



Tibetan Nuns Project

Fall 2002

Good News For Shugsep Nuns



Shugsep nuns and their teachers in front of the old Shugsep Nunnery building

We are delighted to announce that after many obstacles and hindrances, we have finally been able to secure four acres of land below Dharamsala on which to build the new Shunsep Nunnery. After more than ten years of living in their damp and cramped quarters higher up the hill, the nuns will enjoy this beautiful site with wide views of the main town of Dharamsala set against the Himalayan Dhauladhar range to the northeast and the lovely hills and valleys of Kangra to the south.

The top of the site is bordered by an ancient mango grove and a steeply rising protected forest with a tiny Hindu shrine on top. A good access road has been constructed and the property is already fenced and gated for security. A water supply has been found by drilling a bore well which is providing abundant water, and an electrical connection is already established. The gently rising terraces are largely free of boulders and lend themselves to easy drainage and setting of the buildings with maximum light and ventilation.

Over these past two years we have been working steadily on the plans for this new nunnery complex with an architectural firm in Delhi, Dewatsang Sarangal. The basic architectural drawings and construction specifications are now complete and the structural plans are being prepared. We are interviewing

contractors and will be ready to start the construction after the ground breaking puja has been performed, which will take place on an auspicious day before the end of the year.

The first phase of the construction will provide the necessary facilities for the nuns to move in: housing for nuns and teachers, kitchen, dining hall and half the proposed study centre, which will provide three classrooms and a temporary prayer hall. We are aiming to complete this within eighteen months of the start of construction, although we are still U.S. \$50,000 short of the funding to complete the first phase. The second phase, for which we must now begin to fundraise, includes further accommodation, the temple, the second half of the study centre, a small health center, an office and a guest house. This is estimated to cost U.S. \$580,000 and will be undertaken as soon as possible thereafter.



The new Shugsep site

Tibetan Nuns Project

Established in 1987, the Tibetan Nuns Project provides education and support to approximately 500 nuns in five different nunneries in northern India. The Project is dedicated to:

Improving standards of food, sanitation, medical care, basic education and training in existing nunneries.

Working towards future self-sufficiency through innovative educational opportunities.

Establishing further facilities for refugee Buddhist nuns.

Patron

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

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The Tibetan Cultural Region

Since its inception in 1987, The Tibetan Nuns Project has set out to assist nuns from all parts of Tibet and from all the different Tibetan Buddhist lineages without preference or distinction. While our initial concept was to help refugees from Tibet access their educational tradition, we have over the years been receiving increasing numbers of requests for religious education from nuns from the Himalayan regions on the border between Tibet and India: Ladakh, Zaskar, Spiti, Lahoul and Kinnaur.

Historically, geographically and economically these northern mountainous regions of India were linked so tightly to Tibet, one might argue as to which country they belonged. Tibet was a vibrant spiritual and cultural hub for China to the east, Mongolia to the north and India to the south. Monks would follow the trade routes into Tibet to join monasteries and study with great masters, bringing back inspiration and news from Tibet to the remote mountain valley communities.

In 1959 the Chinese seized control of Tibet, severing the age-old connection between the Indian and Tibetan Himalayan regions. Cross border interchange ceased and, just as Tibetans lost their monasteries and Buddhist culture was assailed, so also the Indian border areas lost their access to higher studies and connection with their Buddhist neighbor.

Where conditions for monks and monasteries are depressed, then those for nuns and nunneries are worse. Young women from the border region who are interested in religion, and who, through the spirit of the 21st century, are motivated to study and reach out at this



time when the Tibetans in exile in India are establishing a firm base of monastic education, turn their feet in this direction and seek admission in the recently established Tibetan nunneries in the communities in exile.

According to the nuns who come to the Nuns Project from these regions, there are few and poor nunneries for them to join and even fewer opportunities for them to study. A nun from Zaskar explains how it is nearly impossible to be a nun in that region because nuns have to struggle so hard for mere survival. Usually

they remain in their family homes and receive no education. This is why so many are prepared to take up the great challenge of learning Tibetan in order to join the nunneries in India and study Buddhist philosophy. They will in time become the first women teachers to return to these remote regions to introduce Buddhist learning for women.

We are currently supporting more than 100 nuns from the border areas: about forty at Dolma Ling, twenty at Geden Choeling, forty at Tilokpur, and a few living on their own.



Border area nuns in the upper classes at Dolma Ling

Study Programs in the Various Nunneries

Good progress in studies continues at the nunneries associated with the Tibetan Nuns Project. We have been very fortunate to receive generous funding from the Norwegian Tibet Committee Women's Group through a larger Norwegian donor, Operation A Day's Work. They are paying teachers' salaries and providing textbooks for Shugsep, Dolma Ling, Geden Choeling, and Tilokpur. They also provided the funding for Geden Choeling's four new classrooms, have enabled us to finish new classrooms at Dolma Ling, and next year will provide funding towards the new Shugsep classrooms. We are very grateful for their interest and support.

This year at **Dolma Ling** we undertook a major curriculum revision, and restructured the study programme so that the first four years will function as a basic primary education that we can make available to a maximum number of nuns, both recent refugees from Tibet and nuns from the Himalayan border regions. (see article, p.2) This four year course of study will provide nuns who have had little or no previous education with a basic competency in Tibetan, English, Buddhist debate and philosophy. At the end of the four-year course, students' conduct, combined test results, study habits and monastic discipline will be evaluated to determine who will be admitted to the further course of study. Having completed eleven years of study, a nun must decide which track she would like to pursue—five or six years more study to achieve a Geshe degree, the equivalent to a Western Ph.D. in Buddhist philosophy or an alternative course that we are still working to develop. The top class at Dolma Ling are in their eleventh year of study. Their next course text will take three years.

At **Shugsep**, the nuns are at five different levels of study, and the top class is only one year away from completing the full course of study of the Nyingma "Shedra".

Tilokpur continues to have classes in Tibetan and English. Their Tibetan teacher is one of the first nun teachers, a young woman who has completed a four year course of study at the Saraha Institute in Tibetan language plus teacher training.

Tilokpur is fundraising to build a new new study complex, and when it is finished they will expand their course of study to include the full range of Karma Kagyu teachings.

Geden Choeling nuns continue to make good progress with studies, which include Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan, English, social studies and maths. Having four new classrooms is what has made it possible for them to organize a regular formal course of study.



Geden Choeling nuns in their new classroom

Jang Gonchoe Debate Session

We continued this year with the annual Jang Gonchoe debate session. Each year it is held at a different nunnery, and this year it was the turn of Jangchup Choeling Nunnery in the Tibetan settlement in Mundgod, South India. With funding from the Heinrich Böll Foundation of Germany, we sponsored eighty nuns from four nunneries, three in the Dharamsala area and one in Nepal, to travel to the south for a month's intensive debate. It is inspiring for the nuns to see what their counterparts in other nunneries are doing and to sharpen their debate skills. There are no winners and losers in the traditional sense; rather Tibetan debate is a healthy competition that heightens one's knowledge and sharpens the mind. At its best, it leads to the creation of thoughtful, articulate, and compassionate scholars.

Particularly inspiring about this year's debate session in the south was the strong and positive response of the Tibetan community there. It is a new phenomenon to have nuns studying and debating in this fashion, and the community offered tremendous support and encouragement.



Shugsep nuns in English class



Dolma Ling nuns debating



New books for Tilokpur students

What do the nuns do every day?



Dharamsala nuns produced 35,000 freedom bracelets in 2002 for distribution during Tibet awareness campaigns in Europe.



Shugsep nuns practice the gyaling. This year they will provide all the ritual music at the annual Nyingma Monlam (prayer festival) held in Bodh Gaya in January.



Recycled papermaking is an income generating project that we hope will take off. So far the nuns are making cards, sheets of gift wrap, and small notepads.



Garbage management is a priority in all the nunneries. Recyclable and plastic waste is collected and carefully disposed of while bio-degradable waste is composted.



Shugsep nuns prepare "torma" offerings for special rituals.

Much more than just study and prayer!



These tanks at Geden Choeling were installed with funding from the Lolwe Foundation of Denmark to help deal with chronic water shortages.



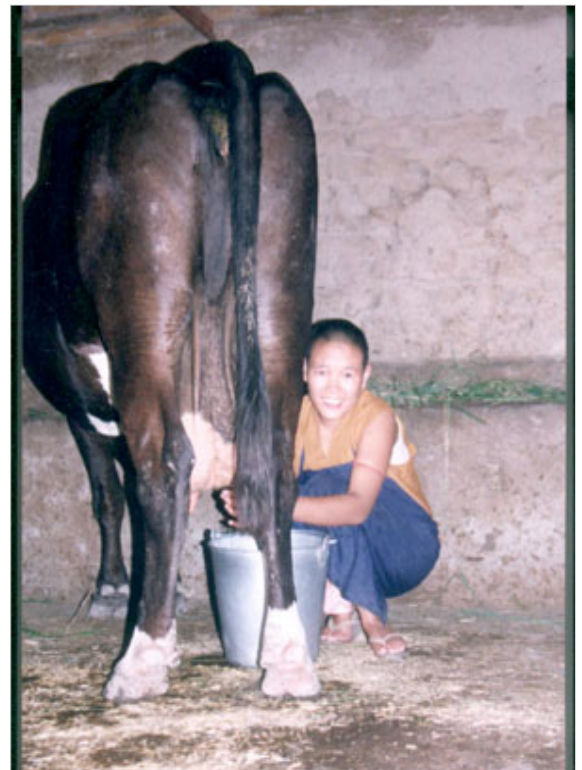
Washing clothes at Geden Choeling is done with minimum use of water.



Composting of kitchen and garden waste provides rich mulch for the garden.



Nuns are learning to make all their own clothing and also are beginning to produce items to sell that will help support them in the future.



Three cows provide milk to meet Dolma Ling's daily needs. Many of the nuns grew up as nomads in Tibet, so daily milking presents no problem.

His Holiness The Dalai Lama Visits Tilokpur

The biggest event of the year for Tilokpur took place on September 28, when His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited there to consecrate the new site where they are planning to build a "shedra", an institute for the full course of study in their Karma Kagyu tradition. It was a major operation for the Tilokpur nuns to make all the necessary arrangements to receive His Holiness, the VIPs present and many other people who had come to see and hear His Holiness. A tent on the new land was decorated brilliantly with of banners and thangkas. His Holiness offered prayers and consecrated the site, named "Drubten Pelmo Gyipe Gatsel" by the Karmapa when he visited Tilokpur in May, 2002. They hope to begin construction soon, but all depends on the success of their fundraising efforts.



Winter Trainings

Computer

This year six Dolma Ling nuns received a three-week computer training to reinforce and build upon the basic training those same nuns received last year. The trainer, a computer software technician from the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, concentrated on teaching the nuns basic word processing skills, PageMaker and Excel. They have since been able to make a small nunnery prayer book and put out frequent notices for the nuns. Some of them enjoy the typing while others like the graphics. This good combination will

be used in the future, as the nuns plan to produce a small magazine in Tibetan written solely by the nuns.

At this point they are concentrating on basic computer skills. Internet access and e-mail are at present not appropriate either to the technology available to us or to the nuns' level of English.

Health

For three weeks in February, Dolma Ling held a health workers training attended by nuns from five different nunneries. The morning training, given by Mrs. Tsering

Lhamo, a public health nurse from the Tibetan Government in Exile, focused on medical record keeping and mental health issues. The evening session, taught by a Tibetan speaking British woman, Jo Gibson, concentrated on

medical terminology in English. The nuns learned to take blood pressure, make dressings, give injections and create a more systematic way of running a health clinic. The nuns hope to be able to learn lab work in the upcoming year.

Leadership

In April, Dolma Ling held a four day leadership and community building training. As a follow-up to a previous leadership training the same trainers from Thailand were invited to come back and work with the nuns. The trainers visited four different nunneries in the Dharamsala area including Shugsep and Geden Choeling. The training aimed to empower the nuns with leadership and team building skills. These skills are not always reinforced within the monastic education but are crucial to the nuns as they will one day be spiritual leaders of their community.

Ouyporn, one of the trainers from Thailand, said that the nuns who participated in the training were all excellent learners. "We are very impressed with their intelligence, confidence and willingness to take risks during the workshop."



Closing function for the winter trainings at Dolma Ling

TNP Office Updates

TNP U.S.A

The Tibetan Nuns Project welcomes our new Development Officer, Debi Goldman, to the Berkeley office. Debi is taking over the legacy built by Meg Moser who left the position in May. Debi initially came to us as volunteer office help in 1999 while attending U.C. Berkeley and continued to help TNP by selling calendars while completing an MA on the east coast.

Also in 2002, we acquired Heidi Basch as our Sponsorship Coordinator. Heidi too has been an active volunteer since 1999. In addition to her duties as Sponsorship Coordinator, Heidi prepares and manages our monthly volunteer nights. Debi and Heidi work tirelessly to keep TNP involved in Bay area events and keep our supporters updated. They are in the Berkeley office Monday through Friday to answer any of your questions or comments.

Thanks to a generous donation of website maintenance and an email subscription program by Firinn Taisdeal Consulting (ft@firinntaisdeal.com), we have been able to cut costs by offering email sponsorship reminders and announcements of events. This year our email subscribers will swiftly receive our updates on the nunneries through our e-newsletter known as the "Postcard from Dharamsala."

New TNP Video

Summer 2002 saw the release of our latest video "Building a Future in Exile," directed and produced by Rosemary Rawcliffe of Frame of Mind Films. Shot on location at Dolma Ling and Shugsep nunneries, Rosemary and crew provide an inside view of progress and future needs at the nunneries. We are very grateful to Rosemary for her magnificent effort on our behalf!

If you are interested in helping us spread the word about our work, consider showing the video to friends or screening it for us at a public event. Please call our U.S. office to order a copy. Also if you are interested in Frame of Mind Film's other productions on Tibetan women please email: rosemary@frameofmindfilms.com.



Dolma, Tashi and Debi at the Dolma Ling office

Fundraising Tour Rescheduled

We are pleased to announce the re-scheduling of the 2001 Support Tour. In April 2003, we will welcome our director, Mrs. Rinchen Khando Choegyal and our co-director, Dr. Elizabeth Napper back to the U.S. This year their focus will be on the new construction of Shugsep Nunnery. The Shugsep nuns have increased in number and continue to live and study in badly deteriorating buildings. Thanks to a generous grant from the Hershey Foundation, we are merely U.S. \$50,000 away from having the necessary funding for the first phase of building. An additional U.S.\$580,000 is needed to complete the entire project. It is our hope that we can raise the funds and further extend support to the brave women of Shugsep Nunnery.

Tentative locations to meet Rinchen Khando-la and Dr. Napper will be in San Francisco, Minnesota, Chicago, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Vancouver, Calgary, Portland and Seattle. Rinchen Khando-la will be on the University of San Francisco Law School campus as a visiting human rights activist from April 7 to 9. She will be speaking at a core convocation at the College of St. Catherine in the Twin Cities, MN on April 14. Other dates are still to be confirmed.

Be sure you are on our email list for regular updates, or check our website.

TNP India

We were sad to see our Project Coordinator, Lhamo Choedon, leave for the U.S. after six years of dedicated work for the project and the nuns. Dolma Tsering who joined in 1999 has taken over most of her responsibilities of keeping the daily accounts, managing emails and coordinating with the U.S. office. In June, Tashi Yangzom was appointed sponsorship secretary and has taken up with enthusiasm the task of writing up the photo-bios of the new nuns in all the nunneries and managing correspondence between nuns and their sponsors.

You Can Help

The Tibetan Nuns Project continues to increase the number of nuns that we support each year. Maintenance and expansion of the Project would not be possible were it not for the help of our volunteers, sponsor and donors. We are very grateful to everyone who has helped us over the years. We are often asked by people how they can best support us, and we've created this resource detailing our current needs.

Make a Donation Your donation will be used for education, medical care, and basic living expenses for the nuns, or special building needs for the infrastructure of the nunneries. You may stipulate that your gift address a specific need. You can make a donation by contacting our Berkeley or Dharamsala offices or on our website.

Host an event/Distribute our goods Some of our supporters have had very innovative ideas such as requesting guests at their wedding to each make a small donation to TNP in honor of the newlyweds. Many have had fun hosting a video party and selling our goods. TNP independently produces and distributes a yearly wall calendar, as well as shirts, freedom bracelets, and greeting cards. This year we will be introducing several new products made by the nuns at Dolma Ling such as handmade paper and small prayer bead bags. Please contact the U.S. office at (510) 647-3423 or email: tnpusa@igc.org for more information.



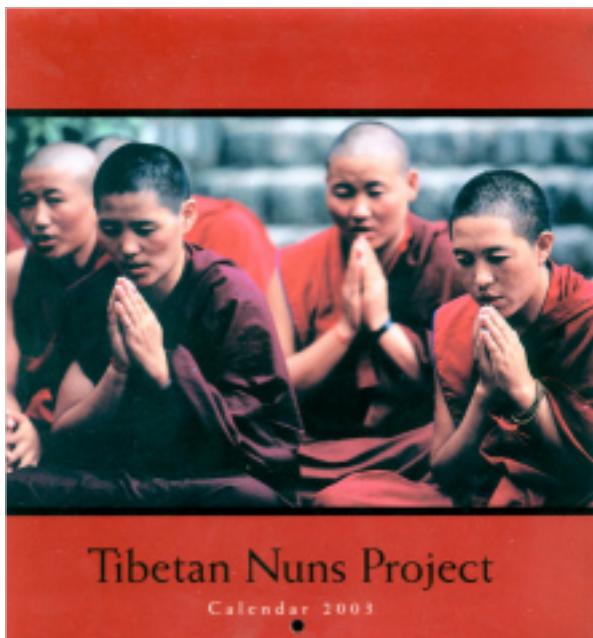
Tibetan Nuns Project

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INDIA

By Airmail

India
Postage

Calendar 2003 now available!



This wall calendar (6.5" x 7") is filled with beautiful color images of Tibetan life and culture, as well as inspiring quotes for each month. Included is the Tibetan lunar calendar and ritual dates for those who do Buddhist practices, and major holidays in the U.S. and Canada.

*** Are you willing to help with sales in your area? ***
Please contact us.

Calendars and Freedom Bracelets

I would like to order:

_____ copies of the **Calendar 2003** @ \$10.00 = \$_____.

CA residents _____ @ \$10.85 (includes sales tax) = \$_____.

Canada residents _____ @ CAD \$14.00 = \$_____.

These prices include shipping costs.

I would like to buy _____ **Freedom Bracelets** @ \$ 3.00 ea.

Add \$1 for shipping and handling per bracelet = \$_____.

Donation

☐ I would like to make donation of \$_____.

☐ Please use it towards the greatest need.

☐ Please use it for _____.

Sponsorship

I'd like to sponsor a nun for \$30/month. I will send payments:

☐ Quarterly (\$90) ☐ Semi-Annually(\$180) ☐ Annually (\$360)

Payment

Make checks or money orders payable to: Tibetan Nuns Project.

Enclosed is my check for \$ _____ or charge my credit card for \$ _____.

Visa/Mastercard No. _____ ExpDate _____.

Name _____.

Address _____.

_____.

Phone _____ Email _____.

☐ I am interested in volunteering. Please send me information.