

# *Brahma Net Sutra*

*commentary by Eler Master Wei Sung*

*translated by Bhikshuni Heng Tao \* \**

*reviewed by Bhikshuni Heng Chih \**

*edited by Upasikas Kuo Ts'an Nicholson and Kuo Tsai Rounds*

SUTRA:

THE SEVENTEENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FORCEFUL BEGGING BY RELIANCE ON OFFICIAL POWER. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT FOR THE SAKE OF FOOD AND DRINK, WEALTH, BENEFIT, OFFERINGS, OR FAME DELIBERATELY DRAW CLOSE TO KINGS, PRINCES, CABINET MEMBERS, OR OTHER OFFICIALS AND RELY ON THE INFLUENCE OF SUCH RELATIONSHIPS TO MAKE COERCIVE DEMANDS, ADMINISTER BEATINGS, CONFISCATE PROPERTY, OR SEIZE WEALTH. ALL SUCH ACTIONS ARE MOTIVATED BY EVIL INTENT AND MUCH SEEKING. HENCE IF A BODHISATTVA BEHAVES IN SUCH A MANNER HIMSELF OR ENCOURAGES OTHERS TO DO SO, HE IS UTTERLY DEVOID OF COMPASSIONATE AND FILIAL THOUGHTS AND HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE SEVENTEENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FORCEFUL BEGGING BY RELIANCE ON OFFICIAL POWER. "Reliance on official power" means to make use of official connections to seize things from people. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA, MUST NOT FOR THE SAKE OF FOOD AND DRINK, WEALTH, BENEFIT, OFFERINGS OR FAME DELIBERATELY DRAW CLOSE TO KINGS, PRINCES, CABINET MEMBERS, OR OTHER OFFICIALS AND RELY ON THE INFLUENCE OF SUCH RELATIONSHIPS TO MAKE COERCIVE DEMANDS, ADMINISTER BEATINGS, CONFISCATE PROPERTY, OR SEIZE WEALTH. Doing things for the sake of getting food, drink, wealth, offerings, or fame is selfish. None of these are good intentions. If one draws close to kings, princes, or cabinet ministers and relies on official power to administer beatings, confiscate property, and the like, one is committing unwholesome actions. For instance, to "seize wealth" means that one takes it without other people offering it. That is being unreasonable and unprincipled.

ALL SUCH ACTIONS ARE MOTIVATED BY EVIL INTENT AND MUCH SEEKING. This is seeking based on evil intent and excessive greed. They are oppressive and unwholesome motives.

HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA BEHAVES IN SUCH A MANNER HIMSELF OR ENCOURAGES OTHERS TO DO SO, HE IS UTTERLY DEVOID OF COMPASSIONATE AND FILIAL THOUGHTS AND HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. For a Bodhisattva to do this himself or teach others to do so is to be completely devoid of compassion. It is to be totally lacking in filial piety. If one has no thoughts of

compassion or filial compliance, one will certainly violate precepts. Getting food, drink, wealth, offerings, or fame for oneself means that one is not doing it on behalf of the Triple Jewel or for the Way--not for the sake of others, but for one's own sake only.

When one does too much seeking, one's greed is never sated. That's if one is doing this for oneself. One may "encourage others to do so" by exhorting them directly or by authorizing letters or books that encourage such actions.

This Precept is one of the nature and of restraint. Too much seeking just amounts violating the Precept against stealing.

Are there exceptions? Yes, if one is seeking on behalf of the Triple Jewel, or for living beings, or for sick people, then it's permissible. However, even then it must be done in accord with Dharma. If one relies on power or coercion to seek, then it's not acceptable.

SUTRA:

THE EIGHTEENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS SERVING AS AN INSTRUCTOR WITH INADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST STUDY THE TWELVE DIVISIONS OF THE SUTRA TEXTS. ONE WHO RECITES THE PRECEPTS SHOULD UPHOLD THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS IN THE SIX PERIODS OF THE DAY AND NIGHT. HE SHOULD UNDERSTAND THEIR MEANING AND PRINCIPLES, WHICH IS THE ESSENCE OF THE BUDDHA NATURE. IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO UNDERSTAND EVEN A SENTENCE OR VERSE OF THE MORAL CODES OR THE CAUSES AND CONDITIONS SURROUNDING THE PRECEPTS BUT FALSELY STATES THAT HE IS ABLE TO EXPLAIN THEM, HE IS DECEIVING BOTH HIMSELF AND OTHERS. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO UNDERSTAND OR KNOW ANY GIVEN DHARMA AND YET ACTS AS AN INSTRUCTOR IN TRANSMITTING THE PRECEPTS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE EIGHTEENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS SERVING AS AN INSTRUCTOR WITH INADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING. A person who doesn't even understand a line from the Sutras or moral codes and yet tries to explain them to others is just cheating himself and cheating others.

A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST STUDY THE TWELVE DIVISIONS OF THE SUTRA TEXTS. ONE WHO RECITES THE PRECEPTS SHOULD UPHOLD THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS IN THE SIX PERIODS OF THE DAY AND NIGHT. The proper responsibility of a Bodhisattva is to transmit the Dharma and save living beings. Therefore, he should study the Twelve Divisions of the Canon as a foundation for crossing over living beings. One should pay particular attention to the moral codes, as they are the very basis for Bodhisattva Precepts. One should uphold and recite precepts throughout the six periods of the day and night.

HE SHOULD UNDERSTAND THEIR MEANING AND PRINCIPLES, WHICH IS THE ESSENCE OF THE BUDDHA NATURE. IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO UNDERSTAND EVEN A SENTENCE OR VERSE OF THE MORAL CODES OR THE CAUSES AND CONDITIONS SURROUNDING THE PRECEPTS, BUT FALSELY STATES THAT HE IS ABLE TO EXPLAIN

THEM, HE IS DECEIVING BOTH HIMSELF AND OTHERS. Merely reciting them is not enough. One should understand the meaning and principles behind them. One must first understand the purity of the original source of the self-nature as being the substance and nature which the effortless Precepts rely upon. Relying on these effortless Precepts, one can accomplish the fruit of Buddhahood. The purity of the self-nature is called the Proper Cause of the Buddha nature. There are three causes for the Buddha nature:

1. The Proper Cause
2. The Conditioned Cause
3. The Final Cause

The Bodhisattva Precepts are the Conditioned Cause of the Buddha nature. When one receives the Bodhisattva Precepts, one then obtains this Conditioned Cause. However, the Proper Cause and the Conditioned Cause both have the same nature--the Buddha nature. They are simply two different types of cultivation. In the end, the two aspects of cultivation return to the one nature--the essence of the Buddha nature.

This is a Precept of restraint. Receiving precepts but not studying them is an offense. Posing as a teacher is another offense. That is, each aspect is a separate offense.

SUTRA:

THE NINETEENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS DOUBLE-TONGUED SPEECH (PROVOKING QUARRELS). WHENEVER A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA ENCOUNTERS A PRECEPT-HOLDING BHIKSHU WITH CENSOR IN HAND WHO CULTIVATES THE BODHISATTVA CONDUCT, HE MUST NOT WITH MALICIOUS INTENT PROVOKE CONTENTION BETWEEN WORTHY ONES. HE MUST NOT SPREAD DECEITFUL SLANDER AMONG THEM, STOPPING AT NO EVIL. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DOES SO, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE NINETEENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS DOUBLE-TONGUED SPEECH (PROVOKING QUARRELS). WHENEVER A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA ENCOUNTERS A PRECEPT-HOLDING BHIKSHU WITH CENSOR IN HAND WHO CULTIVATES THE BODHISATTVA CONDUCT, HE MUST NOT WITH MALICIOUS INTENT PROVOKE CONTENTION BETWEEN WORTHY ONES. HE MUST NOT SPREAD DECEITFUL SLANDER AMONG THEM, STOPPING AT NO EVIL. "Malicious intent" means deliberately "fanning the flames" between two parties. "Censor in hand" is just an example of a Dharma-door or a practice door. It implies that the bhikshu not only holds the Precepts, but also holds to his practices. If one approaches such a bhikshu and provokes a quarrel by gossiping, he violates this Precept. "Malicious intent" can also mean that one resents the people involved and wants to start a fight between them. Perhaps one is jealous of the other person's virtue. Perhaps one sees someone cultivating and one is not cultivating, so fearing the other person's reputation may be better than one's own, one obstructs him or causes him affliction. To "provoke contention between worthy ones" means to start a fight and then fan the fires--first aiding this party and then the other party. Even if the person has said or done

offensive things, it is still a violation to speak about it. How much the more is it a violation to indulge in baseless slander in order to cause contention! Even if a person has a fault, one is not supposed to talk about it, but if he doesn't and one makes it up, the offense is even more severe.

This is a Precept of the nature and of restraint. There are six conditions which make up the offense.

- 1) It's a living being.
- 2) One knows that he is a living being.
- 3) One has the intent to engage in double-tongued speech.
- 4) One speaks about the other person's faults--whether they are actual or false. Whether the faults are really there or not, speaking about them is an offense. Even if the person does have those faults, one commits a violation of this Precept if one speaks about them.
- 5) One speaks about them to another person.
- 6) That person understands. Every single sentence constitutes a separate offense. It's not that the entire speech is just one offense, but rather that every sentence one utters is a separate defiling offense.