

Ethical Considerations regarding Sensual Desires on the Path to Enlightenment : A Philosophical Inquiry Based on the *12th Assembly of the Sutras of the Perfection of Wisdom*

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I. Introduction

In order to present the issues and delineate the outline in a clear and fast fashion, this paper unfolds in sequence as follows: “Theme,” “Research Background,” “TextualReferences,” “Research Approach and Method,” and “The Discursive Structure.”

A. Themes

Since the present paper is entitled “Ethical Considerations regarding Sensual Desires on the Path to Enlightenment,” the focus is on sensual

desires, the context is of the practice on the path to Buddhist enlightenment, and the discursive method to construct the argument about ethical considerations. The subtitle further reveals that this paper takes the *12th Assembly of the Sutras of the Perfection of Wisdom* as its main reference.

B. Research Background

Certain considerations regarding the theme of research and references not only constitute the research background but also contribute to its general outline of this paper.

Since monastic/laity, celibacy/married state, woman/man, body/mind, abstinence/indulgence, vegetarianism/meat eating can be treated as the issues of sensational situations in worldly life, their significance increase with time. Not only does each religion or culture have to pay more regard to and tackle them, but the scholars in these fields also ought to take on the responsibility to make progress in the related research.¹⁾

1) See José Ignacio Cabezón (ed.), *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, Albany: State University of New York, 1992; Bernard Faure, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998; Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003; Janet Gyatso, "Sex," *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, edited by Donald S. Lopez Jr., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005, 271-290; Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Stephanie Kaza, Finding Safe Harbor: *Buddhist Sexual Ethics in America*, *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24/1 (2004): 23-35 Robert Sachs, *The Passionate Buddha: Wisdom on Intimacy and Enduring Love*, Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2002; Miranda Shaw, "Chapter 6: Women in Tantric Relationships: Intimacy as a Path to Enlightenment," *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 140-178; Liz

When one concerns sensational situations in worldly life in terms of Buddhist tradition, one will more or less bear fruit by focusing on certain periods, areas, people, schools, sutras, or cultural relics. Among these, if one bases one's discussion on the Buddhist sutras, a valuable part of the discussion will be dedicated to making clear how the issues are dealt with in reality or in theory on the path to Buddhist enlightenment.

Restricted by the length and necessary to narrow down the scope of references in order to explore the topic more profoundly, the present paper only focuses on one sutra on the path to Buddhist enlightenment. There are many Buddhist sutras on the Path to Enlightenment. For example, both the *Vimalak'rti Sutra* and the *Avatamsaka Sutra* demonstrate rich teachings and discussions about how to live in worldly life. Faced with a variety of sutras, if one makes great efforts to study and adopts the right method, a fruitful result can be anticipated. After some serious considerations, I choose the *12th Assembly of the Sutras of the Perfection of Wisdoms* the main reference of this paper. The reasons are as follows. First, it is the groundwork. Among the existing sutras instructing the Path to Enlightenment, the *Sutras of the Perfection of Wisdoms* often held to be quite preliminary. Hence, concerning the issue of the Path to Enlightenment, it will be the priority. The second reason will be its significance. In the *12th Assembly*, the Path to Enlightenment, the perfection of morality (*śīla-pāramitā*), and the perfection of wisdom form a network of Buddhist practice. When the issues of sensational situations in

Wilson, "Chapter I: Celibacy and the Social World," *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 15-39.

worldly life are situated in the network, they become the ethical considerations of “how Bodhisattvas ought to live.” Consequently, if one attempts to explore how these issues ought to be dealt with on the Path to Enlightenment, one should take this text as its main reference. The final reason is its rarity. The *12th Assembly* has seldom been discussed so far. While this fact can be counted as a regret in the circle of Buddhist studies in regard to the path to Buddhist enlightenment, the scholars are urged to probe into it.

In brief, to explore how Buddhist tradition regulates the sensational situations in worldly life on the Path to Enlightenment, the *12th Assembly* is listed as among the best choices of references because of its being the groundwork, its significance, and rarity.

C. Textual References

The main reference of this paper is the 12th Assembly of the Sutras of the Perfection of Wisdom, abbreviated as the 12th Assembly or the “Perfection of Morality” (*s’ la-pāramitā*).

The Sutras of the Perfection of Wisdom, translated by Hsuan-Tsang in the years of 660 to 663 AD, consists of sixteen Assemblies. The themes discussed from the 11th Assembly to the 16th are generosity, morality, patience, effort, meditation, and wisdom.²⁾ Ranked as the 12th, the Assembly on *s’ la-pāramitā*, despite its structural independence, has much

2) See Yao-ming Tsai, *The Teachings of Prajnaparamita and the Purification of the Buddha-field: Collected Papers on a Buddhist Approach to the World of Buddhism*, Nantou: Right View Publications, 2001, pp. 81-103.

to do with others in the practice of the perfection of morality. Based on such relevance, other assemblies, though not quoted directly, can be auxiliary references to be the broad support and context of theory. Since the *12th Assembly* has only one existing Chinese translation, namely, Hsuan-Tsang's, the source of the quotations will be from it.

D. Research Approach and Method

The subtitle, "A Philosophical Inquiry based on the *12th Assembly of the Sutras of the Perfection of Wisdom*," singles out as the basis of its references. In addition, it discloses its approach to be a philosophical inquiry. "The goal of philosophy is knowledge of the truth about reality and value."³⁾ Once the undertaking of critical thinking centered on the goal of philosophy, the task can be designated as a philosophical approach. However, the philosophical approach does not guarantee that one will reach the goal. It also needs to have recourse to some other relevant and effective methods to systematize the procedure and to carry on the philosophical task.

E. Discursive Structure

"Ethical Considerations regarding Sensual Desires on the Path to Enlightenment" as the theme of research, the content of this paper includes the following five sections. First, Introduction, brings out the topic in a direct fashion, and then presents the preliminary thoughts and aspects

3) See Richard E. Creel, *Thinking Philosophically: An Introduction to Critical Reflection and Rational Dialogue*, Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001, p. 43.

in an ordered way. The second section widely discusses with simplicity and clarity the theme, the connotations of practice, the fundamental concerns, and the advanced establishment of the supreme dimension in the *12th Assembly* of the Sutras. On the one hand, this section provides its interpretation of the text. On the other hand, it lays the foundation of the following ethical discussions. Then, the third section draws out the main subject and constructs the textual references. By so doing, the issues of sensational situations in worldly life in the *12th Assembly* will be looked into from a broad perspective. The fourth section sets out from the ethical principles in the *12th Assembly* and evinces its succinct ethical considerations and dynamic ethical measures concerning the sensual desires at sensational situations in worldly life, especially highlighting ethical judgment guiding sensual desires together with cyclic transmigrations on the Path to Enlightenment. Finally, the fifth section, Conclusion, summarizes the significant achievements derived out of from this brief discussion.

II. Interpretation of the 12th Assembly

Human beings are characterized by sensual desires. If one indulges on sensual desires, one will never go beyond being a mediocre person. Since the 12th Assembly orientates one toward the goal of Buddhahood and underscores the exercise of Samatha-Vipassana meditation as a requisite, it is unavoidable to confront the issue of human sensual desires. When one decides to pick up the issue, one is required not only not to be driven by sensual desires with the consequence of being trapped in worldly life, but

also to be able to take the path to Buddhahood. How can one achieve this? The issue thus deserves specialized discussions.

Concerning sensual desires, the ethical teachings of the *12th Assembly* is never taught in the ivory tower, which regulates how to say or what to say regardless of the reality as it really is, but has much to do with the entire teachings of the *12th Assembly* from the beginning to the end. Therefore, from a broad perspective, the interpretation of the *12th Assembly* is necessary for an insight into the ethical teachings of sensual desires.

Since the purpose of this section is to construct the pertaining background, the interpretation will not be detailed but simple and concise. The main discussions are sub-divided into the following parts: “The Theme of the *12th Assembly*,” “Its Connotations of Practice,” “Its Fundamental Concerns,” and “The Advanced Establishment of the Supreme Dimension of Bodhisattva’s Morality.”

A. The Theme of the 12th Assembly

There are many ways to interpret the *12th Assembly*. One of them is to begin with themes of assemblies. In the very beginning of *12th Assembly*, the perfection of morality is put forward directly to Bodhisattvas, who endeavor to approach the goal of the supreme enlightenment.⁴⁾ To simply put, the theme of this assembly is the perfection of morality, and the audience are Bodhisattvas on the path toward the supreme enlighten-

4) Then, the Buddha told śāriputra: “Now you should preach the perfection of morality to Bodhisattvas, who endeavor to accomplish the supreme enlightenment,” (T. 220 (12), vol. 7, p. 1019b.)

ment.

B. Its Connotations of Practice

After indicating the perfection of morality as the theme, the following task is to interpret the perfection of morality first. By means of the interpretation, what the theme conveys will offer a better understanding of the content. Hence, five paragraphs can be filtered out from the *12th Assembly* as the grounds of explanation:

1. The perfection of morality is neither accretion to nor diminution of dharmas. Once Bodhisattvas perceive either situation, they ought to know that they appropriate morality. Once Bodhisattvas perceive any of accretion or diminution in the perfection of morality, they cannot incorporate the perfection of morality. Only when Bodhisattvas see no dharmas of subjectivity can they incorporate the perfection of morality. (T. 220 (12), vol. 7, p. 1024b-c.)

2. Only when Bodhisattvas observe morality and dedicate all their efforts to obtaining the all-knowing awareness can it be called the perfection of morality. If they observe morality but fails to dedicate their efforts to obtaining the all-knowing awareness, you should know that themorality, though called morality, is not the perfection of morality but that aimed at the goal of *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas* or fruits of living in the world. (p. 1024c.)

3. Once Bodhisattvas make discrimination or circumscription, benefit sentient beings, and trigger morality, the morality they raised is not beyond those of *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas* with nirvana and is not called the

perfection of morality. However, if Bodhisattvas make no discrimination or circumscription, universally enlighten limitless sentient beings, endeavor to the supreme enlightenment, and trigger the morality, the morality they raised is beyond those of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* with nirvana and is entitled the perfection of morality. (p. 1032c.)

4. Pūrṇa says: “For example, Bodhisattvas endeavors to reach the supreme enlightenment, but ordinary sentient beings, *śrāvakas*, and *pratyekabuddhas* do not. Thus, Bodhisattvas’ morality differs from that of the latter.”

Śāriputra says: “Accordingly, all Bodhisattvas’ morality surpasses that of ordinary sentient beings, *śrāvakas*, and *pratyekabuddhas*. That is to say, while Bodhisattvas’ morality, dedicated to obtaining the all-knowing awareness, is entitled the perfection of morality, the morality of ordinary sentient beings, *śrāvakas*, and *pratyekabuddhas* is not, which is the distinction.” (p. 1033a.)

5. For instance, the King of the snow mountains possesses virtues of the king of the mountains, but other mountains do not. When one has such virtues, one wins the title of the King of Mountains. If one does not have such virtues, one will not be made King. Thus, since all Bodhisattvas’ morality is dedicated to the supreme enlightenment and does not desert the goal to obtain the all-knowing awareness, it is entitled the perfection of morality. By contrast, the morality of ordinary sentient beings, *śrāvakas*, and *pratyekabuddhas* is not dedicated to the supreme enlightenment and deserts the goal to obtain the all-knowing awareness, so it is not entitled the perfection of morality. (p. 1033b.)

If properly interpreted, the connotations of the theme will be a key to

comprehending what topic it is. Accordingly, these quotes, though lengthy, are expected not to be flimsy but tenable. Not only the above five quotes but also the entire Assembly can be regarded as emphasis mainly on Buddhist practice on the Path to Enlightenment. Based on the connotations of the scripture, one can apply them to the practice and one's practice will also contribute to disclosing the connotations. Thus, these connotations can be called the connotations of practice.

According to the above five quotes, the connotations of practice of the so-called perfection of morality can be recapitulated as the following six arguments:

1. In the outer interface, the perfection of morality is affirmed as a required course for Bodhisattvas. As for general Buddhists such as on the Path of *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas*, morality is sufficient for them; they are not required to perfect morality. (This argument is based on the above fourth and fifth quotes.)

2. The morality for Bodhisattvas will not be automatically upgraded to be the status of the perfection of morality unless it is complemented by professional requisites. In other words, the relation between the perfection of morality and Bodhisattvas is never mechanic like that of appearances and title. In fact, the perfection of morality is manifested in Bodhisattvas' performance in cultivation and learning by virtue of professional practice. One of the tasks of the *12th Assembly* is to teach Bodhisattvas the necessary thrusts, principles, and theory in the process from morality to the perfection of morality. (This argument is based on each of the above quotes.)

3. To realize the perfection of morality, Bodhisattvas, on the one hand,

should not be trapped in the ideas of subjectivity (or the illusory notion of a permanent self), self-independence, or extremity (or oppositional view) regarding the relevant links for practicing morality, and they ought to actively meditate over or realize the morality as not-selfness, emptiness, and non-duality on the other hand. To be specific, the practice of morality as a matter of fact is to meditate over or realize that the so-called subjectivity, the existence of an independent self, an independent doer, or the unchangeable existence of self does not exist at all. In addition, Bodhisattvas need to contemplate or comprehend that no single item can drive the practice of morality to be limited to either side of any dichotomous concept like accretion/diminution. The practice of morality constructed by such non-subjectivity, emptiness, and non-duality can then be entitled the perfection of morality. In short, one of the connotations of the perfection of morality is to carry out the meanings of non-subjectivity, emptiness, and non-duality. (This argument is based on the first quote.)

4. To practice the perfection of morality, Bodhisattvas are required to dedicate their practice of morality to the highest goal, that is, Bodhisattvas' adjustment of their subsequent orientation. The process of dedication aims to obtain the all-knowing awareness or the supreme enlightenment. Without the process of dedication, the morality Bodhisattvas keep aspiring to obtain the goal of enlightenment or at the worldly levels, like in the three realms (*trailokya* or *triloka*) and six ways of destination (*gati*), remains at the level of morality and is ineligible to be entitled the perfection of morality. In a word, one of the connotations of the perfection of morality is to transform the aim of observation of morality into the all-knowing awareness or the supreme enlightenment in particular. (This argument is based on the

second, fourth, and fifth quotes.)

5. To perfect the practice of morality, Bodhisattvas have to apply their practice or observation of morality to enrich or enlighten all sentient beings without discrimination or limit. If Bodhisattvas enrich certain sentient beings only and do so with reserve or on certain conditions, their practice of morality is only observation of morality at most, not qualified for the perfection of morality. In brief, one of the connotations of the perfection of morality is to practice enriching the sentient beings, especially enriching or enlightening all the sentient beings equally and infinitely. (This argument is based on the third quote.)

6. Bodhisattvas' perfection of morality is more advanced than the general Buddhists' observation of morality on the Path to Emancipation. However, its supremacy lies not in the position or title of Bodhisattvas hold but in their embodiment of the connotations of non-subjectivity, emptiness, non-duality, dedication, or enriching the sentient beings. If one with the title of Bodhisattva has not been ready yet to carry out these connotations at the moment, their practice of morality is less supreme than the general Buddhists' observation of morality with nirvana. (This argument is based on the second, third, fourth, and fifth quotes.)

By recourse to the above five quotes and the succinct six arguments, the connotations of the professional practice of perfection of morality can be briefly expounded. When Bodhisattvas practice the perfection of morality on the Path to Enlightenment and supplement their practice with professional requirements, such as meditating upon or comprehending the practice of morality as not-selfness, emptiness, and non-duality,

dedicating their practice of morality to the goal of the all-knowing awareness or the supreme enlightenment, or applying the practice of morality to enrich or enlighten all the sentient beings in an equal and infinite way, their practice will make supreme their cultivation and learning in wisdom, orientation, or salvific deeds. Thus, the morality they observe can then be entitled the perfection of morality.

C. Its Fundamental Concerns

The fundamental concerns in almost every Buddhist scripture can be a starting point of analysis. The *12th Assembly* is without exception.

Like most of Buddhist scriptures, the *12th Assembly* presents in the form of dialogue, and the participants include the Buddha, Śāriputra, Pūrṇa, and Ānanda. Many issues are brought out one by one with the unfolding of conversations and they all deserve concerns. To make the discussion concise, citing a part of the scripture as the representative of the fundamental concerns of the *12th Assembly* is probably a good choice. In the beginning of the *12th Assembly*, Pūrṇa puts forward the following question:

At that moment, Pūrṇa asked śāriputra: “How can one know Bodhisattvas observe morality? How to judge whether Bodhisattvas violate the morality or not? In what way should Bodhisattvas behave themselves? What shouldn’t Bodhisattvas do?” (p. 1019b-c.)

Pūrṇa’s inquiry, centering around “how” and “what,” can be regarded as an example that the *12th Assembly* aims to carry out the practice. The

questions include four issues: “How can one know Bodhisattvas observe morality?” “How to judge whether Bodhisattvas violate the morality or not?” “In what way should Bodhisattvas behave themselves?” “What shouldn’t Bodhisattvas do?” The four questions are all concerned with Bodhisattvas’ practice of the perfection of morality. As a result, if Bodhisattvas’ practice of the perfection of morality were of no significance, there would not have been the elucidation of the *12th Assembly*.

Then, what are the fundamental concerns of Bodhisattvas’ practice of morality? Generally speaking, the term “fundamental” is opposed to the term “advanced” or “trivial.” Taking Pūrma’s inquiry as example, the former two questions are concerned with the criteria of examining whether Bodhisattvas observe or violate the morality, and the latter two are centered around the issues of what Bodhisattvas should behave themselves and what they ought not to do. If one does not have the criteria in mind, what will the practice of morality be? If one fails to know what ought to do and what ought not to do, how can it be possible for one to practice the morality?

To Pūrma’s inquiry, Śāriputra immediately responded at length. Again, to keep the analysis concise and focused, only a passage will be cited:

Then, Śāriputra replied to Pūrma: “If Bodhisattvas behave themselves like *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas*, such is what Bodhisattvas should not do. When Bodhisattvas behaved themselves in this way, they should know that they violated the morality. If Bodhisattvas deviate from what they ought to do, they will definitely not be able to incorporate the perfection of morality.” (p. 1019c.)

Śāriputra's answer connects "the way and direction Bodhisattvas ought to behave and orientate themselves" with "Bodhisattvas' observation of morality," and he even employs the former to define the latter. Basically, "the way and direction Bodhisattvas ought to behave and orientate themselves" refer to the constituents which facilitate the procession of the Path to Enlightenment. Concerning "the way and direction Bodhisattvas ought not to behave and orientate themselves," a long list is noteworthy since it illustrates the factors, including lingering on the Path to Emancipation, especially the stages or goal of *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas*.⁵⁾ If Bodhisattvas fail to proceed along the supposed track and are occupied with the idea of emancipation, or if they dedicate all their efforts to the stages or goal of *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas*, they totally desert and deviate from the track they are supposed to take. Once they turn away, the position obtained by changing tracks will not exist at all since such a conduct for Bodhisattvas is the same as something they should not do, which can be judged as "Bodhisattvas' violation of morality."

"The way and direction Bodhisattvas ought to behave and orientate themselves" prescribe "Bodhisattvas' observation of morality." Regarding this, three theoretical considerations can be brought out first as the discursive appeals. For one thing, it entails "professional ethics," then, "track rightness," and finally, which range track rightness can be applied

5) "If Bodhisattvas dedicate themselves to the stages of *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas*, they should know that they behave themselves in the wrong way. The wrong way refers to that of *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas*, the way where Bodhisattvas should not stay." (p. 1019c.)

to.

First, professional ethics means taking a profession and engaging in the situations of the professional activities, and the ethical issues and ethical considerations are thus derived. From the light of “professional ethics,” an ethics of a certain field cannot take shape unless one enters a certain profession. For example, if one is not to be a Bodhisattva or a doctor, the “ethics of Bodhisattvas’ practice” or “medical ethics” is not suitable for the one respectively. Consequently, the criteria of “Bodhisattva’s observation of morality” or “Bodhisattva’s violation of morality” cannot be applied to those who are not on the Bodhisattva’s path. In other words, within the category of “professional ethics,” the “ethics of Bodhisattvas’ practice” works only for the professionals who are to be Bodhisattvas. If one employs it to criticize those who are not professionals, either one does not see into the situation or one is quite bored.

Next, “track rightness” designates judging whether the track one takes is correctly corresponding or appropriate. From the perspective of Bodhisattvas as a profession, the practice depends not solely on a single point, a position, an incident, a small area or the like, but on the entire process toward the supreme enlightenment. Since it involves the entire process, the ethical issues will certainly not be trapped in dot-like situations but include the entire process, which needs to be examined thoroughly and ethically. Once one enters the profession of Bodhisattvas, one ought to be ready to be examined by the “ethics of Bodhisattvas’ practice.” The criterion of “track rightness” is used to measure whether the activities of body, language, ideas of Bodhisattvas direct or correspond to the Path to Enlightenment. If they lead or correspond to the Path to

Enlightenment, these conducts can be judged as “observation of Bodhisattvas’ morality;” otherwise, they are “violation of Bodhisattvas’ morality.”

Third, “track rightness” can be a criterion of the “ethics of Bodhisattvas’ practice,” but it is not the only one. Bodhisattvas’ practice is implicated in a variety of factors or multi-layer requirements and almost all these requirements cannot be reduced to a mechanical issue of tracks. Hence, the right track can be a judgment of observation of morality simply in terms of the track. That is to say, the right track does not mean that anything one did at will is acknowledged. As a matter of fact, the *12th Assembly* uses quite a length to gradually introduce the pertinent ethical requirements regarding the factors or layers implicated in the procession of the Path to Enlightenment, such as the characteristics resulted from one’s attachment to the constituents of practice,⁶⁾ the subtle traits brought about by one’s craving for observation of morality,⁷⁾ indecent mentality, and an illusory notion of taking self as the doer.⁸⁾ These conducts are taken as

6) “Once Bodhisattvas attach to all characteristics of objects or matters and perform generosity, they do not behave themselves in the supposed way. Once they do not behave themselves in the supposed way, they should know that they violate Bodhisattvas’ morality. Therefore, Bodhisattvas should not attach to all characteristics of objects or matters while performing generosity, nor should they attach to the perfection of wisdom while performing generosity. How and why is so? Pūma! The perfection of wisdom of the Buddhas is away from all characteristics of objects or matters.” (p. 1020a.)

7) ‘If Bodhisattvas aspire to obtain the perfection of wisdom, they should not discriminate as such: “Because of Bodhisattvas’ morality, I incorporate all the major and minor characteristics of the body.” If Bodhisattvas make such discrimination, they should know that they violate Bodhisattvas’ morality. Therefore, Bodhisattvas should not desire for the major or minor characteristics of the body while dedicating themselves to approaching the

granted by ordinary people; however, in the light of Bodhisattvas as a profession, one commits emotional attachment and cravings, or is trapped in an illusory notion of subjectivity. Such behavior will deteriorate the cultivation of one's profession and hinder the procession of profession, so the problems with emotions or notions are pointed out in an obvious way. Once one does harm to Bodhisattvas as a profession, it is evident that the Bodhisattva learner commits faults and violates morality. Although these details of ethical requirements deserve an overall discussion, they are beyond the scope of this paper. Aside from shedding light on the range the criterion of "track rightness" can be applied to, it can be highlighted as well that the teachings and decisions of the *12th Assembly* regarding the "ethics of Bodhisattvas' practice" pay high regard to the effect of emotions and notions on professional cultivation and procession.

D. Advanced Establishment of the Supreme Dimension of Bodhi-sattvas' Morality

The subject matter of the *12th Assembly* lies in the perfection of morality, and those who carry on the practice are called Bodhisattvas. Naturally, the emphasis of this scripture is on Bodhisattvas' morality. Engaged in the

supreme enlightenment. If Bodhisattvas attach to major or minor characteristics of the body while observing morality, they should know that it is called attachment to morality, which will result in one's destroying and violating morality. Once Bodhisattvas attach to morality, destroy and violate morality, they cannot reach the supreme enlightenment.' (p. 1039a.)

- 8) "If Bodhisattvas practice the perfection of morality but hold on to the idea of the doer, though they are on Bodhisattvas' Path, they are considered to be abandoning Bodhisattvas' dhamas, and they fail to behave themselves conforming to the principle. If Bodhisattvas behave themselves as such, they ought to know that they violate the morality." (p. 1024b.)

profession of life-practice, Bodhisattvas will be demanded to carry on the professional practice further and further and higher and higher if they are going to practice the perfection of morality. As a result, Bodhisattvas' morality will open a transcendent dimension, which means that not all the operation and requirements of morality will only be enclosed in dot-like situations or in the structure of surface.⁹⁾

In other words, the promotion of Bodhisattvas' morality lies not in bringing out more clichés or opposition, but in constructing the supremacy of Bodhisattvas' morality. When it comes to supremacy, the key point is not on observation of morality but on the degree of how one's observation of morality can achieve.¹⁰⁾ Once the supreme dimension is opened, the goal of Bodhisattvas' morality will be transcendent and ultimately reach the supreme one. Just as the stages of Bodhisattvas will be gradually advanced to that of the Buddha, so Bodhisattvas' morality, when proceeding along the supreme dimension, will be the perfection of morality, namely, the Buddha's morality.

On the one side, we have Bodhisattvas' morality; on the other side, we have the others' morality, be it with or without outflows. Among these,

9) With regard to the folding and unfolding of dimensions, please see Yao-ming Tsai, "Interpretative Approach to Navigating Concepts Concerning the Doctrine of Nondual Middle Way: Maneuver into Buddhist Approach to Unfolding Thorough Reality of the Life World," *National Taiwan University Philosophical Review* 32(October 2006): 122, 130-131, 141-144.

10) For example, "If Bodhisattvas uphold morality but cannot dedicate themselves to the all-knowing awareness, they should know that the morality, despite the title of morality, is not the perfection of morality but that used to reach the goal of *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas* or fruits of living in the world," (p1024c.)

Bodhisattvas' morality, except for Tathāgatas' morality, is declared to be the best, the most excellent and sublime, the highest and supreme, with none above it, unequalled, equalling the unequalled. (p. 1033b-c.)

III. How does the *12th Assembly* bring out the issues of sensational situations in worldly life?

With different frameworks of references, the structure and style of the present paper will vary. Within the structure and style, the goals, values, meanings, or functions may be related in various ways and result in diverse ethical considerations, perspectives, procedures, or the results. Accordingly, in order to probe the ethical teachings of sensual desires in the *12th Assembly*, the present section is to construct the textual references in terms of the axis, and then to inquire how this scripture introduces the issues related to sensational situations in worldly life. In a word, the present section is to pull out the main axes and to construct the textual references in order to look into the issues related to sensational situations in worldly life in the *12th Assembly*.

Sensual desires sound like things, and sensational situations at first glimpse seem to be matters. However, from a broad perspective, these so-called things or matters basically are only performances of living activities, which take place in the process of living activities as well. When one thinks deeper, the process of living activities by and large is floating along the process of life, which is constituted by the links of birth, aging, illness, and death. Once one cuts into the process of life, an axis the *12th Assembly* weighs a lot will gradually come to surface.

Parallel to the main axis of the process of life, two other axes are bound up with each other. The outer one is the Path to Enlightenment, and the inner one is that of the perfection of morality. The entire Suttas of the Perfection of Wisdom, or even all the Buddhist sutras, is to launch a significant engineering, or called life engineering, which transforms the process of life into the process of practice. That is to say, depending on the incessant process of life, one carries on the practice of life to its supreme goal. The general goal of the Suttas of the Perfection of Wisdom is to usher one into the all-knowing awareness or the supreme enlightenment, so when one does so, the Path to Enlightenment is derived. However, the Path to Enlightenment as a main axis originated from transforming the process of life also needs other axes to be its backbone. In the case of the *Suttas of the Perfection of Wisdom*, the axes, ranging from the *11th Assembly* to *16th Assembly*, are the perfection of generosity, morality, patience, effort, mediation, and wisdom respectively.

In the case of the *12th Assembly*, there are three main axes: one is the process of life, the second one is Bodhisattvas' Path, and the third one is the perfection of morality underlying the Path to Enlightenment.¹¹⁾ They are interdependent and evolve at the same time. For example, the development of the perfection of morality is not confined on observation of morality, but instead being an axis which makes the Path to Enlightenment proceed. Even the perfection of morality corresponds to

11) As for the argument of three axes, please see: Yao-ming Tsai, "Meditative Practices of the 15th Assembly of the Prajnaparamita-Suttas," *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 17(July 2004): 49-93.

the Path to Enlightenment, so it can be called the achievement of the stage of the Buddha:

Once Bodhisattvas perfect Bodhisattvas' morality, they are entitled Tathāgata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha(i.e. Completely and Perfectly Awakened One). (p. 1033c.)

The perfection of morality is not only closely related to Bodhisattvas' Path, but they both rise and fall in company. Furthermore, the practice of the perfection of morality is not a product of castles in the air but heavily relies on the continuation of life:

Such Bodhisattvas steadily practice the perfection of morality, thinking: "Based on the Bodhisattvas' perfection of morality I behave myself, I wish all sentient beings perfect the morality and avoid violation or destruction of morality. Based on the wholesome roots to dedicate to others, I wish all sentient beings think correctly, and thereby they all feel wonderful joy."Such Bodhisattvas are inclined to dedicate themselves and benefit the sentient beings. After spending five hundred big *kalpas* practicing Mahāyāna, they will be able to rid of the world. (p. 1040b-c.)

On the one hand, undertaking the perfection of morality and the practice on the Path to Enlightenment, one has to embrace the world, thus initiating the process of life. On the other hand, the perfection of morality and the practice on Path to Enlightenment depend on the process of worldly life. Accordingly, one has positive reasons to live in the world.

The reasons are even so sound that drive one, as if unsatisfied, to prolong one's time in the world. Judging from the above quote, if one is to undertake the perfection of morality and the practice on the Path to Enlightenment to the full, the time required will not be a short period of time but rather life after life, like a relay race. Only after countless years and lives will the fruit be enjoyed.

A picture can thus be delineated. When one lives in the world, one's goal is to reach the supreme enlightenment. Consequently, one has to have recourse to the Path to Enlightenment. If one wishes to be on the Path to Enlightenment, one ought to practice generosity, morality, patience, effort, mediation, and wisdom.¹²⁾

Because of the supreme goal, the constituents of the Path to Enlightenment will not be temporal, fragmentary, or stagnant things or matters but those which make "perfection" and which keep one persistently move on and break through, that is, the practice in the passage to the supreme goal. The constituents of the Path to Enlightenment are six kinds of perfection, namely, six main passages. To practice on the Path to Enlightenment, one relies not only on living in the world but also on a very long process of worldly life in parallel with the Path to Enlightenment. However, the very long process of worldly life should not be wasted in cyclic transmigrations, which an ordinary person

12) Scriptural evidence one: "Thoughts connected with the perfection of generosity, morality, patience, effort, mediation, and wisdom are what Bodhisattvas should do." (p. 1022a.)
 Scriptural evidence two: "If Bodhisattvas aspire to reach the perfection of wisdom, they should practice the perfection of generosity, morality, patience, effort, mediation, and wisdom, and dedicate all their efforts to the all-knowing awareness." (p. 1031a.)

often does. After all, one ought to undertake the practice of life, by which one heads for the supreme goal. Therefore, along with the very long process of worldly life is a series of living activities. Likewise, a variety of issues relevant to sensational situations in worldly life, including sensual desires, and other constituents which assist one to live again in the world will overwhelm. Not only does one have to perceive and recognize the forms and causes of these matters but also has to carry on ethical thinking. Either between “ought to” and “ought not to” or between rightness and wrongness, one has to map out principles of assessment. Otherwise, one may treat one’s extended process of worldly life as promotion of the Path to Enlightenment, but, as a matter of fact, one has big problems with one’s living activities, encumbering one’s performance in the practice of life and deteriorating the trend of one’s cyclic transmigrations.

In brief, since the practice on the Path to Enlightenment is a long-term project, the very long process of worldly life constitutes an indispensable support. On the Path to Enlightenment, ethical thinking on the issues regarding sensational situations in worldly life, at least, will not reduce the role of the process of life from a relying support to a burden, and, on the other hand, a thorough ethical thinking not only achieves the perfection of morality but also facilitates the realization of the Path to Enlightenment.

IV. The Ethical Principles and Measures of the *12th Assembly* regarding Sensual Desires

After a preliminary understanding of the textual references, its axes, and the issues concerning sensational situations in worldly life, the ongoing discussion is the ethical considerations of sensual desires. Instead of a direct analysis of and discussion about the ethical issues alone, the method of the present paper is to construct the ethical considerations of the relevant issues based on the textual references. Furthermore, the *12th Assembly* has already proposed a series of ethical principles concerning sensual desires, so the present section will be focused on these principles in the sutra. In scrutinizing the scripture, the related ethical considerations and dynamic ethical measures will be manifested. Consequently, five subdivisions will be drawn out from ethical principles to ethical measures, which will constitute an axis in regard to the professional dealing with sensual desires. The sub-divisions are as follows: “Explanations of the Ethical Principles of Sensual Desires in the Profession of the Path to Enlightenment,” “Recognition of the Problems Related to or Triggered by Sensual Desires,” “The Ethical Rectification of the Errors Resulted from Sensual Desires by the Profession of the Path to Enlightenment,” “Turning Sensual Desires to Serve the Profession of the Path to Enlightenment,” and “The Ethical Judgment Orientating One’s Sensual Desires through Life-and-death Transmigrations to the Path to Enlightenment.”

A. Explanations of the Ethical Principles of Sensual Desires in the Profession of the Path to Enlightenment

The appearance of the *12th Assembly* manifests two characteristics. The first one is un-equivocation. The ethical principles are proposed in almost the clearest way. Second, it explains without dogmatism. It does not dictate orders which demand a complete realization of anyone's wills, or issue moral regulations which bewitch the mind. By contrast, it explicates the reasons and brings about the development of the theory. Thus, the ethical principles in thinking procedure promote cultivating the manners and wisdom of Buddhist practice.

The beginning of the sutra, adhering to the practice of the perfection of morality, discusses the distinction between Bodhisattvas' observation and violation of the morality. Concerning the issue of sensual desires, it introduces definite ethical principles:

Once Bodhisattvas lead a householder's life as lay practitioners, their enjoyment of the five sensational desires ought not to be called violation of morality. …… For example, a prince should fulfill all his father's teachings and demands, and learn what he is supposed to learn. That is to say, princes ought to learn all kinds of skills and deeds well, such as riding elephants, horses, carts ……and other skills and deeds. If princes endeavor to learn such kinds of things contributing to acting as kings, their experiences of the various activities of the five sensational desires will not be blamed. In the same way, since Bodhisattvas dedicate themselves assiduously to approaching the supreme enlightenment, their enjoyment of the activities of the five sensational desires as lay practitioners do not violate

or deviate from the all-knowing awareness. (p. 1019c.)

The above quote definitely points out that Bodhisattvas make great endeavors toward the supreme enlightenment. If they do not desert or deviate from their goal of practice and choose to be lay practitioners, their experiences of pleasures of sensual desires are acceptable and do not violate morality. According to this principle, the implied characteristics of ethical considerations are at least the following three. First, its soundness makes sense in ethics and theory. The theory it expounds is neither extreme asceticism nor blind belief, but rational and corresponding to how things work. Therefore, in the face of sensual desires, the principle will not discredit or smear them, nor will it embrace or furnish them. Second, it highlights their relation to professional practice. Regarding sensual desires, there are different aspects to cut into, such as from the perspective of physiology, psychology, gender, power, language, or cultural modes. However, it seems that the *12th Assembly* evidently underscores professional practice most, deals with sensual desires on account of professional practice, and examines the relation between sensual desires and professional practice. Third, it puts emphasis on opening a path to professional practice. Although it underlines the relation between sensual desires and professional practice, its ethical considerations do not confine to trivial things or any short-term events for partial advantages. On the contrary, they emphasize to what degree the path of professional practice can be.

Emphasis on opening the path to professional practice shows the operation of sensual desires, especially those experienced by lay

practitioners; however, these experiences of sensual activities are tolerable and do not violate morality on the condition that they do not either impede the procession of the Path to Enlightenment or result in a deviation away from it. Such a clear-out proposal of ethical principles about sensual desires on the Path to Enlightenment is not only upheld by a coherent theory of the sutra but also elaborated paragraph after paragraph. In order to present the explanations of ethical principles in a more complete way and to build a more tenable foundation of understanding, two quotes in particular are abstracted as follows:

1. If Bodhisattvas lead a householder's life as lay practitioners experience the five sensational desires without an aspiration to turn to the goal of śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas, they should know that they do not violate morality. Pūma! And why? It's because these Bodhisattvas' will to and desire for perfection does not fade away or die out. What is called the will to and desire for perfection? That is, the resolution to achieve and obtain the all-knowing awareness. (p. 1022b.)

2. If Bodhisattvas lead a householder's life as lay practitioners receive three refuges, believe firmly in the three precious Ones? Buddha, Dharma, and Samgha?and dedicate themselves to the supreme enlightenment, they will not deviate away from their practice of the perfection of morality although they experience the pleasures and activities of the five sensational desires. They are also entitled real observers of morality, and the dwellers of Bodhisattvas' morality as well, (p. 1020a.)

The above two quotes discuss the ethics of Bodhisattvas' practice in the

same fashion. If one is not in the profession of Bodhisattvas, this ethics does not apply. The first quote affirms that the key point is to uphold an intention to elevate oneself, namely, hot pursuit and self-orientation toward the supreme enlightenment, without losing the right track of life-practice. Accordingly, though a lay practitioner undergoes the very long process of life, gets married, and entangles in the flow of sensual desires, he or she does not violate morality. The fact is more than this. The second quote further confirms that although maintaining a householder's life leads practitioners to enjoying and taking advantages of the facilities which provide pleasures in sensual life, these practitioners are eligibly entitled observation of morality from within or dwelling Bodhisattvas' morality if they indeed construct the system of life-practice, set up the aim of the life-practice at the supreme enlightenment, and never disregard the regulations on the Path to Enlightenment.

B. Recognition of the Problems Related to or Triggered by Sensual Desires

Although the 12th Assembly does not regard Bodhisattvas' performance of sensual desires to be violation of morality, it does not mean that the inflictions of sensual desires are without errors or can be ignored or unbridled. In fact, either leading a householder's life as an ordinary person or taking up the profession of the Path to Emancipation or Enlightenment, sensual desires may produce mental defilements or even result in serious problems. Recognizing the mental defilements caused by sensual desires and cultivating the basic abilities of constraint will keep one away from the inflictions of the problems. They are the basic requirements for both the Path to Emancipation and the Path to

Enlightenment. The *12th Assembly* is without exception.

For one thing, the mental defilements triggered by sensual desires are mainly afflictions, that is, agitation or contamination of one's mind, and other relevant mental defilements are chiefly attachment, especially attaching to the concepts shaped by the form of life, such as subjectivity, sentient beings, and the like. If one fails to recognize these mental defilements and is overwhelmed by them, they will result in the mistake of violation of morality and destruction of professional efforts.¹³⁾

After recognizing the potential errors resulted from sensual desires, one ought to constrain or confront the desires and make these two abilities the professional accomplishments if one is to be in the profession of Buddhist practice, either the Path to Emancipation or to Enlightenment. In terms of the Path to Enlightenment, the main constituents are composed of the aforementioned six kinds of perfection. In addition, they still need other sets of subject matters to construct the cultivation and learning of Bodhisattvas' practice. Among them, the fundamental accomplishments are abandoning ten unwholesome deeds, especially the deeds plucked up by avid desires, hatred, and delusion:

After the nirvana of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas will endeavor to practice the perfection of generosity, morality, effort, meditation, and wisdom, and gradually achieve excellence …… endeavor to learn abandoning killing, abandoning stealing, abandoning sexual misconduct, abstaining from lying, abstaining from slanderous speech, abstaining from harsh speech,

13) See T. 220 (12), vol. 7, p. 1032b-c.

abstaining from idle talk, refraining from cravings, refraining from hatred, refraining from wrong views, and gradually achieve excellence …… (p. 1041c-1042b.)

C. The Ethical Rectification of the Errors Resulted from Sensual Desires by the Profession of the Path to Enlightenment

Although one has to constrain or confront the improper mentality formed and linked by sensual desires, one does not have to confine oneself in this. By means of the profession of the Path to Enlightenment, one has the opportunity to change the trend. Once one succeeds changing it, one's goal of life will be more transcendent, one's life more fruitful or stable, and the energy of life stronger than before. Therefore, one ought to exert the supremacy of the profession of the Path to Enlightenment. For example, as the following quote indicates, one is able to activate ideas linking to the supreme enlightenment. Once one connects with the supreme enlightenment, one, as if charged with energy, will be able to demonstrate the transcendent power to overcome previous faults.

Although Bodhisattvas often demonstrate intentions with the five sensational desires inappropriate in principle, such inappropriate intentions will be destroyed once the idea of the supreme enlightenment comes to their mind. (p. 1020a.)

As the above quote shows, the inappropriate intentions hooked up with sensual desires are without justification at the first glimpse, but it is

unnecessary to completely stigmatize them or to calculate appropriated details in opposition. In theory and practice, to be released from such awkward situations at the preliminary stage, one has to bring out the supreme noble way, by which one can trigger the strong dynamic of the mind, namely, producing “an idea of the supreme enlightenment.” By virtue of the strong dynamic, the mind is proceeding on the supreme nobleway, and then it will kick off the links to sensual desires, including the possible difficulties derived from sensual desires. If one can exert one’s supreme power in company with the Path to Enlightenment, then the way of thinking, ethical judgment, and the solutions for ethical rectification are likely to change in a considerable way. The *12th Assemblyis* just to figure out sensual desires in the light of professional practice on the Path to Enlightenment and thereby to offer resolutions.

D. Turning Sensual Desires to Serve the Profession of the Path to Enlightenment

On the one hand, the professional practice on the Path to Enlightenment can be used to solve the problems related to sensual desires. However, does it mean that to the profession of the Path to Enlightenment, the activities of sensual desires, if harmless to the world, have to be treated in a negative way and then be ruled out or be settled? Or, is it likely that they are more or less able to do good to the profession of the Path to Enlightenment? When one proposes such an issue in dynamic thinking from both sides and aspires to find out the answer, one will have to extend the scope of the research approach and consider the multi-layer relation between sensual desires and religious path layer by layer. Here, a quote is cited to be the main reference for discussion:

If Bodhisattvas produce some sort of tender feeling toward sensational objects, although this can be termed inappropriate intention, this does not cause too much obstruction to the progress toward the supreme enlightenment. And why? Inappropriate intention is a kind of mental defilements. By means of mental defilements, Bodhisattvas transmigrate from one existence to the next. Whenever Bodhisattvas transmigrate to any destination in the world, they keep cultivating the perfection of generosity, morality, patience, effort, meditation, and wisdom, and numerous other subject matters, and gradually achieve excellence. Whenever the perfection of generosity, morality, patience, effort, meditation, and wisdom, and numerous other subject matters gradually achieve excellence, Bodhisattvas come nearer to the all-knowing awareness. O Lord, therefore I declare that mental defilements can even significantly benefit Bodhisattvas, i.e., conducive to the all-knowing awareness. If Bodhisattvas are able to observe that mental defilements are conducive to the all-knowing awareness and hence beneficial to Bodhisattvas, such Bodhisattvas are to be known that they have acquired skilful means. Such Bodhisattvas are to be known that, violating none of the Bodhisattvas' morality, they have actually dwelled in the perfection of morality. (p. 1039b-c.)

Depending on sensational objects, sensual desires are produced with some sort of discrimination or tastefulness in the mind. In the strict sense of practice, such desires undoubtedly are unjustifiable. Yet, seeing from a different angle, they do not seriously hinder the practice of the supreme goal on the Path to Enlightenment. The reason is that the improper

mentality carried along with sensual desires is often classified among mental defilements, namely, the emotional agitations or contamination. The emotional agitation or shading in the form of mental defilements propels one to hold on to the world and pushes one to cling to one's birth at each period of life. Since one's birth at a period, followed by one's death at the period, is propelled mainly by mental defilements, they can also be called life-and-death defilements. In the process of life, one enters the world to find a place of each periodic birth, and reveals the corresponding form of life to the place one was born. Nonetheless, in terms of the professional practice on the Path to Enlightenment, such exile-like transmigrations are considerably valuable, for they can contribute to the practice on the Path to Enlightenment and provide a series of subject matters which facilitate the supreme enlightenment. In theory, the more one extends one's life in the world, the longer the period of practice will be. Then, the time spent on persistent dedication to the deeds along the Path to Enlightenment will be longer, and the deeds will likely be continuously carried on. The longer one does, the more one accumulates, and the closer the supreme enlightenment is. In retrospect, once one can make the most of sensual desires, they are not all bad things, and they "can even significantly benefit Bodhisattvas."

At the preliminary stage, sensual desires are treated as something problematic, but now they turn out to be of benefit to Bodhisattvas. In reading the *12th Assembly*, if one does not follow up the turns of thinking, one will be stunned. As a matter of fact, the sutras are not to dull or to train the readers to be dogmatists, but to open an exit for life and to lead one to relentless management on the Path to Enlightenment. If one

opposes against or reproaches sensual desires, one is unable to proceed in life and in practice since one just wastes time opposing or reproaching.

On the one hand, the proposal that some problems of sensual desires need to be surmounted does not mean that all activities of sensual desires have to be banned. On the other hand, that sensual desires are of great benefit to Bodhisattvas does not mean that one allows sensual desires to act at will, as if one was indebtedness to sensual desires, and cannot make any judicious comments. If one is not so frigid and extreme, one can trace some more flexible clues and then one's path can be broader and more sublime.

Truly speaking, the *12th Assembly* indicates that sensual desires are of great benefit to Bodhisattvas because the life-and-death defilements carried along with sensual desires propel the process of continuous rebirth, and provide an opportunity for Bodhisattvas to discipline themselves. The reason that sensual desires are of great benefit to Bodhisattvas lies only in the provision of such a basic opportunity. However, if Bodhisattvas fail to seize the opportunity, the potential benefit of sensual desires will turn out to be none.

E. The Ethical Judgment Orientating One's Sensual Desires through Life-and-death Transmigrations to the Path to Enlightenment

Sensual desires push one to transmigrate, but cyclic transmigrations can be used for life-practice. Accordingly, the following two issues need to be discussed with priority. First, what should the ethical judgment of sensual desires be based on? Second, what is the relation between sensual desires and the Path to Enlightenment?

To the first question, when the emphasis is laid only on the aspect that sensual desires propel cyclic transmigrations, sensual desires will end up with being scolded and banned. By contrast, if the emphasis is laid on the aspect that the process of life can be used for continuous practice, then sensual desires can be loudly praised and benefit Bodhisattvas a lot. However, if one does not wish to be restricted to such fragmentary discourses but further inquires what one should rely on, the answer based on the *12th Assembly* will be that when one chooses to perfect morality as one's practice, one ought to base the ethical judgment on the Path to Enlightenment.

Are sensual desires all wrong? Is the continuation of life worthwhile? Such ethical considerations cannot be obtained by appropriating the phenomena of sensual desires or the continuation of life. Faced with the possibility of being trapped in various fragmentary discourses, one way is to transform sensual desires and the continuation of life into the path of practice of life and to navigate the path of practice of life to the Path to Enlightenment. Then, according to the orientation of the Path to Enlightenment, one can make relevant ethical judgment. In other words, if sensual desires and the continuation of life can be transformed into the Path to Enlightenment, one will extend a new scope of ethical judgment along the Path to Enlightenment.

The *12th Assembly* is based on the facts that sensual desires will push cyclic transmigrations and that cyclic transmigrations can be employed to practicing. Hence, the life-and-death defilements carried along with sensual desires are judged to be great benefit to Bodhisattvas. Then, in terms of the ethics of Bodhisattvas' practice within the category of the professional

ethics, the key to such affirmation lies in the proper direction of the Path to Enlightenment. The following two quotes can serve as the basis of comprehension:

1. If Bodhisattvas in the process of countless lives achieve the excellence of the morality but do not dedicate themselves to the supreme enlightenment or do not incessantly contribute to all sentient beings, they cannot incorporate Bodhisattvas' perfection of morality, and they are unable to fulfill Bodhisattvas' perfection of morality. If Bodhisattvas in the process of countless lives achieve the excellence of the morality but dedicate themselves to the Path of *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas*, they cannot incorporate Bodhisattvas' perfection of morality, and they are unable to fulfill Bodhisattvas' perfection of morality. (p. 1021c.)

2. If Bodhisattvas in the process of countless lives practice *brahma-cārya* (celibacy) but dedicate themselves to the two realms of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, they should not be called the observers of pure morality. And why? Pūrṇa! They desert the perfection of morality and reside in the morality related to the Path of *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas*. When Bodhisattvas reside in the morality related to the Path of *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas*, they are not called Bodhisattvas. And why? It is because they desert the perfection of morality and has no aspiration to the all-knowing awareness. Therefore, they cannot accomplish the supreme enlightenment. (p. 1022b.)

The above two quotes likewise mention that one as a Bodhisattva spends countless lives on observation or purification of morality.

However, when the key point, namely, the proper direction of the Path to Enlightenment, is left off, or when one takes the wrong track, one is far way from the perfection of morality, one cannot accumulate the perfection of morality, cannot fulfill the perfection of morality, and one is unenthusiastic about the supreme wisdom. Such Buddhist practitioners cannot be eligibly called “observers of morality,” and in such way, they cannot reach the supreme enlightenment in the end. To emphasize again, such judgment is only applied to the relevant professions. Since such judgment is professional in character, it is better to comprehend it properly from the perspective of professional ethics.

To measure by Bodhisattvas as a profession, if one spends numerous lives on practice but fails to navigate on the Path to Enlightenment, one’s practice has not been upgraded to be Bodhisattvas’ on the Path to Enlightenment yet, so it is ineligible to obtain the recognition of professional ethics. Subsequently, the lives spent and the main factors continuously propelling the very long process of life, like life-and-death defilements, cannot be approved by professional ethics either, for they are not qualified to be benefit to Bodhisattvas’ practice. As a result, the time spent and the leading factors thrusting cyclic transmigrations, like the afflictions related to life-and-death, not only fail to contribute to the practice on the Path of Bodhisattvas, but they cannot be acknowledged by professional ethics. Based on the above two quotes, the significant items which lead to the Path to Enlightenment include the dedication of all one’s efforts to the supreme enlightenment and universal contribution to sentient beings without cession. These items not only direct Bodhisattvas’ practice to the Path to Enlightenment but also constitute the indispensable

building blocks of the “Perfection of Morality.”

The situation of the above two quotes simultaneously shows that the numerous lives spent on practice cannot obtain the affirmation of professional ethics of Bodhisattvas’ practice. By contrast, the situation in the following two quotes is firmly assured:

1. If Bodhisattvas perform generosity and accordingly dedicate all their efforts to the supreme enlightenment, and incessantly contribute to all sentient beings, it ought to be known that they observe Bodhisattvas’ morality. If Bodhisattvas protect and uphold morality and accordingly dedicate all their efforts to the supreme enlightenment, and incessantly contribute to all sentient beings, it ought to be known that they observe Bodhisattvas’ morality. (p. 1021c.)

2. When Bodhisattvas endeavor to reach the supreme enlightenment, they are not supposed to carry out the perfection from generosity to wisdom in a finite fashion. Time after time, they undertake Bodhisattvas’ practice in the numerous life-and-death transmigrations, and by that time, their perfection from generosity to wisdom will gradually mature and capable of approaching the all-knowing awareness. (p. 1022c.)

The situation these two quotes disclose is that “Bodhisattvas’ observation of morality” is affirmed not mainly because they spend lots of lives on practice but because they practice toward the supreme enlightenment and persist on the Path to Enlightenment. Thus, the factors which facilitate one to be on the Path to Enlightenment include dedication of all one’s efforts to the supreme enlightenment, universal contribution to

sentient beings without cession, and undertaking Bodhisattvas' practice in long term.

By means of the above four quotes, a set of ethical judgment takes shape concerning sensual desires and the derivative transmigrations. Sensual desires or cyclic transmigrations can either be affirmed or not. The affirmation is not made at random or case by case, but made by the criterion of the navigation on the Path to Enlightenment. If one can navigate one's sensual desires or cyclic transmigrations toward the Path to Enlightenment, make the most of the constituents of the Path to Enlightenment to promote Bodhisattvas' practice, the entire set of operating procedure will be firmly approved by the professional ethics of Bodhisattvas' practice. Then, the borrowed sensual desires or cyclic transmigrations can be acclaimed in public for their contribution to Bodhisattvas' practice. By contrast, if they are not directed toward the Path to Enlightenment, they are not qualified for Bodhisattvas as a profession, nor can they be affirmed by the professional ethics of Bodhisattvas' practice.

V. Conclusion

The focus of this paper is on the issues of sensual desires in worldly life, and the main textual reference is the *12th Assembly* of the Sutras of the Perfection of Wisdom. This sutra locates sensual desires on the Path to Enlightenment, carries on the ethical considerations and teachings. Furthermore, it is the Path to Enlightenment that transforms sensual desires and offers an exit. In short, if one adjusts one's notions and put them into

life-practice, sensual desires will not destroy the Path to Enlightenment but be benefit to Bodhisattvas' practice.

The theme of the *12th Assembly* of the Sutras of the Perfection of Wisdom is the perfection of morality, one of Bodhisattvas' required subject matters. When Bodhisattvas practice the perfection of morality on the Path to Enlightenment and supplement their practice with professional requirements, such as meditating upon or comprehending the practice of morality as not-selfness, emptiness, and non-duality, dedicating their practice of morality to the goal of the all-knowing awareness or the supreme enlightenment, or applying the practice of morality to enrich or enlighten all the sentient beings in an equal and infinite way, their practice will make supreme their cultivation and learning in wisdom, orientation, or salvific deeds. Thus, the morality they observe can then be entitled the perfection of morality.

There are three main axes in the entire sutra: one is the process of life, the second one is Bodhisattvas' Path, and the third one is the perfection of morality underlying the Path to Enlightenment. They are interdependent and evolve at the same time. Since the practice on the Path to Enlightenment is a long-term project, the very long process of worldly life constitutes an indispensable support. On the Path to Enlightenment, ethical thinking on the issues regarding sensational situations in worldly life, at least, will not reduce the role of the process of life from a relying support to a burden, and, on the other hand, a thorough ethical thinking not only achieves the perfection of morality but also facilitates the realization of the Path to Enlightenment.

Since the practice on the Path to Enlightenment is quite professional, it

has the counterpart of professional requirements. Concerning “what ought to” and “what ought not to,” how to judge “Bodhisattvas’ violation or observation of morality,” and how to know that Bodhisattvas turn away from or observe the perfection of morality, they can be measured by the “ethics of Bodhisattvas’ practice” from the perspective of the “professional ethics.”

Considering from the “ethics of Bodhisattvas,” sensual desires will not be reduced to reified stuff, but will be unfolded on the Path to Enlightenment and closely related to the dynamic network of the Path to Enlightenment. Subsequently, sensual desires will not be regarded as something similar to judgment and sentence, ending up without a chance to turn around. On the contrary, from sensual desires, a variety of ethical considerations can be brought about.

When one sets sensual desires on the Path to Enlightenment and carries on ethical thinking, one can first rule out of being trapped in the extreme edge. On the one extreme, sensual desires are treated as totally unwholesome in ethics or as germs which are absolutely harmful to Bodhisattvas’ practice. On the other extreme, they are regarded as completely acceptable in ethics or as nutrients which are absolutely beneficial to Bodhisattvas’ practice. These two extreme opinions seem to sentence sensual desires and isolate sensual desires from the dynamic network of the Path to Enlightenment. Hence, such viewpoints are not in accordance with the manner of ethical considerations as is seen from the *12th Assembly*.

After excluding the possibility of being trapped in two extreme judgments, the following six arguments recapitulate a set of ethical

considerations connected with the dynamic network of the Path to Enlightenment.

First, a very fundamental ethical principle throughout the 12th Assembly clearly states that Bodhisattvas endeavor to approach the goal of the supreme enlightenment. When they choose to maintain the status of lay practitioners, their experiences of sensual pleasures are permissible, and they do not violate the morality on the condition that they do not deviate from the goal of their practice.

Second, it is necessary to recognize the indiscretions resulted from sensual desires, including mental defilements and attachment. One should not let these indiscretions grow wild and overwhelm with the result of violating the morality and destroying all the professional efforts toward the supreme enlightenment. Instead, one ought to constrain oneself or to confront sensual desires, like abandoning the ten unwholesome deeds, and employs constraint or confrontation to base the professional capacity and cultivation.

Third, although the sensual desires often hook up with indecent mentality, one ought to exert the superior power of professional practice on the Path to Enlightenment. For instance, raising the idea of dedication to the supreme enlightenment helps release one from the difficulty evolved from sensual desires. At the same time, it manifests the function of ethical rectification.

Fourth, since the life-and-death defilements carried along with sensual desires push the process of continuous rebirth, they afford an opportunity for practice on the Path to Enlightenment. As a result, sensual desires are even of considerable benefit to Bodhisattvas in long- or short-term

practice.

Fifth, to measure by Bodhisattvas as a profession, if one spends numerous lives on practice but fails to navigate on the Path to Enlightenment, one's practice has not been upgraded to be Bodhisattvas' on the Path to Enlightenment yet, so it is ineligible to obtain the recognition of professional ethics. Subsequently, the lives spent and the main factors continuously propelling the very long process of life, e.g. life-and-death defilements, cannot be approved by professional ethics either, for they are not qualified to be benefit to Bodhisattvas' practice. Consequently, the time spent and the leading factors thrusting cyclic transmigrations, like the afflictions related to life-and-death, not only fail to contribute to the practice on the Path of Bodhisattvas, but they cannot be acknowledged by professional ethics.

Finally, if one can navigate one's sensual desires or cyclic transmigrations toward the Path to Enlightenment, make the most of the constituents of the Path to Enlightenment to exert their positive function of Bodhisattvas' practice, the entire set of operating procedure will be firmly approved by the professional ethics of Bodhisattvas' practice. Then, the assumed sensual desires or cyclic transmigrations can be explicitly acclaimed for their contribution to Bodhisattvas' practice. ■