

# The Noble Task for the Tibetan Buddhist Community: To Establish Its Bhikkhuni Lineage

By Ven. Bhikkhuni Wu Yin

It is a holy and noble task for the Tibetan Buddhist community to establish its Bhikkhuni lineage, regardless it is for the entirety of the Vinaya teaching, the completion of the Sangha, the spread of Buddha-dharma, or even for the consideration of equality for women.

Causes and conditions are always carefully examined when the Buddha lay down the precepts, whether it is their observations, transgressions, or exceptions. There are workable ways by which the Tibetan Buddhist community can establish its Bhikkhuni lineage. Only when all the seven groups of disciples are present is a Sangha complete. When qualified women are accepted into the Sangha, obtaining complete education on precepts, doctrine, and meditation, it surely will bring a positive effect on the transmission of the Buddha-dharma. It is also an act which expresses the genuine concern in Buddhism for the equal opportunity in education for women.

◎ The Tibetan Buddhist community should give Bhikkhuni ordination Buddha originally accepts seven groups of disciples in the Sangha. They include bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, siksamanas, sramaneras, sramanerika, upasakas, and upasikas. They together form a complete Sangha. Bhikkhuni ordination is not only

recorded in the Canon, beginning from the Buddha's time to the modern day Taiwan, China, Korea, Vietnam, and other countries. The holy lineage is kept alive in these countries. In the Chinese Buddhist community, the bhikkhuni lineage has been established long ago, started from 433 AD. The lineage has been passed on over fifteen hundred years. The Tibetan Buddhist community till now still lacks of a bhikkhuni lineage. To a certain degree, it is a great regret to the development of the Buddhist community.

Although Buddhism has been transmitted into Tibet; however, due to its geological conditions, and Tibetan historical transmission style, the bhikkhuni lineage has never been established in their history. But its possibility should not be dismissed simply based upon this fact. The issue that whether Tibetan nuns can receive bhikkhuni ordination from the Tibetan bhikkhus has been neglected, even intentionally ignored or dismissed.

In fact, in a single-ordination, the Tibetan bhikkhus can give bhikkhuni ordination to Tibetan nuns according to the Mulasarvastivadin Vinaya. By doing so, the bhikkhus may have certain transgression; however, the Tibetan nuns can therefore obtain bhikkhuni ordination legally. In short, the Tibetan bhikkhuni ordination is not impossible, it all depends upon whether the Tibetan bhikkhus want to do it or not.

◎ Things to be considered for Tibetan Nuns regarding Bhikkhuni Ordination

About setting up precepts or even their observation, the Buddha has always emphasized on the concept of conditions, instead of in black and white prohibition or

exemption. If Buddha appears in the 21st century, with his great compassion and wisdom, witnessing the real situations of the world, he would definitely support the Tibetan nuns to get bhikkhuni ordination to help the spread of the dharma.

To establish the bhikkhuni lineage is simply to restore the tradition of the Sangha, not opening a brand new branch. Judging from the Vinaya Canon of all the schools, it is clearly indicated that a complete Sangha contains seven groups of disciples. Buddha has allowed the bhikkhus to give bhikkhuni ordination for the nuns. It is unquestionably recorded in the Vinaya of various schools.

In May, 2006, there was a conference on “Establishing Bhikkhuni Ordination in the Tibetan Tradition” held in Dharamsala, India. About how to establish the bhikkhuni lineage in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, scholars and Vinaya experts raised three approaches. They are:

1. With the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis from the Dharmaguptaka tradition a dual-ordination can be performed to give bhikkhuni ordination to Tibetan nuns.
2. With bhikkhus from the Mulasarvastivadin tradition and bhikkhunis from the Dharmaguptaka tradition a dual-ordination can be performed to give bhikkhuni ordination to Tibetan nuns.
3. With bhikkhus only from the Mulasarvastivadin tradition a single-ordination can be performed to give bhikkhuni ordination to Tibetan nuns.

I personally support the second and the third approaches. Among the three possibilities, the third one is less perfect, therefore the bhikkhus involved would commit certain transgression, but because of their act the Tibetan nuns would be able to get their long-awaited bhikkhuni ordination. These three approaches all have their respective pros and cons, nevertheless, it is a must-taken step for a beginning.

◎ Tibetan nuns' bhikkhuni ordination and its significance for the spread of the dharma

On another aspect, viewed from the global viewpoint. Today's Tibet is not the old Tibet, nor is it the ancient Tibet. Nowadays, the membership of both the monastics and layity in the Tibetan Buddhist community, including their nationalities, cultures, social status, are much different than that of the old days while it was under the governance of the church-state dual system within a much more conservative society. The Tibetan nuns' role in the spread of the Dharma as well as the well-being of the entire Sangha gets more and more importance by the days. This is something that the Tibetan bhikkhus should not ignore.

While the Chinese Buddhism and the Theravada Buddhism move outside their native countries, being circulated in many corners of the world, the Tibetan Buddhism is widely spread in Europe and North America. Buddhism has become literally a world religion. Regardless whether the members are from Tibetan tradition, Chinese tradition, or Theravada tradition, they together need to make Buddhism one of the important standards for universally recognized cultural value, spirituality and ethics for the humanity. Let those male and female, with pure faith, qualified to be ordained, have the opportunity to join the Sangha, becoming bhikkhus or bhikkhunis, and fulfill

their pursuit of liberation. The Sangha should not adopt the closed-door attitude, and cruelly turning the faithful pursuers away.

This is Buddha's compassion toward the world; furthermore, it is the responsibility of all Buddhist disciples.

◉Nuns getting bhikkhuni ordination is a sign of equality for women

According to the Vinaya, when Buddha accepted women into the Sangha, he had acknowledged that a woman, after going forth and obtaining bhikkhuni ordination, was capable of reaching arhatship. In both Buddhist doctrine and meditative practice, it is equal between men and women in terms of their progress in ethics and spirituality. Having the status of a bhikkhu or a bhikkhuni provides both men and women, in the areas of observing precepts, teaching Dharma to all beings, and the leadership in the Sangha, a higher level of training in the spiritual life in the Sangha. It helps cultivate within themselves the ability to practice as well as to teach the Dharma correctly. To help the members to assume the central role in leadership in the Sangha with the growth of Dharma is the best way to actualize the ideal of guiding all sentient beings with the Dharma.

Establishing bhikkhuni lineage in the Sangha can not only correct the internal gender stereotype within the Buddhist community, which often leads to negative reinforcement, but also clarify the misunderstanding of gender discrimination against women in Buddhism by the general public in society. Moreover, it encourages women directly engaging in the religious practice, actually obtaining the essential

education and training in Buddhism. It provides opportunities for personal development and devotion to upholding the triple gem.

Whether the Tibetan nuns can obtain bhikkhuni ordination is a matter to be determined by the Tibetan Buddhist community. In my opinion, there is no sufficient and well-grounded reason to deny the nuns the opportunity to become bhikkhunis in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

### ***Biography of Bhiksuni Wu-Yin***

Joined the Sangha in 1957, received the bhikkhuni ordination in 1959.

Now is the Abbess of Luminary Buddhist International Society, President of the Buddhist Institute of Hsiang Kuang Temple, and founder of the Hsiang Kuang Buddhist Center for Higher Learning.

Has participated various bhikkhuni ordinations held in Taiwan, Myanmar, and other places, taking the roles of the preceptor, instructor, or witness.

In 1996, taught bhikkhuni precepts in Bodhgaya, India to Western Buddhist nuns, the teaching later was compiled into *Choosing Simplicity*.

Personally observes the Dharmaguptaka Bhikkhuni Precepts, but keeps in touch with nuns who follow other traditions with precepts from other schools. Their nationalities include Germany, France, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, Myanmar, United States, Indonesia, Switzerland, Australia, and Tibet.

Has participated in a dialogue on Vinaya and Gender Issue in Buddhism. Has various dialogues with Catholic priests and nuns and Protestants on the topic of religion.