



GATSAL



*Top, Astronomy club views the heavens from Temple roof, young “nunlet” Sonam Palmo lends her strength.
Bottom, Temple Scenes from Lhabab Duchen 2020: Tsunmas with academic excellence awards,
Tenzin Lhakpa, Dolma Keither and Gen Rigzin, Jetsunma la and Khenpo preside.*

Dear friends,

Despite the continuing lockdown, the past year seems to have passed swiftly at Dongyu Gatsal Ling. We have been careful to keep the nuns as safe as possible and so far we have all remained well. Although we receive only rare visitors and the nuns do not leave the property, nonetheless they have been able to carry on with their studies and ritual performances and seem happy to be in isolation: it has created a strong and harmonious community. For myself it has been a time of appreciation for the quiet rhythms of the monastic year which is usually missed with all the travelling. The nuns have also gained confidence in running everything by themselves.

There has also been the new experience of international Zoom Q&A sessions with Dharma groups ranging around the world from the Americas to Lebanon. This is a wonderful way to reach out to people with no need of packing, visas, airport hassles or jetlag! Instead the world

comes together in one’s own living space. Thank you Zoom!

In September 2020 the new academic term began with 3 of our senior nuns – Tsultrim Palmo, Jigme Chodron and Samten Chodron - taking on the roles as genlas or teachers for the first time in DGL history. Our previous genlas from the nunneries of Dolma Ling (Gen Lobsang Dolkar) and Namdrol Ling (Gen Jinba Sangmo) remain with us and also our Khenpo Sonam Wangyal from Khampagar monastic college. We also have a lay teacher Gen Rigzin to instruct the young nunlets. At this time two senior nuns – Tashi Chotso (who was in charge of our Tara Guesthouse) and Ari Chodron - both entered 3 years retreat in our long-term retreat centre.

Early last November we celebrated Lhabab Duchen which commemorates the occasion when the Buddha returned to earth from Heaven by a wondrous stairway after having spent the 3 months Rains Retreat imparting the Dharma to his mother and other celestial beings. In the morning there was a picnic and at this time the nuns

performed their Dakini Dances. We plan to make this dance an annual event on this auspicious occasion. The temple and stupa were festooned by the nuns with strings of coloured lights. In the evening the nuns performed the ritual to Shakyamuni and the 16 Arhats.

In January came the half-year exams and then preparations for Losar or Tibetan New Year. The nuns cooked mountains of kapsi (twisted fried pastries) and cleaned the whole nunnery assiduously. This year we could not visit Tashi Jong for the annual blessing from Khamtrul Rinpoche as both our communities are in lockdown. Nonetheless the nuns enjoyed a merry picnic with many lively games and lots of good food! One highlight was the tug-of-war between the genlas plus senior nuns and the khenpo and some visiting monks from Tashi Jong!

After the festivities of Losar came a week of Nyungney. This is a purificatory ritual based on the 1,000 armed Avalokiteshvara and includes chanting, mantra recitation, prostrations and fasting (including no



Above, Inaugurating a new DGL tradition: *Khandro Cham, Dakini Dances* at Lhabab Duchen.

liquid). Many ladies came from Tashi Jong and also a number of monks and a togden who stayed in the short-term retreat centre for the duration. In the temple the monks sat in the row behind the senior nuns. Khenpo Chöying Lhundrup who is the principal of the Khampagar monastic college at Tashi Jong officiated. Despite the austerities of this practice everyone emerged looking radiantly happy (perhaps they were merely relieved to have made it to the end!)

Meanwhile we continue to receive applications from girls wishing to join the nunnery. It is encouraging that young people from the Himalayan regions are still drawn to the monastic life and they settle down happily into the routine of study and ritual.

On Sunday evenings my assistant Tsunma Tenzin Dasel has introduced a popular Astronomy class for which we purchased a telescope situated at the top of the temple. The nuns enjoy learning about the constellations and our universe in general.

A while ago someone deposited 3 small female puppies over the nunnery

wall. Of course there was nothing to do but to take them in and care for them. However we do not want too many dogs here (there is already our dog Zangmo who is still spry and healthy at 14 on a purely vegetarian diet of dal, rice and chapatis). We plan to keep one of the puppies – now named Tashi – and, after also neutering the other 2 females, to try to find them good homes if possible. Likewise a stray cat gave birth to 2 kittens who are being raised by the family of our cook. Hopefully we have homes for them too after they have grown enough to leave their mother. There are so many stray animals in India but they are usually good tempered, intelligent and simply in need of care and affection.

Spring is with us and the flowers are abundant while the trees and bushes are all in glorious blossom. It has been dry until recently when we have experienced days of dramatic storms and rainfall that has helped to stave off the drought and has covered the mountains with snow once again. The farmers are grateful to the naga spirits for bringing this timely rain for their

crops but now they need sunshine again to ripen their harvest.

Now the time for the annual exams are with us and the nuns are seriously revising their lessons. In June the nuns will start their annual 2 months of retreat while observing noble silence.

Of course India is in a state of terrible crisis nowadays on account of the upsurge in Covid, especially in the cities. This is a time of great affliction and a cause of heartbreaking anguish for so many. Our hearts go out to all those suffering, often with no proper care or hope. The nuns are performing many extra rituals and sutra readings on behalf of India and the world.

Meanwhile we send our loving best wishes to all of you with our prayers that this time of pandemic may soon pass and the hope that some people inhabiting this precious planet will have learned important lessons in the art of living consciously.

With every good wish in the Dharma,

Tenzin Palmo



The Anniversary Day of VIII Khamtrul Rinpoche

We celebrated the death anniversary of the Eighth Khamtrul Rinpoche on 1st January 2021.

He was the root guru of Ven Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo. They met for the first time in Dalhousie. He was a very intelligent person. He was a wonderful artist, poet and wood crafter. He was a very kind and gentle person. He died in Bhutan. Every year we celebrate his Holiness' death anniversary by discussing philosophy. And Ven Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo told us first meeting story with Rinpoche. Hearing her story, I felt like I have met him in person. After that our two senior nuns told us how to protect and hold our vows. Then we started our discussion. This celebration was different from last year's, where the different audience asked debate presenters questions. But this year those who presented debate asked the audience for the answers. Anyone who wanted to could give the answer. In the night we did a special puja called Lama Chopa, and we offered a butter lamp ceremony.

Ngawang Tsewang Chodron

Clockwise from above: 8th Khamtrul Rinpoche, Temple Offerings, Jetsunma tells a funny story of meeting Khamtrul Rinpoche, Lighting butter lamps, Lama Chopa puja

BIRD RESCUE: Meeting a new species at DGL Dragon Café

In early May, as the spring sunshine lit up the nunnery and the newly cleaned front glass window at the Dragon Café shone in the mid-day sun, bird song and nuns' laughter filled the air. Until in a heartbeat, all went silent after a loud "THUD!" broke the moment.

The nuns immediately jumped into action to rush to see what had happened. And there they discovered a lovely creature none had ever seen before, laying on its side with blood coming out of the bill. It had not realized there was a glass window and seeing only sunshine and blue skies, flew head on into the glass. Dazed, but still alive.

The nun rescue team sprang into action. Yeshe Paldron from Nepal, picking the injured bird up gingerly, put it directly close to her heart. The other tsunmas brought some tissue paper to wipe its bill and clean-up the little trickle of blood.

Tsunma Dasel arrived, and happening upon the scene, was given the details. She asked for a phone to use the camera to capture the goings on. Yeshe related the story, saying, "We are not sure if it is a he or a she, but at least it is alive!" And so began a little lesson about plumage revealing bird gender. "Oh, we can see it is a he, because look at the beautiful colours of the feathers. Mother Nature gave the male birds the beauty as a ruse, a way to draw the attention of predators, creatures who hunt the birds, away from the females and chicks, and towards the males." The nuns were listening as Tsunma Dasel explained. "But what kind of bird is it?" No one could say. None of us had seen such a lovely specimen before, and definitely not this close up. "Anyway, let's say some mantras for it now, Namgyelma is good for injured animals," one of them suggested. And so, mantras began floating over the garden as we all chanted for his wellbeing.

Yeshe tried to put him in a cardboard box with a blanket, but he was perfectly happy to keep hanging on receiving her gentle strokes. So, we took the box back to her room, where eventually he did release and take some rest. A few hours later, she had a feeling to let him out to see if he was ready to fly. And, yes! Away he went.

The next day, Yeshe and another young nun appeared at Dasel's desk. "Sister, what kind of bird was that? How can we find out?"

"Let's go inquire in our local bird books upstairs." So, the three of us proceeded upstairs to sit out on the balcony and investigate in the two lovely bird books, *Birds of the Himalayas* and *Birds of Kangra*. Each nun holding a book, began her own way of searching, until the results came up empty. Then Tsunma Dasel taught them how to use the key guide to identify birds, a visual distinctive thumbnail as a quick way to identify birds. It was fun, like solving a mystery. We had to begin by looking for clues. What shape was our bird friend? What kind of bill did it have? How long were the tail feathers? What colours did it present? Luckily, we had the photographs to use to match up.

Now we combed through the books, finding the category that seemed to correspond with the bird's features. Until finally Yeshe announced, "This is it!" And indeed, it appeared to be: The elusive Great Barbet. According to our bird book, barbets are thick-necked (which most likely saved his life upon impact) tree dwelling birds, and is the largest barbet of his family, which also include wood peckers. More often seen than heard, they are reclusive tree dwellers. But in this case, you too, can view the Great Barbet up close.

Here is a little tale from the *Birds of Kangra* book:

"Around Dharamsala an epic tale has evolved around this bird. The Great Barbet was the servant of a cattle farmer in its previous incarnation. Then, one day the master told his servant to fetch water for his very thirsty ox. But the servant was lazy and instead of carrying water he pretended to have done so- even urinating over his feet to look as though the water had splashed. The ox was very angry and put the servant under a spell. Because of this he was incarnated as the *traioo*, a bird that is perpetually thirsty and can't drink from streams because any water it looks at turns into blood. Therefore the Great Barbet spends its life plaintively wailing "traioo", which in local Gaddi language

means, "I am thirsty." It perches with its bill turned skyward and its eyes closed in the canopy of trees calling for rain that will give it a few drops to drink."

Our new feathered friend the Great Barbet was more fortunate, as after the accident the nuns cleaned him and also offered water, which he took willingly before resting and flying away!





Special instruments

Losar 2021 Templescape, Year of the Iron Ox

Conch

Picnic in the Mountains During Losar Week Celebrations

Losar is the most memorable event in our life . It seems like everything changes into new. During every Losar we have holidays for a week and are allowed to go wherever we want. But unfortunately this year (2021) we were not allowed to go outside the nunnery because of this pandemic, so we celebrated in our Nunnery with our Ven Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo la.

During Losar holiday we had a great and wonderful picnic. Early in the morning we got up and after breakfast we got ready for the picnic. At almost 6 o'clock all the nuns and the staff of DGL left the nunnery. That morning was really special for all of us. We had booked two buses because one bus is not enough for all the nuns so we travelled by bus and Ven Jetsunma la, her assistant Tsunma Tenzin Dasel and our English teacher Anne were all present during the picnic. They came by our nunnery SUV. We held the picnic in a high mountain field with no others around, so we did not have to worry about COVID. It was our first and only time out of the nunnery together in more than a year. We were so happy.

All the nuns played different types of games and we all enjoyed it a lot. There were five nuns who cooked during the picnic and they prepared lunch, tea and dinner at the picnic ground. They did their work very well and we are all so proud to have nuns like them. I did lots of activities like sack races, songs with musical chairs, kite flying, volleyball and so many other games. From these, my favourite games are badminton and football. The weather during the picnic was really chilly, sunny, cool and not too hot. For almost eleven hours we stayed at the picnic playing and so on. Yes of course every tsunma enjoyed a lot during our Losar picnic and had a very good time. That picnic was an amazing and wonderful time.

Thank you
from Tsunma Karma Dolma



Who can eat the apple first look no hands!



Hula-hoopsters



Old fashioned free fun, the classic potato sack race



Musical stools with Hindi background music!



Jetsunma and Khenpos

Losar Celebration 2021

Losar means New Year in Tibetan Language. Now we are in Ox Losar year. (*Lo* means year and *Sar* means new). This Losar is special because we have an extra 9th month of the Tibetan year, so this year will last longer than the previous year.

We do lots of activities during Losar like special pujas, prayers and gatherings etc.

We play all kinds of games at Losar, but we play one special game one night before Losar. In this game we need soup which is made up of flour and in some dough balls we put onion, chilli etc and each of the items have their own meaning. Whoever gets the dough ball with that item inside will describe the character of that person. It's just a Tibetan custom. Games at Losar picnic include balance the potato race, playing chess, and tug of strongest wills (formerly known as tug-of-war).

From Tsunma Ngawang Shedub Palzom

My Most Unforgettable Day Ever

Firstly, I want to tell you about the day which I can't ever forget. That was when we cleaned the whole Nunnery. Nuns usually clean the nunnery but during this time, I had my first chance to do this special work. This work, which is a little bit strange, is the job to clean the sewage tank.

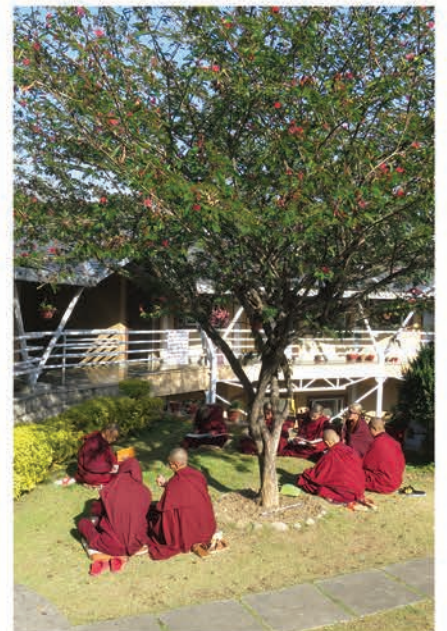
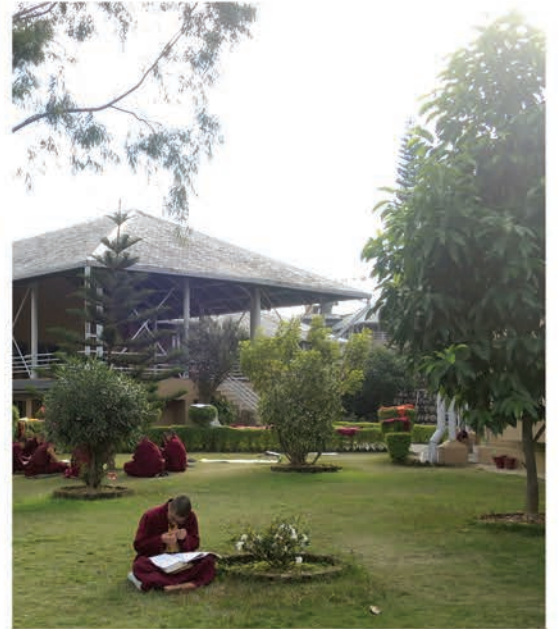
As we know, it stinks so harshly but I did it very properly as much as I can. Septic tank or sewage tank looks like a hole underground. I got inside one of them which was where I saw the biggest snail ever! I saw a big snail, which was really horrible. That made me afraid but I cleaned without wasting time and not harming the snail.

The inside looks like a building wall indeed. It took about three or four hours to clean the whole tank. After finishing the work, I appreciated my own effort for having done such a work. It is good to be a volunteer. I was really glad because I served my Nunnery and that's why that day was my most unforgettable day ever.

Thank you so much
From Tsunma Dechen Dolma







SEEING THE WORLD MY WAY

WHY I LIKE PHOTOGRAPHY

I am writing to share my experience with photography. As we know, all being have different kinds of interests, some like to sing, and some like to dance, but I like photography more than other activities.

What is the main reason I like photography?

In my opinion, when I try to click some photos, I can observe the beauty or main feature of an object or person. It helps me to concentrate. I can capture nature's beauty in photos, which makes me feel very peaceful. I like photography because it is very good to store memories. I can remember my sweet moments by looking at the photo, so that seems to be a main reason to like photography.

Why is photography important to me? And when is the exact time to click a perfect photo?

It is a very precious moment when I click photos. It gives me courage to share my ability. I usually click a photo whenever I feel excited and enthusiastic. I think there is no perfect time to click photos, because there is no idea of our mood, as it changes like seasons. Early morning light and later in the evening are very good times for natural light photos. Light at mid-day is often too strong and creates shadows on the subject.

How can we spread this talent around the whole world?

I think we must encourage people to observe an object. We must explain to them how photography is essential for concentration and being present. It makes us confident. These days many people click lots of photos on their phone, but when we take time, we can really create a special feeling from photos.

Article by Jangchup Dolkar (age 13)

All photos by young nuns, (ages 7-13)



Tshering Dorje In Memoriam



Tshering Dorje outside of Jetsunma's cave

I met with Tshering Dorje in the mid-1960s when I went to the Himalayan region of Lahaul – Land of the Dakinis - for the first time with my dharma sister Pema (Faith Grahame). We planned to stay the summer in retreat at Kardang Gonpa. At that time Tshering Dorje was employed as the personal assistant to the Deputy Commissioner in Keylong. The DC sent Tshering Dorje with us to get a letter of permission from the lamas of Kardang allowing us to stay there.

A couple of years later my lama Khamtrul Rinpoche stated to me that it was time to go away and practice. He proposed Lahaul as a suitable place. The very next day I received a letter from Tshering Dorje suggesting that I should return to Lahaul and he would find me a conducive and quiet Gonpa for retreat. So I settled at Tayul Gonpa for the next 6 years before transferring to a cave about one and a half hours from the monastery.

During my 18 years in Lahaul Tshering Dorje became my close friend and dharma brother and his home at Guskiar was where I could stay overnight on my infrequent visits to Keylong for supplies. His lovely family became my family.

Throughout my 3 years closed retreat in the cave it was Tshering Dorje who brought up the supplies twice a year which allowed me to continue.

Tshering Dorje was uncle to the Queen of Ladakh and was himself a living encyclopaedia on all aspects of Himalayan culture: history, culture, religion, linguistics and geology – his knowledge was inexhaustible. In addition, he was a deeply religious man who held the Buddhadharma in his heart and grieved to see its ebbing away in the face of so-called material progress and the encroachment of other faiths.

He was such a dear and beloved friend and we continued to meet from time to time in these ensuing years while the DGL Nunnery was being established. Indeed, he brought us 4 young girls from Spiti to join our nunnery.

He is irreplaceable and we all grieved at his sudden passing in November 2020. But now he is surely taking a well-earned rest after a lifetime of academic research and adventurous trekking. Finally our dearest Tshering Dorje, having left behind his aging body, is now free to be joyously dancing with the dakinis!



Tshering Dorje's passing, November 2020

A Week of Fasting and Purification Practice February 2021

Tibetan Buddhist Vajrayana practice
of Nyungné (“nyoong-nay”)

Nyungné, the fasting ritual of the 1000-armed Avalokiteśvara/Chenrezig is a practice of the Kriya Tantra tradition and helps to purify negative karma in a short time and to develop great compassion.

In this retreat we practice by renouncing eating, drinking and speaking every other day. In addition, in the form of a sadhana of Avalokiteśvara/Chenrezig, we practice recitation, visualization, meditation, and prostrations. Through this practice, we not only receive strength for our fasting, but also insight into the wisdom and love of the Buddha of compassion.

One’s own renunciation helps to develop compassion for sentient beings who are forced to starve and never quench their thirst for existence. Prostrations help to reinforce renunciation and grow humility. We become aware of our own patterns of greed and attachment and develop gratitude, modesty and mindfulness. The practices of fasting, going without liquid and food on alternate days has a purifying effect on the body and mind to create strength and clarity. Continuously practicing on a set schedule of prayers, mantras, prostrations and meditation leads us to new levels of insight. Together, this potent practice creates amazing opportunities for transformation. We can more easily break with old behaviours and cultivate new, positive patterns.

This year, Khenpo Choying, the principal of Khamgar Monastic Institute and several monks from Khampagar as well as many laywomen (and one or two laymen), joined all the DGL Nuns in performing three sets of Nyungné in what has become an annual DGL tradition just after Losar. May all benefit and be free!

Clockwise from top right: Nyungné 2021; Fresh fruit offering, healthy choice; Prayers, prostrations and purification; Long Life Offering to JTP by senior nuns, Feb 2021; Jetsunma arrives for Her Long Life Ceremony 2021





Excerpts From a Letter of Gratitude and Devotion

I am so lucky to become a nun in your nunnery and always stay with you. I am so grateful to myself also. If I did not meet you, I would never have a chance in my life to practice Dharma and I would not have gone a good way.

When my parents sent me to go to the nunnery in India, I didn't go directly to a nunnery because I feared it was too far from family and out of my country and because I didn't know the value of a nunnery and Dharma practice. Looking back, I see that time that I went the wrong way and my decision was wrong, too. Now, I know why I left both my grateful parents as well as my beautiful country and why I came to India especially in this DGL Nunnery and I got a great opportunity to be a nun and make my future beautiful and live a successful life.

So, I don't waste my time and Jetsunma's, or my family's hopes. I should study very hard as well as I can in my great zeal day by day in my life. Thank you so much for giving me this great and golden opportunity to practice Dharma.

by Karma Chodron, Nepal

PRAISE TO THE JETSUNMA

Ohh Jetsunma, dear Jetsunma
 You are the kindest person in this world
 You give us shelter
 You give us everything we need
 You are our lamp of Dharma
 You show us the best path to walk on
 You have introduced us to the most precious gurus
 You teach us the value of Buddha Dharma
 You are the best guide for us
 We will never forget your kindness
 Ohh Jetsunma, dear Jetsunma.

by Tsunma Tsultrim Palmo



Tsunma Tsultrim Palmo is one of the first two young girls who came to be part of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, before it existed. She is now a Gen la, a teacher, at DLG. Here, she performs an offering at Jetsunma's Long Life Ceremony, February 2021.



Jetsunma and all the tsunmas enjoy
"Saturday Evening Cinema at DGL"



Clip from the film "So if one believes, Guru Rinpoche will be sleeping right at your door."

SATURDAY EVENING CINEMA

Screening of Guru Rinpoche film at DGL Nunnery

Earlier this year, Tsunma Tenzin Dase, assistant to Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo and the nunnery, reached out to a filmmaker to request permission to host a screening at the nunnery of a recently released film he made about Guru Rinpoche, called Precious Guru, Journey into the Wild Heart of the Second Buddha. On Behalf of Jetsunma and all the nuns at DGL Nunnery, we are very grateful to Marc Wennberg for providing the nunnery a free download of his movie to enjoy.

For more information please contact him at www.triptychjourney.org

As the nunnery has been in lockdown since March of 2020 and most likely will continue to be through 2021, we are always looking for some new approaches to share constructive free time. On some weekends we have been holding Saturday Evening Cinema in the yoga room, with all of the nuns gathering together with Jetsunma la to watch. We are constantly in search of excellent Dharma films to screen that can be sent to DGL via download.

Please be in touch with recommendations jtpassistantdgl@gmail.com.

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.



Above: Khenpo Choying Lhundrup, with Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo and other tsunmas at recent ordination.

Right: Tsunma Kalsang Palmo at her getsul ordination, with Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo.



My Nun's Life

Tsunma Kalsang Palmo

Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery is happy to add another ordained tsunma to our ranks. She arrived as Jigme from Ladakh, aged nineteen years old, with a deep wish to take ordination. After quarantine of two weeks, she merged with the community for several months before being offered ordination by Khenpo Choying Lhundrup of our brother monastery of Khampagar at Tashi Jong.

Khenpo Choying is the principal of the Khamgar Monastic College and a very devout and humble monk who comes to perform Sojong, the confession ceremony, with the tsunmas twice a month. Khenpo Choying co-taught the 2 years of Tantric studies to our graduated nuns. He and other monks from Tashi Jong also joined in the Nyungne retreat this year after Losar. We are very grateful to Khenpo Choying for his heartfelt support of the nuns. At Jigme's ordination, he gave her a new name to signify that she has left her old life and identity behind and entered into the Buddha Sangha as an ordained monastic.

Here are a few thoughts she shared with Gatsal:

"As we know, we all are looking for a happy life. A life which is free from suffering, tension, and depression. In my opinion a perfect way of living can be achieved by our own

good karmic deeds. People around the world are living their life in different ways. A wealthy life only can bring joy until our death, and after death it can be a source to create bad or evil karma for us if we did bad deeds. The best life to live is a nun's life. So for me, which is away from every hatred, ignorance and selfish desire.

My experience with my life is that I came to Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery many months ago as a lay person who wished to take nun vows. As I am a nun now, I try to be always free from every kind of distraction and misdeeds, I serve my whole life at the feet of my root-guru. It doesn't matter how cruel I was, what matters is now how loving and polite I am. So, I am still trying to do my best in every moment.

How did I spend my previous life before becoming a nun? I studied in a high school until 12th class in Leh, the main town of Ladakh. I enjoyed my life fully. During that time, I also suffered from political pressure, etc. I couldn't feel peaceful and free. I just felt that I was bound by a rope. Now as a nun, I am free from everything and I am living a peaceful life. This is my best experience ever. My new ordination name is Kalsang Palmo. Thank you."

Front cover: Tsewang Chodron of Kinnaur dances the Khandro Cham.

Back cover: All tsunmas enjoy Khandro Cham, which is now to be held annually at DGL Nunnery's Lhabab Duchen celebration.



BY AIRMAIL

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