

Brahma Net Sutra

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SUTRA:

THE TWENTIETH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO LIBERATE BEINGS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST MAINTAIN A MIND OF KINDNESS AND CULTIVATE THE PRACTICE OF LIBERATING BEINGS. HE SHOULD REFLECT THUS: "ALL MALE BEINGS HAVE BEEN MY FATHER AND ALL FEMALES HAVE BEEN MY MOTHER. THERE IS NOT A SINGLE BEING WHO HAS NOT GIVEN BIRTH TO ME DURING MY PREVIOUS LIVES, HENCE ALL BEINGS OF THE SIX DESTINIES ARE MY PARENTS. THEREFORE, WHEN A PERSON KILLS AND EATS ANY OF THESE BEINGS, HE THEREBY SLAUGHTERS MY PARENTS. FURTHERMORE, HE KILLS A BODY THAT WAS ONCE MY OWN, FOR ALL ELEMENTAL EARTH AND WATER HAS PREVIOUSLY SERVED AS PART OF MY BODY AND ALL ELEMENTAL FIRE AND AIR HAS SERVED AS MY BASIC SUBSTANCE. THEREFORE, I SHALL ALWAYS CULTIVATE THE PRACTICE OF LIBERATING BEINGS AND IN EVERY LIFE BE REBORN IN THE ETERNALLY-ABIDING DHARMA AND TEACH OTHERS TO LIBERATE BEINGS AS WELL."

WHENEVER A BODHISATTVA SEES A PERSON PREPARING TO KILL AN ANIMAL HE SHOULD DEVISE A SKILLFUL METHOD TO RESCUE AND PROTECT IT, FREEING IT FROM ITS SUFFERING AND DIFFICULTIES. FURTHERMORE, HE SHOULD USE THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS AND EXPLAIN THEM IN ORDER TO TEACH AND TRANSFORM BEINGS AND TO RESCUE AND DELIVER THOSE BEINGS. ON THE DAY THAT ONE'S FATHER, MOTHER, OR BROTHER DIES, ONE SHOULD REQUEST A DHARMA MASTER TO LECTURE THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS, SUTRAS, AND MORAL CODE TO GENERATE BLESSINGS FOR THE DECEASED AND LEAD HIM TO SEE THE BUDDHAS AND SECURE REBIRTH AMONG HUMANS AND GODS. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO ACT ACCORDINGLY, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE TWENTIETH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO LIBERATE BEINGS. This is a Precept that prohibits failure to liberate beings. Because Bodhisattvas take compassion as their substance, when they encounter circumstances such as these, they should rescue those beings.

A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST MAINTAIN A MIND OF KINDNESS AND CULTIVATE THE PRACTICE OF LIBERATING BEINGS. HE SHOULD REFLECT THUS: "ALL MALE BEINGS HAVE BEEN MY FATHER AND ALL FEMALES HAVE BEEN MY MOTHER. THERE

IS NOT A SINGLE BEING WHO HAS NOT GIVEN BIRTH TO ME DURING MY PREVIOUS LIVES, HENCE ALL BEINGS OF THE SIX DESTINIES ARE MY PARENTS. THEREFORE, WHEN A PERSON KILLS AND EATS ANY OF THESE BEINGS, HE THEREBY SLAUGHTERS MY PARENTS. FURTHERMORE, HE KILLS A BODY THAT WAS ONCE MY OWN, FOR ALL ELEMENTAL EARTH AND WATER HAS PREVIOUSLY SERVED AS PART OF MY BODY AND ALL ELEMENTAL FIRE AND AIR HAS SERVED AS MY BASIC SUBSTANCE. A Bodhisattva should have a mind of kindness. There are three types of kindness:

1) Kindness with regard to the conditions with living beings.

That is, one contemplates all living beings of the six paths as being one's parents. If one thinks in that way, one could hardly bring forth a hateful mind.

2) Kindness with regard to the conditions of dharma,

That is, one contemplates one's body as being an illusory combination of the four elements of earth, water, wind, and fire.

3) Kindness toward those with whom one doesn't have conditions.

That is, in every life, when one receives rebirth, one enlightens to the principle of non-production and extinction. One reaches a state where one doesn't give rise to discrimination anymore--a state where nothing is produced or destroyed. Then one enlightens to the permanently abiding Dharma.

THEREFORE, I SHALL ALWAYS CULTIVATE THE PRACTICE OF LIBERATING BEINGS AND IN EVERY LIFE BE REBORN IN THE ETERNALLY-ABIDING DHARMA AND TEACH OTHERS TO LIBERATE BEINGS AS WELL." The Precept also says that one has to liberate beings. A person has to do this himself, as well as encourage others to do so. When one teaches others to do so, one can use these three types of kindness to instruct them.

WHENEVER A BODHISATTVA SEES A PERSON PREPARING TO KILL AN ANIMAL HE SHOULD DEVISE A SKILLFUL METHOD TO RESCUE AND PROTECT IT, FREEING IT FROM ITS SUFFERING AND DIFFICULTIES. FURTHERMORE, HE SHOULD USE THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS AND EXPLAIN THEM IN ORDER TO TEACH AND TRANSFORM BEINGS AND TO RESCUE AND DELIVER THOSE BEINGS. To "rescue living beings" means to save them from their present suffering, that is the difficulties that they're in now. To "teach and transform" them by explaining the Bodhisattva Precepts for them is to extricate them from the causes of suffering in the future. If one teaches and transforms them now, they will understand. If they understand, they won't create bad karma. If they don't create bad karma, in the future they won't suffer. So by these two means, one gets rid of their present causes for suffering and does away with a future retribution of suffering. To rescue people is to pull them out of suffering; it is to give them joy.

ON THE DAY THAT ONE'S FATHER, MOTHER, OR BROTHER DIES, ONE SHOULD REQUEST A DHARMA MASTER TO LECTURE THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS, SUTRAS, AND MORAL CODE TO GENERATE BLESSINGS FOR THE DECEASED AND LEAD HIM TO SEE THE BUDDHAS AND SECURE REBIRTH AMONG HUMANS AND GODS. Furthermore, you should cause them to see all Buddhas and be reborn among people and gods where they will see

the Buddha and hear the Dharma. Then they will always cultivate the Way and forever leave the path of animals and difficulties. If you can do this, it is called true liberation.

HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO ACT ACCORDINGLY, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

This is a Precept of restraint. It's not a violation against the nature. If one doesn't liberate life, one isn't violating the law. But to liberate life does mean to practice compassion. There are four conditions which make up an offense:

- 1) That which is before one is a living being.
- 2) One knows it is a living being.
- 3) One lacks a kind mind. That is, one doesn't wish to liberate it. Now if you wish to save a certain being but it's beyond your capacity, then you should singlemindedly recite the Buddha's name. For example, you may see some pigs or sheep that are about to be slaughtered, and you can't liberate them because you can't buy them all. At that time you should singlemindedly recite the Buddha's name so those creatures can hear it. You can speak Dharma also. You can say to them, "All of you living beings should bring forth the Bodhi resolve!" This is creating causes and conditions for rescuing their wisdom-light. Although you are not saving their physical bodies, you are rescuing their wisdom-light. If you can do that, then you're not committing an offense.
- 4) One just sits there, like a spectator, and refuses to rescue the being.

The presence of all four of these conditions constitutes an offense. Failure to rescue their physical bodies is one offense. Failure to rescue their wisdom-life is another offense. There are no exceptions to this Precept.

When people die, it is common practice for the relatives to recite Sutras for them such as the *Amitabha Sutra*, or the *Earth Store Sutra*, or the *Vajra Sutra* and transfer the merit from reciting the Sutras so as to cross over those deceased beings.

SUTRA:

THE BODHISATTVA MUST STUDY AND RESPECTFULLY UPHOLD THE AFOREMENTIONED TEN PRECEPTS. AN EXPANSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH PRECEPT MAY BE FOUND IN THE "EXPIATING OFFENSES" CHAPTER.

THE TWENTY-FIRST MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS HATEFUL BEATING AND SEEKING REVENGE. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT REPAY ANGER WITH ANGER, OR BLOWS WITH BLOWS. EVEN IF A KILLER MURDERS ONE'S FATHER, MOTHER, BROTHER, OR ONE OF THE SIX KINDS OF CLOSE RELATIVES, ONE MUST NOT SEEK REVENGE. EVEN IF THE LEADER OF ONE'S COUNTRY IS ASSASSINATED, STILL ONE MUST NOT SEEK REVENGE. KILLING ONE BEING TO REVENGE THE MURDER OF ANOTHER CONTRADICTS THE WAY OF FILIAL PIETY. MOREOVER, BODHISATTVAS MUST NOT KEEP SLAVES, SERVANTS, ADMINISTER BEATINGS OR SCOLD AND INSULT

BEINGS, FOR TO DO SO ENSURES THE DAILY ACCUMULATION OF THE THREE KARMIC OFFENSES AS WELL AS LIMITLESS OFFENSES OF THE MOUTH. HOW MUCH LESS SHOULD A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY COMMIT ANY OF THE SEVEN REBELLIOUS ACTS! HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA SANGHAN IS DEVOID OF KINDNESS AND SEEKS REVENGE, EVEN IF IT IS FOR INJUSTICES DONE TO ONE OF HIS SIX TYPES OF CLOSE RELATIVES, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE TWENTY-FIRST MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS HATEFUL BEATING AND SEEKING REVENGE. "Hateful beating" means striking out with vengeance. Those methods are not in accord with the way of filial piety. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT REPAY ANGER WITH ANGER, OR BLOWS WITH BLOWS. EVEN IF A KILLER MURDERS ONE'S FATHER, MOTHER, BROTHER, OR ONE OF THE SIX KINDS OF CLOSE RELATIVES, ONE MUST NOT SEEK REVENGE. EVEN IF THE LEADER OF ONE'S COUNTRY IS ASSASSINATED, STILL ONE MUST NOT SEEK REVENGE. KILLING ONE BEING TO REVENGE THE MURDER OF ANOTHER CONTRADICTS THE WAY OF FILIAL PIETY. When one person is killed by another, there is a former cause involved. If one's father or mother or one of one's six types of close relatives is killed, one is not supposed to seek revenge. They were killed because they owed a debt of life to the other person. If one insists on taking revenge, then one increases resentment in the future. If one wishes to seek revenge on behalf of one's parents or kin, then one is just typing up the causes for more resentment, more hatred, and more killing. This is hardly a way of being affectionate to the dead; it is not a true way of being filial to one's parents.

MOREOVER, BODHISATTVAS MUST NOT KEEP SLAVES, SERVANTS, ADMINISTER BEATINGS OR SCOLD AND INSULT BEINGS, FOR TO DO SO ENSURES THE DAILY ACCUMULATION OF THE THREE KARMIC OFFENSES AS WELL AS LIMITLESS OFFENSES OF THE MOUTH. HOW MUCH THE LESS SHOULD A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY COMMIT ANY OF THE SEVEN REBELLIOUS ACTS! The Precept says one can't even keep slaves or servants and beat or insult them. If one should not even do that, then how could one do something even more severe? If one can't even beat one's slaves or servants, how can one kill somebody? As far as keeping servants, lay people are allowed to keep servants, but left-home people are absolutely not allowed to keep any servants. However, lay people are not allowed to scold or to beat their servants.

"How much less should a Bodhisattva commit any of the Seven Rebellious Acts!" This passage is not talking about the Seven Rebellious Acts normally referred to: killing one's father, killing one's mother, spilling the Buddha's blood, killing an Arhat, killing an Acharya, killing an Upadhaya, and disrupting the harmony of the Sangha. Here it refers to the severity of the offense of killing--that is to say; seeking revenge is as heavy an offence as committing one of the Seven Rebellious Acts.

If a person kills another's father, then somebody will kill that person's father. If a person kills another's brother, somebody will in turn kill his brother. So isn't this like killing oneself? It's only a matter of time.

If you kill somebody's father, in the future somebody will kill your father. If you kill somebody's brother, somebody will end up killing your brother. Isn't this equivalent to killing yourself? It's only a matter of time. Very soon in the future the effects will come back to you. For this reason, deliberately seeking revenge can be called one of the Seven Rebellious Acts. This is what is meant in this passage.

People who have taken the Bodhisattva Precepts can still use the law in situations like this to remit the grievance, but they must not do it out of a desire to seek revenge. They can put it in the hands of justice to decide the matter. But if one is a left-home person, one cannot do any of this. According to the rules for a left-home person, one repays resentment with kindness.

This Precept covers both a violation against the nature and a violation against restraint. The offense has a double aspect: first it impairs patience and kindness. Second it ties up more resentment for the future.

There are five conditions which make up the offense:

- 1) There is an enemy.
- 2) One thinks of the person as an enemy.
- 3) One has the intent to seek revenge.
- 4) One performs an act of revenge.
- 5) There is a recipient of the act.

That means that one has sought revenge and the other person was the recipient. Either one killed him or harmed him in some way. It's a heavy offense if one has killed or harmed him. It's a lighter offense if one has scolded or beaten him. If one takes the life of one's enemy, then that also creates a violation of the Precept against killing. Any act of vengeance short of killing is a violation of this Precept.

SUTRA:

THE TWENTY-SECOND MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS ARROGANCE AND FAILURE TO REQUEST DHARMA. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA WHO HAS ONLY RECENTLY LEFT HOME AND WHO STILL HAS NO SOLID UNDERSTANDING MUST NOT ON THE ACCOUNT OF HIS OWN INTELLIGENCE, WISDOM, HONORABLE BACKGROUND, ELDERLY YEARS, GREAT FAMILY NAME, PRESTIGIOUS CLASS, VAST UNDERSTANDING, GREAT BLESSINGS, BOUNTIFUL WEALTH, OR POSSESSIONS OF THE SEVEN JEWELS, BECOME CONCEITED AND ARROGANT. HE MUST NOT FAIL TO ASK FOR AND ACCEPT INSTRUCTION ON THE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES FROM DHARMA MASTERS WHO HAVE STUDIED BEFORE HIM. SUCH DHARMA MASTERS MAY BE OF INFERIOR CASTE, YOUNGER YEARS, OR HUMBLE LINEAGE, OR THEY MAY BE POOR OR PHYSICALLY DISABLED, YET THEY MAY BE GENUINELY VIRTUOUS AND POSSESSED OF EXHAUSTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF ALL THE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES. A NOVICE BODHISATTVA MUST NOT JUDGE DHARMA MASTERS ON THE BASIS OF THEIR CASTE OR FAMILY NAME. IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO REQUEST AND ACCEPT INSTRUCTION

IN THE TRUTH OF THE PRIMARY MEANING FROM DHARMA MASTERS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE TWENTY-SECOND MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS ARROGANCE AND FAILURE TO REQUEST DHARMA. This Precept prohibits being arrogant, looking down on the Dharma and refusing to request instructions. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA WHO HAS ONLY RECENTLY LEFT HOME AND WHO STILL HAS NO SOLID UNDERSTANDING MUST NOT ON THE ACCOUNT OF HIS OWN INTELLIGENCE, WISDOM, HONORABLE BACKGROUND, ELDERLY YEARS, GREAT FAMILY NAME, PRESTIGIOUS CLASS, VAST UNDERSTANDING, GREAT BLESSINGS, BOUNTEOUS WEALTH, OR POSSESSIONS OF THE SEVEN JEWELS, BECOME CONCEITED AND ARROGANT. This refers to a Bodhisattva who is new to the left-home life and has not been steeped in the Dharma for very long. Lacking "solid understanding" means he doesn't really have proper understanding of Buddhism. Since he hasn't been in Buddhism for long and doesn't have proper understanding, there is even less reason for him to be arrogant. However, it is just during those early stages that people tend to become arrogant or conceited. Conceit and arrogance are based on seven things:

- 1) One may rely on one's worldly wisdom and intelligence.
- 2) One may rely on one's influential or lofty position.
- 3) One may rely on one's elderly years.
- 4) One may rely on one's class or family. That is, if one is from a very honorable family, one might snub others.
- 5) One may rely on one's vast understanding. One figures one has it all down.
- 6) One may rely on one's great blessings.
- 7) One may rely on one's wealth. These seven things can increase one's self-pride and conceit.

HE MUST NOT FAIL TO ASK FOR AND ACCEPT INSTRUCTION ON THE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES FROM DHARMA MASTERS WHO HAVE STUDIED BEFORE HIM. SUCH DHARMA MASTERS MAY BE OF INFERIOR CASTE, YOUNGER YEARS, OR HUMBLE LINEAGE, OR THEY MAY BE POOR OR PHYSICALLY DISABLED, YET THEY MAY BE GENUINELY VIRTUOUS AND POSSESSED OF EXHAUSTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF ALL THE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES. Conversely, there may be another Dharma Master who has just the opposite features. He doesn't have any of the seven listed above.

- 1) He may be of inferior caste; he isn't an aristocrat.
- 2) He may be young in years. That is, he doesn't have the honor that comes with age.
- 3) He may come from a humble lineage, which means that his background isn't honorable.

4) He may be poor.

5) He may be from very low or humble circumstance.

6) He may be physically disabled or crippled.

7) He may not be very intelligent. Intelligence refers to sharpness of the ears and brightness of the eyes, but the Dharma Master's eyes and ears may not be so sharp. He may not know everything, but yet have virtue. He truly cultivates. Therefore, he understands the Sutras and moral codes. He is a person who both understands and practices. If one only understands but doesn't practice, that's no good. But since this person is replete with both practice and understanding, what need is there to talk about caste or family? The Precept says that if one fails to seek and accept instructions from such a person, then one commits a great offense.

A NOVICE BODHISATTVA MUST NOT JUDGE DHARMA MASTERS ON THE BASIS OF THEIR CASTE OR FAMILY NAME. IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO REQUEST AND ACCEPT INSTRUCTION IN THE TRUTH OF THE PRIMARY MEANING FROM DHARMA MASTERS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. What a great loss!

This Precept guards against a violation of the nature and is also a Precept of restraint.

It's said,

Arrogance is like a high mountain, the water of Dharma runs off it.

That is, people who are arrogant will not accept other people's opinions or suggestions. In that sense, they are like a steep mountain in the rain: all the water will just slide down. The mountain is not able to retain it.

There are four conditions that make up the offense.

1) The person before one is a Dharma Master.

2) One knows that he is a Dharma Master.

3) One has thoughts of conceit and arrogance.

4) One fails to go to seek and accept instructions.

There are no exceptions to this rule.

-to be continued