



Tibetan Nuns Project

Fall 2016

30
years

2017 is the
Tibetan Nuns Project's
30th Anniversary



An Historic Event



Nunnery Updates



**The Tibetan Nuns
Project Story**



**Interview with a
Geshema nun:
Tenzin Kunsel**



Acts of Generosity

An Historic Event

December 22, 2016 will mark an important day in the history of Tibet as twenty nuns become the first Tibetan women to receive their Geshema degrees. The Geshema degree is equivalent to a Doctorate in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy.

The first batch of graduating nuns completed their fourth and final round of exams in May and come from five nunneries: Kopan Nunnery in Nepal, Jangchup Choeling Nunnery in South India, and the following nunneries in or near Dharamsala: Jamyang Choeling Nunnery, Geden Choeling Nunnery, and Dolma Ling Nunnery.

All four levels of exams are given each year, and in May forty-four nuns sat the various levels of the Geshema exams. The venue rotates



between nunneries, and the site this year was Geden Choeling Nunnery in Dharamsala. The exams were overseen by representatives from each participating nunnery, from the Department of Religion and Culture of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, and from the Tibetan Nuns Project. We are very proud to announce that all forty-four nuns passed their level of exams this year.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama will officially give the twenty graduating nuns their degrees in December at a special ceremony at Drepung Monastery, re-established in exile in Mundgod, South India. Drepung Monastery is one of the three great monastic universities and is celebrating the 600th anniversary of the founding of this monastery in Tibet. The nuns will receive their degrees in front of hundreds, if not thousands, of monastics and the Geshema ceremony will add to the significance of the event.

Earning the Geshema degree marks a turning point for the nuns. This degree will provide them the opportunity to work at various leadership positions in their monastic and lay communities, making them more self-reliant, and establishing them as role models for other nuns to follow.

We are very proud of the academic achievements of the nuns. We are also very grateful to all our donors, individual sponsors, and friends for your support throughout this journey.





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 Dasei – India
Sarah Brosy – 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 Dasei, 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.

Updates from the Nunneries

Sherab Choeling

57 nuns

Coming from villages located around the remote Spiti Valley, the nuns at Sherab Choeling Nunnery attend classes in Buddhist philosophy, English, and Tibetan. They assemble at the main courtyard twice a day for an hour-long debate session. The youngest nuns are too young to start their monastic education, but like other schoolchildren are studying up to fifth grade equivalent, after which they will begin monastic studies.

Apart from their studies, the nuns also spend a lot of time growing their own food and doing chores such as ploughing the fields and working in the greenhouses. They are successfully growing black and green peas, cabbage, and even cauliflower, much to their surprise and delight. This year they had scanty snowfall which made life at the nunnery much easier. However, it was a mixed blessing because of worry about water shortages in the valley's dry summer months.



Taking advantage of the summer weather, nuns at Sherab Choeling debate outdoors

Dorjee Zong

24 nuns

Five new nuns joined this year, bringing the total to 24. The nuns come from villages close to the nunnery and they are often visited by their family members. The two eldest nuns are in their mid-80s, while the youngest nuns are just 7 years old. The seven senior nuns spend most of their time reciting mantras, preparing pujas requested by families who live close to the nunnery, and also organizing Nyungne, a special practice involving two



Young nuns at Dorjee Zong

and a half days of fasting and silence that is effective in the healing of illness, the nurturing of compassion, and the purification of negative karma. The younger nuns are well cared for and very happy to be in the nunnery. They are bright students and are getting an education up to fifth grade equivalent. In the near future, the head nuns plan to construct a facility to accommodate up to 50 nuns including a dormitory, classroom, prayer hall, kitchen, dining hall, toilets, and bathroom.

Dolma Ling

223 nuns

It's been a busy year at the nunnery, with many special events and activities. In early May, the Tibetan Women's Association organized their 8th week-long Buddhist Nuns' Empowerment Program. Nuns from Sakya College in Dehradun, from Orissa, and from Jangchub Choeling Nunnery in Dharamsala also attended the special event. This year, His Holiness the Dalai Lama expressed his concern about health problems in monasteries, nunneries, Tibetan settlements, and schools. Following this, members of the



Quiz time at Dolma Ling

Department of Health came to Dolma Ling to teach the nuns about women's health issues and to share knowledge about two diseases of major concern in the Tibetan refugee community – tuberculosis and hepatitis. On July 4th, the nuns had their annual flower competition held between different classes. The whole courtyard was filled with beautiful flowers and potted plants displayed in front of pictures of H.H. the Dalai Lama. The nuns from Pharchin 3 won first prize. July 6th, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's 81st birthday, was a day of celebration for Tibetans living in every corner of the world.

Geden Choeling

157 nuns



Written exams at Geden Choeling

While the majority of nuns are involved with the regular academic session, a few of the nuns take on leadership roles at the nunnery, such as office secretary, treasurer, and kitchen-in-charge, and therefore do not attend classes for a year or two, until their leadership terms end. The Geden Choeling nuns held their annual prize distribution ceremony on February 29th with special guest Kyabje Ling Choktrul Rinpoche. In early April, the nunnery was honored by a visit from Kyabje Jangtse Choegyal Rinpoche who blessed the nunnery by giving the empowerments of Yamantaka and Vajrayogini over a week-long period. In April, Geshe Phuntsok Tsultrim from Sera Monastery in South India was appointed as the new abbot of Geden Choeling Nunnery for a 3-year term. This year's Geshema examinations were hosted in Geden Choeling Nunnery. The 44 Geshema participants gathered at the nunnery from April 1 to 30th for the preparation period and then stayed for

the scheduled exams from May 1 to 12. We are very happy that the nunnery is well prepared to host such events and to comfortably accommodate more nuns.

Shugsep

71 nuns

Following their annual exams, the nuns attended the Nyingma Monlam Festival in Bodh Gaya in January 2016. This was followed by their one-month winter break. In March, the nuns returned to the nunnery and new nuns were chosen to take on various responsibilities for the running of the nunnery. The new academic year began on April 1st. As part of their studies, on the last Saturday of each month, the nuns alternate between giving a dharma talk on a topic of their choice and debating with their classmates.

The nunnery was blessed this spring to have two special visits by high lamas. In early May, Khenchen Pema Sherab from Namdroling Monastery in South India came for a 5-day visit. During his visit, the 21 nuns newly admitted over the past few years took their novice (*dge tshul*) vows from him. At the end of May, Shechen Rabjam Rinpoche visited the nunnery and gave an oral transmission on the Ego-Serving Rite (*mchod*), a practice descended from the famous 11th century Tibetan yogini, Machig Labdrön.



Shugsep nuns on retreat in Nepal

Tilokpur

110 nuns

Each January and February, the nuns from Karma Drubgyu Dhargyay Ling Nunnery of Tilokpur join the Kagyu Monlam for World Peace. For the last two years, the nuns have also participated in the Kagyu nuns' debate session held every winter.



A special puja at Tilopa's cave

Returning home to their nunnery in March, the nuns performed a three-day long-life puja for a smooth beginning of the academic year and to ward off all obstacles and negativities. Each month, following the Tibetan calendar, the nuns perform special pujas such as the Guru Rinpoche Puja on the 10th day, the Maha Krodi Puja on the 19th, and the Mahakala Puja on the 29th in addition to their pujas each morning and evening.

The new academic year started in March. The senior nuns have one hour of Buddhist philosophy every day from Monday to Friday and two classes or more for junior nuns, along with Tibetan and English language classes for all. In April, the nuns elected a new team of nuns to take on different responsibilities in the nunnery. Since August, the nuns have been practicing new pujas as well as drums (*damaru*) and bells as they work to improve both their educational standards and their ritual skills such as chanting, the use of different musical instruments, making tormas, and so forth.

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.

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 Story



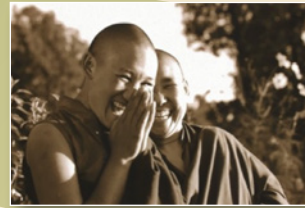
1987

Tibetan Nuns Project
(TNP) founded



Jan 1991

A large group of nuns fleeing Tibet
arrives in Dharamsala
TNP and the Tibetan Women's
Association take the leadership role
in caring for them



1991

TNP sets up sponsorship
program to support
the nuns



Summer 1992

Dolma Ling nuns move to
rented house near building site
for the new nunnery



Sh
re-es
u



2008

Sherab Choeling Nunnery in Spiti
enters TNP sponsorship program



2008

Sakya College for Nuns opens with
TNP support



2006

Construction begins on new
Shugsep Nunnery



Dec 2

His Holiness the
inaugurates Dolma



2010

His Holiness the Dalai Lama
inaugurates Shugsep Nunnery



2010

Dorjee Zong Nunnery enters
TNP sponsorship program



2011

His Holiness the Karmapa
inaugurates new debate
courtyard at Dolma Ling



2012

Decision taken to allow the nuns
to earn the Geshema degree
after 17 years of study and
examinations over a 4-year period



2013

First round of the
Geshema exams

Celebrating 30 Years of Helping the Nuns



1992
Jugseph Nunnery
established in India
under TNP care



early 1990s
Setting up of educational
system and classes
Many nuns who had escaped
were totally illiterate



1993
Construction begins on
Dolma Ling Nunnery



1993
First TNP calendar



1995
With the first five buildings
finished, His Holiness the
Dalai Lama visits Dolma Ling



2005
His Holiness the Dalai Lama
visits Dolma Ling Nunnery



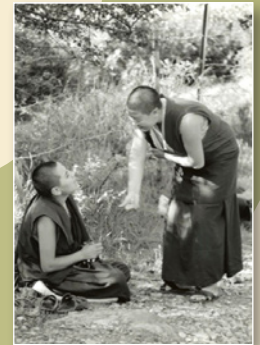
2005
Tibetan edition of
Healthy Body,
Healthy Mind on
women's health



2003
TNP-sponsored
nunneries start their
own magazine



1993-2005
Dolma Ling construction is
slowly completed



Fall 1995
First annual inter-nunnery
debate, the Jang Gonchoe



2014
Launch of Endowment Fund for
the Jang Gonchoe



May 2016
Fourth and final round
of Geshema exams
all 20 nuns pass



December 2016
Geshema degrees to be received
from His Holiness the Dalai Lama
by 20 nuns



2017
30th Anniversary of the
Tibetan Nuns Project

Interview with a Geshema nun: Tenzin Kunsel

Venerable Tenzin Kunsel joined Dolma Ling Nunnery in 1991 and studied Buddhism and the Six Perfections. In 2004, she travelled to Jamchup Choeling Nunnery in southern India to learn Madhyamika and Abhidharma for 7 years. After completing those two subjects, she returned to Dolma Ling Nunnery in northern India to learn Vinaya and Tantra for a year each.

Following a request from Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery to the Tibetan Nuns Project for a senior teacher, Venerable Tenzin Kunsel began teaching the nuns there in February 2012. In 2013, when the opportunity arose to take the Geshema exams, Ven. Tenzin Kunsel prepared for the exams while simultaneously teaching the nuns at Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery and continued doing so in the following years.

The following is an interview with Venerable Tenzin Kunsel who had just completed her first round of examinations for the Geshema Degree.



Venerable Tenzin Kunsel,
soon to be Geshema Tenzin Kunsel

A: I always feel grateful and fortunate to have sponsors who are truly kind. We are from totally different worlds with no blood relation, yet they still extend financial as well as moral support. It is partly because of the sponsors that I am one of those lucky nuns able to grab the rare opportunity to obtain the Geshema qualification.

I also feel that the sponsors are much more generous than my own parents. Parents are bound with the universal responsibility for looking after their own child, but our sponsors are never bound with the responsibility to look after me and take care of me like

their own child. I always pray for their happiness and success in their lives.

Q: What do you think is special about this moment in history of Tibetan nuns of your nunnery and why?

A: His Holiness the Dalai Lama has facilitated the nuns with such an extraordinary opportunity that it should be grasped without any hesitation. I strongly think that such an opportunity will never come in the future if we do not make the best out of it.

Every day I feel extremely fortunate and lucky to be the part of such an historic event. I believe that our area of study is mainly to bring peace of mind in our own lives. The more you learn and get connected, the more inner peace of mind you gain.

Q: How would you like to use the education that you are receiving at the nunnery?

A: I would like to continue to serve our own community, which I am doing now. But looking at my bigger ambition, I definitely would like to go back to Tibet and help the nuns there who are not getting proper religious education. I am quite familiar with two of the nunneries in Tibet where nuns do prayers but are not even provided with the basic education. I am so eager to go back and work at the nunnery inside occupied Tibet.

Q: What is one thing you'd like Tibetan Nuns Project supporters to know about your life at the nunnery?

A: I always wished to say something for our supporters about my experience and the people who work to support the nuns. Many of the staff working at the nunnery are lay people. I would like to thank the staff working at the nunnery who give premier

Background

I was born to a simple family near Lhasa and I came into exile in 1991. In Tibet, we were not given a Buddhist education; instead we only had prayers for people who made offerings at the nunnery. It was really disappointing as well as sad that we were not given the education we needed. I strongly felt that the best way to become educated in Buddhist studies was to come to India. Along with 75 other nuns, I came to Dolma Ling Nunnery.

Q: How has being at the nunnery made a difference in your life?

A: When I first reached Dolma Ling Nunnery, its facilities weren't as good as now. But I never lost hope. Many times, my family pressured me to go to school rather than the nunnery. But I never wanted to go to school because I thought I would not get a proper Buddhist education.

After being admitted to the nunnery, I started my studies from the basic education. It gave me special comfort and peace of mind, making me strongly feel that I had not made the wrong decision to join the nunnery in India.

Q: If you could speak directly to the sponsor who is helping you get education, food, and health care at the nunnery, what would you say to that person?

Wish List Update

Here are 4 top priority projects that we still need your help with:

- Butter Sculpture Workshop \$1,807 still needed
- Painting at Dolma Ling Nunnery \$7,250 still needed
- Furnishing the kitchen \$8,305 still needed
- Retreat hut improvements \$5,600 still needed

Thank you to everyone who helped us fully fund our clean water project, the tables for nuns' rooms, and the cow shed project, all at Dolma Ling Nunnery. To see all our areas of greatest need please visit our Current Projects section of the website at <https://tnp.org/projects-2/>

importance to nuns like us and to our education.

I consider that the life in nunnery is the happiest and that only lucky people will get admitted to the nunnery. But as nuns, we sacrifice our present lives and think much more deeply about our next life. In that way we obtain true peace and happiness.

Q: What has been the happiest day of your life?

A: Since my childhood, I really like helping needy people. This habit is still alive within me, so whenever I get the chance to help, the day turns out to be really meaningful and happy.

If I talk about the future, the day I start working as a teacher after receiving the Geshema Degree will be the happiest day in my life. I really hope that my wish will come true.



Ven. Tenzin Kunsel teaching the nuns at
Dongyu Gatsal Ling

Q: What are the benefits you get from the education and being in the nunnery?

A: I feel strongly that being in nunnery is like being in a completely different world. After all, we never have to worry or think about how we will manage our basic needs. With the help of our sponsors and supporters, our basic needs are fulfilled without any obstacles. The only thing is we have to do is to study sincerely. Because of the proper education I received, I was able to pass the first round of the Geshema exams and am eligible to sit for the second round of Geshema exams.

Q: What are the difficulties you faced during your course of study?

A: Generally speaking, Buddhist studies and philosophy are extremely vast and difficult. One needs strong commitment, extreme hard work, and dedication once you decide to sit for the Geshema exams. So I consider it a golden opportunity that we struggled hard to attain.

Since this interview was made, Venerable Tenzin Kunsel has successfully completed all four rounds of her examinations. She and 19 other nuns will formally receive their Geshema degrees from His Holiness the Dalai Lama at a special ceremony at Drepung Monastery in South India on December 22nd 2016. This is an important first in the history of Tibet!

Acts of Generosity



VICKI ROBINSON

Canadian donor and Tibetan Nuns Project board member



Vicki has included a bequest in her will to the Tibetan Nuns Project



"I'm hoping the impact it will make is that the Tibetan Nuns Project will continue to flourish. It was very easy to do."



HILLARY LEVIN

Baltimore Buddhist, and co-founder of group Technology for Tibetans



Hillary created an online fundraiser using Razoo.com raising \$285 in support of the clean water project



"I wanted to support them in their self-sustaining way of life and ensure they have clean and healthy resources. I'm looking forward to holding another fundraiser in 2017!"



MIYA ANDO

Acclaimed New York artist raised in a Buddhist temple in Japan



For a third year, Miya created a series of 5 special paintings that were auctioned online in support of the nuns



Raised \$3,664 from this year's auction



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

2017 Calendar
NOW ON SALE



**2017
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 2017 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.