

## *The Buddha Speaks The Brahma Net Sutra, Part I*

Commentary by Elder Master Hui Seng

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### Bodhisattva Precept of Non-Stealing

Sutra:

The second major precept prohibits stealing. A disciple of the Buddha must not steal by 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 ghost, spirits, or any other beings—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, the prohibition against 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 one's possessions right out from under him—in plain sight.
- 2) Stealing by stealth. An example might be to steal at night or when no one is around.
- 3) Stealing by deceit or trickery. An example is telling lies or using other forms of deceit in order to steal.
- 4) Stealing by oppression.
- 5) Stealing in court. One finds ways to appeal a court case one is involved in, so as to get 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. Perhaps someone gives you something to keep for them, but then they forget about it. They forgot about it, but you haven't. Not having forgotten it is your responsibility to return the item. To pretend to have forgotten and fail to return an object which has been entrusted to one is a kind of stealing.
- 8) Stealing by dodging taxes. Not paying the taxes that you should is another form of stealing.

The definitions of stealing get quite complex if gone into 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, and so he puts it back. But, if during this process he has moved it to another place, then he has committed an act of stealing.

A disciple of the Buddha must not steal by himself, encourage others to steal, facilitate stealing—that is, 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 North China:

One day, a person came into a pawn shop and asked for a cup of water. Then he mantra'd the water and somehow, that very night, when the bookkeepers were going 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 ghost and 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 of deliberately taking 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 the 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 beings. All valuables and possessions, including such objects as small as a needle or blade of grass. "To the extent that" covers the entire range of stealing, from major robbery to petty theft. A needle or 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, you'll be punished according to civil law. 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 Buddhadharmas also defines precepts of restraint. If one fails to control 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. Dependent Retribution refers to the natural environment, man-made buildings, food and drink, and other provisions of life—things that living beings rely and 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 maybe endangered. Since this breach of conduct is an outright violation of the human nature, it reckons as a major offense.

There are five conditions which will constitute an offense.

- 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 twenty-five cents.
- 5) One must remove the thing(s) from their original place.

If these five conditions are replete, then an offense has been committed.

There are three grades of thins that are possessions of 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 dharma often differs from transcendental Dharmas. In some cultures, if a child steals his parent's belongings, it's not considered a heavy offense. Even if he were arrested, he wouldn't be sentenced. It's assumed that one's parents' possessions will eventually become one's own. But according to the Buddhadharmas, if one steals from one's parents, it is a heavy offense. It is even heavier than if one steals from other people. Some people have the impression that if one steals from the Triple Jewel it's not serious, because the possessions of the Triple Jewel are all gotten from offerings anyway, the meaning being that those possessions were not earned. 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, as well as stealing from those beings of the lower grade, that is 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.

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 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. For reasons such as these we should repay them and be filial. If one is not filial but instead steals from them, how cruel that is! For this reason, stealing from those above is a heavy offence.

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.