

## TIBETAN NUNS PROJECT

### Report on the Debate Courtyard at Dolma Ling Nunnery & Institute February 2014



*This photo was taken by the nuns on October 4, 2013 on the opening day of the Great Winter Debate or Jang Gonchoe, the month-long event at Dolma Ling Nunnery & Institute. Over 400 nuns from 8 nunneries in India and Nepal attended the debates. In the photo, you can clearly see the new metal roof that will provide year-round protection from the elements as the nuns from Dolma Ling Nunnery practice their daily debates.*

#### OUR GRATITUDE TO YOU

We are delighted to be able to share with you this report on the completion of the debate courtyard and roof and to share with you how your donation has helped the nuns.

The debate courtyard at Dolma Ling Nunnery and Institute in Himachal Pradesh, northern India has been a work in progress for many years. It is a very special part of the nunnery where the nuns can gather daily, throughout the year, to practice debate and where the annual month-long Jang Gonchoe Debate Session was held in 2013. The previous soft roof of the debate courtyard was irreparably damaged in extreme weather, so in 2013 the Tibetan Nuns Project took out a loan to build a new permanent metal roof that would shelter the nuns from the harsh weather of northern India, including monsoon rains and searing sun. Thanks to your generosity, all the funding of the courtyard and new roof is now complete!



November 3, 2013 in Dharamsala: His Holiness the Dalai Lama speaks encouragingly to hundreds of exiled Tibetan Buddhist nuns in India at the conclusion of the Great Winter Debate or Jang Gonchoe event. He told them, "I have witnessed nuns debating and they do very well." His Holiness also spoke to the nuns about the importance of their roles in preserving the Buddhist teachings and as future teachers. (Photo taken on Nov 3, 2013 by Tenzin Choejor, Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama)

### MESSAGES TO YOU FROM THE NUNS

"I would like to thank you so much for supporting our education. It is all because of your support that I'm getting all these opportunities to study dharma in Dolma Ling. It has been 10 years now since I'm studying here. It is only through debate and discussion with teachers and dharma friends that has helped me to improve my knowledge and understanding of the teaching in much better way. For the last 7 years we didn't have a proper debate area and during rainy season we have to cancel our debate session. Now we are enjoying our new debate courtyard and proper roof and we also have the chance to participate in debate with nuns from other nunneries too. It has really helped all of us to improve our studies and practices. I know it was all possible because of your support. Once again I would like to express my heartfelt thanks for it. I will assure you that your support will never be forgotten. I will remember you in my prayers always."

Venerable Tenzin Chonyi, Dolma Ling Nunnery

*"Last year the Jang Gonchoe was an excellent one. We debated till mid-night each day. We were overjoyed to share our ideas and thoughts. There were about 400 nuns and all were full with enthusiasm and eager to debate with one another. We can debate even on the rainy days because we have a new debate courtyard which has a wonderful roof. During the Jang Gonchoe everything went as perfect as we hoped for. Thanks a lot for your great kindness. You are always in our prayers and thoughts."*

Venerable Tenzin Nyidon, Dolma Ling Nunnery

*"We would like to extend my hearty gratitude for providing us the support to construct the roof of the debating courtyard. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentions debating is an indispensable necessity in studying Buddhism. So, the debate courtyard is the most useful place to study. Moreover, if we didn't have a good debate courtyard and roof, it would be very difficult to have the gathering of nuns from different nunneries for the winter debating session known as Jang Gonchoe. Thank you so much for your generosity and contribution to construct the roof. Thank you so much!"*

Venerable Lobsang Choedon, Dolma Ling Nunnery

### THE IMPORTANCE OF DEBATE FOR THE NUNS

For centuries, Tibetan monks have held an annual month-long debating session called Jang Gonchoe, an integral part of their Buddhist practice. The practice of debate joins logical thinking with a deeper understanding of Buddhist philosophy. It is an essential part of monastic education in the Tibetan tradition. The month-long debate sessions are an integral part of the nuns reaching the level of excellence in their studies that they have.

The nuns are training in debate for the first time in the history of Tibet. According to Elizabeth Napper, Tibetan scholar and codirector of the TNP since 1991, "Opening up education to the women, particularly in conjunction with training in debate, has been transformative for the nuns. Not only have they been given access to the full intellectual richness of their Buddhist tradition but also, through debate, they have been trained to actively engage with it in a way that gives them confidence in their knowledge. Their body language changes from the traditional meekness of nuns to that of women who occupy space with confidence in their right to do so."

This is the 18th year that the Tibetan Nuns Project has supported the annual Jang Gonchoe debate for the nuns, bringing them closer to equality with the monks in terms of opportunities for learning and advancement along the spiritual path. The annual inter-nunnery debate is a major source of inspiration for the nuns to seriously pursue their studies and offers them the confidence they need to become effective teachers in nunneries and schools.

At the conclusion of the event in November 2013, His Holiness the Dalai Lama called all the nuns up to his residence and gave them a brief talk and then posed for a photograph with the nuns of each nunnery and then with the entire group. It was a day that many of the nuns had only dreamed of – to be in the presence of the Dalai Lama and to hear his words of encouragement about their studies. Many of the nuns had risked their lives fleeing Tibet to see the Dalai Lama and to find the freedom to practice their Buddhist faith.

Thanks in part to your support, the nuns have come a long way in their education. Venerable Lobsang Dechen, Co-Director of the Tibetan Nuns Project and a nun herself, recalls the early days of the Tibetan Nuns Project. "When the nuns arrived in India, they were ill, exhausted, traumatized and impoverished. Many nuns had faced torture and imprisonment at the hands of the Chinese authorities in Tibet and endured immense physical and emotional pain. The

existing nunneries in the struggling Tibetan refugee community in India were already overcrowded and could not accommodate them."

"Most refugee nuns escaping to Northern India have had no education in their own language, nor have they been allowed education in their religious heritage while in Tibet. Many were illiterate on arrival and could not even write their own names."

Now, more and more, the nuns are able to teach other nuns and also lay students and their experience at Jang Gonchoe has helped them on this path.

#### PHOTOS OF OPENING DAY OF THE JANG GONCHOE: OCTOBER 3 2013



Thank you so much for supporting the nuns!

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