

Brahma Net Sutra

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SUTRA:

THE TWENTY-FIFTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS RECKLESS DEALINGS WITH THE ASSEMBLY. AFTER THE BUDDHA'S EXTINCTION, WHENEVER A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA SERVES AS A DHARMA LECTURING HOST, VINAYA MASTER, HEAD OF A SANGHA DWELLING, DHARMA TEACHER, DHYANA INSTRUCTOR, OR GUEST REFECT, HE MUST MAINTAIN A COMPASSIONATE ATTITUDE, SKILLFULLY SETTLE ANY QUARRELS OR DISPUTES, AND CAREFULLY PROTECT ALL POSSESSIONS OF THE TRIPLE JEWEL, USING THEM FRUGALLY AND HANDLING THEM AS IF THEY WERE HIS PERSONAL PROPERTY. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA CREATES DISORDER IN THE ASSEMBLY, PROVOKES QUARRELS AND DISPUTES, OR USES PROPERTY OF THE TRIPLE JEWEL IN A RECKLESS MANNER, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE TWENTY-FIFTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS RECKLESS DEALINGS WITH THE ASSEMBLY. If one does not have a wholesome understanding of the workings of the Great Assembly, one violates this Precept. AFTER THE BUDDHA'S EXTINCTION, WHENEVER A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA SERVES AS A DHARMA LECTURING HOST, VINAYA MASTER, HEAD OF A SANGHA DWELLING, DHARMA TEACHER, DHYANA INSTRUCTOR, OR GUEST PREFECT, HE MUST MAINTAIN A COMPASSIONATE ATTITUDE, SKILLFULLY SETTLE ANY QUARRELS OR DISPUTES, AND CAREFULLY PROTECT ALL POSSESSIONS OF THE TRIPLE JEWEL, USING THEM FRUGALLY AND HANDLING THEM AS IF THEY WERE HIS PERSONAL PROPERTY.

This Precept discusses the time after the Buddha's extinction. A Dharma Lecturing Host is a Dharma Master. A Vinaya Master upholds pure practices and has a thorough understanding of the Precepts. A head of a Sangha dwelling must know how to administrate the activities of the Sangha community. A Dharma Teacher exhorts people to create blessings. Sometimes he's referred to as the one who ties up conditions by going out to beg. Dhyana Instructors are monks who understand the practice of meditation and hold various positions within the Ch'an Hall. A Guest Prefect is a traditional position in a monastery. He looks after those who come to reside at the monastery on a temporary basis. Toward all such people he is involved with, he must maintain an attitude of compassion.

This Precept guards against a violation of the nature and is also a Precept of restraint. Many things occur in a monastic community, and if the person in charge is not skilled at settling quarrels and disputes, then the effect will be immediate. The same applies to not carefully handling the possessions of the Triple Jewel. Mistakes in this area also bring on immediate repercussions. Every misuse effects a different retribution. If he misuses the goods of the Triple Jewel, this is a violation of the Precept against stealing--a violation of the nature. There are no exceptions to this Precept.

What is meant by misusing the goods of the Triple Jewel? If one receives goods for the Buddha Jewel but uses them for the Dharma Jewel, this is misusing goods. Or, if one receives them for the Sangha Jewel but uses them for the Buddha Jewel, that is also misusing goods. In the Buddhist teaching it becomes clear that cause and effect are quite complicated.

If money is given to repair an image of Shakyamuni Buddha, and the money is used to print Sutras instead, then one has used the Buddha Jewel money for the Dharma Jewel. Or, if money is given to print sutras but is used instead to feed the great assembly, that is using the Dharma Jewel Money for the Sangha Jewel. Misusing of funds of the Triple Jewel in this way is considered stealing. If one is not very clear about the Precept, however, one may not realize this and assume that as long as the money is used for the Triple Jewel, it is permissible. Even within one Jewel, the distinctions must be kept very clear. For instance, if a donor gives money to cast an image of Shakyamuni Buddha, but instead an image of Maitreya Bodhisattva is made, this is not keeping the accounts within the Buddha Jewel clearly. If a donor gives money to print the AMITABHA SUTRA, but the VAJRA SUTRA is printed instead, that is a misuse of the funds of the Dharma Jewel. You may think this doesn't matter, but to use the money in this way reveals that one does not really understand the Precepts.

In the school I attended, people who came to visit would sometimes leave money to buy special food for the students at the noon meal (none of us ate after noon). One time a charity organization came to the school to ask for money. Now one would think it would be perfectly fine to use the snack money to contribute to such a worthy cause. But even merit and virtue cannot be dealt with sloppily. First the teacher called all the students together and explained the situation. He told us how much money had accumulated and then asked if the students would agree to use the money for a contribution. Once he got the permission of the group, it was fine to use the money in that way. If he had just made the decision himself, that would have been a misappropriation of funds. The Precepts are designed to counteract cause and effect in the most detailed ways.

SUTRA:

THE TWENTY-SIXTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS RECEIVING PERSONAL OFFERINGS. AFTER FIRST HAVING ESTABLISHED RESIDENCE IN A DWELLING OF THE SANGHA, IF A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA WITNESSES THE ARRIVAL OF A GUEST BODHISATTVA OR BHIKSHU AT A SANGHA DWELLING AT A HOUSEHOLDER'S HOME IN A CITY OR VILLAGE, AT

QUARTERS SET UP BY THE EMPEROR, AT A RESIDENCE FOR THE SUMMER RETREAT, OR AT QUARTERS OF THE GREAT ASSEMBLY, THE NATIVE SANGHAN SHOULD WELCOME HIM UPON HIS ARRIVAL AND SEE HIM OFF WHEN HE LEAVES, MAKING OFFERINGS OF FOOD AND DRINK, A PLACE TO LIVE, SITTING CLOTHS, A STRING OR WOODEN BED, AND SO FORTH. HE SHOULD ALWAYS SUPPLY HIM WITH AN AMPLE AMOUNT OF NECESSITIES. IF HE HAS NOTHING TO OFFER, HE SHOULD BE WILLING TO PAWN HIMSELF, HIS SON OR DAUGHTER, OR TO CUT OFF AND SELL HIS OWN FLESH IN ORDER TO PROVIDE THE GUEST WITH EVERYTHING HE NEEDS. IF A DONOR PROFFERS AN INVITATION TO THE SANGHA, THE GUEST SANGHAN MUST BE GIVEN A FAIR SHARE OF ALL OFFERINGS. FURTHERMORE, THE HEAD OF THE SANGHA IS DWELLING MUST SEND THE GUEST SANGHAN IN RESPONSE TO INVITATIONS IN ACCORD WITH HIS PROPER POSITION. IF THE NATIVE SANGHAN ACCEPT INVITATIONS WITHOUT TAKING THE GUEST SANGHAN ALONG WITH THEM, THE HEAD OF THE SANGHA DWELLING THEREBY INCURS LIMITLESS OFFENSES. HIS BEHAVIOR IS NO DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF AN ANIMAL AND HE IS NOT A TRUE SHRAMANA OR SHAKYAN. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA ACTS IN SUCH A MANNER, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE TWENTY-SIXTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS RECEIVING PERSONAL OFFERINGS. This refers to accepting offerings oneself but not offering a fair share to guest Sanghans. AFTER FIRST HAVING ESTABLISHED RESIDENCE IN A DWELLING OF THE SANGHA, IF A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA WITNESSES THE ARRIVAL OF A GUEST BODHISATTVA OR BHIKSHU AT A SANGHA DWELLING A HOUSEHOLDER'S HOME IN A CITY OR VILLAGE, AT QUARTERS SET UP BY THE EMPEROR, AT A RESIDENCE FOR THE SUMMER RETREAT, OR AT QUARTERS OF THE GREAT ASSEMBLY, THE NATIVE SANGHAN SHOULD WELCOME HIM UPON HIS ARRIVAL AND SEE HIM OFF WHEN HE LEAVES, MAKING OFFERINGS OF FOOD AND DRINK, A PLACE TO LIVE, SITTING CLOTHES, A STRING OR WOODEN BED, AND SO FORTH. HE SHOULD ALWAYS SUPPLY HIM WITH AN AMPLE AMOUNT OF ESSENTIALS. "Guest Bodhisattva" refers to anyone in the assembly of Great Knights. "Guest Bhikshu" refers to anyone in the Sound Hearer assembly. They may take up residence in various places, but all are entitled to receive their fair share of offerings.

IF HE HAS NOTHING TO OFFER, HE SHOULD BE WILLING TO PAWN HIMSELF, HIS SON OR DAUGHTER, OR TO CUT OFF AND SELL HIS OWN FLESH IN ORDER TO PROVIDE THE GUEST WITH EVERYTHING HE NEEDS. IF A DONOR PROFFERS AN INVITATION TO THE SANGHA, THE GUEST SANGHAN MUST BE GIVEN A FAIR SHARE OF ALL OFFERINGS. When a Bodhisattva or bhikshu comes to visit and one has nothing to offer them, then one should be willing to sacrifice oneself to make an offering, how much more should one be willing to find a way to

provide the guest with essentials. If people have means they should even more be willing to make offerings of all kinds to such a visitor.

FURTHERMORE, THE HEAD OF THE SANGHA'S DWELLING MUST SEND THE GUEST SANGHAN IN RESPONSE TO INVITATIONS IN ACCORD WITH HIS PROPER POSITION. IF THE NATIVE SANGHANS ACCEPT INVITATIONS WITHOUT TAKING THE GUEST SANGHAN ALONG WITH THEM, THE HEAD OF THE SANGHA DWELLING THEREBY INCURS LIMITLESS OFFENSES. HIS BEHAVIOR IS NO DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF AN ANIMAL AND HE IS NOT A TRUE SHRAMANA OR SHAKYAN. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA ACTS IN SUCH A MANNER, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

Breaking this Precept is a violation of both the nature and of restraint. All visiting Sangha members should be invited to receive offerings in accord with their positions in the Sangha. They are part of the gathering that recites the Precepts and, as such, should receive their shares of the offerings. If one does not offer a Visiting Sanghan what he rightly deserves, then one defiles the offering. Further, if one is greedy for profit and receives individual offerings, that is a violation of the Precept against stealing.

There are four conditions necessary to incur an offense.

1. There is a visitor who deserves part of the offerings.
2. One knows he is a visitor.
3. One intends to take the offerings himself.
4. One actually does it that way.

Once there was an Abbot who was sitting in meditation and saw a person clothed in fiery armor standing with his foot chained to the threshold of the door. The Abbot asked him, "Who are you?" He gave his name and said that he had abused the property of the Sangha. He took the money that was designated to buy food for the Sangha and used it to erect a Sangha dwelling instead. At the time he thought he had put it to good use and that there was no mistake involved. But this was not the case, and he was now undergoing the punishment of the red-hot armor as a result. "Please sell this Sangha dwelling that I erected," he begged, "and use the money to buy food for the Sangha so that I may be relieved of my offense."

The Abbot did not sell the dwelling, but instead donated the aforementioned amount of money donated for the purpose of buying food for the Sangha. Shortly thereafter the man in the fiery armor came again and thanked the Abbot. "Due to your compassion I have been released from this suffering." Ever after, the imprint of his fiery feet could be seen where they had burned the threshold.

In worldly terms, such a situation would be hard to understand, since the money was still used for the Sangha. But even so, it was inappropriate and is counted as a mistake in cause and effect.

In a book of accounts by Ch'an Master Chih Kung there is an incident related about Great Master Yang Ch'i. When it was time for him to die, he couldn't go. "What is this?" Master Yang Ch'i wondered. "Why is it that I can't die? How strange that I can't be released."

Then from empty space, a good Dharma protecting spirit said to him, "You owe the permanently dwelling a ream of cloth. Give it back and you will be released."

"I don't remember ever taking cloth from the Permanently Dwelling," replied the Master.

"Don't you remember in such and such a year on the fifteenth day of the eighth month the Sangha had an offering of moon cakes. Each person got a cake and you did, too. That was your share. But when you took the moon cake, you took a piece of the temple's paper along with it to wrap it in. That paper did not belong to you. You gave the cake wrapped in paper to your mother. The interest rate on that paper is seven times by day and three times by night, or a total of ten times itself per day. It has accumulated to this point in time so that you truly owe the permanently dwelling a ream of cloth.

The Dharma Master did as he was told and was then able to die. First, however, he asked the good Dharma protecting spirit a question. "If I couldn't get free because of one small incident of taking a piece of paper from the Permanently Dwelling, what happens to all those people in the world who casually take things from the Permanently Dwelling all the time?"

"They are not at the same level of accomplishment as you are. They are still due back in this world for a long time to come. So, if they don't pay it back this life, they will pay back next life. If they don't get it all returned in that life, they can work on it the life after that. This life you are to be liberated, so if you didn't get your debts taken care of, how could you expect to do so?"

Then the Dharma Master understood. Once that was all cleared up, he left. He attained liberation.

SUTRA:

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS ACCEPTING DISCRIMINATORY INVITATIONS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NEVER ACCEPT DISCRIMINATORY INVITATIONS OR OFFERINGS. BECAUSE SUCH OFFERINGS RIGHTFULLY BELONG TO THE SANGHA OF THE TEN DIRECTIONS, IF HE ACCEPTS THEM ONLY FOR HIMSELF, THAT IS TANTAMOUNT TO SEIZURE OF SANGHA PROPERTY OF THE TEN DIRECTIONS. FURTHERMORE, IF HE TAKES FOR HIS OWN USE POSSESSIONS OF ANYONE INCLUDED IN THE EIGHT FIELDS OF BLESSINGS, POSSESSIONS OF BUDDHAS, SAGES, OF TEACHERS AMONG THE SANGHA, OF HIS FATHER OR MOTHER, OR OF A SICK PERSON, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS ACCEPTING DISCRIMINATORY INVITATIONS. Discriminatory invitations are those that are not made to the entire Assembly but to individuals. It is not permissible for a Bodhisattva to accept such kinds of invitations. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NEVER ACCEPT DISCRIMINATORY INVITATIONS OR OFFERINGS. BECAUSE SUCH OFFERINGS RIGHTFULLY BELONG TO THE SANGHA OF THE TEN DIRECTIONS, IF HE ACCEPTS THEM ONLY FOR HIMSELF, THAT IS TANTAMOUNT TO SEIZURE OF SANGHA PROPERTY OF THE TEN DIRECTIONS. It says these offerings rightly belong to the Sangha of the ten directions because a donor's cultivation of blessings should be responded to equally by the Sangha. Everyone in the assembled Sangha is equal and therefore it is not permissible for a certain person to receive offerings that the others do not get. All acts of giving should be done for the benefit of the Assembled Sangha of the Ten Directions. If only one individual accepts an offering, then those of the ten directions miss out, and one has committed an offense. In the extreme, this amounts to stealing things belonging to the Sangha of the ten directions.

FURTHERMORE, IF HE TAKES FOR HIS OWN USE POSSESSIONS OF ANYONE INCLUDED IN THE EIGHT FIELDS OF BLESSINGS, POSSESSIONS OF BUDDHAS, SAGES, OF TEACHERS AMONG THE SANGHA, OF HIS FATHER OR MOTHER, OR OF A SICK PERSON, HE THERE BY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. The eight fields of blessings were listed above. All of them should be regarded as well. Sometimes Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, or Arhats transformationally appear as seemingly ordinary members of the Sangha. There is no way to be sure. So, making offerings to the Assembled Sangha should be regarded as equal to making offerings to the Buddhas of the Ten Directions.

This Precept is one of restraint. Violation of it causes donors to lose sight of the concept of equality and causes the Sangha of the Ten Directions to be deprived of offerings intended for them. Three conditions constitute an offense.

1. There is a discriminatory invitation.
2. One knows that it is a discriminatory invitation.
3. One accepts the invitation.

As soon as one accepts the discriminatory invitation, one has committed an offense.

If a donor offers food and other necessities either at his own home, at a temple, or at another home, and the person holding the Bodhisattva Precepts refuses the offerings because he is angry, that is considered a violation of this Precept as well. Exceptions are if one is sick, if one does not have the strength, if one is mentally ill, if the place is far away, or if the way is dangerous and frightening. Then if one does not accept a general invitation, it is not considered an offense.

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