

"The vows are lost through wayward views, defeating offenses, or by returning them;  
No other condition<sup>1</sup> can destroy them." — Jamgon Kongtrul

# *A Festival of Attainments*

*Understanding Kadampa Ordination,  
with Reference to Historical Precedents  
in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*

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<sup>1</sup> Not even death! See Jamgon Kongtrul's autocommentary on page 48 of this essay.

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The informative commentary to this book [*The Opening of the Wisdom-Eye* by the Dalai Lama] written by the Ven. Bhikkhu Kantipalo (of the Theravada school) refers to a work by Conze which in turn describes the *Avijnaptirupa* as being something totally different in nature to the Vaibhasika meaning outlined in the *Cheng Wi Shi Lun*. **Such are the burdens Buddhist scholars have to bear!** (Shifu Nagaboshi Tomio, *Bodhisattva Warriors: The Origin, Inner Philosophy, History and Symbolism of the Buddhist Martial Art within India and China*, p. 397)



∞ ABSTRACT ∞

Just as Geshe Kelsang Gyatso’s Lorig text (*“Understanding the Mind”* / *“How to Understand the Mind”*) is written exclusively from a Madhyamika-Prasangika point of view (rather than from a Sautrantika point of view, as is traditionally done with Lorig texts), Geshe Kelsang has designed an ordination system that is also interpreted exclusively from a Prasangika point of view (rather than from a Vaibhashika point of view, as is traditionally done in other Tibetan Buddhist traditions). The philosophical background for this presentation—including how the founders of other Tibetan Buddhist traditions have agreed with it in principle, albeit not necessarily in practice—is offered here.

In a sense, this essay is about understanding Kadampa ordination from a Kagyu perspective. Before practicing in the New Kadampa

Tradition (2006-2012), I studied in the Drikung Kagyu tradition (1998-2002) under the guidance of two Kagyu Lamas: Khenchen Könchog Gyaltzen Rinpoche and His Eminence Garchen Rinpoche. When I first began to practice, our local Sangha was helping to review prepublication copies of Khenchen's own English translation of Gampopa's Kadam Lamrim text *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. Giving commentary to these teachings, Khenchen-la says something that Tenzin Peljor would fault Geshe-la for, namely that the vinaya vows of a Bodhisattva can survive death! Tenzin is just ignorant that these teachings exist...

*"The morality of the bodhisattva's precept does exist in the impotent, hermaphrodites, gods and so forth and will not cease at the time of death."* So, they can also receive this vinaya vow. That vow can become a foundation for the bodhichitta practice. So, it will not stop after that. It will continue, because it's sealed by the bodhicitta. (Khenchen Könchog Gyaltzen, *Refuge and Precepts*)

The Drikung Kagyu tradition was founded by the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Tibetan Lama, Lord Jigten Sumgön—and even he recognized the validity of a 10-vow Pratimoksha ordination system for Mahayana practitioners, which he described as the “same intention” as the Buddha. Jigten Sumgön's masterpiece *The Gongchig* plays a very important role in understanding Kadampa ordination, as presented in this essay. Direct quotes by him and others such as the Karmapas and Jamgon Kongtrul (co-founder of the Rimé movement)—more than third-party references—are all available to you herein. Bottom line is: No matter what *form* the vows might take, they all share a single *intent!*

∞ A NOTE TO THE READER ∞

I believe that many laypersons' initial reaction to this topic—that it is only about monasticism—is unnecessarily self-limiting. It is actually about karma *in general*, and the subject is presented in that context in the FPMT, whether you are ordained or not. For example, here is [the first of a 3-part video series](#) by Thubten Chodron on the subject of *non-revelatory forms* (Skt. *avijnaptirupa*), which is admittedly not discussed in the NKT except in Geshe Kelsang Gyatso's *The Ordination Handbook* (now out-of-print).

Although no Tibetan Masters—and no Indian Masters higher than the Vaibhashika school—would accept *avijnaptirupa* in their theory of causality, they still interpret their ordination vows according to that lower Hinayana school, as passed down via the Mulasarvastivada lineage. As a Madhyamika, Geshe-la remarks, *Isn't that odd?! Why doesn't practice coincide with accepted theory when it comes to Pratimoksha vows?*

“Traditionally, Tibetan Buddhism follows the *Vinaya Sutra*, which belongs to the Hinayana tradition. Personally, I find this strange. We are **Mahayana** Buddhists, so why are we following the Vinaya—the Pratimoksha vows—of the **Hinayana** tradition?” – Geshe Kelsang Gyatso

In the spirit of *intellectual honesty*, I invite you to always verify even direct quotes such as this. For example, in November 2015, Geshe Tashi's [challenge to NKT ordination](#) on YouTube is centered on that quote. Unfortunately, he truncated Geshe

Kelsang's words from *The Ordination Handbook*, thus changing its intended meaning, effectively putting words in Geshe-la's mouth by taking them out! He is *not* asking, "Why are we following the Vinaya?" That is a ridiculous straw man! He is actually asking, "Why are we following the Vinaya of the Hinayana?" So, I put back **the highlighted words above**. This mistake—probably originating with Tenzin Peljor—claims that Geshe Kelsang was teaching to abandon the Vinaya *altogether*, when he was merely questioning why Tibetans don't follow the Bodhisattva's Pratimoksha according to a Mahayanist interpretation.

Tenzin Peljor's straw man arguments have been parroted unwittingly by many anti-NKT critics for several years, simply because they take Tenzin Peljor's word for it. For example, two years after this essay was first presented to Tenzin Peljor, his protégé Carol McQuire was published claiming that if the NKT had studied traditional Tibetan Vinaya, "there we would have seen that all Tibetan and other Buddhist ordinations cannot be taken into future lives" (*Realising the Guru's Intention,* *Spiritual and Visionary Communities*, p. 81), which is blatantly *wrong* considering the many direct quotes that I have found by Tibetan Masters, all available to you in this essay, from their classic works. *It's a pity you don't know the content of your own library!*

I also believe that Tenzin Peljor is the ultimate source of the *Australia Sangha Association's* statement from 2008, since they (and now others) merely repeat *his* objections. I wanted to research them all before committing myself to ordination within the NKT, and this essay was the result of that investigation. Thus, this essay focuses on his objections, particularly his blog essay *NKT*

*Ordination: Clarifying More Misunderstandings.* After spending just a few months gathering this material together (all on an interlibrary-loan budget), I came away with serious doubts about Tenzin Peljor's Buddhist education; even more so now since his understanding is still incorrect. At this point, I am *not* surprised: too many critics look for doctrinal faults in Geshe Kelsang's teachings when there simply are *none*, willfully belittling Buddha's holy Dharma just so long as it helps to defame the NKT.

Since a correct understanding of Buddha's Pratimoksha teachings is readily available both within the NKT and outside it, I must conclude that Tenzin Peljor, Carol McQuire, Linda Ciardiello, and the like are simply self-styled 'gatekeepers' of Buddhadharma who really don't know what they're talking about. So, I decided to do their homework for them!

It is my sincere hope that by using only non-NKT quotes by Indian and Tibetan Lamas (such as Vasubandhu, Shantideva, Atisha, the Karmapas, Gampopa, Jigten Somgon, and Jamgon Kongtrul among others), there will be a greater appreciation for Buddhism in general, the Drikung Kagyu tradition especially, and the New Kadampa Tradition in particular... *May these teachings never go extinct!*

EDITORIAL NOTE: The first edition of this essay was posted online on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 to celebrate the Summer Festival. I was ordained a few months later at the Fall Festival at KMC New York, after researching more to substantiate difficult point #22 as discussed on pages [35-37](#), the inspired answer coming just days before my ordination, else I would not have gone through with it.

Others, following the quotation from the Abhidharma, say:

Since the vow has form,  
it is abandoned at the time of death.

Analyzing this, however, it is true that for someone who does not have the resolve to guard the training—because the habituation is lacking—even if he had obtained the vow, it will be lost. [However,] one who has the resolve to guard the training will, by the power of habituation, not turn away from his monastic ordination (*dge slong gi dngos po*, Skt. *bhiksubhava*) even in the intermediate state. If this were not so, it would not fit the teaching according to which in the intermediate state one's fate is determined by one's habits. It is impossible that other habits are effective in the intermediate state, and only the habit of pratimoksha is not! It ensues that while such explanations of yours follow only the trace of the quotation, your familiarity with the practice of the intermediate state and so on is not even as great as a sesame seed.

— Rikzin Chökyi Drakpa, *Light of the Sun* (1633 CE)  
trans. by Jan-Ulrich Sobisch  
(*The Buddha's Single Intention*, pp. 245-255)

∞ INTRODUCTION ∞

“May I perform the conduct of awakening,  
And remember my lives during all states.  
In all my successive lives, from birth to death,  
May I always be a renunciate.”  
— Samantabhadra, *The King of Aspiration Prayers*  
(trans. by Elizabeth Callahan)

This detailed essay is the result of researching various objections raised by Tenzin Peljor concerning ordination vows in the New Kadampa Tradition. Tenzin Peljor would have you to believe that Geshe Kelsang Gyatso is the lone dissenter against all of Tibetan Buddhism when it comes to what is called “three-vow theories” (i.e., Tibetan theories for harmonizing the Pratimoksha, Bodhisattva, and Tantric vows), as if Geshe Kelsang was the only one to teach that ordination vows can continue after death or that Pratimoksha vows can transform into Bodhisattva vows, etc.

Whether or not ordination vows cease at the time of death is discussed below in sections I and II, and whether vows transform over time and/or have the same nature is discussed in sections III and IV. More specifically, sections I and II address the possibility of vows not being lost at the time of death since (I) they are not preserved in the physical body and (II) their duration is determined by one’s intention. With some overlap, the last two sections explain (III) the transformation of Pratimoksha vows into Mahayana vows and (IV) the transformation of Pratimoksha vows from initial, to novice, to full ordination vows.

There is a certain innovative ‘genius’ behind Geshe Kelsang’s decision to revamp monastic ordination. In one fell swoop, it solves the now decades-long conundrum of Tibetan Buddhism’s lack of full ordination for women. At the time of my ordination, two nuns were the Spiritual Directors of the New Kadampa Tradition! Surveying the three vows in all four Tibetan traditions, the major texts referenced in this essay are:

- *Three-Vow Theories in Tibetan Buddhism*  
by Jan-Ulrich Sobisch
- *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes*  
by Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen
- *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*  
by Gampopa
- *Gongchig: The Single Intent, the Sacred Dharma*  
by Jigten Sumgön
- *Buddhist Ethics*  
by Jamgon Kongtrul
- *Treasury of Precious Qualities*  
by Kangyur Rinpoche
- *The Tibetan Vinaya: Guide to Buddhist Conduct*  
by Thrangu Rinpoche
- *Perfect Conduct: Ascertaining the Three Vows*  
by Dudjom Rinpoche
- *Essence of the Ocean of Vinaya*  
by Je Tsongkhapa
- *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*  
by Je Tsongkhapa
- *The Basic Path to Awakening*  
by Je Tsongkhapa

∞ PART I – THE VOWS AS FORM ∞

**ASSERTION:** “According to the **Hinayana** Vaibhashika school, ordination vows are subtle physical form and disappear at the time of death, but according to the **Mahayana**, vows are a type of mind and we do not *necessarily* lose our ordination when we die.” – Geshe Kelsang Gyatso

**OBJECTION:** “It is impossible that ordination vows can continue into the next life. The Vinaya and all commentaries on the Vinaya are clear about this... The ordination vows last for one life and cease with the death... According to the Vinaya the vows cease at the end of the life.” – Tenzin Peljor

Tenzin Peljor’s objection to Geshe Kelsang Gyatso’s teaching from *The Ordination Handbook* is addressed in the following Q&A, the format used for this essay. Notice how I begin by acknowledging that there *are* views within Tibetan Buddhism that contradict Geshe Kelsang’s teaching.

**01 Contrary to what Geshe Kelsang claims, do any of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions teach that Pratimoksha ordination vows cease at the time of death?**

Yes, for example in the Sakya tradition. Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen (1182-1251, also known as Sapan) wrote a text called *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes*. Sakya Pandita opens (vv. 4-5) with a discussion of the duration of the Pratimoksha vows:

A vow, Disciples maintain, is nonmental [i.e., material] and issues from body and voice; since it has form, the vow is relinquished whenever death occurs. On this point the *Abhidharmakosha* also teaches:

“The disciple of Individual liberation is terminated by renouncing the training, by dying, by having become a hermaphrodite, by severance of the roots of virtue, and by the lapse of night.” And this statement is authoritative.

## **02 Who is Sakya Pandita quoting as his scriptural authority?**

Sakya Pandita quotes *Treasury of Knowledge* (Skt. *Abhidharmakosha*, trans. by Pruden) by Vasubandhu. He was a great Indian Buddhist scholar of the fifth century who, after writing this text, was later converted to the Mahayana by his older brother, Asanga. Both are lineage Gurus of the stages of the path to enlightenment (Lamrim).

## **03 Why does Sakya Pandita say that Pratimoksha vows cease at the time of death?**

The main reason given by Sakya Pandita for Pratimoksha vows automatically ceasing at the time of death is that they are *nonmental/material*. In other words, because one’s Pratimoksha vows are *physical forms*, they are destroyed at the time of one’s physical demise. Jared Douglas Rhoton, who translated *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes*, explains (pp. 73-74, n. 1):

It is a tenet of the Vaibhashika school, based on Abhidharma theory, that a vow is endowed with a subtle material form (*avijnaptirupa*; Tib. *rnam par byed ma yin pa'i gzugs*) that adheres in the stream of consciousness. The vow, therefore, is coterminous with its material causes, i.e., body and speech. Body and speech and their effects derive from the four great elements (*mahabhuta*) of earth, water, fire, and air, and from their derivative elements (*bhautika*). Upon the separation of these elements at the time of death, a vow is deprived of its base and thus ceases to exist.

#### **04 Who are the Vaibhashikas?**

There are four schools of Buddhist tenets, which are four philosophical views taught by Buddha according to the inclinations and dispositions of disciples. They are the Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, Chittamatra, and Madhyamika schools. (These names are sometimes rendered into English as Analysts, Traditionalists, Idealists, and Centrists, respectively.) The first two are Hinayana schools and the second two are Mahayana schools. Geshe Kelsang says that “They are studied in sequence, the lower tenets being the means by which the higher ones are understood.”

#### **05 What is *avijnaptirupa*?**

According to the Vaibhashikas, *avijnaptirupa* is the physical form that vows take after one makes them during the ritual ceremony. That is to say, a number of *avijnaptirupa* issue forth from one's avowed actions of body and speech and remain with that person

as subtle physical forms. There is a separate *avijnaptirupa* for each vow (e.g., to abandon killing, to abandon stealing, etc.). It is what makes someone a vow-holder even when one is not consciously thinking about his or her vows. For so long as they abide within the continuum of the person, these subtle physical forms effect a change in one's personality in accordance with those vows. The *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (p. 221) says that "One might understand *avijnaptirupa* as the moral character of a person or a force of habit. It is a potential form, preserved in the physical body."

## **06 Does Tenzin Peljor also refer to *avijnaptirupa*?**

Whether he realizes it or not, Tenzin Peljor is referring to *avijnaptirupa* when he uses the term *non-revelatory form*:

The rabjung ordainee makes promises that belong to the class of "non-revelatory form of virtuous and non-virtuous in-betweens". Therefore, becoming a rabjung is a virtuous promise but it is not a vow. The advantage is that such a ordination [*sic*] generates habits that bring one closer to getting and holding an actual vow—like that of a novice monk or nun (tib. getsul, getsul ma) or a fully ordained monk (tib. gelong). These promises of a rabjung have neither positively nor negatively the impact of a full vow. ([For details see Abhidharma-kosa \[Tib. chos mngon pa mdzod\] by Vasubandhu.](#))

## 07 What does the term *non-revelatory form* mean?

Since *avijnaptirupa* is a physical form that is invisible and intangible to outsiders (and even to oneself), the term is generally translated into English as “non-revealing form” or “non-revelatory form,” and also as “unmanifest form” or “imperceptible form.” *Avijnaptirupa* is described as “a latent potential impressed on the psycho-physical stream of the individual who initiates an ethically significant action. It is an unseen efficacy capable of producing results at some later moment of time” (*Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, p. 183). When someone makes a vow through a *patent* physical action—for example, kneeling in front of a preceptor while reciting a pledge—this gives rise to a *latent* action that persists in the continuum of the person as a non-revealing form.

In *The Tibetan Vinaya: A Guide to Buddhist Conduct* (p. 23), Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche explains:

The transmission of the pratimoksha in Tibet is derived from the Mulasarvastivadin tradition. According to this Mulasarvastivadin, the vows of the fully ordained monastic, of the novice and of the layman are of two forms; that which can be perceived and that which cannot be perceived. At the time when the vow is actually taken, it is in the form which can be perceived because others can actually see one taking the vow. From then on, it becomes the form which cannot be perceived, because others cannot see that one has, for example, abandoned the action of killing. The actions of not killing, not stealing, and not engaging in sexual

intercourse are virtuous actions of the body while not lying is the virtuous action of speech. One can preserve the vows directly or consciously, or indirectly such as at the time of eating or sleeping, since one already has the vows within oneself.

The Berzin Archives' glossary of Buddhist terms has an entry for *nonrevealing form*, which says in part:

A subtle form of physical phenomenon, asserted only by the Vaibhashika and Gelug Prasangika schools, that is caused by a strong constructive or destructive motivation, but which does not show ("reveal") that motivation.

## **08 What about the other philosophical schools?**

The above glossary entry implies that *avijnaptirupa* was not asserted by the Sautrantika or Chittamatra schools. It also implies that *avijnaptirupa* is not accepted by any Madhyamika-Prasangika traditions except the Gelugpas. This is confirmed in an article entitled *Special Features of the Gelug Tradition* by Dr. Alexander Berzin:

Prasangika, like Vaibhashika, asserts that vows are also nonrevealing forms. The non-Gelug traditions assert that only Vaibhashika asserts vows like that. All other tenet systems assert that they are ways of being aware of something. They are aspects of ethical self-discipline. Gelug accepts that this is the case only for Sautrantika, Chittamatra, and Svatantrika.

## 09 Did Vasubandhu adhere to the Vaibhashika view that vows are physical form?

When reporting the Vaibhashikas' view of *avijnaptirupa*, Vasubandhu spoke of himself in the third person, saying "...the author here expresses the opinion of the Vaibhashikas, and not his own" (p. 68). Klein explains that Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* "is considered to be of the Vaibhashika school although Vasubandhu's own commentary on it is said to be written from the view point of the Sautrantikas Following Scripture" (*Knowing, Naming & Negation*, introduction, p. 20). According to Geshe Lhundub Sopa (*Steps on the Path to Enlightenment*, vol. 2, pp. 290-291; emphasis his):

In his *Treasury of Knowledge* Vasubandhu presents the Vaibhashika view of the phenomenal world, but he also interjects objections to that view from his own position, which was in accord with the Sautrantika school. (In later texts he adopted the Yogacara viewpoint.) This conception of revealing and nonrevealing karma was one of the key concepts in the Vaibhashika karmic system that Vasubandhu criticizes and tries to refute. He rejected the notion that karma was in any way physical. The Sautrantika, Yogacara, and Madhyamaka schools maintain that intended karma (i.e., karma that is intended action) is the *thought* that accompanies the action at the time of performing the action. They insist that *the mind is the thing*; physical action is not in and of itself karma.

**10 What reasons did the Vaibhashikas give to support the idea that vows are physical form, and how were these refuted by Vasubandhu?**

Pruden explains (p. 137, n. 57), “We shall see that the Sautrantikas and Vasubandhu do not admit the existence of a specific *dharma* called the *avijnapti*.” In *Treasury of Knowledge*, eight arguments for *avijnaptirupa* are presented by the Vaibhashikas, each of which in turn is refuted by the Sautrantikas (= Vasubandhu) as inconclusive. The last two arguments and their respective refutations specifically concern Pratimoksha vows. Zahiruddin Ahmad paraphrases these for us in *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy in India and Tibet* (pp. 39-40):

[The Vaibhashikas assert:]

7. If *avijnapti* did not exist, the discipline of the *pratimoksha* vows would not exist, because it is only by virtue of *avijnapti* that a person who has taken the vows becomes a monk or nun.

8. A scriptural passage describes the renunciation of sins as a dyke (*setu*) which stops the flow of immorality. An absence cannot be such a dyke. Therefore, there has to be a real existent which prevents immorality. That real existent is *avijnapti*.

[The Sautrantikas, such as Vasubandhu, object:]

7. The *pratimoksha* discipline is not *avijnapti*, but volition (*cetana*), i.e., a determination to abstain from

committing sins and thus preventing bad actions and disciplining body and voice.

8. It is the volition, referred to above, which has the character of a dyke. If immorality were prevented by *avijnapti*, independently of one's volition, a man without memory would not be able to commit a sin.

Emphasizing that vows are mental in nature, not physical, Vasubandhu said that "Discipline is volition" (p. 567), responding to the Vaibhashikas' argument #7 above in part with:

This objection is worthless. In fact, the mental series is performed in such a way that, when a thought of transgression starts to appear, the memory of the vow undertaken also appears: the volition of abstention is then found to be present.

**11 Since Sakya Pandita agreed with the Vaibhashikas, please give an example of someone who taught vows as intention, as Vasubandhu did.**

In December 2009, the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa (Ogyen Trinley Dorje), the current head of the Karma Kagyu tradition, gave some commentary to *Brief Notes on Difficult Points of the Three Vows* by the 7th Karmapa Chödrak Gyatso:

His Holiness' skills in debate were much in evidence as he pitted the positions of the Vaibhashika school, who identify vows as a particular type of physical form, against that of Shantideva, who describes vows as the resolve to abstain.

Shantideva's view is verified in section 160 of his *Compendium of Trainings* (Skt. *Shikshasamuchchaya*): "by a resolve to abstain he succeeds in abstaining" (trans. Bendall, p. 159). We can see this in Jamgon Kongtrul's description as well: "The vows of personal liberation are defined as the intention (as well as concomitant mental states) to forsake..." (p. 85).

The late Dudjom Rinpoche, who was head of the Nyingma tradition, provided a brief description of "the nature of the vow" according to the Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, Cittamatra, and Madhyamika schools (*Perfect Conduct*, p. 18). Concerning the latter, he said:

The Madhyamaka school asserts that the nature of the vow is the "abandoning mind," which means that the primary and secondary consciousnesses (subtle mind) have attained full renunciation.

This is in accordance with the Nyingma master Kangyur Rinpoche (1897-1975) who said that *avijnaptirupa* is only asserted by the Vaibhashika school, adding that "The Sautrantikas, Chittamatrins, and Madhyamikas, however, make no mention of imperceptible forms" (*Treasury of Precious Qualities*, p. 377).

**12 Please give a summary of how vows were regarded by all four philosophical schools, not just the Madhyamikas.**

Jamgon Kongtrul summarizes the four tenet systems' view on the essence of the vows as being either physical or mental in nature (pp. 85-86):

According to the Analysts (*vaibhashika*), the vows have form, either perceptible or imperceptible, and are connected to the individual by the “rope” of acquisition. The Traditionalists (*sautrantika*) hold a different view, stating that [the vows amount to] a complete transformation of the continuum of mind. The Idealists (*cittamatin*) consider [the vows] to be both the seed and the continuity of the intention to forsake what is unwholesome. For the Centrist (*madhyamika*) proponents of intrinsic emptiness (Tib. *rang stong pa*), [the vows] consist in the intention (and concomitant mental factors) to renounce [unwholesome deeds]. Stated concisely, the Traditionalists and the higher schools agree that the vows have the nature of consciousness and that they form with an attitude of disengagement [from cyclic existence] serving as their substantial condition, and with the essential elements [for assuming the vows], etc., serving as their cooperative conditions. (See pages 50-55 of this essay.)

**13 Was *avijnaptirupa* taught by Je Tsongkhapa? Did he think that vows were form or intention?**

In his *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Je Tsongkhapa sides with Vasubandhu against the Vaibhashikas concerning revelatory and non-revelatory physical and verbal karma (vol. 1, p. 303):

The Vaibhashikas divide physical and verbal karma into two types, the perceptible and the imperceptible, and hold that both types always have form.

Vasubandhu refutes this, asserting that physical and verbal karma are intentions that work along with perceptible physical and verbal behavior; thus, both forms of karma [intention and intended] are actually intentions.

By ‘intended karma’, Je Tsongkhapa means “the physical and verbal action motivated by intention.” However, this does not mean that Je Tsongkhapa taught that the nature of the Pratimoksha vow is intention! Here is Ngulchu Dharmabhadra’s amplification of Je Tsongkhapa’s *Essence of the Ocean of Vinaya*, where he discusses the nature of the vows (trans. ACI, *The Ethical Life*, p. 28); the *italicized* words are Tsongkhapa’s:

*It, meaning the basic nature of the individual freedom vows, is physical and verbal karma. According to the Abhidharma School this karma is a kind of invisible and ineffable physical matter. The Consequence section of the Middle Way School also assert that it is physical matter, but they say that it is physical matter belonging to the gateway of phenomena. The others—meaning the Sutrists, the Mind-Only School, and the Independent Section of the Middle-Way School—say that it is the continued intention to give up [bad deeds], along with the seed of this intention. Thus this verse explains that even in our own Buddhist schools, two dissimilar positions are asserted on this point in the tenets of the higher and lower schools.*

According to the Gelugpas, then, some schools say that vows are intention, while the Madhyamaka-Prasangikas are said to agree

with the Vaibhashikas, in so far as vows are considered to be form (Skt. *rupa*, Tib. *gzugs*), specifically “form that is a phenomena source” (Skt. *dharmayatanarupa*). For Je Tsongkhapa, however, a vow is not an *avijnaptirupa* as it is understood in the Vaibhashika school but rather a mental picture. Geshe Michael Roach contrasts the Vaibhashika and Gelug interpretations of *avijnaptirupa*:

But the two schools that say it’s physical differ greatly in what kind of stuff they think that means. One of them says it’s some kind of outer form, and one of them says it’s some kind of visualized or conceptualized form.

He gives examples of the latter in his commentary to the above quote, such as: “The act of refraining from lying is a conceptual picture that you have” (ACI Course 9, Class 3). He adds that Gelugpas do not say that vows are some kind of aura permeating one’s body as per the Vaibhashikas, but the *conceptualization* of not lying, etc.:

I avoid the word *matter*, which is a little tricky. They don’t believe it’s matter, but they do believe it’s physical... They exist as an object of your mind, and that is what the vows are. They are the *conceptualization* of not saying anything bad and not doing anything bad. That’s the highest school.

Thus, as Geshe Kelsang claims, according to the two Mahayana philosophical schools—whether they assert vows as form or intention—ordination vows are *not* preserved in one’s physical body, and so they are not necessarily lost at the time of death

(though usually). Atisha says that monastic vows are lost in this way simply on account of not being recalled in one's new body (*The Complete Works of Atisha*, p. 135).

#### **14 Did the historical Buddha teach that ordination vows can continue into the next life?**

Jan-Ulrich Sobisch answers this according to the Drikung Kagyu tradition, in an online article called *How Jigten Sumgön Tested the Teachings* (17 May 2016). Speaking of “the illustrating stories (*lo rgyus*) that we find in the scriptures” (Skt. *Jatakas*), Sobisch says that:

...Jigten Sumgön accepts them as having the same authority [as] the teachings of Sutra and Tantra. In fact, occasionally, when there is a contradiction between such a story and the teaching in a treatise by an Indian Buddhist master, the story carries more weight. This is, for instance, the case when some scholarly treatises teach that, as a rule, the *pratimoksha* vows always end at death. Here the *Dosherma* [Dorje Sherab's 13<sup>th</sup>-century commentary to the *Gongchig*] teaches that it depends on the capacity of the person. There are stories according to which the vows can arise in a dream, in the intermediate state, and **in the next life as a continuation of the strong habituation to holding the vows in a previous life**. Therefore, the experience transmitted in these stories shows that the rigid explanation of the scholarly treatise does not always hold.

**15 What is the name of the *Jataka* tale being referred to here?**

Jan-Ulrich Sobisch's 850-page book *The Buddha's Single Intention: Drigung Kyobpa Jikten Sumgön's Vajra Statements of the Early Kagyü Tradition* (p. 244) includes a translation of *Light of the Sun* by Rikzin Chökyi Drakpa, a 17<sup>th</sup>-century commentary to the *Gongchig*:

...even when death occurs, it is the great Drigungpa's intention that one's disciplined conduct binds the afflictions of the mind so that one does not pursue the objects of the senses. Thereby one's familiarity with the propensities of disciplined conduct is not abandoned even in the intermediate state and the next life. (3:8)

The following are cited by Rikzin Chökyi Drakpa as evidence: the *Bhadrapala Sutra* (76v1-2), the abbreviated *Kalacakra Tantra* (50r), the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (unverified by Sobisch), and the *Jatakamala* (55v). The latter is the *Garland of Birth Stories*, thirty-four of Buddha's *Jataka* tales as re-told by the 4<sup>th</sup>-century monk Aryasura. Drakpa cites *The Lord of the Fish* (*Maccha-jātaka*), here translated by Peter Khoroché (*Once the Buddha was a Monkey*, p. 103):

Good or bad behavior, by force of habit, becomes part of man's nature, to such a degree that he will go on practicing one or the other even in another incarnation, quite unconsciously, as though in a dream.

∞ *PART II – THE VOWS AS INTENTION* ∞

**ASSERTION:** “If we can maintain the determination to keep our vows through the death process and into our next rebirth, we will still be ordained in our next life.” – Geshe Kelsang Gyatso

**OBJECTION:** “If the ordination vows could be carried into the next life then it follows very soon one would break one of the four root vows in the next life by just having sex through one of the three doors of the body, and since one has broken the root vows in one’s youth one cannot receive ordination in that very life again.” – Tenzin Peljor

**16 Sakya Pandita taught that Pratimoksha ordination vows do not endure past death. Who was he objecting to?**

Concerning this, some say:

“Even though a vow not endowed with the conception of the will to enlightenment may end, a vow that is endowed with that conception could not possibly be lost.”

Rhoton (p. 74, n. 5) notes that, according to Shakya Chokden, the Drikungpas are identified as adherents of the view that “pratimoksha vows exist even after death.” Sobisch also says (p. 40) that here in verse 11, Sakya Pandita was responding to the teachings of the founder of the Drikung Kagyu tradition, Jigten Sumgön:

One of the reasons for Sa-pan's statement that the pratimoksha is lost at death was the teaching of the somewhat earlier master 'Bri-gung-pa sKyob-pa 'Jig-rten-gsum-mgon (1143-1217), who maintained, according to his main disciple sPyan-snga Shes-rab-'byung-gnas (1187-1241), in one of the better-known vajra utterances of his *Same Intention* (ch. III, no. 8), that the pratimoksha is not abandoned at death.

Jigten Sumgön's *Same Intention* (Tib. *Gongchig*) outlines the distinctive features of the Drikung Kagyu tradition. Khenchen Könchog Gyaltsen Rinpoche says that it is the most important text of their tradition. In his forward to Khenpo Samdup's commentary, the head of the lineage—Drikung Kyabgon Chestang—says that the *Gongchig* “represents the highest understanding of the founder of our lineage.” The eighth Karmapa even went so far as to praise it as the “Doctrine of the Kagyupas,” or “the *siddhanta* of the Kagyupas.” Peter Alan Roberts' translation of the verse cited above reads:

Some state that vows are lost at death, on transference [to the next life], and so on, but this [tradition] states that they are not lost through such causes of loss as those.

This verse is in the section on “the Vinaya Pratimoksha” (*Mahamudra and Related Instructions: Core Teachings of the Kagyu Schools*, pp. 378-380). Markus Viehbeck's translation *Gongchig: The Single Intent, the Sacred Dharma* includes Rigdzin Chokyi Dragpa's commentary *The Lamp Dispelling the Darkness*. In part, the commentary to this verse says (p. 59):

In the [*Abhidharma*]kosa it is said that by passing away [the vows] are relinquished. [Vasubandhu] was only thinking of the Hinayana, but in the present context, 'Bri gung pa, the incomparable Jina, explained the Vinaya to be the Mahayana itself. If one therefore holds the view that after one has died the Mahayana-vows are relinquished, what is there to do about this engagement in completely false speaking?

With the words “in the present context,” the commentary is referring to the preceding verses (pp. 55-56) wherein Jigten Sumgön teaches that the Vinaya is common to all vehicles (3:1). That is to say, it is not uncommon to the Hinayana merely as a cause of *liberation*, but was also taught by Buddha as a cause of *full enlightenment* (3:2)...

In some traditions, there are many who state that the Vinaya basket of the sublime Dharma is in the Hinayana, but this [tradition] states that the Vinaya is in all the vehicles. Many have stated that the Vinaya is definitely in the Hinayana alone and therefore is not Mahayana, but this [tradition] states clearly that the Vinaya, in particular, is Mahayana.

Sobisch's translation of 3.2 ends with, “It is obvious that [the Vinaya] is even more present within the Mahayana” (*The Buddha's Single Intention*, p. 214). Similarly, Geshe-la's teaching does not apply to *all* Pratimoksha vow holders, but merely to the Pratimoksha vows as practiced by Mahayanists. Since Bodhisattva vows are taken until one attains enlightenment and

not just for the remainder of this life, then it is possible for a Bodhisattva's Pratimoksha vows to extend past the time of death.

Sobisch says, "It is also interesting to note that unlike Sakya Pandita who insisted on treating the pratimoksha vows strictly from the perspective of the Hinayana, Jikten Sumgön not only tolerated the "Mahayanization" of the pratimoksha vows but, by stating that one should take the vows with the resolve for awakening, was asserting that this would be the best perspective" (*The Buddha's Single Intention*, p. 233).

### **17 Did Sakya Pandita agree with the idea of a Mahayana Pratimoksha vow?**

Yes, Sakya Pandita himself taught both a Shravaka's Pratimoksha vow and a Bodhisattva's Pratimoksha vow (vv. 1-3, 40):

Two traditions of vows  
of Individual Liberation exist:  
one of Disciples  
and another of the Great Vehicle.

From refuge through full monkhood  
a Disciple's vows last as long as he lives.  
They are lost at death.

The effects of the vows  
manifest in a subsequent lifetime.  
The vows of a bodhisattva, however,  
endure even beyond death.

...

Even in the Great Vehicle Individual Liberation that part which consists of the vows such as of full monkhood will be lost a death, whereas that part which consists of the will to enlightenment together with its results will persist even after death.

**18 Wouldn't Sakya Pandita have taught that Bodhisattva vows were also physical form and likewise cease at the time of death?**

The Vaibhashikas taught that "There is no *avijnapti* of the mind" (Vasubandhu, p. 638). So, when Sakya Pandita contrasted the mental nature of the Bodhisattva vows with the physical nature of the Pratimoksha vows (v. 6), he said:

A bodhisattva's vow, however, is nonsubstantial because it originates in the mind and so survives as long as the will is unimpaired.

Thus, according to Sakya Pandita, since Bodhisattva vows are *not* physical form (*avijnaptirupa*), then they do not cease at the time of death. Rhoton explains Sakya Pandita's reasoning (p. 74 n. 1): "The vow of a bodhisattva to attain enlightenment, however, does not undergo a similar dissolution upon death because it is not held to be possessed of material form and hence does not lose its base."

**19 How does Sakya Pandita explain the difference?**

As shown above, Sakya Pandita accepted *avijnaptirupa* and used it to justify his view that it is impossible for Pratimoksha vows to endure past death. To explain this apparent discrepancy, Rhoton notes (p. 22) that while Sakya Pandita treated the Bodhisattva

vow from a Mahayana perspective, he always treated those aspects particular to the Pratimoksha vow strictly from a Hinayana perspective.

**20 But didn't Jigten Sumgön also teach *avijnaptirupa*, just like Sakya Pandita and Je Tsongkhapa?**

Here are Jamgon Kongtrul's concluding remarks concerning the nature of the vows of personal liberation (p. 87):

Centrist proponents of intrinsic emptiness, who do not accept the existence of a fundamental consciousness, assert [that the essence of the vows is] the intention (together with its concomitant mental factors) to forsake [unwholesome deeds]. However, Chandrakirti in his *Analysis of the Five Aggregates*, a treatise on the Central Way, considers [the vows] to be imperceptible form, and Lord Drigungpa and Taktsang the Translator stressed the same view with clever arguments.

In brief, most scholars are of the opinion that the vows at the desire realm level (defined as the ethics of abandoning unwholesome conduct, imbued with an attitude of renunciation) have form.

It is interesting to note that both Jigten Sumgön (3:5) and Sakya Pandita (1:4) refer to the nature of the vows as being imperceptible form (which, according to the Vaibhashikas, is dependent upon the four great elements), and yet they seemingly come to very different conclusions about whether the vows are

necessarily destroyed by death (on the occasion of the separation of the four great elements constituting body and speech). While here saying that Pratimoksha vows have form (*avijnaptirupa*), Jamgon Kongtrul later says that for the non-Vaibhashika schools, Pratimoksha vows are in the nature of consciousness. (See page 48 of this essay.) How is this to be reconciled?

According to the Vaibhashikas, as documented by Vasubandhu, “*Avijnapti* depends on the primary elements, because they are its generating cause, etc.” (p. 68). As quoted at the beginning of this essay, Sakya Pandita said, “A vow, Disciples maintain, is nonmental [i.e., material] and issues from body and voice; since it has form, the vow is relinquished whenever death occurs.” However, if it were the case that vows do not in fact derive from body and speech (as opposed to Sakya Pandita’s interpretation), then their support would *not* be the gross elements, and for this reason they are not necessarily deprived of their support at the time of death. If an *avijnaptirupa* has not arisen from body and speech, then it must have arisen from *mind*; this is different from the Vaibhashika view that “there is no *avijnapti* of the mind” (as was discussed on page 30). Je Tsongkhapa made such a ‘clever argument’ in the earlier-cited quote (p. 303):

The Vaibhashikas divide physical and verbal karma into two types, the perceptible and the imperceptible, and hold that both types always have form. Vasubandhu refutes this, asserting that physical and verbal karma are intentions that work along with perceptible physical and verbal behavior; thus, both

forms of karma [intention and intended] are actually intentions.

What exactly is Vasubandhu (and hence Jigten Sumgön and Je Tsongkhapa) refuting here? Recall Geshe Sopa's commentary to the above passage—*the mind is the thing*—which emphasizes the primacy of mental actions over physical and verbal actions (i.e., every karmic action—even physical and verbal—is actually mental intention). So, while bodily shape and verbal sound have form, the actual physical and verbal karma do not. According to Geshe Kelsang, a vow is “a virtuous determination to abandon particular faults that is generated in conjunction with a traditional ritual.” Thus, the *avijnaptirupas* which are the essence of the vows are issued forth from the mind, specifically the strong determination or intention set during the ordination ceremony. This also appears to be what Jigten Sumgön taught as the basis for the vows, verified in Rigdzin Chokyi Dragpa's commentary to verse 7 (itself probably a retort against Sakya Pandita's criticism of this teaching):

...Furthermore, the thought of renunciation has to arise from [one's] mind; how should a thought of renunciation come to be through [one's] body or speech? Everything is preceded by the mind, the mind is explained as the principal. Understanding this is the essential point. Some indeed proclaim that the vow arises from body and speech, but that the vow should arise from inanimate matter and from sound—this is strange!

Sobisch's alternate translation (*The Buddha's Single Intention*, p. 233, n. 526) of this last line reads, "That the vows arise upon a matter separated from mind [as claimed by Sakya Pandita] would be astonishing to the end of existence!"

**21 Besides Pratimoksha vows being physical form, does Sakya Pandita give any other reason for saying that they do not exist after death?**

Sakya Pandita began his *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes* by objecting to the idea that ordination vows do not necessarily cease at the time of death, by quoting the Vaibhashika school's assertion that Pratimoksha vows are physical form. He then argued (v. 15) that if one's ordination vows could carry on into the next life, it would follow—as Tenzin Peljor also objects—that one would inadvertently be breaking one's vows on account of not remembering having taken them in one's previous life:

In that case, the vows of full monkhood and the like,  
which are endowed with the conception of the will to  
enlightenment,  
would not be lost through all the causes of vow-loss,  
such as death, renouncing the training, or severance of  
the roots of virtue.

Verse 12 here amounts to little more than a straw man argument on Sakya Pandita's part. Critics seem to think that what is being said is that vows continue whether or not one keeps the intention to do so, which is the opposite of what Geshe Kelsang Gyatso teaches:

When most ordinary beings die they forget everything from their previous life. Their memory and mindfulness degenerates, and when they take their next rebirth they are unable to remember anything. If they were ordained they will again have to receive ordination from their Spiritual Guide. However, those practitioners who have gained profound realizations of moral discipline, which are powerful enough to withstand death, can carry their ordination with them into future lives.

Thus, one's Mahayana ordination vows *can* continue even after death, provided one is a realized Bodhisattva or a Tantric adept. Obviously, someone who is unable to remember having taken Pratimoksha vows in their previous life is not someone whose Pratimoksha vows would have withstood death. Simply put, one's ordination vows cease when one loses that intention; they endure for so long as one keeps that intention. To quote Geshe Kelsang again, "If we can maintain the determination to keep our vows through the death process and into our next rebirth, we will still be ordained in our next life."

**22** Wouldn't this contradict Je Tsongkhapa when he says quite categorically that if the Pratimoksha vow "continued unrelinquished upon changing lives, it would be possible to have gods and animals who were monks and the like" (Tatz, p. 108)?

It is important to read everything in context. Here, Je Tsongkhapa was correcting the mistaken views of those who would claim that the Pratimoksha vow is a necessary prerequisite and basis for

taking and holding the Bodhisattva vow. In that case, in order to maintain one's Bodhisattva vow in life after life until enlightenment, it would be necessary to keep its supposed foundation—the Pratimoksha vow—in all future lives as well. (Then, everyone who has ever taken the Bodhisattva vow would automatically keep their Pratimoksha vow, too, no matter where they are reborn—this is *not* what Geshe Kelsang is claiming.) Je Tsongkhapa refutes this claim by saying, “If it [the Pratimoksha vow] were necessary for maintaining it [the Bodhisattva vow], and if it continued unrelinquished upon changing lives, it would be possible to have gods and animals who were monks and the like” (*The Basic Path to Awakening*, p. 108).

Due to uncontrolled rebirth, even a monk or nun with Bodhisattva vows may be reborn as a god or an animal. Tatz comments (introduction, p. 17) that it would be “unimaginable that pratimoksha vows may be carried into another life” for precisely this reason, namely that no monastic discipline exists outside the human realm. However, this reasoning is not meant to apply to all cases; how does it apply to a realized monastic Bodhisattva who conscientiously takes rebirth as a human being? To understand this, please compare the following three statements:

- One loses one's ordination vows at the time of death because one might be reborn as an animal, and there are no monastic animals. (True)
- One loses one's ordination vows at the time of death because one might be reborn as a god, and there are no monastic gods. (True)

- One loses one's ordination vows at the time of death because one might be reborn as a human being, and there are no monastic humans. (False!)

Thus, Tenzin Peljor's argument is *not* conclusive. Je Tsongkhapa's point is merely to say that the Mahayana Pratimoksha vow is neither *necessarily* nor *automatically* carried over into the next life (*The Basic Path to Awakening*, p. 108); and for this reason, "being unrelinquished at the time of death" should not be listed as a defining characteristic (p. 193).

But, the door is left open for those Bodhisattvas who can control death, intermediate state, and rebirth. Except in such special cases, losing one's ordination vows at the time of death is definitely the norm; maintaining one's ordination vows into the next life is very rare, even for monastic Bodhisattvas.

When read in context, there is clearly no contradiction between Je Tsongkhapa has taught, and what Geshe-la is encouraging his ordained disciples.

**23 So, Geshe Kelsang is not claiming that Pratimoksha vows always continue after death?**

Ordinarily, one's Pratimoksha vows *do* indeed cease at the time of death simply because they are taken for the duration of one lifetime (Dudjom Rinpoche, p. 55; Gorampa in Sobisch, p. 82). Similarly, the eight Mahayana precepts cease at dawn the next morning simply because they are taken for the duration of only one day (cf. Sakya Pandita, v. 17).

Normally, one takes Pratimoksha vows for the rest of one's life: "Throughout my life I will..." In contrast, one takes Bodhisattva vows until one attains enlightenment, no matter how many lifetimes that may entail. If the duration of *any* vow is really a matter of intention—hence why one no longer has to observe vows after giving them up, contrary to Sakya Pandita's *non sequitur* in verses 12-13—then cannot they extend beyond this life, as long as one's will remains unimpaired?

**24 Please give an example of the duration of one's vows extending past their original intention.**

Dudjom Rinpoche relates how the one-day vows of the eight Mahayana precepts were made into permanent, lifetime vows by Chandragomin (p. 24):

These eight precepts were embraced for the duration of his life by the great *acarya* Candragomin. Thereafter, this became known as gomi lay ordination. This tradition was carried on by the Theravadan tradition according to Vasubandhu. However, gomi lay ordination does not exist in the Sarvastivada tradition.

It should be noted also that the Theravadins likewise "considered the essence of the precepts to lie in volition (*cetana*)" (*A History of Indian Buddhism*, p. 192; see also *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, p. 185). Jamgon Kongtrul also mentions this lifelong purificatory fast being taught in the Mahayana scriptures (p. 100).

∞ PART III – VOW TRANSFORMATION ∞

**ASSERTION:** “As our renunciation deepens it will transform into bodhichitta, and our ordination vows will transform into Bodhisattva vows and finally into Tantric vows. In this way we can become a higher being able to maintain our ordination into our next life. This is the most profound way of understanding our Kadampa Buddhist ordination.” – Geshe Kelsang Gyatso

**OBJECTION:** “Ordination vows cannot ‘transform into Bodhisattva vows and finally into Tantric vows’, if it were so then also all the ordained persons would receive the Bodhisattva vows and the Tantric vows by a miraculous way of transformation. The Bodhisattva vows and the Tantric vows as well as the ordination vows are conferred only by the proper ceremony as described in the scriptures, a qualified abbot/Sangha or master, and with a conscious [*sic*] intention to receive them. Bodhichitta must be developed by applying the Mahayana teachings and renunciation supports that mind but does not transform into it otherwise if [*sic*] follows the Bodhisattvas who have attained uncontrived Bodhichitta have no renunciation because their renunciation would have transformed into Bodhichitta.” – Tenzin Peljor

**25** Are there any examples of Kadampa-trained Masters teaching that Pratimoksha vows do not cease at the time of death, if transformed into Bodhisattva vows?

Gampopa's Lamrim text *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*—based on Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*—refutes an objection that “the pratimoksha cannot be a foundation for maintenance of the bodhisattva's vow because death causes the pratimoksha precepts to cease, but does not cause the bodhisattva's vow to cease.” His response begins (p. 145):

There are three aspects to the pratimoksha precepts, depending on one's mental state:

- a) If one accepts these seven types merely from a desire to have the happiness of the three realms, then this is morality with a vested interest.
- b) If one takes these precepts in order to completely free oneself from all suffering, it is the morality associated with the Hearer's renunciation.
- c) If one accepts them with an attitude of achieving the great enlightenment, it is the morality of the bodhisattva's precept.

According to Gampopa (1074-1153), the Pratimoksha vows of a person of (a) initial scope or (b) intermediate scope “will cease at the time of death.” But, what of the Pratimoksha vows of a person of (c) great scope? Gampopa answers (*ibid.*, p. 146), “The morality of the bodhisattva's precept...will not cease at the time of death”!

There is no need to have a separate ceremony to receive the bodhisattva's pratimoksha vow. This is because previously you took the Hearer's training vow. If you later cultivate the special attitude, this transforms into

the bodhisattva's vow. Even if you release the inferior mind [Hearer attitude], you have not given up the abandoned mind [the training]. (ibid., p. 146)

## **26 Does one's renunciation disappear on account of having been transformed into bodhicitta?**

In his 2012 oral commentary to his own English translation of *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, Khenchen Könchog Gyaltzen Rinpoche ([Refuge and Precepts](#)) explains Gampopa's quote above:

*"...previously you took the Hearer's training vow. If you later cultivate the special attitude (bodhicitta), this transforms into the bodhisattva's vow."* So, suppose before—without bodhicitta mind—you took the five precepts, or novice or full ordination. Later, you found this bodhicitta teaching. You're so inspired! And, then—with that mind—you cultivate bodhicitta. And, that (your vow that you took), this becomes automatically the bodhisattva's vow, becomes a foundation. So, you no need special ceremony to do that, no? *"Even if you release the inferior mind"* means self-interest, to achieve nirvana for your self-interest. You release that mind—it says here, "Hearer attitude." *"You have not given up the abandoned mind [the training]"* means you have not abandoned (to get rid of) all the obscurations (afflictive emotions). You have not abandoned that. You continue to do good, but only what happens is you expanded your mind for all sentient beings. Before your own interest! Now, that interest, you expanded to all sentient beings.

We can thus understand from this teaching from Gampopa that someone with bodhichitta motivation still remains a renunciate, yet his wish to free (only) himself from samsara has grown and expanded into the wish to free *all* living beings from samsara. In short, the renunciation of a Hinayanist has matured into the renunciation of a Mahayanist. The Sakya Master Gorampa (1429-1489) expressed the same understanding (Sobisch, p. 75):

Go-rams-pa's explanation of the transformation of for example the pratimoksha into the bodhisattva vows (*General Topics*, fol. 72v): after one has completely abandoned the inferior volitional impulse of the auditors, i.e. to pursue peace and happiness merely for oneself, that very resolution to abandon that discards opposing factors becomes the nature of the bodhisattva vows.

In more detail (p. 91, n. 249):

The point has been made earlier by Go-rams-pa (*General Topics*, fol. 63r) that the main element of taking up the pratimoksha vows is renunciation, i.e. the strong desire to attain peace and happiness through freedom from samsara. In the vehicle of the auditors, however, this is limited to oneself, and thus one speaks from the Mahayana point of view of "the inferior intention to pursue peace and happiness merely for oneself." When the resolve of the bodhisattvas, namely the wish to obtain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings, is produced, there exists within that the element of abandoning one's own peace and happiness for all

beings. Through that the inferior intention of the auditors is removed, and that resolution of benefiting sentient beings, of which the abandoning of killing, stealing, etc.—the rules of pratimoksha—is an element, becomes the nature of the bodhisattva vows, since the resolution to abandon harm for beings is not only not discarded but included within the resolve to benefit beings. It is only the narrow scope of one's own personal happiness that is replaced by the taking care of all sentient beings. Therefore there is no cause at all for a loss of the previously obtained pratimoksha vows when the bodhisattva's resolve is produced. On the contrary, through this process of abandoning the inferior intention and the continuation of the resolution to abandon the harming of others, this pratimoksha continues to exist as the bodhisattva pratimoksha.

This is Go-rams-pa's explanation for transformation and same nature. The auditor pratimoksha has been transformed into the bodhisattva or Mahayana pratimoksha, and the nature of the bodhisattva vows, namely to benefit sentient beings, is the same as the nature of the [bodhisattva] pratimoksha, since this pratimoksha of the bodhisattvas is without the inferior intention of the auditors and endowed with the bodhisattva's resolve.

Thrangu Rinpoche explains this as the difference between the Hinayana Pratimoksha and the Mahayana Pratimoksha (p. 76):

However, the pratimoksha vow of the shravaka differs from the pratimoksha vow of the mahayana. As explained earlier, the goal of the pratimoksha vow of the shravaka is individual liberation. Having experienced the vicious state of samsara you are practicing the discipline to liberate yourself from that pain and misery. On the other hand, in the pratimoksha vow of the mahayana, you practice the discipline of mindfulness and awareness to become capable of benefiting other sentient beings in the future.

It makes no sense to object, as Tenzin Peljor does, that consequently “the Bodhisattvas who have attained uncontrived Bodhichitta have no renunciation because their renunciation would have transformed into Bodhichitta.” Je Tsongkhapa gives the correct understanding in *The Basic Path to Awakening* (trans. Tatz, p. 109):

This makes the mistake of failing to distinguish the pratimoksha vow from the lesser-vehicle attitude. In creating the bodhisattva vow you must relinquish the lesser-vehicle attitude, but you need not relinquish the pratimoksha vow.

Kangyur Rinpoche’s understanding of Je Tsongkhapa’s view is that the three vows “coexist in one mind as separate entities,” yet the qualities of the lower vows are enhanced as the higher vows are received, and in this sense a transformation is seen to occur (*Treasury of Precious Qualities*, pp. 310, 475, n. 195-196).

**27 Please explain when Geshe Kelsang says, “As a Bodhisattva you will then have both ordained vows and Bodhisattva vows, but they will not be different, they are the same nature.”**

Although the two sets of vows remain distinguishable in terms of their ritual aspects and commitments, one transforms into the other in the sense of the lower vows being brought up and practiced at the same level as the higher vows (Tsongkhapa, vol. 2, pp. 148-149). In general, both sets of vows are resolutions to abandon suffering and its causes, but initially they are not of the same scope. After the transformation of the Hinayana Pratimoksha vow into the Mahayana Pratimoksha vow, it now has the exact same nature as the Bodhisattva vow. In short, the moral discipline of restraint within the six perfections is none other than the Pratimoksha vow practiced with bodhichitta motivation. Sobisch explains (pp. 311-312) a similar understanding by Gorampa:

In other words, Go-rams-pa teaches that both the pratimoksha and bodhisattva vows have the same nature, namely “the resolution to abandon” (*spong ba'i sems*), which exists before the transformation as the resolution to abandon of pratimoksha, and after the transformation as the resolution to abandon of the bodhisattvas, and which itself is transformed in that its former scope, namely “own benefit,” becomes the much wider scope of the bodhisattvas (i.e. the benefit for others). It is apparent that this “resolution to abandon,” which in this regard can only refer to the abandoning of non-virtue (and in general also refers to suffering), and

which appears to be what constitutes the same nature of the vows in the Sa-skyapa doctrine according to Gorampa-pa's explanation, is very similar to the 'Bri-gungpa's "same vital point," namely the abandoning of non-virtue (and, according to them, also the achieving of virtue).

**28 If Gorampa taught the transformation of vows, did other Sakya Teachers like Sakya Pandita do so as well?**

Lightly paraphrased, Rhoton says that according to Sakya Pandita the three sets of vows are not completely distinct in nature but become, in fact, "of a single nature" through transformation during Vajrayana initiation. In his text on the root vows of the Vajrayana system (*rTsa ba'i ltung ba bcu bzhi pa'i 'grel pa gsal byed 'khrul spong*), Sakya Pandita's uncle and Teacher—Drakpa Gyaltsen—is traditionally said to have posited an essential identity of the three sets of vows through transformation of the two lower codes to the level of Tantric observance, stating that the Pratimoksha vows "turn" (*gyur*) into the Bodhisattva vow, and that later on these are called (*zhes bya ba*) the vows of the Tantric adept (pp. 23, 34 n. 75). Sobisch reports (pp. 227-228) that Gorampa took Drakpa Gyaltsen's words "as an authoritative statement by one of the great five founders of the Sa-skyapa tradition, teaching a transformation of vows." Drakpa Gyaltsen said:

At the time the monks produce the resolve for awakening, all [their] pratimoksha [vows] turn into the vows of a bodhisattva (*byang sems sdom par 'gyur*). At the time they enter into the mandala [through Tantric

initiation], all vows [become] vows of the Tantric adept (*rig 'dzin sdom pa*).

Sobisch summarizes (p. 311):

Thus two transformations are taught by Grag-s-pa-ryal-mtshan, namely the transformation of the auditor pratimoksha into the bodhisattva pratimoksha, and the transformation of all vows into the vows of the Tantric adept. Since all vows turn into the Tantric adept's vows in the end, this also appears to be an example for the teaching of the same nature of the vows after the transformation.

**29 After having received Hinayana Pratimoksha vows, does one need to receive the Mahayana Pratimoksha vows in a separate ceremony?**

This was first addressed by Gampopa above. Noting that a separate, uncommon ceremony for the Bodhisattva's Pratimoksha vows was never introduced into Tibet, Jamgon Kongtrul (pp. 150-151) answers according to two possible scenarios: (1) from the start, someone receives Pratimoksha vows with a Mahayana motivation, or (2) someone first receives Pratimoksha vows with a Hinayana motivation, but this later transforms into a Mahayana motivation:

[T]he proclaimers' personal liberation vows themselves, received with an altruistic intention, form the basis of the characteristics of the Universalists' vows of personal liberation. If at the time of receiving the Individualists'

vows, one's objective is to attain full awakening for the benefit of others, the vows become Universalists' vows. This is the case even if this was not one's objective at that time, but one develops the resolve to awaken afterwards.

Thrangu Rinpoche gives another possible sequence: first someone receives the Bodhisattva vows, and then later takes up the Pratimoksha. In that case, "Since an ordinary person had already taken the bodhisattva vow, then when he or she received the pratimoksha vows, they were viewed from a mahayana perspective" (pp. 49-50). Sobisch clarifies that "the Mahayana pratimoksha is only obtained through the common ritual, i.e. the ritual of the auditors that is then endowed with the production of resolve through which the pratimoksha vows turn into the Mahayana vows" (p. 39).

Contrary to Sakya Pandita (vv. 4-5, 40) and the Nyingmapas (translation in Sobisch, p. 407), according to Jamgon Kongtrul (p. 153), at this point the Pratimoksha vows are no longer to be understood or explained from the point of view of the Vaibhashika school which had taught that the Pratimoksha vows cease at the time of death (recalling the *avijnaptirupa* discussion):

The vows are lost when the root of one's virtue is cut by harboring wayward views, committing a defeating offense, or giving back the ordination. The vows are not lost through any other circumstances (such as death and sex-change) because both offenses and vows [in this system] are asserted to be of the nature of consciousness.

∞ *PART IV – THE PERFECTLY PURE VOWS* ∞

**ASSERTION:** “Although he [Geshe Potowa] received his initial ordination from a Teacher who was a fully ordained monk, at that time he had no renunciation so his ordained vows were not real Pratimoksha vows. Some years later he met Dromtonpa and received Lamrim teachings, and through putting these teachings into practice he gained the realization of renunciation. Only then did his ordained vows become actual Pratimoksha vows. We can therefore say that Dromtonpa was his Ordaining Master because his actual Pratimoksha vows developed through the kindness of Dromtonpa and his Lamrim teachings. This is a very practical way of understanding how our ordination develops over time.” – Geshe Kelsang Gyatso

**OBJECTION:** “Here the meaning of what Geshe Potowa said is confused. What Geshe Potowa wanted to emphasize is that due to the influence of Dromtöpa he developed renunciation and this realization made him really an [*sic*] renunciate not the ritual or the ordination. However, this does not imply that he did not receive the ordination vows by the proper Vinaya ceremony nor does this statement by Geshe Potowa imply that his vows were established by developing renunciation. The vows are not received by developing or not developing renunciation but by the proper Vinaya ceremony otherwise it follows that newly ordained people don’t

receive the vows by the ceremony of ordination and if they haven't received the vows they cannot break them, hence they can have sexual intercourse, they can kill human beings, lie about attainments or steal without breaking their vows—at least as long as they haven't develop [*sic*] renunciation." – Tenzin Peljor

**30 Did Geshe Potowa's ordination vows become "real" from the start through the ordination ceremony, or by later developing renunciation?**

Let us see how the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa told the story, in a teaching called *How Discipline Becomes Pure*:

Gyalwang Karmapa spoke of three types of discipline, each based on a different motivation. One form of discipline is grounded in fear, and His Holiness noted that the vinaya contains many accounts of people in India seeking monastic ordination out of a wish to escape punishment by the king. A second type of discipline is motivated by the hope or wish to be reborn in higher realms in the future, and the third is a discipline based on renunciation of cyclic existence itself. Not only is the third form of discipline superior to the other two, His Holiness said, it is the only authentic basis for holding the vows.

Illustrating this point, he related the story of the Kadam geshe, Geshe Potowa, who had already taken monastic ordination before he met the layman Dromtonpa, heart disciple of the founder of the Tibetan Kadam tradition,

the great Indian pandit Jowo Atisha. Upon seeing Dromtonpa and receiving instruction from him, Geshe Potowa underwent an intense experience of renunciation, and, consequently, although he had already received his monastic ordination from another teacher, Geshe Potowa declared that Dromtonpa the lay teacher was his abbot—that is, the preceptor who had granted him his monastic vows—because it was from Dromtonpa that he had received his first genuine experience of renunciation. It was this renunciation that transformed his monastic discipline into the third type of discipline—pure discipline that is based on renunciation. In that sense, Dromtonpa merited the title of abbot even if he did not preside over the actual ceremony conferring the vows.

In the appendices (pp. [81-83](#) of this PDF), I have also transcribed the 2019 address by the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa during the 36th Kagyu Monlam, in which he again relates this story as a teaching to show that renunciation is the very *life force* of monastic vows. As the Karmapa says, renunciation is how you *live up* to being a monk or a nun, this being the *substantial* cause of the Pratimoksha (as was explained by Jamgon Kongtrul on page [21](#)).

**31 Is Tenzin Peljor correct in objecting that “The vows are not received by developing or not developing renunciation but by the proper Vinaya ceremony”?**

According to Dudjom Rinpoche, “The morality of total renunciation is the very ground upon which all pratimoksha precepts are built” (p. 18). In *Essence of the Ocean of Vinaya*, Je

Tsongkhapa says that renunciation “acts as the cause” of the Pratimoksha. Recall also the quote from Jamgon Kongtrul above which says that renunciation is the *substantial cause* of the Pratimoksha. Similarly, Sobisch (p. 43) cites Gorampa (*Detailed Explanation*, p. 169, fol. 101v):

“If one is not endowed with the resolution to renounce samsara, even though one takes the vows of ordination, it will not become pratimoksha, as in the biographies of Ananda’s two nephews and of gCung-mdzes-pa’i-dga’-bo (Sundarananda).”

The view that pratimoksha vows are obtained through renunciation is also expressed in the *Abhidharmakosha* (ch. IV, v. 15).

As explained by Gampopa above, the three types of Hinayana Pratimoksha discipline described here depend on one’s mind. From within (a) the initial scope, an ordinary small being might take Pratimoksha vows to seek protection from the fears of this life, whereas a special small being might take Pratimoksha vows motivated by the fear of suffering in future lives. Having entered into (b) the intermediate scope, a real renunciate takes Pratimoksha vows motivated by the fear of any samsaric rebirth. To demonstrate this, Kangyur Rinpoche says in *Treasury of Precious Qualities* (p. 302):

The three vows must be received according to their own respective rituals. However, even if the vows of the lay or monastic state are taken in accordance with the pure rituals of the Pratimoksha, if the underlying

intention is to practice discipline only as a protection from suffering and as a means to gain temporary benefits, the vows themselves remain of only nominal value. But as the story of Nanda shows, it is when the determination to leave samsara really takes birth within the mind that the mere vow is transformed into the authentic commitment of Pratimoksha.

The story of Nanda is given in Patrul Rinpoche's *Words of My Perfect Teacher* (pp. 95-96), in which Buddha shows Ananda's brother Nanda the future results of his being a monk according to each of the three mental attitudes mentioned above; at the end of the story, Nanda realized that "To be born among the gods in the future and then to end up in the hell-realms made no sense, so he developed a real determination to seek freedom from samsara." Kangyur Rinpoche adds (p. 313):

More specifically, it should be said that unless a particular attitude arises, such as the determination to free oneself from samsara, the vows lack true authenticity. For authenticity does not automatically come from merely receiving the vows. Therefore, practitioners must strive skillfully to enhance their inner attitude, beginning with their determination to leave samsara. And even when their attitude has been transformed, the specific aspects of the various vows must still be observed.

This shows very clearly that the number of vows that one holds is no indication of one's realization of renunciation. Geshe Sopa says that "the qualities of monks or nuns is not measured by their

robes or haircut, but by their mental attitude” (p. 388). Can we not then also say that the quality of a monk or nun is not to be measured by the number of vows that he or she has taken, but by his or her level of renunciation?

**32 If one does not yet have renunciation, does this mean that one’s ordination vows are not “real”?**

Without renunciation one remains a person of (a) initial scope, and by definition there are no Pratimoksha vows for a person of initial scope. With a mind of renunciation, the ‘Pratimoksha’ vows of a person of initial scope transform into the Pratimoksha vows of a person of (b) intermediate scope. Nevertheless, many people take ordination vows without having realized renunciation; to distinguish the two, the former are considered provisional vows, while the latter are real ordination vows. In this sense, Geshe-la agrees with Tenzin Peljor that Rabjung ordination “does not confer actual ordination vows,” only novice and full ordination vows are actual ordination vows. However, this is not a fault of the vows but of the person’s attachment to samsara; once he or she overcomes that fault, there is no reason to consider that the promises previously made are not from then on functioning in that person’s mind as real ordination vows. Again, emphasizing that which is *most* important, the Guru yoga of the first Drikung Chungtsang Rinpoche, Rigdzin Chökyi Dragpa (1595-1659), pleads, “Although I, a commoner of little mind, have maintained the prātimokṣa as my vows, I am separated from the mind of renunciation. Please look compassionately on me from afar!” (trans. by Jan-Ulrich Sobisch).

It should also be noted that, according to the Tibetan tradition, one of the 8 vows of Rabjung ordination is to wear monastic robes, which Kadampa monastics do!

**33 Does this understanding of Pratimoksha vows transforming on the basis of one's realization of renunciation relate to the debate on *avijnaptirupa*?**

Jamgon Kongtrul (pp. 149-150) contrasts the Vaibhashika (= Analysts) and Madhyamika (= Centrists) perspectives on whether the different levels of Pratimoksha vows have the same nature and why it is that one level transforms into the next:

Once a person has assumed and is maintaining the three levels of discipline [layperson, novice, and monk or nun] discussed above, in what way do these three coexist? Do these exist each with a different or with an identical essence, or does the former level change into the next?

According to the Analysts who believe [the levels of discipline] to be form, each level exists simultaneously and is substantially different in the mind of a monk who has received them sequentially. They substantiate this view by stating that within the continuum of that monk, each level of discipline exists with a substantially different form because he has received the three disciplines through their respective procedures and he has not lost them through any cause.

According to the Centrists and others who believe the levels of discipline to be consciousness, the levels neither exist simultaneously nor with different natures in the mind of the monk who has received them sequentially. They substantiate this view by saying that if this were the case, three substantially different attitudes of renunciation would exist simultaneously in the sphere of a single primary mind, which is illogical. Moreover, they assert that the levels of discipline are not substantially identical since in a single continuum these three are mutually exclusive. This being the case, [it follows that] in the continuum of a monk, the former levels of discipline transform into the latter ones, becoming increasingly advanced in terms of the essence [of the ethical training], etc. When a layperson receives the vows of novice and then those of a monk, at those times, the former disciplines become the essence of the latter ones. This is comparable to the path of accumulation transforming into the path of preparation, and that path into the path of seeing. Therefore, although a full-fledged monk has received and not damaged the novice ordination, it is illogical to assert that he still has the novice vows. This is because in the continuum of a monk, the three disciplines are neither substantially different forms nor substantially different in the nature of consciousness; neither do the two disciplines [that of a novice and that of a monk] exist simultaneously and with an identical nature [in the mind of a monk].

A similar way of thinking is presented by Kangyur Rinpoche in his *Treasury of Precious Qualities* (p. 302). In particular, he uses this same reasoning not just for the three levels of monastic ordination, but also for how one set of vows transforms into the next: from Pratimoksha, to Bodhisattva, and finally Tantric...

The same applies if, in addition to the pratimoksha vow, one goes on to take the vow of bodhichitta that aims at the welfare of others. While the specifically pratimoksha aspect is associated with the bodhisattva commitment, the determination “to free only oneself” from samsara is transmuted. It becomes indistinguishable from the attitude of bodhichitta endowed with the twofold aim. When copper ore is smelted, the extracted copper is not substantially different from the original mineral. Yet if the *quality* of its preceding state persisted in the copper, the end result would have to be both ore and extracted copper at the same time, which is impossible. Likewise, when the determination to free oneself from samsara is improved (by bodhichitta), the resulting attitude of mind is not *substantially* different (from the previous one). Yet if it did not lose its earlier inferior *quality*, the resulting mindset would be both selfish and unselfish at the same time, and this is impossible.

In exactly the same way, when in addition to the bodhisattva vow one receives the vow of the Mantrayana, the altruistic attitude is itself raised to a

higher power... The altruistic attitude is thus enhanced and transmuted into the Mantrayana vow...

**34 Has Geshe Kelsang replaced the 253 vows of a fully-ordained monk with merely 10 vows?**

As explained before, the number of vows taken is no indication of one's realization of renunciation. To emphasize this point, Geshe-la's presentation of initial, novice, and full ordination is *the same* in terms of their number of vows. In Kadampa Buddhism, monastics of all levels of Pratimoksha ordination hold the same 10 vows, with either artificial, real, or spontaneous renunciation as the true distinguishing factor:

<b>Level of Ordination</b>	<b>Tibetan Buddhism <i>Mulasarvastivada</i> (= Hinayana Vinaya)</b>	<b>Kadampa Buddhism <i>Madhyamika</i> (= Mahayana Vinaya)</b>
Initial (Tib. <i>Rabjung</i> )	Holds 8 vows	Has artificial renunciation
Novice (Tib. <i>Getsul</i> )	Holds 36 vows	Has real renunciation
Full (Tib. <i>Gelong</i> )	Holds 253 vows	Has spontaneous renunciation

In the Hinayana commentaries to the practice of the Vinaya, the way to control non-virtuous actions—albeit only actions of body and speech, since one's restraint (i.e., *avijnaptirupa*) is form, and form cannot discipline the mind (see discussion in Kongtrul, p.

85)—is by holding an increasing number of vows (abandoning an increasing number of objects), whereas in Kadam Lamrim practice the way to control your mind is by increasing your scope of aspiration (see the section on the 3 divisions of non-attachment in *How to Understand the Mind*).

In terms of what is allowed and prohibited, [rather than looking at the object], one must look inwards and practice [at the level of] one's own actual realization... If, instead of taking the Dharma which is suitable for one's own mind into one's mind stream and practicing it, one takes what is allowed and prohibited absolutely in terms of objects, the systems of the three vows will become all tangled up like a [ball of] weeds, and one will become completely confused and unable to get past [the confusion]. (Khenpo Samdup, *Clarifying the Central Thoughts of the Single Intention*, p. 142)

Thus, from a practical point of view, in the NKT-IKBU the three levels of Pratimoksha ordination are interpreted differently from the Tibetan traditions which still accord with the Hinayana commentaries on this point. As Geshe Kelsang says, "Vinaya is not necessarily Hinayana, although Tibetans follow this tradition of interpretation."

At a deeper level of understanding, there is no contradiction between these two systems, as can be shown by these two statements by Geshe Kelsang:

"Practically speaking, all the 253 vows explained in the *Vinaya Sutra* are included within the ten commitments."

“These ten commitments that you promise to keep are a condensation of the entire Lamrim teachings.”

The 253 vows being condensed into 10 does not mean that the former are being replaced, just presented or expressed in a very concise way. (See pages [93-105](#) for a parallel listing.) According to Je Tsongkhapa (*The Great Treatise*, vol. 2, p. 103), the many vows of a Bodhisattva are similarly condensed into the practice of the six perfections. Khenpo Samdup gives the exact same explanation (*Clarifying the Central Thoughts of the Single Intention*, p. 28; trans. Mark Riege):

Thus it is taught. However, since there is such an extreme multitude of Dharma teachings, if you think that you won't be able to practice all of them, bodhisattvas who are skilled in means practice all of the 84,000 Dharma teachings complete in the ten perfections (paramitas), and they are also completely included in the three trainings [of morality, concentration, and wisdom]. Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend* says about how to practice:

Always train in supreme disciplined conduct,  
supreme discriminating wisdom, and supreme  
concentration.

The more than 150 teachings  
are completely contained in these three [trainings].

Furthermore, it is made clear in [Maitreya's] *Ornament of Realization* (*Abhisamayalankara*), and in teachings in the *Ornament for the Mahayana* (*Mahayana Sutra Lankara*)

and others, how all six of the paramitas are complete within each one of them.

In any case, why quibble over the *number* if the *meaning* is the same? According to Jigten Sumgön, the different levels of Pratimoksha vows all share “the same vital point,” which is said to be abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions (Sobisch, p. 342). This is echoed by Jamgon Kongtrul who said, “In brief, all of the seven [sets of] vows of personal liberation are fulfilled in the forsaking of the ten unvirtuous actions” (*Buddhist Ethics*, pp. 85, 154; see also Tsongkhapa, vol. 2, pp. 149-150). Can we not say the same about the 10 vows of Kadampa ordination, that they come to *the same point* and have *the same, single intention*?

**35 Are the NKT vows an authentic presentation of the Vinaya? What is the origin of the latter five vows?**

In the *Vinaya Sutras*, Buddha says that through moral discipline we shall attain concentration, and through concentration we shall attain wisdom. Therefore, the purpose of the Vinaya (Tib. *dulwa*) is “to control [the mind]” through higher moral discipline, as this is the foundation for developing pure concentration (i.e., tranquil abiding), and in turn profound wisdom (i.e., superior seeing). Je Phabongkhapa said, “Nothing is said to be better than the lamrim for taming the mind” (*Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, p. 72).

About the 10 ordination vows of the New Kadampa Tradition, Geshe Kelsang has said:

These ten commitments that you promise to keep are a condensation of the entire Lamrim teachings. Although

we can finish a verbal explanation of these vows in a few hours, their practice is all embracing. You should do this—few words but always practice, practice extensively. (*The Ordination Handbook*)

While the first five Kadampa vows (“*Throughout my life I will abandon killing, stealing, sexual activity, lying and taking intoxicants*”) are common to all Vinaya lineages, the latter five (“*I will practise contentment, reduce my desire for worldly pleasures, abandon engaging in meaningless activities, maintain the commitments of refuge, and practise the three trainings of pure moral discipline, concentration and wisdom*”) are taken from the Mahayana *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* (which explains all the stages of the paths of wisdom and method) and its commentaries—such as Kamalashila’s *Stages of Meditation*—which list the six ‘branches’ or necessary conditions for attaining tranquil abiding, including these five internal conditions:

1. little desire
2. contentment
3. no distracting activities
4. pure moral discipline
5. no distracting conceptions

Look familiar? These preparatory practices are methods of training the mind—methods of moral discipline. The very purpose of becoming ordained is to practice a moral discipline that would enable one to achieve tranquil abiding. With tranquil abiding, one can attain superior seeing. These three higher trainings—moral discipline, concentration and wisdom—are the

path to liberation from samsara. In his *Stages of the Path*, Atisha says, “One who neglects the branches of tranquil abiding will never attain concentration, even if he meditates with great effort for a thousand years.”

### **36 Does anyone teach that vows do *not* transform one into another?**

According to the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, there is sharp disagreement with Drakpa Gyaltzen’s view mentioned above, arguing that “the Kagyu tradition follows Gampopa in understanding that the three types of vow are separate in nature, and that the lower vows do not transform when the higher are taken” (*Gyalwang Karmapa Explores Differing Philosophical Positions of “The Nature of Vows”*).

Say what?! First of all, it would be interesting to see how this is reconciled with Gampopa’s own words quoted before, which seems to say the exact opposite in regards to transformation, an alternative translation of which reads: “We have first to undergo the training of a Shravaka and then, when we have grasped the discipline with the particular intention (which a Bodhisattva has) and when it has become lasting with us, it develops into the Bodhisattva-discipline. This means giving up a low-level, but not a renouncing, attitude” (trans. Guenther, pp. 107-108).

Secondly, in regards to whether vows are the same or different in nature, Sobisch notes (pp. 188, 190) that there is some ambiguity in the text to which the Karmapa is likely referring:

Even in the same section that teaches the natures as very different (*Work A 6*), one also finds explained that “it is also not acceptable that the natures of the vows are on all occasions different.”

... It seems to be clear that sGam-po-pa rejects both possibilities, i.e. on the one hand that the vows “are the same [with regard to their natures]” (= conclusion of section 5) and on the other hand that (their natures) are “always different” (= conclusion of first paragraph in section 6).

One interesting distinction made in the debate on transformation is whether it is the *vows* themselves that are transformed or rather the *person*. In other words, it seems that all four Tibetan Buddhist traditions agree that there is a transformation—the Nyingma position being outlined next—but the Kagyupas in particular explain it in terms of a transformation of the person, not the *vows*.

Sobisch explains (pp. 217, 223, 235) that for Karma Trinlaypa (1456-1539), “whose explanations of the theories of the three vows were a major influence on the subsequent developments within the Karma bKa'-brgyud-pas and beyond”:

[I]t is not the lower vows as such that are transformed or changed, but the perspective of the practitioner... [H]e explains that it is also the intended sense of sGam-po-pa's treatise the *Thar pa rin po ch'i rgyan* that the pratimoksha vows turn into morality of the bodhisattva vows because they have turned into the vows of the

mental stream of consciousness of a bodhisattva. In other words, the person changes into a bodhisattva, and only because of that the pratimoksha vows turn into the vows of a bodhisattva. He concludes:

Therefore, do not confuse [sGam-po-pa's] teaching of the changing person with [the Sa-skyapa's] teaching of the changing vows.

Sobisch points out, however, that Karma Trinlaypa's interpretation of Gampopa's words previously cited are not supported by the grammar of the Tibetan language (p. 235). For Gampopa, grammatically his subject is the *vows*, not the *person*:

In this passage, the only possible interpretation grammatically is that it is the vow of pratimoksha that is the subject that undergoes transformation. If this is the passage that Karma-'phrin-las-pa had in mind, then he has subjected it to further doctrinal interpretation and restatement. (p. 317)

Additionally, this same Teacher, in Sobisch's words, said that as a consequence of the lower vows improving through the possession of the higher vows, "it is taught that, when the possessor of the vow enters the Mahayana, the teaching that the pratimoksha is lost at death does not hold" (pp. 222, 224-225).

Following up on this in a footnote, Sobisch notes that "There are some very interesting remarks on pratimoksha (*not* being lost) at the time of death by the eighth Karma-pa Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje, contained in his lengthy commentary on the *Same Intention*."

Unfortunately, this text by the 8<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje, has not yet been translated into English.

### **37 What about vow transformation in the Nyingma and Kagyu traditions?**

There are also some views on the transformation of vows within the Nyingma tradition, who say “Therefore the intention of this treatise [of] our system is that we maintain the three vows transformed [and] to be of the same nature and to have distinctive aspects... The way of transformation is a way in which the earlier [vows] are transformed into the later ones” (trans. Sobisch, pp. 415, 417):

One must also understand how it is that the essence of the lower vows transforms into that of the higher vows and the manner in which lower qualities are elevated as the higher vows are obtained... At the time that one receives a vow, one embraces the nature of that vow. Then, as the next vow is received, the essence of what one already holds transforms into the next, without presenting any conflict. (Dudjom Rinpoche, *Perfect Conduct*, pp. 141, 142)

Similarly, Tulku Thondup says in the preface to *Perfect Conduct* that “The stream of lower vows merges into the higher vows, and the higher vows embody all the vows and merits of the lower ones” (pp. x-xi).

If the pratimoksha is practiced with the motivation of bodhicitta, this is known as the morality of abstaining

from harmful deeds. Upon obtaining empowerment, it then becomes the vajra training. Its essence transforms accordingly, as is clearly established in the transmission of the *Pancasatasahasra*. (Dudjom Rinpoche, *Perfect Conduct*, p. 172)

In *Treasury of Precious Qualities*, Kangyur Rinpoche provides a detailed exposition of the Nyingma view in his commentary to Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa's (1730-1798) *The Quintessence of the Three Vows*:

It is taught in our tradition that when the pratimoksha and bodhichitta vows are transformed into the mantra vow, the different aspects of the former remain distinct (i.e., operative) within the mantra vow itself. This is the teaching of all the great masters of India and Tibet as clearly set forth in the Ancient Translation tantras such as the *sgyu 'phrul dra ba*. Furthermore, the *Garland of Light* clearly states, "Some believe that the three vows relate to each other in the same way as the earth, water, and boat. This is wrong. The great masters Ashvaghosha and Lilavajra have said that the three vows are differentiated only according to their aspects." This in turn is the unmistakable view of the learned and accomplished masters of Tibet. These include Rongdzom Chokyi Zangpo, the majority of the teachers of the Zur lineage and especially the second Buddha, Longchen Drime Ozer, as well as the great tetron Gyurme Dorje (Terdag Lingpa), of the Ancient Translation school, and also the great translator

Rinchen Zangpo, Sakya Pandita (who was Manjushri in person) and his followers, all of whom belong to the New Translation schools. The manner in which the transformation takes place has already been explained.

This is strikingly similar to vow transformation in the Drikung Kagyu tradition. In his commentary to Jigten Somgön's vajra statement that "Due to transformation in the one who holds them, the vows become three," Khenpo Samdup says (*Clarifying the Central Thoughts of the Single Intention*, pp. 64, 66; trans. Mark Riege):

It is not the case that the vows are three due to any difference in the objects that are to be abandoned, cultivated, and attained. Rather, the vows are counted as three due to the manner of transformation in the individual mind streams that support the vows.

If the intention to abandon harming others is in the mind stream of a beginner, this is the essence of the vows of individual liberation.

When that person gives rise to the resolve to benefit others and the wish to attain complete enlightenment, these become the essence of the bodhichitta vows.

And if that person purifies the mind stream through ripening and liberating [instructions], and practices generation and completion, this becomes the essence of the Secret Mantra vows.

Therefore, [Jigten Somgön] asserts that these three vows come from the process of advancing through the levels of individual realization.

Translator Mark Riege followed up with additional commentary by Khenpo Samdup:

Rather than determining that external things like empowerments make someone a Vajrayana practitioner, the *Gongchig* makes the determination based on the basis of the inner realization: for example, if we think about our own liberation, even if we practice the generation stage, we are practicing Hinayana.

∞ CONCLUSION ∞

In his book *The Ri-Me Philosophy of Jamgon Kongtrul the Great*, Ringu Tulku says (p. 193):

In relation to the Sutrayana aspect of Tibetan Buddhism, there is a saying that its conduct follows the Sarvastivada Vinaya and its view is the Madhyamaka philosophy.

Geshe Kelsang seems to ask: If the Madhyamika-Prasangika view supersedes the lower schools in all other areas, then why not in regard to the Vinaya as well? In other words, why do we not follow the Prasangika in both view *and* conduct? Geshe-la himself has never said that the Vaibhashika presentation is wrong; he would never disparage the Buddha's Hinayana teachings in this way. Rather, we can understand that the Hinayana interpretation is correct at one level, while for Mahayanists the various Mahayana interpretations are "more correct" and closer to Buddha's final intention.

This matter has been debated—fervently at times—over many centuries and even today there is disagreement between traditions (not just with the NKT). Jigme Lingpa listed *six* different three-vow theory presentations—contrasting the Indian and Tibetan traditions with each other—but considered each of them "admissible" according to that tradition's skillful means. It is time to stop bad-mouthing Geshe Kelsang Gyatso for also having an opinion. Why pick on him for ~~inventing~~ *sharing* a point of view about whether vows are form or intention, whether vows cease at the time of death, whether the three sets of vows are the same

nature, or whether one type of vow can transform into another? If you object to Geshe Kelsang for teaching one position or another, then why not object to every other Tibetan Lama throughout history who has held to that same view? (Is that not a double standard?) If anything, to continue to criticize Geshe Kelsang in this way shows that you haven't done your research!

My goal has been to show the historical precedent for each aspect of Kadampa ordination by looking at the three sets of vows as taught in the Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu, and Gelug traditions. In my opinion, by always following solely a Prasangika interpretation, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso appears to be the first to “bring it all together” into a coherent whole wherein *theory* and *practice* are aligned. I am *impressed!*

Thus, we can understand from scripture and pure reasoning that in the three vows [pratimoksha, bodhisattva, and Mantra], it is primarily the three [non-virtues] of mind [which are covetousness, ill-will, and wrong view] that must be abandoned. (Khenpo Samdup, *Clarifying the Central Thoughts of the Single Intention*, p. 130)

#### **ADDENDUM**

Tenzin Peljor's paraphrase of this portion of Geshe-la's talk is *totally mixed up!*

There follows a discussion of how the New Kadampa ordination is Prasangika, following Khedrubje's commentary to the Perfection of Wisdom sutras...

The previous monastic vows follow ‘Madhyamika-Svantantrika’ commentaries due to the influence of powerful Madhyamika-Svantantrika Masters ‘materially and politically’ according to ‘my root Guru, Kyabje Trijang Dorejechang [*sic*]’.

Here, Geshe-la was giving a tangent example of how it is that some Prasangikas had come to follow a lower philosophical school’s point of view. This particular example only relates to commentaries to *Ornament for Clear Realizations* (Skt. *Abhisamayalamkara*) by Maitreya, not commentaries on the monastic vows.

After giving this example, Geshe-la goes on to explain how something similar had happened concerning the levels of ordination vows, with Prasangikas again following a lower school’s interpretation, in this case the Vaibhashika school’s interpretation of the monastic vows.

∞ LIGHT OF THE SUN ∞

Excerpted from *Clarifying the Central Thoughts of the Single Intention: A Commentary of Jigten Somgön's Gongchig* by Khenpo Samdup, pp. 124, 134, 128; trans. Mark Riege)

Among all the Buddhist schools, who have different ways of explaining the nature of vows, the Vaibashika (Particularist) school of shravaka hearers and listeners asserts that it is “invisible form.” Based on this, in our extraordinary tradition, the nature of a vow is the [imperceptible] form of consciousness<sup>†</sup> itself.

Since it is asserted here that the Vinaya is Mahayana itself, and therefore the vows are not abandoned even upon death, it is proven [that the vows are not imperceptible forms of body but of consciousness]. It would be difficult to explain correctly otherwise, since there would only be many contradictions.

...

If one accepts the assertions of the Vaibashika school of shravaka hearers and listeners that (1) between Mahayana and Hinayana, the Vinaya is Hinayana; and (2) between material and mental [form], the vow is [imperceptible] material form; and (3) when [one] takes vows and precepts, it is [only] for as long as one lives; then the pratimoksha vow [one] has taken will be relinquished by the nine causes of relinquishing [it].

However, in this extraordinary tradition, if one embraces the

vows by giving rise to bodhichitta, and (1) accepts them as being Mahayana; (2) views the nature of the vows as the so-called “imperceptible form” of the essence of consciousness itself; and (3) when taking vows and precepts, resolves to protect them until attaining enlightenment; then the vow is not necessarily terminated even if [one of] the nine causes of relinquishing the vows occurs, as, for example, the bodhichitta vow [is not terminated by either death or time, which are both causes of relinquishing the vows].

Furthermore, there are also some of higher capacity who, due to the force of previous [habituation], don't relinquish their vows even when passing on, as, for example, in the story of the throne base.\* Also, Asanga and Vasubandhu taught that, when the sublime Dharma subsides, [which is said to be one of the causes of relinquishing vows], even though new vows will not arise, ones that have already arisen will not be relinquished.

† *In this context, consciousness (shes pas) and intent ('du shes) are the same.*

\* Jan-Ulrich Sobisch's translation of Rigzen Chökyi Dragpa's *Gongchig* commentary recounts the story (*The Buddha's Single Intention*, p. 245):

Thus, through these quotations from the *Kalacakra Tantra* and the sutras, it is taught that in future lives one will carry on the habits with which one has become familiar. The *Karunapundarika Sutra* teaches that [certain monks] were miraculously born in the buddhfield of

the tathagata Stainless and in Sukhavati on a lotus, along with their garments such as the Vinaya vase, begging bowl, and yellow outer robe. There are many explanations taught, such as the story of the “base of the seat,” according to which a fully ordained monk fell asleep while seated, practicing dhyana. When [on waking] he went elsewhere to wash, a poisonous snake tormented by the heat curled up in a cool, damp spot under the seat. When, not knowing that the monk had retaken his seat, the poisonous snake was pressed down, it became angry and bit the monk between the eyebrows so that he died. When he was born among the thirty-three gods, not being attached to the sense pleasures of gods, he continued to be mindful of his status of a fully ordained monk.

∞ ABIDING IN UNITY ∞

Excerpted from *The Buddha's Single Intention: Drigung Kyobpa Jikten Sumgön's Vajra Statements of the Early Kagyü Tradition* (by Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, pp. 230-233)

Concerning the topic of the way in which the essence of the pratimoksa vow exists, most Tibetan traditions see a contradiction between the Vaibhasikas, on the one hand, and the Sautrantikas, Yogacaras, and Madhyamikas on the other. Like Jikten Sumgön, the (Hinayana) Vaibhasikas contend that the essence of the vows is imperceptible form. Other philosophical schools, like the Sautrantikas, Yogacaras, and Madhyamikas, teach that the essence of vows is volition, or something similar to that. The *Dosherna* provides a very brief overview of the views of the various traditions:

- Mahayana-Cittamatra: The essence of the vows is a resolve to abandon, together with its seed. This is equivalent to having a sense of propriety and embarrassment, that is, guarding with recollection, alertness, and awareness on (the appropriate) occasion.
- Sravaka-Sautrantika: The essence of the vows is a resolve to abandon, which is an uninterrupted, continuous actualization.
- Sravaka-Vaibhasika: The essence of the vows is an imperceptible form.

Dorjé Sherab summarizes that upholders of the Vinaya in Tibet, in general, hold the view of Cittamatra in the highest esteem, that of the Sautrantikas in the medium esteem, and that of the Vaibhasikas in the lowest esteem. Jikten Sumgön, however, maintains that since the essence of the vow is imperceptible form, the Vaibhasikas have taught it correctly.

This discussion can be traced back to a passage in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakosha* (4.3), where Vasubandhu, taking the position of a Sautrantika, refutes the Vaibhasika position. As Vasubandhu portrays them, the Vaibhasikas accepted that vows were "an imperceptible form" (Skt. *avijñaptirupa*), because when the trainee kneels down and recites the formula, the vows arise from body and speech. The argument is that whatever arises from body and speech—which derive from the great elements—must also be form. However, while the bodily action of kneeling down and the vocal action of reciting the formula are perceptible, the vow, which arises from that, is not; hence we say, "imperceptible form."

Why was it necessary to teach that the vows have form, even if imperceptible? It appears that the Vaibhasikas wanted to explain how the vows are not interrupted even when they are not "mentally manifest or patent" in the mental continuum. By being a certain kind of subtle form, attached to the mental continuum, they could continue to exist therein as an uninterrupted potential in latent, unmanifest, and imperceptible form. When Vasubandhu refuted this, taking the Sautrantika position, he essentially characterized the vows as volition (*cetana*), that is, the determination to abstain from nonvirtuous actions of body and

speech. Yogacaras and Madhyamikas hold similar positions.

According to the *Rinjangma*, disciplined conduct occurs when one possesses perfect conditions and causes. These are (1) the simultaneously operative condition and (2) appropriative cause. The first is to be free from opposing factors, that is, the four impediments, and to assemble the requirements, such as the upadhyaya, the acarya, the Sangha, the upper robe, the lower robe, the mat, the begging bowl, and the sieve. The appropriative cause is one's perfect, excellent resolve: renunciation. But Rinchen Jangchup points out that it is also very important to take the vow with the resolve for awakening since one thereby aims at the highest goal, which improves the quality of the vow.

When these causes and conditions come together, the vows arise, and their essence is an imperceptible form. As Rinchen Jangchup states, the definition of form is *capable of being damaged*, and since opposing factors such as attachment and aversion can destroy the vows, the (imperceptible) form—the essence of the vow—can be damaged. Why is it “imperceptible”? One ascertains the essence of the vows through the certainty of thinking, “I am a monk,” or “I am a novice.” This thought, however, is not taught as having a shape, color, and so on, yet it is “unimpeded.” Thus, since it is not the object of the five sense organs but an object of consciousness and unimpeded, it is “imperceptible form.”

Dorjé Sherab points out that the essence of the pratimoksa vow, namely the certainty expressed in such thoughts as “I am a monk,” is not a form in the sense of having color and shape, or in the sense of being an object of the five senses. Instead, it is the

arising of a form that is the object of mental consciousness. It is called a “form” because it is an “embodiment” (*rang gzugs*) of that thought and, in particular, the embodiment of a virtuous motivation. Chökyi Drakpa, too, explains “imperceptible form” as an “embodiment of thought / motivation.”

It is interesting that both Sakya Pandita and Jikten Sumgön accept the essence of the pratimoksa vows to be imperceptible form, yet they seem to have different reasons for this view and draw different conclusions from it. Sakya Pandita accepts the theory that what arises from body and speech—which both derive from the great elements—must be material form and must therefore be lost when its basis (the material body) disintegrates. Jikten Sumgön, on the other hand, seems to reject the idea that “vows arise upon a matter separate from mind” (as Chökyi Drakpa puts it). For him, the essence of the pratimoksa vows is the embodiment of such thoughts as “I am a monk.” The preceding actions of body and speech (when taking the vow) have a material basis, but the subsequently arising essence of the vow arises from thought. The vow, however, is an *embodiment* of that thought, which is form because it can be damaged, and it is imperceptible, because it lacks shape, color, and so on. In this sense there seems to be no contradiction between such concepts as the “imperceptible form” of the Vaibhasikas and the “volition” of the other traditions, since the monk’s volition to abandon nonvirtue is a destructible embodiment of a thought.

It is also interesting to note that unlike Sakya Pandita who insisted on treating the pratimoksha vows strictly from the perspective of the Hinayana, Jikten Sumgön not only tolerated the

“Mahayanization” of the pratimoksha vows but, by stating that one should take the vows with the resolve for awakening, was asserting that this would be the best perspective.\*

[\*We have already seen this in vajra statement 3.2. My discussion of this topic is informed by an e-mail exchange with Michael-James B. Weaver in 2012.]

EDITORIAL NOTE: The discussion in this appendix is related to difficult point #20, as presented on pages [31-34](#) of this essay.

∞ THE LIFE FORCE OF THE VOWS ∞

*Gyalwang Karmapa's Address to the 36th Kagyu Monlam*

(transcribed by Könchog Nyima)

[9:30]

There's a custom of having a special address on the last day of the Monlam. However, today I don't have anything *special* to share. **But, I *would* like to encourage all of you!**

I have had the actual task of supervising the Monlam since 2004. Thus far, more than 10 years have passed, and many things have changed on many fronts. I think there have been many *positive* changes, many changes *for the better*. I consider the *most important* adaptation to be concerning the behavior and conduct of the monastics.

As *best* we can, we put into practice the teachings from the Vinaya of the true Dharma. We have done a lot of work to increase understanding in this area. You all know the reason for this: There are many who become monks and nuns in Tibet, India, Nepal, Bhutan, and so forth; but of those who do, not many understand *well* what it means to be a monk or what it means to be a nun.

In order to *live up* to the name of being a monk or nun, we first need to understand what it *means* to be a monk or nun! We have to understand the vows that we need to hold and guard. **For this reason, we have *no choice* but to inform our monastics about this, so they *cannot* be monastics *in name*, but also *true monastics in actuality*.**

Especially, many think that after ordination, or according to the Vinaya, there are *many* things that ordinary people are *allowed* to do that monastics can *no longer* do. They think there are many things that are not allowed, that it's like *a bunch of rules!*

**But, really, the vows of ordination are not just *rules* or a *list of things* we are allowed or not allowed to do. What is *more important* than this is *desiring* or *striving* for liberation, or the mind of renunciation.**

This mind of renunciation is very important, and it also should be *unfabricated*—meaning that one shouldn't need to try to generate it. It should arise *naturally* from within. When it's like that, we call it “unfabricated.”

If it arises in an *unfabricated* way in our being, we will have what we call “ethical conduct of renunciation,” or “perfectly pure vows.” If we don't give rise to this, then we won't have the perfectly pure vows, or the ethical conduct of renunciation.

**For this reason, the vows of ordination are *not* just an outer form or a ritual for body and speech. In truth, the *essence* of the inner meaning is this generation of this mind that strives for liberation, this mind of an unfabricated wish for emancipation.**

There's a teaching of the Kadampa spiritual master Potowa where he said that *first* he received novice and full ordination from an abbot. But it was *later*, when following the old Shramana of Retreng, that he *really* received the vows of ordination. Now, this old Shramana of Retreng is Dromtonpa. Dromtonpa was a *layperson*, a householder. So, it was from a layperson that he

*actually* received the novice *and* full monastic vows!

**What did he mean by that?! It was based on the kindness of Dromtonpa that he generated the mind of renunciation! And, it's based on generating this *mind* of renunciation that one receives the true vows, the perfectly pure vows, the ethical conduct of the vow of renunciation!**

The vows that he had received before were just *an outer appearance* [= body and speech] of receiving the vows. He had not received *the inner essence* [= mind] of the vows, the *life force* of the vows! **This illustrates a very *critical point*: The vows are *not* received through the outer form, *not merely*. What we *really* need in to order to receive the *true* vows comes from this inner essence.**

Take *me*, for example....

[15:15]

∞ *THE PRECIOUSNESS OF KADAMPA ORDINATION* ∞

*by Gen-la Khyenrab*

After an early visit to Conishead Priory in the late 1970s, just as Manjushri KMC was being established in the English Lake District by Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, I became inspired and began to wish to live the pure life of an ordained monk, though with a family and job there was no way I could fulfil this wish without abandoning my responsibilities. So I waited.

For various reasons, I waited 12 years before receiving my NKT ordination in 1992 from Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso...and I believe that waiting so long to fulfil this wish is one of the reasons I remain determined that I will never abandon this ordination. I feel like the man with no legs who fell on to the back of a horse...no way will I give it up.

In *Meaningful to Behold* there is a story illustrating the importance of taking full advantage of our precious human life.

In a remote village in Tibet there lived a man who had no legs. One day as he was making his slow, laboured way across the countryside with the aid of crutches he accidentally fell over the edge of a cliff. As luck would have it he landed on the back of a wild horse grazing below. The horse was so startled that it galloped off with the man holding on for dear life. Quite a long time passed and, to the wonderment of the other villagers, the man showed no signs of tiring of his unusual mount. 'Why don't you get off that horse?'

they shouted at him as he raced by. ‘Not on your life!’ he shouted back to them. ‘This is the first time in my life I have ever been on horseback. When can a legless man like me ever hope for such an opportunity again? I’m going to take full advantage of it while I can.’ And off he went, clutching on to the back of the wild horse.

Today I still feel like that legless man – I am trying to take full advantage of my opportunity to be ordained in this precious human life and make progress on the spiritual path.

[At this link](#) you can read about the qualities of the Kadampa ordination system created by Venerable Geshe Kelsang that make it so special and practical for modern people to practise – this ordination is completely valid and is fully in accordance with Buddha Shakyamuni’s intentions as will be explained.

∞ THE MIDNIGHT HEAVENS ∞

*In the night sky, there are never as many constellations as there are stars...* Legalists such as Tenzin Peljor still reject the latter five Kadampa ordination vows simply because they do not appear worded exactly as such in the *Vinaya* or *Pratimoksha Sutras*. (Their scriptural origin is discussed on pages 61-63 of this essay.) For example, they would say that, even though it is more succinct, the vow “to practice contentment” just is not to be found in traditional ordination texts. I would say they cannot see the forest for the trees! For example, vow #31—to not get a new mat before six years are up—is obviously a particular instance of the more general principle to practice contentment. Recognizing and appreciating the ‘spirit’ of the individual precepts of the *Vinaya* is how all the Kadampa ordination vows are to be understood as a whole:

Practically speaking, all the 253 vows explained in the *Vinaya Sutra* are included within the ten commitments.  
(Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *The Ordination Handbook*)

Another mistake made by legalists is when they try to pigeonhole the 10 Kadampa vows into either the 5 vows of a layperson, the 8 vows of a renunciate (Tib. *Rabjung*), the 10 or 36 vows of a novice monk (Tib. *Gestul*), or the 253 vows of a fully-ordained monk (Tib. *Gelong*). However, the vows of Kadampa ordination are to be regarded as a practical condensation of the essential meaning of each of these sets of vows. As such, we should look to see how the 253 vows of a *Gelong*, for example, are subsumed under the more broadly encompassing 10 vows, rather than the other way around. The following is my own attempt to show how all the

monastic vows—whether initial, novice, or full ordination—are naturally included within the comprehensive vows of Kadampa ordination. There are no doubt different ways of doing this, and many of the 253 vows could be subsumed under more than one of the 10 Kadampa vows. I used *The Sramanera/Sramanerika Precepts* by Venerable Thubten Chodron as the reference for the novice vows, and *Buddhist Ethics* as the reference for the vows of full ordination.



~~~ RABJUNG VOWS ~~~

# **Kadampa Vow**

# Tibetan Vow

**1. Abandon Killing**

1. Not killing human beings

**2. Abandon Stealing**

2. Not stealing

**3. Abandon Sexual Activity**

4. Vow of celibacy

**4. Abandon Lying**

3. Not lying

**5. Abandon Taking Intoxicants**

5. Not becoming intoxicated (drugs, alcohol)

**6. Practice Contentment**

7. Wear the robes of an ordained person and shave one's head

**7. Reduce One's Desire for Worldly Pleasures**

6. Leave behind lay clothes and signs

**8. Abandon Engaging in Meaningless Activities**

**9. Maintain the Commitments of Refuge**

8. Follow the Buddha's teachings

**10. Practise the Three Trainings of Pure Moral Discipline, Concentration, and Wisdom**

~~~ NOVICE VOWS ~~~

**1. Abandon Killing**

1. One should avoid taking a human life
2. One should avoid killing an animal or insect
3. One should avoid for selfish reasons, doing an action which may kill an animal or insect and not caring about it; for example, using water that contains insects without straining it; digging a hole in the earth without considering the creatures that might die as a result; cutting grass; overburdening an animal, which causes its death
4. One should avoid while doing something for others, doing an action which may kill an animal or insect and not caring about it; for example, splashing water which has insects on a dry place

**2. Abandon Stealing**

6. One should avoid stealing, taking what has not been given. This includes borrowing things and not returning them, not paying fees and taxes one is required to

**3. Abandon Sexual Activity**

5. One should avoid sexual intercourse

#### 4. Abandon Lying

7. One should avoid lying in which one claims to have spiritual realizations or powers that one does not have

8. One should avoid accusing a pure monk or nun of transgressing one of the four root precepts (parajika) when he or she has not

9. One should avoid insinuating that a pure monk or nun has transgressed one of the four root precepts when he or she has not

10. One should avoid causing disunity among the sangha community through untrue slander or taking sides in a disagreement

13. One should avoid telling others lies

14. One should avoid criticizing the storekeeper in the monastery of giving more to those who are near to him or her instead of sharing them with all, when this is not the case

15. One should avoid criticizing directly or by insinuation that the storekeeper in the monastery of not giving oneself a share of the food or other things equal to that given to other monastics, when this is not the case

16. One should avoid claiming that a monastic gave a teaching in return for a little food, which is not the case

17. One should avoid criticizing a monk or nun by saying that he or she transgressed a precept in the second group (sanghavasesa) when this is not the case

## **5. Abandon Taking Intoxicants**

20. One should avoid taking intoxicants

## **6. Practice Contentment**

19. One should avoid covering the vegetables with rice; covering the rice with vegetables

28. One should avoid sitting on an expensive throne

29. One should avoid sitting on an expensive bed

30. One should avoid sitting on a high throne

31. One should avoid sitting on a high bed

32. One should avoid eating after midday (Exceptions: if one is ill, if one is traveling, or if one cannot meditate properly without food.)

33. One should avoid touching gold, silver or precious jewels (includes money)

## **7. Reduce One's Desire for Worldly Pleasures**

24. One should avoid wearing ornaments

25. One should avoid wearing cosmetics

26. One should avoid wearing perfumes

27. One should avoid wearing the rosary like jewelry, wearing flower garlands

34. One should avoid wearing lay people's clothing and ornaments; letting one's hair grow long

## **8. Abandon Engaging in Meaningless Activities**

- 21. One should avoid singing with self-attachment or for nonsensical reasons
- 22. One should avoid dancing with self-attachment or for nonsensical reasons
- 23. One should avoid playing music with self-attachment or for nonsensical reasons

## **9. Maintain the Commitments of Refuge**

- 11. One should avoid supporting someone who is creating disunity in the sangha community, taking sides in the dispute
- 12. One should avoid doing actions which obliterate lay people's faith in the sangha; for example complaining untruthfully to lay people that action brought by the sangha against oneself was unfair
- 36. One should avoid disrespecting or not following the guidance of one's ordination master

## **10. Practise the Three Trainings of Pure Moral Discipline, Concentration, and Wisdom**

- 18. One should avoid abandoning the training, for example, rejecting the good advice of a nun or monk; criticizing the Pratimoksha Sutra
- 35. One should avoid not wearing the robes of a Buddhist monastic

~~~ FULL ORDINATION VOWS ~~~

**1. Abandon Killing**

- 3. murder
- 58. destroying vegetation
- 66. casting water containing living beings
- 88. using water that contains life
- 108. killing an animal

**2. Abandon Stealing**

- 2. theft
- 46. redirecting dedicated offerings
- 63. evicting a monk out of anger
- 115. using without permission
- 121. overstaying one's welcome

**3. Abandon Sexual Activity**

- 1. sexual intercourse
- 5. ejaculation
- 6. touching or holding the bare skin of a woman motivated by sexual desire
- 7. speaking of sexual intercourse with a woman
- 8. extolling sexual intercourse
- 9. matchmaking
- 21. having one's robes washed by an unrelated nun
- 22. accepting cloth from an unrelated nun
- 34. having wool washed by an unrelated nun
- 52. teaching Dharma to a laywoman in private
- 53. reciting or chanting scriptures out of vanity

68. teaching the Dharma to a nun without having been appointed
69. teaching the Dharma to a nun after sunset
71. giving a Dharma robe to an unrelated nun
72. making a Dharma robe for an unrelated nun
73. walking together on a road with a nun
74. going with a nun in a boat
75. sitting in a secluded and sheltered place with an unrelated woman
76. standing in a secluded and sheltered place with an unrelated woman
77. persuading a householder to prepare food via a nun
89. sitting in the home of those engaging in intercourse
90. standing in the home of those engaging in intercourse
91. serving food to a naked ascetic
101. sleeping more than two nights with someone not fully ordained
112. sleeping in the same place as a woman
117. accompanying a woman on the road
124. leaving without informing one's fellow monks
127. going to town and staying overnight with an unrelated layperson
129. visiting the royal apartment in the night
138. requesting an unrelated nun's alms

#### **4. Abandon Lying**

- 4. telling lies about one's level of spiritual attainment
- 12. making a groundless accusation defaming a fellow monk
- 13. making an accusation against a fellow monk for a trivial reason
- 48. lying
- 56. accusing a steward of favoritism
- 59. censuring through devious slander an honest caretaker of the community
- 70. jealously accusing a monk of teaching a nun to get a little food
- 109. causing regret is to sadden a fellow monk by denigrating the benefits of entering the monastic life or by saying that he has not received vows [i.e., he is not actually a monk]
- 116. defaming a monk without evidence

#### **5. Abandon Taking Intoxicants**

- 126. drinking alcohol or any kind of intoxicant leading to negligent behavior

#### **6. Practice Contentment**

- 10. constructing a hut exceeding the prescribed size
- 11. constructing a dwelling larger than for four monks
- 18. keeping extra cloth not intended for one's robes for more than 10 days
- 20. retaining extra cloth intended for one's robes for more than 30 days
- 23. requesting cloth from an unrelated layperson when one already has the three monastic robes

24. requesting excess cloth from an unrelated layperson when one lacks the three monastic robes
25. requesting from an unrelated layperson robe material of a fine quality, more valuable than that which the layperson had intended to offer
26. requesting finer quality than two donors have prepared to offer
27. accepting a robe after one has insistently asked for it more than 3 times
28. making for oneself a mat out of a valuable material such as silk
29. making a mat out of only black sheep's wool
30. making a mat of white and black wool containing more than half black wool
31. making a new mat while the old one has not yet been used for 6 years
32. using a new mat that has not been sewn with a hand span patch from the old one
33. carrying wool on the road motivated by acquisitiveness
35. handling gold or other precious substances motivated by acquisitiveness
36. lending gold or other commodities to make a profit, motivated by acquisitiveness
37. trading non-precious items such as grain in order to make a profit
38. keeping an unconsecrated begging bowl for more than 10 days
39. requesting an extra begging bowl from an unrelated layperson
40. engaging an unrelated weaver to make cloth for one's robes without payment or remuneration
41. engaging a weaver to make finer and more valuable cloth for

one's robes

42. taking back gifts from a fellow monk
43. using rainy season retreat offerings before the retreat ends
45. keeping the large rain cloak for too long
47. storing foods and medicines for more than 7 days
64. harassing a fellow monk who had taken up residence in the monastery earlier than oneself
78. accepting alms of food 2 or 3 times in one day from unrelated householders
80. taking excess food
81. resuming eating a meal after thinking and saying, "I have finished"
82. giving food to a monk who has finished eating
83. gathering to eat with 3 or more monks in a place other than the communal dining hall out of disharmony
84. eating in the afternoon foods that are permissible only from dawn until noon
85. partaking of stored foods and medicines
86. eating what has not been offered and accepted
87. asking an unrelated householder for good foods without the host's invitation, motivated by greed
105. wearing undyed clothing
131. accepting from an unrelated layperson a needle case of fine materials which was made for oneself
132. making a seat for the monastic community with legs higher than a cubit
133. covering the seats of the monastic community with cotton
134. using a mat that exceeds the prescribed length or width
135. exceeding the size for the flannel to relieve skin rash

- 136. exceeding the size for the large rain cloak
- 137. exceeding the size for the robes

### **7. Reduce One's Desire for Worldly Pleasures**

- 106. handling treasures or other precious articles that may cause pride
- 107. bathing more than once every two weeks
- 128. wandering into the village and not returning before the mealtime of the community

### **8. Abandon Engaging in Meaningless Activities**

- 65. sitting down heavily upon a chair with pointed legs on the soft roof of the monastery
- 92. watching an army
- 93. staying in an army camp
- 94. inciting war preparations
- 99. lighting a fire
- 110. tickling a fellow monk with the intention of provoking a reaction
- 111. playing in water frivolously
- 113. frightening a fellow monk out of scorn
- 114. hiding any of the articles of a fellow monk out of scorn
- 120. tilling the soil without a special necessity

## **9. Maintain the Commitments of Refuge**

- 14. causing a schism
- 15. taking sides with a monk who is trying to create a schism
- 16. causing a layperson to lose faith
- 79. eating for a second day at the home of an unrelated householder who hosts non-Buddhist renunciates
- 100. later withdrawing one's assent to a formal procedure of the monastic community
- 103. sharing spiritual instructions and material things with a monk who has been expelled from the monastery
- 104. sharing spiritual instructions and material things with a novice who has been expelled from the monastery
- 118. traveling with a thief
- 119. conferring full ordination on someone under the age of 20
- 122. rejecting advice concerning monastic discipline
- 125. disrespectfully refusing to perform a religious duty for which one has been appointed
- 139. accepting food without regard to seniority
- 140. transgression the rule not to beg at a particular household
- 141. eating without checking the safety of the forest when one has been appointed to do so

## **10. Practise the Three Trainings of Pure Moral Discipline, Concentration, and Wisdom**

- 17. defiance when one has incurred a downfall
- 19. separation from one's robes for more than a day
- 44. separation from one's robes for more than 7 days when one is living in seclusion
- 49. criticizing the faults of a fellow monk such as his being from a

- bad lineage or not having all his faculties intact
50. slandering two or more fellow monks with the intention to cause discord among them
51. reviving a quarrel between monks that has already been settled
54. revealing a fellow monk's lapses in discipline to a layperson and others when one has not been appointed to bring forth the allegation in the appropriate ceremony
55. declaring that one has developed superhuman powers to someone who is not a monk, without a specific necessity
57. scorning the monastic discipline
60. refusing to comply, denying the allegation of a downfall
61. leaving communal bedding or seats that one has used where sun, wind, rain, etc. can spoil them
62. leaving the temple without clearing up the grass and leaves that one has spread under the mat
67. laying more than 3 layers of unbaked bricks in one day
95. striking a fellow monk
96. threatening to strike a fellow monk
97. concealing a fellow monk's lapse of discipline
98. preventing alms to a fellow monk, due to enmity
102. not giving up erroneous views
123. eavesdropping in on secret conversations of fellow monks with whom one has a dispute with the intention to increase it
130. purposefully disparaging the rules of discipline as they are being recited during confession

**And so forth...**

142. wearing the lower robe unevenly, high in one place and low in another
143. wearing the lower robe raised up so that it is too high
144. wearing the lower robe trailing so that it is too low
145. wearing the lower robe with the bottom edge hanging to one side
146. wearing the lower robe with the top folded over
147. wearing the lower robe gathered unevenly at the belt
148. wearing the lower robe with it hanging over the top of the belt
149. not wearing the upper robes even all around
150. wearing the upper robes too low
151. wearing the upper robes too high
152. not controlling body and speech with mindfulness while travelling
153. dressing with indignity while travelling
154. idle chatter while travelling
155. letting one's eyes wander while travelling
156. gazing more than yoke's length ahead while travelling
157. covering the head while travelling
158. hoisting the lower robe
159. draping the upper robe over both shoulders
160. walking with the hands clasping the nape of the neck
161. walking with the hands clasped behind the head
162. going about jumping
163. strutting
164. walking only on the heels
165. walking only on tiptoes

166. walking with the hands on one's hips, elbows extended
167. walking with the body bent
168. swinging or waving the arms while walking
169. wagging the head while walking
170. touching shoulders with others while walking
171. walking around holding another's hand
172. sitting before the patron or host has invited one to sit
173. sitting without checking whether or not there are living beings on the seat
174. sitting down heavily
175. sitting with the legs stretched out and the feet crossed
176. sitting with the thighs crossed
177. sitting with one ankle on top of the other
178. tucking the legs under the seat while sitting
179. sitting with legs outspread
180. sitting with the private parts exposed
181. filling the begging bowl to the brim
182. taking equal amounts of rice and vegetables
183. accepting food out of order of seniority
184. not paying attention to the begging bowl when accepting food
185. holding out the begging bowl before food is offered
186. covering the vegetables with rice when wanting more vegetables
187. covering the rice with vegetables when wanting more rice
188. holding the begging bowl higher than the serving dishes
189. eating food with poor manners
190. eating very large mouthfuls
191. eating very small mouthfuls
192. not eating in moderation, according to etiquette

193. opening the mouth before bringing food to it
194. speaking with the mouth full
195. making *blah blah* sounds when food is not tasty
196. making *yum yum* sounds when food is tasty
197. making *brr brr* sounds when food is cold
198. making *phff phff* sounds when the foot is hot
199. poking out the tongue while eating
200. eating rice one grain at a time
201. criticizing the quality of the food
202. chewing the food on the right and then the left cheek
203. making a smacking sound against the palate
204. biting off part of a mouthful of food
205. licking food off one's hands after wiping the begging bowl
206. licking food from the begging bowl
207. shaking off food that is tuck to one's hand
208. shaking the begging bowl while eating
209. making the food into the shape of a stupa
210. scorning the begging bowl of another monk
211. touching the water container with food stuck to the hands
212. tossing dishwater at another monk
213. throwing dishwater into the grounds of a household without permission
214. putting leftover food into one's begging bowl
215. putting down the begging bowl on bare earth without a support beneath it
216. putting down the begging bowl at the edge of a ravine
217. putting down the begging bowl at the edge of a crevice
218. putting down the begging bowl near a slope or steps
219. washing the begging bowl at the edge of a ravine
220. washing the begging bowl at the edge of a crevice

221. washing the begging bowl near a slope or steps
222. washing the begging bowl while standing
223. scooping water by holding the begging bowl against the current of the river
224. teaching the doctrine while standing up to a person who is seated as though sick
225. teaching while sitting to someone lying down
226. teaching to a person who is seated on a high or rich seat
227. teaching someone when walking behind him
228. teaching someone walking in the center of the road when you are on the side
229. teaching those with covered heads
230. teaching those with their clothes hoisted up
231. teaching those with their upper robes draped over both shoulders
232. teaching those with arms crossed holding the neck
233. teaching those with hands clasped behind
234. teaching those wearing topknots
235. teaching those wearing hats
236. teaching those wearing crowns
237. teaching those wearing flower garlands
238. teaching those wearing silk veils
239. teaching those mounted on elephants
240. teaching those mounted on horses
241. teaching those riding a palanquin
242. teaching those riding in a vehicle
243. teaching those wearing shoes
244. teaching those holding staffs
245. teaching those wearing umbrellas
246. teaching those holding weapons

- 247. teaching those holding swords
- 248. teaching those holding bows and arrows
- 249. teaching those wearing armor
- 250. defecating or urinating while standing
- 251. throwing feces or urine into water or onto grass
- 252. spitting or cleaning the nose, or vomiting into water, unless ill
- 253. climbing trees taller than a man, unless in danger

∞ WHAT IF WE COULD LOOK THROUGH BUDDHA'S EYES? ∞

My conundrum (*with possible solution identified on the next page*)...

| Nihilism            | The Middle Way                                       | Eternalism         |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Utter Non-existence | Ultimate Non-existence →<br>← Conventional Existence | Inherent Existence |

1. Everything that exists is either an ultimate truth or a conventional truth.
2. If something exists, it does not exist inherently or independently of conceptual imputation by mind.
3. In the state of enlightenment, there are no conceptual thoughts. That is to say, Buddhas have no conceptual minds.
4. Thus, in the state of enlightenment, there are no conventional truths. No conventional objects exist—not even as mere name or mere imputation—because Buddhas have no conceptual minds to impute conventional phenomena. [Actually, the non-conceptual minds of an enlightened being *can* conceive objects!]
5. Also, in the state of enlightenment, emptiness (ultimate truth) does not exist—not even as mere name or mere imputation—for it, too, is merely imputed by mind, yet Buddhas have no conceptual minds to impute it.
6. Therefore, from the point of view of an enlightened being, the two truths do not exist at all. There is nothing to behold.

| <p><i>Understanding the Mind</i> (p. 24)<br/><i>How to Understand the Mind</i> (p. 174)</p>                                                                                                                              | <p><i>Comprensión de La Mente</i> (p. 24)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p><i>Cómo Comprender La Mente</i> (p. ??)</p>                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>There are five types of object: appearing object, observed object, engaged object, apprehended object and conceived object.</p>                                                                                       | <p>Hay cinco tipos de objetos: objeto aparente (tib. <i>suang yul</i>), objeto observado (tib. <i>dmigs yul</i>), objeto conectado (tib. <i>gzugs yul</i>), objeto aprehendido (tib. <i>gzugs yul</i>) y objeto concebido (tib. <i>shen yul</i>). [<i>Objeto conectado</i> y <i>objeto aprehendido</i> son términos sinónimos.]</p> | <p>Hay cinco tipos de objetos: objeto aparente, objeto observado o de observación, objeto conectado, objeto aprehendido y objeto concebido.</p>                                                           |
| <p>When we see a table with our eye awareness, for example, that table is the appearing object of our eye awareness because it appears directly to our eye awareness.</p>                                                | <p>Cuando, por ejemplo, vemos una mesa, dicha mesa es el objeto aparente porque aparece de manera directa ante la percepción visual.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p>Cuando, por ejemplo, vemos una mesa, dicha mesa es el objeto aparente de nuestra percepción visual porque aparece de manera directa ante ella.</p>                                                     |
| <p>The table is also the observed object, engaged object and apprehended object of our eye awareness because at that time our eye awareness is focused on the table, understands the table and apprehends the table.</p> | <p>También es el objeto observado, el objeto conectado y el objeto aprehendido de la percepción visual porque en ese momento nuestra mente está enfocada en la mesa, comprende este objeto y lo aprehende.</p>                                                                                                                      | <p>También es el objeto observado, el objeto conectado y el objeto aprehendido de la percepción visual porque en ese momento la mente está enfocada en la mesa, comprende este objeto y lo aprehende.</p> |
| <p>However, the table is not a conceived object of our eye awareness because only conceptual minds have conceived objects.</p>                                                                                           | <p>No obstante, la mesa no es el objeto concebido por la percepción visual porque solo las mentes conceptuales tienen objetos concebidos.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>Sin embargo, la mesa no es el objeto concebido de la percepción visual porque solo las mentes conceptuales tienen objeto concebido.</p>                                                                |
| <p>For us, non-conceptual minds cannot conceive an object.</p>                                                                                                                                                           | <p>En nuestro caso, las mentes no conceptuales no pueden concebir un objeto [<u>sólo las de los Budas pueden hacerlo</u>].</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>En nuestro caso, las mentes no conceptuales no pueden concebir un objeto.</p>                                                                                                                          |

*“We purify downfalls and so forth through sojong, [so] if we restore vows in our mental continuum and purify the downfall, it is [also] called sojong. The confession of [breaches of the] pratimoksha [vows] is done in the presence of the preceptor, instructor, and Sangha; [confession of breaches of] the bodhisattva [vows is done] in the presence of the guru, buddhas, and bodhisattvas; and [breaches of] the secret mantra are confessed in the presence of the guru and assembly of mandala deities.”*

— Pabongkha Rinpoche, *The Essence of the Vast and Profound: A Commentary on Je Tsongkhapa’s Middle-Length Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*