



## The Karmapa

When I was first asked to write a letter supporting bhikṣuṇī ordination for Tibetan nuns, my initial reaction was, “No. Letters are not enough. I must do more.” In terms of simply expressing my support for full ordination for women, since Lord Buddha himself already expressed his complete support by granting his permission for women to become fully ordained members of the sangha he himself created, it is absurd for someone like me to add my voice in support. Yet the matter of bhikṣuṇī ordination is not widely understood within the Tibetan community. Since I bear the name of Karmapa, it seems I also bear some responsibility to assist in clarifying the topic.

Lord Buddha offered women the opportunity to become full members of his monastic sangha and created the entire set of bhikṣuṇī vows for them, because bhikṣuṇī vows are the most effective foundation on which women can strive for liberation and enlightenment. Today, women around the world continue to suffer, as do men. They continue to yearn for release from suffering, and many women are sincerely striving for liberation following the path pointed out by Lord Buddha. As Mahayana practitioners we have a serious responsibility to offer women the best possible conditions for reaching liberation and enlightenment. We generate bodhichitta aspirations and recite prayers for all beings to become enlightened. If after that we fail to offer all possible opportunities to women sincerely seeking to do so, there is a danger that our prayers become mere words, and we may need to ask ourselves just how deep our commitment to the bodhisattva path really is.

For three decades, the supreme example of bodhisattva action in the world—His Holiness the Dalai Lama—has had research done, held conferences and generally encouraged us Tibetans to determine how we might make bhikṣuṇī ordination available to nuns in our Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya tradition. His Holiness has repeatedly stressed the importance of having all four circles of disciples—bhikṣus, bhikṣuṇīs, lay male and lay female practitioners—in order to make Tibet and India once again central lands for the flourishing of Buddhadharma. A great deal of progress has been made and a number of promising options for conferring bhikṣuṇī ordination according to the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya have been identified. Yet it seems we, His Holiness’ disciples and followers, have not moved in the direction he indicated and have not yet acted to fulfil his wishes in this regard.

It is up to all of us together to support the fulfilment of the wishes of our supreme guide, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. During a Dharma activity in Bodhgaya two years ago, I publicly stated my personal commitment to bring about bhikṣuṇī ordination for Tibetan nuns. Although it is clear that there are technical issues still to be resolved, I continue to believe that within the vast ocean of Buddha’s compassion, infinite skilful means await us. What each of us needs to offer today is our willingness to apply those means. I invite you to join with me in working to do so.

Ogyen Trinley Dorje

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