



Tibetan Nuns Project

Fall 2015



20th Anniversary
of the Inter-Nunnery
Debate



A Long Journey to an
Amazing Result
Ven. Lobsang Dolkar



Nunnery Updates



Himalayan
Nunneries



Completed Small
Projects

20th Anniversary of the Jang Gonchoe Inter-Nunnery Debate

On October 3, 2015 at Geden Choeling Nunnery in Dharamsala, India 359 nuns from seven nunneries in India and Nepal gathered for the start of the 21st Jang Gonchoe, the annual inter-nunnery debate.

Tibetan Nuns Project Director Rinchen Khando Choegyal spoke to all of the participating nuns on the opening day of this year's Jang Gonchoe.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of this important educational opportunity that, until 1995, was open only to monks.

The nuns are now building their own strong tradition of debate. Opening up a centuries-old tradition of Buddhist debate to the nuns enables and empowers them to become great teachers in their own right.

The nunneries taking part this year are Geden Choeling, Dolma Ling, and Jamyang Choeling from Dharamsala; Thukjee Choeling and Khachod Gyakil Ling from Nepal; Jungchup Choeling from South India; and the Buddhist Education Center for Women in Kinnaur.

We are extremely grateful to all our supporters who have helped make this milestone possible. With your support of



The Jang Gonchoe session in 1997



scholarships, the creation of debate courtyards at the nunneries and the Jang Gonchoe Endowment Fund established, the inter-nunnery debate can continue for years to come.

The annual Jang Gonchoe event provides an important learning opportunity for the nuns and helps them to prepare for their higher degrees and leadership roles. Part of the examinations for the Geshema degree involves debate. 2016 will be a milestone year for Tibetan nuns as they will begin receiving the Geshema degree, thus fulfilling a longstanding aspiration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and marking a new chapter in development of nuns' communities.



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

Director

Rinchen Khando Choegyal

Co-Directors

Elizabeth Napper

Ven. Lobsang Dechen

Project Co-Ordinator India

Tsering Diki

U.S. Executive Director

Lisa Farmer

Sponsorship

Tenzin Dasel – India

Sarah McHugh – U.S.

Many thanks to the following people who contributed to the design, content, and editing of this newsletter:

Tsering Diki, Ven. Lobsang Dechen,
Tenzin Dasel, Ven. Delek Yangdon,
Ven. Delek Yangchen, Heather Wardle
and Anita Veen

WEBSITE: www.tnp.org

India: c/o Dolma Ling
PO Sidhpur 176057
Dist. Kangra, H.P.
Email: infoindia@tnp.org
Phone: (91-9805) 783104

USA: 815 Seattle Blvd. S, Suite 216,
Seattle, WA 98134
Email: info@tnp.org
Phone: 206 652 8901

The Tibetan Nuns Project is a 501(c)3 organization.
All donations are tax-deductible in the U.S.

A Long Journey to an Amazing Result Venerable Lobsang Dolkar



Venerable Lobsang Dolkar, one of the first Dolma Ling nuns

Born into a simple family in eastern Tibet, Lobsang Dolkar, became a nun in her teens. With no opportunity to study, she spent her days in household chores and tending livestock. Being a nun meant reciting mantras and doing prostrations.

When her brother married, she became free to make a pilgrimage to Lhasa where she made friends with another nun. They decided to go to India to attend the 1990 Kalachakra being given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Caught twice crossing into Nepal and handed back to the Chinese, their third attempt was successful.

Lobsang Dolker had not planned to stay in India, but her friend convinced her it was no use returning to Tibet and they should instead enroll in the newly founded nunnery, Dolma Ling. She is among the first batch of nuns who entered the study program and at the same time helped with its construction. It was a joyous moment in 1994 when they moved into newly constructed rooms and had a home in India. Sadly she did not see her parents again; they passed away two years ago.

When she began her studies, it was hard for her to grasp what was being taught since she had had no previous education. But she never gave up. She feels that the opportunity to earn the Geshema Degree is very special and is grateful to His Holiness the Dalai Lama for his continuous support of

nuns' education. Access to this degree encourages nuns to persevere.

Lobsang says that, in the beginning, she was scared to sit the Geshema exams, but she never thought of backing out because she did not want younger nuns to accept failure without trying hard for their degree. In May she successfully passed year 2 of the four-year exams. All being well, she will be a Geshema in 2017.

Looking back on how far she has come, Lobsang appreciates the importance of education and is grateful to all the teachers and staff for their dedication to the nuns.

Other news of studies at Dolma Ling

In February, 25 nuns from two intermediate levels sat for the Rigney Rabjampa examination, equivalent to a 12th grade Tibetan language exam. 18 passed, and they can now pursue higher studies in Tibetan language leading to a B.Ed. degree that will enable them to teach in Tibetan schools and institutes.

In March, 30 senior nuns attended the first Science Meets Dharma Workshop organized by the Department of Religion and Culture. Topics included history of science, botany, geometry and mirrors, physics and optics, energy and reactions. The nuns found it informative and particularly enjoyed the information about the different stages of plants. They also appreciated learning of the connection between science and dharma teachings.



Taking the Class 12 Equivalency Exam

Nunnery Updates



Young nun practices debating at Tilokpur, the oldest Kagyu nunnery outside of Tibet

Tilokpur Nunnery

There are two branches of Tilokpur, older and new. Around 35 nuns live at the original complex (Karma Drubgyu Thargay Ling). This includes 11 of the youngest nuns who are being given a basic education in Tibetan, English and math and four elder nuns who started three-year retreats in November 2014. Among the remaining senior nuns, seven have taken up leadership roles, overseeing both sections of the nunnery.

At the newer nunnery, Drubten Pemo Gaype Gatsal, which is focused on studies, the nuns have classes in Tibetan, English, Buddhist philosophy, debate and computing. Two nuns attended a month-long basic computer-training course during their summer vacation, and now take turns teaching the others for an hour each day.

In the winter, the nuns attended the Kagyu Monlam in Bodh Gaya. This was followed by the second Kagyu annual inter-nunnery debate, called the Arya Kshema Winter Dharma Gathering, in which nine different nunneries from the Kagyu tradition from Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, and Dharamsala participated for 16 days.

Four nuns have learned to drive so that the nunnery need not rely on hiring local taxis. Apart from their academic studies, the nuns also work on a large piece of nunnery land dedicated to growing fruits and vegetables such as tomatoes, eggplants, pumpkins, okra, coriander, peppers, papayas, lychees, and mangoes.

Sakya College for Nuns

There are nuns studying at various levels ranging from the most senior in 5th year down to pre-first year. The nuns take a keen interest in their Buddhist studies, which involve daily debate sessions and language classes.

In November and December 2014, the nuns received from His Holiness Sakya Trizin an oral transmission of the Sakya Kabum, collected works of the five founding masters of the Sakya tradition. Following this they completed their annual coursework and exams, and then had their summer break. Many nuns visit their families who live in Tibetan settlements in South India, Dharamsala and Nepal. Others return to the Sakya Nunnery in Delyiling, Dehradun.



Nuns sit exams at Sakya College for Nuns

Geden Choeling Nunnery

Construction of the debate courtyard, which was started in October 2014, has been completed. The new debate courtyard will be of immense benefit especially during the monsoon months and allows the nunnery to host this year's inter-nunnery Jang Gonchoe debate session.

The nuns' days are full: They begin academic studies at 8 am with hour-long classes in Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan and English. At 12:15 they have a one-hour lunch break followed by independent study and the ritual prayers. Dinner is at 5 pm and at 6 they do an offering puja followed by debating

practice. Each Saturday a special debate is held between the senior and junior nuns. This peer learning helps the nuns to resolve their philosophical questions. Twice a week they have computer classes.



Debating at Geden Choeling

Shugsep Nunnery and Institute

Each morning the nuns begin with daily rituals that include prayers for the departed along with prayers for the well being of all who live. Then throughout the day, they pursue a rigorous course of studies. This year eight nuns completed their nine-year course of study and received the Lopon degrees.

Recently the nuns opened a shop in McLeod Ganj to help support the nunnery and also began making dried noodles as one of the items sold there.

In the winter they took part in the annual Nyingma Prayer Festival in Bodh Gaya, the place where the Buddha became enlightened. The Shugsep nuns organized the monlam puja and led the chanting procession. Around 10 Nyingma nunneries attended the occasion.



The new shop in McLeod Ganj to help support the nunnery



Himalayan Nunneries

Sherab Choeling Nunnery

This past winter the remote Spiti Valley in northern India experienced an extremely heavy snowfall and all the local villages were cut off. Unable to get supplies, the nuns ran out of cooking gas and for over two months had to rely solely on firewood to cook. In order to fetch water from the nearby village, the nuns had to clear a path that was waist-deep in snow.



Thankfully they had enough stores of vegetables and tsampa (roasted barley flour) to last them through the winter months.

The nuns are progressing well in their studies. The youngest batch, who joined last year, are successfully working on the first five years of their basic

studies. Teachers are sent from the local government school to the nunnery because there are so many students there. Once their basic studies are finished, these young nuns will be introduced to Buddhist philosophy and debate practice.



Summer is the most important and busy season at the nunnery. The nuns must work hard in the fields and store firewood for the winter in addition to concentrating on their studies. This summer the nuns experimented with growing cabbage outdoors on a small plot of land.

Tomatoes, cabbage, and spinach grow well in the nuns' greenhouse.



Thank you to all our sponsors!

Your gifts are vital to providing the nuns with food, education, health care, shelter and clothing. You also help to preserve Tibet's culture and religion at a very difficult time and empower these brave and dedicated women to become leaders and teachers.

We have 69 new nuns at six nunneries awaiting sponsorship. Can you help us help them?
Dorjee Zong Nunnery: 11 nuns • Dolma Ling: 5 nuns • Geden Choeling: 15 nuns
Sherab Choling: 17 nuns • Shugsep: 7 nuns • Tilokpur: 14 nuns

To sponsor one of these nuns today, you can:

Visit our website at www.tnp.org Call our office at 1-206-652-8901 Or, complete the enclosed form on page 8.

The Tibetan Nuns Project also supports nuns in remote Himalayan areas of north India. In these regions, whose residents are ethnically Tibetan and Buddhist, the nuns have traditionally received little or no education. Some have recently begun to develop educational programs and have approached us for assistance.

Dorjee Zong Nunnery

There had been seven nuns at this remote nunnery in Ladakh under our sponsorship program and we have just expanded that to 19 with the admission of a new group of very young nuns.

Nuns in this nunnery are not engaged in rigorous philosophical studies but they have one teacher who has been teaching them the core Buddhist studies and Tibetan. The nuns spend a lot of time performing needed rituals on holy days as well as offering special prayers and rituals requested by the people from the nearby villages. Thanks to their teacher, the nuns have recently learnt how to offer the Tara Puja.

Although the senior nuns at Dorjee Zong are elderly, they are very strong physically and mentally. They look after all the nunnery buildings and chores, and they work in the nunnery's fields each summer growing barley, cauliflower, cabbage, radishes, carrots, and potatoes. The last winter's weather was extreme and there was heavy snowfall. However, in this arid region, the nuns were happy because a good snowfall leads to healthier vegetation and an abundance of water during the summer months.

A Visit to Dorjee Zong Nunnery

By Rinchen Khando Choegyal, Founder and Director of the Tibetan Nuns Project, and Tsering Diki, Project Co-Ordinator

In August, we travelled for three days over rough, bumpy roads from Leh in Ladakh to Zanskar, a remote area in northern India. Located in this majestic, arid landscape is Dorjee Zong Nunnery, home to 19 nuns.

It was good to see the nuns and the nunnery once again. Since 2010 the Tibetan Nuns Project has been helping this small nunnery with sponsorship and a teacher's salary, and it was wonderful to see the assistance we have been providing used to the fullest extent. The nuns are very happy to be receiving support and care from us and their sponsors.



During our short visit, the Director gave a warm and personal talk to all of the nuns and we could see how inspired they were and how cared for they felt. This was encouraging and inspiring for those of us who are trying to work for them. There are 12 young nuns and seven elder nuns. The younger nuns looked very bright and happy to be where they are, and we felt energized to help them even more. Our focus will be mainly on education, health care, and overall development, including setting up infrastructure for an education system and facilitating a good educational programme.

The nuns are beautiful beings and the place where they live amazingly serene and untouched by modernity. It is certainly conducive for study and inner development. Fortunately, there are three nuns who have studied in Dharamsala and who are enthusiastic about taking responsibility for making their nunnery into something productive and useful towards educating the women of Ladakh.

We are very grateful to Ngari Rinpoche's office in Ladakh for fully funding the journey from Leh to Zanskar which was so well organized by their Chanzoe la. En route we stopped at Kargil and then in Rangdum (Ngari Rinpoche's monastery). On the way we passed by many small villages whose residents stood by the roadside to welcome Ngari Rinpoche. The whole landscape was truly mesmerizing and the people seemed innocent and pure at heart.

The beautiful photos are all by media nun Delek Yangdron, who accompanied us on the trip.



Because of Your Support...

Dolma Ling Nuns' Café

The Nuns' Café opened on March 31, 2015 and is a much appreciated addition to the nunnery. Now nuns and guests can access healthy, freshly cooked meals at any time of the day. One laywoman works as the main cook and two senior nuns have taken on the full-time responsibility of running the café. Evenings from 5–9 pm another layperson works part-time. Daily, two nunnery nuns work on a rotation basis in the café to help with food preparation and dishwashing.



The café which opened this spring fulfills a long-time wish of the nuns



Our thanks to Julia from Santa Monica for helping to fulfill the nuns' aspirations

Media Section and Language Lab

We are very happy to have completed this important multi-purpose building at Dolma Ling Nunnery, which houses the media section, language lab and Nuns' Café. On March 8 the Media Section moved into the new facility and the nuns



Empowering the nuns to tell their own stories

working on media have expressed their happiness and satisfaction in finally having a permanent working space as they develop their skills.

Also on the upper floor of the new building is a language lab equipped with seven computers. Each computer has English-learning software and the English teachers at the nunnery regularly bring their classes to the lab. The nuns enjoy working there alongside their teachers who guide them in improving their skills in reading, writing and listening. In addition, the language lab provides a good resource for the nuns to improve their knowledge of English outside their normal classes.



The language lab allows the nuns to advance their English skills

Tofu Machine and Facility

Our new tofu facility has been beautifully completed next to the solar bathhouse building. The long-awaited tofu machine was fully funded by a very generous donor and was installed in April 2015. Each Saturday six nuns work in groups of three on a rotation basis to make tofu for the nunnery kitchen and café as well as for outside orders. The nuns have made tofu for local institutions such as Namgyal Monastery, Norbulingka, and for some restaurants in McLeod Ganj.

The 230 nuns at Dolma Ling follow a vegetarian diet and tofu is a nutritious, protein-rich part of their weekly menu. Making tofu also helps generate some income for the nunnery.



Dolma Ling Kitchen Extension

The number of nuns and staff being fed on a daily basis at Dolma Ling has more than tripled since the original kitchen was opened in 1993 and now totals about 280. This spring we conducted a successful campaign to fund construction of a kitchen extension, and we are extremely grateful to all those who made this project possible, in particular Kent and Marsha from Virginia.

Final internal finishing work is almost complete, and the nuns have already moved into the ground floor vegetable preparation and storage area. They are using a small classroom for cooking until they can move into the refurbished and greatly enlarged kitchen. The main door has been widened, windows improved, and the washing areas shifted to the back of the building for



easy and efficient drainage. Solar panels are in place and the hot water system is functioning. Once moved into the new kitchen, whatever additional platforms and shelving are required will be ordered and installed.

Completed Small Projects

Our headquarters at Dolma Ling Nunnery in India and our small Seattle office have been fundraising for specific projects that were requested by various nunneries. We're happy to report that this year, thanks to the kindness of our supporters around the world, we were able to help the nuns at Shugsep to build a much needed iron staircase to access their solar hot water panels. We also raised the funds for Shugsep to purchase a new truck to replace their

broken, unsafe one. Additionally we were able to help Dolma Ling acquire two new vehicles—a motorbike for the accountant to use for quick trips into Dharamsala and to local banks and a new truck to transport food and supplies.



Soon to Begin

The Tibetan Nuns Project is working to develop plans for a major new project, a study center that will focus particularly on laywomen, Tibetan and non-Tibetan, who wish to seriously study Buddhism. In the past many have expressed interest in studying the philosophical texts just as the nuns do, but could not be readily accommodated in the nunneries. We seek to establish a center at Dolma Ling Nunnery and Institute so that laywomen can have a safe environment within the Dolma Ling grounds in which to live, study and practice. The study center will also provide accommodation and facilities for visiting nuns during the annual inter-nunnery debate session and during the Geshema exams. Expect more information about this exciting new project in the coming year as plans are finalized!

Special Thanks

This year, the acclaimed New York artist Miya Ado once again donated five paintings and held an online auction to benefit the nuns. We are deeply grateful for her support. We also thank Olivier Adam for his many photos and for his Etsy site, Daughters of Buddha, to help the nuns.

Thank You to Our Volunteers

Marianne Kenady, Steven Smith,
Constance Trowbridge, Puget Sound Business Journal



Tibetan Nuns Project

815 Seattle Blvd South,
Suite 216
Seattle, WA 98134
USA

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SEATTLE, WA
PERMIT NO 681

2016 Calendar
NOW ON SALE



2016
TIBETAN NUNS PROJECT

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.

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 2016 Calendar
 Price: U.S. \$12.00 plus \$1.75 shipping & handling, (\$.75 s&h each additional)
 WA state residents add \$1.15 each for tax
 Please contact our U.S. office (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: _____
 Visa, MC, Discover, AmEx # _____ ExpDate _____
 Name _____
 Address _____

 Phone _____ Email _____

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