



# *The Buddha Speaks* *The Brahma Net Sutra*

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SUTRA:

THE THIRTY-SEVENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS TRAVELING IN DANGEROUS SITUATIONS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA SHOULD ALWAYS CULTIVATE DHUTANGHA PRACTICES TWICE EACH YEAR, CULTIVATE DHYANA SAMADHI IN THE WINTER AND SUMMER, AND OBSERVE THE SUMMER RETREAT. HE SHOULD ALWAYS MAKE USE OF A TOOTHBRUSH, SOAP, THE THREE ROBES, A DRINKING FLASK, A BOWL, A SITTING MAT, A TIM-HEADED STAFF, A CENSOR, A WATER FILTER, A TOWEL, A KNIFE, A FIRE-STARTING DEVICE, TWEEZERS, BEDDING, COPIES OF THE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES, AND IMAGES OF BUDDHAS AND BODHISATTVAS. WHEN CULTIVATING DHUTANGHA PRACTICES AND WHEN TRAVELING, WHETHER IT BE FOR A HUNDRED OR THREE THOUSAND MILES, A BODHISATTVA SHOULD ALWAYS TAKE ALONG THESE EIGHTEEN ESSENTIALS.

DHUTANGHA PRACTICES SHOULD BE CULTIVATED FROM THE FIFTEENTH OF THE FIRST LUNAR MONTH TO THE FIFTEENTH OF THE THIRD LUNAR MONTH AND FROM THE FIFTEENTH OF THE EIGHTH LUNAR MONTH TO THE FIFTEENTH OF THE TENTH LUNAR MONTH. DURING THESE PERIODS THE EIGHTEEN ESSENTIALS SHOULD ALWAYS BE A CLOSE TO A BHIKSHU AND WINGS TO A BIRD.

EVERY HALF MONTH, ON THE UPOSATHA DAYS, THE NEWLY-STUDYING BODHISATTVA MUST PERFORM THE UPOSATHA CEREMONY BY RECITING THE TEN MAJOR AND FORTY-EIGHT MINOR BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS BEFORE THE BUDDHA AND BODHISATTVA IMAGES. IF THERE IS ONLY ONE PERSON PRESENT TO PERFORM THE UPOSATHA CEREMONY, THEN HE SHOULD DO SO BY RECITING THE PRECEPTS ALONE. HOWEVER,

IF THERE ARE TWO, THREE, OR EVEN A HUNDRED THOUSAND PEOPLE PRESENT, THE PRECEPTS ARE STILL TO BE RECITED BY ONE PERSON ONLY. THAT PERSON SHOULD SIT IN A HIGH POSITION, WHILE THE REST OF THE ASSEMBLY SITS AND LISTENS FROM A LOWER POSITION DRESSED IN THE FIVE, SEVEN, AND NINE STRIP SAMGHATI ROBES.

THE SUMMER RETREAT MUST BE HELD AND MANAGED IN STRICT ACCORDANCE WITH DHARMA. WHEN CULTIVATING DHUTANGHA PRACTICES, A BODHISATTVA MUST AVOID DANGEROUS PLACES. HE MUST REFRAIN FROM TRAVELLING THROUGH COUNTRIES THAT ARE IN CRISIS, OR WHICH ARE RULED BY EVIL KINGS. HE MUST ALSO AVOID PRECIPITOUS TERRAIN, THE REMOTE WILDERNESS OR JUNGLES, OR AREAS INHABITED BY LIONS, TIGERS, OR WOLVES, AND AREAS PRONE TO FLOOD, FIRES, AND HURRICANES, PLACES INHABITED BY THIEVES, ROADS INFESTED WITH POISONOUS SNAKES, OR ANY OTHER SUCH DANGEROUS PLACES. WHETHER CULTIVATING DHUTANGHA PRACTICES OR OBSERVING THE SUMMER RETREAT, HE MUST AVOID ENTERING DANGEROUS PLACES. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY ENTERS DANGEROUS SITUATIONS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE THIRTY-SEVENTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS TRAVELLING IN DANGEROUS SITUATIONS. This Precept prohibits getting involved in dangerous situations or travelling in dangerous places. This particularly applies to Bodhisattvas who have just begun studying. If there are Bodhisattvas who are already very experienced and who have the power in them to influence beings, then if they go to perilous places, they can actually pacify the dangers or appease the crisis. That's a different matter. Bodhisattvas who have just begun studying cannot wander into those dangerous places.

A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA SHOULD ALWAYS CULTIVATE DHUTANGHA PRACTICES TWICE EACH YEAR, CULTIVATE DHYANA SAMADHI IN THE WINTER AND SUMMER AND OBSERVE THE SUMMER RETREAT. HE SHOULD ALWAYS MAKE USE OF A TOOTHBRUSH, SOAP, THE THREE ROBES, A DRINKING FLASK, A BOWL, A SITTING MAT, A TIN-HEADED STAFF, A CENSOR, A WATER FILTER, A TOWEL, A KNIFE, A FIRE-STARTING DEVICE, TWEEZERS, BEDDING, COPIES OF THE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES, AND IMAGES OF BUDDHAS AND BODHISATTVAS. WHEN CULTIVATING DHUTANGHA PRACTICES AND WHEN TRAVELLING, WHETHER IT BE FOR A HUNDRED OR THREE HUNDRED MILES, A BODHISATTVA SHOULD ALWAYS TAKE ALONG THESE EIGHTEEN ESSENTIALS.

The Precept says he should practice *dhutangha*, or ascetic practices during the two periods. The two periods refer to spring and autumn. During these times the weather is mild and one does not run into harm while travelling and teaching living beings. But when the weather gets very cold or very hot, it's not appropriate to be travelling around the country.

Dhutanga, or dhuta, is Sanskrit and translates as "shaking up." It means to shake off the wearisome dust. This is as if dust alighted on your clothes and you shook it off, you could get rid of the dust. There are twelve ascetic practices; they all involve food, clothing, and dwelling places. Clothing, food, and the dwelling place are called the three constants. The point of ascetic practice is to refrain from enjoying any of these three in excess. To be frugal at all times with these three constants is to be in accordance with the dhutangha practices. These twelve practices enable one to leave the wearisome dust and to practice superior conduct. One who cultivates dhutangha is practicing a sublime conduct. Such conduct is lauded by the Sages. The Venerable Mahakasyapa was foremost in his dhuta practices. You might recognize him as the very old Bhikshu who always stood right next to the Buddha. When he was already 120 years old, the Buddha said to him, "You're getting on in years. You probably should stop cultivating ascetic practices. You should give them up."

But the Venerable Mahakasyapa just kept on practicing. His family was almost as rich as the King's. For example, if the King had a thousand oxen plowing the fields, his family would have 999 out there, because they didn't dare outdo the King. But after he left the home-life, he decided to cultivate dhutangha practices. And he never gave it up throughout his entire life. That's why it's said these practices are praised by the Sages. The Buddha praised him and said, "As long as there are people who can cultivate dhutangha practices, my Proper Dharma will abide in the world." These practices are very effective in getting rid of people's greed, anger, and stupidity.

What are the twelve?

1) Dwelling in an *aranya*. An *aranya* is Sanskrit and it translates as "a still and quiet place." It refers to a Way Place where people don't make a lot of noise or disturb others.

2) Always begging for one's food. In India, the monks didn't cook. They went out begging.

3) Begging in succession. That means begging from house to house in succession, without discriminating. In the *SHURANGAMA SUTRA* it says this practice is promulgated for the sake of avoiding doubt or slander. Two of the Buddha's disciples didn't beg in succession. One was the Venerable Subhuti; the other was Mahakasyapa. Subhuti fancied going to beg from rich families. Why did he do this? His intent was to avoid begging from the poor. He figured since the poor families were so poor, they couldn't even feed themselves, let alone him. So how could he go and beg from them? Therefore he only went to rich families to beg for food. This caused people to slander and say, "He just like to eat good food." They said, "Look, these monks aren't

democratic; they only mooch on the rich, and the poor ones don't even get to plant blessings." The Venerable Mahakasyapa did just the opposite. He always went to poor households to beg, for he knew they were poor this life because they had failed to give in past lives. His reasoning was that if they didn't give in this life either, they would continue to be poor. This caused people to doubt. They said, "Those poor people don't even have enough to eat themselves, why does this monk go and beg from them?"

There was both doubt and slander just because these two monks didn't beg in succession. Begging in succession means that one goes from house to house in succession for seven houses in a row.

4) Eating one meal a day at noon. Now when the Buddha was in the world, all the left-home people ate once a day at noon. Therefore in the *SUTRA OF FORTY-TWO SECTIONS* which was spoken just before the Buddha entered Nirvana, he taught his Bhikshus: "You should eat once a day and rest under trees at night. Be careful not to acquire things. What makes people stupid is love and desire." He was referring to food and drink and saying, "You cannot be greedy." That was how he taught his great disciples.

When Buddhism came to China, the monks ate in the temples where donors came to make offerings, and no longer went out to beg for their food.

5) Limiting one's intake when eating. Why is it that one must limit one's intake? If one practices eating once a day at noon, or eating only before noon, if one overeats, then it's very easy to get sick.

6) Not drinking fruit juices or honey and so forth after noon.

7) Wearing rag robes. That is, you don't wear spiffy clothes. What are rag robes? They are cloths that are picked up from the garbage can or stuff that other people discard. You wash the rags, and then patch and sew them together to make your robes. The Buddha wore those clothes, too, and one time he gave a rag robe he had gotten from the garbage can to Mahakasyapa. Mahakasyapa immediately started bowing to that robe. He said, "When I look at these clothes, it's just as if I were seeing my teacher." It was like bowing to the Buddha image in the Buddha hall, because it reminded him of the dhuta practices, whose purpose was to shake off the wearisome dust.

8) Keeping only three robes. No more than that. Only three pieces. You don't wear anything else.

9) Dwelling in a graveyard. Meditating or dwelling in a graveyard.

10) Resting underneath trees. You sleep under a tree. If you're practicing the dhutas, you don't lie down to sleep.

11) Sitting in an open space. You don't have a shelter or a roof over your head.

12) Never lying down. One would only sit. These are the twelve dhuta practices that pertain to clothing, food, and dwelling.

These three things are called desire. If you have too many clothes, that's indulging in greed and desire. One gets rid of these desires by shaking them off. One starts decreasing them and making things simpler and simpler.

DHUTANGHA PRACTICES SHOULD BE CULTIVATED FROM THE FIFTEENTH OF THE FIRST LUNAR MONTH TO THE FIFTEENTH OF THE THIRD LUNAR MONTH AND FROM THE FIFTEENTH OF THE EIGHTH LUNAR MONTH TO THE FIFTEENTH OF THE TENTH LUNAR MONTH. DURING THESE PERIODS THE EIGHTEEN ESSENTIALS SHOULD ALWAYS BE AS CLOSE TO A BHIKSHU AS WINGS TO A BIRD. The Precept continues to say that one sits in dhyana in winter and summer. Why is this? Because summers are too hot, and winters are too cold. During these times it's good to stay at one place and cultivate meditation--Ch'an. One should not be travelling and teaching living beings during such times. Then there is the summer retreat for the Sangha. The summer retreat is held because travelling in the summer particularly obstructs the Way. It's very easy for travelers to step on little bugs and small creatures and kill them. Therefore, for the ninety days of summer, the Sangha stays in-doors and doesn't go out. That's the summer retreat.

When practicing dhutangha, a Sanghan should have eighteen essentials by his side:

1) A willow branch. That refers to a toothbrush. In the olden times they didn't have toothpaste or toothbrushes, so the Buddha taught his disciples to chew on willow sticks. The willow stick has a bitter taste to it, and it can get rid of the fire in the mouth. Therefore, it's used to purify the mouth.

2) Soap. Soap was usually made from some bean or another. It was a bean derivative.

3-5) The three robes. The *samghati* is the great robe, or host cloth. The *uttarasangha* is the seven-piece robe. This is also called the robe for entering the assembly. The *antaravasaka* is the inner robe. That's a five-piece robe, the robe one works in. If one is performing chores, one can wear the five-piece robe.

6) A flask. There are several types of flasks:

a) A pure flask, which is for storing water for drinking.

b) A flask for common usage. This is for holding water to wash one's hands with. For example, before one bows to the Buddha or recites sutras, one has to first wash one's hands.

c) A flask for the body. This is for cleansing the places where one relieves nature.

7) A bowl. In Sanskrit this is *patra*. Translated it means "the bowl of appropriate measure." That means it suits one's in-take, to the amount that one eats. It also means that the substance, the color and the capacity of the bowl are according to Dharma. As to its substance, what is it made of? It has to be made of either pottery (clay) or iron (or steel). One cannot use gold, silver, copper, wood, or any of the seven precious gems. The color of the bowl should be glazed with sesame so that it becomes a grey color. That way the rice won't go sour. The third is the capacity, how big one's bowl is. One's bowl should correspond to the size of one's stomach. That is, however much you can eat, that's how big your bowl should be. There are three sizes of bowls: big bowls, medium bowls, and small bowls. The biggest bowl should not exceed three *sheng* (a Chinese measure). According to the Northern calculation, one sheng is almost equivalent to five pounds. Three sheng is almost fifteen pounds. That's a pretty big bowl! The smallest bowl is one and a half sheng--about eight pounds.

8) Sitting cloth. The Sanskrit is *nisidanam*. The sitting cloth is for protecting one's body, for protecting one's robe, and for protecting one's bedding. If you have to sit in a dirty place, you can put your sitting cloth down first, then sit on it. If you go to a place which is just immaculate, and you aren't so clean, you can stretch out your sitting cloth to sit on so that you won't dirty the other person's place.

9) Tin staff. Earth Store Bodhisattva holds a tin staff. What is a tin staff for? It's the hallmark of a sage. Most people who wield tin-headed staffs are not ordinary people. They are usually people who are astute cultivators.

10) A censor. A censor is for cultivating pure offerings. Even when one's practicing dhuta practices, one still has to burn incense and make offerings to the Buddha.

11) A water filter. Cultivators had to filter their water, because there might have been bugs in the water. Nowadays water is very hygienic, and there are usually no visible worms in it.

12) A towel. The towel is for wiping dirt off the body.

13) A knife. A cutting knife. It should be small. The specifications for the cutting knife are that its length should not exceed three joints of the finger, that's about one and a half inches, and it shouldn't be wider than one joint of the finger, which is one-half an inch. It is a small cutting knife to be used as the need arises.

14) A fire-starting device. In the Buddha's time they didn't have matches, so they needed a fire-starting device to make a fire for cooking food.

15) Tweezers. Tweezers may be used for different things, for example, clipping the wick off your oil lamp.

16) Bedding. This actually refers to a rope bed. A person who travels has to be able to put his bed away at any time.

17) Sutras and Vinaya texts. The sutras mesh with the One mind. The Precepts can regulate the three karmas of the body, mouth, and mind.

18) Buddha or Bodhisattva images. The Buddha images represent the ultimate fruition of the mind. The Bodhisattva images represent the resolve for the true cause.



These images help one work toward accomplishing Buddhahood. These eighteen essentials are objects one uses daily. They also represent dharmas. On the phenomenal level, they represent the Dharma-door that leads to Buddhahood.

The Precept says, "These things should be as close to one as wings are to a bird." A bird is never apart from its wings, and that's the way a cultivator should cherish these eighteen objects. He should never be apart from them.

These eighteen things are some of the one hundred and ten objects that left-home people should be equipped with. According to the Vinaya, if one is going to live in a cold country and one is a Sanghan, then one should be equipped with one hundred and ten things. But the eighteen items listed here are the essentials. Very often in tropical countries, one doesn't need all one hundred and ten items.

Some people who do not understand the meaning behind these eighteen essentials think that by taking them along one would be guaranteed offerings. This is a mistake! Some people may belittle the eighteen essentials and say they are not really rules prescribed for the Great Knights. Out of arrogance they may say, "What's the use of hauling all this stuff around?" In that way they abuse the appearance of this Dharma-door. They miss the point. That was not the original intent of the Buddha. Taken into consideration both the noumena and phenomena one should be complete with these things.

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IS ONLY ONE PERSON PRESENT TO PERFORM THE UPOSATHA CEREMONY, THEN HE SHOULD DO SO BY RECITING THE PRECEPTS ALONE. HOWEVER, IF THERE ARE TWO, THREE, OR EVEN A HUNDRED THOUSAND PEOPLE PRESENT, THE PRECEPTS ARE STILL TO BE RECITED BY ONE PERSON ONLY. THAT PERSON SHOULD SIT IN A HIGH POSITION WHILE THE REST OF THE ASSEMBLY SITS AND LISTENS FROM A LOWER POSITION DRESSED IN THE FIVE, SEVEN, AND NINE-STRIP SAMGHATI ROBES. Uposatha has two meanings: "Increase and grow," and "purify and disperse." It increases and causes one's good roots to grow; it purifies and gets rid of one's evil karma. What's an Uposatha day? It is the day when one recites the Precepts. The Uposatha applies particularly to Bodhisattvas who have just begun studying. That is, if one is new in the Way, one has to make a point to recite them regularly. The assembly had to wear robes. This refers to the five, seven, or nine-piece robes. This applies specifically to Bhikshus and Bhikshunis. Only Bhikshus and Bhikshunis can wear the five, seven, or nine-piece robes. Nobody else in the assembly can do so. Neither a shikshamana, a shramanera, or shramanerika, or a layperson can wear those robes. A shikshamana is a woman who is studying the Dharma. A shramanera is a man who has just left home. A shramanerika is a woman who has just left home. These three assemblies along with laypeople can wear a seamless sash. However, laypeople are only permitted to wear this seamless sash to ceremonies; they cannot use it for street wear.

This is a Precept of restraint, which means that it applies only to people who have received the Precepts. You can see there are many subdivisions in the Precept. The most important part is the restriction against travelling through dangerous places. The other stipulations, such as possessing the eighteen essentials and reciting the Precepts according to Dharma are sub-restrictions.

THE SUMMER RETREAT MUST BE HELD AND MANAGED IN STRICT ACCORDANCE WITH DHARMA. WHEN CULTIVATING DHUTANGHA PRACTICES, A BODHISATTVA MUST AVOID DANGEROUS PLACES. HE MUST REFRAIN FROM TRAVELLING THROUGH COUNTRIES THAT ARE IN CRISES, OR WHICH ARE RULED BY EVIL KINGS. HE MUST ALSO AVOID PRECIPITOUS TERRAIN, THE REMOTE WILDERNESS OR JUNGLE, OR AREAS INHABITED BY LIONS, TIGERS, OR WOLVES, AND AREAS PRONE TO FLOODS, FIRES, AND HURRICANES, PLACES INHABITED BY THIEVES, ROADS INFESTED WITH POISONOUS SNAKES, OR ANY OTHER SUCH DANGEROUS PLACES. WHETHER CULTIVATING DHUTANGHA PRACTICES OR OBSERVING THE SUMMER RETREAT, HE MUST AVOID ENTERING DANGEROUS PLACES. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY ENTERS DANGEROUS SITUATIONS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. Why is there a Precept that prohibits one from travelling in dangerous places? It's to prevent one from losing one's life. When faced with a crisis, a person may be shaken or even lose his life. Although it's said that the Great Knights, the Bodhisattvas, should renounce their bodies for the Dharma, one cannot refuse to be cautious and deliberately go out and simply invite trouble.

In the Confucian teachings there also exists the principle that one should go so far as relinquishing one's life to accomplish benevolence. However, it also says,

*One Who knows his destiny will never stand under a wall that's about to topple.*

Although Confucianism is based on determinism, still, one does not just ask for trouble. The same goes for a Buddhist who understands cause and effect. If one really understands cause and effect, one will not deliberately make oneself vulnerable to situations where one's life might be in danger.

There are three conditions that make up the offense:

1) It is a dangerous place. This means a country or an area that's hazardous. Confucius also said this:

*One should never enter a country that's in danger; one should never live in a country that is undergoing revolt.*

2) One knows that it is a place of danger.

3) One actually enters the place. Once you start walking in that place, every step you take constitutes a separate, light offense.

There is an exception to this. If you were in a country which wasn't in danger, but you hadn't any way of knowing beforehand, it's not considered an offense.

As to the eighteen essentials, one should be equipped with them. If one isn't that's an offense. If one slights them and doesn't take them seriously, and if at any moment one is not completely equipped with them, it is considered an offense.

Another part of the Precept pertains to reciting the Precepts every half month. It is an offense if one doesn't recite them. It is also an offense if one recites them, but not in accord with Dharma.

*-continued next issue*