

**A SEMINAR TO BE ORGANISED BY THE
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION AND CULTURE OF THE
CENTRAL TIBETAN ADMINISTRATION**

TOPIC:

Whether or not there is a way to give *bhikshuni* (*dge slong ma*) ordination to Tibetan nuns (*rab byung btsun ma*) in accordance with the *vinaya* of the Mulasarvastivada tradition that flourished in Tibet, the tradition practised in Nalanda Buddhist University in India.

DATE:

22nd to 24th May 2006

PARTICIPANTS:

Vinaya masters of the Buddhist countries

VENUE:

The hall above the CTA staff mess
Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamsala

TRANSLATED BY:

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THE CORE TOPIC

A MEANS TO ACHIEVE BHIKSHUNI ORDINATION

There are two chief topics with regard to finding a way to either re-introduce or newly introduce a method for ordaining Tibetan nuns (*rab byung btsun ma*) as bhikshunis (*dge slong ma*), that is, nuns who have received full ordination in accordance with the Vinaya of the Mulasarvastivada tradition descended from Nalanda Buddhist University that flourished in Tibet:

1. A way to re-introduce the tradition of ordaining *bhikshunis* by a *sangha* consisting only of *bhikshus* as was practised in Tibet in the past or
2. A way to newly introduce a tradition of bestowing *bhikshuni* ordination by a *sangha* of *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*, i.e. *bhikshus* who uphold the Mulasarvastivada Vinaya tradition of Tibet and *bhikshunis* who uphold the *vinaya* of other traditions, [i.e. the Sthaviravada or Theravada and the Dharmagupta].

Based on the two mentioned topics, *vinaya* practitioners are requested to discuss and write analytical articles on how to ordain *bhikshunis* in accordance with the *vinaya* texts of Mulasarvastivada School practised in Tibet, which will help us to resolve and ascertain the standpoint of *vinaya* practitioners of Mulasarvastivada School that flourished in Tibet in the forthcoming ‘International Conference of Buddhist *Vinaya* Practitioners’.

Here I will discuss the issue by way of four points: the history of bhikshuni ordination, a brief introduction, the core topic, and conclusion.

1. THE HISTORY OF BHIKSHUNI ORDINATION

In India, initially, during the time of Buddha Shakyamuni, he first ordained his first five disciples, imparting the *bhikshu* ordination, which marked the origin of the formation of the *bhikshu sangha*. Then came the *bhikshuni sangha*, which was formed by giving simultaneous ordination to 500 Shakyani women including Mahaprajapati after they accepted to follow the eight chief rules (*gurudharmas*).

Other than that, the procedure for full ordination is that women should successively move through the stages of *upasika* (*dge bsnyen ma*), *pravrajita* (*rab byung ma*), *shramanika* or novice nun (*dge tshul ma*), *shikshamani* (*dge slob ma*), *brahmacari* (*tshang spyod nyer gnas*) and then full ordination as a *bhikshuni*. Thus, a four-fold assembly of disciples came into being [fully ordained monks and nuns, and male and female holders of the *upasaka* ordination] who spread the Buddhadharma and caused it to flourish.

The compassionate Buddha allowed women to be ordained as bhikshunis. Why he resisted at the beginning is, according to the *Commentary on Lesser Points* (*phran tshogs 'grel pa*) [a commentary on one of the four sections of the *vinaya*, ‘*dul ba phran tshogs kyi gzhi*, that which deals with minor matters,] that for a brief time at the beginning Buddha did not give full ordination for women due to his special loving compassion towards women; he did so with the purpose that they might renounce cyclic existence and as a special technique that they might enter into the higher paths. We

need to understand this in accordance with that explanation.

Buddha gave equal opportunities to men and women, and he never made any discrimination between them. From the time of the Buddha, there were set forth, in terms of monastics, fully ordained monks (*dge slong pha*) and fully ordained nuns (*dge slong ma*) and, in terms of lay practitioners, both male lay vow holders (*upasaka, dge bsnyen pha*) and female lay vow holders (*dge bsnyen ma*) [that is, lay ordination with any of five precepts]. These are the four types of Followers of the Buddha (*ston pa'i 'khor rnam pa bzhi*) mentioned in the three baskets (*sde snod gsum*) of Buddha's teachings and particularly in the vinaya texts. In a similar vein, the statements in many scriptures, "Noble sons and noble daughters," indicate that Buddha made no discrimination between men and women and gave equal rights.

FIRST BHIKSHUNI

Mahaprajapati was the first *bhikshuni* within Buddha Shakyamuni's teaching and she was prophesied by Buddha to be supreme among all the elder nuns. Gradually a *bhikshuni sangha* came into being in the Noble Land of India.

FIRST SHRI LANKAN BHIKSHUNI

During the time of Dharma King Ashoka, his son Mahindra and his daughter Sangammitra travelled successively to Sri Lanka. Initially they introduced the order of *bhikshus* and later Shri Lankan women received *bhikshuni* ordination. Anula Devi was the first Shri Lankan *bhikshuni*. The *bhikshuni* lineage continued there until eleventh century CE, after which it came to an end.

FIRST CHINESE BHIKSHUNI

In the fourth century CE, a very devout Chinese Buddhist woman named Ching Chien received *bhikshuni* ordination from a *sangha* consisting only of *bhikshus* and received the trainings and vows of a *bhikshuni*. There are clear accounts referring her as the first Chinese *bhikshuni*. This tradition of receiving *bhikshuni* ordination from a *sangha* consisting only of *bhikshus* is a living tradition that is practised in several Buddhist countries.

In the fifth century CE, the Kashmiri scholar Sanghavarma and a group of Sri Lankan *bhikshunis* led by Bhikshuni Devasara travelled to China and introduced a tradition of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination involving a *sangha* of both *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*. Thus, a lineage of *bhikshuni* ordination involving a *sangha* of both *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis* arose there.

TIBETAN BHIKSHUNI

In the fifteenth century CE at Gyama in central Tibet, within the Mulasarvastivadin tradition there is an account of a woman who was especially devout being given full ordination by a *sangha* consisting of ten *bhikshus*. Chodup Palmo Tsotrung of Gyama received the *bhikshuni* ordination from a group of masters that included Panchen Shakya Chokden (1428-1507) as the abbot (*upadhyaya*), Chen-nga Drupgyalwa as the karma master (*karmacharya*), Jetsun Kunga Gyaltzen as the interviewer in isolation (*bramacharya upavasak acharya*). She came to be known as 'the Gyama Bhikshuni' or the Bhikshuni of Gyama.

However, this practice was criticized, stating that it was an invalid way of imparting

bhikshuni ordination. In any case, there was never a lineage of *bhikshuni* vows that came directly from India or from any other country.

The lineage of *bhikshuni* ordination that came from China is a living tradition that is being practised in countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Korea. Not only can a thriving *bhikshuni sangha* be seen in those countries, but also new *bhikshuni* ordination is being imparted.

Many nuns from different parts of the world have received the *bhikshuni* vows and precepts of ordination in those countries. Several Tibetan nuns residing in the exile community have been offered special invitations to visit those countries to receive *bhikshuni* ordination, but even though patrons have offered financial support, only a few have chosen to go and receive the ordination. Until now, no Tibetan nun has received *bhikshuni* ordination on her own initiative.

In response to requests made in 1993 by some nuns from Eastern and Western countries for the restoration of *bhikshuni* lineage, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has shown great interest and concern regarding this matter and has repeatedly said:

If we could newly introduce the *bhikshuni* lineage in Tibet, there would be great benefit in the sense that it would make Tibet a country possessing the “four-fold assembly of disciples” of Buddha, and hence would make Tibet a “central-land” of the teachings of Buddha. However, such important matters related to the *Vinaya* should be discussed and decided collectively by *sangha* members and not by individual high-ranking Buddhist *lamas* or leaders. A meeting of a Tibetan *sangha* of *vinaya*-masters should be convened to discuss the matter thoroughly.

In 1993, as a preparation for the ‘Tibetan Religious Conference’, we invited several Tibetan scholars and *vinaya*-masters to give their opinions. At that time, there did not emerge a decisive and unanimous opinion regarding ordination of *bhikshunis*.

In 1995, under the auspices of the Department of Religion and Culture of the Central Tibetan Administration, the ‘Fifth Tibetan Religious Conference’ was convened at the Norbulinga Institute, Dharamsala. The possibility of establishing *bhikshuni* ordination was discussed in the conference and at the end the following resolution was made:

In order to come to a decision regarding the establishment of *bhikshuni* ordination for Tibetan nuns, the Department of Religion and Culture has taken special responsibility to do thorough research on the issue and has sought opinions from Tibetan scholars and *vinaya*-masters. However, they have not yet been able to reach a decisive opinion. There has been a free and open discussion in this conference, but still there is a need for authentic and reliable sources on the basis of which this essential matter can be decided in the future by scholars and *vinaya*-masters. For this, a special committee of scholars should be formed to gather together a comprehensive presentation of

scriptural citations and reasonings based on which this can be settled.

In 2000, under the auspices of the Department of Religion and Culture of the Central Tibetan Administration and Norbulinga Institute, the ‘Seventh Tibetan Religious Conference’ was held at the Norbulinga Institute, Dharamsala. There was further discussion regarding *bhikshuni* ordination and the following resolution was passed:

It is best to resolve the matter of *bhikshuni* ordination in accordance with the textual and practical approaches of the individual *vinaya* traditions.

In 2003, under the auspices of the Department of Religion and Culture of the Central Tibetan Administration, the ‘Eighth Tibetan Religious Conference’ was held at the Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Varanasi. The possibility of establishing *bhikshuni* ordination was further discussed in the conference and was the following resolution was made:

With the regard to restoration of *bhikshuni* ordination within the Mulasarvastivada *vinaya* tradition, it is being discussed that there is a Chinese *bhikshuni* lineage. Hence, it is imperative to do a thorough research on the authenticity of the ordination rite and so forth of the Chinese *bhikshuni* ordination; and when we obtain reliable and genuine facts, *bhikshuni* ordination will be determined in conformity with that tradition.

In any case, the issue of restoring or newly establishing *bhikshuni* ordination has been discussed by Tibetan *vinaya*-masters and scholars in many conferences. However, in short, up until now a final decision on a means of accomplishing *bhikshuni* ordination for the Tibetan nuns has not been taken.

Furthermore, the Department of Religion and Culture of the Central Tibetan Administration is going to convene an assembly of Tibetan *vinaya*-masters for a conference in Dharamsala this year (2006) to discuss a means of accomplishing *bhikshuni* ordination in conformity with the Mulasarvastivada *vinaya* tradition of Nalanda that flourished in Tibet.

The reason why Tibetan nuns have been unable to receive *bhikshuni* ordination in conformity with the Dharmagupta *vinaya* tradition that flourished in China is briefly mentioned below with a short introductory history.

II. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Although the *bhikshuni* lineage of Sri Lanka was completely broken there in the eleventh century CE, it had been transmitted to China in the fifth century CE after a group of Sri Lankan *bhikshunis* led by Bhikshuni Devasara travelled to China. They introduced the tradition of bestowing *bhikshuni* ordination by a *sangha* of both *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*. This lineage is extant even today, and we need to carry out research regarding sources showing that this is unbroken up to the present. Since 1982

the Department of Religion and Culture of the Central Tibetan Administration has been doing research on *bhikshuni* ordination; the findings were published in four books [three in Tibetan and one English summary] in 2000 and were sent to about two hundred persons—high lamas, scholars, and Tibetan *vinaya*-masters of all four traditions as bases of examination. They were asked to send their opinions here. However, we received only thirteen articles whose opinions were not unanimous. The bases of examination are clearly mentioned in the four books.

SUMMARY OF THE THREE BOOKS ON THE LINEAGE OF BHIKSHUNI ORDINATION

Out of great concern and responsibility, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama has time and again emphasized the need to conduct a thorough investigation on the actual situation of the lineage of *bhikshuni* ordination and has instructed our department to carry out that research. Consequently, in order to resolve the possibility of Tibetan nuns receiving the complete set of *bhikshuni* vows – the bases of all higher trainings – the Department of Religion and Culture of the Central Tibetan Administration has been carrying out extensive research over a lengthy period of time. Our department has published three books covering topics such as the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition that flourished in Tibet, the Dharmagupta *vinaya* tradition that flourished in China, the beginnings of the first *bhikshuni sangha* in China and the transmission of its lineage. The following is a summary of these three books – the bases of examination:

According to available sources found here [in the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives], there never was *bhikshuni* lineage in Tibet that came directly from India or any other country. However, there is a scriptural source in the Tibetan translation of the *vinaya* texts of Mulasarvastivadin tradition (*gZhi smra'i 'dul ba lung*) that says that if a *sangha* comprised only of *bhikshus* imparts *bhikshuni* ordination to women through performing a *bhikshu* ceremonial rite (*pha chog*), the act though authentic will incur a minor infraction (*nyes byas*) to the performers [those who impart the *bhikshuni* vows through a ceremonial rite].

With this *vinaya* source, several Tibetan *vinaya*-masters such as Panchen Shakya Chokden (1428-1507) initiated a new system of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination in Tibet in which a *sangha* comprised only of *bhikshus* imparted the *bhikshuni* ordination using a *bhikshu* ceremonial rite. However, this practice met with much opposition from *vinaya*-holders who were his contemporaries, such as Kunkhyen Gorampa Sonam Senge (1429-1489).

They opposed the new system mainly with two reasons. First, they argued that no great pioneering *vinaya*-holders had imparted the *bhikshuni* ordination in Tibet in the past. Second, they claimed that the new system violated *vinaya* texts such as the Root Sutra of Monastic Discipline (*Vinayamulasutra*, '*Dul ba'i mdo rtsa ba*) and Extensive Elucidation of *Vinayamulasutra* (*mDo rgya cher 'grel*).

The *Vinayamulasutra* states:

One can not become a *bhikshuni* if one has not received the *brahmacaryopasthana* (*tshang spyod nyer gnas*).

And:

After that, the *sangha* imparts it (*bhikshuni* ordination).

The *Extensive Elucidation of Vinayamulasutra* states:

As it is the occasion, the *bhikshuni sangha* utters [the ceremonial rite of the *brahmacaryopasthana*].

They argued that a nun cannot seek *bhikshuni* ordination unless she has received the *brahmacaryopasthana*, as is established by the passage cited from the *Vinayamulasutra*. And the vows of *brahmacaryopasthana* are bestowed only by a *bhikshuni sangha* as is established by the citation from the *Extensive Elucidation of Vinayamulasutra*. Since Tibet never had *bhikshuni sangha* in the past, it is too extreme to impart *bhikshuni* ordination to women exclusively by a *bhikshu sangha*; and such practice is tantamount to denouncing the *Buddhadharma*.

Even though the practice [of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination to women by a *sangha* of only *bhikshus*] is directly condemned primarily with these citations from the Vinaya texts, the *vinaya*-holder, Panchen Shakya Chokden – who held that the said practice does not contradict the rules set forth in Vinaya texts – responded to the objection by saying that the *bhikshuni* ordination conducted by two different ceremonial rites – *bhikshu* ceremonial rite (*pha chog*) and *bhikshuni* ceremonial rite (*ma chog*) – needs to be separately interpreted. He argued that the citations do not refute his practice because the said requisites outlined in the Vinaya texts are required for imparting *bhikshuni* ordination for women by performing a *bhikshuni* ceremonial rite (*ma chog*), however, such requisites are not required for imparting *bhikshuni* ordination for women by performing a *bhikshu* ceremonial rite (*pha chog*). In a similar fashion, Drukchen Pema Karpo (1527-1592) also asserted the principle.

In any case, there are Vinaya textual references which state that the act of bestowing *bhikshuni* ordination by a *sangha* consisting only of *bhikshus* performing the *bhikshu* ceremonial rite is acceptable. However, it seems there is no Vinaya statement which states that flawless and perfect vows (*nyes med phun tshogs kyi sdom pa*) [of *bhikshuni*] are generated [when such a procedure is followed].

The arguments persist as to whether it is appropriate for a *bhikshu sangha* to impart *bhikshuni* ordination to a woman who has not received the *brahmacaryopasthana* vows. However, there are Vinaya textual references which state that a woman can receive the vows of *shikshamana* (*dge slob ma*) and *brahmacaryopasthana* from a *bhikshu sangha* in the case that the required number of *bhikshunis* does not exist [in that area]. However, it seems there is no Vinaya source proving that flawless and perfect vows [of *shikshamani* and *brahmacaryopasthana*] are generated.

To put it briefly, the great *vinaya*-masters of Tibet such as Panchen Shakya Chokden initiated a new system of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination to women using a *bhikshu* ceremonial rite carried out by an exclusively *bhikshu sangha*. Likewise, to facilitate the possibility of re-introducing the same practice today, the Department of Religion and Culture of the Central Tibetan Administration published a book entitled *Thubwang Gongsal (Oral Instructions of Munindra [Buddha])*. This book is published as a basis of research for the upholders of *Tripitaka*, especially the *vinaya*-holders and *vinaya*-scholars of Tibet.

In order to support the said practice of *bhikshuni* ordination in Tibet, a second book entitled ‘*Rabsel Melong*’ (*Clear Mirror*) has been published. It is a collection of all the indispensable textual statements of the Vinaya texts of the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition and the *bhikshuni pratimoksha* ceremonial rites (*dge slong ma’i las chog*) which were translated into Tibetan that are available at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. Hence, this book is a basis of research to resolve the possibility of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination, having a complete set of fundamental vows, to Tibetan nuns in conformity with the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition that flourished in Tibet.

The third book is a brief account of research findings on the status of *bhikshunis* that flourished in China which was done by our Department. The summary of this book is as follows:

The facts concerning the origin of the Chinese *bhikshuni* are primarily based on the Chinese document entitled the *Biographies of Bhikshunis* (Chinese: *Pi-chie-ni-chuan*) which was written in the sixth century CE and its translations found in other languages. According to this document there were two types of traditions pertaining to the bestowal of *bhikshuni* ordination that flourished in China.

The first tradition was adopted in the fourth century CE where the *bhikshuni* ordination was imparted to women by an exclusively *bhikshu sangha*. This tradition has been practised since then and is still being practised to this day.

In justifying the validity of this tradition [i.e. imparting *bhikshuni* ordination by an exclusively *bhikshu sangha*], the Chinese *bhikshunis* quote the dialogue between the Chinese *bhikshunis* and Sri Lankan *bhikshunis* who came to China [in 429 CE]. The following is the summary of the dialogue:

At that time, the visiting Sri Lankan *bhikshunis* asked, “Have foreign *bhikshunis* ever been here before us?” The Chinese *bhikshunis* answered that there had been none. The Sri Lankan *bhikshunis* then asked, “If that was the case, how had the Chinese nuns taken *bhikshuni* ordination from the *sangha* of both *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*?” The Chinese *bhikshunis* replied, “Like that of Mahaprajapati, they took the *bhikshuni* ordination from a *bhikshu sangha* only.” Although the Chinese *bhikshunis* justified the validity of the tradition of *bhikshuni* ordination that was flourishing then, they still had some doubts and consulted the Indian *vinaya*-holder Acharya Gunavarman (*Yon tan go cha*) – who was staying in China at that time – about the possibility of retaking the *bhikshuni* ordination. Acharya Gunavarman confirmed the validity of *bhikshuni* ordination imparted by a *sangha* consisting of *bhikshu* only [by saying, “As the *bhikshuni* ordination is finalized by the *bhikshu sangha*, the *bhikshuni* ordination still results in pure vows, just as in the case of Mahaprajapati], but he also consented the re-ordination saying, “With the intention of advancing the three higher trainings, receiving the *bhikshuni* ordination again has great benefit.”

It is distressing to find out that apart from the above dialogue there are no corroborative statements available in the Vinaya texts of the Dharmagupta *vinaya* tradition that flourished widely in China which support the practice of *bhikshuni* ordination imparted by a *sangha* consisting of *bhikshus* only. It remains a difficult issue here for the fact that we have not yet found any clear statements justifying the validity of said practice.

The second tradition of *bhikshuni* ordination imparted by a *sangha* of both *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis* initially began in the fifth century CE [433 CE] in China. During that time a group of Sri Lankan *bhikshunis* and the Indian *vinaya*-holder Sanghavarman (*dGe 'dun go cha*) who acted as the chief preceptor (*upadhyaya*) imparted a dual *bhikshuni* ordination [i.e. of imparting the ordination by a *sangha* of both *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*] to many Chinese women which was the beginning of the dual *bhikshuni* lineage in China.

Although many claimed that this lineage is unbrokenly transmitted up to this day, however, like the previous system, this also remained a mere claim, as there are no reliable and corroborative statements available justifying the validity that it is extant [unbroken] to this day. Hence, it also remains a difficult issue here.

In short, even though the documents on the origin of the Chinese *bhikshuni* can be found and their sources are not troublesome to be assessed, however, two things are essentially needed in order to receive the Chinese *bhikshuni* ordination for the Tibetan nuns. Firstly, it is important to find the *Vinaya* sources [from the Dharmagupta *vinaya* tradition] supporting the tradition of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination exclusively by a *bhikshu sangha* [that flourished in China]. Secondly, it is crucial to find the sources supporting that the lineage of the dual *bhikshuni* ordination – initially transmitted from the Sri Lankan *bhikshunis* – is unbrokenly transmitted up to this day.

Despite our earnest effort and continuous research for a long period of time, we have not been able to find a substantial testimony on these two issues. This has been the only reason for the failure of resolving the formal reception of the Chinese *bhikshuni* ordination for Tibetan nuns and it is the genuine fact. Allegations that this failure is rooted in a sense of gender discrimination are baseless and unwarranted.

Lastly, we request all the concerned people to give us a helping hand to find these indispensable two sources. On December 4, 2000, the Department of Religion and Culture published these three books as bases of research to determine the possibility of the *bhikshuni* ordination for Tibetan nuns.

After earnest effort and continuous research, the Department of Religion and Culture of the Central Tibetan Administration has found a realistic element and new insight regarding the possibility of accomplishing *bhikshuni* ordination in conformity with the Dharmagupta *vinaya* tradition. In order to establish the Chinese tradition of *bhikshuni* ordination in the *sangha* community of Tibetan nuns, two indispensable points must be clearly spelt out and understood by the *vinaya*-holders and the nuns of Tibet. When they understand the issues clearly, just like the approach of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the international body of *vinaya*-holders will not encounter inconvenience in resolving the final decision regarding imparting a pure and complete *bhikshuni* ordination to Tibetan nuns in conformity with the Dharmagupta *vinaya* tradition that flourished in China.

In order to initiate and spread the tradition of Chinese *bhikshuni* ordination in the *sangha* community of Tibetan nuns, the concerned people should know the two indispensable points, but they remain unresolved to this day and need further research.

According to the documents, two traditions of *bhikshuni* ordination were originated and flourished in China. The first tradition of *bhikshuni* ordination was imparted by a *sangha* consisting of *bhikshus* only. The second tradition of *bhikshuni* ordination was imparted by a dual *sangha* consisting of both *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*. The *vinaya*-holders and nuns of Tibet must comprehend how these two traditions developed and the factual nature and actual position of the traditions claimed to be transmitted to this day. These problematic issues should be clearly understood by them.

In 1997, a researcher was specifically sent to Taiwan by the Department of Religion and Culture specially to find solutions to these issues. These two issues were raised and discussed in the seminar organized by the Buddhist Research Centre of the University of Taiwan amongst the invited assembly of *vinaya*-holders of Chinese *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis* and scholars. Our researcher made every effort to find the answer to these problematic issues; likewise, the Chinese *vinaya*-holders helped to find the solutions. However, still we have not found any clear and detail answer to these two issues. Hence, the possibility of the *bhikshuni* ordination remains unresolved.

In 1998, a seminar to which an assembly of *vinaya*-holders of *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis* of the three *vinaya* traditions [Mulasarvastivadin, Sthaviravadin or Theravadin and Dharmaguptika] were invited was organized here in Dharamsala by the Department of Religion and Culture of the Central Tibetan Administration. The possibility of receiving the *bhikshuni* ordination in accordance with the three *vinaya* traditions, and particularly the two issues – the indispensable points according to the Vinaya texts – were discussed. They also readily discussed how to find the sources to resolve these two problematic issues regarding the *bhikshuni* ordination in accordance with the Dharmagupta *vinaya* tradition that flourished in China. However, they were unable to find the sources. Hence, the *bhikshuni* ordination was not finalized at that time. Yet, everyone unanimously agreed that it would be best if it is discussed and resolved by an international body of *vinaya*-holders.

After that, we requested all the concerned people – the *vinaya*-holders of Chinese *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*, the Eastern and Western Buddhist monks and nuns who show concern towards the *bhikshuni* ordination, scholars and researchers – to help us to find and send these two sources, which are the indispensable points with respect to the Dharmagupta *vinaya* tradition. However, no one reported us so far. We again earnestly request the concerned people to assist us in finding these sources in order to achieve the desired goal.

Some people not knowing the real situation [pertaining to the above mentioned points] say that His Holiness the Dalai Lama prohibits the *bhikshuni* ordination. This is not true and has no factual sources and reasons behind it. The majority of the people know that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has taken great interest and concern in the *bhikshuni* ordination since 1980 and in many places he has repeatedly advised to do a thorough research on it. He also advised the Department of Religion and Culture to do a thorough research. Likewise, the researcher [Archarya Geshe Thubten Jangchub] has continuously put his effort in finding the two indispensable points, which is essential pertaining to the Vinaya texts. However, the truth is that he was unable to find them to this day. Another important truth is that the Chinese *vinaya*-holders of *bhiskhus* and *bhikshunis* claim that there are clear and detailed sources; however, it remains a mere claim. The researcher felt and was also told by some that the Chinese *vinaya*-holders do

not take any responsibility and interest on these two issues which are indispensable points from the Vinaya perspective. Whatever the case may be, we have not found a reliable source to this day.

For this very reason, the situation of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination to the Tibetan nuns in accordance with the Chinese *bhikshuni* tradition remains unresolved up until now.

III. AGENDAS

THERE IS A SEPARATE AGENDA PERTAINING TO THE CHINESE BHIKSHUNI LINEAGE THAT REQUIRED FURTHER RESEARCH; ITS SUMMARY IS AS FOLLOWS:

1. A Vinaya source is to be sought that supports a *bhikshuni* ordination by a *sangha* consisting of only *bhikshus*.
2. A reliable document is to be sought that records a clear and detailed account of the dual *bhikshuni* lineage or the *bhikshuni* ordination imparted by a *sangha* of both *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*.
3. To continue an uncompleted research pertaining to the approaches of *bhikshuni* ceremonial rites exercised today by the Chinese *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis* and the *bhikshuni* ceremonial rite instructed in the Vinaya texts of the Dharmagupta *vinaya* tradition.

For that we earnestly request all the *vinaya*-holders in general and particularly the Chinese *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis* who follow the Dharmagupta *vinaya* tradition to take additional responsibility and help us to make these issues clearer and more reliable.

A MEANS TO ACHIEVE BHIKSHUNI ORDINATION IN CONFORMITY WITH THE VINAYA TEXTS OF THE MULASARVASTIVADIN VINAYA TRADITION

In order to find the methods of re-introducing or introducing the *bhikshuni* ordination, having a complete set of fundamental vows, for the Tibetan nuns in conformity with the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition of Nalanda that flourished in Tibet, there are two main subjects to be discussed:

1. Whether or not it is possible to re-introduce the tradition of *bhikshuni* ordination imparted only by a *bhikshu sangha* – as practised in Tibet in the past – in the nunneries of modern Tibetan society.
2. Whether or not it is possible to introduce a tradition of imparting a flawless and perfect *bhikshuni* ordination by a *sangha* of both *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*.

AGENDA ONE:

THE POSSIBILITY OF RE-INTRODUCING THE TRADITION OF BHIKSHUNI ORDINATION IMPARTED BY A SANGHA OF ONLY BHIKSHUS

After earnest effort and continuous research since 1982, the Department of Religion and Culture of the Central Tibetan Administration has found an element of new insight

regarding the possibility of accomplishing the *bhikshuni* ordination in conformity with the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition of Nalanda that flourished in Tibet. Here are the details:

There was neither a *bhikshuni* lineage [that directly came from India or from any other country] nor a dual *bhikshuni* ordination [that was imparted by a *sangha* of both *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*] in Tibet in the past; however, in the fifteenth century CE, some women were bestowed *bhikshuni* ordination by a *sangha* of only *bhikshus*. Nevertheless, some also came forth to criticize this practice. The main reason for criticizing the practice was that a novice nun cannot be ordained as a *bhikshuni* unless she has received the vows of *brahmacaryopasthana*. The vows of *brahmacaryopasthana* should be imparted only by a *bhikshuni sangha*. Since the *bhikshu sangha* cannot impart the vows of *brahmacaryopasthana*, there never was a *bhikshuni sangha* who received the vows of *brahmacaryopasthana* [in Tibet]. For this reason, the practice of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination only by a *bhikshu sangha* was considered to be unacceptable in Tibet.

However, although it is claimed that there never was a *bhikshuni sangha* in Tibet, there is a clear account stating not just that there *bhikshunis*, but that there were hundreds of *bhikshunis* in Mi-nyag Rawagang [in Tibet]. And, although it is asserted that the vows of *brahmacaryopasthana* are imparted only by a *bhikshuni sangha* and not by a *bhikshu sangha*, nevertheless, there are sources in Vinaya texts of the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition that flourished in Tibet stating that a *bhikshu sangha* can impart the vows of *brahmacaryopasthana* as well. There are also clear Vinaya sources stating that if a woman [novice nun] is bestowed *bhikshuni* ordination by an exclusively *bhikshu sangha*, flawless and perfect *bhikshuni* vows are not generated, however, incomplete or imperfect *bhikshuni* vows are generated; and if *bhikshuni* ordination is bestowed on a woman through a *bhikshu* ceremonial rite, it is regarded as an authentic act (*las chags pa*).

Since there are Vinaya sources stating that imparting *bhikshuni* ordination by a *sangha* consisting only of *bhikshus* is an authentic act, although there never was a *bhikshuni* lineage in Tibet in the past, however, roughly in the fifteenth century CE, some Tibetan *vinaya*-holders introduced a tradition of bestowing *bhikshuni* ordination on women. Some of the accounts are mentioned below.

Tibetan *vinaya*-holders such as Namkha Sonam (1378-1466), Sangye Sangpo, the abbot of Goyabpa monastery (fifteenth century) and Panchen Shakya Chokden (1428-1507) respectively bestowed *bhikshuni* ordinations on women such as Bhikshuni Chuwar Rangjon Ponmo, Shakya Chokden's mother Bhikshuni Shakya Sangmo and Gyama Bhikshuni Chodup Palmo Tsodrung by a *sangha* consisting of *bhikshus* only.

There are some accounts of a *bhikshuni sangha* existing in Tibet before these *vinaya*-masters. For example, there are accounts mentioning "As Bhikshuni Tashi Palmo emerged in Mi-nyak Rawagang [monastery] as a disciple of Khenchen Kazhipa Rigpae Senge (1287-1375) and his entourage, they also took great care of the *bhikshuni sangha*" and "Hundreds of *bhikshunis* earnestly engaged in teaching, learning and practice of [Shantideva's] Bodhicharyavatara, Vinaya and so on". Especially, some reliable documents clearly recorded that Drogon Chogyal Phagpa (1235-1280)

imparted *bhikshuni* ordination to hundreds of women.

There is a possibility of re-introducing in the same manner this tradition of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination to the Tibetan novice nuns in the nunneries of the contemporary Tibetan community. There are sources in the Vinaya texts of Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition of Nalanda which mention that the act of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination without the abbot [abbess] is permissible. Hence, such sources logically disprove the claim, stating that imparting *bhikshuni* ordination without the abbot [abbess] is an extreme path. Hence, like the system practised in Tibet in the past, by virtue of need, the present Tibetan *vinaya*-holders should discuss and resolve the matter in conformity with the Vinaya texts of the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition in order to reach a final determination.

AGENDA TWO:

THE POSSIBILITY OF INTRODUCING A NEW TRADITION OF BHIKSHUNI ORDINATION IMPARTED BY A SANGHA OF BOTH BHIKSHUS AND BHIKSHUNIS

According to the Vinaya texts of the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition of Nalanda that flourished in Tibet, the minimum number of *sangha* members required for the dual *bhikshuni* ordination, having a complete set of fundamental vows, in a “central-land” is twenty-two: ten *bhikshus* and twelve *bhikshunis*. This minimum number of *sangha* members was set forth by Buddha Shakyamuni himself in his ‘Minor Precepts of Vinaya’ (*dul ba phran tshogs kyi gzhi*, one of the four categories of scriptures on the monastic discipline, *Vinaya-agama*, that which deals with minor matters):

After that, all the *bhikshus* should assemble and sit, at least a minimum number of ten *bhikshu* companions [is required] and all the *bhikshunis* should assemble and sit, at least a minimum number of twelve *bhikshuni* companions [is required]. In front of the *bhikshus* who perform the act [i.e. ceremonial rite], [she] should be placed on bunch of grasses or on a clean mat with folded hands. Then the *sangha* of both *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis* should impart the *bhikshuni* ordination [to her].

Here the number of *sangha* members required in the “border-land” is not mentioned. Although in the *Sublime Vinaya Text* (*Vinaya-uttama*, *Dul ba gzhung bla ma* or *Dul ba gzhung dam pa*), Buddha Shakyamuni (***skye pa ma gtogs: to be discussed with the researcher***) did not mention the number of *sangha* members required for the *bhikshuni* ordination in the “central-land” and “border-land”, however, texts such as Acharya Gunaprabha’s *Practical Vinaya: One Hundred Formal Procedures* (*Karmashatama*, *Dul ba’i lag len las brgya rtsa gcig pa*) and Acharya Dharmamitra’s *Extensive Elucidation of Vinayamulasutra* (*Dul ba mdo rtsa ba’i rgya cher ‘grel*) mention that in the case that the required number of *bhikshunis* does not exist in the “border-land,” then the minimum number of *sangha* members required for the dual *bhikshuni* ordination is eleven: five *bhikshus* and six *bhikshunis*, however, the minimum number of *sangha* members required for the dual *bhikshuni* ordination in the “central-land” is twenty-two just as it is mentioned in the ‘Minor Precepts of Vinaya’.

The Karmashatama Vinaya states:

After that, in addition to the *sangha* of *bhikshunis*, in the “central-land”, a *sangha* of ten or more *bhikshus* should assemble; and in the case that the required number of *bhikshunis* does not exist in the “border-lands”, then in addition to the *vinaya*-holders [of *bhikshus*] and five [*bhikshunis*], more *bhikshus* should be added. It should be known that the act [i.e. ceremonial rite] of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination done by the *bhikshu sangha* is the dual *bikshuni* ordination [i.e. the *bhikshuni* ordination imparted by both *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*].

The *Extensive Elucidation of Vinayamulasutra* states:

For the act [i.e. the ceremonial rite] of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination in the “central-land”, the *sangha* should have ten or more *bhikshus* and twelve or more *bhikshunis*. For the act [i.e. the ceremonial rite] of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination in the “border-land”, in the case that the required number of *bhikshunis* does not exist, the dual *sangha* should have five or more *bhikshus* classified as *vinaya*-holders and six or more *bhikshunis* who are classified as *vinaya*-holders.

Thus, the flawless and perfect *bhikshuni* ordination is imparted by a dual *sangha* of *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*. However, the *bhikshuni* vows are obtained only from a *bhikshu sangha* and not from a *bhikshuni sangha*. Kunkhyen Tsonawa Sherab Sangpo proved this in his *Dulwa Tsotik* (a Vinaya commentary; ‘*Dul ba mtsho taik*) by quoting statements from the Vinaya texts: the *Minor Precepts of Vinaya* and *Laezhi Tikka* (*Las gzhi’i tai ka*).

The *Dulwa Tsotik* states:

After imparting the vows of celibacy, in addition to the assembled *sangha* of *bhikshunis*, here, to make up the deficiency, [the *sangha* of *bhikshunis*] are added as the supplementary members. The *Laezhi Tika* states, “For the act [i.e. the ceremonial rite] of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination, since the *bhikshu sangha* is the primary factor, the other *sangha* members of *bhikshunis* etc. are simply required in accordance with the tradition.” Here, to establish that the *bhikshu sangha* is the primary factor, the *Minor Precepts of Vinaya* states, “The *bhikshni* received the *bhikshuni* ordination from the *sangha* of *bhikshus* and they should bestow the entities [vows] of the *bhikshuni*.”

Buton Rinchen Drup (1290-1364) and Kunkhyen Jamyang Zhaepa (1648-1721) also established that the *bhikshu sangha* is the primary factor for imparting the *bhikshuni* ordination.

Buton's *Commentary on the Karmashatama* states:

After [generating] the vows of *brahmacaryopasthana*, the vows of a *bhikshun* are given by the *sangha* of *bhikshus*; the congregation of women is simply required in accordance with the tradition.

Jamyang Zhaepa's Vinaya text entitled *Kalsang Rewa Kunkong* states:

Here in this context, since the vows of *bhikshuni* primarily obtained from the *sangha* of *bhikshus* are prime vows, in addition to the *sangha* of *bhikshunis*, the *sangha* of *bhikshus* should be added; and this is the way to add...

Thus, with a Tibetan *sangha* consisting of ten or more *bhikshus*, who follow the stainless Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition of Nalanda that flourished in Tibet, and a *sangha* consisting of twelve or more *bhikshunis*, who follow the other Vinaya traditions [the Sthaviravadin or Theravadin and the Dharmaguptika], obtaining the completion of a specified number of twenty-two *sangha* members; and by performing the *bhikshuni* ceremonial rite of the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition, it is possible to introduce a new system of *bhikshuni* ordination for the Tibetan novice nuns. It seems this method does not contradict the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition; however, the *vinaya*-holders should make a final decision that does not contradict the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition.

IDENTIFYING THE VINAYA TEXTS FOR STUDY AND PRACTICE

It seems there are great temporary and long-term benefits if the would-be Tibetan *bhikshunis* [who would be ordained through the previous mentioned method] engage in the listening, contemplation and meditation of the Vinaya texts of the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition of Nalanda that flourished in Tibet, and put its trainings into practice. The reasons are as follow:

Firstly, all the Vinaya texts related to *bhikshuni* pertaining to the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition are already translated in Tibetan; and are ready to be used by all. Secondly, there are many *bhikshu vinaya*-holders who hold its unbroken lineage who can give practical guidance. From them, would-be *bhikshunis* can ask for instructions on the prescribed limits of its disapprovals, avowals and sanctions pertaining to its salient points, hidden meanings and subtle matters. Thirdly, since the vows of a *bhikshuni* are obtained from a *sangha* of senior Tibetan *bhikshu vinaya*-holders, if the would-be *bhikshunis* could pay attention and wish to practise, they should recognize the existing requisites which are complete and unmistakable, and can be found without much difficulties. Having understood such, they would know that Vinaya texts of the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition and their commentaries are available for study. If it is done in this fashion, it also does not contradict the proscribed law of the Dharma King.

The Dharma King, Tride Songtsen, declared three important laws in Tibet. The law related to this context is mentioned in Buton Rinchen Drup's *History of Buddhism*:

The Tibetan king, Tride Songtsen Ralpachan, decreed that *vinaya* traditions other than the Mulasarvastivada should not be established or cultivated, and their *pitakas* not translated.

Kongtrul Yonten Gyatso also mentioned in his *Sheja Kunkyab Treasury*:

The *bhikshu* lineages that flourished in Tibet from the three areas (Upper Lineage, Pandit Sakya Shri's Lineage and Lower Lineage of Vinaya) are of the Mulasarvastivada *vinaya* tradition. It is so because the Dharma King prescribed that Tibet should follow the philosophical view of the Middle Way School and that conduct other than of the Mulasarvastivada Vinaya School is not allowed. For example, since Atisha held the *bhikshu* lineage of the Mahasamgika *vinaya* tradition, [his followers] could not ask him to transmit his *bhikshu* ordination [for the Tibetans]. This symbolises that Tibetans, as decreed by the Dharma king, should not follow other than the Mulasarvastivada *vinaya* tradition.

Furthermore, Khenpo Shantarakshita prophesied, "They would be no *tirthikas* (extreme non-Buddhist, *mu stegs pa*) in Tibet. However, Buddhism will diffuse into two separate divisions and they will dispute. At that time, invite my disciple, Kamalashila, and let him take the dispute. After his debate, the clash will be settled in accordance with the *dharma*." As prophesied, [Hva-shang and his entourage] started to propagate the perverted teachings of Buddhism in Tibet in the past and started to dispute about the philosophical views and conducts [of Buddhism]. The Dharma King invited Kamalashila and asked him to debate [against Hva-shang and his entourage]. He defeated [Hva-shang and his entourage] and settled the dispute in accordance with the Buddhist teachings. Later on, four of the Chinese entourages assassinated Kamalashila. The detailed account on this topic is mentioned in Buton's *History of Buddhism*.

Hence, the Vinaya texts that should be studied by the would-be *bhikshunis* should be the Vinaya texts of the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition and its commentaries just as it was decreed by the Dharma King.

A MEANS TO ACHIEVE BHIKSHUNI ORDINATION IN CONFORMITY WITH MULASARVASTIVADIN VINAYA TRADITION IN THE FUTURE

In future years, if Tibetan *bhikshunis* are ordained through the *bhikshuni* ordination imparted by a *sangha* of both *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*, they should find their desired teacher/s of the topics (*gnas kyi slob dpon*) who can guide them with instructions on the prescribed limits of Vinaya regarding the disapprovals, avowals and sanctions pertaining to its salient points, hidden meanings and subtle matters. In the distant future, as soon as they become qualified as steadfast in discipline and learned *vinaya*-holders and unbrokenly hold the vows for twelve years, they can start imparting *shikshamana* and *brahmacaryopasthana* vows; and the dual *bhikshuni* ordination can be imparted by twelve Tibetan *bhikshuni vinaya*-holders and ten Tibetan *bhikshu vinaya*-holders to the Tibetan novice nuns in conformity with the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition. However, such proposal should be finally determined by the

vinaya-holders in conformity with the Mulsarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition.

IV. CONCLUSION

In brief, the important Vinaya issues should be discussed and determined by the assembly of *vinaya*-holders without contradicting the Three Scriptural Collections (*Tripitakas*), just as the *Vinayamulasutra* states:

If [an act] goes against the ceremonial rite, then, the act is not acceptable. Here, the ceremonial rite is: the required number of *sangha* members should be complete; the act should be uttered; and the act should be performed.

The act is not acceptable if it goes against the ceremonial rite. The *vinaya*-holder Kunkhyen Tsonawa elucidated on this topic:

If it goes against the ceremonial rite, then, the act is utterly not acceptable and the act is not flawless. Specifically, if, for example, four members are missing from the required number of *sangha* members, and if they act such as reciting the four kinds of supplications, then, the act is utterly unacceptable. If the act goes against the sequentially order, then, the act is not accepted as flawless. Although the act is not done in sequence, but if they are able to understand the meanings of the words, then, it is accepted as a flawed act.

The *Extensive Elucidation of Vinayamulasutra* and the *Dulwa Tsofik* clearly mention how to perform the flawless and perfect acts pertaining to the ceremonial rite of the *bikhshuni* ordination. Therefore, one should look into them.

The recitation of the *Pratimoksha-sutras* (the Vinaya texts containing the code of precepts for monks) is regarded as both the Teacher (Buddha) and the teaching (Dharma) and the subtle instructions of the Vinaya should be determined by the assembly of *vinaya*-holders in conformity with the Vinaya as stated in the *Vinayamulasutra*:

Oh Bhikshus! When I, your Teacher, pass into *parinirvana* and became no more available, you should not regard and think “Our Teacher and Teaching are missing”. The purpose of which I told you to recite the *Pratimoksha-sutras* twice a month is from now on it is your Teacher and Teaching. Oh Bhikshus! For all the subtle points of the fundamental precepts and minor precepts, you convene the *sangha* and discuss the issue and resolve it to reach a peaceful decision.

Moreover, Tsongkhapa Lobsang Drakpa (1357-1419), in his *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path (Lam rim chen mo)*, quoted the statement of the incomparable Lord Dimamkara Atisha:

From the mouth of Atisha, “We in India, if any important or controversial issues come to light, convene an assembly of upholders of the Tripitaka. Then, we discuss whether it is

disapproved in the Tripitaka or whether it contradicts the Tripitaka. In this way, we make the decision. In Vikramashila, on top of this, we discuss whether it is disapproved from the conduct of bodhisattvas or whether it contradicts the conduct of bodhisattvas. Then, it would be set forth and all the *vinaya*-holders abide by the decision.”

Likewise, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said time and again:

In any case, such matters related to these lineages should be discussed and decided collectively by the upholders of Tripitaka in general, and particularly by the *vinaya*-holders; there is no way an individual person can make a decision.

Hence, the final decision on the *bhikshuni* ordination should be discussed and determined only by the *bhikshu vinaya*-holders without contradicting the Vinaya. Otherwise, no one has the right to make decisions, just as it is proscribed in the Vinaya. Hence, it should be put into practice.

In order to present our perspective and position on how to accomplish *bhikshuni* ordination in accordance with the fundamental principles of the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition of Nalanda that flourished in Tibet in the forth coming International Conference of Buddhist Vinaya-holders, the Tibetan *vinaya*-holders are requested to discuss and write analytical articles based on the three agendas listed below:

1. To re-introduce the tradition of receiving *bhikshuni* ordination from a *sangha* consisting only of *bhikshus*
2. To introduce a new tradition of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination imparted by a Tibetan *sangha* of *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*
3. Any other method of imparting *bhikshuni* ordination that does not contradict the Mulasarvastivadin *vinaya* tradition

Based on these three agendas, the *vinaya*-holders are requested write the article by clearly quoting all the essential sources from the Vinaya texts.

Please reach your articles here by 25th April, 2006.

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