

Thosamling News

June 2013



The visit to Thosamling Nunnery by His Holiness

the Dalai Lama on 17th of May 2009, to bless our temple, is the highlight of the last 10 years. The constant support and kindness of His Holiness during this time has been immeasurable. For instance, He suggested the establishment of Thosamling as a non-sectarian nunnery for international nuns, gave our nunnery its name, and funded the building of our temple. He also recommends that newly ordained international nuns, especially those who are not affiliated with a particular monastery, stay at Thosamling.

Over the past 10 years, Thosamling's achievements have included training over 20 new nuns, and providing retreat facilities for over 500 nuns and lay-women. Ninety ordained Sangha and lay-people have completed Thosamling's Tibetan language course, and 20 have studied under the multi-year traditional Buddhist philosophy program. Thosamling's programs have been responsible for training 15 interpreters who now serve around the world, and have provided a strong foundation for eight ordained Sangha to follow Geshe-studies in the Tibetan monasteries. Ven. Thupten Choekyi from Australia is one of them (interviewed on Page 6).

Words From Ani Sangmo

This year, Thosamling Nunnery and Institute is celebrating its 10th anniversary. Going through old photos and looking back over these wonderful last 10 years, I realized how many accomplishments we have achieved, although it has not been easy at times.

Many, many people have helped to make Thosamling a wonderful place for international nuns, where we can practice the Dharma together with lay-women. I am grateful to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who has supported Thosamling from the very beginning and who funded our beautiful temple. I also thank all the supporters who helped us through the years, especially when we were in need. This newsletter also serves to launch the "Friends of Thosamling" program - an initiative of our long-term German friends, Toni Geddert and Andrea Schwarz (Page 8).

I hope you all enjoy reading this special newsletter and that you will come to visit us for a retreat, study or for volunteer work.

*Ani Tenzin Sangmo
Director of Thosamling*



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Thosamling, the name given to our nunnery by His Holiness, means “*place of hearing and contemplating the Buddhadharmā*”. This is exactly our mission: to encourage and provide a supportive environment in which international nuns and lay-women, from any of the four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, can study and contemplate the Dharma. In fulfilling this mission, today there are up to 15 aspiring nuns and ordained nuns, and up to 20 lay-women resident in Thosamling at any time. They may be in Sangha training, studying the Dharma, undertaking a personal retreat (Page 6), or assisting in one of Thosamling’s projects. Currently, Thosamling offers short-term Tibetan language courses each year, as well as a Buddhist philosophy program, and weekly public Dharma teachings (Page 3). We have links throughout the world (Page 8), and locally with the Buddhist community and local villages (Page 7).



Ani Tenzin Sangmo, who founded Thosamling, is our director, overseeing all of the operations of Thosamling. She is assisted by Shashi Gora, our administrator.



Ani Jampa, from Germany, is responsible for providing spiritual guidance and training to new nuns and aspirants in *vinyana* (ethics and discipline), *pujas* (offerings and rituals), and the making of *tormas* (ritual offering cakes) and *tsa-tsa* (clay statues of the Buddha).

Thosamling Today

The need for a non-sectarian (Rime) nunnery, such as Thosamling, in India, stemmed from the limited options for ordained Sangha in the West, where the establishment of Buddhism is in its early stages. As a result, many Buddhist nuns from Europe, the Americas, Australia, and other Asian countries come to India seeking a conducive community for their practice. In order to fulfill this need, Thosamling Nunnery and Institute was established. Thosamling also fulfills a need for lay-Buddhist women from such countries, who wish to heighten their practice by experiencing life in a monastic community.



Geshe Tsewang Nyima, who holds a Geshe Lharampa degree (the highest attainment in Tibetan Buddhism, requiring over 20 years of study), provides spiritual direction to Thosamling and its residents, as well as teaching our philosophy program and courses. A highly experienced interpreter translates Geshe-la’s teachings into English.

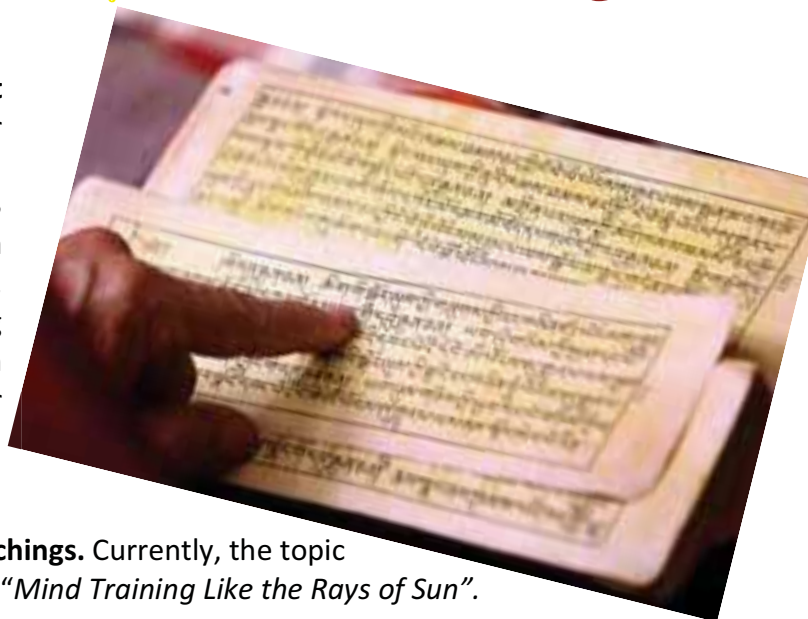


Last but not least, Thosamling is very grateful to our dedicated staff, who work tirelessly behind the scenes to provide nutritious and varied meals, bake cakes and bread, manage the facilities, clean, and care for the garden.

Activities and Facilities at Thosamling

Teachings

Thosamling offers a very unique **Buddhist Philosophy** program, which is taught by our resident Geshe, along the lines of the traditional Tibetan monastic curricula but condensed into 3 years. This course follows the 5 major Mahayana Buddhist topics taught in the great monasteries, and incorporates Tibetan language and debating skills. Our interpreter provides English translation for the majority of the program, although for debating Tibetan language skills are required.



Geshe-la also provides a **weekly public Dharma teachings**. Currently, the topic being taught is *lo-jong* following Nam-khaPel's text "*Mind Training Like the Rays of Sun*".

As an aid to their study and practice of Tibetan Buddhism, many nuns and lay-practitioners have undertaken the challenge of learning the Tibetan language in the classes offered at Thosamling. Periodic **short-term Tibetan language courses** are available several times each year. In the second half of 2013, the following courses will be offered (more information on our website-www.thosamling.com):

1. Intensive 3-month crash course in colloquial Tibetan for beginners (2 July -20 Sept), with formal teaching and conversational practice.
2. Ten-week advanced Tibetan class focusing on oral Dharma teachings (5 Aug-11 Oct), lead by our Geshe's interpreter.
3. Six-week course in Literary Tibetan with Professor Bill Magee, renowned author and teacher (12 Oct-23 Nov).

Thosamling is also close to many high lamas, such as H.H. Dalai Lama, Gyalwa Karmapa, Kamtrul Rimpochee and others, and to the Dharma centres of Tushita and Deerpark.

Retreats

Retreat is a necessary part of the Buddhist practitioners' development. In Tibetan, the word *retreat* literally means "*to take time away from everyday distractions and focus inwardly*". Thosamling, situated in the fields at the foot of the spectacular Dhauladar Range, in the safe state of Himachal Pradesh, offers a serene and conducive environment for such long and short-term introspection for both monastic and lay-women. We provide three nutritious vegetarian meals per day, quiet self-contained accommodation, and spiritual support. Many retreatants tell us that such conducive facilities are rare to find anywhere in the world, let alone in India (See interview on Page 6). Therefore, in order to make the Dharma available to all, we aim to keep our prices as low as possible - less than \$200 per month with discounts to ordained Sangha.

Volunteers

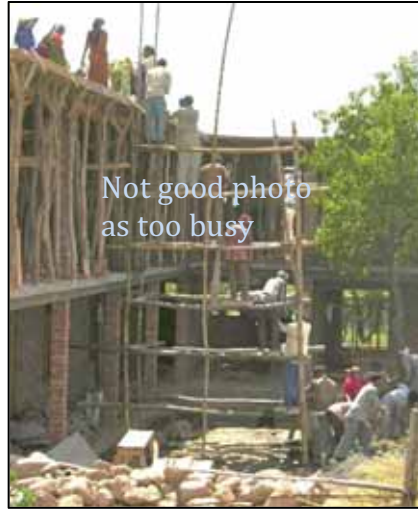
Occasionally, Thosamling seeks volunteers with specific skills, such as organic farming, computer knowledge and facility maintenance, to provide service in return for accommodation and meals.



From Humble Beginnings

May 2000- Kind advice of His Holiness to establish a Rime (non-sectarian) nunnery

In 2001- Ani Sangmo established a Trust and purchases the land with funds from a Dutch sponsor



January 2003- Construction of Dawa accommodation block begun – all material had to be carried 1km to the site, and all work was done manually by a team of Indian and Nepalese workers from local villages

July 2003- Thosamling opened its doors- the first 3 nuns arrived to join Ani Sangmo

August 2003- First classes in Tibetan Language began

March 2004- His Holiness Gyalwa Karmapa blessed site

August 2005- Temple completed. Frescoes of female deity of wisdom, Pranjaparamita, & 21 taras



March, 2006- Geshe Tsewang Nyima took up residence at Thosamling; August 2009, his new



February, 2006 Ling Rinpoche plants our Boddhi tree, germinated from the seed of the Boddhi tree in Bodhgaya

To Significant Achievements

March, 2006- Geshe-la established the Buddhist Philosophy program- Today, we offer this 3 year program, community Dharma teachings and a range of Tibetan language courses



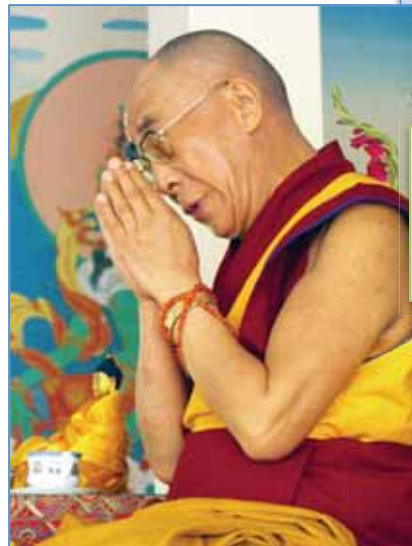
December, 2009- All construction completed- Today there are 2 two-storied accommodation blocks; a dining-kitchen complex; 2 class-rooms; recreational room; office; dormitory; staff quarters; temple with well-stocked library and accommodation above; Geshe-la's house; private retreat cottage



March, 2011- Full-time administrator hired, making life easier for Ani Sangmo



Our temple building today



May 2009 – His Holiness blessed our temple and recommended newly ordained Western nuns to stay at Thosamling



Our Bodhi tree is now 8 m high

April, 2009 - Queenies Oven began- 5 young Indians trained- 3 bakers, 1 bookkeeper, 1 shop manager- today this team has a bakery shop and runs the business



August 2012- Thosamling buys a small minivan, making shopping, transport to teachings and delivery of the popular bakery items easier

Thubten Choekyi, a young Australian nun



from the Blue Mountains near Sydney, has embarked on a seemingly impossible journey for a Western woman. She is in her fourth year of a 20-year study program to become a Geshema- the highest rank of Buddhist monastic teachers and equivalent to a PhD in Buddhist Philosophy. Not only would this be a difficult undertaking for anyone, but Ani Choekyi must pray, study, contemplate, debate and memorize completely in Tibetan for 16 hours each day, while living in a typical Tibetan nunnery, Jamyang Choling near Dharamsala in India, with 90 Himalayan nuns.

She is motivated to deeply understand the key concepts of Buddhism in order to eventually gain enlightenment so she can *“end her own suffering and help every single [living] being to do the same”*. She doesn't know how long that will take, but she says that she *“must start on the journey”*.

Ani Choekyi is very grateful to Thosamling for giving her the strong foundation for her current studies and the ability to live in a Tibetan nunnery. As a new nun, she spent 3 years in Thosamling from 2006-2008, where she made the transition from being *“just a normal girl”* to being a Buddhist nun living in a monastic community. By completing Thosamling's 3-year Tibetan language program, Choekyi gained sufficient fluency in Tibetan to spend 5 month's translating for Lama Chamtrul Rinpoche, and subsequently to begin her current Geshema studies. Thosamling's philosophy program gave her the basis for debating and further study.

When asked about her future aspirations, Choekyi replied, her olive green eyes dancing with delight: *“With any luck, if I live a long life, and as long as all the conditions are present, then I will go back to Australia to share the Dharma and the seeds of enlightenment to transform people's lives to a happier state- that's it. What else is there to do?”* And yes, *“if the causes and conditions remain good”* she may become Australia's first Geshema.

Chris Parker, a lay-Buddhist woman who has been in retreat at Thosamling for the past 6 months, spent two years researching retreat centres around the world before deciding that Thosamling was the most affordable and conducive place to undertake a long-term retreat. Chris, from the USA, says that Thosamling meets all her needs and is: *“more than I had expected”*. From the day she arrived, *“all the stress, struggles, and hurdles that [had to be] overcome to prepare for and come were cleansed away by the engulfment of the garden, and [then] entrance into a clean, warm, comfortable room with a peaceful aura”*.

For Chris, *“Thosamling provides a comfortable, laid-back, and natural environment that is both communal yet private [where] everyone is warm, friendly, and accommodating – a reflection of how the place is managed”*. The staff have been *“flexible in helping with the material support needed to successfully do retreats, [and] the nuns and Geshe-la are very approachable and welcoming in providing spiritual support”*. And let's not forget Queenie, Nyima, and Dawa – *“sweet dogs..... here to protect us in our retreats!”*

Having plenty of time to practice was a big concern for Chris. Therefore, the laundry service and provision of healthy, vegetarian meals saved her much time! She says that as an urbanite, her dream of *“living in a place with a view of trees and [hearing] birds chirping”* came true at Thosamling, where *“breathing in the Himalayan air is like no other”* and where views of the Himalayan mountains and nature abound. Chris says that she has *“been able to quietly do the retreat in an isolated location yet enjoy the convenience of accessing amenities”*. Overall, Chris recommends Thosamling as a conducive environment for short or long-term retreats, including all the ngondro practices.



Thosamling Projects

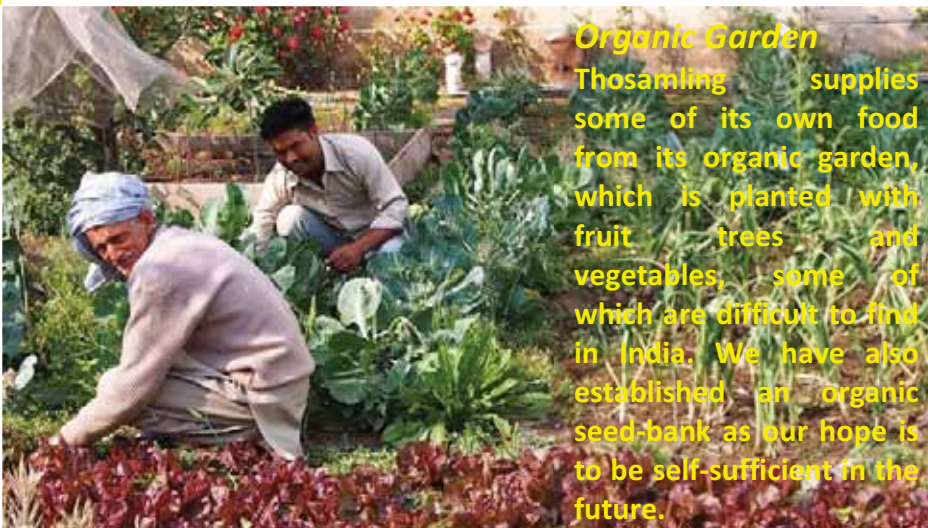
Queenie's Oven Bakery

Thosamling has trained and empowered a group of under-employed young men and women to run a highly successful bakery business. This business now operates its own bakery shop near the famous Norbulingka Institute and supplies home-baked wholesome breads, tarts, cakes and biscuits not only for our temple pujas and residents, but also to tourist restaurants in McLeod Ganj. It is a delight to see the confidence with which these young people operate their business. Their long-term goal is to make Queenies Oven famous throughout India.



Zero Waste and Environmental Protection

Our neighbouring communities of Sidhpur and Norbulingka, as well as Himachal Pradesh in general, face a garbage problem -rubbish is indiscriminately thrown onto vacant land, and into waterways and waste management is non-existent. In order not to add to this problem, Thosamling developed a zero waste project, in which we reuse or recycle 100% of our waste. Organic waste and paper are used for compost and cow-food; glass, metal and plastic bottles are reused or become a source of income for local people; soft plastic becomes cushion stuffing; harder plastic is made into fly-curtains and bags; tetrapaks make wallets. We are now taking our successful model into the local community by training local women to make the recycled products for sale, working with local people to clean-up local areas, and provide environmental and recycling education in local schools and communities.



Organic Garden
Thosamling supplies some of its own food from its organic garden, which is planted with fruit trees and vegetables, some of which are difficult to find in India. We have also established an organic seed-bank as our hope is to be self-sufficient in the future.

Other

To celebrate our 10th anniversary of operation, we are fund-raising to construct eight 2m stupas along the entrance path. We have made experimental solar cookers for use by local families and raised awareness of environmental protection; as well as working with local animal charities to control dog populations.



Friends of Thosamling Membership Program

Thosamling provides a serene environment with high quality facilities, services and spiritual guidance at affordable prices (less than \$200 per month). However, with rising prices, we are finding it difficult to continue offering such unique opportunities to international monastic and lay-women. As there are no schemes to support Western nuns, Thosamling provides a nurturing environment for nuns from many countries- in fact, the Dalai Lama recommends

new nuns stay at Thosamling for two years after their ordination.

The **purpose** of the *Friends of Thosamling* membership program is to gain support that will enable our nunnery and teaching institute to continue making the Dharma available for everyone by assisting us to cover our operational costs; support the accommodation and training of international nuns; maintain our beautiful temple; fund our resident Geshe's living expenses and his teachings; and assist nearby communities by undertaking small-scale projects. With your help, together we can keep the Dharma alive and available to all who seeks happiness and freedom from suffering. By becoming a *Friend of Thosamling*, you will also accumulate extensive merit for yourself, and ultimately, for the benefit of all sentient beings.

As a *Friend of Thosamling* you will receive our 6-monthly newsletter, daily prayers for your good health and success, prayers for your family and friends during hard times, as well as discounts on accommodation, retreats and courses, as follows:

Level of Membership	Annual Donation \$AUS	Benefits						
		News-letter	Name on prayer list	Prayers for family	Discount on stay	Discount on courses	2-week Annual Retreat	Dharma gift
<i>Friend</i>	\$90	Yes	Yes	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Member</i>	\$180	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-	-	-
<i>Sponsor Member</i>	\$360	Yes	Yes	Yes	10%	-	-	-
<i>Special Member</i>	\$430	Yes	Yes	Yes	15%	-	-	-
<i>Royal Member</i>	\$560	Yes	Yes	Yes	15%	15%	Yes	Yes

Payment can be made by cash or via paypal through our website, www.thosamling.com.

With heartfelt thanks for your generous support, *Ani Tenzin Sangmo*

Please post the completed form to us at Thosamling Institute, Sidhpur, 176057, Distt. Kangra H.P. India; or email your contact information and desired membership level to us at thosamling@gmail.com.

FRIENDS OF THOSAMLING APPLICATION

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____ Thosamling newsletter by: Email or Post

Level of Membership (tick the appropriate box):

Friend \$90
Member \$180

Sponsor Member \$360
Special Member \$430
Royal Member \$560

Payment by: Cash Paypal