

Tibetan Nuns Project

Winter 2006

Two New Projects



**News on Bhikshuni
Ordination**



**Progress on Shugsep
Construction**



English Health Book
— *Healthy Body,
Healthy Mind*

Sakya Nuns College

Sakya Nuns College will commence operation in 2007. It will be situated in Manduwala, about 19km from Dehra Dun. There was infrastructure in place, and the head of the Sakya College for monks, Khenpo Gyatso, developed a plan to convert it into an institution where nuns could study. He believes it is essential to provide the same opportunities to nuns as to monks. His Holiness Sakya Trizin has welcomed Khen Rinpoche's idea. Khen Rinpoche approached the Tibetan Nuns Project for assistance, and we have agreed to take on major financial responsibility for fundraising for the Institute, providing that this runs as a good institution. An initial group of thirty nuns has been chosen from the Sakya Nunnery in Dekyi Ling Settlement near Dehra Dun. The nuns will follow the same curriculum as the Sakya College for monks, graduating with an equal degree. Sakya College covers the six major fields of Buddhist studies in its curriculum. The institute will delay the start of regular classes until next year, as some parts of the complex, which have been used as a retreat center, need repair first.



First group of Sakya Nuns



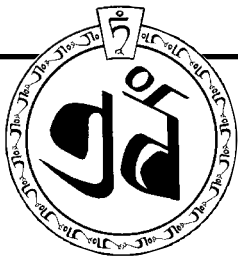
Sherab Choeling nuns

Sherab Choeling Institute

Sherab Choeling Institute, located in Morang Village in Lahaul-Spiti, the northern region of Himachal Pradesh, approached the Tibetan Nuns Project this year for help sustaining their institute, which we happily agreed to provide. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama consecrated the nunnery in 1995, encouraging the nuns to study. Although Lahaul-Spiti is part of India, ethnically, the people are descended from Tibetans and the majority are devout Buddhists. They have preserved an ancient Tibetan culture, speaking an old dialect of the Tibetan language, as written in Tibetan scriptures. This was the first religious educational project for Spiti women. Traditionally women in this region have suffered from many social and educational disadvantages. Many have been deprived of any kind of education, and this institute has come up as the first in Spiti to provide women with the opportunity to overcome these disadvantages.

There are forty-four nuns ranging in age from seven to fifty. The curriculum is designed to educate the nuns in Buddhist philosophy, meditation, Tibetan language and literature, in addition to a basic education in English, Hindi and math.

Many young girls seek admission to Sherab Choeling, but due to lack of facilities, it is not possible. The Tibetan Nuns Project will help by raising awareness, finding sponsors for the nuns, and helping them to fundraise for the further development of the Institute.



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

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Co-Directors

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Annie Wilson – USA

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Tsering Diki, Ven. Lobsang Dechen and Annie Wilson

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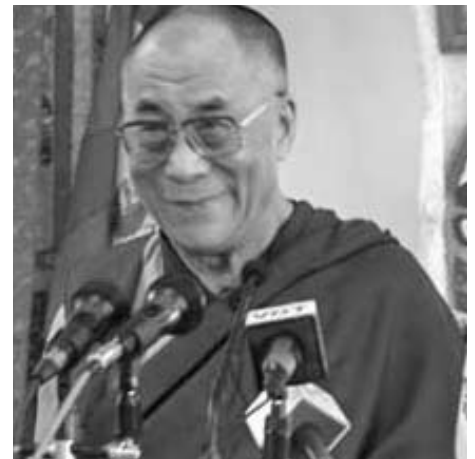
Bhikshuni Ordination Update

In May 2006, as part of the long on-going research regarding full ordination for nuns in the Tibetan Vinaya tradition, a three day Tibetan Vinaya Masters Conference was hosted by the Department of Religion and Culture in Dharamsala, India. Four monks from each religious order of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition were the main speakers in the conference. Others in attendance were, from Taiwan, Bhikshunis Ven Heng-Ching and Ven Hueyan, and from Germany, Bhikshuni Jampa Tsedron. His Holiness the Karmapa, Kalon Tripa Professor Samdong Rinpoche, and members of the Bhikshuni Ordination Committee were also in attendance. Several Tibetan and Western nuns attended the meeting as observers.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama graced the meeting and addressed the participants.

There is no concrete evidence that the bhikshuni ordination was ever introduced into Tibet. The conference discussed three main topics: whether or not only male sangha ordination can be employed to ordain Tibetan nuns according to the Tibetan Mulasarvastivada tradition, whether or not Tibetan nuns could be ordained in collaboration with bhikshunis from other Buddhist traditions who would introduce the aspect of female ordination, currently missing in the Tibetan tradition; and finally, whether there might be an alternate method of conferring full ordination to nuns.

Despite the lack of conclusion, the atmosphere in the meeting was positive and more open to the ideas of a bhikshuni



ordination than on previous occasions. Many of the attending masters presented interesting and relevant points. Half of the participants were in favor of introducing the bhikshuni ordination. This is not enough to enable any decisions to be taken on behalf of the tradition. It was agreed that more research will be conducted with a presentation of the topic to be done at the International Vinaya Conference in Hamburg, Germany in July 2007.

In June 2006, the 9th High Lamas Conference was held at Norbulingka Institute, just outside Dharamsala. Unfortunately, the bhikshuni issue was not addressed further. The question of offering the Geshe-ma and Khenmo degrees to the nuns was debated sincerely but no conclusion was reached. It was agreed to place these issues on the agenda for the 10th High Lamas conference.

Thank You Norway

We are extremely grateful to the Norwegian Tibet Committee's Women's Group (NTCWG) and the Forum for Women and Development (FOKUS) for their continuing support. They have provided funding for education at Dolma Ling since 1997 and since 2000, have extended their program to three other nunneries: Geden Choeling, Tilokpur and Shugsep, which has helped us meet the expenses of teachers' salaries and educational materials, as well as the cost of constructing classrooms.

In April 2006, the NTCWG conducted an overall assessment of the project. An evaluation team consisting of Pema Tsamcho and Camilla Solholm from NTCWG, Hanne Lotte Moen from FOKUS, and external evaluators, Nora Ingdal and Youdon Aukatsang, visited all the nunneries. They spoke to TNP Director, Mrs. Rinchen Khando Choegyal, Co-directors Ven. Lobsang Dechen and Dr. Elizabeth Napper, held separate interviews with nuns and teachers and assessed the living conditions of the nuns.

They were positive and impressed with what they heard and saw in the nunneries and gave us valuable suggestions about areas where we could improve.

Dolma Ling Activities

The 2006 academic session at Dolma Ling began on 31 March. We now have 192 nuns taught by 14 teachers. Now that the infrastructure of the nunnery is established, the nuns can focus on their studies without the distraction of construction work going on. The senior class contains twenty one students studying third year Madhyamika and eight students doing their third year of Tibetan Language and Literature. This spring they should receive their Uma Rapijam and Rigne Rapijam degrees, respectively, after which they can choose to continue their studies in Philosophy or Tibetan here at Dolma Ling, or go to teacher training or other speciality courses elsewhere.

The Tibetan Nuns Project has always sought to provide the nuns with the best education possible and has given the nuns a platform to mold their future the way they want to. Six of our nuns studied in the nunnery for many years and then moved to Sarah Institute to get their teaching



Dolma Ling nuns taking an exam

qualification. They are now working as Tibetan teachers in different branches of Tibetan Children's Village schools in the Dharamsala area. Among the nuns who completed their Pharchin course (equivalent to a B.A.) at Dolma Ling, two nuns did a year long religious teacher training course at Sarah Institute. One is now teaching in a school in Kullu which is run by the Department of Education of the Central Tibetan Administration, and the other nun, Delek Yangzom, came back to Dolma Ling to continue her studies. We are overjoyed to see these nuns working to improve the education offered to Tibetan children and to make their mark in society.

As we are well equipped with computers, computer training is being held here regularly. Last year Antje Kharchi devoted a month to teaching the office staff how to use InDesign and Photoshop so that they could manage the newsletters. She returned again for a few days this year to answer some questions. In the meantime, a professional computer trainer, Mr. Harald Weichhart from Austria gave a thorough course in Photoshop and InDesign for the office staff and nuns who have shown particular interest in learning computer. He also taught video editing to two nuns and one of our Tibetan teachers. It will be a great help to be able to



Computer class at Dolma Ling

document special events at Dolma Ling without calling on people from outside.

Extra-curricular activities such as quiz competitions, Tibetan essay competitions and inter-class flower shows are organized every year in the nunnery to enhance group participation among the nuns and to teach them the importance of team work. Badminton courts and a volley ball court have been made to encourage nuns to exercise. They also participate in gardening and take responsibility for the maintenance of the buildings and grounds now that our construction staff have left. Many nuns are also involved in our income generating projects which include tailoring, paper making, vegetable growing and keeping cows. The tailoring section has gained one nun, Tenzin Lhatso. She was sent for training in appliqué, returned and is busily taking charge of all the work on door curtains, cushion covers and so on.

Health Book — *Healthy Body, Healthy Mind*

This year the Tibetan Nuns Project published a health book in English called *Healthy Body, Healthy Mind*: a straightforward, easy-to-understand handbook on women's health for Tibetan nuns and laywomen. It contains extensive information on women's health issues, geared to the Tibetan community. We published a Tibetan version last year and then found that it would be helpful to have an English version as well.

We are grateful to all the individuals and organizations who gave their valuable time and energy to producing this book and to the Global Fund for Women for funding it. It will be distributed widely to schools, clinics and nunneries in the Tibetan communities throughout India, Nepal and the Himalayan region.

We anticipate that the information contained, such as protection against HIV and Hepatitis B infection, health choices, principles of good nutrition, maintaining good hygiene and care for the environment will filter through women into the wider community. We also hope the book will encourage women to set up self-help organizations to offer support and help to each other.

Those who wish to purchase the book in either Tibetan or English can contact Paljor Publications, our distributor, based in Delhi at the following e-mail: sales@paljorpublications.com.

Great Progress at Shugsep!



Nuns' room at Shugsep



Old Shugsep buildings



Nuns making ritual tormas

Sixty nuns currently live at Shugsep. They follow the nine year educational program of Namdroling Monastery, in South India, which is under the direction of Pema Norbu Rinpoche, head of the Payul Lineage. Seventeen nuns have graduated since 2003. They are now engaged in furthering their understanding of the texts through research and meditation in preparation for taking their Khenmo degree.

Most of the nuns in this nunnery are victims of Chinese oppression and have moved to India in order to preserve their particular lineage of Longchenpa's Longchen Nyingtik. Every year new nuns apply to join Shugsep Nunnery but due to limited accommodation they cannot be admitted. The building in which nuns are presently housed is steadily deteriorating despite our efforts to improve it. Fortunately, construction of a new nunnery with facilities for up to 108 nuns is at last underway.

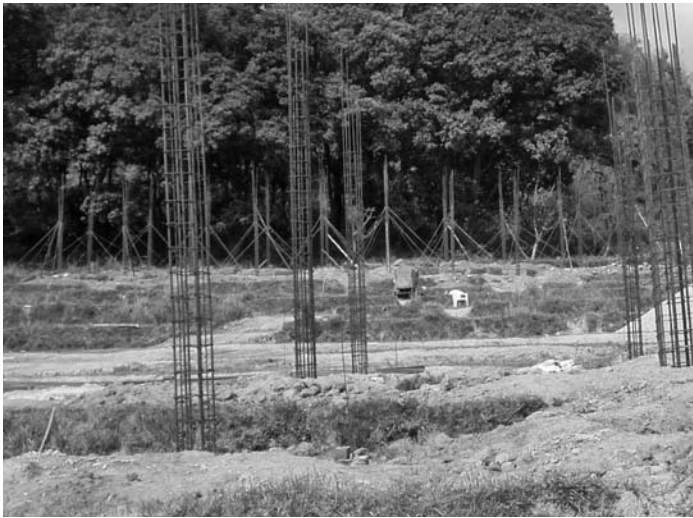
Construction of the new Shugsep began in January, 2006, after a lengthy period of legal work to secure the land. The architects, who have also undertaken the contract for construction, have a



Tibetan class in the old prayer hall



Nuns performing new Shugsep land consecration puja



Early stages of construction of the nuns housing



Dining hall and institute buildings

permanent site manager and skilled labor team established on site, supplemented by local labor as required. The Tibetan Nuns Project construction supervisors regularly visit the site to check on work progress and confer with the site manager and architects.

The first phase of the construction, due to be completed towards the end of 2007, includes the kitchen and dining hall. This has been expanded to include a garage on the ground floor and a number of rooms above the dining hall, which will provide accommodation for the nuns, an office and other requirements until the rest of the construction is complete. Then these rooms will be used as a workshop, computer room and additional office space.

The first housing wing, nestled in front of the mango grove which we are carefully preserving, will have three floors and will be able to accommodate seventy two nuns. On the lower side of the land, the institute building which contains a lecture hall, a library, four classrooms and four staff quarters is also taking shape. Particular effort has been made to site the buildings so as not to cut down the old bodhi trees on the site.

Despite the heavy monsoon this year, good progress has been made on all these buildings: the first floor slabs have been poured and work is continuing on the upper floor brickwork and setting in windows and doors. Fortunately, the Shugsep site is relatively easy to work as the land is not too rocky. We are also constructing a stone boundary wall to protect the privacy of the nuns. The electrical transformer, which was ordered some months ago, is now due to be installed. A tube well was dug to provide water for the site and we are planning considerable ground water re-charge wells to maintain it.



Nuns' quarters coming up



Making progress on the institute and staff quarters

Geden Choeling and Tilokpur Nunnery

A constant trickle of nuns continues to arrive in Dharamsala from Tibet. They come seeking an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, religious freedom and educational opportunities. With new nuns joining every year, Geden Choeling has become overcrowded, with more than 130 nuns currently living in this small area. Among them are a number of older nuns, who are happy as they are well cared for by the younger nuns. A plan to build new accommodation is in place and construction will start as soon as they have obtained necessary permits from the local government.



Buddhist Philosophy class at Geden Choeling

The nunnery is raising its own building fund and has also requested help from TNP. The growing number of nuns has also led to a water shortage so, this year, the TNP funded the installation of another two new tanks. As water is in short supply in McLeod Ganj itself, these tanks are designed to “capture” and store rainwater which can then be used for washing and construction purposes.

Since TNP started an educational program for Geden Choeling at their request, we are happy to see that the nuns are performing well in their studies. The highest level is now in Pharchin 7. They study Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan language, English and basic computer skills. They have five teachers; two teach Buddhist philosophy, two teach Tibetan and one teaches English.



One of our elderly nuns

In Tilokpur the number of nuns has gradually increased to eighty, of whom forty-six are attending regular classes. A number of nuns are on retreat at Sherab Ling, a retreat centre near Dharamsala. Others are performing duties in the nunnery and some have retired.

Tilokpur's education program is still quite basic though the TNP is searching for a Buddhist Philosophy teacher from the Karma Kagyu tradition. At present the nuns study English and Tibetan. They believe it is important to be well-versed in Tibetan language before embarking on the study of philosophy. Tilokpur Nunnery has two semesters a year, and after each semester they have a one month break. The highest class is now in their eighth year of study. Construction of a new institution is under way; it will include an office, classrooms, a hostel for the nuns and the main meeting hall which we hope will enable them to continue their practice and study more comfortably.



Tilokpur nuns in class

Assistance for “Floating Nuns”

The Tibetan Nuns Project supports a large number of nuns living on their own or in retreat in the Dharamsala area: they are known as “floating nuns”. We maintain a small office in McLeod Ganj, run by one nun who works primarily to help these nuns. Currently we have a total of 138 nuns in this category, of whom 64 have sponsors. The remaining nuns are living outside Dharamsala and are not sponsored because it is very difficult to keep track of them. However, the TNP supports them with a small monthly stipend, medical assistance, and a yearly shoe allowance.



Floating nuns with TNP Director, Co-Director, and staff

Most of the nuns in this category are elderly and cannot study so they stay in retreat and devote their time to religious practice. There are some younger nuns who also choose to live on their own, finding their own teachers under whom they study and practice. They mainly study the Graduated Path, meditate and attend the teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the main temple in McLeod Ganj.

On July 14, 2006, a meeting with the floating nuns was held at Dolma Ling Nunnery. Around 50 nuns attended the meeting which was presided over by our Director, Rinchen Khando Choegyal, and Co-Director, Ven. Lobsang Dechen. The Director spoke to the nuns about leading a simple committed life. They were advised to follow the precepts and stick to the guidelines of their vows which are designed to help them to tame their minds.

TNP USA - Seattle, Washington

Co-Director Ven. Lobsang Dechen Visits the U.S. office

2006 has marked many great accomplishments for the Tibetan Nuns Project, especially our US office. We have moved to the 4th floor in our current building, (619 Western Ave) to a beautiful office painted and decorated by our wonderful Seattle volunteers. In addition to expanding our office space, we have expanded our US board as well. This year we welcome to our board Venerable



TNP Co-Directors, Ven. Lobsang Dechen and Dr. Elizabeth Napper, visiting Ven. Thubten Chodron at Sravasti Abbey.

Lobsang Dechen, herself a nun and one of our Co-Directors who resides in India, and Tsetan Phanucharas, who also serves as president of the Los Angeles Friends of Tibet. Ven. Lobsang Dechen was able to travel to Seattle to attend our board meeting in May thanks to the kind donation of air miles from Mr. Donald Novak of Durango, CO. Both Co-Directors, Dr. Elizabeth Napper and Lobsang Dechen, traveled to the US from India for our board meeting and to do several fundraisers for the construction of Shugsep Nunnery, which will be the focus of our fundraising efforts for the next few years. During their trip to the US, we visited Sravasti Abbey in eastern Washington, a monastic center established by Ven. Thubten Chodron, and also spoke at South Idaho Community College in Cour d'Alene, which provided a venue for TNP to present their current projects to the community.

Lobsang Dechen was delighted to visit our US office for the first time. She commented, "I was very happy to meet the volunteers who work with the Nuns Project office in the USA. I saw some of them even using their lunch break to help the nuns and was very impressed with the skills that our volunteers offer us. Their volunteer service in US office makes a lot of difference in the nuns' lives in

India. We are very proud and thankful to all the people who work on behalf of us."

Another memorable fundraising event was a Mother's Day luncheon at the home of Ms. Ann Milam. Our Co-Directors spoke as guests of honor. Thank you, Ann, for opening your home to TNP. And thank you to all of those who attended. We deeply appreciate the support.

Products

The products handmade by the nuns have been a great success. In addition to the beautiful mala beads and prayer flags, the nuns have begun sewing dolls out of recycled robes. Another very popular item is cloth shopping bags. The colorful and durable bags are often seen all around Seattle!

You can purchase these items on our website. We are also looking for distributors to sell the nuns' products in their stores. If you are interested in receiving a product brochure or finding out about wholesale prices, please contact the US office at (206) 652-8901.



New products from the nuns

Interns & Volunteers

Our first year in Seattle has brought us new sources of volunteers from all over the country. TNP is grateful to Genevieve Brooks from Benington College in Vermont who completed a two-month internship with us. Genevieve helped with grant research and running all aspects of our office.

We also thank the University of Washington's Carlson Learning Center who have provided us with fabulous service learning students for the entire school year. If you would like to intern with the TNP U.S.A. office or if you know any school or community programs that offer credit for volunteer hours, please contact Annie at 206-652-8901.

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 volunteers to help and 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 600 nuns living in six nunneries: Dolma Ling, Geden Choeling, Shugsep, Tilokpur, Sherab Choling and Sakya Nuns College) 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, or endowment development.



Tibetan Nuns Project

c/o Dolma Ling
P.O. Sidhpur 176057
District Kangra, H.P
INDIA

*2007 Calendar
Now on Sale*



Tibetan Nuns Project
2007

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.

By Airmail

Postage

Calendars and Freedom Bracelets

I would like to order:

_____ copies of the **Calendar 2007**

Price: Rs. 400, U.S \$10.00, €8 (Shipping included)

Please contact our U.S. office (tnpusa@igc.org) for shipping worldwide

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, €23, Rs.1,200/month.

I will send payments:

☐ Quarterly (\$90, €68, Rs.3,600) ☐ Semi-Annually (\$180, €136, Rs.7,200)

☐ Annually (\$360, €272, Rs.14,400)

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

Enclosed is my check for: _____ or charge my credit card for: _____

Visa/Mastercard No. _____ Exp Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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