



# Tibetan Nuns Project

Fall 2014

## Geshema Exams Round Two



**Geshema  
Exams**



**Delek Wangmo's  
Story**



**Young Nuns  
at Shugsep**



**Nunnery  
Updates**



**Building  
Self-sufficiency**



Looking over the exam papers

Round two of the historic Geshema examinations took place at Dolma Ling Nunnery and Institute from May 1 to May 16, 2014. The Geshema degree is the female equivalent of the Geshe and is comparable to a doctorate in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. The exams take place over four years and are the culmination of a rigorous 17-year course of study. It is a level of scholarship and Buddhist training that was previously only available to monks.

This spring 29 nuns took the oral and written examinations – 23 of them took Part 2 of the exams and 6 nuns took Part 1. Two other nuns, one from Dolma Ling Nunnery and one from Jangchup Choeling Nunnery, were unable to sit their examinations this year because of ill health.

Exam results were announced on July 6th, the birthday of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We are very happy to report that 26 of the 29 nuns passed. The three who failed – one in Part 2 and two in Part 1 – will be able to re-sit their exams next spring.

The exams are a landmark achievement for Tibetan nuns, and their success is especially notable because some of the nuns who have reached this level were totally illiterate and unable to even write their names when they escaped from Tibet in the late 80s and early 90s.



Three of the senior nuns awaiting their turns to debate

All being well, the nuns who passed Part 2 this year will complete Part 4 of their exams in 2016 and will form the first group of Geshemas in the history of Tibet.



Written examination exams



Reading messages of good luck



## 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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## One of the First Geshemas: Venerable Delek Wangmo



Senior nun, Venerable Delek Wangmo (center), feels very fortunate to be among the first nuns in Tibetan history to have the chance to receive a Geshema degree.

Venerable Delek Wangmo's journey to the Geshema exams has been a long, arduous and sometimes dusty one.

Born into a semi-nomadic family in Lithang province in Eastern Tibet, Delek did not go to school but spent her time tending the family's sheep, yaks, goats and horses. At age 15, she became a nun and a few years later, set out on a very long pilgrimage to Lhasa with her Lama.

"The pilgrimage was hard, as we had to cover the distance from Lithang to Lhasa by prostrations [a distance of almost 1000 miles, 1500 km]. We would do prostrations in the rain and our clothes got wet and dirty and we could not wash them out every day.

"In spite of the hardship, I learned much from my time on the pilgrimage. I started my education then. Along the way our Lama gave us teachings and I learned the Tibetan alphabet. It was difficult because we had to study at night and often did not have enough light to study by. But once I learned the alphabet, the rest of my studying got much easier for me. I started memorizing prayers once I had learned to read."

The pilgrimage did not turn out as planned when authorities refused the nuns permission to visit Lhasa. In the end, she along with 40 other nuns in a group of 125 escaped from Tibet via Nepal and arrived in Dharamsala in December 1990.

"I joined Dolma Ling Nunnery in 1990. We first lived in rented accommodation below McLeod Ganj. In mid-1992, we moved to a location near the site for the planned Dolma Ling Nunnery. The living conditions were not so good in the beginning. We lived in overcrowded rooms and the study program wasn't so well organized because, during that time, the number of new nuns coming from Tibet increased every month. Slowly things improved. The construction of the present

Dolma Ling Nunnery began in 1993 and we moved into our new housing block in October 1994."

Twenty years later, Delek Wangmo is now teaching at Dolma Ling Nunnery and has just passed Part 2 of her Geshema exams. Her commitment has never wavered. Venerable Delek Wangmo feels that if she could make it through an arduous journey to India and years of difficult study, she can face any that arise throughout her whole life.

For Delek Wangmo having the opportunity to receive a Geshema degree is a dream come true for her and her sister nuns. "Getting this degree after years of intense study of philosophical texts has given the nuns new energy to study even harder, as well as encouraged us to uphold the academic values His Holiness the Dalai Lama always emphasizes. It is the path that will lead us to work independently and become recognized as philosophy teachers within as well as outside the community."





# The Annual Inter-Nunnery Debate: Jang Gonchoe 2014

Our supporters around the world once again rallied to help hundreds of nuns from India and Nepal hold the annual month-long inter-nunnery debate session called “Jang Gonchoe.” This debate tradition is critical to fostering the nuns’ ability to assume roles as fully qualified teachers of their tradition.

Until 1995, there was no such annual gathering for nuns, though it has been a part of monks’ education for centuries. The Tibetan Nuns Project has worked hard to open up this opportunity for the nuns and make debate a core part of their education. 2014 marks 20 years since the nuns started having such an annual session and building their own strong tradition of debate. The number of nuns wanting to participate in the Jang

Gonchoe is increasing steadily. In 2013 over 400 nuns from 8 nunneries in India and Nepal took part in the Jang Gonchoe held at Dolma Ling Nunnery & Institute.

In 1997, the Tibetan Nuns Project assumed responsibility for raising the necessary funding each year for travel, food and accommodation of 200 nuns.

You can support the Jang Gonchoe in several ways. You can provide \$100 scholarships to the nuns to cover expenses to attend, or you can make a donation directly to this year’s Jang Gonchoe. Or, you can donate to the Jang Gonchoe Endowment Fund that we have newly established to ensure that the event can continue for years to come. This Endowment Fund was launched this spring thanks to two very special donors

– a Western nun living in France and a Canadian volunteer in Dharamsala. Thus far we have received US\$45,000 for the Endowment; the amount needed to fully endow it is US\$300,000. You can give to the Endowment or donate to scholarships via our website at [www.tnp.org](http://www.tnp.org).



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## Swiss Tibetan Donor Raises U.S.\$7,800 for Jang Gonchoe

This year as we began raising funds for Jang Gonchoe, one of our regular supporters, Dr. Anita Dudhane from Goa, introduced to us Mr. Kalsang P. Chokteng, a Tibetan friend of hers. He lives in Switzerland and has been the project manager of “Science Meets Dharma” for the last ten years, a project initiated by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

In April, Mr. Chokteng visited Dharamsala and we gave him our proposal and budget for this event. The total budget for 2014 was nearly ten lakh Indian rupees or US\$15,500. Mr. Chokteng promised to raise half of the amount needed. Less than 4 months later, in mid-August, he returned to Dharamsala and gave us Rs. 474,159, (US\$7,800)!

When we asked how he had managed to raise this sum in just a few months, he described how his fundraising efforts fell into four categories: giving talks, selling small items, organizing social gatherings such as dinners, picnics, and food festivals, and finally bothering his relatives and friends for a good cause!

He explained that the people he approached were particularly moved by the idea that the Geshema degree, equivalent to a PhD in Buddhist Philosophy, will be granted to nuns for the first time in history of Tibet. Now they will join women in professional roles, since there are Tibetan women doctors, engineers, scientists, and politicians in the cabinet of the Central Tibetan Administration.

In Switzerland, Kalsang Chokteng spoke to groups such as the Tibetan Women’s Association where the response was great because the cause was self-evident. He also sold small items such as packages of noodles and Swiss pocket knives with a donation included in the sale prices. He felt it was important to not just beg, but to give something in return for the donation, however small it might be.

He also organized picnics with Indian and Tibetan food and reached out to family and friends who knew of his dedication over the past decade to monks and nuns.

We are very grateful to Mr. Kalsang P. Chokteng for working so hard for the cause of the Tibetan nuns to help them improve their debating skills and their understanding of Buddhist philosophy.



Mr. Chokteng fundraising by organizing picnics

# NUNNERIES

WHERE DO YOUR SPONSORSHIP DOLLARS GO?

## DOLMA LING NUNNERY & INSTITUTE

In May, the nunnery was host to the Geshema exams (pg 1). In June, the nuns teamed up with neighboring villagers for a community clean up. One improvement to the nunnery includes a nuns' café that will enable the nuns to generate income for the nunnery. The nuns also continue to make products for sale through the online Tibetan Nuns Project store. In addition, the bumpy road from Norbulingka Institute to the nunnery, which has been a major obstacle to transportation, has just been improved.

Dolma Ling currently has 237 nuns.



## TILOKPUR NUNNERY



This year a major event at Tilokpur Nunnery was a three-day teaching from May 5–7 by the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa. On the first day, His Holiness the Karmapa consecrated the new Mahakala shrine room and then presided over a Mahakala puja. On the second day it was the Four Common Practices of Mahamudra, also known as the Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind. On the third day, the Karmapa gave the Vajrasattva Initiation from Marpa. The day ended with a debate and the nuns had the opportunity to demonstrate their engagement with traditional Buddhist education.

There are two branches of Tilokpur Nunnery. The older compound (Karma Drubgyu Thargay Ling) has become a center for about 20 senior nuns who perform daily prayers and do short retreats. The newer branch, Drubten Pemo Gaype Gatsal, is located down the hill and accommodates younger nuns engaged in intensive studies.

Tilokpur currently has 54 nuns.

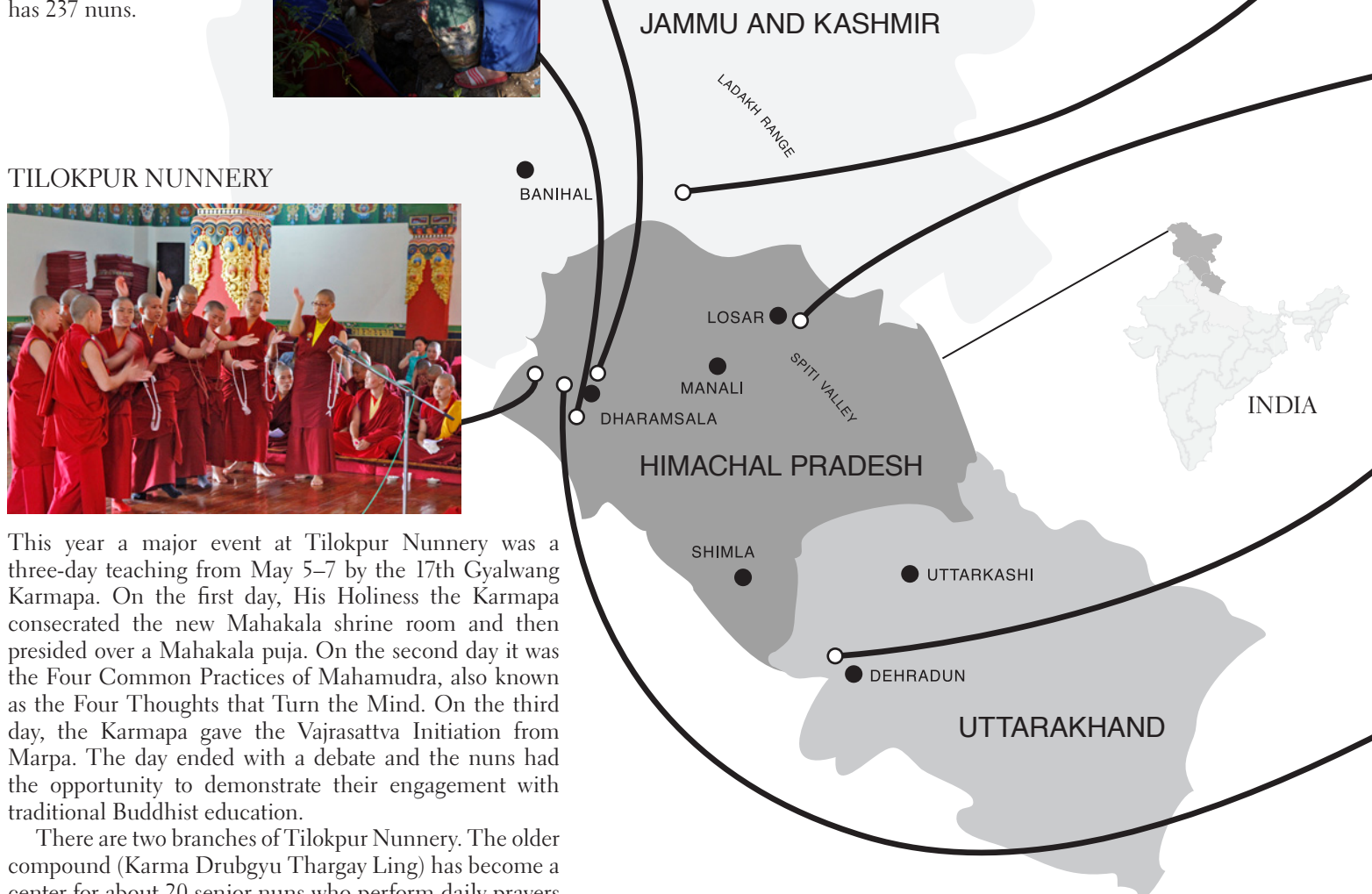
## GEDEN CHOELING NUNNERY



Thirteen new nuns were admitted at the start of 2014. This year one nun took Part 1 of the Geshema examinations and another nun took Part 2. Both nuns had passing marks, and their example serves as a good source of motivation

for the upcoming nuns. The office moved to the front of the nunnery, near the main gate. A new debate courtyard with good roofing is also under construction and will enable the nuns to debate during the long monsoon season. Geden Choeling is known for some of the elaborate rituals they perform. Here the nuns are preparing for a fire puja at the conclusion of an extensive Vajrayogini ceremony.

Geden Choeling currently has 136 nuns. The number of nuns will gradually increase as more housing becomes available.





## DORJEE ZONG NUNNERY



Located in the remote region of Zanskar, this nunnery is very small and has just seven nuns, two of whom are over 75 years old. Locally there is a need for both general and spiritual education, and we hope to help them develop more in the future.

## SHERAB CHOELING NUNNERY

The year started with 14 new nuns in the nunnery including three 5-year-olds. Along with Tibetan classes, younger nuns are also taught mathematics and Hindi up to 5th standard, after which the nuns are introduced to English language classes. Nuns have been able to set up three greenhouses where they mostly grow spinach. The head nun has donated her share of a field to the



nunnery so the nuns have been able to grow peas and wheat. The new prayer hall is nearly finished with plans to turn the old nunnery block into a small 3-room retreat center for the nuns.

Sherab Choeling currently has 42 nuns.

## SAKYA COLLEGE FOR NUNS



All nuns passed their year-end examinations in April, so now there are batches in the 1st, 3rd and 5th year of studies. On July 15th, the nuns returned after their 10-week summer break. Before classes began, the nuns cleaned the nunnery and did a few days of rituals as preparation for a good academic year. Now the nuns have settled back into their routine of attending classes and taking part in debate sessions.

Sakya College for Nuns admitted 10 new nuns this year and currently has 37 nuns.

## SHUGSEP NUNNERY & INSTITUTE



Four new nuns joined Shugsep Nunnery this year and three nuns graduated with the Lupon degree. Twelve very young nuns who were admitted to Shugsep Nunnery in 2010 have proved very bright in their studies. They first came to the nunnery as lay girls, with the youngest age 6 and the eldest around 10 years old. All of them are from an isolated area in the Nubri Valley in Nepal, a place that cannot be reached by road. Their village elder had asked Shugsep Nunnery to admit them because their families were extremely poor and could not provide good care for them.

These young nuns had their hair-offering ceremony the following year and took their nuns' vows after a year in the nunnery. As they were too young to be introduced to Buddhist philosophy, it was decided to give them 3 years of basic primary education like that given in lay schools. Starting from scratch, these nuns worked with their teacher to lay a good foundation of basic education on which they can build their future philosophical studies. Sadly, one young nun passed away in early 2012 following a serious illness; in spite of the special medical treatment and being on life support for a long time, she did not survive.

The other young nuns are doing well in their studies and we are sure they will become smart, responsible nuns in the future. While at varying levels, they will each have an opportunity to study Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan language and literature, English and ritual practice.

Shugsep currently has 103 nuns. Many nuns go on rigorous retreats; some for a few months, others for years.

# Building self-sufficiency at Dolma Ling Nunnery



The shop at Dolma Ling Nunnery

Here is an overview of some of the projects that the nuns have developed to generate income for the nunnery.

## Tailored Products

The tailoring program at Dolma Ling Nunnery had a modest start with a plan to make nuns robes so that the nuns wouldn't have to go to the market and pay for the service. Now the tailoring program has expanded greatly and is quite successful. There are two lay staff and a few nuns with strong tailoring skills working in this section. Among the products that the nuns make for sale are prayer flags, door curtains, nun and monk dolls, mala bags and a variety of bags of different sizes and purposes.

## Malas

The nuns make a wide range of long malas (prayer beads) and wrist malas and each is blessed by the nuns. The Tibetan Nuns Project sells 14 different types of long malas and wrist malas made from natural materials such as stone, wood and bone. The wrist malas are a variation of the standard 108-bead mala and are very popular with visitors to the nunnery.

All of the products made by the nuns are specially blessed by them.  
They can be purchased through our online store at [tnp.org/products](http://tnp.org/products).

## Making Tofu

Dolma Ling nuns make tofu once a week to supply the nunnery kitchen and also sell extra tofu on special orders. We are happy to announce that the long awaited donor from Taiwan has decided to send us funding for a bigger tofu machine made in India. We are looking at suppliers closer to our city which will be more economical. Once we are able to install the machine we will be able to sell the product on a larger scale and meet the demand from a nearby community.



Nuns making tofu at Dolma Ling Nunnery.

## Garbage Enzymes

Several years ago a Malaysian group visited the nunnery and taught the nuns how to make a garbage enzyme made from water, vegetable and fruit scraps and jaggery (brown sugar). This has been very beneficial for the nuns because it is cheap, easy to make and can be used for a wide variety of purposes. The nuns use it for cleaning the kitchen, dining room floors, toilets, and for laundry, bath water, and skin care. The enzymes are also bottled and sold to staff and the public.

## Guesthouse

A fully furnished four-room guesthouse is also run by the nuns at Dolma Ling. The nuns take care of the booking, cleanliness and comfort of the guests during their stay. Each room has an attached kitchen area for the guests to cook their own meals however some prefer to eat nunnery food at the staff dining room by paying a very small amount for the meals. With all the serenity of the environment guests enjoy a peaceful stay.

## Nuns' Café

Thanks to the generosity of one committed donor, we are now completing the kitchen for the nuns' café.

## In the Spotlight: Tibetan Handicrafts Exhibition

The tailoring program at Dolma Ling Nunnery and Institute received a big boost in July when the nuns were invited to show their handicrafts at a special two-day Art and Crafts Exhibition organized by the Department of Education of the Central Tibetan Administration. No other nunneries or monasteries were invited to the exhibition that took place on July 25th and 26th.



The nuns took an active part in the block-printing workshop before giving their own workshop to the students.

The exhibition was organized to introduce traditional Tibetan crafts to 25 teachers and students from 9 different schools located in Himachal Pradesh, Dehradun and Nepal. The nunnery product manager, Mr. Tenzin Yanga, and two nuns from the tailoring section attended the exhibition.

The nuns gave a short workshop about their handmade dolls, demonstrating to the students how to put robes on the nun and monk dolls. The school participants enjoyed it very much.



Demonstrating to the school students



# Nurse Volunteer in India

This year we were blessed to have Mrs. Dekyi Choden Zingkha from Portland, Oregon as a volunteer nurse at the Dolma Ling Nunnery clinic from early May to late July. Mrs. Dekyi Choden moved to the US from Nepal in 1992 as part of the US-Tibetan Resettlement Project and graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Nursing from Oregon Health Sciences University in Portland in 1997. She works for the Legacy Health System in Portland.

She worked tirelessly gathering sick nuns together, taking them to hospitals for checkups and looked after their follow-up care. One of her patients, Ven Tenzin Ngangdon had been suffering from severe hip pain that led to loss of mobility. Mrs. Dekyi Choden helped her go to Delek Hospital and other private hospitals. When it was determined that Ven Tenzin Ngagdon needed urgent hip surgery, she, Ven Delek Yangdron and Ven Tsering Dolma took her to Chandigarh during

the extremely hot summer months for the operation. We are very happy to say that the surgery was a success and Ven Tenzin Ngangdon is recovering well.

During her stay Mrs. Dekyi Choden also visited different nunneries to give talks and to raise health awareness among the nuns. The nuns were very happy to have the opportunity to speak to her frankly about their health issues.

We are very grateful to her and to all our other volunteers for their hard work and dedication!



## Seattle and India Office Updates



In the past year we had major changes in both offices. Our long-time Project Manager in India, Dolma Tsering, emigrated to the US. Her position is now held by Tsering Diki. Tenzin Dase has joined us as Sponsorship Secretary in India and Tenzin Yanga is helping with the self-sufficiency projects and providing accounting assistance to the nuns with all of their various income-generating ventures.

Located in the International district in downtown, our Seattle office continues to thrive. This past year we focused on sending you more news about the nuns,

improving our giving and purchasing systems, website interactions, and our social media presence.

This year, Lisa Farmer, the Executive Director, visited India for the first time and met all of our India office staff. The trip was an excellent opportunity for Lisa to see first hand the dedication of the nuns and the impact of the generosity of our supporters. Lisa's trip also helped with the creation of new products and was, of course, very beneficial in helping the Seattle office communicate the work of the Tibetan Nuns Project globally.



## What You Can Do

There are so many ways you can use your time, talent and creativity to help the nuns. Even a small action has a big ripple effect.

- **Celebrate!** Ask your friends and family to make a donation in your name instead of buying you a gift.
- **Get together.** Gather friends, family or colleagues and sponsor a nun.
- **Sell something.** Hold a yard sale, host a clothing swap, or bake muffins for the nuns.
- **Host a house party** for the nuns using our simple House Party Kit.
- **Leave a legacy** of compassion with a gift in your will. Contact us for information and sample wording.
- **Get creative.** Sell or auction your paintings or photos on eBay or locally.
- **Be inventive.** If you have a special talent running marathons or skipping rope for hours, get sponsors to back you and raise funds for the nuns.
- **A drop in the bucket.** Place a Good Karma Jar at your place of work or Buddhist center and ask people to drop in some change to support the nuns.
- **Buy our 2015 calendar** or other products and give them as gifts. Visit our online store at <http://tnp.org/products/collection/catalog/>. We have a range of special projects that we are working on during this fiscal year. You can donate to these projects at <http://tnp.org>.

In the coming months renowned New-York artist, Miya Ando, will help the nuns again by auctioning online a special series of paintings. Watch TNP's Facebook page and your email news for details about the auction.

### THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS:

Marianne Kenady  
Steven Smith  
Constance Trowbridge  
Mark Glenning  
Puget Sound Business Journal



## Tibetan Nuns Project

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**2015  
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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.

◆ **Are you willing to help with sales in your area?** ◆  
Please contact us at [info@tnp.org](mailto:info@tnp.org).

Shop our online store for dolls, prayer flags,  
malas, hoodies, pujas, sponsorships and more:  
<http://tnp.org/products/>

### Calendar Order and Donation Form

#### I would like to order:

\_\_\_\_\_ copies of the 2015 Calendar

Price: U.S. \$11.00 plus \$1.50 shipping & handling, (\$.75 s&h each additional)

WA state residents add \$1.10 each for tax

Please contact our U.S. office ([info@tnp.org](mailto:info@tnp.org)) for shipping worldwide.

#### Donation

I would like to make a donation of: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Please use it towards the greatest need.

☐ Please use it for \_\_\_\_\_

#### Sponsorship

I'd like to sponsor a nun for \$30/month.

I will send payments: ☐ Monthly (\$30, €22) ☐ Quarterly (\$90, €66)

☐ Semi-Annually (\$180, €133) ☐ Annually (\$360, €266)

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

Enclosed is my check for: \_\_\_\_\_ or charge my credit card: \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ I am interested in leaving a gift in my will to the Tibetan Nuns Project.  
Please send me information.