

Brahma Net Sutra

commentary by Elder Master Wei Sung

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SUTRA:

THE ELEVENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS ACTING AS A COUNTRY'S MILITARY ENVOY. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT FOR THE SAKE OF PERSONAL BENEFIT OR EVIL INTENTIONS ACT AS A COUNTRY'S EMISSARY WHERE HIS INVOLVEMENT MAY BRING ABOUT THE CONFRONTATION OF OPPOSING MILITARY FORCES, THE COMMENCEMENT OF BATTLE, AND THE SUBSEQUENT SLAUGHTER OF LIMITLESS LIVING BEINGS. A BODHISATTVA MUST NOT EVEN GO AMONG MILITARY TROOPS OR HAVE DEALINGS WITH THEM, MUCH LESS MAY HE DELIBERATELY ACT AS A MILITANT FOR HIS COUNTRY. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY DOES SO, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE ELEVENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS ACTING AS A COUNTRY'S MILITARY ENVOY. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT FOR THE SAKE OF PERSONAL BENEFIT OR EVIL INTENTIONS ACT AS A COUNTRY'S EMISSARY WHERE HIS INVOLVEMENT MAY BRING ABOUT THE CONFRONTATION OF OPPOSING MILITARY FORCES, THE COMMENCEMENT OF BATTLE, AND THE SUBSEQUENT SLAUGHTER OF LIMITLESS LIVING BEINGS. A Bodhisattva must not act as a military envoy out of a desire to get benefit for himself or because of other evil intentions. This means he must not act as a go-between with the aim of bringing about battle between troops. When troops clash in battle, limitless beings are killed.

A BODHISATTVA MUST NOT EVEN GO AMONG MILITARY TROOPS OR HAVE DEALINGS WITH THEM, MUCH LESS MAY HE DELIBERATELY ACT AS A MILITANT FOR HIS COUNTRY. "Personal benefit or evil intentions" means that the person is not acting as a peacemaker, which would be an acceptable role for a Bodhisattva. Instead, he intentionally creates trouble. A Bodhisattva should not go among military troops. It's not a place suited for left-home people to cultivate the Way. If one is intent upon cultivating, one has to completely put down wealth, honor, and fame.

"A militant." Mencius of the Confucian School said, "I am skilled at fighting. I am skilled in the ways of war. What is today called a capable minister, in times of old was considered a militant among the people." Those we now call very capable ministers are those who in ancient times were called national militants. He also said, "If I were an emperor and had to do battle, I would certainly win. But those who today are called capable ministers, were known as militants in times past." A militant is someone intent on harming. If one commences battle, citizens will certainly be injured. It is said that the people

are the foundation of a nation. And when the foundation is undermined, the King perishes. To harm the people is to harm the nation.

HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY DOES SO, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. This precept is one of the nature, as well as one of restraint. The main part of the Precept guards against the desire for offerings and benefit. Since this kind of behavior involves the causes and conditions for harming, every single dealing, every single word that is interchanged, is considered a separate offense. If in addition a militant or an envoy acts out of hatred or resentment, then his behavior also violates the Major Precept against killing. If one resorts to pillage, that also violates the Major Precept against stealing.

In China, during the Ming Dynasty, there was a Dharma Master whose name was Yao Kuang Hsiao. After he left the home life, however, he involved himself in deviant livelihood—he was good at fortune telling, geomancy, and the like. He became very skilled at these things. The Emperor, Yung Le, who at that time was still just a feudal lord, asked him to cast his fortune for him.

The Dharma Master said, "I see that you have a desire to be an Emperor."

"Never." said the feudal lord.

But the Dharma Master kept flattering him and egging him on. Now it happened that in that lord's house there were forty sons, and each of the sons was tutored by a monk.

The Dharma Master said, "If you have me as your aide, I will help you to become King." Eventually the Dharma Master convinced the lord to invade Nanching, the southern capital. The lord won and was crowned emperor. However, the Dharma Master's sister was so appalled by his militant conduct that she disowned him. An ordinary person would have been moved by the brother's position as a high official; after all, she could have been appointed a cabinet member at the very least. But she didn't succumb to temptation. She regarded her brother as a militant. Hence she has come down in history as a "worthy" sister.

There are exceptions to this Precept. During the T'ang Dynasty there was a Dharma Master named Cheng Yin Feng (鄭隱峰). Once, when two armies were clashing in battle, he flew across the sky above their heads. All the troops stared up and said, "Oh, there's a monk flying across the sky!" and with that they lost their desire for battle. So although that technically was passing through a military base, he did it in order to stop the war.

During the Chin Dynasty, there was a man named Fo T'u Ch'eng (佛圖澄), who hung a bell in the hall at his temple. He could tell by the way it rang whether an auspicious event or a calamity was in store. Therefore, he could inform others about the outcome of battles as to victories and defeats. But since he used this information in a constructive rather than a destructive way, it, too, is considered an exception.

SUTRA:

THE TWELFTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS UNCOMPASSIONATE BUSINESS DEALINGS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT BUY AND SELL GOOD PEOPLE, SLAVES, ANY

OF THE SIX TYPES OF DOMESTIC ANIMALS, COFFINS, OR OTHER PRODUCTS USED IN THE DISPOSAL OF CORPSES. HE MUST NOT CARRY ON SUCH DEALINGS HIMSELF, NOR MAY HE ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO SO. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA ENGAGES IN THIS TYPE-OF BUSINESS OR ENCOURAGES OTHERS TO DO SO, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE TWELFTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS UNCOMPASSIONATE BUSINESS DEALINGS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT BUY AND SELL GOOD PEOPLE, SLAVES, ANY OF THE SIX TYPES OF DOMESTIC ANIMALS, COFFINS, OR OTHER PRODUCTS USED IN THE DISPOSAL OF CORPSES. This precept prohibits engaging in slavery or the sale of human beings for any reason or purpose, because these types of business dealings break up families and cause great suffering. When one sells the six types of domestic animals, one becomes involved in the conditions for killing, because the animals are sold to be killed. Nor should one sell coffins or any products used in the disposal of corpses. In such a case one is reaping profit from other people's deaths.

HE MUST NOT CARRY ON SUCH DEALINGS HIMSELF, NOR MAY HE ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO SO. It is also prohibited to ask someone else to do these things on your behalf or to teach others to engage in such dealings. In all cases, one commits this defiling offense.

People who make coffins might start thinking like this: "So many days have passed, and nobody has died. If more people died, then business would prosper." Just because of the very nature of his business, he might harbor such bad intentions. Therefore, Mencius warns, "...That is why in choosing an occupation, one cannot be too careful." By the same token, in learning a craft, one has to be very, very careful in one's choice. Some crafts benefit people; other crafts harm people. For example, if one sells any of the six types of domestic animals or if one uses mantras to cause people to die so one can sell more coffins, then one is adding the offense of stealing and killing on top of this defiling offense.

An exception to this Precept is buying animals in order to liberate them. If one is going to set them free, then that's not dealing in business. One may also buy coffins for the poor. But if there is any kind of profit involved in such dealings, in due time a corresponding retribution follows.

If one sells people as slaves or sells animals, in the future one will be separated from one's relatives or will be afflicted with many illnesses and have a short life span.

SUTRA:

THE THIRTEENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS BASELESS SLANDER. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT, HARBORING EVIL INTENTIONS, HEAP BASELESS SLANDER UPON VIRTUOUS PEOPLE AND GOOD HUMAN BEINGS, DHARMA MASTERS, TEACHERS AMONG THE SANGHA, KINGS, OR HONORABLE CITIZENS, SAYING THAT THEY HAVE COMMITTED ONE OF THE SEVEN REBELLIOUS ACTS OR VIOLATED ONE OF THE TEN MAJOR PRECEPTS. A BODHISATTVA SHOULD MAINTAIN A FILIAL, KIND, AND COMPASSIONATE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THEM, TREATING THEM JUST AS IF THEY WERE HIS OWN PARENTS, BROTHERS, OR ANY OF THE SIX TYPES OF CLOSE

RELATIVES. IF INSTEAD HE DELIBERATELY HARMS THEM AND CAUSES THOSE INDIVIDUALS TO FALL INTO UNDESIRABLE CIRCUMSTANCES, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

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IF INSTEAD HE DELIBERATELY HARMS THEM AND CAUSES THOSE INDIVIDUALS TO FALL INTO UNDESIRABLE CIRCUMSTANCES, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. This precept guards against a violation of the nature and it is also a precept of restraint. There are six conditions that make up the offense.

- 1) The person has not committed an offense.
- 2) One knows he has not.
- 3) One has the intent to slander.
- 4) One says he has committed certain offenses, including one of the Seven Rebellious Acts or a violation of the Ten Major Precepts.
- 5) There is someone present who hears the accusation.
- 6) The one who hears, understands.

SUTRA:

THE FOURTEENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS IGNITING DESTRUCTIVE FIRES. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT DELIBERATELY START A GREAT BLAZE WITH

UNWHOLESOME INTENTIONS, SET FIRE TO MOUNTAIN FORESTS OR WILDERNESS, OR BUILD BONFIRES FROM THE FOURTH LUNAR MONTH TO THE NINTH LUNAR MONTH. A BODHISATTVA MUST NOT SET FIRE TO PEOPLE'S HOMES, CITIES, VILLAGES, DWELLINGS OF THE SANGHA, FIELDS AND TREES, THE POSSESSIONS OF GHOSTS AND SPIRITS, GOVERNMENT PROPERTY, AND SO FORTH. HE MUST NOT DELIBERATELY SET FIRE TO ANY THING OR ANY PLACE THAT CONTAINS LIVING CREATURES. IF HE DELIBERATELY STARTS SUCH A FIRE, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE FOURTEENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS IGNITING DESTRUCTIVE FIRES. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT DELIBERATELY START A GREAT BLAZE WITH UNWHOLESOME INTENTIONS, SET FIRE TO MOUNTAIN FORESTS OR WILDERNESS, OR BUILD BONFIRES FROM THE FOURTH LUNAR MONTH TO THE NINTH LUNAR MONTH.

This is the fourteenth Precept, which prohibits setting destructive fires. An "evil intention" refers to the person who very recklessly and indulgently sets these fires. The prohibition extends from the fourth lunar month to the ninth lunar month, and those months apply only to countries that have cold climates. In the north, during these months all the vegetation grows, and small bugs and other creatures are in abundance. If one sets a fire during that period of time, one is bound to kill many creatures. But before the fourth lunar month, or after the ninth lunar month, when most of the tiny insects have died, then it's permissible for one to set a fire. However, in the tropics, like Malaysia or Thailand, the summers are just the same as the winters. It's hot all year round and the ground is always inhabited by bugs and crawling creatures.

A BODHISATTVA MUST NOT SET FIRE TO PEOPLE'S HOMES, CITIES, VILLAGES, DWELLINGS OF THE SANGHA, FIELDS AND TREES, THE POSSESSIONS OF GHOSTS AND SPIRITS, GOVERNMENT PROPERTY, AND SO FORTH. When it says a Bodhisattva must not

set fire to homes, cities, and villages, and dwellings of the Sangha, spirits and kings, and so forth, it means that one must not do that out of recklessness. For example, one is reckless if one sets fire to a piece of land and lets it get out of hand so that it burns down other people's houses and property as well. But if one sets a fire deliberately, out of revenge or with the intent to harm others, then one has also committed the major offense of stealing.

HE MUST NOT DELIBERATELY SET FIRE TO ANY THING OR PLACE THAT CONTAINS LIVING CREATURES. IF HE DELIBERATELY STARTS SUCH A FIRE, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. Even if one does not set a fire with the purpose of burning living creatures, it is almost inevitable that one will kill living creatures in the process. That is why this prohibition extends from the fourth lunar month to the ninth lunar month. But if one deliberately burns for the purpose of killing--"deliberately" means that one was fully aware of what one was doing and what the consequences would be then one violates this precept.

This is a precept of restraint. There are four conditions which make the offense.

- 1) One sets a fire at an inappropriate time. That is, sometime between the fourth to the ninth lunar month.
- 2) One is aware that this is not an appropriate time.
- 3) One has a reckless attitude.
- 4) One actually sets the fire.

There are exceptions to the rule. For lay people, if it's for the purpose of agriculture, then one can burn. For left-home people, if it's a preventive measure, it's permissible. For example, when Dharma Master Hsu Yun was at Nan Hua Temple, some troops came to set fire to the surrounding mountains. The entire forest was in danger of being burned to the ground. So the monks set a back-fire in order to counter the blaze. Since it was a preventative measure, it was acceptable. *-continued next issue*