

Bodhisattva's Jewel Necklace of Primary Actions Sūtra

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Translated from Sanskrit into Chinese in the Later Qin Dynasty (384-417, time of Kumarajiva),
by the Śramaṇa Zhu Fonian from China, translated into English by Rulu, edited by Kokyo (Taisho Tripitaka 24:1485)

Thus I have heard: At one time the Buddha revisited the bodhimāṇḍa in the kingdom of Magadha, where he had attained perfect enlightenment under the bodhi tree. As he had done then, he sat down there. As he had emitted bright Buddha light then, he emitted forty-two beams of light...

Chapter 7: The Great Assembly's Receiving and Learning (the Precepts)

At that time Foremost Reverence Bodhisattva respectfully bowed to all Buddhas. At the request of the great assembly, he asked for the essential teachings given in the past seven assemblies because he had trust in the Three Treasures and wished the Dharma to remain in the world for a long time. For the continuation of the Dharma, not for worldly fame or benefits, he asked the Buddha, "World-Honored One, you have explained the causes and effects of sages and honored ones, and their store of merits. In this assembly of fourteen koṭi people, who can, without leaving their seats, become bodhisattvas and train for bodhi step by step from start to finish?"

Then the topknot on Shakyamuni Buddha's head emitted buddha light and bodhisattva light, which summoned buddhas and bodhisattvas from a hundred koṭi buddha-lands in the ten directions. After they had assembled, he told Bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, Dharma Wisdom, Merit Grove, Vajra Banner, Vajra Store, and Good Wealth: "Look upon Foremost Reverence Bodhisattva in the midst of this assembly, who can ask about the three right observations on the pure path of buddhas in the dharma realm, called the Dharma Gate of Illuminating Observations, through which all bodhisattvas go. Each of you seven bodhisattvas should lead a multitude of a million to go through this Dharma gate."

[The Buddha answered Foremost Reverence Bodhisattva] "Child of Buddha, I will now repeat my teachings on the way of illuminating observations, which is the path with six sections. Listen and ponder in order to develop your wisdom.

The Three Collective Bodhisattva Precepts

"Child of Buddha, the precepts are given for the assembly to receive and use restraint in their actions. When sentient beings first enter the ocean of the Three Treasures, they must have trust as their roots. When they abide in the Buddha family, they must have the precepts as their roots. Novice bodhisattvas, whether male or female believers, those incomplete in their faculties, eunuchs, male or female prostitutes, slaves or servants, or even magically conjured persons, can all receive the precepts if they want to. When first arousing bodhichitta and leaving home, those who wish to be bodhisattvas must first accept the true Dharma precepts. The precepts are the roots of the store of meritorious actions. They are the roots of all actions taken to attain buddhahood. The precepts can remove enormous evils, including the seven [wrong] views and the six entrapping afflictions. They are the bright mirror of the true Dharma.

"Child of Buddha, to all bodhisattvas I now reveal the roots of all precepts. They are called the three gates, namely (1) the precept of embracing standards of conduct, which is the ten parājikas; (2) the precept of embracing good dharmas, which is the 84,000 Dharma gates; (3) the precept of embracing sentient beings, which is loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, to give all sentient beings ease and joy. (3 precepts: sho-ritsugi-kai, sho-zenbo-kai, sho-shujo-kai)

"Child of Buddha, there are three ways to receive the precepts. First, one can receive them before buddhas and bodhisattvas. Precepts received in this way are high-grade precepts. Second, after the passing away of buddhas and bodhisattvas, if within 1,000 li (300 miles) of one's place there is a bodhisattva who has already received these precepts, one can ask such a Dharma teacher to teach and confer the precepts. One should bow down at his feet and ask, 'Great Venerable One, please be my teacher and impart the precepts to me.' Precepts received in this way are called middle-grade precepts. Third, after the passing away buddhas [and bodhisattvas], if no Dharma teacher is available within 1,000 li of one's place, one can join one's palms and kneel before the images of buddhas and bodhisattvas, and receive the precepts by making a vow. Three times one should declare, 'I, disciple so-and-so, say to the buddhas in the ten directions and to the bodhisattvas on the noble grounds, that I vow to learn all bodhisattva precepts.' Precepts received in this way are called low-grade precepts. Child of Buddha, these three ways to receive the precepts were pronounced by past buddhas, will be pronounced by future buddhas, and are pronounced by present buddhas.

"Child of Buddha, these Buddha precepts were learned, will be learned, and are learned by bodhisattvas of the past, future, and present. It is utterly wrong to say that buddhas or bodhisattvas, without entering the door of true precepts, have attained supreme bodhi, standing on the ground of equality like the empty sky."

The Ten Major Precepts

The Buddha told the disciples, "I now explain the true precepts. When good men and good women accept these precepts, three times they should make prostrations to all buddhas in their past lives in the past without a beginning, to all buddhas in their future lives in the endless future, and to all buddhas of the present in their present lives. Also three times they should make prostrations to the Dharma and the Saṅgha. Children of Buddha, they should reverently hold the four indestructible faiths and honor the four Dharmas to rely upon. Three times they should say, 'From now on, through all future lives, I take refuge in Buddha, take refuge in Dharma, take refuge in Saṅgha, and take refuge in the precepts.'

"Then teach them to repent of their faults in the past, present, and future. For faults of the ten harmful karmas they have committed in their past lives with their body, speech, and mind, they should vow never to repeat them in the endless future. For faults of the ten harmful karmas they have committed in their present lives with their body, speech, and mind, they should vow never to repeat them in the endless future. For faults of the ten harmful karmas they might commit in their future lives with their body, speech, and mind, they should vow never to commit them in the endless future. After repentance, they will have purified their three karmas [of body, speech, and mind], which become like pure aquamarine [vaiḍūrya], translucent throughout. Then you can impart to them the ten endless precepts. Ask them to listen attentively when you pronounce the precepts as I do now.

(1) ‘Disciples of Buddha, until one has acquired a buddha’s body, from this life to the endless future, one should not purposely kill sentient beings. Violation of this precept goes against what a bodhisattva should do, and will cause one to lose one’s status of a sage or honored one at any of the forty-two levels. Can you observe this precept?’ The precept recipients should say that they can.

(2) ‘Disciples of Buddha, until one has acquired a buddha’s body, from this life to the endless future, one should not purposely steal anything. Violation of this precept goes against what a bodhisattva should do, and will cause one to lose one’s status of a sage or honored one at any of the forty-two levels. Can you observe this precept?’ The precept recipients should say that they can.

(3) ‘Disciples of Buddha, until one has acquired a buddha’s body, from this life to the endless future, one should not purposely engage in sex. Violation of this precept goes against what a bodhisattva should do, and will cause one to lose one’s status of a sage or honored one at any of the forty-two levels. Can you observe this precept?’ The precept recipients should say that they can.

(4) ‘Disciples of Buddha, until one has acquired a buddha’s body, from this life to the endless future, one should not purposely speak falsely. Violation of this precept goes against what a bodhisattva should do, and will cause one to lose one’s status of a sage or honored one at any of the forty-two levels. Can you observe this precept?’ The precept recipients should say that they can.

(5) ‘Disciples of Buddha, until one has acquired a buddha’s body, from this life to the endless future, one should not sell alcohol. Violation of this precept goes against what a bodhisattva should do, and will cause one to lose one’s status of a sage or honored one at any of the forty-two levels. Can you observe this precept?’ The precept recipients should say that they can.

(6) ‘Disciples of Buddha, until one has acquired a buddha’s body, from this life to the endless future, one should not purposely speak of the faults of monastic or lay bodhisattvas. Violation of this precept goes against what a bodhisattva should do, and will cause one to lose one’s status of a sage or honored one at any of the 42 levels. Can you observe this precept?’ The recipients should say...

(7) ‘Disciples of Buddha, until one has acquired a buddha’s body, from this life to the endless future, one should not be possessive. Violation of this precept goes against what a bodhisattva should do, and will cause one to lose one’s status of a sage or honored one at any of the forty-two levels. Can you observe this precept?’ The precept recipients should say that they can.

(8) ‘Disciples of Buddha, until one has acquired a buddha’s body, from this life to the endless future, one should not be angry. Violation of this precept goes against what a bodhisattva should do, and will cause one to lose one’s status of a sage or honored one at any of the forty-two levels. Can you observe this precept?’ The precept recipients should say that they can.

(9) ‘Disciples of Buddha, until one has acquired a buddha’s body, from this life to the endless future, one should not purposely praise oneself and belittle others. Violation of this precept goes against what a bodhisattva should do, and will cause one to lose one’s status of a sage or honored one at any of the 42 levels. Can you observe this precept?’ The precept recipients should say that they can.

(10) ‘Disciples of Buddha, until one has acquired a buddha’s body, from this life to the endless future, one should not purposely disparage the Three Treasures. Violation of this precept goes against what a bodhisattva should do, and will cause one to lose one’s status of a sage or honored one at any of the 42 levels. Can you observe this precept?’ The precept recipients should say that they can.

“Child of Buddha, after receiving these ten endless precepts, each recipient transcends the four māras and the suffering in the three realms of existence. Life after life, he will not lose these precepts, because they follow him until he has attained Buddhahood.

“Child of Buddha-Son, for all sentient beings of the past, present, and future, if they do not accept these Bodhisattva precepts, they are not called sentient beings or humans. Being outside the ocean of the Three Treasures, they are not called Bodhisattvas, men or women, or ghosts or spirits, but called animals. They are called non-Buddhists, who hold the wrong views, against human empathy. Know that there are ways to receive the Bodhisattva precepts, but no way to abandon them. Even if they are violated, one still retains them throughout the endless future.

All Sentient Beings Can Receive the Ten Major Precepts

“If someone wishes to receive the Bodhisattva precepts, a Bodhisattva Dharma teacher should first recite and explain the precepts, so that the recipient will open his mind with understanding and delight. Then he should confer the precepts to him. If a Dharma teacher teaches even one person to leave home and receive the Bodhisattva precepts, his merit surpasses that acquired from building 84,000 pagodas [stūpa]. His merit will be immeasurable if he teaches two, three, or even 100,000 people. Also, husband and wife, and the six branches of family, can be each other’s teachers [and confer the precepts].

“Those who accept the Bodhisattva precepts join the bodhisattvas in the realm of buddhas and will transcend the suffering of repeated birth and death in the three realms of existence. Therefore, you should receive these precepts. Those who have precepts, even though they violate them, surpass those who have no precepts to violate. While those who have received the Bodhisattva precepts are called Bodhisattvas, those who have no precepts are called non-Buddhists. He who receives one of the ten major precepts is called a one-measure Bodhisattva. He can also accept two, three, or four precepts. If he accepts all ten precepts, he is called a full-measure Bodhisattva. Therefore, a Bodhisattva observes the ten major precepts and 84,000 precepts for his actions. If he has violated any of the ten major precepts, the violated precept cannot be restored by repentance. However, [after earnest repentance] he can receive the precept again. The 84,000 precepts for his actions are all minor precepts. If he has violated any of them, he can restore the violated precept by repenting to a qualified person.

“The essence of these ten precepts for ordinary beings and holy beings is the mind. If the mind ends, the precepts end. As the mind is endless, so too are the precepts. All sentient beings in the six realms can accept the precepts if they understand their Bodhisattva teacher’s words. After receiving the precepts, they will not lose them. As all buddhas of past, present, and future kalpas say this, so too, under this tree, I now say this to this multitude of fourteen koṭi people. Child of Buddha, those who have not yet entered the first of the ten levels of abiding are called faith-as-appearance Bodhisattvas. Child of Buddha, if these bodhisattvas who have newly received the ten endless precepts observe them for ten thousand kalpas, they will enter the first level of abiding. Child of Buddha, you should first impart the Bodhisattva precepts to the assembly, then expound this jewel necklace sūtra to them, so that they can hold the same views and take the same actions.”

At that time a koṭi people in the multitude rose from their seats and accepted the Buddha precepts. The Brahma-king Dhāśa, together with innumerable deva-sons, after fully observing these ten major precepts [for ten thousand kalpas], entered the first level of abiding.