

Tibetan Nuns Project

The Rising Status of Tibetan Buddhist Nuns

Fall 2026



**The Rising Status
of Tibetan
Buddhist Nuns**



**Seven Nunneries:
The Enduring Legacy
of Your Support**



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to His Holiness
the Dalai Lama**



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Culture and Religion**



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For centuries, the highest levels of Buddhist scholarship and religious leadership in Tibetan Buddhism were almost entirely the preserve of men. Traditionally, nuns have not had the same access to education or status as monks.

Today, thanks to your support, that is steadily changing.

This year, Tibetan Buddhist nuns reached a series of historic milestones that together signify one of the most significant transformations in contemporary Buddhism. Record numbers are earning their tradition's highest academic qualifications, more women than ever are pursuing advanced Tantric studies once closed to them, and a new generation of female scholars is emerging to teach, preserve, and shape a tradition facing cultural genocide in Tibet.

These achievements represent far more than educational success. They reflect determination, dedication, and a decades-long movement toward equality within one of the world's oldest living spiritual traditions. They are the fruit of your generosity.

The Tibetan Nuns Project aims to elevate the educational standards and the position of women. To do this, we have developed a groundbreaking education system aimed at both preserving Tibetan culture and empowering the nuns to live in and lead in the modern world.

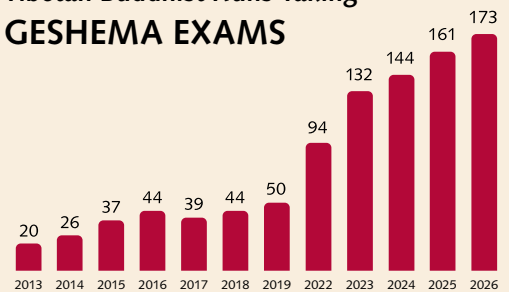
"The story isn't simply about women catching up," says Board Chair and Founding Director, Elizabeth Napper. "It's about helping to ensure the future of Tibetan Buddhism itself."

The momentum is unmistakable.

In 2025, a record number of nuns graduated with the prestigious Geshema degree, the highest

level of training in the Gelug tradition, equivalent to a PhD in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. Awarded after at least 19 years of study and four years of rigorous exams, the Geshema degree equips nuns to become senior teachers and scholars.

Tibetan Buddhist Nuns Taking GESHEMA EXAMS

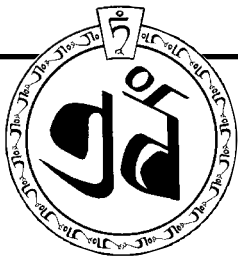


The Geshema degree, equivalent to a PhD in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, was only opened to women in 2012. Ten years ago in 2016, 20 nuns became the first Geshemas. In 2025, 47 nuns became Geshemas, bringing the total to 120. All being well, the 33 nuns who took their fourth and final exams in the summer of 2026 will pass and graduate in October.

This year started with another historic achievement. The first-ever Khenmo enthronement at Shugsep Nunnery was held on February 18, the first day of Tibetan New Year or Losar. Nineteen senior nuns became Khenmos, the highest scholarly and teaching title for nuns in the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, equivalent to the Khenpo title for monks. The position recognizes exceptional scholarship, spiritual accomplishment, and the authority to teach at the highest level.

This photo shows 18 of the 19 nuns enthroned as Khenmos on February 18, 2026 at Shugsep Nunnery. The nunnery was re-established in exile by TNP after many Shugsep nuns escaped from Tibet in the early 1990s seeking freedom to practice their religion. One nun was teaching in the US and unable to attend the ceremony.





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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His Holiness the Dalai Lama

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Unless otherwise stated, photos are taken by the nuns at their respective nunneries.

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The Rising Status of Tibetan Buddhist Nuns (*continued*)

"The significance of the Khenmo degree is that it shows every young nun that the full potential of her tradition is available to her," says Elizabeth Napper.

Only months later in April, the post-graduate Tantric Studies program launched in 2017 welcomed its largest intake of nuns. Advanced tantric education has historically been one of the least accessible areas of Tibetan Buddhist learning for women, despite its central place in religious practice.

In the summer of 2026, another record was set as the largest-ever cohort of nuns began sitting the notoriously demanding Geshema examinations, signalling that the pipeline of future scholars continues to expand.

None of these extraordinary accomplishments would be possible without your support. Opportunities that the nuns once considered a dream are, thanks to you, becoming firmly established. As the numbers clearly show, the senior nuns are inspiring and paving the way for more nuns to follow in their footsteps.

Next year marks the 40th anniversary of the Tibetan Nuns Project. While we

celebrate many successes, it's time to put our core programs on solid ground with our Long-Term Stability Fund, our Higher Studies Fund, and our legacy giving program.

With the growing number of nuns pursuing advanced education and higher degrees, the costs for food, housing, and transport have also hugely increased. Our new Higher Studies Fund aims to ensure that financial constraints do not restrict nuns from pursuing advanced degrees and the specialized training needed to become teachers of their ancient traditions.

There is power in investing in women's education. Your gifts empower the nuns to be teachers and leaders at a time when Tibetans and a troubled world need their wisdom and compassion.

The milestones reached over the past 39 years are not isolated accomplishments, but chapters in a larger story. It is the story of a generation of women excelling in an educational tradition from which they were once largely excluded, and in doing so helping secure the future of Tibetan Buddhism itself. They show the power of your generosity.



Pictured here are the 13 Geshemas who graduated from the Tantric Studies program on January 31, 2026. The post-grad program in Tantric Studies was launched by TNP in 2017. In April 2026, a record 47 Geshemas enrolled in this one-year study program held at Gyuto Tantric University near Dolma Ling Nunnery. Our new Higher Studies Fund aims to make both the Geshema degree program and the Tantric Studies program self-sustaining.

Geshema Delek Wangmo, the first female principal of Dolma Ling Nunnery, speaks to the 300 nuns at the annual prize giving ceremony in March 2026. Highly educated nuns return to their nunneries as teachers, administrators, translators, retreat leaders, and role models. They preserve centuries-old Buddhist knowledge while making it accessible to new generations, strengthening communities in exile and helping safeguard Tibetan culture.



Seven Nunneries: The Enduring Legacy of Your Support

The Tibetan Nuns Project currently supports almost a thousand nuns, with 867 living at seven nunneries in northern India and another 129 non-resident nuns who live and practice on their own.

Two of the nunneries, Dolma Ling, a non-sectarian nunnery home to 302 nuns, and Shugsep, a Nyingma nunnery home to 115 nuns, were built and are fully supported by the Tibetan Nuns Project. Two other nunneries in the Dharamsala area were already established in 1987, when TNP was founded: Geden Choeling, a Gelug nunnery now home to 176 nuns, and Tilokpur, also known as Karma Drubgyu Thargay Ling, a Kagyu nunnery with 142 nuns. We also support two nunneries in the remote Himalayan border areas: Sherab Choeling in Spiti (60 nuns) and Dorjee Zong in Zaskar (19 nuns). The seventh institution we directly support is Sakya College for Nuns near Dehradun, where 53 nuns are currently enrolled.

Thank you to everyone who sponsors a nun. More sponsors are always needed. The cost to sponsor a nun is just \$1 a day.



Long-Life Offerings to His Holiness the Dalai Lama



On April 24, 2026, representatives from TNP and nuns from 14 nunneries, including those who participate in the annual inter-nunnery debate and the Geshema exams, as well as representatives from the seven nunneries directly supported by TNP, gathered in Dharamsala to offer long-life prayers for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. They presented His Holiness, who is the patron of the Tibetan Nuns Project, with lovingly crafted unique offerings including a commemorative plaque, a book chronicling the Tibetan Nuns Project and its nunneries, a thangka, robes, and statues. Among those at the audience were Rinchen Khando Choegyal, TNP's Founding Director and Special Advisor (*left*), Youdon Aukatsang, Director of TNP India, Lisa Farmer, ED of TNP US, Nangsa Choedon, former director in India, Philippa Russell, Karma Dolma, Project Coordinator of TNP India, and Geshema Delek Wangmo, the first female principal of Dolma Ling Nunnery. (*lower left*) The event was widely reported in the Tibetan media. Long live His Holiness the Dalai Lama! *Photos courtesy OHDDL.*



Your Donations in Action



Dolma Ling Vehicle: The roads around Dharamsala are treacherous, especially during the monsoon. The new vehicle replacing their 14-year-old one is making a huge difference in the daily lives of the over 300 nuns at Dolma Ling. It is used for daily shopping, collecting materials for maintenance and small projects, visiting banks and government offices, travelling to other nunneries, and taking nuns to hospitals during medical emergencies.



New School at Dorjee Zong Inaugurated: Construction of the school at this remote nunnery in Zanskar started in 2019 and the building was inaugurated on July 30, 2026. The school offers quality education to young nuns and local lay girls and now has 27 students, including 13 nuns.



Fixing the Leaking Pipes at Shugsep: In 2025, severely corroded pipes at Shugsep Nunnery were replaced thanks to generous supporters.



Teachers' Salaries: Thanks to you, we fund 41 teachers at seven nunneries, as well as several other teachers at remote Himalayan nunneries. This is one of our ongoing projects and current needs. The teachers are at:

- Dolma Ling – 17, of whom three are nuns
- Shugsep – four
- Geden Choeling – seven
- Tilokpur – five
- Sherab Choeling – four
- Sakya College for Nuns – four
- Dorjee Zong – one nun in charge

Research Training Center: Thanks to five generous donors, Shugsep Nunnery's Research Center opened in March 2026. In the pilot program, three senior nuns are learning to integrate traditional Buddhist studies with modern research practices.



Protecting Nuns from Cold and Mold: In spring 2025, Sherab Choeling Nunnery in the Indian Himalayas asked for help to insulate the ground floor against cold and mold, which had caused illness among the nuns. With support from 44 donors, the project was completed and the nuns are extremely grateful.

Deepest thanks to all our wonderful sponsors who provide food, education, shelter, clothing, and basic medical care to over 900 nuns in India. More sponsors are always needed. Visit tnp.org





Geshema Exams: The 2026 Geshema exams took place at Geden Choeling Nunnery in Dharamsala from July 21 to August 16th. The degree was only formally opened to women in 2012. Ten years ago in 2016, 20 nuns became the first Geshemas. This year, a record 173 Tibetan Buddhist nuns from seven nunneries in India and Nepal took various levels of the four-year Geshema exams. The Geshema degree is the highest level of training in the Gelug tradition and is equivalent to a PhD in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy.



Shugsep Nunnery Retreat Center: For the first time in exile, the nunnery has a purpose-built facility for senior nuns to enter long-term retreat in their own community. Fundraising began in 2022 and the center was completed in spring 2026. On March 30, 2026, eight senior nuns (six Khenmos and two Lopenmas) began their retreats. The new center raises aspirations, sets higher standards, and boosts confidence for the next generation of nuns.



Shugsep Kitchen improvements: The project is fully funded and work will start in the fall of 2026 to insulate the roof to make it safer and more comfortable in both intense heat and cold. The kitchen will be re-roofed with newly available powder-coated metal roofing which is an exceptionally durable, weather-resistant surface that would not require repainting.



Warm Woolens: Deepest thanks to the volunteer knitters with Wool-Aid for the latest shipment of warm hats, gloves, scarves, sweaters, and blankets for Tibetan Buddhist nuns in northern India. Since 2016, Wool-Aid has been sending warm items to the nuns, making sure the colors match their robes.



Teaching Tibetan Children: Each winter, Geshemas and senior nuns at Dolma Ling teach Tibetan refugee children how to read and write in Tibetan. See page 6 for why this is so important.



Debate Training: From Oct 5 to Nov 8, 2025, 460 nuns and 23 teachers from 10 nunneries in India and Nepal had one month of intensive training in monastic debate in Bodh Gaya. Monastic debate is critical in traditional Tibetan Buddhist learning. Through debate, nuns test and consolidate their classroom learning. The 2026 Jang Gonchoe debate was held from September 20th to October 20th in Dharamsala.

Your Sponsorship Gifts

Sponsorship remains the heart of our work and we are deeply grateful to everyone who sponsors a nun.



The Survival of Tibet's Culture and Religion

For generations, Tibetan culture has been sustained through its language, spiritual traditions, monastic institutions, and the dedication of Buddhist practitioners. Part of our mission is “to establish, strengthen, and support educational institutions to sustain the Tibetan religion and culture.”

Our work is taking place against a backdrop of cultural genocide in Tibet. For the third year in a row, Tibet has received a global freedom score of 0 from the international human rights monitoring group Freedom House. Tibet remains “not free,” and its score of zero ties South Sudan for the second-lowest on the list of 208 areas examined.

About 1 million Tibetan children have been separated from their families and placed into Chinese residential schools. Photos of His Holiness the Dalai Lama are banned, and celebrating his birthday can lead to arrest. Peaceful calls for religious freedom are punished with imprisonment under vague charges like “separatism” or “endangering state security”.

On July 1st, a sinister new Chinese law promoting linguistic, cultural,

and ideological assimilation came into effect. Part of it mandates a “national common language” and prohibits any organization or individual from obstructing its dissemination. In practice, this may criminalize efforts by Tibetan communities to preserve and promote their own language in their own land.

Although we cannot directly change the situation inside Tibet, we can help Tibetans preserve their identity in exile.



“The survival and identity of any people depends fundamentally on the preservation of their language. Religion, culture, history, and collective memory are all preserved and transmitted through language. If a language disappears, the identity of that people gradually fades with it,” said His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s representative in London.

She added, “With Tibetan children in Tibet being denied the right to learn their own language, we are approaching a critical threshold that threatens our existence as a distinct people in the world.”



Preserving Tibet’s unique culture and religion is a service to the world. Your generosity helps protect a priceless heritage and empowers the women who are dedicating their lives to keeping it alive.

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



Looking Ahead: Creating Stability for the Nuns

Next year is the 40th anniversary of the Tibetan Nuns Project. After four decades of work, our greatest goal is to secure a stable future for Tibetan nuns living in exile in northern India. Whatever the future holds for Tibet, your support can help preserve their culture, education, and spiritual traditions.

In 2022, we launched our Long-Term Stability Fund, a quasi-endowment that

supports the nuns’ education and basic needs. While we still have much to achieve, we are deeply grateful to those who have donated to this fund and also those supporters who have chosen to include a gift in their wills to the Tibetan Nuns Project.

Since 1987, we have relied on annual fundraising to meet the urgent needs at the nunneries. However, this makes the situation for the nuns very vulnerable to economic downturns and world events. It’s time for us to create a strong, stable future for the nuns. As one supporter, Elen, shared: “*This is not charity; it is an investment in humanity.*”



Easy Choice to Leave a Legacy

By Dechen Tsering, Board Member

Leaving a legacy gift to the Tibetan Nuns Project feels like a wonderful opportunity to ensure the ongoing growth of Tibetan nuns who have sacrificed so much for the freedom to practice their religion.

While it is an easy choice for me to leave funds to them upon my death, the choices they made were incredibly hard and courageous. Many of the senior nuns have risked life and limb to flee Chinese-occupied Tibet to gain basic rights to education and religion.

Historically, Tibetan nuns were denied higher education in Buddhism. Today, with groundbreaking support from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and advocacy by the Tibetan Nuns Project, Tibetan nuns are earning PhD-level degrees in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and receiving the title Geshema. This milestone continues to inspire many Tibetan nuns to pursue Geshema degrees.

The determination, courage, and resilience of Tibetan nuns inspire me to leave a legacy gift to the nuns and to work for a better future for Tibetans everywhere and for the world. It is my hope that more people will leave legacy gifts for the Tibetan Nuns Project so that the future of the nun-related projects is sustained.



Our Project Wish List

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

HOUSING FOR ELDER NUNS: Please help provide safe, comfortable rooms for elder nuns at Dolma Ling Nunnery and Institute. There are nuns who are fragile and ill who need your help.

TEMPLE ROOF REPAIR: The temple roof at Shugsep is leaking, causing great discomfort and concern among the 115 Tibetan Buddhist nuns there. Please help the nuns repair it.

LONG-TERM STABILITY FUND: Build a strong and stable future for Tibetan nuns living in exile in northern India. No matter what the future of Tibet holds, you can help these dedicated and courageous women to preserve their culture and spiritual traditions.

HIGHER STUDIES FOR NUNS: Please help provide crucial, long-term support for Tibetan Buddhist nuns who wish to pursue higher studies and become teachers and leaders.

TEACHERS' SALARIES: We need help to fund teachers' salaries at various Tibetan Buddhist nunneries in India. The annual cost of one teacher's salary ranges from \$1,500 to \$5,000, depending on the location of the nunnery and the skills of the teacher.



EXERCISE EQUIPMENT FOR HEALTHY NUNS: Please help fund exercise equipment for the over 400 Tibetan Buddhist nuns at two nunneries in India so that they can be healthy and strong.

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

MONTHLY GIFTS: A little goes a long way! Become a monthly supporter at any amount you choose and provide the essentials of life such as food, shelter, and education to the nuns.

AREA OF GREATEST NEED: Enable us to help the nuns with any urgent needs by donating to the Area of Greatest Need.



Tibetan Nuns Project

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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