



Tibetan Nuns Project

Fall 2022



Historic Khenmo Enthronement



Dorjee Zong Visit and Update



Your Donations in Action!



Celebrating 35 Years



More Sponsors Needed



We've Moved



Inter-Nunnery Debate Resumes



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Geshema Exams Resume After 2-Year Delay

After a long wait, Tibetan Buddhist nuns working towards their Geshema degrees were able to take exams for this highest degree, equivalent to a doctorate in Buddhist philosophy. The pandemic forced the cancellation of the annual exams in 2020 and 2021.

On August 7th, 95 nuns began two weeks of written and oral debate exams at Geden Choeling Nunnery in Dharamsala. Eleven nuns sat their final fourth-year exams. A graduation ceremony will take place in mid-November in Bodh Gaya at the conclusion of the month-long inter-nunnery debate session called the Jang Gonchoe.

The rigorous written and debate exams take four years to complete, with one set held each year. It is the highest level of training in the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism and for males is called the Geshe degree. Until recently, this degree was only open to men.

Candidates are examined on the entirety of their 17-year course of study of the Five Great Canonical Texts. They must achieve a score of at least 75 percent during their multi-year studies to be eligible to sit for the exams.

Up to September 2022, 44 Tibetan Buddhist nuns have earned this degree. The world needs their wisdom and compassion.

The new Geshema Endowment at the Tibetan Nuns Project funds all costs associated with the exams including food, travel, exam materials, and graduation robes. Thank you to all the donors including the Pema Chodron Foundation, the Pierre and Pamela Omidyar Fund of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, the



The candidates assembled on July 6th for a month of final exam preparations. David's good luck message said: *"I am very glad to see that the Geshema examinations will take place in 2022, and look forward to supporting the spread of female teachers in these especially treacherous times!"*

Frederick Family Foundation, and the Donaldson Charitable Trust.

Thank you also to the 75 people who sent good luck messages to the nuns! The messages were posted at the exam site for all the nuns to see.



2022 Geshema exams photos taken by the Dolma Ling Media Nuns. The Geshema degree was only formally opened to women in 2012 and nuns began taking Geshema exams in 2013.



Tibetan Nuns Project

Established in 1987, the Tibetan Nuns Project provides education and support to more than 900 nuns in northern India. The mission of the project is to:

Educate and empower nuns of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition as teachers and leaders;

Establish, strengthen, and support educational institutions to preserve the Tibetan religion and culture.

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Historic Khenmo Enthronement!

Tibetan Buddhist nuns made history again on June 14th 2022, the holy day of Saga Dawa Duchon, when the first group of nuns attained the highest degree of "Khenmo" at the Sakya College for Nuns.

The Khenmo degree for nuns, like the Khenpo degree for males, is roughly equivalent to a PhD. In the Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya traditions, the title is awarded usually after 13 years of intensive post-secondary study.

The comparable title in the Gelug and Bon lineages is Geshe or, for nuns, Geshema. A nun who holds the title Khenmo is recognized as a female Buddhist teacher/scholar who can give official and high-level teachings.

Sakya College for Nuns was established under the guidance of His Holiness Sakya Trichen and with the blessings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama with the aim of producing qualified female masters and teachers who could independently teach 18 renowned Indian commentaries on the teachings of the Buddha.

True to its goal, the College has produced some bright students in the last 13 years – students who have now developed into very good teachers. As recognition of their excellent academic achievements, His Holiness Sakya Trizin Rinpoche graciously officiated at the ceremony awarding the Khenmo title to three senior nuns of the College.

The Khenmos will now be able to take on the responsibility of producing qualified students and further dedicating their lives to the service of the Dharma.

The Khenmos who were ceremonially enthroned on June 14th are Khenmo Kunga Paldon, Khenmo Kunga Woetso, and Khenmo Ngawang Yangga.

Historically, Tibetan nuns have not had the same access to educational opportunities as monks. These dedicated women, who have in recent years gained equal access to education within their spiritual tradition, are teachers and leaders of the future.



Nuns at Sakya College line up to offer congratulations and kataks, ceremonial prayer scarves, to the three Khenmos.



(L to R) Khenmo Kunga Woetso, Khenmo Kunga Paldon, Khenchen Sonam Gyatso, Khenpo Ishey Tsering, Khenmo Ngawang Yangga.

Dorjee Zong Visit and Update

In the remote Indian Himalayas lies a 700-year-old Tibetan Buddhist nunnery called Dorjee Zong. The nunnery has a long tradition of meditating nuns, some of who are famed for having reached high levels of realization.

For over 12 years, Dorjee Zong has been receiving support with sponsorship of the nuns, teacher salaries, and a big construction project to improve all facilities at the nunnery. During the pandemic, this remote nunnery was even more cut off than usual. In August 2022, a team from the Tibetan Nuns Project office near Dharamsala travelled for several days over hazardous roads from Leh to Zaskar. The team wanted to check on the nuns' welfare and the progress of various projects at the nunnery including the major construction project started in 2019.

Dorjee Zong is home to 20 nuns – 13 young nuns and 7 elder nuns. The oldest two are both 90 years old. The seven elder nuns spend time reciting mantras, circumambulating the sacred site of the nunnery grounds, and taking care of their field and greenhouse to stock up on supplies for winter. The younger nuns live and study in the lower and newer part of the nunnery.

Girls in the Himalayas are generally given far less education than boys. Girls are often removed from school as early as



Nangsa Choedon, Director of the Tibetan Nuns Project in India (middle), Tsering Diki, Assistant Director (left), and Delek Yangchen, one of the Dolma Ling media nuns (right) with the two eldest nuns at Dorjee Zong. These two nuns are both 90 years old.

grade 4, if they are sent at all. The nunnery educates both lay girls and nuns. It gives them a chance for education that they would not otherwise have.



One of the bright new classrooms being built



Nuns' quarters in the new housing block. Before 2019, the nunnery was very basic and had just one classroom and one main building used for everything.



Dorjee Zong Nunnery prior to the expansion project

Construction Project Update

The nunnery recently embarked on an ambitious project to improve all the facilities for the nuns. Construction started in 2019, but the work was hampered by the pandemic. Also, the long severe winters and remote location reduce the construction window to around five months each year.

The two-story building is finished! The ground floor is now being used as students' quarters, the top floor is being used as the school office, dining hall, staff quarters, and meeting room. Once other facilities are complete, the entire building will be used to accommodate future students.

The three-story kitchen and prayer hall building is coming along very well. The ground floor has a large dining hall which will, in future, be used by students, staff, and teachers.

The first floor has a hall to be used for prayers, workshops, meetings, and teachings. Opposite there will be a library and computer room for the students with the library's wooden book shelves serving as a room divider.

According to the original plans, the nunnery was to have separate school blocks, staff, and office blocks. Now, instead of building separate blocks, the construction committee decided to add a second floor onto the existing building. This new design will be more cost effective and warmer; there were not any other sunny building locations.

Thank you so much for your support of the nuns!



New multipurpose building

Your Donations in Action

"I would like to be able to support a fellow Buddhist female student and support the next generation of Tibetan nuns. We need more female leadership and equal opportunity. I really have high hopes for these women of all ages. The world needs you. xx"

—Testimonial from Kimberley, a donor



Newly ordained nuns with His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the ordination ceremony in March 2022. This spring many nuns joined the nunneries. Dolma Ling accepted 32 new nuns who all wish to follow the intensive 17-year course of studies leading to the Geshema degree. TNP currently supports 931 nuns and 7 nunneries.



Shugsep nuns cleaning windows. The nuns work hard to maintain their nunneries. Your support keeps the nunneries strong and healthy in the harsh climate of northern India.



In June, 160 nuns, teachers, and staff of Dolma Ling and TNP India received boosters.



Nuns at Dolma Ling express gratitude for the 74 fans in the dormitories, kitchen, and clinic where it regularly reached 97°F (36°C). Thanks to you the nuns are much more comfortable.



Dolma Ling nuns working to repair the drains so sewage from the nunnery does not run down to the village below.



A generous donor funded special new heavy robes for the 261 nuns at Dolma Ling to wear during winter. The nunnery is unheated and monastic rules do not allow nuns to wear coats or sweaters in the prayer hall.



Last winter, during the school break, the Geshema nuns at Dolma Ling helped the local refugee children improve their Tibetan reading and writing skills. These nuns hold the highest degree in their tradition, roughly equivalent to a PhD in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy.



Geshema Tenzin Kunsel speaks to Indian university students as part of the 26th annual Gurukul Program which seeks to revive the centuries-old exchange of ideas between Indians and Tibetans.



Your donations empower nuns to be teachers, leaders, and role models. Geshema Delek Wangmo is one of two Geshemas teaching at Dolma Ling.



Each day about 250 nuns gather at the debate courtyard at Dolma Ling to practice monastic debate. The improved and expanded courtyard will provide the nuns shelter and space for their daily practice. This shows the new sliding windows at the back of the courtyard to block monsoon rains.



The huge water project to bring clean water to the 400 nuns and staff at Dolma Ling has begun thanks again to your generous support. Due to the heavy monsoon rains, it was risky to work.



The nuns at Sherab Choeling are getting a new 10-seat multi-purpose vehicle thanks to you.

Celebrating 35 Years!

The Tibetan Nuns Project was founded in 1987 to educate and empower nuns of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition as teachers and leaders; and to establish, strengthen, and support educational institutions to sustain Tibetan religion and culture.



"We will never forget the immeasurable support that we have received from all our kind friends from all over the world. We are ever grateful for your kindness and generosity and the history of Tibet will never forget you." Rinchen Khando Choegyal, Founder and Special Advisor, Tibetan Nuns Project

Thanks to your generosity we have:

- Created a ground-breaking educational program for nuns;
- Built and established Dolma Ling Nunnery and Institute, a non-sectarian nunnery;
- Constructed and re-established Shugsep Nunnery and Institute in India;
- Established the annual inter-nunnery debate, the nuns' Jang Gonchoe;
- Laid the groundwork for higher degrees for nuns;
- Helped award the Geshema degree for the first time in the history of Tibet;
- Enabled Geshema graduates to participate in an advanced education program in Tantric studies;
- Created a sponsorship program to support over 900 nuns and 7 nunneries in India, providing the nuns with food, education, clothing, shelter, and health care.

Thank you for supporting the nuns!



More Sponsors Needed

This year there are 42 more nuns than last year being supported. Currently, your gifts support 931 nuns with food, shelter, clothing, education, and health care.

More sponsors of nuns are needed. It costs just \$1 a day to sponsor a nun and provide the necessities of life.

Here are the number of nuns at the various nunneries:

Dolma Ling 261

Shugsep 101

Tilokpur 89

Geden Choeling 190

Sherab Choeling 62

Sakya College 63

Dorjee Zong 20

Non-resident 145

Total number of nuns: 931



Will you sponsor a nun for \$1 a day?

We've moved!

Our US office has moved, but only by two floors. The space is smaller and will allow considerable savings on rent so that these funds can help the nuns in India. Our new address is:

Tibetan Nuns Project
815 Seattle Blvd South, Suite 418
Seattle, WA 98134
206-652-8901
Email: info@tnp.org

Inter-Nunnery Debate Resumes

Around 495 nuns from 10 nunneries in India and Nepal are taking part in the month-long inter-nunnery debate called the Jang Gonchoe. The last inter-nunnery debate was held in 2019. The pandemic forced the nuns to cancel it in 2020 and 2021 because it was too unsafe to gather. This year the Jang Gonchoe is being held from October 16 to November 17 at the Kagyu Centre in Bodh Gaya.



Nuns practicing daily debate at Sherab Choeling Nunnery in Spiti. For the first time, nuns from Sherab Choeling are taking part in the inter-nunnery debate beginning in Bodh Gaya on October 16th.



Throughout the year, nuns practice debate daily at their own nunneries. However, the inter-nunnery debate provides intensive training in monastic debate. This practice is essential for the nuns who wish to pursue higher degrees such as the Geshema degree.

Current Needs

Here is our wish list of current needs and projects for the nuns and nunneries:

SPONSOR A NUN: Sponsor a nun for just \$1 a day and provide her with education, food, shelter, health care, and opportunity.

10-SEAT VEHICLE FOR SHUGSEP: Replace Shugsep Nunnery's old vehicle which is unsafe and beyond repair so the nuns can get supplies and access medical services.

AREA OF GREATEST NEED: To enable us to help the nuns with any urgent needs please donate to the Area of Greatest Need.



To Help You Can

1. **Make a gift online** at tnp.org
2. **Call our office** in Seattle, US at 1-206-652-8901
3. **Mail a check to:**
The Tibetan Nuns Project
815 Seattle Boulevard South, Suite 418
Seattle, WA 98134 USA
(Please include a note about how you wish your gift to be used.)
4. **Donate securities**
5. **Include a gift in your will** to the Tibetan Nuns Project



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**2023
TIBETAN NUNS PROJECT**



Ways to Help the Nuns

- Donate today at tnp.org
- Sponsor a nun for \$1 a day
- Become a monthly donor
- Shop in our online store at tnp.org
- Leave a gift in your will
- Support one of our Current Needs
- Give a tribute card
- Give a gift of stock



The Tibetan Nuns Project is a 501(c)3 organization. All donations are tax deductible in the US
Please consider a gift in your will to the Tibetan Nuns Project