

“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*

This 30-page essay is the third in a trilogy of responses to blogs written by Tenzin Peljor; it is also the third essay I have written concerning Kadampa ordination vows. (The first two are [here](#) and [here](#).) This one attempts to directly answer various objections raised by him concerning Kadampa ordination. While it is clear he has put a lot of thought into the matter, it is questionable whether he has done much research.

Tenzin Peljor would have you to believe that Geshe Kelsang is the lone dissenter against all of Tibetan Buddhism when it comes to what is called “three-vow theories,” as if Geshe Kelsang is 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. 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.

Surveying the three vows in all the 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
- *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* by Gampopa
- *Gongchig: The Single Intent, the Sacred Dharma* by Jigten Sumgon
- *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

~~~ I ~~~

“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’s objection to Geshe Kelsang’s teaching quoted here is addressed in the following Q&A.

**Contrary to what Geshe Kelsang claims, do any of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions teach that 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.

**Who is Sakya Pandita quoting?**

Sakya Pandita quotes Vasubandhu’s *Treasury of Knowledge* (Skt. *Abhidharmakosha*). He was a great Indian Buddhist scholar of the fifth century AD 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.

## 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 physical form. In other words, because one's Pratimoksha vows are physical form, 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.

## 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. The first two are Hinayana schools and the second two are Mahayana schools. They are studied in sequence, the lower tenets being the means by which the higher ones are understood.

## 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 the 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 one's 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 the vows. The *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* 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" (p. 221).

### 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.)

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

Since *avijnaptirupa* is a physical form that is invisible and intangible to outsiders, the term is generally translated into English as “non-revealing form” or “non-revelatory form,” and also as “unmanifest form” or “imperceptible form.” That is to say, you do not know what another person has pledged until it manifests through some external behavior; before it becomes a *patent* physical or verbal action, the *latent* action persists in the continuum of a person as a non-revealing form.

In *The Tibetan Vinaya*, 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.

### **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.

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

According to Geshe Lhundub Sopa (*Steps on the Path to Enlightenment*, vol. 2, pp. 290-291, emphasis in original):

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.

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

In *Treasury of Knowledge*, eight arguments for *avijnaptirupa* are presented by the Vaibhashikas, each of which in turn is refuted by the Sautrantikas (= Vasubandhu). Half of these refutations show that there is no scriptural basis for *avijnaptirupa* in Buddha's teachings (i.e., Buddha never taught it). 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 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" (*Treasury of Knowledge*, translation by Pruden, p. 567), responding to 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.

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

In [December 2009](#), the 17th 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 was a Prasangika, and his view is verified in section 160 of his *Compendium of Trainings* (Skt. *Shikshasamuchchaya*): "by a resolve to abstain he succeeds in abstaining" (translation by 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 (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).

**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 (*cittamatrin*) 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.

**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 (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.

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 (translation by ACI, *The Ethical Life*, p. 28):

*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.*

The lower half of the Madhyamaka school (i.e., the Svatantrikas) says that vows are intention, just as do the Prasangikas of the Nyingma, Sakya, and Kagyu traditions. The upper half of the Madhyamaka school (i.e., the Gelug Prasangikas) is said to agree with the Vaibhashika school, in so far as vows are considered to be physical form. For Je Tsongkhapa, however, a vow is not an *avijnaptirupa* as in the Vaibhashika school but rather form that is a phenomena source (Skt. *dharma-ayatana*). Geshe-la explains in *Heart of Wisdom* (p. 127) that the term *phenomena source* “refers specifically to phenomena that appear exclusively to mental consciousness.” Geshe Michael Roach gives examples of this 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 hanging through one’s body (= *avijnaptirupa*), but the *conceptualization* of not lying, etc.: “I avoid the word *matter*, which is a little tricky. [Gelugpas] 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.”

Thus, as Geshe Kelsang claims, according to all of the Mahayana philosophical schools—whether they assert vows as intention or as phenomena source—vows are not forms being preserved in one’s physical body, and so they are not necessarily lost at the time of death. Atisha says that vows are lost at the time of death simply on account of not being recalled in one’s new body (*The Complete Works of Atisha*, p. 135).

~~~ II ~~~

“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.

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

Sobisch says that here Sakya Pandita was responding to the teachings of the founder of the Drikung Kagyu tradition, Jigten Sumgon:

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 Sumgon’s *Same Intention* (Tib. *Gongchig*) outlines the distinctive features of the Drikung Kagyu tradition; Khenchen Konchog Gyaltsen Rinpoche says that it is the most important text of their tradition. 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 Sumgon teaches that the Vinaya is common to all vehicles (3:1); it is not uncommon to the Hinayana, but in fact was intended by Buddha as a Mahayana practice (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.

Similarly, Geshe-la's teaching does not apply to *all* Pratimoksha vows, 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.

### **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.

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

Sakya Pandita contrasted the mental nature of the Bodhisattva vows with the physical nature of the Pratimoksha vows (v. 6):

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, the Bodhisattva vows are *not* physical form (*avijnaptirupa*), and so 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."

**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.

**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 (i.e., arguing against something one's opponent does not actually claim). Critics seem to think that what is being said is that vows continue whether or not one keeps the intention to do so. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso explains what is actually the case:

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.

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"? (*Basic Path*, pp. 108; 193)

Losing one's ordination vows at the time of death is the norm; maintaining one's ordination vows into the next life is very rare, even for monastic Bodhisattvas. Due to uncontrolled rebirth, even a Bodhisattva 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 there is no monasticism outside the human realm. However, this reason given by Je Tsongkhapa is not pervasive; how does it apply to a Bodhisattva monk or nun who conscientiously takes rebirth as a human being? To understand this point, 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)

Je Tsongkhapa's point is merely to say that the Pratimoksha vow is not *automatically* carried into the next life, but the door is left open for those Bodhisattvas who can control death, intermediate state, and rebirth.

Interestingly, Markus Viehbeck briefs his readers on two stories of monk-gods which are mentioned in Rigdzin Chokyi Dragpa's commentary to the verse of the *Gongchig* cited above; these stories are taken from the *Karuna Pundarika Sutra* and the *Vinaya*, respectively (p. 60).

**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 lifetimes that may entail. If the duration of one's vows is really a matter of intention—hence why one no longer has to observe them after giving them up, contrary to Sakya Pandita's *non sequitur* in verses 12-13—then cannot they extend beyond this life for so long as the will is unimpaired?

**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).

~~~ III ~~~

“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 concious [*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.

**Are there any examples of Kadampa-trained Masters teaching that Pratimoksha vows do not cease at the time of death and can transform into Bodhisattva vows?**

Gampopa’s *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, a Lamrim text based on Atisha’s *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, responds to 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." However, the Pratimoksha vows of a person of (c) great scope "will not cease at the time of death." Furthermore, Gampopa states (p. 146):

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].

**Does one's renunciation disappear on account of having been transformed into bodhichitta?**

We can understand from Gampopa's teaching cited above that someone with bodhichitta motivation stills remain a renunciate, but his wish to free 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* (translation by 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 to 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).

**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 Go-rams-pa's explanation, is very similar to the 'Bri-gung-pa's "same vital point," namely the abandoning of non-virtue (and, according to them, also the achieving of virtue).

**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*) in to 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. Gags-pa-rgyal-mtshan 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 Gags-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.

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

This was first addressed by citing 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.

Thrangü Rinpoche gives another possible sequence: first someone receives the Bodhisattva vows, then later takes up the Prätimoksha. In that case, "ince 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 quoted above (vv. 4-5, 40) and the Nyingmapas (translation in Sobisch, p. 407), according to Jamgon Kongtrul, at this point the Prätimoksha vows are no longer to be understood or explained from the point of view of the Vaibhashika school which taught that the Prätimoksha vows cease at the time of death:

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.

~~~ IV ~~~

“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 Gyasto

**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 [*sic*] 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.

**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 17th 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.

**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 (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 reflects 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 measured by the number of vows he or she has taken, but by his or her level of renunciation?

**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 receiving them; once he or she overcomes that fault—i.e., attachment to samsara—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.

It should be noted that, according to the Tibetan tradition, one of the 8 vows of Rabjung ordination is to wear monastic robes.

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

Jamgon Kongtrul 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:

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...

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

As explained before, the number of vows taken is no indication of one’s mental state or intention. 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 distinguishing factor.

| Level of Ordination            | Tibetan Buddhism<br>(Hinayana Vinaya) | Kadampa Buddhism<br>(Mahayana Vinaya) |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 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, whereas in Kadam Lamrim practice the way to control your mind is by increasing your scope of aspiration (see section on the 3 divisions of non-attachment in *Understanding the Mind*). 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 follow 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. According to Je Tsongkhapa (vol. 2, p. 103), the many vows of a Bodhisattva are similarly condensed into the practice of the six perfections. In either case, why quibble over the *number* if the *meaning* is the same? According to Jigten Sumgon, 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 vows of personal liberation are fulfilled in the forsaking of the ten unvirtuous actions” (*Buddhist Ethics*, p. 85; 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?

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

According to the 17th 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.” First of all, it would be interesting to see how this is reconciled with Gampopa’s 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” (translation by 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*" by Jigten Sumgon; unfortunately, this text is not yet available in English.

### **What about vow transformation in the Nyingma tradition?**

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" (translation by 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, pp. 141, 142).

Similarly, Tulku Thondup says in the preface to Dudjom Rinpoche's *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).

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 terton 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.

~~~ 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 with the Vinaya too? Geshe-la himself has never said that the Vaibhashika presentation is wrong; he would never disparage the Hinayana in this way. Rather, we can understand that the Hinayana interpretation is correct at one level, while for Mahayanists the Mahayana interpretation is “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. Jigme Lingpa listed six three-vow theories—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 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, why not object to every other Tibetan Lama throughout history who has held the same view?

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 view, Geshe-la seems to have been the first to “bring it all together” into a coherent whole.

## 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 Dorejchang [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.