Once more it is time to put out another edition of our Gatsal Newsletter and to let you know what is happening at Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery.

At the time of writing in late July most of our nuns are engaged in their annual 2 month retreat. The nuns are sorted into groups with different practices and during this time they maintain the rule of noble silence apart from chanting. However the newcomers, who do not yet know sufficient Tibetan, are housed in the study centre where they do not disturb the retreatants and can continue with their study of Tibetan reading, writing and grammar.

It has always been my wish that new nuns joining the nunnery should have finished their schooling. This ensures that they have a basic education and an aptitude for study. This year however we have been approached by quite a few younger girls who are very keen to become nuns. I accepted the first of these quite reluctantly but they have fitted in and done so well with their studies that we have been encouraged to accept other younger girls, having first carefully checked their motivation for becoming nuns. Khenpo Ngawang and the English teacher Charanjit Singh have been most encouraging and said that without exception these young nuns are excelling themselves in their studies, so we have great hopes that they will be able to take on more and more responsibility as they get older.

Recently His Eminence Dorzong Rinpoche, aided by Khenpo Losal, Popa Rinpoche and 7 senior monks from the Khampagar Monastery in Tashi Jong, bestowed the Getsulma or novice ordination on 12 of our nuns. This is always a joyful occasion and the nuns look resplendent in their yellow dharma robes.

Khenpo Ngawang, the nuns’ philosophy teacher, has taken his 2 month holiday while the nuns are in retreat. He is spending this time in meditation with the Togdens at the Yamantaka temple in Tashi Jong. Our Bhutanese Genla has also taken two months holiday and we are very fortunate to have a replacement nun teacher from the Dolma Ling Nunnery to teach the young nuns Tibetan reading, writing and grammar during the monsoon retreat.

Last February I attended the Annual Drukpa Council [ADC] held by His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa at the Druk Amitabha Mountain Nunnery situated on a hill behind the great Swyambhunath Stupa in Nepal. There were more than 1000 people in attendance including monks and lay people from Bhutan and many people from the regions of Ladakh, Lahaul and Kinnaur in their traditional dress. It was also an opportunity for many Rinposhes and Khenpos of the lineage to gather and meet for discussions along with delivering public teachings.

During May and June I was in Europe giving Dharma talks and interviews and meeting with many wonderful people. I was accompanied throughout by my friend the nun Tenzin Dolma who is fluent in several European languages and is the embodiment of kindness and generosity. Being Swiss she is also highly organised! During this tour we were invited to speak at several Drukpa Kagyu centres and it was a pleasure to see the Dharma flourishing in Europe.

Since this was my last extended teaching tour, I would like to say thank you again to all tour coordinators and their assistants and to everyone who
Dear friends, continued

contributed by translating, giving us accommodation, meals, transport etc. throughout all my past tours. Everywhere people have been so kind and I am deeply grateful to all the many people involved in these tours. I would also like to thank all those who have donated funding or items to the nunnery, and those who have written to the office offering their help translating and transcribing Newsletters and Teachings. The support we have received for the nunnery has been most gratifying.

The temple continues to rise and our team of young Nepali craftsmen are busy on the cement embellishments for the friezes and columns. At present they are at work on the dragons that coil around the pillars - facing outwards to invoke peace and ward off obstacles - in accordance with our tradition. This nunnery belongs to the Drukpa Kagyu lineage and the word “Druk” means dragon. Meanwhile in the shrine room of the Study Centre a team of young artists from Tashi Jong are painting the carved wooden shrine in commendably subdued colours (by Tibetan standards).

The statues for the Study and the Retreat Centres have been beautifully gilded and painted and look both resplendent and refined. Gen Lodro has been closely involved in filling the statues with /zung/ (rolls of printed mantras) and precious substances. This is a highly skilled job and we are deeply grateful to Lama Lodro for his continued assistance with these arcane technical matters.

As I write the monsoon rains are coming down and it is the season for magnificent storms where thunder and lightning bounce off the mountains for hours at a time. (Then of course we have the inevitable power and internet failures!!) It is a great relief that the dry river beds are now full of water and that the countryside is lush and green again. The local farmers are planting the rice crops that will sustain their families for the coming year.

Lama Lodro has been associated with the DGL Nunnery from the very beginning. In those days he taught Tibetan writing to our first batch of nuns at Tashi Jong. He is a monk of many practical accomplishments including painting, filling statues and stupas. He has an extremely good eye for detail and on many occasions has pointed out seemingly small discrepancies which have been a great help.

When the statues were being filled Lama Lodro was at the Nunnery for many consecutive days, conducting Pujas as the mantras were placed inside the statues. It is important to have a highly trained monk of pure discipline and devotion to carry out these duties. Lama Lodro has been an invaluable and reliable help to us throughout the years and he seems to very much enjoy helping us. The nuns enjoy working with him as he is always smiling and laughing

Lama Sonam Lodro was born on the 10 September 1980 and received his initial monastic ordination in the presence of the great Khenpo Lekshey at Nubgon Monastery, which is a branch-monastery of Khampagar, in East Tibet. He continued studying at the monastery for 15 years during which he undertook the basic monastic education including the study of Buddhist philosophy under the direction of Ratrul Rinpoche, Khenpo Talo, and other scholars.

On leaving Tibet Lama Lodro came under the guidance of His Eminence Dorzong Rinpoche from whom he received the novice ordination as well as much teaching. Lama Lodro received his Bhikshu (full ordination) vows from His Holiness Penor Rinpoche.

In recent times, Lama Lodro worked as Tibetan language teacher at the Young Monks School of the Khampagar Monastery in Tashi Jong and of course also taught our nuns of the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery. Lama Lodro also played a leading role in the construction of the Stupa at the DGL Nunnery and is now the advisor guiding the decoration of our main Temple and the puja hall of the Study Centre.

Lama Sonam Lodro
An Appreciation

Lama Sonam Lodro

Tenzin Palmo
To be happy and survive we rely on the help of each other. From the moment we were born our mother fed us. Then through the kindness of others we gained the skills to live in a community. Everything that you and I have done until now has required the support of others. Just like a small tree needs the elements to grow strong we cannot do anything alone. We cannot clap with just one hand!

The world is made of people from different religions and culture. In order to live together happily it is important that we learn to respect each other. We do this by developing patience, tolerance and loving kindness. When we don’t support each other, we throw our power away. One stick alone is easy to break, but a group of sticks are very strong. Our nunneries are what we create them to be, every act of kindness however large or small has an impact on us all. We each have something to offer. A small smile, being a good listener, helping in practical ways or using our thinking skills help to create a place of peace and harmony.

At Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery I have been helping the retreat nuns. They rely on me and others to bring food, gas, clothing, medicine and things for their pujas. Being able to help them gives me satisfaction and make me feel very happy.

Studying the Dharma is something very difficult. By taking the opportunity to help each other we can build each others self esteem and confidence.

I feel very privileged to live in a Nunnery where I can study and practice the Dharma. If we help and support each other we can make the best of this special opportunity. It is only in giving that we receive and by loving that we are loved.
It has been my great good fortune to become associated with DGL Nunnery, first as a trustee, and then as the nuns’ English teacher. In fact my connection with the founder of the Nunnery goes back to the late sixties when Jetsunma, then Anila Tenzin Palmo was living in the nearby village of Andretta. She appeared to be a motivated and dedicated practitioner of the Dharma. She was already doing her practice, living in a solitary cottage on the top of a high hill above the village, surrounded by deep forest.

She would come down to ‘Mirage’, owned by the family of Professor Jai Dayal, which was where her Dharma sisters Ani Lodro, Ani Jinba and Ani Pema were living. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo would come to this house to collect her supplies of food and other supplies.

It was during these visits that I happened to meet her and come to know about her zeal and compassion for understanding the Buddha Dharma and that she practiced it in letter and in spirit. She seemed even then to incorporate it’s tenets in her own life most religiously and sincerely. Even the tiniest and most insignificant creature, (such as a mosquito) was dearer to her than any other living being.

Once when I visited her at the ‘Mirage’ in the middle of the monsoon, the place was very damp and full of weeds and bushes. It was infested with swarms of mosquitoes. I was moved to see her catching them when they were sitting on her bare arms and feet, and carefully taking them out of the room. Such was her love and concern for these tiny blood sucking creatures.

She has carried the same kind of love and developed it further over the years. She always felt excited about women’s issues, in particular their impoverishment and their hopeless state of existence, especially in this part of the world and particularly the women in Buddhist nunneries.

A great manifestation of her unbounded love can be seen today in the form of DGL Nunnery near Tashi Jong Monastery in northern India. The Nunnery has over 60 nuns at the moment. It really is a tribute to her untiring efforts and humility to see that she has created the best kind of infrastructure available for the nuns, who mostly come from very humble backgrounds.

She is always concerned about the various incomplete tasks and upkeep of the Nunnery. She works hard to achieve the best available academic and religious education, and provides them with ideal living conditions. Jetsunma is always very busy working towards these ends. She is indeed a great source of inspiration to us.

I am very moved when I see so many people coming to the Nunnery. They are Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, and Jews and are from all kinds of nationalities. Jetsunma welcomes them all with open arms. She looks so pleased to see everybody who comes to the Nunnery. She loves to discuss various problems and issues of common interest with them. She has developed a very cosmopolitan culture of people interested in supporting the Nunnery. She has not shut herself in a cocoon but freely mixes with one and all.

In my opinion this is what the world needs today. We should not be running in different directions dictated by our own inflated egos. Rather, we should come together to share each others viewpoints. A true religion unites people rather than separating them. This is the very essence of religion and has been understood so well by Jetsunma. She follows this philosophy in letter and in spirit.

Jetsunma treats everyone equally and would not like to have special food for herself. She wants to share whatever is in the kitchen. The woman who cooks for her always eats her food at the dining table alongside Jetsunma.

Today, everybody seems to be busy getting more and more material goods for himself, there is a mad race going on to fill ones own coffers by throwing consideration to the wind, endangering life and the environment. The result of this mad race is there for all of us to see in most countries in the world. It fills my mind with great joy to see Jetsunma doing everything for others and not for herself.

Compared to Jetsunma, my own contribution at the Nunnery is very little and not of much significance. I am reminded of a story about a small sparrow in a certain forest. Someone had set the forest on fire. The little sparrow on seeing this terrible sight tried to extend a helping hand to those who were trying to put the fire out. She would go to a river flowing nearby and collect a few drops of water in her small beak, and pour them down on the rising flames. Someone in the multitude observed the sparrow doing this and could not resist asking her, 'Do you think you can even hope to extinguish this forest fire in this way?' The sparrow very humbly replied 'I know I cannot, tiny as I am, but tomorrow when history is written my name will be included in the list of those who tried to put out the fire, and not in the list of those who started the fire, or those who stood by and did nothing.'
The work on the temple has continued throughout the monsoon season and each week we see advancements and changes. Although we have kept it modest in size it is very traditional in design. It will eventually seat 150 nuns in rows. We have received a very generous offering for the main throne and table. These will be of carved wood.

There are beautifully carved dragons coiling around the four internal pillars. There will be three main statues, Shakyamuni Buddha flanked by Green Tara and Akshobhya Buddha. We plan to have some frescoes of particular relevance to women, such as The 21 Taras, Machig Labdron etc.

We have also commissioned stained glass window panels which will be made by a Canadian Nun who specializes in creating beautiful stained glass images. These will be of Tara and Prajnaparamita.

We hope that the work on the temple will be completed within the next year.
My name is Lhamo Yangzom.

I am twenty two years old. My mother is no longer in this world, but I have our father and four brothers. They are all still in Tibet. Two of my brothers are monks and the other two are married. They are nomad farmers in Tibet. My father works in the field.

Our families are Khampas and our home is in Markham. Since there was no school for girls like me in Tibet I spent my time looking after the home and feeding the animals like cow and yaks.

I decided that my life would be more valuable as a nun and was ordained in Tibet by a visiting Rinpoche. Soon after, in 2006, I was given the chance to come to India, where I hoped I would have the chance to see the Dalai Lama and to study.

There were 80 people in our group. It was in January or February and the weather was icy cold. Due to Chinese security guards, we could not go by vehicle. So, we walked to India and there were many hardships. We had to walk at night to avoid being seen and we hid in caves during the day.

We would take it in turns going ahead of the group looking for the path, in case there were Chinese soldiers waiting. One day the Chinese caught the boy who was walking ahead. We heard this happening and hide. We were very frightened and when it was safe we turned back and went back to Tibet. We don’t know what happened to the boy – it could have been any of us.

We started again after 1 month and finally got to Nepal after 23 days. We stayed there for 2 months while our papers were processed, then we were taken by bus to Delhi. After a while we were put on another bus and taken to Dharamsala. I was taken to the newcomer’s school.

I soon heard about DGL nunnery through friends. I asked if I could join. I liked it because it is a very quiet peaceful place and the facility for study is good. I have a sponsor and am so grateful to my sponsors to give me this opportunity to spend my life in study and prayer and living for the benefit of all sentient beings.

For the last few months I have been sick with TB and a liver abscess. I had to stay in my room alone so that others did not get sick. At first I felt so sad to be alone without any friends and wondered why I am not like others. I spent this time reading and praying. I thought that since everything is impermanent and has an end I would overcome this sadness one day. The doctors have now told me my health is good and I can once again mix with the other nuns.

I am very grateful to Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo for this opportunity. I can now speak and write a little English. I want to be able to use my life as a nun to help others, maybe one day as a teacher.

Live and Let Live

by Drimay Palmo

Live and let live should be the motto of each one of us. Others will let us live only if we let them live. We can’t hope to live in peace if we disturb the peace of others. All great religions of the world give the highest importance to the love of fellow beings. Love of one’s own country, religion or community does not mean that we should run down others.

Peaceful existence should be the goal of every individual, community and nation. Only such thinking can save mankind from impending disaster. We nuns are living in a community founded by Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo. She always teaches these noble things to us. Currently she is teaching about six perfections. The six perfections are generosity, morality, Patience, Joyous effort, concentration and wisdom. We nuns are always trying to incorporate these values in our day-to-day life to contribute a bit for restoring peace and happiness in the world.
Om Tara. What a privilege it is to know Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo. And what could be more joyful than being part of her effort to raise awareness for the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Endowment Fund?

I met Jetsunma on her first New York City teaching tour in 2002, at the Shambhala Meditation Center where Deborah Garrett was then its executive director. So I feel it is especially auspicious that seven years later Deborah and I are collaborating as directors of development for the newly created DGL Endowment Fund, to help achieve the nunnery’s goal of raising two million US dollars to ensure the long-term education and well-being of our DGL nuns and nunnery. With the support of Jetsunma, Monica Joyce, Eliz Dowling, and many others, Deborah and I look forward to offering many opportunities to the supporters of Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo and Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery to help build this endowment so that the nunnery can continue to thrive and accomplish its purpose.

My inspiration became even stronger earlier this year when I visited the nunnery for the first time and fully grasped the scope of Jetsunma’s undertaking. I was totally taken by the heartfelt wisdom embedded in the facilities and programming to encourage these young women to be powerful, loving representatives of the Dharma. The nuns have already begun to exercise their leadership outside the nunnery. At a regional dharma conference earlier this year, they spoke to their sisters from other nunneries on developing confidence. So much has been accomplished in such a short period of time, and this is just the beginning.

As many of you know, Jetsunma is planning to lead a pilgrimage to the “cave in the snow” in the autumn of 2010 to raise funds for the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Endowment Fund. If you are interested in participating in the pilgrimage, please email Deborah and me at pilgrimage@gatsal.org, and Lesley Kovitz, our tour coordinator, will be in touch with you. And of course, email us at endowment@gatsal.org for any questions about the DGL Endowment Fund.

What an honor to support Jetsunma’s mission to nurture a new generation of Tibetan Buddhist nuns from the Himalayan regions to realize their spiritual and intellectual potential. Needless to say, this deep wish and expression of Tara, the divine feminine, extends to all of us.

May it be so.
Evan Zazula
Welcome & Goodbye

The DGL Nunnery team is delighted to welcome Evan Zazula and Deborah Garrett. Evan and Deborah both live in New York and are helping us to raise money for the Endowment Fund. This fund is very important for the future of the Nunnery, since nowadays monastic institutions are no longer funded by the nuns’ own families and the surrounding villages.

I have known Evan for several years (see Evan’s article) and know him to be a warm hearted and intelligent man with deep devotion to the Dharma.

Deborah Garrett is also a very good-hearted and sincere Dharma practitioner. She was Executive Director of the Shambhala Meditation Center of New York from 2002 to 2005. Today she devotes her time to practice and volunteer work. She is vice chair of the Shambhala Trust and on the board of The Mountain Institute, an international organization focused on cultural preservation, economic development and environmental conservation in the Himalayas.

Tenzin Lhakpa has joined us to replace Yeshi Lhamo. She is another bright and highly qualified young woman from Tashi Jong Monastery - which seems to have an almost unlimited supply of talent!!!

We are very happy to have Lhakpa with us since the work of accountant requires someone of integrity with a clear mind, and who is of course good at figures.

First we said farewell to our talented accountant/secretary Yeshi Lhamo who has been with us for 3 years and was very competent in dealing with our quite complicated financial affairs. Yeshi is the daughter of the master artist in Tashi Jong and she has now moved to New York to stay with her brother.

Jude Avery worked at the Nunnery as my assistant for 2 years, dealing with arrangements of my tours and many other matters. Since she is an artist by training she was an invaluable help working with the Nunnery Webmaster Brian Sebastian on our Website design and the Gatsal Newsletters. Jude has moved on to devote the foreseeable future to spiritual development, in retreat and attending teachings.

We wish both of these lovely and talented young women happiness and success in their chosen paths.

How to Support the Nuns at DGL

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo and the nuns at Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery thank our supporters in a most heartfelt manner. Your kindness helps our Nunnery to flourish and keep the Dharma alive. Sponsoring a nun costs the equivalent of US$365 a year.

Cheques should be made payable to ‘Dongyu Gatsal Ling Trust’ and posted to:
Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery
Village Lower Mutt, P.O. Padhiarkhar, Via Taragarh
Distt. Kangra, H.P. 176081, India

Anyone wishing to make a donation to DGL Nunnery via Tenzin Palmo’s account in their own country by Swift or Telegraphic Transfer, please email Eliz Dowling for details on eliz_palmo@hotmail.com

For further information or to contact Tenzin Palmo please email DGL on dgloffice@gatsal.org

Dongyu Gatsal Ling Trust is registered in India as a charitable organization designated for the support of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery and its activities.
After they left Tibet my parents came to Phunstok Ling Colony in Orissa. This is where I was born. I was sent to learn art from painters at Mindroling Monastery at Clementown in Orissa. I enjoyed learning to paint from the masters when the old temple there was re-built. I found that this was something I could do, and enjoyed it very much. I then went to Bykaluppe to the Nyingma Monastery, Namdroling to continue my studies.

I have now been painting statues for 14 years. I like this much more than sketching or other types of painting as it is wonderful to see finished statues. I am a Buddhist and I like to make the Buddhas look beautiful.

I get the painting jobs by word of mouth. I have painted in Rewalsar, Bir and Nepal and have been to many places on the Tibet/Nepal border, painting statues in different monasteries.

When I am asked to paint the statue, I find out exactly what is wanted and then work closely with the statue makers to make sure it is right.

I hope I will be coming back to Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery to paint the temple statues once the temple is nearer completion. I have enjoyed working for the nunnery, but I enjoy my work everywhere, because I am painting the Buddhas. In between statue painting jobs, I paint thankas.
PILGRIMAGE TO THE CAVE IN THE SNOW

20th September to 7th October 2010

For further information refer to our website www.tenzinpalmo.com

Or email pilgrimage@gatsal.org for further information

BY AIRMAIL

From:
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