

# *Sera Je Geshe Lharampa Bhikshu Rinchen Ngudrup*

*The Flawless Ordination of Bhikshunis by Bhikshu only Sangha*

FIRST OF ALL I would like to pay my Tashi Delek to the organizers<sup>1</sup>, and to the monks, and nuns from all over the world. The main reason I came here today is that it has been many years that I have been teaching Tibetan nuns. They are very skilled in the study of the four main philosophical treatises, and they have reached to a very high status. This is very rare in the world. They are now very near to getting the Geshe degree. For this reason, I think the time has come to get full ordination or gelongma (bhikshuni) ordination for them.

It is my great hope and aim that the nuns receive a flawless bhikshuni ordination, which is a main root for attaining enlightenment. Since Tibetan nuns will be living within the context of a Tibetan society, it is very important that their ordination is acceptable to Tibetan vinaya masters, and we must assist to ensure that this comes about. For this to happen, we need to demonstrate that this is a flawless and valid ordination.

I came from Tibet in 1988. I studied for 8 years in Dhargye monastery in Kham, eastern Tibet. Since there is a problem of religious freedom in Tibet I came to India to study. I joined SeraJe monastery in Balakape settlement in south India where I studied for 19 years. I gained my Geshe Lharampa degree in 2004. I was a teacher in Dolma Ling Nunnery for four years and this year have joined Gyato monastery to complete my training.

I was asked to carry out some research regarding the Bhikshuni vow. Drawing on textual sources recognized as authoritative by all Tibetan vinaya scholars particularly from the canonical texts of our Kangyur I have compiled a book demonstrating that it is possible to bring about a valid bhikshuni ordination in the Mulasarvastivada tradition. My conclusion is that Bhikshuni ordination by a Sangha of only Bhikshus is possible. This book is available on the counter outside, and has been circulated in the Tibetan monasteries over the past few months and many Tibetan monks have now reconsidered their position and understanding of the matter.

*I WILL NOW SUMMARIZE SOME OF MY ARGUMENTS IN BRIEF*

If a woman really wants to practice the Buddha Dharma sincerely by taking full ordination and they require help, then the Bhikshus are obliged to help. In order to find a way to help, we should look either at the words of the Lord Buddha or to some

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<sup>1</sup> This talk was given at the “1st International Congress on Buddhist Women’s Role in the Sangha: Bhikshuni Vinaya and Ordination Lineages” held at the University of Hamburg from July 18-20, 2007, in cooperation with the University’s Asia-Africa Institute.

reliable commentary by a renowned Buddhist scholar for a means to give the vows, then there won't be any dispute.

The Lord Buddha has said in The Minor Vinaya Precepts (Lung Tengze Lhasa edn. P 158182), the vows are given in sequence: Upasika, Sramanika, Shikshamana and Bhramacharya by Bhikshunis. However, in The Summer Retreat Instructions (Lhasa edn. From page 341. The Lord Buddha has said if the Sramanika or Shikshamana requests the Bhikshus to give them ordination then the Bhikshu should take proper leave from his summer retreat and go forth for 7 days to confer the requested ordination.

Why the Lord Buddha said these two different things is that if there are Bhikshunis then they should do according to the first quotation, but if there are no Bhikshunis and yet women want to receive ordination then the Bhikshus should help them to do so. What I want to make very clear is that the Lord Buddha himself said this. Where he has said it is in the Mahaprajapati Bhikshuni sutra translated from the Chinese into English P.83. Bhikshus cannot normally be the presiding master, but if there are no Bhikshunis at all around then Bhikshus can preside over the Bhikshuni ordination.

In the Summer Retreat Instructions, Lhasa edn. it is not clearly stated that the Bhramacharya ordination is to be given by Bhikshus. However, the most highly acclaimed researcher in the world Gunaprabha said very clearly in the Vinaya Root Sutra which is a very authentic source, that the Bhramacharya ordination is to be given by Bhikshus. The reason why Gunaprabha words are the most authentic is that, in the Minor Vinaya precepts the Buddha says: “the Vinaya has to be recited, not written in a book” Therefore it was not written down in a book but was recited by many people in different languages, in different places so over time the 18 schools of Vinaya arose. Of those, the Mulasravastavadin tradition has it's own various forms of reciting. The most thorough work on the Mulastravastavadin Vinaya was done by the great Nalanda scholar Gunaprabha whose commentary is known as the Root Sutra. Since his research is authentic, whatever he has written as being the words of Lord Buddha should be taken as true.

The Summer Retreat Instructions (Lhasa edn.) gives only one way of reciting the Vinaya. If there is any confusion or conflict of ideas then people refer to the Root Sutra. It is clear in that that Bhiksus can confer the Bhramacharya ordination on women. To get Bhikshuni ordination the Buddha said there should be both Bhiksus and Bhikshunis, however, when all requirements cannot be fulfilled, for example, if there are no Bhikshunis to give the Bhramacharya ordination, then it is considered a special case and Bhiksus can give this ordination. This is clearly stated.

So, if it is the ease that there are no Bhikshunis so that the Bhramacharya ordination is conferred by Bhiksus, then, taking into account that it is also the case that as soon as Bhramacharya ordination is given Bhiksuni ordination has to be taken, it follows

that unless a miracle has occurred to create Bhikshunis, then an only Bhikshu Sangha will be there to give the Bhiksuni ordination.

Furthermore, in the Minor Precepts of Vinaya it is stated that Bhiksuni ordination has to be taken from Bhiksus. Even in the case of dual ordination, Bhiksunis are there as a presence but the real ritual is performed by the Bhiksus. This is clearly stated in the Extensive Commentary and Autocommentary on the Vinayasutra; the Bhikshu is the main performer of the Bhiksuni ordination. Therefore since there are no Bhiksunis, Bhiksus can give the Bhiksuni ordination. In short, if women have the desire to take ordination, since the Bhikshu lineage is not broken the Bhikshuni lineage is possible if women are there to receive it.

In conclusion, it is clearly stated in the Bhikshunivibhanga of the Mulasarvastivada tradition that if qualified women wish to become fully ordained nuns and the sangha does not fully ordain them, the monks incur a fault (Tibetan: *nyespa*)

Therefore, we bhikshus have a serious responsibility to the nuns and to the Buddhadharma to ensure that the nuns receive the full ordination they seek, and that I firmly believe they are fully capable of receiving and upholding. I pray for harmony among all vinaya traditions and for the re-establishment of bhikshuni nuns in the Tibetan tradition. This will certainly contribute to peace in the world.