



# Tibetan Nuns Project

Fall 2011

## Congratulations to Our Graduates!



**His Holiness  
the Dalai Lama  
inaugurates  
Shugsep Nunnery  
and presents  
twenty-seven nuns  
with graduation  
certificates**  
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**Success story of  
nuns**  
page 2



**Tibetan Nuns  
Project booth  
during Kalachakra**  
page 7

A primary goal of the Tibetan Nuns Project is to assist nuns in reaching the same level of education as the monks. Each of the four traditions schools of Tibetan Buddhism has its own specific curriculum and degrees attained, but much is shared. All are based on the teachings of the Buddha and the Indian commentaries that developed to explicate them. Exactly which commentaries they most closely rely on varies between traditions as do the number of years of study, but there is uniformity as to the basic topics. Thus all study Logic and Epistemology, which provide the basic tools for advanced philosophical study; Perfection of Wisdom for understanding of the Buddhist path; Middle Way for understanding of Buddhist philosophy; and Tantra for the final level of teachings.

The two nunneries that the Tibetan Nuns Project fully support, Shugsep and Dolma Ling, have now had study programs in place for more than fifteen years, and nuns are graduating at various levels.



His Holiness the Dalai Lama takes a close look at the Shugsep graduation certificates

attended the event. The ceremony began with His Holiness the Karmapa presenting graduation certificates to 40 nuns who had recently graduated from the Perfection of Wisdom and Middle Way levels of study.

After presenting the certificates, His Holiness the Karmapa addressed the nuns, emphasizing how fortunate they were to have such good facilities so they can fully concentrate on study. He also encouraged them to continue work towards the Geshema degree and for full ordination, and repeated his own commitment to work for better conditions for women. The ceremony ended with the Karmapa's planting a Bodhi tree sapling along the pathway to the debate courtyard.

As a part of the Shugsep Nunnery inauguration on December 7 by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, he personally presented graduation certificates to 27 nuns. These nuns had graduated from the three upper levels of study, Perfection of Wisdom, Middle Way, and Tantra. Twenty-one have stayed on in the nunnery, some working as teachers and on the nuns' administrative committee. Three began a long retreat in Nepal and three have started a one-year retreat within the nunnery.

Dolma Ling nunnery also held a special graduation this year. On April 8, His Holiness the Karmapa inaugurated the new debate courtyard. Heads of different monasteries and nunneries and the Tibetan Women's Association President



His Holiness the Karmapa cuts the inaugural ribbon to open the new debate courtyard



Dolma Ling nuns receive graduation certificates



A Bodhi tree sapling planted



## 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.

Patron

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

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# Nuns Work As Successful

Over the past nine years, about fifty nuns have finished different levels of studies at Dolma Ling nunnery. After completing the Perfection of Wisdom level, which is equivalent to a B.A., nuns can go on to higher philosophical studies or they can pursue further studies to become teachers. Three nuns who chose the latter path are Delek Tsomo, Choezin Dolma, and Tenzin Choetso. All three successfully gained admission to a three-year course at the nearby Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies. After completing that course, which focuses on Tibetan language, history, and culture, they continued their studies for one more year to attain their teaching certificates.



Choezin Dolma making full use of the board



Delek Tsomo explaining to the class



Nuns working on Shugsep DVD cover

Now all three are successfully teaching at the Transit School in Dharamsala. The Tibetan Government in Exile started this school for persons over age 18 years who are newly arrived from Tibet. These adult refugees are offered the opportunity of a five-year course of study. Delek Tsomo and Choezin Dolma have been working at the school for over 1½ years, while Tenzin Choetso has completed one year.

They each teach four classes a day.

Two are teaching junior classes, while one is teaching the 2nd standard and sometimes also 3rd and 4th standard students. The nuns are delighted to be teaching at this school, as all the students are from Tibet. They say that although some of the students are older than them, they are very hardworking and sincere in class. With memories of having themselves arrived as illiterates from Tibet years before, it is particularly rewarding to them to be able to share the knowledge and skills they have gained with these new arrivals.

## Nun Excels in Computers at Dolma Ling

Delek Yangdron is one of our most senior nuns in Dolma Ling Nunnery and Institute. She arrived in India the winter of 1990 in the first group to join the newly founded Institute. Illiterate on arrival, she began her education in Buddhist studies and progressed to completion of the first year of Vinaya studies. She was among the first group to receive training in computer skills and because of this special interest, she also taught in the Dolma Ling computer

*(Continued on page 4)*



# News from Shugsep

On December 7, His Holiness the Dalai Lama inaugurated the Shugsep Nunnery and Institute. Present at this joyous occasion were members of the Tibetan Government in Exile as well as representatives of the local monastic institutions and other honored guests. To our great joy, the main donor for the project, Betsy Gordon attended, accompanied by her husband and several associates.

The ceremony began with a talk by His Holiness to the nuns and audience and included prayers of auspiciousness and dedication. Afterward, His Holiness personally presented graduation certificates to 27 nuns and distributed small statues to those from the Tibetan



His Holiness the Dalai Lama arrives at Shugsep

Nuns Project, the Shugsep Nunnery, and the construction staff who had assisted with the project. The ceremony was followed by lunch for all 300 attendees, including local villagers and school children. The function concluded with a traditional dance performance by members of the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts.



Offering of the mandala by the nuns



Butter lamp house taking shape

A few details of the project that remain to be completed are underway. A butter lamp house is being built, the clinic and computer room furnished, the library established, and more trees and flowers are being planted in the nunnery.

The new academic session began in April with nearly 70 nuns, including seven newly admitted. Among the 70, 12 are very young nuns from a Nepal area near the Tibet border. They arrived a year ago and began introductory studies. They have yet to take nuns' vows but received a hair offering ceremony from Tulku Jigme Dorjee from the Tibet Shugsep nunnery during his 15-day visit. Classes for these young nuns include Tibetan, Mathematics, and Social Science. Although these nuns are very young, they are quick learners and have made good progress in just one year.



Nuns planting a sapling



Hair offering ceremony from Tulku Jigme Dorjee

Chinese officials expelled many nuns from the Tibetan Shugsep nunnery due to their political activities on behalf of Tibet. They want to join the nunnery in India now that it is finished and has space. However, crossing borders after the 2008 uprising has become almost impossible.



Religious texts being labeled in the library



*(Continued from page 2)*

room, providing basic computer education to the other nuns while continuing her own studies. While in charge of the computer room, she designed the nuns' yearly magazine and helped a senior Dolma Ling teacher with design for his book on full ordination for nuns. In 2008, when the unrest in Tibet started, a teachers' group from Darjeeling approached her to design and type a book on Tibetan issues. Because she spent three months helping them, she was unable to take the year-end exam to continue her studies. Returning to Dolma Ling, she worked in the nunnery as a receptionist and caretaker of the guesthouse.

While Delek Yangdon worked in the computer room, she also learned Final Cut Pro video editing software and videography. The nunnery then established a media section under her supervision. She has made videos for a number of people, including Tulkus and nuns who have brought her footage for editing.

## Activities at Dolma Ling

### Studies

This year 23 new nuns were admitted to Dolma Ling Nunnery when the new academic year began in March. In addition to their regular course of studies, some nuns participate in additional special programs. Three senior nuns have joined a five-year science program that is given for one month every year at the Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies to train monks and nuns in using science with reference to Buddhist philosophy. This May was their third session. In addition, another group of senior Dolma Ling nuns was sent to a four-month training program in Varanasi to improve their Hindi language skills so they can better teach Buddhism to Indians. Also this year a new level of Tantric Studies was introduced for the most senior nuns who have finished the Vinaya course, completing the full range of studies required for a Geshe degree. Though they have completed the necessary studies, a mechanism for granting them the appropriate degree is not yet in place. As they wait for a decision as to how this will be done, they are moving on to the next traditional level of studies.



Nuns in the corridor

### Facilities

The grounds of Dolma Ling are also being improved. At present, five retreat huts are under construction for nuns who need prolonged retreat periods after they complete their studies. The first hut is almost finished and needs only final wall plastering, glass bricks for natural



First retreat hut

light, a toilet and bathroom. The foundations of the second and third huts are complete and land is being prepared for the fourth and fifth huts. A septic tank has been constructed and sewage lines are going in. A new annex to the solar bathhouse will serve as a facility for tofu and juice making, and also supply tea for the debating courtyard. Work began on July 9 and the foundation work of laying stones is finished. Outdoor work is now slowed due to very heavy monsoon rains.



New annex building coming up



Interior of the 1st hut (glass bricks fixed and plastering, toilet and bathroom



Nuns helping with the construction of huts





Prayer flags by nuns ready for distribution



Nuns prepare tofu for the nunnery kitchen every week



## Self-sufficiency

The primary focus of the Tibetan Nuns Project is to provide a good educational foundation to the nuns but we also seek to help them to work towards self-sufficiency. At Dolma Ling, the nuns make products in the Tailoring section, which are then sold in the nunnery shop and also by the U.S. office of the TNP.

Due to high demand for tofu from the neighboring community and its commercial potential, the nuns requested a larger kitchen and more efficient tofu machine to allow increased production of tofu, and that project is now underway. At present, they produce a batch every Saturday for the kitchen, individual staff and nearby institutes.

## Environment

The nuns also maintain the environment, clean the nunnery, plant flowers, look after the trees, sort and recycle garbage.

Three nuns at Dolma Ling are making compost enzymes. A Malaysian group visited the nunnery in Dharamsala two years ago. They gave slide shows on how to make enzymes and how they can benefit everyday life. The nuns prepare enzymes by mixing water, left over vegetable and fruit waste, and jaggery (brown sugar) and storing the mix in an airtight container for three months. Our nuns in Dolma Ling have also added tofu to the mixture.



Cleaning the debate courtyard

These enzymes are being used in the bathhouse, toilets, and kitchen. Along with cleaning, they also help to repel insects and house bugs. Enzymes can be mixed in the soil to make it fertile and can be used for healing dandruff and skin problems. Some nuns as well as a few people from outside the nunnery are now purchasing these enzymes, which are sold for at a nominal rate.



Beautiful flowers grown by the nuns



Cleaning the pathways



Nuns making enzymes



A nun buying enzyme



# News from Other Nunneries

## Sakya

The nuns of the Sakya College for Nuns (formerly Sakya Nuns Study Institute) returned to the institute on July 15<sup>th</sup> after their long annual break. As an auspicious beginning, the nuns performed the Tara Puja for the first three days to draw positive energy for success in their studies and for good health. They then carried out a vigorous round of cleaning before resuming their studies. Last year's primary topics of study were Shantideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* and Aryadeva's *Four Hundred*. This year the philosophical text being undertaken is Sakya Pandita's *Treasury of Valid Cognition*.

For a typical 2<sup>nd</sup> year student, her day starts with Buddhist philosophy class at 8 am, followed by self-study in her room until noon. After lunch, she attends a Tibetan language class, followed by a philosophy class with the Abbot from 3:30 pm. The day ends with two 1½ hr sessions of debate, in the late afternoon and evening. Optional classes in English and Hindi are also offered.

The College has accepted 11 new nuns. They are from Rinchen Choeling Nunnery in Dickyling and are currently waiting there until sponsors are found to support them.



Nuns cleaning

## Geden Choeling

Last fall, Geden Choeling started construction of a new two-story building. The ground floor will serve as retail shops, which will increase nunnery income, along with funds from public prayer offerings and donations. The first floor will house elderly and senior nuns. An office and dispensary for the growing number of nuns will be added inside the nuns' living quarters. A debate hall is planned on the first floor in front of the small office. The debate ground will give the nuns more space to practice philosophy freely and also enable them to possibly host the annual Jang Gonchoe debate session in the near future. The construction work is now 60% finished.

Despite construction still underway, the nuns have resumed their regular classes. Eighty-five of the 150 nuns in residence currently attend classes. The curriculum consists of Buddhist Philosophy, Tibetan, English, and training in use of computers for those at the higher levels of study. This year five nuns are in the most senior class, Dzod 1<sup>st</sup>. There are classes at seven levels of study: logic, four levels of Pharchin, Uma, and Dzod. Apart from the educational program, all nuns attend the regular prayer sessions each morning and evening, where they recite prayers requested by the local community.



Health talk for the nuns

Although Geden Choeling concentrates on education within the nunnery, it also provides opportunities for lay people and some nuns living outside the nunnery to attend classes. Current lay students of different nationalities include Korean, Vietnamese, and German as well as seven Tibetan nuns who live on their own and are sponsored by the Tibetan Nuns Project.

The nuns are also dealing with medical problems, some as severe as TB and cancer. The nunnery has a small clinic that offers treatment for minor health problems. To improve health awareness, this year special talks on health and hygiene were organized. A Tibetan monk from South India was also invited to teach the nuns yoga.



Upcoming two story building

## Tilokpur

Tilokpur's academic studies have progressed since the nuns returned from their one-month break on March 21. The nunnery recently welcomed five new nuns from Sikkim, Manali, and Nepal. The nuns attend regular classes in Buddhist Philosophy, English, and Tibetan, with a debate session every evening. Their Abbot teaches them basic Buddhist practice every afternoon. Apart from the usual courses offered at Tilokpur, two nuns took a two-month computer course in Dharamsala with support from the Tibetan Nuns Project. One of these nuns now gives basic computer lessons to the nuns.

The nunnery is busy with new construction work, as the number of nuns steadily increases. Before, Tilokpur did not have a dining room and the kitchen was too small. As a solution, the old living quarter of the nuns is being replaced by a new building. The ground floor will have a dining hall and new kitchen and the first floor will house the living quarters. The foundation of the building has been laid and work has begun on the structure.



New building coming up behind the old one

# Update from Seattle

The Tibetan Nuns Project Seattle office has had a busy year of changes. Susanne Peterson, US Operations Manager, left the organization in May after over 2 years of dedicated service. She was instrumental in standardizing and organizing the US operations, bringing the organization's capabilities to a whole new level during her tenure. While she offers ongoing support to the office, she has moved on to pursue personal and artistic projects full time. Thanks, Susanne, for your continued dedication to the nuns and for your patient help during the transition! Your unending energy and giving spirit have been a tremendous asset to the organization.

The other half of the transition: Carol Shisler started in June as the new US Operations Manager. Carol has a strong background working with regional and international non-profits in the Seattle area. She most recently worked with Landesa, an international development organization, helping to establish their offices in India and administer grants to help the rural poor. She has been buying TNP calendars for years, never guessing that she would one day have the opportunity to help out in a greater capacity.

Kristina Sherman, Project Administrator, and Jennifer Jackson, Office Assistant, continue to keep the Seattle operations running efficiently and happily.

We would not be able to support the nuns as we do without the dedication and care of a long list of talented and tireless volunteers:

Constance, Marianne, Sharyn, Kitt, Steve, Brian, Kristin, Shu-Hsiang, Fred, Judyth, Sandy, Ellen, Alison, Mia, Irakli, Sasha, Camilla, Tess, Emma, Susan, Souvik, Sonia, Tiffany, Jonathan and Annie

We enjoyed the company and assistance of an Intern from Smith College this summer. Tenzing Khendu spent the month of July helping out in our Seattle office. Her work on the newsletter, the calendar and in preparations for the Kalachakra event were greatly appreciated. Thanks Tenzing for your hard work and friendship!



Tenzin Khendu at work in office

The Seattle office will be moving into a new space the end of September. The building that has been our home for the past 6 years has been closed due to damage sustained in an earthquake 10 years ago, and a new transportation tunneling project going through the neighborhood. The new address on Seattle Boulevard is in an historic building that, like our current building, is an artist community. We will miss many of our old neighbors, and look forward to exploring our new neighborhood in Seattle's International District.

## Kalachakra 2011 [word count 182]



Tibetan Nuns Project booth during Kalachakra

Tibetan Nuns Project staff and volunteers were fortunate to participate in the Kalachakra for World Peace which was offered in the heart of the US capital, Washington, DC from July 6-16. People from all corners of the world came together to listen to His Holiness the Dalai Lama's teachings. Just adjacent to the conference facilities, was the outdoor Kalachakra Marketplace, a Tibetan version of an Indian bazaar. Booths categorizing from Tibetan arts and craft to non-profit organizations took to the streets of the Market. Included in the marketplace was the TNP booth. Elizabeth Napper, Co-Chair attended the Kalachakra and Carol Shisler and her team of volunteers managed the booth. Sales, sponsorships and donations in the booth were unprecedented. Those attending the teachings, as well as other DC tourists and residents provided generous support to the organization. Many of the items made by the nuns in India sold out, including the nun and monk dolls, which were a huge draw. The event was a great

opportunity to learn from His Holiness and also spread awareness of the Tibetan Nuns Project's mission. The Kalachakra organizers arranged for the Tibetan Nuns Project to coordinate having pujas done for the event sponsors. The Nuns performed pujas for 460 individuals and groups that supported the event.

Thanks to Terri, Dawn, Bethany, Callie, Cyndy, Daniel, Dee, Diane, Dugan, Julie, Karen, Maggie, Mary Ellen, Paula, Ralfee, Sheryl and Vicki for the amazing volunteer energy you brought to our time in DC.



Monk happy to see a monk doll



Little boy poses with a nun doll



# Tibetan Nuns Project

c/o Dolma Ling  
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## 2011 Calendar NOW ON SALE



2011  
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I will send payments:

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☐ Quarterly (\$90, €65)

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