

Brahma Net Sutra

commentary by Elder 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 TWENTY-EIGHTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS ISSUING DISCRIMINATORY INVITATIONS TO A SANGHAN. WHENEVER A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA, BE HE A BODHISATTVA SANGHAN, BODHISATTVA LAYPERSON, OR ANY OTHER DONOR, WISHES TO EXTEND AN INVITATION TO THE SANGHA, THE FIELD OF BLESSINGS, IN ORDER TO SEEK FULFILLMENT OF HIS OWN WISHES, HE SHOULD GO TO THE SANGHA'S DWELLING PLACE AND INQUIRE FROM A PERSON IN A POSITION OF AUTHORITY, SAYING, "I NOW WISH TO ISSUE AN INVITATION TO MEMBERS OF THE SANGHA SO AS TO SEEK FULFILLMENT OF MY WISHES." THE PERSON IN AUTHORITY SHOULD ANSWER, "IF A PERSON OFFERS AN INVITATION TO SANGHANS ACCORDING TO THEIR PROPER ORDER, THE MERIT IS THE SAME AS MAKING OFFERINGS TO THE WORTHIES AND SAGES AMONG THE SANGHA OF THE TEN DIRECTIONS."

IF A PERSON OFFERED A DISCRIMINATORY INVITATION TO FIVE HUNDRED ARHATS, OR FIVE HUNDRED BODHISATTVAS AMONG THE SANGHA, THE MERIT ACCRUED DOES NOT MEASURE UP TO THAT WHICH COMES FROM MAKING AN OFFERING TO ONE COMMON SANGHAN ACCORDING TO HIS PROPER ORDER. ISSUING DISCRIMINATORY INVITATIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE SANGHA IS CULTIVATING AN EXTERNALIST DHARMA. NONE OF THE SEVEN BUDDHAS HAVE PERMITTED THE DHARMA OF DISCRIMINATORY INVITATIONS. SUCH INVITATIONS CONTRADICT THE WAY OF FILIAL PIETY. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY ISSUES A DISCRIMINATORY INVITATION TO ANY SANGHAN, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH MINOR PRECEPTS PROHIBITS ISSUING DISCRIMINATORY INVITATIONS TO A SANGHAN. Issuing discriminatory invitations means that one doesn't invite the Sangha members according to their proper order. One picks favorites. WHENEVER A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA, BE HE A BODHISATTVA SANGHAN, BODHISATTVA LAYPERSON, OR ANY OTHER DONOR, WISHES TO EXTEND AN INVITATION TO THE SANGHA, THE FIELD OF BLESSINGS, IN ORDER TO SEEK FULFILLMENT OF HIS OWN WISHES, HE SHOULD GO TO THE SANGHA'S DWELLING PLACE AND INQUIRE FROM A

PERSON IN A POSITION OF AUTHORITY, SAYING, "I NOW WISH TO ISSUE AN INVITATION TO MEMBERS OF THE SANGHA SO AS TO SEEK FULFILLMENT OF MY WISHES." THE PERSON IN AUTHORITY SHOULD ANSWER, "IF A PERSON OFFERS AN INVITATION TO SANGHANS ACCORDING TO THEIR PROPER ORDER, THE MERIT IS THE SAME AS MAKING OFFERINGS TO THE WORTHIES AND SAGES AMONG THE SANGHA OF THE TEN DIRECTIONS." The Precept refers to a Bodhisattva Sanghan or Bodhisattva layperson. This is because there are Bodhisattvas within each of the nine Dharma realms. There may be Bodhisattvas in the realms of gods, asuras, people, and the like. Therefore, there are Bodhisattvas among Sangha members and the laity. Donor in Sanskrit is *danapati*; dana means "to give," pati means "to transcend." In other words, possessing the merit and virtue of giving, one can transcend the sea of suffering. In general, donors are the Dharma-protectors of the Triple Jewel. When a donor extends an invitation to the Sangha, the field of blessings, desiring to seek fulfillment of his own wishes, he should go to the Sangha's dwelling place and find a person of authority. He should say to that person, "I now wish to invite members of the Sangha to receive an offering in order to seek fulfillment of my wishes."



The person in authority should answer, "If a person offers an invitation to the Sangha according to proper order, the merit is the same as making offerings to the Worthies and Sages among the Sangha of the ten directions."

IF A PERSON OFFERED A DISCRIMINATORY INVITATION TO FIVE HUNDRED ARHATS, OR FIVE HUNDRED BODHISATTVAS AMONG THE SANGHA, THE MERIT ACCRUED DOES NOT MEASURE UP TO THAT WHICH COMES FROM MAKING AN OFFERING TO ONE COMMON SANGHAN ACCORDING TO HIS PROPER ORDER. ISSUING DISCRIMINATORY INVITATIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE SANGHA IS CULTIVATING AN EXTERNALIST DHARMA. NONE OF THE SEVEN BUDDHAS HAVE PERMITTED THE DHARMA OF DISCRIMINATORY INVITATIONS. SUCH INVITATIONS CONTRADICT THE WAY OF FILIAL PIETY. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY ISSUES A DISCRIMINATORY INVITATION TO ANY SANGHAN, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPTS AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. But if one offers a discriminatory invitation to five hundred Arhats or five hundred Bodhisattvas among the Sangha, the merit one receives does not even reach the merit from inviting just one

common Sanghan in accord with his proper order. There may be people in the world who think that there is much greater merit in inviting Arhats and Bodhisattvas. But this passage of the Precept states that this is not so. Why not? It's because most of us could not tell a common person from a sage. Therefore, if one can have thoughts of equality towards even common Sanghan, it may be that one may get to make offerings to a Buddha! A Buddha might manifest and so one can't discriminate when one invites the Sangha. Discriminating is an externalist method. The seven Buddhas never used this method. The seven Buddhas refer to Shakyamuni Buddha and the six Buddhas prior to him. The seven Buddhas never permitted discriminatory invitations because it's not according to filial piety. Hence, issuing discriminatory invitations is a defiling offense.

In this precept the term "Arhat" is mentioned. Arhat is a Sanskrit word which has three meanings.

1. Killer of Thieves,
2. One Worthy of Offerings, and
3. No Birth

To kill thieves is to kill the thieves of the afflictions caused by view delusions and thought delusions. When people apply effort in stillness, they may bring forth false thoughts. These false thoughts are like thieves. But the Arhat is able to kill these thieves of affliction so they don't come to bother him anymore. Since he can kill the thieves of affliction, his blessings increase to the point where he becomes One Worthy of Offerings. He is worthy to receive offerings from humans and gods in the Triple Realm. The third meaning of Arhat is "no birth." When most people die, they enter what is called the intermediate skandha body. This means that the previous skandha body is already discarded, but the next skandha body hasn't yet arrived. That is, one has not yet been reborn. The previous skandha body is composed of form, feeling, thought, activity, and consciousness. After having gotten rid of that body of the five skandhas, and prior to the next reincarnation, one is at an intermediate stage and has what's called an intermediate skandha body. Because ordinary people haven't cut off their afflictions they can't get out of the revolving wheel, so they all go through the stage of the intermediate skandha body. Arhats don't have to do this. After they die, they just certify to the principle of emptiness.

The Seven Buddhas are very near to our kalpa. Usually intervals between the appearance of each Buddha is very long. But the time between Kashyapa Buddha, the sixth Buddha, and Shakyamuni Buddha, the seventh Buddha, is just two million years. Comparatively speaking, that is not a long time. The time from Shakyamuni Buddha to Maitreya Bodhisattva will be some nine million years. That's not a very long space of time, either. In the Worthy Kalpa, our present kalpa,--which will be followed by the Kalpa of Constellations--a thousand Buddhas will appear in the world. Shakyamuni Buddha is the fourth, so there are still nine hundred and ninety-six Buddhas yet to appear. The Worthy Kalpa has more Buddhas than any other kalpa. The first of the Seven Buddhas is Vipasyin Buddha. His name means "Supreme Contemplation." The second Buddha is Sikhin Buddha. His name means "Fire." The afflictions of people are just like fuel, and this Buddha can burn up the firewood of afflictions. The third is Visvabhu Buddha. His

name means "Pervading Everywhere with Self-Mastery." That means he's able to go everywhere with absolutely no obstructions. These three were the Buddhas of the previous kalpa, called the Kalpa of Adornment. The fourth Buddha is Krakucchanda Buddha, which means "That Which Should Be Cut Off." What should be cut off? Afflictions and ignorance like sand and dust. The fifth Buddha is Kanakamuni Buddha. His name means "Gold Stillness." "Gold" is solid and "Stillness" means he doesn't move. He has certified to a state of purity and non-doing. The sixth is Kasyapa Buddha. His name means "Drinker of light." The image of the Buddha which has hands clasped at his breast is Kasyapa. It signifies that he won't let the light escape. That's because if the light was revealed to people, it's so bright that it would blind them. The Venerable Mahakasyapa's name has the same meaning as this Buddha's. Shakyamuni Buddha is the last one, the seventh Buddha, whose name means "One Able to Be Humane" and "Still Quietude." To be humane means able to be compassionate. Still Quietude means that his mind doesn't move with false thoughts. Still means very calm; quiet means not making any noise. This refers to not bringing forth discriminations in one's mind. The latter four are of the Worthy Kalpa. Together they make up seven, and so they are called the Seven Buddhas.

This Precept is only a violation of restraint. It isn't a violation against the nature. If one makes discriminations regarding what is considered a field of blessings and what is not, one's mind becomes petty and narrow. It doesn't accord with the Dharma-door of Equality. If people start discriminating and saying, "Oh, this Sangha member is a field of blessings, that one isn't," then their minds aren't broad and vast anymore. Look at the Buddha. He is equal in the way he treats living beings. He considers all living beings to be Buddhas. It is just because he had the mind of equality that he became a Buddha. He said, "All living beings of the great earth are completely endowed with the virtuous marks of the Thus Come One's Wisdom. It is only because of false thinking and attachment that they cannot certify to it." If on the cause ground one is not level and equal with beings, then one will receive a like retribution.

There are exceptions to this Precept. If a layperson wants to invite the Master, he took refuge under or if he is particularly close to someone in the Sangha, exceptions can be made. Also, if people want to invite a Dharma Master to come and speak the Dharma, or to administer the Precepts, then they can select the person who is superior in both capability and virtue.

The retribution resulting from issuing discriminatory invitations is to lose the vastness and perfection of the blessings and virtue that would have resulted if one had adhered to the Dharma-door of level equality and marklessness. Since one goes against this Dharma-door of level equality and marklessness, as a consequence one loses the blessings and virtue one might have received.

SUTRA:

THE TWENTY-NINTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS DEVIANT LIVELIHOODS.
A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT WITH EVIL INTENTIONS OR FOR

THE SAKE OF PERSONAL BENEFIT, LIVE AS A SOLICITOR FOR MALE AND FEMALE PROSTITUTES; HE MAY NOT COOK FOR HIMSELF OR BE MILLER OF GRAIN FOR HIMSELF; HE MAY NOT BE A FORTUNE TELLER WHO USES PHYSIOGNOMY TO DETERMINE WHETHER COUPLES ARE SUITABLE MARRIAGE PARTNERS OR BE ONE WHO INTERPRETS THE RELATIVE AUSPICIOUSNESS OF DREAMS; HE MAY NOT BE ONE WHO PREDICTS THE GENDER OF UNBORN CHILDREN; OR ONE WHO RECITES INCANTATIONS AS A MAGICIAN; HE MAY NOT ACT AS A SKILLED CRAFTSMAN; AS A FALCON TRAINER OR ONE WHO CONCOCTS NON-MEDICINAL DRUGS BY COMBINING HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF POISONOUS INGREDIENTS. FURTHER, HE MAY NOT MAKE A LIVING BY COLLECTING VENOM FROM SNAKES, MAKING POISONOUS DRUGS FROM GOLD OR SILVER, OR BY PRACTICING WITCHCRAFT. SUCH PROFESSIONS ARE DEVOID OF COMPASSION, SYMPATHY, OR FILIAL PIETY. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY ACTS IN SUCH MANNERS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE TWENTY-NINTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS DEVIANT LIVELIHOODS. Deviant livelihood means a profession that does not accord with the Buddha's teachings.

A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT WITH EVIL INTENTIONS OR FOR THE SAKE OF PERSONAL BENEFIT, LIVE AS A SOLICITOR FOR MALE OR FEMALE PROSTITUTES; HE MAY NOT COOK FOR HIMSELF OR BE MILLER OF GRAIN FOR HIMSELF, HE MAY NOT BE A FORTUNE TELLER WHO USES PHYSIOGNOMY TO DETERMINE WHETHER COUPLES ARE SUITABLE MARRIAGE PARTNERS OR BE ONE WHO INTERPRETS THE RELATIVE AUSPICIOUSNESS OF DREAMS; HE MAY NOT BE ONE WHO PREDICTS THE GENDER OF UNBORN CHILDREN; OR ONE WHO RECITES INCANTATIONS AS A MAGICIAN; HE MAY NOT ACT AS A SKILLED CRAFTSMAN; AS A FALCON TRAINER; OR AS ONE WHO CONCOCTS NON-MEDICINAL DRUGS BY COMBINING HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF POISONOUS INGREDIENTS. FURTHER, HE MAY NOT MAKE A LIVING BY COLLECTING VENOM FROM SNAKES, MAKING POISONOUS DRUGS FROM GOLD OR SILVER, OR BY PRACTICING WITCHCRAFT. A person cannot live as a solicitor for male or female prostitutes. Nor may he cook for himself, or be a miller for himself. This is because in India, in the past, all left home people begged for their food. In the Thervada countries, such as Thailand, Burma, and Ceylon, all the monks still beg for their food and do not cook in their own temples. Cooking for one-self is discouraged as a practice for left-home people because it takes up a lot of time, especially if people eat more than one meal a day, and thereby obstructs their Way karma. For this reason, Bhikshus were taught to beg for their food. They just ate what they were given. If some got more than others they would even out the portions. When Buddhism came to China, the system changed. Each temple cooked its own food. So, this part of the Precept applied especially to the Sanghans of India of that time. They shouldn't cook themselves, or be a thresher or miller of grains for

themselves. The third stipulation is that they should not look at the features of people, whether men or women, cast their horoscopes for them, or tell them their fortunes, or explain their dreams, telling them whether their dreams are auspicious or inauspicious. Nor should they predict the gender of unborn children, telling people whether they would have a son or daughter. This is just another type of fortune telling. They should not use mantras or spells. Nor should they be skilled craftsmen. A skilled craftsman or a skilled artist is very clever, but if one has left the home-life, one should develop one's karma in the Way. When one gets involved with skills and crafts, that also obstructs one's karma in the Way. Nor may one act as a falcon trainer. The falcon or eagle can be trained to go into water to get fish and go into the forest to catch birds. By training such a falcon, one is intent on harming other living beings. If one concocts drugs by mixing hundreds of thousands of poisonous ingredients, these poisons also can harm people. Collecting venom from snakes means that one intends to use it as a poison. Snake venom can also be used as a snake repellent, but that's not what is meant here.

Nor can one practice witchcraft. In countries like Malaysia, India, Nepal, Burma, and Thailand there are examples of this. In Malaysia it's called a 'hex,'--black magic. This kind of magic isn't common in China Proper, but in the southern part of China, in *Yun Nan* Province, which is near Burma, this type of practice is quite common. I once heard of a man who came from Northern China and after living a while in Yun Nan he married a woman from the South. After staying with her for a couple of years, he decided to go back to the North. The wife thought that when he got back to the North, he wouldn't come back to her. She knew how to practice witchcraft, so she made a bowl of noodles for him and asked him to eat it. But he didn't eat the bowl of noodles. When she wasn't looking, he put the noodles underneath the cup-board and went on to eat something else. After about six months in the North, he came back. When the wife saw him, she was scared out of her wits. She said, "Are you a ghost?" because if he had eaten the bowl of noodles he would certainly have died. "How is it that you are still living?" she asked. "What happened to the bowl of noodles I gave you?"

He said, "I didn't eat it." The bowl of noodles was still underneath the cupboard and when he pulled it out, it had all completely turned into poisonous snakes! If he had eaten it, he most certainly would have lost his life.

I also saw a case of black magic in Malaysia. It involved a woman over thirty who never married. The father loved her very much, but he didn't love his son. The son's wife was a Thai woman and a lot of Thai people know how to practice witchcraft. She laid a spell on her sister-in-law. When the young woman realized that she had been hexed, she came and asked, "In Buddhism do you have a way of getting rid of such poison?"

Somebody told her, "In Buddhism, we have the Great Compassion Mantra. If you recite it sincerely, it can cure anything."

The woman memorized The Great Compassion Mantra. The poison had worked its way into her system so that all her fingers turned black. If she hadn't used the Great Compassion Mantra to neutralize the poison, her illness would have been fatal. She kept

on reciting it until all the poison was driven from her body. Witchcraft and sorcery are deviant magic used to harm people. If one practices these things, one is without compassion, sympathy, or filial piety. Therefore, if a Bodhisattva deliberately acts in this way, he violates this Precept and commits a defiling offense. When the Precept says, "with evil intentions," it means that the person does not consider the opportunity to benefit people. SUCH PROFESSIONS ARE DEVOID OF COMPASSION, SYMPATHY, OR FILIAL PIETY. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY ACTS IN SUCH MANNERS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

There are seven categories of deviant livelihoods mentioned: the first is that one sells sex. The second is that one cooks. The third is that one acts as a fortune teller. The fourth is that one practices spells and magic. The fifth is that one acts as a skilled craftsman. The sixth is that one acts as a falcon trainer. The seventh is that one concocts poisonous drugs. None of these seven things benefit other people, and some also cause harm. The more one engages in those practices, the more one's Way-mind grows thin; one loses the resolve to cultivate. Bit by bit, one retreats from the Way. This Precept is a violation of the nature, and is also a Precept of restraint.

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