

# Tibetan Nuns Project

Winter 2005

## Prayers for Disaster Victims



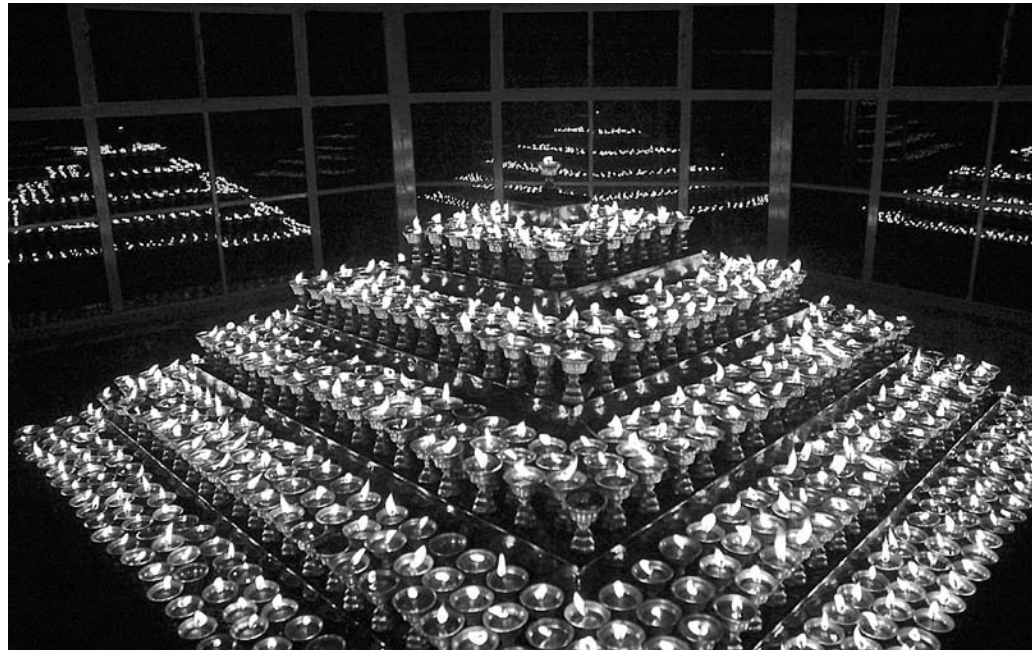
Exciting news



His Holiness  
the Dalai Lama  
inaugurated Dolma  
Ling on December  
8th

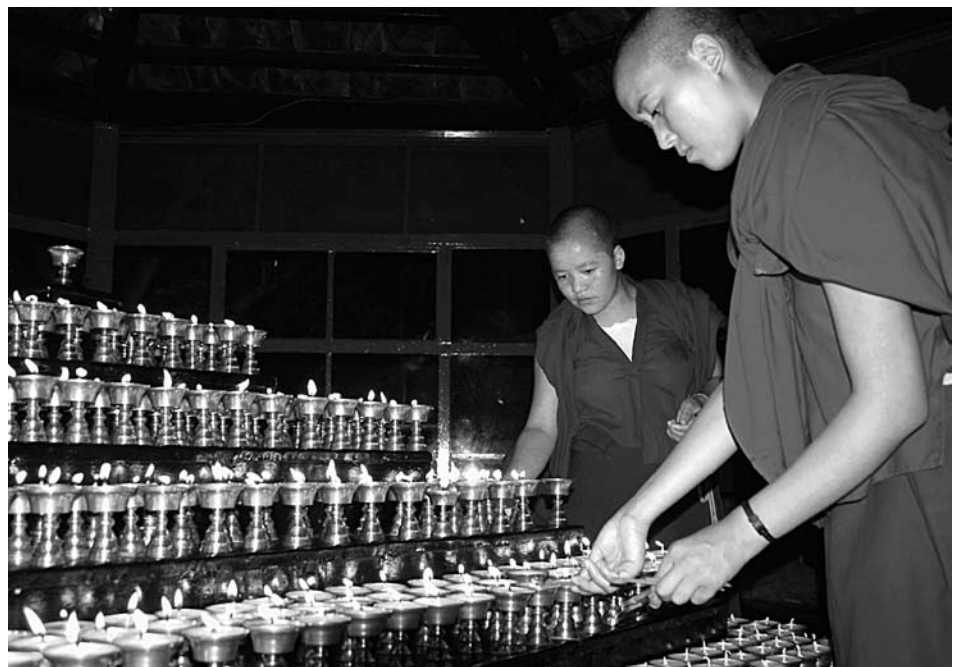


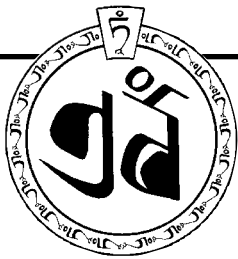
Permission to  
register new Shugsep  
Land finally granted



An offering of butter lamps made by Dolma Ling nuns for all disaster victims

Tibetans customarily offer prayers and light butter lamps for people who are ill, those facing difficulties, and the dead. During this past year of unusual natural disasters, the Dolma Ling nuns have prayed for the victims and offered lamps at the butter lamp pavilion behind their prayer hall. The thousand lamps flickering throughout the night lighten the darkness, offering peace and hope to all.





# 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**

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Ven. Lobsang Dechen

### **Project Co-ordinator India**

Dolma Tsering

### **Development Officer U.S.**

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### **Sponsorship**

Tashi Yangzom – India

Laura Ellis – USA

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Diane Nelson, Tsering Diki, Ven. Lobsang Dechen

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

# Annual Debate-Eleventh Session



The Jang Gonchoe participants in front of Jamyang Choeling's new prayer hall

Jang Gonchoe is a month long debate session which is held between different nunneries every year from September 20 to October 19. The venue rotates among the different participating nunneries. At first only four nunneries attended, but now that has risen to eight, with nuns coming from Nepal, Spiti, South India and Kinnaur, as well as three nunneries in the Dharamsala area.

Initially this year's session was to be held at Khachoe Gakyil Ling Nunnery in Nepal. However because of the political situation in Nepal, nuns would have difficulty crossing the border in large groups, so it was decided that Jamyang Choeling Nunnery in Dharamsala would host the debate instead.

This is the first year that Jamyang Choeling has had the physical facilities

to host such a large group, and so it is an exciting event for all. With the buildings spread throughout an eight acre site, the scene is spacious and peaceful. Now filled by nearly 238 nuns, it echoes with the sound of nuns clapping as they punctuate their point in debate.

This annual event gives all the participating nuns a chance to come together and develop their debating skills, as well as improve their mastery of the philosophical texts. It is from this group of educated women that the first female geshe—Geshemas—will come forth. His Holiness the Dalai has instructed the Department of Religion and Culture of the Tibetan Government in Exile to start preparing a formal procedure to bestow this degree, which will be a historic first within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.



Nuns at debate

# Full Ordination and Geshe Degree for Nuns

On February 22, 2005, a meeting was organized by the Tibetan Nuns Project to form a Committee on Gelongma Ordination in order to assist in causing some movement on this important issue.

As many people are aware, within the Tibetan tradition, the highest level of ordination, that of bhikshuni, is not presently bestowed on nuns. It is a complicated issue, the crux of which involves the question of ordination lineage. According to the monastic rules (vinaya) full ordination of nuns is bestowed by a group of ten senior nuns (bhikshunis) and then by ten senior monks (bhikshus). Since there are currently no bhikshunis in the Tibetan tradition, to begin this ordination would involve bringing in bhikshunis who followed a different lineage of the monastic rules. However, both monks and nuns within the Tibetan tradition would like to find a way to have bhikshuni ordination within their own Sarvastivadin tradition. As yet, no clear way to do so has been found, and the matter has stalled without visible progress for a number of years.

The meeting held in February, which was chaired by TNP Director Rinchen Khando Choegyal, was attended by twenty-eight nuns from eight different nunneries representing all the major Tibetan Buddhist lineages. Everyone participated freely in the conversation and put forward their views on this issue. The meeting gave a forum to our ideas and direction for the future. During the meeting we formed an eleven member committee, six of whom were chosen as a working committee.

This committee is now working closely with the Department of Religion and Culture of the Tibetan Government in Exile to bring about progress on this matter. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has long been supportive of finding a way to commence the bhikshuni ordination within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. In recent months he has spoken out on this important issue more and more frequently, whenever he gives public teachings, to both Tibetan and Western audiences. We include on this page the text of a statement he made on 28 June of this year at the main temple in Dharamsala in front of a crowd of several thousand people.

## His Holiness' Statement on Gelongma Ordination

Although there has previously been discussion regarding bhikshuni [ordination], no decision has been reached. However, we need to bring this to a conclusion. We Tibetans alone can't decide this. Rather, it should be decided in collaboration with Buddhists from all over the world. Speaking in general terms, were the Buddha to come to this 21<sup>st</sup> century world, I feel that most likely, seeing the actual situation in the world now, he might change the rules somewhat.

Tibetans are not solely responsible for the Buddhist tradition, but amongst those who are responsible, we have an important role. In general, in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, Korea, Japan, and China, there are many "upholders of the vinaya" (bhikhsus), and vast numbers of ordained persons; there are nuns and also there are bhikshunis. Hence, all of these come within the sphere of those who are important in any decision that is taken. We Tibetans alone cannot decide this.

However, now, from our Tibetan side we need to plan for when there is an international gathering to discuss this matter, so that we are able to present and explain in complete form whatever discussions and research we have undertaken. Thus, we need to bring our research to a conclusion and have a clear presentation to make, and then we should make connections with all corners of the Buddhist world. If we are

able to do this, I think it will be very good.

Then, regarding what we can do ourselves, many of our nunneries have set up programmes of advanced levels of education. Those studies are underway, and well-educated nuns are coming up. We had discussion some years ago that if nuns have studied two, three or however many of the [five] main texts, then if they take the debate exam on those texts, accordingly, they need to receive a Geshe-ma degree. It was discussed that if there can be Gelongma (bhikshuni), then there can also be Geshe-ma.

For this, there needs to discussion with the Department of Religion and it needs to be settled with a written document. This applies not just to we Tibetans, there are also many nunneries from Ladakh in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east.

In many countries of the world, not just within Buddhism, women have great faith in religion. For example, if we look at the Christian church, the majority of those who visit the churches are women. Regarding Muslims, I can't say. But in any case, it seems that within the Buddhist countries in the Himalayan region, it is women who have greater faith in their religion. Hence nunneries become very important and accordingly, studies should be of high quality and if, gradually, the lineage of bhikshuni ordination can be introduced it would be good.



# December 8th Inauguration



Nuns preparing for His Holiness' arrival

Many who have visited here during the twelve years that Dolma Ling has been under construction have admired the careful overall planning and architecture. With the completion of the final housing block, **DOLMA LING IS FINISHED AT LAST!!!**

Nuns have been living and studying at Dolma Ling since 1994, but we delayed a formal inauguration until it was complete. To mark this achievement, His Holiness the Dalai Lama most kindly graced the occasion of the formal inauguration which was held on December 8<sup>th</sup>. Over 300 guests including representatives of the Tibetan government in exile, nearby monasteries and NGO's attended the ceremony, which was held in the temple. In addition, over 600 pilgrims recently arrived from Tibet crowded into our courtyard awaiting a public audience with His Holiness.

In his inspiring forty minute address, His Holiness focused on the importance of study and practice if Tibetan culture and its Buddhist tradition are to flourish. Infrastructure is needed, but it is only the beginning.



His Holiness the Dalai Lama in the prayer hall



Tibetan gate at the entrance of Dolma Ling



Nuns waiting for His Holiness' arrival



Nuns waiting to receive His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama



His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama arriving at Dolma Ling

# Day at Dolma Ling Nunnery



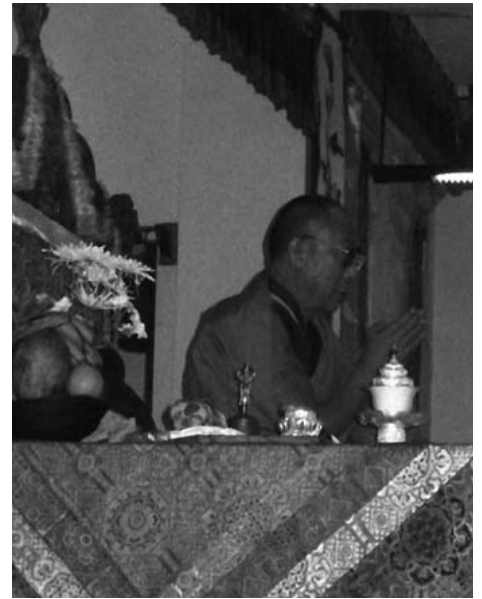
New arrivals from Tibet waiting to see His Holiness

Regarding the bhikshuni ordination for nuns, His Holiness made the point that even in the time of the Buddha when social norms regarding women were so different, he allowed them to become fully ordained. In modern times, when gender equality is accepted as being an important value to strive for, within the Tibetan context it would be a big mistake not to work towards that goal.

Following the main function, His Holiness addressed the new arrivals from Tibet and greeted each personally.

A local village style lunch was served to over 3,000 in the field next to the nunnery — to all the attendees as well as neighboring villagers. There was colourful and joyful singing and dancing by two troops of performers, one local Indian girls and the other Tibetans from a nearby Institute.

It was a perfect day, and a memorable and important landmark in the history of the Tibetan Nuns Project.



His Holiness giving his talk



Folk dance being performed by local village girls



Applique made in honour of all our Donors



Traditional offering to His Holiness as he entered Dolma Ling



His Holiness admiring the sand mandala made by the nuns

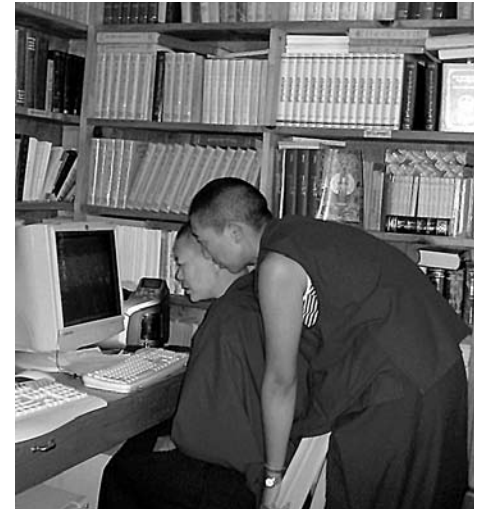
# Events at Geden Choeling

The nuns at Geden Choeling have recently been introduced to basic computer skills. They are being taught by one of the senior nuns who had the opportunity to take a year's computer course open to ex-political prisoners.

This year old buildings at Geden Choeling are being repaired which will improve the living condition of nuns. As the wooden buildings are very old and some parts are rotten, it gets very damp and wet inside during monsoons. With

more nuns being admitted every year, the nuns need a better place to live. Most of the repair work in the nunnery is carried out with the kind help of people who donate the required funds.

Two new buildings are also in the planning stages. They will make life more comfortable during monsoons and winters, and the nunnery will also have more space for new nuns who come in every year.



Computer class at Geden Choeling

# News from Shugsep Nunnery



Rinchen Khando Choegyal & Lobsang Dechen with Kathrin Franke in Leipzig

additional three years' funding towards teachers salaries and textbooks for four nunneries plus funding for the annual Jang Gonchoe debate session.

In Sweden they met mainly with the Swedish Tibet Committee. In Germany they visited Humburg and Leipzig. The main organizers of the German portion of the trip were Gabriele Rabkin and Kathrin Franke.

We express our heartfelt thanks to all the groups and individuals who funded and organized our trip to Europe and gave us their precious time as well as those who made generous donations.

## News of the nuns

This year although most of the Shugsep nuns attended the spring teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, twelve nuns from Shugsep went to South India to receive teachings on central channel yoga from Penor Rinpoche.

Among the nuns who have completed their nine year basic study course, three have joined the Tibetan Institute in Sarah to enhance their skills in Tibetan. Two have been selected to teach the younger nuns this year. Two are improving their English skills and also work as health care workers in the nunnery. The rest of the nuns help the nunnery with daily work and are also keeping up with their research work.

Because it was inevitable that the nuns would have to remain in their old buildings at least through 2006, we built a new though temporary assembly building to make their living conditions a little easier.



Prayer session held in the new hall

## Fundraising Tour

Last year representatives from the Norwegian Tibet Committee Women's Group visited all the nunneries under the Tibetan Nuns Project, enabling them to take a close look at the progress we have made through their funding of teachers' salaries and textbooks.

Then Director Mrs. Rinchen Khando Choegyal and Co-Director Lobsang Dechen made a fundraising trip to Norway, Sweden, and Germany. In Norway they met members of the Norwegian Tibet Committee and FOKUS and were able to thank them for their consistent support for the Tibetan Nuns Project, and ask for their help to continue. Consequently, we have been granted an

## Shugsep construction to begin!

At long last, after a lengthy two year process, we have received permission from the Himachal Pradesh government to register the land we have purchased for the new Shugsep Nunnery, and we can at last begin construction!

We are happy that we have, during this time of waiting, been able to raise funds for the first phase of construction for the new Shugsep Nunnery and to draw up all the plans for the new nunnery. We have signed the final contract, and construction will commence in early 2006.

The new nunnery is planned to house and educate 108 nuns, and will be built in phases as we can raise the necessary funds.

# TNP USA Moves to Seattle, Washington

## New Seattle Office

In April 2005 TNP moved its US office from its former location in Berkeley, California to its new home in Seattle. We are now located in the heart of Seattle's downtown Pioneer Square arts district. Our opening reception featured the "Path of Promise" photo exhibition in the gallery and a talk by our Co-Director, Dr. Elizabeth Napper. The Tibetan Nuns Project has been wonderfully received by supporters in Seattle. Many thanks to all who have attended our events and helped to get us established in our new office.

## "The Path of Promise"



One of the beautiful images in the photo exhibit.

This exhibition, with photography by Jeff Davis ([www.lumenproduction.com](http://www.lumenproduction.com)), has been traveling North America for over a year now. Featuring beautiful color photographs and captions storyline, it has been viewed by thousands at exhibitions in the Vancouver Library Moat Gallery, Telluride Film Festival, Banff Mountain Culture Centre, the Women's Center at University of Washington, Shakti Vinyasa Yoga Studio in Seattle, Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts in Edmonton, and most recently was featured at the teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the Starr Pass Marriott in Tucson, Arizona as well as an exclusive showing at the Stone Ave. Gallery in Tucson. Contact our US office for information on how to bring the exhibit to a gallery near you.

## Outreach and Events

In August, TNP was on the front page of Seattle Post-Intelligencer's Life section in an article about Tibet Fest, an annual cultural event sponsored by the Tibetan Association of Washington. The article can be viewed at [http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/238407\\_nuns29.html](http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/238407_nuns29.html). If you are interested in representing TNP at local events in your area contact our US office for information.

## Volunteer Night

Our utmost gratitude goes to the many volunteers who help us with mailings, inventory and events. We are continuing the Berkeley tradition of "Volunteer Night" here in Seattle on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of each month. Email invitations will be sent out the first Monday of the month, so be sure that we have your current email address. Corrections and additions can be sent to: [tnpusa@igc.org](mailto:tnpusa@igc.org)

## Products

The nuns continue to produce beautiful hand-made products that are sold at our events and on our website in order to promote their sustainable income-generating projects. Some of these products include meticulously hand-sewn door curtains, hand-made paper greeting cards, prayer flags, hanging dharma wheels, freedom bracelets, apron purses and wallets, and an extensive selection of prayer beads that are strung and blessed by the nuns. Also available on the website are TNP shirts, sweat-shirts, and 2006 calendars with photos by Jeff Davis. Contact the US office to request a product brochure.



## You Can Help

Although we are growing at a rapid speed, the US office keeps costs low by keeping our staff to a minimum and relying heavily on our volunteers to help and continue to contribute pro-bono services and in kind donations.

Some ways to help:

◆ Make a donation: Your donation will be used for education, medical care, and basic living expenses for the nuns. Donations can be made by cash, check and Visa/Mastercard and are tax-deductible in the US and Canada.

◆ Donate assets: An alternative to cash donations is by giving assets, such as stocks, mutual funds or real estate, which have appreciated in value. When you sell an appreciated asset the gain is taxable to you. But when you give that same asset to a 501(c) 3 non-profit group, you get a tax deduction and you do not pay any income tax on the gain. The non-profit can then sell the asset and they do not pay any income tax on the gain either since they are tax exempt.

◆ Sponsor a nun: Thirty US dollars (\$30) a month provides basic necessities for one nun living in exile (for more than 500 nuns living in four nunneries: Dolma Ling, Geden Choeling, Shugsep and Tilokpur) representing all religious traditions as well as nuns living on their own and in retreat. Sponsors are asked to commit to at least one year. Sponsors receive a photobio of a nun and are welcome to correspond with her.

◆ Help us with our wish list for this year: color laser printer, a rotary cutting board, always office supplies (especially toners!), air miles to extend our outreach to further venues and Macintosh software.

◆ Distribute our products: Become a calendar distributor or sell the handmade products made by the nuns at Dolma Ling. Order our product brochure today.

◆ Volunteer at our office: In addition to second Wednesday volunteer work parties, we are always in need of PR/Marketing advice, event planning, technology (Mac wizards welcome!) advice, grant writing and foundation/corporate research, Endowment Development, and photographers.



# Tibetan Nuns Project

619 Western Ave. #22  
Seattle, WA 98104

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION  
BULK RATE  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
SEATTLE, WA  
PERMIT NO. 681

**2006 Calendar  
Now on Sale**



This wall calendar (6.5" x 7") is filled with beautiful color images of Tibetan Buddhist nuns' 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 2006** @ \$10.00 = \_\_\_\_\_

WA residents add \$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)

*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.