

Brahma Net Sutra

commentary by Elder Master Wei Sung

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SUTRA:

THE BODHISATTVA MUST STUDY AND RESPECTFULLY UPHOLD THE AFOREMENTIONED TEN PRECEPTS. THEY WILL BE EXTENSIVELY EXPLAINED IN THE "PROHIBITIONS" CHAPTER.

THE THIRTY-FIRST MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO RESCUE AND RANSOM SACRED OBJECTS AND INDIVIDUALS WHEN WITNESSING THEIR IMPERILMENT. THE BUDDHA SAID, "IN THE EVIL AGE WHICH FOLLOWS UPON MY EXTINCTION,WHENEVER A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA SEES AN EXTERNALIST, AN EVIL PERSON, OR A THIEF SELLING IMAGES OF BUDDHAS, BODHISATTVAS, OR OF HIS PARENTS, COPIES OF SUTRAS OR MORAL CODES, OR FINDS THEM BEING ABUSED, OR IF HE SEES ANY BHIKSHU, BHIKSHUNI, BODHISATTVA, OR WAY-CULTIVATOR RESOLVED ON BODHI BEING SOLD AS A SERVANT TO OFFICIALS OR AS A COMMON SLAVE, HE SHOULD FEEL COMPASSION AND KINDNESS AND DEVISE AN EXPEDIENT METHOD TO RESCUE AND PROTECT SUCH INDIVIDUALS AND OBJECTS. HE SHOULD TEACH AND TRANSFORM THE OFFENDER IN ALL CASES, AND RAISE FUNDS OR VALUABLES TO RANSOM THOSE IMAGES OF BUDDHAS AND BODHISATTVAS, THOSE BHIKSHUS, RESOLVED BODHISATTVAS, SUTRAS, AND MORAL CODES." HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO RANSOM THE PERSON OR OBJECT IN PERIL, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE BODHISATTVA MUST STUDY AND RESPECTFULLY UPHOLD THE AFOREMENTIONED TEN PRECEPTS. THEY WILL BE EXTENSIVELY EXPLAINED IN THE "PROHIBITIONS" CHAPTER. This section concludes the next set of ten Minor Precepts.

THE THIRTY-FIRST MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO RESCUE AND RANSOM SACRED OBJECTS AND INDIVIDUALS WHEN WITNESSING THEIR IMPERILMENT. THE BUDDHA SAID, "IN THE EVIL AGE WHICH FOLLOWS UPON MY EXTINCTION, WHENEVER A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA SEES AN EXTERNALIST, AN EVIL PERSON, OR A THIEF SELLING IMAGES OF BUDDHAS, BODHISATTVAS, OR OF HIS PARENTS, COPIES OF SUTRAS OR

MORAL CODES, OR FINDS THEM BEING ABUSED, OR IF HE SEES ANY BHIKSHU, BHIKSHUNI, BODHISATTVA, OR WAY-CULTIVATOR RESOLVED ON BODHI BEING SOLD AS A SERVANT TO OFFICIALS OR AS A COMMON SLAVE, HE SHOULD FEEL COMPASSION AND KINDNESS AND DEVISE AN EXPEDIENT METHOD TO RESCUE AND PROTECT SUCH INDIVIDUALS AND OBJECTS. The Buddha continues speaking and begins the next set of ten Precepts. The particulars of this Precept would probably not have happened when the Buddha was in the world, so he specifically refers to the time after his extinction. However, that does not refer to the peaceful age that followed his demise. Rather, it refers to the later evil age. That is, when unwholesome things happen, just as described in the Precept. "Externalists" refers to those who seek outside their minds for dharmas. They do not entertain proper principle. An "Evil person" is one who is up to no good. A "Thief" is out to get something at the expense of others.

What do these people do? They sell "images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, or of his parents, or copies of sutras or moral codes." They steal Buddha images and then blackmarket them. They do the same with sacred texts. If we see this occurring we should do what we can to stop it; at least buy up the books ourselves. They may also sell left-home people or people who have resolved their minds to be Bodhisattvas. Anyone who sees this being done should bring forth thoughts of compassion. They should devise some expedient method to rescue the people or the texts. They can buy the images and texts so they will not be destroyed or abused.

HE SHOULD TEACH AND TRANSFORM THE OFFENDER IN ALL CASES AND RAISE FUNDS OR VALUABLES TO RANSOM THESE IMAGES OF BUDDHAS AND BODHISATTVAS, THOSE BHIKSHUS, BHIKSHUNIS, RESOLVED BODHISATTVAS, SUTRAS, AND MORAL CODES. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO RANSOM THE PERSON OR OBJECT IN PERIL, HE THEREBY VIOLATES HIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. Not only should one rescue the beings, images, and texts, one should teach and transform those who are doing the selling. If one does not ransom the people or things in peril, one violates this Precept and commits a defiling offense.

This is a Precept of restraint because it only applies to those who receive the Bodhisattva Precepts. There are four conditions which constitute an offense.

- 1) There is a situation in which one should ransom things. ('Things' refers to the venerable images, sutras, and Vinaya texts, and people of the Way.)
- 2) One knows that one should ransom the things.
- 3) One does not resolve to rescue them.
- 4) One lets things get destroyed.

Every time such an incident occurs and one does not act, it is an offense. There are no exceptions to this precept. This precept does not include selling images and sacred texts for the purpose of propagating the Dharma. It refers to selling them for personal profit or into situations in which they might be abused or destroyed.

SUTRA:

THE THIRTY-SECOND MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS HARMING LIVING BEINGS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT SELL KNIVES, CLUBS, BOWS, ARROWS, OR CARRY ON BUSINESS WITH ALTERED SCALES OR MEASURING DEVICES, ABUSE THE LICENSE OF OFFICIAL POWER TO CONFISCATE A PERSON'S VALUABLES, OR HAVE AN INTENT TO HARM, BIND, OR IMPRISON HIM, OR ATTEMPT TO RUIN HIS SUCCESS. FURTHERMORE, HE MUST NOT RAISE CATS, FOXES, PIGS, DOGS, AND OTHER SUCH ANIMALS. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY DOES SO, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE THIRTY-SECOND MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS HARMING LIVING BEINGS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT SELL KNIVES, CLUBS, BOWS, ARROWS, OR CARRY ON BUSINESS WITH ALTERED SCALES OR MEASURING DEVICES, ABUSE THE LICENSE OF OFFICIAL POWER TO CONFISCATE A PERSON'S VALUABLES, OR HAVE AN INTENT TO HARM, BIND, OR IMPRISON HIM, OR ATTEMPT TO RUIN HIS SUCCESS.

A Buddhist disciple cannot sell knives, clubs, bows or arrows, because these are weapons that harm living beings. Nor can one collect or use altered scales or measuring devices. The scales are rigged to show a certain number of ounces, when what is on them actually weighs less. By altering the scales in this way, one cheats people. This Precept also prohibits any other kind of measuring device which is rigged to give the customers less than their fair share. For example, measuring a piece of cloth with an altered ruler is not right. If a person rigs devices that let him get more than he pays for, or lets him sell less than he gets paid for, then he has violated this Precept. If one merely collects these altered measuring devices but does not use them to do business with, that's considered a light offense. If one uses them, that's a heavy offense. If one is engaged in business that cheats others and the people are not aware they're being cheated, then that's also stealing.

Another restriction prohibits using official power to oppress other people. This kind of oppression goes against the heart of kindness and compassion. It is a light offense, but if one actually confiscates other people's belongings, then one is also stealing. If one forcefully takes something from another person, that's stealing. One cannot harm, or bind, or imprison other people. One cannot harm them physically or attempt to undermine their success.

FURTHERMORE, HE MUST NOT RAISE CATS, FOXES, PIGS, DOGS, AND OTHER SUCH ANIMALS. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY DOES SO, HE THEREBY COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. One is not supposed to raise cats and dogs, and other such animals. Why? Because cats and dogs eat mice; they harm other living creatures

In *Hsia Men* Province, there once lived Vinaya Master *Hung-yi* who was very well known for the strictness by which he held the Precepts. He said, "Feed the food you would have normally to cats to the mice, and then you will have no trouble with mice." So in that province that's what people did. Every day after lunch, the people would set out dishes of food and all the mice would come out and eat from the dishes. Nobody had cats. The mice were actually fed at proper times. That way, the mice didn't steal food or gnaw on people's clothes. That was due to the inventiveness of Vinaya Master *Hung-yi*.

One is not supposed to raise pigs because they are raised to be slaughtered. This goes against the principle of kindness. There are five conditions that make up an offense.

- 1) The objects or the things before one do not accord with the Dharma.
- 2) One has an evil intent.
- 3) One deliberately collects these things. For example: knives and clubs, and so forth.
- 4) One abuses official power.
- 5) One harms living beings.

And if these five conditions are all met, then one makes an offense. There are no exceptions to this rule.

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