



GATSAL



Left, Jetsunma celebrating her 76th birthday in Sydney, Australia. Right, Jetsunma with Wangdrak Rinpoche.

Dear friends,

Here we are again at the end of yet another year. For me personally 2019 has been a quiet year with not so much travel abroad.

In April, after my long-time assistant Tsunma Aileen had returned to Australia, some nuns contacted Geshema Kunsel who had previously taught at DGL. They requested her to find a suitable assistant to replace Aileen. So Geshema Kunsel asked an American nun named Tenzin Dasel if she would be interested in undertaking the role. Fortunately Dasel was enthusiastic – and also qualified for the task as she is computer literate, well-organised - and can even drive in India! In addition she is a photographer and an experienced meditation and mindfulness teacher. So we are very grateful to the Buddha Tara (and Geshema) for supplying us with such an excellent assistant without even having to ask!

The main event on my calendar was in late June when the 16th Sakyadhita Conference was held in the

Blue Mountains north of Sydney in Australia. Over 800 women (including 600 nuns) from all Buddhist traditions joined us at the Fairmont Hotel to celebrate New Horizons in Buddhism with panel talks, workshops and meditations covering the entire spectrum of the Dharma from a feminine perspective. As usual there was an atmosphere of warmth and laughter (despite being winter in the mountains) along with an exchange of ideas and experiences. There was also a surprise 76th birthday party organised by the Vietnamese delegation! The next Sakyadhita conference will be held in Sarawak, E. Malaysia (near Borneo) in late June 2021.

After the Conference I spent 3 weeks in solitary retreat in the lovely countryside of New South Wales and then gave a talk in Sydney. From there my companion May Ling and I went to stay with long-time friend Heather who lives in Ubud. Bali is a unique small island where the main preoccupation of the inhabitants is the maintenance and offerings for their temples. Almost every house has an elaborate personal shrine, so festivals

and ceremonials can take up much of a householder's day. From Bali we returned to Singapore where I gave talks organised by the Drukpa Centre there. I returned to DGL in mid-August which is monsoon season.

The nuns by this time had finished their exams in May and gone on holiday in June. Several of them had requested to stay in retreat during this time rather than return to their homes. Others remain at the Nunnery and do side trips usually to places of pilgrimage. Some nuns visited my former cave in Lahaul.

In July the nuns undertook their annual Rains Retreat and practised together for a month while keeping Noble Silence. In August a teacher was invited to instruct the nuns in Tibetan grammar for a month. The nuns produce a magazine every year in the Tibetan language containing articles, poems and translations which they have written themselves (along with photos taken mainly by Tsunma Trinley Paltso). This magazine is distributed to other monastic centres, so the nuns want to be sure that their grammar is impeccable.

In September the new academic term began again and several new girls received primary ordination from Kyabgon Khamtrul Rinpoche. Then in October my new assistant Tenzin Dasel and I attended a meeting of the International Buddhist Council in Delhi who were presenting a festival of Art, Film and Philosophy. There were several documentaries and films of interest and I gave a talk on Creativity Beyond the Ego...(!) Meanwhile 24 of our nuns received the Getsulma or Novice ordination from Khenpo Chöying who is the Abbot of the Khampagar Monastic College in Tashi Jong.

Also in October Tsunma Dasel and I attended an International Network of Engaged Buddhists conference held at Deer Park in Bir. On the first day we had the privilege of an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama at his palace in Dharamsala. His Holiness looked very well and kindly spoke with the 170 members for over an hour in English. On the last day of the INEB Conference, four of the DGL nuns came to perform the Chöd ritual for the participants. In the afternoon we had an audience with His Eminence Tai Situ Rinpoche at his nearby monastic settlement of Sherab Ling. Many of the members of INEB are Thai monks and nuns who seemed much more relaxed outside of their own society. Later some came to visit DGL and even attended the talks I gave at Tushita.

In early November Tsunma Dasel and I went to Dharamsala where I gave a weekend commentary on the Meditation chapter in the Bodhicaryavatara [Way of a Bodhisattva]. The author Shantideva is not always easy to interpret for modern audiences, many of whom are not Buddhist. However the large audience seemed to enjoy the sessions (they returned for the second day) and as usual the devoted team running

the Tushita FPMT Centre were so hospitable and helpful.

During this time the Non-Himalayan monks and nuns were invited for lunch and a meeting to discuss the problems and challenges (with some possible solutions) facing foreigners ordained in the Tibetan tradition. About 20 nuns and monks attended – including some Thais – and we discussed the possibility of a training program for those newly ordained or considering ordination. We have now planned a one month training program at Thosamling Nunnery below Dharamsala starting in mid-November 2020, for which we will invite several eminent senior nuns and monks to act as instructors and examples.



Jetsunma teaching in South India

Lhabab Duchon which commemorates when the Buddha descended from the Trayastrimsa Heaven after teaching Dharma to his mother Mayadevi and other celestials, was celebrated as usual this year with a picnic during which the nuns in costume enacted a scene from the life of Shakyamuni, as well as presenting several comedy sketches. The younger nuns entertained us with songs. In the evening came the ritual to the Buddha and the 16 Arhats along with some vigorous displays of debating.

Later that same week we were honoured with a visit from Yonge Mingyur Rinpoche who taught the nuns on the Bardos or Intermediate States. Then he kindly visited our nuns

in long-term retreat and answered their many questions on practice. We are very grateful to Mingyur Rinpoche for continuing to make the time for visiting our nuns who really appreciate his wise and humorous instruction.

Our nuns have also been quite involved in outside meetings and events and I leave them to tell their own stories later in this issue.

In January I returned to Singapore for my annual one-week private retreat with Wangdrak Rinpoche the abbot of Gebchak Yogini Nunnery in Tibet and Tenzin Chozom. Later we went with Rinpoche on pilgrimage to Sumatra in Indonesia to visit the ruins of a large monastic complex where the great Bengali scholar Atisha Dipankara stayed for 12 years with his

teacher Serlingpa in the 10th century. It was a very inspiring journey and we appreciated the good nature and kindness of the local village people.

I also gave a talk at Phor Kark See which is the largest temple in Singapore and then continued back to India and a teaching tour in Mumbai, Poona and Bangalore. Everywhere we met with friendliness and a genuine interest in the Dharma. It was moving to meet with people so dedicated to the helping professions which they embrace with genuine compassion and caring.

Now we are approaching the Tibetan New Year in February and the nuns have made mountains of kapsi (twisted fried pastries) and cleaned every inch of the nunnery with great vigour and enthusiasm. They are a lesson in harmonious and joyful cooperation.

May the year of the Iron Mouse bring some peace and compassion into this threatened world and may the outer and inner confusion resolve into clarity.

All good wishes in the Dharma,

Tenzin Palmo



INEB with His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama

UPDATE FROM THE 19TH BIENNIAL INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF ENGAGED BUDDHIST CONFERENCE CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF INEB

The theme of the gathering was *Culture of Awakening Cultivating and Harvesting Wisdom*. It was held at Deer Park Institute in Bir, India from 22-24 of October 2019, gathering over 200 participants from 14 countries around the world to address the interconnections, complexities, contradictions and complications facing modern societies in the 21st century. Specifically, we addressed whether the universal values of peace, freedom, transparency, equality and social progress are being supported by human rights, dignity and democratic principles both within the Buddhist community and beyond.

The conference was a platform to examine closely some very specific themes that the Buddha Dharma supports, and when applied purely, might serve as catalysts for social movements. Many diverse voices highlighted the call to live by ethical and just values, naming areas of practical application in the modern world including: environmental protection, gender equality, mental health and the modern application of Dharma in daily life through ethics and non-harm of the three doors: body, speech and mind.

The day before the conference convened, over 170 attendees were blessed by an audience with His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama. As soon as He entered the room, He came directly to Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, greeting Her with a blessing on the head, saying, “Oh, good to see you, my old friend.” As Jetsunma would later recount, “We are indeed old friends, since we met in 1964!”



Tsunmas perform the Chöd ritual at INEB

Jetsunma recently agreed to become a patron of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). As such, she steers and supports INEB’s objectives to promote understanding, cooperation, and networking among global Buddhist and inter-religious social action groups. INEB serves the broader interfaith and international community by acting as an information resource and facilitating conferences,

education, and training based on Buddhist values.

On the final day of closing ceremonies, four tsunmas from Dongyu Gatsal Ling joined to offer a chant from the Chod practice which was the first time most participants had heard this and was appreciated by all.



Tsunmas love of learning is only surpassed by their love for all sentient beings

HISTORIC EVENT MONKS COME TO DGL NUNNERY TO DEBATE WITH THE TSUNMAS

Written by Tsunmas Samten Dolma, Tsewang Chodron (B), Lhachoe Wangmo

This year, during the death anniversary of the eighth Khamtrul Rinpoche, four of our tsunmas wrote an assignment on topics from the Dharma text. They had invited the monks from Khampagar Monastery to come debate against them at the nunnery. The monks accepted, and about 150 of them attended this historic event.

The tsunmas write, “It was a big challenge for us, as we were debating with the monks for the first time. But it was worth doing. While writing the assignments, we had to read lots of books, which deepened our knowledge on our chosen topics. And during question and answering sessions, many monks and nuns asked us so many questions, which made us to think logically from different angles. So, we gained lots of benefit from it.”

We think that conducting this type of program would help us to improve our studies which will be of great help

in doing our practice. And it will also help us to improve our courage to face the crowd and benefit ourselves as well as others. Moreover, these days nuns are given more

opportunity to participate in the larger form of group discussions and debate. Previously, we lacked the courage and experience and we didn’t feel bold enough to participate in it. So, we think that if we organize this type of small program at DGL we can gradually improve our courage and can grasp the opportunity to grow.

Lastly, we would like to thank Jetsunma for granting us permission to conduct the program, and Khenpo

Sonam Wangyal for organising the program with all the gen las (teachers), nuns and monks involved for making it successful. We hope that this type of program will be organized in the future too, so that many can gain benefit from it.



Khenpo and senior teachers



Bodhi CHEETA



Making Khapsi at Losar



Quiet study DGL library



Balancing act



Jetsunma and Tenzin Dasel in South India



Khapsi at Losar



Daybreak at DGL



Nuns performing play at picnic time



Morning cleanup crew



Happy to see you



2019-2020 Disciplinarian Pema Chodron



WORKING FOR DGL

After the graduation 17 of the senior nuns, Jetsunma and Committee members decided that those nuns have to do or learn how to run the nunnery. So some senior nuns are teaching the junior nuns. Tsunma Wangchuk is running the Café. Tsunma Tashi is running the Guesthouse. We two are learning the office work. When we were told that we have to do that we were not ready because our English is not enough and we don't know about the computers and accounts at all. Somehow we are learning now. We learn

some of Dolma Keither, the office manager's job but not all things. Until now we spent most of the time with Lhakpa, the accountant of the nunnery. Her job is very difficult for us to learn. She teaches us in the best way as much as she can, but sometimes it goes out of our head. Actually we don't know anything about accounts or banking work. So we think it takes lots of time for us to learn that. We are also trying our best as much as we can and hope one day we can do something for our nunnery.

Trinley Paltso and Ngawang Chozom



Ngawang Chozom



Tsunmas doing morning yoga

VOLUNTEER YOGA TEACHER

Liz Taucher

“Sometimes we have to give up control and trust that the universe will take care. Then things can start to fall into place.”

That’s what Jetsunma told me, when I came to see her only a few weeks earlier.

And oh, how right she was. Mere minutes after the meeting, her words still echoing in my mind, I ran into my dear friend Ven. Dase and things, indeed, started to fall into place. Before I knew it, I had made arrangements to return to DGL nunnery in a few days as a volunteer yoga teacher to assist the nuns in their morning hatha yoga practice.

Arriving at DGL the following week, I was yet again struck by the beauty of the place, the snow mountains in the background, the stately temple, the exquisite flowers. I could already hear the faint sound of chanting in the distance, the beating of drums and the occasional Tibetan horn. The call of so many Pujas I would attend during my week at DGL.

The next morning after the communal meditation in the main temple, I made my way to the outside area where the nuns were gathering for their 30-minute morning yoga asana session. Feeling excited, a little nervous even. I had taught many classes, but nuns? Never. I didn’t know a shred of Tibetan either; this was

going to be interesting.

My worries dissolved as soon as we dove into our first sun salutation. A rhythm took over the 50 or so tsunmas, as the nuns are called here, and I could feel my heart open. I slowly started correcting postures, feeling curious gazes softening and smiling eyes taking their place. Everyone was here, trying her best. My mind relaxed. For one week I joined their yoga practice each morning, helping out, guiding and suggesting, and hopefully contributing to their journey towards a better balance of body and mind.

It was truly a wonderful week, from lunches with Jetsunma, all the staff, and a few guests every now and then, to wonderful conversations with Rebecca, the current volunteer English teacher. And the tsunmas performed various stunning Pujas with extraordinary accuracy, talent and enthusiasm – my time at DGL was filled with impressions long to last and a feeling of contributing to something bigger, something beneficial, something worth the effort.

I bow my head in deepest respect and gratitude, to Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, and also to all the tsunmas who put in tremendous work, and to the rest of the dedicated DGL community, with gratitude for welcoming me with such incredible warmth and kindness.

Symposium on Monastic Education for Young Monks and Nuns

Ngawang Mingyur Chodron

We had a great opportunity to attend the first conference on how to best foster learning of Dharma in new generations of the Sangha. It was for three days. The conference was attended by great Masters, Rinpoches, Tulkus, Geshe, Geshemas, Khenpos, monks, and nuns. On the first day, H.H. the Dalai Lama also came and blessed all of us.

The main discussion was about how to give the best education to nuns and monks in the primary through 9th standards in order to help them become holders of the Dharma. All participants got a chance to tell their own opinions. The conference was not only about the students' development. It was also for the teachers who teach them.

We were divided into seven groups. Each group had 25 to 30 people. We discussed how to give the best education to monks and nuns. My group talked about many ideas like how important it is to have trained and educated teachers. Another thing we discussed was which subjects to teach in each class.

In the evenings, each group's leaders met and talked about all the groups' recommendations. On the last day they had a long list of ideas. One of the people who organized the conference read each recommendation and we voted on whether we thought it was a good idea. Now each nunnery and monastery will work on these ideas.

I think in future it would be a good idea to have more meetings and discussions like this. I am happy that I attended this conference.



Ngawang Mingyur Choedron

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.

Sponsorship of a nun here costs \$365 per year.

We welcome your contribution to support our nuns and accept credit card, check/cheque, direct deposit or electronic bank transfer.

US residents are entitled to tax-deductible donations via Dongyu Gatsal Ling Initiatives, a US not-for-profit 501(c) (3) organisation.

Full details for all these methods of payments, including link for US donors wishing to make a tax deductible donation, can be found by visiting our website

www.tenzinpalmo.com

on **Sponsor a Nun** page

Dongyu Gatsal Ling Trust is registered in India as a Charitable organisation designated for the support of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery and its activities.

Being a Librarian

I have been a librarian nun for one and a half years. I have a library partner. We work together. We made little changes in the library like making the Young Nuns' Corner. When nuns are coming to the library we help them.

Nona ma'am catalogues the new books. We use the alphabet from a to z to make the catalogue. We also give each book a number and we work to make the library a nice place to study. We put the classification outline on the wall below the clock so everyone can use it. It will help them find the books they want. We put magazines on bookshelves. Once a week we change the books in the Young Nuns' Corner. And we also check twice a week to make sure books are in the correct alphabetical order. This year we made a classification outline for the library. It was Jetsunma's request.

We have another library in the main temple where there are books of Tibetan philosophy in the Tibetan language. I am very glad to be a librarian because I like to know about the books and new ideas and full of knowledge around me.

Tsewang Chodron Negi



Library nun Tsewang Chodron Negi

Why I Became a Nun & How Do I Feel at DGL

I became a nun because I wished to be a nun from the time I was small. My mother always used to tell me that her dream was to walk on Buddha's path but her fate was not as good as my karma so she couldn't be a nun like me. I became a nun also to fulfill my mother's Dharma path on behalf of her. All my family, friends and teachers were happy when I told them that I wanted to become a nun. I became a nun at the age of sixteen after completing class eight. I became a nun in a nunnery called Sherab Choling. That nunnery was under the 70th Je Khenpo of Bhutan. I stayed there for at least six years after that my brother suggested that I go to India to do some studies in Philosophy and Debate. I came to DGL Nunnery in 2017. Now I am studying here and practicing the Dharma. I feel very happy at DGL Nunnery because all the senior nuns are like our big sisters. They always guide us to be good, do good, speak good, etc. When we feel sick they take care of us like our own family. Jetsunma is like our mom who keeps us all under her protection and I am happy to be under her love and care. Our teachers are also like our parents who always support us in every situation. They teach us good things to do and avoid bad things. Whenever I talked to them or whenever I am with them I feel that I am sitting with my own parents. So that is why I feel very peaceful and happy at DGL.

Thank you,
Sonam Choki
Lotak class



Sonam Choki

Front cover: Putting up new prayer flags at Losar
Back cover: Khenpo with tsunmas



BY AIRMAIL

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