." What are the General Characteristics, or the appearances, of the precepts? Basically, precepts have no appearance, but there is an appearance to one's holding them or not holding them.

Extensively speaking, they are the Ten Major and Forty-eight Minor Precepts, but to describe them as a whole, it just means being filial. If one doesn't respectfully uphold them, then that's just not being filial. Filial children really respect their parents, to the point that they regard them as living spirits or Buddhas. People who hold precepts and particularly revere them are just performing an act of filial compliance.

If one hasn't heard the precepts explained, then one doesn't know, but once one has heard them, then many, many implications arise. Just take for example leafing through the Sutra pages with saliva on your fingers--you can't do that, because saliva is not clean. If you do so, this means touching the Sutras with dirty hands, and that's an offense. For example, if you scratch your head, scratch your face, rub your eyes, or scratch your nose, you should clean your hands before touching the Sutras, otherwise it's

considered an offense. So, when one recites the Sutras, the best thing to do is to put before oneself a little dish with a wet towel on top. Then if one scratches one's head or picks one's nose, afterwards one can clean one's hands with the towel.

The precepts proper don't spell this out precisely. But each precept is like a tree. Just as the branches of each tree grow into many sub-branches, so, too, within a single precept there can be many subdivisions of prohibitions.

Today we're going to talk about the first precept: the precept against killing. That one precept alone branches out into ten divisions, and if we were going to discuss it in detail, it would take days and days. You may think that these precepts, as written, are already really expansive, but if you consult the Vinaya Store, then it is even more detailed. But of course, if you didn't study it you would never know.



SUTRA:

THE FIRST MAJOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS KILLING. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT KILL BY HIMSELF, ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO KILL, KILL WITH EXPEDIENT MEANS, PRAISE KILLING, OR REACT WITH DELIGHT UPON WITNESSING KILLING. HE MUST NOT EMPLOY ANY METHOD WHATEVER, NOT EVEN MANTRAS, TO KILL ANY LIVING BEING. FURTHER, A BODHISATTVA MUST NOT INVOLVE HIMSELF IN THE CAUSES, CONDITIONS, METHODS, OR KARMA OF KILLING. TO THE EXTENT THAT HE CANNOT DELIBERATELY KILL ANY LIVING CREATURE. A BODHISATTVA SHOULD ALWAYS GIVE RISE TO AN ETERNALLY ABIDING MIND OF KINDNESS, COMPASSION, AND FILIAL COMPLIANCE. THUS, HE SHOULD DEVISE SKILLFUL MEANS TO RESCUE AND PROTECT ALL BEINGS. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA KILLS WITH INDULGENCE OR EVINCES DELIGHT IN KILLING ANY BEING, HE THEREBY COMMITS A BODHISATTVA PARAJIKA OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

The text reads, **A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA.** Who is a disciple of the Buddha? He or she is one who brings forth the Bodhi resolve, who receives the Bodhisattva Precepts, who glorifies the Buddha's

lineage, who dwells in the Buddha's comportment and precepts, who is not insane or scattered, who is not sick at heart, who is not in possession of another's life, and who knows that he himself has received the Bodhisattva Precepts. Such a one is called a Buddhist disciple.

The Sutra says that he **MUST NOT KILL BY HIMSELF**. To kill by oneself means two things: first, by using internal form, such as striking with one's hands or kicking with one's feet. The second is by using external form, which refers to knives, clubs, stones, axes, etc. Using either of these methods to cause another person's life to be terminated is called killing by oneself.

The second aspect is that he should not **ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO KILL**. Encouraging others to kill means telling them face-to-face to kill, or sending a servant to kill someone. Perhaps writing a letter instructing someone to kill. In these cases, one doesn't do the killing but tells others to kill, and that is the same offense. One may tell them face-to-face, write, or send a messenger--all of these carry the same offense as if one had done the killing. The third is to **KILL WITH EXPEDIENT MEANS**. This refers to things one does before the actual killing--for example, one may bind or gag the victims. Or one may set them off onto a certain road and ambush them along the way, capture them, and then kill them. All of this falls under facilitating the killing.

The fifth is to **PRAISE KILLING**. Originally the person the offender approaches didn't have an intent to kill. But the offender praises killing, saying "Oh, it's really good to do this killing. You're a really great hero." This causes the other person to bring forth the intention to kill.

The sixth is to **REACT WITH DELIGHT UPON WITNESSING KILLING**. This means that a person originally had the intent to kill and the offender goes along and encourages him. He exhorts him to actually do it and acts as an accomplice.

Seventh, **HE MUST NOT EMPLOY ANY METHOD WHATEVER, NOT EVEN MANTRAS, TO KILL ANY LIVING BEING**, up to and including hidden weapons; that is, burying arrows in the earth, setting up a trap so that when someone steps on that place the arrows are set off and the person is killed. Or setting up a fiery pit. In ancient times in India, this method was used to ambush. Even the Buddha met with this one time. People would dig a hole in the ground, put a fire in there, and the unknowing person walking along the path would fall into the fiery pit. All of this is grouped under "killing with mantras."

FURTHER, A BODHISATTVA MUST NOT INVOLVE HIMSELF IN THE CAUSES of killing. The Eighth aspect, the "causes" of killing means the intent to kill. ...**THE CONDITIONS** of killing. This means that one creates the conditions for killing, or uses provisional means to bring about the act of killing.

The tenth is called the **METHODS** of killing. That would include weapons such as daggers, swords, pits, bows and arrows, poisons, and mantras--all of those methods of killing.

The last is called the **KARMA OF KILLING**. The karma means to actually cut off the life source of a person. This is accomplishing the karma of killing.

TO THE EXTENT THAT HE CANNOT DELIBERATELY KILL ANY LIVING CREATURE. "To the extent" means even down to the tiniest of sentient creatures, such as moths, ants, insects, and all small crawling creatures.

As far as the Bhikshu precepts are concerned, if one kills small creatures like these, it is not considered a major transgression. But in the Bodhisattva precepts, even killing these tiny creatures is considered a major offense--a Parajika offense. This is because Bodhisattvas take compassion as their foundation. From that frame of reference, if one kills even small living creatures it's just harming the mind of compassion.

What's meant by "deliberately killing?" This is different from if one kills accidentally or without any premeditation. If one accidentally steps on a bug without deliberate intention, that's not a transgression in this sense.

A BODHISATTVA SHOULD ALWAYS GIVE RISE TO AN ETERNALLY ABIDING MIND OF KINDNESS, COMPASSION, AND FILIAL COMPLIANCE. "Eternally abiding" means that he should always be compassionate towards all living creatures because he knows that "the mind, the Buddha, living beings--these three are no different," and that their nature forever abides. It's just temporarily that living beings appear as living beings and Buddhas as Buddhas. But ultimately they are the same substance.

What's meant by "kindness and compassion?" It means that you have great compassion which regards everything as having the identical substance as yourself. You are as careful in your regard as if you were protecting an infant. For instance, if any part of your body is damaged, you can't say, "Well, this head belongs to me, but if the feet are in trouble, I won't pay any attention to them." Everything belongs to the same body. The Bodhisattva regards all living beings as the same substance as himself. If any part of your body is afflicted with an illness, you will quickly try to cure that illness. By the same token, if any living being is suffering, the Bodhisattva would feel as if he himself were suffering. The only intent of the Bodhisattva is to pull living beings out of suffering and give them joy.

"Filial compliance" means revering the Buddha nature of all living beings, considering them to be the same as your own parents.

In the *Essay on Exhortation to Bring Forth the Bodhi Resolve* it says that the Bodhisattva "in contemplating even ants, would consider them parents of his past lives." This kind of regard for living creatures is the same as mentioned above. If you can look at an ant and think, "This is probably my mother or father of a past life and in the future this ant will become a Buddha," if you respect the Dharma in this way, will you be able to kill an ant?

THUS, HE SHOULD DEVISE SKILLFUL MEANS TO RESCUE AND PROTECT ALL BEINGS. Kindness, compassion, and filial piety are attitudes that should come naturally. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA KILLS WITH INDULGENCE OR EVINCES DELIGHT IN KILLING ANY BEING, HE THEREBY COMMITS A BODHISATTVA PARAJIKA OFFENSE. You shouldn't kill any beings with any kind of indulgence or delight. "Indulgence" means that you do things any old way you like; say, because of greed you give rise to killing. For example, people who fish and hunt do this out of greed and desire to eat the flesh of living creatures. They don't know how to restrain themselves. Or, there are those who kill in order to vent their anger.

A person who has received the precepts is called a Bodhisattva. Here the title "Bodhisattva" means that such a person can uphold the precepts.

"Parajika" means an offense that merits casting out--being cast out of the sea of the Buddhadharm. One forever loses the wonderful cause and the wonderful result. The second meaning of Parajika means "an offense that brings a fall." One commits a Parajika Offense; one falls into the three evil destinies. The third meaning is "the victory of the other party." Originally, when one took these precepts, one wanted to break through afflictions and conquer the demonic armies. But once you break these precepts, then afflictions are victorious over you--they beat you. The demon king says, "You can't accomplish your Way karma now, because you're still within my grasp!" That's a victory of the other party.

The fourth meaning of Parajika is "dharma of utmost evil"--evil to the extreme. It is called "a dharma by which one's head is cut off." This implies that when one's head is cut off, it won't grow back again. It's also called "the dharma which is like cutting out the heart of a tala tree." In India there is a type of tree called the tala tree. If you cut out the heart of that tree, the rest of the tree would stop growing and all the branches will dry up. If you break a precept of this nature, it's like cutting out the heart of a tala tree--everything else will die.

There's also another meaning to the word Parajika--"the end of a needle which is snapped off." If the end of a needle is snapped off, you can't use the needle any more. Another meaning is that it's like "a big boulder which has been split into two halves." Once a rock is split into two halves you can't glue them back together.

In the Vinaya it says, "When a person receives the Bhikshu precepts, the earth spirits convey the news to the spirits of empty space, and the spirits of empty space pass the news on further. So that in a single instant, the sound of this news pervades up to the First Dhyana, the Great Brahma Heavens." At this point the demon king quakes with fright! If a person breaks the Bhikshu precepts, the Dharma Protecting Spirits who guard him will heave a great sigh. The sound of this sigh will also pervade to the First Dhyana and when the demons hear this they are delighted. They say, "You are no longer a Buddhist disciple--ha! ha!"

So, in the case of someone receiving the Bhikshu precepts, all the three realms know about it. In the case of someone receiving Bodhisattva precepts, it's even more earth-shattering. At the moment when the karmadana transmits the precepts, and one is certified as to actually having received the precepts, then the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions will spontaneously see this person's image before them. They will say, "This person has just received the Bodhisattva precepts. In the future he'll become a Buddha." As a result, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are all sympathetic and mindful of this person and will protect him.

There must be four conditions met before an act is considered to be an offense against this precept:

- 1) The creature that is killed has to be a living being.
- 2) One must know that it is a living creature. If one didn't have this thought when the killing was done, then one condition is missing and one's act of killing is not considered a violation of this precept.
- 3) One must have the intent to kill.
- 4) The creature's life must be terminated. Every precept carries with it several

conditions and it's only if all of these conditions are met that the act is counted as an actual offense. *-to be continued*

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