

Brahma Net Sutra

commentary by Elder Master Wei Sung

*translated by Bhikshuni Heng Tao * **

*reviewed by Bhikshuni Heng Ch' ih **

edited by Upasika KuoTs'an Nicholson and Kuo Tsai Rounds

THE THIRTY-FIFTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO MAKE GREAT VOWS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST ALWAYS MAKE MYRIAD VOWS: VOWING TO BE FILIAL TO HIS PARENTS AND MASTERS AMONG THE SANGHA, VOWING TO FIND A GOOD TEACHER, FELLOW STUDENTS, AND GOOD KNOWING ADVISORS WHO WILL ALWAYS GIVE HIM INSTRUCTIONS IN THE GREAT VEHICLE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES, IN THE TEN STAGES OF ADVANCEMENT, THE TEN DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES, THE TEN VAJRA STAGES, AND THE TEN GROUNDS, THEREBY CAUSING HIM TO OPEN UNDERSTANDING, TO CULTIVATE IN ACCORD WITH THE DHARMA, AND TO RESOLUTELY UPHOLD THE BUDDHA'S PRECEPTS. HE SHOULD BE WILLING TO GIVE UP HIS LIFE RATHER THAN TO LOSE HIS RESOLVE FOR EVEN A SINGLE THOUGHT. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO MAKE THESE VOWS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE THIRTY-FIFTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO MAKE GREAT VOWS. If you fail to make great vows, that is a violation of a Minor Precept, and is a defiling offense. The Precept says that the Buddha's disciple should always and constantly make great vows. That means that one doesn't simply make vows one time and then is done with it. One continually makes these vows. This is because if you don't make vows for a long time, then you forget them. What are the vows you have to make?

A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST ALWAYS MAKE MYRIAD VOWS: VOWING TO BE FILIAL TO HIS PARENTS, AND MASTERS AMONG THE SANGHA; VOWING TO FIND A GOOD TEACHER, FELLOW STUDENTS, AND GOOD KNOWING ADVISORS WHO WILL ALWAYS GIVE HIM INSTRUCTIONS IN THE GREAT VEHICLE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES, IN THE TEN STAGES OF ADVANCEMENT, THE TEN DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES, THE TEN VAJRA STAGES, AND THE TEN GROUNDS, THEREBY CAUSING HIM TO OPEN UNDERSTANDING, TO CULTIVATE IN ACCORD WITH DHARMA, AND TO RESOLUTELY UPHOLD THE BUDDHA'S PRECEPTS. HE SHOULD BE WILLING TO GIVE UP HIS LIFE RATHER THAN TO LOSE HIS RESOLVE FOR EVEN A SINGLE THOUGHT. You have to vow to be filial to your parents, and to be filial to your teachers among the Sangha. Vow to find a good teacher, good fellow students, good cultivators of the Way, and Good Knowing Advisors who will always give instructions in the Great Vehicle Sutras and moral codes. These teachers and cultivators will teach you about the Dharmas of the Great Vehicle. There are the stages or positions

that one should vow to study. They include the Ten Stages of Advancement, which is just another name for the Ten Dwellings. In the Ten Dwellings, one is born in the Buddha's household and becomes the Buddha's disciple. The Ten Developmental Stages are the Ten Conducts. The Ten Conducts include extensive practice of the Six Perfections and performing the Buddha's work. The Ten Vajra Stages are the Ten Transferences. One transfers the merit from doing the Buddha's work to the Buddha mind. The Ten Grounds refers to dwelling on the Buddha's ground and enlightening to the Buddha's principle. These forty positions all assist one in breaking through ignorance so that one's Dharma-nature will manifest.

With regard to the Ten Dwellings, if one arrives at the First Dwelling, one is able to accomplish the Eight Marks of Buddhahood and be a Buddha in one hundred worlds. The Eight Marks are :

1. Descending from the Tushita Heaven;
2. Entering the womb;
3. Dwelling in the womb;
4. Leaving the womb;
5. Leaving the home-life;
6. Accomplishing the Way,
7. Subduing the demons; and
8. Speaking the Dharma to cross over living beings.

This is the accomplishment of somebody who has reached the position of the First Dwelling. When one reaches the Second Dwelling, one can do this in ten thousand worlds. So it increases proportionately. When one reaches the Tenth Ground, this becomes an immeasurable number of worlds.



Kuan Yin Bodhisattva

One also vows to meet Good Knowing Advisors who will always teach one to open understanding and to cultivate in accord with those positions just spoken of--to practice the Bodhisattva Path. One should vow resolutely to uphold the Buddha's Precepts. What's meant by resolutely? It means that one would rather give up one's life than to break the Precepts. In thought after thought, one does not lose one's resolve to study the Great Vehicle.

HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO MAKE THESE VOWS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. If a Bodhisattva fails to make these vows, he violates this Minor Precept.

A vow is a decision to aspire towards a wholesome state. That is, one's mind wants to go towards what is wholesome. One thinks about it, reflects upon it, hopes for, and seeks a sublime state. If one continually makes vows, one's Bodhi resolve will never be cut

off. The Precept says that one should make myriad vows, but actually there are ten named:

1) One vows to be filial to one's parents, teachers, and the Sangha. That's because they give great kindness.

Vinaya Master Tao Hsuan of the T'ang Dynasty said, "It takes seven lifetimes to repay one's parents' kindness in full." Furthermore, he said to his disciples, "Do you know, to repay your parents' kindness would take seven lives, but to repay the kindness of your teachers and the Sangha would take many kalpas."

One's parents give one one's physical body, but one's teachers provide one with the Dharma body. They help one escape the revolving wheel and end birth and death. This type of kindness is greater than one's parents kindness. So that's the first vow.

2) One vows to find a good teacher who can guide one to cultivate.

3) One vows to meet fellow students and wholesome friends. Good fellow cultivators really have an important influence on one's own cultivation. Great Dharma Master Wei Shan said, "To draw near Good Knowing Advisors is like walking in the dew. Although it doesn't wet your clothes directly, you always feel the moisture." Although one's fellow cultivators may not actually be speaking lofty principles, one is always under their influence. Their example can teach one. So, imperceptibly, one can really obtain benefit from them.

4) One vows that they will always teach one the Great Vehicle Sutras and Vinaya. That is, one vows that one's fellow cultivators and teachers will always teach one Great Vehicle Dharmas.

5) One vows to understand the Stages of Advancement, that is, the Ten Dwellings.

6) One vows to understand the Developmental Stages, that is, the Ten Conducts.

7) One vows to understand the Ten Vajra Stages, that is, the Ten Transferences.

8) One vows to understand the Ten Grounds. These forty stages are all characteristic of the Great Knights of the Dharma-body. Great Knights of the Dharma-body have broken through ignorance and manifested the Dharma-nature. They've all arrived at the position of accomplishing Buddhahood and can accomplish Buddhahood with the Eight Marks in a minimum of a hundred worlds.

9) One vows to cultivate in accord with the Dharma. That is, one accords with the Dharma which is within the Ten Dwellings, Ten Conducts, Ten Transferences, and Ten Grounds, and cultivates them accordingly.

10) One vows to maintain the Buddha's Precepts. Why is the vow to hold the Precept the last one? Because Precepts are the very foundation of the Dharma-door of

the MindGround. The Bodhisattva Dharma is the MindGround Dharma. The Precepts are its basis. If one doesn't hold Precepts, how can one make progress? This last vow sums it all up by saying that you absolutely must maintain the Precepts.

This is a Precept of restraint. It's not a Precept against the nature. That means it applies to people who have received the Precepts, the reason being that if one does not bring forth great vows, one cannot accomplish a great position. When one should be bringing forth these vows and one doesn't, then that counts as an offense.

There are three conditions that make up an offense.

1. One has no intention to make vows. One is lazy and doesn't want to make them.
2. One has no wish to make these vows. One opposes the idea and doesn't want to make vows.
3. After making the vows, one quickly forgets them.

That, then, is a violation of this Precept.

SUTRA:

THE THIRTY-SIXTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO BRING FORTH RESOLUTIONS. ONCE A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA HAS MADE THE TEN GREAT VOWS, HE MUST MAINTAIN THE BUDDHA'S PRECEPTS AND MAKE THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTIONS:

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER CAST MYSELF INTO A ROARING BLAZE, A DEEP ABYSS, OR ONTO A MOUNTAIN OF KNIVES THAN EVER VIOLATE THE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES OF THE BUDDHAS OF THE THREE PERIODS OF TIME BY ENGAGING IN IMPURE ACTIONS WITH ANY WOMAN.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER MY BODY WERE WRAPPED AND BOUND IN A THOUSAND LAYERS OF WHITE-HOT IRON NETTING THAN EVER ACCEPT ANY CLOTHING OFFERED BY A FAITHFUL DONOR FOR A BODY THAT HAS VIOLATED THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER SWALLOW GLOWING HOT IRON PELLETS AND STREAMS OF RAGING FLAMES FOR A HUNDRED THOUSAND AEONS THAN EVER SWALLOW WITH A MOUTH THAT HAS VIOLATED THE PRECEPTS THE MYRIADS FLAVORS OF FOOD OR DRINK OFFERED BY A FAITHFUL DONOR.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER LIE DOWN IN A RAGING FIRE, OR A RED-HOT IRON MESH, THAN EVER ACCEPT ANY BLANKETS OR BEDDING OFFERED BY A FAITHFUL DONOR FOR A BODY THAT HAS VIOLATED THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER BE IMPALED BY THREE HUNDRED SPEARS FOR A PERIOD OF ONE OR TWO AEONS THAN EVER ACCEPT THE

MYRIAD TYPES OF MEDICINES OFFERED BY A FAITHFUL DONOR FOR A BODY THAT HAS VIOLATED THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER LEAP INTO A CAULDRON FULL OF MOLTEN IRON FOR ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND AEONS THAN ACCEPT THE MYRIAD TYPES OF SHELTER, HOUSING, GARDENS, GROVES, FIELDS, OR ESTATES OFFERED BY A FAITHFUL DONOR FOR A BODY THAT HAS VIOLATED THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER BE PULVERIZED TO PIECES FROM HEAD TO TOE BY THE POUNDING OF A STEEL SLEDGE THAN ACCEPT ANY BOWS OR OTHER FORMS OF REVERENCE FROM A FAITHFUL DONOR FOR A BODY THAT HAS VIOLATED THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER MY TWO EYES WERE GOUGED OUT BY ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND WHITE- HOT IRON SWORDS AND SPEARS THAN GAZE AT BEAUTIFUL FORMS WITH A MIND IN VIOLATION OF THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER BOTH MY EARS WERE POKED OUT AND JABBED BY A HUNDRED THOUSAND IRON-AWLS FOR A PERIOD OF ONE OR TWO AEONS THAN EVER LISTEN TO ATTRACTIVE SOUNDS WITH A MIND IN VIOLATION OF THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER MY TONGUE WERE CUT OUT BY ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND KNIVES THAN EVER TASTE THE VARIOUS FLAVORS OF PURE FOOD WITH A MIND IN VIOLATION OF THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER MY BODY WERE HACKED AND CHOPPED BY AXES THAN EVER BE GREEDY TO EXPERIENCE PLEASANT SENSATIONS WITH A MIND IN VIOLATION OF THE PRECEPTS.

FINALLY, I VOW THAT ALL BEINGS WILL ATTAIN BUDDHAHOOD.

HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO MAKE THESE RESOLUTIONS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE THIRTY-SIXTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO BRING FORTH RESOLUTIONS. ONCE A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA HAS MADE THE TEN GREAT VOWS, HE MUST MAINTAIN THE BUDDHA'S PRECEPTS AND MAKE THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTIONS: What's meant by a resolution? Is it different from a vow? They are the same and yet they are different; they have slightly different connotations and are very often used as a pair. A resolution is an oath, a thought that has to be made solid. It has to be made very

firm. It is courageous and like a speeding arrow which will never retreat. The difference between a vow and a resolution is this: a vow leads ahead. It's the forerunner. A resolution follows right along behind. Vows are like the engine of the train, while resolutions are like the compartments it pulls along behind. Yet the resolutions hold the generator which provides the pulse and power to give momentum to the whole train. So, in cultivation, one has to make vows AND resolutions. Then one can arrive at one's final goal. The purpose of vows is to advance in virtue and cultivate goodness. Resolutions have the effect of guarding against transgressions and getting rid of evil. So, vows are for advancing in virtue; resolutions are for preventing one from doing evil things. In this way, the two work together.

The ten vows that one ought to make were discussed in the previous Precept. This Precept of making resolutions contains thirteen resolutions which further divide into five sub-divisions.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER CAST MYSELF INTO A ROARING BLAZE, A DEEP ABYSS, OR ONTO A MOUNTAIN OF KNIVES THAN EVER VIOLATE THE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES OF THE BUDDHAS OF THE THREE PERIODS OF TIME BY ENRAGING IN IMPURE ACTIONS WITH ANY WOMAN. The first resolution is about restraining desire and defilement. The next five deal with receiving offerings.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER MY BODY WERE WRAPPED AND BOUND IN A THOUSAND LAYERS OF WHITE-HOT IRON NETTING THAN EVER ACCEPT ANY CLOTHING OFFERED BY A FAITHFUL DONOR FOR A BODY THAT HAS VIOLATED THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER SWALLOW GLOWING HOT IRON PELLETS AND STREAMS OF RAGING FLAMES FOR A HUNDRED THOUSAND AEONS THAN EVER SWALLOW WITH A MOUTH THAT HAS VIOLATED THE PRECEPTS THE MYRIAD FLAVORS OF FOOD AND DRINK OFFERED BY A FAITHFUL DONOR.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER LIE DOWN IN A RAGING FIRE, OR ON A RED-HOT IRON MESH, THAN EVER ACCEPT ANY BLANKETS OR BEDDING OFFERED BY A FAITHFUL DONOR FOR A BODY THAT HAS VIOLATED THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER BE IMPALED BY THREE HUNDRED SPEARS FOR A PERIOD OF ONE OR TWO AEONS THAN EVER ACCEPT THE MYRIAD TYPES OF MEDICINES OFFERED BY A FAITHFUL DONOR FOR BODY THAT HAS VIOLATED THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER LEAP INTO A CAULDRON FULL OF MOLTEN IRON FOR ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND AEONS THAN ACCEPT THE MYRIAD TYPES OF SHELTER, HOUSING, GARDENS, GROVES, FIELDS,

OR ESTATES OFFERED BY A FAITHFUL DONOR FOR A BODY THAT HAS VIOLATED THE PRECEPTS.

Here the Precept says, "One shouldn't be greedy for good food, a good place to live, etc." This means one can receive offerings if one is holding the Precepts. However, it's not permissible to break the Precepts and receive offerings at the same time. Why is this? It's because faithful donors make offerings to people who hold the Precepts, and if one does not hold them, but receives offerings, then the retribution one incurs later on will be very severe. The intent of those donors is to make offerings to cultivators, so if one who breaks the Precepts still receives offerings, one will have to suffer in the future. When one makes these resolutions it means that one is resolving to always keep the Precepts. It does not mean that one is resolving not to receive offerings; it doesn't say one cannot receive offerings. It says one cannot receive offerings if one breaks the Precepts or while breaking the Precepts.

Now some people may bring up this argument. They say, "We have no virtue, and it's very hard for us to digest the offerings of faithful donors. Wouldn't it be better if we had a little business on the side and provided ourselves?"

No, that would be called deviant livelihood. Even if one were to take a drink of water or tread on the ground, isn't that receiving an offering from one's country? That is, even if one were to go through those motions, one has already received offerings from one's country. But if one has the above attitude, then not only does one aid the situation of breaking the Precepts, but one also transgresses further by being engaged in deviant livelihood. This is really pitiful!

The third division is a resolution about respect. I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER BE PULVERIZED TO PIECES FROM HEAD TO TOE BY THE POUNDING OF A STEEL SLEDGE THAN ACCEPT ANY BOWS OR OTHER FORMS OF REVERENCE FROM A FAITHFUL DONOR FOR A BODY THAT HAS VIOLATED THE PRECEPTS. That is, one cannot be revered if one has broken the Precepts. This means that one has to vow never to break the Precepts. It doesn't mean that one vows not to be bowed to; that's not the point. Some people say, "My Precept virtues are not sufficient, and I cannot take bows, so if you bow to me, I'll just bow back to you." This even reaches the point where left-home people are bowing to heavenly spirits or to laypeople. If one has received either the Bhikshu Precepts or the Bodhisattva Precepts, one cannot bow to heavenly spirits, or to the Lord of the Earth, or to laypeople. Otherwise, not only are you not doing anything to amend the breaking of Precepts, you are also harming the comportment of a left-home person. That is not a wise way to act.

The fourth division is the next five resolutions.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER BOTH MY EYES WERE GOUGED OUT BY ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND WHITE-HOT IRON SWORDS AND SPEARS

THAN GAZE AT BEAUTIFUL FORMS WITH A MIND IN VIOLATION OF THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER BOTH MY EARS WERE POKED OUT AND JABBED BY A HUNDRED THOUSAND IRON-AWLS FOR A PERIOD OF ONE OR TWO AEONS THAN EVER LISTEN TO ATTRACTIVE SOUNDS WITH A MIND IN VIOLATION OF THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER MY NOSE WERE CHOPPED AWAY BY ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND BROADSWORDS THAN EVER SMELL FRAGRANCES WITH A MIND IN VIOLATION OF THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER MY TONGUE WERE CUT OUT BY ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND KNIVES THAN EVER TASTE THE VARIOUS FLAVORS OF PURE FOOD WITH A MIND IN VIOLATION OF THE PRECEPTS.

I RESOLVE THAT I WOULD RATHER MY BODY WERE HACKED AND CHOPPED BY AXES THAN EVER BE GREEDY TO EXPERIENCE PLEASANT SENSATIONS WITH A MIND IN VIOLATION OF THE PRECEPTS.

These concern the six sense organs. The five organs interact with the five sense objects, but the organ of the mind is the "bos s." One of these resolutions talks about accepting the myriad flavors of food offered by donors. This has already been mentioned before. However, in the previous section, receiving offerings of food with a body that has violated the Precepts was discussed, whereas in this section it discusses a deviant mind which is greedy for the flavors of food. So there is a slight variation from the previous resolution. If one is greedy for good flavors, that is also called a mind of breaking the Precepts. Therefore, people who eat vegetarian food shouldn't be too hung up on good flavors.

The last division is the resolution to cross over living beings. FINALLY, I VOW THAT ALL BEINGS WILL ATTAIN BUDDHAHOOD. You have to vow that all living beings will become Buddhas. If you don't make that resolution, then you don't have a mind to save living beings. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO MAKE THESE RESOLUTIONS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

This is a Precept of restraint. It's restricted to only those who have received the Precepts. There are three conditions which make up the offense.

- 1) One has no intent to make resolutions.
- 2) One has no wish to comply with resolutions. One doesn't want to go along with it.
- 3) Upon making resolutions, one forgets them very quickly.