



Tibetan Nuns Project

Fall 2010

Shugsep Inauguration Coming Soon



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Shugsep Jetsunma

December 7, 2010 will mark the inauguration of Shugsep Nunnery by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This is a joyous occasion for the Nyingma nuns, the many generous donors who have supported them over the years, and the Tibetan Nuns Project. It has

been a long road for all and especially for the first group of twelve Shugsep nuns who arrived from the Shugsep Nunnery in Tibet in 1991. They fled to India seeking religious freedom and education. Many other Shugsep nuns escaping persecution in Tibet have since joined them.

The Shugsep nuns have a long and illustrious history dating back to some of the most famous women of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, Ma-jik-lap-dron of the eleventh century and Shugsep Jetsunma in the twentieth century. The nuns

from Shugsep have repeatedly expressed a wish to maintain their individual identity and the Nyingma traditions.

When the Shugsep nuns first arrived, they settled in two very small houses on a one-acre plot of land in the forest below McLeod Ganj. The buildings

were physically unsound, walls were crumbling, and as more and more nuns joined, rooms became overcrowded. The nuns did not have a separate space for classrooms apart from their living quarters. In addition, the mold and damp from the annual monsoons were causing chronic

health problems for the nuns.

In 1996, the Tibetan Nuns Project began fundraising efforts to rebuild Shugsep Nunnery. However, it was not until 2002 that we learned Shugsep could not be rebuilt in the same location as the previous nunnery – the foundation was poor and the road had washed away from the rains, so it could not be replaced.

It took three more years of legal work to receive a permit for another piece of land on which to build.

Finally, construction of the new nunnery started in 2006 in its new location, just outside of Dharamsala.

Two years later, in May of 2008, fifty-

eight Shugsep nuns happily moved into the completed portion of the new nunnery. Now, five years after its start, construction is fully complete. Landscaping has begun and preparations for

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“The Shugsep nuns have a long and illustrious history dating back to some of the most famous women of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.”



Old Shugsep Nunnery



Nuns moving in May 2008



Tibetan Nuns Project

Established in 1987, the Tibetan Nuns Project provides education and support to more than 700 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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Celebrating a Nun's Success

Tenzin Palmo was born in the village of Detsa in Lithang in eastern Tibet. At the age of eight she began to think about becoming a nun. Ironically enough, Tenzin Palmo always kept her hair short, which was unusual for a Tibetan girl.

At eighteen she asked her parents for permission to ordain. They happily supported her under the condition that she remain dedicated to her choice.

After taking nun's vows, she and her sister joined a large group walking from Lithang to Lhasa, the capital, doing prostrations the entire way.

Their pilgrimage to Lhasa was cut short by interference from government officials, so Tenzin Palmo traveled instead to India, where she was admitted to Dolma Ling Nunnery.

While at Dolma Ling Nunnery, Tenzin Palmo successfully completed four years of basic Logic courses, seven years of Pharchin (Perfection of Wisdom) studies, and three years of Uma (Madhyamika). Her motivation and tenacity led her to pursue further studies. She then enrolled in Sarah College (Tibetan Institute for Higher Studies) for



a nine-month teacher-training course in Buddhist Philosophy.

For over a year now, Tenzin Palmo has been teaching at the Central School for Tibetans in Bandra, Maharashtra. Far from Dharamsala, Bandra is a

remote area in central India with a small Tibetan settlement. The adjustment was difficult in the beginning, she says, but gradually, as she came to know the rest of the staff, her life became easier.

The school, which covers grades one through eight, has 80 students and 12 staff.

Tenzin Palmo teaches Buddhist Philosophy to all the students and social science to fourth grade students, balancing three or four classes a day. Even after the close of the academic school year, she remained dedicated to teaching and continued to help students in the local community.

Tenzin Palmo is happy that she is able to impart the knowledge and confidence she gained from her studies at Dolma Ling Nunnery to her students today. She says that her family is very proud of her career as a teacher, especially her father. "He has advised me to be sincere and dedicated in my work," she says.

Retreat Center Becomes Reality

The Tibetan Nuns Project plans to construct eight small retreat huts at Dolma Ling to develop a full retreat center. One of our long-term goals has been to provide 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 choose a more contemplative path.

These huts give nuns the opportunity to develop their own insight and knowledge in a space that ensures complete privacy.

The huts are single-story structures consisting of a single room with a bathroom and pantry, and will have ample natural light and ventilation.

They will be made using only natural products. We are building the first hut as a prototype; the foundation, roof and wooden frame are complete. Once we are satisfied with the design and construction, we will move ahead on the remaining seven. The project is substantially but not fully funded.



Prototype retreat hut

Sustainable Nunneries

Dolma Ling Nunnery was constructed by the Tibetan Nuns Project with sustainability in mind. A common disposal system streamlines the process of dealing with the nunnery's trash. Organic waste from the kitchen is mixed into food for the cows. Leftover food is composted, mixed with cow dung and left to decompose for some time. It is used as fertilizer for the nunnery gardens.

In the past five years, the popularity of prepackaged drinks and food in India has increased dramatically. The nuns are working hard to minimize their use of plastics and are addressing the issue by making their own fresh fruit juices, a healthier alternative to soft drinks and soda. Plastic waste is given to the local Indian government for use in road making.

In addition to composting and recycling, the nuns reuse old paper as the raw material to make cards and envelopes. During the paper making process, the nuns add flower petals and pieces of fabric to the liquid solution. When the paper is dried and finished, they have beautiful cards on which to

write messages to their sponsors.

One of the remarkable sustainable features of Dolma Ling is the solar-powered bathhouse. Nine shower units can serve one hundred nuns per day. Wastewater from the showers is stored in the pond behind the bathhouse and is then used to water the gardens. The pond behind the nunnery is cleaned

frequently, as it is the main means of water storage from which water is pumped through a filtration process into different tanks and then made available throughout the nunnery. Solar panels have been placed above the

kitchen, making hot water available for cooking.

Alongside a commitment to the environment, Dolma Ling is also devoted to providing a healthy lifestyle for the nuns. The kitchen prepares wholesome vegetarian meals on a daily basis, and some nuns make tofu. They often take orders for their tofu from neighboring businesses.



Cleaning the main nunnery pond

"Nine solar-powered shower units can serve one hundred nuns per day."



Making fresh tofu



Sorting trash for recycling



Pond behind solar bathhouse

Shugsep Nunnery to

(Continued from page 1)

the inauguration ceremony are in full swing. The whole process benefited immensely from the careful oversight of Philippa Russell, who has served as liaison between the Tibetan Nuns Project and our architects and contractors.

We are all very happy to see Shugsep Nunnery completed. Special thanks go to Betsy Gordon for major funding for the construction and to Beverly and Bruce Gordon for funding the beautiful statues that adorn the temple.

The nuns are very proud that they have achieved a high level of education in their Nyingma Buddhist



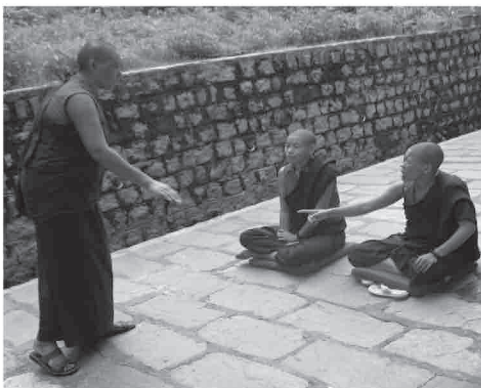
Main prayer hall and housing blocks



Offering ritual prayer



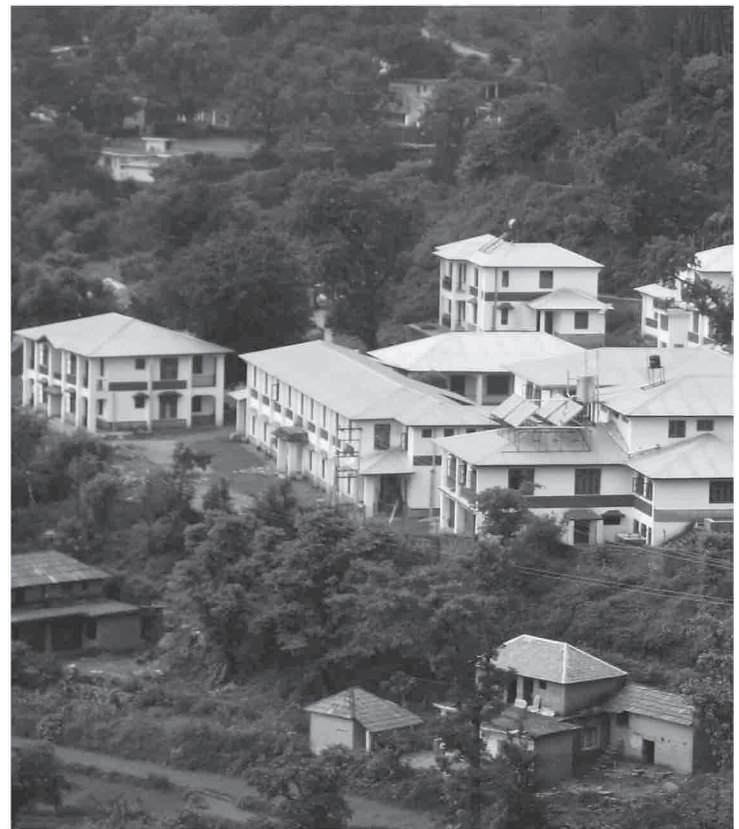
Filling butter lamps



Shugsep nuns debating



Main entrance



Panoramic view of the new Shugsep Nunnery



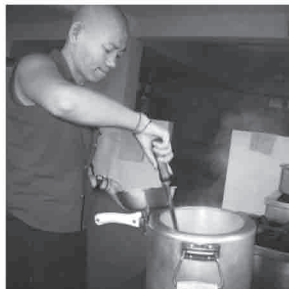
Buddhist philosophy class



Arranging religious texts in the library

Celebrate in December

studies. Twenty-eight nuns have completed the nine-year course leading to the Lopön degree. Some have gone to Nepal for long-term retreat, but many of the nuns are playing important roles in Shugsep. A committee of five nuns now manages the administrative affairs of the nunnery. Committee president Ani Tenzin Choedon oversees day-to-day work. Two nuns are teaching Tibetan language to the younger nuns. Others are specializing in ritual arts and topics in Buddhist philosophy, as well as working on improving their Tibetan and English.



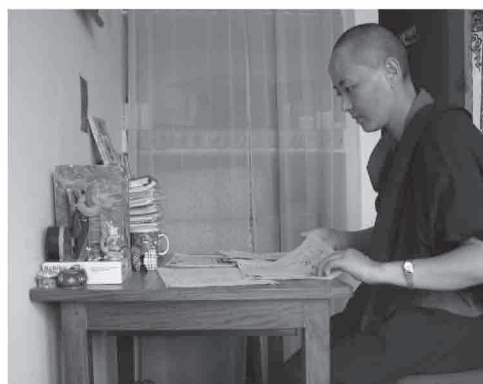
Working in the kitchen



Keeping the nunnery clean



Making ritual objects



Comfortable in her room



Dining hall



Working in the office

Empowering Voices Through Debate

Every year the Tibetan Nuns Project sponsors Jang Gönchoe, a month-long inter-nunnery debating session. The practice of debate cultivates deep logical thinking and leads to mastery of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Debating proficiency is important for the nuns so that they can become fully qualified teachers and decision makers in their tradition.

This year Dolma Ling Nunnery is hosting Jang Gönchoe from September 21 through October 20, 2010. Preparations are virtually complete –

the Manjushri statue has been painted and blessed, and electricity has been successfully installed.

Because the number of nuns who want to debate has grown, the nunneries have requested that the number of nuns allowed to participate increase by five per nunnery. This means 148 nuns, plus two teachers per nunnery, will be attending Jang Gönchoe this fall. The 100 Empowered Voices campaign (tnp.org/100empoweredvoices) is an effort to raise awareness and provide long-term funding for Jang Gönchoe.



More News from Nunneries

Dorjee Zong

Last year we accepted Dorjee Zong Nunnery in Zaskar, Ladakh, into our sponsorship program. Today eight Dorjee Zong nuns are being sponsored through the Tibetan Nuns Project. This very small, remote nunnery was founded in the 14th century and has a long history of highly realized women. Elderly Dorjee Zong nuns practice Lamrim, the stages in the path to enlightenment as the Buddha taught them. The younger nuns are thrilled to be commencing the study of Buddhist philosophy.

Geden Choeling

Geden Choeling has welcomed a new abbot, Phenden Gyaltzen Rinpoche, to the nunnery. Abbots are sent from Sera Monastery in South India on a three-year rotating basis and help to run the nunnery alongside the nuns' administrative committee.

There are currently 160 nuns living in Geden Choeling, including 25 new nuns from Tibet and the neighboring Himalayan regions. Two Tibetan teachers, two Buddhist Philosophy teachers, and one English teacher make up the staff.

Over the past year, two new buildings designated for nuns' housing were constructed. Nevertheless, because of mold and dampness from the annual monsoons, the condition of the older buildings is steadily worsening.

Construction has just begun on a new two-story facility; the upper floor will have living quarters and the ground floor a debating courtyard, office, and dining room. Work on the new project started in June, thanks to the generosity of one of our donors.



Sakya Nuns Institute

Immediately after the September inauguration of the Sakya Nuns Institute last year, the academic session began for the twenty-five resident students. Teaching duties are shared by the principal, Ven. Dechen Wangmo, and the abbot, who is the head of Sakya College for monks.

The nuns have been successful in their studies and have remained committed to their other responsibilities, including maintaining the grounds and working in the kitchen. After the academic year ended with their term-end exams in April, Sakya nuns took part in an educational tour to Sravasti with the Sakya College students and staff.

Sherab Choeling

Nuns at Sherab Choeling are progressing steadily in their education. Thus far, twelve nuns have completed their first year in Pharchin (Perfection of Wisdom) teachings, and fifteen nuns have progressed through their second year of Pharchin. As the nuns move forward to the next level of Buddhist studies, they are also working to master Tibetan grammar, English, Hindi, and ritual practices.

People from the nearby village recently donated a piece of land where the nuns can grow spinach, beans, and potatoes.

Tilokpur Nunnery

Built near the cave of the great Tibetan yogi Tilopa, Tilokpur Nunnery overlooks a small town 40 kilometers from Dharamsala. It is the oldest Kagyu nunnery outside of Tibet. The nuns at Tilokpur have welcomed a new abbot from Tsurbhu Labrang and will be continuing their studies in the Kagyu tradition. Fifty-six nuns are now being sponsored through the Tibetan Nuns Project. The nuns are very fortunate to have a Geshe from Sera Je teaching them Buddhist philosophy, including vigorous debate.

News & Updates

Compassionate Action

Many of our supporters have asked for ways to help us in their communities. Here are some ideas:

Host a house party

We now have a house party fundraising kit for those who want to help raise awareness and donations for the Tibetan Nuns Project. Included is everything you need to host a successful event, including an introductory DVD, sample invitations, background, instructions, and even Tibetan recipes! If you're interested in this helpful kit, please email info@tnp.org.

Hold a School Fundraiser

In the past, schools doing projects and courses about Tibet have asked us for information about the nuns as well as fundraising ideas. We're happy to provide an easy fundraiser that benefits both the school and the Tibetan Nuns Project. "Freedom bracelets" hand-made by the nuns can be purchased by the school at a substantial discount and then sold for a higher price by the students to their communities. Not only does the school make money, but the community also becomes aware of our work and the issues in Tibet. If you're interested, email info@tnp.org.

Shop Online (Yes, it will help!)

You can help raise money for the Project this season by shopping online at name brand stores – how? Simply register at www.igive.com and select the Tibetan Nuns Project as a "favorite cause." iGive gives a portion of all your purchases to the Tibetan Nuns Project.

Heartwarming Update

Kelsang Dolma is 73 years old and one of the oldest nuns at Dolma Ling Nunnery. She came from a farming family in Tibet where they grew grains and vegetables. Her father and brother-in-law were arrested and died in prison, and her mother died soon after. At age 28, Kelsang Dolma became a nun. She labored for many years in Tibet until she escaped to India, a very difficult and

Leave a Legacy in Your Will

In addition to providing for the future financial security of your loved ones, you can make thoughtful gifts as part of your estate planning. It can be gratifying to know that a portion of your legacy will be put to charitable use in the future. Your generous act today can help secure a stable future for the nuns. Please email info@tnp.org for details.

Rinchen Khando Choegyal Visits US and Canada

Tibetan Nuns Project Director, Rinchen Khando Choegyal, will visit northern California and Vancouver, BC, this



October. She is the second woman in the history of Tibet to be elected as a Cabinet Minister in the Tibetan Government in Exile and is a founding member of

the Tibetan Women's Association. She is married to the youngest brother of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. She has been the Director of the Tibetan Nuns Project since its inception in 1987 and has dedicated herself to improving the lives and status of the nuns.

We extend to you a warm invitation to attend the public events where Rinchen Khando Choegyal will speak. For more information, please visit the Tibetan Nuns Project web site at www.tnp.org.

hazardous trip. Ever since then she has had extreme knee pain. Recently, the Tibetan Nuns Project sponsored much-needed knee surgery. She can now do her daily work and walk comfortably. When her relatives in Tibet heard about her successful surgery, they sent a donation to the Tibetan Nuns Project to help defray the cost of the surgery.

THANK YOU to our Volunteers and Interns!

We would like to dedicate this column to the amazing people who show up every week to help us in our Seattle office. These volunteers dedicate their valuable time, bringing with them their energy, enthusiasm, and commitment to helping the nuns. We couldn't do what we do without these compassionate volunteers.

THANK YOU to Constance, Annie, Greg, Sharyn, Camilla, Sasha, Marianne, Olivia, Tiffany, Steve, Kristen, Tenzin, Brian, Shu-Hsiang, Jamyang, Leah, Nathan, Ikuko, Eric, Irakli, Mia, Monique, Lily, Patti, and Brittany for helping us this past year.



Monique and Mia

We are grateful for our two wonderful interns this year. A big thank you to Meredith Lawrence, from the University of Puget Sound and Karen Jensen, from Smith College.



Karen

Meredith



Tibetan Nuns Project

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**2011 Calendar
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**2011
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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 are the Tibetan lunar calendar and ritual dates for those who do Buddhist practices, plus major holidays in the U.S. and Canada.

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