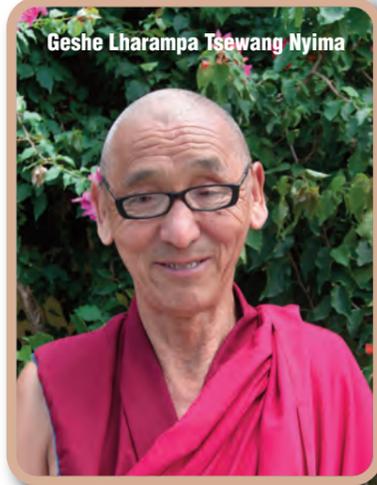


THÖSAMLING INSTITUTE

and Nunnery for International Buddhist Women



Geshe Lharampa Tsewang Nyima

Newsletter Winter 2010/2011

It is November 17, 2010,
although it looks
like spring at
Geshela's house corner

Public Teachings @ TSL: **Bodhicaryavatara** with Geshe Tsewang Nyima

In the course of the previous year to this teaching, Geshela had covered the first four chapters of Shantideva's famous text, the **Bodhisattvacharyavatara**, and had almost completed the fifth chapter. The following excerpt is a rough transcript (lightly edited*) of the translation by TSL's study program translator Katy of the end of the fifth chapter, and it shows Geshe-la's great learnedness and clarity of teaching style, always taking the needs of the listeners present into account...

(*all mistakes are the responsibility of the editor)

This text of Shantideva is teaching the **Six Perfections**, or **Six Paramitas**, and they are shown in their respective order, except for the first one.

All in all there are ten chapters in Shantideva's **Bodhisattvacharyavatara**. The first is called 'Benefits of the Awakening Mind', the second one is 'Disclosure of Wrong-

doing', the third one is 'The full acceptance of the Awakening Mind', the fourth is 'Conscientiousness', the fifth 'Guarding Alertness', number six is 'Patience', number seven 'Enthusiasm' or 'Joyful Effort', then it's 'Meditation' or 'Concentration', number nine is about 'Wisdom', and the tenth is 'Dedication'.

The first of the Six Perfections is 'Generosity'. It doesn't have a specific chapter dedicated to it, but is mainly mentioned in the first chapter which is called 'Benefits of the Awakening Mind', and also in the last, the tenth, which is 'Dedication'.

'Discipline' or 'Ethics', the second paramita or perfection, is shown in two chapters: chapter four, 'Conscientiousness', and chapter five, 'Guarding Alertness'. All the other chapters are dealing with each of the other four perfections, 'Patience', 'Joyful Effort', 'Concentration' and 'Wisdom'.

The first chapter is about the benefits of bodhicitta. Why do we start with this first? Because whatever you want to engage in, whatever action you want to perform, you should first check: What's the purpose and what are the benefits of performing that action?

By contemplating the benefits, the advantages of performing an action, you will generate a very strong motivation, a strong determination to complete the action you are about to do. This goes for Dharma, but also for mundane purposes: Whatever you do at work for example, like doing business, or working in the fields like a nomad or a farmer etc – whatever it is you are doing, first you should check: What are the benefits and what's the purpose?

E.g. if you are doing some business, first you should check what it is about – which in this case is: making money. Then you check the benefits of making



No one and nothing can free you but your own understanding

Ajahn Chah



Studies of Buddhist Philosophy

Thösamling’s Study Program of Buddhist Philosophy with resident teacher Geshe Lharampa Tsewang Nyima (right) will continue: **Druptha** (tenents) for students of the second year, and **Madhyamika** (uma jugpa) for students of the fourth year.

At this stage, students should be able to understand and speak Tibetan well enough in order to follow classes.

Start: 28th March

Left: Students and resident teacher of the philosophy study program of Thösamling International Institute and Nunnery were happy and honoured to offer the fruits of their efforts in the form of a debate to His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the occasion of His Holiness’s visit in May 2009. **Right:** Geshe Tsewang Nyima supervises afternoon debate classes in TSL’s temple.



Tibetan Language Program 2011

Thösamling International Institute has started its **Two-Year Tibetan Language Program** with the **First-Year Course** on 31st of January, taught by TLP’s new Tibetan teacher Gen Lamsang.

We did not have to search far as Gen-la was living already in Sidhpur and had been teaching English to Tibetan nuns in the area. He is very famous for his patience, explanation skills and detailed way of teaching. It is quite rare to have a teacher like him.

People who know the alphabet very well, can spell acceptably and can communicate in simple sentences might still join the class – an interview with the course coordinator is required.

Year Two is about to start – joining the **Philosophical class** is still possible if you are quick (for requirements please visit our website – see above).

Start: 28th March

Classes are taught by Katy, TSL’s skilled and experienced translator and language teacher.

The **Preparatory class**, which is based on the first chapters of ‘Dudra’ (collected topics), will probably start at a later time.

The **Spoken Dharma class** which is aimed at familiarizing students with the format of an oral teaching by a Tibetan Lama, has already started. You can still join.

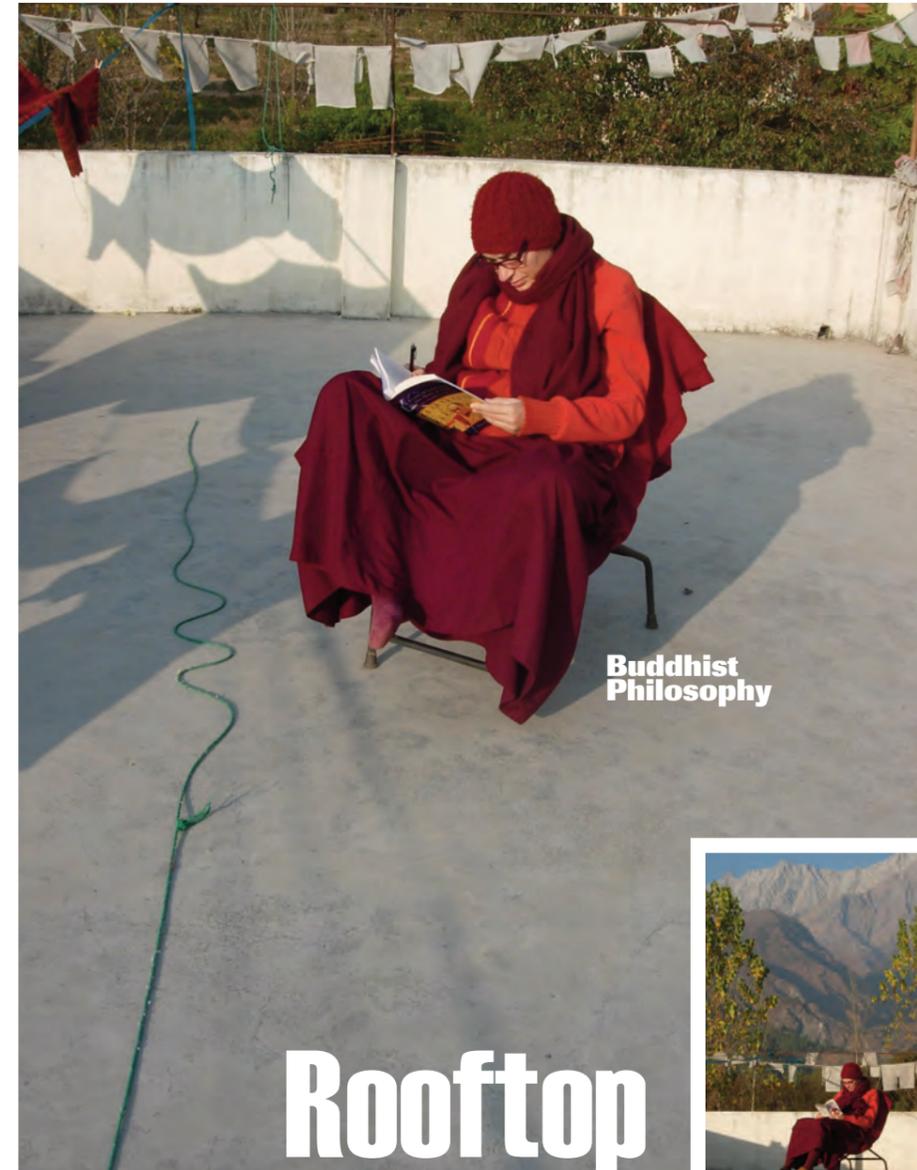
General afternoon class: Students might wish to **combine** those classes with **private classes of conversation** with well-trained conversation partners (*see below*: cheating permitted – laptops can help, but are not required).





Ngöndro Purification Prostration Recitation

Thösamling International Nunnery & Institute offers a peaceful environment for personal retreats like preliminary practices etc. For your strict retreat Thösamling offers accommodation with own bathroom, & meals can be delivered to your door. If you wish, you can also receive advice by our resident teacher Geshe Lharampa Tsewang Nyima (from Drepung Loseling Monastery). For more information, visit us on www.thosamling.net



**Buddhist
Philosophy**

Rooftop Studies

Thösamling not only offers comfortable classrooms, but also breathtaking open-air locations for private studies ... **Visit us on the rooftop !** Or on www.thosamling.net



Hindi

One thing that will happen for sure at Thösamling is that you will meet with

Interesting people

Let's begin with **Samra Hamzik**. In 2009 she came to Thösamling for a couple of weeks. Here she tells her story of how she found herself working at Delek Hospital in Dharamsala ...



Samra from Bosnia at Thösamling, flanked by Nyima (left) and Dawa (right)

The idea to fly to India and work in Dharamsala for three weeks came up after I met a German speech therapist, Melanie Eikema*, on the internet. She had been living in Dharamsala for 5 years (the last 3 years at Thösamling Nunnery & Institute) and was looking for speech therapists who would come to do some volunteer work. Melanie informed the chief doctor of the Tibetan Delek Hospital in McLeod Ganj, Dr. Tseten, about my arrival.

However, it took us more than a week to arrange a meeting. I explained to Dr. Tseten that I had been involved in diagnostics & therapy of swallowing disorders (dysphagia) with neurologic and geriatric patients and would love to pass my knowledge on to the staff of Delek Hospital. He was very pleased, and we arranged a training for nurses and doctors on the spot.

Both the nurses and the doctors (two Tibetan doctors and a young Italian neurologist) were very interested in learning more about the topic. The training lasted only half an hour since all of them had to go back to their work. I wished I had had more time and space to go more into the theoretical background as well as show practically how to deal with dysphagia

patients. Unfortunately my time was limited and I couldn't arrange another training, as I was to leave only ten days later.

But there was one patient, Pasang Drolma, a 75-year-old Tibetan lady, who had come four years earlier from Sikkim to Dharamsala, and her son, a thangka painting teacher at Namgyal Monastery. Pasang Drolma suffered from respiratory problems and an aspiration pneumonia. I arranged three therapy sessions with her. She was very cooperative and grateful, even though she did not understand the language. The nurses as well as her son were shown several breathing exercises which Pasang Drolma had to absolve several times a day, and some "swallowing" techniques which would help protect from aspiration.

There is a lot work to do here in Dharamsala, concerning both speech and language therapy as well as dysphagia therapy which are completely unknown to local therapists.

I spent only three weeks in Dharamsala – not long enough to do much in this respect. But I hope to be able to come back next year, to stay longer and to be able to contribute more.



Melanie and her 'amala', a Tibetan lady and shop-keeper in D'ala

In 2005 I attended His Holiness the Dalai Lama's annual spring teachings in Dharamsala for the first time. It was during that period that I made some friends who were students of Rato Choengla Rinpoche. Very happy to meet a high lama like him, I was informed of another lama, Rato Chuwar Rinpoche, of the same monastery, at that time 8 years old, living in Dharamsala. Despite of being an incarnated lama, he was tested as being autistic and could not speak. So the question was put to me if I, as a speechtherapist, could possibly help "little Rinpoche" to improve his language skills...

A little confused about all the new ideas that I was confronted with in the Buddhist teachings (I was new to Buddhism at the time) as well as doubting if I was the right person to help Rinpoche, I nevertheless went to see Rato Rinpoche and on that occasion interviewed his attendant. But a next challenge presented itself: the language barrier. The attendant, being a Tibetan monk and refugee, had no English skills, nor was I able to speak Tibetan, so we had to rely on an interpreter. We were successful and managed to convey the most important information, also thanks to the cooperation of Rinpoche's parents who lived close by.

In the course of time we were fortunate to build up a very good relationship (I went to see Rinpoche almost every afternoon). As Rinpoche's language & communication skills were very limited, the therapy had to start from a very basic level. To teach Rinpoche English was out of the question because nobody else around him would use it. So I decided to study Tibetan – together with Rinpoche, assisted by his attendant, his father & sometimes another monk. Slowly Rinpoche's ability to communicate as well as his vocabulary improved, as did my Tibetan.

Being interested to learn more about Buddhism, I attended classes on Buddhist philosophy in the mornings at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA). Some of the staff got to know me, and the message spread that a speechtherapist was in town. They got in touch with the local Tibetan hospital, and in the course of time either one of the nurses or the doctor would approach me whenever there was a patient in need.

I did what I could, but seeing how things went, thought to myself that being on my own I could actually not achieve that much. This was the reason why I asked a friend and speechtherapist to publish a letter on his website addressing other speechtherapists to come and volunteer...

Left from top: A correct position in the wheel chair is crucial for breathing – Risking deeper breaths: a challenge for Drolma-la – First swallowing exercises – Making bubbles with a straw: another effective way to learn again to breath and swallow properly

*see column opposite page



A stone is a stone is a stone...

14 April 2010, in the temple of Thösamling International Nunnery and Institute: Ven Rinchen is visiting and takes the chance to share some of her meditation experiences – everyone welcome. The only instruction beforehand: to bring a stone...

Here some excerpts from a rough and lightly edited transcript of the guided meditations which she presents in three steps:

(...) The first meditation will be a meditation on the little stone that you brought. It's used in many different traditions. I initially learned it from the yogic tradition, and there it's called *tatrak*, which is the Sanskrit word for 'focussing'. This is a very good start for any kind of meditation that you are practicing – to first gather the mind which is usually all over the place. So we start with **focussing meditation** for about twenty minutes. After that you can stand up and move the body a little bit. Then we'll continue with the second set of meditation which is rather focussing on the **breath** – so coming closer to yourself. I will guide you through that part for also about twenty minutes. And then again, a small break, so that you can move the body. The third set will be a set of **vipassana**, *laktong* practice, which is again using mainly the physical body, but this time the focus is to look at what is arising in every moment. So whatever happens in your experience of your physical body, don't get stuck in one place, even if there is a strong experience, like pain for instance – don't get stuck in it, just notice it and move on. So we'll move with our awareness through the body, not stopping, just keeping looking at the impermanence of everything that is arising.

Ven Rinchen first explains the seven-point meditation posture which is quite well-known (therefore it shall not be further mentioned here), then chants beautifully the Refuge Prayer before guiding us skillfully through the meditations.

Keep your gaze on the stone in front of you. ... And as you watch the stone, you might observe thoughts coming and going – just let them pass by like clouds in the sky. You keep your focus on the stone. ... And whenever you get hijacked by a thought, just notice that that has happened, and again come back to focussing on your stone. ... There is no particular "Wow!" or interest in that, different patterns coming from the stone, or any kind of mental fabrication such as light appearing or whatever the mind is up to. Just come back to focussing on the stone as it is, letting everything else fall.

Whatever thoughts or feelings arise, just keep coming back to watching the stone in front of you. Telling your mind that right now this stone is all there is, this stone is your whole world. ((*Dogs barking...*)) Hearing sound... appearance of hearing sound ... going away, moment has passed... staying with the stone...

(The bell rings – end of first round) Keep your mindfulness, and start to blend formal meditation with post meditation so that as soon as you come out of meditation, you keep moving mindfully. So you don't start to go like this and that, but move slowly, and come up to a standing position.

Rinchen then gives us instructions how to relax the body in the break between sessions, like stretching etc. Time for the next session...

So again choose your position – your legs, your hands ... Except that we put the stone aside and move on to breathing meditation. Again I will guide you in this one for about twenty minutes. First calm to stillness. And tell your mind that you will be still for twenty minutes, just focussing on your breath.

Now feel your whole physical body as one. There are no parts – hands, arms, legs and head. Just ONE body. Feel the weight of your body pressing down towards the earth, the cu-

shion. (...) Now move your attention to your breath, your natural breath. Without changing anything. Do not *do* anything with your breath, just observe the breath as it is right now. ... (...) Whatever it is, just be aware of the breathing as it is right now. ... Where in the body can you feel your breath? Is the breath fast or slow or somewhere in between? Is the breath shallow? Or deep? Or somewhere in between? ... As you feel the flow of the air going in and out through your nose, be aware of the air going in... slightly more cold ... and the air coming out slightly more warm ... just being aware of the difference in temperature of the air going in and out ...

Rinchen lets us further experience how every part of the body is expanding on inhalation and relaxing on exhalation, until even every finger is breathing, the top of our head is breathing, every cell is breathing...

(The bell rings – end of second round) Remember to keep your mindfulness as you come out of meditation. Move your body slowly, gently... as it is the most precious human body existent. ... You can come up standing or stay sitting...

How are you? Okay to do one more? So, the last one... Those two, as you noticed, are more shine practice, focussing practice. Now we move on to what can lead to insight meditation. We'll still use our physical body as the object of meditation. Again letting go of what we experienced today with the breath. Come back to checking your posture is the first thing. Grounding yourself...

Now we are going to move into the awareness of the sensations in the physical body. And remember, whatever happens will pass. Nothing stays. So your job is just to observe, to be aware of the changes happening in the body as you move with your awareness through the body. We start with just a few minutes of stillness again... Again feel the whole body as ONE, feel your whole body... And guide your awareness down to your feet. And feel both of your feet ... and be aware of any sensation that you can feel in your feet right now – pulse, itching, heat, coldness, whatever is there, just being aware of what is going on right now. Nothing is better, nothing is worse, just using whatever awareness can pick up right now, feeling both your feet... whatever sensation is there...

Slowly we move with our awareness up and down through the whole body in a kind of 'scanning' process...

If there is any unpleasant sensation, try to stay with it. Don't push it away or move away from it. If it's too strong, of course then let go and move on... One scanning should be at least a few breaths long, never shorter than that. So just try yourself and continue being aware of different sensations in your body ... Keep the spine erect. Keep scanning your body as if you were a curious explorer. ... Not holding on to any particular sensation, neither the pleasant ones nor the unpleasant ones and also not the neutral ones, just let go...

Rinchen finishes the session: Now let go of awareness of sensations, and just be aware of your physical feet and legs, the parts of your body that are resting on the ground, on the cushion ... you feel the pressure points, the heaviness of the body. Just be aware of the breath, preparing yourself to slowly come back into the room, to continue your evening. When you feel ready to move, you can give stretch your fingers, legs a little, and just relax...

Welcome back to the outside world!

Can you see how these three meditations follow each other? How they are good to be done in this order? If we don't develop a one-pointed mind, you can do any kind of wonderful meditation on the mind and be just all over the place. So

even if it can be a bit boring – I think at least to do one-pointed meditations, focus meditations – it is so good, such a good medicine. To start with that, whatever it is you are doing.

It's not like waking up tomorrow

And the meditation with the breath – that's the way our teacher woke up, that's the way the Buddha woke up and became the Buddha, focussing on the breath. Exactly how he did it of course I don't know, but just to use the breath as an object of meditation. Because it is always there, we always have it with us until the last breath. So you don't need anything else. It's such a good object to use. You can also really feel the whole body as one, and all the different cells moving ... At least for me it's such a strong reminder of how everything is renewing itself all the time. And how we can make new choices every moment. Let go of our old ways and habits every moment. It is nothing in the future, it's not like waking up tomorrow. It's never going to happen. It's just waking up in the so-called present. That's the only way you can do it.

And the last one – as I said it's more about taking a really good look at impermanence. Which is also just such a 'door-opener'. Because everything constantly changes, and it's not up to us. We are not this body. Because there is something observing what is happening, so obviously there are two different things going on.

So this is what I want to share with you today. Please forgive me if there is anything that I have done wrongly. It's totally my fault. My teachers were perfect. Is there any question, anything you want to share?

One participant, a beginner to meditation, had felt that time had passed so fast...

This might change... The next time, in another meditation, there might be an expectation – even if it's subtle – that there will be the sensation of time going fast, and it might not be. It might just be the opposite. Like: "Ah, this is so slow and heavy..." Every time you sit, there will be a new experience. So don't hold on too much to the present one. Very tricky...

Another participant had felt very tired after some time...

Then just stay with the tiredness. This is what is happening. Whatever comes up, just notice it.

Dedications for the benefit of all beings finish this meditation experience, with Ven Rinchen chanting... Thanks a lot!



Making the invisible visible Painting a Buddha



Ven Karma Yeshe
at Tsering Art School,
Kathmandu

Philippine Ven Karma Yeshe recently finished her studies of thangka painting at Tsering Art School in Kathmandu, Nepal. Fortunately for Thösamling, she pays regular visits to the nunnery, always benefiting Thösamling itself and also all her fellow nuns immensely. She not only painted TSL's temple with images of the Twenty-one Taras, a big-size Green Tara and a Prajnaparamita, but also helped with the graphic work in general – like the corporate identity for Queenie's Oven, and especially with fundraising projects like Thösamling's Cookbook, deity cards, and more recently, with a wonderful Children's book about a yeti, a dragon and the environment – see the following pages...

Here some of her thoughts on thangka painting...

"Having been an artist, I think practicing sacred art is an incredible way to accumulate merit while working!

It makes me glad if a thangka I have painted for someone inspires them in their own practice.

I feel extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to pursue this path and to have trained under my incredibly knowledgeable, kind and humble teacher Konchog-la, from whom I feel I have so much more to learn."

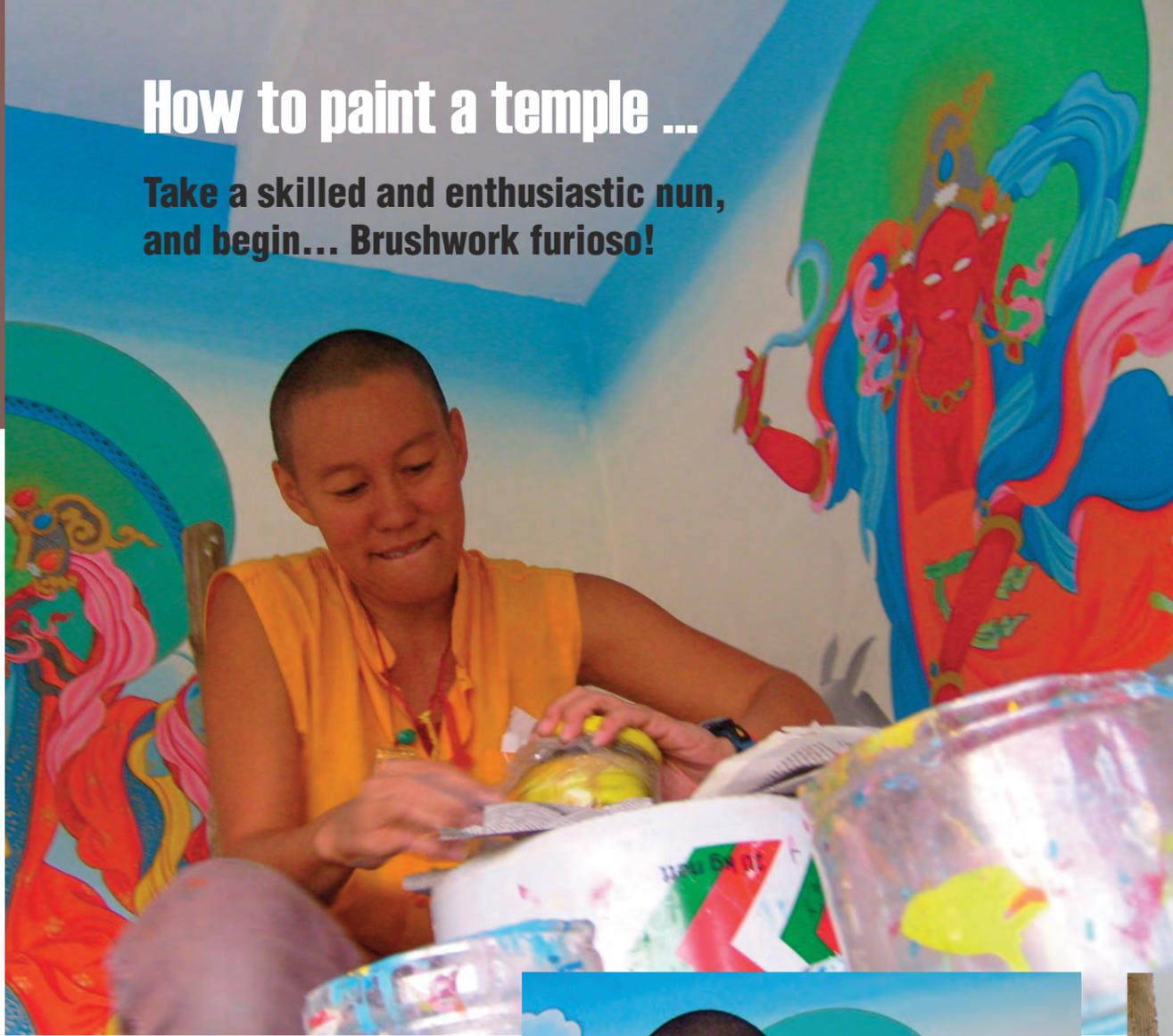


The thangka paintings
from top counterclock-
wise: Chenrezig – White
Tara – Shantideva.
For more examples of
Karma Yeshe's thangka
art, visit her website on
www.karmayeshe.blogspot.com



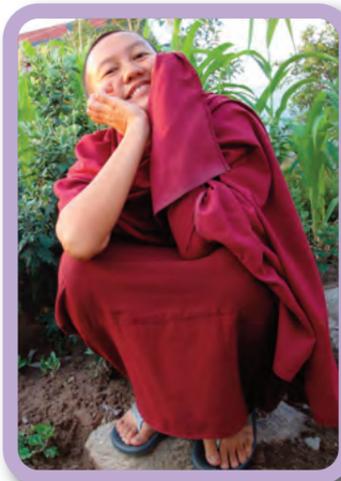
How to paint a temple ...

Take a skilled and enthusiastic nun, and begin... Brushwork furioso!



These pictures give a small impression of what it means to climb on a scaffolding and try to paint accurately from all angles... That Karma Yeshe is a long-time yoga practitioner is a contributing factor to the success of this enterprise. Here she is painting the entrance hall of the temple with the images of female Dharma protectors.

The Yeti and the Dragon



A children's book with paintings by Karma Yeshe, text: Sönam Wangmo

The Yeti and the Dragon is a story about two friends – a yeti and a dragon – who use their wits to help mindless scientists escape from great danger and at the same time keep the environment clean.

Here are some impressions of how the book *might* look like – as Karma Yeshe was so kind to give this book draft to Thösamling as a fundraising project for **Thösamling's Nun's Fund**. Fundraising is one of the daily activities in a Buddhist nunnery. And especially in Thösamling, where according to His Holiness the Dalai Lama's most kind wishes, every Western nun can stay for free, so that she can spend her whole time and energy studying and practicing, in order to one day benefit all beings.

The profit of this book will go in total to the Nun's Fund, and only a small part to the author of the texts as a little thank you. Karma Yeshe offered all her work as usual for free. May she receive all the merits of her generosity in plentitude!



"There were once a yeti and a dragon who were friends. Here they are watching a group of international scientists who are trying to be the first in the world to videotape a real yeti. ..."



"The moral of the story is this: Your good deeds are always, always rewarded, even if you don't realise it. ..."



We are looking for sponsors

who would like to support this project which will not only benefit the nuns at TSL, but hopefully many children – the grown-ups of our future world – and the environment they will live in.

The production costs will be approx. 900 US-\$. Donations can be made via **PayPal** on Thösamling's website www.thosamling.net

Please make sure to mention the purpose of your donation: *Children's Book*. And please note: Andrea Schwartz is the secretary of TSL's German office.



"And there's another moral. We all share our planet, humans, deities, yetis and dragons, and it is better and healthier for everyone to make sure we all look after it and put our rubbish in the right place. ..."



Thank you very much for your concern & generosity!

As we read in the article on the great benefits of meditation, here some thoughts about finding the time to meditate in every-day life:

Time to meditate ...



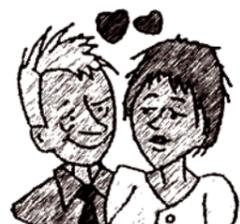
Too young to meditate



Too exhilarated to meditate



Too daring to meditate



Too much in love to meditate



Too busy to meditate



Too tired to meditate



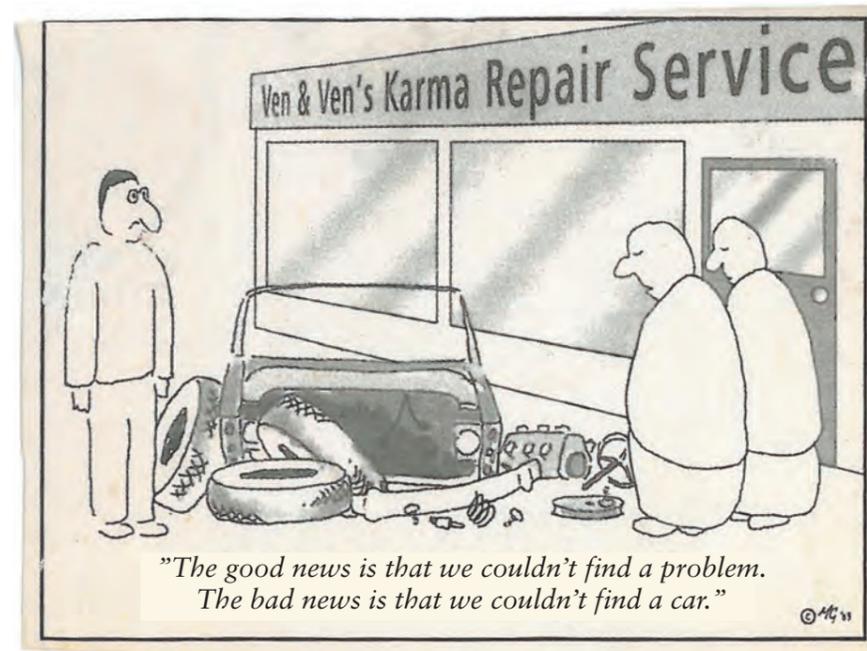
Too worried to meditate



Too old to meditate



Too late to meditate



Sign in the window of a Paris bookshop:

*Avec Moïse tout est loi
Avec Jésus tout est amour
Avec Marx tout est argent
Avec Freud tout est sexe
Avec Einstein tout est relatif*

Translation:

*According to Moses, everything is law
According to Jesus, everything is love
According to Marx, everything is money
According to Freud, everything is sex
According to Einstein, everything is relative
...
According to Buddha, everything is empty*

*... to be continued by a Buddhist:
Avec Bouddha tout est vide*

**Times are hard...
but modern**

**It's not enough not to have any thoughts,
one must also be able to express them.**

**Don't believe any statistics
which you didn't falsify yourself.**

**You can do whatever you want,
but not like this.**

2011 TOURS

Pilgrimage to Mt Kailash & Lake Manasarovar in Tibet, Everest Base Camp, Nepal

21 days 20 nights • departing Kathmandu, Nepal 2 June 2011 • A\$ 4,995 • US\$ 4,500 • € 3,100

A must for all Buddhists and non Buddhists alike. After a brief visit to Kathmandu you will fly to Lhasa, then go overland to Mt Kailash which is considered an extremely sacred place in Buddhist's, Hindu's and 3 other religions. The circumambulation of Mt Kailash will coincide with Saka Dawa, one of the most important sacred Buddhist days. During Saka Dawa people place special emphasis on dharma practice like circumambulation of monasteries and stupas, prostrations, taking precepts, reciting mantras, making offerings and saving animals' lives, etc. All the merits will be multiplied 100,000 times from your dharma practices. The full moon day will be on Day 14 (15th June) of the trip. After the trek around Mt Kailash we will visit Everest Base Camp before returning by road to Kathmandu.

"Thus it should be told, for they who have faith in my deeds and awareness of their own will travel to higher states. After my passing away, the new monks who come and ask of the doctrine should be told of these four places and advised that a pilgrimage to them will help purify their previously accumulated negative karmas, even the five heinous actions."

Words of the Buddha from Lung-Treng-Tik: a commentary by The First Dalai Lama (1392-1474)

The trip will be co-led by Glen Svennson, currently a Buddhist teacher with FPMT.

Ladakh – A LNA Supporters & Friends Tour

14 days 13 nights • departing Delhi 14 July 2011

A\$ 2,750 • € 2,275

As a fundraising trip for the Ladakh Nuns Association you will travel to some of the ancient monasteries of Ladakh including Hemis, Stok, Lamayuru and Alchi where you will experience the wonders of architecture centuries old. You will also experience the joy of openness of rugged mountains, and high plains with yaks and shepherds tending to their animals in traditions of time gone by. There will also be a two-day workshop focusing on Tibetan Medicine as a healing technique, an alternative is a short trek for these days. This magical trip starts in Delhi, flying to and from Leh.

The full itinerary can be found on our website <http://www.eknoexperience.com/travel/ladakh.html>

Other 2011/2012 Tours

Friends Tour – trekking in Ladakh – July 2011

Dharamsala & Dalai Lama's teachings, India – September/October 2011

Pilgrimage to Buddha's Sites, India & Nepal – January 2012

Bhutan – March/April 2012

You can follow our 2011/2012 tours by visiting the Nirvana Tours Blog <http://nirvanatours.blogspot.com/>

We look forward to hearing from you and hope that you can make 2010 or 2011 be your special year to visit India!

Kind regards,

Sharon Thrupp

Nirvana Tours & Ekno Experience Tours & Travel Pty Ltd.

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