

Brahma Net Sutra:

The fourth major precept prohibits false speech. A disciple of the Buddha must not himself engage in false speech, encourage others to do so, facilitate false speech, nor may he involve himself in the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of false speech, to the extent of saying that he has seen what he has not seen, or that he has never seen what he has actually seen, or lying through physical or mental deeds. A Bodhisattva should always maintain proper speech and proper views and lead all other beings to maintain them as well. If, instead, he causes all beings to give rise to deviant karma, he thereby commits a Bodhisattva Pārājika offense.

Commentary:

The fourth major precept prohibits false speech. False speech is prohibited because it misleads others. The Five Precepts distinguish major false speech and minor false speech. Major false speech means that you claim that you have certified to a state that you have not certified to, and to claim that you have attained something that you have not attained. Minor false speech refers to the ordinary lies that you cheat people with. If one indulges in major false speech, one violates the fundamental Precept. In the Bodhisattva Precepts, however, it's different. Here, false speech means anything that is false, anything that's not true, that cheats ordinary people, and that tries to deceive the Sages. Any speech that deludes people's minds is called false speech.

False speech has four distinctions which apply to the four functions of seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing.

- 1) Upon seeing something, one claims one hasn't seen it. Or, not having seen something, one claims one has seen it.
- 2) Upon hearing something, one claims one hasn't heard it. Or, not having heard something, one claims one has.
- 3) Being aware of something, one claims one is not aware of it. Or, not being aware of something, one claims one is aware of it.
- 4) Knowing something, one claims one doesn't know. Or, not knowing, one claims one does.

One can commit violations of false speech regarding any of those four functions.

A disciple of the Buddha must not himself engage in false speech. There are many ways in which one may engage in false speech. For example, one may falsely claim to have attained the Ten Grounds—which is the same as saying that one is just one step away from Buddhahood; or to have reached the Four Thresholds, the positions directly prior to fully attaining the Four Fruitions of Arhatship. One may falsely claim to have reached the Four Dhyanas, to have reached the Four Stations Emptiness, to have accomplished the Contemplation of Impurity, to have mastered Anapana Mindfulness, which is the practice of inhalation and exhalation, or to have attained the Six Penetrations or Eight Liberations. One may falsely claim that gods, or dragons, or asuras, or ghosts and spirits come to make inquiries and ask advice, or that one has cut off all the Knots and Servants, and, having cut off affliction for the sake of name and profit, one claims to have attained any of those without actually having been certified to them, one has committed a major transgression involving false speech.

A disciple of the Buddha must not encourage others to do so. This may mean that one encourages others to sing one's praises, to proclaim one's virtues—one gets them to advertise for one and say, "Oh, so-and-so is such a great cultivator!" A disciple must not facilitate false speech.

This means so manifest any number of special styles. For example, one makes a great display of one's awesome comportment, or one makes a show of possessing much Way virtue or in other ways one attempts to appear unusual. Or one makes use of oracles, spirits, or ghosts. One works it so that the oracle will say, "This person has incredibly good roots; he's really out-of-sight. He is the Buddha come again." Using this type of trickery, one advertises for oneself. This also includes using mantras and spells to cause other people to have dreams. Spirits or voices may appear to tell those people who are dreaming, "Do you know? He is a great cultivator—such a lofty person!" or "He's a Buddha of old."

Nor may he involve himself in the causes... The causes of false speech means to give rise to the mind that wants to cheat other people out of a desire for reputation or gain. It's for name and for benefit that one wants to cheat.

The conditions of false speech means that whether active or composed, whether speaking or silent, or by one's awesome comportment, one uses all manner of devices to display one's own sagely virtue. One does all this so as to show that one is really someone special. That's one of the conditions of false speech.

The methods of false speech involves falsely claiming that one has attained the Ten Grounds and so forth, or that one has certified to them all. The karma of false speech means that he actually utters these things and that the person listening understands and accepts them. If you open your mouth and the other person doesn't know what you are talking about, the karma of false speech hasn't actually transpired, but if the other person understands, then you have accomplished the karma.

To the extent of saying that he has seen what he has not seen, or that he has never seen what he has actually seen, or lying through physical or mental deeds. A Bodhisattva should always maintain proper speech and proper views and lead all other beings to maintain them as well. If, instead, he causes all beings to give rise to deviant views and deviant karma, he thereby commits a Bodhisattva Pārājika offense.

In order for a Pārājika offense to occur, there must be five conditions fulfilled:

1. The person one speaks to is a living being.
2. One knows that he's a living being.
3. One has the intent to deceive him.
4. One claims one is replete with major accomplishments; in this case meaning accomplishment of the Ten Grounds, Pratyeka Buddhahood, or the Four Fruits of Arhatship.
5. The person one speaks to understands what is said.

When these five conditions are all met, one has committed a Major Pārājika Offense.

Before Shakyamuni Buddha became a Buddha, when he was still practicing the Bodhisattva Way in a certain incarnation, he was an emperor named Universal Light. He was really good at keeping the Precept against false speech. One day, the King wandered outside of his palace where he met a poor Brahman. The poor Brahman pleaded with the King,

"Please help me! I am really destitute; I have nothing to eat and nothing to wear. I'm really afflicted."

Universal Light King said, "I was planning to go and take a walk in the garden. When I return from my walk, I will most certainly help you out."

Just as he was strolling in the garden, he was captured by the Mottle-footed King. The Mottle-footed King could fly. He had the shape of a person, but his legs were like those of a beast; like a lion. Why did he capture Universal Brightness King? It was because his teacher told him that if

he got together a thousand kings and then made a sacrifice of their heads to the mountain spirit, he would attain the Way. So he went about gathering a thousand kings.

At that time in India there were many little kingdoms. So Mottle-footed King, using his spiritual powers, went from country to country nabbing their kings. By the time he got to Universal Brightness King, he had already captured nine hundred ninety-nine kings, and this was to be the last.

Then Universal Brightness King started weeping. Mottle-footed King said to him, "You're a man, a general. In life you shouldn't have any distress or woe, and in death you should not fear, so what are you crying like a child for?"

Universal Light King said, "I do not weep because I'm afraid to die. Rather, it's because ever since I was born, I never lied. If a promise came from my mouth, I'd make sure it was carried out to completion. I never cheated. But today at my palace there was a poor Brahman who asked me to save him. I promised him that when I came back from my garden, I would help him out. But now you have captured me, which means that I have uttered false speech. I can no longer help that Brahman. That's why I'm crying!"

And so Mottle-footed King said, "Okay, I'll let you return to your palace and save the Brahman. I'll give you seven days. After those seven days, if you don't return by yourself, I'll go back and get you. There's no way you can run away." And so when the King returned to his own country, he set up very great, lavish Dharma assemblies. He invited a hundred Dharma Masters and used all of his gold, silver, and varied jewels as offerings. Not only did he make offerings to the Triple Jewel, he gave everything to the poor. Then the hundred Dharma Masters spoke Dharma. They spoke the Dharma of Impermanence, Suffering, Emptiness, and No-self. The sense of their teaching is summed up in a verse. The first Stanza discusses impermanence:

When the kalpa-fire finally arises, *ch'ien and k'un* are set ablaze.
Sumeru and the huge ocean are all reduced to ashes.
The heavenly dragons, having exhausted their blessings, perish.
Heaven and earth are both demolished, how can a country be permanent?

"When the kalpa-fire finally arises, *ch'ien and k'un* are set ablaze." The world goes through four stages of formation, dwelling, decay, and emptiness. When the last stage is ended, a huge fire arises. *Ch'ien* and *k'un* are heaven and earth. They become a huge mass of fire.

"Sumeru and the huge ocean are all reduced to ashes." By that time, Mt. Sumeru and the great oceans all are burnt to ashes. "The heavenly dragons, having exhausted their blessings, perish." When the waters are gone from the sea, the dragons, of course, can't hang around anymore. Since their blessings are exhausted, they perish. "Heaven and earth are both demolished, how can a country be permanent?" If both heaven and earth can be destroyed, how can one still hold on to a country? So, the gist of the message was, "You should put your country down; it's nothing to hang on to."

Birth, old age, sickness, and death revolve in turn without end.
Desires run deep; disasters are more fierce than festering sores.
The stress of afflictions finds its cause in worry and distress.
The Three Realms are all suffering—how can you rely on your country?

This second stanza discusses suffering. It says, “Birth, old age, sickness, and death revolve in turn without end.” People go through the stages of birth, old age, sickness, and death and never stop revolving on the wheel. “Desires run deep; disasters are more fierce than festering sores.” People’s greedy desires are really deep, and the disasters they are destined to undergo are serious. They are more fierce than festering sores. They are more severe than cancer. “The stress of afflictions finds its cause in worry and distress.” It’s only because you are always worrying and fretting that you have afflictions.

The last line says, “The Three Realms are all suffering—how can you rely on your country?” The three realms—the Desire Realm, the Form Realm, and the Formless Realm—are not safe. They are like a burning house, a fiery house full of suffering. If the Three Realms are not safe to be relied on, how are you going to rely on your country?

Existence originally is non-existence.

What flourishes will eventually decline; what is real will eventually be false.

Living beings are stupid and dull, and they dwell as if in an illusion.

Sound and echo are both empty; so, too, is your country.

This third stanza speaks about emptiness. “Existence originally is non-existence.” All things come to be through causes and conditions. Look at empty space. Originally it was nothing, and then suddenly a mass of clouds appears. Where did they come from? They came from emptiness. Even the very earth we’re on arose from emptiness. Originally there was nothing. Then there came a congregation of karma, and when these karmas united, there was a response and the earth came into being. So existence originally came out of nothingness. It is causes and conditions that bring about the myriad of creations.

“What flourishes will eventually decline; what is real will eventually become false.” Take a look at how the King of Chou devised the Eight Hexagrams and how he worked the Tables. When anything comes to its apex, its ultimate, it changes to the direct opposite. So it is with people when they come to their very prime, to the point of their greatest strength; they will then go into decline.

“Living beings are stupid and dull, and they dwell as if in an illusion.” It’s as when one strikes a bell—first there is sound, and then there comes an echo. And in a while, both sound and echo fade into nothingness. Just as sound and echo are both empty, so, too, a country is the same.

The spirit of the consciousness has no shape and falsely rides upon the four snakes.

Nourished by ignorance, it is but a toy cart.

The mind has no permanent ruler; the spirit has no permanent home.

If your shape and your spirit will leave you, how much the more will your country?

The last stanza speaks about no-self. So it says, “The spirit of the consciousness has no shape and falsely rides upon the four snakes.” The consciousness here refers to the Eighth Consciousness. This consciousness doesn’t have a shape; it only has a name. However, it is the soul that leads you to reincarnation and rebirth. It falsely rides on the four snakes. The four snakes are the four elements; earth, water, fire, and wind. The verse says, “Nourished by ignorance, it is but a toy cart.” This body is falsely set up, but people think it’s for real, so when a child is born, they celebrate. They think it’s really a happy event. Actually, they’re being taken for a ride. This consciousness is being nourished by ignorance.

“The mind has no permanent ruler; the spirit has no permanent home.” Your mind does not have a real boss that stays constant, and the spirit doesn’t have a real home. That means you stay in one house, and after you’re tired of it, you move on to another house. When this body is old and decrepit, you die and move to another one. “If your shape and your spirit will leave you, how much the more will your country?” So, if your physical form and spirit will both leave you, how can you hang on to a country?

The hundred Dharma Masters spoke this Dharma to tell the Universal Light King to put it down. After the King had made these grand offerings, he gave the kingdom to the Prince and prepared to return to that place where he was kidnapped to turn himself in. His great officials said, “Don’t go. Aren’t you just going to your own death?”

“If I don’t go, he will come and get me,” replied the King. “There’s no way that I can escape this.”

The court officials said, “We can make a net and hoist it up into empty space so he can’t get in.”

The King replied, “No, that way I would also have told a lie.”

Unable to detain him, the officials watched him go. When the Mottle-footed King saw the Universal Light King appear, he was really amazed. “This person is unbelievable. He’s not afraid to die.” The Mottle-footed King was so moved that he decided not to kill him after all. So what did he do? He used a thousand mantos (steamed buns) and painted the face of a person on each bun, complete with eyebrows, eyes, ears, and nose. They looked just like human heads. He offered the thousand mantos to the spirits; thus the thousand kings were saved. The other nine-hundred and ninety-nine kings were all very moved by how true to his word this Universal Light King was; they felt indebted to him. After all, it was he who saved all their lives. None of them wanted to leave. So they thousand kings all lived together; they stayed in one place. This is the origin of the place that is called the City of the House of Kings (Sanskrit *Rajagriha*) in the midst of the Magic Mountains.

Mottle-footed King said, “You’re really incredible! Why do you stay so true to your word?”

In answer, the Universal Light King spoke a verse. He said,

True speech is the foremost Way.

True speech is the ladder that ascends to heaven.

With true speech, even a petty person becomes a great person.

But with false speech, one falls into the hells.