



# GATSAL



Top row, Jetsunma giving the nuns a weekly lecture; one of our nuns using the new outdoor gym equipment, Jetsunma in a Zoom conversation with Vicki Mackenzie. Bottom row, Picking up flowers to bless the tools in Diwali, a visit from the family of our new Zanskari nuns, behind the scenes during the Life of the Buddha play performed during Lhabab Duchen.

## Dear friends,

Here we are already in Summer of 2022 – how swiftly the year has passed!

In our last Gatsal newsletter we were in the summer of 2021 and I apologise for the delay in putting out this next issue.

During this time until recently we remained in lockdown and during the year all the nuns received the required vaccinations. Fortunately no one became ill from the covid virus. The nuns continued with their studies, meditation and rituals as usual.

Since the nuns could not travel back to their homes during the annual holiday in June, last year we divided that month into two equal parts with the 2 month silent retreat in between. The nuns maintained perfect silence and discipline while divided into several groups following various practices.

In August my assistant Tsunma Tenzin Dasel left to return to her Dharma centre in Maine, USA. She is a skilful teacher and her presence was

needed ‘back home’. We have been very grateful for the 2 years she spent with us here at DGL – mostly during the time of lockdown. She is hoping to spend more time between projects in Ladakh and the USA as well as reconnecting with DGL during her summer stay in India.

In due time we welcomed Felipe Zabala from Bolivia who is an expert in IT and very capable of maintaining our online presence and in dealing with the collection of archival material.

The new term started in early September. At this time a medical team funded by the Tibet Fund based in New York, came to give blood tests for all the nuns to find out their haemoglobin levels. We were happy that most of our nuns tested normal and the few others were given iron supplements. During this month a group of young girls arrived from Zanskar – a remote region of Ladakh – and immediately settled into the nunnery.

In late October it was again Lhabab Duchen which commemorates when Lord Buddha returned to earth after teaching Dharma to his late Mother in

heaven during the Rainy Season. This year for the first time our celebrations including the Dakini Dances were broadcast around the world and many thousands of people could watch the live streaming also of the Life of the Buddha in 12 Acts put on by the nuns with elaborate costumes. In the evening was the puja to Shakyamuni Buddha and the 16 Arhats in the decorated main temple.

Following this three of our senior nuns: Jangsem Dolma (ex-medical nun), Trinley Wangmo (ex-bursar) and Sherab Dolma (ex-disciplinarian) entered a 3 year 3 month retreat in what had been the short-term retreat centre. We wish them every happiness and the fulfilment of their aims.

In February came mid-term exams and at the beginning of March was Losar or the Tibetan New Year of the Water Tiger. Since the previous lunar year extended for 13 months, Losar was a month later than the Chinese celebration. This year was very joyful because we finally ended lockdown and so everyone went over to Tashi Jong for the New Year blessing from



*Top row, Nuns interacting with the clown during the Guru Rinpoche Dances in Tashi Jong; the newly ordained nuns of DGL. Bottom row, Jetsunma interacting with Khamtrul Rinpoche in Losar; our little nunlets received various teddy bears to cuddle with; Dakini Dance performance during Lhabab Dhucen.*

Kyabgon Khamtrul Rinpoche. This was the first time in 2 years that we had seen Khamtrul Rinpoche and he was seated on a throne in front of the main temple so everyone could see him and he could see us. We all filed past for a blessing and then the ladies of Tashi Jong presented traditional Tibetan dances – and then Kinnauri dances!

As well as our own picnic at DGL, the nuns later spent several days at picnics in Tashi Jong. Himalayan people love outdoor picnics!

After Losar feasting came a week of Nyungney fasting! This annual event is dedicated to the 1000 armed Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, and includes fasting, prostrations and chanting. Many Tibetan and Kinnauri people (mostly women) joined from Tashi Jong. It is a strenuous practice (especially not taking in liquid for over 30 hours) but it is a practice of purification so everyone emerges looking radiantly happy.

In April our long-awaited Outdoor Gym Equipment finally arrived. This was kindly sponsored by Jonathon

and Adrian, friends of Anne Hale, but it was delayed due to lockdown. Now the men came from Chandigarh and put up the equipment in some spare land near the butter-lamp house. The nuns have been enjoying the workout between classes and we hope that their enthusiasm will continue.

Now that lockdown is officially over the nuns went to Tashi Jong to see the three days of Guru Rinpoche dances presented by the monks of Khampagar monastery. In addition several of our senior nuns joined the monks in the week-long pujas called drubchen. On the last day we all went to Tashi Jong for the empowerment-blessing which was bestowed by H.E. Khamtrul Rinpoche to everyone - monastic and lay – who had gathered there for this event.

In May 2022 the nuns had their end-of-term exams for which they diligently revised from early morning to late at night. Now in June many of the nuns have returned to their villages since they have not seen their families for over 2 years. In July they will return for the annual 2 months silent meditation retreat.

Once again this is a challenging time for the world with its environmental disasters, wars and military takeovers to remind us that this is indeed still samsara.

Genuine peace can only be found within our own mind and we must take care not to add to the fear and hatred already present in the world with our own paranoia. While events continue to be controlled by those with uncontrolled minds, there is not much chance of long-lasting harmony and goodwill. Let us join in sending love, light and infinite compassion to all those who are suffering at this troubled time. Meanwhile our nuns continue to pray for the happiness and welfare of all living beings on this precious planet.

Our sincere gratitude and all best wishes in the Dharma,

With every good wish in the Dharma,

*Tenzin Palmo*



*Clockwise from above left: Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo (center), the Queen Mother (left) and the Fourth King (right) of Bhutan; His Holiness the Je Khenpo with a group of 3 Gelongmas; The nuns walking around the tents set up for the ordination.*

# Bhikshuni Ordination

We are pleased and honoured to announce that on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 the full bhikshuni ordination was bestowed on 142 nuns at an auspicious site below Paro Taktsang in Bhutan by His Holiness the Je Khenpo, Tulku Jigme Chhoeda, head lama of the Drukpa Kagyu monastic order in Bhutan. This historic event was supported by His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and organised by Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Ashi Tshering Yangdoen Wangchuck, who is the Patron of the Bhutanese Nuns Foundation and Dr Tashi Zangmo the founding director of the BNF.

Traditionally the full ordination for nuns was not given in the Mulasarvastivada vinaya lineage extant in Tibetan and Bhutanese Buddhism. The nuns only received as far as novice or shramaneri ordination. The revival of the full ordination has been a subject of research for many years but no resolution on how it could be carried out had been agreed upon. It remains a highly controversial subject.

However nowadays nuns are living in well-run nunneries and becoming highly educated in Buddhist philosophy and practice. They themselves are now teachers and authoring books. So, the time is ready for them to take the next step and become fully ordained as the Buddha Himself specified and as modern scholarship has shown to be a valid possibility. The nuns are fully capable of studying and undertaking the Vinaya or Monastic code, performing the monastic rituals and leading an exemplary life. In this way the Fourfold

Sangha of monastics and laity will be completed as was the Buddha's intention.

Therefore, it was with great courage and compassion that His Holiness the Je Khenpo of Bhutan made the decision to bestow this higher ordination on nuns - thus opening the door to the elevation and encouragement of all nuns in the Mulasarvastivada tradition.

The ceremony itself was carried out by the bhikshu [monk] sangha with HH the Je Khenpo as ordaining master. This method of ordination was allowed by the Buddha in the absence of a bhikshuni [nun] sangha. After 12 years as bhikshunis the nuns themselves will be empowered to constitute a twofold ordaining sangha of both nuns and monks.

Since there were so many nuns and they were meticulously ordained three nuns at a time, the actual ceremony stretched over 3 days. On the first day His Majesty the 4<sup>th</sup> or former King, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, along with his wife the Queen Mother and other members of the Royal family, visited the ordination site and the king gave an encouraging and inspirational address to the nuns.

This is a truly momentous occasion for nuns in the Mulasarvastivada lineage and we rejoice that finally a high Lama of impeccable reputation such as the Je Khenpo has stepped forward to help and support the female sangha in this tradition.



*Top:* The Queen Mother with the Princess' family; Jetsunma and Dr. Tashi Zangmo hard at work.

*Middle:* Jetsunma with Sherab Zangmo from DGL; a view of the location right below Paro Taktsang; Jetsunma with Dawa Choezom, the first and only Tibetan to be ordained as a Gelongma in this ceremony.

*Bottom:* The tents set up by the army where the nuns rested; Jetsunma with Emma Slade, the first Westerner to receive the Gelongma ordination.

## Situation During Pandemic

Yeshe Tsomo (18 years)

Most people had faced many troubles during pandemic (COVID-19). It is a very dangerous disease, which made people very scared and created panic around world. Due to the disease, many people lost their beloved ones and lots of crisis situations happened, which was unexpected. Especially poor people and beggars suffered a lot because of their poverty. In India most of them died because of the situation and some of them felt depressed and helpless. Therefore we know and understand why it was such an unforgettable time.

Situation inside the nunnery - by the grace of Buddha and our venerable Jetsunma la, all the nuns had a safe time during the crisis. But we really suffered because we knew the situation outside, so we prayed as much as we could. We recited our prayers with true conviction. Fortunately our studies still continued but our purpose was to get the situation back in normal like it used to be.

In my opinion it is our pledge to be compassionate to others during such a hard time. I was in a neutral mood and I didn't feel very depressed because I did as much as I could on behalf of others. I wish we will stay secure forever under the blessing of our Ven. Jetsunma la, we believe in her. In future, we will always help each other in every situation.



## Root Guru

Jangchub Dolkar (14 years)

As a Buddhist nun, we have a root guru, from whom we take Refuge. We follow the teachings of Buddha. The Root Guru has a main role in our lives. He gives us teaching and his blessings. He is very loyal and honest to his disciples. Relationship between guru and disciple is very pure like water. He can help us towards the way to liberate us from Samsara. He is the only source of happiness in our life. Without his support we can't survive in this fake world. He teaches us the difference between wrong and right deeds.

## Smile

Ngawang Paltso (21 years)

A smile is a beautiful thing that we can give others without any cost. It is very nice to smile when we meet people. In all sentient beings only people can smile with their teeth showing.

A smiling face makes us turn our frown upside down. A smile is a simple act of kindness that can also make ourselves feel better. Smiles are not only beautiful, they can also create joy. It is also a sign of happy mood. I appreciate that a smile can make life joyful.

I think that a smile does not cost much but it gives back many things. We all want to be happy and smiling makes us beautiful. A smiling face can change our mood. Smiling helps me to stay positive. I love to smile.



## New Year

Yeshi Paldon (20 years)

First of all I would like to wish 'Happy New Year' to all of you and I wish this year to be better than previous years. May everyone be happy and not be sad like past year. Something bad has been happening in everyone's life in the past due to Covid. All this should not be happening to anyone. May everyone make good use of this new year. The past few years have taught us a lot. We have to learn something good with the new year and teach others to be good too. There should be something good to learn in the New Year. Try to be a good person by thinking as well as acting good. We should learn something and always keep moving forward and always move our friends forward and become a good person as time goes by. We start something new with the New Year. We need to think with positivity and start everything with new and good. New Year is a very special day for everyone. One should always think good with new year and forget all the bad that happened in the past and forgive. Kindness and love is what makes everyone nice and beautiful in the New Year.

But what is the use of all being negative, we have to forget it all and enjoy our new year. It is to our advantage to move forward only by starting something good with the New Year. After this New Year my work has become more. The work of fulfilling the dream of my parents and doing something good for the animals. May all of us pray together for all those who have become homeless and orphans. After my new year celebrations I was busy doing work but I didn't feel bad because I was helping someone who needs it. Keep the intention clear and everything will be fine for all of us. We have welcomed this year very well and I hope it will be great for everyone too.

Wherever I am today, it is all because of my dear teachers, my good parents, sponsors and friends and I want to thank all of them. Wish you all a very Happy New Year'.



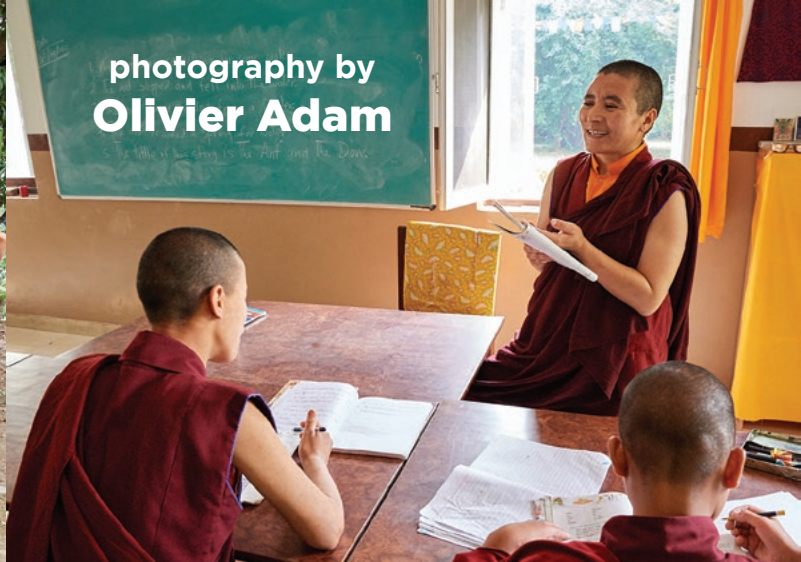
## Water Tiger Year

Tenzin Kunsel (22 years)

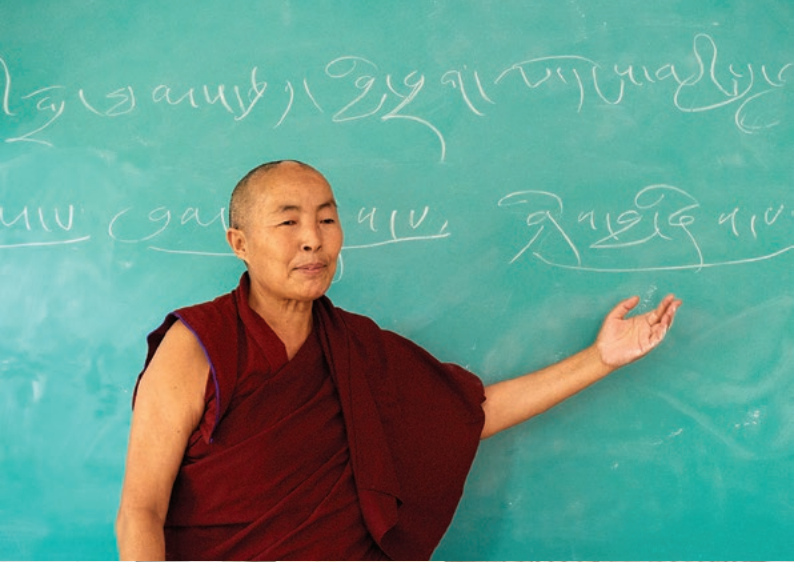
This New Year (Losar) was a very happy and contented time for me. After 2019 I was not so excited for such a big function like Losar, because many beings had died due to Covid-19 which ruined our country. So 2022 is such a gift from the Three Jewels. It brings us a joy and happy days so this Water Tiger Year is such a memorable one.

Lockdown was opened and people were doing like before. We nuns had well prepared for Losar. This year Losar was imprinted in my heart with lots of wishes and happiness. We got a chance to meet with our Rinpoche la [Kyabgon Khamtrul Rinpoche], which was very fortunate for us. For almost six days we had been invited to Tashi Jong for lunch and dinner. It was a great moment in time for me.









## Nyungney

Karma Dolma (22 years)

My experience during Nyungney (fasting). Nyungney is a religious observance and during this time we abstain from all or some kinds of food or drink and devote our prayer to the Lord Avalokiteshvara. He is a reincarnation of the Lord Buddha which represents love and kindness to all sentient beings.

In our nunnery we do this prayer gathering once a year which takes six days to complete. During this time, we eat for a day and after that we refrain from food and water for a day. We follow these rituals on alternative days.

At the start it is a little bit difficult but as the days go by this process becomes more energetic. At the end of the Nyungney we had a big prayer gathering with all the people who had come from Spiti and Tashi Jong to attend the fast.

Fasting is a great way of collecting virtues and merits. During this time we try to do our best and make it beneficial for all suffering beings.



## Women

Jamyang Dolkar (20 years)

In this world there are many people but women are very special. They face many problems but they don't give up easily. They do hard work for others. Many women don't get respect from others but they don't get emotional about that.

Women are the ones who give birth, they suffer many pains inside but still they smile from outside. Many women work in the home and they don't get a chance to become educated. Women can understand others feelings very easily.

There are many types of women in this world, not all are same. Some women are very kind and hard-working and some are opposite. Some work and face lots of problems and they are never considered important. For me women are the ones who made this earth beautiful. So for me women are the best persons I have ever seen.

## Nun's Life

Pema Chokyi (30 years)

All around the world people are living in different ways.

I am a nun so my life is different from other people's lives. I live a simple life that I have dedicated to the feet of my root guru. As a nun, I usually do prayers and study and practice Dharma. We nuns and monks represent Buddhism, so we must behave very carefully. During my free time, I like to read Buddhist stories. During prayer time we dedicate our merit and virtue of all suffering beings. That's how we spend our whole day and life.



## Myself

Samten Wangmo (22 years)

I am a nun which is best thing that has happened to me. I understand what is bad and good. I got a very precious human life. I live in nunnery called Dongyu Gatsal Ling (DGL) which is located in Himachal Pradesh.

In this nunnery I am studying and practising Dharma. Actually we have many subjects but most days we are learning philosophy because it is very useful in life. I like to practise debate and to learn other subjects. Meditation is one of my favorite subjects because I am learning to tame the mind.

In this nunnery I am very happy with my friends. The facilities provided for us are excellent. I like to stay here until I die. This is all about my life in which I learn Dharma as well as enjoying my time with friends.

## Human Life

I would like to say something of my thoughts on human life. Our human life is very precious. We can understand the source of suffering because we are practising Dharma. Dharma is a lamp and the seed of happiness. If we can identify between sadness and the source of happiness, it benefits our lives as well as the lives of others. We can help others who have problems. It shows us the wonderful world and teaches us many kinds of education. If we can use our precious life very carefully then it helps us with many things, which is why we have to take care of our human life.



## Lunar 10<sup>th</sup> Day for Padmasambhava

Kunsang Lhamo (20 years)

We usually have a special prayer on every lunar tenth day of the Tibetan calendar but once a year this Tenth Day is most special and different compared to others.

During this time of the special 10<sup>th</sup> Day, most of the elder nuns went to Tashi Jong for a prayer ritual which continued for a week. This 10<sup>th</sup> Day we woke up early in the morning and started prayer at 3:00am till 9:00am. After the prayer we went to Tashi Jong for a special ritual dance performance (Cham). It was a unique performance because this whole Cham is devoted to Guru Padmasambhava and other supreme bodhisattvas. It is a very holy Cham and people came to watch this Cham from far away. It is very auspicious to visit a Cham like this once in a lifetime. It is believed that it helps us during the journey after death. All of the nuns attended the whole performance which lasted for three days. The special holy dances were performed by the monks of Khampagar monastery and Ven. Khamtrul Rinpoche led the whole Cham.

After the performance we got to see our Ven. Khamtrul Rinpoche again and then we had lunch. At about 3:00pm we drank tea and then we returned to our nunnery. Attending the Cham and meeting Ven. Khamtrul Rinpoche on such an auspicious day inspired me a lot.

## Friend

Sonam Choky (28 years)

A friend is the one with whom we share everything, the one whom we trust blindly, share our things and problems, showing the right and good paths to walk along and basically the ones we feel the closest.

Friends are important in life because they are the ones who are always there for us when everyone leaves us alone. Good friends are those who help each other, who can understand our feelings and always makes us laugh when we are upset, who stays with us in our sadness and happiness as well. Friends are the ones who can see inner beauty and never leave.

I need a friend who can always be there for me in my every situation, who can understand my silence and supports me. I don't need a rich friend but a good-hearted friend.

I will do whatever possible I can do for my friend, and will always help her. I'll try my best to make my friend's life easier and happier.



## My Nunnery

Tsewang Chodron (22 years)

My heart is where my home is. My home is my beautiful nunnery. I love being here and am glad to meet my friends and teachers. I feel grateful to be here at my nunnery. All the basics that are needed to have a happy life, such as food, clothing, medicine and education as well as educational materials, are met by the nunnery. During these days, I am able to focus on my Dharma at the centre of my daily activities and I also get knowledge from my compassionate teachers. So I would like to say thanks to my nunnery.

## Mother

Karma Chodron (23 years)

My dearest mother I miss you so much and I love you so much from my little heart. I am forever grateful to you. I know you are far away from me but when I close my eyes, I see your cute face. I know I can't return your love, care, kindness and compassion but I am always praying for you to be always happy and healthy.

When I was with you, I never valued your presence and kindness but now this distance between us, has made me realize how important you are in my life.

I don't have words to say to you, mother. I don't know how I can be thankful to you. Without you, I wouldn't be living in this world. How important you are in my heart. My mother is most valuable to me. No one can take her place in my heart. I miss you so much, my mother.



## Our Mother Jetsunma La

Shedrub Palzom (20 years)

Our mother Jetsunma is the one and only reason for our peaceful life, all because of her we can do our studies and all dharma practice peacefully.

Our mother Jetsunma is the person who loves us and cares for us without expecting anything from us. She is the one who understands us. She always supports us and makes sure to know whether all the nuns are happy or not.

She always works hard for all of us to be free from problems like food and bed etc. she always tries to make us comfortable and provide a better life to us.

She teaches us many things and many subject like Dharma text and all, but more importantly, she teaches us to be good beings.

She always helps all beings like us and even small ants also. She always helps others and never thinks about herself. We all love our mother Jetsunma.



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## My Parents

Yeshe Palzom (20 years)

Parents are the most important being in our life. Lucky are those who have parents. Parents are precious gems. They raise us and give us whatever we need. Parents always correct our mistakes and show us the true way. They take us from darkness to light. They are our makers. Parents are like a wax candle, that burns themselves to give light to their children. My life is totally incomplete without them. Mother's love is certain like earth and father's worth is like sky. I am such a lucky girl by having their love. I have a small family with seven members. I am the smallest one and they all love me a lot.

My parents taught me to be a good person. My parents are the best parents in the world. They are the most important part of my life. They help me with every step in my life.



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## Compassion

Jigme Chodron (22 years)

Compassion is the way of getting enlightenment. By practicing compassion we can easily walk on the path of the Buddha. From these ways we can imagine or know that all beings had been our mother in our previous lives. Knowing all beings are our mother, we can't see them in suffering. From seeing them in suffering we can't bear, when we see them in trouble or in suffering.

By having compassion, we can practice very quickly the way to enlightenment and to liberate all beings from samsara. So that's why Buddha also has shown that compassion is the first path to becoming a Bodhisattva. All of the Rinpoches and Bodhisattvas mostly teach about compassion and advise us to be compassionate and practice the dharma.





## **My Life Before Nun**

**Sonam Choedron (21 years)**

My name is Sonam Choedron and I was born on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2002. When I was at home, I had a habit to stay quiet. Most of my time through my childhood I spent being alone. I didn't play with my friends or go outside of my house much. During that whole time, I liked to stay quiet and that made me happy and calm.

Sometimes, during night time I looked at the sky and enjoyed seeing a sky full of stars and the moon. When gazing at the sky I got lost in my heart and spoke to myself. I also wished to have a wonderful life like the sky and also to have a life with happiness with my family. During night time when the sky was full of stars and the moon, it looked very beautiful and pretty.

In my early life most of my time was spent with my mother. When I was eight years old, I learnt to cook food for my mother. I would always get up early in the morning and made food for my family. My mother always gave me advice about my future to be a happy girl.

In my earlier life there were so many memorable days which were very sad and that I'll never forget in my life. Sometimes when I was reminded of my past life, it makes me cry and feel unhappy in my heart. I never thought that my being quiet made my family unhappy, especially to my mom. She always said to me not to sit quiet and always be joyful and play with friends, go outside.

In my heart, my mother is the most respected lady for me. So, I want to say thanks to my mother because she contributed a great part of her life to make me a nice girl.

# **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.dglnunnery.com](http://www.dglnunnery.com)**

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

## My Nunnery

Lekshe Dolma (27 years)

My nunnery's name is Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery. It is one of the most beautiful and peaceful nunneries in Himachal Pradesh. It is located near Tashi Jong. The founder of my nunnery is Venerable Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo la. She is an honest and brave lady.

One amazing thing is that she is from England and I am very proud and grateful for her hard work. She bore a lot of difficulties at the beginning but she worked hard and built a beautiful nunnery, in which I am practising Dharma without any obstacles with lots of other nuns like me. From different countries people come to visit my nunnery. Whenever they visit they enjoy the clean and peaceful nunnery. I love my nunnery more than my hometown. I feel very fortunate to be a nun in this nunnery.



## Buddhism

Kalsang Tsomo (25 years)

Our religion describes our tradition and our traditions are the most important thing that have been handed down for many generations. Every religion has its own culture.

There are many types of religion in this world. Every religion is good in their way. But I feel Buddhism is special because its scripture shows the path of liberation. It is a simple religion but it takes lots of practice to follow the path.

If we can attain full knowledge, we can easily be liberated from Samsara and that makes it easier to help other beings to also be liberated. If we follow that path, we will never drop off into hell.

Liberating all others can only be done by Buddhism, that's why Buddhism is so sacred and holy.



## Human Life

Yeshi Chodron (13 years)

As we know, human life is the most important source to attain enlightenment. Without it we can't practice dharma. If we really want to help others, first we should care for our own life. Our life is very important, not only for the next lifetime but also for this life. Human birth is hard to achieve. We learn to appreciate to be born as a human. By having a precious life we can do good deeds. If we do good deeds, we can die without regret. So always try to make a good life, because that leads to right action.



**Front cover:** Jetsunma and the three brand new Gelongmas from the Drubda of DGL

**Back cover:** Laying out the prayer flags during Losar.



**BY AIRMAIL**

**To:**

**From:**

**Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery**  
VILLAGE LOWER MUTT  
P.O. PADHIARKHAR, VIA TARAGARH  
DISTRICT KANGRA (HP) 176081 - INDIA  
[office@dglunnery.com](mailto:office@dglunnery.com)

