

LITURGY OF THE **BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS**

INCENSE ANTHEM

*Incense has just begun to burn in the censer
Permeating the entire Dharma realm;
My mind is filled with sincerity and respect;
May the Buddhas compassionately be my witnesses.*

Homage to Vairocana Buddha, Lord of the Brahma Net.

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ON OPENING THE SUTRA

The Dharma incomparably profound and exquisite
Is rarely met with, even in hundreds of thousands of millions of eons
I am now able to see, listen, accept and hold it;
I vow to understand the true meaning of the Tathagatas' wonderful teachings.

Homage to our Teacher Sakyamuni Buddha.

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I.

Assembly of precept-holders,
Please listen attentively!
I take refuge in Vairocana Buddha (1)
I take refuge in the Diamond Buddhas of the Ten Directions
I bow to the Bodhisattva Maitreya, who will descend to earth and become a Buddha.
I shall now recite the Three Root Precepts
All Bodhisattvas should pay heed.
The precepts are a light shining brightly
Dispelling the darkness of the night.

The precepts are a precious mirror
Clearly reflecting one and all.
The precepts are a wish-fulfilling gem ⁽²⁾
Showering treasures upon the destitute.
To escape suffering and attain Buddhahood swiftly
These precepts are the supreme way.
Therefore, Bodhisattvas
Should keep them steadfastly.

II.

Most Virtuous Ones (*or Upasaka/Upasika*)!

It is now springtime (*or summer or winter*). Four months make a season. ⁽³⁾ Half a month (*or one month, one month and a half, two months, etc.*) has elapsed, less one night (*or plus one night*). Three and a half months remain (*or three months, two and a half months, two months, etc.*).

Old age and death weigh upon us. The Dharma will soon disappear. Most Virtuous Ones (*Upasaka/Upasika*)! To attain Enlightenment, practice diligently and singlemindedly. By practicing diligently and singlemindedly, all the Buddhas attain Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment -- not to mention other virtues.

Seek the Dharma diligently while young and healthy. How can you fail to seek the Way and, unguarded, let old age overtake you? What pleasures are you still awaiting?

The day is done. Life dwindles with it.
For fish stranded in shallow water, what joy is there? ⁽⁴⁾

III.

Question: Is the Sangha ⁽⁵⁾ assembled? (*by the reciter*).

Answer: Yes, it is (*by the monk in charge*).

Question: Is the Sangha united and harmonious?

Answer: Yes, it is united and harmonious.

Question: Why has the Sangha gathered?

Answer: To recite the Bodhisattva precepts.

Question: Have those who have not taken the precepts and those who are not pure left this assembly?

Answer: In this assembly, there is no one who has not taken the precepts, and no one who is not pure. *(If there are, they should be asked to leave and the monk in charge should say: "Those who have not received the precepts and those who are not pure have left.")*

Question: How many are there of pure mind who wish to attend but cannot and have asked others to represent them?⁽⁶⁾

Answer: In this assembly, there is no one of pure mind who wishes to attend but cannot and is represented by another *(or, if there is, the representative should step forward to state his name and that of the absent monk and confirm that the absent monk is pure and would have wished to be in attendance.)*

IV

Most Virtuous Ones *(or Upasaka/Upasika)*! Join your palms together and listen attentively! I am now about to recite the preamble to the great precepts of the Buddhas. Most Virtuous Ones! Be silent and attentive. In this assembly, those who are aware that they have transgressed should repent. With repentance, peace of mind is restored. Without repentance, your transgressions will become heavier. Those who have not transgressed may remain silent. By your silence, I know that you are pure (have kept the precepts).

Most Virtuous Ones *(or Upasaka/Upasika)*! Listen attentively: In this Dharma-Ending Age following the demise of the Buddha, we should reverently keep the Pratimoksa.⁽⁷⁾ The Pratimoksa is none other than these precepts. Those who keep these precepts are like wanderers in the dark stumbling upon a light, like the destitute coming upon a treasure, like the sick finding a cure, like prisoners set free, like wanderers discovering the way home. Let it be understood that the precepts are a worthy teacher to us all, as though the Buddha were still here among us.

If we do not fear transgressions, it is difficult to develop a wholesome mind. Therefore, the sutras contain this teaching: Do not regard a minor misdeed as inconsequential. In time, drops of water may fill a large vessel. Offenses committed in a moment, may result in eons of suffering in the hells. Once the human state is lost, it may not be regained for myriads of lifetimes.

Youth is like a galloping horse. Our life is more fleeting than the waters of a mountain stream. Today we are alive; tomorrow, who knows? Let each of us practice diligently and singlemindedly. Do not be lax; guard against laziness. Do not indulge in rest and sleep. During the night, singlemindedly recite the Buddha's name and meditate. You should never while away the time, causing deep regret in the future.

Members of the assembly! Keep these precepts singlemindedly and respectfully; study them and cultivate in accordance with the Dharma.

Most Virtuous Ones *(or Upasaka/Upasika)*! Today is the fifteenth *(or fourteenth)* day of the month; the moon is full *(or is not full)*. We are holding the Uposatha service,⁽⁸⁾ reciting the Bodhisattva precepts. Members of the assembly should listen attentively.

Whoever has transgressed, confess now. Otherwise, remain silent. By your silence, I shall know that this assembly is pure and may recite the precepts.

Now that I have finished the preamble to the Bodhisattva precepts, I ask you once more, members of the assembly, are you pure? (*three times*)

Members of the assembly, by your silence I know that you are pure. This is something of which you should all be aware.

Homage to the Brahma Net Assembly of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas (three times).

THE BUDDHA SPEAKS ***THE BRAHMA NET SUTRA***

Bodhisattva Mind-Ground Chapter
Second Part⁽⁹⁾

Based on Kumarajiva's text
China, Eastern Chin dynasty, 5th c.

I. Vairocana Buddha

At that time, Vairocana Buddha began speaking in general about the Mind-Ground for the benefit of the Great Assembly. What he said represents but an infinitesimal part, the tip of a hair, of His innumerable teachings -- as numerous as the grains of sand in the river Ganges.

He concluded: "The Mind-Ground has been explained, is being explained and will be explained by all the Buddhas -- past, present, and future. It is also the Dharma Door (cultivation method) that all the Bodhisattvas of the past, present, and future have studied, are studying and will study."

"I have cultivated this Mind-Ground Dharma Door for hundreds of eons. My name is Vairocana. I request all Buddhas to transmit my words to all sentient beings, so as to open this path of cultivation to all."

At that time, from his Lion's Throne in the Lotus Treasury World, Vairocana Buddha emitted rays of light. A voice among the rays is heard telling the Buddhas seated on thousands of lotus petals, "You should practice and uphold the Mind-Ground Dharma Door and transmit it to the innumerable Sakyamuni Buddhas,⁽¹⁰⁾ one after another, as well as to all sentient beings. Everyone should uphold, read, recite, and singlemindedly put its teachings into practice."

After receiving the Dharma-door of the Mind-Ground, the Buddhas seated atop the thousands of lotus flowers along with the innumerable Sakyamuni Buddhas all arose from their Lion seats, their bodies emitting innumerable rays of light. In each of these rays appeared innumerable Buddhas who simultaneously made offerings of green, yellow, red and white celestial flowers to Vairocana Buddha. They then slowly took their leave.

The Buddhas then disappeared from the Lotus Treasury World, entered the Essence-Nature Empty Space Floral Brilliance Samadhi and returned to their former places under the Bodhi-tree in this world of [Jambudvipa](#). They then arose from their samadhi, sat on their Diamond Thrones in Jambudvipa and the Heaven of the Four Kings, and preached the Dharma of the "Ten Oceans of Worlds."

Thereupon, they ascended to Lord Shakya's palace and expounded the "Ten Dwellings," proceeded to the Suyama Heaven and taught the "Ten Practices," proceeded further to the Fourth Heaven and taught the "Ten Dedications," proceeded further to the Transformation of Bliss Heaven and taught the "Ten Dhyana Samadhi," proceeded further to the Heaven of Comfort From Others' Emanations and taught the "Ten Grounds," proceeded further to the First Dhyana Heaven and taught the "Ten [Vajra](#) Stages," proceeded further to the Second Dhyana Heaven and taught the "Ten Patiences," and proceeded further to the Third Dhyana Heaven and taught the "Ten Vows." Finally, in the Fourth Dhyana Heaven, at Lord Brahma's Palace, they taught the "Mind-Ground Dharma-Door" chapter, which Vairocana Buddha, in eons past, expounded in the Lotus Treasury World (the cosmos).

All the other innumerable transformation Sakyamuni Buddhas did likewise in their respective worlds as the chapter "Auspicious Kalpa" has explained.

II. Sakyamuni Buddha

At that time, Sakyamuni Buddha, after first appearing in the Lotus Treasury World, proceeded to the east and appeared in the Heavenly King's palace to teach the "Demon Transforming Sutra." He then descended to Jambudvipa to be born in Kapilavastu -- his name being Siddhartha and his father's name Suddhodana. His mother was Queen Maya. He achieved Enlightenment at the age of thirty, after seven years of cultivation, under the name of Sakyamuni Buddha.⁽¹¹⁾

The Buddha spoke in ten assemblies from the Diamond Seat at Bodhgaya to the palace of Brahma.

At that time, he contemplated the wonderful Jewel Net⁽¹²⁾ hung in Lord Brahma's palace and preached the *Brahma Net Sutra* for the Great Assembly. He said:

"The innumerable worlds in the cosmos are like the eyes of the net. Each and every world is different, its variety infinite. So too are the Dharma Doors (methods of cultivation) taught by the Buddhas.

"I have come to this world eight thousand times. Based in this Saha World, seated upon the Jeweled Diamond Seat in Bodhgaya and all the way up to the palace of the Brahma King, I have spoken in general about the Mind-Ground Dharma Door for the benefit of the great multitude."⁽¹³⁾

"Thereafter, I descended from the Brahma King's palace to Jambudvīpa, the Human World. I have preached the Diamond Illuminated Jeweled [Precepts](#) (the Bodhisattva precepts) from beneath the Bodhi-tree for the sake of all sentient beings on earth, however dull and ignorant they may be. These precepts were customarily recited by Vairocana Buddha when he first developed the [Bodhi Mind](#) in the causal stages. They are precisely the original source of all Buddhas and all Bodhisattvas as well as the seed of the [Buddha Nature](#).

"All sentient beings possess this Buddha Nature. All with consciousness, form, and mind are encompassed by the precepts of the Buddha Nature. Sentient beings possess the correct cause of the Buddha Nature and therefore they will assuredly attain the ever-present Dharma Body.

For this reason, the ten [Pratimoksa](#) (Bodhisattva) precepts came into being in this world. These precepts belong to the True Dharma. They are received and upheld in utmost reverence by all sentient beings of the Three Periods of Time -- past, present and future.

"Once again, I shall preach for the Great Assembly the chapter on the Inexhaustible Precept Treasury. These are the precepts of all sentient beings, the source of the pure Self-Nature."

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Now, I, Vairocana Buddha
Am sitting atop a lotus pedestal;
On a thousand flowers surrounding me
Are a thousand Sakyamuni Buddhas.
Each flower supports a hundred million worlds;
In each world a Sakyamuni Buddha appears.
All are seated beneath a Bodhi-tree,
All simultaneously attain Buddhahood.
All these innumerable Buddhas
Have Vairocana as their original body.
These countless Sakyamuni Buddhas
All bring followers along -- as numerous as motes of dust.
They all proceed to my lotus pedestal
To listen to the Buddha's precepts.
I now preach the Dharma, this exquisite nectar.
Afterward, the countless Buddhas return to their respective worlds
And, under a Bodhi-tree, proclaim these
major and minor precepts
Of Vairocana, the Original Buddha.
The precepts are like the radiant sun and moon,
Like a shining necklace of gems,
Bodhisattvas as numerous as motes of dust
Uphold them and attain Buddhahood.
These precepts are recited by Vairocana,
These precepts I recite as well.
You novice Bodhisattvas
Should reverently accept and uphold them.
And once you have done so,

Transmit and teach them to sentient beings.⁽¹⁴⁾
Now listen attentively as I recite
The Bodhisattva Pratimoksa -- the source of all precepts in the Buddha Dharma.
All of you in the Great Assembly should firmly believe
That you are the Buddhas of the future,
While I am a Buddha already accomplished.
If you should have such faith at all times,
Then this precept code is fulfilled.⁽¹⁵⁾
All beings with resolve
Should accept and uphold the Buddha's precepts.
Sentient beings on receiving them
Join forthwith the ranks of Buddhas.
They are in essence equal to the Buddhas,
They are the true offspring of the Buddhas.
Therefore, Great Assembly,
Listen with utmost reverence
As I proclaim the Bodhisattva Moral Code.

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III. The Buddha Reciting the Bodhisattva Precepts

At that time, when Sakyamuni Buddha first attained Supreme Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, he explained the Bodhisattva precepts. The Buddha taught filial piety toward one's parents,⁽¹⁶⁾ Elder Masters and the Triple Jewel. Filial piety and obedience, he said, are the Ultimate Path [to Buddhahood].⁽¹⁷⁾ Filial piety is called the precepts -- and it means restraint and cessation.⁽¹⁸⁾

The Buddha then emitted limitless lights from his mouth. Thereupon, the whole Great Assembly, consisting of innumerable Bodhisattvas, the gods of the eighteen Brahma Heavens, the gods of the six Desire Heavens, and the rulers of the sixteen great kingdoms⁽¹⁹⁾ all joined their palms and listened singlemindedly to the Buddha recite the Mahayana precepts.

The Buddha then said to the Bodhisattvas: Twice a month I recite the precepts observed by all Buddhas. All Bodhisattvas, from those who have just developed the Bodhi Mind to the Bodhisattvas of the Ten Dwellings, the Ten Practices, the Ten Dedications, and the Ten Grounds also recite them. Therefore, this precept-light shines forth from my mouth. It does not arise without a cause. This light is neither blue, yellow, red, white, nor black. It is neither form, nor thought. It is neither existent nor nonexistent, neither cause nor effect.⁽²⁰⁾ This precept-light is precisely the original source of all Buddhas and all members of this Great Assembly. Therefore all you disciples of the Buddha should receive and observe, read, recite and study these precepts with utmost attention.

Disciples of the Buddha, listen attentively! Whoever can understand and accept a Dharma Master's words of transmission can receive the Bodhisattva precepts⁽²¹⁾ and be called foremost in purity.⁽²²⁾ This is true whether that person is a king, a prince, an official, a monk, a nun, or a god of the eighteen Brahma Heavens, a god of the six Desire Heavens, or a human, a eunuch,

a libertine, a prostitute, a slave, or a member of the [Eight Divisions](#) of Divinities, a [Vajra](#) spirit, an animal, or even a transformation-being.⁽²³⁾

IV. The Ten Major Precepts

The Buddhas said to his disciples, "There are ten major Bodhisattva precepts. If one receives the precepts but fails to recite them, he is not a Bodhisattva, nor is he a seed of Buddhahood. I, too, recite these precepts.

"All Bodhisattvas have studied them in the past, will study in the future, and are studying them now. I have explained the main characteristics of the Bodhisattva precepts. You should study and observe them with all your heart."

The Buddha continued:

1. First Major Precept On Killing

A disciple of the Buddha shall not himself kill, encourage others to kill, kill by expedient means, praise killing, rejoice at witnessing killing, or kill through incantation or deviant mantras. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of killing, and shall not *intentionally* kill any living creature.⁽²⁴⁾

As a Buddha's disciple, he ought to nurture a mind of compassion and filial piety, always devising [expedient means](#) to rescue and protect all beings. If instead, he fails to restrain himself and kills sentient beings without mercy, he commits a [Parajika \(major\) offense](#).⁽²⁵⁾

2. Second Major Precept On Stealing

A disciple of the Buddha must not himself steal or encourage others to steal, steal by expedient means, steal by means of incantation or deviant mantras. He should not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of stealing. No valuables or possessions, even those belonging to ghosts and spirits or thieves and robbers, be they as small as a needle or blade of grass, may be stolen.

As a Buddha's disciple, he ought to have a mind of mercy, compassion, and filial piety -- always helping people earn merits and achieve happiness. If instead, he steals the possessions of others, he commits a Parajika offense.⁽²⁶⁾

3. Third Major Precept On Sexual Misconduct

A disciple of the Buddha must not engage in licentious acts or encourage others to do so. [As a monk] he should not have sexual relations with any female -- be she a human, animal, deity or spirit -- nor create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of such misconduct. Indeed, he must not engage in improper sexual conduct with anyone.⁽²⁷⁾

A Buddha's disciple ought to have a mind of filial piety -- rescuing all sentient beings and instructing them in the Dharma of purity and chastity. If instead, he lacks compassion and encourages others to engage in sexual relations promiscuously, including with animals and even their mothers, daughters, sisters, or other close relatives, he commits a Parajika offense. ⁽²⁸⁾

4. Fourth Major Precept On Lying and False Speech

A disciple of the Buddha must not himself use false words and speech, or encourage others to lie or lie by expedient means. He should not involve himself in the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of lying, saying that he has seen what he has not seen or vice-versa, or lying implicitly through physical or mental means. ⁽²⁹⁾

As a Buddha's disciple, he ought to maintain Right Speech and Right Views always, and lead all others to maintain them as well. If instead, he causes wrong speech, wrong views or evil karma in others, he commits a Parajika offense.

5. Fifth Major Precept On Selling Alcoholic Beverages

A disciple of the Buddha must not trade in alcoholic beverages or encourage others to do so. He should not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of selling any intoxicant whatsoever, for intoxicants are the causes and conditions of all kinds of offenses.

As a Buddha's disciple, he ought to help all sentient beings achieve clear wisdom. If instead, he causes them to have upside-down, topsy-turvy thinking, he commits a Parajika offense. ⁽³⁰⁾

6. Sixth Major Precept On Broadcasting the Faults of the Assembly

A disciple of the Buddha must not himself broadcast the misdeeds or infractions of Bodhisattva-clerics or Bodhisattva-laypersons, or of [ordinary] monks and nuns -- nor encourage others to do so. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of discussing the offenses of the assembly.

As a Buddha's disciple, whenever he hears evil persons, [externalists](#) or followers of the [Two Vehicles](#) speak of practices contrary to the Dharma or contrary to the precepts within the Buddhist community, he should instruct them with a compassionate mind and lead them to develop wholesome faith in the Mahayana.

If instead, he discusses the faults and misdeeds that occur within the assembly, he commits a Parajika offense. ⁽³¹⁾

7. Seventh Major Precept On Praising Oneself and Disparaging Others

A disciple of the Buddha shall not praise himself and speak ill of others, or encourage others to do so. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of praising himself and disparaging others.

As a disciple of the Buddha, he should be willing to stand in for all sentient beings and endure humiliation and slander -- accepting blame and letting sentient beings have all the glory. If instead, he displays his own virtues and conceals the good points of others, thus causing them to suffer slander, he commits a Parajika offense.⁽³²⁾

8. Eighth Major Precept On Stinginess and Abuse

A disciple of the Buddha must not be stingy or encourage others to be stingy. He should not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of stinginess. As a Bodhisattva, whenever a destitute person comes for help, he should give that person what he needs. If instead, out of anger and resentment,⁽³³⁾ he denies all assistance -- refusing to help with even a penny, a needle, a blade of grass, even a single sentence or verse or a phrase of Dharma, but instead scolds and abuses that person -- he commits a Parajika offense.

9. Ninth Major Precept On Anger and Resentment

A disciple of the Buddha shall not harbor anger or encourage others to be angry. He should not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of anger.

As a disciple of the Buddha, he ought to be compassionate and filial, helping all sentient beings develop the good roots of non-contention. If instead, he insults and abuses sentient beings, or even transformation beings [such as deities and spirits], with harsh words, hitting them with his fists or feet, or attacking them with a knife or club -- or harbors grudges even when the victim confesses his mistakes and humbly seeks forgiveness in a soft, conciliatory voice -- the disciple commits a Parajika offense.⁽³⁴⁾

10. Tenth Major Precept On Slandering the Triple Jewel

A Buddha's disciple shall not himself speak ill of the Triple Jewel or encourage others to do so. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods or karma of slander. If a disciple hears but a single word of slander against the Buddha from externalists or evil beings, he experiences a pain similar to that of three hundred spears piercing his heart. How then could he possibly slander the Triple Jewel himself?

Hence, if a disciple lacks faith and filial piety towards the Triple Jewel, and even assists evil persons or those of aberrant views to slander the Triple Jewel, he commits a Parajika offense.⁽³⁵⁾

V. Conclusion: The Ten Major Precepts

As a disciple of the Buddha, you should study these ten parajika (major) precepts and not break any one of them in even the slightest way -- much less break all of them! Anyone guilty of doing so cannot develop the Bodhi Mind in his current life and will lose whatever high position he may have attained, be it that of an emperor, [Wheel-Turning King](#), Bhiksu, Bhiksuni -- as well as whatever level of Bodhisattvahood he may have reached, whether the Ten Dwellings, the Ten Practices, the Ten Dedications, the Ten Grounds -- and all the fruits of the eternal Buddha Nature. He will lose all of those levels of attainment and descend into the [Three Evil Realms](#), unable to hear the words "parents" or "Triple Jewel" for eons!⁽³⁶⁾ Therefore, Buddha's disciples should avoid breaking any one of these major precepts.⁽³⁷⁾ All of you Bodhisattvas should study and observe the Ten Precepts, which have been observed, are being observed, and will be observed by all Bodhisattvas. They were explained in detail in the chapter, "The Eighty Thousand Rules of Conduct."⁽³⁸⁾

VI. The Forty-eight Secondary Precepts

Then the Buddha told the Bodhisattvas, "Now that I have explained the Ten Major Precepts, I will speak about the *forty-eight secondary precepts*."

1. *Disrespect toward Teachers and Friends*

A disciple of the Buddha who is destined to become an emperor, a [Wheel-Turning King](#), or high official should first receive the Bodhisattva precepts. He will then be under the protection of all guardian deities and spirits, and the Buddhas will be pleased.⁽³⁹⁾

Once he has received the precepts, the disciple should develop a mind of filial piety and respect. Whenever he meets an Elder Master, a monk, or a fellow cultivator of like views and like conduct, he should rise and greet him with respect. He must then respectfully make offerings to the guest-monks, in accord with the Dharma.⁽⁴⁰⁾ He should be willing to pledge himself, his family, as well as his kingdom, cities, jewels and other possessions.

If instead, he should develop conceit or arrogance, delusion or anger, refusing to rise and greet guest-monks and make offerings to them respectfully, in accordance with the Dharma, he commits a secondary offense.

2. *On Consuming Alcoholic Beverages*

A disciple of the Buddha should not intentionally consume alcoholic beverages, as they are the source of countless offenses. If he but offers a glass of wine to another person, his retribution will be to have no hands for five hundred lifetimes.⁽⁴¹⁾ How could he then consume liquor himself! Indeed, a Bodhisattva should not encourage any person or any other sentient being to consume alcohol, much less take any alcoholic beverages himself.⁽⁴²⁾ A disciple should not drink any alcoholic beverages whatsoever. If instead, he deliberately does so or encourages others to do so, he commits a secondary offense.

3. *On Eating Meat*

A disciple of the Buddha must not deliberately eat meat. He should not eat the flesh of any sentient being. The meat-eater forfeits the seed of Great Compassion, severs the seed of the Buddha Nature and causes [animals and transcendental] beings to avoid him. Those who do so are guilty of countless offenses. Therefore, Bodhisattvas should not eat the flesh of any sentient beings whatsoever. If instead, he deliberately eats meat, he commits a secondary offense.⁽⁴³⁾

4. On Five Pungent Herbs

A disciple of the Buddha should not eat the five pungent herbs -- garlic, chives, leeks, onions, and asafoetida.⁽⁴⁴⁾ This is so even if they are added as flavoring to other main dishes.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Hence, if he deliberately does so, he commits a secondary offense.

5. On Not Teaching Repentance

If a disciple of the Buddha should see any being violate the Five Precepts, the Eight Precepts, the Ten Precepts, other prohibitions, or commit any of the Seven Cardinal Sins or any offense which leads to the Eight Adversities -- any violations of the precepts whatever -- he should counsel the offender to repent and reform.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Hence, if a Bodhisattva does not do so and furthermore continues to live together in the assembly with the offender, share in the offerings of the laity, participate in the same Uposatha ceremony⁽⁴⁷⁾ and recite the precepts -- while failing to bring up that person's offense, enjoining him to repent -- the disciple commits a secondary offense.

6. Failing to Request the Dharma or Make Offerings

If an Elder Master, a Mahayana monk or fellow cultivator of like views and practice should come from far away to the temple, residence, city or village of a disciple of the Buddha, the disciple should respectfully welcome him and see him off. He should minister to his needs at all times, though doing so may cost as much as three taels of gold! Moreover, the disciple of the Buddha should respectfully request the guest-master to preach the Dharma three times a day by bowing to him without a single thought of resentment or weariness.⁽⁴⁸⁾ He should be willing to sacrifice himself for the Dharma and never be lax in requesting it.

If he does not act in this manner, he commits a secondary offense.

7. Failing to Attend Dharma Lectures

A Bodhisattva disciple who is new to the Order should take copies of the appropriate sutras or precept codes to any place where such sutras, commentaries, or moral codes are being explained, to listen, study, and inquire about the Dharma. He should go anywhere, be it in a house, beneath a tree, in a temple, in the forests or mountains, or elsewhere. If he fails to do so, he commits a secondary offense.⁽⁴⁹⁾

8. On Turning Away from the Mahayana

If a disciple of the Buddha disavows the eternal Mahayana sutras and moral codes, declaring that they were not actually taught by the Buddha, and instead follows and observes those of the Two Vehicles and deluded externalists, he commits a secondary offense.⁽⁵⁰⁾

9. On Failure to Care for the Sick

If a disciple of the Buddha should see anyone who is sick, he should wholeheartedly provide for that person's needs just as he would for a Buddha. Of the eight [Fields of Blessings](#), looking after the sick is the most important. A Buddha's disciple should take care of his father, mother, Dharma teacher or disciple -- regardless of whether the latter are disabled or suffering from various kinds of diseases.⁽⁵¹⁾

If instead, he becomes angry and resentful and fails to do so, or refuses to rescue the sick or disabled in temples, cities and towns, forests and mountains, or along the road, he commits a secondary offense.⁽⁵²⁾

10. On Storing Deadly Weapons

A disciple of the Buddha should not store weapons such as knives, clubs, bows, arrows, spears, axes or any other weapons, nor may he keep nets, traps or any such devices used in destroying life.⁽⁵³⁾

As a disciple of the Buddha, he must not even avenge the death of his parents -- let alone kill sentient beings!⁽⁵⁴⁾ He should not store any weapons or devices that can be used to kill sentient beings. If he deliberately does so, he commits a secondary offense.

The first ten secondary precepts have just been described. Disciples of the Buddha should study and respectfully observe them. They are explained in detail in the six chapters [now lost] following these precepts.

11. On Serving as an Emissary

A disciple of the Buddha shall not, out of personal benefit or evil intentions, act as a country's emissary to foster military confrontation and war causing the slaughter of countless sentient beings. As a disciple of the Buddha, he should not be involved in military affairs, or serve as a courier between armies, much less act as a willing catalyst for war. If he deliberately does so, he commits a secondary offense.⁽⁵⁵⁾

12. On Unlawful Business Undertakings

A disciple of the Buddha must not deliberately trade in slaves or sell anyone into servitude, nor should he trade in domestic animals, coffins or wood for caskets. He cannot engage in these types of business himself much less encourage others to do so. Otherwise, he commits a secondary offense.⁽⁵⁶⁾

13. On Slander and Libel

A disciple of the Buddha must not, *without cause and with evil intentions*, slander virtuous people, such as Elder Masters, monks or nuns, kings, princes or other upright persons, saying that they have committed the Seven Cardinal Sins or broken the Ten Major Bodhisattva Precepts. He should be compassionate and filial and treat all virtuous people as if they were his father, mother, siblings or other close relatives. If instead, he slanders and harms them, he commits a secondary offense.⁽⁵⁷⁾

14. On Starting Wildfires

A disciple of the Buddha shall not, out of evil intentions, start wildfires to clear forests and burn vegetation on mountains and plains, during the fourth to the ninth months of the lunar year. Such fires [are particularly injurious to animals during that period and may spread] to people's homes, towns and villages, temples and monasteries, fields and groves, as well as the [unseen] dwellings and possessions of deities and ghosts. He must not intentionally set fire to any place where there is life. If he deliberately does so, he commits a secondary offense.⁽⁵⁸⁾

15. Teaching Non-Mahayana Dharma

A disciple of the Buddha must teach one and all, from fellow disciples, relatives and spiritual friends, to externalists and evil beings, how to receive and observe the Mahayana sutras and moral codes. He should teach the Mahayana principles to them and help them develop the Bodhi Mind -- as well as the Ten Dwellings, the Ten Practices and the Ten Dedications, explaining the order and function of each of these Thirty Minds (levels).

If instead, the disciple, with evil, hateful intentions, perversely teaches them the sutras and moral codes of the Two Vehicle tradition as well as the commentaries of deluded externalists, he thereby commits a secondary offense.⁽⁵⁹⁾

16. Unsound Explanation of the Dharma

A Bodhisattva Dharma Master must first, with a *wholesome mind*, study the rules of deportment, as well as sutras and moral codes of the Mahayana tradition, and understand their meanings in depth. Then, whenever novices come from afar to seek instruction, he should explain, according to the Dharma, all the Bodhisattva renunciation practices, such as burning one's body, arm, or finger [as the ultimate act in the quest for Supreme Enlightenment]. If a novice is not prepared to follow these practices as an offering to the Buddhas, he is not a Bodhisattva monk. Moreover, a Bodhisattva monk should be willing to sacrifice his body and limbs for starving beasts and hungry ghosts [as the ultimate act of compassion in rescuing sentient beings].⁽⁶⁰⁾

After these explanations, the Bodhisattva Dharma Master should teach the novices in an orderly way, to awaken their minds. If instead, for personal gain, he refuses to teach or teaches in a confused manner, quoting passages out of order and context, or teaches in a manner that disparages the Triple Jewel, he commits a secondary offense.

17. On Exacting Donations

A disciple of the Buddha must not, for the sake of food, drink, money, possessions or fame, approach and befriend kings, princes, or high officials and [on the strength of such relationships],

exact money, goods or other advantages. Nor may he encourage others to do so. These actions are called untoward, excessive demands and lack compassion and filial piety. Such a disciple commits a secondary offense.⁽⁶¹⁾

18. On Serving as an Inadequate Master

A disciple of the Buddha should study the [Twelve Divisions of the Dharma](#) and recite the Bodhisattva precepts frequently. He should strictly observe these precepts in the Six Periods of the day and night and fully understand their meaning and principles as well as the essence of their Buddha Nature.⁽⁶²⁾

If instead, the disciple of the Buddha fails to understand even a sentence or a verse of the moral code or the causes and conditions related to the precepts, but pretends to understand them, he is deceiving both himself and others. A disciple who understands nothing of the Dharma, yet acts as a teacher transmitting the precepts, commits a secondary offense.

19. On Double-tongued Speech

A disciple of the Buddha must not, with malicious intent gossip or spread rumors and slander, create discord and disdain for virtuous people. [An example is] disparaging a monk who observes the Bodhisattva precepts, as he [makes offerings to the Buddhas by] holding an incense burner to his forehead.⁽⁶³⁾ A disciple of the Buddha who does so commits a secondary offense.

20. Failure to Liberate Sentient Beings

A disciple of the Buddha should have a mind of compassion and cultivate the practice of liberating sentient beings. He must reflect thus: throughout the eons of time, all male sentient beings have been my father, all female sentient beings my mother. I was *born of them*.⁽⁶⁴⁾ If I now slaughter them, I would be slaughtering my parents as well as eating flesh that was once *my own*. This is so because all elemental earth, water, fire and air -- the four constituents of all life -- have previously been part of my body, part of my substance. I must therefore always cultivate the practice of liberating sentient beings and enjoin others to do likewise -- as sentient beings are forever reborn, again and again, lifetime after lifetime. If a Bodhisattva sees an animal on the verge of being killed, he must devise a way to *rescue and protect* it, helping it to escape suffering and death. The disciple should always teach the Bodhisattva precepts to *rescue and deliver* sentient beings.⁽⁶⁵⁾

On the day his father, mother, and siblings die, he should invite Dharma Masters to explain the Bodhisattva sutras and precepts. This will generate merits and virtues and help the deceased either to achieve rebirth in the Pure Lands and meet the Buddhas or to secure rebirth in the human or celestial realms.⁽⁶⁶⁾ If instead, a disciple fails to do so, he commits a secondary offense.

You should study and respectfully observe the above ten precepts. *Each of them is explained in detail in the chapter "Expiating Offenses."*

21. On Violence and Vengefulness

A disciple of the Buddha must not return anger for anger, blow for blow. He should not seek revenge, even if his father, mother, siblings, or close relatives are killed -- nor should he do so if the ruler or king of his country is murdered. To take the life of one being in order to avenge the killing of another is contrary to filial piety [as we are all related through the eons of birth and rebirth].⁽⁶⁷⁾

Furthermore, he should not keep others in servitude, much less beat or abuse them, creating evil karma of mind, speech and body day after day -- particularly the offenses of speech. How much less should he deliberately commit the Seven Cardinal Sins. Therefore, if a Bodhisattva-monk lacks compassion and deliberately seeks revenge, even for an injustice done to his close relatives, he commits a secondary offense.

22. Arrogance and Failure to Request the Dharma

A disciple of the Buddha who has only recently left home and is still a novice in the Dharma should not be conceited. He must not refuse instruction on the sutras and moral codes from Dharma Masters on account of his own intelligence, worldly learning, high position, advanced age, noble lineage, vast understanding, great merits, extensive wealth and possessions, etc. Although these Masters may be of humble birth, young in age, poor, or suffering physical disabilities, they may still have genuine virtue and deep understanding of sutras and moral codes.

The novice Bodhisattva should not judge Dharma Masters on the basis of their family background and refuse to seek instructions on the Mahayana truths from them. If he does so, he commits a secondary offense.⁽⁶⁸⁾

23. On Teaching the Dharma Grudgingly

After my passing, if a disciple should, with a wholesome mind, wish to receive the Bodhisattva precepts, he may make a vow to do so before the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and practice repentance before these images for seven days. If he then experiences a vision, he has received the precepts. If he does not, he should continue doing so for fourteen days, twenty-one days, or even a whole year, seeking to witness an auspicious sign. After witnessing such a sign, he could, in front of images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, formally receive the precepts. If he has not witnessed such a sign, although he may have accepted the precepts before the Buddha images, he has not actually received the precepts.

However, the witnessing of auspicious signs is not necessary if the disciple receives the precepts directly from a Dharma Master who has himself received the precepts. Why is this so? It is because this is a case of transmission from Master to Master and therefore all that is required is a mind of utter sincerity and respect on the part of the disciple.

If, within a radius of some three hundred fifty miles, a disciple cannot find a Master capable of conferring the Bodhisattva precepts, he may seek to receive them in front of Buddha or Bodhisattva images. However, he must witness an auspicious sign.

If a Dharma Master, on account of his extensive knowledge of sutras and Mahayana moral codes as well as his close relationship with kings, princes, and high officials, refuses to give

appropriate answers to student-Bodhisattvas seeking the meaning of sutras and moral codes, or does so grudgingly, with resentment and arrogance, he commits a secondary offense.

24. Failure to Practice Mahayana Teachings

If a disciple of the Buddha fails to study Mahayana sutras and moral codes assiduously and cultivate correct views, correct nature and the correct Dharma Body, it is like abandoning the [Seven Precious Jewels](#) for [mere stones]: worldly texts and the Two-Vehicle or externalist commentaries.⁽⁶⁹⁾ To do so is to create the causes and conditions that obstruct the Path to Enlightenment and cut himself off from his Buddha Nature. It is a failure to follow the Bodhisattva path. If a disciple intentionally acts in such a manner, he commits a secondary offense.

25. Unskilled Leadership of the Assembly

After my passing, if a disciple should serve as an abbot, elder Dharma Master, Precept Master, Meditation Master, or Guest Prefect, he must develop a compassionate mind and peacefully settle differences within the Assembly -- skillfully administering the resources of the Three Jewels, spending frugally and not treating them as his own property.⁽⁷⁰⁾ If instead, he were to create disorder, provoke quarrels and disputes or squander the resources of the Assembly, he would commit a secondary offense.

26. Accepting Personal Offerings

Once a disciple of the Buddha has settled down in a temple, if visiting Bodhisattva Bhiksus should arrive at the temple precincts, the guest quarters established by the king, or even the summer retreat quarters, or the quarters of the Great Assembly, the disciple should welcome the visiting monks and see them off. He should provide them with such essentials as food and drink, a place to live, beds, chairs, and the like. If the host does not have the necessary means, he should be willing to pawn himself or cut off and sell his own flesh.⁽⁷¹⁾

Whenever there are meal offerings and ceremonies at a layman's home, visiting monks should be given a fair share of the offerings. The abbot should send the monks, whether residents or guests, to the donor's place in turn [according to their sacerdotal age or merits and virtues].⁽⁷²⁾ If only resident monks are allowed to accept invitations and not visiting monks, the abbot is committing a grievous offense and is behaving no differently than an animal. He is unworthy of being a monk or a son of the Buddha, and is guilty of a secondary offense.

27. Accepting Discriminatory Invitations

A disciple of the Buddha must not accept personal invitations nor appropriate the offerings for himself. Such offerings rightly belong to the Sangha -- the whole community of monks and nuns of the Ten Directions. To accept personal offerings is to steal the possessions of the Sangha of the Ten Directions. It is tantamount to stealing what belongs to the Eight Fields of Blessings: Buddhas, Sages, Dharma Masters, Precept Masters, monks/nuns, mothers, fathers, the sick. Such a disciple commits a secondary offense.⁽⁷³⁾

28. Issuing Discriminatory Invitations

A disciple of the Buddha, be he a Bodhisattva monk, lay Bodhisattva, or other donor, should, when inviting monks or nuns to conduct a prayer session, come to the temple and inform the monk in charge. The monk will then tell him: "Inviting members of the Sangha according to the proper order is tantamount to inviting the [Arhats](#) of the Ten Directions. To offer a discriminatory special invitation to [such a worthy group as] five hundred Arhats or Bodhisattva-monks will not generate as much merit as inviting one ordinary monk, *if it is his turn.*"⁽⁷⁴⁾

There is no provision in the teachings of the Seven Buddhas⁽⁷⁵⁾ for discriminatory invitations. To do so is to follow externalist practices and to contradict filial piety [toward all sentient beings]. If a disciple deliberately issues a discriminatory invitation, he commits a secondary offense.

29. On Improper Livelihoods

A disciple of the Buddha should not, for the sake of gain or with evil intentions, engage in the business of prostitution, selling the wiles and charms of men and women.⁽⁷⁶⁾ He must also not cook for himself, milling and pounding grain. Neither may he act as a fortune-teller predicting the gender of children, reading dreams and the like. Nor shall he practice sorcery, work as a trainer of falcons or hunting dogs, nor make a living concocting hundreds and thousands of poisons from deadly snakes, insects, or from gold and silver. Such occupations lack mercy, compassion, and filial piety [toward sentient beings]. Therefore, if a Bodhisattva intentionally engages in these occupations, he commits a secondary offense.

30. On Handling Business Affairs for the Laity

A disciple of the Buddha must not, with evil intentions, slander the Triple Jewel while pretending to be their close adherent -- preaching the Truth of Emptiness while his actions are in the realm of Existence. Furthermore, he must not handle worldly affairs for the laity, acting as a go-between or matchmaker⁽⁷⁷⁾ -- creating the karma of attachment. Moreover, during the six days of fasting each month and the three months of fasting each year,⁽⁷⁸⁾ a disciple should strictly observe all precepts, particularly against killing, stealing and the rules against breaking the fast. Otherwise, the disciple commits a secondary offense.⁽⁷⁹⁾

A Bodhisattva should respectfully study and observe the ten preceding precepts. *They are explained in detail in the Chapter on "Prohibitions".*⁽⁸⁰⁾

31. Rescuing Clerics Along with Sacred Objects

After my passing, in the evil periods that will follow, there will be externalists, evil persons, thieves and robbers who steal and sell statues and paintings of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and [those to whom respect is due such as] their parents. They may even peddle copies of sutras and moral codes, or sell monks, nuns or those who follow the Bodhisattva Path or have developed the Bodhi Mind to serve as retainers or servants to officials and others.⁽⁸¹⁾

A disciple of the Buddha, upon witnessing such pitiful events, must develop a mind of compassion and find ways to rescue and protect all persons and valuables, raising funds wherever he can for this purpose. If a Bodhisattva does not act in this manner, he commits a secondary offense.

32. On Harming Sentient Beings

A disciple of the Buddha must not sell knives, clubs, bows, arrows, other life-taking devices, nor keep altered scales or measuring devices. He should not abuse his governmental position to confiscate people's possessions, nor should he, with malice at heart, restrain or imprison others or sabotage their success.⁽⁸²⁾ In addition, he should not raise cats, dogs, foxes, pigs and other such animals.⁽⁸³⁾ If he intentionally does such things, he commits a secondary offense.

33. On Watching Improper Activities

A disciple of the Buddha must not, *with evil intentions*, watch people fighting or the battling of armies, rebels, gangs and the like.⁽⁸⁴⁾ He should not listen to the sounds of conch shells, drums, horns, guitars, flutes, lutes, songs or other music, nor should he be party to any form of gambling, whether dice, checkers, or the like.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Furthermore, he should not practice fortune-telling or divination nor should he be an accomplice to thieves and bandits. He must not participate in any of these activities. If instead, he intentionally does so, he commits a secondary offense.

34. Temporary Abandoning of the Bodhi Mind

A disciple of the Buddha should observe the Bodhisattva precepts every day, whether walking, standing, reclining or seated -- reading and reciting them day and night. He should be resolute in keeping the precepts, as strong as a diamond, as desperate as a shipwrecked person clinging to a small log while attempting to cross the ocean, or as principled as the "Bhiksu bound by reeds".⁽⁸⁶⁾ Furthermore, he should always have a wholesome faith in the teachings of the Mahayana. Conscious that sentient beings are Buddhas-to-be while the Buddhas are realized Buddhas, he should develop the Bodhi Mind and maintain it in each and every thought, without retrogression.⁽⁸⁷⁾

If a Bodhisattva has but a single thought in the direction of the Two Vehicles or externalist teachings, he commits a secondary offense.⁽⁸⁸⁾

35. Failure to Make Great Vows

A Bodhisattva must make many great vows -- to be filial to his parents and Dharma teachers, to meet good spiritual advisors,⁽⁸⁹⁾ friends, and colleagues who will keep teaching him the Mahayana sutras and moral codes as well as the [Stages of Bodhisattva Practice](#) (the Ten Dwellings, the Ten Practices, the Ten Dedications, and the Ten Grounds). He should further vow to understand these teachings clearly so that he can practice according to the Dharma while resolutely keeping the precepts of the Buddhas. If necessary, he should lay down his life rather than abandon this resolve for even a single moment. If a Bodhisattva does not make such vows, he commits a secondary offense.

36. Failure to Make Resolutions

Once a Bodhisattva has made these Great Vows, he should strictly keep the precepts of the Buddhas and make the following resolutions:

1.- I would rather jump into a raging blaze, a deep abyss, or into a mountain of knives, than engage in impure actions with any woman, thus violating the sutras and moral codes of the Buddhas of the Three Periods of Time.

2.- I would rather wrap myself a thousand times with a red-hot iron net, than let this body, should it break the precepts, wear clothing provided by the faithful.

I would rather swallow red hot iron pellets and drink molten iron for hundreds of thousands of eons, than let this mouth, should it break the precepts, consume food and drink provided by the faithful.

I would rather lie on a bonfire or a burning iron net than let this body, should it break the precepts, rest on bedding, blankets and mats supplied by the faithful.

I would rather be impaled for eons by hundreds of spears, than let this body, should it break the precepts, receive medications from the faithful.

I would rather jump into a cauldron of boiling oil and roast for hundreds of thousands of eons, than let this body, should it break the precepts, receive shelter, groves, gardens, or fields from the faithful.

3.- I would rather be pulverized from head to toe by an iron sledge hammer, than let this body, should it break the precepts, accept respect and reverence from the faithful.⁽⁹⁰⁾

4.- I would rather have both eyes blinded by hundreds of thousands of swords and spears, rather than break the precepts by looking at beautiful forms. [In the same vein, I shall keep my mind from being sullied by exquisite sounds, fragrances, food and sensations.]

5.- I further vow that all sentient beings will achieve Buddhahood.⁽⁹¹⁾

If a disciple of the Buddha does not make the preceding great resolutions, he commits a secondary offense.

37. *Traveling in Dangerous Areas*

[As a cleric], a disciple of the Buddha should engage in [ascetic practices](#) twice each year. He should sit in meditation, winter and summer, and observe the summer retreat. During those periods, he should always carry eighteen essentials such as a willow branch (for a toothbrush), ash-water (for soap), the traditional three clerical robes, an incense burner, a begging bowl, a sitting mat, a water filter, bedding, copies of sutras and moral codes as well as statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

When practicing austerities and when traveling, be it for thirty miles or three hundred miles, a cleric should always have the eighteen essentials with him. The two periods of austerities are from the 15th of the first lunar month to the 15th of the third month, and from the 15th of the eighth lunar month to the 15th of the tenth month. During the periods of austerities, he requires these eighteen essentials just as a bird needs its two wings.

Twice each month, the novice Bodhisattva should attend the Uposattha ceremony and recite the Ten Major and Forty-eight Secondary Precepts. Such recitations should be done before images of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. If only one person attends the ceremony, then he should do the reciting. If two, three, or even hundreds of thousands attend the ceremony, still only one person should recite. Everyone else should listen in silence. The one reciting should sit on a higher level than the audience, and everyone should be dressed in clerical robes. During the summer retreat, each and every activity should be managed in accordance with the Dharma.

When practicing the austerities, the Buddhist disciple should avoid dangerous areas, unstable kingdoms, countries ruled by evil kings, precipitous terrains, remote wildernesses, regions inhabited by bandits, thieves, or lions, tigers, wolves, poisonous snakes, or areas subject to hurricanes, floods and fires. The disciple should avoid all such dangerous areas when practicing the austerities and also when observing the summer retreat.⁽⁹²⁾ Otherwise, he commits a secondary offense.

38. Order of Seating Within the Assembly

A disciple of the Buddha should sit in the proper order when in the Assembly. Those who received the Bodhisattva precepts first sit first, those who received the precepts afterwards should sit behind. Whether old or young, a Bhiksu or Bhiksuni, a person of status, a king, a prince, a eunuch, or a servant, etc., each should sit according to the order in which he received the precepts. Disciples of the Buddha should not be like externalists or deluded people who base their order on age or sit without any order at all -- in barbarian fashion. In my Dharma, the order of sitting is based on seniority of ordination.

Therefore, if a Bodhisattva does not follow the order of sitting according to the Dharma, he commits a secondary offense.⁽⁹³⁾

39. Failure to Cultivate Merits and Wisdom

A disciple of the Buddha should constantly counsel and teach all people to establish monasteries, temples and pagodas in mountains and forests, gardens and fields. He should also construct stupas for the Buddhas and buildings for winter and summer retreats. All facilities required for the practice of the Dharma should be established.

Moreover, a disciple of the Buddha should explain Mahayana sutras and the Bodhisattva precepts to all sentient beings. In times of sickness, national calamities, impending warfare or upon the death of one's parents, brothers and sisters, Dharma Masters and Precept Masters, a Bodhisattva should lecture and explain Mahayana sutras and the Bodhisattva precepts weekly for up to seven weeks.⁽⁹⁴⁾

The disciple should read, recite, and explain the Mahayana sutras and the Bodhisattva precepts in all prayer gatherings, in his business undertakings and during periods of calamity -- fire, flood, storms, ships lost at sea in turbulent waters or stalked by demons ... In the same vein, he should do so in order to transcend evil karma, the Three Evil Realms, the Eight Difficulties, the Seven Cardinal Sins, all forms of imprisonment, or excessive sexual desire, anger, delusion, and illness.⁽⁹⁵⁾

If a novice Bodhisattva fails to act as indicated, he commits a secondary offense.

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The Bodhisattva should study and respectfully observe the nine precepts just mentioned above, as explained in the "Brahma Altar" chapter.

40. Discrimination in Conferring the Precepts

A disciple of the Buddha should not be selective and show preference in conferring the Bodhisattva precepts. Each and every person can receive the precepts -- kings, princes, high officials, Bhiksus, Bhiksunis, laymen, laywomen, libertines, prostitutes, the gods in the eighteen Brahma Heavens or the six Desire Heavens, asexual persons, bisexual persons, eunuchs, slaves, or demons and ghosts of all types. Buddhist disciples should be instructed to wear robes and sleep on cloth of a neutral color, formed by blending blue, yellow, red, black and purple dyes all together.

The clothing of monks and nuns should, in all countries, be different from those worn by ordinary persons.⁽⁹⁶⁾

Before someone is allowed to receive the Bodhisattva precepts, he should be asked: "have you committed any of the Cardinal Sins?" The Precept Master should not allow those who have committed such sins to receive the precepts.

Here are the Seven Cardinal Sins: shedding the Buddha's blood, murdering an Arhat, killing one's father, killing one's mother, murdering a Dharma Teacher, murdering a Precept Master or disrupting the harmony of the Sangha.

Except for those who have committed the Cardinal Sins, everyone can receive the Bodhisattva precepts.

The Dharma rules of the Buddhist Order prohibit monks and nuns from bowing down before rulers, parents, relatives, demons and ghosts.

Anyone who understands the explanations of the Precept Master can receive the Bodhisattva precepts. Therefore, if a person were to come from thirty to three hundred miles away seeking the Dharma and the Precept Master, out of meanness and anger, does not promptly confer these precepts, he commits a secondary offense.⁽⁹⁷⁾

41. Teaching for the Sake of Profit

If a disciple of the Buddha, when teaching others and developing their faith in the Mahayana, should discover that a particular person wishes to receive the Bodhisattva precepts, he should act as a teaching master and instruct that person to seek out two Masters, a Dharma Master and a Precept Master.

These two Masters should ask the Precept candidate whether he has committed any of the Seven Cardinal Sins in this life. If he has, he cannot receive the precepts. If not, he may receive the precepts.

If he has broken any of the *Ten Major Precepts*, he should be instructed to repent before the statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. He should do so six times a day and recite the Ten Major and Forty-eight Minor Precepts, paying respect with utter sincerity to the Buddhas of the Three Periods of Time. He should continue in this manner until he receives an auspicious response, which could occur after seven days, fourteen days, twenty-one days, or even a year. Examples of auspicious signs include: experiencing the Buddhas rub the crown of one's head, or seeing lights, halos, flowers and other such rare phenomena.

The witnessing of an auspicious sign indicates that the candidate's karma has been dissipated. Otherwise, although he has repented, it was of no avail. He still has not received the precepts. However, the merits accrued will increase his chances of receiving the precepts in a future lifetime.

Unlike the case of a major Bodhisattva precept, if a candidate has violated any of the Forty-eight Secondary Precepts, he can confess his infraction and sincerely repent before Bodhisattva-monks or nuns. After that, his offense will be eradicated.

The officiating Master, however, must fully understand the Mahayana sutras and moral codes, the secondary as well as the major Bodhisattva precepts, what constitutes an offense and what does not, the truth of [Primary Meaning](#), as well as the various Bodhisattva cultivation stages -- the Ten Dwellings, the Ten Practices, the Ten Dedications, the Ten Grounds, and Equal and Wonderful Enlightenment.

He should also know the type and degree of contemplation required for entering and exiting these stages and be familiar with the Ten Limbs of Enlightenment as well as a variety of other contemplations.

If he is not familiar with the above and, out of greed for fame, disciples or offerings, he makes a pretense of understanding the sutras and moral codes, he is deceiving himself as well as others. Hence, if he intentionally acts as Precept Master, transmitting the precepts to others, he commits a secondary offense.

42. Reciting the Precepts to Evil Persons

A disciple of the Buddha should not, *with a greedy motive*, expound the great precepts of the Buddhas before those who have not received them, externalists or persons with heterodox views. Except in the case of kings or supreme rulers, he may not expound the precepts before any such person.

Persons who hold heterodox views and do not accept the precepts of the Buddhas are untamed in nature. They will not, lifetime after lifetime, encounter the Triple Jewel. They are as mindless as trees and stones; they are no different from wooden stumps. Hence, if a disciple of the Buddha expounds the precepts of the Seven Buddhas before such persons, he commits a secondary offense. ⁽⁹⁸⁾

43. Thoughts of Violating the Precepts

If a disciple of the Buddha joins the Order out of pure faith, receives the correct precepts of the Buddhas, but then develops thoughts of violating the precepts, he is unworthy of receiving any offerings from the faithful, unworthy of walking on the ground of his motherland, unworthy of drinking its water.

Five thousand guardian spirits constantly block his way, calling him "Evil thief!" These spirits always follow him into people's homes, villages and towns, sweeping away his very footprints. Everyone curses such a disciple, calling him a "Thief within the Dharma." All sentient beings avert their eyes, not wishing to see him.

A disciple of the Buddha who breaks the precepts is no different from an animal or a wooden stump. Hence, if a disciple intentionally violates the correct precepts, he commits a secondary offense.⁽⁹⁹⁾

44. Failure to Honor the Sutras and Moral Codes

A disciple of the Buddha should always singlemindedly receive, observe, read and recite the Mahayana sutras and moral codes. He should copy the sutras and moral codes onto bark, paper, fine cloth, or bamboo slats and not hesitate to use his own skin as paper, draw his own blood for ink and his marrow for ink solvent, or split his bones for use as pens.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ He should use precious gems, priceless incense and flowers and other precious things to make and adorn covers and cases to store the sutras and codes.

Hence, if he does not make offerings to the sutras and moral codes, in accordance with the Dharma, he commits a secondary offense.

45. Failure to Teach Sentient Beings

A disciple of the Buddha should develop a mind of Great Compassion. Whenever he enters people's homes, villages, cities or towns, and sees sentient beings, he should say aloud, "You sentient beings should all take the Three Refuges and receive the Ten [Major Bodhisattva] Precepts." Should he come across cows, pigs, horses, sheep and other kinds of animals, he should concentrate and say aloud, "You are now animals; you should develop the Bodhi Mind." A Bodhisattva, wherever he goes, be it climbing a mountain, entering a forest, crossing a river, or walking through a field should help all sentient beings develop the Bodhi Mind.⁽¹⁰¹⁾

If a disciple of the Buddha does not wholeheartedly teach and rescue sentient beings in such a manner, he commits a secondary offense.

46. Preaching in an Inappropriate Manner

A disciple of the Buddha should always have a mind of Great Compassion to teach and transform sentient beings. Whether visiting wealthy and aristocratic donors or addressing Dharma gatherings, he should not remain standing while explaining the Dharma to laymen, but should occupy a raised seat in front of the lay assembly.⁽¹⁰²⁾

A Bhiksu serving as Dharma instructor must not be standing while lecturing to the Fourfold Assembly. During such lectures, the Dharma Master should sit on a raised seat amidst flowers and incense, while the Fourfold Assembly must listen from lower seats. The Assembly must respect and follow the Master like filial sons obeying their parents or Brahmans worshipping fire. If a Dharma Master does not follow these rules while preaching the Dharma, he commits a secondary offense.

47. On Regulations Against the Dharma

A disciple of the Buddha who has accepted the precepts of the Buddhas with a faithful mind, must not use his high official position (as a king, prince, official, etc.) to undermine the moral code of the Buddhas. He may not establish rules and regulations preventing the four kinds of lay disciples from joining the Order and practicing the Way, nor may he prohibit the making of Buddha or Bodhisattva images, statues and stupas, or the printing and distribution of sutras and codes.⁽¹⁰³⁾ Likewise, he must not establish rules and regulations placing controls on the Fourfold Assembly. If highly placed lay disciples engage in actions contrary to the Dharma, they are no different from vassals in the service of [illegitimate] rulers.

A Bodhisattva should rightfully receive respect and offerings from all. If instead, he is forced to defer to officials, this is contrary to the Dharma, contrary to the moral code.

Hence, if a king or official has received the Bodhisattva precepts with a wholesome mind, he should avoid offenses that harm the Three Jewels. If instead, he intentionally commits such acts, he is guilty of a secondary offense.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

48. On Destroying the Dharma

A disciple of the Buddha who becomes a monk with wholesome intentions must not, for fame or profit, explain the precepts to kings or officials in such a way as to cause monks, nuns or laymen who have received the Bodhisattva precepts to be tied up, thrown into prison or forcefully conscripted. If a Bodhisattva acts in such a manner, he is no different from a worm in a lion's body, eating away at the lion's flesh. This is not something a worm living outside the lion can do. Likewise, only disciples of the Buddhas can bring down the Dharma -- no externalist or demon can do so.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾

Those who have received the precepts of the Buddha should protect and observe them just as a mother would care for her only child or a filial son his parents. They must not break the precepts.

If a Bodhisattva hears externalists or evil-minded persons speak ill of, or disparage, the precepts of the Buddhas, he should feel as though his heart were pierced by three hundred spears, or his body stabbed with a thousand knives or thrashed with a thousand clubs. He would rather suffer in the hells himself for a hundred eons than hear evil beings disparage the precepts of the Buddha. How much worse it would be if the disciple were to break the precepts himself or incite others to do so! This is indeed an unfilial mind! Hence, if he violates the precepts intentionally, he commits a secondary offense.

The preceding nine precepts should be studied and respectfully observed with utmost faith.

VII. Conclusion

The Buddha said, "All of you disciples! These are the Forty-eight Secondary Precepts that you should observe. *Bodhisattvas* of the past have recited them, those of the future will recite them, those of the present are now reciting them.

"Disciples of the Buddha! You should all listen! These Ten Major and Forty-eight Secondary Precepts are recited by all *Buddhas* of the Three Periods of Time -- past, present, and future. I now recite them as well."

VIII. Epilogue

The Buddha continued: "Everyone in the Assembly -- kings, princes, officials, Bhiksus, Bhiksunis, laymen, laywomen and those who have received the Bodhisattva precepts -- should receive and observe, read and recite, explain and copy these precepts of the eternal Buddha Nature so that they can circulate without interruption for the edification of all sentient beings. They will then encounter the Buddhas and receive the teachings from each one in succession. Lifetime after lifetime, they will escape the Three Evil Paths and the Eight Difficulties and will always be reborn in the human and celestial realms."

I have concluded a general explanation of the precepts of the Buddhas beneath this Bodhi Tree. All in this Assembly should singlemindedly study the Pratimoksa precepts and joyfully observe them.

These precepts are explained in detail in the exhortation section of the "Markless Celestial King" chapter.

At that time, the Bodhisattvas of the Three Thousand World System (cosmos) sat listening with utmost reverence to the Buddha reciting the precepts. They then joyously received and observed them.

As Buddha Sakyamuni finished explaining the Ten Inexhaustible Precepts of the "Mind-Ground Dharma Door" chapter, (which Vairocana Buddha had previously proclaimed in the Lotus Flower Treasury World), countless other Sakyamuni Buddhas did the same.

As Sakyamuni Buddha preached in ten different places, from the Mahesvara Heaven Palace to the Bodhi Tree, for the benefit of countless Bodhisattvas and other beings, all the countless Buddhas in the infinite lands of the Lotus Treasury World did the same.

They explained the Buddha's Mind Treasury (the Thirty Minds), Ground Treasury, Precept Treasury, Infinite Actions and Vows Treasury, the Treasury of the Ever-Present Buddha Nature as Cause and Effect of Buddhahood. Thus, all the Buddhas completed their expositions of the countless Dharma Treasuries.

All sentient beings throughout the billions of worlds gladly receive and observe these Teachings.

The characteristics of the Mind-Ground are explained in greater detail in the chapter "Seven Forms of Conduct of the Buddha Floral Brilliance King."

IX. Verses of Praise

The sages with great samadhi and wisdom
Can observe this teaching;
Even before reaching Buddhahood
They are blessed with five benefits:
First, the Buddhas of the Ten Directions
Always keep them in mind and protect them.
Secondly, at the time of death
They hold correct views with a joyous mind.
Third, wherever they are reborn,
The Bodhisattvas are their friends.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾
Fourth, merits and virtues abound as
The Paramita of Precepts is⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ accomplished.
Fifth, in this life and in succeeding ones,
Observing all precepts, they are filled with
merits and wisdom.

Such disciples are sons of the Buddha.
Wise people should ponder this well.
Common beings clinging to marks and self
Cannot obtain this teaching.
Nor can followers of the Two Vehicles,

abiding in quietude,

Plant their seeds within it.
To nurture the sprouts of Bodhi,
To illuminate the world with wisdom,
You should carefully observe
The True Mark of all dharmas:⁽¹⁰⁸⁾
Neither born nor unborn,
Neither eternal nor extinct,
Neither the same nor different,
Neither coming nor going.
In that singleminded state
The disciple should diligently cultivate
And adorn the Bodhisattva's practices and deeds
In sequential order.
Between the teachings of study and non-study,
One should not develop thoughts of discrimination.
This is the Foremost Path --
Also known as Mahayana.

All offenses of idle speculation and meaningless debate⁽¹⁰⁹⁾
Invariably disappear at this juncture;
The Buddha's omniscient wisdom
Also arises from this.
Therefore, all disciples of the Buddha
Should develop great resolve,
And strictly observe the Buddha's precepts
As though they were brilliant gems.
All Bodhisattvas of the past
Have studied these precepts;
Those of the future will also study them.
Those of the present study them as well.
This is the path walked by the Buddhas,
And praised by the Buddhas.
I have now finished explaining the precepts,
The body of immense merit and virtue.
I now transfer them all to sentient beings;
May they all attain Supreme Wisdom;
May the sentient beings who hear this Dharma
All attain Buddhahood.

X. Verses of Dedication

In the Lotus Treasury World,
Vairocana explained an infinitesimal part of the Mind-Ground Door,
Transmitting it to the Sakyamunis: (110)
Major and minor precepts are clearly delineated,
All sentient beings receive immense benefits.

Homage to Vairocana Buddha, Lord of the Brahma Net.

END OF SUTRA

*
* *

Gatha

All celestials, titans and spirits
Who have come to hear the Dharma,
Should earnestly uphold it, that it may remain forever,
And everyone may practice it with diligence.
All who have come here to listen,
Whether of this earth or beyond,

Should rely on the True Dharma, practicing day and night,
With compassion toward all beings, always rescuing and protecting them.
We wish that the world may be forever calm and peaceful,
And that the infinite wisdom of the Dharma always benefit sentient beings.
May all their transgressions be erased,
May they escape suffering and enter Nirvana.
May the precepts always perfume their bodies,
May samadhi always clothe their forms.
May the flowers of wisdom adorn all lands,
May all realms always be peaceful and serene.

Homage to the Dharma-protecting Bodhisattvas- Mahasattvas (3 times)

(At this point, the reciter of the precepts arises and, with palms joined, announces: "As instructed, I [name] have just finished reciting the precepts. If, because of my laxity in guarding the three karma of body speech and mind, there were errors or omissions, I humbly request the indulgence of the assembly.")

*

**

The Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra

When the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara was practicing the deep Prajna Paramita, she perceived that the Five Skandhas were empty. Thus, she overcame all ills and suffering.

Oh, Sariputra, form does not differ from emptiness, and emptiness does not differ from form. Form is emptiness and emptiness is form; the same is true for feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness.

Oh, Sariputra, the characteristics of emptiness of all dharmas are non-arising, non-ceasing, non-defiled, non-pure, non-increasing, non-decreasing.

Therefore, in emptiness there are no forms, no feelings, perceptions, impulses or consciousness; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind; no form, sound, smell, taste, touch or phenomena; no realm of the eye and so forth, up to no realm of consciousness; no ignorance and no ending of ignorance, and so forth, up to no old age and death and no ending of old age and death. There is also no suffering, or cause of suffering, or cessation of suffering, and no Path. There is no wisdom and there is no attainment, because there is nothing to be attained.

The Bodhisattvas, relying on Prajna Paramita, have no obstruction in their minds. Because there is no obstruction, there is no fear, and they transcend confusion and deluded views, ultimately reaching Nirvana.

The Buddhas of the past, present and future, relying on Prajna Paramita, attain Supreme Enlightenment. Therefore, the Prajna Paramita is the great divine mantra, the mantra of

illumination, the supreme mantra, the unequalled mantra, which can dispel all suffering -- truly and not falsely. She then uttered the Prajna Paramita mantra, saying:

"Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha."

*
* *

(If time allows, the practitioner can recite the Buddha's name and dedicate the merits, following the general [Pure Land](#) liturgy; alternatively, if time does not permit, the text below may be used.)

Listening to these precepts is an act of supreme virtue;
I dedicate these countless supreme virtues and merits to all sentient beings in the Dharma Realm,
Vowing that they may swiftly achieve rebirth
In the land of the Buddha of Limitless Light.
I vow to eradicate all obstructions and afflictions,
I vow to attain Supreme Enlightenment,
I vow to eradicate all delusive karma,
Thus will I always follow the Bodhisattva Path.
I vow to be reborn in the Western [Pure Land](#),
The Nine Lotus Grades will be my parents;
When the blossoms open, I will see Amitabha Buddha and awaken to the truth of Non-Birth,
Non-retrogressing Bodhisattvas will be my friends.

I dedicate these merits and virtues
To everyone everywhere
So that all sentient beings and I
Achieve Buddhahood together.
I take refuge in the Buddha, vowing that sentient beings may understand the Great Way and develop the Supreme Mind;
I take refuge in the Dharma, vowing that sentient beings may penetrate all the sutras with wisdom as profound as the oceans;
I take refuge in the Sangha, vowing that sentient beings be in harmony with the Great Assembly, free of all obstructions.

Vows

May Amitabha Buddha always come to protect me, helping to develop my good roots. May I be diligent in this life and never lose the pure causes for rebirth in Amitabha's Land. When I depart

from this world, may my body and mind be in correct concentration, with no impediments to my faculties of hearing and sight. May Amitabha Buddha appear before me, with the Assembly of Bodhisattvas bearing a lotus dais. In an instant, I shall be reborn in the Pure Land, perfect the Bodhisattva Path and rescue all sentient beings. Together, may we all achieve Supreme Wisdom.

Bowing with Utmost Reverence

Homage to the great merciful and compassionate Buddha Amitabha of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss;

Homage to the great compassionate Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, to the Bodhisattva Mahasthama and to the Pure Assembly of Bodhisattvas, as vast as the oceans;

Homage to the Pure Land Assembly, as vast as the oceans, of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, superior Bodhisattvas and Beings of the Highest Virtue.

NOTES

*(by Van Hien Study Group,
based on commentaries of Elder Masters.)*

1. *Vairocana Buddha*: The primordial Buddha. Represents the Dharma Body of Buddha Sakyamuni and all Buddhas. His Pure Land is the entire cosmos.

2. *Wish-fulfilling gem*: "A jewel said to possess the power of producing whatever one desires. It symbolizes the greatness and virtue of the Buddha and the Buddhist scriptures." (*A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms and Concepts*, p. 504-505)

3. *Four months make a season*: Traditionally, in Buddhism, following the Indian custom, the year is divided into three seasons: spring, summer and winter. There is no autumn.

Upasaka/Upasika: Laymen/Laywomen who have taken at least one of the five lay precepts; in the context of this sutra, members of the laity who have taken the Bodhisattva precepts.

4. These verses allude to the following story:

Three fish were stranded in shallow water. One returned to the sea by leaping over an obstacle in its path (a small boat). Another returned to the sea by swimming around the boat. The third fish just frolicked in the water, oblivious to its situation. In the end, when the water dried up, it suffocated to death.

5. *Sangha*: The Order of monks and nuns.

6. If a monk or nun who has taken the Bodhisattva precepts and kept them since the last service cannot attend the semi-monthly Uposatha, he should request a colleague to represent him and

state that he is in agreement with the proceedings. Acceptable reasons for absence include Dharma work and illness.

7. *Pratimoksa*: A body of precepts; in this case, the 58 Bodhisattva precepts. The term also applies to the full body of Bhiksu/Bhiksuni precepts.

8. *Uposatha*: Semi-monthly service for recitation of precepts, either the Bhiksu/Bhiksuni or Bodhisattva precepts. According to the Vinaya, the recitation should be preceded by a public confession of transgressions. In practice, this part of the service is often omitted.

9. The *Brahma Net Sutra* was translated from a Sanskrit text. A Tibetan translation is also extant, confirming the Indian origin of the Sutra. Master Kumarajiva's translation bureau was reportedly composed of some three thousand monks.

The *Brahma Net Sutra* is "a two-fascicle sutra translated into Chinese in A.D. 406 by Kumarajiva of the Later Chin dynasty. According to the preface written by his disciple Seng-chao, this text corresponds to the tenth chapter of a much longer Sanskrit original consisting of 120 fascicles comprising sixty-one chapters. The first fascicle ... expounds forty stages of Bodhisattva practice ... The second sets forth ten major and forty-eight minor precepts. This sutra was highly valued in China, [Korea, Vietnam] and Japan as a work detailing precepts for Bodhisattvas, and many commentaries were written on it" (*A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms and Concepts*, p. 30).

Please note that the Mahayana *Brahma Net Sutra*, (and the Bodhisattva precepts contained therein), is a different text from the sutra of the same name found in the *Digha Nikaya* of the Pali (Theravada) canon. These Bodhisattva precepts are traditionally taken by Mahayana monks and nuns a few days (or sometimes immediately) after they take their precepts of ordination as a Bhiksu or Bhiksuni. The Bodhisattva precepts are also given on these occasions to advanced laymen and laywomen. Although the *Brahma Net Sutra* can be high in tone and demanding of practitioners, readers should not be scared away or discouraged. They should not, however, expect to grasp the full significance of the injunctions without developing the Bodhi Mind and engaging in serious practice.

The Sravaka (monks' and nuns') precepts were established by the Buddha to correct problems as they occurred. For example, during the alms rounds, young monks would receive less food than older ones and so would sometimes go hungry. Therefore, the Buddha established the rule that donations should be pooled and shared equally among all monks. The Bodhisattva precepts, on the other hand, are based on eternal truths inherent in the Self-Nature (e.g., the precepts on generosity). Thus, while the Sravaka precepts are practical rules, the Bodhisattva precepts are independent of time and space, but part and parcel of the Self-Nature -- the Mind.

10. In Mahayana texts, the word "Sakyamuni" can be taken to mean a) a greatly compassionate being and b) an ascetic who has calmed his mind. In the cosmos, there is an infinite number of such sages -- an infinite number of Sakyamuni Buddhas.

Each time a Buddha is about to teach the Mahayana Sutras, he first emits lights from various parts of his body as an auspicious sign. This is to help members of the assembly to develop

faith and deep respect, thus becoming more receptive to the teachings and receiving extra benefits. Emitting light is thus an act of compassion of the Buddhas.

11. *Seven years of cultivation*: this refers to the six years the future Sakyamuni Buddha practiced alone (after discovering that the ascetic teachings he received earlier were not leading to Supreme Enlightenment), as well as the forty-nine days he meditated under the Bodhi tree.

12. *Jewelled Net (of Indra)*: one of the most beautiful and profound metaphors in the Mahayana tradition. It is associated with the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, with its conception of unity and universal interdependence:

Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra (Brahma), there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each "eye" of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring.

The Hua-Yen [Avatamsaka] school has been fond of this image, mentioned many times in its literature, because it symbolizes a cosmos in which there is an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all the members of the cosmos. This relationship is said to be one of simultaneous mutual identity and mutual intercausality (Francis Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism*, p.2).

13. *I have come to this world 8,000 times*. The Buddha has been among us countless times, in countless forms. He knows our world, and we can rely on His teachings (cf. *Lotus Sutra*).

14. Bodhisattva disciples should transmit the Bodhisattva precepts to sentient beings. There is no such requirement in any other set of precepts. See Introduction.

15. Important point: if we truly believe that sentient beings are the Buddhas of the future, we would never think of killing them, or harming them in any way. Rather, we would have feelings of compassion toward all sentient beings, without exception. This sense of compassion is the very *essence* of the Bodhisattva precepts. Therefore, the *Brahma Net Sutra* states: "If you should have such faith/ Then this precept code is fulfilled."

16. *Filial piety* (filiality) toward one's parents means not only to avoid causing them pain, but also to strive to make them happy. *To be filial, therefore, is to have compassion towards our parents.*

Moreover, "parents" in the Mahayana context does not mean one's parents in this lifetime only but also *throughout the eons of time*. Through the eons of rebirth, all men and women must have been our fathers or mothers at one time or another. Thus, the word "parents" represents all sentient beings. (See, for example, the *Filial Piety Sutra*.)

In other words, to be filial toward one's parents means to have compassion for all sentient beings. Thus, if a person is truly filial to his parents, he is in effect *observing all the Bodhisattva*

precepts. This is because all these precepts have but one goal -- to nurture compassion for all sentient beings by showing them the way to Enlightenment.

17. *Ultimate Path*: The Path or Way to Buddhahood, not Arhatship (goal of the Two Vehicles or Theravada) or the paths of gods and humans. For example, if one were to donate ten thousand dollars to a temple, hoping to receive wealth in a future lifetime or to obtain happiness, one would not be following the Ultimate Path. On the other hand, transferring the merits one has accrued to all sentient beings so that they, as well as ourselves, may achieve Buddhahood is the Ultimate Path.

18. *Restraint and Cessation*: The basic or Sravaka precepts taught by the Buddhas (i.e., the five lay precepts, the ten precepts of novice monks, or the 250 for Bhiksus) all have an essentially negative tone. They are meant to prevent the practitioner from committing offenses. The Bodhisattva precepts, on the other hand, shift the emphasis toward the altruistic aspect: we should consider all sentient beings as part of our family; we should be filial to them, have compassion for them. Thus the Bodhisattva's precepts, unlike other precepts, have two components: self-benefit and benefit to others, *with the emphasis on benefit to others*.

19. There were 16 great kingdoms in the Indian subcontinent at the time of the Buddha.

20. In other words, the Bodhisattva precepts are above differentiations, above idle speculation -- above human reasoning. Trying to understand the Bodhisattva precepts *in their totality* with our limited mind is no different from viewing the heavens through a child's telescope! It is for this reason that the editors have relied on the commentaries of knowledgeable Dharma Masters in preparing these notes.

21. The Sravaka precepts (lay and Bhiksu/Bhiksuni precepts) are conferred only on able-bodied persons in full possession of their mental and physical capacities. This is because monks and nuns are the temporal representation of the Buddha on earth. Joining the Order is like being selected as officers in the army, the army of liberation.

In contrast, Bodhisattvas take the ideal of benefitting sentient beings as their only goal. Therefore, with a few specific exceptions, everyone can receive the precepts and everyone can study and put them into practice. Please note in this connection that for a Bodhisattva precept to be broken and either a Parajika (major) or secondary offense created, several factors must come into play: *a) foundation, b) intention, c) action, d) result*.

For example, in the case of the precept against killing: a) the object has to be a sentient being and the perpetrator aware of this fact; b) the aim must be to kill; c) an act of violence must be perpetrated; d) the victim must actually die. However, even if only one factor, *intention (motivation)* is involved, the Bodhisattva still incurs some negative karma for having violated part of the precept. (The importance of the mind is reflected in modern jurisprudence through the distinction between manslaughter, attempted murder, murder in the first and second degrees.)

Knowledge as to *when* and *how* a precept is violated would remove some of the fear and reluctance that laypersons sometimes have with regard to taking the precepts.

22. Before they receive the Bodhisattva precepts, sentient beings differ greatly in wisdom, status, wealth, and so forth. However, once they receive the precepts, they have joined the ranks of the Awakened, those "foremost in purity":

When sentient beings receive the Bodhisattva precepts ... At that time, they become "supreme vehicles of the Dharma", and are foremost in purity.

23. *Transformation beings*: refers to certain types of sentient beings, such as gods or dragons, who can take the appearance of human beings for the purpose of, for example, attending sermons or receiving the precepts (as such opportunities are not necessarily available at all times in their respective realms). See also [note 109](#).

24. The mind is the key factor in all Bodhisattva precepts. For example, Dr. J.J.M. de Groot, wrote the following, with reference to Chinese Buddhist monks in the nineteenth century:

Even when they are away from their temples, the monks strictly abstain from non-vegetarian food. In any case the temptation does not arise for them: after following a vegetarian diet for a year or two, they develop an invincible disgust for meat and fish. On several occasions, when the author of these lines has had the opportunity to take his meals [in one of the huts reserved for lay guests adjacent to the monastery where he was staying], he was visited by monks curious to see how and what he ate. However, as soon as they smelled the odor of his pork roast or his leg of lamb, they would dash out of the hut -- sick and ready to throw up (*Le Code du Mahayana en Chine*, p. 103).

Killing by expedient means: refers to the means employed to facilitate the killing of a sentient being, such as pointing out the whereabouts of a chicken to others, cornering it, binding its feet, forcing its head onto the butcher block, etc.

25. *Parajika offense*. A major offense, which warrants expulsion from the Buddhist Order. (In practice, the cleric is given the opportunity to repent and reform.)

Killing sentient beings, including slaughtering animals for food, is among the heaviest transgressions in Buddhism. This is not only because such acts create untold suffering but also because they cut short the lives of future Buddhas (as all sentient beings have a common Buddha Nature). The injunction against all forms of killing (including suicide), covering all sentient beings, is unique to Buddhism. Jainism, for example, approves of the penance of death by self-starvation, while Hindu ceremonies such as the Srauta rites "center on offering into the altar fires oblations of milk, butter, honey ... domestic animals ..." (K. Crim, *Dictionary of Religions*, p. 369 and 790.)

Note: There are important exceptions to this rule. A well-known recent example is the self-immolation (suicide) of Master Thich Quang Duc in the early sixties to protest the persecution of Buddhists in Vietnam. The Master, a recognized and respected figure, killed himself not to escape personal suffering, but rather to call attention to the plight of the population at large, bring a halt to the persecutions and, in the good Mahayana tradition, *save the perpetrators themselves from major transgressions*.

The first Sravaka precept (the precepts of Bhiksus/ Bhiksunis) is not to indulge in sexual relations, while the first Bodhisattva precept is not to kill. This is because the Sravakas' main

goal is to become Arhats and escape Birth and Death. Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, take *compassion* as their main calling, and killing is the very antithesis of compassion. Another explanation is that the Sravaka precepts are specific to an audience and time. Thus, in the time of the Buddha, when a Bhiksu/Bhiksuni committed a certain offense, the Buddha, in response, instituted a certain precept or regulation. This is how the first Bhiksu/Bhiksuni precept against sexual relations came into being. Bodhisattva precepts, on the other hand, are universal in scope, beyond time, space and audience. They were promulgated independently of specific offenses, to help the practitioner return to his Self-Nature and achieve Buddhahood -- they are the precepts of the Mind.

26. The life of a sentient being can be divided into two aspects: the internal, related to the physical body, and the external, having to do with food, possessions, and the like. The physical body is sustained by food and other essentials. If these essentials are stolen, life becomes very difficult. In extreme cases, stealing them is tantamount to taking a person's very life. Therefore, the precept 'not to steal' is second in importance only to the precept 'not to kill.' Please note, too, that in the "Four Means of Salvation," charity is first and foremost. These are the four means by which Bodhisattvas interact with society in order to carry out their work. Charity, the giving of one's possessions to benefit others, is the antithesis of stealing. (Master Yen-p'ei) *Stealing by expedient means*: refers to such acts as hiding other people's possessions, etc. and then adopting an air of innocence, feigning ignorance as to what occurred.

27. According to the commentaries, improper sexual behavior includes such actions as engaging in sex at inappropriate times (in the daytime, on fasting or auspicious days) or in inappropriate places (outside a couple's bedroom, for example).

28. Sexual relations with any sentient being are strictly forbidden to monks and nuns. The purpose is to sever attachments and cut off the very cause of Birth and Death (see Charles Luk, tr., *Surangama Sutra*, p. 152 ff). See [note 77](#) and the following:

This precept is placed third, indicating that it is 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 is... 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 *Surangama 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 (Master Hsuan Hua).

29. Examples of physical means include nodding, shaking one's head, etc. An instance of lying through mental means is when someone who has committed a misdeed remains silent when asked. The most serious example of false speech in Buddhism, constituting a major offense is to claim to have achieved a level of attainment (Arhatship, for example) when one has not in fact attained it. The purpose of such a claim is, of course, to receive respect and offerings. Other lies are considered secondary in importance.

30. Selling alcoholic beverages is considered a major offense while consuming alcoholic beverages is only a secondary one. (secondary precept No. 2). This is because Bodhisattvas place compassion first and foremost and aim at benefitting others -- to sell liquor is to harm

others, to consume liquor is to harm only oneself. Why should we not consume alcoholic beverages? Buddhism prohibits alcoholic beverages not to deny enjoyment of life, but because alcohol clouds the mind and prevents one's innate wisdom from emerging. Thus, to sell liquor goes against the Bodhisattva's compassionate goal -- to help sentient beings develop wisdom and achieve Buddhahood.

31. The Bodhisattva's aim is to benefit sentient beings. Therefore, when someone commits an offense, the Bodhisattva does not advertise it but patiently finds ways to counsel him. Furthermore, a Bodhisattva should mention the good points of others so as to encourage them on the right path and help them develop their potential.

Illustration: the *Lotus Sutra* relates the story of a Bodhisattva named "Never Despise." Whenever he encountered a layman or cleric, he would approach him, bow down to him, and say aloud, "I dare not look down on you because you will become a Buddha in the future." This declaration angered some persons, who would insult and beat him. In response, Never Despise would simply run far away and repeat, "I dare not look down on you because you will become a Buddha." Why did the Bodhisattva Never Despise act that way? It was because he cultivated the practice of seeing everything with eyes of equality, of respecting all sentient beings equally, as they all have the Buddha Nature and are all future Buddhas. Another explanation could be that many cultivators cannot conceive of themselves as future Buddhas. The Bodhisattva Never Despise was raising their sights, urging them to strive for the full Enlightenment of Buddhahood.

32. "One can say that the habit of praising oneself and looking down on others is common to most people. That is why wherever we go, if we do not hear a person praise himself, we can hear him speak ill of others. Seldom do we hear anyone speak about his own shortcomings while praising the good points of others. That is why, since ancient times, it has never been easy to create an atmosphere of non-contention and happiness between individuals on this earth. If people got into the habit of "returning the light and looking within", aware every minute, every hour that they still have many shortcomings, while others have many good qualities, there would never be self-congratulation or criticism of others. This is particularly true in the case of Bodhisattvas, who should always admit their own mistakes and never entertain the thought of hiding them. If they were to hide their mistakes, those mistakes would not only not disappear, they would, on the contrary increase in intensity until in time they would control everything. By then, to extinguish them would be impossible. Moreover, not only should Bodhisattvas not hide their shortcomings, they should not boast of their achievements either. To do so would lessen the value of these achievements until in time they would disappear entirely. Then, even if they wanted to boast, they could no longer do so." (Master Yen-p'ei)

"To praise oneself and speak ill of others necessarily makes other people suffer. Not only that, such action tends to raise the ego -- the very opposite of the goal of cultivation. Furthermore, in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (chapter 49), sentient beings are compared to the roots of a tree growing in the rocks and sand of the barren wilderness, while the Bodhisattvas and Buddhas are the flowers and fruits. Therefore, Bodhisattvas need sentient beings. How can they go about criticizing them, unless it is for the purpose of helping them correct their mistakes?" (Rev. Minh Duc)

33. The Buddhist disciple becomes angry and loses his temper because the other party keeps asking for help.

34. This ninth precept includes two parts: (1) being angry and (2) harboring grudges. This precept, like others, takes compassion as its cornerstone. Once anger arises, all compassion is lost. The Bodhisattva should not harbor grudges toward anyone and should gladly forgive the mistakes of others.

Moreover, once we are reborn in this impure world, we are bound to meet with events that go against our wishes. When these events occur -- as they are bound to -- we should keep calm and try to transcend them. What is the use of getting angry or getting even? Supposing we were lost in the depths of the forest, filled with poisonous plants, deadly insects and ferocious beasts. We should expect to be pricked by thorns and bitten by insects. The best course of action is to find a way out of the forest. To lose one's temper, cursing the thorns and insects, is irrational, to say the least. (After Master Yen-p'ei)

35. "Few people would dare slander the Buddha. However slandering the Dharma or Sangha is another story. An example of slander of the Dharma is to criticize the Two-Vehicle Teaching as inadequate for *all* sentient beings. Slandering the Sangha is very common nowadays. If a cleric breaks the precepts, he will receive bad karma, but this does not preclude him from being a good teacher. It is like being lost with a group of people in a deep, dark ravine and among them is a leper who happens to have a torch. A wise person would suppress his revulsion and follow the leper to safety. Please note in this regard the teachings on the Four Reliances, the most important of which is reliance on the Dharma, not on any particular teacher. Moreover, the Buddhist disciple should have a calm mind, free of discrimination in all circumstances. To speak ill of others is to harbor a mind of discrimination, not yet realizing that good and bad, correct and incorrect are in essence non-existent and dream-like." (Rev. Minh Duc)

Note: Major Precept #8 stems from greed, #9 from anger and #10 from delusion.

36. Someone who falls into the Three Evil Realms (hell, hungry ghosts, animality) can expiate his offenses and achieve rebirth in the human realm only after countless years. Only then will that person be likely to understand family obligations or learn the teachings of the Buddha. According to Buddhist teachings, cultivation is easier in the human realm, which contains both hardship and happiness, than in a realm with too much hardship (Three Evil Realms) or too much happiness (Celestial Realms).

37. All the Bodhisattva precepts are based on compassion, on avoiding harm and being of benefit to others. To break them intentionally is to have no compassion toward sentient beings and to lose the seed of Enlightenment. One is then cast out of the Sea of the Dharma and is no longer a Bodhisattva. Note that the most important thing in cultivation is to develop and nurture the seed of Enlightenment (the Bodhi Mind), because without that seed, one cannot become a Buddha.

38. This chapter was not transmitted outside of India.

39. A Buddhist disciple who is to become an emperor or a high official should first receive the Bodhisattva precepts because the mistakes made by a person in high position have wide and far-reaching implications. It is, then, an act of compassion to urge leaders to study and observe the Bodhisattva precepts so that they can work for the benefit of the many instead of the few.

40. Why should one rise to greet and make offerings to Elder Masters? It is because they are the causes and conditions which help the cultivator attain Enlightenment. To fail to respect and draw near them is to lose the benefits of their teachings. *In accord with the Dharma*: with body, speech and mind (rising to greet them, saying welcoming words, in all sincerity).

41. *No hands for 500 lives*: the disciple will be reborn as a worm, reptile, etc. This retribution appears unusually harsh at first sight; however, in Buddhism, the worst karma is to lack wisdom, the consequence of intoxication. Without wisdom, we can never escape Birth and Death and are bound to revolve in samsara not only for 500 lives but even *for untold eons!*

A story is told of Mahakasyapa (the senior disciple of the Buddha) visiting the Jeta Grove accompanied by Anathapindika (a famous benefactor of the Order), and suddenly catching sight of a black ant scrambling across his path. Drawing Anathapindika's attention to the insect, he recalled that in *untold eons past*, during the times of the six previous Buddhas, he had come across that ant. Now, under Sakyamuni, the seventh Buddha, he himself had become an Arhat, but the poor ant, after eons of rebirth, was still just an ant, condemned to scavenge for scraps of food, condemned to the sufferings of an insect's life -- as devoid as ever of wisdom! Please note that selling alcoholic beverages is a major or root offense as opposed to consuming intoxicants which is only a minor offense. To drink alcohol hurts only oneself, but to sell alcoholic beverages hurts others and goes against the Mind of Compassion that a Bodhisattva should nurture at all times.

42. *Exception*: "When the Buddha was in the world, King Prasenajit's Queen had received the eight precepts of a layperson. One time, King Prasenajit wanted to kill his cook. When his Queen heard about this she wanted to save the cook, so she bedecked herself in fine adornments, put on fragrant powders, placed flowers in her hair, and prepared delicious food and wine. Then she took along several ladies-in-waiting and went to see the King. King Prasenajit was extremely pleased with the wine and the food, and afterwards the Queen beseeched the King to forgo his idea of killing the cook. The King consented, and so in this way the cook was saved. The next day, the Queen went to the Buddha's place and repented. She had already taken the eight lay precepts, and one of them is that one can't put fragrant oils or perfumes on one's body or flowers in one's hair. She had also *drunk wine* the previous day...But since the only reason she did all that was because she wanted to save the cook's life, the Buddha said, "Not only have you not transgressed the precepts, you actually have gained merit and virtue" (Master Hsuan Hua).

43. Eating meat not only goes against the spirit of Great Compassion, it also has far-reaching health implications as illustrated by the recent refusal of the European Community to buy American beef from cattle fattened with hormones. See also the following passage from the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the only text recommended by Bodhidharma:

In the present sutra, all meat-eating, in any form, in any manner, and in any place, is unconditionally and once for all, prohibited for all. Thus, Mahamati, meat eating I have not permitted to anyone, I do not permit, I will not permit. Meat eating, I tell you, Mahamati, is not proper for homeless monks (D.T. Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, p. 219).

44. *Pungent herbs*: "They are: leek, onion, garlic, and a few other such herbs such as asafoetida, an ingredient common in curries etc. Eaten raw they are believed to incite people to

anger and disputes; eaten cooked they increase one's sexual desire." Buddhist adepts are advised to avoid them, as their consumption tends to disturb the peacefulness of the mind. "According to the [*Surangama Sutra*], garlic, three kinds of onions, and leeks are the *five forbidden pungent roots*. 'If eaten raw, they are said to cause irritability of temper, and if eaten cooked, to act as an aphrodisiac; moreover, the breath of the eater, if reading the sutras, will drive away the good spirits.'"

Note: Much of the publicized health benefits of garlic and other pungent roots may be industry-inspired and/or commercial puffery. Buddhist practitioners, particularly those who recite mantras, are usually advised to avoid them altogether.

45. Important point.

46. In a spirit of compassion, the Buddhist disciple should counsel an offender to practice repentance. He should not watch in silence as the offender repeats the offense.

Offenses arise from the mind;
Repentance is done by the mind.
When the mind forgets them,
The offenses exist no more.
The mind forgetting and the
offenses eradicated,
Both then are empty.
This is true repentance and reform.
(Master Hsuan Hua, tr.)

47. *Uposattha*: Semi-monthly gathering of monks and nuns to recite the precepts.

48. *Note:* It is incumbent on the host to request the guest master to teach the Dharma as often as three times a day, time and health permitting.

49. Note the example of the youth Sudhana in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, who traveled "south" to some one hundred and ten cities in search of the truth. If it were not for his determination to go wherever required to find the Dharma, how could he finally be admitted to Maitreya's Tower and achieve Enlightenment in one lifetime? An exception to this rule is when one is already fully conversant with a particular sutra or commentary, or when the sutra or commentary is being taught in a language one does not understand.

The sutras teach that when attending a Dharma lecture, a practitioner should concentrate on listening and learning the Dharma. He should avoid personal reactions to the teacher, such as, the teacher i) has/has not violated the precepts; ii) comes from a poor/wealthy background; iii) has a pleasant/unpleasant physical appearance; iv) has good diction / a speech impediment; v) has a melodious/harsh voice.

50. When preaching the Dharma, a Bodhisattva disciple should always emphasize the development of the Bodhi Mind. Thus, when teaching the practice of Buddha Recitation, for example, he should urge his listeners not only to recite the Buddha's name but also to teach others to do likewise -- all the while seeking rebirth in the Pure Land as a stepping stone to

Buddhahood. An exception to the rule of not turning away from the Mahayana is when the capacity of the audience is limited and, for reasons of expediency, can only be taught the Two-Vehicle Path as a stopgap measure.

51. This precept -- looking after the sick -- exists only in the Bodhisattva precepts. *Reason:* The Bhiksu/Bhiksuni and lay moral codes are based on self-cultivation and purification, while the Bodhisattva moral code rests on compassion -- compassion for the sick and helpless. Why are the sick foremost among the Eight Fields of Blessings? It is because the other Fields of Blessings, including the Buddhas and sages, derive from our sense of *gratitude*. We are grateful to Sakyamuni Buddha for *leaving his throne* and luxurious life to find the Path to Enlightenment and teach it to us. The sick, on the other hand, constitute a *Field of Blessing based on compassion*. Since the highest moral attribute in Buddhism is compassion, the sick represent the foremost Field of Blessings.

52. The following story is a good illustration of taking care of the sick, as the foremost Field of Blessings: During the Han dynasty, an official named Yuan-Nang murdered an official named Ch'ao Ts'o. Afterwards, day and night, he saw the ghost of Ch'ao Ts'o coming to take revenge. Realizing his mistake, he left home and became a Bhiksu, cultivated vigorously, and was no longer troubled by the ghost. Because he did not encounter the ghost again, he vowed to become a Bhiksu in his succeeding lives and became a great, renowned Dharma Master who lectured on Sutras and taught widely, coveting neither fame nor wealth. For ten lives he cultivated diligently and met no more ghosts. He rose to a higher and higher position in every life until, in his tenth life, he became the Emperor's teacher and was given the title "National Master." The Emperor made him a gift of an aloeswood chair, the kind only emperors used. It was so handsome and beautifully carved that when National Master Wu Ta sat down on it he suddenly thought, "Just how many Dharma Masters are there as lofty as I? How many have received a gift from an Emperor as fine as this chair?" His one thought of arrogance laid him open for the attack of the revengeful ghost of Ch'ao Ts'o of ten lives past. Instantly, one of his legs began to swell, and a sore which had the shape of a human face formed on it. It was complete with a mouth, nose, eyes, and ears. Not only that, it could talk. "You want to get away from me, " it would say, "but you can't. I am determined to take your life." It also demanded to be fed, and would eat only fresh, raw meat. If Wu Ta didn't give meat to the sore, it would cause him unbearable pain. Even though he was a National Master, Wu Ta had no way to get rid of the sore ... Earlier, National Master Wu Ta had taken care of the Venerable Kanaka when the latter's body had broken out with noxious boils. He had waited on him, served him broths and medicines, and had cured him. At that time, the Venerable Kanaka had said to him, "In the future, no matter what difficulty besets you, no matter how insoluble your problem may seem, come to such and such a place in Szechwan and I will find a way to help you. Wu Ta had no recourse but to find Kanaka in Szechwan. The Venerable Kanaka used "samadhi water" to wash Wu Ta's sore, and the human face disappeared. Actually, the Venerable Kanaka, who was a fourth stage Arhat, did not really have an illness. He deliberately manifested a disease as a method to save National Master Wu Ta in the future. (Master Hsuan Hua)

53. Not looking after the sick (Minor precept No. 9) is to fail to save lives, while storing weapons is to create the conditions for actually destroying life. Both go against the Mind of Compassion of a Bodhisattva.

54. A Bodhisattva disciple should not avenge even the death of his parents because this would be killing the parents of a *past lifetime* to avenge the parents of the *current lifetime*. Such action goes counter to the spirit of compassion -- the very marrow of Buddhism. Note in this regard the concept of filiality in [Note 16](#).

During the Ch'ing Dynasty in China, in Yang Chou, there was a person named Ch'eng Pai Lin. One day he had a dream in which Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva told him, "Tomorrow the Ch'ing army will arrive. Out of the seventeen people in your household, sixteen will survive. But you cannot escape your fate. Tomorrow Wang Ma Tze will kill you, because in a past life you stabbed him twenty-six times and killed him." Then Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva added, "There is still an expedient method that may work. Prepare a fine feast tomorrow, and when he comes, invite him to eat with you. Afterwards, allow him to kill you. Perhaps that will change things."

The dream was vivid and when Ch'eng Pai Lin awoke the following morning, he went out and bought wine and vegetables, brought them back, and had a feast prepared. Then noontime came, someone knocked at the door. He opened the door and said, "Are you Wang Ma Tze?" "How strange," said the man at the door, "I'm from the north, how did you know my name?" His host invited him in and said, "... You're welcome; I've prepared a feast for you. Won't you join me?" Then he related the dream he'd had the night before. "Last life I killed you with twenty-six stabs of a knife, and so this life you have come to kill me. After we've finished this meal, you can do it." Wang Ma Tze pondered over this and said, "But if you killed me last life, and I kill you this life, won't you kill me again next life? It will just go on and on. No, I won't kill you." Then he took his knife and scratched twenty-six marks on his host's back to represent that the debt had been repaid. Not only did Wang Ma Tze not kill his host, but afterwards they became very good friends. Wang said to his host, "The Ch'ing army is following en masse. They are not reasonable, so the best would be for you and your family to go to Su Chou. It's safe there." So that is what Ch'eng Pai Lin did. This is a case of turning grievance into friendship and reversing the retribution that is due one. From this you can see that it's possible to alter one's fate. (Master Hui Seng)

In Buddhism, the more offenses a person commits and the heavier these offenses are, the more a Bodhisattva should have compassion for him. Buddhism exists because there are people who commit infractions and offenses. Thus, the most revered and most popular Bodhisattvas of the Mahayana always live in places of great turmoil and suffering.

55. A Bodhisattva should not act as a country's emissary for the purpose of spying or fostering war. However, if he were to do so to put an end to war or military confrontation, he would be acting in a spirit of compassion. The key words in this precept are *for personal benefit or evil intention*.

56. To sell human beings and domestic animals is to make one's living off the *life* of others; to sell coffins and products connected with the disposal of corpses is to make one's living off the *death* of others. Unconsciously, if not consciously, one is happy to see others die, since one's livelihood is dependent on the number of deaths. The offense can be subtle -- in the rejoicing mind -- or not so subtle, as demonstrated by periodic exposures of questionable practices in the funeral industry. (See *US News and World Report*, March 23, 1998.) To make one's living off the life and death of others is to lack compassion, the very essence of Mahayana

Buddhism. Therefore, all professions or trades connected with the above are forbidden to aspiring Bodhisattvas.

57. This secondary precept 13 is related to major precept 7 (praising oneself and disparaging others) and major precept 10 (slandering the Triple Jewel). The offense committed here is secondary because: a) unlike in major precept 7, there is no self-praise and b) unlike in major precept 10, the objects of slander are virtuous persons, which include the Sangha (the community of monks and nuns) but not the Triple Jewel as a whole (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha).

More important, this secondary precept 13 deals specifically with slander *without cause*. For a follower of the Two Vehicles (Theravada), this type of slander is a major offense, because it is immoral. (The emphasis here is on *the personal integrity of the slanderer*.) However, for a Bodhisattva, it is a secondary offense, because baseless slander can be refuted and is thus less likely to do *permanent* damage to the victim than slander based on fact. (The emphasis in this instance has shifted to the *well-being of the victim* -- compassion being the basis of Bodhisattvahood.) (After Master Yen-p'ei)

This example illustrates the major difference between the Bodhisattva and other precepts. See also [note 62](#).

58. This precept refers to the setting of fires for farming and other such necessary purposes. Otherwise, the offense would be that of killing or stealing (Major precepts No. 1 and No. 2).

In Asia, the period between the fourth and ninth months coincides with the reproductive cycles of such insects as ants and earthworms. Therefore, the Buddha forbade the setting of fires during those periods, out of a spirit of compassion toward all creatures, however lowly and helpless.

Note: The blanket bombing of enemy targets, common in modern warfare, can be subsumed under this precept. Even when not many persons are harmed, tremendous destruction may be wrought on other sentient beings, seen and unseen, as well as on the environment.

59. To the followers of the Monastic Tradition (i.e., early Buddhism or Theravada), the attainment of the state of Arhat is the ultimate goal. They are attached to that teaching as the orthodox and highest form of Buddhism. For Mahayanists, such a goal is limited and unwholesome. Therefore, *unless a person cannot profit from Mahayana teachings*, it is an offense for a Bodhisattva to teach the Two Vehicle Tradition. To do so would cause sentient beings to lose the great benefit of Supreme Enlightenment and Buddhahood.

60. *Wholesome mind*: in the Mahayana context, means to seek Buddhahood and to rescue all sentient beings.

Why should a Bodhisattva teach the difficult Bodhisattva renunciation practices to a novice coming from afar? It is to test his capacity as a potential Bodhisattva and strengthen his resolve for the difficult tasks ahead. Moreover, to succeed in cultivation, a novice must cultivate a *wholesome mind* (seek Buddhahood and rescue sentient beings). To do so, he has to (1) set aside the ego/sever the attachment to the self (burn one's body...) and (2) be willing to sacrifice himself for sentient beings (forsake his body for starving beasts...). Unless the novice is ready to

make such commitments, he is not a good "vessel of the Dharma" and is likely to fail. A famous example of such commitment is the story of Master Hui-k'o, the second patriarch of Zen, who knelt in the snow for days and finally cut off his arm, to persuade Bodhidharma to accept him as a disciple. *N.b.* This precept is directed specifically at monks and nuns, as an example of the Bodhisattva ideal. See also *The Seeker's Glossary of Buddhism*, under "Generosity".

61. The offenses described here are relatively minor, such as charging high rent or high interest on loans. Otherwise, the transgressions would be the major offense of stealing (second major precept). On filial piety, see [note 16](#).

62. *Principles of the Bodhisattva precepts*: The Sravaka precepts were promulgated by the Buddha as the offenses actually arose. They were expressly devised for monks and nuns and are to be taken only by them. The Bodhisattva precepts, on the other hand, are the precepts of the Mind, and are common to all sentient beings. Therefore, they can be observed by all.

The *essence of the Buddha Nature* includes such qualities as compassion, filiality, etc. Each of us intrinsically possesses the Buddha Nature, the primary *cause* of Buddhahood. Observance of the Bodhisattva precepts creates the *conditions* for the Buddha Nature to manifest itself. When cause and conditions come together, the result is Buddhahood. This is referred to as the "essence of the Buddha Nature".

63. Bodhisattvas engage in countless cultivation practices. One such practice is to light incense and then either place the incense pieces on a large incense burner before the image of a Buddha or, alternatively, raise a small burner to one's forehead and recite verses of praise or mantras while facing the Buddha. If a disciple, out of envy, gossips about a Bodhisattva who engages in these practices (calling him a fake and a showoff, for example), the disciple commits a secondary offense.

This precept is similar to precept 13, but differs with respect to the goal of the offender. In precept 13, the aim of slandering monks in particular is to defame them and make them lose offerings, while in this precept it is to cause discord within the Sangha.

64. "Throughout the eons of time, all male sentient beings have been my father; all female sentient beings have been my mother. I was born of them." This is a poetical way to express the truth that we are all related throughout the eons of time, and thus to save sentient beings is to save one's family and ultimately oneself.

65. Precept #20 has two parts, the first part concerning the *living* and the second part the *deceased*.

(1) In the first part, there are two related concepts, "rescue and protect" and "rescue and deliver". The first concept relates to the potential victim, while the second concept embraces the killer as well. To help both, it is necessary to develop the killer's sense of compassion. Once there is true compassion, all killing ceases, and *both the killer and the victim are liberated*. Thus, the sutra states: "the disciple should always teach the Bodhisattva precepts to rescue and deliver sentient beings." (2) Furthermore, not only the living, but also the dead, should be liberated. Therefore, monks and nuns should be invited to explain the Bodhisattva sutras and precepts on the death anniversaries of parents and other kin.

Note: "If a Bodhisattva sees an animal on the verge of being killed, he must devise a way to rescue and protect it":

Now, if you wish to save a certain being but it's beyond your capacity, then you should singlemindedly recite the Buddha's name. For example, you may see some pigs or sheep that are about to be slaughtered, and you can't liberate them because you aren't able to buy them all. At this time you should singlemindedly recite the Buddha's name so those creatures can hear it. You can speak Dharma also. You can say to them, "All of you living beings should bring forth the Bodhi resolve [Bodhi Mind]." This is creating causes and conditions for rescuing their wisdom-light (Mind). Although you are not saving their physical bodies, you are rescuing their wisdom-light. (Master Hui Seng)

66. When a Buddhist dies, it is the practice for relatives to recite the sutras and perform other meritorious acts, transferring all the merits to the dead. This helps the deceased achieve rebirth in the Pure Lands ("behold the Buddhas") or, alternatively, to obtain a good rebirth in the human or celestial realms. Rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha is the aim of many Mahayana Buddhists, as this is viewed as a *realistic goal*, considering the circumstances of ordinary human beings in the Saha World. See also [note 94](#), last part.

67. *A Bodhisattva must not return anger for anger.* This is because wherever there is anger, all compassion is lost. "To seek revenge and maim and kill and prosecute" is to create the causes of future sufferings and ensure that they will never end. Even today, this lesson has unfortunately not been learned despite all the hindsight available to us from past warfare and genocide: "President Clinton came [to Kigali] today to talk to scarred and mutilated survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and to acknowledge that the world could have protected them, though it did not . . . Both in his meeting with the victims and the speech to an invited audience here, Mr. Clinton called for sharper vigilance against genocide and swifter prosecution of its perpetrators ..." (*NY Times*: March 26, 1998).

N.B. Buddhists do not cultivate a sense of vengefulness because they realize that sentient beings know only Cause and Effect in the present, but not in past or future lifetimes. The present perpetrators might have been the victims in a previous lifetime; thus, to exact retribution now may be to jeopardize the parents of one lifetime in order to avenge the parents of another! This truth can be glimpsed in the current wave of ethnic conflicts in Africa and the Balkans. See also secondary precepts 10 and 21 as well as [note 64](#).

68. "According to the *Brahma Net* and *Avatamsaka Sutras*, we should ignore appearances and external forms when seeking a good teacher. For example, we should disregard such traits as youth, poverty, low status or lack of education, unattractive appearance or incomplete features, but should simply seek someone conversant with the Dharma, who can be of benefit to us. Nor should we find fault with good spiritual advisors for acting in certain ways, as it may be due to a number of reasons, such as pursuing a hidden cultivation practice or following an expedient teaching. Or else, they may act the way they do because while their achievements may be high, their residual bad habits have not been extinguished. If we grasp at forms and look for faults, we will forfeit benefits on the path of cultivation.

"Thus, when Buddha Sakyamuni was still alive, the Bhikshu Kalodayin was in the habit of moving his jaws like a buffalo; a certain Bhikshuni used to look at herself in the mirror and adorn

herself; another Bhikshu liked to climb trees and jump from one branch to another; still another always addressed others in a loud voice, with condescending terms and appellations. In truth, however, all four had reached the stage of Arhatship. It is just that one of them was a buffalo in a previous life, another was a courtesan, another was a monkey, and still another belonged to the Brahman class. They were accustomed to these circumstances throughout many lifetimes, so that even when they had attained the fruits of Arhatship, their residual habits still lingered."We also have the example of the Sixth Patriarch of Zen. Realizing that the cultivators of his day were attached to a literal reading of the sutras and did not immediately recognize their Buddha Nature, he took the form of an ignorant and illiterate person selling wood in the marketplace. Or else, take the case of a famous Zen Master who, wishing to avoid external conditions and concentrate on his cultivation, took the expedient appearance of a ragged lunatic, raving and ranting. As a result, both distinguished Masters were criticized during their lifetimes. The Sixth Patriarch was faulted for his ignorance, while the Zen monk was called insane and berserk. Therefore, finding a good spiritual advisor is a difficult task indeed" (Thich Thien Tam, *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith*).

69. A Bodhisattva should not follow the Two Vehicle teachings or worldly teachings because they all have one principle in common: the rejection of the concept of Buddha Nature as basic to all sentient beings.

There are exceptions to this precept not to study and practice non-Mahayana teachings. "If one needs to understand worldly doctrines in order to rescue people from the world, then one can study those doctrines. However, if one studies them with the sole purpose of benefitting oneself and fails to seek Supreme Enlightenment, then it is not permissible to study them." (Master Hui Seng)

70. "What is meant by skillfully administering the resources of the Three Jewels? If one receives goods for the Buddha Jewel but uses them for the Dharma Jewel, this is misusing goods. Or, if one receives them for the Sangha Jewel but uses them for the Buddha Jewel, that is also misusing goods. In Buddhist teachings, it becomes clear that Cause and Effect are quite complicated. If money is given to repair an image of Sakyamuni Buddha and the money is used to print sutras instead, then one has used the Buddha Jewel money for the Dharma Jewel.

Misuse of funds of the Triple Jewel in this way is considered stealing. If one is not very clear about the precepts, however, one may not realize this and assume that as long as the money is used for the Triple Jewel, it is permissible." (Master Hui Seng)

71. *To pawn himself, or cut off and sell his own flesh*: is a figure of speech for selling one's physical labor or one's intellectual labor. (Master Tri Quang)

72. "All visiting Sangha members should be invited to receive offerings in accord with their position in the Sangha (seniority of ordination). They are part of the assembly that keeps the precepts and, as such, should receive their share of the offerings. If one does not offer a visiting Sangha what he rightly deserves, if one is greedy for profit and receives individual offerings, that is a violation of the precept against stealing." (Master Hui Seng)

N.B. In ancient times, a meal offering was a particularly welcome opportunity, as it spared the clerics the time and effort of the alms round and allowed them more time for practice.

73. This precept specifically prohibits a cleric from seeking invitations and donations for himself personally. In the regulations on offerings there is a stanza that stipulates:

Above, offerings should go to the Buddhas of the Ten Directions;
In the middle, to the community of monks;
Below, to all sentient beings of the Six Realms.
Offerings belong to all without distinction.

Moreover, the offerings destined for the community of monks belong to all monks and nuns, not only those residing at the temple, but also to *current* visiting monks and nuns as well as *future* visitors. Thus, technically, the offerings should be divided equally among all those present, with a portion set aside for future visiting monks.

This editor remembers visiting a temple in India and upon seeing goods piled up in corner rooms, thinking to himself that the temple was too wealthy. Later he realized that these goods had been set aside for visiting monks in observance of this precept!

74. It is very important to issue invitations to monks and nuns according to their proper order or seniority according to the time of their full ordination as a Bhiksu or Bhiksuni. This is to avoid discord and dissension within the assembly, with popular monks receiving the bulk of the invitations and others receiving none. For a layperson to fail to respect this precept is to lose deep merit and virtue, as he would, in effect, disrupt the harmony of the Sangha. Thus, to issue a discriminatory invitation goes against the spirit of compassion and non-discrimination that all Buddhists, particularly Bodhisattvas, should nurture.

Furthermore, to offer a discriminatory invitation even to 500 Arhats is not necessarily meritorious because the degree of merit or virtue depends on three factors: the recipient, the gift and, most important, the *mind of the giver*. If the gift is presented with a mind of compassion and equanimity, with no thought of gift, recipient or giver, then the merits accrued become infinite. Otherwise, they are limited. See in this connection the *Vimalakirti Sutra*.

75. *Seven Buddhas*: Sakyamuni Buddha and the six Buddhas who preceded him. By extension, it means all the Buddhas.

76. *Prostitution*: This is probably an injunction against the ancient Indian custom of temple prostitutes (*devadasi*).

In general, an improper livelihood is any occupation that is contrary to the spirit of compassion toward sentient beings. Such occupations include not only traditional ones like fisherman and hunter but also working in slaughter houses or ammunition factories. In the sutras, the Buddha even forbade monks and nuns from tilling the soil, planting crops, or pressing seeds to get oil because such actions often result in the killing of small animals and insects. (Laymen, being subject to a lesser standard of morality, are not prohibited from engaging in such activities. Moreover, they may even be given the opportunity to earn merit and virtue through service to

the clergy. Monks and nuns, relieved of daily chores, can then concentrate on their main calling -- practicing the Dharma for the benefit of all.)

77. Matchmaking is singled out in this precept because it creates the karma of attachment, *the very cause of endless births and rebirths within Samsara*. A Bodhisattva, motivated by compassion for the suffering of all sentient beings in the cycle of existence, cannot be a party to the creation of such karma. (See also [note 28](#).)

78. *Six days of fasting, three months of fasting*. Fasting in this context means not eating after noontime.

In *popular Buddhism*, the special days and months of fasting are explained as special times when the celestial rulers of this galaxy go on their inspection trips to assess the compliance of human beings with the basic moral tenets. Therefore, people watch themselves during those times and are on their best behavior by abstaining from all offenses! On a deeper level, this is an expedient means of bringing practitioners gradually to a pure style of living all year.

79. This precept deals with offenses *from the point of view of timing*. From that perspective, killing or stealing at particular times (fasting days) constitutes a minor offense, *on top of* the major offense.

80. This Chapter was not transmitted outside of India -- see Introduction.

81. *Selling Bodhisattvas, Bhiksus, Bhiksunis*, can be understood literally (as in time of war) but can also refer to those who take advantage of Buddhism to further their personal interests, financial and otherwise. Examples that immediately come to mind are salespeople who gain clients through connections with the clergy as well as politicians on the lookout for votes.

82. *A Bodhisattva should not sell knives*. The Bodhisattva precepts are the precepts of the Mind-Nature. Thus, if one were to store knives and clubs to kill and maim, it would be against the spirit of compassion inherent in the Mind-Nature and therefore against the precepts. However, if knives are stored as kitchen utensils, such action does not go against the spirit of compassion, and therefore is not against the precepts.

Confiscation of possessions: As theft, confiscation of property is a major offense. However, in this context, the emphasis is on the abuse of power, which constitutes a secondary offense.

83. *A Bodhisattva should not raise cats, dogs*. There are several reasons for this. One is compassion: cats eat other sentient beings, while pigs are raised to be eaten themselves and foxes for their skins or for medicinal purposes. Secondly, raising domestic animals gives rise to feelings of attachment, which is precisely what the cultivator seeks to avoid. It also takes time and effort, which would better be devoted to the "great matter of Birth and Death." Yet, there are exceptions to this rule: to give temporary shelter to a starving cat in the middle of winter is clearly the right thing for a Bodhisattva disciple to do.

Note: Under this precept, to keep a dog to watch over one's property is not considered an offense for a lay Bodhisattva.

84. A Bodhisattva cannot watch fights (gang fights, bullfights ...) or armed battles because such action goes against the spirit of compassion. How can a compassionate person watch maiming and killing and derive enjoyment from it? The same goes for being party to gambling, where one party necessarily has to lose.

Note: the key expression here is "unwholesome intentions." If the Bodhisattva's intention is to mediate conflict and prevent bloodshed, he not only may watch battles, etc., he may indeed be obligated to do so.

85. A Bodhisattva cannot listen to music or attend theatrical performances because he needs to keep the mind empty and still at all times ...

86. *Bhiksu bound by reeds.* In the time of the Buddha, there was a Bhiksu who observed the precepts to the letter. One day, he was accosted by brigands who stole his clothes and begging bowl and, fearing reprisal, were about to kill him. Fortunately, there was someone among them who knew about Buddhism. He said, "There is no need to kill him. Just tie his hands and feet and leave him among the living reeds. That will be enough." The Bhiksu thus bound did not move lest he uproot the fresh reeds and thus break the precept "not to kill." When the brigands had left, a passer-by saw the monk and untied him. Henceforth, he became known as the "Bhiksu bound by reeds."

87. *Sentient beings are Buddhas-to-be, while the Buddhas are realized Ones.* This is the basic tenet of the Mahayana, distinguishing it from Theravada Buddhism and non-Buddhist teachings.

Illustrative Story on Keeping the Bodhi Mind. A Bodhisattva should maintain the Bodhi Mind in each and every thought without retrogression: In days of yore, an older master was traveling along a winding country road, followed by a disciple carrying his bags. As they walked, they saw lands being tilled while farmers and oxen were strained to the utmost. Countless worms and insects were maimed or killed in the process, and birds were swooping to eat them. This led the disciple to wonder to himself, "How hard it is to make a living. I will cultivate with all my strength, become a Buddha and rescue all these creatures." *Immediately* the Master, an Arhat able to read the thoughts of others, turned around and said, "Let me have those heavy bags and I will follow you." The disciple was puzzled but did as instructed, changing places with his teacher and walking in front. As they continued on their way with the hot sun bearing down on them, dust swirling all around them, the road stretching endlessly in front, the disciple grew more and more tired. It wasn't long before he thought to himself, "There are so many sentient beings and there is so much suffering, how can I possibly help them all? Perhaps I should try to help myself first." *Immediately*, the Master behind him said, "Stop. Now you carry the bags and follow me." The puzzled disciple did as told, knowing he was not supposed to ask questions. He took up the bags again and walked behind. This sequence repeated itself several times. The Master walked in front with the disciple carrying the bags, then the disciple in front with the Master carrying the bags, back and forth, until noontime came and they stopped for lunch. Then the disciple gathered his courage and asked the reason why. The Master said, "When you had exalted thoughts of saving all living beings, you were a Bodhisattva in thought, and I as an Arhat had to follow you. But as soon as you had selfish thoughts of saving yourself only, you were no longer a Bodhisattva, and being junior to me in years and cultivation, you had to carry my bags."

88. See Introduction (Characteristics of the Sutra).

89. The word "parents" refers to our fathers and mothers through the eons, i.e., all sentient beings. The words "good spiritual advisors" can include a friend or even an enemy since both can teach us aspects of the truth. Note the concept of "adverse-conduct" Good Spiritual Advisor. In the *Lotus Sutra*, Devadatta was such a person who, through constant goading, allowed Sakyamuni Buddha to perfect the paramita of patience. The Buddha thus attained Supreme Enlightenment faster than He would have, had it not been for the constant thorn in His side that Devadatta represented.

90. The general point of the resolutions is to cut down on the poison of greed. The Buddhist disciple should rather die than break the precepts. Why? Because death concerns only this *present life* while breaking the precepts can cause suffering over *many lifetimes*.

91. Precept 36, which applies to clerics, can be summarized as five main groups of resolutions: (1) to abstain from sexual relations with anyone; (2) to earn the offerings of the laity (clothing, food, shelter ...) by faithfully observing the precepts;(3) to earn the respect of the laity by faithfully observing the precepts;(4) to control the mind of attachment to the five dusts (form, sound, fragrance, taste and touch);(5) to help all sentient beings attain Buddhahood. The most important resolutions are the last two.

92. A disciple should not travel to dangerous areas as this would be flirting with death -- the taking of his own life -- an offense against Major precept no. 1. Moreover, as a Bodhisattva, he should not provoke others to incur evil karma through harming him.

93. This precept establishing the order of seating, i.e., the ranking of a monk by his sacerdotal age (the date he took the precepts) only, is revolutionary, considering that it was promulgated more than 2,500 years ago. An important exception to this seniority rule is made for those who lecture on the Dharma. In this case, anyone, including a layperson, can deliver Dharma talks and even Dharma Masters should listen if the need arises. This custom is expressed in the well-known saying, "The novice speaks the Dharma, the Dharma Masters listen."(The novice referred to here is Master Wu Ta, who lectured on the *Lotus Sutra* to the Fourfold Assembly at the age of 15! See also [note 52.](#))

94. This precept is divided into two parts. "When the precept tells people to establish monasteries and temples, it is so they can cultivate *blessings*; when it tells people to explain the Great Vehicle Sutras, it is so they can cultivate *wisdom*." (Master Hui Seng)

A practitioner should have a clear understanding of the causes and conditions of calamities and fortunate events. These occur as a result of bad or good karma -- and karma has its source in the mind. Reciting or explaining sutras has the power to change a wicked mind into a pure mind, a deluded mind into an enlightened mind. Thus, to recite or explain sutras is to create good karma, enabling sentient beings, alive or dead, to escape or mitigate the impact of negative karma. Since a Bodhisattva's mission is to rescue sentient beings and guide them to enlightenment, he should recite and explain Mahayana sutras on all occasions, and particularly during the ceremonies for the dead. (Master Prajna-Suddhi)

More than a century ago, in his extensive study of the *Brahma Net Sutra*, the Dutch clergyman Dr. J.J.M. de Groot wrote:

Recitation and lectures on the [*Amitabha*] *Sutra*, accompanied by ritual services ... [are held not only for deceased monks but] also for laypersons every seven days for seven consecutive weeks, if the family of the deceased so desires and can afford them ... These ceremonies for the dead are special events in their own right and, as long as they last, the family life of all concerned becomes topsy-turvy ... Suffice it to say that these ceremonies are almost never neglected, thus making the 39th precept of the Bodhisattva Code one of those which exercise the most practical influence on the life of the Chinese. (*Le Code du Mahayana en Chine*, p. 146.

Ceremonies for the dead are in fact the best occasions to meet and teach the living!

95. *A disciple of the Buddha should explain Mahayana sutras and moral codes to all sentient beings.* From the point of view of the early schools of Buddhism, the Dharma is a precious jewel and it should therefore not be given out without the proper request.

From the point of view of the Mahayana tradition of being of benefit to all sentient beings, the Bodhisattvas should freely share and make it available to all. Sentient beings are upside down and deluded. How can they know about the Dharma and request it?

96. The Buddha taught that monks and nuns should wear garments of a different hue from those worn by ordinary persons. Their clothes should also be different in cut and appearance and their heads should be shaved. However, these distinctive features are also found among other people. For instance, some convicts shave their heads in American prisons, while in China, certain groups of religious people wear robes similar in appearance and color to those of Buddhist monks and nuns. The truly distinguishing features of a Buddhist cleric could be the marks on the top of his head, the result of voluntarily burning dots with incense on the day of his full ordination.

97. Precept 40 emphasizes that the Bodhisattva precepts should be conferred upon everyone, but goes on to exclude those who have committed any of the Five Cardinal Sins.

While this may appear contradictory, it actually is not. In the egalitarian spirit of Buddhism, everyone should be able to take the Bodhisattva precepts. However, the purpose of conferring any precept is *to benefit the recipients* and lead them to Enlightenment. With their heavy karma and strong guilt feelings (always sad, nervous and self-reproachful), those who have committed the Cardinal Sins are not normally good vessels for the precepts. They may even denigrate the precepts, creating even more negative karma. Thus, to withhold the precepts temporarily while advising them to engage in sincere repentance is a realistic course of action. This notwithstanding, those who have sincerely repented and demonstrated their true change of heart may, under certain circumstances, receive the precepts. (Even King Ajatasatru, guilty of patricide, was able to repent and become an Arhat.) This is in conformity with the pre-eminent role of the mind in Buddhist teaching and the all-compassionate spirit of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

The Dharma rules prohibit monks and nuns from paying respect and bowing to kings, parents, relatives. Monks and nuns represent the Dharma, which should not be subject to (or seen as subject to) temporal authority. More fundamentally, the clergy should not rely on ("bow to") advice and teachings outside the Dharma.

98. *People with heterodox views.* From the Mahayana point of view, any person who does not develop the Bodhi Mind (the Mind of rescuing all sentient beings, leading them to Supreme Enlightenment and Buddhahood) is heterodox and limited.

An exception is made in the case of kings, rulers or high officials, to whom the *Brahma Net Sutra* should be taught, even if they are not Buddhists or hold heterodox views. This is because a ruler's views can influence multitudes, and Bodhisattvas, out of compassion for the many, should make an attempt to expose him to the compassionate teachings of the Buddhas.

N.B. In precept 39, the Buddha taught that a Bodhisattva should explain the Mahayana sutras and moral codes (i.e., the *Brahma Net Sutra*) to all sentient beings, regardless of time and place. In precept 42, on the other hand, He forbids the recitation of the Bodhisattva precepts to those who have not received them or to externalists. This seeming contradiction is understood as follows. In precept 39, the Buddha was speaking from the point of view of *rescuing and liberating* sentient beings, while in precept 42, He was speaking from the viewpoint of *preventing* evil karma. Thus, those who have not received the precepts *may not attend the monthly Uposattha recitation*, which includes confessions of offenses, as they may then tend to criticize the "sinners" and incur negative karma for themselves. On the other hand, anyone can listen to the sutra itself *on other occasions* and benefit thereby.

99. "This precept is referring to people who deliberately decide to break the precepts. It prohibits the intent to violate precepts before one has actually violated them." (Master Hui Seng). If a particular precept is actually violated, the offense depends on the specific violation.

If a Bodhisattva monk develops thoughts of violating the precepts, he is unworthy of receiving any of the offerings from the faithful. A story is told in the sutras of three deities who were washing a Bhiksu's robe in the Ganges but could not hold it under water. Yet, as soon as they took a single grain of rice donated to a temple and placed it on the robe, the robe sank to the bottom. The story illustrates how important offerings of the believers are, particularly if they are made with a pure mind. If a monk or nun accepts such offerings, but does not cultivate the precepts, these offerings become great liabilities, leading the errant cleric down the path of perdition. Even deities and ghosts follow such a cleric and sweep away his very footprints to prevent anyone from following his example.

Animal, wooden stump. A monk who breaks the precepts, who is unclear about what constitutes keeping or breaking them, is no different from a sentient being driven by instinct or an inanimate object. Therefore, he is "no different from an animal or a wooden stump".

100. One way to observe this precept nowadays is to print and distribute Mahayana sutras and commentaries free or for a nominal charge, for the benefit of all. The great teachings on the Buddha Nature are contained in the Mahayana sutras; therefore, one should revere the sutras by adorning and displaying them.

101. The essence of Mahayana teachings is to help all sentient beings develop the Bodhi Mind, and create the causes and conditions of full Enlightenment. Sentient beings here, of course, include animals as well as unseen deities and ghosts. Thus, the sutra says that wherever he goes, be it crossing a mountain, entering a forest, crossing a river or walking in a field, a Bodhisattva should help all sentient beings develop the Bodhi Mind. Teaching the Dharma to

animals and ghosts, for example, can benefit them, because their minds are then influenced by the compassionate words of the Bodhisattvas. Thus, this precept contains the expression "concentrate and say aloud". See, for example, the following anecdote:

There's ... an incident from the Buddha's time. There were Bhiksus in the assembly who had certified to Arhatship. Some of them were old and didn't have any teeth. When they recited the Sutras, they didn't sound very eloquent. This prompted a [novice] to say, "When you recite the Sutras, you sound like a bunch of dogs barking." Just because of this one sentence of slander, in his next life he fell into the destiny of a dog. One of the bhikshus he slandered was an Arhat. If he had slandered an ordinary person, he would have had bad karma, but it would not have been so bad. But because he scolded a sage, in his next life he became a dog. Because he was a dog, he had the habits of a dog, and he liked to steal food to eat. He would grab tidbits from the kitchen of his master. Once, his master saw this and cut off the dog's four legs and threw him out onto the grass. The dog was yelping in pain. Shariputra happened to walk by at that point. He spoke Dharma for the dog, telling him, "You know, the Four Elements are really suffering. Your body is false. Put it down; don't get angry." After Shariputra spoke Dharma, the dog didn't yelp anymore, and he died in peace, passing away quite happily. Since at the moment of his death he didn't give rise to anger, he was reborn again as a person and left the home life at seven years of age under Shariputra. Shariputra spoke the Dharma for him, at which point he certified to Arhatship. So you see, this person was once a novice, then he became a dog, and then he became a person again.

When he was a dog, he still retained the good roots from his past lives, and that's why he could understand human speech. Since he died happily, in his next life he became a left-home person again. After that, he never took the full Bhikshu precepts; he wanted to stay a novice forever so he could serve his teacher Shariputra, to repay his kindness ... Therefore, if animals and transformation beings can understand the Dharma Master's words, they can take these precepts. Of course, if they don't understand, they can't take them. (Master Hui Seng)

There are many ways to teach sentient beings: *verbal* teachings, *bodily* teachings, and *mental* teachings. The verbal form of the Dharma, the most common among humans, is the least effective and the least efficient. If one does not have the capacity to teach verbally, one can teach via one's behavior (bodily teaching). This is one of the methods used by the Buddha: upon seeing His marks of greatness, people develop respect and become his disciples. The last form of teaching, mental teaching, is done by silent vows and dedication of merit.

102. Why should a Dharma Master occupy a high seat while speaking the Dharma? It is because sentient beings learn and accept the teachings better when their minds are receptive, i.e., when they have developed eagerness and respect. Furthermore, a Dharma Master should be seated, as it is then easier to keep his mind empty and still.

"There are exceptions to this rule. In the *Sanghika Vinaya* it says 'a Bhiksu may be running chores and performing affairs for the stupa, the temple or the Sangha. When he goes to the king or sees the lords of estates, and if they should say to him, 'Bhiksu, would you please speak the Dharma for me?' at this time the Bhiksu can't insist that the king sit on a lower seat while he sits on a high chair.' He can't immediately force that type of situation. He can't hold to the letter of the law. This is an exception to the rule." (Master Hui Seng)

A Dharma teacher can be anyone -- a monk, nun, layman, or even an inanimate object such as a meditation cushion. The *Avatamsaka* and *Amitabha Sutras*, for example, speak of clouds and trees speaking the Dharma ... Upon watching leaves fall one by one from a tree, a person can awaken to the truth of impermanence -- the transitory nature of all life forms. The youth Sudhana in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* had fifty-two teachers, ranging from Bodhisattvas, to deities, to courtesans. The story is told in the sutras of a group of people lost in a deep, dark ravine. Among them is a leper who happens to have a torch. A wise person would suppress his revulsion and follow the leper to safety.

Why is a Dharma Teacher or good spiritual advisor necessary on the path to Enlightenment? It is because he can nurture our Bodhi Mind and our wisdom -- the two crucial factors in cultivation.

103. *Four kinds of lay disciples*: Upasakas, upasikas, as well as ordinary laymen and laywomen.

Note: An originally well-intentioned disciple might turn against the Dharma out of jealousy of the respect accorded to the clergy, anger at their criticism of his own mistakes, or disappointment at the behavior of individual monks and nuns.

104. This precept and secondary precept No. 1 apply exclusively to laymen. Both urge laymen to join hands with the Sangha to protect and preserve the Dharma.

A Bodhisattva should rightfully receive offerings from all: Whatever a cleric receives is for the benefit of the Sangha as a whole (and by extension, all sentient beings). Therefore, he need not thank laypersons for their donations, except as an act of courtesy. In fact, thanking a donor actually decreases the latter's merits (ego-based giving vs. altruistic giving) and is thus a disservice to him.

105. *If a Bodhisattva acts in this manner, he is no different from a worm in a lion's body, eating away at the lion's flesh*. The lion is the fiercest of animals, and when he roars all the other beasts flee. In the same way, people who have taken the precepts are likened to a lion; no other beings will bother them. However, just as worms that live in the lion's body dare to feed on the lion's flesh, so too, disciples within Buddhism can undermine the entire system. Buddhist disciples themselves are capable of destroying the Dharma, more so than the people outside Buddhism. (Master Yen-p'ei)

106. *Bodhisattvas are their friends*: a reference to the pure lands of the Buddhas, particularly the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha, where the faithful will be reborn in the company of Bodhisattvas and other spiritual friends. See the *Amitabha Sutra*:

"Moreover Shariputra, all those born in the Land of Utmost Happiness never fall back. Among them are many whose next birth will be in Nirvana. The number of them is extremely large; there is no reckoning that can tell it. Only in measureless, unlimited, innumerable kalpas could it be told. Shariputra, the beings who hear this ought to make a vow -- a vow to be born in that land. Why should they? Having succeeded thus, all are then persons of the highest virtue; all are assembled in the same circumstances." (H. Seki, tr.)

107. The Paramita of precepts is the second of the six Paramitas, or "perfections". See the following story on the "perfection of precepts" and its exceptions:

"Once when the Buddha Shakyamuni was in the world, there were two Bhikshus cultivating in the mountains. One day, one of the Bhikshus went down the mountain to get food and left the other one sleeping. In India at that time, the Bhikshus simply wore their sashes wrapped around them; they did not wear clothing underneath. This Bhikshu had shed his robe and was sleeping nude. He probably was a lazy person, and with no one on the mountain to watch after him, he'd decided to take a nap. At that time a woman happened along, and seeing the Bhikshu, she was aroused and took advantage of him. Just as she was running away from the scene, the other Bhikshu returned from town and saw her in flight. Upon investigation he found out that the woman had taken advantage of the sleeping Bhikshu, and he decided to pursue her, catch her, and take her before the Buddha in protest. He took out after her, and the woman became so reckless that she slipped off the road and tumbled down the mountain to her death. So one Bhikshu had violated the precept against sexual activity and the other had broken the precept against killing. Although the Bhikshu hadn't actually pushed her down the mountain, she wouldn't have fallen if he hadn't been pursuing her.

"'What a mess.' concluded the two Bhikshus. Messy as it was, they had to go before the Buddha and describe their offenses. The Buddha referred them to the Venerable Upali. But when Venerable Upali heard the details, his verdict was that, indeed, one had violated the precept against sexual activity and the other against killing, offenses which cannot be absolved. 'You're both going to have to endure the hells in the future,' he concluded. Hearing this, the two Bhikshus wept, and they went about everywhere trying to find someone who could help them. 'Eventually, they found the Great Upasaka Vimalakirti, who asked why they were crying. When they had related their tale, he pronounced his judgment that they had not violated the precepts. 'If you can be repentant,' he said, 'then I can certify that you didn't break the precepts.' 'How can that be?' they asked. 'The nature of offenses is basically empty,' replied the Upasaka. 'You did not violate the precepts *intentionally*, and so it doesn't count. It is an exception.' Hearing this explanation by the Great Teacher Vimalakirti, the two Bhikshus were enlightened on the spot and were certified as attaining the fruition...So there are many exceptions within the prohibitive precepts. But if people always look to the exceptions, they will simply not hold the precepts..." (Master Hui Seng)

N.B. In the above story, Vimalakirti was referring specifically to the two major precepts of not killing and abstaining from sexual activities. The two monks did not violate these precepts because the mind (intent) was not involved. Vimalakirti was not addressing possible issues of secondary responsibility.

108. The *True Mark of all dharmas* is a key concept in this sutra. It refers to the essence or noumenon of the Bodhisattva precepts, which is "neither born nor unborn, neither eternal nor extinct, neither the same nor different, neither coming nor going." In other words, the True Mark of all dharmas = essence of the Bodhisattva precepts = *Emptiness*. To observe the Bodhisattva precepts in the true sense, we have to transcend the ego -- there is no practitioner, no sentient beings to be saved, no precepts being observed. Otherwise, our practice is merely a human practice, tainted by ego and self-interest, not a Bodhisattva practice, not a *paramita* action. (Rev. Nhat-Chan)

109. See the famous Zen story of Master Pai-chang and the fox, which warns against meaningless speculation and debate (and rejection of the law of Cause and Effect):

"Once there was an old cultivator ... Although he claimed to be a Buddhist, all he cultivated were outside ways. That meant his outlook and knowledge were deviant. One day a person came and asked him, 'You're an old cultivator with a lot of practice behind you, but does a great cultivator fall within Cause and Effect or not?' ... The old cultivator very casually, without a moment's hesitation, replied majestically '*Great cultivators do not fall within Cause and Effect.*' He bellowed it out. Now, that sentence might not have seemed important, but when he died he became an old fox ... The old fox ... had some [karmic affinities] with Ch'an Master Pai Chang. It began to turn up at the Master's Sutra lectures, taking on the appearance of an elderly layman with a long white beard and the ruddy face of a child -- for it had spiritual powers by then."(Master Hsuan Hua)

Eventually, the layman/old fox was enlightened by Master Pai Chang, who taught: "Great cultivators are not unclear about Cause and Effect. It is not that they don't come under it; they are not obscure about it." Soon afterward, the layman/old fox died peacefully and was given the last rites of a monk.

110. See [note 10](#).

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