



Tibetan Nuns Project

Fall 2012



**Nuns to
Receive Geshema
Degree**
Pg. 1



Mastering Debate
Pg. 2



**Dolma Ling
Graduates**
Pg. 3



**The Global
Economic Crisis
& Where the Nuns
You Sponsor Live**
Pg. 5

Historic Decision to Grant Degree



After more than two decades of inspiration and encouragement from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and constant effort and determination by the nuns in their studies, nuns of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition will at last be able to receive the Geshema degree. This is the highest degree available, equivalent to a Ph.D. in theology. His Holiness was extremely gracious in granting the nuns a special opportunity to debate before him during the Great Prayer Festival in Dharamsala in March, 2012. This was a first in the history of Tibet, and during this event, His Holiness expressed his joy at the nuns' high level of knowledge and recommended strongly that

it was time to include them in the degree granting process.

Soon after this, the Department of Religion and Culture of the Central Tibetan Administration convened a special meeting of abbots and scholars from six different nunneries, and representatives of the Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies at Sarah, the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, and the Tibetan Nuns Project.

During this meeting it was unanimously decided that the nuns be allowed to take final examinations for the Gesh-

ema degree and be acknowledged for their academic achievements. It was also decided that a high standard examination would be conducted according to rules and regulations established by the Geshema Examination Controller Board, which was also formed during this meeting. Once she obtains a Geshema degree, besides being in possession of a treasure of knowledge, a nun will be eligible to assume various leadership roles in the monastic and lay communities.

Full Ordination for Nuns: The Gelongma Ordination

Although the issue of the Geshema degree has been decided, that of full ordination for nuns is yet to be resolved. This is because two different issues must be addressed: the Geshema degree reflects academic achievement within the monastic educational system, while in Gelongma ordination a nun would receive vows in a lineage of transmission that reaches back to the Buddha himself. On a number of occasions, His Holiness has said he does not have authority to grant Gelongma ordination to the nuns, as this is a matter that must be decided by the monastic community. So, with the kind blessing of His Holiness a special Gelongma Research



Geshema meeting in progress

Committee has been formed in Dharamsala to do conclusive research on the issue of full ordination. Organized by the Department of Religion and Culture of the Tibetan government in exile, the committee comprises two representatives from each of the four main religious traditions plus two from the Tibetan Nuns Project. *Continued on page 2..*



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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Continued from page 1... The committee will meet for four months, having begun work August 1 with instructions on their mandate from former Chief Kalon, Samdhong Rinpoche as chief guest. He laid out clearly the issues in the monastic rules that need to be resolved and encouraged the committee members to find a way forward. We hope that the findings of this committee will be positive for the nuns who have been waiting for many years.

We are extremely grateful to His Holiness for the education and over-all development of the nuns welfare without which they would not have made this significant progress.

Nuns Build Skills

Jang Gönchoe – Mastering Debate

Because proficiency in formal dialectical debate is at the core of the studies leading to the Geshe degree, the Tibetan Nuns Project has encouraged and supported its practice by establishing literacy and educational programs for the nuns, and by sponsoring the month-long inter-nunnery debate session known as Jang Gönchoe. We have sponsored Jang Gönchoe since 1997 and the number of participating nuns has grown each year. Last year over 155 nuns from eight nunneries were able to participate.

This year's debate session was hosted by Jamyang Choeling Nunnery in Dharamsala and was facilitated by a new

committee of nuns representing the participating institutions. Each year, the committee of nuns takes increasing levels of responsibility for organizing and managing this event.

As Tibetan nuns now have the opportunity to pursue the Geshema degree, more nuns than ever are interested in participating in this annual event. If you would like to help the Tibetan Nuns Project continue to sponsor Jang Gönchoe, you may donate directly at the Tibetan Nuns Project website at www.tnp.org/YouCanHelp.



Nuns Publish A Magazine

Along with Jang Gönchoe, the Tibetan Nuns Project supports other programs to increase academic excellence. Nuns at Dolma Ling, as well as other nunneries, are gaining competency on computers. To highlight the nuns' skills and academic achievements, the Tibetan Nuns Project sponsors an annual magazine called 'Thieusar', which means "A Newly Opened Flower."

Beginning in 2003, nuns from Dolma Ling, Shugsep, Geden Choeling, and Tilokpur have contributed small pieces to the magazine, ranging from short stories and poems to Tibetan calligraphy and descriptions of historical pilgrimage sites, as well as a section devoted to inspirational people the nuns admire. In the first years of its inception, Gen Chokyi Dolma, a Dolma Ling Tibetan



language instructor, helped the Dolma Ling nuns publish the magazine. In the process, the nuns developed computer skills of design and word processing. Initially, Dolma Ling took the responsibility of editing and publishing 'Thieusar', and now that responsibility is rotating amongst participating nunneries. Shugsep and Geden Choeling have each published an issue and this year the magazine will be prepared and published by Tilokpur Nunnery.

News From Dolma Ling



Pharchin, Rigne and Rigne Rabjampa Graduates, 9/25/2012. Certificates given by Sherig (Educational Department) Secretary Ngodup Tsering.

Dolma Ling Nunnery has made substantial progress this year in educational advancement and construction projects. Classes are proceeding well and 25 nuns have joined the nunnery. Recently, 31 nuns passed the Uttar Madhyama examination, thereby earning the equivalent of a high school diploma. The exam included Buddhist epistemology, Tibetan grammar, history, poetry, lexicography and calligraphy. Successful candidates are now qualified to apply to university programs.

Late last year, five nuns took part in training in New Delhi to improve their English language skills, enabling them to more effectively communicate their knowledge of Buddhist philosophy. After this training, one nun, Ani Tenzin Kunsel, went on to teach Buddhist philosophy at Dongyu Gyatsal Ling nunnery near Palampur, India. While she was originally slated to teach for one year, Ani Tenzin Kunsel has been asked to extend her tenure for another year, to the delight of her students.

Construction projects have advanced this year at Dolma Ling, including progress on a kitchen for making tofu, retreat huts and a media and language learning building. The new kitchen will enable nuns to generate income to support the nunnery by making and selling tofu. The donor of the kitchen equipment visited the nunnery in June and was happy to see that the kitchen building had been completed. The kitchen will continue to be outfitted with equipment as the necessary funds are raised. Eight retreat huts are now nearly complete and the entire retreat complex will eventually be powered by solar energy, including a central hot water system and lighting throughout.

Progress is being made on construction of the media building, which will include a language lab, video facilities, teachers' dining room and a cafe, providing further income for the nunnery. Despite the difficult and slow nature of the work, the structure is gradually coming together.



One of the senior most nuns teaching philosophy



Retreat huts nearing completion

The Nunneries

JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Geden Choeling Nunnery



Geden Choeling, of the Gelukpa tradition, is the oldest nunnery in Dharamsala, located in McLeod Ganj, Upper Dharamsala. "Geden Choeling" means "home of the virtuous ones who devote their lives to the Buddha Dharma." The Project provides sponsors and supports their strong study program of Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan, and English.
125 Nuns

Karma Drubgyu Thargay Ling



Built near the cave of the great Tibetan yogi Tilopa, Tilokpur is the oldest Kagyu nunnery outside of Tibet, supporting nuns from the Himalayan border regions of India and the Mustang region of Nepal. The Tibetan Nuns Project provides sponsors and has helped them start regular classes in Tibetan, Buddhist philosophy, and English.
65 Nuns

Dolma Ling Nunnery & Institute



Built and fully funded by the Tibetan Nuns Project, Dolma Ling is the first institute dedicated to higher Buddhist education for nuns from all traditions. It offers a 17-year curriculum of traditional Buddhist philosophy, debate, Tibetan language, English, math and computer skills. Located near Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh.
212 Nuns

● BANIHA L

● LOSAR

● MANALI

● DHARAMSALA

SPITI VALLEY

HIMACHAL PRADESH

● SHIMLA

● UTTARKASHI

● DEHRADUN

UTTARAKHAND

INDIA

Dorjee Zong Nunnery



Founded in the 14th century, Dorjee Zong has a long history of meditating nuns in the Ge-luk tradition, some of who are famed for reaching high levels of realization. It is a very small nunnery located in Zanskar, a very remote region of North India near Ladakh. The Tibetan Nuns Project provides sponsors and support for educating the nuns.

8 Nuns

Sherab Choeling Nunnery



Located in the remote Spiti Valley of Himachal Pradesh, Sherab Choling was founded in 1995 with the vision to educate Himalayan Buddhist nuns from all Tibetan Buddhist traditions. They receive sponsorship support from the Tibetan Nuns Project as well as support for their 17-year study program that includes Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan, Hindi and English.

35 Nuns

How the Global Economic Crisis Affects Nunneries

While most global economic news this year has focused on Greece, Spain and the European debt crisis, India is facing its own economic challenges, which affect Tibetan nunneries. With inflation on the rise, the price of everyday items has increased sharply. Unfortunately, this means that your sponsor dollar simply does not stretch as far as it used to. Everything from a pair of shoes for a nun to vegetables for a nunnery kitchen costs much more now. The same goes for other necessities such as medical care and clothing.

To help offset rising costs, we are hoping to enroll at least 200 more sponsors this year so that the Tibetan Nuns Project can continue its programs dedicated to the education and empowerment of nuns living in India.

Knowing that \$360 a year is a generous donation, we will not seek to increase the sponsorship amount for nuns. Instead, nuns will be assigned more than one sponsor, up to a maximum of three to ensure that the daily expenses of all the nuns are met.

Despite the financial challenges of this year, the Tibetan Nuns Project maintains its commitment to improving living conditions and educational opportunities for nuns in exile. We are extremely grateful to all of our sponsors who are helping relieve these pressures by their continuing support. Without your help, none of this would be possible. Thank You!

Shugsep Nunnery & Institute



Shugsep nuns of the Nyingma tradition trace their lineage back to some of the greatest female teachers in Tibetan history. Many of the nuns studying here come from the original Shugsep in Tibet. Fully supported by the Tibetan Nuns Project, it provides a 9-year academic program of Buddhist philosophy, debate, Tibetan language, and English. Located near Dharamsala, Hamachal Pradesh.

75 Nuns

Sakya College For Nuns



The Sakya College for Nuns was inaugurated in 2009 and provided, for the first time, a dedicated higher Buddhist studies facility for the Sakya Nuns. With the help of the Tibetan Nuns Project, the nuns are now able to pursue Buddhist studies for up to 15 years, earning the highest degrees in their tradition. Located in Manduwala, near Dehra Dun.

35 Nuns

News from the Nunneries

Shugsep Nunnery

Following their annual examinations last December, the majority of nuns from Shugsep travelled to Bodh Gaya to attend the Kalachakra initiation given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This was followed by the annual ten day Nyingma Monlam prayer festival.

In March, seven nuns were admitted after passing the entrance exam. The nuns returned from winter vacation late in the month and organized an academic achievement award ceremony that included esteemed guests Mr. Sonam Thenpel (Vice Speaker of the Tibetan Parliament in Exile) and Ven. Lobsang Dechen (Co-director of the Tibetan Nuns Project). Khenpo Pema Sherap also gave a three-day initiation.

Regular classes resumed in April and have proceeded smoothly. In May, the nunnery invited the present head of the Nyingma tradition, Taklung Tsetrul Rinpoche, to give an initiation. The visit was special for Rinpoche who personally received an initiation from Shugsep Jetsun Rinpoche, the founder of the original nunnery named for her in Tibet.

Geden Choeling

Like Shugsep Nunnery, most nuns from Geden Choeling attended the Kalachakra initiation in Bodh Gaya before going on pilgrimage to sacred sites in the area. In March, the nunnery admitted 22 new nuns and held its own annual awards ceremony, which was attended by Mrs. Rinchen Khando Choegyal, Director of the Tibetan Nuns Project and Co-director, Ven. Lobsang Dechen.

The nuns at Geden Choeling have regular classes in Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan and English languages and some are also able to attend computer courses in which they learn everything from basic typing to more advanced software. Most senior nuns also perform a variety of leadership roles within the nunnery including office secretary, cashier, temple upkeep and overseeing the nuns' daily discipline.

The nuns are pleased to have finished most of the recent construction work at the nunnery. The only remaining projects are to connect water and electricity before the new facilities are operational. Geden Choeling has also offered the Tibetan Nuns Project a small office in the newly constructed building in appreciation of the Project's support.

More on page 7...

Sakya College for Nuns

The Nuns' College academic session began in mid July of last year when it welcomed 11 new nuns, bringing the total number of nuns to 35. The nuns study Buddhist philosophy and debate in the Sakya tradition. Classes in Tibetan grammar and writing inform the nuns' study of philosophy while courses in English and Hindi are optional. The nuns completed their academic year with an examination in April. The senior level of nuns have now completed the study of Sakya Pandita's Tsadma Rigter and Kunkyen Gorampa's commentary on the text.

Usually the nuns have a two and a half month break until mid July, but this year their Abbot, Khenchen Gyatso, kept them in classes to study and debate on the topic of logic.

An additional ten nuns have been accepted into the Sakya College for Nuns, but cannot actually begin their studies until each has two sponsors. We posted this information on Facebook and have had a wonderful response. We are most grateful to all of our new sponsors.



Sakya nuns in class



Shugsep nuns in class



Geden Choeling annual award ceremony

Sherab Choeling

The nuns of Sherab Choeling Nunnery have been busy with their regular classes in Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan and English. As part of their daily schedule, nuns also debate for an hour each evening. Recently, Mrs. Rinchen Khando Choegyal, Tibetan Nuns Project Director decided that nuns will have an additional course on Lamrim ("Stages of the Path") taught by a teacher of Buddhist philosophy.

At present, there are 50 nuns at Sherab Choeling. Most nuns attend classes while a few, including Ani Bhutit, head of the nunnery, are take responsibility for managing the nunnery. Construction

of a new building at the nunnery is nearing completion. The building is two stories and includes 60 nuns' quarters, a cowshed, storeroom and guest rooms. Work continues on a new prayer hall. The nunnery has two cows and also a greenhouse where the nuns grow green peas, spinach, and cabbage.



Overall view of the new nunnery

Seattle Office Evolution

You might have noticed some comings and goings in our Seattle team over the past few months. The Tibetan Nuns Project is very grateful to Carol Shisler, who has left to pursue a wonderful opportunity at ITECH. Our sincere thanks to Susanne Peterson and Gretchen Frankenstein for their amazing work during the interim, as we searched for our new leader. We hope you will join us in welcoming Lisa Farmer as our new U.S. Operations Manager. Lisa brings many years of non-profit leadership experience to the Tibetan Nuns Project and we are excited to have her on board! Finally, we would also like to welcome Tiffany Lin as our new Project Coordinator and Angie Galliett as our Bookkeeper. Our new team is looking forward to getting to know you so please pick up the phone and say hello!

As soon as mid October, we are hoping to launch a revised Tibetan Nuns Project website. Constructed to be more user-friendly, the new site will be more dynamic with easier access to up-to-date information. The site will also make it easier for our donors to update their sponsorship and make payments, along with an updated store for a smoother shopping experience. Finally, the new site will make

our office more accessible with easier options for sending comments and questions to the staff.

Elsewhere on the web, our Facebook page is thriving with over 3,000 fans! Thanks to all of you who posted photos of yourselves wearing freedom bracelets. Your photos have been shared with the very nuns who make these bracelets such a great opportunity to connect our supporters with the people they impact; we love seeing how the nuns become part of your lives. To stay up to date with the Nuns Project, be sure to "like" our Facebook page and be current with all of our news, the needs of the nuns we support and our community events here in Seattle.

In addition to the work of our outstanding office staff, our team of volunteers continues to provide invaluable work on a variety of projects. Many thanks to Marianne Kenady, Constance Trowbridge, Lollie Groth and the Puget Sound Business Journal for their monthly contributions. We would like to thank all of our devoted volunteers for their hard work and commitment.

Contact us if you'd like to join our team!



Tibetan Nuns Project

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☐ Please use it for _____

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

Visa/Mastercard/Discover No. _____ Exp Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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