

# FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

*for*

# BLESSINGS

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## **The Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns of Tibet**



Photo by James Gritz

[www.JamesGritz.com](http://www.JamesGritz.com)

“In BLESINGS, travelers from our world pass into a new dimension as through the eye of a needle by shedding deeply ingrained preconceptions enduring unaccustomed physical hardships...This well-made film is deeply moving and at the same time, deeply still.”

~Sherab Chödzin Kohn, author of *A Life of the Buddha*

*Facilitator's Guide for BLESSINGS: The Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns of Tibet*

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# **The Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns of Tibet**

## **Study Guide**

### **Introduction by Tsoknyi Rinpoche III:**

*"The first Tsoknyi Rinpoche began the tradition of the Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns more than a century ago with the simple but revolutionary idea of providing the same training for women that had been reserved for monks. His unique vision was of a time when these women would become among the most accomplished Buddhist practitioners in the world.*

*Because of the devastation of the Cultural Revolution, I thought that the tradition of the nuns was all gone, and I was sad that I hadn't spent time with them. Then, when I visited Tibet, I realized that through the kindness and great effort of the older nuns, this tradition had been kept alive and is now taking root again with a new generation of nuns.*

*When Tibet exploded, the Dharma was brought out. Dharma is carried by people, not by books. It is in the human mind naturally, and these nuns who are practicing are bringing the benefit out. 'Benefit' is not just material—doing something, producing something, showing me something. Benefit or value is non-material. It is spirit, love, compassion, kindness. It is a human value, not a material value.*

*The nuns embody the full richness of Buddhist love, compassion and wisdom in female form. It's quite rare, I think. If this light of tradition is gone from this earth, even though we have texts, the experiential warmth and blessings of this living women's tradition is gone forever.*

*Through the medium of video, we are able to share the warmth and blessings of the nuns with the world. May it be of benefit to all beings".*

## BUDDHISM – HISTORY & BELIEFS

In Buddhist tradition it is believed that many Buddhas, or Awakened Ones, have appeared in the past and many more are yet to come. The Buddha of our era was born around 563 B.C.E. in Lumbini, (now in Southern Nepal), and given the name Siddhartha Gautama. He was born into a wealthy family of the Shakya clan and hence is often known as Shakyamuni, "sage of the Shakyas." Despite enjoying a privileged existence, Siddhartha realized that his life, like everyone else's, inevitably included the suffering of sickness, old age and death. Realizing this he was moved to leave his home and family, and embark on a spiritual quest. He studied with several renowned spiritual masters but found that they did not have the ultimate answers he sought. The practice of severe austerities, including near-starvation, brought him to the edge of death but not to the truth. Abandoning asceticism, he meditated alone under a tree and attained enlightenment, becoming "Buddha".

### THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

Having discovered the truth for himself at the age of the 35, the Buddha devoted the rest of his life to sharing it with others. The first teaching he gave, known as the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma, was to five yogis who had been his companions while he practiced austerities. He explained that all existence within samsara, the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth, is marked by suffering. This is known as the First Noble Truth, the *truth of suffering*. The Buddha then taught that this *suffering is caused by a fundamental ignorance*, shared by all beings, of the true nature of existence. This is the Second Noble Truth. Next, the Buddha taught the Third and Fourth Noble Truths, that the *cessation of suffering is possible*, and that the *Eightfold Path leads to the cessation of suffering*.

Following this first "turning of the wheel", the Buddha continued teaching until around 483 B.C.E. when, at age of 80, he "attained parinirvana" - not just death but release from the cycle of karmically-determined rebirth.

Three main schools of Buddhism emerged from the extensive teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni. The Theravadin, or Hinayana (meaning "small vehicle") school is based solely on the first turning and spread primarily throughout Southeast Asia. The Mahayana ("large vehicle") school is based on the second turning which expounded on the wisdom of emptiness. These teachings spread along the great trade routes throughout Central Asia and China. The third turning is the foundation of the Vajrayana ("diamond vehicle") or Tantric path of Buddhism, which is the school that spread to and flourished in Tibet.

## **THE INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM INTO TIBET**

Before the introduction of Buddhism, most Tibetans followed an indigenous, shamanistic religion known as Bön. Buddhism was first introduced during the reign of King Songtsan Gampo (c.605 – 650 C.E.) who married princesses from Nepal and China, both of whom were Buddhists. He built the first Buddhist temples, including the Jokhang in Lhasa. After Songtsan Gampo, Buddhism spread very slowly until the ascension of King Trisong Detsen, who ruled from 755 to 797 or 804 C.E. Trisong Detsen invited many masters, including Shantarakshita a great scholar from India to help establish Buddhism in Tibet. When Shantarakshita was unable to establish a monastery in Tibet because, according to legend, local spirits and demons would destroy each night what was built during the day, he suggested that Trisong Detsen invite the powerful tantric master Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) to Tibet. Padmasambhava succeeded in subduing the beings that were opposing the establishment of Buddhism and with his help Tibet's first monastery was built at Samye, near Lhasa. At that time, the first Tibetan monks were ordained and a massive translation project begun, with many Indian and Tibetan scholars translating the entire Buddhist canon into Tibetan. These early translations are the basis of the Nyingma, or Old Translation school of Tibetan Buddhism.

About 815 C.E King Ralpachen ascended the throne and continued to actively support the spread of Buddhism in Tibet. Tibetan tradition holds that Ralpachen was murdered by two of his ministers who favored the indigenous Bön religion and who then placed Ralpachen's anti-Buddhist brother, Langdarma, on the throne. It is said that under Langdarma, Buddhism was savagely persecuted for several years until Langdarma was assassinated.

Following the death of Langdarma, Buddhism gradually recovered. Tibetan Buddhists journeyed to India and returned with new translations of Buddhist scriptures. Prominent among these were Marpa and Drogmi whose lineages of disciples gave rise to the Kagyu and Sakya schools, two of the three main "new translation" schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

The last of the four main schools, the Gelug, ("Virtuous ones") was established by the master-scholar Tsongkhapa (1357-1419 C.E.), and emphasizes scholarship and monastic discipline. The Dalai Lama is the head of the Gelug tradition.

In the 19th century, a movement known as Ri-mey (literally, "without borders") began in Kham, eastern Tibet, to combat sectarianism between the different Tibetan Buddhist schools. The Nangchen nuns follow the Ri-mey tradition.

In October 1950 the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) of China began the process of incorporating Tibet into the People's Republic of China. The invasion was swift and met little resistance after the initial defeat of the Tibetan army in a battle at Chamdo, eastern Tibet.

In 1959, a popular uprising in Lhasa was brutally suppressed and China tightened its grip on Tibet, causing the Dalai Lama to escape into exile in India. Many of the greatest masters of Tibetan Buddhism fled the Chinese invasion, including H.H. the 16th Karmapa, H.H. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, and H.H. Sakya Trizin, the respective leaders of the Kagyu, Nyingma and Sakya schools. Also among the lamas who escaped at this time was Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, father of Tsoknyi Rinpoche.

Following the Chinese invasion and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution that began in 1966, almost all of Tibet's roughly 7000 monasteries were destroyed and the monks and nuns were either forced to return to lay life, imprisoned or fled into exile in India or Nepal. A large number of Tibetans followed the Dalai Lama into exile. To the present day, Tibetans continue to risk the hazardous trek across the Himalayas to leave occupied Tibet. A number of the major Tibetan Buddhist monasteries were reestablished in India and Nepal along with substantial Tibetan communities, providing an unprecedented opportunity for non-Tibetans to learn about Tibetan Buddhism.

Some Tibetan teachers, who escaped from Tibet, took a deep interest in western culture. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, was one such teacher. As a young man in 1959 he studied Comparative Religion at Oxford University before co-founding, with fellow exile Akong Rinpoche, the first Tibetan Monastery in the West, Samye Ling in Scotland. Trungpa Rinpoche later moved to the United States where he was very influential in the establishment of Tibetan Buddhism. Beginning in the 1970's many of the great lamas toured the west, teaching and establishing centers across the United States and in Europe.

Today, many of the lamas who first introduced westerners to Tibetan Buddhism have passed on and their *tulkus* or reincarnations have been recognized. These include the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Khamtrul Rinpoche and Dudjom Rinpoche. These young tulkus are receiving the training that their predecessors received as well as education in English, so they can carry on their lineages. Also among those taking the place of the introductory lamas are a younger generation of lamas, born and educated in exile, such as Dzigar Kontrul Rinpoche, Dzongsar Khentse Rinpoche, Tsoknyi Rinpoche and his brothers, Mingyur Rinpoche and Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche and others who hold both the traditional Tibetan teachings and an understanding of western cultures. This combination enables them to

communicate the teachings to a new generation. Western teachers, fully trained in Tibetan teachings are also emerging and assuming leadership roles in establishing authentic Buddhist traditions in the West.

## SELECTED BIOGRAPHIES

**Machig Lapdrön** (1030-1129 A.D.) was a great 11<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan yogini who formalized the practice of Chöd in Tibet. Chöd, which means “cutting through” is a visionary Buddhist practice of cutting attachment to one’s body as a means to develop egolessness and compassion for all beings. The Chöd practitioner visualizes offering her/his body to spirits and demons and practices in lonely and dreaded places – like cemeteries – working to overcome all fear. As can be seen in BLESSINGS, Chöd practitioners use a bell, a small drum (a Chöd *damaru*), and a thigh-bone trumpet (*kangling*) in the practice. Machig Lapdrön died at the age of 99. A complete biography of Machig can be found in Tsultrim Allione’s *Women of Wisdom* (see glossary).

**Padmasambhava** was a great tantric master who, in the eight century firmly established Buddhism in Tibet, overcoming forces that had been hostile to the spread of the teachings. He is known in Tibetan as Guru Rinpoche, the precious teacher and by many other names. One such name is ‘the Lotus Born’, referring to the belief that he spontaneously manifested from a lotus flower as an eight year-old boy. Padmasambhava, together with other panditas and translators rendered into Tibetan all the existent Buddhist scriptures on Sutra and Tantra as well as most of the treatises explaining them. He concealed many of the teachings as *terma* (hidden spiritual treasures) which have been revealed over the centuries and continue to be revealed up to the present. Therefore he continues to be a central figure in Tibetan Buddhism, especially the Nyingma school.

**Yeshe Tsogyal:** (777-837 A.D.) An incarnation of several female Buddhas, in the form of a woman appeared to assist Padmasambhava in spreading the Vajrayana, especially the terma teachings, in Tibet. Yeshe Tsogyal, whose name means ‘Victorious Ocean of Wisdom,’ was renowned from childhood for her beauty and devotion to the Buddha’s teachings. King Trisong Deutsen made her his queen. When he offered all his possessions to Padmasambhava, he also offered Yeshe Tsogyal to be Padmasambhava’s spiritual consort. She became Padmasambhava’s greatest disciple, engaged in practice with incredible perseverance and attained a level equal to Padmasambhava himself, able to tame evil spirits and revive the dead. She had the siddhi of being able to remember all of the teachings without writing



them down, so was the chief compiler of all the inconceivable teachings given by Padmasambhava.

**Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo** was raised in London and in 1964. At age twenty, she travelled to India to pursue her Buddhist path. There she met her Guru, His Eminence the 8th Khamtrul Rinpoche, a great Drukpa Kagyu lama, and became one of the first Westerners to be ordained as a Tibetan Buddhist nun. She remained with Khamtrul Rinpoche for six years before he directed her to the Himalayan valley of Lahaul to undertake more intensive practice. Tenzin Palmo stayed in a small monastery in Lahaul for several years. Then, seeking more seclusion and better conditions for practice, she found a nearby cave where she remained for an additional 12 years, the last 3 years in strict retreat.

Before H.E. Khamtrul Rinpoche passed away in 1980, he had requested that Tenzin Palmo start a nunnery. In 1993, the Lamas of the Khampagar monastery in Himachal Pradesh, India repeated that request and Tenzin Palmo took on the task. In January 2000 the first nuns arrived and in 2001 the construction of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery began and is now nearing completion.

In 2008 His Holiness the 12th Gyalwang Drukpa, Head of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage gave Tenzin Palmo the rare title *Jetsunma*, or Venerable Master, in recognition of her spiritual achievements and efforts in promoting the status of female practitioners in Tibetan Buddhism.

For a full biography of Venerable Tenzin Palmo, see *Cave in the Snow* by Vicki Mackenzie. (see Resources)

**Tsultrim Allione**, M.A. was one of the first American women to be ordained as a Tibetan nun in 1970 by the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa. She is the author of *Women of Wisdom*, a groundbreaking book on the lives of great women Tibetan practitioners, as well as articles and audio programs on the sacred feminine and other Buddhist topics. After four years as a nun, Tsultrim returned her monastic vows, married and had three children. She has continued to practice, study and teach for the last thirty years, earning a degree in Buddhist Studies/Women Studies from Antioch University. Inspired by the vision of a Western retreat center while living in the Himalayas and seeing the need to create a place for the reemergence of the sacred feminine, Tsultrim founded Tara Mandala in 1993 where she is now the resident teacher. She travels extensively and teaches a variety of practices from Tibetan Buddhist lineages, including Dzogchen and Chöd. In the summer of 2007, while traveling in Tibet, Tsultrim was recognized as an emanation of Machig Lapdrön, the 11<sup>th</sup> century yogini who founded the Chöd lineage. Her most recent book, *Feeding Your Demons – Ancient Wisdom for Resolving*

*Inner Conflict*, adapts the ancient wisdom of Chöd practice for modern practitioners.

**Sherab Zangmo:** Until her death in 2008, Sherab Zangmo was Gechak Gompa's most respected nun, and widely regarded as the most realized woman in Nangchen. She was also one of the few nuns left of the older generation who were at Gechak Gompa before "the troubled times" that began in 1959. Sherab Zangmo came to Gechak Gompa at the age of ten and subsequently saw her family only for one day. During her meditation at Gechak, dakinis and deities arose to Sherab Zangmo in visions. In particular, as she describes in *BLESSINGS*, while doing dark retreat, Sherab Zangmo had many visions and completely accomplished the practice. Although she was still a young nun at this time, this was not a temporary meditation experience but a profound realization, very rarely accomplished in such a sudden fashion.

During the Cultural Revolution, Sherab Zangmo went to a remote place, and remained out of contact with others from Gechak Gompa, and her family. She continued to meditate, and in spite of illness, stayed in retreat for more than twenty years including 4 years in solitary retreat in a mountain cave. In the mid 1980's after conditions improved, Sherab Zangmo was asked to return to the newly rebuilt Gechak Gompa and teach. Until her death, she gave empowerments, instructions and inspiration to a new generation of nuns. She died joyfully, whilst teaching on the pure lands, in 2008.

## HISTORY OF THE TSOKNYI LINEAGE

The Tsoknyi lineage began in the 19th century with the great yogi Drubwang Tsoknyi (1828/49–1904), also referred to as the first Tsoknyi Rinpoche. Drubwang is an honorific or title indicating a yogi who has attained a high level of accomplishment. The name Tsoknyi translates literally as “two accumulations,” referring to the accumulations of wisdom and merit, which every Vajrayana practitioner must accumulate. Drubwang Tsoknyi was considered to be an emanation or incarnation of two earlier masters, Rechungpa and Ratna Lingpa. Rechungpa (1083-1161) was the principal disciple of Tibet’s greatest yogi, Milarepa, and an adept of the Six Yogas of Naropa. Ratna Lingpa (1403–1478) was one of the great tertöns or revealers of hidden dharma treasure (terma) belonging to the Nyingma school.

Drubwang Tsoknyi lived in the Kingdom of Nangchen in what is now Eastern Tibet. He was associated with Tsechu Gompa, a monastery located next to the royal palace by the Tsechu River at Nangchenghar. Tsechu Gompa follows the Drukpa Kagyu lineage, one of eight sub-schools of the Kagyu branch of Tibetan Buddhism. Drubwang Tsoknyi fully mastered the practices of the Drukpa Kagyu, including the Six Yogas of Naropa, a group of very powerful advanced practices that result in great spiritual realization and apparently magical powers. Drubwang Tsoknyi was a contemporary of the three great lamas of the time: Jamyang Khyentse, Jamgon Kongtrul, and Chokgyur Lingpa, and became the principal guru for the 6th Khamtrul Rinpoche, Tenpa'i Nyima, and the great master Shakya Shri.

As an incarnation of the tertön Ratna Lingpa, Drubwang Tsoknyi was also a tertön, or treasure revealer, whose terma discoveries included a new version of a terma text first revealed about 500 years previously by Ratna Lingpa. Drubwang Tsoknyi excelled in the yogas of the Nyingma tradition of Ratna Lingpa. The termas he discovered are the basis of the Tsoknyi lineage, which belongs to the Nyingma tradition. Through his student, Tsang Yang Gyamtso, Drubwang Tsoknyi I established a lineage of nuns who received all the teachings he had mastered. At a time when few women in Tibet were introduced to the advanced teachings of Tibetan Buddhism, the Tsoknyi Nangchen nuns became known as outstanding practitioners and teachers.

The second Tsoknyi Rinpoche was born into the family of the King of Nangchen in the first half of the 20th century and received the Six Yogas of Naropa from the 6th Khamtrul Rinpoche (who had received them from Drubwang Tsoknyi). He mastered all the teachings that his previous incarnation held. He was captured by the Chinese in the early 1960’s and died in prison.

The present incarnation of Drubwang Tsoknyi (Tsoknyi Rinpoche III) was born in 1966 and recognized at the age of eight as the reincarnation of Tsoknyi Rinpoche II by His Holiness the 16th Gyalwang Karmapa. He was born into a family of Dzogchen masters as the son of Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche and great, great-grandson of the treasure revealer Chokgyur Lingpa (a contemporary of Drubwang Tsoknyi). Therefore, as well as being the principle holder of the Tsoknyi lineage and a Drukpa Kagyu lineage holder, Tsoknyi Rinpoche III was trained by his father from an early age in the family tradition deriving from Chokgyur Lingpa (the New Treasures).

When he was 13, Tsoknyi Rinpoche was brought to Khampagar Monastery at Tashi Jong in India, the seat (in exile) of the Khamtrul Rinpoche line. His teachers include some of the most renowned masters of Tibet: Khamtrul Rinpoche Dongyu Nyima, his father Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche, and Adeu Rinpoche. In addition to his more than 30 nunneries and monasteries in Tibet, Tsoknyi Rinpoche is the spiritual head of two nunneries and one monastery in Nepal. Ngesdön Ösel Ling Monastery in Kathmandu is his seat in the East, and Yeshe Rangsal in Crestone, Colorado, is his seat in the West. Following the death in 2006 of the 8th Adeu Rinpoche of Tsechu Gompa in Nangchen, Tsoknyi Rinpoche is now also the main lama for Tsechu Gompa, until the next Adeu Rinpoche incarnation assumes that role.

### **THE NANGCHEN NUNS**

Until 1949, Nangchen where the great majority of the Tsoknyi nunneries are located, was an independent kingdom in Eastern Tibet, with its own language and its own government. It is now a county in the Qinghai province of China. Nangchen is so remote that before 1949, it was entirely outside of Chinese or Tibetan influence, and even today it is rarely visited. The region lies entirely above 10,000 feet. Despite its high altitude, much of Nangchen is grassland, dissected by the steep gorges of rivers that converge to form the Mekong. The population has traditionally been largely nomadic or semi-nomadic herders, known as excellent horseman and fierce fighters. In 1994, French "explorer" Dr Michel Peissel described Nangchen as, "The remotest, largest, and most secretive of the many little kingdoms of the much-feared Khamba [sic] tribes," and, "...no doubt the last of the truly unexplored old Tibetan kingdoms."

The Tsoknyi nunneries were founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Tsang-Yang Gyamtso, who was commanded by his teacher, Tsoknyi Rinpoche I to build nunneries in order to provide female practitioners with the same

opportunities as men to learn and practice the most advanced teachings of Tibetan Buddhism.

Nangchen is famous for its meditators, yogis and yoginis who practice with great persistence and determination and attain great realization. The region is known as *gomde*, literally "land of meditators". Even in this environment, the Nangchen yogini nuns are famous for their accomplishments in profound yogas and meditation, particularly in "tsa lung" (practices such as tummo or inner heat), dzogchen (the highest meditation), and chöd (cutting through all clinging to ego), which derive from the Kagyu and Nyingma schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The tradition of the Tsoknyi nuns thrived for a century growing to 4000 women living in 40 nunneries scattered throughout the mountains of Nangchen.

But all that changed when, during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960's all 40 nunneries were destroyed and the nuns were dispersed. Many of the nuns were sent to Chinese work camps, or escaped back to their nomadic families. Some were killed. But a handful of nuns hid in caves where they continued to practice in secret. Most of the texts were lost, but the nuns managed to keep their tradition alive in their minds. After 20 years, these nuns began to regroup and rebuild their nunneries, stone by stone. Gradually others joined them. By the time Tsoknyi Rinpoche III visited them in 2003 for the first time, he realized that through the efforts of the older nuns, this sacred tradition had been kept alive and was taking root in a new generation. Despite extreme physical hardships and primitive living conditions, today's remaining elder nuns are passing on their spiritual heritage to a new generation.

Tsoknyi Rinpoche III took on the responsibility of helping them survive, and today approximately 3,000 nuns receive his support in approximately 35 nunneries. Most of the nuns are under 45 years old, a new generation that have joined the nunneries since they were rebuilt after the destruction of the Cultural Revolution. Principal amongst the nunneries is Gebchak Gonpa, home to approximately 400 nuns.

The majority of the nuns come from the local nomad population and most of them have traditionally relied on their families for support. The nunneries' yearly schedule includes breaks in the summer during which the nuns can go home to help their families with harvesting crops and herding yaks, returning to the nunneries with a share of the crop in the form of tsampa, the flour made from roasted barley that makes up the staple of their diet. Butter and tea (which they add to the tsampa) are the other staple foods. In recent times, forced urbanization or resettling of nomadic families in permanent housing has begun to erode this traditional family based support system on which the Nangchen nuns have relied.

The nuns' story is one of dedication and tenacity. Typically, they perform many of their spiritual practices in a group, teaching and helping each other all their lives. Many nuns do three-year, nine-year or even lifetime retreat. Today, as originally established by Tsoknyi Rinpoche I and Tsang Yang Gyamtso more than 100 years ago, most nunneries includes a three-year retreat for all nuns, followed by entry into one of sixteen types of practice houses. Alternating periods of maintaining daily upkeep with retreat, the Nangchen Nuns remain in practice for the rest of their lives.

In retreat, the nuns' daily routine is one that has been followed by yogis and yoginis for hundreds of years, comprising four three-hour meditation sessions. At night, most remain sitting in a meditation box, mingling meditation and sleep.

Many of the nuns are accomplished masters of difficult yogic practices. At Gebchak Gompa they perform a yearly ritual to demonstrate mastery of tummo, the yoga of inner fire. In mid-winter temperatures far below freezing, a hundred or so nuns sit all night, wrapping wet sheets around their bare torsos, drying the sheets with the heat of the practice. The most adept may dry 25 sheets before, just before dawn, the nearly-naked practitioners perform a long procession around the nunnery, pausing to wet their sheets in barrels of icy water at the four corners and drying them as they walk. This very rare and awe-inspiring event, as well as the realization attained by these nuns, has gained them respect and renown throughout Tibet. In a culture where female practitioners have struggled to gain respect, the Tsoknyi Nangchen nuns have risen to a high level of status, with many monks and lamas seeking their teachings and instruction.

The power of the nuns' practice is evident in the atmosphere of harmony and cooperation within the nunneries. Also, there is a profound impact on the surrounding communities. The communities and villages that surround the nunneries have become more peaceful and markedly happier, as violence and alcoholism have been reduced by the contact between the traditionally fierce Khampa nomads and the nuns. The nuns serve the community through spiritual support and counseling, helping with ceremonies at the time of death and so forth. This is a tangible example of the power of spiritual influence.

The values that the Tsoknyi Nangchen nuns embody—peace, love and compassion—affect the entire community and continue to branch out to the rest of the world. The nuns' lives exemplify the power of living Dharma and its realization to transform hearts and minds everywhere.

## MORE ON FEMALE PRACTITIONERS

Tsoknyi Rinpoche I's decision to create a system of nunneries in order to train women in the highest teachings of Tibetan Buddhism was revolutionary in the context of Tibetan society where the word for woman translates as "lower birth". His vision that in time the nuns would become some of the most accomplished spiritual practitioners in the world was also unique in the context of Tibetan Buddhism, which has been traditionally male dominated.

The stories of female practitioners in Tibetan Buddhism do exist, but they are hard to find. The most frequently cited accomplished woman practitioner is Yeshe Tsogyal, one of the principal students and the consort of Guru Padmasambhava, the Indian tantric master who helped to establish Buddhism in Tibet in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

In a famous discourse with Padmasambhava, Yeshe Tsogyal laments the condition of women practitioners:

*"Inadequate women like me with little energy and an inferior birth incur the world's hostility. When we go begging, the dogs are hostile. If we possess food or wealth then thieves molest us. If we are attractive we are bothered by fornicators. If we work hard the country people are hostile. Even if we do nothing at all the tongues of malicious gossips turn against us. Whatever we do, the lot of a woman on the path is a miserable one. To maintain our practice is virtually impossible, and even to stay alive is very difficult..."*

In his response, which is included in BLESSINGS, Padmasambhava encourages Yeshe Tsogyal with these words:

*"Yogini seasoned in the Secret Mantra!  
The ground of Liberation  
Is this human form, this common human form  
And here distinctions, male and female,  
Have no consequence.  
And yet if bodhicitta (the awakened heart of compassion)  
graces it, a woman's form indeed will be supreme. "*

## **A VAJRA SONG OF TSOKNYI RINPOCHE I**

The following song was originally composed by Tsoknyi Rinpoche I, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is chanted daily by all the Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns. Mingyur Yogini of Decheniling nunnery, one of the oldest and most accomplished of the nuns, chants "Don't Wander" in BLESSINGS.

*Don't wander, don't wander, place mindfulness on guard;*

*Along the road of distraction, Mara lies in ambush.*

*Mara is the mind, clinging to like and dislike;*

*So look into the essence of this magic, free from dualistic fixation.*

*Realize that your mind is unfabricated primordial purity.*

*There is no buddha elsewhere; look at your own face.*

*There is nothing else to search for; rest in your own place.*

*Non-meditation is spontaneous perfection, so capture the royal seat.*

## **THE PRACTICE OF COMPASSION**

Throughout BLESSINGS, in interviews with the nuns, they talk about the importance of meditation and contemplation. One essential part of the Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns daily practice is generating an altruistic mind through deeply felt contemplations on Bodhicitta, such as the following:

### **CONTEMPLATION ON BODHICITTA**

**By Tsoknyi Rinpoche III**

*Remain free and completely at ease. Within this open state of mind, remind yourself that all sentient beings possess this awake openness as their basic nature. Everyone has Buddha nature, yet, unaware of this, they suffer in all sorts of terrible samsaric states. Contemplate how utterly sad this is and form the resolve: "Through the method of this training, I will remove the*



*delusion of all sentient beings. I will do away with this temporary delusion of seeing things as they are not.” Develop that confidence, that courage. Remind yourself that all the confusion of samsara, all deluded experience comes about through clinging to the notion of me and mine. It all originates from cherishing oneself. Breath out deeply and slowly, a long deep breath, and imagine the exhalation carries all your virtue, positive karma and merit to all sentient beings. Gently breath in again. Gather all their negative karma, obscurations and suffering. Take it into yourself, and again send them your positive merit. Practice like this for a while.*

*Now imagine that all the suffering of sentient beings really does dissolve into yourself, that you really do take it on yourself. When their suffering enters you, it vanishes completely, melting into the state of primordial purity, like snow on water. Imagine your positive karma, virtues and merit are truly given away to all sentient beings, and that they receive it and it dispels all their suffering.*

*May all beings have happiness and be free from suffering.  
May they achieve the sublime happiness and dwell in equanimity*

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**Blessings** – In Tibetan, literally “splendor waves” or “gift waves,” conveying the sense of radiant atmosphere that comes toward one when opening to the teacher and lineage.

**Bodhicitta** – Sanskrit for “mind of enlightenment” or “heart of enlightenment”. Bodhicitta has two aspects: absolute, or realizing the insubstantiality of all phenomena, and relative, or aspiring and acting with love and compassion in order to free all beings from suffering.

**Bodhisattva** – Sanskrit for “one who exhibits bodhicitta.” “Bodhi” literally means blossomed in Sanskrit, and “sattva” means a heroic mind. Thus Bodhisattva refers to those who commit themselves to the Bodhisattva path of developing compassion and loving kindness in order to liberate all sentient beings.

**Buddha** – Sanskrit for an individual who attains complete enlightenment. When we speak of “the Buddha”, it refers to the one who most recently discovered the path to enlightenment, the Buddha known as Shakyamuni who lived in India in the 6th century BCE.

**Buddha nature** – The essential nature of all sentient beings; the potential for full enlightenment. Since all beings have Buddha nature, they have the potential to become buddhas through spiritual practice.

**Chöd** – Literally cutting, destroying, it is a method of meditation in which one symbolically offers one's own body as food for demons or spirits, as a means of cutting through attachment to body and ego. Practitioners are known as Chöwas. The practice was founded by the 11<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan yogini, Machik Labdrön.

**Compassion** - The determination to free all sentient beings from suffering arising from the egoless insight that "I" and "others" are not separate, and that the suffering of others is not different from one's own.

**Dakini** – Sanskrit for "sky traveler" or "sky enjoyer," this refers to a female practitioner who has attained full enlightenment. In tantra, a dakini is the supreme embodiment of wisdom itself.

**Devotion** – In Tibetan Buddhism, the relationship between teacher and disciple is of paramount importance as the teacher (in the video also referred to as the guru or master) is the tangible representation of the Buddha and his teachings. Devotion to the teacher is made up of faith, love, trust, respect and a longing for the wisdom the teacher can transmit.

**Dharma** – This is a Sanskrit term most commonly used to refer to the teachings of the Buddha. Specifically, it refers to the wisdom or truth underlying or inherent in the teachings.

**Dzogchen** – Tibetan for "great perfection," it refers to the highest teachings which emphasize natural ease and the direct or intuitive perception of reality rather than fabricated effort and rational analysis. The Nangchen nuns practice the Dzogchen teachings and many have realized the meaning of these teachings.

**Ego** – The notion of a truly or intrinsically existent, independent self or that which we call "I". Fixating on this belief is often called "ego clinging"

**Egolessness** – The absence of independent or intrinsic existence, either of oneself or of external phenomena. Egolessness is a fundamental tenet of Buddhism and is one of the "Three Marks of Existence", the other two being suffering and impermanence.

**Emptiness** – the absence of a fixed independent existence in all phenomena which is therefore the unlimited potential for everything to exist. It is the state of openness, a complete absence of grasping and fixation that is experienced when the mind is at rest. A true understanding of emptiness is experiential, transcending conceptual thought.

**Enlightenment** (freedom, liberation) – Knowing reality as it is. Synonymous with Buddhahood, it is the complete realization of the innate potential or Buddha nature that is inherent in all sentient beings.

**Four Reminders** – Four thoughts which one contemplates in order to turn the mind toward reality as it is: *the preciousness of a favorable human birth*, *the reality of death*, *the unerring law of cause and effect*, and *the pain of confused existence*. The four reminders are contemplated by the nuns before beginning any daily practice.

**Four Noble Truths** – The subject of the Buddha's first teaching and often considered to be the foundation of all Dharma teachings. The Four Noble Truths are: (1) *The Truth of Suffering* (sometimes translated as Dissatisfaction) (2) *The Truth of the Origin of Suffering* (i.e., Ignorance). (3) *The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering* (i.e., Enlightenment). (4) *The Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering* (the Eightfold Path).

**Guru** – (Sanskrit) Spiritual teacher and guide. The guru is of central importance in tantric Buddhism, as the one from whom a practitioner directly receives the teachings, initiations, blessings etc.

**Hinayana** – Sanskrit for “narrow” or “lesser,” this refers to the foundation of the spiritual path, and emphasizes investigating mind and its confusion.

**Impermanence** – the core Buddhist belief that all phenomena are subject to change and decay. In Buddhist philosophy, impermanence is one of the Three Marks of Existence, the other two being suffering and egolessness (lack of inherent existence).

**Karma** – Sanskrit for actions. The law of cause and effect according to which all experiences are the result of previous actions, and all actions are the seeds of future experiences.

**Liberation** – see Enlightenment.

**Lineage** – an unbroken chain of direct transmission of teachings from master to disciple.

**Machik Labdrön** – (1055-1153) Great Tibetan female teacher and incarnation who set down the Chöd practice of cutting through ego-clinging.

**Mahayana** – Sanskrit for “great” or broad, this refers to the stage of the spiritual path that emphasizes universal Buddha nature and the wisdom of egolessness and compassion.

**Mantra** – (Sanskrit) Literally “mind protection.” A mantra is a combination of sacred seed syllables or a verse which both invokes and embodies in sound the qualities of a specific deity or aspect of enlightenment. A mantra protects the mind from ordinary perceptions and conceptions.

**Meditation** – A method to familiarize oneself with one’s mind and mind’s essence by first resting calmly and freely without being disturbed by rising and dissolving thoughts and emotions. Through this process one reaches the state of insight into the nature of reality.

**Meditation box** – a square box-like seat used by Tibetan yogins and yoginis, where they sit and practice and in which they remain upright at night rather than lying on a bed. The upright posture facilitates the practice of dream and sleep yoga.

**Mind** – Key concept in all Buddhist teaching which distinguishes between thinking mind and mind essence. Thinking mind is the dualistic state that gets caught up with or absorbed in perceived objects, believing whatever one happens to think. Mind also refers to undeluded mind, the fundamental nature, the Original Face, Buddha nature.

**Ngöndro** – Tibetan for preliminary practices of Vajrayana, such as 100,000 taking refuge vows and prostrations, 100,000 mantra recitations, 100,000 mandala offerings, and 100,000 guru yoga offerings. The nuns complete ngöndro practice before beginning a deity practice.

**Offering scarf (katag)** – A common part of many Tibetan rituals, such as welcoming, farewells and congratulations, katags are traditionally offered as a mark of respect.

**Pointing out** – A direct introduction to the nature of one’s mind by a qualified master.

**Prayer Flags** – Found only in Tibetan Buddhism, prayer flags are pieces of fabric in five symbolic colors, imprinted with prayers, mantras and/or images of deities. As they flutter, they are believed to bless the surrounding environment with their prayers

**Prayer wheel** – A cylinder mounted on an axis, and filled with paper scrolls on which are printed large numbers of mantras. Spinning the cylinder is believed to be similar to saying the enclosed mantras aloud. Prayer wheels vary from small and hand held, to large ones mounted in rows in walls.

**Primordial purity** – the Buddha nature, present in all sentient beings, the purity which can never be spoiled or tainted in any way.

**Renunciation** – usually translated here as "determination to be free," renunciation is the turning away from everyday worldly pursuits because of the belief that all phenomena or appearances are illusory or dream-like, and that attachment to them is the cause of suffering and samsara (cyclic existence).

**Retreat** – withdrawing from everyday activities in order to undertake intensive spiritual practice without distraction. Retreats can be done individually (solo) or in a group. Three year retreat is a retreat taking three-years and three months, during which the retreatant practices intensively every day. The exact practices vary between the different schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

**Rinpoche** – A Tibetan honorific term for highly realized teacher, Rinpoche literally means, "very precious."

**Samsara** – Sanskrit for "cyclic existence" or repetitive confusion. Traditionally it is described as consisting of birth, death and rebirth, being propelled by negative emotions and the karmic force of one's actions and characterized by suffering, impermanence, and ignorance.

**Sangha** – Sanskrit for "one with virtuous motivation," this refers variously to followers of Buddhism, to Buddhist monastics (nuns and monks), and to those who have realized the Buddha's teachings ("noble sangha"). It can also mean a community of practitioners who study with a Buddhist teacher.

**Tantra** – Sanskrit for "continuity," this refers to Vajrayana teachings and practices.

**Tulku** – (Tibetan) Incarnate lama. Unique to Tibetan Buddhism, Tulkus are realized lamas who have chosen to take human form again in order to guide others to enlightenment.

**Tummo** – Inner heat or inner fire practice. One of the advanced Vajrayana (tantric) practices. Although the purpose of tummo is to develop realization in the mind, it also results in the production of physical heat in the body. As

a test of their perfection of tummo practice, the Nangchen nuns perform a ceremony in which they circumambulate the monastery wearing a wet sheet in the coldest month of the year.

**Transmission** – the passing of a teaching or initiation from a qualified teacher to a student. A qualified teacher is an authentic lineage master who is the most recent in an unbroken lineage. Because the dharma is a living, experiential tradition and not just the words or philosophy, transmission from a guru or lama who has mastered the teaching is considered essential if a student is to benefit from a teaching or practice.

**Tsampa** - *tsam pa*, flour made from roasted barley or other grains. It is a staple food in Tibet. In the video, the nuns are seen eating tsampa mixed with tea and yak butter.

**Vajrayana** – Sanskrit for “indestructible” or diamond-like path, it refers to the highest Buddhist teachings which emphasize the clarity and power aspects of phenomena.

**Yogi (masc.) or yogini (fem.)** – someone who practices tantra. Often refers to someone who has already attained stability in the natural state of mind through tantric practice. Yogis and yoginis can be both monastic and lay practitioners.

## **TOPICS – AND RESOURCES – FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION**

**BLESSINGS** touches on a number of topics that can form the basis for discussion or further study. Among them are:

1. The history and beliefs of Buddhism in general and Tibetan Buddhism in particular.
2. Tibetan Buddhist spiritual practices, including the practice of meditation, loving-kindness practices, mindfulness, Dzogchen and Vajrayana practices such as Cho and tummo.
3. The role of women in Tibetan Buddhism and in Tibetan society.
4. The culture and history of Tibet, particularly the nomadic regions of Kham and Amdo.
5. Tibetan Dharma in western society

There are many extraordinary resources for further study, including translations of some of the original Buddhist texts and commentaries, teachings from many of the present day as well as historical Tibetan teachers, books on Buddhism by western practitioners and scholars. We have selected a handful of books as suggested additional resources for further study and discussion of the topics addressed in BLESSINGS.

### **Tibetan Buddhist Beliefs and Practices:**

Chodrön, Pema. Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living. Boston: Shambhala, 1994.

---. The Wisdom of No Escape and the Path of Loving-Kindness. Boston: Shambhala, 1994.

Kontrul, Dzigar. It's Up to You: The Practice of Self-Reflection on the Buddhist Path. Boston: Shambhala, 2006.

Lama, Dalai. How to Practice: The Way to a Meaningful Life. Atria, 2003.

Palmo, Tenzin. Reflections On A Mountain Lake: Teachings on Practical Buddhism. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2002.

Patrul, Rinpoche et al: Words of My Perfect Teacher. Boston: Shambhala, 1998.

Powers, John. Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2007.

Ray, Reginald A. Indestructible Truth: The Living Spirituality of Tibetan Buddhism. Boston: Shambhala, 2000.

---. Secret of the Vajra World: The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet. Boston: Shambhala, 2002.

Sogyal Rinpoche, Patrick D. Gaffney and Andrew Harvey. The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying: The Spiritual Classic and International Best Seller, Revised and Updated. New York: Harper San Francisco, 2002.

Thupten, Anam. No Self, No Problem. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2009.

Trungpa, Chogyam. Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism. Boston: Shambhala, 1973.

Tsoknyi, Drubwang, et al. Fearless Simplicity: The Dzogchen Way of Living Freely in a Complex World. Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe, 2003.

Tsoknyi, Drubwang. Carefree Dignity: Discourses on Training in the Nature of Mind. Trans. Erik Pema Kunsang and Marcia Binder Schmidt. Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe, 1998.

Urgyen, Tulku. As It Is: Volume I. Trans. Erik Pema Kunsang. Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe, 1999.

---. As It Is: Volume II. Trans. Erik Pema Kunsang. Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe, 2000.

---. Rainbow Painting: A Collection of Miscellaneous Aspects of Development and Completion. Trans. Erik Pema Kunsang and Marcia Binder Schmidt. Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe, 2004.

---. Vajra Speech. Trans. Erik Pema Kunsang. Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe, 2001.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche. The Joy of Living: Unlocking the Secret and Science of Happiness. New York: Harmony, 2007.

## **Buddhism: History and Belief:**

Gethin, Rupert. The Foundations of Buddhism. Oxford University Press, 1998.

Hagen, Steve. Buddhism Plain and Simple. Broadway, 1998.

Hahn, Thich Naht: The Heart of the Buddha's Teachings. Broadway, 1999.

Jamyang Khyentse, Dzongsar. What Makes You Not a Buddhist. Boston: Shambhala, 2007.

Kohn, Sherab Chodzin. A Life of the Buddha. Boston: Shambhala, 1994.

---. Entering the Stream: An Introduction to Buddha and His Teachings. Boston: Shambhala, 1993.



Lopez, Donald. The Story of Buddhism: A Concise Guide to it's History & Teachings. HarperOne, 2002.

Rahula, Walpole. What the Buddha Taught: Revised and Expanded Edition with Texts from Suttas and Dhammapada. Grove Press, 1974.

Shantideva. The Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhicaryavatara). Boston: Shambhala, 2006.

## **Buddhism in the West:**

Allione, Tsultrim. Feeding Your Demons: Ancient Wisdom for Resolving Inner Conflict. New York: Little Brown, 2008.

Batchelor, Stephen. Buddhism Without Beliefs: A Contemporary Guide to Awakening. Riverhead Trade, 1998.

Chödrön, Pema. When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times. Boston: Shambhala, 1997.

Fields, Rick. How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America. Boston: Shambhala, 1992.

Paine, Jeffery. Re-Enchantment: Tibetan Buddhism Comes to the West. WW Norton & Co., 2004.

Seager, Richard Hughes. Buddhism in America. Columbia University Press, 2000.

## **Women in Tibetan Buddhism:**

Allione, Tsultrim. Women of Wisdom. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2000.

Boucher, Sandy. Opening the Lotus: A Woman's Guide to Buddhism. Boston: Beacon, 1997.

Cabezón, Jose Ignacio. Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender. SUNY Press, 1991.

Campbell, June. Traveller in Space: In Search of Female Identity in Tibetan Buddhism. London: Athlone, 1996.

Changchub, Gyalwa and Namkhai Nyinpo. Lady of the Lotus-Born: The Life and Enlightenment of Yeshe Tsogyal. Trans. Padmakara Translation Group. Boston: Shambhala, 1999.

Edou, Jerome. Machig Labdrön and the Foundations of Chöd. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1995.

Gregory, Peter M., Mroczek, Susanne, Women Practicing Buddhism. American Experiences, Wisdom Publications, 2007.

Gross, Rita M., Buddhism after Patriarchy. SUNY Press, 1992.

Mackenzie, Vicki. Cave in the Snow: Tenzin Palmo's Quest for Enlightenment. London: Bloomsbury, 1998.

Nyingpo, Namkhai. Mother of Knowledge: The Enlightenment of Yeshe Tsogyal. Trans. Tarthang Padmasambhava, et al. Treasures From Juniper Ridge: The Profound Instructions of Padmasambhava to the Dakini Yeshe Tsogyal. Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe, 2008.

Paul, Diana Y. Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahayana Tradition. University of California Press, 1985.

Shaw, Miranda. Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism. Princeton: Princeton University, 1994.

Simmer-Brown, Judith. Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism. Boston: Shambhala, 2002.

Willis, Janice D. Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1995.

## **History, Religion & Culture in Tibet:**

Kunsang, Erik Pema and Marcia Binder Schmidt. Blazing Splendor: The Memoirs of Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe, 2005.

Lama, Dalai. Freedom in Exile: The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama. HarperOne, 1991.

Pachen, Ani and Adelaide Donnelley. Sorrow Mountain: The Journey of a Tibetan Warrior Nun. Tokyo: Kodansha America, 2002.

Trungpa, Chogyam. Born in Tibet. Boston: Shambhala, 1995.

Tsogyal, Yeshe. The Lotus-Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava. Trans. Erik Pema Kunsang. Boston: Shambhala, 1993.

## Website Resources

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, [www.tenzinpalmo.com](http://www.tenzinpalmo.com)

Tsoknyi Rinpoche III, Pundarika Foundation, [www.pundarika.org](http://www.pundarika.org)

Tsultrim Allione, Tara Mandala, [www.taramandala.org](http://www.taramandala.org)

Victress Hitchcock, Chariot Productions, [www.chariotvideos.com](http://www.chariotvideos.com)

James Gritz, Photography, [www.jamesgritz.com](http://www.jamesgritz.com)

### **Tibetan books and additional resources sites:**

Snow Lion Publications – [www.snowlionpub.com](http://www.snowlionpub.com)

Namse Bangdzo Bookstore – [www.namsebangdzo.com](http://www.namsebangdzo.com)

Wisdom Publications – [www.wisdom-books.com](http://www.wisdom-books.com)

Vajra Echoes – [www.vajraechoes.com](http://www.vajraechoes.com)

Nalandabodhi Bodhi Dharma Bookstore – <http://nalandabodhi.webpossystem.com>

Tibetan Buddhism Resource Site, [www.khandro.net](http://www.khandro.net) *(this is a great overall resource to learn more about all subjects in Tibetan Buddhism)*

## **THE TSOKNYI NANGCHEN NUNS ENDOWMENT FUND**

A portion of the proceeds from the sale of the BLESSINGS DVD is donated to the Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns Endowment Fund. Established in 2006 under the auspices of Pundarika Foundation's 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, the goal of the Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns Preservation Project Endowment Fund is to raise \$1.4 million in order to permanently support the Nangchen Nuns and their 30+ nunneries. Once fulfilled, the fund will disperse approximately \$100,000 per year to meet the daily and long-term expenses of over 3,000 Nuns. These allocations will be made by Tsoknyi Rinpoche III and a committee of representative nuns from all the nunneries in Nangchen to ensure that the most critical needs are met. With the policies of the Chinese government focusing on the dismantling of nomadic communities and their relocation to larger cities, the traditional family support of the nuns has become harder to maintain in recent years. The support from the Endowment fund is therefore increasingly critical if the lineage of the Nangchen nuns is to survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Contributions to the fund will help provide:

- Medical Care, Supplies and Clinics\*
- Food (at least One Hot Meal a Day)
- Yaks, Greens and Gardens
- Nutritional Supplements and Iodized Salt
- Health Education & General Education
- Shelter and Bedding
- Clothing (Sunglasses, Shoes and Socks, Fleece Outerwear)
- Places to Practice (rudimentary mud and stone buildings are crumbling)
- Elder Care and Elder Housing
- Emergency Relief
- Potable Water Stations, Hand Washing Stations and Sanitation
- Stoves for Heat and Cooking
- Solar Power for Lighting in Main Halls for Reading
- Means to Deliver Supplies and Transport the Sick

\*The nearest hospital is a two-day journey by horseback, making it impossible for elderly nuns to travel for medical care.

For more information on the Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns, please visit [www.pundarika.org](http://www.pundarika.org).