



Jamyang Foundation



Newsletter

Jamyang Foundation, a non-profit, non-sectarian project to promote Buddhist education for women, was founded in Dharamsala, India, in 1987. It began from a literary program for nuns recently arrived from Tibet seeking religious freedom. Gradually classes in Tibetan grammar, debate, meditation, and English were added. By 1989, a fulltime study program had developed.

Founded by Karma Lekshe Tsomo, an American nun from Honolulu, Jamyang Foundation began in a small retreat center in the forest, close to His Holiness Dalai Lama's residence in Dharamsala. Slowly the new study program attracted just enough donations to keep the nuns eating. Meanwhile, requests for admissions began pouring in from all over the Himalayas, from young nuns and laywomen anxious to study and practice intensively. Gradually Jamyang Foundation established study programs at eight locations in the Himalayas.

Buddhism began in India, but survived only in Bengal and the most remote Himalayan regions: Kinnaur, Ladakh, Spiti, and Arunchal Pradesh. In the Himalayan areas people have struggled to preserve their unique cultural heritage for 1000 years. Snowbound during the intensely cold winters, the people turn to Buddhist meditation, teachings, and prayer.

In the past, opportunities for women to study Buddhism were limited. As a result, most teachers of Buddhism in the Tibetan tradition were male. Jamyang Foundation arose to meet the need for female teachers and role models. The ultimately goal is world peace through gender equity.

An Overview of the Projects

The first project established was Jamyang Choling Monastery in Dharamsala. Soon after, Jamyang Choling Institute was established in a beautiful rural area near Dharamsala. These two projects were sponsored entirely by Jamyang Foundation until the year 2000, when they became independent, in line with Jamyang Foundation's goal of promoting self-sufficiency.

Jamyang Choling Monastery is located in Macleod Ganj, Dharamsala. Founded in 1988, it has 14 students from Tibet, Kinnaur, Spiti, and Zangskar, studying Madhyamika philosophy and debate with their teachers, Geshe Damcho Gyaltzen and Gen Gyatso. Jamyang Choling Institute is located in Oder, via Gharoh, Dharamsala. It was founded in 1993 and has 45 students from Tibet, Bhutan, Kinnaur, Ladakh, Spiti, Zangskar, Arunchal Pradesh, Nepal, and Uttar Kasha studying Prajnaparamita philosophy, debate, and Tibetan.

Jamyang Choling currently includes six education projects in the Himalayas, with a total of 115 students. These projects include:

Changchub Foundation Monastery

Village Zangla, Zangskar

Founded: 1989

Number of students: 26

Ethnic background: Zangskar (Ladakh)

Teacher: Munshi Tsering

Subjects: Prajnaparamita philosophy, debate, meditation, Tibetan

Yangchen Foundation Monastery

Village Pangmo, Spiti, Himacal Pradesh

Founded: 1991

Number of students: 18

Ethnic backgrounds: Spiti, Kinnaur

Teacher: Gen Dorje Tsering

Subjects: Prajnaparamita philosophy, debate, meditation, Tibetan

Khachoe Drubling Monastery (Jujik Shelgon)

Village Karsha, Zangskar

Study program founded: 1993

(Monastery founded in 1946)

Number of students: 27

Ethnic background: Zangskar (Ladakh)

Subjects: Prajnaparamita philosophy, debate, meditation, Tibetan

Sherab Foundation Institute

Village Morang, Spiti, Himachal Pradesh

Founded: 1995

Number of students: 28

Ethnic backgrounds: Spiti, Kinnaur

Teacher: Gen Tsering Dhondrup

Subjects: Buddhist texts, debate, meditation, Tibetan, English, Hindi, math

Pishu Monastery

Village Pishu, Zangskar, Ladakh

Study program founded: 1996

(Monastery is ancient)

Number of students: 18

Ethnic background: Zangskar

Teacher: Dr. Norbu Tsering

Subjects: Buddhist texts, ritual, meditation, Tibetan, English

Jampa Foundation

Village Chuling, Kinnaur Himachal Pradesh

Founded: 1999

Number of students: 25

Ethnic background: Kinnaur

Subjects: Buddhist texts, Tibetan, meditation

News from the Projects

Spiti

In Spiti, two dzomos (a cross between a yak and a cow) were donated by Dr. Yvonne Vaucher and are giving students plenty of nutritious milk! A jeep gifted by Joanne Molyneaux is making healthcare accessible to entire villages. Preparations are underway to welcome H.H. Dalai Lama, in hopes that he will visit the schools again this year.

From 1999 to 2002, the entire Himalayan region experienced widespread drought. Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Dorje Tsering visited the Jamyang Foundation projects in 2001 and 2002, distributing donations for food and other necessities. Packages of vegetable and flower seeds – Peace Seeds – were donated by the Global Peace Foundation and distributed to six monasteries, but growth was hampered by a lack of water. Fortunately, there was a bountiful snowfall this winter, so hopefully there will be plenty of water for crops this year. This summer the Peace Seeds will be distribute to six schools and six outreach projects. The results of these seeds will provide fresh produce and brighten the hearts of the students!

From May 2003, Jennifer Lane, a law student from California Western School of Law, will teach English and human rights to the nuns at Yangchen Choling, using the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a text. From July 2003, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Tsering Dolma Mullens, Dorje Tsering, and Suzan Koa will teach healthcare in the villages of Spiti, including information on HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, domestic violence, and dental hygiene. They will train two students from Yangchen Choling to continue healthcare education in the villages.

Zangskar

In Zangskar, fighting between India and Pakistan has prevented several volunteer English teachers from reaching these remote schools. Gifts of solar equipment by the Yap family and flashlights by Carol Stevens lightened up the situation. Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Dorje Tsering visited the projects in 2001 and 2002, distributing support for food and necessities in a time of widespread drought. In 2002, Sonali Dutt accompanied them to help videotape the projects.

In July and August 2003, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Tsering Dolma Mullens, Dorje Tsering, and will travel to Zangskar to disseminate healthcare information in the villages of Zangskar. including information on HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, domestic violence, and dental hygiene. They will train two students from Changchub Choling to continue healthcare education in the villages.

Kinnaur

In Kinnaur, villagers donated land for a new school on a beautiful hilltop above the village of Miru. Jampa Choling began its work in January 2000 and soon attracted an enthusiastic group of 25 young nuns. That winter, two senior students from Dharamsala, Sra. Tenzin Deden and Tenzin Palyon, visited the group and taught the students Buddhist texts, Tibetan language, and meditation for three months in a private home.

Construction on the new monastery began in 2001. Despite landslides and roadblocks, the new assembly hall is gradually taking shape. In July 2001, Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Dorje Tsering visited the project for the first time, to encourage the students and deliver donations from well-wishers around the world.

When they visited the project for the second time in July 2002, the road to the new monastery was blocked by a landslide, but they were able to meet the students at the road below the mountain. They were also able to deliver a magnificent 45" Buddha image for the monastery, a gift from Dr. Yvonne Vaucher, professor of pediatrics at UCSD Medical Center in San Diego. Dr. Vaucher has donated a total of eight Buddha images thus far. The most recent two donations will be delivered to Zangskar by jeep this summer!