

## **Antidotes to not understanding how to achieve Enlightenment:**

### **The seven pratimoksha vows**

(from In Search of the Stainless Ambrosia, Jewel Ornament of Liberation, Jewel Treasury of Advice and Transformation of Suffering)

by Khenchen Konchog Gyaltzen Rinpoche

Before taking the Bodhisattva vow, it is essential to take one of the seven pratimoksha vows which are the foundation. For example, if you invite a king to your dwelling place, you must first clean it thoroughly and decorate. Only then is it fit for so distinguished a visitor. In the same way, to invite the king known as Bodhicitta our mind must be cleansed and free of harmful thoughts. Only then can one cultivate Bodhicitta. Among the seven vows there are two categories including those for householders and those for renunciates. The householder vows are known as upasaka and upasika vows and include the five basic disciplines: not taking life (especially that of humans), not lying (especially with regard to spiritual life), not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct, and not becoming intoxicated. Renunciates' vows, which are built on upasaka discipline, include the categories known as Bhikshu, Bhikshuni, Siksamana, Sramanera, and Sramanerika. In order to achieve peace and harmony for oneself and others, these ethics must be kept, for without proper conduct it is impossible to achieve serenity, no matter how hard we try. A story told by the Buddha illustrates the importance of ethical behavior:

In one of the Buddha's previous lifetimes, in the forest of Kashika, there lived four noble beings - a bird, a monkey, a rabbit, and an elephant. The four, who drank at the same spring, soon became friends. One day they decided that it would be proper to show the greatest respect for the eldest among them. To determine their respective ages, each one recalled the height of a nearby nyagrota tree when he had first seen it. The elephant said, "I must be the oldest. I remember that when I was born the shadow of the tree fell across my body." The monkey said, "I must be the older than the elephant. When I was born the tree had the same size as me." The rabbit said, "I must be older than either of you. When I was born, the seed of the tree was just sprouting. I took a young leaf and ate it." The bird said, "I am older than any of you. When I was born I ate the fruit of a tree south of this spring. The seed of the nyagrota tree passed through my body as waste. So I planted it." The four then showed each other respect accordingly. The elephant placed the bird on the crown of his head, the rabbit on his neck, and the monkey on his back. Then the bird said, "Now we must keep the five basic disciplines throughout our lives." This they did, and to insure that all other beings did the same, the bird initiated all those with wings, the elephant initiated all those with fangs, the rabbit initiated all those with paws, and the monkey initiated all those with fur. The peace that then pervaded the kingdom was so great that the king and his ministers felt its effects and began congratulating themselves. The king thought that it was his wise Dharma rule which was causing the kingdom to prosper; the queen thought that good fortune was due to the royal couple's lack of sexual misconduct; the princes thought it was due to the respect they showed their parents; and the subjects thought that it was due to their obedience to the king. Because each attributed the kingdom's prosperity to a different factor, a great dispute ensued. The king therefore summoned a great, clairvoyant master, who said, "The kingdom's prosperity is due to none of your efforts. In the Kashika forest live four great beings who keep the five disciplines and initiated their families into these disciplines. Through their efforts, prosperity resulted. Because the king and his subjects have also kept these precepts, the kingdom has reaped the benefits of this practice of the Dharma. Any animals who have died have been reborn in the thirty-three states of the God realm." Indra, king of the god realm, expressed his amazement with the following praise: "With respect and courteousness,

enduring the hardship of the forests, through the moral behavior of the birds, all sentient beings of the world are firmly stabilized." The Buddha then revealed that he was the bird in a previous life, while his attendant Ananda was the elephant, Shariputra was the rabbit, and Maugotlayaya was the monkey.

So if one wishes to be free of disease, mental distress and other undesirable conditions in this life and the next, one must keep these vows. The person who belongs to the Mahayana family and has taken refuge in the Three Jewels, and who observes any of the seven sections of the Pratimoksha vow, possesses the foundation for cultivating Bodhicitta.

*The root of the Buddha's teachings is the morality of the vinaya.  
Without this, even if you are called a practitioner, you are still a samsaric person.  
Therefore, guard your discipline as you would guard your eyes.  
(from Jewel Treasury of Advice)*