



GATSAL

Issue 19

Newsletter of the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery

January 2007

Dear Friends,

During July and August the nuns were in their annual two month silent retreat. The junior nuns performed 110,000 prostrations and recited the 100 syllable Vajrasattva purification mantra. At the same time the senior nuns practised the Buddha Akshobhya ritual and meditation taught to them by Popa Rinpoche from Tashi Jong. When the retreat ended the ritual teacher, Gen Jinpa, together with the senior nuns, came to perform the outdoor Fire Puja to mark the completion of the retreat.



After this the nuns celebrated with a picnic and His Eminence Dorzong Rinpoche came to the Nunnery and gave a talk to the nuns on shamatha or calm abiding meditation. We are always so grateful to the Rinpoches for their kindness in guiding and assisting our nuns.

In September 2006 we accepted another 18 young women, some of them newcomers from Tibet and others from the Himalayan valleys of Kinnaur, Ladakh and Spiti. For the first time we have nuns from Bhutan and a nun from Zangskar. This year most of these newcomers are already nuns but some were lay girls and received primary ordination from His Eminence Khamtrul Rinpoche. So now we have 52 nuns and have moved into the second wing of the dormitories.



For the 6 weeks between the start of the new term and leaving on pilgrimage, the senior nuns had intensive training in ritual, tormas making and the playing of ritual instruments with particular emphasis on mastering the Chöd ritual. We are extremely grateful to Gen Jinpa and Gen Sonam Tenzin for teaching the nuns during this time and to Khampagar Monastery for allowing these senior monks to come to us on such a regular basis.

In September I travelled with Paula Sharp to Israel for three weeks to give a series of retreats. Of course Israel is such a tense and troubled land so it is no wonder that the message of the Dharma and the peace and insight of meditation are welcomed. I gave some retreats and was cared for by such kind and goodhearted people. Although travelling and giving talks is sometimes quite tiring, one is rewarded by the sincere interest that people have in practising the Dharma and by the many lovely people that it is my good fortune to meet.




12th November was Lha-bab Du-chen which commemorates the day when Lord Buddha returned from heaven after teaching the Dharma to his Mother. The Nunnery was decorated with coloured lights and candles looking like a Pureland. In the evening the nuns performed a puja to the Buddha and the 16 Arhats during which 3 nuns delivered discourses which they had each composed and memorised. There was then a lively demonstration of debate which caused much interest. We were happy to have our generous Malaysian friends Li Lian and her sister Li Li in attendance.



On the 17th November the senior class left for a month's pilgrimage of the various Buddhist sacred places in India such as Bodhi Gaya and Sarnath etc. Since many of them had never ridden in a train before this is an adventure for them as well as a chance to accumulate good karma and pray for the world. They were accompanied by Gen Tsering, a senior nun from HH Penor Rinpoche's Nunnery who is teaching Tibetan to the new nuns, and Outi Kourula, one of the volunteer English teachers.

So another year draws to a close and we are happy to see further progress with the nuns' training program and with the construction work. We remain always deeply grateful and appreciative of the kindness of our many well-wishers whose support makes Dongyu Gatsal Ling a reality.

With all good wishes,

 (Tenzin Palmo)

News from the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nuns

Health and Well Being at DGL: Refining the Programme

This year, more than ever, we are prepared to meet the individual health needs of every Nun at DGL. Having recently welcomed 20 new enthusiastic novices into our community, with earnest dedication to their health and well being, we assume this on-going responsibility to assure clear minds and strong Dharma practice. Tenzin Namtrul - our English teacher - has completed a comprehensive survey of the health issues affecting the Nuns. Because many of them come from rural areas without access to consistent healthcare, this survey allows us to track their health at intake and throughout the year. In these remote areas of India and Tibet, proper dental and eye care are unavailable, and good clinical evaluations and diagnosis - from minor viral to serious bacterial ailments or specific disease and gynaecological issues - are rare. We now have a plan for assisting the Nuns with health problems to get the help they need.



With 52 Nuns in residence – representing three separate groups, (senior, middle, and junior), one Nun from each group will be assigned the role of Health Companion. Tenzin Namtrul will head up this effort. Any Nun requiring treatment by a dentist, optometrist, hospital or local clinic will be accompanied by one of the assigned 'companions', namely Lobsang Wangmo, Tsewang Chodron and Jangsem Dolma.

The near-by Ayurvedic Hospital is equipped to handle acute conditions, and determine whether an ailment is chronic, thereby requiring further evaluation and treatment. The hospital also has access to allopathic medicines and homeopathic remedies. We have considerable confidence in a local Tibetan nurse, Jampa, who is on staff. Jampa was a nurse/trainer for the Tibetan Children's Village throughout India and speaks fluent Tibetan, English and Hindi. She trains the Nuns in hygiene, first aid, and how to eat sensibly to prevent stomach upsets.

We are pleased to report that during the last two years, the local Indian Rotary Association has provided free-of-charge eye examinations for the Nuns, and due to the generosity of a donor, DGL is able to pay the cost of basic frames and lenses through its Health Fund. As a result, our young women are able to read texts without strain many for the first time.



Our Retreat

We started retreat on 16th July 2006. We had to do hundred words of mantra and prostrations. This time we are new comers. We didn't know how to prostrate and what things we needed in the prostrations but we didn't have many problems, because Khenpo and senior nuns helped us as much as they can. First we started prostrations in the evening of July 16th at 7 pm. That evening we did a few prostrations. We have divided into four periods of time. In the morning we got up at 4.30 am. At 5 o'clock we started our first period. Then we did our written work. We had finished our last period at 9.30 pm. During our retreat we kept silent and we didn't have to cook. We had a cook from Tashi Jong.

First we've had a big problem prostrating but after one week, it didn't feel difficult to prostrate. The majority of the nuns finished their prostration in one month. Some of the nuns needed forty days for prostrations.

After one month we started hundred words of Mantras. When we have got free time we did some extra prostrations and we made Tsa Tsa. We finished our retreat on 16th October 2006 in the morning. During our retreat we hadn't cut our hair and nails. We got very long hair and long nails. It was very great opportunity for the sentient beings and to us to purify our obscurations. We were very excited with our retreat. In the future we will have a longer time for retreat.

Tsultrim Zangmo, Rinzin Choedon and Ngawang Chozom. (Middle Nuns)



News from the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nuns

PILGRIMAGE DIARIES



*I had a deep feeling
that my pilgrimage
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for the sake of all sentient beings.*

Ani Tenzin Palmo asked me last summer when I was teaching English at the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, to accompany the senior nuns on their first pilgrimage. Naturally I agreed. This past November-December we did extensive travelling on our one-month pilgrimage. We covered quite a few miles and kilometers, both by train, bus and cars, and did a lot of walking, as well as climbing. Traveling in India, and especially in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the poorest states in India, is a chapter of its own! However, it was worth the trouble, since all these Buddhist sites had a special energy about them as the Buddha Himself had been there before.

The nuns have written about the various sites in their diaries, so I will not describe them in detail. On our travels we mostly stayed at monasteries and temples on the way. After our train ride to Lucknow, our first Buddhist site was Shravasti and from there we continued to Lumbini, Nepal where the Buddha was born. Veluvana-Bamboo Grove was the first piece of land owned by the Sangha and it was given to the Buddha by King Bimbisara. It was very pleasant and peaceful there, and the meditation place He liked the best.

After 14 days of travelling with our drivers we arrived in Bodhgaya and waved goodbye to them. Bodhgaya is the place where the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree. There was a very special, vibrating and powerful energy around the Mahabodhi Temple built on that particular location. Buddhists from all over the world come to this holy place for pilgrimage. There were old, recently arrived Tibetans and children doing full-length prostrations around the site at all hours. Their humbleness and dedication cannot leave anybody untouched. Many people were doing their 100,000 prostrations around the Temple area.

In Sarnath we met Khenpo Wangchuk, an uncle of a nun at the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery. He is a professor at a Tibetan University for Higher Studies. He showed us around the campus and later took us very kindly to Varanasi to see the River Ganga. We took a boat to the main ghat where they cremate corpses 24 hrs a day. We saw how they dipped a body into the holy water before cremation. Wood was stacked everywhere for the pyres. At the next ghat people were brushing their teeth, bathing, washing their laundry, having picnics.

From Varanasi we traveled 30 hrs on a train to Pathankot and drove back to the Nunnery. And we were happy to be back. We learnt a lot, not only about Buddhist sites but from each other as well. We are all very grateful for having been able to participate in this wonderful pilgrimage. We were blessed in many ways. I wish many of you would have an opportunity to do the same in the future.

Outi Korula



Entrance to Temple, Bodhgaya

News from the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nuns



PILGRIMAGE DIARIES



Outside Thrangu Rinpoche Monastery

We spent two days in Shravasti. We stayed there at a Korean Temple. It was very nice and extraordinarily clean. There was plenty of water, both hot and cold for washing and drinking. We cooked dinner and breakfast ourselves.

In the morning we went to Jetavana Park to visit this holy place. There were many things that have happened in this garden. We were very surprised to see that place. It was very special for us because we saw it for the first time. Outi and a monk explained to us about this holy place.

There is a Bodhi Tree there. Ananda had requested the Buddha for it to be planted there. The Buddha stayed in this park the third rainy season after His enlightenment. We visited His throne which was made of brick and stone. We did Puja in front of His old throne. We also visited many ruins.

We saw Angulimala's Temple there, too. He became Buddha's disciple in this area. Buddha showed several miracles during seven days in this garden. We visited the place where the Buddha went to heaven to teach His mother.

We were very lucky to get a chance to go on a pilgrimage. Otherwise it is difficult to go alone. We spent one or two days at every holy place where we went. It was just wonderful because we took our time and saw everything properly. Some kind people sponsored for us to go on this pilgrimage. That's why we got this chance to go. We did dedications for them.

Rinchen Dolma and Kalden Chosto

After Kushinagar we went on pilgrimage to Vaishali which was the place where the monkeys offered honey to the Buddha. We needed to get tickets to get inside.

We saw a huge Ashokan Pillar there and a beautiful garden. There was a big stupa and many small stupas. There was the pond that was dug by the monkeys. We did circumambulations and some prayers there. Outi took some photos of us near the pond. It was very nice and we liked it very much. We also saw a Shanti Stupa at Vaishali. It was a big and nice stupa. It has statues on four sides of the stupa depicting the life of the Buddha. Afterwards we had tea nearby the stupa.

Then we went to see Nalanda (literally "the giver of the lotus") was a great Buddhist center of learning from 427 CE to 1197) It was a huge university. It was very nice and beautiful. We had a guide who explained how the Buddhist monks studied and how they cooked. We arrived there late and couldn't see all around Nalanda. We saw the kitchen and the main temple of Nalanda and other ruins. We liked it very much.

Tsultrim Palmo and Tenzin Desel



On 20th of November we arrived at Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha. It felt great at Lumbini. We visited His exact birthplace. Immediately after His birth, Buddha took seven steps. We could see His steps there. One of them was inside the Mayadevi Temple and six of them were outside.

We also saw the bathing place of the Buddha and His mother. We visited many temples there: Karmapa's Temple, Ladakhi Temple, Sakya, Korean, Taiwanese and Chinese Temples. The Ladakhi Temple was especially great because there are images in the circumambulation area displaying the twelve deeds of the Buddha's life.

We stayed in Lumbini for three days at Gotami Nuns' Temple. They lent us a gas stove and utensils. We cooked nice food there. On the 2nd day we were invited for lunch at the Korean Temple. There were many other Sanghas and lay people as well. There was a nice arrangement for Sanghas in a big hall.

We performed Pujas on the first and third day. We circumambulated the Buddha's birthplace every morning and evening for the three days.

We had a great time!

Dolkar Palmo and Dekyi Chotso

News from the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nuns

PILGRIMAGE DIARIES

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After a while we realized
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We stayed at a Chinese Temple the first two days and next two days at a Burmese Temple in Kushinagar. We visited the holy place where Lord Buddha had attained Mahaparinirvana. We did some prayers, dedications and did kora around the main temple. We also visited the Buddha's cremation site, Ramabhar Stupa and a river named Hiranyawati where Lord Buddha's body was washed before the cremation. The river was dirty because there was no one to take care of it. The people who were in charge of the Mahaparinirvana Temple were monks and lay people from Kushinagar. There was only one small Tibetan Monastery called Namgyal Datsang there. We visited a place where Lord Buddha drank His last sip of water.

When we first saw the holy body of Lord Buddha lying down at the Mahaparinirvana Temple, we felt very sad and tears fell down from our eyes. At that very moment we couldn't pray or dedicate anything. After a while we realized about the impermanence of this life. We know that there are very few people who realize impermanence. We think we got this precious human body from the merits and virtues accumulated in our previous life. So, we as human beings have a chance and right to realize impermanence and do our best for our next life.

Yonten Lhamo and Kunzang Chodron



Flower Offerings , Bodhgaya



Dharmarajika Stupa

We arrived in Rajgir at 6 pm and stayed at a Burmese Temple. We went out for dinner in a restaurant. Next morning we went to see Vishva Shanti Stupa. After that we visited Gridhakuta Hill from where the Buddha had set forth the Second Turning of the Wheel. We performed a big Puja. There are two caves there. One is Shariputra's and another one is Anathapindika's. We came down by foot. It took us a whole day. One of the famous places we saw there was Bimbisara's Jail and a park which Bimbisara had offered to the Buddha after His enlightenment.

Next morning we went to see the hot water springs and Buddha's meditation place, Pippala Watchtower where He used to meditate after lunch. From there we climbed up to Saptarni Caves. Buddha's jealous cousin Devadatta tried many times to harm and kill the Buddha in Rajgir. There we saw many things.
Drimay Palmo and Lobsang Wangmo

News from the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nuns

PILGRIMAGE DIARIES



Travelling in the train was a different experience. It was my first time in train. I was so happy to see some men serving all the foods, tea, and coffee and so forth. The train has toilets and sleeping seats. I'm thankful to have this opportunity with the grace of the Three Jewels and our kind sponsors. I had a deep feeling that my pilgrimage shouldn't be just the sight seeing but for the sake of all sentient beings.

The first morning I visited the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya and saw the statue of Lord Buddha, I wished all the sentient beings had this same opportunity. I realized the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death when I saw the Lord Buddha Statue. I thought that until I become tired I prostrate and circumambulate to purify my sins. All the people do offerings to the Three Jewels and give alms to the beggars to purify their sins and accumulate merit. The accumulation of virtue was like the fall of rain. The blessings of the Three Jewels. There were monks, nuns, boys, girls, so many people. I prayed that the enlightened activity of all lamas and teachings would flourish. May the teachings of the Buddha rise like the sun. May all sentient beings be happy and quickly achieve the ultimate state of Buddhahood.
Thupten Lhamo

We had a pilgrimage for one month. We went to see many Buddha's holy places. We liked Sarnath the most which was our last pilgrimage site.

The first day we bought tickets and went inside the holy grounds. We went to see the place where the Buddha had come to give His first teaching to His five disciples. We did koras around the Dhamekh Stupa. There was also a very nice Deer Park with deer inside. We bought some food and fed them. There was another park with peacocks and crocodiles and other animals. That evening we met Khenpo Wangchuk. He is a very kind khenpo. We went inside the ruins of Dharmarajika Stupa and he explained many things to us nicely.

The second day we went to see the Ganga in Varanasi with Khenpo Wangchuk. People were very busy there. They were washing their clothes and bathing their bodies. We all went on boat on the Ganga. We had Masala Dosas and Lassi. Many of us had never had it before. Khenpo Wangchuk paid for our lunch. Then we came back into our rooms and had a little rest.

The third day we did an Offering Puja in front of the Dharmarajika Stupa. We prayed for all sentient beings to have a long life and be peaceful in their lives. We were very lucky to see H.H the Gyalwang Karmapa in Sarnath. He gave us blessed seeds and a photo of White Tara. After lunch we went to see the Archaeological Museum. There we saw many old antique statues from the time when Muslims had destroyed the old precious Buddhist temples and statues in Sarnath. There were also many Hindu statues. It was very pleasurable to visit this holy place called Sarnath.

JigmeyChodron, Wangchuk Chodron and Yangchan Dolyang



At the Deer Park, Sarnath

News on Building Progress at DGL



It is November 2006, and I'm back at DGL for the second time this year. As always, it is a joy to be here with Tenzin Palmo, the nuns, and staff. With snow-capped peaks in the distance, the site looks particularly beautiful.

Work on the site is progressing well. The end of 2006 will finish all electrical work on the main buildings. Our Delhi-based architect, Savinder Anand, has finalized the drawings for the clinic, so work will begin soon. Manu, our invaluable Site Manager, continues to oversee the project, and we are blessed to have the same reliable contractors for the past two years.

Retreat Centre

The sloping slate roofs are finished on both short and long-term wings of the Retreat Centre. Our contractor predicts that the building will be finished mid-2007 at which time we will prepare the Centre for the senior nuns as they begin taking longer retreats. Each wing has a central courtyard with a small temple surrounded by private rooms with good light and ventilation

Study Center

It is exciting to see the steel frame of this two-story building going up. Dedicated to study the Centre includes a puja (prayer) hall, library, classrooms, and a courtyard for debating practice. We expect the building to be completed in 2007



Signs of Progress

Manu and the carpenters have ordered the wood for construction of the furniture for Retreat and Study Centres as it must be 'seasoned' for at least six months before use.

Since the Nunnery site slopes steeply, the boundary and retaining walls are constructed of large stones embedded with cement. A strong wall of similar construction was recently built at the low-end of the site by the stream, which borders the nuns' dormitories, and will accommodate a future garden. We have found a good khabari (re-cycling man) to come regularly which eliminates our having to travel to Dharmasala for disposal.

Our progress is heartening, and I look forward with great anticipation to my next visit in late-March 2007.

Monica Joyce



Ushinsha Vijaya Central Female Statue in the Stupa

Our modest sized Stupa is now nearing completion. The project has been overseen throughout by Gen Lodro who is an expert in such matters. He also bought on our behalf a lovely statue of the female buddha Ushnisha Vijaya to be placed in the front window of the stupa. The inner contents such as relics, texts and tsa-tsas have already been placed inside the 'vase' part of the stupa, an exercise which took the nuns and the Gen Lodro many hours. The outer form has already been constructed. Now we await the gilding of the copper 'sun & moon' which rests on top of the conical spire and the decorated surrounding frame of the small shrine inserted into the front of the stupa in Tibetan fashion. We will invite His Eminence Khamtrul Rinpoche to consecrate the Stupa when the senior nuns have returned from their pilgrimage.



The Temple Building Campaign



The Temple is the heart beating at the centre of any Buddhist monastery. We are planning a modest-sized structure which will be in the traditional Tibetan style, with enough space to hold about 150 people. The upper floor will contain rooms for visiting Lamas to stay on occasion. Inside the Temple the main statues will be Shakyamuni Buddha, flanked by Padma Sambhava and Arya Tara. There will also be images of other buddhas and bodhisattvas as appropriate. These statues will be made by highly skilled Bhutanese artists working in clay. A complete collection of the sutras (Kangyur) and commentaries (Tengyur) will be included to represent the Jewel of the Dharma. There will be thrones for the Rinpoches and cushioned benches and low tables for the nuns. We plan to start the building of the Temple as soon as the study and retreat centres are finished in mid 2007. Although we do not have enough funds yet to complete this sacred task, we are confident that such an important work will surely happen. Any contribution towards the building of this Temple, towards the making of the statues or the furnishings and decoration would be both a highly meritorious action and deeply appreciated. If you wish to make a donation for the Temple please specify that this is your intention.

How to Support the Nuns at DGL

Your generous contributions over the last six years have helped 52 young women achieve their spiritual potential exemplary of the precious Drukpa Kagyu tradition. With completion of the nuns' living quarters, office and staff buildings and basic infrastructure, our goals and aspirations are being realized – as practice and study continues and preparations for the next group of novices begins. Funds permitting, we look forward to completion of the nuns' study and retreat centers this year; and in the not too distant future, a traditional Temple, a clinic and accommodations for guests.

On-going, high-quality training for female meditation teachers – including practical skills that allow them to manage their Dharma-activities is vital in today's world: **Your support remains essential** to help DGL achieve this most cherished goal.

Meanwhile, our safe and secure **on-line donation and purchase system** is a convenient way to make a contribution at this time. Please visit our websites www.tenzinpalmo.com or www.gatsal.org and click on "**How to Contact Us/How to Donate**".

Checks may be written and payable to Dongyu Gatsal Ling Trust. Please mail to:

**Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery
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P.O. Padhiakhar, Via Taragarh
District Kangra, H.P. 176081
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**For more information, please email Yeshe at the DGL office at dgl.nunnery@yahoo.com.
Correspondence for Venerable Tenzin Palmo is received at the same email address.**

Dongyu Gatsal Ling Trust is registered in India as a charitable organization designated for the support of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery and its activities



To receive "GATSAL" please send us your email address!