

Changling Rinpoche

Perfect Conduct

November 19 – 20, 2005

October 7 – 8, 2006

This text *Perfect Conduct* was written by the master Ngari Panchen, the pandita of Ngari. He was born in 1487 in the western part of Tibet (and was the mind emanation of the religious king Trisong Detsen and the ninth reincarnation of Gyelse Lharje.) Ngari Panchen belongs to the Northern Treasure lineage of the Nyingmapa school. He explains in *Perfect Conduct* how to hold the vow of pratimoksha, how to hold the vow of a bodhisattva, how to hold the samayas of vajrayana – what should be abandoned, avoided, and what should be engaged.

Guru Rinpoche said, "the view is vast as space, but activities should be very fine, like a bride coming into a new family."

Longchenpa in the first chapter of "The Wishfulfilling Treasure" said, "until the movement of this present ordinary mind has totally ceased, karma will never fail. It will always work, even if you are a dzogchenpa." It only stops with enlightenment.

To achieve the result of the path is 100% impossible without Perfect Conduct. You know that we say the human form is precious and it is difficult to take rebirth as a human and we give the example of the numbers and the cause. The practice of generosity and the rest of the practice give a positive result, but the only cause of human rebirth is Perfect Conduct.

Pratimoksha (the sravaka or foundation vehicle vows) is based on Perfect Conduct, the bodhisattva vow is based on Perfect Conduct, and even the vajrayana is based on Perfect Conduct. Without holding the samayas of vajrayana we really can't practice the path of vajrayana. Without understanding, the samayas (commitments) of vajrayana, the development stage, the generation stage and dzogchen don't work. We even say the bodhisattva vows and the vajrayana samayas are Perfect Conduct. To hold these vows, the very first thing that is important to understand is what needs to be abandoned and what needs to be engaged. Without understanding what to give up and what to engage, we really can't hold the vows of a bodhisattva, the vajrayana samayas, or pratimoksha.

In the tantra it says very clearly that if you don't know how to do development stage or completion stage and just understand what the samayas are and hold that perfectly, then in a maximum of seven human rebirths you will achieve enlightenment. Without these samayas the different practices don't work. This is why Nagarjuna (an Indian philosopher of the 1st century) said that Perfect Conduct is like the earth. The earth is the foundation of the living and the non-living, of the moving and the non-moving, the foundation of everything. In the same way, Perfect Conduct is the foundation of all the paths starting from the foundation vehicle up to dzogpa chenpo.

Buddha gave teachings on pratimoksha in which he explained how to practice the path of the foundation vehicle through Perfect Conduct. Even the sutras of Mahayana mention view and meditation. All these are based on Perfect Conduct. How to practice and hold the vow. In the vajrayana tantras, the development stage, the completion stage and dzogchen are all based on vajrayana with its own Perfect Conduct. If you practice vajrayana without empowerment, it doesn't work, because during the empowerment you first have to receive the vajrayana vow. Then the practice works. Before receiving the empowerment it doesn't

work, because we didn't receive the vow. Actually, receiving the empowerment is receiving the vow of vajrayana. Receiving the vow of vajrayana is receiving the empowerment. So the empowerment is giving the vajrayana vow.

When Ngari Panchen wrote Perfect Conduct, he stated that what is important is how we receive the vow. Then he describes what the vows are: what is a pratimoksha vow, what is a bodhisattva vow and what is a vajrayana vow. Then he describes how we should receive the vow. And after we receive the vow, how we should continue the vow. Then he talks about how we repair the vow if it is broken. Speaking openly, all these different practices are all how to practice the vows. The vows, what to be abandoned and what to do, are all explained by the Buddha himself. The vows are practicing on karma, and the only ones who can understand, who can see the cause and fruition of karma, are the enlightened ones. Only the enlightened ones can describe that this cause will create this karma and get this kind of wisdom. Besides enlightened beings, no one can describe it. So the lineage of all the vows has to come from an enlightened being.

The point of Perfect Conduct is to make sure that we do not fall down or become engaged in negative karma. The vows protect us from engaging in negative activities. The vows are not new rules giving us extra work. The vows are based on negative karma and positive karma. The negative karma is to be abandoned and positive karma is to be engaged. Until this present ordinary mind has been totally purified into a full form of awakened, enlightened mind, karma always works. It never fails. That is why we as dzogchen practitioners must be careful with karma. Guru Padmasambhava said: Your view may be vast as space, but your conduct should be very fine.

Until you achieve the level of Samantabhadra (the primordial enlightened state), karma always works. So even the bodhisattva at high levels needs to be careful of karma. Practicing on the vajrayana path and engaging in negative karma don't match. Which becomes stronger? Either the practice becomes stronger or karma becomes stronger. Karma is always stronger. Even a small negative karma can affect the practice, even a strong practice. This is the reason Guru Padmasambhava says be careful with karma.

Perfect Conduct is practicing karma in more detail. It is not making extra rules. All these vows are based on how to stop the three poisons. According to monks' vows, they are not allowed to sleep on a high bed or a very expensive bed as this can build up pride and attachment from desire. All these vows are based on using details of life to stop the afflictive emotions. Just now when we say desire we only understand a really strong attached mind. Besides that we don't understand the rest of subtle desire. In the rest of pratimoksha, the monk's vows, it says the monks are not allowed to have more than three robes. They are not allowed to have more than one yellow robe, or to have more than only extra bowl. Why? To stop the subtle desires. Practicing the vow, especially the pratimoksha vow, is based mainly on dealing with desire. The bodhisattva vow is based on dealing with hatred mind. The vajrayana vow is based on dealing with ignorance mind.

The main practice of the pratimoksha vow is to give up harming others. On top of that, the bodhisattva vow is benefiting others. On top of that, the vajrayana vow mind is building up the perfect view, perfect realization. So if you see that pratimoksha is meant to stop harming others, then you see that the root of harming others is desire. On top of that the purpose of the bodhisattva vow is to benefit others by purifying the anger mind through compassion and bodhisattva mind. On top of that, vajrayana is to have perfect realization, to build up a perfect view in order to purify ignorance, which is a misunderstanding mind.

The vajrayana samayas are based on how to build up perfect realization. The problem is that we practice a lot but we don't have results because our conduct and our activities are not done properly. That is why we do lots of practice but don't get any results. To make the result of these activities sure, we must understand what Perfect Conduct is and then practice it. If we are able to understand Perfect Conduct and hold that much, even if we don't know the great views and meditation, even just holding the getsul vow, the first monks' vow, only that much, even if we don't know how to do practices, without any doubt the result will be seven continuous human rebirths. In these seven rebirths this person will always meet with the perfect path because of the previous karma. And when in another life he meets with the path, he will improve more. That is how the path continues. There are many problems with practitioners. They don't get any improvement because they don't take care of their conduct.

From one side it appears that Perfect Conduct has rules. But actually when the vows state what is to be abandoned, this is about the cause of the suffering. What we have to avoid is the cause of suffering. The thing we need to engage is the cause of happiness. The Buddha has explained the cause of suffering. He says avoid this or engage in this.

Really, for me, of the practice we do and karma, I think karma is the stronger. If the practice is stronger, then I think that individual is taking care of Perfect Conduct. I think this is a person who knows how to practice it. I think the one who knows how to take care of Perfect Conduct also knows how to practice. From one side, whether dzogchen, Mahayana or Hinayana, to achieve liberation, the practice of the path is the six paramitas. If one of the six paramitas is missing, that means the path is missing. Just now what we try to grab from this path are the last two paramitas: the paramita of concentration/samadhi and wisdom. The first four, we just keep them up. That is why our practice is not working properly. The Buddha explained six paramitas not two paramitas. The second paramita is Perfect Conduct, which we call discipline.

This text has explained all the vows of the three vehicles because the vajrayana practitioner has to hold all the three vows. The Hinayana practitioner only has to take care of pratimoksha. The Mahayana practitioner has to take care of two vows, the pratimoksha and bodhisattva. A vajrayana practitioner has to take care of pratimoksha, Mahayana and vajrayana. A dzogchen practitioner has to take care of all the nine yanas' vows. Practicing dzogchen is not that easy since one must take care of all the vows of the nine yanas.

This is why we say that pratimoksha practice is the easiest practice of all. The great master Atisha said that from the point of pratimoksha he didn't break even a small subtle vow; he was totally pure. Then he said that when he received the Mahayana bodhisattva vow some of the path fell apart. When he received the vajrayana vow, the breaking of vows was like the rain. Because according to the vajrayana he had to be in pure vision twenty-four hours a day. He had to see everything as a pure Buddha, everyone as enlightened. Especially from the dzogchen point of view he had to see everybody as a perfect Samantabhadra. So if we are not able to understand that, and if we see things as ordinary, the vow of dzogchen is being broken. We must see everybody as perfect, enlightened Samantabhadra. If we are not able to see that then practicing dzogchen doesn't work. It is not understood.

The path of enlightenment depends on Perfect Conduct. Buddha has mentioned very clearly that to understand if his teaching is alive or not, see if Perfect Conduct is alive or not. If Perfect Conduct is alive that means the teachings of Buddha are alive. If Perfect Conduct has degenerated that means the teachings of Buddha have come to an end. He made that very clear. That was his last word. The path and enlightenment are based on Perfect

Conduct. Refuge is also a vow. It is the beginning of Perfect Conduct and the end is dzogchen.

If we really wish to practice dzogchen, we must know Perfect Conduct, all the Perfect Conduct. Without understanding Perfect Conduct we can't even practice the Hinayana path, because in Nyingmapa, the path is divided into nine yantras, starting from sravaka. The way the nine yantras are established is as the entrance, the view, the meditation, and the result. It has been explained as four parts. After the entrance door comes the view, then the meditation, then the activities, then the result.

The entrance door is Perfect Conduct. We have nine yantras. First are the sravaka and pratyakhyabuddha. The entrance door of these two is pratimoksha. The bodhisattva entrance door is the bodhisattva vow. Then we have the outer tantra: kriya, upa, and yoga. Their entrance doors are their own vows. The last three yantras, maha yoga, anu yoga and ati yoga, each have an entrance door. What are those entrances? For all, Perfect Conduct.

Without going through this door, there is no other way that we can sneak into the path. The pratimoksha vow is received through its own ceremony, the bodhisattva through its own path, and vajrayana through empowerment. The one who has gone directly into vajrayana and received the empowerment gets all these vows. On the dzogchen path, when you receive the empowerment of dzogchen, Rigpai Tsal Wang, the empowerment of the expression of rigpa, it is mentioned clearly in the text at the time of preparation that you are going to hold all the vows of all the paths. Even in the empowerment of the maha yoga – pratimoksha, the bodhisattva, the vows of the vidyadhara, vajrayana – all this I am going to hold, everything. Without going through these stages, we can't get into empowerment. Based on this vow, we receive the vase empowerment vow. Then when we receive the second empowerment we receive the secret empowerment vow. When we receive the third empowerment we receive the wisdom empowerment vow. One who has received only the vase empowerment does not need to bother with secret or wisdom. The one who has received the wisdom empowerment has to take care also of the vase and secret empowerment vows. The one who has received the fourth empowerment needs to take care of all vows of the path.

Perfect Conduct is none other than these vows, the samayas. It is very important to understand how to practice these vows. If we had to study without Ngari Panchen's writing, we would have to study a hundred volumes of the Buddha's wisdom. Ngari Panchen brought everything into a short version so that we can understand it easily in a short period without going through the hundred volumes. The hundred volumes of Kangyur are based on the Perfect Conduct.

Here, concludes the opening talk on Perfect Conduct. The full text (118 pages) of Perfect Conduct is available for purchase on the Lotus Speech website.