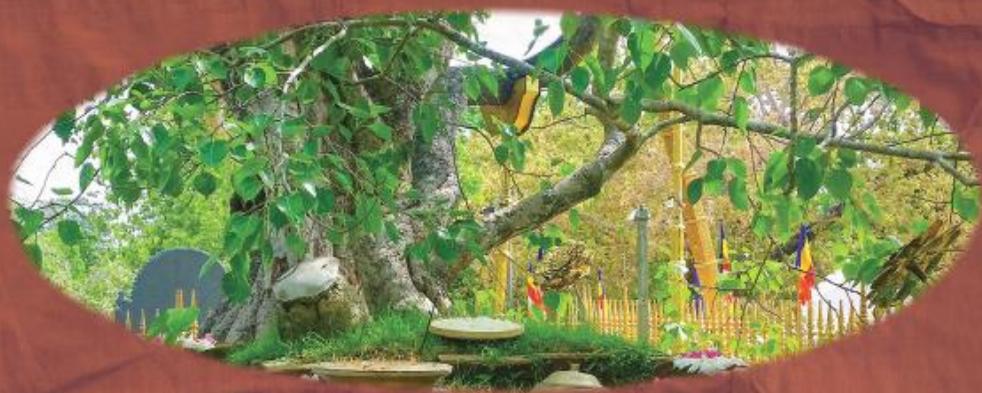


# *Bhikkhunī Ordination*

## හික්ඛුණී පැවිද්ද

*From Ancient India to Contemporary Sri Lanka*

පුරාණ ඉන්දියාවේ පටන් වර්තමාන ශ්‍රී ලංකාව දක්වා



BHIKKHU ANĀLAYO

හික්ඛු අනාලයෝ

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Bhikkhu Anālayo  
හික්ඛු අනාලයෝ

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Forewords by Bhante Guṇaratana,  
Bhikkhu Bodhi, and Ajahn Brahmavamso

පෙරවදන්: හේතේපොළ ගුණරත්න නා හිමි,  
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Cover image: the Śrī Mahā Bodhi Tree at Anuradhapura, grown from the sapling brought by Bhikkhunī Saṅghamittā from India

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## Foreword by Bhante Guṇaratana

Any impartial observer can notice that in all Buddhist countries women always are taking leading roles in almost all Buddhist activities—offering alms, offering robes, observing full moon and new moon celebrations, listening to Dhamma sermons, listening to Paritta chanting, attending meditation retreats, etc. They support monasteries and monastics with utmost devotion and dedication. They serve spreading Buddha Dhamma by teaching children basic Buddhist devotional practices, ethics, morals, and Buddhist culture before they go to school.

All Buddhist monks should be grateful to Buddhist women for all the service they render to uphold Buddhist principles. The twenty-first century would stand as a milestone in Buddhist history if all leading head monks would recognize currently ordained *bhikkhunīs* and accord them the same status as *bhikkhus*. Political leaders would be wise and compassionate to grant them their due place in the society. Everyone in Sri Lanka has a national ID card. Unfortunately, Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* do not have a *bhikkhunī* ID card. They have no way to prove that they have been ordained as *bhikkhunīs*.

Sri Lanka is well known for taking leadership in preserving Buddhism from the day of its introduction to Sri Lanka by the Venerable Arahant Mahinda in the third century B.C.E. up to this day in spite of all obstacles and difficulties. In the modern history of spreading Buddha Dhamma in the west, Sri Lanka took the leadership in establishing the first Theravāda Buddhist Vihāra in Washington D.C. in 1965. Since then all other Theravāda Buddhist countries gradually established their own Buddhist temples in the West. Now there are Theravāda Buddhist temples in almost every state of the United States.

This is a time when recognition of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha is more essential than ever before, due to the fact that fewer laymen enter the Bhikkhu Saṅgha and more and more ordained *bhikkhus* leave the robe soon after or even before they graduate

from universities. According to available resources there are approximately 7,000 ordained female Saṅgha members in Sri Lanka. Several thousands of them are *bhikkhunīs* fully ordained by both Saṅghas—the Bhikkhu Saṅgha and the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. If they are duly acknowledged by the most venerable Mahānāyaka Theras of all major sects and by the government, they can replenish the gap created by the *bhikkhus* who leave the Bhikkhu Saṅgha and by the fact that not many laymen nowadays take *bhikkhu* ordination. If the Sri Lankan government and the most venerable Mahānāyaka Theras sincerely wish to uphold Buddha Dhamma and prevent Buddhism from disappearing from Sri Lanka, this is the time for them to come to terms with their own conscience, overcome their objections to *bhikkhunī* ordination and accept these dedicated monastics as legitimately ordained *bhikkhunīs* who will serve Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Even without due recognition these *bhikkhunīs* are already rendering enormous service to Buddhism.

It would be a great honor for Sri Lanka if the most Venerable Sri Lankan head monks of all sects gave their blessings by recognizing the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha and advise the government to recognize them as legitimately ordained *bhikkhunīs* following the same convention of higher ordination that *bhikkhus* follow. There is no legitimate reason for denying them this recognition. The Sri Lankan leading venerable monks would be highly respected by all fair-minded people if they overcome their resistance to *bhikkhuni* ordination and recognize the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha.

Venerable Bhikkhu Anālayo's scholarly research on the historical development of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha from the time of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's ordination as a *bhikkhunī* up to the modern controversial state of *bhikkhunī* ordination has given sufficient reasons for re-establishing the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in this century, when Buddhism is widely and quickly spreading throughout the world.

## Foreword by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Today Theravāda Buddhism in Asia is at a crossroads. It faces a grave problem, and the way it responds will determine whether its adherents can effectively deliver the Buddha's liberating message to the modern world. The problem is the absence—or shadowy status—of a Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, an order of fully ordained nuns, in the countries that follow this ancient Buddhist tradition. Critical inquirers will inevitably ask—as many already have: “How can Theravādin Buddhists speak of ‘liberation’ when they won't let their women take the essential step that culminates in that goal?”

To be sure, starting in the late 1990s, measures have been adopted to revive the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, and in Sri Lanka an impressive number of women have taken full ordination (*upasampadā*) and live together in communities that are ardently supported by the lay devotees. For female lay followers in particular, the presence of *bhikkhunīs* has been like a cool breeze on a hot tropical afternoon. Liberal-minded *bhikkhus*, too, back their ordained sisters and insist on the legitimacy of their place in the Saṅgha. However, recognition has not come from the places where it counts most: from the chief monastic prelates and the government.

The Mahānāyaka Theras in Sri Lanka—the heads of the major Nikāyas—have been conspicuous by their silence or their vocal opposition to the ordination of women. The government, too, following the Mahānāyaka Theras, has not granted them recognition. In Thailand and Myanmar Buddhist women face still stronger opposition. Thailand has a small number of women living as *bhikkhunīs*, but their status has been flatly rejected by the Saṅgha hierarchs and the country's monastic law prohibits *bhikkhus* from participating in a *bhikkhunī* ordination. In Myanmar, to my knowledge there are no *bhikkhunīs* at all, or at least none who openly declare themselves as such.

This conservative resistance clashes both with the Buddha's own intention and with the spirit of our age. Despite his initial hesitation about creating a female order, once he proceeded with this step, the Buddha often celebrated the role the *bhikkhunīs* played in preserving and disseminating his teaching. Many of the *bhikkhunīs* distinguished themselves by their wisdom, learning, and meditative skills, and the historical records of Buddhism during its early centuries testify to their vitality. No doubt, since these records were largely composed by monks, much was passed over in silence, and the lives of many eminent *bhikkhunīs* are hidden forever in the dark corridors of history.

The Buddha's affirmative attitude towards female monastics corresponds in many respects to the spirit of our own time. Today women have been participating in almost every domain of communal life, holding positions that were formerly considered the unique prerogative of men. They serve as surgeons, attorneys, business executives, senators, and parliamentarians. In all three major Theravāda countries, women have ascended to the highest office of government. Yet despite these advances in women's status in secular life, in those same countries the full ordination of women still lacks official recognition. If the Asian countries following Theravāda Buddhism are to fully step into the modern world, it is clear they must explicitly permit women to receive full ordination, and that ordination has to be endorsed and upheld by the Saṅgha elders.

For outsiders the resistance the elders have shown to the ordination of *bhikkhunīs* gives the impression that Theravāda Buddhism is a patriarchal system intent on preventing women from living the spiritual life to the full. Yet, while patriarchal attitudes may be involved, it would be a mistake to think that opposition to the ordination of women is principally due to gender bias. Three of my own teachers, back in the 1980s, were opposed to women's ordination, and yet I am confident they had no bias against women, and in fact were deeply regretful that or-

dination was not available to them. The major stumbling block has not been male bias but the prevailing interpretation of the *Vinaya* rules concerning women's ordination.

The sixth *garudhamma*, or major guideline, laid down for *bhikkhunī* ordination requires that a candidate must be ordained by both branches of the monastic community, the Bhikkhu Saṅgha and the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. However, in the course of history, at some point during its sojourn in Sri Lanka—perhaps in the eleventh century—the continuity of *bhikkhunī* ordination was interrupted, probably during a time of political turbulence. Thereafter, based on the sixth *garudhamma*, the *Vinaya* authorities decided that *bhikkhunī* ordination was no longer possible. As they saw it, since ordination had to be conferred by a Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, and the transmission was now broken, there was simply no way to revive the order of fully ordained Buddhist women.

Like a giant boulder that rolls down a hill and blocks a narrow mountain road, for centuries this interpretation prevented earnest Theravādin women from fulfilling their aspirations to lead the complete holy life. Instead, they had to be content with secondary types of renunciant status: as *dasasil mātās* in Sri Lanka, as *thila shins* in Myanmar, and as *mae chis* in Thailand. Many merely took eight precepts and lived with their families as lay renunciants. And with this they had settled for some nine centuries, resigned to a status determined by a narrow and in many ways exclusionary reading of the *Vinaya*.

Yet come the late twentieth century and the picture changed. As the status of women improved and they were increasingly granted moral, social, and legal equality with men, the interpretation of the *Vinaya* that prevented women from obtaining full ordination came to appear increasingly unfair, unjust, and unjustifiable. Among a small number of determined women, an unquenchable aspiration for full ordination took root and sought a way to its fulfillment. Yet, if the ordination of women was to be restored, it had to be done in a way that respected the integrity of the *Vinaya*, not in a way that flagrantly rejected its authority.

In time, as a result of sustained inquiry, two means were found to circumvent this obstacle without contravening the legal requirements of the *Vinaya*. One, which was adopted in a grand ordination ceremony held at Bodhgayā in India in 1998, drew upon *bhikkhunīs* from Taiwan to fulfill the role of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha required by the ordination procedure.

However, because these *bhikkhunīs* came from a different *Vinaya* lineage from the Theravāda—from the Dharmaguptaka lineage established long ago in China—and because the *bhikkhus* in the ordination were of mixed school affiliations, technically, as Bhikkhu Anālayo maintains, they could not be considered Theravāda *bhikkhunīs*. Nevertheless, as a result of this ordination, they were also no longer lay followers, novices, or (in the case of the Sri Lankans) *dasasil mātās*. They were now *bhikkhunīs*, albeit of the Dharmaguptaka tradition. The challenge was to induct them into the Theravāda tradition.

To achieve this, the second method was employed. Right after the dual ordination at Bodhgayā, the Sri Lankan *bhikkhus* brought the newly ordained women to Sarnath for a second ordination, which they conducted on their own, in Pāli, following the procedure laid down in the Pāli *Vinaya*. This ordination was based upon a stipulation that the Buddha had made at the very foundation of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha: “I authorize the giving of the higher ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*.” Since the Buddha never abrogated this rule, the Sri Lankan *bhikkhus* maintained it could still be considered valid, and it was on this ground that they conferred the second ordination on the Sri Lankan women.

It is principally from this ordination, held twenty years ago, that the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha sent down roots in Sri Lanka and attracted candidates in Sri Lanka and from elsewhere. Today, stemming from this ordination, there are now vibrant groups of Theravāda *bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal, Vietnam, and Indonesia, as well as in several Western countries.

Still, however, the Theravāda countries have not granted official recognition and support to *bhikkhunīs*. This remains a glaring omission, and thus there is need for solid, scholarly, text-based arguments to justify the revival of *bhikkhunī* ordination. In this treatise, Bhikkhu Anālayo uses his vast scholarly knowledge of the canonical texts to fulfill that need. His investigations go back to the very origins of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, shedding new light on disputed questions. As he shows, the Buddha saw that his Sāsana would only be complete when it included members of all four communities: *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunīs*, male lay followers, and female lay followers. A Sāsana with only three communities—missing an order of *bhikkhunīs*—would be like an elephant with three legs.

Now that a method has been found to restore the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha to its honored place, it is incumbent on Buddhist monastic leaders to put aside their doubts and objections and throw the weight of their authority behind the newly emergent order of *bhikkhunīs*. It is only in this way that the *bhikkhunīs* can flourish, and it is only with an order of *bhikkhunīs* that the Sāsana itself can flourish. If Buddhism is to win the respect of people throughout the world, it is necessary to show that Theravāda Buddhism affirms the worth and full spiritual potentials of women. This can only be done by recognizing the validity of *bhikkhunī* ordination. Means of conferring the ordination now exist. It is time for those who bear responsibility for the well-being of the Saṅgha to openly endorse them.

## Foreword by Ajahn Brahmavamso

Māra, the Evil One, attempted to stop the Lord Buddha from spreading the Dhamma by encouraging the Lord Buddha's Parinibbāna while He was still at Bodhgayā (Uruvelā). The Lord Buddha refused, stating that the Parinibbāna would occur only after the four Buddhist groups had been well established, and were flourishing and capable. It was the Lord Buddha's mission to create these four groups, the Bhikkhu Saṅgha, the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, lay men followers and lay women followers. Unhappily, the second Buddhist group, the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, is not flourishing because it is not formally recognised. I believe this carefully researched book by Bhikkhu Anālayo is an important contribution towards restoring what the Lord Buddha worked so hard to establish but is now mostly lost: a flourishing and capable Bhikkhunī Saṅgha.

An elephant, a great tusker, with only three legs can only proceed unsteadily. It would never be trusted with bearing a Great Relic, such as the inspiring Tooth Relic, of the Lord Buddha. Similarly, when the modern-day disciples of the Lord Buddha in Sri Lanka heroically carry forward the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha, they will only struggle unsteadily when they are missing one leg.

Indeed, as every Sri Lankan Buddhist knows, the Bhikkhunī Saṅghamittā brought the sapling of the Śrī Mahā Bodhi Tree to Anuradhapura 23 centuries ago. The great tree remains, but the lineage of Saṅghamittā, the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, does not. May it be properly recognised to bring a new Golden Age of Dhamma to the ancestral home of Theravāda Buddhism, Sri Lanka.

## Introduction

In what follows I bring together my research on *bhikkhunī* ordination, published in various articles, in order to present a comprehensive and continuous account of this topic from ancient to modern times.

In the first chapter I examine passages from the Pāli discourses on the four assemblies of the Buddha's disciples, which set the background for appreciating the significance of the existence of an order of *bhikkhunīs*.

In the second chapter I take up the account in the *Cullavagga* in the Pāli *Vinaya* of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's ordination by accepting eight *garudhammas*, "principles to be respected", which I study in more detail in the third chapter. Here and elsewhere, references to subsections of the Pāli *Vinaya* are according to the PTS edition.

With the fourth to sixth chapters I continue examining the evolution of *bhikkhunī* ordination as reported in the *Cullavagga*, covering the ordination of the Sakyan women (followers of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī) by *bhikkhus* only, ordination in two stages, and ordination by messenger.

In the seventh and last chapter I turn to the transmission of *bhikkhunī* ordination from India to Sri Lanka and from Sri Lanka to China. My main sources for studying the transmission to Sri Lanka is the chronicle *Dīpavaṃsa* and for the transmission to China the relevant sources in the Taishō edition of the Chinese canonical scriptures. In addition, I also examine the revival of *bhikkhunī* ordination in Sri Lanka.

In the conclusion, I relate the significance of the revival of *bhikkhunī* ordination to the revival of lay meditation in Theravāda societies in the past century.

In a monograph with the title *The Foundation History of the Nuns' Order*, I have translated and compared the different *Vinaya* accounts of how the order of *bhikkhunīs* came into existence (Anālayo 2016). Although on a few occasions in my

present exploration I refer to my comparative findings, in what follows my main concern is rather to develop a coherent reading of the Pāli canonical report. My aim is to understand the *Cullavagga* account on its own terms and in its relevance to Theravāda monastic law.

For this reason, my study focuses on the Pāli canonical sources and I will take up information found in the commentaries or in parallel versions only when this seems opportune as supplementary to my main discussion. From the viewpoint of Theravāda jurisprudence, the text of the Pāli *Vinaya* is the central reference point for deciding legal matters and therefore invested with foremost authority; Pāli commentaries and sub-commentaries are of comparably less authority and *Vinayas* of other Buddhist schools are not of direct relevance.

For the sake of transparency, I provide the Pāli original of key canonical passages before presenting my English translation. In this way I hope to enable readers familiar with Pāli to check the accuracy of my translation, which in turn forms the starting point of my ensuing discussions. As the Pāli passages are in italics, I hope that readers who do not wish to consult the original will find it easy to skip the parts not relevant to their interests.

In the Pāli *Vinaya* the rules are embedded in a narrative context which often, although not invariably, can help one to understand their implications and significance (Brahmāli and Anālayo 2017). In what follows I attempt to uncover such significance by presenting, to the best of my abilities, a coherent interpretation of the narrative background to the rules on ordaining *bhikkhunis*.

My aim throughout is to facilitate a better understanding of what underpins the twentieth century revival of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, a development I believe to be of major significance for Theravāda Buddhism now and in the future.

## The Four Assemblies

The expression “four assemblies” refers to a basic division of the Community of Buddhist disciples into monastic and lay, and into male and female. Hence the full set of four assemblies comprises:

- *bhikkhus*,
- *bhikkhunīs*,
- male lay followers,
- female lay followers.

### THE MAHĀPARINIBBĀNA-SUTTA

The importance of these four emerges from a passage in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya* (discourse 16 in the collection). The passage records a statement made by the Buddha at what appears to have been a very early time in his teaching activities, soon after his awakening. In this statement, the Buddha told Māra that he would not pass away until he had achieved his mission of having competent disciples from each of the four assemblies.

For the case of the *bhikkhunīs*, the statement reads as follows:

*na tāvāhaṃ, pāpima, parinibbāyissāmi, yāva me bhikkhuniyo na sāvikā bhavissanti viyattā vinītā visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā dhammānudhammappaṭiṭṭhānā sāmīcīpaṭiṭṭhānā anudhammacārīniyo, sakaṃ ācariya-kam uggahetvā ācikkhissanti desessanti paññāpessanti paṭṭhapessanti vivarissanti vibhajissanti uttānīkarissanti, uppannaṃ parappavādaṃ saha dhammena sunīggahītaṃ nīggahetvā sappāṭihāriyaṃ dhammaṃ desessantī ti.*

Evil One, I will not enter final Nibbāna for as long as my *bhikkhunī* disciples are not competent, disciplined, confident, learned, upholders of Dhamma, practitioners

of the Dhamma in conformity with the Dhamma, practising in the proper way, and living in conformity with the Dhamma; who, having learned it from their own teacher, will explain it, teach it, declare it, establish it, disclose it, analyze it, and reveal it; and, having well refuted with Dhamma the tenets of others that have arisen, will teach the Dhamma with wonderful effect.

This statement implies that the Buddha had from the outset planned to have *bhikkhunīs* among his disciples. In other words, the granting of the going forth and higher ordination to female aspirants was an integral dimension of the Buddha's mission from its beginning. This was a necessary requirement for the coming into being of accomplished *bhikkhunīs* in the way described in the passage quoted above. According to the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, the Buddha felt this to be of such importance that he was determined not to pass away until he had achieved it.

The importance this statement carries in the Theravāda tradition is reflected in the fact that it recurs again in other discourse collections in the Pāli canon, namely in the *Iddhipāda-saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* (discourse 10), among the Eights of the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* (discourse 70), and in the sixth chapter of the *Udāna* (discourse 1). Clearly this description of four assemblies of capable disciples is of central importance and needs to be taken seriously as enshrining a fundamental principle of the Buddha's teaching activity.

#### WOMEN'S ABILITY TO AWAKEN

The teachings given by the Buddha, in the way these have come down in the Pāli discourses, were not limited to only privileged members of society. Caste, for example, was considered to be of no direct relevance for one's ability to realize awakening, and neither was gender.

The only passage among the Pāli discourses that openly questions the ability of women to reach awakening is a state-

ment by Māra, the embodiment of the forces that are antagonistic to the Buddha's teaching. The *Bhikkhunī-saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* (discourse 2) reports that the *bhikkhuni*, whom Māra had addressed with this challenge, was quick to dismiss his silly ideas:

*itthibhāvo kiṃ kayirā  
cittamhi susamāhite,  
ñāṇamhi vattamānamhi  
sammā dhammaṃ vipassato?*

What does being a woman matter  
To one with correct insight into the Dhamma,  
When the mind is well concentrated  
And knowledge increases?

This is just one of a number of instances, reported in the *Bhikkhunī-saṃyutta*, where Māra invariably has to face defeat on accosting an accomplished *bhikkhunī*. Each of these *bhikkhunīs* proves her worth by rejecting his challenges, showing that the Buddha's vision of having accomplished *bhikkhunī* disciples, able to refute others, did find fulfilment. The same is also evident in the poems by accomplished *bhikkhunīs* collected in the *Therīgāthā*, an impressive testimony to the fact that being a woman does indeed not matter at all when one cultivates concentration and develops insight into the Buddha's teachings.

In this way the coming into existence of an order of *bhikkhunīs* as one of the four assemblies of disciples is an important requirement for the Buddha's message to reach out to all humanity. Both men and women have thereby in principle the option to decide whether to dedicate themselves to the monastic life or implement the teachings of the Buddha within the setting of household life.

#### THE FOUR ASSEMBLIES AND THE COMMUNITY

The distinct contribution made by the members of each of these four assemblies to the flourishing of the Buddhist Commu-

nity, the *Saṅgha*, can be seen from a discourse among the Fours of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* (discourse 7). Here is the relevant part, which I present by alternating between the original Pāli and its translation:

*bhikkhu, bhikkhave, viyatto vinīto visārado bahussuto dhammadharo dhammānudhammapaṭipanno saṅghaṃ sobheti.*

*Bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* who is competent, disciplined, confident, learned, an upholder of the Dhamma, a practitioner of the Dhamma in conformity with the Dhamma, illuminates the Community.

*bhikkhunī, bhikkhave, viyattā vinītā visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā dhammānudhammapaṭipannā saṅghaṃ sobheti.*

*Bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhunī* who is competent, disciplined, confident, learned, an upholder of the Dhamma, a practitioner of the Dhamma in conformity with the Dhamma, illuminates the Community.

*upāsako, bhikkhave, viyatto vinīto visārado bahussuto dhammadharo dhammānudhammapaṭipanno saṅghaṃ sobheti.*

*Bhikkhus*, a male lay follower who is competent, disciplined, confident, learned, an upholder of the Dhamma, a practitioner of the Dhamma in conformity with the Dhamma, illuminates the Community.

*upāsikā, bhikkhave, viyattā vinītā visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā dhammānudhammapaṭipannā saṅghaṃ sobheti.*

*Bhikkhus*, a female lay follower who is competent, disciplined, confident, learned, an upholder of the Dhamma, a practitioner of the Dhamma in conformity with the Dhamma, illuminates the Community.

*ime kho, bhikkhave, cattāro viyattā vinītā visāradā bahussutā dhammadharā dhammānudhammapaṭipannā saṅghaṃ sobhenti ti.*

*Bhikkhus*, these four, being competent, disciplined, confident, learned, upholders of the Dhamma, practitioners of the Dhamma in conformity with the Dhamma, illuminate the Community.

In this way, each of the four assemblies makes its own distinct contribution to illuminating the Community, the *Saṅgha*. The discourse continues by summing up the same teaching in verse, which brings out the contributions to be made by each of the four assemblies:

*yo hoti viyatto ca visārado ca,  
bahussuto dhammadharo ca hoti;  
dhammassa hoti anudhammacārī,  
sa tādiso vuccati saṅghasobhano.*

One who is competent and confident,  
learned and an upholder of the Dhamma,  
who rightly lives in conformity with the Dhamma,  
such a one is reckoned as illuminating the Community.

*bhikkhu ca sīlasampanno,  
bhikkhunī ca bahussutā;  
upāsako ca yo saddho,  
yā ca saddhā upāsikā;  
ete kho saṅghaṃ sobhenti,  
ete hi saṅghasobhanā ti.*

A *bhikkhu* who is endowed with virtue,  
a *bhikkhunī* who is learned,  
a male lay follower who has faith  
and a female lay follower who has faith,  
these indeed illuminate the Community,  
for they are illuminators of the Community.

The verses put the spotlight on the virtue of *bhikkhus* and the learnedness of *bhikkhunīs*, as well as the faith or confidence of male and female lay followers. This does of course not imply that a *bhikkhunī* could not illuminate through her virtue. In fact this is explicitly stated in another discourse among the Fours of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* (discourse 211) in relation to illuminating an assembly:

*bhikkhunī, bhikkhave, sīlavatī kalyāṇadhammā parisa-sobhanā.*

*Bhikkhus, a bhikkhunī who is virtuous and of good character illuminates an assembly.*

#### THE FOUR ASSEMBLIES AND THE DECLINE OF THE DHAMMA

Other discourses more specifically address the contribution to be made by the four assemblies in order to prevent the decline of the Dhamma. According to a discourse in the *Kassapa-saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* (discourse 13), the members of each of the four assemblies can contribute to preventing such a decline in the following manner:

*idha, kassapa, bhikkhū bhikkhuniyo upāsakā upāsikāyo satthari sagāravā viharanti sappatissā, dhamme sagāravā viharanti sappatissā, saṅghe sagāravā viharanti sappatissā, sikkhāya sagāravā viharanti sappatissā, samādhismiṃ sagāravā viharanti sappatissā.*

Kassapa, here *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunīs*, male lay followers, and female lay followers dwell with respect and regard towards the Teacher, dwell with respect and regard towards the Dhamma, dwell with respect and regard towards the Community, dwell with respect and regard towards the training, and dwell with respect and regard towards concentration.

*ime kho, kassapa, pañca dhammā saddhammassa ṭhitiyā asammosāya anantaradhānāya saṃvattantī ti.*

Kassapa, these are the five qualities that lead to the longevity of the true Dhamma, to its non-decay and non-decline.

In this way the respectful and reverential behaviour of each of the four assemblies, including the assembly of *bhikkhunīs*, is what prevents the decline of the Dhamma. Similar presentations can be found in several discourses in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*. Besides occurrences among the Sixes (discourse 40) and among the Sevens (discourse 56), another such statement, found among the Fives (discourse 201), mentions the following additional object of respect:

*bhikkhū bhikkhuniyo upāsakā upāsikāyo ... aññamaññaṃ sagāravā viharanti sappatissā.*

*Bhikkhus, bhikkhunīs, male lay followers, and female lay followers ... dwell with respect and regard towards one another.*

Mutual respect and regard between the four assemblies of the Buddha's disciples is clearly required in order to ensure their smooth cooperation and thereby prevent a decline of the Dhamma. Through such forms of respect and regard the four assemblies can support each other in the implementation of the Buddha's teachings.

#### THE WHEEL-MARK ON THE BUDDHA'S FEET

The significance of establishing the four assemblies can be seen in a passage related to the thirty-two superior bodily marks with which, according to tradition, the Buddha was endowed. The *Lakkhaṇa-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya* (discourse 30) sets each of these marks in relation to past life virtues and former deeds of the Buddha-to-be.

One of these marks concerns the soles of the Buddha's feet, which were adorned with auspicious wheel-marks. The *Lakkhaṇa-sutta* relates the possession of these auspicious marks, already evident at the time when the Buddha-to-be was

just born, to his destiny of being surrounded, once he had become a Buddha, by a large retinue of disciples, including *bhikkhunīs*. The passage proceeds as follows:

*heṭṭhā pādātalesu cakkāni jātāni honti saḥassārāni sanemikāni sanābhikāni sabbākāraparipūrāni suvibhattantarāni.*

On the soles of his feet wheels manifest with a thousand spokes, complete in all respects with rim and hub, and well arranged.

*so tena lakkhaṇena samannāgato ... sace pana agāras-mā anagāriyaṃ pabbajati, arahaṃ hoti sammāsambud-dho loke vivaṭṭacchaddo.*

Being endowed with this mark ... if he goes forth from the home life into homelessness, he becomes an Arahant, a Fully Awakened One, who withdraws the veil [of ignorance] from the world.

*buddho samāno kiṃ labhati? mahāparivāro hoti; mahā'ssa honti parivārā bhikkhū bhikkhuniyo upāsakā upāsikāyo devā manussā asurā nāgā gandhabbā. buddho samāno idaṃ labhati.*

Being a Buddha what does he gain? He has a great company. Great are his retinues of *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunīs*, male lay followers, female lay followers, *devas*, humans, *asuras*, *nāgas*, and *gandhabbas*. Being a Buddha he gains this.

This makes the existence of each of the four assemblies an integral, even indispensable part of the very condition of being a Buddha as a teacher of humanity. In this way the present passage goes a step further than the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, according to which the Buddha had planned, after his awakening, to have *bhikkhunī* disciples. According to the *Lakkhaṇa-sutta*, this was already clear well before the Buddha reached awakening, namely since the time of the Buddha's birth, as evi-

dent from the auspicious wheel marks on his feet. In this way the *Lakkhaṇa-sutta* makes it indubitably clear that the Buddha was destined to have *bhikkhunī* disciples.

#### THE COMPLETENESS OF THE HOLY LIFE

The preceding discourse in the same *Dīgha-nikāya*, the *Pāsā-dika-sutta* (discourse 29), reports the Buddha declaring that the completeness of the holy life taught by him was evident in the accomplishments reached by the four assemblies of his disciples. For the case of the *bhikkhunīs*, his declaration takes the following form:

*santi kho pana me, cunda, etarahi therā bhikkhuniyo sāvīkā viyattā vinītā visāradā pattayogakkhemā, alaṃ samakkhātum saddhammassa, alaṃ uppanaṃ parappavādaṃ sahadhammena suniggahītaṃ niggahetvā sappāṭihāriyaṃ dhammaṃ desetum.*

Cunda, I have senior *bhikkhunī* disciples now who are competent, disciplined, confident, who have reached security from bondage, who are capable of proclaiming the true Dhamma and who, having well refuted with Dhamma the tenets of others that have arisen, are capable of teaching the Dhamma with wonderful effect.

The discourse continues with the same statement made for *bhikkhunīs* of middle standing, *majjhimā bhikkhuniyo*, and even for those who are new, *navā bhikkhuniyo*, in the sense of having only recently been ordained.

In other words, such highly accomplished disciples of the Buddha, who are capable of teaching the Dhamma and of standing their ground in debate with others, were found not only among senior *bhikkhunīs*, but also among those who had less seniority and even among some who had only recently joined the Buddhist Order of *bhikkhunīs*.

This confirms that the Buddha had indeed achieved his mission, as proclaimed in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, of having

competent, disciplined, and confident disciples from each of these four assemblies, including an assembly of *bhikkhunīs*.

The *Pāsādika-sutta* sets this in contrast to a type of teaching and holy life that does not possess accomplished disciples from each of the four assemblies, which for this reason will be incomplete. In other words, for the “holy life”, the *brahmacariya*, taught by the Buddha to be “complete” or “perfect”, *paripūra*, the coming into being of accomplished *bhikkhunī* disciples is a necessary requirement.

Without the coming into existence of such *bhikkhunī* disciples, it would not have been possible for the *Pāsādika-sutta* to proclaim that the holy life taught by the Buddha is complete in all respects.

#### HIGH NUMBERS OF ARAHANT BHIKKHUNĪS

A similar perspective also emerges from the *Mahāvaccagotta-sutta* in the *Paribbājaka-vagga* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* (discourse 73). According to this discourse, the completeness of the Buddha’s dispensation was evident in the high numbers of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* who had become fully liberated, and in the fact that similarly high numbers of male and female lay followers had attained lower levels of awakening. Here is the passage relevant for the case of *bhikkhunīs*:

*na kho, vaccha, ekaṃ yeva sataṃ na dve satāni na tīṇi satāni na cattāri satāni na pañca satāni, atha kho bhiiyyo va yā bhikkhuniyo mama sāvika āsavānaṃ khayā anāsa-vaṃ cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ diṭṭhe va dhamme sa-vaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharantī ti.*

Vaccha, there are not only one hundred, not two hundred, not three hundred, not four hundred, not five hundred, but even more *bhikkhunīs*, disciples of mine, who with the destruction of the influxes have here and now realized for themselves through higher knowledge, and dwell established in, the influx-free liberation of the mind and liberation by wisdom.

This forms the reply to the query by the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta if, in addition to the Buddha himself and his *bhikkhu* disciples, any *bhikkhunī* had realized the final goal. The Buddha's statement in the *Mahāvaccagotta-sutta* makes it clear that there was in fact a large number of such *bhikkhunīs*, more than five hundred.

This in turn implies that the *bhikkhunīs* who feature in the *Bhikkhunī-saṃyutta* as being able to defeat Māra, or those whose verses are recorded in the *Therīgāthā*, are not the only instances of accomplished *bhikkhunīs*. Judging from the description given by the Buddha in the *Mahāvaccagotta-sutta*, his granting of ordination to women resulted in the coming into existence of large numbers of arahant *bhikkhunīs*.

#### OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUAL BHIKKHUNĪS

Besides the *Bhikkhunī-saṃyutta* and the *Therīgāthā*, accomplished *bhikkhunīs* are also prominent in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* among the Ones (section 14). The relevant section lists various disciples according to their respective eminence.

In relation to being accomplished in wisdom and in supernormal powers, two *bhikkhunīs* are mentioned as particularly outstanding:

*etad aggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvikanāṃ bhikkhunīnaṃ mahāpañānaṃ yadidaṃ khemā.*

*Bhikkhus*, she is the foremost among my *bhikkhunī* disciples in great wisdom, namely Khemā.

*etad aggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvikanāṃ bhikkhunīnaṃ iddhimantānaṃ yadidaṃ uppalavaṇṇā.*

*Bhikkhus*, she is the foremost among my *bhikkhunī* disciples in supernormal powers, namely Uppalavaṇṇā.

The same two *bhikkhunīs* are also mentioned in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* among the Twos (section 12) and again among the Fours (discourse 176) as the role models for other *bhikkhunīs*,

just as Sāriputta and Mahāmoggallāna served as the role models for other *bhikkhus*.

Returning to the Ones of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, other *bhikkhunīs* were outstanding for mastery of the *Vinaya* and teaching the Dhamma, as follows:

*etad aggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvikānaṃ bhikkhunīnaṃ vinayadharānaṃ yadidaṃ paṭācārā.*

*Bhikkhus*, she is the foremost among my *bhikkhunī* disciples in mastery of the *Vinaya*, namely: Paṭācārā.

*etad aggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvikānaṃ bhikkhunīnaṃ dhammakathikānaṃ yadidaṃ dhammadinnā.*

*Bhikkhus*, she is the foremost among my *bhikkhunī* disciples in giving talks on the Dhamma, namely Dhamma-dinnā.

The section on the Ones continues by mentioning several other *bhikkhunī* disciples considered outstanding in respect to a particular quality.

In evaluating these statements, it needs to be kept in mind that for one particular *bhikkhunī* to be accorded the rank of foremost in a particular respect, other *bhikkhunīs* must have been endowed with the same quality, although to a lesser degree. In other words, for Khemā to be foremost among *bhikkhunīs* accomplished in great wisdom, other *bhikkhunīs* must also have been accomplished in great wisdom. For Uppalavaṇṇā to be the leading *bhikkhunī* in supernormal powers, other *bhikkhunīs* must also have had supernormal powers.

Again, there must have been a number of *bhikkhunīs* who mastered the *Vinaya* or who were good at giving Dhamma talks, and it is among these that Paṭācārā and Dhamma-dinnā were reckoned to be the most eminent. This further confirms what already emerged from the *Mahāvaccagotta-sutta*, namely that the Buddha's granting of ordination to women resulted in the coming into existence of large numbers

of accomplished *bhikkhunīs*, far more than those who are individually mentioned by name.

Another quality highlighted among the Ones of the *Ari-guttara-nikāya* concerns monastic seniority. Among *bhikkhunīs* of senior standing, Mahāpajāpati Gotamī was foremost:

*etad aggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvikanāṃ bhikkhunīnaṃ rattaññūnaṃ yadidaṃ mahāpajāpatī gotamī.*

*Bhikkhus*, she is the foremost among my *bhikkhunī* disciples in seniority, namely Mahāpajāpati Gotamī.

Mahāpajāpati Gotamī's eminence in this category reflects her role in the coming into being of the order of *bhikkhunīs*, of which she became the first member. In the next chapter I turn to the account of her ordination in the *Cullavagga* of the *Vinaya*.

#### SUMMARY

The auspicious wheel-mark on the Buddha's feet predicted, already at his birth, that as a Fully Awakened One he would have four assemblies of disciples, including an assembly of *bhikkhunīs*.

At a time apparently soon after his awakening, the Buddha is on record for stating emphatically to Māra that he would not pass away until he had four assemblies of accomplished disciples, including *bhikkhunīs*.

As one of the four assemblies, the *bhikkhunīs* illuminate the Community and through good conduct make a substantial contribution to preventing the decline of the Dhamma. The capability of women to awaken is amply confirmed by the discourses, which throw into relief the eminence and accomplishment reached by large numbers of *bhikkhunīs* in ancient India.

## Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's Ordination

The account of how Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī received ordination and thereby became the most senior among *bhikkhunīs* is found in the tenth chapter of the *Cullavagga* of the Pāli *Vinaya*. This part of the *Cullavagga* will be of continuous relevance to my exploration in this and subsequent chapters, as it contains the rules on *bhikkhunī* ordination together with their narrative setting.

### MAHĀPAJĀPATĪ GOTAMĪ'S REQUEST

The narration begins in Kapilavatthu, the home town of the Buddha. The *Cullavagga* reports that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had approached the Buddha and made the following request:

*sādhu, bhante, labheyya mātugāmo tathāgatappavedite dhammavinaye agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajjan ti.*

Venerable sir, it would be good if women could receive the going forth from home to homelessness in the teaching and discipline made known by the Tathāgata.

According to the *Cullavagga* account, the Buddha declined. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī repeated her request twice, but the Buddha kept on refusing. When the Buddha left for Vesālī, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and a following of Sakyan women shaved off their hair, put on monastic robes, and followed him to Vesālī. On arriving there, they met Ānanda, who intervened on their behalf with the Buddha.

In view of the passages surveyed in the previous chapter, the report of the Buddha's refusal is unexpected and requires further examination. Here it can be helpful to study the relevant portion from the Theravāda *Vinaya* in comparison with other *Vinaya* traditions, because the long period of oral transmission may result in a portion of text becoming lost.

As already mentioned in the introduction, for the purposes of Theravāda monastic law, the Pāli *Vinaya* is the main point of reference. Thus the suggestion to consult parallel versions is only meant as a way of helping to make sense of the narrative in the way it is found in the Pāli *Vinaya*.

#### THE NATURE OF ORAL TRANSMISSION

The possibility of a portion of text being lost can be illustrated with the case of the *Chabbisodhana-sutta*, the “Discourse on Sixfold Purity”, found in the *Anupada-vagga* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* (discourse 112). In spite of the explicit reference to “six” (*cha*) in its title, the discourse expounds only five types of purity of an arahant. The commentary, the *Papañcasūdanī*, reports several explanations for this inconsistency. One of these explanations refers to the reciters from India, according to whom an arahant's detachment in regard to the four nutriments (edible food, contact, volition, and consciousness) should be added to the five purities mentioned in the discourse.

That this is indeed the solution can be seen through comparative study of a parallel preserved in the *Madhyama-āgama*, a discourse collection brought from India to China and translated into Chinese. Besides the five purities mentioned in the *Chabbisodhana-sutta*, this parallel lists non-attachment in regard to the four nutriments as a sixth purity (Taishō I 732b, found as the second in the list of six purities).

From this it follows that at some point during oral transmission, in India or in Sri Lanka, this sixth purity was lost. Indian reciters still knew of a complete version of the discourse that had this sixth purity, but by the time the discourse had reached Sri Lanka, this part of the text had gone missing. The case of the *Chabbisodhana-sutta* shows that substantial portions of a Pāli canonical text could be lost during oral transmission.

The difficulties of relying on oral transmission are explicitly taken up in the Pāli discourses themselves. The *San-*

*daka-sutta*, found in the *Paribbājaka-vagga* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* (discourse 76), points out that oral tradition is not necessarily well transmitted and therefore need not be correct:

*sussutam pi hoti dussutam pi hoti, tathā pi hoti aññathā pi hoti.*

[Some of it] is well heard, [some of it] is not well heard;  
[some of it] is true, [some of it] is otherwise.

The *Caṅkī-sutta*, found in the *Brāhmaṇa-vagga* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* (discourse 95), also takes up the unreliability of oral tradition:

*api ca, bhāradvāja, svānussutaṃ yeva hoti, tañ ca hoti rittaṃ tucchaṃ musā; no ce pi svānussutaṃ hoti, tañ ca hoti bhūtaṃ tacchaṃ anaññathā ... saccam anurakkhatā, bhāradvāja, viññunā purisena nālam ettha ekaṃsena niṭṭhaṃ gantuṃ: idam eva saccam, mogham aññan ti.*

Now, Bhāradvāja, something may be well recollected, yet it may be empty, hollow, and false; and something may not be well recollected, yet it may be factual, true, and not otherwise ... Bhāradvāja, for a wise person who protects truth this is not sufficient for coming to a definite conclusion: only this is truth, anything else is wrong.

The recommendation is that someone who wishes to preserve truth should not take a definite stance on what has been transmitted orally, claiming that this alone is true, everything else is false.

Considering the parallel versions of a particular text offers a way of giving proper consideration to the nature and possible errors of oral transmission in accordance with the recommendations made in the *Sandaka-sutta* and the *Caṅkī-sutta*. Doing justice to the indications in these Pāli discourses requires allowing, in principle, the possibility that at times a portion of a text preserved in the Pāli canon could be incomplete due to textual loss.

## MAHĀPAJĀPATĪ GOTAMĪ IN ROBES WITH SHAVEN HEAD

Allowing in principle the possibility of textual loss throws a different light on an aspect of the account of the founding of the *bhikkhunī* order in the Pāli *Vinaya* that is not entirely straightforward. As briefly mentioned above, according to the *Cullavagga*'s report, once the Buddha had refused Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's request to go forth, she and her followers shaved off their hair and put on robes.

According to the *Nandatthera-vatthu* in the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had earlier become a stream-enterer. Her attainment of stream-entry is also evident in the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga-sutta*, found in the *Vibhaṅga-vagga* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* (discourse 142), which narrates events that clearly precede her request for ordination, described in the *Cullavagga*.

On the assumption that she had already reached this lofty distinction before the present event, it is inconceivable that as a stream-enterer she would openly defy the Buddha's command by an apparent act of self-ordination.

In fact, even if she had not been a stream-enterer at that time, it would still be difficult to conceive of the Buddha's foster-mother behaving in such a disobedient and even rebellious way.

Moreover, when Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī with shaven head and wearing robes approaches Ānanda, the latter comments on her exhausted bodily condition after having travelled, but he makes no remark at all about her being shaven-headed and wearing robes. The narration in the *Cullavagga* does not depict him as surprised when seeing Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her followers with shaven heads and wearing robes, as if that was entirely natural.

This only makes sense if this was not just a rebellious act undertaken by the women on their own, but much rather something that was based on some sort of permission given by the Buddha.

## THE PERSPECTIVE AFFORDED BY THE PARALLELS

The solution to this conundrum can be found by consulting accounts of the same event in other *Vinayas*. In my monograph study on *The Foundation History of the Nuns' Order*, I have translated and compared these different versions (Anālayo 2016).

Relevant to the present issue are versions of this story preserved in the canonical texts of three Buddhist schools, the Mahīśāsaka, the Mūlasarvāstivāda, and the Sarvāstivāda. All these texts were from India and had been brought to China for translation. Besides the Chinese translations, in the case of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* we also have the relevant passage preserved in a Sanskrit fragment as well as in Tibetan translation.

These texts report that, when Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī approached the Buddha with her request, he indeed did not allow her to go forth, but he then offered her an alternative. This alternative was that she could shave off her hair and wear robes (Anālayo 2016: 49f). But apparently she should live in the protected environment of her home instead of going forth to wander around India as a homeless person.

## THE MOTIVATION FOR THE BUDDHA'S REFUSAL

The perspective afforded by a comparative study changes the situation considerably. Instead of conveying the impression that the Buddha was against an order of *bhikkhunīs* in principle, he is shown to offer an alternative to women who wish to become monastics. This alternative seems to express the concern that, at a time when the Buddhist order was still in its beginnings, lack of proper dwelling places and the other harsh living conditions of a homeless life might be too much for Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her following.

The Theravāda *Vinaya* in fact records that on several occasions *bhikkhunīs* were raped (I will come back to this topic in the next chapter), making it clear that in ancient India for

women to go forth could be dangerous. The situation then was different from modern South and Southeast Asia, where women who have gone forth can usually expect to be respected in their choice of living a celibate life.

Returning to the *Vinaya* narration, on the assumption that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her followers had received explicit permission to shave their hair and wear robes, the rest of the story flows on naturally. It now becomes understandable why they would indeed do so and why Ānanda, on seeing Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī shaven-headed and in robes, would not be surprised nor find this worth commenting on.

Laity at times followed the Buddha for quite some distance on his journeys, as reported in the sixth chapter of the *Mahāvagga* (section 24). In view of such a custom, it seems natural for Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her group similarly to follow the Buddha in an attempt to show that they were able to brave the living conditions of going forth. This had not been forbidden by the Buddha.

Having in this way proven their ability to handle the condition of going forth would also explain why the Buddha eventually allowed them to become *bhikkhunīs*. It would have documented in public that the wish of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her followers to become *bhikkhunīs* was not an idle fancy entertained by them while comfortably living at home, but something they sincerely aspired to and whose challenges they were willing and able to face.

#### ĀNANDA'S INTERVENTION

According to the narrative in the *Cullavagga*, the Buddha's allowance for women to go forth in his dispensation came about in response to an intervention by Ānanda on behalf of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her group.

The *Cullavagga* reports that, although the Buddha at first still refused, Ānanda brought up women's potential to reach the four levels of awakening as well as the Buddha's personal indebtedness to his fostermother Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī for rais-

ing him when he was an infant (as his mother had died soon after giving birth).

The second of these arguments does not seem to have had much persuasive power, which can be seen from the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga-sutta* in the *Vibhaṅga-vagga* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* (discourse 142), already mentioned above in relation to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's stream-entry. The *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga-sutta* reports Ānanda raising the same argument in order to convince the Buddha to accept a robe given to him by Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī (based on a comparative study it seems probable that this discourse might have been the place of origin of this argument; see Anālayo 2016: 68–72).

In reply to this argument, the Buddha clarified that he had already well settled this debt and did not accept the gift. What according to the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga-sutta* was not sufficient to convince the Buddha to accept the gift of a robe could not have had a substantially different effect in relation to the considerably more weighty issue of granting ordination to women.

In fact the different passages surveyed in the previous chapter make it clear that the Buddha's hesitation could hardly mean that he was in principle opposed to having an order of *bhikkhunīs*. Instead, as suggested by the parallel *Vinaya* versions, the report about his hesitation is best read as an expression of concern for how to protect Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her followers as *bhikkhunīs* (and thereby also protect the reputation of the Buddhist monastic Saṅgha as a whole) in the ancient Indian setting.

This required the cooperation of the already existing order of *bhikkhus*, who would have to take a position of guidance and protection towards the *bhikkhunīs* that the Buddha alone could hardly fulfil. In such a situation, it makes sense for Ānanda, who often acted as a spokesman of the *bhikkhus*, to support Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's request and bring up the topic of women's ability to reach the four levels of awakening.

It can safely be assumed that the Buddha would have already been aware of this potential before Ānanda's enquiry, but other *bhikkhus* need not have been aware of it, including Ānanda himself. For them to be motivated to serve as custodians of a newly founded order of *bhikkhunīs*, Ānanda's intervention and the public confirmation of women's potential would have been a more convincing scenario compared to the Buddha just accepting a request by his foster-mother while on a visit to his home town.

As already mentioned, by now Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her followers had proven their ability to endure the condition of wandering mendicants in the ancient Indian setting, and they were already shaven-headed and wearing robes. This would now make them appear as more promising candidates for *bhikkhuni* ordination than they were earlier at Kapilavatthu, when Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī originally made her request.

These factors in combination could explain why the Buddha was now willing to grant what he had earlier refused.

#### THE PROMULGATION OF THE GARUDHAMMAS

In what follows I turn to the ensuing portion of the *Cullavagga* (I have added numbering to the *garudhammas*, which is not found in the Pāli original, in order to facilitate the subsequent discussion).

*sādhu, bhante, labheyya mātuḡāmo tathāgatappavedite dhammavinaye agāasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajjan ti.*

[Ānanda addressed the Buddha]: “Venerable sir, it would be good if women could receive the going forth from home into homelessness in the teaching and discipline made known by the Tathāgata.”

*sace, ānanda, mahāpajāpatī gotamī aṭṭha garudhamme paṭiggaṇhāti, sā v'assā hotu upasampadā.*

[The Buddha replied]: “Ānanda, if Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī accepts eight principles to be respected, then that will be her higher ordination:

1) *vassasatupasampannāya bhikkhuniyā tadahupasampannassa bhikkhuno abhivādanaṃ paccuṭṭhānaṃ añjalikammaṃ sāmīcikkammaṃ kātabbaṃ. ayam pi dhammo sakkatvā garukatvā mānetvā pūjetvā yāvajīvaṃ anatikkamanīyo.*

“A *bhikkhunī* who has received the higher ordination since a hundred years should pay homage to, rise up for, put the palms of her hands together for, and behave appropriately towards a *bhikkhu* who has received the higher ordination on that very day. This is also a principle to be revered, respected, honoured, venerated, and not to be transgressed for the whole of one's life.

2) *na bhikkhuniyā abhikkhuke āvāse vassaṃ vasitabbaṃ. ayam pi dhammo sakkatvā garukatvā mānetvā pūjetvā yāvajīvaṃ anatikkamanīyo.*

“A *bhikkhunī* should not spend the rainy season in a residential area where there is no *bhikkhu*. This is also a principle to be revered, respected, honoured, venerated, and not to be transgressed for the whole of one's life.

3) *anvaddhamāsaṃ bhikkhuniyā bhikkhusaṅghato dve dhammā paccāsiṃsitabbā: uposathapucchakaṅ ca ovādūpasāṅkamaṇā ca. ayam pi dhammo sakkatvā garukatvā mānetvā pūjetvā yāvajīvaṃ anatikkamanīyo.*

“Every fortnight a *bhikkhunī* should seek two things from the order of *bhikkhus*: enquiring about [the date of] the observance day and coming for the exhortation. This is also a principle to be revered, respected, honoured, venerated, and not to be transgressed for the whole of one's life.

4) *vassaṃ vuṭṭhāya bhikkhuniyā ubhatośaṅghe tīhi ṭhānehi pavāretabbaṃ: diṭṭhena vā sutena vā parisaiṅkāya vā. ayam pi dhammo sakkatvā garukatvā mānetvā pūjetvā yāvajīvaṃ anatikkamanīyo.*

“After the completion of the rainy season a *bhikkhunī* should make an invitation before both orders in respect to three matters: what has been seen, heard, or suspected. This is also a principle to be revered, respected, honoured, venerated, and not to be transgressed for the whole of one's life.

5) *garudhammaṃ ajjhāpannāya bhikkhuniyā ubhatośaṅghe pakkhamānattaṃ caritabbaṃ. ayam pi dhammo sakkatvā garukatvā mānetvā pūjetvā yāvajīvaṃ anatikkamanīyo.*

“A *bhikkhunī* who has offended against a serious rule is to undergo penance for a fortnight before both orders. This is also a principle to be revered, respected, honoured, venerated, and not to be transgressed for the whole of one's life.

6) *dve vassāni chasu dhammesu sikkhitasikkhāya sikkhamānāya ubhatośaṅghe upasampadā pariyesitabbā. ayam pi dhammo sakkatvā garukatvā mānetvā pūjetvā yāvajīvaṃ anatikkamanīyo.*

“A probationer who has trained for two years in six principles should seek higher ordination from both orders. This is also a principle to be revered, respected, honoured, venerated, and not to be transgressed for the whole of one's life.

7) *na bhikkhuniyā kenaci pariyāyena bhikkhu akkositabbo paribhāsitabbo. ayam pi dhammo sakkatvā garukatvā mānetvā pūjetvā yāvajīvaṃ anatikkamanīyo.*

“A *bhikkhunī* should not in any way revile or abuse a *bhikkhu*. This is also a principle to be revered, respected,

honoured, venerated, and not to be transgressed for the whole of one's life.

8) *ajjatagge ovaṭo bhikkhunīnaṃ bhikkhūsu vacanapatho, anovaṭo bhikkhūnaṃ bhikkhūsu vacanapatho. ayam pi dhammo sakkatvā garukatvā mānetvā pūjetvā yāvajīvaṃ anatikkamanīyo.*

“From today on, *bhikkhunīs* are not permitted to criticize *bhikkhus*. *Bhikkhus* are permitted to criticize *bhikkhunīs*. This is also a principle to be revered, respected, honoured, venerated, and not to be transgressed for the whole of one's life.

*sace, ānanda, mahāpajāpatī gotamī ime aṭṭha garudhamme paṭiggaṇhāti, sā v'assā hotu upasampadā ti.*

“Ānanda, if Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī accepts these eight principles to be respected, then that will be her higher ordination.”

*atha kho āyasmā ānando bhagavato santike aṭṭha garudhamme uggahetvā yena mahāpajāpatī gotamī tenupasaṅkami, upasaṅkamtivā mahāpajāpatim gotamim etad avoca:*

Then the venerable Ānanda, having learned from the Blessed One these eight principles to be respected, approached Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. Having approached her, he said this to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī:

*sace kho tvam, gotami, aṭṭha garudhamme paṭiggaṇheyāsī, sā va te bhaviṣṣati upasampadā.*

“Gotamī, if you accept eight principles to be respected, then that will be your higher ordination:

*vassasatūpasampannāya bhikkhuniyā ... anovaṭo bhikkhūnaṃ bhikkhūsu vacanapatho. ayampi dhammo sakkatvā garukatvā mānetvā pūjetvā yāvajīvaṃ anatikkamanīyo.*

“A *bhikkhunī* who has received the higher ordination since a hundred years ... *bhikkhus* are permitted to criticize *bhikkhunīs*. This is a principle to be revered, respected, honoured, venerated, and not to be transgressed for the whole of one's life.

*sace kho tvam, gotamī, ime aṭṭha garudhamme paṭigganheyyāsi, sā va te bhavissati upasampadā ti.*

“Gotamī, if you accept these eight principles to be respected, then that will be your higher ordination.”

*seyyathā pi, bhante ānanda, itthī vā puriso vā daharo yuvā maṇḍanakajātiko sīsaṃ nahāto uppalamālaṃ vā vassikamālaṃ vā attimuttakamālaṃ vā labhitvā ubhohi hatthehi paṭiggahetvā uttamaṅge sirasmiṃ paṭiṭṭhāpeyya. evam eva kho ahaṃ, bhante ānanda, ime aṭṭha garudhamme paṭigganhamī yāvajīvaṃ anatikkamanīye ti.*

[Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī said:] “Venerable Ānanda, it is just as if there were a young woman or a young man, youthful and fond of adornment who, having washed the head, on obtaining a garland of lotuses, jasmine, or roses, would accept it with both hands and place it on the head. Venerable Ānanda, in the same way I accept these eight principles to be respected, not to be transgressed for the whole of one's life.”

*atha kho āyasmā ānando yena bhagavā tenupasaṅkami, upasaṅkamitvā bhagavantaṃ abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ nisīdi. ekamantaṃ nisinno kho āyasmā ānando bhagavantaṃ etadvoca:*

Then the venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One. Having approached and paid homage to the Blessed One, he sat down to one side. Sitting to one side, the venerable Ānanda said this to the Blessed One:

*paṭiggahitā, bhante, mahāpajāpatiyā gotamiyā aṭṭha garudhammā, upasampannā bhagavato mātucchā ti.*

“Venerable sir, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī has accepted the eight principles to be respected; the Blessed One's maternal aunt has received the higher ordination.”

The salient point in the passage translated above is the Buddha's promulgation of the eight *garudhammas*, whose acceptance counts as Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's higher ordination.

#### THE BEGINNING OF AN ORDER OF BHIKKHUNĪS

Since the Buddha presents these eight *garudhammas* in reply to a general request that women be allowed to go forth, it seems clear that he has now decided to start an order of *bhikkhunīs*; he is not merely making a special allowance only for his foster-mother. In other words, although the procedure of receiving ordination through the acceptance of the *garudhammas* is valid for Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī alone, nevertheless her higher ordination needs to be considered a first step in a development that is aiming at “allowing women to go forth from home into homelessness in the teaching and discipline made known by the *Tathāgata*”.

The same is evident from the formulation of the *garudhammas* themselves, as most of these deal with situations that arise once an order of *bhikkhunīs* has come into existence, not with a situation where Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī is the only existing *bhikkhunī*.

In fact already the first *garudhamma* speaks of “a *bhikkhunī* who has received the higher ordination since a hundred years”. The formulation shows that this *garudhamma* is not just concerned with matters right at that time, since no *bhikkhunī* was yet in existence, let alone a *bhikkhunī* ordained a hundred years ago. Although by having accepted the *garudhammas* Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī did become a *bhikkhunī*, it would have required many more years for her to reach the seniority described in this *garudhamma* (provided she or anyone else even lived that long).

It follows that these *garudhammas* are best understood as describing the Buddha's vision of how the *bhikkhunīs* should

behave in future times. In the present setting, it would indeed be meaningful for the Buddha to clarify to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī what he expected to happen. By accepting these principles she would become the first and most senior of *bhikkhunīs*; therefore, as their future leader, she is the one to whom such principles had to be conveyed to ensure their implementation.

This in turn makes a proper understanding of the eight *garudhammas* an important dimension of the canonical account of how the order of *bhikkhunīs* came into existence and was expected to operate. To a more detailed study of the eight *garudhammas* and their significance I turn in the next chapter.

#### SUMMARY

The initial request to grant ordination to women was probably refused because at this time, when the Buddhist order was still in its beginnings, lack of proper dwelling places and the other harsh living conditions of a homeless life posed a considerable challenge for accommodating an order of *bhikkhunīs*.

In order to forestall problems in the ancient Indian setting resulting from allowing women to participate fully in the monastic life, the Buddha is on record for promulgating eight *garudhammas*, “principles to be respected”, that delineate key aspects of behaviour for future *bhikkhunīs* and depict central aspects of the interrelation between the two monastic orders.

## The Eight Garudhammas

The eight *garudhammas* have repeatedly been considered of doubtful authenticity. However, in my comparative study of *The Foundation History of the Nuns' Order* I have not been able to confirm this impression (Anālayo 2016: 95–116).

What does emerge from such comparative study is that the formulations of some of these *garudhammas* appear to have gone through a process of development, but the idea as such that the Buddha set up a group of eight guidelines for the newly founded order of *bhikkhunīs* is, as far as I am able to determine, quite early and part of the common heritage of the different *Vinaya* traditions.

It also fits the narrative context, in that the Buddha would have given a set of injunctions on how the two monastic orders should collaborate in terms of positioning the two towards each other and in terms of how this would affect the overall public image of Buddhist monasticism.

A problem is sometimes seen in the fact that several of the *garudhammas* recur as *pācittiya* regulations for *bhikkhunīs*. The assumption is that the existence of such *pācittiya* rules shows the corresponding *garudhammas* to be anachronisms.

However, this does not fully take into account the function of the *garudhammas* as basic guidelines that do not carry any penalty. Once such a basic guideline does not suffice, it would only be natural if a corresponding rule comes into existence that spells out the gravity of the offence and also incorporates the issue into the code of rules, the *pātimokkha*, to be recited every fortnight.

In the same vein, and this is of particular importance to my overall topic, the basic vision of the cooperation between the two monastic orders in matters of ordination, as stipulated in the sixth *garudhamma*, requires adaptation to specific situations.

Neither such adaptation of a *garudhamma* nor the as-signing of several of these principles to be respected to the category of a *pācittiya* offence entails that the *garudhamma* itself must be late.

#### PAYING HOMAGE

The first *garudhamma* concerns the paying of homage that *bhikkhunīs* are expected to perform towards *bhikkhus* regardless of their respective monastic seniority:

A *bhikkhunī* who has received the higher ordination since a hundred years should pay homage to, rise up for, put the palms of her hands together for, and behave appropriately towards a *bhikkhu* who has received the higher ordination on that very day.

The topic of such paying of homage comes up soon again in the same tenth chapter of the *Cullavagga*, which reports that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī asked Ānanda to request the Buddha to prescribe the paying of homage according to seniority, regardless of gender.

A similar request is on record in some other *Vinayas*, which specify that this took place after some time, once a number of *bhikkhunīs* had reached seniority (Anālayo 2016: 104–106). This seems indeed a meaningful placing of such a request, as only when *bhikkhunīs* had reached seniority would it make sense to reconsider if they should indeed be expected to pay homage to junior *bhikkhus*.

The *Cullavagga* reports the Buddha giving the following reply:

*aṭṭhānam etaṃ, ānanda, anavakāso yaṃ tathāgato anujāneyya mātuḡāmaṣṣa abhivādanaṃ paccuṭṭhānaṃ añjalikammaṃ sāmīcikammaṃ.*

It is impossible, Ānanda, it cannot come to be that the Tathāgata would authorize the paying of homage to, ris-

ing up for, putting the palms of the hands together for, and behaving appropriately towards women.

*ime hi nāma, ānanda, aññatitthiyā durakkhātadhammā mātuḡāmassa abhivādanam paccuṭṭhānam añjalikammaṃ sāmīcikkammaṃ na karissanti; kim aṅga pana tathāgato anujānissati mātuḡāmassa abhivādanam paccuṭṭhānam añjalikammaṃ sāmīcikkammaṃ ti?*

Ānanda, these heterodox practitioners of badly proclaimed teachings will not pay homage to, rise up for, put the palms of the hands together for, and behave appropriately towards women. How then could the Tathāgata authorize the paying of homage to, rising up for, putting the palms of the hands together for, and behaving appropriately towards women?

This passage makes it clear that the underlying concern behind this *garudhamma* relates to the public image of the early Buddhist monastic order. In the setting of ancient India, the full participation of women in the monastic life, permitted in the Buddhist and Jaina orders, was in itself a daring step. Presumably it would have been unthinkable to take this so far as to have male monastics publicly pay homage to their female counterparts.

In fact a late text of the Jain tradition, the *Upadeśamālā*, reflects similar concerns (Anālayo 2016: 106n49). This makes it probable that the expectation of such behaviour reflects the need to take into account a fairly pervasive public opinion in the Indian setting.

Here it is also significant that this particular *garudhamma* does not recur as a *pācittiya* rule. In other words, a *bhikkhunī* who fails to conform to the described behaviour does not incur a *pācittiya* offence and is not in need of performing an act of disclosure in front of a fellow *bhikkhunī*, as is the case when incurring a *pācittiya* offence. She has simply failed to conform to an aspect of monastic etiquette.

## THE RAINY SEASON RESIDENCE

The second *garudhamma* concerns the type of residence *bhikkhunīs* should not choose for the rainy season period:

A *bhikkhunī* should not spend the rainy season in a residential area where there is no *bhikkhu*.

This *garudhamma* corresponds to *pācittiya* rule 56 for *bhikkhunīs*. According to the background narration to this rule, some *bhikkhunīs* did spend the rainy season period in such a place and as a consequence did not receive any exhortation from the *bhikkhus*. Finding out about this, other *bhikkhunīs* raised criticism as follows:

*kathaṃ hi nāma bhikkhuniyo abhikkhuke āvāse vassaṃ vasissantī ti?*

How can *bhikkhunīs* spend the rainy season in a residence where there is no *bhikkhu*?

The formulation makes it clear that, from the viewpoint of the *Vinaya* narrative, the expectation for *bhikkhunīs* to spend the rainy season only in a place where there are *bhikkhus* was already well in place before the reported event happened.

According to the *Vinaya*, learning of this situation was what then motivated the Buddha to make such behaviour a *pācittiya* offence. It is worthy of note that both the *garudhamma* and the *pācittiya* rule are motivated by the wish to ensure that the *bhikkhunīs* have access to *bhikkhus* who can provide them exhortation.

The way the narrative proceeds confirms a point made above, namely that the existence of a *pācittiya* rule that corresponds to a *garudhamma* does not in itself imply that the latter must be of doubtful authenticity. On the assumption that the *garudhamma* was already in place, the story reads quite naturally, and the fact that it was not observed then led to the corresponding regulation.

At the same time, it is also possible that the narrative was influenced by the idea that the promulgation of the *garudhammas* must have happened when the order of *bhikkhunīs* came into existence. Thus my point is not that the narrative proves that the corresponding *garudhamma* must have already been in existence in exactly this form, but only that the supposed anachronism used to argue for the alleged lateness of the *garudhammas* is not really an anachronism.

#### EXHORTATION AND THE DATE OF THE UPOSATHA

The third *garudhamma* concerns the same topic of exhortation as well as the date for the observance day. This date needs to be determined by deciding whether it falls on the fourteenth or the fifteenth day after the previous *uposatha*. On the day determined as the *uposatha*, the *bhikkhunīs* are expected to receive an exhortation from the *bhikkhus*.

Every fortnight a *bhikkhunī* should seek two things from the order of *bhikkhus*: enquiring about [the date of] the observance day and coming for the exhortation.

This *garudhamma* corresponds to *pācittiya* rule 59. The corresponding narrative proceeds similarly to the previous *garudhamma*, in that some *bhikkhunīs* did not meet the expected behaviour. Here is the full narration:

*tena kho pana samayena bhikkhuniyo uposatham pi na pucchanti ovādam pi na yācanti. bhikkhū ujjhāyanti khiyyanti vipācenti:*

At that time the *bhikkhunīs* did not enquire about [the date of] the observance day and did not request exhortation. The *bhikkhus* complained, took offence, and criticized it:

*kathaṃ hi nāma bhikkhuniyo uposatham pi na pucchisanti ovādam pi na yācissantī ti.*

“How can these *bhikkhunīs* not enquire about [the date of] the observance day and not request exhortation?”

The *Vinaya* reports that this then motivated the Buddha to make it a *pācittiya* offence if the *bhikkhunīs* behave in such ways. The above passage shows the *bhikkhus* to have been clearly aware of the need for *bhikkhunīs*, as stipulated in the third *garudhamma*, to enquire about the date of the observance day and to request exhortation, since they complain when this does not happen.

This shows that, from the viewpoint of the *Vinaya* account, the *bhikkhus* themselves clearly recognized the function of the *garudhammas* as regulating interrelations between *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*. They were aware of what was expected of both orders and complained when the standard was not kept up.

Although the *garudhammas* were not addressed to *bhikkhus*, they nevertheless do indicate the way in which *bhikkhus* were expected to collaborate with *bhikkhunīs*. In fact the whole set of eight *garudhammas* recurs in the word commentary section of the *Vinaya* account of *pācittiya* 21 for *bhikkhus*, where these eight are part of an instruction that a *bhikkhu* should give to *bhikkhunīs*. From the viewpoint of the word commentary that forms part of the canonical Pāli *Vinaya*, the *bhikkhus* were clearly expected to be well familiar with the eight *garudhammas*.

#### THE INVITATION

The fourth *garudhamma* describes the invitation (*pavāraṇā*) to be undertaken by *bhikkhunīs* towards their own order and the order of *bhikkhus*:

After the completion of the rainy season a *bhikkhunī* should make an invitation before both orders in respect to three matters: what has been seen, heard, or suspected.

This *garudhamma* has its counterpart in *pācittiya* rule 57 for *bhikkhunīs*. The narration proceeds according to the pattern of *pācittiya* rule 56, in that here, again, other *bhikkhunīs* criticized such behaviour and as a final result of being informed of what had happened, the Buddha promulgated the corresponding *pācittiya* regulation.

#### PENANCE

The fifth *garudhamma* concerns the penance (*mānatta*) to be undertaken by *bhikkhunīs* towards their own order and the order of *bhikkhus*:

A *bhikkhunī* who has offended against a serious rule is to undergo penance for a fortnight before both orders.

Although this *garudhamma* does not recur as a *pācittiya* rule, a reference to it can be found at the conclusion of the section on *saṅghādisesa* offences for *bhikkhunīs*. Such offences constitute the second gravest type of offence laid down in the *Vinaya*.

After the detailed exposition of the *saṅghādisesa* offences, this part of the *Vinaya* indicates, regarding a *bhikkhunī* who has incurred a *saṅghādisesa* offence:

*ubhatosaṅghe pakkhamānattaṃ caritabbaṃ,*

she is to undergo penance for a fortnight before both orders.

This helps to clarify the significance of the term *garudhamma* in the context of the fifth *garudhamma*. What requires the undergoing of penance (*mānatta*) is a *saṅghādisesa* offence. Subsequent to that, the offending monastic has to go through an act of rehabilitation called *abbhāna*. A *saṅghādisesa* offence is a breach of the rules which merits the offender's temporary loss of standing.

This is not the sense the term *garudhamma* carries when it is used for the eight *dhammas* that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī ac-

cepted in order to receive higher ordination. Here the term *garudhamma* does not stand for an offence of the *saṅghādisesa* category. In my translation, I have tried to reflect this difference by translating the *garudhammas* accepted by Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī as “principles to be respected”, but when the same term occurs in relation to the observance of penance, I instead translate *garudhamma* as “a serious rule”.

The foregoing has already shown that several of the eight *garudhammas* recur as *pācittiya* rules elsewhere in the *Vinaya*. Thus they cannot be *saṅghādisesa* offences. In fact none of the eight *garudhammas* belongs to the category of *saṅghādisesa* offences. Unlike a *saṅghādisesa* offence, a *pācittiya* is a light offence and just requires disclosure to a fellow monastic. If the *pācittiya* offence involves possessions, their formal forfeiture is also required.

Neither disclosure to a fellow monastic nor formal forfeiture are required in the case of a breach of the first *garudhamma*, discussed above. This particular *garudhamma* does not even correspond to a *pācittiya* offence.

In sum, the eight *garudhammas* are indeed “principles to be respected”, and none of them concerns a breach of monastic law as serious as a *saṅghādisesa* offence.

## ORDINATION

The sixth *garudhamma* is perhaps the most important from the viewpoint of my overall topic, as it concerns the granting of ordination to a female candidate:

A probationer who has trained for two years in six principles should seek higher ordination from both orders. This is a principle to be revered, respected, honoured, venerated, and not to be transgressed for the whole of one’s life.

The rules related to higher ordination for female candidates are the topic of the next chapters. In the course of my discussion, I will refer to the type of ordination that requires the pres-

ence of both monastic orders as “dual ordination”, in contrast to “single ordination”, which is when a quorum of *bhikkhus* can grant ordination on their own.

For the present *garudhamma*, the comparative perspective based on other *Vinaya* traditions is again of relevance (Anālayo 2016: 95–99). From this perspective, the reference to dual ordination by both orders is not found in all versions, as some only refer to single ordination given by monks. From a historical perspective, the implications of this difference seem to me uncertain and I fail to see a definite reason for categorically preferring one reading over the other.

In the *Cullavagga* narrative the reference in the sixth *garudhamma* to dual ordination by both orders leads up to a whole episode based precisely on this formulation and the resultant need to clarify in which way the followers of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī should be ordained when no *bhikkhunī* order is in existence. This in turn implies that the reference to dual ordination by both orders must be an early element in the development of this text and needs to be taken for granted when trying to develop a coherent reading of the Pāli *Vinaya* account.

In the case of the stipulation on probationary training the situation is different, however, as the remainder of the narrative would work just as well if the probationary period were not mentioned in the *garudhamma*. This is indeed the case in several other *Vinayas*, so that from a comparative perspective it seems possible that the probationary training is a later addition to the sixth *garudhamma*.

The impression that this reference could be a later addition is based not only on its absence in several parallel versions, but also on consulting the report of another episode in the same Pāli *Vinaya*. This is the narrative setting for the promulgation of *pācittiya* 61 for *bhikkhunīs*, which reports that a pregnant woman had been ordained. The reaction among lay people on seeing her going out to beg alms in this condition then led to criticism by other *bhikkhunīs* and eventually to the Buddha promulgating a rule that a *bhikkhunī* who grants higher

ordination to someone who is pregnant incurs a *pācittiya* offence. If from the outset all candidates had been observing the probationary training, which requires continuous adherence to celibacy, this could not have happened.

However, it could of course be imagined that lack of proper adherence to the *garudhamma* led to the ordaining of a pregnant woman. Yet, had the probationary training been in existence, instead of a rule against ordaining a pregnant candidate, a more natural response would have been a rule against lax observance of the probationary training, thereby also covering breaches of celibacy that do not result in pregnancy.

This is in fact found in *pācittiya* 63 for *bhikkhunīs*, which concerns precisely the requirement to train as a probationer. According to the relevant narrative, higher ordination had been given to female candidates who had not undergone probation for two years in the six principles. As a result:

*tā bālā honti abyattā na jānanti kappiyaṃ vā akappiyaṃ vā,*

these were foolish and ignorant, they did not know what was allowable and what was not allowable.

This provides a natural context for the arising of a stipulation regarding the need for a probation period.

Nevertheless, it should also be mentioned that the narrative reports that the criticizing *bhikkhunīs* referred to the need for a period of probation for two years in the six principles, similar to the cases of other *pācittiyas* discussed above that refer to principles enshrined in the corresponding *garudhamma*. Here, too, this gives the impression that such a need was already recognized at the time of the reported event.

In sum, although I personally think it probable that the probationary training was not part of the formulation of the sixth *garudhamma* from the outset, the case is not unequivocal.

Be that as it may, the narrative continues by reporting detailed instructions given by the Buddha regarding how to ad-

minister such probationary training. These show that the six principles correspond to six of the ten precepts of a novice, namely:

- to refrain from killing,
- to refrain from taking what is not given,
- to refrain from sexual activity,
- to refrain from false speech,
- to refrain from intoxication,
- to refrain from eating at the wrong time.

What marks the difference from an undertaking of these precepts by lay disciples or even by novices is that they are taken in the following manner:

*dve vassāni avītikkamma samādānaṃ samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the resolution not to transgress it for two years.

Thus the challenge faced by a probationer is to maintain such ethical conduct continuously for two years in order to qualify for higher ordination. A *bhikkhunī* ordaining a female candidate who has not maintained such continuity incurs a *pācittiya*.

The incurring of a *pācittiya* in this way does not imply, however, that the ordination itself is invalid, as already shown by Bhikkhu Bodhi (2010: 45f).

This becomes evident from a closer look at the text that follows *pācittiya* 63 for *bhikkhunīs* on the probationary training. After stipulating that ordaining a female candidate who has not trained for two years as a *sikkhamānā* results in a *pācittiya* offence for the ordaining *bhikkhunī* preceptor, the *Vinaya* continues by discussing several such cases where a female candidate is ordained who has not fulfilled the *sikkhamānā* training.

Three cases concern offences that are incurred when the ordination itself is legal, *dhammakamma*, and another three cases concern an ordination that is not legal, *adhammakamma*. The first three cases are as follows:

- 1) *dhammakamme dhammakammasaññā vuṭṭhāpeti*, “the act being legal, she ordains her perceiving the act as legal”;
- 2) *dhammakamme vematikā vuṭṭhāpeti*, “the act being legal, she ordains her being uncertain”;
- 3) *dhammakamme adhammakammasaññā vuṭṭhāpeti*, “the act being legal, she ordains her perceiving the act as illegal”.

These three cases differ because the preceptor has a different perception. She may think the act to be legal (1), she may be in doubt about its legality (2), or she may think the act to be illegal (3). In each of these three cases, the preceptor incurs a *pācittiya* offence, *āpatti pācittiyassa*.

In each of these three cases, however, the act itself of ordaining a female candidate who has not fulfilled the training as a *sikkhamānā* is legal, *dhammakamma*. This clearly implies that a *bhikkhunī* ordination is not invalidated by the fact that the candidate has not fulfilled the *sikkhamānā* training.

Therefore, from the viewpoint of the canonical *Vinaya*, the higher ordination of a female candidate is still valid even if she has not undertaken the training period of two years as a *sikkhamānā*.

## REVILING AND CRITICISM

The comparative perspective is also of interest to the remaining two *garudhammas*, as in one other *Vinaya* tradition only the second one has a counterpart (Anālayo 2016: 107).

These two *garudhammas* are in fact related to some degree, as the seventh *garudhamma* concerns reviling and the eighth *garudhamma* concerns criticism. Therefore in what follows I take them up together. The seventh *garudhamma* reads:

A *bhikkhunī* should not in any way revile or abuse a *bhikkhu*.

According to the eighth *garudhamma*:

From today on, *bhikkhunīs* are not permitted to criticize *bhikkhus*. *Bhikkhus* are permitted to criticize *bhikkhunīs*.

The seventh *garudhamma* corresponds to *pācittiya* rule 52 for *bhikkhunīs*, whose promulgation is preceded by a report of an actual instance of such behaviour by the infamous group of six *bhikkhunīs*. The same injunction to avoid reviling and abusing *bhikkhus* applies also to male novices, *sāmaṇeras*, according to the first chapter of the *Mahāvagga* (section 57).

The need to avoid criticism, however, is less self-evident. In fact the *Vinaya* reports instances where criticism raised by *bhikkhunīs* of *bhikkhus* motivated the Buddha to promulgate a ruling against such behaviour of *bhikkhus*, without any censure of the fact that the *bhikkhunīs* had voiced criticism.

A case illustrating this concerns *pācittiya* 21 for *bhikkhus*, which prevents them from just setting themselves up as exhorters of *bhikkhunīs*. This is what, according to the accompanying narration, the infamous group of six *bhikkhus* had done, followed by then engaging in all kinds of irrelevant chattering rather than giving a proper exhortation. On being asked by the Buddha about the exhortation, the *bhikkhunīs* are on record for stating:

*kuto, bhante, ovādo iddho bhavissati? ayyā chabbaggiyā parittaññeva dhammiṃ kathaṃ katvā divasaṃ tiracchānakathāya vītināmetvā uyyojesun ti.*

Venerable sir, how could the exhortation have been effective? The masters of the group of six, having given a trifling talk on the Dhamma, spent the day in irrelevant chatter, and then dismissed us.

This formulation does amount to criticism, which in this case was clearly quite appropriate.

In addition the two *aniyata* regulations can be consulted, according to which breaches of rules by *bhikkhus* can even be

pointed out by a trustworthy lay woman. Once that much is possible, there seems to be little scope to prohibit *bhikkhunīs* from voicing any criticism in principle, in particular if this concerns actual instances of misbehaviour by *bhikkhus* deserving of criticism.

This in turn suggests that the point at stake would be directly criticizing a *bhikkhu* face to face in a challenging or offensive manner or else in a way that implies the assuming of disciplinary authority by the *bhikkhunī(s)* over *bhikkhus*.

#### THE GARUDHAMMAS AND THE BHIKKHUS

Be that as it may, the *bhikkhus* must have come to know about the *garudhammas*, presumably on being informed by Ānanda that the Buddha had promulgated them for Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, who had accepted them. Thus the *bhikkhus* would have known that they were expected to undertake the following activities, wherever a *bhikkhunī* order is in existence:

- inform the *bhikkhunīs* of the observance day, the *uposatha* (*garudhamma* 3),
- give them the exhortation, the *ovāda* (also *garudhamma* 3),
- cooperate in their invitation ceremony, the *pavāraṇā* (*garudhamma* 4),
- cooperate in their observance of penance, *mānatta* (*garudhamma* 5),
- cooperate in their higher ordination, *upasamapadā* (*garudhamma* 6).

In the next chapter I will briefly return to the topic of exhortation, in relation to a special allowance given by the Buddha for a *bhikkhu* to approach the dwelling of a *bhikkhunī* to give her an exhortation. This is recorded in the narrative related to *pācittiya* 23 for *bhikkhus*, which reports that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had been sick and did not receive an exhortation, as *bhikkhus* did not dare to go to her quarters for that purpose. When she

conveyed her disappointment to the Buddha, he made an amendment to the rule.

Out of the areas of cooperation listed above, a topic that will be of continuous relevance in the remainder of my exploration is the role to be played by *bhikkhus* in relation to the ordination of female candidates. Before turning to that, however, the narrative of what happened after Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's acceptance of the eight *garudhammas* needs to be studied.

#### THE PREDICTION OF DECLINE

The need for the *bhikkhus* to collaborate with the newly founded order of *bhikkhunīs* provides a background for what ensues in the *Cullavagga* after Ānanda had informed the Buddha that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had accepted the eight *garudhammas*.

According to the *Cullavagga*, at this juncture of events the Buddha predicted the lifespan of his dispensation would be shortened from a thousand to five hundred years. He also illustrated the situation with similes that describe a household with many women and few men, which can easily be attacked by robbers, and a ripe crop of rice or sugar cane that is suddenly attacked by a disease.

Based on a comparative study of this prediction in the different *Vinayas*, I have come to the conclusion that it probably originates from the canonical account of the first *saṅgīti*, held after the Buddha's demise (Anālayo 2016: 159–177). In other words, as far as I am able to tell, the prediction of decline is not an authentic record of what the Buddha actually said.

However, in what follows I will be taking the account in the *Cullavagga* at its face value, since my task is to arrive at a coherent reading of the Pāli canonical text as it has come down. Here it should be noted that this prediction comes after Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had accepted what the Buddha had proposed. It thus could not be a censure of her act of accepting the *garudhammas*, which was done simply in compliance with what the Buddha had suggested she should do.

Nor could it have functioned as a warning to Ānanda, since to perform that purpose the Buddha should have voiced this prediction earlier, when Ānanda was making his petition. At this point in the narrative of the *Cullavagga*, the prediction can no longer fulfil such a function.

Phra Payutto (2013: 49) suggests the following interpretation:

the Buddha laid down the eight *garudhammas* as a protective embankment. With such protection the teachings will last for a long time, just like before.

In other words, from the viewpoint of this interpretation the prediction and the similes would serve to stress the importance of the eight *garudhammas*. They alert members of both monastic orders to the need to implement the guidelines given by the Buddha regarding the collaboration between *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*.

#### THE SIMILE OF THE DYKE

This need is in fact evident from another simile found at this juncture in the *Cullavagga* (already alluded to in the quote above by Phra Payutto). The simile reads as follows:

*seyyathāpi, ānanda, puriso mahato taḷākassa paṭikacc'eva āḷim bandheyya yāvadeva udakassa anatikkamanāya; evam eva kho, ānanda, mayā paṭikacc'eva bhikkhunīnaṃ aṭṭha garudhammā paññattā yāvajīvaṃ anatikkamanīyā ti.*

Ānanda, it is just as if a person would construct a dyke for a great reservoir as a precaution so that the water does not overflow; in the same way, Ānanda, I have as a precaution prescribed the eight *garudhammas* for *bhikkhunīs*, which are not to be transgressed for the whole of one's life.

The commentary on this simile, the *Samantapāsādikā*, explains:

*paṭikacc' eva avītikamanatthāya garudhammā paññat-tā. tesu apaññattesu ... pañc'eva vassasatāni saddhammo tiṭṭheyya. paṭikacc'eva paññattattā pana aparāni pi pañcavassasatāni ṭhassatī ti. evaṃ paṭhamaṃ vuttaṃ vassasahassam eva ṭhassatī ti.*

The *garudhammas* have been prescribed as a precaution for the sake of non-transgression. Had these not been prescribed ... the True Dhamma would endure [only] five hundred years. Being prescribed as a precaution, it will endure another five hundred years. Thus it was said at first that it will endure a thousand years.

The imagery of a dyke recurs in the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta* in the *Anupada-vagga* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* (discourse 119). The dyke here serves to ensure that a pond becomes full to the brim with water. The accumulated power of the water, which would be available if the dyke were to be opened, illustrates the power of mindfulness of the body as a means of reaching any attainment.

The image of a dyke also occurs in a discourse among the Fives of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* (discourse 28), where the power accumulated through this dyke illustrates the power of various types of concentration, leading up to any of the six higher knowledges.

Applied to the present context, this suggests that the promulgation of the *garudhammas* functions as a dyke that serves to afford sufficient protection to women who go forth as *bhikkhunīs* in the Buddha's dispensation. In this way women can actualize their potential to awaken, comparable to what is possible through mindfulness of the body or the cultivation of different types of concentration.

## THE BHIKKHUS AS PROTECTORS

In terms of the ancient Indian setting, the *bhikkhus* now had the role of acting as protectors and guides of the *bhikkhunīs*. These are placed under male tutelage comparable to that of lay

women who, in the ancient Indian setting, were under the protection of their fathers, husbands, or sons.

Here it is also of relevance that in the *Cullavagga* account Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī expresses her acceptance of the eight *garudhammas* with recourse to a simile, already mentioned in the previous chapter:

It is just as if there were a young woman or a young man, youthful and fond of adornment who, having washed the head, on obtaining a garland of lotuses, jasmine, or roses, would accept it with both hands and place it on the head.

In the ancient Indian setting, the giving of a garland to a female has connotations of a marriage engagement. It implies that the woman so garlanded is betrothed and should no longer be considered as a potential wife by other males. She is now under the protection not only of the male members of her own family, but also of those of her future in-laws. As such, a woman garlanded as a sign of engagement, *mālāguṇaparikkhittā*, finds mention in the discourses in a list of women with whom having sexual relations is particularly reprehensible.

At the same time, however, in a discourse in the first chapter of the *Majjhima-nikāya* (discourse 5), the *Anaṅgaṇasutta*, the same simile serves to illustrate the joy experienced by *bhikkhus* on receiving an instruction in the Dhamma.

Combining these two indications, the usage of the simile of placing a garland of flowers on her head by Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī could be understood to convey her joy at being allowed to go forth. At the same time, it can be read as an allusion to the fact that, by means of the eight *garudhammas*, she is now entering a relationship of protection and tutelage with the order of *bhikkhus*, comparable to the protection a woman garlanded as a sign of engagement would receive from the family of her in-laws.

This tutelage in particular ensures that the woman who has entered it is not seen as fair game by other males who might

otherwise try to take advantage of her. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the *Vinaya* reports several occasions when *bhikkhunīs* were raped.

A case in point is the narrative that accompanies *pācittiya* 27 for *bhikkhus*. Travelling alone, without being accompanied by *bhikkhus*, a group of *bhikkhunīs* was raped. This then led to an amendment of the regulation that *bhikkhus* should not travel together with *bhikkhunīs*, making it allowable to do so in order to afford protection to *bhikkhunīs*. The same scenario recurs in relation to crossing a river in the narrative for *pācittiya* 28 for *bhikkhus*. Clearly the perception of *bhikkhunīs* as fair game was a serious problem, despite their wearing of monastic robes and having shaven heads.

From this viewpoint, for Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her following to go forth would indeed be comparable to a household with many women and few men, which can easily be attacked by robbers. The possibility of being raped might then appear similar to a ripe crop of rice or sugar cane that is suddenly attacked by a disease.

The perspective that emerges in this way provides an approach to understanding this part of the *Cullavagga* account in a way that does not conflict with the material surveyed in the first chapter of this study. Once several discourse passages see all four assemblies, including the *bhikkhunīs*, as potentially contributing to a prevention of the decline of Dhamma through their conduct, the mere existence of *bhikkhunīs* could hardly in itself be considered as fostering such a decline.

Instead, the theme that appears to stand in the background of several *garudhammas*, as well as of the above-mentioned similes, appears to be the need for *bhikkhus* to act as protectors and guides for the newly-founded order of *bhikkhunīs*. This need manifests right away in relation to the ordination of the Sakyan women who had followed Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī.

In fact the *Vinaya* accords significant importance to the willingness of *bhikkhus* to confer higher ordination on *bhik-*

*khunīs*. According to the third chapter of the *Mahāvagga* (section 6), if a probationer wishes for higher ordination, a *bhikkhu* is permitted to leave his rains residence for up to seven days in order to participate in her higher ordination. He should go with the thought:

*upasampadaṃ ussukkaṃ karissāmi vā, anussavessāmi vā, gaṇapūrako vā bhavissāmī ti.*

I will make an effort for her higher ordination, I will make the announcement or I will complete the quorum.

The first reported instance of *bhikkhus* granting higher ordination to female candidates, the ordination of the Sakyā women, is the topic I will be exploring in the next chapter.

#### SUMMARY

The eight *garudhammas* regulate various aspects of conduct for *bhikkhunīs*, several of which recur as *pācittiya* rules elsewhere in the *Vinaya*. The *garudhammas* also show how the two monastic orders are to collaborate, with the order of *bhikkhus* taking a leading role in legal matters and coming to stand in place of the protection a lay woman would have received from her father, husband, or son.

Out of the eight *garudhammas*, the one of particular importance for the overall topic of *bhikkhunī* ordination is the sixth. This stipulates the need for both orders to collaborate in giving ordination to a female candidate who has completed the probationary training. Elsewhere the *Vinaya* indicates that failure to complete such probationary training does not invalidate an ordination, although the preceptor incurs a *pācittiya* offence.

## The Ordination of the Sakyan Women

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had received her ordination by accepting the eight *garudhammas*. Three of these, the fourth, fifth, and sixth *garudhammas*, require the cooperation of “both orders”. Thus not only in matters of invitation (fourth *garudhamma*) and the undergoing of penance (fifth *garudhamma*), but also in matters of ordination (sixth *garudhamma*) the respective procedures could not have been implemented right away.

Although Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had now become a *bhikkhunī*, she was alone. For the procedures described in these three *garudhammas* to be undertaken, first an order of *bhikkhunīs* had to come into existence by ordaining other female candidates who could then join Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī to perform these legal acts.

Yet, an order of *bhikkhunīs* could not come into existence in the way described in the sixth *garudhamma*. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī could not have gathered a *bhikkhunī* quorum for cooperating with a quorum of *bhikkhus* in giving ordination to female candidates, simply because there were no other *bhikkhunīs*. Higher ordination from both orders was impossible at that time.

This impossibility had the predictable result that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had to come back to the Buddha and ask what she should do in regard to her five hundred followers, who also wanted to become *bhikkhunīs*.

### MAHĀPAJĀPATĪ GOTAMĪ’S REQUEST FOR GUIDANCE

The *Cullavagga* reports Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī requesting guidance from the Buddha in the following manner:

*atha kho mahāpajāpatī gotamī yena bhagavā tenupasaṅkami, upasaṅkamitvā bhagavantaṃ abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ aṭṭhāsi. ekamantaṃ thitā kho mahāpajāpatī gotamī bhagavantaṃ etadavoca: kathāhaṃ, bhante, imāsu sākiyānīsu paṭipajjāmī ti?*

Then Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī approached the Blessed One. Having approached and paid homage to the Blessed One, she stood to one side. Standing to one side, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī said this to the Blessed One: “Venerable sir, how should I proceed in relation to those Sakyan women?”

*atha kho bhagavā mahāpajāpatiṃ gotamiṃ dhammiyā kathāya sandassesi samādapesi samuttejesi sampahaṃsesi.*

Then the Blessed One instructed, encouraged, inspired, and gladdened Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī with a talk on the Dhamma.

*atha kho mahāpajāpatī gotamī bhagavatā dhammiyā kathāya sandassitā samādapitā samuttejitā sampahaṃsitā bhagavantaṃ abhivādetvā padakkhiṇaṃ katvā pakāmi.*

Then Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, having been instructed, encouraged, inspired, and gladdened by the Blessed One with a talk on the Dhamma and having paid homage to the Blessed One, left [circumambulating him], keeping her right side towards him.

*atha kho bhagavā etasmiṃ nidāne dhammiṃ kathaṃ katvā bhikkhū āmantesi: anujānāmi, bhikkhave, bhikkhūhi bhikkhuniyo upasampādetun ti.*

Then the Blessed One, having given a talk on the Dhamma in relation to this matter, addressed the *bhikkhus*: “*Bhikkhus*, I authorize the giving of the higher ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*.”

According to the excerpt translated above, in a situation when no order of *bhikkhunīs* had yet come into existence, the Buddha authorized *bhikkhus* to ordain female candidates on their own. The present ruling on single ordination caters to the case when the standard procedure of dual ordination by both orders,

envisaged in the sixth *garudhamma*, cannot be followed, simply because an order of *bhikkhunīs* is not in existence.

#### THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE SIXTH GARUDHAMMA

In the preceding part of the *Cullavagga* narrative, the Buddha is on record as promulgating the sixth *garudhamma* in reply to Ānanda's request to create an opportunity for women to go forth in the Buddha's dispensation. In this way, the *Cullavagga* presents the Buddha as asking Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī to accept a stipulation that she will not be able to carry out.

Even though by accepting the whole set of eight *garudhammas* she could become a *bhikkhunī*, she would not be able to form the quorum required for conferral of the higher ordination on her following of Sakyan women who also wanted higher ordination. From the outset it was clear that she would be unable to act according to the sixth *garudhamma* in the way this is now found in the *Cullavagga*.

Taking into account the way the Buddha is presented elsewhere in the canonical texts, it seems hardly possible to assume that the *Vinaya* portrays him as having overlooked the fact that he was promulgating a ruling that right away was impossible to keep. In fact I am not aware of any case in the *Vinaya* where the Buddha gives a ruling that, as soon as it is promulgated, is impossible to put into practice.

The *Vinaya* does record numerous instances where the Buddha finds a need to amend rules, but these are shown to arise because of new situations or problems that manifested subsequently, not because straight away the rule could not be followed at all.

Therefore a more convincing interpretation of the present episode would be to assume that it shows the Buddha purposefully acting in this way. This impression is supported by the fact that he did not lack alternative courses of action.

A simple alternative would have been to formulate the sixth *garudhamma* in a different way. The Buddha could have simply stipulated the need for female candidates to receive or-

dination from *bhikkhus*, without mentioning any *bhikkhunīs* and without bringing in the need for a probationary training.

Such a formulation would have been entirely unproblematic. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's followers could have been directly ordained by the *bhikkhus*, without any need for Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī to come back and enquire about how to proceed. Yet this is not what the *Cullavagga* reports.

In the present situation in the *Cullavagga* narrative, when Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī approaches the Buddha to ask how she should proceed to settle the situation of her followers, the Buddha could have easily ordained them himself. A simple act of ordination on his part would have sufficed and been a straightforward solution, similar to the way he elsewhere ordains *bhikkhus* himself.

An even easier solution would have been to make the acceptance of the eight *garudhammas* serve as the higher ordination for Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's followers as well. Such a use of the *garudhamma* ordination procedure would have been straightforward and no further action would have been required. The *bhikkhunī* order created in this way would have been able to cooperate with *bhikkhus* in future ordinations, in accordance with the sixth *garudhamma*. But this is not what the Pāli *Vinaya* reports.

#### ORDINATION BY BHIKKHUS

In spite of all these possible alternatives, the Buddha is on record for delegating the task of ordination to the *bhikkhus*. The *Cullavagga* narrative reads as if the Buddha creates the conditions for further legislation and then uses this to promulgate a rule that *bhikkhus* should ordain *bhikkhunīs* on their own in a situation where no *bhikkhunī* order able to cooperate with them is in existence. On this reading the circumstances and details described in the *Cullavagga* fall into place in a meaningful manner.

If one instead were to presume that the authorization for *bhikkhus* was meant to settle the situation at that one time in the past only, one would have to consider the *Cullavagga* as showing the Buddha to be acting inconsistently or even overlooking the consequences of what he is doing. For him to pro-

mulgate the sixth *garudhamma* in the form now found in the *Cullavagga* makes sense only if one assumes that he wanted to create an opportunity to provide additional legislation alongside the basic indication that the ordination of women should be done by both orders whenever possible.

To create such an opportunity in turn only really works if it is meant to lead to a general rule, instead of a make-shift solution for one single occasion only. Such additional legislation then is relevant not only for the present occasion, but also for future occasions whenever the conditions that led to its promulgation recur, that is, whenever a *bhikkhunī* order is not in existence.

In other words, the ruling “I authorize the giving of the higher ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*” can be considered to serve as a precedent for later times, in that in a situation where no *bhikkhunī* order is in existence but a *bhikkhu* order is in existence, the *bhikkhus* can give ordination to female candidates on their own.

This has in fact already been explained by the Jetavan Sayādaw, U Nārada Mahāthera, in his commentary on the *Milindapañha* written in Pāli and published in 1949:

*mahāpajāpatigotamiyā: kathāhaṃ bhante imāsu sākiyānīsū paṭipajjāmī ti vutte, na bhagavatā kiṃ nu kho idān’eva bhikkhunīsaṅgho abhāvo anāgate pī ti bhikkhunīsaṅgho abhāvo bhavissatī ti passatā,*

[When] Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī said: “Venerable sir, how should I proceed in relation to those Sakyan women?” the Blessed One did not [think]: “How is it, is the order of *bhikkhunīs* [only] not existent now and [not] in the future?” He saw: “The order of *bhikkhunīs* will also not exist [in the future].”

*bhikkhunīsaṅghe abhāve bhikkhusaṅghe anujānanokāse sampatte ti jānatā: anujānāmi bhikkhave bhikkhūhi bhikkhuniyo upasampādetuṃ ti anupaññattibhāvo bhikkhusaṅghena mātuḡāmo upasampādetabbo ti paññatto.*

Knowing that with the order of *bhikkhunīs* not existing there arises an occasion for an allowance to the order of *bhikkhus*, he prescribed, by way of a supplementary prescription, that women should be higher ordained by the order of *bhikkhus*: “*Bhikkhus*, I authorize the giving of the higher ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*.”

#### THE DOUBT OF THE SAKYAN WOMEN

The *Cullavagga* continues by reporting that the Sakyan women were in doubt about the status of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī:

*atha kho tā bhikkhuniyo mahāpajāpatiṃ gotamiṃ etad avocuṃ: ayyā anupasampannā, mayaṃ c’ amhā upasampannā. evaṃ hi bhagavatā paññattaṃ: bhikkhūhi bhikkhuniyo upasampādetabbā ti.*

Then those *bhikkhunīs* said this to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī: “The lady is not higher ordained, but we are higher ordained. For this has been prescribed by the Blessed One: ‘*Bhikkhunīs* should be higher ordained by *bhikkhus*.’”

*atha kho mahāpajāpatī gotamī yenāyasmā ānando tenupasaṅkami, upasaṅkamitvā āyasmantaṃ ānandaṃ abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ aṭṭhāsī. ekamantaṃ ṭhitā kho mahāpajāpatī gotamī āyasmantaṃ ānandaṃ etad avoca:*

Then Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī approached the venerable Ānanda. Having approached and paid homage to the venerable Ānanda, she stood to one side. Standing to one side, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī said this to the venerable Ānanda:

*imā maṃ, bhante ānanda, bhikkhuniyo evaṃ āhaṃsu: ayyā anupasampannā, mayaṃ c’ amhā upasampannā; evaṃ hi bhagavatā paññattaṃ: bhikkhūhi bhikkhuniyo upasampādetabbā ti.*

“Venerable Ānanda, these *bhikkhunīs* said this to me: ‘The lady is not higher ordained, but we are higher or-

dained. For this has been prescribed by the Blessed One: ‘*Bhikkhunīs* should be higher ordained by *bhikkhus*.’”

*atha kho āyasmā ānando yena bhagavā tenupasaṅkami, upasaṅkamitvā bhagavantam abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ nisīdi. ekamantaṃ nisinno kho āyasmā ānando bhagavantam etad avoca:*

Then the venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One. Having approached and paid homage to the Blessed One, he sat down to one side. Sitting to one side, the venerable Ānanda said this to the Blessed One:

*mahāpajāpatī, bhante, gotamī evam āha: imā maṃ, bhante ānanda, bhikkhuniyo evam āhaṃsu: ayyā anupasaṃpannā, mayaṃ c’amaḥā upasaṃpannā; evam hi bhagavatā paññattaṃ: bhikkhūhi bhikkhuniyo upasaṃpādetabbā ti.*

“Venerable sir, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī says this: ‘Venerable Ānanda, these *bhikkhunīs* said this to me: “The lady is not higher ordained, but we are higher ordained. For this has been prescribed by the Blessed One: ‘*Bhikkhunīs* should be higher ordained by *bhikkhus*.’””

*yadaggena, ānanda, mahāpajāpatiyā gotamiyā aṭṭha garudhammā paṭiggahitā, tad eva sā upasaṃpannā ti.*

[The Buddha said]: “Ānanda, from the time Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had accepted the eight principles to be respected, that was her higher ordination.”

Regarding the impression of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī’s followers that she had not been properly ordained, the Buddha’s reply makes it unmistakably clear that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had indeed received the higher ordination.

#### THE ORDINATION PROCEDURE

The *Cullavagga* account proceeds directly from the Buddha’s pronouncement “I authorize the giving of the higher ordination

of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*” to the doubt of the Sakyan women and thus does not give any further information on how the Buddha’s authorization was actually carried out by the *bhikkhus*.

Since no further specifications are made, it seems fair to assume that the *bhikkhus* would simply have used the standard formal transaction with one motion and three proclamations, *ñatticatuttha kamma*, as laid down for the ordination of male candidates in the first chapter of the *Mahāvagga* (section 28). This was preceded by ordination through simply administering the three refuges. Bhikkhu Ṭhānissaro (1994/2009: 387; chapter 24) explains:

When the Buddha discontinued the going-for-refuge as a method of admission into the Bhikkhu Saṅgha, he retained it as the method by which boys too young for Acceptance could go forth. Ven. Rāhula, the Buddha’s own son, was the first to receive the Going-forth in this way.

The first chapter of the *Mahāvagga* (section 54) reports that it was during the Buddha’s first visit to Kapilavatthu that Rāhula received his novice ordination by way of taking the three refuges. It follows that, by the time the Sakyan women were ordained, the formal transaction with one motion and three proclamations would have already been in use.

The simple procedure used for such a *ñatticatuttha kamma* in early times is as follows: A competent *bhikkhu* announces the motion, mentioning the name of the candidate and of the preceptor. This is then followed by three proclamations that combine the information just announced in the motion with an invitation to the assembled quorum of *bhikkhus* to remain silent if they agree with the motion and to speak up if they do not. Such a procedure could easily have been used to ordain the Sakyan women.

The doubt about Mahāpajāpati Gotamī’s status, voiced by the newly ordained *bhikkhunīs*, makes it clear that she had no formal role in their ordination. Had she taken some role in the or-

dination, such as acting as a preceptor, such a doubt could not have arisen.

This appears to have been in fact the Buddha's intention, in the way it emerges from the preceding portion in the *Cullavagga*. Even though Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī approaches him with the question: "Venerable sir, how should I proceed in relation to those Sakyan women?", in reply the Buddha just gives her a talk on the Dhamma. Only once she has left does he address the *bhikkhus* with instructions on how to proceed. The idea seems to be that the *bhikkhus* should take care of ordaining the Sakyan women, without any involvement of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī.

In fact at this juncture in the narrative of the *Cullavagga* Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had just become a *bhikkhunī* herself; she had not yet had any chance to get acquainted with *Vinaya* procedure. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī would have lacked the required expertise to serve as a preceptor for her followers, however much she had been their leader in earlier times.

Moreover, according to the *Cullavagga* report she had just accepted the eight *garudhammas*, including the stipulation in the sixth *garudhamma* that ordination of a female candidate requires both orders. For her to participate in an ordination of her followers conducted only by the order of *bhikkhus* would be in contradiction to the sixth *garudhamma*.

This in turn makes it only natural that in the *Cullavagga* narrative the Buddha, who had earlier asked her to accept the *garudhammas*, now leaves her out of a procedure that differs from the procedure envisaged in the sixth *garudhamma*.

#### MAHĀPAJĀPATĪ GOTAMĪ'S STATUS

In addition to the Buddha's explicit indication, the *bhikkhunī* status of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī can also be seen, for example, from *pācittiya* 23 for *bhikkhus*. This rule prevents a *bhikkhu* from going to the dwelling place of *bhikkhunīs* to give them exhortation. The *Vinaya* reports that the Buddha made a special amendment to this rule on account of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī.

On one occasion she had been sick. Some *bhikkhus* paying her a visit to enquire about her condition did not give her an exhortation, in order to keep the rule preventing them from giving an exhortation at the dwelling place of a *bhikkhunī*.

When the Buddha came himself to visit her, she told him that she missed the inspiration she had earlier received from *bhikkhus* giving her an exhortation. This motivated the Buddha to give her a talk on the Dhamma himself, followed by amending the rule to the effect that a *bhikkhu* can give an exhortation to a *bhikkhunī* in her dwelling place if she is sick.

This regulation is occasioned by an episode involving Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī as a *bhikkhunī* and is meant to enable her, as well as other *bhikkhunīs*, to receive a visit and an exhortation from *bhikkhus* to uplift them when they are sick.

Her status as a *bhikkhunī* also emerges from the listing of outstanding *bhikkhunī* disciples in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, discussed in the first chapter, which accords to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī the rank of being foremost among *bhikkhunīs* in seniority. In sum, there can be no doubt that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was reckoned a *bhikkhunī* in the *Vinaya* and the discourses.

That the same holds for her followers is implicit in the fact that the Buddha is not shown to object to their claim to have received higher ordination. Instead, on being informed by Ānanda of what they had said, the Buddha only objects to their assumption that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had not received the higher ordination, clarifying that this was a misunderstanding.

In short, the *Vinaya* clearly recognizes both Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her followers as *bhikkhunīs*. This is of relevance to the implications of the canonical definition of a *bhikkhunī* given elsewhere in the *Vinaya*.

#### THE DEFINITION OF A BHIKKHUNĪ

The various rules for *bhikkhunīs* in the *Vinaya* come together with a definition of what it means to be a *bhikkhunī*. This definition, found right away in the word explanation of the first *pārājika* rule for *bhikkhunīs*, states:

*bhikkhunī ti: bhikkhakā ti bhikkhunī, bhikkhācariyaṃ ajjhu-pagatā ti bhikkhunī, bhinnapaṭadharā ti bhikkhunī, sāmāñ-ñāya bhikkhunī, paṭiññāya bhikkhunī, ehi bhikkhunī ti bhik-khunī, tīhi saraṇagamanehi upasampannā ti bhikkhunī, bha-drā bhikkhunī, sārā bhikkhunī, sekhā bhikkhunī, asekhā bhikkhunī, samaggena ubhatosaṅghena ñatticatutthena kam-mena akuppena ṭhānārahena upasampannā ti bhikkhunī.*

A ‘*bhikkhunī*’ [means]: [being called] a *bhikkhunī* [because] ‘she begs’, a *bhikkhunī* [because] ‘she has consented to the conduct of begging’, a *bhikkhunī* [because] ‘she wears a patchwork robe’, a *bhikkhunī* [because] of being called such [by others], a *bhikkhunī* [because] ‘she acknowledges to be one’, a *bhikkhunī* [because of having been ordained by the address] ‘come *bhikkhunī*’, a *bhikkhunī* [because] of having received higher ordination by way of taking the three re-fuges, a *bhikkhunī* [because she is a source of] auspicious-ness, a *bhikkhunī* [because she is like that] in substance, a *bhikkhunī* [because] she is in training, a *bhikkhunī* [because] she has gone beyond training, and a *bhikkhunī* [because] she has been higher ordained in a way that is unchallenge-able and fit to stand by both complete orders through a for-mal transaction with one motion and three proclamations.

*tatra yāyaṃ bhikkhunī samaggena ubhatosaṅghena ñatti-catutthena kammena akuppena ṭhānārahena upasam-pannā, ayaṃ imasmiṃ atthe adhippetā bhikkhunī ti.*

Herein a *bhikkhunī* who has been higher ordained in a way that is unchallengeable and fit to stand by both complete orders through a formal transaction with one motion and three proclamations, this is what is meant here by the designation of a ‘*bhikkhunī*’.

The main point made by this definition of the term *bhikkhunī* is to clarify that the *Vinaya* rules only apply to those who are properly ordained, they do not apply to someone just called *bhikkhunī* for any other reason.

## THE DEFINITION OF A BHIKKHU

A similar definition exists for *bhikkhus*, which is found in the word-explanation for the first *pārājika* for *bhikkhus*:

*bhikkhū ti: bhikkhako ti bhikkhu, bhikkhācariyaṃ ajjhupagato ti bhikkhu, bhinnapaṭadharo ti bhikkhu, sāmāññāya bhikkhu, paṭiññāya bhikkhu, ehi bhikkhū ti bhikkhu, tīhi saraṇagamanehi upasampanno ti bhikkhu, bhadro bhikkhu, sāro bhikkhu, sekho bhikkhu, asekho bhikkhu, samaggena saṅghena ñatticatutthena kammaena akuppena ṭhānārahena upasampanno ti bhikkhu.*

A ‘*bhikkhu*’ [means]: [being called] a *bhikkhu* [because] ‘he begs’, a *bhikkhu* [because] ‘he has consented to the conduct of begging’, a *bhikkhu* [because] ‘he wears a patchwork robe’, a *bhikkhu* [because] of being called such [by others], a *bhikkhu* [because] ‘he acknowledges to be one’, a *bhikkhu* [because of having been ordained by the address] ‘come *bhikkhu*’, a *bhikkhu* [because] of having received higher ordination by way of taking the three refuges, a *bhikkhu* [because he is a source of] auspiciousness, a *bhikkhu* [because he is like that] in substance, a *bhikkhu* [because] he is in training, a *bhikkhu* [because] he has gone beyond training, and a *bhikkhu* [because] he has been higher ordained in a way that is unchallengeable and fit to stand by a complete order through a formal transaction with one motion and three proclamations.

*tatra yvāyaṃ bhikkhu samaggena saṅghena ñatticatutthena kammaena akuppena ṭhānārahena upasampanno, ayaṃ imasmiṃ atthe adhippeto bhikkhū ti.*

Herein a *bhikkhu* who has been higher ordained in a way that is unchallengeable and fit to stand by a complete order through a formal transaction with one motion and three proclamations, this is what is meant here by the designation of a ‘*bhikkhu*’.

This definition also contrasts a *bhikkhu* ordained by a formal transaction with one motion and three proclamations to someone who is just called a *bhikkhu* because he begs, etc.

#### MAHĀKASSAPA AS A BHIKKHU

Care needs to be taken when handling the above definition as applicable to instances of the term *bhikkhu* in the remainder of the *Vinaya*. Here room needs to be made for the fact that, according to the eleventh chapter of the *Cullavagga*, Mahākassapa presided over the recitation of the *Vinaya* at the first *saṅgīti*. Obviously this implies that he was still alive and also still a *bhikkhu* at that time.

Now the report of Mahākassapa's first meeting with the Buddha in the *Kassapa-samyutta* of the *Samyutta-nikāya* (discourse 11) records three instructions given to him by the Buddha. According to the commentary, the *Sāratthappakāsinī*, these three instructions formed his higher ordination. The *Vinaya* commentary, the *Samantapāsādikā*, regarding the definition of a *bhikkhu* in the word explanation for the first *pārājika* for *bhikkhus*, in fact refers to the case of Mahākassapa's ordination as a distinct form of ordination by "accepting an instruction", *ovādapaṭiḡgahaṇūpasampadā*. This type of ordination is not explicitly mentioned in the *Vinaya* definition of a *bhikkhu*.

This example shows why care is required in the way the definition of the term *bhikkhu* is interpreted. It seems best to assume that it refers to those ordained by a formal transaction with one motion and three proclamations as an example for an ordination that is "unchallengeable and fit to stand", not as the only possible option for an ordination that is "unchallengeable and fit to stand".

If one were to insist that only those ordained by a formal transaction with one motion and three proclamations can be reckoned as legally valid *bhikkhus*, and nobody else, then strictly speaking Mahākassapa would also not count as a *bhikkhu*. One would then be forced to conclude that the Theravāda *Vinaya* does not recognize the convener of the first *saṅgīti* as a *bhikkhu*.

Such a conclusion would be self-defeating, as it would result in the codification of monastic law at the first *saṅgīti* being the result of a recital undertaken at the request and under the leadership of a non-*bhikkhu*.

Instead of depriving the main protagonist in the codification of the *Vinaya* of his legal authority, it seems preferable to adopt an open interpretation that leaves room for the validity of forms of higher ordination in addition to the one by a formal transaction with one motion and three proclamations, mentioned in the *Vinaya* definition of a *bhikkhu*, as long as these forms of ordination are similarly “unchallengeable and fit to stand”. This is quite clearly the case for Mahākassapa.

#### SINGLE ORDINATION AND THE DEFINITION OF A BHIKKHUNĪ

In the same vein, when interpreting the definition of a *bhikkhunī* one would have to make allowance for Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī’s higher ordination by accepting the eight *garudhammas* as well as for her followers being ordained by *bhikkhus* only. Neither type of ordination is explicitly mentioned in the definition of a *bhikkhunī*, similar to the case of Mahākassapa’s ordination not being mentioned in the definition of a *bhikkhu*.

In sum, then, in relation to the *Vinaya* definitions of a *bhikkhu*, as well as that of a *bhikkhunī*, the one who has been higher ordained by one or both complete orders is best considered as a prominent example of an ordination that is “unchallengeable and fit to stand”, instead of being an exhaustive account of valid ordinations.

Whereas the form of higher ordination received by Mahākassapa and Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī were administered by the Buddha himself and thus are not forms of ordination that can be given by others, the higher ordination given to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī’s followers differs in this respect, as such an ordination can be given by *bhikkhus*.

Keeping in mind the above suggested conclusions, the definition of what makes one a *bhikkhunī* would leave open the possibility of *bhikkhunīs* being ordained by *bhikkhus* on their

own, if this takes place in a situation where such a form of higher ordination is legally valid. It would be legally valid if this takes place when no *bhikkhunī* order capable of cooperating in such an ordination is in existence.

In such a situation, higher ordination by a quorum of *bhikkhus* alone would be “unchallengeable and fit to stand”, and those ordained in this way would have to be considered as falling within the scope of the legal definition of a *bhikkhunī*.

Although ordination by *bhikkhus* is the way to proceed at a time when no order of *bhikkhunīs* is in existence, the situation differs once such an order exists. With the successful ordination of the Sakyan women, an order of *bhikkhunīs* had come into existence and could thus cooperate in the granting of ordination to other female candidates. To such dual ordinations I turn in the next chapter.

#### SUMMARY

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī’s inability to implement the sixth *garudhamma*, requiring both orders to collaborate in the ordination of female candidates, leads to the Buddha stipulating that the *bhikkhus* on their own should give ordination to her followers. This sets a precedent for a time when an order of *bhikkhunīs* is not in existence. In such a setting, *bhikkhus* are entitled to give ordination on their own.

## Ordination in Two Stages

After reporting how the followers of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī received ordination, the *Cullavagga* continues with various incidents that involve *bhikkhunīs*. Unsurprisingly, the newly ordained *bhikkhunīs* did not know how to perform various legal acts. A case in point is the recitation of the code of rules, the *pātimokkha*.

### RECITATION OF THE CODE OF RULES

The tenth chapter of the *Cullavagga* (section 6) reports that the *bhikkhunīs* did not recite the code of rules. This motivated the Buddha to authorize such recitation. As the *bhikkhunīs* were uncertain as to who should perform such recital, the Buddha is on record as authorizing that the *bhikkhus* should recite the *pātimokkha* for the *bhikkhunīs*.

When the resultant regular visiting of *bhikkhus* to the nunnery led to suspicions by the laity that the *bhikkhus* were having improper relations with the *bhikkhunīs*, the Buddha revoked the earlier prescription and authorized that from then on the *bhikkhunīs* were to recite the code of rules themselves. In order to do so, however, they had to be taught by the *bhikkhus*, leading to yet another authorization by the Buddha to the effect that the *bhikkhus* were to teach the recitation of the code of rules to the *bhikkhunīs*.

A similar pattern can be seen in relation to other legal acts, which at first the *bhikkhus* were to take care of, but then eventually the matter passes into the hands of the *bhikkhunīs*, once they have learned how to go about it.

### THE STUMBLING BLOCKS

A comparable development can also be discerned in relation to the granting of ordination, which evolved into two stages, the first of which is given by the *bhikkhunīs* on their own. Here is

the report in the *Cullavagga* about what circumstances led to this development:

*tena kho pana samayena upasampannāyo dissanti animittā pi, nimittamattā pi, alohitā pi, dhuvalohitā pi, dhuvacoḷā pi, paggharantī pi, sikhariṇī pi, itthipaṇḍakā pi, vepurisikā pi, sambhinnā pi, ubhatobyañjanā pi.*

At that time there were seen among the higher ordained those who had no [sexual] organs, incomplete [sexual] organs, who did not menstruate, who menstruated continuously, who continuously had to use a sanitary cloth, who were incontinent, who had uterine prolapse, who were female *paṇḍakas*, who were androgyne, whose [urethra and anus] were conjoined, who were hermaphrodites.

*bhagavato etam atthaṃ ārocesuṃ. anujānāmi, bhikkhave, upasampādentiyā catuvīsati antarāyike dhamme pucchituṃ. evañ ca pana, bhikkhave, pucchitabbā:*

They told this to the Blessed One, [who said]: “*Bhikkhus*, I authorize the one who is giving higher ordination to ask [the candidate] about twenty-four stumbling blocks. *Bhikkhus*, she should be asked in this way:

*nasi animittā? nasi nimittamattā? nasi alohitā? nasi dhuvalohitā? nasi dhuvacoḷā? nasi paggharantī? nasi sikhariṇī? nasi itthipaṇḍakā? nasi vepurisikā? nasi sambhinnā? nasi ubhatobyañjanā? santi te evarūpā ābādhā: kuṭṭhaṃ, gaṇḍo, kilāso, soso, apamāro? manussāsī? itthīsī? bhujissāsī? aṇaṇāsī? nasi rājabhaṭṭī? anuññātāsī mātāpītūhi, sāmikena? paripuṇṇavīsativassāsī? paripuṇṇaṃ te pattacīvaram? kiṃ nāmāsī? kānāmā te pavattinī ti?*

“You are not without [sexual] organs, are you? You are not with incomplete [sexual] organs, are you? You are not without menstruation, are you? You are not with continuous menstruation, are you? You are not one who

continuously has to use a sanitary cloth, are you? You are not incontinent, are you? You do not have uterine prolapse, do you? You are not a female *paṇḍaka*, are you? You are not androgynous, are you? You are not one whose [urethra and anus] are conjoined, are you? You are not a hermaphrodite, are you? Do you have a disease such as leprosy, boils, eczema, tuberculosis, or epilepsy? Are you a human being? Are you a woman? Are you a free woman? Are you without debts? You are not in royal service, are you? Do you have the permission of your parents and of your husband? Are you fully twenty years old? Are your robes and bowl complete? What is your name? What is the name of your female preceptor?"

A comparable enquiry into stumbling blocks for male candidates is also part of the final version of the procedure for granting higher ordination to *bhikkhus*. Both are meant to prevent the entry of undesirable members into the respective orders.

#### THE FEMALE PRECEPTOR

Noteworthy in the above passage is the last question regarding the female preceptor, *pavattinī*. The term *pavattinī* clearly designates the preceptor as female; in the case of the corresponding enquiry after stumbling blocks for male candidates, found in the first chapter of the *Mahāvagga* (section 76), the equivalent question concerns the name of the *upajjhāya*, the male preceptor.

This shows that the enquiry translated above is situated at a time when the *bhikkhunīs* were to some degree involved in the granting of ordination, at least in the form of a female preceptor who proposed the candidate to the order of *bhikkhus* for ordination.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the ordination of the followers of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was undertaken by *bhikkhus* only and the context shows that she did not have a role in

that ordination. This appears to have subsequently changed, evident from the reference to a female preceptor, *pavattinī*.

In fact, once an order of *bhikkhunīs* had come into existence through the ordination of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's followers, an order that was capable of forming a quorum for the ordination of a female candidate, it would have been natural for subsequent ordinations to follow the injunction given in the sixth *garudhamma*.

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had earlier been the leader of the group of Sakyā women and now was the most senior *bhikkhunī*. Since, according to the *Cullavagga* account, she had accepted the *garudhammas* as her own ordination, it can safely be assumed that she would have used her authority among the *bhikkhunīs* to ensure these were implemented, in particular the sixth *garudhamma* when ordaining further female candidates.

Such female candidates would have stayed with the *bhikkhunīs* when preparing for their ordination as well as afterwards, and the *bhikkhunīs* would have brought the candidates to the *bhikkhus* for ordination. Keeping in mind that dual ordination in separate stages only came into existence later, at the present stage in the evolution of *bhikkhunī* ordination it would be natural if the *bhikkhunīs* were also present during the actual ordination conferred by the *bhikkhus*.

An implementation of the sixth *garudhamma* would only have required their silent presence during the ordination. This could have served as an expression of approval of the motion, such silence being the customary mode of approving a legal act in *Vinaya* procedures.

#### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SIXTH GARUDHAMMA

As mentioned in chapter 2, it seems possible, although not certain, that the formulation of the sixth *garudhamma* did not originally cover the training as a probationer. Nevertheless, even implementing the requirement of a probation period would

not have been impossible at that early stage in the history of the *bhikkhunī* order.

Once Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her followers had become *bhikkhunīs*, it must have taken some time before news spread and other women became aware of the recently created possibility to go forth in the Buddha's dispensation. Moreover, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her followers were known to the Buddha personally and had already gone through some degree of preparatory training by shaving their heads, wearing monastic attire, and following the Buddha on his wanderings from Kapilavatthu to Vesālī. Subsequent candidates had not necessarily gone through such experiences and thus would have needed some time to learn how to adjust to the monastic life-style. For such candidates it would be meaningful if they were not to receive ordination right away, but rather after some time of living with the *bhikkhunīs* and thereby implicitly after a period of surveillance of their ability to adjust to the monastic life-style.

Moreover, the *Cullavagga* shows that it took quite a while for the newly ordained *bhikkhunīs* to familiarize themselves with various monastic procedures, making it probable that some time was required for them to settle into their new situation before they were ready to grant ordination to further candidates.

Whatever may be the final word on the probationary training, the other aspect of the sixth *garudhamma*, the cooperation of both orders in granting an ordination, could definitely have been implemented as soon as Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's followers had been ordained. On the assumption that a simple formal transaction was used with one motion and three proclamations, a *ñatticatuttha kamma*, this would just require the presence of a quorum of *bhikkhunīs*, in addition to the quorum of *bhikkhus*.

Given the seniority of the order of *bhikkhus* and the lack of experience of the *bhikkhunīs*, the role of announcing the motion and the three proclamations would have been performed by

a competent *bhikkhu*. The only difference compared to the assumed scenario for ordaining the Sakyan women would have been the presence of a quorum of *bhikkhunīs*, in addition to the quorum of *bhikkhus*.

In this way, the most natural course of events would have been for dual ordination to come into being as soon as this had become possible through the ordination of the Sakyan women.

Whereas a simple formal transaction with one motion and three proclamations would have been unproblematic, the introduction of the enquiry about stumbling blocks did lead to problems.

#### THE EMBARRASSMENT OF THE CANDIDATES

The *Cullavagga* continues by reporting that the following problem arose:

*tena kho pana samayena bhikkhū bhikkhunīnaṃ antarāyike dhamme pucchanti. upasampadāpekkhāyo vitthāyanti, maṅkū honti, na sakkonti vissajjetuṃ.*

At that time the *bhikkhus* asked among the *bhikkhunīs* about the stumbling blocks. Those who wanted to be higher ordained were abashed, they were embarrassed and unable to reply.

*bhagavato etam atthaṃ ārocesuṃ. anujānāmi, bhikkhave, ekato-upasampannāya bhikkhunīsaṅghe visuddhāya bhikkhusaṅghe upasampādetuṃ ti.*

They told this to the Blessed One, [who said]: “*Bhikkhus*, I authorize the higher ordination in the order of *bhikkhus* for one who has been higher ordained on one side and has cleared herself in the order of *bhikkhunīs*.”

*tena kho pana samayena bhikkhuniyo ananusitthā upasampadāpekkhāyo antarāyike dhamme pucchanti. upasampadāpekkhāyo vitthāyanti, maṅkū honti, na sakkonti vissajjetuṃ.*

At that time the *bhikkhunīs* asked those who wanted to be higher ordained and who had not been instructed [about this type of questioning] about the stumbling blocks. Those who wanted to be higher ordained were abashed, they were embarrassed and unable to reply.

*bhagavato etam atthaṃ ārocesuṃ. anujānāmi, bhikkhave, paṭhamaṃ anusāsivā pacchā antarāyike dhamme pucchitun ti.*

They told this to the Blessed One, [who said]: “*Bhikkhus*, I authorize that she should first be instructed and then be asked about the stumbling blocks.”

*tatth’eva saṅghamajjhe anusāsanti. upasampadāpekkhāyo tath’eva vitthāyanti, maṅkū honti, na sakkonti vissajjetuṃ.*

They instructed them just there in the midst of the order. Those who wanted to be higher ordained were still abashed; they were embarrassed and unable to reply.

*bhagavato etam atthaṃ ārocesuṃ. anujānāmi, bhikkhave, ekamantaṃ anusāsivā saṅghamajjhe antarāyike dhamme pucchituṃ.*

They told this to the Blessed One, [who said]: “*Bhikkhus*, I authorize that, having taken her aside and instructed her, she is asked about the stumbling blocks in the midst of the order.”

In a traditional society like ancient India it is quite understandable that women, on being asked such rather personal questions in front of men, would feel too embarrassed to reply; in fact the same might well occur even in modern times. Hence the promulgation by the Buddha that this enquiry should first be undertaken within the order of *bhikkhunīs* and thus without the presence of men. This then resulted in the two-stage ordination procedure.

But even that proved too challenging, leading to additional promulgations by the Buddha intended to render the situation less embarrassing for the female candidates.

#### THE COLLABORATION OF THE BHIKKHUNĪS

Of further significance is the formulation used for the initial attempt to enquire about the stumbling blocks:

At that time the *bhikkhus* asked among the *bhikkhunīs* about the stumbling blocks. Those who wanted to be higher ordained were abashed.

Noteworthy here is that the enquiry is undertaken among *bhikkhunīs*, but the embarrassed women are instead referred to as “those who want to be higher ordained”, *upasampadāpekkhā*.

Now the term *bhikkhunī* also occurs in the rule on single ordination, where it refers to the candidates for ordination:

*anujānāmi, bhikkhave, bhikkhūhi bhikkhuniyo upasampādetun ti.*

*Bhikkhus*, I authorize the giving of the higher ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*.

In that context this is a peculiar but still understandable usage, since the procedure does result in making them *bhikkhunīs*.

In the present case, however, the passage is not about the whole procedure, but only about the enquiry regarding stumbling blocks. Moreover, due to the embarrassment and consequent lack of reply to these questions, the ordination could not have been carried through to its successful completion. Thus it would not be possible to refer to these candidates of an unsuccessful ordination as *bhikkhunīs*.

#### ORDAINED ON ONE SIDE

It would also not work to assume that the usage of the term *bhikkhunī* here implies that the candidates had previously gone

through part of their ordination by a quorum of *bhikkhunīs*. In the *Cullavagga* account this two-stage procedure only comes into being *after* the present incident.

Moreover, those who have gone through the first of these two stages are in the Pāli *Vinaya* consistently referred to as “ordained on one side”, *ekato-upasampannā*, and not as *bhikkhunīs*.

The word *upasampannā* in this compound clearly implies that the procedure conducted by the *bhikkhunīs* on their own should be reckoned as a form of ordination, *upasampadā*. At the same time, however, those who have been successfully ordained in this way do not yet deserve to be called *bhikkhunīs*, for which the procedure to be carried out subsequently by a quorum of *bhikkhus* is required.

This in turn supports the impression that the term *bhikkhunīs* in the passage on the enquiry about stumbling blocks would not refer to the candidates for ordination.

#### THE BHIKKHUNĪS AND THE CANDIDATES

The candidates for ordination are called “those who want to be higher ordained”, *upasampadāpekkhā*. The same term *upasampadāpekkhā* is used consistently to designate the candidates for ordination in subsequent sections of this part of the *Cullavagga*, which is concerned with the enquiry into stumbling blocks.

This consistent usage of the term *upasampadāpekkhā* for the female candidates for ordination makes it unlikely that the occurrence of the term *bhikkhunīs* in the passage translated above results from a textual error. Oral transmission in general tends to stereotype. This means that a reference to *bhikkhunīs*, which is out of keeping with the rest of the passage, stands a good chance to be ‘corrected’ to *upasampadāpekkhā*. In contrast, a change in the opposite direction is rather improbable.

At a subsequent point in this part of the *Cullavagga* the two terms *bhikkhunī* and *upasampadāpekkhā* occur again in close proximity, similar in this respect to the passage transla-

ted above, although the grammatical forms differ. In this case the two terms clearly refer to different persons, distinguishing the *bhikkhunī*, who has been appointed to the task of rehearsing the enquiry into stumbling blocks, from the *upasampadāpekkhā*, who is being taught how to reply to this enquiry:

*tāya sammatāya bhikkhuniyā upasampadāpekkhā upasamkamitvā evam assa vacanīyā: ...*

That *bhikkhunī*, who has been agreed on, having approached the one who wants to be higher ordained, should speak to her like this: ...

The same basic difference seems to hold for the passage describing the first and unsuccessful attempt to enquire about the stumbling blocks, in that those referred to as *bhikkhunīs* must be different from those referred to as *upasampadāpekkhā*, “those who want to be higher ordained”.

#### DUAL ORDINATION

In sum, it seems that the passage under discussion is best read as a reference to already ordained *bhikkhunīs* taking part in the ordination. This confirms the suggestion made above, based on the reference to the *pavattinī*, that at this stage in the evolution of the *bhikkhunī* order, in the way this is described in the *Cullavagga*, dual ordination appears to have already come into existence. This later evolved into the two-stage dual ordination procedure.

Had the *bhikkhus* given ordination alone, the appropriate formulation would have been to describe that they asked the candidates for ordination about the stumbling blocks, not the *bhikkhunīs*, followed by stating that these same candidates were embarrassed. It should read: ‘At that time the *bhikkhus* asked those who wanted to be higher ordained about the stumbling blocks. Those who wanted to be higher ordained were abashed; they were embarrassed and unable to reply.’

The circumstance that the *bhikkhus* are described as asking the *bhikkhunīs* would imply that the latter took part in the ordination procedure. Since some of the questions are of a rather intimate nature, especially those concerned with sexual deformities, it would be quite understandable if the *bhikkhus* did not ask the women about such matters directly. Instead, it would be natural to enquire about the suitability of the candidates among the *bhikkhunīs*, who had brought these for ordination.

Such indirect questioning is not in itself unusual. An example from the discourses would be the *Naḷakapāna-sutta* in the *Bhikkhu-vagga* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* (discourse 68), where the Buddha enquires of the *bhikkhus* in the assembly if Anuruddha and others, who have recently gone forth, delight in the holy life. Only after not receiving any reply does he finally ask them directly.

#### A PROBLEM OF PĀLI GRAMMAR

The assumption that this is another case of such indirect questioning could also explain the peculiar grammar of the sentence in question, where the genitive *bhikkhunīnaṃ* is used with *pucchati* rather than the expected accusative. Here the genitive seems to be conveying the sense that the *bhikkhus* asked “among the *bhikkhunīs*”.

The alternative of relating *bhikkhunīnaṃ* to *antarāyike dhamme* does not work, as the stumbling blocks are only relevant for those wanting to be higher ordained, not for already ordained *bhikkhunīs*. (Supposing a *bhikkhunī* had any of the diseases comprised among the list of stumbling blocks, she would nevertheless remain a *bhikkhunī*).

It would also be superfluous to add a specification to the expression *antarāyike dhamme* to convey that these are stumbling blocks for becoming a *bhikkhunī*, as the present sentence is immediately preceded by a detailed listing of the stumbling blocks for female candidates, making it indubitably clear what type of stumbling blocks are meant. In fact a recurrence of the

same expression *antarāyike dhamme pucchanti* just a few lines of text later stands on its own and is not preceded by a genitive or qualified in any way. Instead, it is preceded by a reference to those wanting to be higher ordained in the accusative, *upa-sampadāpekkhāyo*.

Whatever may be the final word on this grammatical peculiarity, it seems fair to conclude that dual ordination was being performed well before the present ruling on the enquiry about stumbling blocks. That the *Cullavagga* does not explicitly mention a shift from single to dual ordination is not surprising, since this had already been regulated with the sixth *garudhamma* and therefore did not require any further ruling.

#### THE TWO-STAGE PROCEDURE

For a proper appreciation of the development of *bhikkhunī* ordination, it is important to keep in mind that the embarrassment episode is not about dual ordination as such, but rather about a two-stage procedure in conducting dual ordination. Its promulgation serves as an amendment to the basic procedure described in the sixth *garudhamma*. Instead of just giving higher ordination together, the procedure to be adopted now is that the *bhikkhunī* order should give ordination first, followed by ordination given by *bhikkhus*.

In the resultant two-stage ordination the candidate first goes through the first part of the procedure conducted by a quorum of *bhikkhunīs* on their own. The candidate thereby becomes one who is “ordained on one side”, *ekato-upasampannā*. Next she is to approach a quorum of *bhikkhus* for the completion of the ordination.

In this way, the present episode itself is not just about the need for both *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* to participate in the ordination, which is already clear from the sixth *garudhamma*. Instead, it is more specifically about the need for the *bhikkhus* not to participate in the first part of the ordination when questions about the stumbling blocks are asked. The present ruling

does not inaugurate dual ordination as such, but much rather a two-stage procedure for dual ordination.

#### SUMMARY

Following the ordination of the Sakyan women, it seems fairly probable that the stipulations of the sixth *garudhamma* on dual ordination were put into effect right away. These might at the outset have required simply the presence of a quorum of *bhikkhunīs* during the motion and three proclamations.

The need to implement an enquiry into possible stumbling blocks to ordination leads to the embarrassment of the candidates, resulting in an amendment to the basic procedure envisaged in the sixth *garudhamma*. Instead of both orders conducting the ordination together, now the first part of the ordination, involving the enquiry into stumbling blocks, is conducted by an order of *bhikkhunīs* on their own.

When the *bhikkhunīs* have completed their side of the ordination, the candidate becomes one who is “ordained on one side”, *ekato-upasampannā*. In order to achieve the status of being a *bhikkhunī*, a second stage in the ordination procedure is required in the presence of a quorum of *bhikkhus*.

The development that emerges in this way concords with a general pattern evident in the *Cullavagga*, where at first the *bhikkhus* conduct legal matters on behalf of the *bhikkhunīs*, but with the passage of time the *bhikkhunīs* learn to take care of most legal matters on their own.

## Ordination by Messenger

Ordination of a female candidate in two stages, examined in the previous chapter, requires a candidate who has been “ordained on one side” to present herself in front of a quorum of *bhikkhus* for completion of the ordination.

### ORDAINING A FORMER COURTESAN

The tenth chapter of the *Cullavagga* (section 22) reports that the fulfilling of this requirement led to problems:

*tena kho pana samayena aḍḍhakāsī gaṇikā bhikkhunīsu pabbajitā hoti. sā sāvatthiṃ gantukāmā hoti: bhagavato santike upasampajjissāmī ti.*

At that time the [former] courtesan Aḍḍhakāsī had gone forth among the *bhikkhunīs*. She wanted to go to Sāvattihī, [thinking]: “I will be higher ordained in the presence of the Blessed One.”

*assosum kho dhuttā: aḍḍhakāsī kira gaṇikā sāvatthiṃ gantukāmā ti. te magge pariyutthimsu.*

Rogues had heard that: “It seems that the [former] courtesan Aḍḍhakāsī wants to go to Sāvattihī”, and they took control of the road.

*assosi kho aḍḍhakāsī gaṇikā: dhuttā kira magge pariyutthitā ti. bhagavato santike dūtaṃ pāhesi: ahañ hi upasampajjitukāmā; kathaṃ nu kho mayā paṭipajjitabban ti?*

The [former] courtesan Aḍḍhakāsī heard that: “It seems that rogues have taken control of the road.” She sent a messenger to the Blessed One’s presence, [saying]: “I indeed wish to be higher ordained; how should I proceed?”

*atha kho bhagavā etasmiṃ nidāne dhammiṃ kathaṃ katvā bhikkhū āmantesi: anujānāmi, bhikkhave, dūtena pi upasampādetun ti.*

Then the Blessed One, having given a talk on the Dhamma in relation to this matter, addressed the *bhikkhus*: “*Bhikkhus*, I also authorize the giving of the higher ordination by messenger.”

*bhikkhudūtena upasampādentī. bhagavato etam atthaṃ ārocesuṃ: na, bhikkhave, bhikkhudūtena upasampādetabbā. yo upasampādeyya, āpatti dukkaṭassā ti.*

They gave higher ordination through a *bhikkhu* as messenger. They told this to the Blessed One, [who said]: “*Bhikkhus*, higher ordination should not be given through a *bhikkhu* as messenger. For those who give higher ordination [in this way] there is an offence of wrong-doing.”

*sikkhamānadūtena upasampādentī ... sāmaṇeradūtena upasampādentī ... sāmaṇeridūtena upasampādentī ... bālāya avyattāya dūtena upasampādentī.*

They gave higher ordination through a probationer as messenger ... they gave higher ordination through a male novice as messenger ... they gave higher ordination through a female novice as messenger ... they gave higher ordination through a messenger who was foolish and inexperienced.

*na, bhikkhave, bālāya avyattāya dūtena upasampādetabbā. yo upasampādeyya, āpatti dukkaṭassa. anujānāmi, bhikkhave, vyattāya bhikkhuniyā paṭibalāya dūtena upasampādetuntī.*

[They told this to the Blessed One who said]: “*Bhikkhus*, higher ordination should not be given ... through a messenger who is foolish and inexperienced. For those who give higher ordination [in this way] there is an offence

of wrong-doing. *Bhikkhus*, I authorize the giving of the higher ordination through an experienced and competent *bhikkhunī* as messenger.”

The above ruling has as its rationale the wish to protect a *bhikkhunī* candidate from the danger of being raped by rogues. In order to prevent such a thing from happening, the Buddha is on record for making a special allowance that the candidate does not have to approach the *bhikkhus* personally. Instead, another *bhikkhunī* who is experienced and competent can act as a messenger on behalf of the candidate in order to complete her ordination.

#### THE PROBLEM OF RAPE

As already mentioned in the second and third chapters, other passages in the *Vinaya* show that the danger of rape did not affect only those who had formerly been courtesans, but was a problem for *bhikkhunīs* in general.

Besides the reports in the narratives to *pācittiyas* 27 and 28 for *bhikkhus* that whole groups of *bhikkhunīs* were raped when travelling or when crossing a river, discussed in chapter 3, narratives related to the third *saṅghādisesa* for *bhikkhunīs* also record cases of rape: A *bhikkhunī* travelling alone was raped, *bhikkhunīs* crossing a river singly were raped, and a *bhikkhunī* who, in order to relieve herself, had stayed behind a group of *bhikkhunīs* (with whom she was travelling) was also raped.

The danger of being raped was apparently not confined to being on a journey. Even being in one's hut seems not to have been safe. According to the narrative portion that comes after the first *pārājika* for *bhikkhus*, the arahant *bhikkhunī* Up-palavaṇṇā was raped by a man who had hidden in her hut and assaulted her when she came back from begging for alms.

In view of this situation, it would indeed be a meaningful consideration to take into account the vulnerability of *bhik-*

*khunīs* in this respect and adjust the ordination procedure to ensure the safety of the female candidate.

#### THE MOTIVATION BEHIND THE RULES ON ORDINATION

What emerges from the above ruling, as well as from the other rules given on *bhikkhunī* ordination, is the Buddha's concern to facilitate in whatever way possible the ordination of female candidates.

According to the *Vinaya* account, the sixth *garudhamma* is part of a series of guidelines laid down by the Buddha in order to start an order of *bhikkhunīs*. The rule on single ordination has the purpose of enabling the ordination of *bhikkhunīs* when the standard procedure cannot be followed. The ruling on two stages in dual ordination serves to ensure that embarrassment does not interrupt the carrying out of ordination. The regulation on using a messenger is meant to enable ordination even for a candidate who, due to potential danger, cannot present herself in front of a quorum of *bhikkhus*.

These four regulations are all designed to facilitate ordination of *bhikkhunīs*. In the way the *Cullavagga* proceeds, none of these rules were formulated in order to prevent the ordination of *bhikkhunīs*.

#### OVERVIEW OF THE RULES ON ORDINATION

According to the report given in the *Cullavagga*, the rulings given by the Buddha on *bhikkhunī* ordination result in altogether four promulgations:

1) The sixth *garudhamma* on dual ordination:

A probationer who has trained for two years in six principles should seek higher ordination from both orders.

2) Single ordination:

I authorize the giving of the higher ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*.

3) Dual ordination in two stages:

I authorize the giving of the higher ordination in the order of *bhikkhus* for one who has been higher ordained on one side and has cleared herself in the order of *bhikkhunīs*.”

4) Dual ordination by messenger:

I authorize the giving of the higher ordination through an experienced and competent *bhikkhunī* as messenger.

According to the presentation in the *Cullavagga*, the sixth *garudhamma* on dual ordination is the first and foundational indication of how the Buddha wanted the higher ordination of female candidates to be done. As already clarified by the Jeta-van Sayādaw, U Nārada Mahāthera:

*dve vassāni sikkhitasikkhāya sikkhamānāya ubhato saṅghe upasampadā pariyesitabbā ti vutto eko garudhammo bhikkhunīsāṅghe anuppanne yeva sikkhitasikkhāya sikkhamānāya mūlapaññattibhāvena paññatto.*

The principle to be respected that “a probationer who has trained for two years should seek higher ordination from both orders” was prescribed, by way of a fundamental prescription, when the order of *bhikkhunīs* had not yet arisen, for a probationer who has trained.

This “fundamental prescription”, *mūlapaññatti*, has been amended by rulings involving supplementary prescriptions, *anupaññatti*. These subsequent amendments are the other three rules given in the survey above.

In these three instances, it is clearly not the case that only the last one mentioned is valid. Even though the authorization to ordain through a messenger is the last of the promulgations by the Buddha on the issue of *bhikkhunī* ordination, as recorded in the Theravāda *Vinaya*, its legal significance needs to be ascertained by examining the narrative context that precedes it. This brings to light that the first form of the ruling on

ordination by messenger reads “I *also* authorize the giving of the higher ordination by messenger.” The use of the term “also”, *pi*, makes it clear that this ruling is not meant to invalidate the rule on ordination by both orders.

Such an explicit indication is required, since both rules deal with the same basic situation where an order of *bhikkhunīs* is in existence. In this respect these two rules differ from ordination by *bhikkhus* only, which concerns a basically different situation.

In spite of being based on the same situation in which an order of *bhikkhunīs* is in existence, the promulgation of ordination by messenger does not invalidate ordination in two stages. It is not the case that from this point onwards only higher ordination by messenger is possible.

Just as ordination in two stages has not been rendered invalid by the promulgation of ordination by messenger, so too single ordination by *bhikkhus* only has not been invalidated by the promulgation of ordination in two stages. Instead, all three types of procedure are equally valid and do not conflict with each other, as together they address the following possible situations:

- Single ordination: a *bhikkhunī* order is not in existence.
- Dual ordination in two stages: a *bhikkhunī* order is in existence and the candidate can safely approach the *bhikkhus*.
- Dual ordination by messenger: a *bhikkhunī* order is in existence, but the candidate cannot safely approach the *bhikkhus*.

In this way, one rule regulates how to proceed at a time when no *bhikkhunī* order is in existence.

Another rule regulates how the higher ordination of female candidates should be undertaken when a *bhikkhunī* order is in existence and the female candidate can approach the order of *bhikkhus* without putting herself into danger.

Yet another rule regulates how the higher ordination of female candidates should be undertaken when a *bhikkhunī* order is in existence and the female candidate would put herself into danger on attempting to approach the order of *bhikkhus* for higher ordination.

In this way, the three rules complement each other rather than being in conflict with one another. Together they ensure that a female candidate is able to take higher ordination in spite of the absence of an order of *bhikkhunīs*, or in spite of being embarrassed by personal questions posed in the presence of men, or in spite of being unable to come personally for the final part of the ordination ceremony to be conducted in front of a quorum of *bhikkhus*.

#### A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Another and fairly widespread interpretation of this part of the *Cullavagga* is that the regulation on dual ordination in two stages replaced the one on single ordination. The basic logic behind this interpretation is that, even without explicit mention being made, a subsequent ruling implicitly rescinds an earlier ruling on the same matter.

On this interpretation, it is not possible for *bhikkhus* to give ordination to female candidates even when no *bhikkhunīs* are in existence, because single ordination was only valid during the first few years and was implicitly rescinded when dual ordination in two stages came into existence in response to the embarrassment episode.

The lack of an explicit abolishment of the ruling on single ordination by *bhikkhus* only is then assumed to be due to the need for the *bhikkhus* to collaborate in the two stage procedure. The assumption is that if the Buddha had explicitly abolished his promulgation “I authorize the giving of the higher ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*”, then the *bhikkhus* would no longer have been able to participate even in the two-stage procedure.

## THE AUTHORIZATION OF BHIKKHUS

The last argument does not seem to stand up on closer scrutiny of what the *Cullavagga* indicates. The fact that the *bhikkhus* were in principle authorized to have a function in the ordaining of *bhikkhunīs* is already clear from the reference to both orders in the sixth *garudhamma*. It is thus not something that only came into being with the rule on single ordination by *bhikkhus* only.

Moreover, even if this rule on single ordination had been explicitly abolished, the wording of the ruling on the two-stage procedure begins with the following: “I authorize the giving of the higher ordination in the order of *bhikkhus* ...”

Clearly this rule stands on its own; it has an explicit authorization for *bhikkhus* to perform their part in the ordination of a female candidate. The implementation of this rule does not require that any other rule is being preserved rather than being abolished.

Even if there had never been any ruling on single ordination, the functionality of the two-stage procedure would not be in any way impaired. It would still be clear that *bhikkhus* are to give the higher ordination to female candidates, once these have been ordained by the *bhikkhunīs*.

## THE RESCINDING OF AN EARLIER RULE

The other argument, the alleged automatic rescinding of the rule on single ordination by the rule on the two-stage procedure, also does not seem to do full justice to the material found in the *Cullavagga*. It ignores the foundational function of the sixth *garudhamma*. The rule on single ordination is not the first and original promulgation by the Buddha concerning *bhikkhunī* ordination. Instead this rule is a supplement to the procedure envisaged in the sixth *garudhamma*.

This is clear from the way the *Cullavagga* proceeds, where the sixth *garudhamma* is the first pronouncement made by the Buddha on the matter of *bhikkhunī* ordination. This finds

further confirmation in the references discussed in the previous chapter, which indicate that dual ordination, as envisaged in the sixth *garudhamma*, appears to have been undertaken well before the embarrassment event and its consequent ruling leading to ordination given in two stages.

Any dual ordination before the ruling in response to the embarrassment episode would have been done in reliance on the sixth *garudhamma*. Given the function of the rule on single ordination as addressing a situation in which dual ordination was just not possible, it would only be natural for subsequent ordinations to follow the procedure that was, according to the sixth *garudhamma*, in line with how the Buddha preferred the ordination of female candidates to be undertaken.

Another problem with the suggestion regarding the alleged automatic rescinding of the rule on single ordination is that it conflicts with the intention the narrative context suggests is relevant for all four regulations on *bhikkhunī* ordination. As mentioned above, all of these four regulations serve to facilitate ordination of *bhikkhunīs*, not to prevent it. This makes it rather doubtful that an interpretation of any of these rules as completely and definitely preventing the ordination of *bhikkhunīs* does justice to their intent.

In fact, if that had been the point, one might wonder why the *Cullavagga* does not report an explicit abolishment of the authorization for *bhikkhus* to grant ordination on their own. Such an explicit abolishment would have clarified the situation: from now on *bhikkhunī* ordination can only be done by both orders. Yet, this is not what according to the *Vinaya* account happened.

This seems significant, since several rules in the *Cullavagga* that address legal matters related to *bhikkhunīs* do have such indications. According to the *Cullavagga*, at first the Buddha prescribed that the *bhikkhus* should undertake the recitation of the *bhikkhunī* code of rules, the acknowledgement of offences (*āpatti*) done by *bhikkhunīs*, and the carrying out of formal acts (*kamma*) for *bhikkhunīs*. When later on this task was

passed over to the *bhikkhunīs*, the Buddha is on record for explicitly indicating that *bhikkhus* should no longer undertake these matters. Not only that, but he even makes it clear that the *bhikkhus* would incur a *dukkata* offence if they were to continue undertaking these matters on behalf of the *bhikkhunīs*.

No such indication is anywhere found regarding the authorization of *bhikkhus* to ordain *bhikkhunīs* on their own, an authorization given in a situation when no order of *bhikkhunīs* was in existence.

### THE BUDDHA AS A LEGISLATOR

This brings me to another, and in my view the most substantial, problem with this mode of interpretation, which is that it makes the Buddha's promulgation of the sixth *garudhamma* become a meaningless act. Even leaving aside the other problems mentioned earlier, this alone suffices to refute the interpretation that it is impossible for *bhikkhus* to give ordination to female candidates even when no order of *bhikkhunīs* is in existence.

On this interpretation, in reply to the request that he allow "women to receive the going forth from home into homelessness in the teaching and discipline made known by the Tathāgata", the Buddha asked Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī to accept a way of ordaining women that she could not possibly implement.

This implies that, when Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī returned to ask about how to proceed in this situation, the Buddha suddenly realized the problem caused by his own legislation. He then found himself forced to drop the sixth *garudhamma* for good and replace it with another rule, since the sixth *garudhamma* was just not appropriate for the situation for which he had promulgated it. The argument continues that this new rule was later amended to allow for dual ordination. On adopting this interpretation, the sixth *garudhamma* never had any practical function, but was from beginning to end a meaningless regulation.

As mentioned in chapter 4, elsewhere the *Vinaya* does report that on a number of occasions the Buddha would amend or change a rule, but in such cases this happens in response to some event or misbehaviour that had occurred in the meantime. I am not aware of any case where the Buddha is on record for promulgating a rule that from the outset was entirely dysfunctional, in the sense that it just could not be implemented.

It seems to me that the price to be paid for upholding the position that it is impossible for *bhikkhus* to give single ordination to female candidates, when no order of *bhikkhunīs* is in existence, is too high. It requires demoting the Buddha to a short-sighted and careless law-giver.

Instead, it is preferable to assume that, in the account given in the *Cullavagga*, the sixth *garudhamma* as well as the other *garudhammas* are meant to encapsulate the Buddha's general vision of the future for the order of *bhikkhunīs*. Consequently the rule on single ordination was meant to be applicable to the specific situation when the standard procedure described in the sixth *garudhamma* cannot be followed, because no order of *bhikkhunīs* is in existence. In this way, a depiction of the Buddha as thoughtless can be avoided.

In sum, the traditional belief that the Theravāda *Vinaya* does not enable a revival of an extinct *bhikkhunī* order seems to be based on a reading of the relevant rules without sufficient consideration of their narrative background. If studied in their narrative context, it becomes clear that an extinct order of *bhikkhunīs* can be revived by the *bhikkhus*, as long as these are not extinct as well.

As already stated by the Jetavan Sayādaw, U Nārada Mahāthera:

*anujānāmi, bhikkhave, bhikkhūhi bhikkhuniyo upasampādetuṃ ti bhagavato vacanaṃ atītaṃse pi bhikkhunīsaṅghe abhāvaparicchedaṃ, anāgataṃse pi bhikkhunīsaṅghassa abhāvaparicchedaṃ, paccuppannaṃse pi bhikkhunīsaṅghassa abhāvaparicchedaṃ.*

The Blessed One's statement: "*Bhikkhus*, I authorize the giving of the higher ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*" was restricted to [a period in] the past when an order of *bhikkhunīs* did not exist; it will also be restricted to [a period in] the future when an order of *bhikkhunīs* will not exist; and at present it is also restricted to [a period in] when an order of *bhikkhunīs* does not exist.

## SUMMARY

The need to protect female candidates for higher ordination from being attacked by rogues led to the promulgation of a rule authorizing the completion of the second stage of higher ordination, to be conducted in the presence of a quorum of *bhikkhus*, through a messenger and thus without the female candidate being personally present.

The different rulings on *bhikkhunī* ordination in the *Cullavagga* can be seen as supplements to the basic procedure envisaged in the sixth *garudhamma*, according to which a female candidate should receive the higher ordination from both monastic orders.

If an order of *bhikkhunīs* is not in existence, ordination of a female candidate can be given by *bhikkhus* on their own. If such an order is in existence, the two-stage procedure of ordination should be followed, with the *bhikkhunīs* taking care of the enquiry concerning stumbling blocks during the first stage and the *bhikkhus* completing the ordination during the second stage (unless this puts the candidate into danger, in which case this part can be performed by a messenger on behalf of the candidate).

The prevalent belief that the authorization for *bhikkhus* to grant ordination to a woman on their own is no longer valid is unconvincing, once the relevant parts of the *Cullavagga* are examined carefully. Instead, whenever an order of *bhikkhunīs* is not in existence, the *bhikkhus* retain the right to grant ordination on their own.

## Bhikkhunīs in Sri Lanka

The order of *bhikkhunīs* appears to have thrived in India until about the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Long before it disappeared from India, the ordination lineage had been transmitted to Sri Lanka during the time of the reign of King Asoka.

The *Dīpavaṃsa* reports that the preaching activities of the arahant Mahinda, son of Asoka, had led to numerous conversions to Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The recently converted king of Sri Lanka requested the *bhikkhu* Mahinda to confer ordination on Queen Anulā and her followers.

### THE QUEEN'S WISH TO ORDAIN

The relevant part in the fifteenth chapter of the *Dīpavaṃsa* (verses 74–80) reports:

*buddhe pasannā dhamme ca  
saṅghe ca ujudiṭṭhikā  
bhava cittaṃ virājeti  
anulā nāma khattiyā.*

Being from a noble clan and named Anulā  
She had firm faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma,  
and the Saṅgha; being of straight view,  
Her mind had become disenchanted with becoming.

*deviyā vacanaṃ sutvā  
rājā therama id'abravī:*

Having heard the words of the queen  
[Expressing her wish to go forth]  
The king said this to the elder [Mahinda]:

*buddhe pasannā dhamme ca  
saṅghe ca ujudiṭṭhikā.  
bhava cittaṃ virājeti,  
pabbājehi anūlakaṃ.*

“She has firm faith in the Buddha, Dhamma,  
And the Saṅgha; being of straight view,  
Her mind has become disenchanting with becoming.  
Give Anulā the going forth!”

*akappiyā mahārāja  
itthipabbajjā bhikkhuno.*

[Mahinda replied]:  
“Great King, it is not proper for a *bhikkhu*  
To give the going forth to a woman.

*āgamissati me rājā  
saṅghamittā bhagiṇiyā,  
anulaṃ pabbājetvāna  
mocesī sabbabandhanā.*

“My sister Saṅghamittā  
Will come here, o King;  
Having given the going forth to Anulā,  
She will make her find release from all bondage.

*saṅghamittā mahāpaññā  
uttarā ca vicakkhanā,  
hemā ca māśagallā ca  
aggimittā mitāvadā.  
tappā pabbatachinnā ca  
mallā ca dhammadāsiyā,*

“Saṅghamittā of great wisdom [will come],  
[together with] Uttarā the discerning one,  
Hemā and Māśagallā,  
Aggimittā of measured speech,  
Tappā and Pabbatachinnā,  
Mallā and Dhammadāsiyā.

*ettakā tā bhikkhuniyo  
dhūtarāgā samāhitā.  
odātamanasāṅkappā  
saddhammavinaye ratā,*

“These *bhikkhunīs*,  
Concentrated and with lust shaken off,  
With pure thoughts and minds  
Delight in the true Dhamma and *Vinaya*.

*khīṇāsavā vasī pattā*  
*tevijjā iddhikovidā,*  
*uttamatte ʔhītā tattha*  
*āgamissanti tā idha.*

“With the influxes destroyed and [self]-control attained,  
[Endowed with] the three knowledges and skilled in supernormal feats,  
Established in the highest thus,  
They will come here.”

According to the sixteenth chapter of the *Dīpavaṃsa* (verses 37–38), Queen Anulā and her followers did indeed receive ordination from Saṅghamittā and her group of eminent *bhikkhunīs*. They also attained the same level of high distinction by becoming themselves “concentrated and with lust shaken off”. In other words, Anulā and her followers also became arahant *bhikkhunīs*.

While travelling to Sri Lanka, Bhikkhunī Saṅghamittā is on record as having brought along a branch from the Bodhi Tree to be planted in Sri Lanka. The resulting tree has continued to serve as an object of great reverence for Sri Lankan Buddhists from ancient times to today.

#### MAHINDA’S STATEMENT

The *Dīpavaṃsa* reports that, on being asked to grant ordination to the queen, Mahinda replied: “Great King, it is not proper for a *bhikkhu* to confer the going forth on a woman.” The implications of this passage need discussion.

The canonical *Vinaya* has no explicit ruling against the conferring of the “going forth” on a female by a *bhikkhu*. It is only in the commentary, the *Samantapāsādikā*, (in a gloss on the

narrative of the ordination of Yasa, reported in the first chapter of the *Mahāvagga*) that the suggestion is found that, just as “a male only gains the going forth from a *bhikkhu*, a woman only gains it from a *bhikkhunī*”, *purisañ hi bhikkhuto añño pabbā-jetuṃ na labhati, mātugāmaṃ bhikkhunito añño*.

Now in the passage above from the *Dīpavaṃsa*, the expression *pabbajjā* does not seem to carry its technical *Vinaya* sense of “going forth” as a stage distinct from the higher ordination, the *upasampadā*. Instead, it appears to be used here as a term that describes the transition from lay to monastic life in general. That is, here the expression *pabbajjā* would cover both the going forth and the higher ordination.

Since the king had only recently converted to Buddhism, it could hardly be expected that he would be familiar with the technicalities of ordination. As his request is formulated with the expression: “Give Anulā the going forth”, *pabbājehi anulākaṃ*, it is natural that Mahinda’s reply uses the same terminology.

The *Dīpavaṃsa* in fact continues to use the same expression “going forth” when reporting that Anulā and her followers received ordination: *pabbajjimsu*. Yet, they eventually became *bhikkhunīs*, not just *sāmaṇerīs*. Thus it seems clear that in this usage both the “going forth” and the “higher ordination” are included under the term *pabbajjimsu*.

Now Mahinda and his *bhikkhus* could indeed not just confer the higher ordination on the queen and her followers, since in India an order of *bhikkhunīs* was in existence. This is why the queen and her followers had to wait until Mahinda’s sister Saṅghamittā and her group of *bhikkhunīs* had come. In that situation, it was indeed the correct procedure to bring a quorum of *bhikkhunīs* from India.

In relation to this transmission of the *bhikkhunī* ordination lineage, it is also noteworthy that Mahinda showed no trace of hesitation or misgivings regarding the establishment of an order of *bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka as such, as long as this was done in the proper way by bringing *bhikkhunīs* from India to confer or-

dination. The famous arahant, credited with the conversion of Sri Lanka to Buddhism and thus with a missionary activity that could have hardly been more important from the viewpoint of the Theravāda tradition, clearly did not consider the coming into being of *bhikkhunīs* as something detrimental.

Rather than trying to prevent this in some way, he did what he could to facilitate this development by inviting his own sister, Saṅghamittā, to come to Sri Lanka. In fact the inspiring description he gives of the group of arahant *bhikkhunīs* that he plans to invite to Sri Lanka, extolling their various qualities, is similar to the praise of accomplished *bhikkhunīs* in the Pāli discourses. It shows that accomplished *bhikkhunīs* were in existence not only at the time of the Buddha, but also in later times.

Moreover, by reaching the same lofty distinction as Saṅghamittā and her group, Anulā and her followers had joined the ranks of arahant *bhikkhunīs*, thereby making the transmission of *bhikkhunī* ordination from India to Sri Lanka a truly auspicious event.

#### THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE BHIKKHUNĪ ORDER

The order of Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* appears to have become extinct at some point in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century during a period of warfare and political turmoil in Sri Lanka, when the *bhikkhus* were so hard-pressed that they had to flee abroad.

Once peace had been restored and the *bhikkhus* returned from abroad, they would of course have realized that the order of *bhikkhunīs* had come to an end. When confronted with this situation, it would have been natural for them to turn to the account of how the Sri Lankan order of *bhikkhunīs* originally came into being.

Whereas the relevant part in the eighteenth chapter in the *Mahāvamsa* (verses 9–11) is fairly terse on this matter, detailed information can be found in the *Dīpavamsa* passage translated above. The *Dīpavamsa*'s description, with its highlight on the accomplished *bhikkhunīs* who came from India to

confer ordination, would have made it appear highly desirable to find *bhikkhunīs* elsewhere to start the order in Sri Lanka again. Since, as far as we know, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century no Theravāda *bhikkhunī* order was in existence outside of Sri Lanka, this would not have been possible.

Given the statement by Mahinda that “it is not proper for a *bhikkhu* to confer the going forth on a woman”, it would not be surprising if in such a situation the Sri Lankan *bhikkhus* were under the influence of this wording when examining the relevant portions of the *Vinaya* on *bhikkhunī* ordination. The words of the renowned arahant, who according to tradition brought Buddhism to Sri Lanka, would naturally have carried great weight.

Being influenced by Mahinda’s authoritative statement could easily have led to consulting the *Vinaya* rules without fully taking into account the significance of their narrative context. This would then have led to the conclusion that the rule allowing *bhikkhus* to confer the higher ordination on *bhikkhunīs* had been rendered invalid by later rulings.

Once such a perception had arisen and had been passed on to subsequent generations, the weight of established tradition and respect for one’s teachers would have prevented closer enquiry. In this way, it can easily be understood how the firmly embedded belief arose among many traditional Theravāda *bhikkhus* that it is impossible to revive a *bhikkhunī* order that has become extinct, a belief that continues up to the present day.

In sum, given the historical circumstances of the transmission and disappearance of the order of *bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka, it would not be surprising if the *bhikkhus* should have had the impression that they could not re-establish such an order on their own.

#### TRANSMISSION TO CHINA

Before the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* order came to an end, in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* transmitted the ordination lineage to China (Taishō L 939c). By that time different *Vinaya* traditions were in circulation in China. Apparently no

*bhikṣuṇī* ordination lineage had yet been properly transmitted to China, and local *bhikṣuṇīs* had received ordination from *bhikṣus* only.

The lack of canonical *Vinaya* texts in China had motivated the Chinese pilgrim Bhikṣu Fāxiān to travel to India to procure such texts. On his way back to China, he also visited Sri Lanka. During Fāxiān's stay in Sri Lanka, information about the situation for female monastics in China would have spread, making it highly probable that the wish to transmit the *bhikkhunī* ordination lineage motivated a group of Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* to set out on what in those days was a long and dangerous journey.

In fact this group of Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* was decimated during the journey, leaving those who arrived short of the required number for forming the quorum to conduct ordination. Four years later another group of *bhikkhunīs* arrived from Sri Lanka. Together with those who had arrived earlier and had learned Chinese in the meantime, the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* gave ordination to a great number of Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs*.

#### PREVIOUS ORDINATIONS IN CHINA

Guṇavarman, an Indian *Vinaya* expert, affirmed the legality of the *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations carried out in China earlier, even though, due to the lack of both orders, ordination of female candidates had been conferred by the order of *bhikṣus* only. The relevant passage reports (Taishō L 941a):

求那跋摩云：國土無二眾，但從大僧受得具戒。

Guṇavarman said: “The country did not have both orders; therefore the ordination was [to be] received from the great order [of *bhikṣus*].”

Guṇavarman is on record for translating a Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* text for *bhikṣuṇīs* into Chinese. This makes it probable that he was ordained in the Dharmaguptaka tradition himself,

in which case he would have been speaking from the perspective of its legal parameters.

As mentioned in chapter 3, the *garudhamma* on ordination shows some variations in different *Vinaya* traditions, and one such variation is whether both orders are required to grant ordination to a female candidate. This is clearly the case in the Theravāda *Vinaya*, but the corresponding ruling in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* proceeds as follows (Taishō XXII 923b):

式又摩那學戒已，從比丘僧乞受大戒。

A probationer, who has trained in the precepts, should request the higher ordination from the order of *bhikṣus*.

Even though Guṇavarman considered the ordinations done previously as valid, he approved of the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs* taking ordination again with the assistance of the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs*. This seems to have had a function similar to a procedure known in the Theravāda commentarial tradition as *dalhīkamma*, literally ‘an act of strengthening’. In the present case, the ordination by the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* strengthened the appeal to the legal validity of the ordained status of the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs*.

#### THE ORDINATION BY THE SRI LANKAN BHIKKHUNĪS

Regarding the ordination conferred by the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs*, no further information is available about the actual procedure adopted at that time.

Even if the *bhikkhunīs* who had come from Sri Lanka had taught the Chinese candidates how to perform the ordination ritual in Pāli, this still would not have resulted in a full transmission of the Theravāda ordination lineage, because for that the cooperation of Theravāda *bhikkhus* would have been required. Thus the ordination conferred by the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* at that time would not have fulfilled strict Theravāda legal requirements. From the viewpoint of Theravāda law,

it would at best only have resulted in the candidates becoming “ordained on one side”, *ekatoupasampannā*.

In fact the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs* had no intention to change their monastic lineage and become Theravādins. The purpose of receiving ordination from the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* was to strengthen the legal validity of the ordained status the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs* already had. From the perspective of the Chinese, the important point was to go through an ordination ceremony conducted by *bhikkhunīs*, rather than making sure the ceremony completely fulfilled all the parameters of Theravāda law.

Besides, the legal significance of differences between monastic ordination traditions need not necessarily have been clear to those involved in these ordinations (even nowadays this is not necessarily clear to everyone).

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* was apparently imposed on all monastics in China by imperial decree (Taishō L 793c). From then onwards, this *Vinaya* was to be followed when giving ordination and carrying out other legal acts.

#### THE THERAVĀDA AND DHARMAGUPTAKA VINAYAS

The rules for *bhikkhunīs* in the Theravāda *Vinaya* differ from those in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*. Minor differences in formulation already manifest with the most important category of rules, concerning *pārājika*, a breach of which entails loss of one’s status as a fully ordained monastic. In the case of the *pācittiya* rules, where a breach entails acknowledgement in front of another monastic and in some cases forfeiture of the item concerned, there are variations between the rules, and the overall count of rules also differs. Although the legal codes for *bhikkhunīs* in the Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka traditions share a common origin, they have evolved in different directions and can no longer be considered as the same code.

The language used for legal acts is also not the same. For a Theravāda legal act to be considered valid, it needs to be conducted in Pāli. Legal acts based on the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* are conducted in Chinese.

Another requirement for a Theravāda ordination to be considered as valid is the correct procedure for ritually demarcating the area within which the ordination is to be performed with a boundary, a *sīmā*. The Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* lists markers to be used for establishing the *sīmā* that are not listed in the Theravāda *Vinaya*. Apart from the languages used for the act of demarcation being different, the actual formula to be used for establishing the *sīmā* also differs between the two *Vinayas*.

From a legal point of view, members of these two *Vinaya* traditions do not belong to the same community; they are not *samānasamvāsa*. It follows that members of one of these orders would not be able to conduct legal actions, such as the conferral of ordination, that are valid for the other community.

The principle problem of legal acts undertaken by monastics of one *Vinaya* tradition on behalf of members of another *Vinaya* tradition can be illustrated by turning to secular law. For a legal act in a particular country to be recognized as valid, it needs to be based on the laws of that country and to be executed by those who have been invested with legal authority in that country. A public prosecutor from Mexico, for example, can only take action when cases fall within the sphere of his or her jurisdiction, namely in the country of Mexico. The prosecutor no longer has such legal power when cases fall outside of the sphere of his or her jurisdiction, such as, for example, when they happen across the border in the state of California in the USA.

This does not imply that those who live outside of this jurisdiction consider that public prosecutor as not being an attorney or as not well versed in law. That is, this is not a question of passing a value judgment, but a question of legal applicability. Even though California did at some time in the past belong to Mexico, now it is part of the United States of America and therefore subject to US law. Only someone invested with legal authority according to US law can act as a public prosecutor in the state of California.

The situation with two different *Vinaya* traditions is similar. Even though these all go back to the time of the Bud-

dha in ancient India, by now they are as different as California and Mexico.

Thus the transmission of ordination by Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* did not result in establishing a lineage of *bhikkhunī* ordination in China that, from a strict Theravādin legal viewpoint, can confer ordinations on Theravāda candidates in a valid manner. This holds for both male and female candidates.

This in turn means that the disappearance of the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century was at the same time the extinction of the Theravāda lineage of *bhikkhunī* ordination. Until recently, the only avenue for a Sri Lankan woman to become a Theravāda nun was as a *dasasil mātā*.

#### DASASIL MĀTĀS

The *dasasil mātā* movement goes back to the beginning of the 20th century when a Sri Lankan nun took the precepts in the Burmese *thila shin* tradition and brought this tradition to Sri Lanka.

The dress of the *dasasil mātās* developed into its present form of wearing ochre robes that are like monastic robes in colour, but on closer inspection differ in as much as they are not made out of the patchwork style cloth worn by male novices and *bhikkhus*.

The way *dasasil mātās* usually take the ten precepts differs from the way these are taken by laity, but also from the way these are taken by male novices. This reflects the fact that these nuns are seen as standing somewhere in between the laity and monastics.

#### THILA SHINS

The Burmese *thila shins*, from which the *dasasil mātā* tradition originated, similarly stand in an ambivalent position between the lay and the monastic world. They usually wear robes of a pinkish colour that even at a distance distinguishes them clearly

from *bhikkhus* and *sāmaṇeras*; in fact pink features among the colours not allowable for *bhikkhus*.

They usually do not officiate at public ceremonies or preach in public. In fact *bhikkhus* use the same mode of address for laywomen and *thila shins*, clearly signalling the fact that, from their perspective, *thila shins* are considered close in status to laity.

The *thila shins* only go begging on specific days and receive uncooked food, whereas Burmese *bhikkhus* can go begging any day and will receive cooked rice and prepared dishes. Under normal circumstances *bhikkhus* are not permitted to cook food or keep it overnight. In awareness of this, lay followers do not offer food that requires cooking to a *bhikkhu*.

Some *thila shins* will save up all their donation income from the rest of the year just to be able to adopt the ten precepts and not use money during the three months of the rainy season.

## MAE CHIS

The situation of the *mae chis* in Thailand seems to be still worse, even though they look back on a long history, apparently having already been in existence in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Because the *mae chis* wear only white robes, their appearance is visually similar to the laity except for the fact that they have shaven heads. In traditional Theravāda countries, white is the colour worn by laity on religious observance days and is never worn by *bhikkhus*.

A *mae chi* usually takes only eight precepts at her ordination, which is considered a secular event. Unlike *bhikkhus*, *mae chis* do not necessarily receive free medical treatment. At temples they are sometimes expected to work for the food and shelter they receive.

Nunneries housing *mae chis* usually lack important sacred structures typical of a temple. While the government denies them the benefits of free travel, etc., accorded to *bhikkhus*, they are also denied the right to vote, in line with the custom that monastics do not vote.

## REVIVAL ATTEMPTS

Attempts to revive *bhikkhunī* ordination in the Theravāda tradition have a long history. One such attempt in Thailand led to the promulgation of a Saṅgha Act in 1928, still in effect today, which prohibits Thai *bhikkhus* from participating in any ordination of *bhikkhunīs*, as well as from giving novice or probationer ordination to female candidates.

In Myanmar, the situation came to a stalemate in 2004 when controversy surrounding the return home of a Burmese *bhikkhunī*, ordained in Sri Lanka, eventually culminated in a ban on further discussions of *bhikkhunī* ordination.

In Sri Lanka a turning point seems to have come after an ordination conducted in 1998 at Bodhgayā. Earlier attempts at revival include an ordination in the USA in 1988, when Ayyā Khemā was ordained, and at Sārṇāth in 1996, when *bhikkhunī* Kusumā received ordination.

Now the wish to revive a *bhikkhunī* order does not require replacing the *dasasil mātā*, *thila shins*, and *mae chi* in their respective countries. There is no reason why these different modalities of female renunciation cannot exist side by side.

The question is thus not one of abolishing or dismissing what is already there, but rather one of enabling women to choose between the alternatives of becoming an eight or ten precept nun and taking ordination as a *bhikkhunī*.

Nowadays in Theravāda countries some men also prefer not to become *bhikkhus*, and instead live a celibate lay life, at times by becoming *anagārikas*. Such celibate males exist alongside *bhikkhus*; in fact they often live in close relationship with *bhikkhus* at a monastery.

In the same way, the option of being eight or ten precept nuns will probably be of continuing appeal to some women in Theravāda countries. This does not imply, however, that the alternative option of becoming a *bhikkhunī* should not also be made available to those who feel ready for it.

Improving the situation of the eight- or ten-precept nuns is a very important and praiseworthy task that should be given full attention, but this does not suffice to fulfil the wish of those who want to have access to full ordination. Alongside such endeavours, there clearly remains a need to restore the full *bhikkhunī* ordination.

Recent developments in Sri Lanka have in fact shown that many *dasasil mātās*, who earlier were not interested in *bhikkhunī* ordination, changed their minds and took higher ordination once this became available.

Moreover, the new *bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka are well respected by the laity and make major social and religious contributions by meeting the needs of lay followers. This leaves little room for arguing that a revival of the *bhikkhunī* order is not needed or will not be beneficial for society at large.

#### THE CANDIDATES AT THE BODHGAYĀ ORDINATION

Although there had been *bhikkhunī* ordinations earlier, it is since the 1998 Bodhgayā ordination that the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka has gained momentum and subsequent *bhikkhunī* ordinations have been conducted in Sri Lanka itself.

At the Bodhgayā *bhikkhunī* ordination, the candidates received Theravāda robes and bowls, and they did not take the bodhisattva vows. After completing the ordination, the new Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* underwent a second ordination at which only Theravāda *bhikkhus* officiated.

The female candidates that had come from Sri Lanka to participate in the Bodhgayā ordination had been carefully chosen among experienced *dasasil mātās*. Moreover, they had been given a special training to prepare them for higher ordination. Because they had been *dasasil mātās* for many years, they had for a long time trained in a form of monastic conduct that covers the six rules incumbent on a probationer, a *sikkhamānā* (as mentioned above, failure to comply with the requirement of the probationary period does not invalidate the ordination itself).

## BELONGING TO A DIFFERENT COMMUNITY

As already mentioned above, the officiating Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs* do not belong to the same community as the Theravāda monastics; they are not *samānasamvāsa*. This in turn means that it is not possible for them to carry out legal acts that will be recognized as valid by traditional members of the Theravāda tradition.

In the *Vinaya*, being of a “different community”, *nānāsamvāsa*, may come about as a result of a disagreement about the rules. In such a case, a fully ordained monastic disagrees with the community where he lives as to whether a particular act constitutes an offence. Because of this discord over the implication of a *Vinaya* rule, the monastic, together with his fully ordained followers, might carry out legal acts independently from the community. Alternatively, the community might ban them from participating in their legal acts by an act of suspension.

The status of being *nānāsamvāsa* may thus come into existence because of a dispute about the interpretation of the rules. It can be resolved by settling the dispute. Once there is agreement on the interpretation of the *Vinaya* rules, those who were *nānāsamvāsa* become again *samānasamvāsa*, part of the same community.

The tenth chapter of the *Mahāvagga* (section 1) explains that there are two ways of again becoming *samānasamvāsaka*. The first is:

*attanā vā attānaṃ samānasamvāsakaṃ karoti.*

On one’s own one makes oneself to belong to the same community.

Here one becomes part of the community through one’s own decision. This happens when one gives up one’s earlier view and is willing to adopt the view held by the rest of the community regarding the *Vinaya* rules.

The second way of again becoming part of the same community takes place when one is reinstated by the community after one had been suspended.

For the present case of *bhikkhunī* ordination, this second option does not seem relevant, as there is no record of the Dharmaguptakas being suspended by the Theravādins (or the other way round). The two traditions appear to have come into being simply because of geographical separation. The coming into being of different ordination lineages in this way is something not envisaged in the canonical *Vinayas*, hence the legal uncertainty.

Following the first of the two alternatives, perhaps the difference in the rules could be overcome if the newly ordained *bhikkhunīs* decided to follow the Theravāda *Vinaya* code of rules. Through a formal decision of this type, perhaps they might be considered *samānasamvāsa*.

In line with this way of thinking, the ordination performed by Theravāda *bhikkhus* after the dual ordination at Bodhgayā might then be considered as an expression of the acceptance of these newly ordained *bhikkhunīs* by the Theravāda community.

In this way, the ordination by the Theravāda *bhikkhus* would have had the function of what in the modern tradition is known under the technical term of *dalhīkamma*, literally “an act of strengthening”, already mentioned above. This refers to a formal act through which a *bhikkhu* or a group of *bhikkhus* ordained elsewhere gain the recognition of a particular community of which he or they wish to be a part.

Yet, in the present case this solution is not necessarily compelling. In fact the *Vinaya* precedent regarding how to become *samānasamvāsa* concerns only differences in the interpretation of the rules. Here, however, the difference is in the rules themselves.

Now, as mentioned above, the *Vinaya* does not explicitly recognize the existence of different *Vinaya* traditions and the problems that result from this situation, therefore leaving some

room for interpretation. Nevertheless, it remains doubtful if the idea of becoming *samānasaṃvāsa* can be applied to the present case.

At least among those committed to a strict interpretation of *Vinaya*, such a suggestion will not easily be perceived as acceptable. In fact the ninth chapter of the *Mahāvagga* (section 4) considers a legal act done in reliance on the participation of someone who is of a different community as lacking validity:

*catuvaggakaraṇaṃ kammaṃ nānāsaṃvāsakacatuttho kammaṃ kareyya, akammaṃ na ca karaṇīyaṃ.*

A legal act to be performed by a chapter of four that were to be performed as a legal act with one from a different community as fourth is not a legal act and should not be performed.

The *Mahāvagga* continues by applying the same principle to the case of legal acts requiring a higher quorum, such as the chapter of ten, which is required for granting ordination.

#### COMBINING DUAL AND SINGLE ORDINATION

If the ordination granted by the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs* is considered unacceptable, then this implies that at present there is no *bhikkhunī* order in existence that can give ordination to female followers of the Theravāda tradition.

Although the female candidates at the Bodhgayā ordination followed the stipulations made in the sixth *garudhamma*, in as much as they did indeed try, to the best of their abilities, to “seek for higher ordination from both orders”, from this viewpoint they were not successful.

In this case, the subsequent ordination of these female candidates carried out by Theravāda *bhikkhus* only is legally valid. Its validity is based on the precedent that according to the canonical *Vinaya* was set by the Buddha himself when he delegated the ordination of the followers of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī to the *bhikkhus*.

The combination of dual and single ordinations adopted in this way stands on firm legal ground. The order of *bhikkhunīs* has been revived and has a right to claim recognition as a Theravāda order of *bhikkhunīs*.

#### SUMMARY

During the time of King Asoka, the *bhikkhunī* ordination lineage reached Sri Lanka and lasted there until about the eleventh century.

The ordinations conferred by Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* in China in the early fifth century served the function of strengthening the claim to validity by the local *bhikṣuṇīs*, who until then had received ordination only from *bhikṣus*. However, it did not result in an ordination lineage that could be relied on to confer ordinations that, from a strict legal perspective, are valid within the context of Theravāda law.

Lacking access to higher ordination, until recently women in Theravāda countries wishing to go forth had only the option of living as eight- or ten-precept nuns in an ambivalent situation placed between laity and monastics.

The combination of dual and single ordination done in 1998 has successfully revived the order of *bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka.

A Buddhist tradition that has only three of the four assemblies could be compared to a noble elephant with one leg crippled. The elephant can still walk, but only with difficulties. The medicine to restore the crippled leg is now available; all it needs is a concerted effort to support the healing process.

## Conclusion

The four assemblies are the foundation for the thriving of the teachings of the Buddha. The important contribution *bhikkhunīs* can make to illuminating the Community and preventing the decline of the Dhamma is a recurrent topic in the Pāli discourses, which leave no doubt that the Buddha was from the outset destined to have *bhikkhunī* disciples. These indications provide a background against which to evaluate passages in the account of the coming into existence of an order of *bhikkhunīs* in the *Cullavagga* that convey a negative impression.

Throughout the *Cullavagga* the Buddha can be seen to make a consistent effort at facilitating *bhikkhunī* ordination, once he has decided that the time has come to get it started. The same holds for the arahant Mahinda, who is on record for doing his best to enable a correct transmission of the ordination lineage of *bhikkhunīs* from India to Sri Lanka.

Closer inspection of the rules regarding *bhikkhunī* ordination in the *Cullavagga* makes it clear that the authorization given by the Buddha to *bhikkhus* to grant ordination to female candidates on their own, in a situation when no *bhikkhunī* order is in existence, remains valid. To argue otherwise risks putting the Buddha in a bad light, as if he had been a short-sighted and careless law-giver.

Comparable to the positive role accorded to *bhikkhunīs* in the Pāli discourses, the meditative accomplishment of several lay meditators is a recurrent theme in the same sources. The highlighting of accomplished *bhikkhunīs* among the Ones in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* is followed by presenting the female lay disciples Uttarā and Sāmāvatī as foremost in meditation and in the practice of *mettā*.

An example of a male lay disciple accomplished in meditation is Pessa in the *Kandaraka-sutta*, found in the *Gahapati-vagga* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* (discourse 51). In front of the Buddha, Pessa describes his practice of the four establish-

ments of mindfulness, the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. Other lay practitioners proficient in *satipaṭṭhāna* are Sirivaḍḍha and Māna-dinna, mentioned in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* (discourses 29 and 30).

The householder Citta even confutes the leader of the Jains by proclaiming his expertise in attaining the four *jhānas*, a feat reported in the *Citta-saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* (discourse 8).

In later times, the involvement of lay disciples in mindfulness practice or the cultivation of *jhāna* appears to have gradually diminished. This has now changed with the revival of large scale lay meditation practice during the twentieth century, particularly in regards to the cultivation of mindfulness.

This development did not meet with undivided approval from the outset. Some *bhikkhus* in Sri Lanka were concerned that the methods taught, in particular the emphasis on dry insight without any formal cultivation of tranquillity, did not conform to their understanding of the canonical scriptures. In spite of such criticism, however, mindfulness meditation continued to expand throughout Asia, including Sri Lanka itself, and the West.

By now, interest in the practice of mindfulness has spread far and wide, and its clinical use has affected a range of areas in secular society. It is slowly becoming an integral part of daily life for many people in the world.

In this way the revival of lay meditation, in spite of initial resistance from some *bhikkhus*, has been successful and resulted in a range of beneficial effects. Although not all of the modern applications of mindfulness conform to the set of values that inform traditional Buddhist practice, there can be no doubt about the overall positive repercussions of this development. Equipped with the possibility to cultivate meditative insight, male and female lay disciples of the Theravāda tradition are nowadays able to cultivate wisdom in a manner that would not have been possible in the past, when they had little or even no access to meditation instructions.

Comparable to the loss of regular lay meditation practice, in the course of history the Theravāda tradition also lost its *bhikkhunī* ordination lineage. In terms of the contribution to be made by the four assemblies to the wellbeing of the Sāsana, the two lay assemblies were hampered and the assembly of *bhikkhunīs* no longer in existence.

The significance of the revival of lay meditation in the twentieth century thus has its counterpart in the revival of *bhikkhunī* ordination, which is becoming a prominent feature of Theravāda Buddhism in the early twenty-first century. Both contribute to the full participation of all four assemblies in contemporary Theravāda Buddhism.

Both also share the circumstance that they initially met with opposition from some *bhikkhus*, who were under the impression that these revivals do not conform to the canonical scriptures. Such opposition has been particularly strong in the case of the revival of *bhikkhunī* ordination, where legal concerns naturally have a much greater impact than in the case of meditation practice. Nevertheless, in both cases such opposition continues to diminish, allowing each process its natural unfolding.

In this way, these two remarkable developments promise to result in the full resurrection in the Theravāda tradition of the four assemblies that according to the Pāli canon are the foundation for the Buddha's teaching.

Moreover, these two developments allow each of these four assemblies, be they *bhikkhus* or *bhikkhunīs*, male or female lay disciples, to endeavour to live up to the ideal sought by the Buddha himself, according to the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, namely to have disciples from each of the four assemblies who are:

competent, disciplined, confident, learned, upholders of Dhamma, practitioners of the Dhamma in conformity with the Dhamma, practising in the proper way, and living in conformity with the Dhamma.

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### ස්තූතිය

මෙම පොතෙහි කටුපිටපත කියවා අදහස් දැක්වීම සම්බන්ධයෙන් හික්ඛු බෝධි, හික්ඛු බ්‍රහ්මාලී ස්වාමීන්වහන්සේලාට, සහ හික්ඛුනී ධම්මදින්නා මෙහෙණියට මෙන්ම සිංහලට පරිවර්තනය කිරීම සම්බන්ධයෙන් හික්ඛු දැරංගල කුසලඤාණ ස්වාමීන්වහන්සේට මා ණයගැති වෙමි.

In this book, university professor and meditation teacher Bhikkhu Anālayo studies in detail the history of bhikkhunī ordination, as reported in the Pāli Vinaya, in order to facilitate a better understanding of the legal dimensions of its twentieth-century revival in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

සරසවි මහාචාර්යවරයෙකු සහ භාවනා ගුරුවරයෙකු වන අනාලයෝ භික්ෂුන් වහන්සේ, භික්ෂුණී උපසම්පදාවේ ඉතිහාසය අරභයා පාලි විනයයෙහි එන චාරිතාව මෙහි දී විස්තරාත්මක ඇගයුමකට ලක් කරන සේක. විසි වන සියවසේ ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ සහ වෙනත් රටවල ඇති වූ භික්ෂුණී උපසම්පදා පුනරුදයේ විනයානුකූල පැතිකඩ පිලිබඳ වඩා හොඳ අවබෝධයකට ඉඩ සැලසීම මෙහි අරමුණ යි.