



Tibetan Nuns Project

Fall 2009

Community of Sponsored Nuns Grows



Sakya Inauguration
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**The Geshema and
Khhenmo Degrees**
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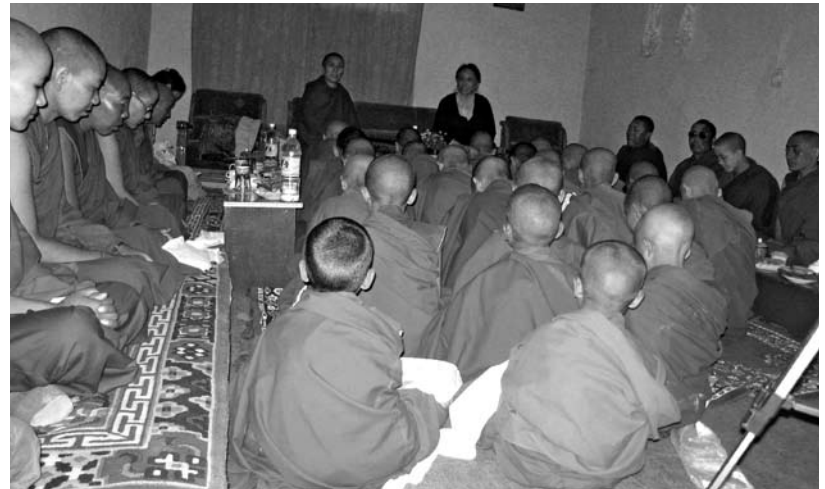


**Steps to Self
Sufficiency**
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Thanks to the ongoing generosity of our many sponsors, the Tibetan Nuns Project is able to expand our support to include more nuns in remote border areas of India.

In late June 2009, Spiti, a Himalayan region of Himachal Pradesh, 15 hours east of Dharamsala, was the focus of a trip by TNP Director Rinchen Khando Choegyal, Co-Director Ven. Lobsang Dechen, a staff nun. They visited Sherab Choling, a nunnery that came into our sponsorship program two years ago, and Yangchen Choling, a nearby nunnery which has requested support from the Tibetan Nuns Project.

The nuns in remote Himalayan border areas like Spiti have a somewhat different situation from the refugee nuns we support. While they are ethnically Tibetan and practice Tibetan Buddhism, they are not refugees; their people have been Indian citizens for generations. Thus, they don't suffer from the problems related to dislocation. Unfortunately, they still face the challenges shared by nuns throughout much of the Buddhist world, including lack of educational opportunities within their own monastic institutions.



TNP Director and Co-Director speaking to Yangchen Choling Nuns

Young women from these regions who are interested in studying and practicing their religion have very few options. In the past, a number of nuns from these areas have traveled to Dharamsala and entered nunneries supported by TNP.

As awareness of their progress grew, interest has developed in their home communities to improve their own facilities and programs. It was this swell of support that drew TNP into sponsoring nuns at Sherab Choling.

As a result of the trip, we agreed to look for sponsors for Yangchen Choling as well as funding for an English teacher. The nunnery currently houses 40 nuns and has two resident teachers, one for Buddhist philosophy and one for Tibetan language.

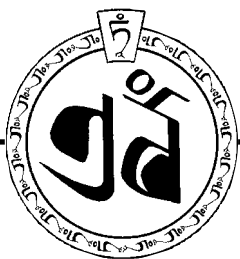
We have also accepted the Dorjee Zong Nunnery, located in Zanskar, a very remote area two days journey west of Dharamsala, into our sponsorship program. Founded in the 14th century, Dorjee Zong has a long tradition of meditating nuns, some of whom are famed for having reached high levels of realization. This very small nunnery seeks help in educating the nuns and guiding them in community service.

The Tibetan Nuns Project is also taking on small projects with other nunneries in outlying regions. For example, a nunnery in Nubra, Ladakh, needs \$2,000 for fencing; a retreat center near Manali needs \$15,000 to finish a building project; and several nunneries need funds for teachers' salaries.

Our sponsors' and donors' ongoing support continues to transcend difficult and distant geography to truly improve the lives of these women.



Sherab Choling nuns debating



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.

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His Holiness the Dalai Lama

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Rinchen Khando Choegyal

Co-Directors
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Ven. Lobsang Dechen

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Many thanks to the following people who contributed to the design, content, and editing of this newsletter:

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

Sakya Nuns Institute



Sakya Institute nuns

The inauguration of the Sakya Nuns Institute on September 26, 2009, ushered in a new era for Sakya nuns. For the first time they can engage in higher Buddhist studies at a dedicated facility. The 25 nuns of the inaugural class—and generations to come—will be able to pursue Buddhist studies for up to 15 years at the Tsechen Shed-Dub Samten Phuntsok Ling Charitable Society, earning the highest degrees in the Sakya tradition.

As they advance through their training, the nuns will earn a series of degrees. Those completing seven years of study will earn the Kachupa degree (equivalent to a bachelor's), and after two more years will attain the Lopön degree (equivalent to a

master's). Those who complete 13 years of study, including an examination and the composition and defense of an original thesis, will be awarded the Rabjampa degree (equivalent to a doctorate). Finally, those completing a further two years of study in tantra will receive the highest degree of Ngagampa.

Honoring the significance of the institute, those working on the project made special efforts to make the facility as functional and beautiful as possible. Every room has been refinished and refurnished. One of the most important accomplishments was the successful drilling of a well, crucial in a region of water shortages. Also, a solar water-heating system was installed, classrooms and staff quarters completed, and a utility vehicle acquired.



Young Sakya nuns studying

Geshema and Khenmo Degrees

A primary goal of the Tibetan Nuns Project is to empower nuns to teach Buddhist philosophy in nunneries and schools. To do this, the nuns must achieve equal academic standing with the monks, proving their qualifications by earning the highest degrees. For monks, depending on their tradition, these degrees are called the Geshe or Khenpo degrees; for nuns, the equivalents will be the Geshema or Khenmo degrees.

Traditionally these degrees have not been accessible to nuns. Now, the Department of Religion and Culture of the Tibetan government-in-exile, with the strong encouragement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, is working to develop a process by which nuns will have the opportunity to hold the highest degrees and credentials.

Nuns are beginning to graduate from the 19-year program of philosophical studies required for a Geshema degree and the 12-year program for a Khenmo degree. Traditionally, after completing these programs, monks have the opportunity to spend another few years reviewing and consolidating their studies in preparation for a very stringent examination and also write a major composition. This stage of study has not been available to nuns.

The Tibetan Nuns Project is committed to supporting those nuns who wish to undertake the final steps toward their advanced degrees; we are seeking support to provide the special study and living facilities they need to complete their degrees and be fully empowered to share their knowledge.



View of the prayer hall and covered pathways

In May, 2008, fifty-eight Shugsep nuns moved into the completed phase of the new nunnery just outside of Dharamsala. The nuns are now well settled in the core buildings, which include a housing wing, five classrooms, library, lecture hall, dining hall, and kitchen. Solar panels on the roof supply piping hot water to the kitchen all year round. Electrical and water systems are now fully installed and functional.

This year, with space at last available, Shugsep admitted four new nuns. So far 23 nuns have completed the nine year course of study that grants them the degree of Lupon. These nuns are now handling administration of the nunnery and focusing attention on English and ritual arts. They hope to someday be able to reach the level of Khenmo. The current top level class is at their eighth year of study.

Two further housing wings and the prayer hall are well on the way to completion. Three large statues, the main images for the prayer hall, are being gilded and will be ready ahead of schedule. The ornamental door for the temple has already been installed.

Final phase buildings—the office, clinic and solar shower facility, and a guesthouse—are 80% complete. Extensive cutting and retaining work at the entrance has improved the approach to the nunnery and provides space for parking and turning. A traditional monastic gate is due to be started soon.

There is still considerable work to be done, but we are very hopeful that everything will be complete by the end of this year. At that time, we will set the date for the official inauguration.

Shugsep Nunnery Update



Studying ritual arts



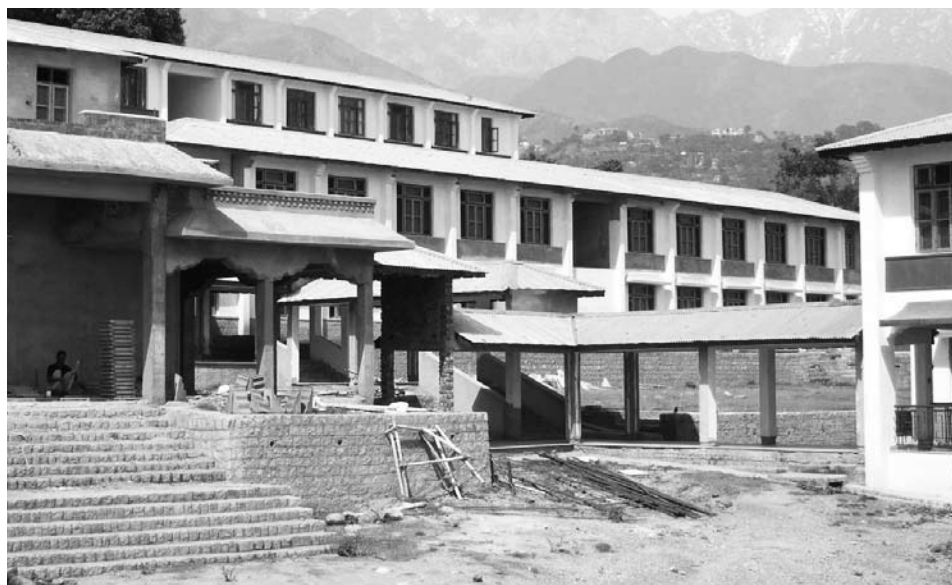
Moving between classes



Learning to use the fire extinguishers



Painting the head of the Buddha statue



Nearly completed housing wings

Dolma Ling Progress and Steps Towards Self-Sufficiency



English class in progress



New solar shower units



View of the debating courtyard under construction

At Dolma Ling Nunnery & Institute 209 resident nuns are fully engaged in study, practice, nunnery work, and self-sufficiency projects. This year, fifteen students will complete Abhidharma studies, the fourth of the five major topics they need to master for the “Geshema” degree. Their final topic will be Vinaya (Monastic Discipline).

We are delighted that our new shower facility with sustainable solar technology is bringing hot water to the nuns for the first time. The solar bathhouse has nine shower units and can serve 100 nuns per day. Input water comes from a nearby river and out-flow water passes through a process that renders it not only safe, but also advantageous for use in the gardens.

The new debate courtyard is in the final stage of construction. The full form of the courtyard is in place, and the five pavilions and the additional stage area are all complete. The coated high tensile fabric canopy has been installed, and our team of masons is completing all necessary stone work. Work is also underway to shape the land around the courtyard so that it settles comfortably into the landscape. Projected completion date of this important project is late fall.

As each year goes by, the nuns at Dolma Ling take more responsibility for managing their own institution. In the fall of 2008, a committee of eight nuns was formed to administer the internal functioning of the nunnery. We are pleased to report that by actively helping to run the nunnery, our nuns are gaining confidence and skills. The nuns run a small “tuck” shop, where they sell daily sundries, toiletries, and snacks. This is a major responsibility for two nuns who are elected annually as “Changdzo”, which translates as “Treasurer” but doesn’t begin to encompass their responsibilities in managing funds, property, and organizing new activities, which this year even included making fresh juice to sell. Others run the guesthouse, keep the offices clean, and



Solar panels on the bath house

manage the pumps that send water throughout the complex. Still others operate a small long distance phone booth and Internet facility. Some nuns tend a herd of eight dairy cows and others participate in the tailoring section, which includes making robes and products that are sold in the Dolma Ling shop and on our website. All nuns participate in stringing and blessing the mala beads that we sell, as well as making the “Freedom Bracelets” that are another of our core products.

Several nuns have had training in digital technology, including computers, cameras, and video. Because of this, a few now work full-time in the Dolma Ling office. In addition, a number of nuns have become very proficient with digital cameras and, for the first time, all photographs in our 2010 Tibetan Nuns Project calendar were taken by the nuns and staff at Dolma Ling. We have given cameras and training to other nunneries we support with the intention that the pictures will be featured in future calendars.

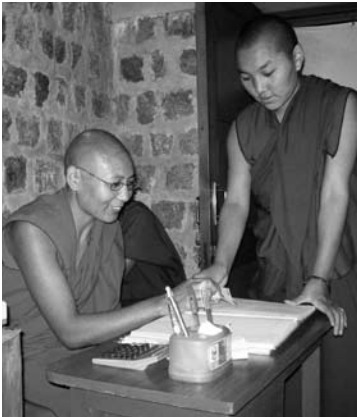
For some time the nuns have been interested in starting a small restaurant on the Dolma Ling property. They ran a very successful trial version twice during past Jang Gonchoe debating sessions. Therefore we are excited to include the development of a restaurant among our upcoming projects (see p 6).



Making fresh juice



Hot water storage tank for the bath house



At work in the telephone room



Shopping at the tuck shop



Stringing prayer beads



Capturing life at Dolma Ling on video

Upcoming Projects

Retreat Center

One of our long-term goals has been to provide retreat facilities for nuns who wish to engage in sustained periods of meditation. This is an important aspect of internalizing Buddhist teachings, both for those who engage in sustained study and for those who chose a more contemplative path. We have secured a piece of land adjacent to Dolma Ling and are currently developing a plan to provide facilities for both long term and shorter secluded retreats.

More Income Generation

A number of nuns really enjoy cooking and preparing food and have experience



Making fresh tofu

in running a successful restaurant out of a storeroom. Recently a small group of nuns learned to make tofu, which they are regularly supplying to the Dolma Ling kitchen, staff and several other local customers. Lacking suitable space for these activities on a long-term basis, we plan to build a tofu-making kitchen along with a restaurant. Above it we will locate the staff dining room, which currently occupies a much needed classroom.

Media and Language Program

A pilot training program in media skills has been introduced at Dolma Ling, and several nuns have been trained in the techniques of still photography, video creation and editing, and interview techniques. Working with their teacher, they have produced a series of videos on life at Dolma Ling, the Tibetan Nuns Project, and Shugsep. The media room is currently housed in a classroom that is also used to show films and conduct workshops. We propose to expand this successful program with expanded media facilities and also develop a new intensive language training program for up to 30 students. For this, we need a new learning facility composed of 4-5 classrooms, a hall,



Working in the media room

and office, as well as a separate housing wing that will allow us to welcome lay women students into the program.

Housing for Elder Nuns

Quite a few older nuns have very different needs than the younger nuns who follow a rigorous study and practice schedule. These nuns want to be close to the main temple in Dharamsala, site of public teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Tibetan Nuns Project owns a possible site that we hope to develop to accommodate up to 50 older nuns. This project will take time, as many environmental factors need to be considered. Building this will allow us to accomplish one of our long-term goals of providing better facilities for aging nuns.



Geden Choeling

Geden Choeling currently houses a total of 125 nuns; 75 attend classes regularly and others share a variety of responsibilities in the nunnery. There are also five full-time teachers of Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan, and English. The nunnery has seven levels of classes; the highest, with nine students, is midway through Madhyamika (Middle Way) studies, the fourth

News from Other Nunneries

of the fifth topics the nuns must master to receive the Geshema degree.

This year, after a long wait for a building permit, they constructed a 4-story building that provides 16 rooms for older and sick nuns. They also built two new classrooms above the library. Much needed repairs were completed, including replacing a badly leaking solar tank.

Tilokpur

The nuns have formed a management committee that is administering the internal activities of the nunnery. Regular classes in Tibetan, Buddhist philosophy, and English are ongoing. We have helped Tilokpur to purchase new classroom books, including Buddhist philosophy

and math textbooks, as well as furniture for the new nunnery/study institute. The office is now better equipped technically with a new computer, fax, and printer, and two nuns have completed a month-long computer training course.

Nuns Not Living in Nunneries

Some nuns prefer to live on their own and are not attached to a specific nunnery. They are often older nuns who are interested in meditative retreat rather than in learning higher Buddhist philosophy. In June 2009, a meeting was held at Dolma Ling for these nuns to connect and receive encouragement in living a well-disciplined monastic life, including maintaining good health and hygiene.

Exciting Updates

New this Year!

All of the 2010 Tibetan Nuns Project calendar photographs were taken by nuns and staff at Dolma Ling Nunnery and Institute intimate view into the nuns' daily lives. Thank you to our supporters for providing funds for the digital cameras.

We're on Facebook!

If you use Facebook, please visit us, become a fan, participate, and spread the word about TNP. We've included photographs, videos, and upcoming events. Just type in "Tibetan Nuns Project" in the Facebook search box. We hope to see you there.

Website – www.tnp.org

We've just upgraded our site with up-to-date information, pictures, and additional features. We now have our own shopping cart, which means that you can make your sponsorship contributions, donations, and purchase products all in one transaction! Plus, we've added names of individuals and organizations who dedicate a percentage of their proceeds (from product sales or services) to the Tibetan Nuns Project. When you utilize their services or buy their products, you help us! If you know of others we should add to this list, please email us at info@tnp.org.

Company Gift Matching

If your employer provides employee matching gifts, your sponsorship contributions and donations could qualify. If so, we would be more than happy to help you

fill out the paperwork or provide you with any information you need to submit to your company. Our federal tax identification number is 68-0327175.

Products

The nuns take great pride in making products for sale through our web site and the store at Dolma Ling Nunnery. As part of this income generating program, the nuns create nun and monk dolls, door hangings, prayer beads and bags, kataks (offering scarves), prayer flags, cell phone holders and more. If you are purchasing gifts for friends and family throughout the year, please consider a gift made with love by the nuns.

Paperless in Seattle

We're doing our part to help the environment and reduce costs by utilizing email communication when appropriate. If you'd like to receive emails reminders and acknowledgements, please email us at info@tnp.org. This will help us save paper, postage, and time. If you're interested in receiving a year-end tax acknowledgement letter instead of monthly, quarterly and/or semi-annual paper letters, please let us know.

Gifts for Nuns

Sponsors often ask if they can send gifts to their nun/s. Please know that the gift of sponsorship is sufficient. However, if you want to send a gift, we recommend that you send a small gift (we discourage monetary gifts) directly to our office in India (the address is on page 2 of this newsletter). Please remember to include the nun's name, number and the nunnery name.

Meet our staff



Kelsang Tsering, Tsering Diki, Tashi Yangzom, Dolma Tsering



Susanne Peterson, Kristina Sherman

Our core staff in India are Dolma Tsering, Project Co-Ordinator; Tashi Yangzom, Sponsorship Secretary, Kelsang Tsering, Accountant; and Tsering Diki, Special Projects. Working under Director Rinchen Khando Choegyal, and Co-Director Ven. Lobsang Dechen, they keep all of the day-to-day work flowing. We feel fortunate to have such an experienced and hard-working team.

We have redefined positions in our U.S. office to streamline procedures and now have with us Susanne Peterson as U.S. Operations Manager and Kristina Sherman as Project Administrator. Co-Director Elizabeth Napper has spent much of the past two years in the U.S. seeing the office through its restructuring and staff transitions.

We have been very fortunate to have many wonderful volunteers this past year. Thank you, everyone, who has contributed time and energy. We couldn't do what we do without you.

To All Our Donors and Sponsors

Thank You!

We are deeply grateful for your continued support.

We really enjoy our contacts with all of you.
Please feel free to write, phone, or email us any time!

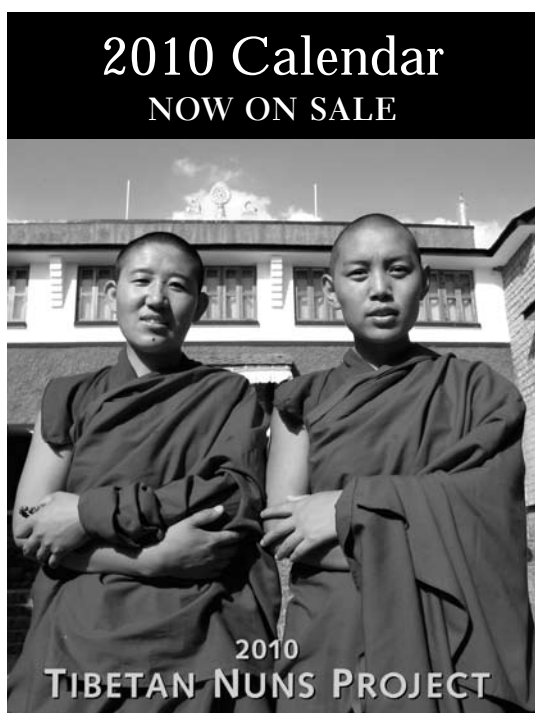


Tibetan Nuns Project

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

By Airmail

Postage



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 2010

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/MastercardNo. _____ ExpDate _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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