

IMI ORDINATION GUIDELINES FOR FPMT STUDENTS

Background

These guidelines have been developed by the International Mahayana Institute (IMI) to provide direction for students at FPMT Centers who are planning to take ordination.

IMI is the international community of FPMT monks and nuns. IMI was established by FPMT Founder, Lama Yeshe in November 1973 for the purpose of helping monks and nuns maintain their ordination.

The purpose of the guidelines is to provide direction for students before, during and after taking ordination

These guidelines have been developed in consultation with the Spiritual Director of FPMT, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and the IMI Senior Sangha Council.

They also take into account:

- **The ordination policy of the Office of His Holiness Dalai Lama**
- **Input from FPMT Tibetan teachers at the Geshe Conference in Sarnath in December 2006 on the subject of ordination at FPMT Centers including ordination for students of teachers at FPMT Centers.**

1. Interest in taking ordination

Lama Zopa Rinpoche emphasizes the primary consideration in any request for ordination is the relationship of the student with the teacher. The student-teacher relationship is not only important in determining the suitability of the candidate for ordination at the time of the request but also as the student integrates into the monastic community after taking vows.

While the teacher has the responsibility of deciding the suitability of the student requesting ordination, the decision to ordain is made by the student him (her) self.

Prerequisites for requesting ordination are to:

- **have a foundation in the Lam.rim through listening and meditation.**
- **have a firmly established relationship with a spiritual teacher,**
- **have cultivated an understanding of renunciation in undertaking the life of a monk or nun,**
- **have developed the wish to devote one's life to service and practice while living as a member of a monastic community**
- **have experience of observing the 8 Mahayana Precepts**
- **have experience of doing solitary retreat (for at least a few weeks)**

FPMT students considering ordination should also:

- have had Buddhist refuge for at least three years,
- have lived with five lay vows for at least two years,
- NOT be a Shugden practitioner,
- be at least 20 years of age,
- ideally, have permission from their family,
- be free of any encumbering relationships; if married, the candidate will have permission from their partner and be living separately,
- be free of any encumbering financial obligations,
- not be returning to their ordinary work situation; working in a Dharma center is permissible,
- have held the *getsul* ordination for at least three years if requesting *gelong* ordination.
- be willing to undertake the IMI Pre-ordination Training Course
- be willing to follow the advice of the FPMT Spiritual Director and /or the IMI regarding living arrangements, education and service, etc., after ordination. (This would also involve consultation with one's own root guru).

Prior to requesting ordination you will need to carefully consider what it means to be ordained and how your life will change after ordination. To help you in this process, it is strongly recommended that prior to requesting ordination you discuss your interest with a senior (ordained for 10 years or more) IMI monk or nun. If this is not possible you can discuss with the Spiritual Program Coordinator at your center to help you get in touch with the regional IMI representative.

Further information for those interested in ordaining is available online at www.imisangha.org.

2. Requesting Ordination

Once you have decided to take ordination you will need to request permission to do so from your teacher. In preparation for meeting with your teacher:

- be clear about your motivation for seeking ordination
- know your post ordination plans such as where you will live and how you will support yourself

Your teacher will review your background, current situation, dharma understanding as well as your practical and emotional suitability for ordination. On the basis of this discussion your teacher may:

- ask you to defer your plans for ordination
- accept to grant ordination himself
- advise you to request ordination from one of his teachers
- ask you to complete the IMI ordination application form available at office@imisangha.org to assist them in responding to your request

If you request ordination from a teacher that you do not have an established relationship with they may ask you to obtain a letter of recommendation from one or more teachers you have studied with.

Your teacher may recommend you take ordination from His Holiness Dalai Lama. For information on the pre-requisites for ordination *with His Holiness* the Dalai Lama and the application procedure see Tushita Meditation Center's site:

www.tushita.info/programs/pre-ordination-course

For the application form and further details on how to apply for ordination with His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Please contact Tenzin Tsepag at His Holiness' Office on the following email address: tsepag@dalailama.com

For further information about ordination in the FPMT, IMI's ordination policy or pre ordination training, please contact IMI at office@imisangha.org

3. Preparation for ordination

When your request for ordination is granted, again contact a senior IMI monk or nun at your local FPMT center or the regional IMI representative who will help you with your preparation for ordination including:

- Enrolling in a pre-ordination training program
- Appropriate offerings to make during the ceremony
- Obtaining two sets of robes
- Communication with the monastic community you will be moving into or the center where you will live.
- Familiarity with the vows you will be taking and the ordination ceremony
- Plan post ordination practice. It is Lama Yeshe's advice to do extensive dharma practice immediately after receiving ordination before there is any degeneration of the vows

Recommended reading:

Advice for Monks and Nuns, Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archives (www.lamayeshe.com).

Preparing for Ordination: Reflections for Westerners Considering Monastic Ordination in the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition, Ven. Thubten Chodron, Sravasti Abbey

<http://archive.thubtenchodron.org/Publications/PreparingForOrdination/index.html>

4. The Ordination Ceremony

During the ordination ceremony you will be asked a series of questions relating to your qualifications to enter the monastic community as prescribed by the Vinaya.

Rituals during the ceremony include the hair cutting, blessing of the robes and conferment of the vows depending on the level of ordination.

Where possible a senior IMI sangha member will help you on the day of the ceremony - shaving your head, putting on your robes etc. They will also help you transition into your new role and connect with your new family, your monastic community.

Having taken ordination you will need to receive an explanation of the vows you have taken. One of the conditions that cause us to break our vows is not understanding them. This should happen in a timely manner (e.g. within the first few weeks of ordination).

5. Entering Monastic Life

Taking ordination not only involves the commitment to keep certain vows for the rest of your life but also the transition from a lay to a monastic life style. You become part of a monastic community.

To stabilize the transition you will need to receive teachings and commentary on the Vinaya and maintain the vows to the best of your ability – you are a representative of Buddhism and the entire sangha community

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has advised that newly ordained monks and nuns commit to living in a monastic community, or similarly conducive environment that supports subduing the mind: five years for a monk and four years for a nun.

Particularly in the beginning, there needs to be balanced education available, not just philosophical study, to produce good monk and nuns.

Rinpoche has stressed that the main protection for one's ordination is the study and meditation of Lam-rim, to generate some experience. A monastic community can help provide the physical, emotional and practice support required as a monastic.

Therefore it is recommended that following ordination you not return to your ordinary work situation but live in a monastery or nunnery or other suitable environment such as a residential Dharma center for at least five years (four years for nuns). Working in a Dharma center is permissible.

In some cases your teacher may give alternative advice on where you should live and what you should do for the first five years. In this case it is recommended you commit to follow the guidance of your teacher for the five year period.

Being ordained, you should spend your life in the activities of studying, meditation retreat and/or offering service.

6. IMI Membership

As a student of an FPMT center or teacher you are eligible to join IMI after taking ordination. Being a member of IMI means you will be part of an international community of monks and nuns which will nurture and strengthen you as an ordained person. You will also have more opportunities for study and practice.

To become a member of IMI please complete the membership application form (available online at www.imisangha.org)

IN SUMMARY:

The international director of IMI is supported by regional IMI representatives. Your local senior sangha living in your center, or in your area, is another important resource available to you because you can have direct access to them. If there is no senior sangha at your center or in your area, contact the IMI representative in your region and they will connect you with a senior monk or nun in the region.

They can help:

- 1. Provide information about ordination, training programs, available resources.**
- 2. Offer guidance. While having enthusiasm for becoming a monk or nun, often students are not well prepared for what follows. The ordination is the easy part. A senior monk or nun can guide you on the many aspects of ordained life.**
- 3. Assist with preparation for the ordination ceremony including obtaining the required robes, coordinating the ordination time and**

place with the teacher, ordaining sangha, the local monastic community and FPMT Center staff.

- 4. Access training. All monks and nuns are expected to attend pre- or post-ordination training. Currently, a program is being developed to offer ordination training at a regional level. The IMI representative can help you access ordination training. This may be a basic level of training provided using existing training materials until the program is implemented.**

- 5. Integration into the IMI Community. The IMI representative can support you in joining a monastic community and accessing retreat and study opportunities available through IMI or an FPMT center.**