

JAMYANG FOUNDATION

AN EDUCATION PROJECT FOR HIMALAYAN WOMEN



2023 NEWSLETTER 5998 Alcala Park, San Diego, CA 92110 | www.jamyang.org



Himalayan nuns chant at the opening ceremony of the 2023 Sakyadhita Conference in Korea

Heartfelt best wishes, dear friends!

Jamyang Foundation students and staff wish to express their gratitude for your generous support and for all the wonderful opportunities of this very eventful and meaningful year. Over a dozen nuns from remote Himalayan regions were sponsored by Sakyadhita Korea to attend the 2023 Sakyadhita Conference on Buddhist Women held in Seoul, Korea, in June 2023 ~ a life-changing experience for everyone. Amidst the many challenges facing humanity, our students are striving to spread wisdom, peace, and kindness in their monasteries, villages, and throughout the world. Every day, they make sincere prayers and send good thoughts to all sentient beings, especially remembering the kind donors who keep them in good health so their worthy aspirations can be fulfilled.

May peace and compassion warm the hearts of all living beings!

Karma Lekshe Tsomo
Director



After returning to Zangskar, Himalayan nuns share their experiences at the 2023 Sakyadhita Conference.

GLIMPSES NEW WORLDS

by Stanzin Jigsal

In June, I was very fortunate to attend the 2023 Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Seoul, South Korea. I learned so many new things, especially how to do different types of meditation and how to live with nature. The two things that impressed me most about South Korea were the hospitality of the people and their kindness towards everyone. At the Sakyadhita Conference, I met many Dharma friends from different countries. Amazingly, one day I met a nun from South Korea who could speak Tibetan! We discussed many different topics, especially comparing the similarities and differences between Buddhist practices in South Korea and India. She suggested that I share my experiences at the 2023 Sakyadhita Conference in Korea with other nuns after returning to my monastery in Zangskar and I was very happy to do so.

After the conference, we went on a temple tour where I observed the peaceful atmosphere of Korean temples in the countryside. For two nights, we had the opportunity to stay at Beakdamsa Monastery, located far from the city and close to nature. The peaceful atmosphere beside a river was very conducive to meditation practice. It was fascinating to learn about Buddhism in Korea. I observed that the aim of Buddhist practice there is very clearly to achieve nirvāṇa. To that end, Korean Buddhists focus upon meditation. They practice diligently to uplift all sentient beings and rescue them from suffering.

The only difficulty I experience was with the language, because I cannot speak or understand English well. My favorite experiences were meeting so many nuns from different parts of the world. I sincerely appreciate the tranquil environment of Korea.



WITH OPEN EYES

by Nima Dolkar

The 2023 Sakyadhita Conference on Buddhist Women held in Seoul, Korea, in June 2023, was an eye-opening experience for me. I learned that people in Korea really take great care of their guests. I felt like compassionate bodhisattvas were welcoming me. It was truly an amazing experience. I learned a lot from the participants who gave talks, especially about the daily lives of nuns in different parts of the world, and met many new Dharma friends from other countries. Unfortunately, the conference schedule was very busy and due to my language limitations, we were not able to exchange contact information. I hope we will get the chance to meet again and visit one another's monasteries.

During the three-day pilgrimage tour following the conference, we visited some monasteries that were around one thousand years old. I saw monasteries that had a thousand Buddhist images, many of them images of Avalokitesvara (Tibetan: Chenresig), the Bodhisattva of Compassion. It was fascinating that these images were often shown in different postures and with different hand gestures (mudras) than the ones I am accustomed to seeing in Ladakh. What impressed me most on the tour was that all the monasteries were very clean, without even a tiny speck of dust on the floor. The same goes for the streets, towns, and cities in Korea. Every place we saw, without exception, was immaculately clean.

I learned a great deal about Buddhism in Korea, especially that Buddhists there take great pride in welcoming their guests. The welcome receptions we received made us feel very special, like high lamas (rinpoches) being welcomed to our own monastery. It was very nice to see everyone treated equally. The most difficult thing I encountered was communications. As mentioned earlier, I was not able to exchange contact information because my English is not so good. This taught me the importance of learning English as an international language.

My favorite experience was seeing the inspiring teamwork in the monasteries of Korea. In Ladakh, when nuns have responsibilities in the monasteries, such as kitchen duties, we take full responsibility for all the meals. The rest of the nuns are reluctant to help if they are not on duty. However, in Korea everyone contributes to doing everything. Even if one person has the responsibility for a certain job, everyone is willing to chip in to help keep things running harmoniously. Teamwork was very important, and everyone pitched in to help each other. This was a great learning experience for me, opening my eyes on how to improve cooperation with my Dharma sisters.



ONLINE MONASTIC STUDENT EXCHANGE

by K.S. Devina

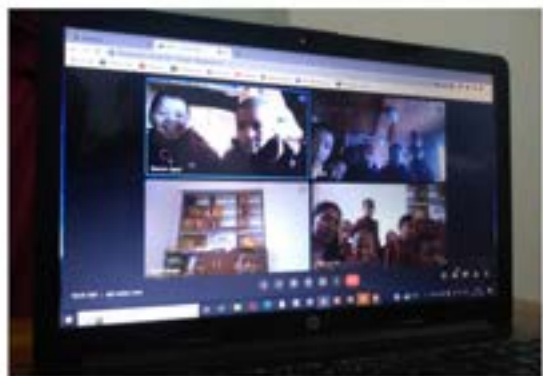
"Simple exchanges can break walls down between us, for when people come together and speak to one another and share a common experience, then their common humanity is revealed."

~ Barack Obama

A novel idea for an Online Student Exchange Program was initiated at Changchub Chöling Monastery in Zangla (Zangskar, Ladakh) in November 2023; to encourage the exchange of ideas, culture, and experiences between young monks and nuns was initiated at Changchub Chöling Monastery in Zangla (Zangskar, Ladakh) in November 2023. The exchange program gave the nuns at Changchub Chöling an opportunity to communicate online with young monks from Zangskar who are about the same age. The monks are currently studying at Tashi Lhunpo Monastic School in Mysore, Karnataka, South India. The initiative gave the students a virtual platform to discuss their daily lives, curriculum, study program, and the rituals of monastic life.

This was the first Online Student Exchange program for young monastic students to begin learning the ethics of online communications. The nuns living in the remote region of Zangskar also got to learn about the lifestyle of Zangskari monks studying at Tashi Lhunpo. The village of Zangla recently got a Jio cellular service tower, allowing the nuns to expand their knowledge about what is happening around the world events and get connected with others, for their mutual benefit.

The program was co-coordinated by Venerables Stanzin Jigsal and Tenzin Tsepel, two nun teachers in Zangla, and Ms. Devina in Mysore. The students, previously isolated due to the remoteness of their homeland, found the online communications exhilarating. With one laptop, the nuns of Changchub Chöling Monastery successfully conducted this novel program to prove that "No barrier is bigger than one's determination." They hope that simple exchange programs such as this can help break down barriers and further beneficial communications among people around the world.



Changchub Chöling nuns exchange ideas with young monks at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery

A BUSY WINTER STUDY PROGRAM AT SANGHAMITRA

by Senior Nuns of Kinnaur

This year, 16 nuns and one Tibetan teacher from the Himalayan region of Kinnaur (Himachal Pradesh, India) traveled by road and train, arriving in Delhi on September 25 and then arriving in Bodhgaya on September 27. The trip was good. Some nuns felt a bit tired, but we arrived safely. When we got out of the cars at Sanghamitra and saw our new English teacher from America, we felt very happy! On the second day after we arrived, we went to the Mahabodhi Temple and offered apples from Kinnaur and flowers to the Buddha. At this sacred site, where the Buddha achieved awakening, we prayed for blessings for all sentient beings.

The next day we started our regular classes. Our daily schedule is very busy.; wWe get up at 5 or 5:30 am. From 6 to 7, we all gather in the prayer hall in front of the shrine to the Buddha. The first 30 minutes, we sit in silent meditation, and then we make prayers for the peace and happiness all beings. From 7 to 8, we memorize Tibetan grammar and philosophy...and gather in the prayer hall in front of the shrine to the Buddha. From 6 to 7, we all gather together in the prayer hall in front of the shrine to the Buddha. The first 30 minutes, we sit in silent meditation, then we . From 7 to 8, we memorize Tibetan grammar and philosophy for an hour. Breakfast is a At 8 o'clock., we have breakfast. From 9 to 10 am, we debate aspects of the Dharma, the Buddha's teachings. At 10 o'clock, some nuns have Buddhist philosophy class es and some have computer class. From 11 to 12 noon, the two groups switch subjects.

At 12 o'clock, we all have lunch and a short from 12-1 we rest. The aAfternoon and evening is scheduleare carefully scheduledd hourly. From 1 to 1:30 pm we have handwriting class. From 2 to 3 pm, the senior nuns have Tibetan grammar class and the two youngest nuns have English class. From 3 to 4 pm, the junior nuns have basic English class and from 4 to 5 pm, we study introductory Buddhist philosophy. From 5 to 6 pm, we have another debate session and from 6 to 7 pm, we have evening prayers, especially chanting the prayers of the 21 Taras. From 7 to 8 pm, we memorize our lessons in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. At 8 o'clock, we have dinner and from 9 to 10 pm, we do our homework. We go to bed at 10:30 or 11 pm. This is all in one day's work!

Every week Monday, we have a break. on Monday, We clean the monastery, water the trees, wash our clothes, bathe, and take a rest. In November, 12 nuns and one teacher traveled to Jangchub Choeling Nunnery in South India for a one-month debate conference. The rest of us stayed at Sanghamitra and continued our classes. We will stay and study at Sanghamitra Institute until April 2024. In January, we will have the opportunity to attend the Kalachakra Empowerment. The Kalachakra is very special for us because His Holiness the Dalai Lama teaches it and this year it will be held in Bodhgaya, the most sacred Buddhist site.

We are very fortunate to study in Bodhgaya during the winter months, because there is no snow and the weather is very nice. We are very happy to be studying here and it is only possible due to the support of our kind donors. All nuns offer ourtheir sincere prayers for your good health, happiness, and success in life! We hope to see you one day at Sanghamitra Institute in Bodhgaya.



Himalayan nuns debate Buddhist philosophy under the bodhi tree in Bodhgaya

A JOURNEY TO INDIA, WHERE BUDDHIST NUNS ARE SAVING NATURE

by Carlo Pizzatir

When I arrive in Zangla (Ladakh, India), the sun is peeking behind mountains that reach 20,000 feet. We're three thousand meters above sea level in the remote Zaskar Valley, isolated from the world for six months in winter when the snow-covered passes no longer allow vehicles to pass through. In the coming years, thanks to tunnels and new infrastructures, the motorway will arrive here as well, bringing with it tourism, money, and pollution.

A tall, thin nun, encountered on the road leading to a cluster of houses, leads me through vegetable gardens and simple gardens where I meet the charismatic teacher Stanzin Tsepel. Together with her, I find an enthusiastic teacher from Delhi, Devina, preparing for the lessons. We drink tea made from barley grown in the very green fields that I can see beyond the small window of the classroom, where we sit cross legged on mats.

In this Buddhist convent there are 17 novices. The youngest is four years old, the oldest is 30. Eleven Buddhist nuns look after them, the oldest of whom is 92 years old. The temple around which the convent was built has existed for a thousand years. Three centuries ago, a Buddhist saint, meditating in a cave on this mountain, decided that the convent should be founded here for the good of the population of Zangla.

A natural spring was recently discovered nearby that is said to have medicinal properties for treating rheumatic pains. Mud wraps from the Chumik Spring cure back pain, hip pain, and knee pain. But in recent years, with the increase in pilgrimages, the sacred source is getting soiled by cigarette butts, glass beer bottles, and plastic bottles. As a result, according to some nuns, the spring is starting to diminish its healing abilities.

Soon, at 7 am, the red-robed nuns will begin their half hour of yoga, followed by an hour of Buddhist philosophy study, prayers in the meditation room, and breakfast, followed by recess, then lessons until lunch. After almost another two hours of school and a cup of tea, at 6 pm there is a philosophical debate based on what was learned in the morning. Then dinner and some fun. Before 10pm, everyone is in bed.

The nunnery survives thanks to the contributions collected by an American Buddhist nun through the Jamyang Foundation. Support from the Indian Ministry of Culture has also been added for six years, since the nuns began an environmental activity, practicing and teaching how to recycle plastic and explaining the problem of water scarcity to the inhabitants of the valley. Even though they are surrounded by water here – the glacier at the top and the river at the bottom of the valley – there is not yet a system that holds back the flow for irrigation and so, paradoxically, they suffer from drought.

"We teach the novices to observe the changes around us," explains teacher Tsepel. "We elderly people have seen a different world, without plastic, without canned foods or the horrible polystyrene plates. In the valley, we used to carry our plate and cup with food in a saddlebag. We need to go back to that. There is nothing to be ashamed of in being respectful of nature, bringing your own plate and washing it. On the walk to the village we started to see the plastic coming. Packets of instant noodles, cartons of milk, dirty paper."

Devina intervenes. She has applied a scientific method to the education of novices: "The girls have noticed this growing pollution and plastic dirt. We decided to quantify the phenomenon. Where does it come from, where does it go, who produces it, and how can we reduce it? We started to compost and continued the dry toilet, which is the best way to handle human excreta. The students bring me every little piece of waste asking, 'Can we reuse it? What can we do with this?' They started seeing every empty plastic bottle not as garbage but as a resource. Along the garden, a concrete wall and empty bottles illustrate how waste is reused as ornamental art."

A JOURNEY TO INDIA, WHERE BUDDHIST NUNS ARE SAVING NATURE (*cont'd*)

by Carlo Pizzatir

Reasoning about the phenomenon of pollution and global warming, which is reducing glaciers visibly, emotions have arisen, which feed eco-anxiety. Devina says, "It is alright to evoke feelings, but not to feel sorry for yourself. It's good to stimulate a pro-active reaction." The novices composed a poetic song to nature: "Are the mountains happy or not? Nature is our beauty, nature is our life. Ladakh will not survive unless we get involved." While they sing, the girls cry together with the mountains.

"The Buddha always preached the well-being of our entire existence, not just humans," explains teacher Tsepel. "When we pray, we do it for the entire world, not for a part of it. The Buddha teaches that no sentient being should be harmed, be it an insect, a butterfly, or a tree. Harming any being is a sin. Specifically, the Buddha always said to pray for nature. This demonstrates that, for him, the environment has always been a spiritual priority."

The Abhidharma, says Tsepel, is a sacred text that mixes philosophy, psychology, and Buddhist ethics in various sutras to investigate the unconventional reality of the phenomenal world. The third verse explains the genesis of the world. "Nature and the environment support human life. If we go against nature, nature will go against us. We are interconnected. If we don't take care of her, she will turn against us," says Tsepel. "The Bodhicaryāvatāra, a text that guides us to help human beings to Buddhist awakening, explains this interdependence and how we must go hand-in-hand with nature or all hell could come."

"But what do you personally think of what awaits us in the coming years, I ask." How does the teacher of a Buddhist convent in one of the highest places in the world, which is also about to be reached by development and therefore environmental degradation, see the collective future? "In a few years, new roads will bring inevitable development: large hotels and therefore more traffic, more business, more money. What will we gain? Big cars. Bigger houses, more rooms, more beds, more living rooms? A mat on the floor is enough for me to sleep on. What's the point of all these roads if there isn't enough water for everyone? It's not easy to convince others. Those who run after money are blind. They are identifying with objects. They see the immediate, not the future. They think they are creating a life of greater comfort for the next generations. They have good intentions. But they are short-sighted. They don't know what they are doing. There is no gratitude towards the environment. The rent I have to pay to live in this world is respect for nature."

(Originally published in Italian in the national daily newspaper La Repubblica's cultural pages on August 31, 2023.)

Carlo Pizzati is the award-winning multilingual author of ten works of fiction and non-fiction. He has worked as a foreign correspondent on several continents since 1987. He has a son and lives with his spouse and a few adopted stray dogs near a fishermen's village in Tamil Nadu, India. d

DREAMS OF A NOBLE LIFE

by Mong Sano Marmar

Visakha Girls' School is growing steadily year by year with the generous support of kind donors and Buddhist Global Relief. Currently the school offers daily midday lunches for 137 girls up to 7th grade. Along with providing midday meals and paying the salaries of the teachers, this year the school installed an off-grid solar system and set up an IT lab. In rural areas such as Dhosi Village, there is no running water or electricity. With the new solar system installed, the school is able to provide electricity for the school, operate a water pump, provide lighting, and run fans in the classrooms. Previously, the water pump ran on a diesel generator, whereas solar power is much cheaper and more sustainable. Now ten laptops have been installed in the IT lab, so teachers can use online resources for teaching and, importantly, the girls can gain valuable computer literacy skills.

Using water provided by the water pump, the school was able to plant about one thousand papaya trees on the hilly slopes around the school grounds. Due to the arid nature of the land, without a reliable water supply, creating a papaya orchard would have been impossible. Now, with the newly installed solar panels, the papaya project is now going very well.

Visakha Girls' School is growing, with a new grade added each year. The school needs to hire extra teachers, which increases costs significantly. With the continuing support of BGR and other kind donors, we hope to continue this noble task.

Most of the students at Visakha Girls' Schools are from five local villages spread out in a 4–5 km radius surrounding Manikchari, Khagrachari, Bangladesh. There are no alternative educational opportunities for these girls anywhere nearby. For a couple hundred families in the locality, this is the only school. At the moment, 137 girls attend the school in classes from pre-school through 7th grade. Next year, the school also plans to accept 8th grade students.

Nothing tells the story better than the experiences of the students. Sau-kroi and Krbai Marma are two sisters who are both in 3rd grade at Vishakha Girls' School. Their home is located about three miles away from the school. Their parents are farmers. Previously, they attended a school near their home, but the school closed down due to the Covid pandemic and their schooling was interrupted for about a year. Then our parents admitted us to Visakha Girls' School. This school is completely free, unlike the other school, and we also get lunch at school every day. These are big things for my family. The sisters like the many fun activities at Vishakha School and would like to continue studying at least up to the 8th grade.

Chingmra-U Marma is a 6th grade student at Visakha Girls' School. She is from Gaiinda Para, which is a couple of miles away from the school. Her mother, Chingsa Nue Marma, is a garment worker. Her father, Shanto Kumar Tripura, left the family when Chingmra-U was in the 4th grade. Ever since, her mother has been the only provider for the large family of grandparents, uncles, aunts, and their children. Chingmra-U would not have gotten an education without Visakha Girls' School, which provides everything free of charge, including daily lunch. The lunch program is very helpful for the family and they are very grateful.

Jharna Chakma is a 6th grader at Visakha Girls' School. Her father's name is Nidhan Chakma and her mother's name is Fullurani Chakma. The family relies on Jhum cultivation on the hilly slopes. As the eldest child, Jharna often helps her parents with farming and takes care of her five siblings. The family lives about four kilometers from the school, in Dhochari Aga Chakma Para. Due to the hilly terrain and distance, it is very difficult to attend school in the next town, Manikchari, and her parents cannot afford to pay the costs of attending such a school. With no other options available, her parents decided to send her to Visakha School, which not only provides free tuition but also offers free daily meals. The family was surprised when she got admitted to this school, which has a computer lab, microscope, and teachers who use various techniques to keep students engaged and focused. She is learning computer skills at school, which is not possible at other schools. Now she can dream of becoming a successful person!










Congratulations

Changchup Choeling Nunnery Zangla has been featured as one of the winning schools at the Sustainability Education Initiative instituted by the Wipro Foundation. The nunnery has been selected as one of the 20 best schools in the country at Sustainability awards program 2022-23. Notably,