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From Monks to Yogis: Historical Transformation Within the Vajrayana Buddhist Sangha: An Opening Address

by Tsugla Lopen

Lord Buddha first generated the bodhichitta, accumulated merit and perfected the paths for countless aeons, and finally attained the complete enlightenment. He taught thousands of different teachings to lead all the followers to higher realms and nirvana. Lord Buddha's teachings if summarized can be categorically grouped into two: i) the sutrayana system of defining characteristics and ii) the vehicle of Secret Vajrayana.

In the teachings of sutra and tantra, many different paths are being taught, but the real meaning of the paths can be categorized into threefold vows.

The classification of the threefold vows is pratimoksha (individual liberation); the foundation of all the path is the outer pratimoksha vow. The main source of all paths is the inner bodhisattva vow, and the secret mantrayana vow is the main pillar of the path.

Those three vows are all interdependent, giving rise to one another depending on each other, thus giving rise to higher and lower levels. The three vows each inside have many categorization, with sub-division and different methods of receiving vow, etc.

In general, we say monk or bikshu to those ones merely wearing the outer attire of monk and also to those wearing clothes similar to that of a monk. In reality, a bikshu or full monk is a person who has been ordained into full order

of bikshu vows, one of the eight kinds of vows of pratimoksha. Examples of a monk are Nagarjuna and Naropa in ancient India who are all great panditas and accomplished siddhis, and many great Kagyu masters in Tibet and Bhutan

A person with pure and perfect vow of a bikshu /monk, who takes on bodhisattva vow, and also takes on the sacred mantrayana vow altogether is, A Person possessing the three vows, can be named as A bikshu, Bodhisattva, or Tantrik without contradiction. However, since the sacred mantrayana vow is said to be higher vow than other, the monk who has entered the mantrayana field and mainly practices mantrayana, he can be called tantrik or yogi.

In general, the term yogi has many meaning and significance; however, it can be also applied to all who practice shamatha and vipashyana or calm-abiding and clear-seeing concentration, and to those who practice and the experience the two-fold generative and completions stage practices.