

# *Brahma Net Sutra*

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SUTRA:

THE FIFTH MAJOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS DEALING IN INTOXICANTS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT HIMSELF DEAL IN ANY TYPE OF INTOXICANT WHATEVER, ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO SO, OR INVOLVE HIMSELF IN THE CAUSES, CONDITIONS, METHODS, OR KARMA OF DEALING IN INTOXICANTS, FOR INTOXICANTS ARE THE CAUSES AND CONDITIONS FOR ALL MANNER OF OFFENSES. A BODHISATTVA SHOULD ENCOURAGE ALL BEINGS TO GIVE RISE TO BRIGHT, PENETRATING WISDOM. IF, INSTEAD, HE INFLUENCES BEINGS TO GIVE RISE TO UPSIDE-DOWN THINKING, HE THEREBY COMMITS A BODHISATTVA PARAJIKA OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

The Five Lay Precepts prohibit partaking intoxicants but do not, as it does here, restrict dealing in intoxicants. In the Five Lay Precepts one is instructed not to use intoxicants oneself, but it does not mention dealing in intoxicants. The Bodhisattva Precepts, however, forbid the selling of intoxicants as a major offense. That's the theme of the Bodhisattva Precepts throughout: if you harm others, the offense is heavy; if you harm yourself, the offense is considered lighter. If you consume intoxicants, that's just harming yourself; but, if you sell intoxicants, you are harming others. "Dealing in" means selling for the sake of profit; selling to make money. "Intoxicants" refers to beverages that make people become drunk. They are also called "potions of ignorance," because once one drinks them, one becomes muddled, unstable, and up-side down.

A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT HIMSELF DEAL IN ANY TYPE OF INTOXICANT WHATEVER. One cannot sell intoxicants oneself. To "ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO SO" means to urge them to go into business with oneself, to join oneself in selling liquor. It is also a major offense to make other people sell liquor with one. The person who is selling the liquor, and the person who teaches him to sell the liquor are both committing a heavy offense. However, if you teach the other person to sell for his own profit, and you do not share in that profit, then it's considered a light offense.

...OR INVOLVE HIMSELF IN THE CAUSES... Now to the causes, conditions, and so forth of dealing in intoxicants. The "cause" of selling intoxicants is the intent to make a profit. The CONDITIONS refer to the vessels, like the bottles, cans, boxes, and so forth, that hold the liquor. The METHODS are the measuring devices; for example the number of ounces per bottle and the cost of each bottle, including such things as recycling that involves processing bottles by refilling them. ...KARMA OF DEALING IN INTOXICANTS... The "karma" means that with one's own hands one sells the liquor to the person. One only has to sell it to another person and the karma is created. The precept says that the Bodhisattva cannot sell any type of intoxicant. It is explained in this way because each country has a wide variety of intoxicants. There are wines that are made from flowers or grains

and there are wines that are made from fruit. In China, most wines are made from rice, wheat, or barley. In America, many wines are made from grapes and there are many types of liquor. But, no matter what type of intoxicant it is, if it causes people to get drunk, then one cannot sell it.

...FOR INTOXICANTS ARE THE CAUSES AND CONDITIONS FOR ALL MANNER OF OFFENSES. In the *Vinaya of the four Divisions*, it states clearly the Ten Disadvantages incurred when one drinks wine or takes intoxicants:

1. The complexion goes bad. One's face becomes ruddy, swollen, and the veins are destroyed.
2. One loses one's strength. People who are drunk become unstable and lose their sense of balance.
3. One loses one's vision. Things become dim, and one can't see straight as though one were looking through a net.
4. One manifests the appearance of anger.
5. One wastes resources. Originally, the grains could have been used beneficially for food, but once made into wine their effect becomes detrimental. That reckons as a waste of resources.
6. One's illnesses increase.
7. One tends to pick fights. Normally, a person may be quite peaceful, but once he gets drunk, he loses his temper.
8. One loses one's reputation. People who habitually drink alcohol become notorious. They are referred to as "winos," and "drunken ghosts."
9. One's wisdom decreases. Normally, one might be fairly intelligent, but when one gets drunk, one manifests stupidity.
10. At the end of one's life, one will fall into the Three Evil Paths.

Those are the Ten Disadvantages that are incurred just by drinking alcohol, how much the more will it be for those who sell alcoholic beverages to other people? They, too, will fall into the Three Evil Realms.

This is a precept of restraint. The above were all precepts of the nature, which means they are also prohibited by law, because they oppose the nature. Killing, stealing, and false speech are punishable by law. But, it is not illegal to deal in intoxicants, so this is a precept of restraint. After taking this precept, one must not deal in intoxicants.

You may ask, "If it is not punishable by law, why should we have such a precept?"

This is a precept against evil comportment. Even people who have not received the precepts are exhorted not to create of karma. Although people haven't received this precept, they will still incur this retribution if they involve themselves in the karma of selling intoxicants. For this reason, a very severe stipulation has been set up for the Great Knights--the Bodhisattvas. If one wishes to leave the world--if

one wishes to cultivate transcendental Dharmas--then one must refrain from creating karma such as this.

A BODHISATTVA SHOULD ENCOURAGE ALL BEINGS TO GIVE RISE TO BRIGHT, PENETRATING WISDOM. IF, INSTEAD, HE INFLUENCES BEINGS TO GIVE RISE TO UPSIDE-DOWN THINKING, HE THEREBY COMMITS A BODHISATTVA PARAJIKA OFFENSE.

There are five conditions which make it a heavy offense.

1. It is a living being. That is, the one being sold the intoxicants is a living being.
2. One is aware that he is a living being.
3. One is selling with the hope of profit.
4. The intoxicants are genuine.
5. The transaction takes place. That is, one sells it to another person. When these five conditions are met, they make up the offense.

SUTRA:

THE SIXTH MAJOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS DISCUSSING OFFENSES OF MEMBERS OF THE FOUR ASSEMBLIES. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT HIMSELF DISCUSS THE OFFENSES OF ANY BODHISATTVA SANGHA, BODHISATTVA LAYPERSON, BHIKSHU OR BHIKSHUNI, NOR MAY HE ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO SO, OR INVOLVE HIMSELF IN THE CAUSES, CONDITIONS, METHODS, OR KARMA OF SPEAKING OF THE OFFENSES OF THE FOUR ASSEMBLIES. WHENEVER A BODHISATTVA HEARS AN EVIL-HEARTED EXTERNALIST OR EVIL EXPONENT OF THE SMALL VEHICLES SPEAK OF PRACTICES WHICH ARE NOT IN ACCORD WITH THE DHARMA AND NOT IN ACCORD WITH THE PRECEPTS WITHIN BUDDHISM, HE SHOULD ALWAYS FEEL PITY FOR SUCH DETRACTORS, INSTRUCT THEM, AND LEAD THEM TO A WHOLESOME BELIEF IN THE GREAT VEHICLE. IF, INSTEAD, A BODHISATTVA DISCUSSES THE FAULTS OF THOSE WITHIN THE BUDDHADHARMA, HE THEREBY COMMITS A BODHISATTVA PARAJIKA OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE SIXTH MAJOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS DISCUSSING OFFENSES OF MEMBERS OF THE FOUR ASSEMBLIES. "Discussing" in this case refers to speaking to people who have not taken the Bodhisattva Precepts, because if one were speaking to people who have already taken the precepts, it might not incur such a heavy offense. But here it refers to speaking to people who haven't taken the Bodhisattva Precepts about the offenses of the Seven Assemblies within the Great Vehicle. The Seven Assemblies are:

- 1) Bhikshus;

- 2) Bhikshunis;
- 3) Shikshamanas (women called students of the Dharma who have left the home-life and received the ten Shikshamana Precepts);
- 4) Shramaneras;
- 5) Shramanerikas.
- 6) Upasakas; and
- 7) Upasikas;

If a left-home person speaks to people who haven't taken the precepts of the offenses of the two-fold assembly of Bhikshus and Bhikshunis, that is considered a violation of the Bhikshu and Bhikshuni Precepts. This Bodhisattva Precept, however, prohibits discussing the offenses of both the Bodhisattva Sanghas and the Bodhisattva laypeople, that is, of the entire Seven-fold Assembly of the Great Vehicle. This precept pertains to maintaining the sangha Jewel, so it is a very important Dharma-door. To slander any of the Seven-fold Assembly is considered a major offense.

...NOR MAY HE ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO SO, OR INVOLVE HIMSELF IN THE CAUSES... The "causes" just means that one has the intent to speak of the offenses of others. The CONDITIONS refer to the way in which one speaks. One may use flowery speech so that what he says sounds very good, but basically he's just discussing the faults of others.

The METHODS refers to what one speaks about. To speak about either the heavy or light offenses of the Seven-fold Assembly to those outside the Assembly is a violation of this precept. Basically, the violation of any precept is not something that needs to be known to anyone who has not received the precepts. If one discusses the offenses of such-and-such a person to one who has not received the precepts, that is called speaking of the offenses of the Four Assemblies, and such an act violates this sixth major precept.

...OR, the KARMA OF SPEAKING OF THE OFFENSES OF THE FOUR ASSEMBLIES. The "karma" means to have actually spoken. One speaks very clearly about the offenses of another, and the person he speaks to understands what he's saying and the karma has thereby been created.

WHENEVER A BODHISATTVA HEARS AN EVIL-HEARTED EXTERNALIST OR EVIL EXPONENT OF THE SMALL VEHICLES SPEAK OF PRACTICES WHICH ARE NOT IN ACCORD WITH THE DHARMA AND NOT IN ACCORD WITH THE PRECEPTS WITHIN BUDDHISM, HE SHOULD ALWAYS FEEL PITY FOR SUCH DETRACTORS, INSTRUCT THEM, AND LEAD THEM TO A WHOLESOME BELIEF IN THE GREAT VEHICLE. Why are those of the Two Vehicles referred to as "evil" people? It's because, in this case, the Two Vehicles are attached to their own standards and limitations and doubt the generous capacity of the Great Vehicle. They're really attached to their own methods and consider themselves alone to be correct. They fail to understand the wonderful function of the Great Vehicle. That's why the Sutra admonishes them by calling them "evil exponents." This precept prohibits speaking about the offenses of those within the Buddhadharma. This does not refer to speaking of people who have already lost their precepts

because they've committed a really major offense and have been cast out of the sea of the Buddhadharma. Rather, it refers to speaking about people who are within the Buddhadharma.

IF, INSTEAD, A BODHISATTVA DISCUSSES THE FAULTS OF THOSE WITHIN THE BUDDHADHARMA, HE THEREBY COMMITS A BODHISATTVA PARAJIKA OFFENSE.

This precept is a precept of the nature as well as a precept of restraint. Why is that? It is because even according to the civil laws of people, one who slanders another person must make a public apology. Since this precept prohibits a violation of the law, it is known as a precept of the nature. Within Buddhism, it is a precept of restraint. There are six conditions which must be fulfilled before one has committed a major offense:

- 1) The person one is talking to is a living being.
- 2) One knows he is a living being.
- 3) One has the intent to speak of the offenses.
- 4) The offenses are actually spoken of.
- 5) The person one is speaking to hasn't received the precepts.
- 6) The person being spoken to understands what is being said. If the person one is speaking to doesn't know what is being talked about, it's not considered an offense. The conditions aren't met. But, if that person understands fully what one has said, then the sixth condition is met, and the act becomes a major offense.

SUTRA:

THE SEVENTH MAJOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS PRAISING ONESELF AND DISPARAGING OTHERS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT PRAISE HIMSELF AND DISPARAGE OTHERS, ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO SO, OR INVOLVE HIMSELF IN THE CAUSES, CONDITIONS, METHODS, OR KARMA OF PRAISING HIMSELF AND DISPARAGING OTHERS. A BODHISATTVA SHOULD BE WILLING TO STAND IN FOR ALL BEINGS IN UNDERGOING SLANDER AND INSULT. HE SHOULD ACCEPT UNFORTUNATE SITUATIONS AND LET OTHERS RECEIVE FAVORABLE ONES. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA BOASTS OF HIS OWN VIRTUE AND CONCEALS THE GOOD WORKS OF OTHERS, THUS CAUSING THEM TO BE SLANDERED, HE THEREBY COMMITS A BODHISATTVA PARAJIKA OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE SEVENTH MAJOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS PRAISING ONESELF AND DISPARAGING OTHERS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT PRAISE HIMSELF AND DISPARAGE OTHERS. What is meant by "praising oneself?" It means that one lauds one's own merit and virtue. "Disparaging others" means that one discusses the offenses of other people. One brings up one's own long points and discusses the shortcomings of others. Disparaging others can be done through both the written and the spoken word.

If two people get together and show off their good points to each other while exposing the shortcomings of other people, saying how great they themselves are and how bad other people are, and if they are doing this for the sake of name and profit, then this constitutes a major offense. A major offense is a parajika offense which merits expulsion from the sea of the Buddhadharma.

...ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO SO... To encourage other people to do so means that one teaches other people to praise oneself and to slander others. This is also a major offense. Or, one teaches another person to praise himself and slander others. That is a light offense. ...OR INVOLVE ONESELF IN THE CAUSES... The "causes" include greed for profit or reputation and popularity.

The CONDITIONS include creating all kinds of expedients, facilitating the entire process by finding out a person's shortcomings and discovering things to say against him. The METHODS refer to talking about a person's good and bad points; it means talking about rights and wrongs.

...OR KARMA OF PRAISING HIMSELF AND DISPARAGING OTHERS. The "karma" means that the other person understands what is being said.

This precept is one of the nature and of restraint. It's a precept of the nature because it involves a violation of human rights and even the civil law prohibits it. Within Buddhism, it is also a precept of restraint; that is, one should refrain from such involvement. There are five conditions which constitute a major offense.

- 1) The person one is speaking to is a living being.
- 2) One knows that he is a living being.
- 3) One has the intention to praise oneself and slander others.
- 4) One has the material to praise oneself and slander others.
- 5) The person whom one speaks to understands. What is meant by the intention to praise oneself and to slander others? It means that one wants to expose the shortcomings of the other party, so that name and profit will come to oneself. It is not for the sake of helping subdue the other person or for the sake of benefitting him that this is being done. If one were to admonish the person and say, "You shouldn't be doing this," etc., in order to help him subdue his faults, then that would be different. If one were trying to benefit him by speaking of his offenses, that, too, would be all right. But if one doesn't have either of these motives in mind, then to praise oneself and disparage others is pure slander.

The fourth condition above--to have the material to praise oneself and slander others --is further explained as follows:

- 1) One may bring up another person's social status, whether honorable or lowly.
- 2) One may refer to another's occupation, his livelihood, as to whether it is noble or base.
- 3) One may speak of another's skill or profession, as to whether it is superior or inferior.
- 4) One may discuss another's offenses, as to whether he has them or doesn't have them.

- 5) One may speak of another's afflictions, as to whether they are light or heavy.
- 6) One may talk of another's physical characteristics, as to whether they are fine or ugly.
- 7) One may talk about another's wholesome dharma, as to whether he is replete with them or not.

All these topics of conversation are considered the material for praising or slandering.

As to the creation of bad-mouth karma, every single phrase or utterance of such topics as these constitutes one major offense. Every single phrase in such a conversation constitutes a separate major offense. Think about it. If you talk a lot about the offenses of others, your own offenses must be great indeed!