

# *Brahma Net Sutra*

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THE THIRTY-EIGHTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO OBSERVE THE PROPER ORDER WHEN SITTING WITH THE ASSEMBLY. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST ACCORD WITH DHARMA BY TAKING THE PROPER PLACE WHEN SITTING WITH THE ASSEMBLY. THOSE WHO FIRST RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS SIT IN FRONT, WHEREAS THOSE WHO LATER RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS SIT BEHIND THEM ACCORDING TO THE ORDER IN WHICH THEY RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS. REGARDLESS OF WHETHER ONE IS OLD OR YOUNG, A BHIKSHU OR A BHIKSHUNI, A PERSON OF INFLUENTIAL OR NOBLE STATUS, A KING, A PRINCE, AND SO FORTH TO A EUNUCH, OR A SLAVE, ONE MUST STILL OBSERVE THIS REGULATION, ALLOWING THOSE WHO FIRST RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS TO SIT IN FRONT AND THOSE WHO LATER RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS TO SIT BEHIND THEM ACCORDING TO THE ORDER IN WHICH THEY RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS. DO NOT BE LIKE SENSELESS FOLLOWERS OF EXTERNALIST WAYS WHO BASE THEIR ORDER ON AGE OR WHO HAVE NO ORDER AT ALL AND THUS SIT IN NO PARTICULAR SEQUENCE, OR WHO BASE THEIR ORDER ON RANKS LIKE THE MILITARY, OR CASTE SYSTEM. WITHIN MY BUDDHADHARMA THOSE OF FOREMOST POSITION SIT IN THE FRONT AND THOSE OF LESSER POSITION SIT AT THE BACK. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA SITS OUT OF ORDER, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

## COMMENTARY:

THE THIRTY-EIGHTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS: FAILURE TO OBSERVE THE PROPER ORDER WHEN SITTING WITH THE ASSEMBLY. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST ACCORD WITH DHARMA BY TAKING THE PROPER PLACE WHEN SITTING WITH THE ASSEMBLY. THOSE WHO FIRST RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS SIT IN FRONT, WHEREAS THOSE WHO LATER RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS SIT BEHIND THEM ACCORDING TO THE ORDER IN WHICH THEY RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS. REGARDLESS OF WHETHER ONE IS OLD OR YOUNG, A BHIKSHU OR A BHIKSHUNI, A PERSON OF INFLUENTIAL OR NOBLE STATUS, A KING, A PRINCE, AND SO FORTH TO A EUNUCH, OR A SLAVE, ONE MUST STILL OBSERVE THIS REGULATION, ALLOWING THOSE WHO FIRST RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS TO SIT IN FRONT AND THOSE WHO LATER FRECEIVED THE PRECEPTS TO SIT BEHIND THEM ACCORDING TO THE ORDER IN WHICH THEY RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS. This Precept prohibits failure to observe the proper order or to observe the difference between the honored and the humble. Generally, when one talks about an honored position one is referring to people like kings or ministers; and when one speaks of people in a humble position one means

eunuchs, serfs, or slaves. But according to the Buddha's Precepts, the only criterion is Precept-age. It does not refer to one's previous status. It doesn't matter what you were before you were before you received the Precepts. After you've received the Precepts, the criterion to judge your position is when you took the Precepts.



To sit in accordance with the Dharma has two aspects.

- 1) In general, this refers to the seven assemblies which are: Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Shramaneras, Shramanerikas, Shikshamanas—the first five comprise the left-home assembly. The Upasakas and Upasikas are the lay assembly.
- 2) Specially, this refers to the kind of Precepts you have received when you received them.

Sitting in the assembly refers to two situations.

- a. When people are reciting the Precepts.
- b. Other occasions.

In either of these two situations, you cannot sit out of order. The Precept also talks about age when it says it doesn't matter whether one is old or young. This also has two aspects:

- 1) Within the seven assemblies.
- 2) Within the kinds of Precepts.

In this seven assemblies, a Bhikshuni who has received Precepts for a hundred years cannot sit in front of a Bhikshu who has just received the Precepts. The Bhikshuni may be considerably senior to the Bhikshu in Precept-age, but she cannot sit in front of him. Why is this? When the Buddha was in the world, his aunt asked the Buddha whether women could leave the home life and the Buddha said, "no." She asked three times and finally the Buddha consented, but he also established the Eight Dharmas of Respect which Bhikshunis should observe with regard to Bhikshus. The Buddha said, "If women bring forth a mind of compassion, their mind of compassion is greater than a man's. But when they get angry or when they become arrogant, their anger and arrogance are also greater than a man's." For this reason, the Buddha set up the rules that Bhikshunis should not go before the Bhikshus. Even if a Bhikshuni has received both Great Vehicle and Small Vehicle Precepts, and the Bhikshu may only have received Small Vehicle Precepts, she cannot sit in front of him. The order is based on the Sound Hearer Precepts. In the same way, a Shramanera who has just received the Precepts is entitled to walk ahead of a Bhikshuni, no matter how old her Precept age is. A Shramanerika must walk behind a Bhikshuni. A Shikshamana must walk behind a Shramanerika.

The Bodhisattva Precepts are without an appearance, without any mark; that is, whether one is a man, woman or any other being, if one has received the Bodhisattva Precepts, one does not assume a particular appearance that shows one has received them. But if one has received the Bhikshu, Bhikshuni, Shramanera, or Shramanerika Precepts, there is an appearance that goes along with them. One naturally assumes the appearance of a left-home person.

An Upasaka is a layman who receives the five precepts, and an Upasika is a laywoman who receives the five precepts. Since they are lay people, although they may have received the Bodhisattva Precepts a hundred years ago, they cannot sit in front of a Shramanera, even one only old enough to chase away the birds. When a boy is seven years old and he can receive the Shramanera Precepts, he's called a scarecrow Shramanera; that is, he is old enough to scare the birds away. But although this Shramanera may be young, a layman or a laywoman cannot sit in front of him, even if they have received the Bodhisattva Precepts a hundred years ago. How much the less could they sit in front of a Shramanera or a Bhikshu! In the *SUTRA OF PRODUCTION OF GOODNESS*, it Says, "An Upasaka or Upasika who walks in front, or sits in front of a Bhikshu or a Shramanera incurs an offense of recklessness." In both walking in the line and sitting within the assembly, one cannot be out of order.

The Precept refers to people with noble status or positions, such as kings and princes, who are the direct opposites of people of inferior circumstances, such as eunuchs or slaves. But although they may be either kings or eunuchs and slaves, they all fall into the two assemblies or laymen and laywomen. Within them are also fine distinctions. For example, a prince may have received the Bodhisattva Precepts, but if he hasn't left the home-life, he cannot sit ahead of his father the King. If the Prince has received the Bodhisattva Precepts but the King hasn't, theoretically the Prince should be able to sit in front of his father. But this cannot be. In this case, the Bodhisattva Precepts would not allow him to sit in front of the King. But if the Prince had left the home-life and received the Bhikshu Precepts, then he could rightfully sit in front of the King. Why is this? It is because one manifests the appearance of a Bhikshu. That makes the difference. So the Precepts lists all these different types of people and says, "and so forth to," which means elders, officials, ministers, Brahmans, and the like are included, although they are not mentioned.

If these types of people were observing worldly customs, they might base their position upon their official status, with those of the highest rank sitting first; or according to age, with the oldest ones sitting first; or by their virtue, with the more virtuous ones sitting first. Basically there's no particular order to this. But in this case, the Buddha said, "We don't want to pay attention to any of those other considerations. The only criterion for the order in which you sit is your Precept age."

Eunuchs are mentioned. They belong to one of the Eight Difficulties--those with incomplete faculties. They are not permitted to leave home. They cannot receive either the Bhikshu or the Shramanera Precepts. Slaves cannot leave the home-life unless their masters allow them to; that is, they can't do anything they please. They have to get permission from their owners. But if slaves are able to receive both Bhikshu and Shramanera Precepts, they can also sit in front of the King.

DO NOT BE LIKE SENSELESS FOLLOWERS OF EXTERNALISTS WHO BASE THEIR ORDER ON AGE OR WHO HAVE NO ORDER AT ALL AND THUS SIT IN NO PARTICULAR SEQUENCE, OR WHO BASE THEIR ORDER ON RANKS LIKE THE MILITARY, OR CASTE SYSTEM. WITHIN MY BUDDHADHARMA THOSE OF FOREMOST POSITION SIT IN THE FRONT AND THOSE OF LESSER POSITION SIT AT THE BACK. The Precept says that the Bodhisattva cannot in any case sit out of order. This applies to all the assemblies at all times. It refers to both the common and specific. The common refers to the seven assemblies. The specific refers to the kind of Precept. Both kinds of orders must be observed in the proper manner, according to Dharma.

This is a Precept of restraint. Restraint means that it applies to people who have received the Precepts. There are three conditions that make up an offense.

- 1) One is not walking or sitting in order.
- 2) One knows one is out of order.
- 3) One deliberately sits down or tells somebody else to sit out of order. Both of these are offenses. Are there exceptions to the rule? The Sutras cite examples where Bodhisattvas have shown deference to the Bhikshus, but nonetheless have been allowed to walk ahead of them. Another exception is when a Shramanera, although he is a lower seated Sanghan, is able to speak the Dharma, and then he can ascend the Dharma seat to speak.

SUTRA:

THE THIRTY-NINTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO CULTIVATE BLESSINGS AND WISDOM. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST CONSTANTLY TEACH AND TRANSFORM ALL LIVING BEINGS AND LEAD THEM TO ESTABLISH SANGHA DWELLINGS, RETREATS IN THE MOUNTAINS AND FORESTS, GARDENS AND FIELDS, TO ERECT STUPAS, TO HONOR THE BUDDHA, TO PROVIDE ACCOMODATIONS FOR THE WINTER AND SUMMER DHYANA RETREATS, AND TO BUILD ALL FACILITIES REQUIRED BY THOSE WHO CULTIVATE THE WAY. FURTHERMORE, A BODHISATTVA SHOULD EXPLAIN THE GREAT VEHICLE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES FOR THE SAKE OF BEINGS. WHENEVER A PERSON IS SERIOUSLY ILL, WHENEVER THERE IS A NATIONAL CRISIS OR A DISASTER OF THIEVES, ON THE DAY WHEN ONE'S FATHER, MOTHER, BROTHER, UPADYAYA, OR ACHARYA DIES, AND FOR THREE TO SEVEN WEEKS AFTER THEIR DEATH, A BODHISATTVA SHOULD EXPLAIN THE GREAT VEHICLE SUTRAS AND MORAL REGULATIONS AS WELL AS SPONSOR OFFERINGS OF PURE FOOD, WITH THE AIM OF BENEFITTING THE VICTIMS OF SUCH PREDICAMENTS.

MOREOVER, IN ORDER TO SAVE BEINGS: THOSE BURNT BY FIRE, OR FLOODED BY WATER, TO HELP SHIPS LOST AT NIGHT IN FURIOUS STORMS AND TO RESCUE BEINGS DOOMED BY THE RAKSHASAS OF THE RIVERS AND GREAT SEAS, ONE SHOULD READ, RECITE, AND EXPLAIN THESE SUTRAS AND MORAL REGULATIONS.

FOR THE SAKE OF ERADICATING ALL MANNER OF OFFENSE RETRIBUTION, THE THREE EVIL PATHS, THE EIGHT DIFFICULTIES, THE SEVEN REBELLIOUS ACTS, IMPRISONMENT BY HANDCUFFS, SHACKLES, YOKES, AND CHAINS, MUCH SEXUAL DESIRE, MUCH ANGER, MUCH STUPIDITY, OR MUCH ILLNESS, THE BODHISATTVA SHOULD READ, RECITE, AND EXPLAIN THE GREAT VEHICLE SUTRAS AND MORAL REGULATIONS. HENCE, IF THE NEWLY-STUDYING BODHISATTVA FAILS TO ACT ACCORDINGLY, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

THE BODHISATTVA MUST STUDY AND RESPECTFULLY UPHOLD THE AFORMENTIONED NINE PRECEPTS. THEY WILL BE FURTHER EXPLAINED IN THE "BRAHMA ALTAR" CHAPTER.

COMMENTARY:

THE THIRTY-NINTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO CULTIVATE BLESSINGS AND WISDOM. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST CONSTANTLY TEACH AND TRANSFORM ALL LIVING BEINGS AND LEAD THEM TO ESTABLISH SANGHA DWELLINGS, RETREATS IN THE MOUNTAINS AND FORESTS, GARDENS AND FIELDS, TO ERECT STUPAS TO HONOR THE BUDDHA, TO PROVIDE ACCOMODATIONS FOR THE WINTER AND SUMMER DHYANA RETREATS, AND TO BUILD ALL FACILITIES REQUIRED BY THOSE WHO CULTIVATE THE WAY. FURTHERMORE, A BODHISATTVA SHOULD EXPLAIN THE GREAT VEHICLE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODE FOR THE SAKE OF BEINGS. WHENEVER A PERSON IS SERIOUSLY ILL, WHENEVER THERE IS A NATIONAL CRISIS OR A DISASTER OF THIEVES, ON THE DAY WHEN ONE'S FATHER, MOTHER, BROTHER, UPADYAYA, OR ACHARYA DIES, AND FOR THREE TO SEVEN WEEKS AFTER THEIR DEATH, A BODHISATTVA SHOULD EXPLAIN THE GREAT VEHICLE SUTRAS AND MORAL REGULATIONS AS WELL AS SPONSOR OFFERINGS OF PURE FOOD, WITH THE AIM OF BENEFITING THE VICTIMS OF SUCH PREDICAMENTS.

If one fails to cultivate blessings or wisdom, one has violated this Precept. The Precepts says, "a disciple of the Buddha," meaning one who has received the Precepts, must constantly teach and transform all beings. Teach them to build dwellings for the Sangha, to set up fields, parks, and gardens, or to erect Stupas, and winter and summer dhyana retreats. That is, one has to prepare all these accommodations to facilitate those who cultivate the Way.

Furthermore, a Bodhisattva should explain the Great Vehicle Sutras and moral codes for everybody, because the job of a Bodhisattva is to speak the Great Vehicle Sutras and Precepts to all beings. There are different vehicle teachings in Buddhism. There's the Small Vehicle, the Medium Vehicle, and the Great Vehicle. In the Sutras there is an analogy for this. The Small Vehicle is likened to a sheep cart. The sheep pulls a cart, but it can take only one person. The Medium Vehicle is like a deer cart which can carry a few more people. The Great Vehicle is likened to an ox cart, which can carry a lot of people in it. This analogy shows that the Great Vehicle can cross over many people, while people of the lesser vehicle can only cross over

themselves. Great Vehicle Sutras have within them a lot of power to influence people, and that's why one has to proclaim them.

If one is sick or the country is in a state of crisis or run down by thieves, or if one's parents are ill or dying, or at the time of death of an upadyaya—one's teacher, or an acharya—a master of regulations, for three to seven weeks after their death, one should explain the Great Vehicle Sutras and the moral codes. This means to sponsor Dharma assemblies and pure vegetarian meals, so that one can benefit the people and help deliver beings from distress.

MOREOVER, IN ORDER TO SAVE BEINGS: THOSE BURNT BY FIRE, OR FLOODED BY WATER, TO HELP SHIPS LOST AT NIGHT IN FURIOUS STORMS AND TO RESCUE BEINGS DOOMED BY THE RAKSHASAS OF THE RIVERS AND GREAT SEAS, ONE SHOULD READ, RECITE, AND EXPLAIN THESE SUTRAS AND MORAL REGULATIONS. One should read and recite the Precepts and Sutras during any of these difficult times.

FOR THE SAKE OF ERADICATING ALL MANNER OF OFFENSE RETRIBUTION, THE THREE EVIL PATHS, THE EIGHT DIFFICULTIES, THE SEVEN REBELLIOUS ACTS, IMPRISONMENT BY HANDCUFFS, SHACKLES, YOKES, AND CHAINS, MUCH SEXUAL DESIRE, MUCH ANGER, MUCH STUPIDITY, OR MUCH ILLNESS, THE BODHISATTVA SHOULD READ, RECITE, AND EXPLAIN THE GREAT VEHICLE SUTRAS AND MORAL REGULATIONS. HENCE, IF THE NEWLY-STUDYING BODHISATTVA FAILS TO ACT ACCORDINGLY, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPTS AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. The eight difficulties were discussed already. The seven rebellious acts are just about to be lectured.

When any difficulty arises, such as being imprisoned by handcuffs, shackles, yokes, or chains, having too much sexual desire--that's greed, or too much anger or stupidity--the three poisons; or being afflicted with much illness, one should recite the Great Vehicle Sutras or Precepts. If you don't know how to lecture them, you should recite them.

If you wish to transfer the merit to the deceased, you can recite for them the AMITABHA SUTRA, or the EARTH STORE SUTRA. If you don't know how to lecture, then you can recite them. Or, even if you recited the BRAHMA NET SUTRA, this Sutra, it would be okay. When the deceased hear this their blessings and wisdom will increase.

If Bodhisattvas who have just begun studying do not do this, they have violated this Precept.

When the Precept tells people to establish Sangha dwellings, it is so they can cultivate blessings; when it tells people to explain the Great Vehicle Sutras, it's so they can cultivate wisdom.

This is a Precept of restraint, which means that it applies to people who have received the Precepts. You should cultivate according to your capacity. However much strength you have, you should do that much. When you encounter the circumstances in which you can do these things, you should do them. If you encounter the circumstances and fail to do so, then that's an offense. Each time constitutes a separate offense. The exception to the rule is if it's beyond your

capacity. If you're talking, and nobody wants to listen to you, or you don't have any money at all to help build Sangha dwellings, then such activities are beyond your capacity. Another exception would be if a person particularly cultivates a certain Dharma-door, like Dhyana contemplation, and puts everything else down. Then if he doesn't go and build Sangha dwellings, that's excusable.

*-continued next issue*