

# *Brahma Net Sutra*

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SUTRA:

THE TWENTY-THIRD MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS SLIGHTING OTHERS AND SPEAKING THE DHARMA IN A BIASED MANNER. DISCIPLES OF THE BUDDHA, AFTER THE BUDDHA'S NIRVANA, WHENEVER A PERSON WITH WHOLESOME INTENTION SINCERELY WISHES TO RECEIVE THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS, HE SHOULD FIRST VOW BEFORE THE BUDDHA AND BODHISATTVA IMAGES TO ACCEPT AND UPHOLD THE PRECEPT AND THEN CULTIVATE REPENTANCE AND REFORM FOR SEVEN DAYS. IF DURING THAT PERIOD HE EXPERIENCES A VISION OF AUSPICIOUS SIGNS, HE HAS RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS. IF HE DOES NOT, HE SHOULD CONTINUE TO REPENT FOR TWO WEEKS, THREE WEEKS, OR EVEN A YEAR IF NECESSARY. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT HE EXPERIENCES AN AUSPICIOUS SIGN FOR ONLY THEN HAS HE RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS BEFORE THE BUDDHA AND BODHISATTVA IMAGES. IF HE HAS NOT OBTAINED SUCH AUSPICIOUS SIGNS, THOUGH HE MAY HAVE VOWED BEFORE THE BUDDHA IMAGES TO ACCEPT AND UPHOLD THE PRECEPTS, HE HAS NOT ACTUALLY RECEIVED THEM. HOWEVER, IF A PERSON RECEIVES THE PRECEPTS FROM A DHARMA MASTER WHO HAS PREVIOUSLY RECEIVED THEM HIMSELF, IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO EXPERIENCE AN AUSPICIOUS VISION. WHY? BECAUSE THE DHARMA MASTER HAS ALREADY RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS AS PERSONALLY CONFERRED FROM MASTER TO MASTER SO THERE IS NO NEED FOR AN AUSPICIOUS SIGN. IF ONE SINCERELY WISHES TO ACCEPT AND UPHOLD THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS AND ONE FORMALLY ACCEPTS THEM BEFORE A DHARMA MASTER WHO HAS ALREADY RECEIVED THEM HIMSELF, THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS WILL BE CONFERRED. IF THERE IS NO DHARMA MASTER WHO CAN CONFER THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS WITHIN THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY MILES, ONE WHO WISHES TO RECEIVE THEM MAY VOW BEFORE THE IMAGES OF THE BUDDHAS AND BODHISATTVAS TO ACCEPT AND UPHOLD THEM, IN WHICH CASE IT IS ESSENTIAL TO EXPERIENCE AN AUSPICIOUS VISION.

ALTHOUGH A DHARMA MASTER MAY UNDERSTAND THE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES AND MAY HAVE STUDIED THE GREAT VEHICLE PRECEPTS, AND ALTHOUGH HE MAY BE AN INTIMATE COMPANION OF KINGS, PRINCES AND VARIOUS OFFICIALS; NEVERTHELESS, IF HE IS VISITED BY A NEWLY STUDYING BODHISATTVA WHO INQUIRES ABOUT THE MEANING OF THE SUTRAS OR MORAL CODES, HE MUST NOT TREAT THAT STUDENT OF DHARMA WITH A SLIGHTING, HATEFUL, OR ARROGANT ATTITUDE. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA REFUSES TO OFFER APPROPRIATE RESPONSES TO EACH ONE OF HIS QUESTIONS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

## COMMENTARY:

THE TWENTY-THIRD MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS SLIGHTING OTHERS AND SPEAKING THE DHARMA IN A BIASED MANNER. DISCIPLES OF THE BUDDHA, AFTER THE BUDDHA'S NIRVANA, WHENEVER A PERSON WITH WHOLESOME INTENTIONS SINCERELY WISHES TO RECEIVE THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS, HE SHOULD FIRST VOW BEFORE THE BUDDHA AND BODHISATTVA IMAGES TO ACCEPT AND UPHOLD THE PRECEPTS AND THEN CULTIVATE REPENTANCE AND REFORM FOR SEVEN DAYS. IF DURING THAT PERIOD HE EXPERIENCES A VISION OF AUSPICIOUS/ SIGNS, HE HAS RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS. IF HE DOES NOT, HE SHOULD CONTINUE TO REPENT FOR TWO WEEKS, THREE WEEKS, OR EVEN A YEAR IF NECESSARY. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT HE EXPERIENCES AN AUSPICIOUS SIGN FOR ONLY THEN HAS HE RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS BEFORE THE BUDDHA AND BODHISATTVA IMAGES. IF HE HAS NOT OBTAINED SUCH AUSPICIOUS SIGNS, THOUGH HE MAY HAVE VOWED BEFORE THE BUDDHA IMAGES TO ACCEPT AND UPHOLD THE PRECEPTS, HE HAS NOT ACTUALLY RECEIVED THEM.

"Whenever a person with wholesome intentions sincerely wishes to receive the Bodhisattva Precepts." A wholesome intention means that above, one seeks the Buddha's Way, and below, one wants to transform beings. After the Buddha's entry into Nirvana, a situation might arise in which one may vow to receive the Precepts before the Buddha images. If one vows to do this "receiving the Precepts directly." But to do this, one must first cultivate repentance and reform for seven days. If one experiences an auspicious vision, then the Precepts have been transmitted.

What is meant by an auspicious vision? For example, one may see the Buddha coming to rub one's crown, or one may see light or flowers. If one does not experience any of these visions, one hasn't received the Precepts. Then one must continue to repent and reform for two weeks, three weeks, all the way up to a year. It is of utmost importance that one experiences an auspicious sign, then one has received the Precepts before the Buddha and Bodhisattva images. If one doesn't obtain an auspicious sign, even if one has vowed before the Buddha and Bodhisattva images to receive them, one hasn't really received them.

HOWEVER, IF A PERSON RECEIVES THE PRECEPTS FROM A DHARMA MASTER WHO HAS PREVIOUSLY RECEIVED THEM HIMSELF, IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO EXPERIENCE AN AUSPICIOUS VISION. WHY? BECAUSE THE DHARMA MASTER HAS ALREADY RECEIVED THE PRECEPTS AS PERSONALLY CONFERRED FROM MASTER TO MASTER, SO THERE IS NO NEED FOR AN AUSPICIOUS SIGN. IF ONE SINCERELY WISHES TO ACCEPT AND UPHOLD THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS, AND ONE FORMALLY ACCEPTS THEM BEFORE A DHARMA MASTER WHO HAS ALREADY RECEIVED THEM HIMSELF, THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS WILL BE CONFERRED. IF THERE IS NO DHARMA MASTER WHO CAN CONFER THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS WITHIN THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY MILES, ONE WHO WISHES TO RECEIVE THEM MAY VOW BEFORE THE IMAGES OF THE BUDDHAS AND BODHISATTVAS TO ACCEPT AND UPHOLD THEM, IN WHICH CASE IT IS ESSENTIAL TO EXPERIENCE AN AUSPICIOUS VISION. However, if a person receives them from a Dharma Master, it's not necessary for him to experience a vision. Why is this? It is because the Dharma Master has received the Precepts as conferred personally from one

Master to another. Yet, even if one receives them from a Dharma Master, if one is insincere in the process, one won't receive the Precepts. What is meant by utmost sincerity? It means that one looks upon the Dharma Master as the Buddha himself. If within three hundred and fifty miles from where one lives there is no Dharma Master, then one can choose to vow before the images of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to receive the Precepts.

ALTHOUGH A DHARMA MASTER MAY UNDERSTAND THE SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES AND MAY HAVE STUDIED THE GREAT VEHICLE PRECEPTS, AND ALTHOUGH HE MAY BE AN INTIMATE COMPANION OF KINGS, PRINCES, AND VARIOUS OFFICIALS; NEVERTHELESS, IF HE IS VISITED BY A NEWLY STUDYING BODHISATTVA WHO INQUIRES ABOUT THE MEANING OF THE SUTRAS OR MORAL CODES, HE MUST NOT TREAT THAT STUDENT OF DHARMA WITH A SLIGHTING, HATEFUL, OR ARROGANT ATTITUDE. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA REFUSES TO OFFER APPROPRIATE RESPONSES TO EACH ONE OF HIS QUESTIONS, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

Even if a Dharma Master has tremendous understanding of the Great Vehicle Teachings and has influential acquaintances in government, should he use a slighting or hateful or arrogant attitude and refuse to reply to a newly studying Bodhisattva who asks about the meanings of the Sutras and Vinaya, he has committed a defiling offense. He is arrogant, slights others, and speaks Dharma in a biased manner.

"The Precepts are transmitted from Master to Master." This means that the Dharma Masters transmitting them are the direct heirs to the Thus Come One. These Precepts belong to the direct lineage of the Buddhas. They are also the permanently abiding Dharma Body. Anybody who can uphold the Precepts finds that the Tathagata's Dharma Body dwells in them and is never destroyed. For this reason, The Vinaya Store says, "Those who uphold the Vinaya will be Buddhas in their next lives, or are waiting to become Buddhas." It is said that people who hold the Precepts purely will be born in the Western Pure Land in a superior grade of lotus. They are always born in a higher grade than those who don't uphold the Precepts. When one brings forth utmost sincerity, one regards one's teacher as if he were the Buddha. "If one doesn't see an auspicious sign, one hasn't received the Precepts." The act of vowing to receive the Precepts by oneself is that difficult! It's really not easy to vow to receive the Precepts oneself. "One has to have utmost sincerity when one receives the Precepts from one's teacher." This means that even if one receives them from a Master, it is still not easy. For these reasons, after one has received the Precepts, one should seek instructions from experienced Masters. Since this is the case, how can an experienced Dharma Master not answer in an appropriate manner?

"A slighting attitude" means that one looks down on the other person. To have a "hateful attitude" here means to be stingy with the Dharma. To have an "arrogant attitude" means that one relies on one's own blessings and honor and refuses to explain the Dharma practices.

This Precept prohibits a violation against the nature and is also a Precept of restraint.

There are four conditions which make up an offense:

- 1) A person is requesting the Dharma.

- 2) One is aware that a person is requesting the Dharma.
- 3) It is because one has an arrogant mind that one refuses to speak for him.
- 4) One speaks in a biased manner. That is, whatever one says is not proper.

Then every utterance constitutes a separate defiling offense.

SUTRA:

THE TWENTY-FOURTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO PRACTICE AND STUDY THE BODHISATTVA TEACHINGS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA SHOULD INDUSTRIOUSLY STUDY THE BUDDHA'S SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES AND CULTIVATE THE GREAT VEHICLE'S PROPER DHARMA, PROPER VIEWS, PROPER NATURE, AND PROPER DHARMA BODY. HE MUST NOT RENOUNCE THESE SEVEN PRECIOUS THINGS AND INSTEAD STUDY DEVIANT VIEWS OF THE TWO VEHICLES, EXTERNALISTS, THE WORLDLY CLASSICS, THE ABIDHARMA, THE MYRIAD TREATISES, LITERATURE, OR ACCOUNTING. TO DO SO IS TO CUT OFF ONE'S BUDDHANATURE, TO CREATE CAUSES AND CONDITIONS THAT OBSTRUCT THE WAY, AND TO FAIL TO CULTIVATE THE BODHISATTVA WAY. HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY BEHAVES IN SUCH A FASHION, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE.

COMMENTARY:

THE TWENTY-FOURTH MINOR PRECEPT PROHIBITS FAILURE TO PRACTICE AND STUDY THE BODHISATTVA TEACHINGS. A DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA SHOULD INDUSTRIOUSLY STUDY THE BUDDHA'S SUTRAS AND MORAL CODES AND CULTIVATE THE GREAT VEHICLE'S PROPER DHARMA, PROPER VIEWS, PROPER NATURE, AND PROPER DHARMA BODY. The Sutras, moral codes and Great Vehicle Dharmas point to the Bodhisattva Treasury. They are the Dharma doors cultivated by Bodhisattvas. Proper Views refer to understanding the myriad modes of behavior. If one's views are not proper, one will make mistakes. Proper Nature refers to one of the kinds of causes of the Buddha-nature that people have. There are three such causes:

1. Proper causes of the Buddha-nature.
2. Perfect causes of the Buddha-nature.
3. Ultimate causes of the Buddha-nature

The proper Dharma body is the nature which accomplishes the fruition.

This Precept forbids not studying the Sutras and moral codes but instead studying deviant views.

HE MUST NOT RENOUNCE THESE SEVEN PRECIOUS THINGS AND INSTEAD STUDY DEVIANT VIEWS OF THE TWO VEHICLES, EXTERNALISTS, THE WORLDLY CLASSICS, THE ABIDHARMA, THE MYRIAD TREATISES, LITERATURE, OR ACCOUNTING. The Two

Vehicles possess extreme views which lean to the side of emptiness. Those of externalist views get caught up in mistaken reckonings. Those of the Two Vehicles believe in the Buddhist principle that through cultivation one can be certified to Arhatship, but once they certify to the principle of emptiness, they do not want to put themselves out to save living beings. They linger in the state of emptiness and refuse to rescue others. Because of this, Buddhism does not advocate that people study only the Two Vehicles. Externalists do not accord with the principle of true suchness; they make mistaken calculations. The worldly classics discuss mundane subjects. The *Abidharma* means "discriminating wisdom." "Myriad treatises" refers to the shastras of heterodox ways. Literature refers to worldly books, debates, and so forth.

Those of the Two Vehicles don't wish to seek Anuttarasamyaksambodhi because they know that it might take three great asamkhyeya kalpas and they feel that it is too long. The Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment-- Bodhi--is like a tree that grows from a sprout. Those of the Two Vehicles cannot plant their sprouts, so they are known as "withered sprouts." Those of externalist ways allow the seed of proper enlightenment to dry up.

TO DO SO IS TO CUT OFF ONE'S BUDDHA-NATURE, TO CREATE CAUSES AND CONDITIONS THAT OBSTRUCT THE WAY, AND TO FAIL TO CULTIVATE THE BODHISATTVA WAY. Causes and conditions that obstruct the Way means that within, the cause for proper understanding is impeded, and without, the conditions for proper cultivate are impeded. Thus the path of cultivation encounters a big obstacle.

HENCE, IF A BODHISATTVA DELIBERATELY BEHAVES IN SUCH A FASHION, HE THEREBY VIOLATES THIS MINOR PRECEPT AND COMMITS A DEFILING OFFENSE. This is a Precept of both the nature and of restraint. If one begins studying the Two Vehicles from the moment one leaves home, without cultivating anything else, this is considered a violation of restraint. If one never studies any Buddhadharma at all, even that of the Two Vehicles, but only studies the doctrines of externalist ways, then that is a violation of both the nature and of restraint.

There are exceptions to this Precept. If one needs to understand the doctrines of the Two Vehicles in order to teach and transform those who adhere to their theories, or if one needs to understand the doctrines of externalists in order to take them across, or if one needs to understand worldly doctrines in order to rescue people of the world, then one can study those principles. However, if one studies them with the sole purpose of benefitting oneself and fails to seek Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment, then it is not permissible to study them.

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