



Brahma Net Sutra

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SUTRA:

THE SECOND MAJOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS STEAL-ING. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT STEAL HIMSELF, ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO STEAL, FACILITATE STEALING, STEAL WITH MANTRAS, OR INVOLVE HIMSELF IN THE CAUSES, CONDITIONS, METHODS, OR KARMA OF STEALING, TO THE EXTENT THAT HE MUST NOT DELIBERATELY STEAL THE POSSESSIONS OF GHOSTS, SPIRITS, OR ANY OTHER BEING; ALL VALUABLES AND POSSESSIONS, INCLUDING SUCH OBJECTS AS SMALL AS A NEEDLE OR A BLADE OF GRASS. A BODHISATTVA SHOULD GIVE RISE TO A MIND OF FILIAL COMPLIANCE, KINDNESS, AND COMPASSION TOWARD THE BUDDHA-NATURE. THUS, HE SHOULD ALWAYS AID PEOPLE TO PRODUCE BLESSINGS AND HAPPINESS. IF INSTEAD A BODHISATTVA STEALS ANOTHER'S VALUABLES OR POSSESSIONS, HE THEREBY COMMITS A BODHISATTVA PARAJIKA OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

The first of the Bodhisattva Parajika Precepts prohibits killing. This is because Bodhisattvas take compassion as their basis, and killing is, of course, the exact opposite of compassion. Bhikshu and Bhikshuni Precepts take the precept against sexual misconduct as the first Parajika, because the aim of a left-home person is to leave the Triple Realm. Since sexual desire is the very root of revolving on the wheel, the precept against sexual misconduct is number one in the Bhikshu Precepts. But with Bodhisattva Precepts, prohibiting killing is the foremost.

Now we will discuss the second precept, which prohibits stealing. Stealing means taking another's possessions without them having been given to you. If you take what others haven't given, that's called stealing. There are eight different kinds of stealing:

1) Stealing in the open. This is snatching the thing right out from under someone, in plain sight.

- 2) Stealing by stealth. One might steal at night or when no one is around.
- 3) Stealing by deceit or trickery. For example, one tells lies, or uses other forms of deceit to steal.
- 4) Stealing by oppression.
- 5) Stealing in court. Involved in a court case, one finds ways to appeal the case so one gets what one wants.
- 6) Stealing by force. This is similar to number four, stealing by oppression; one just forcibly takes what one wants.
- 7) Stealing by not returning what was entrusted to one. Say, someone gives you something to keep for them, but then they forget about it. *They* forget about it, but the one who has it doesn't forget. Since he hasn't forgotten, it is his responsibility to return the item. But if he pretends to have forgotten and does not return it, that's this kind of stealing.
- 8) Stealing by dodging taxes. Not paying the taxes that you should is what is meant here.

The definitions of stealing get quite complex if gone into in detail. For instance, another type of stealing is moving an object from its original place. One may see something and decide that it's so nice that he wants it. But when he picks it up, he sees that it has a flaw in it, so he puts it back. But, if during this process he has moved it to another place, then he has committed this act of stealing.

A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT STEAL BY HIMSELF, ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO STEAL, FACILITATE STEALING, or employ expedient means in stealing. What is meant by expediently stealing? It means that when something comes one's way, one just expediently hides it away with the intent of keeping it.

...STEAL WITH MANTRAS... I heard of the following incident when I was in Northern China. One day, a person came into the pawn shop and asked for a cup of water. Then he mantra'd the water and somehow that very night, when the bookkeepers prepared to go over the money, they found that it had all disappeared. There was absolutely nothing in the cash drawer! It seems that person had stolen all of the money by means of a mantra.

Another method of stealing with mantras is to get ghosts or spirits to do one's bidding. A person can intone spells and make ghosts and spirits do the stealing.

...OR INVOLVE HIMSELF IN THE CAUSES, CONDITIONS, METHODS, OR KARMA OF STEALING... What are "the causes of stealing?" This means to give rise to a thought to deliberately take another person's possessions. And you can do this either with a thought of deceit, a crooked thought, a thought of anger, or a thought of threat. All of these are called causes of stealing.

"The conditions of stealing," refers to peeping in through windows or doors to see where things are kept so that later one can know where to take them from.

"The methods of stealing" refers to the actual preparations to steal, such as getting a key, or finding some way to unlock somebody's safe, and selecting the things to be stolen.

"The karma of stealing" means actually removing an object from its original place. Once an object is removed from its original place, the karma of stealing is created.

...TO THE EXTENT THAT HE MUST NOT DELIBERATELY STEAL THE POSSESSIONS OF GHOSTS, SPIRITS, OR ANY OTHER BEING ALL VALUABLES AND POSSESSIONS, INCLUDING SUCH OBJECTS AS SMALL AS A NEEDLE OR BLADE OF GRASS. "To the extent that" covers the entire range, from major robbery to petty theft. A needle or a blade of grass, for instance, are usually considered insignificant. But this covers the whole gamut.

A BODHISATTVA SHOULD GIVE RISE TO A MIND OF FILIAL COMPLIANCE, KINDNESS, AND COMPASSION TOWARD THE BUDDHA-NATURE. "The Buddha-nature" refers to that which all living beings are endowed with--a nature which will come to fruition in the future. It means that eventually they will become Buddhas. A "nature" is an unchanging essence.

If you happen to steal from people, then you'll be punished in ways used by people. This precept is a deed of both the nature and of restraint. A precept of the nature refers to a prohibition of deeds which even the laws of society prohibit. Stealing, for instance, is illegal, and if one is caught doing it, one will be punished. Therefore, a violation of this kind of precept is an offense against the nature, that is, it contradicts human nature. The Buddhadharma also defines precepts of restraint. If one fails to restrain oneself, one commits an offense against that restraint, and mars one's goodness. Sometimes these two coincide, and sometimes they don't. For example, the precept against taking intoxicants is only a precept of restraint because there are no laws in the worldly realm against this. The precept against selling intoxicants is the same.

In the world there are two types of retribution: Proper and Dependent Retribution. Dependent Retribution refers to the natural environment, man-made buildings, food and drink--all the external things. That is, things that living beings rely on, depend on, for survival. That's why it is called Dependent Retribution. Our physical bodies are called our Proper Retribution. If one steals, one usurps another person's Dependent Retribution and robs him of his external life-force. If one takes things from someone which gives him sustenance, then deprived of those things, that person's very life may be endangered. Since this causes distress, even the law forbids it. Buddhism also prohibits this.

There are five conditions which will constitute an offense. All five conditions have to be met.

- 1) The thing(s) belong to someone else.
- 2) One must know that they belong to someone else.
- 3) One has to have the intent to steal.
- 4) The thing(s) are worth more than 25¢. According to Indian law of that time, if one stole something worth more than 25¢, the offense was punishable by death.
- 5) One must remove the thing(s) from their original place. That is, if these five conditions are replete, then an offense has been committed.

There are three grades of things that are possessed by others:

- 1) The upper grade includes the property of the Buddha, property of the Dharma, the property of the permanently-dwelling Sangha of the four directions, and the property of one's parents and teachers. Worldly dharmas often differ from transcendental Dharmas. In some cultures, if a child steals his

par-ent's belongings, it's not considered a heavy offense. Even if he were arrested, he won't be sentenced. It's assumed that one's parents' possessions will eventually end up as one's own. But according to the Buddhadharma, if one steals from one's parents, it is a heavy offense. It is even heavier than if one stole from other people. Some people have the impression that if one steals from the Triple Jewel it's no big deal, because the possessions of the Triple Jewel are all gotten from offerings anyway, the meaning being that they didn't earn these things to begin with. But, according to the laws of cause and effect, if one steals from the Triple Jewel, or the Sangha of the four directions, or from one's parents and teachers, the offenses incurred are much heavier than if one were to steal from any other source.

2) The middle grade includes things that belong to both humans and gods. Humans refer to other people.

3) The lower grade includes the property of ghosts, spirits, and animals.

A major violation of this precept refers to stealing from the upper grade and stealing from people of the medium grade who are one's superiors. A light offense means stealing from humans and gods of the medium grade, and stealing from those beings of the lower grade, that is the property of animals, ghosts, and spirits. So that's the difference between a heavy or a light offense. Of course, if you want to break it down there are many more subtle divisions.

Now, why is it that if you steal from the Triple Jewel or from your parents and teachers the offense is so heavy? It is because our parents gave birth to us and nurtured our physical bodies. Our teachers give "birth" to our Dharma bodies and help us to enlighten to the Way. Therefore, the Triple Jewel, our teachers, and our parents are those who have given us the greatest kindness. It is because of this that we should repay them and be filial. If one is not filial, but even steals from them, how cruel that is! For this reason, stealing from those above one is a heavy offense.

THUS HE SHOULD ALWAYS AID PEOPLE TO PRODUCE BLESSINGS AND HAPPINESS. IF INSTEAD A BODHISATTVA STEALS ANOTHER'S VALUABLES OR POSSESSIONS, HE THEREBY COMMITS A BODHISATTVA PARAJIKA OFFENSE.



SUTRA:

THE THIRD MAJOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS SEXUAL CONDUCT. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT HIMSELF DELIBERATELY ENGAGE IN SEXUAL CONDUCT WITH ANY MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITE SEX, OR ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO SO, NOR MAY HE INVOLVE HIMSELF IN THE CAUSES, CONDITIONS, METHODS OR KARMA OF SEXUAL CONDUCT. THIS PROHIBITION EXTENDS TO SEXUAL CONDUCT WITH ANIMALS, GODS OR GODDESSES, GHOSTS OR SPIRITS, OTHER FORMS OF LUSTFUL BEHAVIOR, AND ALL PERVERSE TYPES OF SEXUAL CONDUCT. A BODHISATTVA SHOULD GIVE RISE TO A MIND OF FILIAL COMPLIANCE. THUS HE SHOULD RESCUE ALL BEINGS AND INSTRUCT THEM IN THE DHARMAS OF PURITY. IF INSTEAD A BODHISATTVA ENGAGES IN PROMISCUOUS SEXUAL CONDUCT WITH ANY PERSON, WITH ANIMALS, HIS MOTHER, DAUGHTER, SISTERS, OR ANY OTHER OF THE SIX TYPES OF CLOSE RELATIVES, HIS BEHAVIOR IS UTTERLY DEVOID OF COMPASSION AND HE THEREBY COMMITS A BODHISATTVA PARAJIKA OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

This precept is placed third, indicating that it's not as heavy as the precepts against killing and stealing. But if you seek to get out of the Triple Realm by cultivating the Way, then sexual conduct is a factor that obstructs you even more than killing or stealing. Sexual conduct here means: defiling intercourse, vulgar and shameful conduct. It's called conduct which is "not Brahmalike," because Brahma means pure. It's not pristine, not pure. It's also called "impure conduct," because it is the very root of birth and death. It's the source of revolving in the wheel of rebirth.

In the *Shurangama Sutra* it says: "All living beings, just because of sexual desire, are sustained in their lives." If they cut off sexual desire, they can transcend revolving in samsara; they can leap out of birth and death.

A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA MUST NOT HIMSELF ENGAGE IN SEXUAL CONDUCT WITH ANY MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITE SEX, OR ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO SO. The Bodhisattva should not become involved in sexual conduct himself or encourage others to become involved in sexual conduct. NOR MAY HE INVOLVE HIMSELF IN THE CAUSES, CON-DITIONS, METHODS, OR KARMA OF SEXUAL CONDUCT. The "causes of sexual conduct" means a defiled mind. The "conditions" of sexual conduct means to look at and then run after the object. The "methods" of sexual conduct are the means which facilitate pursuing the object. The "karma" of sexual conduct means that the actual sexual conduct transpires. There are three conditions which make up this offense.

- 1) The situation. There is a possibility to engage in sexual conduct.
- 2) Thought. One has the thought of sexual desire.
- 3) The actual event transpires.

THIS PROHIBITION EXTENDS TO ANY CONDUCT WITH ANIMALS, GODS OR GODDESSES, GHOSTS, OR SPIRITS, OTHER FORMS OF LUSTFUL BEHAVIOR, AND ALL PERVERSE TYPES OF SEXUAL CONDUCT. A BODHISATTVA SHOULD GIVE RISE TO A MIND OF FILIAL COMPLIANCE. THUS HE SHOULD RESCUE ALL BEINGS AND INSTRUCT THEM IN THE DHARMAS OF PURITY. IF INSTEAD A BODHISATTVA ENGAGES IN PROMISCUOUS SEXUAL CONDUCT WITH ANY BEING, WITH ANIMALS, HIS MOTHER, DAUGHTER, SISTERS, OR ANY OTHER OF THE SIX TYPES OF CLOSE RELATIVES, HIS BEHAVIOR IS UTTERLY DEVOID OF COMPASSION, AND HE THEREBY COMMITS A BODHISATTVA PARAJIKA OFFENSE.

Sutras always begin with the words: "Thus I have heard." These were one of the four last instructions of the Buddha. Another of the four last instructions the Buddha gave in reply to Ananda's question: "When the Buddha no longer dwells in the world, what shall we take as our dwelling? What should we rely on as our dwelling?" The Buddha's reply was: "Rely on the Four Places of Contemplation." Those Four Contemplations are pertinent to this third precept, so let us look into them.

- 1) Contemplate that the body is impure.
- 2) Contemplate that feelings are suffering.
- 3) Contemplate that thoughts are impermanent.
- 4) Contemplate that dharmas are without a self.

This is an excellent method for cultivation. Living beings who revolve in birth and death must use the Four Contemplations to get out of the wheel of rebirth. Every thought we give rise to is a place or a location. We must direct these Four Contemplations to these places. It's easy to awaken to the Way if you use these contemplations.

About two hundred years after the Buddha entered Nirvana, King Ashoka ruled in India and unified the country. He was awesome and powerful but very cruel. The implements by which he punished criminals were like the tools in the hells. He devised mountains of knives, trees of swords, copper pillars, iron pillars, and copper oil vats. He had an entire city built that was like a huge torture chamber. The walls were really high, and it had a one-way street, which means that if you got in, you wouldn't get out. It was a dead end. Everyone who went in died there. It didn't matter what type of offense you had, if you were sent into that huge torture city, your life was over.

Once there was a Bhikshu who happened upon that city. When he saw the huge wall, he thought there must be a wealthy home inside. So he wandered into that city. But once inside, the people there told him, "You can only come in; you can't go out. You can't leave. Everyone who comes into this city is killed in the end."

The Bhikshu pleaded, "I have only just left the home life, and I haven't had a chance to cultivate. If I die now, all of my efforts have been wasted. Can you give me one year? In this year I will use all my efforts to cultivate. Then I won't be afraid to die."

They said, "Who will give you a year's reprieve?"

"Well, can I have half a year?"

"No!"

Finally, it came down to half a month-- they allowed him fifteen days. "After fifteen days, you will have to meet your death sentence." But, every day all he could do was worry. It's said, the entire sea of karmic obstructions arises from false thinking. The reason why people have karmic obstacles is because their thoughts just fly all around at random. But now he had no other thought except the thought of death. He was just worried sick. In that sense, his thoughts became very concentrated. The days decreased, and the time for him to be sentenced was almost at hand.

The last two or three days were all that were left to him and then a woman somehow wandered into the city, also by mistake. Once again, the people inside told her, "Once you come here, there's no way out," So they sent the woman to her death. What method did they use to kill her? They sent her through a kind of mill, a sievelike devise used to husk rice or wheat. Once the woman was sent through the sieve, all her internal organs and intestines and everything in them just flew all over the place. It was so filthy--much dirtier than a toilet.

The Bhikshu witnessed this and thought, "Before I cultivated the Contemplation of Impurity--the Nine Contemplations--but, at that time it was only a contemplation. Now I'm seeing it for real, and it's really like that. So filthy:"

His mind had already become very concentrated from the psychological stress of impending death, and now, with the catalyst of seeing the woman's innards spilling all over the place, he immediately accomplished the Contemplation of the Impurity of the Body. He actually brought the contemplation to success. Once a person successfully completes this contemplation, he can attain the fruit of Arhatship, so that's what he did; he attained the fruit of Arhatship and was no longer afraid to die.

The half month came to an end, and it was his turn to die. They put him in a double boiler. He was placed in a pot on top of another one full of boiling water to be steamed like a dumpling. Then after they'd steamed him for a sufficient amount of time, they lifted the lid and found that the Bhikshu was seated very upright in full lotus with his palms placed together—unharmd. The jailers reported the incident to the king. They said, "There is this strange person..."

So the king came in person and asked, "Who is this person?"

They reported to him, "About two-hundred years ago in the country of Kapilavastu there was a prince who cultivated and achieved Unsurpassed Proper and Equal Right Enlightenment. He transmitted the teaching and crossed over many disciples. This is a descendant of those disciples."

The king said, "Is anybody still alive who saw this prince of Kapilavastu?"

"Yes," they replied, "in the country of Shravasti there is a Bhikshuni who is an Arhat. She saw that Buddha and she is still alive."

King Ashoka went personally to see the Bhikshuni and asked her, "You saw the prince who accomplished Unsurpassed Enlightenment?"

She said, "Yes."

He asked, "What did he look like?"

She said, "He was just as the Sutras describe. There's nothing that compares to him. He was so fine. The fine points of that prince just can't be talked about." The Bhikshuni continued, "When I was ten years old, I went with my brother, King Prasenajit who'd invited the Buddha to come to the Palace. I bowed to the Buddha. When I bowed a hairpin fell out from my hair. The hairpin was made of gold, but the Buddha's light was also golden. I couldn't find it because the Buddha's light was so dazzling. Only after the Buddha left and the light dispersed was I able to find my hairpin."

King Ashoka was impressed. "So, there really was such a person!" In addition, he'd talked with the Bhikshu who couldn't be steamed. It was obvious he had spiritual powers. So, from then on, King Ashoka changed from the bad to the good. He said, "I killed so many people--both good and bad. How can I make amends for my offenses?"

He was told, "From now on, the only way you can make amends is to expend all of your efforts in propagating the Buddhadharma. Use the merit and virtue from propagating the Buddhadharma to lighten your karmic burden."

So King Ashoka did just that. Later, all of his children left the home life, and the king himself expended all of his effort propagating the Dharma. He spread the Dharma to the four directions and built stupas everywhere. He became a powerful Dharma protector. So this is a case of a person who was originally extremely evil changing his ways and becoming extremely good. *-continued next issue*