



Tibetan Nuns Project

Fall 2003

Fundraising Tour



Rinchen Khando Choegyal and Dr. Elizabeth Napper with Dr. Steven Aung of the International Buddhist Friends Association in Edmonton, Alberta

This year we undertook a strenuous tour of North America to raise the funds needed to begin construction of the new Shugsep Nunnery. Director, Rinchen Khando Choegyal and Co-director, Dr. Elizabeth Napper, traveled to San Francisco in April to begin a trip in which they visited 14 cities in 6 weeks. They were joined by Development Officer, Debi Goldman, in giving talks and slide presentations in San Francisco, Chicago, Minneapolis, Portland, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Carmel, Palo Alto, Vancouver, Victoria, Banff, Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary and Seattle. With the help of a final donation after the tour ended, we reached our goal of \$85,000—the remaining amount needed for the first phase of construction.

The tour was made possible by the hard work of many individuals and organizations in each city we visited, and every one of them deserves a big “thuk je che” (Tibetan thanks). Some of the new supporters we met along the road include the University Ministry of the University of San Francisco, the College of St. Catherine’s in St. Paul, Thupten Dadak and Tibetan Education Action from Minneapolis, the Dalai Lama Foundation in Palo Alto, the Banff Mountain Culture Centre and the International Buddhist Friends Assoc. in Edmonton.

We also received wonderful support from the Tibetan communities in Minneapolis, Portland, the Bay Area and Calgary.

We are already thinking about the second and third phases of Shugsep construction and are planning future fundraising tours. Rinchen Khando Choegyal will visit Japan in October of 2003. In the fall of 2004, with the help of the Norwegian Tibet Committee Women’s Group and the Heinrich Böll Foundation we are planning a trip to Norway, Germany and Switzerland. We are also thinking of a visit to Australia in the spring of 2005. If you have any ideas or suggestions, please contact us in either India at bwes@vsnl.com or the U.S. at tnpusa@igc.org.



Greeting the president of the Minneapolis Tibetan

Tibetan Nuns Project

Established in 1987, the Tibetan Nuns Project provides education and support to more than 500 nuns 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

Director

Rinchen Khando Choegyal

Co-Directors

Elizabeth Napper
Ven. Lobsang Dechen

Project Co-ordinator India
Dolma Tsering

Development Officer U.S.
Debi Goldman

Sponsorship

Tashi Yangzom - India
Aya Miyashita - USA

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WEBSITE: www.tnp.org

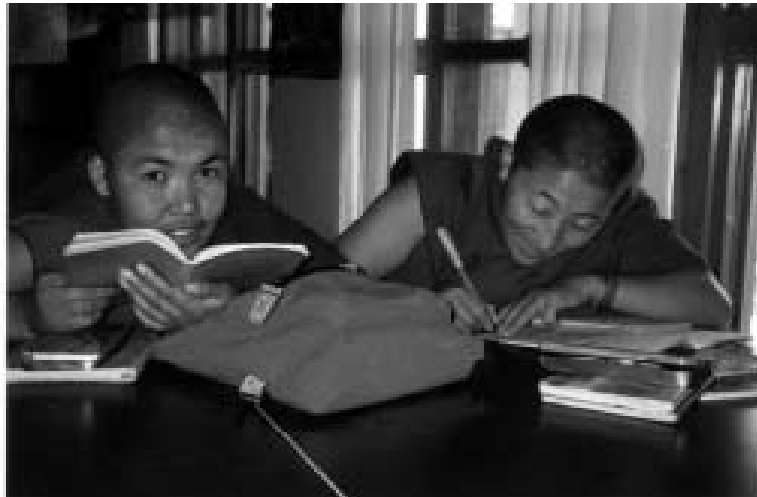
India: c/o Dolma Ling
PO Sidhpur 176057
Dist. Kangra, H.P.
Email: bwes@vsnl.com
Ph: (1892) 246419

USA: 2288 Fulton St., #312
Berkeley, CA 94704
Email: tnpusa@igc.org
Ph: (510) 647-3423

*The Tibetan Nuns Project is a 501(c)3 organization.
All donations are tax-deductible in the U.S.*

What the Nuns Project Does

Since the Chinese occupation of Tibet, thousands of Tibetan Buddhist nuns have escaped to India in hope of freely practicing their religion. Leaving their families behind and risking imprisonment and



end, in 1993 we founded Dolma Ling Nunnery and Institute of Higher Education to provide a non-sectarian, full-time course of study, including classes in philosophy, debate, Tibetan and English. Over the

years, we at the Nuns Project have witnessed the nuns gain knowledge and confidence to pursue self-reliant lives of religious practice and community service.

torture, many of these women journey to Dharamsala, home of the Dalai Lama and an ever-growing Tibetan refugee community.

The Tibetan Nuns Project organizes donations from around the world to provide basic support—food, clothing, housing and medical care—for Tibetan Buddhist nuns and nunneries of all traditions. Of the nunneries we work closely with, Dolma Ling is non-sectarian, Shugsep is Nyingma, Geden Choeling is Geluk, Tilokpur is Kagyu; we also support nuns at the Sakya nunnery in Dehra Dun. We offer sponsorship to nuns living in retreat on the hill above Dharamsala and provide a small monthly stipend to nuns recently arrived from Tibet until they can find a home in exile. We are now receiving increasing numbers of nuns from the Himalayan border regions of Ladakh, Zaskar, Spiti, and Kinnaur. Nunneries there are few and poor, so many young women make the trek to the Dharamsala area seeking education. We currently support over 100 nuns from these border areas.

Nuns arriving from Tibet and the Indian border regions need more than food and shelter. Most arrive illiterate and lacking the skills they need to sustain themselves and their religious practice in their new environment. A central aspect of the Nuns Project, therefore, is to assist them in their educational efforts. To this

Heartfelt Thanks

We extend our deep appreciation to all of our sponsors and donors for 2003. Now in their seventh year of support for the Nuns Project, the **Heinrich Boll Foundation** of Germany is providing running costs for Dolma Ling. Also in their seventh year of generous assistance, the **Norwegian Tibet Committee Women's Group** is sponsoring teachers' salaries and educational materials for all four of the Dharamsala nunneries with which we work. We have received grants from the **Lolwe Foundation** of Denmark to help with special projects at Geden Choeling and Damo nunneries. This year the **Hershey Foundation** and **Chindak** of Germany, a charitable arm of the Rigpa Foundation, have given us substantial contributions towards the construction of the new Shugsep nunnery. Finally, we wish to recognize all of the individuals who continue to donate to the Nuns Project year after year as well as the new friends we made in 2003. It is you who support the nuns and make the success of our projects possible. *Thank you!*



Who Teaches the Nuns?



Geden Choeling teachers

The long-term goal of the Tibetan Nuns Project is to establish and support educational curricula and opportunities for Tibetan Buddhist nuns. Because historically nuns have not had access to formal

education, there are very few nuns who are qualified to teach. One of our ongoing tasks, therefore, is the recruitment of qualified teachers for the various nunneries that we support.

The teachers we employ are both monastic and lay. Monks (often *geshes* and *khenpos*) from the large monasteries and training institutes of the various Buddhist traditions teach Buddhist philosophy and debate. The nuns also learn ritual arts such as butter sculpture and the creation of sand mandalas from monk instructors.

English is taught in the nunneries by lay women and men educated in the Indian university system. For Tibetan language, we employ mostly young men and women who have come from Tibet in the past ten years. Recent refugees often have stronger Tibetan-language skills than their Indian-raised counterparts, and once they have completed a teacher-training course at nearby Sarah Institute (a branch of the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics), we and many other institutions in the exile com-



The first nun teaching Tibetan at Tilokpur

munity hire them to teach Tibetan language, literature and grammar.

Leadership in the Nunneries

Tibetan Buddhist nunneries have their own democratic system of organization and authority. The internal affairs of the nunneries are handled by the nuns themselves according to traditional positions of authority which include:

Umdze—the **chanting master** leads the pujas. She must know all of the chants by heart as well as how to perform the various rituals.

Gegu or *Chötrim*—the **disciplinarian** keeps track of attendance at pujas and other ceremonies. She organizes work parties and writes passes for nuns who need to leave the nunnery when the abbot is away. She is responsible for keeping track of the nuns and handling infractions of nunnery rules.

Changdzö—the **treasurers** are responsible for nunnery finances and property. Their duties include receiving and distributing offering money, running the nunnery store and making purchases for the nunnery.

Gönnyer—the **keeper of the temple**



A puja at Geden Choeling

makes the daily water offerings, lights the butter lamps, escorts visitors, and keeps the temple clean.

Nyerba—**kitchen managers** do the purchasing for the kitchen and are often directly involved in cooking.

Who holds these posts is determined by election, and different nunneries have slightly different policies regarding the length of time nuns serve in these offices. The position of *nyerba*, for example, is usually a full-time job that two nuns hold for one or two years. At Dolma Ling, however, it is a month-long rotation in which all nuns participate two by two, thus allowing them to keep up with their studies.

In the Dharamsala nunneries there are also practical posts such as secretary, office helper, health-care worker and water filtration system manager. These duties require additional training and are usually long-term appointments. All positions of authority come with additional obligations, yet the nuns accept them gracefully

Finishing Dolma Ling



Completed classrooms of the

Dolma Ling is almost complete! Over the past two years the **Norwegian Tibet Committee Women's Group** provided funds for four new classrooms in the sixth and final wing. We have laid the foundations for the sixteen nuns' rooms that are the final portion of that building, but have postponed further work on them until we can raise the necessary funding. US \$36,000 will allow us to complete this last wing.

We are also beginning the last of Dolma Ling's structures, the office building, which will also provide a welcoming entrance to the nunnery, a reception area for visitors, a shop selling products made by the nuns and much-needed space for Dolma Ling and TNP administration which is presently housed in space designed for income generating projects.



Nuns and lay students help with construction during regular work periods



The kitchen was completely redone this year with funding from the Heinrich Böll

Progress Towards Self-Sufficiency

Papermaking

We make use of waste paper and cloth at Dolma Ling in our papermaking project. A huge success at recycling, the nuns transform all trash of this type into greet-



Making cards during a class work session

ing cards, envelopes, note pads and wrapping paper. They first cut the waste paper and cloth into small pieces which are put into a beating machine. The resulting pulp is then pressed through screens onto cloths that are hung to dry. Once the paper has dried, the nuns enjoy creating note cards decorated with dried flowers and leaves gathered from around the

dharma books as well as rosary bags to hold the rosaries which are strung and blessed by the nuns. Our rosaries are selling well in the US and we hope to market them in London too. In the coming months, the nuns will learn to make traditional Tibetan shirts, cushion covers and pillowcases.

Tailoring

At present, we have ten nuns working on the tailoring project. Our new tailoring instructor has taught all of them the complicated art of cutting cloth for sewing robes and is now instructing them in making traditional Tibetan door curtains. These door curtains are a real hit with visitors, and will soon be available for sale.

The nuns also sew covers for



Nuns learning to cut fabric in the tailoring section

Special Winter Courses



Learning to repair a geyser

Following the Kalachakra and Nyingma Monlam festivals held in Bodhgaya in February, TNP conducted three winter training courses at Dolma Ling. As in years past, representatives from all of the nunneries around Dharamsala were invited.

The first workshop was a two-week refresher course for the two health-care workers at each nunnery. This is the sixth year we've held this ongoing training.

At the same time, we also held a class in basic electrical training. Three nuns from each nunnery learned how to test

lights, join wires, fix geysers and tube lights and repair switches. The knowledge that the nuns gained has proved useful and empowering as they are no longer dependent on outside help for all minor electrical repairs.

Our third workshop was a cultural program focused on the ancient Tibetan tradition of **Lama Mani**. In Tibet, Lama Mani was a way of teaching Buddhist stories and principles to the illiterate lay populace. An itinerate storyteller, called a *bhuchen*, would travel from place to place with a collection of *thangkas* (religious



Bhuchen teaches the art of Lama Mani

paintings). He would stop in villages and tell stories about the life of the Buddha, Buddhist adepts and other religious events. Following his stories, the *bhuchen* would lead the people in reciting mantras.

Since the Cultural Revolution, the Lama Mani tradition has all but disappeared. In order to preserve this practice, we requested the only surviving *bhuchen* in exile to introduce the nuns to this art. In the future we hope to hold a more extensive seminar for those seriously interested in continuing this tradition.

Advanced Studies at Dolma Ling

This year the top class at Dolma Ling advanced to the level of Madhyamika studies (called "Uma" in Tibetan).

Madhyamika is a very subtle and difficult subject, forming the heart of the Tibetan philosophical tradition and is traditionally studied for at least three years. Although all are based on Indian texts, each Tibetan tradition has its own commentarial literature. Hence, the sect to which a nun or monk belongs determines which texts and commentaries she or he studies.

As Dolma Ling seeks to be a non-sectarian institution, the decision regarding which texts to study was not an easy one. Since it would be impossible for the nuns to master all systems of Madyamika, we

have decided, upon consultation with numerous teachers including H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama, to study the classical Indian texts, the source of all Tibetan expositions. The primary texts are works by the great seventh century Indian master, Candrakirti. Outside of their formal classroom instruction, the nuns may study commentaries from any tradition that they wish.

Six nuns from this class chose to go to South India to study according to the Geluk curriculum. Five went to the Sarah Institute and one entered Norbulinka to focus just on Tibetan language study. Six have stayed to pioneer the non-sectarian curriculum. Congratulations to our first class of nuns to embark on this challeng-



The "Uma" class

Progress at Geden Choeling



The newly covered rooftop area

This year efforts at Geden Choeling nunnery have been focused on improving the nuns' health through gradually upgrading the facility.

In response to the chronic water shortage in McLeod Ganj, the Nuns Project, with funding assistance from the Lolwe

Foundation of Denmark, installed a well, pump and water tank in the front of the nunnery. Water from the well is pumped to tanks at the top of the property where it is stored in large tanks which feed the bathrooms and subsidiary tanks by gravity. The water passes through a new double-filtration system and arrives as clear, clean drinking water for the nuns. Engineers from the Delhi firm who installed the filtration system spent time here training two nuns who are now operating and maintaining it daily.

Largely with money raised by the nuns themselves, a wooden floor is being installed in the temple over the bare concrete floor the nuns had been sitting on. Damp in the summer and cold in the winter, it was causing numerous health problems. In order to improve the condition of the temple, it was also necessary to seal and waterproof the temple roof. As part of that process, we also erected a clear cover over the rooftop area to keep out the monsoon rains, thus creating a usable space for the nuns and their teachers to work and study—all lit with natural



Cleaning the water filter



The new wooden floor nearly complete

Spic Macay Students at Dolma Ling

On June 7, four Indian students arrived at Dolma Ling to spend a month experiencing life in the Tibetan exile community. As part of an India-wide Spic Macay scholarship program in collaboration with the Foundation for Universal Responsibility, the mission of these four women was, in their own words, "to see, learn and cherish the sentiments of Tibetans who have made Dharamsala a home away from home."

Young women and men from all over India have been coming to Dharamsala with the Spic Macay program for many years now. Usually a group of eight students, the men stay at various monasteries in the area, while the women stay together—for the past several years at Dolma Ling. Highlights of the students' time in the Dharamsala area included an introduction to the Norbulingka Institute of Tibetan arts and literature, classes at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, a visit with the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa and an



"What can I say about my month in Dolma Ling Nunnery? That it was an eye-opener, that I realized how simple it is to be kind, that compassion breaks all barriers, that never have I felt so much at home in a place so far from home..."

Bhavana Kumar



audience with H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama.

The students who stay at Dolma Ling live with the nuns, participating in their classes and talking with them in Hindi and English, thus helping the nuns improve their conversation skills. The Indian women were very curious about Buddhism and the everyday lives of the nuns and were impressed with the nuns' sincerity, energy and discipline. When the month was over, they were reluctant to go, one student even extending her stay an extra ten days!

Not only does this nation-wide program provide a wonderful opportunity for the nuns to interact with the larger Indian community, it repeatedly proves a positive experience for the Indian women who return to their homes eager to spread the word about the Tibetan community in Dharamsala.



Images at the four corners of this page all appear in this year's calendar. See "New Visuals" below.

The theme for our year in the Berkeley office has been volunteerism! Thanks to many generous donations and discounts we have revamped our office to become a more effective and efficient central hub for fundraising to support the nuns.

Through the expert computer skills of Keigo & Daniel at Network Mechanics (www.netmechs.com) our Macs are networking beautifully, allowing us to respond to our sponsors and donors quickly and efficiently. Our new computer capabilities have inspired us to use our website more interactively. Thanks to the beautiful photography of Lobsang Wangdu and Yolanda O'Bannon, you can now view and purchase products from Dolma Ling online as well as keep up to date on Nuns Project and other Tibet related events in your area.

We continue to have successful monthly Volunteer Night parties. This event falls the second Wednesday of every month from 6:30-9:00pm. Invites are sent monthly by email, so please make sure you are signed up on our email list. We were also



TNP USA

most fortunate to receive a summer intern as part of the externship program for Russian immigrant teens funded by the Jewish Family and Children Services of San Francisco. Our wonderful intern was Sasha Chizhayeva. A refugee herself, Sasha said, "It was a great experience to learn about Tibetan nuns and their struggle to achieve religious freedom. Their stories of persecution were very similar my own family's struggle as Jews in Russia."

New Faces

Our Project Administrator Heidi Basch graduated from UC, Berkeley, in June and left her position to intern in Senator Tom Lantos' office in Washington D.C. We wish Heidi the best of luck and know that she will be a great supporter for Tibetans in her political career. We have hired Aya



Rosary and bag available for sale

Miyashita to serve as our new Project Administrator. Aya received her BA from UC Santa Cruz in Community Studies with a minor in Education in 2000. She has been very active in the Tibetan community in Berkeley and has traveled to many of the Tibetan settlements in India and Nepal.

New Visuals

Valued recent donations are new additions to the visual products we use for fundraising. Photographer Jeff Davis visited our nunneries in the late spring of 2003 and came back with compelling photographic imagery of the work we are supporting in India. Thirteen of his color photos are featured in the 2004 calendar, available for sale now through our website or by contacting the U.S. office (order form available on the back page). Several selections



from the calendar, some shown on this page, are also available for sale as 16"x20" matted photos. These images will be available for sale on the website in the late fall as well as at various events through the end of the year. Together with Jeff, we are proposing to produce a traveling photo exhibit available for viewing in the spring of 2004. Keep checking the website for updates. Jeff's greater collection of work can be seen at: www.jeffdavisphotography.com

Another addition to our bank of visuals is a colorful display board designed by Carol Brighton and Stan Clark to help promote the income generating projects. The display boards will be available for loan if anyone is interested in displaying the nuns' products. Contact the US office for more information.

Our Wish List

There are a number of items that would greatly enhance our work. If you can help with any of these, please let us know: a fax machine, an Emac computer, a laser printer, a digital camera, printing services, and non-profit consulting. Thanks!



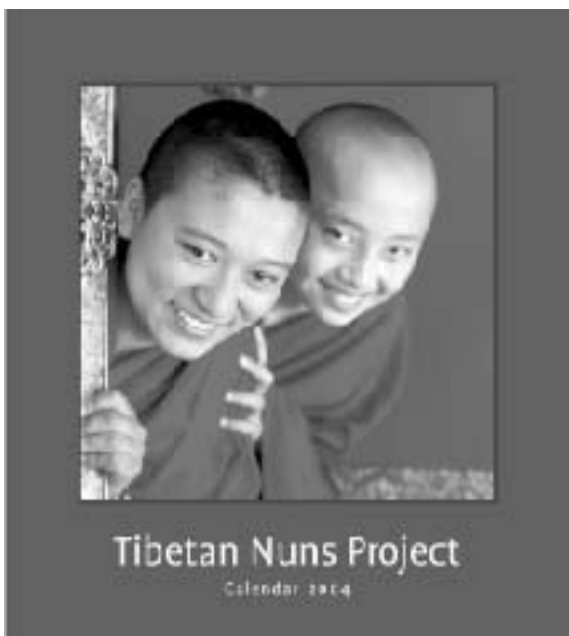


Tibetan Nuns Project

2288 Fulton St. #312
Berkeley, CA 94704
USA

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Calendar 2004 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 2004** @ \$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.