

# *Brahma Net Sutra*

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SUTRA:

THE THIRTY-THIRD MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS:

A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT WITH UNWHOLESOME INTENTIONS WATCH THE QUARRELING OF MEN AND WOMEN, THE BATTLING OF ARMIES, FIGHTING AMONG BRIGANDS, OR OTHER SUCH SPECTACLES. HE MUST NOT INDULGE IN LISTENING TO THE SOUNDS OF CONCH SHELLS, DRUMS, HORNS, GUITARS, HARPS, HARPSICORDS, FLUTES, LUTES, SINGING, OR OTHER MUSIC. HE MUST NOT BECOME INVOLVED IN ANY FORM OF GAMBLING, WHETHER DICE, GO, PARCHISI, ROULETTE, CARDS, BALL GAMES, BILLARDS, DARTS, CHECKERS, OR OTHER GAMES. FURTHERMORE, A BODHISATTVA MUST NOT PRACTICE DIVINATION OR SORCERY, USING CLAWS, PLANTS, WILLOW BRANCHES, BOWLS, SKULLS, OR OTHER DEVICES, NOR MAY HE SERVE AS AN ACCOMPLICE TO A THIEF. HE MUST NOT PARTICIPATE IN ANY OF THESE AFFAIRS. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY DOES SO, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE THIRTY-THIRD MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS:

A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT WITH UNWHOLESOME INTENTIONS WATCH THE QUARRELING OF MEN AND WOMEN, THE BATTLING OF ARMIES, FIGHTING AMONG BRIGANDS OR OTHER SUCH SPECTACLES.

A deviant livelihood is an improper livelihood. An evil intent means one is not doing these things in order to benefit people according to their propensity, but rather that one has deviant thoughts and a deviant mind. This precept is divided into five sub-restrictions:

- 1) One cannot watch fighting or quarreling.
- 2) One may not listen to entertaining music.
- 3) One may not play various gambling games;
- 4) One may not practice divination.
- 5) One may not act as an accomplice to thieves.

The first restriction talks about watching fights and quarrels. This includes such spectacles as chicken fights, or bull fights. Nor should one watch battles amongst armies; watching battles or fighting increases the hatred in people.

HE MUST NOT INDULGE IN LISTENING TO THE SOUNDS OF CONCH SHELLS, DRUMS, HORNS, GUITARS, HARPS, HARPSICHORDS, FLUTES, LUTES, SINGING, OR OTHER MUSIC. One should not listen to conches. For example, where I lived in Northern China there was a Tibetan Temple where over a thousand Lamas lived. When they blew their conches, you could hear it for over ten miles; the sound went very far. Harps and harpsichords represent various stringed instruments. One has 7 strings, another has twenty-five strings. Flutes and lutes are woodwinds. One has thirteen holes, another twenty-four. Singing and other music refers to entertainments.

HE MUST NOT BECOME INVOLVED IN ANY FORM OF GAMBLING, WHETHER DICE, GO, PARCHISI, ROULETTE, CARDS, BALL GAMES, BILLIARDS, DARTS, CHECKERS, OR OTHER GAMES. One is not supposed to engage in any form of gambling. Parchisi is a type of Chinese chess which was invented by the Emperor Wu. One is not supposed to watch a type of opera performed by women, which was popular in the Han Dynasty among the people in the Court. One can't be involved in ball games, or shuffleboard as mentioned in *THE BOOK OF PROPRIETY*.

FURTHERMORE, A BODHISATTVA MUST NOT PRACTICE DIVINATION OR SORCERY, USING CLAWS, PLANTS, WILLOW BRANCHES, BOWLS, SKULLS, OR OTHER DEVICES. One form of divination uses claws and a mirror. One faces a mirror on the wall and recites "magic spirits in the heavens, magic spirits of the earth, please come out now and show your efficacy." Then something is supposed to appear in the mirror; it's like a Ouiji board, but on a mirror. Sometimes they're magical, and sometimes they don't work so well. Nor can one use certain types of grasses for divination purposes. The type that came from the groves of Fuh si and King Wen was used to cast oracles. This is like the yarrow sticks used to this day--the ones used in the *BOOK OF CHANGES (I CHING)*.

Another type of sorcery uses willow branches. One calls on the spirits that inhabit the camphor trees and willow trees to work for one. In Buddhism we have mantras that give spiritual aid to things, but those of outside ways use these other methods. Nor can one use bowls. This means one pours water into a bowl and then one proceeds to stir up the water, let it settle, and then reads certain things. This is a variation on reading tea leaves. One cannot tell of auspicious or inauspicious events. Nor can one use skulls. If one mantras a skull successfully, the spirit attached to it will come and report to the person, telling about auspicious or inauspicious happenings.

NOR MAY HE SERVE AS AN ACCOMPLICE TO A THIEF. The fifth category of restriction is to act as an accomplice, or a servant of thieves. One cannot become engaged in any of these activities because they are all deviant livelihoods.

HE MUST NOT PARTICIPATE IN ANY OF THESE AFFAIRS. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY DOES SO HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

There are four conditions that make up the offense:

- 1) One encounters such a circumstance.
- 2) One has the intent to grasp at the appearance. That means one wants to get involved.
- 3) One gets hold of expedient means.
- 4) One actually becomes engaged in the affair.

These four conditions will make up the offense.

As to the prohibition against playing music, or hearing music, basically there are some types of music that can benefit people's bodies and minds, so why should music be prohibited by the Precepts?

In China, under the Confucian system of teaching, music in the ceremonies was regarded as an essential vehicle to groom the people's moral spirit. Confucius had a disciple named Tse-ch'ien. It was said that he played the harp and thereby ruled the province. Because he played the harp so well, the entire province came under his sway. Therefore, music can really influence people's minds.

Another story was related of Confucius himself. He was a native of the country of Lu, and the neighboring country was Ch'i. One time he went to his neighboring country of Ch'i and listened to the music of Hsun. So in the *ANALECTS* it says, "Confucius was in the Kingdom of Ch'i where he listened to music for three months, and lost his appetite for meat." From this you can see how strong, how powerful music can be; and in Confucius's teaching, music played a very important part. Confucius also said,

If you watch a person's demeanor, you can know how he will govern;

If you listen to his music, you will know about his virtue.

For example, a person might play the harp, the flute, or any other reed instrument and if their nature is violent, or if they have a quick temper, you can really hear it from their music. Or, if their nature is very calm, you can also hear it from their music.

In China, there was once a monastery which had a requirement for any new monk who wanted to stay the night: He had to go to the Buddhahall and strike the drum three times. From that, the other monks could judge what his character was like. If this person was a violent person, you could hear it from the way he banged on the drum. If he was a real 'mousy' creature, he wouldn't even dare to hit the drum to make noise. One would also know that. But if a person had a very even temper, then the drum beating would also be even and resonant.

It's also said that in the Sung Dynasty, in the Northern frontier, there was a county supervisor who sent troops to the borders several times in an attempt to quell the rebelling armies, but with no success. Every time they failed in battle. But he was very smart. In his house there was a serving girl who was very good at playing the flute. People really liked to hear her play. He dressed up the maid-servant so she looked like a beggar--she wore ragged clothes, torn shoes, torn hat, and soot on her face, so she looked like she hadn't washed for days. She took a begging can with her, went into the enemy line, and started playing her flute. After a few days of listening to her play, the entire rebelling army started to weep. They were so moved by her music, that they said, "We

left our homes and villages in order to come and stir up a rebellion? What for?" They put down their weapons and surrendered. From that incident came the saying,

"A skilled army and fast horses are no match for a little maid-servant who plays the flute."

Under the influence of Confucianism in China, Buddhism began to emphasize music in Ceremonies. However, as fine as music is, for a cultivator it can use up a lot of time and thereby obstruct one's cultivation. Since cultivation is more important than the pleasure of listening to music, this prohibition was established.

SUTRA:

THE THIRTY-FOURTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS:

EVEN A MOMENTARY DEPARTURE FROM MAINTAINING THE BODHI RESOLVE. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST PROTECT AND UPHOLD THESE PROHIBITIONS AND PRECEPTS, WHETHER WALKING, STANDING, SITTING, OR LYING DOWN. IN THE SIX PERIODS OF THE DAY AND NIGHT HE SHOULD READ AND RECITE THESE PRECEPTS. HE SHOULD BE LIKE VAJRA. HE SHOULD ACT LIKE A PERSON WHO IS CROSSING THE OCEAN CLINGING TO A FRAGILE AIR BLADDER, OR LIKE THE BHIKSHU WHO DARED NOT MOVE WHEN BOUND AMONG THE RUSHES. FURTHERMORE, HE MUST ALWAYS PRODUCE WHOLESOME BELIEF IN THE GREAT VEHICLE AND CONTEMPLATE THUS: "I KNOW I SHALL BECOME A BUDDHA; ALL BUDDHAS HAVE DONE SO." HIS RESOLVE TO ATTAIN BODHI SHOULD NEVER BE FORSAKEN EVEN FOR THE SPACE OF A SINGLE THOUGHT. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA RAISES EVEN A SINGLE THOUGHT THAT IS CHARACTERISTIC OF THE TWO VEHICLES OR EXTERNALIST WAYS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE THIRTY-FOURTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS EVEN A MOMENTARY DEPARTURE FROM MAINTAINING THE BODHI RESOLVE. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST PROTECT AND UPHOLD THESE PROHIBITIONS AND PRECEPTS, WHETHER WALKING, STANDING, SITTING, OR LYING DOWN. IN THE SIX PERIODS OF THE DAY AND NIGHT HE SHOULD READ AND RECITE THESE PRECEPTS.

This Precept prohibits even a momentary departure from the resolve for Bodhi. You can't go back on your resolve for Bodhi even for an instant! The resolve for Bodhi is the resolve to accomplish the Buddha Way on High. You can never, never depart from that. Always, at all times, you should bring forth that resolve. You should maintain and uphold these Precepts whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, in the six periods of the day and night; that is, the three periods of the day, and three periods of the night. During these times you should read and recite these Precepts.

HE SHOULD BE LIKE VAJRA. "Vajra" means solid and indestructible.

HE SHOULD ACT LIKE A PERSON WHO IS CROSSING THE OCEAN CLINGING TO A FRAGILE AIR BLADDER, OR LIKE THE BHIKSHU WHO DARED NOT MOVE WHEN BOUND AMONG THE RUSHES. An "air bladder" is like a life preserver. If a boat sinks and you are lost at sea and you are clinging to an air bladder, that's the only thing that can save you. If the air inside escapes, it's all over. Here the air bladder is analogous to the Precepts. If one depends on the Precepts, then one will be able to go across the bitter sea of suffering without sinking or drowning. As for the Bhikshu who was bound by rushes, when the Buddha was in the world, there was a Bhikshu who, while traveling along the road, was robbed by bandits. They took his clothes and possessions. Then one of the thieves said, "If we let this Bhikshu go, he's going to go back and tell someone. What if the police come after us? Let's kill him."

But another thief knew how Bhikshus maintain precepts and said, "There's no need to kill him. Just bind him among the rushes. Because his precepts prohibit him from harming even grass and trees, he won't dare move." So the thieves tied him up with the rushes and left.

He laid there all night. The next day the King happened to be out traveling and came upon the Bhikshu tied up with rushes. However, at that time in India, there was a religion whose followers wore no clothing. So at first the King thought he was a follower of this religion. But the people with him said, "No, that man is the Buddha's disciple."

"How do you know?"

"Well, it's because his right shoulder is sun tanned, but his left shoulder is not. He must be a Buddhist disciple because they keep their right shoulders bare."

Then the King spoke to the Bhikshu in a verse:

I see that you have no illness,  
You look quite plump and well to me.  
Why are you tied up among the rushes,  
Not daring to move for a day and night?

The Bhikshu answered, also in verse:

This grass is really fragile,  
It wouldn't be difficult to break.  
However, I am restricted by the Vajra Precepts of the World Honored One,  
So I dare not move.

The King was extremely moved by this. He untied the Bhikshu immediately, gave him a set of clothes and then took him back to the palace and had a new set of clothes made for him. That Bhikshu guarded the Sound Hearer Precepts with such fervor, so how much more should a Bodhisattva maintain the Bodhisattva Precepts! He should be willing to die rather than violate them.

FURTHERMORE, HE MUST ALWAYS PRODUCE WHOLESOME BELIEF IN THE GREAT VEHICLE AND CONTEMPLATE THUS: "I KNOW I SHALL BECOME A

BUDDHA; ALL BUDDHAS HAVE DONE SO." HIS RESOLVE TO ATTAIN BODHI SHOULD NEVER BE FORSAKEN EVEN FOR THE SPACE OF A SINGLE THOUGHT. In thought after thought, maintain the Bodhi resolve. Do not think like those of the Two Vehicles or externalist ways even for a single instant. That is, don't ever have thoughts of only saving yourself and not saving others.

There's a story which illustrates this point. There was once a master and his disciple who were walking along the road. The teacher was walking in front, and the disciple was behind carrying the luggage. The teacher was an Arhat. The disciple, who was trailing along behind him, suddenly had this thought, "The world is full of suffering, I really have to resolve to save living beings!" At that time the teacher turned around and said, "Give me the luggage. You can walk up front."

They walked for a while, and the little disciple thought, "Living beings are really hard to rescue, I think I'd better save myself first." At that time the teacher said, "You can have the luggage back and walk behind now."

This happened several times, until finally the disciple said, "Why do you keep taking the luggage and giving it back to me, teacher?"

The teacher explained, "Every time you resolve to save living beings, it's something that even I couldn't do. Therefore, I should serve you. Every time you retreat from the resolve, you're just my disciple. I'm an Arhat, and you're still an ordinary person. However, every time you resolve to save others, you're doing something that I can't do. That's why we have been trading places."

From this one can see how important even a single thought can be!

HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA RAISES EVEN A SINGLE THOUGHT THAT IS CHARACTERISTIC OF THE TWO VEHICLES OR EXTERNALIST WAYS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

There are three conditions that make up this offense:

- 1) One grows tired of the great practices that one has taken up.
- 2) One runs after another sect.
- 3) One renounces the Great Vehicle and goes after the Small.

Every single thought is an offense.

*-continued next issue*