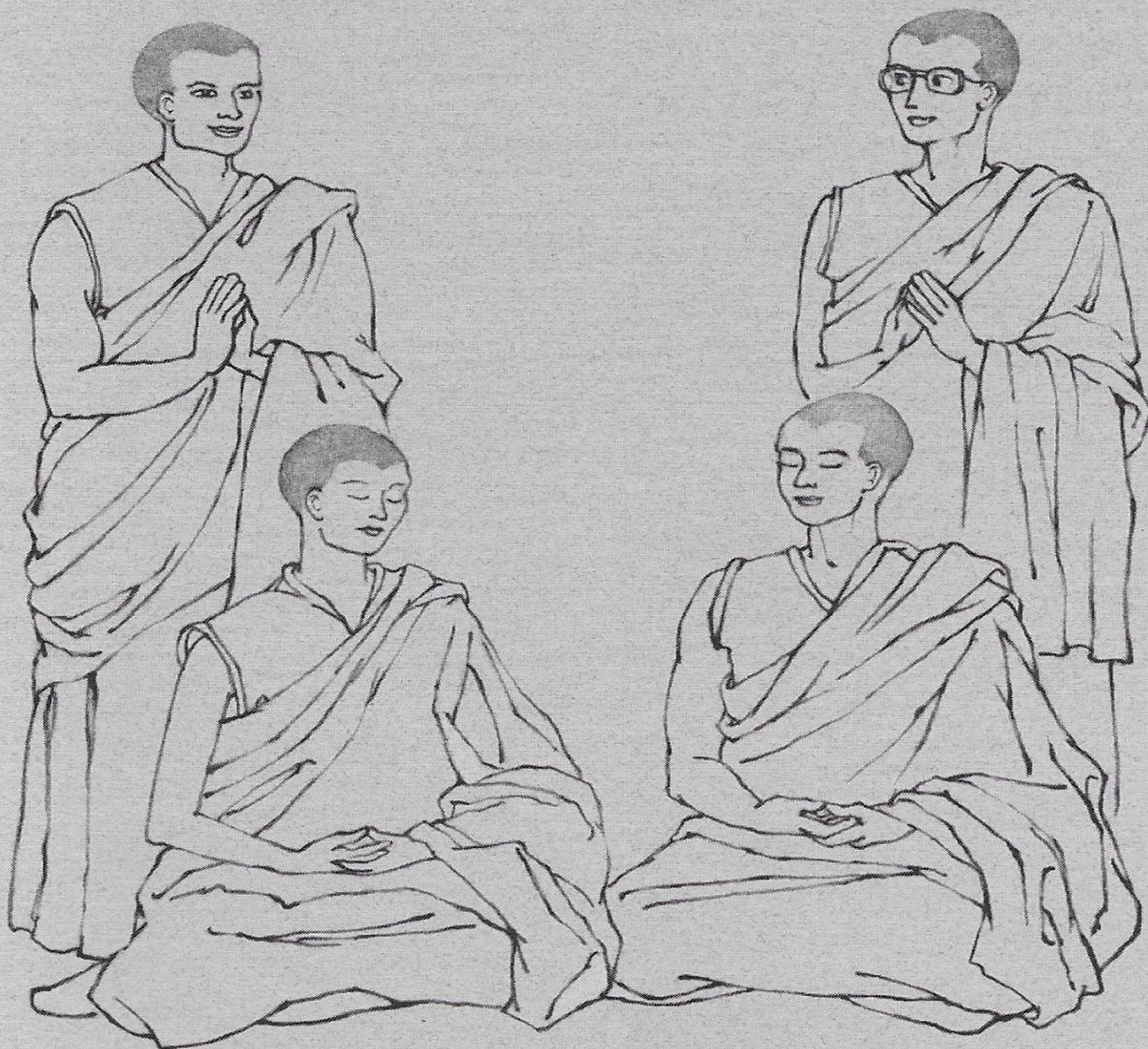


# Preparing for Ordination: Reflections for Westerners Considering Monastic Ordination in the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition

Edited by  
Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron



Foreword by  
His Holiness The Dalai Lama

**Preparing for Ordination:  
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in the  
Western Buddhist Tradition**  
**Edited by Ven. Thubten Chodron**

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*The decision to take monastic ordination is an important one, and to make it wisely, one needs information. In addition, one needs to reflect over a period of time on many diverse aspects of one's life, habits, aspirations, and expectations. The better prepared one is before ordaining, the easier the transition from lay to monastic life will be, and the more comfortable and joyous one will be as a monastic. This booklet, with articles by Asian and Western monastics, is designed to inform and to spark that reflection in non-Tibetans who are considering monastic ordination in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.*

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## Foreword

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Many of the Buddha's discourses and treatises by subsequent scholars clearly state that the single innermost treasure of the Buddha's doctrine is the Vinaya, the teaching on moral conduct of ordained monks and nuns. Therefore, it is said that wherever there is a monk or nun observing the vows of full ordination, the Buddha's doctrine exists there. Indeed, the Buddha is present in that place. However, merely taking the vows is not sufficient by itself. It is also extremely important to maintain pure moral discipline by correctly observing those activities that are to be cultivated and those that are to be given up. Therefore, it is very helpful to reflect over and again how moral discipline is the root of all excellence and to consider the benefits of guarding such discipline and the shortcomings of not doing so. Numerous scriptures explain these issues and several of them are available in English translation.

These days, interest in Buddhism is spreading beyond its traditional boundaries in Asia. More and more people from non-Buddhist backgrounds are expressing a wish to become ordained as Buddhist monks and nuns. Sometimes they face unexpected problems. These may occur because they did not properly understand what ordination entailed or because they lack the social and spiritual support that is taken for granted in traditional Buddhist societies. With a heartfelt wish to ease some of these problems, Ven. Thubten Chodron and other like-minded friends have prepared this booklet of advice, based on their own experience, for people, particularly Westerners, who are considering ordination as Buddhist monks and nuns.

This is a work of true spiritual friendship. Ordination is not something to be taken lightly. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, it is intended to be a lifelong commitment. The Buddhist tradition itself will not be strengthened merely by increasing the numbers of people who become ordained. That will depend rather on the quality of our monks and nuns. Therefore, those who sincerely seek ordination deserve proper guidance, encouragement and support.

Having taken ordination we must constantly remember that the primary reason for holding vows as a nun or a monk is to be able to dedicate ourselves to the practice of the Dharma and the welfare of sentient beings. Part of Buddhist practice involves training our minds through meditation. But if our training in calming our minds, developing qualities like love, compassion, generosity and patience, is to be effective, we must put them into practice in our day to day life. Even if only a few individuals try to create mental peace and happiness within themselves and act responsibly and kindly towards others, they will have a positive influence in their community.

If we can do that we will fulfill the Buddha's fundamental instruction not only to avoid harming others, but actually to do them some good.

## Introduction

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This booklet has been percolating for many years now, as senior Western monastics have become more concerned with the preparation and training of the Western sangha. During *Life as a Western Buddhist Nun*, a three-week educational program on the Vinaya held in Bodhgaya, India, in February, 1996, this concern jelled, and many of the senior nuns at the program decided to produce a booklet to those Westerners who are considering monastic ordination. At the nuns' audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama following *Life as a Western Buddhist Nun*, we proposed that Western monastics become more involved in the screening and preparation of applicants for ordination. His Holiness responded enthusiastically, and this booklet is the first step in that direction. Volunteering to edit and prepare the booklet, I collected articles from other monks and nuns and from one layman. The booklet is financed by donations made to *Life as a Western Buddhist Nun*, and is given for free distribution to those who are interested.

This booklet is a compilation of the thoughts of several Western monastics in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and of some Asian spiritual masters. Over the years, Western monks and nuns have learned about monastic life through our experience as well as by studying with our kind and wise spiritual masters. We feel a responsibility to share what we have learned so that others can benefit from our experience and can avoid some of the mistakes we have made. We are not setting down a policy that everyone must observe. Within Buddhism, the various traditions have different ways of interpreting and keeping the precepts. Even within one tradition, the monastic discipline may be lived differently from one monastery to another or from one teacher to another. We are not looking for unflinching uniformity. Although Buddha's disciples have a common refuge, they have differing inclinations and dispositions.

However, because Buddhism is new in the West, people's knowledge is limited, and our Tibetan teachers are not always familiar with the nuances of our cultures or with our particular Western mentality and values. Because we are working cross-culturally, care must be taken in bringing Buddhism in general and monasticism in particular to the West. At times Tibetan teachers and Western disciples have misconceptions, incorrect assumptions, or simply lack of knowledge about each other. If not clarified and resolved, these can lead to many difficulties and much confusion when Westerners ordain. We hope that this booklet will help prevent such problems and will enable people to build firm foundations so that their lives as monastics may be joyful, meaningful, and productive.

In Buddhist teachings, the ideal is explained so that we will know in what direction to

develop and for what to aim. It is the same in this booklet. The ideal, the strict interpretation, is often given. Knowing that and trying to go in that direction in our practice, we may sometimes have to deviate from the strict view due to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. When such situations arise, we will be better equipped to make wise decisions if we know the ideal than if, in ignorance, we reinterpret the attitudes and conduct expected of monastics without being aware of the traditional views.

The monastic lifestyle has existed continuously from the Buddha's time until the present, and through it countless people have progressed along the path to liberation and enlightenment. It is very important for individual practitioners, the Buddhist community, and society as a whole that the monastic lifestyle be continued in a pure fashion. For this to happen, people must be well-prepared before ordination and well-trained after it. In that way, the Dharma and the Vinaya will grow in our minds and through that, we will be able to benefit others. It is with this in mind, that this booklet was humbly assembled.

More and more Sanskrit words, written without diacritics, are coming into common English usage. Since this booklet is written for Buddhist practitioners who may not be academic scholars, Sanskrit words in this booklet follow that trend. A glossary of terms is available at the end of the booklet. Also, the word "Sangha" is capitalized when it refers to one of the Three Jewels of refuge, and not capitalized when it refers to the monastic community. As one of the Three Jewels of refuge, Sangha refers to any person, monastic or lay, who has attained the path of seeing. The monastic community, or sangha, is a conventional representative of that ultimate Sangha.

This booklet was made possible through the kindness of many people. I am especially grateful to the Buddha and to the lineages of monastics who have preserved the Vinaya and the Pratimoksa ordination for over 2,500 years, thus enabling the Dharma and the Vinaya to touch the hearts of so many people throughout history in Asia and now in the West. Many thanks to all of the contributors as well as to the sponsors of this publication. I also thank Bhikshuni Lekshe Tsomo for her valuable editorial suggestions, Daria Fand for designing the cover, the nuns of Life as a Western Buddhist Nun for their inspiration, Bets Greer for her technical assistance, and Dharma Friendship Foundation in Seattle for its support while I worked on this booklet.

We welcome your feedback on this booklet and welcome articles to be included in future editions.

[Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron](#),

Seattle, USA  
June 1, 1996

## **The Benefits and Motivation for Monastic Ordination**

[Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron](#) and [Bhikshuni Tenzin Kacho](#)

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Our mind is the creator of our happiness and suffering, and our motivation is the key to our actions and their results. Therefore, the motivation for receiving monastic ordination is of great importance. When we reflect deeply on the disadvantages of cyclic existence, the determination to free ourselves from it and to attain liberation arises in our mind. The method to do that is to practice the Three Higher Trainings: ethics, concentration, and wisdom. To develop the wisdom that liberates us from cyclic existence, we must be able to concentrate. Otherwise we will not be able to meditate on emptiness in a sustained manner. Developing concentration requires us to subdue the manifest disturbing attitudes in our mind. A firm foundation for doing this is created by pacifying our gross verbal and physical actions motivated by these disturbing attitudes. Ethics -- living according to precepts -- is the method to harmonize our physical and verbal actions, and thus to subdue the gross disturbing attitudes. Thinking that we can ignore our bad habits and how they manifest in our daily life and yet still develop spiritual realizations by meditating is erroneous.

Ethical discipline challenges us to live the Dharma in our daily interactions, that is, to integrate what we experience in meditation into our relationships with other people and with our environment. The Higher Training in Ethics is developed by taking and keeping one of the various types of Pratimoksa vows: the lay vow with five precepts or one of the monastic vows: the novice vow (sramanara/sramanerika) with ten precepts, or the full vow (bhikshu/bhikshuni). For women, there is an intermediate ordination (shiksamana) between novice and full ordination with six additional regulations. Because transmission of the bhikshuni lineage did not occur in Tibet, women seeking this ordination must go to Chinese, Korean, or Vietnamese masters to request it.

Since there are different levels of ordination and each successive level requires greater mindfulness and awareness due to the increased number of precepts, it is advisable to progress gradually, rather than immediately receiving the full ordination. In this way, we will be able to adjust to the commitment required at each stage. Sometimes in people's enthusiasm for the Dharma and for ordination, they quickly take full ordination. However, experience has shown that this can prove difficult, and some people feel overwhelmed. A gradual approach allows a solid foundation to be built and sustained and joyful practice to ensue.

Ordination is easy to take, but difficult to keep. If we sincerely want to remain as monastics our entire life, we must cultivate a strong motivation before ordaining, and

continuously develop it afterwards. Without thinking deeply about the disadvantages of cyclic existence, our motivation to ordain will be weak, and the precepts will seem like many "shoulds" and "don'ts." In that case, keeping the precepts will seem burdensome. However, when we are aware of the preciousness and rarity of this human life and our potential to attain higher spiritual states in order to be of benefit to others, then living in accord with precepts is a joy. In comparison, the happiness of family, career, relationships, and pleasure are seen as unsatisfactory and our interest in them pales. We have a long-range and noble spiritual goal, and this gives us the courage to go through the ups and downs of life and of Dharma practice. Having this long-term goal and stability in Dharma practice over a period of time enables us to keep the ordination once we have taken it.

The disadvantages of cyclic existence are many: in addition to birth, sickness, aging, and death, while alive we face not getting what we seek, being separated from what we like, and encountering undesirable circumstances. All these problems are caused by our internal disturbing attitudes and the actions (karma) that they fuel. As a householder, we must do many things for the sake of our family. We easily find ourselves in situations where we must create negative karma by lying or cheating. We are surrounded by distractions: the media, our career, and social obligations. It is easy for disturbing attitudes to arise and more difficult to accumulate positive potential because our lives are so busy with other things. We face the difficulty of finding the right life partner and then the difficulty of making the relationship last. At the beginning we have the problem of no children, and later the problems of raising the children.

As a monastic, we have more freedom from such distractions and difficulties. On the other hand, we also have great responsibility. We have decided to be more aware and not to act according to whatever impulse arises in our minds. Initially this may appear as a lack of freedom, but in fact such awareness frees us from our bad habits and the difficulties they create. We have voluntarily chosen to keep precepts, and so we must slow down, be aware of our actions, and choose what we do and say wisely. If we have the view that we can act counter to our precepts and then simply purify later, it is like thinking we can drink poison now and take the antidote later. Such an attitude or behavior hurts us.

However, we should not think that we are bad people when we are unable to keep our precepts perfectly. The reason that we take precepts is because our mind, speech, and actions are not subdued. If we were already perfect, we would not need to take precepts. Therefore, we should do our best to live according to the precepts, but when our disturbing attitudes are too strong and the situation gets the better of us, we should not be discouraged or criticize ourselves in an unhealthy way. Rather, we can apply

the antidotes to purify and restore our precepts, and make a determination for how we aspire to act in the future. In that way we will learn from our mistakes and become stronger practitioners.

As monastics, we represent the Three Jewels to others. People will be inspired to or discouraged from learning and practicing the Dharma depending upon our behavior. For example, if they see monastics who are kind to others and are happy living ethically, they will try to do the same. If they see monastics who act brashly and loudly or manipulate others to get what they want, they may lose faith in the Dharma. When we cherish the Three Jewels and cherish other beings, then acting responsibly for their benefit is a joy. During those times that our disturbing attitudes are strong and we seek our own immediate happiness and benefit, we see precepts as burdensome and oppressive. At those times, it is important to cultivate anew our motivation for becoming monastics and remember that living according to the precepts benefits ourselves and others.

If we become a monastic with strong conviction in the path to liberation, willingness to persevere and to face our problems, confidence in our potential, and patience with ourselves and others, we will be able to live as monastics happily and for a long time. However, if we wish to ordain because we have a romantic idea of living a holy life, or seek an easy way out of our personal or financial problems, we will be unhappy as a monastic because what we seek will not be actualized. By understanding what a crucial role our mind plays in keeping ordination, we see that keeping the Pratimoksa (individual liberation) precepts makes not only our words and deeds peaceful, but our mind calm as well.

### **Joining the Sangha Community**

Ordination is not only about living ethically, it is about being a member of a special community, the Buddhist sangha, the monastics upholding the precepts and principals established by the Buddha. This is a virtuous community of people who practice the Buddha's teachings and assist others in taking refuge. As members of the sangha we focus on developing four special qualities:

1. When someone harms us, we try not to respond with harm;
2. When someone is angry with us, we try not to react with anger;
3. When someone insults or criticizes us, we try not to reply with insult or criticism;
4. When someone abuses or beats us, we try not to retaliate.

This is the behavior a monastic should try to develop. The root of these is compassion. Thus the main quality of the spiritual community stems from compassion.

The Buddha's ultimate goal for establishing the sangha is for people to attain liberation and enlightenment. The manifest goal is to create a harmonious community that enables its members to progress along the path. The Vinaya Pitaka says that this community should work at being:

1. physically harmonious: we live together peacefully;
2. harmonious in communication: there are few arguments and disputes, and when they occur, we remedy them;
3. mentally harmonious: we appreciate and support each other;
4. harmonious in the precepts: we have a similar lifestyle and live according to the same precepts;
5. harmonious in views: we share similar beliefs;
6. harmonious in welfare: we equally use and enjoy what is given to the community.

These are the ideal circumstances we aspire and work towards in our life together as a community.

### **The Current Situation of Western Monastics in the Tibetan Tradition**

The Buddha said that the ordaining master should care for the disciples like a parent for a child, helping to provide requisites for daily sustenance, as well as Dharma teachings. However, due to various factors, one of which is that the Tibetans are a refugee community, this is not what generally occurs for Westerners who ordain. It is important to be aware of this before ordaining, because Westerners face particular challenges in living as monastics. If, before ordination, we are aware of the challenges we may face after it, we will be better equipped to prevent or resolve the difficulties that may arise.

At present there are few established monastic communities in the West. Thus we often do not have a community to live with, or we live in a center with lay people, perhaps with one or two other monastics, or in a mixed community of monks and nuns. We are often expected to provide for ourselves financially. This adds strain to ordained life, for if one has to put on lay clothes and work at a job in the city with non-Buddhist people, one may lose the motivation and vision of ordination. Thus, it is advisable

before ordaining to clear all financial debts we may have and to seek a benefactor or other means of support. In terms of education, often there is little guidance or training on how to live as a monastic, and many of us must generate our own program of study, develop friendships over long distances with other monastics, and be responsible for ourselves. Thus, before ordaining it is wise to establish a good relationship with a spiritual mentor who will guide us and to find conducive circumstances where we can live and receive the monastic training and Dharma education that we need.

In the monastic communities in Asia, we are separated from Asian monastics by culture, language, manners, and habits. It is difficult to live in Tibetan monasteries because they are often over-crowded, and Westerners face visa problems and illness. Living in Western Dharma centers, we are often expected to work long hours to serve our teachers and the public. While doing this is beneficial, we need to have a balance between service, study, and practice. If we do not live in a community with other monastics, there is sometimes the difficulty of loneliness. If we become too close emotionally with lay practitioners, there is danger that we become distracted and lose our purpose as monastics. Thus, we are challenged to acknowledge and learn to work with our emotions. Western society often sees monastics of any tradition as parasites because they do not seem to produce anything. We must have a strong mind and clear goals in order to prevent unnecessary doubt from arising when we encounter others' lack of understanding of the purpose of monastic life.

### **The Benefits of Ordination**

The guidelines our precepts provide have great meaning when we devote ourselves to practice rather than having only an intellectual or casual interest in Buddhism. As monastics, our simplified lifestyle enables us to be content with little and gives us the time to develop our practice in a deep and committed way. We will become more mindful and restrain ourselves from getting caught up or going astray by following our endless wants and desires. We will develop greater awareness of ourselves and others; we will have a method to deal with our problems and will no longer be obliged to react strongly to things for which we have aversion. Rather than acting on impulse, mindfulness of our precepts will help us to check first before engaging in an action. We will develop greater tolerance, will not get emotionally entangled in unhealthy relationships, and will be of greater assistance to others. People become calmer, healthier, and more content by living in the conducive circumstances that precepts create. By living according to the precepts, we will become an ethical and trustworthy person and thus become stronger and more confident.

Maintaining our precepts enables us to purify stores of negative karma and to create

great positive potential (merit). This acts as a basis for obtaining higher rebirths in the future so that we can continue to practice the Dharma and finally attain liberation and enlightenment. Living in precepts will protect us from harm, and through our subdued behavior, the place where we live will become more peaceful and prosperous. We will become an example of individuals who are content with little and of a community that can work together and resolve its problems in a healthy way. Our mind will be peaceful and calm; we will no longer be propelled by our bad habits; and distractions in meditation will arise less often. We will get along better with others. In future lives, we will meet the Buddha's teachings and conducive circumstances for practice, and we will be born as a disciple of Maitreya Buddha.

Living in accord with the precepts directly contributes to world peace. For example, when we abandon killing, all living beings who contact us can feel secure. When we abandon stealing, everyone around us can relax and not fear for their possessions. Living in celibacy, we relate to others more honestly, free from the subtle and not-so-subtle games between people. Others can trust us when we are committed to speaking truthfully. In this way, each precept influences not only ourselves, but also those with whom we share this world.

In the Lamrim Chenmo, the Higher Training in Ethics is described as the stairway to all other virtuous practices. It is the banner of all Dharma practice, the destroyer of all negative actions and unfortunate rebirths. It is the medicine which cures the disease of harmful actions, the food to eat while traveling the difficult road in samsara, the weapon to destroy the enemy of the disturbing attitudes, and the foundation for all positive qualities.

## Being a Monastic in the West

[Bhikshu Thich Nhat Hanh](#)

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The practice of Buddhism is an art. Monks and nuns are artists and the materials which they use as artists are the five aggregates of form, feeling, discrimination, mental formations, and consciousness. The art is to bring harmony and peace into your five aggregates so that you can offer happiness to others. Truth, beauty, and goodness are found in art. Good monastics are beautiful, which means that they embody goodness and truthfulness. They are successful in the practice due to their mindfulness. Mindfulness leads to insight, understanding, compassion, and love. We practice mindfulness to increase our concentration, which leads us to look deeply. Then love arises in a natural way, and you are able to understand, accept, and be compassionate. The best thing a monastic can do is offer his or her understanding and love.

The gatha that a monastic recites before receiving the upper robe in the novice ordination is: "How wondrous is the robe of a monastic! It is the field of all merit. I bow my head to receive it today and vow to wear it life after life." You want to wear the robe of a nun or monk life after life because you have been happy as a monastic.

Happiness is the absence of ill-being. Happiness does not consist of obtaining something outside ourselves. By transforming ill-being, happiness arises and blooms. When we practice mindfulness, we allow happiness to spring up like sweet water from the earth. Usually we look for happiness by ignoring the ill-being in us. We are not at ease with our ill-being and cover it up by using our six senses and their objects to satisfy our cravings. Eyes seek form, ears seek sound, nose seeks smells, tongue seeks tastes, and we seek body contact in sexual activity to forget our suffering. We think that sensual pleasures can help us and make us happy. We seek forgetfulness of our suffering. For example, we eat without being hungry and we can't stop. True joy contains peace and harmony, while fake joy is a fever. Indulging in the five sensual desires of money and material possessions, fame, sex, food, and sleep is a fever. Eventually no sensual desire can cover up our suffering. It just waters the seeds of further suffering. Mindfulness practice is a way to transform ill-being and suffering.

Monks and nuns do not seek happiness outside of themselves. They embrace their ill-being and transform it. They want to practice full time and to live in a temple or practice center with the sangha. Their beginner's mind brings harmony and peace to themselves and others, and it must be nourished each day. Bodhicitta is the mind of enlightenment, awakening, understanding, and love. With it you practice for everyone. You want to nourish your mind of understanding, and you want to alleviate

suffering. This is the mind of a bodhisattva. You devote your whole life to this practice.

Precepts are a manifestation of a mindful life. You keep the precepts from a mind of understanding and love. You understand that if you break the precepts, you will cause harm and suffering. The vow to keep the precepts is willingly accepted and is not imposed. A monastic with happiness, love, compassion and understanding can do a lot for the world. A happy person can be of great benefit to the world. Therefore, we must practice the precepts conscientiously.

Is it possible to produce a happy Buddhist monastic in the West? How can we practice so that we are harmonious with the culture in the West, and do not suffer from the negative aspects of that culture? How can we place a Buddhist monastic in society so that he or she can radiate peace and happiness? It is possible. There is a 2,500 year history of the Buddhist Order in Asia. Some of the Asian practices can be relevant for us. We must see what we learn from them as well as from the experiences of Catholic nuns in Western countries.

When you first become a monastic, a time may come when you are embarrassed because lay people show respect to you. When you wear the robe of a monastic, you are a symbol of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. When people show respect to you, you must practice mindful breathing and remember that people are showing respect to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha through your robe, not to you as an individual. If you become arrogant, you will ruin your life as a nun or monk.

It is important to wear your robes, to be reminded that you are a monastic. Many people want to see the monastic robes. The seed of devotion is still alive. When someone shows respect to a monastic, the monastic should do his or her best to help the person by sitting peacefully and breathing in and out. A monastic should know how to breathe in and establish peace and stability in him or herself, and to breathe in and feel joy and stability. Peace, concentration, joy and stability are possible with one in-breath and one out-breath. The layperson receives peace, stability, and faith by touching the Three Jewels through the monastic. You must do your best to practice at that time. Be a mindful monastic at that moment. In the Sutra on Happiness, the Buddha said that to have the opportunity for regular contact with monks and nuns is the greatest happiness.

Laypeople and monastics should help each other to practice. The practice of laypeople has an impact on ordained people. Ordained people are like big brothers and sisters to laypeople and offer great comfort to laypeople. The Buddhist community is composed of monks, nuns, laywomen, and laymen. We need all four sections of the community

to be present, including children.

## **If We Want to Work for the Good of All Beings, What Should We Do?**

[Bhikshu Gendun Rinpoche](#)

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Because we understand that the good of all beings is the result of positive acts, we need to know how to act positively. To learn this, there must be teachings. These teachings can only be useful and accessible if they are kept alive by people who practice them, who carry on the tradition, who comprehend and integrate their meaning, thus being able to hand them down to others. To do this, there must be a foundation; there must be the sangha (monastic community). This sangha needs a place to live -- it cannot just dwell somewhere in space. It needs to be organized, and this organization is the monastery.

The sangha is not comprised of ordinary people, but of people who practice, experience, and realize the Dharma. The immaterial Dharma is given into a receptacle, the sangha, which keeps it alive. If all of these conditions are brought together, the Dharma remains alive, authentic, and people can then take advantage of the teachings, practice them, and eventually hand them on to others. In this way the good of beings is accomplished. If we go back to square one, we conclude that a monastery must be built.

We could say to ourselves that, in fact, the most important thing is to practice the Dharma. We may begin to practice without paying attention to the organizational structure and think, "I've received the teachings from the lama. I can practice on my own and the good of beings will be accomplished through my personal practice." In the long run, this notion is very limited. If everyone is just concerned with the present, with the relative side of it, without bothering about the continuity of the message, there will be myriad little stars everywhere which will all disappear one day and nothing will remain after us. The energy devoted to the transmission will help the handful of people around the transmission source, but eventually the message will disappear, as will those who had access to it, who developed their practice, but couldn't benefit from a structure. The objective of the sangha is to be a container, and especially, to ensure the transmission.

The sangha's goal is to think of the distant future. The distant future isn't now, it's the centuries to come, the future generations. Organizational structures must be developed in order to be able to convey this immaterial thing, the realization of the Dharma, throughout the ages. The sangha is crucial because it ensures the durability of the Dharma experience: it receives, practices, understands, perfects, and spreads the teachings. It guarantees that this experience will continue for many centuries.

We must acknowledge the universal law which states that happiness and the root of happiness come from positive acts; suffering and the root of suffering come from negative acts; enlightenment is attained by working for the good of all beings; and the qualities of altruism, generosity, benevolence and so forth bring ourselves and all beings to the freedom from suffering which is perfect enlightenment.

## **H. H. the Dalai Lama** Answers Questions at Life as a Western Buddhist Nun

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**Question:** When the Buddha first ordained monastics, there were no precepts. The precepts were gradually made afterwards, when some monks and nuns misbehaved. Thus there must have been a deeper meaning or purpose that the Buddha had in mind for monasticism, beyond the keeping of precepts. Please talk about the deeper essence or meaning of being a monastic.

**His Holiness the Dalai Lama:** First, on the individual level, there is a purpose in being a monk or nun. The Buddha himself was an example of this. He was the prince of a small kingdom, and he renounced this. Why? If he remains in the kingdom with all of the householders' activities, those very circumstances compel one to become involved in attachment or in harsh attitudes. That is an obstacle for practice. With family life, even though you yourself may feel content, you have to take care of your family, so you have to engage in more worldly activities. The advantage of being a monk or nun is that you do not have to be entrapped in too many worldly engagements or activities. If, after becoming a monk or a nun, as a practitioner you can think and develop genuine compassion and concern for all sentient beings-or at least the sentient beings surrounding you-then that kind of feeling is very good for the accumulation of virtues. On the other hand, with your own family, your concern and wish is to repay your family members. Perhaps there are some exceptional cases, but generally speaking, that burden is a real burden, and that pain is a real pain. With that, there is no hope of accumulating virtue because your activities are based on attachment. Therefore, becoming a monk or nun, without family, is very good for the practice of the Buddhadharma because the basic aim of Dharma practice is nirvana, not just day-to-day happiness. As monastics, we seek nirvana, permanent cessation of samsaric suffering, so we want to pacify the seed or the factors that bind us in the samsaric world. The chief of these is attachment. Therefore the main purpose of being a monastic is to reduce attachment: we work on no longer being attached to family, no longer being attached to sexual pleasure, no longer being attached to other worldly facilities. That is the main purpose. This is the purpose on the individual level.

**Q.:** Please speak about the advantage of taking higher ordination as a bhikshu or bhikshuni. Why did you chose to become a bhikshu rather than to remain as a sramanera? What is the best way to prepare to take ordination as a bhikshu or bhikshuni?

**H.H.:** Generally, in our tradition, with higher ordination, all your virtuous activities become more effective, more powerful, more forceful. Similarly, the negative activities are more powerful (he chuckles), but we usually tend to look more on the

positive side. The teachings of the bodhisattva vehicle and tantric vehicle, for example Kalachakra, express great appreciation for the bhikshu vow. We feel it is a great opportunity to take higher ordination. A bhikshu or bhikshuni has more precepts. If you look at them point by point, sometimes you may feel there are too many precepts. But when you look at the purpose-to reduce attachment and negative emotions-then it makes sense. In order to reduce our negative emotions, the Vinaya puts more emphasis on your actions. So Vinaya contains very detailed and precise precepts about physical and verbal actions. The higher vows-the bodhisattva vow and the tantric vow-put more emphasis on the motivation. If you look at how the bhikshu and bhikshuni precepts work, you will get a better understanding of their purpose.

Generally speaking, those Buddhist practitioners who are really determined to follow this practice according to the Buddha's guidance of course become sramanera(ika), then bhikshu(ni). Then they take the bodhisattva vow and finally the tantric vow. I feel the real preparation for taking bhikshu or bhikshuni ordination is not the study of the Vinaya, but more meditation about the nature of samsara. For example, there is a precept of celibacy. If you just think, "Sex is not good. Buddha prohibited it, so I can't do it," then it is very difficult to control your desire. On the other hand, if you think of the basic aim, the basic purpose-nirvana-then you will understand the reason for the precept and it will be easier to follow it. When you do more analytical meditation on the Four Noble Truths, you will gain conviction that the first two truths are to be abandoned and the last two to be actualized. Having examined whether these negative emotions-the cause of suffering-can be eliminated, you will become confident that they can. You can see clearly there is an alternative. Now the whole practice becomes meaningful. Otherwise, keeping precepts is like a punishment. When you do analytical meditation, you will realize there is a systematic way to reduce the negative emotions, and you will want to do that because your aim is nirvana, the complete elimination of negative emotions. Contemplating this is the main preparation. Study the Four Noble Truths, and do more analytical meditation on these topics. Once you develop genuine interest in nirvana and feel it is possible to attain, you will feel, "That's my purpose, that's my destination." The next question is, "How can I reduce negative emotions step by step on the emotional level and on the practical level?" Thus, you progressively becomes an upasaka, a full upasaka, an upasaka with celibacy, a sramanera, and a bhikshu. For women, one is first upasika, then sramanerika, shiksamana, and bhikshuni. Gradually taking the various levels of precepts is climbing the steps to liberation.

**Q.:** Is there a different way of practicing the Vinaya for someone who is in the Vajrayana tradition? How do we integrate our study and practice of Vinaya with our study and practice of the tantra?

**H.H.:** According to our tradition, we are monastics and are celibate, and we practice the Tantrayana simultaneously. But the way of practice is through visualization. For example, we visualize the consort, but we never touch. We never implement this in actual practice. Unless we have reached a stage where we have completely developed the power to control all our energy and have gained the correct understanding of sunya (emptiness, reality), unless we truly possess all the faculties through which those negative emotions can be transformed into positive energy, we never implement practice with an actual consort. Although we practice all the higher practices, as far as implementation is concerned, we follow Vinaya. We never follow according to Tantrayana. We can't drink blood!! (everyone laughs). In terms of actual practice, we have to follow the stricter discipline of Vinaya. In ancient India, one of the reasons for the degeneration of the Buddhadharma was the wrong implementation of certain tantric explanations.

**Q.:** It is difficult to follow the Vinaya literally in all situations nowadays. Can adaptations be made to how we live it?

**H.H.:** Obviously, we must make every effort to follow the Vinaya teachings and precepts. Then in certain cases, if there is sufficient reason to make certain adaptations, it is possible. But we should not make these adaptations too easily. First we should give preference to following the Vinaya precepts as they are. In cases where there are enough sound reasons that necessitate an adaptation, then it is permissible.

**Q.:** What is the source of joy in the mind? How do we maintain a sense of joy? How do we deal with doubt and insecurity that may arise?

**H.H.:** As a practitioner, once you gain some inner experience as a result of your spiritual practice, that gives you some deep satisfaction, happiness, or enjoyment. It also gives you some kind of confidence. I think that is the main thing. This comes through meditation. The most effective method for your mind is analytical meditation. But without proper knowledge and understanding it is difficult to meditate. There is no base for knowing how to meditate. To be able to do analytical meditation effectively, you should have knowledge of the whole structure of Buddhism. So study is important; it makes a difference in your meditation. But sometimes in our Tibetan monasteries there is too much emphasis on the intellectual side, and the practice side is neglected. As a result some people are great scholars, but as soon as their lecture finishes, then ugliness appears. Why? Intellectually, they are a great scholar, but the Dharma is not integrated with their life.

Once you personally experience some deeper value as a result of our practice, then no

matter what other people do, what other people say, your happiness will not be affected. Because through your own experience you will be convinced, "Yes, there is some good thing there." The Buddha made it very clear. Right at the beginning he said it was extremely important for each individual to make his or her decisions and make effort in the practice.

## A Letter to a Friend Considering Ordination

[Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron](#)

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Dear Dharma friend,

I received your letter. You want to be a monastic! You sound both happy and nervous about this. It is very worthwhile to be a monastic, and the more prepared your mind is for ordination, the easier the transition from lay to ordained life will be. Therefore, I will write some questions for you to reflect on in the hopes that they will help you to think deeply and thus eliminate potential obstacles in your mind. When I requested my spiritual master for permission to be ordained, he said, "Yes, but wait a while." He made me wait nearly a year and half. I was impatient to ordain and did not want to wait, but looking back on it now, it was very good that I did. During that time I repeatedly contemplated the topics outlined in these questions. This helped me considerably, so now I would like to share them with you. When you contemplate these questions, it is important to be as honest as you can and use them as a tool to discover your own thoughts and feelings. Sometimes your truthful answer may not be what you would like it to be or what you think your spiritual teacher would want it to be. However, there are no right or wrong answers here. The better you know yourself, with all your strengths and weaknesses, the better you will be able to prepare for ordination.

1. Why do you want to become a monastic? What is your deepest motivation, your deepest reason for wanting to take ordination? What does ordination mean to you? Are there difficult relationships, situations, or emotions that you are trying to be free from? Is ordination a way of avoiding those or a way of facing them?
2. Where does being ordained fit into your Dharma practice? How will it help you? What things about being ordained will be difficult for you?
3. One of our precepts is to follow the Dharma advice of our abbot (abbess) or teacher. Is there a teacher with whom you have a strong connection? It is important to train under the guidance of a qualified and skillful teacher, not just to move around going wherever your fancy takes you. Are you willing to discuss your plans with your teacher and follow his or her Dharma instructions, or do you like to do what you want to do?
4. As sangha members, we are part of a larger spiritual community. We sit in order of our ordination and respect those ordained before us. We also should listen to the advice and suggestions of the senior monks and nuns because they have more experience as monastics. Is there a part of you that has difficulty with respecting and listening to those who are senior? How can you work with that attitude so you can value their guidance and reap the benefit from their experience and concern?

5. Which of the Buddhist traditions will be your principal practice? Theravada? Chinese? Tibetan? It is important to know which direction you will take in your practice; otherwise you could end up doing a mixture of things and not get anywhere.
6. In order to be able to keep our ordination, we need living conditions conducive to spiritual practice. Where will you live after taking ordination?
7. There is no large organization that supports and looks after Western monastics. We are responsible for our own finances, health insurance, and so forth. Worrying about these things can distract us from practice, so it is better to have these firmly in place before ordination. Will you have an income or financial support? Do you have health insurance?
8. Do you have any social obligations to clear up before ordination (debts, divorce, caring for aged parents or children)? Do you have any serious health problems that will influence your ability to practice, to live in community, or to keep the ordination?
9. We have years and lifetimes of conditioning behind us. It is important to look at this closely and resolve it. Thus, the next sets of questions deal with societal values and goals that previously have been inculcated in us. Do you wish to be successful in a career? Imagine meeting your old friends after several years. They have good careers, success, a comfortable life, and reputation. How will you feel? Will you feel like a useful member of society even though you have not produced anything tangible that is valued by society?
10. Ordination entails developing our ability to handle our own emotions without seeking emotional support from a partner. It also involves managing our sexual energy. How do you feel about marriage and family life? Would you like a life-long companion to share your life with? Is it difficult for you to control your emotional or sexual attraction for others? Even if marriage and family do not seem so interesting now, how will you feel when you are older? Often women in their middle or late thirties and men in their late forties undergo a crisis, thinking, "If I want to get married and have children, I have to do so now. Otherwise, my age will make having a family difficult." Imagine yourself at that age and investigate how you might feel.
11. How will you feel when you are old if you have no children, grandchildren, home, security, and so forth? What could your old age be like as a nun or monk? as a lay person?
12. Two of our precepts are to abandon the signs of a lay person and to take on the signs of a monastic. This entails shaving our head, wearing robes, and keeping our precepts wherever we are and whomever we are with. Are you easily influenced by what other people think of you -- be they strangers or family and friends? How will you feel if people on the street stare at you because you wear robes? How will

you feel if your family and friends say that you are escaping from reality or wasting your life by being a monastic? How will you feel if your parents are upset because you are not living a "normal" life?

13. Have you told your family and close friends that you are considering becoming a monastic? Are you comfortable with the way they reacted, or do you feel guilty, hurt or angry? It is very important to work out these emotions. Also, it is important to give your parents love. They often fear that their child is rejecting them, or that they will never see their child again if he or she takes ordination. We have to be sensitive to their needs, to reassure them that we love them, and yet not feel pulled by their emotions or wishes. What meditations can you do to help you overcome the attachment or anger you may have towards your family?
14. Are you prepared to live in a community? This involves giving up doing what you want to do when you want to do it. You have to follow the discipline of the community. You have to live and work with people whom you may not normally choose as your friends. How do you feel about having your ego confronted like this?
15. Which is your strongest disturbing attitude: attachment, anger, ignorance, jealousy, pride, doubt? If it goes unaddressed, it will cause problems in your practice and make you doubt your ordination. Know which one is the strongest and start applying the antidotes in your meditation now.
16. To actually receive the ordination during the ordination ceremony, you must have developed to some extent the determination to be free from cyclic existence and to attain liberation. To be able to keep the ordination after receiving it, you have to constantly cultivate this motivation. Do you regularly meditate on the disadvantages of cyclic existence and its causes, or is there a part of your mind that is resistant to thinking about that? The eight worldly concerns are some of the chief obstacles to developing the determination to be free. We are attached to 1) money and material possessions, 2) praise and approval, 3) reputation and image, and 4) pleasure from the five sensual objects. We have aversion to 5) not receiving or losing our money and possessions, 6) blame or disapproval from others, 7) bad reputation or image, and 8) unpleasant sensations from our five senses. Which of these are the strongest for you? Are you familiar with the antidotes for them? Do you apply those antidotes? Do you feel that giving up those eight mental states would make you unhappy?
17. How do you feel about going through the hardships of ordained life? How can you strengthen your spir-itual goals and make them more heartfelt and central to your life? Ordained life, like lay life, is not always easy. There will be problems, ups and downs. When the down times come, people are tempted to blame their ordination, thinking "My ordination is the problem. If I were not a monastic, I would not have this problem." What are the benefits of ordination? Do you have

deep conviction in them? It is important to have a clear understanding of these things beforehand, and to be courageous in facing physical, emotional, and spiritual difficulties in your life.

8. Is there a part of your mind that is seeking respect from others because you are ordained? Do you expect others to treat you well? to give you things? to show you respect? Or are you willing to be the servant of others, thus cultivating the altruistic intention?
9. What are your needs and concerns after ordination? What resources do you have -- internal and external -- to help you meet those? What things do you feel confident about? What things do you feel shaky about?

These are some things to think deeply about. Each point has several questions, and it could be helpful to write down your responses. Put them aside for a few weeks. Then reread them and make adjustments. Reflecting on these questions again and again over time will help remove unclarity in your mind and possible obstacles in your ordination. They will help you go through the emotional high of wanting to be a monastic and to understand your mind better.

I wish you all the best on the path to enlightenment and pray that your wisdom, compassion, and skill grow so that you may spread happiness to many beings.

Yours in the Dharma,

Thubten Chodron

## **A Garland of Advice for Prospective Monastics**

[Bhikshuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo](#)

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Dear Friend,

Thank you for your letter. I am very happy to hear of your interest in taking ordination as a Buddhist nun. The issue of ordination is a complex and fascinating one. The experience of each individual who ordains is unique and depends on many factors. First, I suggest you read the sections of the book *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha* that deal with ordination and monasteries in the West. This may answer some of your questions and will no doubt raise further ones. According to Buddhist tradition, the sign that the Dharma is established in a place is the presence of a monastic sangha. It is my sincere wish that a strong sangha be established in the West, so I am very happy to share my experience with you.

I have been happily ordained for 19 years: 13 years in India and 6 years in Hawai'i. However, I have had many friends over the years who have ordained but are no longer in robes. Their experience highlights issues that need to be considered seriously by anyone thinking of requesting ordination.

The wish to ordain is extremely virtuous, surely the result of positive actions and prayers. The monastic lifestyle is wonderful for Dharma practice, but being a Western monastic is not always easy. Buddhism is new in the West and as yet there is very little support for Western monastics on any level. Whether in India or the West, the problems of life cannot be solved simply by receiving ordination.

One of the first things to consider is one's motivation for ordaining. If it is to live a peaceful life, to escape the problems of the world, to avoid human relationships, to withdraw from emotional problems, or to get material support, receiving ordination will not guarantee any of these. The highest motivation is to practice the Buddha's teachings wholeheartedly for the sake of liberating oneself and others from cyclic existence. Laypeople can practice the Buddha's teachings wholeheartedly too, but what distinguishes an ordained practitioner is the depth of commitment. Receiving lay, novice, or full ordination is a lifelong commitment to maintain various levels of precepts. To make any of these commitments requires a thorough understanding of Buddhist teachings and a strong resolve to practice them.

Prerequisite to taking any of these ordinations is taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, which signifies becoming a Buddhist. Therefore, it is important to reflect on one's affinity with this spiritual tradition before making a commitment. It

is also important to reflect on one's determination to keep the precepts before taking them. The novice and full ordinations represent increasingly serious commitments to Dharma practice. These ordinations involve more responsibilities and greater visibility: wearing robes, shaving the head, keeping additional precepts, and maintaining the expected behavior of a Buddhist monastic.

Taking on these commitments is a gradual process of ever-increasing dedication to the Buddhist path. Although I had been a Buddhist since childhood and wanted to be a nun for many years, I began by taking refuge in a formal ceremony with my teacher. Then I took the two lay precepts I felt sure I could keep. Each year I added one more precept until I had five. After keeping the five lay precepts for several years and becoming comfortable with them, it still took several more years of simplifying my life before I became a nun. When I met Ven. Nyanaponika, the renowned German monk, in Sri Lanka and told him of my aspiration to become a nun, he advised me, "Make sure you are not running away from anything." This turned out to be very sound advice. It caused me to reflect on my motivation and consider seriously whether I was ready for monastic life.

It is possible to take eight precepts for life, including celibacy, and continue living in the world. Such a person may wear lay clothes, work a regular job, and wear an ordinary hairstyle, but privately maintain precepts similar to a monastic. To quietly maintain a celibate lifestyle is extremely virtuous, but can also be very difficult. Since nothing external distinguishes one from a layperson, it is easy to get drawn into worldly affairs and lose one's monastic resolve.

Becoming a monastic is very different, since the robes and shaved head announce one's dedication to the spiritual life and one's disassociation from worldly affairs such as sex, alcohol, and entertainment. Being visible in this way has its advantages and disadvantages. It protects one from worldly involvement, gives others a readily identifiable spiritual resource, and is a constant reminder of one's spiritual aspirations. At the same time, people have expectations of what a spiritual person should be and expect monastics to live up to them. Unless one's motivation is strong, such expectations may begin to feel constricting.

For me, ordination has often entailed a struggle for sustenance. One of the first things to consider is how to support oneself. In the Tibetan tradition, it is possible to work at a job and be ordained. Unless you are independently wealthy or find some means of support, it may be necessary to work, but I do not feel that it is necessary or appropriate for monastics to wear lay clothes and long hair. I have worked at hospitals and universities for years with robes and a shaved head. The robes attract attention, which can be uncomfortable. Contemplating the value of precepts helps develop self-

confidence, while contemplating compassion for living beings helps put others at ease. In time, people get used to the robes and often come to seek spiritual advice. The robes seem to inspire trust and serve to remind people of their own spiritual dimension. Some people say it is better to wear lay clothes and be integrated in society, but I do not wish to be integrated in society, since my goals and interests are very different from the mainstream.

I recommend that people interested in ordination begin by receiving the lay precepts and practice with them until they feel comfortable. Meanwhile, through reading and talking with people who are or have been in robes, you can research the matter of being a monastic in Western society, understanding the benefits as well as the challenges. You also need to consider carefully the matter of financial support, since you can expect little support from any direction.

Becoming a monastic is a lifelong commitment and entails trying to live according to very strict rules of discipline that were set forth at the time of the Buddha. It is good to be clear about this code of discipline as well as the social and cultural expectations involved before ordaining. Although it is possible to change one's mind and return to lay life, it is generally a disappointing experience, both for the person and the people around. At present, there is no ideal place for Western monastics to train as monastics, so it is difficult to learn correct deportment. Courses offering training for prospective and new monastics are badly needed.

Another thing to consider is the gender issue. Whether in Western or Asian societies, monks and nuns are often treated differently. Monks, especially Asian monks, are given respect and material support, while nuns, especially Western nuns, are sometimes neglected. Experiences of gender and racial discrimination like this can be quite discouraging. Attitudes are changing rapidly, and women can make a very positive contribution by demonstrating their capabilities. The most effective approach in Asian societies seems to be humility, sincerity, and perseverance.

What enabled me to live happily as a nun over the years was learning to transform my attitude toward difficult situations. When I had no money, I would reflect on renunciation. When I encountered obstacles, I would reflect on karma ripening. When I was sick, I would reflect on the Four Noble Truths. When I felt inadequate, I would reflect on Buddha nature, the potential for all beings to manifest enlightenment. Praise helped me develop humility, while humiliations helped me develop inner strength.

My teacher reminded me to reflect on the rarity of ordination, constantly rejoicing in my good fortune. Generating bodhicitta, the attitude wishing to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings, is one of the most valuable Buddhist teachings for

maintaining a steady practice and handling difficulties in monastic life when they arise. With sincerity and a pure motivation, all difficulties can be overcome and can even be beneficial to our practice. If you have any further questions, please feel free to write to me again.

Happiness in the Dharma,

Karma Lekshe Tsomo

## Writing an Autobiography

[Luminary Temple](#) in Chia-I, Taiwan

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The one who requests ordination writes an autobiography. This gives him or her time to reflect and put into words key thoughts on ordination and practice. It also gives the ordination master and the monastery the opportunity to get to know the person. The autobiography should include responses to the following questions. The one who requests ordination writes an autobiography. This gives him or her time to reflect and put into words key thoughts on ordination and practice. It also gives the ordination master and the monastery the opportunity to get to know the person. The autobiography should include responses to the following questions.

1. How did you come to know about Buddhism?
2. What was it that initially attracted you to Buddhism?
3. What is your motivation to learn Buddhism?
4. What does your daily Buddhist practice consist of?
5. What has your Buddhist education included?
6. Have you done any meditation retreats? What was your experience in them? What did you learn?
7. What do you want to accomplish as a monastic? What is your goal, your dream?
8. What is the relationship between your motivation to learn Buddhism, ordination, and the sangha community? What is your understanding of the purpose and mission of monastics?
9. How is your health? Have you had any acute illnesses or injuries in the past? Do you have any chronic ailments now?
10. Are you or have you ever been on medication for mental problems? Have you ever been hospitalized for mental difficulties?
11. Describe your family of origin and how the people relate to each other. What are your observations of your parents and sibling? Have you ever been married or in a long-term relationship? What is happening now with that?
12. What is your educational background?
13. What work experience have you had?

## **Waiting for the Right Time**

[Upasaka Guy Rom](#)

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I would like to share my experience while encountering the Dharma. What I say may seem obvious to many Dharma practitioners, but if it clarifies something for just one person, then that is enough.

When I first met the Dharma, my mind was racing. I had a strong instinct for the teachings, and I was fascinated and excited by them. I had a strong desire to become a monk as soon as possible, to practice intensely, and to become a Buddha quickly. Luckily, my teacher would not allow me fall into my own trap. Becoming a monk at that time in my life would have been disastrous for me. This was because, unbeknownst to me at the time, my understanding of the Dharma was intellectual. My desire to be ordained was simply a desire of the ego; there was little Dharma motivation from the heart. Consequently, taking ordination would have made me feel pressured, instead of bringing peace and happiness, which are the real purpose of practicing the Dharma and keeping the precepts. I would have been in constant internal conflict as I tried to live up to my ideal of a perfect monastic, instead of accepting myself and working with what I am at present.

After some time, I realized my faulty motivation. I came to my senses, or more accurately, I left my senses and discovered a tiny drop of Dharma in my heart. As I practiced more, self-acceptance began to arise in my heart. I stopped pressuring myself with my idealistic, intellectual understanding of the Dharma and the expectations it produced. Dharma is beautiful, and we have to have a long-term view in order to find it within ourselves. It will take a long time to practice and develop Dharma qualities. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, "The longer the practitioner is willing to practice, the quicker he or she will achieve the goal." Joyous effort means being peaceful and happy with the practice and willing to spend a long time at it. When we have this, then we are truly practicing. Dharma now means to me becoming a better human being, caring for others, trying to develop a kind heart. It does not mean being intellectual, uptight, and pushing myself.

I hope to be ordained when I am confident to keep the precepts purely in a peaceful, happy state of mind. Then being ordained will benefit my practice and that in turn will benefit many other people as well. In the meantime, I will try to live according to the precepts while wearing lay clothes and having long hair, and practice being a monastic before actually becoming one.

## **Protocol for Sangha in the Tibetan Tradition**

[Bhikshuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo](#)

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The question of protocol for sangha members in the Tibetan tradition raises many delicate yet important issues. An ordained sangha member is expected to be a model of polite and refined behavior, but what does that model look like? On the one hand, Western culture has its own standards of courtesy and its own etiquette which may be quite different from customs in Asia. On the other hand, once one takes ordination and wears the robes of a Buddhist renunciant, it is important to respect the Buddhist tradition and to behave in a way consistent with one's role as an exemplar of that tradition.

Being an exemplar is a tough assignment, one which we work into gradually as our Dharma practice deepens. Sangha members are expected to be calm, courteous, and respectful, particularly in public and in the presence of monks, nuns, and teachers, which is not always easy. This is not to say that all monks and nuns behave this way or that when we wear Tibetan robes we should try to become Tibetans. The customs of one culture are not necessarily better than those of another. The fundamental issue is practical: by understanding and observing polite behavior, we express respect for the tradition and feel comfortable and happy in it. If we do not know or care about the culture, we feel awkward and unhappy. We offend people, disappoint our teachers, and feel inadequate as a monk or nun.

Western people receive little or no training in protocol when they are ordained, and learning by trial and error can be a very discouraging process. Due to cultural and gender differences, it is difficult for Western nuns and monks to train intensively with qualified masters of the Tibetan tradition on an everyday basis. Therefore, some of us who have learned by making mistakes thought it would be helpful to share what we have learned over the years. The standards of behavior described here are optimum, not necessarily mandatory. They are applicable to Tibetan social and religious situations, whether in Asia or the West. Familiarity with these norms will help sangha members understand the cultural landscape they now inhabit. The good news is that many of these suggestions will help navigate social and monastic situations in other cultures, too.

Many of the suggestions included here concern proper dress, hair length, and deportment. One may think, "Why be so concerned about outer appearances? The important thing is the purity of the mind." It is true that mental purification is at the heart of Buddhist practice. At the same time, the Buddha and his early followers recognized the value of disciplining one's body, speech, and mind. Although certain

Vinaya rules and monastic customs may appear unrelated to spiritual practice, they provide guidelines for training in mindfulness and awareness with every action. Proper deportment is important in relation to the lay community also. Monastics who are refined, gentle, calm, and collected inspire others to practice. Monastics who behave poorly may cause them to lose faith or to criticize the tradition. Standards of behavior vary according to place and time, but monastics are wise to adopt a high standard and practice until it becomes natural. As Zopa Rinpoche says, "What is the point of being a bad monk?"

## **Monastic Dress**

The Buddhist robes are a distinctive sign of a Buddhist monastic. The simple, patchwork design symbolizes renunciation. Robes for monastics vary in color and styling from culture to culture, reflecting adaptations to climate and social conditions over the centuries. In the Tibetan tradition, the robes for nuns and monks include a maroon lower robe called shamtab, a maroon shawl called zen, a maroon vest called donka, and a yellow robe called chogu which is worn on special occasions. A underskirt called meyog and an shirt called ngullen are worn underneath these. Yellow, orange, red, or maroon are the most common colors for the underskirt and shirt. A yellow belt called kerag cinches the shamtab around the waist. It is generally a plain strip of cloth, but there are variations. Monks and nuns who are fully ordained wear a shamtab with five strip of patches sewn in a particular pattern and have a second yellow robe with 25 strips of patches called namcha which is worn on special occasions. Underwear is advised, including a sports top or similar undergarment for nuns. Special care is taken when sitting cross-legged to avoid any embarrassing display.

The shamtab, zen, and donka are worn from the moment one wakes up in the morning until going to bed at night, even when going to the toilet. Robes should be worn properly, clean and neat, at all times. Although not specified in the Vinaya texts, an extra set of these three items, the shirt, and underskirt is generally kept to wear during laundering. In very hot weather, the shirt is sometimes worn without the donka. In the Tibetan tradition, sleeves, hats, scarves, and trousers are not appropriate. Special care is paid to proper dress when going for teachings, ceremonies, and when meeting one's teachers. If, due to cold weather, a sweater is worn in an informal situation, it should be simple, without decoration, and of a solid, acceptable color, such as yellow or maroon. Shoes are worn outside the monastery and are generally removed when entering temples. Sandals may be worn inside the monastery. Leather shoes are not worn by monastics in China, Korea, Taiwan, or Vietnam, but there is no such prohibition in the Tibetan tradition. Unlike Theravadin countries, closed shoes are considered preferable to sandals in a formal situation. Shoes should be brown in color

(never black or white) and conservative in design.

## **Shaving the Head**

A shaved head is the other distinctive sign of a Buddhist monastic. Like robes, the shaved head also symbolizes renunciation. According to the Vinaya texts, the hair may reach a length of two fingerbreadths, but normally it is shaved or sheared at least once a month. It is not appropriate to have someone of the opposite sex shave one's head, since it involves bodily contact which is not permitted. Learning to shave one's own head with electric clippers or a razor is a good solution.

## **Sitting, Standing, and Walking**

Physical behavior is a reflection of one's mental attitude. Therefore monastics cultivate refined behavior and are mindful of body language while sitting, walking, and standing. While sitting on a chair or sofa, one does not cross the legs or ankles. Hands are placed quietly in one's lap. To lie down, stretch, look here and there, run, or gesture wildly in public is considered impolite. When a teacher or someone senior enters the room, one stands and remains standing quietly and respectfully until directed to sit or until others sit.

When walking, the body and mind are subdued and under control. It is not appropriate to glance here and there; the eyes are kept focused on a spot about one yard ahead. When passing teachers or acquaintances, a brief greeting or subtle acknowledgment is sufficient. In Asian cultures, it is not appropriate for monastics to stop and talk on the street, especially with someone of the opposite sex. If there is some information to be conveyed, find an appropriate location -- not concealed but away from public view -- to speak briefly.

Nuns and monks carry as little as possible when walking along the street. They are supposed to have a minimum of possessions, so carrying one shoulder bag is considered sufficient. Especially when attending teachings, monastics carry their chogu, the text, a cup, a cushion, and little else. It is considered a bit pretentious to carry a mala and recite mantras aloud while walking on the street; Secret Mantra should be secret. The same applies to doing prayers, rituals, or meditation ostentatiously in public.

In Asian cultures, it is not considered appropriate for monastics to sit and talk for a long time in tea shops and restaurants. This is considered laypeople's behavior. If invited out for lunch, eat a reasonable amount politely in a reasonable length of time and return to the monastery. It is not appropriate to go for lunch alone with a member

of the opposite sex. Before going out of the monastery even for a short time, the discipline master should be informed and permission received. It is best to go with a companion. Monastics should be safely in the monastery before nightfall and should not go out after that.

When traveling on pilgrimage or from place to place, it is best for monastics to travel together and to stay in temples or monasteries. It is not allowable for monks or nuns to stay overnight in the same room with someone of the opposite sex. It is especially important to maintain good discipline when staying in a home, hotel, or a guest house. One should avoid movies and party situations. When staying in a monastery, one should follow the rules and timetable of the monastery, eating whatever is served, if invited.

In teachings or ceremonial situations, monks and nuns are seated in front as a mark of respect, not out of pride. It is appropriate for monks and nuns to quietly and humbly take an appropriate seat in order of seniority, keeping some space between monks and nuns, if possible. Being seated in front entails a responsibility to sit quietly and pay attention to the teachings, setting a good example for others. When receiving a blessing from the lama or presenting a kata, monks and nuns are generally asked to go first, in order of seniority. In Buddhist cultures, monks go before nuns.

## **Speech**

Like physical behavior, speech is also a reflection of one's mental attitude. Therefore monastics should speak in an appropriate way, at an appropriate time, and not too much. Appropriate speech includes topics related to Dharma; worldly topics should be avoided. One's tone of voice should be gentle, neither too soft nor too loud. Talking or laughing loudly is considered inappropriate, especially in public areas, around teachers or those who are senior.

Polite terms of address are important in human relations. A recognized reincarnate lama is Rinpoche, a teacher is Genla, an ordinary monk is Gushola, and an ordinary nun is Chola. Genla and Ajala are usually safe, polite ways of addressing adult men and women in Tibetan society; Pala and Amala are used for elderly men and women. When using a person's given name, the suffix "-la" will make it polite, for example, Tashi-la or Pema-la. To attach "-la" to Rinpoche or Lama is redundant; these terms are already polite.

## **Social Etiquette**

In Western cultures, shaking hands is a polite form of greeting, but this custom can be

problematic for monastics. In Asian cultures, bodily contact with a member of the opposite sex, even hugging one's mother or father, is avoided. His Holiness the Dalai Lama suggests shaking hands when the other party extends his or her hand, but not extending one's own hand first. A friendly attitude can often overcome embarrassing moments. It takes practice to become comfortable in social and cross-cultural situations, to avoid offending others yet maintain the integrity of one's role as a monastic.

## Appendix 1

### The Sramanera and Sramanerika Ordination Ceremony: A Summary

[Bhikshu Tenzin Josh](#)

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The ceremony of ordination as a sramanera or sramanerika (novice) is conducted on the basis of having taken the lay precepts of an upasaka/upasika, and rabjung (renunciation, leaving the householder's life). Then one takes the novice vow of a sramanera/sramanerika. The ceremony consists of preparation, actual practice, and conclusion.

#### **1. Preparation**

##### **Being free from obstacles**

To take ordination, a person must be free from obstacles preventing ordination. If one is free from the obstacles, he or she may receive the vow. If not, the vow will not be generated in his or her mind, or if generated, it will not abide in the mind. Questions regarding a person's suitability for ordination are asked in the presence of the ordaining bhikshu. One listens and replies with an undistracted mind. The questions regard the following:

1. One is not a heretic or schismatic.
2. One is not under 15 years of age.
3. If one is under 15 years of age, one is able to scare away crows (i.e. one is big enough to scare away a gathering of big birds.).
4. If able to scare away crows, one is not under seven years old.
5. One is not a slave.
6. One is not in financial debt.
7. One has permission from one's parents.
8. If one does not have one's parents' permission, one is in distant country (i.e. it takes more than seven days to contact them.).
9. One is not ill (with a physical or mental disability that would interfere with monastic life, study and meditation).
10. One has not violated a bhikshuni.
11. One is not living as a thief or spy.
12. One is not of different views (doubting whether to follow Dharma or not to follow it).
13. One is not abiding in wrong views (non-Buddhist views).

14. One is not a hermaphrodite.
15. One is not a eunuch.
16. One is not a spirit.
17. One is not an animal.
18. One is not involved with a heretic or schismatic.
19. One has not killed one's mother.
20. One has not killed one's father.
21. One has not killed an arhat.
22. One has not caused a schism in the sangha.
23. One has not maliciously drawn blood from the body of a Buddha.
24. One has not committed one of the four defeats (parajika).
25. One is not someone who does not accept the law of cause and effect.
26. One is not crippled.
27. One is not an albino.
28. One is not missing any limbs.
29. One is not a royal servant or favorite of the king.
30. One has permission of the king.
31. If one does not have the permission of the king, one is in a distant country.
32. One is not renowned as a violent robber.
33. One is not a degraded wrongdoer.
34. One is not of the cobbler caste.
35. One is not of the lowest caste (blacksmith, fisherman).
36. One is not of the lowest caste of worker.
37. One is not a being other than a human being.
38. One is not a person from the Northern Continent.
39. One is not someone who has changed sex three times.
40. One is not a woman posing as a man or a man posing as a woman.
41. One is not a tyrant.
42. One does not resemble a person born from another continent or world.

If a person is able to reply to each of the questions, "I am not," he or she is suitable to be ordained.

### **Taking the upasaka/upasika vow**

This is done in conjunction with taking refuge. Having prostrated to a representation of the Buddha, regarding it as the actual Buddha, and then to the preceptor, one kneels with one's hands in prostration mudra at the heart. The preceptor explains the proper mental attitude for taking refuge (i.e. caution regarding the dangers of cyclic existence

and faith/confidence in the Triple Gem). One recites the refuge after the preceptor, saying that one takes refuge in the Buddhas, the Dharma, and the Sangha for as long as one lives. At that time, one also receives the five lay precepts of an upasaka/upasika. Most important is one's mental attitude, thinking with joy, "I have now received the lay precepts, and this is my preceptor."

### **Rabjung (leaving the lay life of a householder)**

This is a prerequisite for novice ordination. First one requests the ordination and a bhikshu (who has been ordained at least ten years) to be one's abbot. A bhikshu other than the abbot asks one to prostrate to all the sangha present and to remove the white clothing of a lay person. He requests the abbot on one's behalf to be one's abbot and to ordain one. From then on, one refers to that person as one's abbot. (One removes the white clothing of a lay person either by changing from white clothes into monastic robes, or symbolically by wearing and then removing a white kata.). One takes up the name, dress, signs, and way of thinking of an ordained one. One should now have a zen (upper robe; the chogu is not yet needed), shamtab (lower robe), dingwa (seating cloth), bowl (with a few seeds or other food in it so it is not empty), and water filter (The bowl and water filter may be borrowed. The robes must be one's own.). These are all determined by the abbot and oneself. Both hold their left hands below each article and right hands above it, and do a recitation to determine the article as being one's object of use. It is explained that the robes are to distinguish one from lay people and members of other sects and to protect one from insects and the elements. One should consider them as being only for these purposes (not for beautifying oneself). The purpose of the other articles is explained, i.e. the bowl for eating food, the dingwa to distinguish one as a Buddhist monastic and to protect the community's property when sitting, the water filter to prevent killing insects when using water. One is aware that now one is shaving the head and leaving the householder's life. One's hair is cut (prior to coming to the ceremony, one's head is shaved, leaving a small tuft at the crown, which is cut now), after which flowers or rice are thrown to rejoice at one's leaving the householder's life.

One prostrates to the Buddha and the abbot, and then kneels. The abbot advises: "It is excellent to be ordained. There is a great difference between lay and ordained people. All the Buddhas of the three times become enlightened only on the basis of ordination. There are none who do so from the basis of a lay person. One accumulates infinitely more positive potential (merit) by taking one step towards the monastery with the thought of ordaining than do the sentient beings of the three worlds by making offerings, even of their spouses and children, for eons. Due to the distractions of lay life, lay people are unable to accomplish very meaningful or helpful things for the future. From this, only future suffering can arise. Through abandoning these

activities and having few possessions, ordained people can cultivate hearing, thinking and meditating. From this, both temporary happiness and ultimate nirvana can be reached. One is following in the footsteps of the Buddha himself." While listening to this advice, have a mind of faith and belief in the abbot, seeing him as a wise parent and oneself as the son or daughter.

Upon taking rabjung, one abandons the signs (dress, hair, etc.) and name of lay life. One takes the name given by the abbot.

## **2. Actual**

The actual recitation involves first taking refuge. Then, one recites "Following the matchless lion of the Shakyas, from now until I die, I take up the signs and clothes of an ordained one and abandon those of a lay person." Most important is to feel strongly in one's mind that one has received the rabjung ordination.

From now on, one should keep the discipline, wear only the monastic robes, abandon lay clothes, respect the abbot, not wear white or black clothes, fringes, sleeves, ornaments, or jewels, and not have long hair. One should eat at correct times and see the abbot as a parent (and the abbot should regard one as if one were his own child, i.e. the abbot helps to raise the disciple to become strong and healthy in the Dharma and as a member of the sangha.)

## **Taking the sramanera/sramanerika vow**

### **A. Preparation**

Here one requires a chogu (yellow patched robe). One should be free from the four obstacles:

1. Incorrect place, i.e. the Three Jewels should be there.
2. Incorrect lineage, i.e. one should not have wrong views such as not believing in karma, etc.
3. Incorrect marks, i.e. one should wear ordained clothing.
4. Incorrect thought, i.e. abandon thinking:
5. I will take the vow only for a few months or years, but not for my life;
6. I will keep the precepts only in one place, but not in another;
7. I will keep the precepts in conducive circumstances, but not in bad circumstances;
8. I will keep some precepts, but not all of them;
9. I will keep them when I am with certain people, but not with others.

The abbot explains the proper motivation, which is the determination to become free from cyclic existence: "Cyclic existence is completely unsatisfactory. Any realm one is born into, any companions one has, any possessions one obtains are unsatisfactory and do not bring lasting happiness. Therefore, develop the determination to become free from cyclic existence and to attain liberation. The method to do this is to take refuge in the Triple Gem and to take and keep the precepts." It is very important to have this attitude; otherwise, it is difficult for the vow to arise.

## **B. Actual**

The vow is then taken by repeating verses after the abbot. At the end, one thinks strongly that one has received the vow in one's mind and rejoices.

## **3. Conclusion**

A bhikshu, who acts as the lopon (acharya), checks and announces the exact time of ordination. From this, one will know where to sit in groups of sangha. One should prostrate and show respect to those who are older in ordination. One does not prostrate to those younger or to lay people. There is much benefit from keeping this practice of order and respect.

Having received the vow, one should now try to live according to it. As the Buddha said:

For some ethical discipline is joy,  
For some ethical discipline is misery.  
Possessing the ethical discipline is joy,  
Transgressing the ethical discipline is misery.

Then repeat some words after the abbot promising to keep the discipline of the ten precepts (the four root and six secondary precepts) just as the arhats of the past have done. The sangha present then say prayers of auspiciousness and throw flowers or rice. Finish by prostrating to the abbot and all the bhikshus present.

## **The Sramanera/Sramanerika Precepts**

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### **The Ten Precepts**

The sramanera/sramanerika (novice) vow consist of ten precepts, which can be listed in a more expanded way as thirty-six precepts. The ten are to abandon:

1. killing (To break from the root, one must kill a human being with intention);
2. taking what is not given (stealing) (To break from the root, one must steal something that could bring about legal intervention in one's society);
3. sexual intercourse (To break from the root, one must have intention and experience orgasm. This refers to heterosexual or homosexual contact.);
4. lying (To break from the root, one must lie about one's spiritual attainments);
5. taking intoxicants (This includes alcohol and recreational drugs);
6. singing, dancing, playing music;
7. wearing perfume, ornaments or cosmetics to beautify the body;
8. sitting on a high or expensive bed or throne;
9. eating after midday;
10. touching gold, silver or precious objects (including money).

Precepts 1-4 are root precepts and deal with actions that are by nature negative. Precepts 6-10 are branch precepts and deal with actions that are to be avoided because of a precept established by the Buddha.

### **The Thirty-six Precepts**

One should avoid:

1. taking a human life;
2. killing an animal or insect;
3. for selfish reasons, doing an action which may kill an animal or insect and not caring about it; for example, using water that contains insects without straining it; digging a hole in the earth without considering the creatures that might die as a result; cutting grass; overburdening an animal, which causes its death;
4. while doing something for others, doing an action which may kill an animal or insect and not caring about it; for example, splashing water which has insects on a

- dry place;
5. sexual intercourse;
  6. stealing, taking what has not been given. This includes borrowing things and not returning them, not paying fees and taxes one is required to;
  7. lying in which one claims to have spiritual realizations or powers that one does not have;
  8. accusing a pure bhikshu or bhikshuni of transgressing one of the four root precepts (parajika) when he or she has not;
  9. insinuating that a pure bhikshu or bhikshuni has transgressed one of the four root precepts when he or she has not;
  10. causing disunity among the sangha community through untrue slander or taking sides in a disagreement;
  11. supporting someone who is creating disunity in the sangha community, taking sides in the dispute;
  12. doing actions which obliterate lay people's faith in the sangha; for example complaining untruthfully to lay people that action brought by the sangha against oneself was unfair;
  13. telling others lies;
  14. criticizing the storekeeper in the monastery of giving more to those who are near to him or her instead of sharing them with all, when this is not the case;
  15. criticizing directly or by insinuation that the storekeeper in the monastery of not giving oneself a share of the food or other things equal to that given to other monastics, when this is not the case;
  16. claiming that a monastic gave a teaching in return for a little food, which is not the case;
  17. criticizing a bhikshu or bhikshuni by saying that he or she transgressed a precept in the second group (sanghavesesa) when this is not the case;
  18. abandoning the training, for example, rejecting the good advice of a nun or monk; criticizing the Pratimoksha Sutra;
  19. covering the vegetables with rice; covering the rice with vegetables;
  20. taking intoxicants;
  21. singing with self-attachment or for nonsensical reasons;
  22. dancing with self-attachment or for nonsensical reasons;
  23. playing music with self-attachment or for nonsensical reasons;
  24. wearing ornaments;
  25. wearing cosmetics;
  26. wearing perfumes;
  27. wearing the rosary like jewelry, wearing flower garlands;
  28. sitting on an expensive throne;
  29. sitting on an expensive bed;

- 30. sitting on a high throne;
- 31. sitting on a high bed;
- 32. eating after midday (Exceptions: if one is ill, if one is traveling, or if one cannot meditate properly without food.);
- 33. touching gold, silver or precious jewels (includes money);
- 34. wearing lay people's clothing and ornaments; letting one's hair grow long;
- 35. not wearing the robes of a Buddhist monastic;
- 36. disrespecting or not following the guidance of one's ordination master. (Precepts 34-36 are called the three degenerating actions.)

### **Five Conditions Conducive to Keeping One's Precepts**

- 1. External: cultivate a relationship with a spiritual mentor who keeps pure ethical discipline and who knows the Vinaya well, and rely on his/her teachings.
- 2. Internal: develop mindfulness and introspective alertness with a pure motivation.
- 3. Know the actions that one has to abstain from.
- 4. Attend the sojung ceremony to purify and restore the training precepts.
- 5. Rely on conducive circumstances (shelter, clothes, food, medicine, etc.).

### **The Ten Precepts as Explained by Thich Nhat Hanh**

- 1. Do not kill living beings (any creatures that move and breathe). Have compassion and love all beings as a mother loves her children. Do not yourself kill or tell anyone else to kill. Do not eat meat from animals that have been killed. When you are overwhelmed by impatience, practice mindfulness and do not say: "It would be better if he were dead!" or wish silently that someone were dead. Consider all beings as your own marrow, your parents, your children or yourself. Embrace all of them in your heart with love, and wish all of them liberation from suffering.
- 2. Do not steal even a small amount of money or things of little value like hay, wool or grain. Do not take anything which the legitimate owner has not given you. Do not talk or think too much about buying things. Do not be carried away by beautiful forms, sounds, scents or tastes so that you feel you have to have them. Do not crave for clothes. Guard the six senses.
- 3. Keep your heart and your body pure. Do not talk or think about sexual behavior in a way which waters the seeds of sexual desire. When your mind is not attached it is as free as space and knows no obstacles. Be mindful of the six senses. Your body is made of the four great elements: earth, water, fire and air. Your body is

not you and is always changing. It is better to keep your mind and your heart free from attachment.

4. Speak only after thinking. Do not spread news that you have not witnessed with your own eyes or heard with your own ears. Do not fabricate stories or help others to fabricate. Do not dispute about politics and the situation in the world. Devote yourself to studying the precepts and mindful manners. The most important thing to attain is liberation from suffering. Do not waste your energy in talking about less important things.
5. Monks and nuns are not allowed any kind of alcoholic drinks or intoxicants. Wine ruins virtue, the family, our health and our life. Someone who is under the influence of alcohol and drugs does not have the clarity of mind to meditate and practice mindfulness. If we continue to drink and take drugs, we shall be bound to the wheel of samsara.
6. Do not adorn yourself with garlands of flowers, perfumes, jewelry, luxurious or colorful clothes and attractive accessories. Clothes must be simple and dark in color. Be humble and walk with your head lowered. Instead of thinking about perfumes and garlands, practice transforming the unwholesome mental concomitants, and be eager to realize the truth through the teachings in order to bring happiness to beings.
7. Novices are not allowed to use high seats ornamented with gold, silver and precious fabrics. Do not desire such luxury, talk about it or make efforts to acquire it. Do not use elegant mats, painted fans, bracelets or rings. Liberation from suffering is much more important than these things. You should practice the path of understanding, be diligent in meditation, grow in stability, and learn to let go.
8. Do not let yourself be carried away by listening to music and watching dancing. Your body should be used for serving the Dharma and not sense pleasures. Use music to honor the Buddha and chant sutras. Let your joy be healthy and not cause you to be caught in the world. Reading the sutras and meditating on the deep meaning is a great pleasure. Do not use cars unnecessarily. Free yourself from attachment, and focus on complete freedom and the vehicle which will take you out of the fear of impermanence.
9. Do not accumulate or talk with craving about money or precious things. You have started on the path to perfect purity. The Dharma is your most precious treasure, and your daily task is to understand more deeply its meaning. Letting go will free you from ill-being. The practice of letting go is something you can do for the whole of your life. If you enjoy that practice, it will remove all the obstacles.
10. Do not eat too much. Do not eat or invite others to eat when the community is not eating. Do not eat just because the food looks good. Take the foods which keep you in good health. The joy of meditation is an important spiritual food.

## Biographies of the Contributors

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In alphabetical order:

Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron

Thubten Chodron graduated from UCLA, taught elementary school, and pursued graduate courses in Education. In 1975, she began practicing Buddhism with Ven. Zopa Rinpoche and later with Tsenzhab Serkong Rinpoche. In 1977, she received sramanerika ordination and in 1986, bhikshuni ordination. She studied and worked as spiritual director at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa in Italy and Dorje Pamo Monastery in France, and was the resident teacher at Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Singapore. She currently teaches at Dharma Friendship Foundation in Seattle, USA, and in 2002 will begin a monastery in the USA, Sravasti Abbey at Liberation Park, with Santikaro Bhikkhu. Her books include *Open Heart, Clear Mind*; *Working with Anger*, and *Buddhism for Beginners*.

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## Bhikshu Thich Nhat Hanh

Born in central Vietnam in the mid-1920's, he became a monk at the age of 16. When war came to his country, he and his fellow monks faced the difficult choice of remaining in monastic isolation or entering society in order to help war victims. They chose both-to meditate while helping victims of the war. Thich Nhat Hanh founded the School of Youth for Social Service, which engaged 30,000 young people working with war victims and helping rebuild the countryside. In 1966, he toured the U.S. to speak out against the war and was nominated by Dr. Martin Luther King for the Nobel Peace Prize. In the 1970's he served as Chairman of the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris. Today Thich Nhat Hanh heads Plum Village, a community of meditators and activists in southern France.

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Bhikshu Tenzin Josh

From England, Tenzin Josh ordained several years ago in the Tibetan tradition. He has spent some time living in Theravada monasteries in Thailand. He currently studies at the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics in Dharamsala, India.

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Bhikshuni Tenzin Kacho

Japanese-American, Tenzin Kacho was raised in an Asian-American environment in Hawaii and experienced the blending of many different cultures, religions, and traditions. She was first introduced to Tibetan Buddhism in 1971 in Hawaii and in 1975 she went to India for a year to further her studies. As a single mother, she raised a daughter, and when her daughter was grown, Tenzin Kacho took sramanerika ordination in 1985. She studied with Geshe Tsultrim Gyaltzen and was president of Thubten Dhargye Ling Buddhist Center in Los Angeles. In 1994 she took bhikshuni ordination in the Vietnamese tradition. She lives alternately in the U.S. at various Dharma centers and in Dharamsala at Geden Choling Nunnery.

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His Holiness the Dalai Lama

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, is the spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan people. Born to a peasant family, he was recognized at the age of two as the reincarnation of the XIII Dalai Lama. His Holiness has traveled extensively, speaking on such subjects as universal responsibility, love, kindness, and compassion, and his books have been published in a variety of Western languages. His Holiness was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

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## Bhikshu Gendun Rinpoche

Born in Tibet, Gendun Rinpoche studied and did retreat for many years before fleeing to India after the Chinese takeover of Tibet. He received the full Kagyu lineage transmission from the Karmapa and did ten years of retreat in Kalimpong, India. In 1975, the Karmapa sent Gendun Rinpoche to establish his European headquarters at Dhagpo Kagyu Ling in France. He lived there for ten years and traveled to teach at other European Dharma centers. He then went to Le Bost, France, where he is now abbot of Kundreul Ling, a monastery and retreat center.

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Upasaka Guy Rom

Guy Rom was born in Israel and became interested in Buddhism while visiting India and Nepal in the early 1990s. His principal teacher is Lati Rinpoche, and he has studied and practiced in Dharamsala as well as South India for several years.

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## Luminary Temple

A monastery and Buddhist institute established by Bhikshuni Master Wu Yin, the Luminary Temple has approximately 100 nuns who study, teach, and practice the Dharma in the temple's various branches in Taiwan.

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Lekshe Tsomo received her M.A. in Asian Studies from the University of Hawaii in 1971. She studied for five years at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives and several years at the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, both in Dharamsala. In 1977, she received sramanerika ordination and in 1982 bhikshuni ordination. She established Jamyang Choling Nunnery in Dharamsala, is a founding member of Sakyadhita and is currently completing her Ph.D. thesis at the University of Hawaii.

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## Glossary

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**Abbot:** the one who gives the disciples the monastic precepts.

**Bhikshu:** male fully-ordained monk.

**Bhikshuni:** female fully-ordained nun.

**Chogu:** upper yellow robe made of seven strips of patches.

**Defeat:** see parajika.

**Donka:** vest.

**Gatha:** a brief saying to recite and contemplate that helps one to maintain mindfulness of one's activities.

**Kerag:** belt.

**Mala:** prayer beads, rosary.

**Meyog:** underskirt.

**Monastic:** a general term for a monk or nun. This includes one who is a sramanera, sramanerika, bhikshu, or bhikshuni.

**Namcha:** upper yellow robe made of up to 25 strips of patches, worn by bhikshus and bhikshunis only.

**Ngullen:** shirt.

**Ordination ceremony:** the ceremony during which one takes Buddhist precepts.

**Parajika:** A root precept for bhikshus and bhikshunis. A full transgression means one is defeated and is no longer a monastic.

**Pratimoksa vows:** the vows of individual liberation. They are of eight kinds: 1) bhikshu, 2) bhikshuni, 3) shiksamana, 4) sramanera, 5) sramanerika 6) upasaka, 7) upasika, 8) one-day vow with eight precepts.

**Pratimoksa Sutra:** the sutra containing the list of bhikshu or bhikshuni precepts.

**Precept:** a guideline or rule for training one's body, speech, or mind.

**Rabjung:** leaving the householder's life.

**Sanghavasesa:** the second most serious categories of precepts for bhikshu and bhikshunis.

**Shiksamana:** female nun who holds the novice precepts plus six additional regulations for two years and is preparing to become a bhikshuni.

**Sramanera:** male novice monk with ten (subdivided into 36) precepts.

**Sramanerika:** female novice nun with ten (subdivided into 36) precepts.

**Shamtab:** lower robe.

**Upasaka:** male lay follower of the Buddha who has taken refuge and often lay precepts.

**Upasika:** female lay follower of the Buddha who has taken refuge and often lay precepts.

**Vinaya Pitaka:** one of three categories or baskets of the Buddha's teachings. Its topic concerns monastic precepts and the functioning of the sangha community.

**Zen:** upper shawl.

## Suggested Reading

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