



Brahma Net Sutra

Commentary by Elder Master Wei Sung

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SUTRA:

THE FORTY-FOURTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO MAKE OFFERINGS TO THE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA SHOULD CONSTANTLY AND SINGLEMINDEDLY RECEIVE, UPHOLD, READ, AND RECITE THE GREAT VEHICLE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES. HE SHOULD BE WILLING TO PEEL OFF HIS SKIN FOR PAPER, DRAW HIS OWN BLOOD FOR INK, EXTRACT THE LIQUID FROM HIS BONES TO THIN IT, AND SPLIT HIS BONES TO FASHION A PEN TO WRITE OUT THE BUDDHA'S PRECEPTS. THEY SHOULD BE WRITTEN OUT AND PRESERVED ON SUCH SURFACES AS BARK, PAPER, FINE CLOTH, OR BAMBOO SLATS. A BODHISATTVA SHOULD USE THE SEVEN PRECIOUS THINGS, PRICELESS INCENSE AND FLOWERS, OR VARIOUS GEMS TO ADORN THE COVERS AND CASES IN WHICH THEY ARE STORED. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO MAKE OFFERINGS TO THESE DHARMA TREASURES IN ACCORD WITH DHARMA, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE FORTY-FOURTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO MAKE OFFERINGS TO THE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA SHOULD CONSTANTLY AND SINGLEMINDEDLY RECEIVE, UPHOLD, READ, AND RECITE THE GREAT VEHICLE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES. The Sutras and moral codes are Dharma treasures. If one doesn't make offerings to them, one isn't being respectful. HE SHOULD BE WILLING TO PEEL OFF HIS SKIN FOR PAPER, DRAW HIS OWN BLOOD FOR INK, EXTRACT THE LIQUID FROM HIS BONES TO THIN IT, AND SPLIT HIS BONES TO FASHION A PEN TO WRITE OUT THE BUDDHA'S PRECEPTS. This is how far you should be willing to go in order to make offerings to the Sutras.

THEY SHOULD BE WRITTEN OUT AND PRESERVED ON SUCH SURFACES AS BARK, PAPER, FINE CLOTH, OR BAMBOO SLATS. One can use the bark of certain trees, or paper which is made from the chaff of grains. One can use fine cloth or bamboo slats to write out the Sutras or Vinaya.

A BODHISATTVA SHOULD USE THE SEVEN PRECIOUS THINGS, PRICELESS INCENSE AND FLOWERS, OR VARIOUS GEMS TO ADORN THE COVERS AND CASES IN WHICH THEY ARE STORED. There are five ways in which one can make offerings to the Sutras and moral codes.

- 1) Receive and uphold them. We left-home people do this every day.
- 2) Read and recite them.
- 3) Write them out. Writing out the Sutras is an act of offering.
- 4) Explain them for others.
- 5) Use flowers, incense, and assorted jewels to adorn them. The Precept teachers ask if we are willing to peel off our own skin for paper, and draw our own blood for ink, and so forth, in order to receive the Buddha's Precepts. If one is willing to make this type of sacrifice, one should certainly be willing to write out the Sutras on bark, paper, fine cloth, and make offerings to them.

HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO MAKE OFFERINGS TO THESE DHARMA TREASURES IN ACCORD WITH DHARMA, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. One who doesn't have reverence for the Dharma commits this offense.

SUTRA:

THE FORTY-FIFTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO TEACH LIVING BEINGS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA SHOULD ALWAYS PRODUCE A MIND OF COMPASSION. WHENEVER HE ENTERS A CITY OR A HOUSEHOLD AND ENCOUNTERS LIVING BEINGS, HE SHOULD DECLARE TO THEM, "YOU LIVING BEINGS SHOULD TAKE REFUGE IN THE TRIPLE JEWEL AND UPHOLD THE TEN PRECEPTS." WHEN HE SEES COWS, HORSES, PIGS, SHEEP, OR OTHER ANIMALS, HE SHOULD THINK AND SAY ALOUD TO THEM, "NOW YOU HAVE BECOME AN ANIMAL. YOU SHOULD IMMEDIATELY RESOLVE YOUR HEART ON BODHI." WHEREVER A BODHISATTVA GOES, WHETHER IT BE THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS, FORESTS, RIVERS, OR THE COUNTRY-SIDE, HE SHOULD INFLUENCE ALL BEINGS TO RESOLVE THEIR HEARTS ON BODHI. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO TEACH AND TRANSFORM BEINGS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

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THE FORTY-FIFTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO TEACH LIVING BEINGS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA SHOULD ALWAYS PRODUCE A MIND OF COMPASSION. WHENEVER HE ENTERS A CITY OR A HOUSEHOLD AND ENCOUNTERS LIVING BEINGS,

HE SHOULD DECLARE TO THEM, "YOU LIVING BEINGS SHOULD TAKE REFUGE IN THE TRIPLE JEWEL AND UPHOLD THE TEN PRECEPTS." A person should bring forth a mind of great compassion when he enters any place and sees living creatures. One should exhort them to take refuge with the Triple Jewel: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. One should also exhort them to receive the Ten Precepts. The Ten Precepts refer to the Ten Bodhisattva Precepts.

WHEN HE SEES COWS, HORSES, PIGS, SHEEP, OR OTHER ANIMALS, HE SHOULD THINK AND SAY ALOUD TO THEM, "NOW YOU HAVE BECOME AN ANIMAL. YOU SHOULD IMMEDIATELY RESOLVE YOUR HEART ON BODHI." A Bodhisattva also brings forth a great compassion heart towards animals. Why should he have this mind of compassion? It is because he realizes that all living beings and all Buddhas of the three periods of time on the mind-ground are not two, but are the same. People's spiritual essence is the same as living creatures and ultimately the same as that of all Buddhas. It's just that for us it's hidden. We're covered over by karmic obstacles and so it doesn't manifest. That is why we are at present different from the Buddhas. Now, the purpose is to remove the suffering from the virtue of their nature and then bestow upon them the joy of the virtue of the nature. The virtue of the nature is an inherent quality within all living beings. The Bodhisattva is mindful of this in his heart. He also tells all living creatures to take refuge with the Triple Jewel and bring forth the Bodhi mind so that they may quickly open enlightenment.

There are many different kinds of animals. Some understand human language, some don't. It depends upon their karmic retribution--how deeply they have fallen--and on whether they have Way-virtue.

For example, in Peiking, on the Western Mountain, there are three monasteries: Hsi Yu, Chih Tai, and T'an Chiao. At T'an Chiao Monastery, there was a cat who knew how to recite the Buddha's name. One day after a young monk had eaten breakfast, he was sitting on his little stool outside. The mice were running back and forth, and the cat was purring away asleep on the bed. The young monk was about to beat up the cat. He said, "You only know how to eat and sleep, you don't even know how to catch mice!"

But an old monk happened along and said, "You know, the cat's stronger than you. You don't know to recite the Buddha's name, but the cat is reciting the Buddha with every purr!"

What proof was there of this? After the cat died, he was buried in the back yard. From his little grave there sprouted a lotus flower. For a lotus flower to grow where there is no water is pretty unusual. It just came up by itself in the grave. This is proof that even animals are endowed with the Buddha-nature, and judging from this sign, the cat was probably reborn in the Western Pure Land.

WHEREVER A BODHISATTVA GOES, WHETHER IT BE THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS, FORESTS, RIVERS, OR THE COUNTRYSIDE, HE SHOULD INFLUENCE ALL BEINGS TO RESOLVE THEIR HEARTS ON BODHI. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA FAILS TO RESOLVE TO TEACH AND TRANSFORM BEINGS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

This is a Precept of restraint. To act in a way other than this would be to contradict the great vows of a Bodhisattva. When people take refuge with the Triple Jewel they make four great vows: the first says, "Living beings are endless; I vow to save them all." If you don't teach and transform beings, that is a violation of the first vow.

There are four conditions that make up an offense:

- 1) It is a living creature.
- 2) One knows that it's a living creature.
- 3) One does not have a mind to teach and transform it.
- 4) One actually fails to teach it.

When one encounters an opportunity to teach and fails to teach, that's an offense.

-continued next issue