

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, daughters, 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 offence.

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 Brahma-like," 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 on the wheel of rebirth.

In the *Shurangama Sutra* it says: "All living beings are sustained in their lives because of sexual desire." 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 deliberately 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, conditions, 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 of engaging in sexual conduct.
- 2) Thought. One has the thought of sexual desire.
- 3) The actual event transpires.

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Sutras always begin with the words: "Thus I have heard." This was one of the four last instructions of the Buddha. The Venerable Ananda queried the Buddha about four matters, the

last of which 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 those 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 the city 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 here; you can’t get out. You can’t leave. Everyone who comes into this city gets 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 will 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. People have all sorts of karmic obstacles 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. When there were only two or three days left before his death sentence, 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 sieve-like device used to husk rice or wheat. Once the woman was sent through the sieve, all her internal organs and intestines and everything 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 sitting very upright in full lotus with his palms placed together—unharmed! The jailers reported the incident to the King. They said, "There's 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 Power 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 him. 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, my brother King Prasanejit invited the Buddha and his disciples 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 disappeared 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 offences?"

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 to glorify 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.