

Brahma Net Sutra

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SUTRA:

THE EIGHTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS TURNING FROM THE GREAT VEHICLE. IF A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA TURNS HIS MIND AWAY FROM THE ETERNALLY ABIDING SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES OF THE GREAT VEHICLE, OR DECLARES THAT THEY WERE NOT ACTUALLY SPOKEN BY THE BUDDHA, AND, MOREOVER, ACCEPTS AND UPHOLDS THE UNWHOLESOME VIEWS OF THE TWO VEHICLES AND EXTERNALISTS, INCLUDING THEIR PROHIBITIONS, DEVIANT VIEWS, TEXTS, AND MORAL CODES, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

When looking at precepts and the vehicle, meaning the Dharma-door one cultivates, there are four possible combinations. There are many kinds of Dharma-doors, such as reading the Sutras, listening to the Dharma, reciting the Sutras, or sitting in Dhyana. All of these are considered the "vehicle." That is, riding on such a vehicle, one can go from the position of a common person to Buddhahood. Precepts refer to the prohibitions and rules one abides by, whether they be the Great Vehicle or Small Vehicle Precepts. The four combinations are:

1) One is quick with the precepts, but slow with the vehicle. That is, one is really strict in upholding precepts, but one doesn't use effort to cultivate. Such a person can gain rebirth in good paths but will not have the opportunity to hear the Dharma. An example would be those born in the heavens who never get to hear the Dharma. This happens because they never applied effort to the Dharma-doors of cultivation.

2) One is quick with the vehicle but slow with the precepts. This person is really a diligent cultivator, but he's sloppy with precepts. The result is that one falls into the evil paths but can hear the Dharma. An example of this is those of the eight divisions of ghosts and spirits: the gods, dragons, gandharvas, garudas, kinnaras, mahoragas, humans, and non-humans. Although they belong to the categories of ghosts, animals, and spirits, they still have the opportunity to see the Buddha and hear the Dharma. This is because in past lives they really worked hard in cultivation, but they didn't hold their precepts well.

3) One is quick with both the vehicle and the precepts. That combination, of course, is the best. That is, one works hard on one's Dharma-door and one also maintains the precepts strictly. The result is that one is born in good paths and one is able to hear the Dharma. By contrast there are beings who get reborn in the heavens but only enjoy the blessings there and don't listen to the Dharma. Even when Dharma is spoken in the heavens, they don't go to listen. Since everything is so comfortable there, and they can get whatever they think about, they become so sated that they don't go to hear the Dharma. This happens because in their past lives they never applied effort. Beings who gain the reward of the heavens but just spend their blessings will fall back eventually. But if one continues to apply effort even in the heavens, then one can progress rather than fall.

4) One is slow in both vehicle and precepts. People in this category don't apply effort in cultivating, nor do they uphold the precepts. As a result, they forever stay in the evil paths and never get a chance to hear the Dharma. Every Buddha who comes into the world emits a light, which reaches even to the beings in the hells. But, if in past lives one never planted conditions with the Buddha or the Dharma, then one wouldn't be able to see this light. Only if one has conditions with the Triple Jewel, can one see the light during this time and be rescued from the three evil paths.

Another important point is that those who hold the precepts should not look down on people who do not uphold the precepts. It says in the *Mahavipashyana*. "One cannot use the eye of a common person to judge living beings. Only when one possesses wisdom that is equal to the Thus Come One can one judge living beings."

In China, during the North-South Kingdoms, there was an Emperor named Wu of the Liang Dynasty who was a Taoist. Later, Ch'an Master Chih Kung and other foreign high monks came to China and converted the Emperor to Buddhism. Taoist practice is equivalent to the first category discussed above, that of quick with the vehicle but slow with the precepts. That is because Taoists work very hard at cultivating ascetic practices, but they do not regard anger as something which is important to control. So when the Emperor embraced Buddhism they got jealous and angry and marched on the capitol. They wanted to have a contest with the Buddhists. Since they had developed spiritual penetrations through their cultivation, they thought that they could really make a name for themselves. Now at that time, there was a Dharma Master Pai Tzu. Although he was a bhikshu, he was unkempt, ate meat, drank wine, and ate the five pungent plants. He was really dirty and always broke, so he would go to a certain Dharma Master and ask for money. He used it to buy wine and meat. Other people would say, "Dharma Master, why are you giving *that* guy money? He's just going to use it to create bad karma."

The Dharma Master would reply, "He's a human being, too. Don't you want him to live? How can I see him starve to death?"

Actually this Dharma Master happened to be an extraordinary person. He recognized that Dharma Master Pai Tzu was also unusual, that he was just manifesting the provisional for the sake of the Actual and was in reality a Sage.

So the Taoists were marching up north in a company six-thousand strong, to match their wits with six thousand bhikshus. All the Buddhist monks were seated, wearing their wrap--around Precept sashes. Suddenly a big wind arose, and all their sashes were ripped off their bodies. The sashes started whirling up into empty space, as if caught in a tornado. After a time, all the sashes came drifting down again, but much to everyone's amazement, each sash landed on the very person it belonged to. There were six thousand monks, and they all got their own sashes back. Obviously this was the opening stunt pulled by the Taoists, and it was no small feat.

"Okay, you show us one and we'll show you two," they challenged, meaning that it was the Buddhists' turn to come up with something. Well, in general, the monks just didn't have that type of spiritual penetrations. However, that one Dharma Master, who was no ordinary person, was not phased and said, "Is Pai Tzu around?" Indeed, he was in the back row sound asleep.

Someone poked him and said, "Somebody's calling you."

"What's somebody calling me for?" he muttered.

"Well, if somebody is asking for you, why don't you just go up front and find out what they want?"

So he sauntered forward, rubbed his eyes, and said, "What were you people talking about? I didn't even hear anything."

"The Taoists said, 'You show us one and we'll show you two,'" he was told.

At which Dharma Master Pai Tzu lifted one foot off the ground and said, "I'm showing you one, you show me two now."

The Taoists couldn't show him two. And so they lost. "What else happened?" inquired Pai Tzu.

"They ripped our Precept sashes off our backs, swirled them in the air, and then brought them back down on the right people."

"Gee, I missed it," said Pai Tzu, "Why don't you have another go at it?"

But the Taoists were powerless to repeat the performance. Dharma Master Pai Tzu's strength of spiritual penetrations completely counteracted their combined powers. As a result of these interactions, the Taoists were influenced to become vegetarians. From this story we can see that we can't judge people on face value. That's why the *Maha Vipashyana* says, "Only when one possesses wisdom like the Thus Come One, can one judge living beings."

THE EIGHTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS TURN-ING FROM THE GREAT VEHICLE. IF A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA TURNS HIS MIND AWAY FROM THE ETERNALLY-ABIDING SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES OF THE GREAT VEHICLE, OR DECLARES THAT THEY WERE NOT ACTUALLY SPOKEN BY THE BUDDA, AND MOREOVER ACCEPTS AND UPHOLDS THE UNWHOLESOME VIEWS OF THE TWO VEHICLES AND EXTERNALISTS, INCLUDING THEIR PROHIBITIONS, DEVIANT VIEWS, TEXTS, AND MORAL CODES, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. "Turns his mind away" means to turn one's back on the Great Vehicle. This not only includes rejecting the Sutras and moral codes by refusing to read them, but also to say that they were not actually spoken by the Buddha. After this, one goes on to uphold and accept the unwholesome views of the Two Vehicles or those of Externalist ways. This refers to someone who will accept the prohibitions or the deviant views and the text and moral codes of externalist ways, while maintaining that the Great Vehicle teachings were not spoken by the Buddha. Anyone who does this commits a defiling offense.

This Precept refers to a violation against the nature and is a precept of restraint. If one becomes attached to the teachings of the Two Vehicles, that's considered a violation of restraint only. But if one turns to belief in the teachings of external ways which advocate deviant teachings, then it's a violation against the nature. Why is this? It is because the very worst thing that can happen to a person is to get caught up in deviant views. Deviant views are what cause people to fall.

SUTRA:

THE NINTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO LOOK AFTER THE SICK. WHENEVER A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MEETS WITH ANYONE WHO IS SICK, HE SHOULD CONSTANTLY MAKE OFFERINGS TO THAT PERSON THE SAME AS HE WOULD TO A BUDDHA. WHETHER THE PERSON IS ONE'S PARENT, ONE'S TEACHER, A MEMBER OF THE SANGHA, OR A DISCIPLE, IS ONE WITH IMPAIRED FACULTIES, OR IS AFFLICTED WITH ANY OF THE MANIFOLD ILLNESSES, ONE SHOULD MAKE OFFERINGS AND CARE FOR THAT PERSON UNTIL HE RECOVERS. OF THE EIGHT FIELDS OF BLESSINGS, LOOKING AFTER THE SICK IS THE FOREMOST. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO LOOK AFTER THE SICK, OR IF HE DIRECTS HATEFUL THOUGHTS TOWARD THAT PERSON AND THEREBY REFUSES, TO RESCUE THE INDIVIDUAL, WHETHER HE IS IN A DWELLING OF THE SANGHA, THE CITY, THE WILDS, THE MOUNTAIN FORESTS, OR ALONG THE ROAD, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

Now we come to the ninth Minor Precept. THE NINTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO LOOK AFTER THE SICK. When one encounters a sick person and

doesn't look after him or help him, one loses the Bodhi heart. A person who has received the Bodhisattva Precepts must help sick people when they encounter them.

WHENEVER A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MEETS WITH ANYONE WHO IS SICK, HE SHOULD CONSTANTLY MAKE OFFERINGS TO THAT PERSON THE SAME AS HE WOULD TO A BUDDHA. "Offerings" refers to things like food, water, or medicine. One should regard a sick person as one would a Buddha. The blessings for helping a sick person are just like those one would plant with the Buddha.

OF THE EIGHT FIELDS OF BLESSINGS, LOOKING AFTER THE SICK IS THE FOREMOST. This field of blessings has two aspects: the Field of Respect, and also the Field of Compassion. When one looks after the sick, one can cover both aspects. In looking after the sick, one is planting blessings in the field of compassion, and if the sick person is a member of the Triple Jewel, then one is planting blessings in the field of respect, as well.

WHETHER THE PERSON IS ONE'S PARENT, ONE'S TEACHER, MEMBERS OF THE SANGHA, OR A DISCIPLE, IS ONE WITH IMPAIRED FACULTIES, OR IS AFFLICTED WITH ANY OF THE MANIFOLD ILLNESSES, ONE SHOULD MAKE OFFERINGS AND CARE FOR THAT PERSON UNTIL HE RECOVERS. Perhaps one's own parents are sick, or one's teacher, or a Sangha member, or a disciple. "Impaired faculties" means that perhaps a person can't see or can't hear well. You should make offerings and care for anyone who is afflicted with any of a myriad of illnesses until he recovers.

HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO LOOK AFTER THE SICK, OR IF HE DIRECTS HATEFUL THOUGHTS TOWARD THAT PERSON AND THEREFORE REFUSES TO RESCUE THE INDIVIDUAL, WHETHER HE IS IN A DWELLING OF THE SANGHA, THE CITY, THE WILDS, THE MOUNTAIN FORESTS, OR ALONG THE ROAD, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. If a Bodhisattva fails to look after the sick or if he directs hateful thoughts towards a sick person, such as, "I don't care if that person gets better, it's no business of mine," and as a result, doesn't care for the individual, whether he's in the dwelling of the Sangha, in the city, in the wilds, in a mountain forest, or along the road, he violates this Precept and commits a defiling offense.

What are the Eight Fields of Blessings?

- 1) The Buddha.
- 2) The Sages.

Sages are those who have cut off afflictions and attained Bodhi. They may be Sages of the Lesser Vehicle--that is, those who have obtained one of the four fruitions of Arhatship--or Sages of the Great Vehicle who cultivate the Ten Dwellings, Ten Conducts, and the Ten Transferences.

- 3) An Upadhaya--one's own teacher.
- 4) An Acarya--one's teacher of comportment and rules.
- 5) A member of the Sangha.
- 6) One's father.
- 7) One's mother.
- 8) The sick.

Of these eight, the first seven constitute fields of respect. The eighth, the sick, is a field of compassion. These are called fields because just like with fields, one must cultivate seeds of blessings in order for there to be growth. If one plants seeds of blessings in the seven fields of respect, one can increase one's blessings. If one plants seeds in the eighth field, that is, of the sick, one can bring forth compassion and then one's blessings will be even greater.

This is a Precept of restraint only. Most of the Minor Precepts are Precepts of restraint. "Restraint" means to stop one from doing something. Why did the Buddha restrain his disciples in so many ways? It is because holding to the Precepts of restraint also amasses merit and virtue.

There are some people who say, "We haven't received the Five Precepts, but we're doing the same thing as those people who have received them. We don't eat meat, and we don't drink wine. Isn't that the same? We're just good people, isn't that enough?"

This question is similar to the question asked by a disciple of Confucius. He asked, "If a person is born and he doesn't do any evil, isn't he naturally considered a Sage?"

Confucius answered, "He can only be considered a decent fellow, but he does not reckon as a superior person, nor as a Sage. If he didn't go along the path of the Worthy Sages, he would still not be considered a Worthy Sage." That's like if your intention was to ascend a flight of stairs, you would actually have to go up step-by-step, and if you didn't you would not be considered as to having ascended the stairs. The same applies to all these Precepts of Restraint. If you keep them, they will increase your blessings. Here's an example: Left-home people are not supposed to eat after noon. Some eat one meal a day and don't eat after noon. If a left-home person eats after noon, he has broken this particular Precept. But other people can eat several meals a day, and they have not violated the Precepts. So why is this a restriction for a left-home person? It's because, if one holds this Precept of not eating after noon, then one amasses the merit involved in maintaining that restraint. It says in the Vinaya that if a person holds this Precept, everyday he acquires merit amounting to ninety-one t'an (Chinese measure) of grain. And if one maintains this Precept every day, the merit and virtue would naturally compound. Since the Buddha wanted to help his disciples increase their blessings and wisdom, he used the method of the Precepts of restraint.

When the Buddha was in the world, there was a prince named Courageous Army. Since he was a prince, he was very wealthy. He also led a life of debauchery. He did anything

he pleased. The Buddha noticed that the Prince had only seven more days to live, so he sent the Venerable Ananda to get the Prince.

"The Prince has only seven more days to live, and if he doesn't leave the home life, after he dies it's for sure he will fall, because his actions merit falling into the hells." So Ananda went to the Prince and transmitted the message. The Prince said, "Well, since I have seven days, why don't you go and tell the Buddha, I'll play for six, and on the last day I'll come and leave the home life. Ask the Buddha whether that's okay or not. If he agrees to this, you don't have to come back. But if he doesn't go along with it, then come back and get me."

So the Venerable Ananda went back to the Buddha and told him the Prince's reaction. The Buddha said, "Well, let him be. It's just that he's so deeply attached to his habits."

So the prince partied for another six days, and on the seventh day he came to the Buddha's place, shaved his head, and received the Precepts. But when he received the Precepts, his resolve was exceptionally solid. Not only did he hold them with his body, he actually held them in his mind, and he didn't dare to forget any one of them. He knew that if he gave his body up, he would fall into the hells. It's like when you have to walk across a suspended bridge, you can't waiver. Just one false step, and you fall into the river, so in every step you must be careful. After this one day and night of exceptional diligence in holding the Precepts, he died. And then his relatives came and they said, "Wouldn't it have been something if he could have left the home life and then lived for a few more years? He left the home life, and he still had to die; what was the point?"

But the Buddha said, "Although he may have looked the same, actually, when he died, he was different. If he had not amassed merit and virtue for that one day and night, after he died, he would have fallen into the hells. Now, not only has he not fallen into the hells, he was reborn in the Tushita Heaven. After he has enjoyed the blessings in this heaven, he will be reborn in the path of people, and he will leave the home life. And after living for several tens of years in the human world, he will then again be reborn in the Tushita Heaven--the "Knowing Contentment Heaven." Again he will leave the home life when he returns. In this way, he will go back and forth for twenty kalpas. After that, he will certify to Arhatship. So, this one day and night of cultivating the Precepts--this merit and virtue--has become the foundation for his becoming an Arhat in the future." That's why these Precepts of merit and restraint really have virtue.

SUTRA:

THE TENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS COLLECTING DEADLY WEAPONS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT COLLECT KNIVES, CLUBS, BOWS, ARROWS, SPEARS, AXES, OR ANY OTHER WEAPONS USED IN FIGHTING OR WAGING WAR, NOR MAY HE KEEP NETS, TRAPS, OR ANY OTHER INSTRUMENTS OF EVIL WHICH MAY BE USED IN KILLING BEINGS. WHEN HIS OWN PARENTS ARE MURDERED, A BODHISATTVA STILL MUST NOT SEEK REVENGE, HOW MUCH THE LESS WOULD HE SLAUGHTER OTHER

LIVING BEINGS. HENCE, HE SHOULD NOT COLLECT ANY WEAPONS THAT CAN KILL LIVING BEINGS. IF HE DELIBERATELY COLLECTS SUCH WEAPONS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

THE BODHISATTVA MUST STUDY AND RESPECTFULLY UPHOLD THE AFOREMENTIONED TEN PRECEPTS. THEY WILL BE EXTENSIVELY EXPLAINED IN THE FOLLOWING SIX PERFECTIONS CHAPTER.

COMMENTARY:

THE TENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS COLLECTING DEADLY WEAPONS. One may not store or collect weapons or instruments designed for war or killing. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT COLLECT KNIVES, CLUBS, BOWS, ARROWS, SPEARS, AXES, OR ANY OTHER WEAPONS USED IN FIGHTING OR WAGING WAR, NOR MAY HE KEEP NETS, TRAPS, OR ANY OTHER INSTRUMENTS OF EVIL WHICH MAY BE USED IN killing beings. All these implements harm living beings.

WHEN HIS OWN PARENTS ARE MURDERED, A BODHISATTVA STILL MUST NOT SEEK REVENGE, HOW MUCH THE LESS WOULD HE SLAUGHTER OTHER LIVING BEINGS. In the ways of the world, if someone killed one's father, one would be expected to avenge his death. But according to the dictates of the Bodhisattva Precepts, even if one's own parents were killed, one should not seek revenge. This is because it involves the cycle of cause and effect. If you kill someone this life, he will kill you in a future life, and if that cycle is allowed to continue, it will go on forever without end.

HENCE, HE SHOULD NOT COLLECT ANY WEAPONS THAT CAN KILL LIVING BEINGS. IF HE DELIBERATELY COLLECTS SUCH WEAPONS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

This is a Precept of the nature and of restraint, because these instruments are used to expedite killing. Buddhism teaches that caging or killing animals is not in accord with the Way of filial piety.

During the Ch'ing Dynasty in China, in Yang Chou, there was a person named Ch'eng Pai Lin. One day he had a dream in which Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva told him, "Tomorrow the Ch'ing army will arrive. Out of the seventeen people in your household, sixteen will survive. But you cannot escape your fate. Tomorrow Wang Ma Tze will kill you, because in a past life you stabbed him twenty-six times and killed him." Then Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva added, "There is still an expedient method that may work. Prepare a fine feast and when he comes, invite him to eat with you. Afterwards, allow him to kill you. Perhaps that will change things."

The dream was vivid and when Ch'eng Pai awoke the following morning, he went out and bought wine and meat and vegetables, brought them back, and had a feast prepared.

When noontime came, someone knocked at the door. He opened the door and said, "Are you Wang Ma Tze?"

"How strange," said the man at the door, "I'm from the north, how did you know my name?"

His host invited him in and said, "Good that you've come; I've prepared a feast for you. Won't you join me?" Then he related the dream he'd had the night before. "Last life I killed you with twenty-six stabs of a knife, and so this life you have come to kill me. After we've finished this meal, you can do it."

Wang Ma Tze pondered over this and said, "But if you killed me last life, and I kill you this life, won't you kill me again next life? It will just go on and on. No, I won't kill you." Then he took his knife and scratched twenty-six marks on his host's back to represent that the debt had been repayed. Not only did Wang Ma Tze not kill his host, but afterwards they became very good friends. Wang said to his host, "The Ch'ing army is following en masse. They are not reasonable, so the best would be for you and your family to go to Su Chou. It's safe there."

So that is what Ch'eng Pai Lin did. This is a case of turning grievance into friendship, and reversing the retribution that is due one. So in Buddhism, it is possible to change one's fate.

THE BODHISATTVA MUST STUDY AND RESPECTFULLY UPHOLD THE AFOREMENTIONED TEN PRECEPTS. THEY WILL BE EXTENSIVELY EXPLAINED IN THE FOLLOWING SIX PERFECTIONS CHAPTER. The first ten of the Forty-eight Minor Precepts have just been explained. When you have read them, you should study and investigate these ten Precepts. You should not forget them. Then you should respectfully and sincerely uphold them. The Six Perfections Chapter was not transmitted from India, and so that part of the Sutra text is not available.

continued next issue

OTHER UPCOMING EVENTS:

6/7-7/13: INTENSIVE CHINESE AT DRBU.

7/15-10/31: One Hundred Eight Day PRECEPT PLATFORM culminating in the transmission of the BHIKSHU AND BHIKSHUNI PRECEPTS on Oct.31.

10/31-11/7: KUAN SHIH YIN BODHISATTVA RECITATION WEEK.

11/7-1/16 Ten-week intensive CH'AN MEDITATION (DRBU credit available).