



# The NYEMA Sun

NYEMA Projects' semi-annual newsletter on humanitarian projects in eastern Tibet

Spring 2002 Vol. 1, No. 1

## In This Issue:

Letter from Venerable Lama Norlha. . . . . 1

About NYEMA . . . . . 1

Monastic Initiative:  
Kala Rongo . . . . . 2  
Korche Monastery. . . 3  
Affiliated Projects . . . . 4

Education Initiative . . . . 5

Medical Initiative. . . . . 6

Community Initiative. . . . 7

Donation Form . . . . . 8

If you would like to be notified via email of future newsletters—as well as important new developments in Nangchen—we cordially invite you to join our mailing list. [Sign up!](#)

## A Letter from Venerable Lama Norlha

Dear Friends:

From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for your generosity and support in helping to improve the quality of life in my native land of Nangchen over the past few years. The people of Nangchen are also sincerely grateful and every day see reminders of their benefactors' compassion.

I am pleased to introduce the first issue of NYEMA's on-line newsletter, **The NYEMA Sun**. Amazing progress is being made in so many areas—from the opening of Tibet's first monastic college for women at Kala Rongo Monastery to supplying new beds and stoves in the student dormitories at Yonten Gatsal Ling Primary School. Future projects include building residences for Nangchen's elderly population, expanding our satellite school program that has introduced literacy and basic math skills to children in remote areas, providing medical training for women, and continuing to expand the monastic institutions that are so important to serving their communities and preserving the language, religion and culture of Tibet.

I hope you enjoy the first edition of **The NYEMA Sun** and visit our website often to follow our ongoing progress. Tashi Delek!

Sincerely,

**Lama Norlha**

Lama Norlha  
Chairman

Copyright ©2002 NYEMA Projects, Inc., New York, USA. All rights reserved.

## About NYEMA Projects, Inc.

Venerable Lama Norlha has striven unceasingly over the past 20 years to help the people of eastern Tibet. In 1982, he began channeling relief funds to the region. In 1984, he was able to visit to his homeland for the first time since the communist takeover; and he has returned many times since then to oversee a host of projects aimed at restoring the rich legacy of Buddhist practice and study in eastern Tibet, to improve the quality of life for Nangchen residents, and, in particular, to elevate the status of women in the area.



Venerable Lama Norlha's efforts have yielded extraordinary results. Between 1982 and 1995, he not only rebuilt Korche Monastery and re-established the traditional three-year retreat program there, but also created a monastery for nuns at the holy site of Kala Rongo, fulfilling the wishes of His Holiness the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa, His Eminence the Twelfth Tai Situ Rinpoche and Kyabje Dorje Chang Kalu Rinpoche. In 1996, together with Dr. Pema Dorje, another Nangchen



native, he obtained permission to establish a primary school for children who would otherwise have never had an opportunity to receive an education. The overwhelming success of these projects inspired Venerable Lama Norlha and Dr. Dorje to create, in 1997, the Nangchen Yushu Educational and Medical Association (NYEMA), a non-profit organization aimed at establishing basic educational and medical resources in their native land.

Since it was founded, NYEMA has succeeded in building more than 30 schools, creating and maintaining basic medical clinics, and revitalizing monastic and cultural traditions in danger of being lost. Most recently, Tibet's first ever monastic college for women has been established at Kala Rongo. Though tremendous inroads have been made, there is still much work to be done.

Photo:  
Top right: Nangchen's scenic landscape  
Bottom left: Venerable Lama Norlha (left) and Dr. Pema Dorje, NYEMA co-founders, en route to Nangchen  
©1996 Tsultrim Oser



### First Monastic College for Women in Tibet Begins Classes

History was made last year when the first monastic college (*shedra*) for women in Tibet opened at Kala Rongo Monastery in December 2001. Forty nuns, all graduates of the first three-year retreat program at Kala Rongo, entered the *shedra*, Kagyu Shedrup Chöling, on December 1, 2001, to begin a nine-year program that encompasses Buddhist philosophy, logic and debate, mathematics and language. The nuns are being taught by Khenpo Tsepa Dorje and Khenpo Phutsok Gelek, who also teach in the main monastery itself. The daily schedule of the nuns includes morning and evening chanting, and studying and lectures during the day.



The *shedra* houses a shrine room, library, classrooms, a kitchen furnished with a new stove and pots, and students' living quarters. The building is crowned with a copper roof, painted gold and adorned with gilded ornaments. Statues of Guru Rinpoche and Shakyamuni Buddha have been installed in the shrine room, and a new generator will provide electrical power for the building. Although exterior construction was completed in October 2001, much of the interior remains unfinished and furnishings need to be purchased.



### Activities at the Main Monastery

Three hundred nuns live in the monastery and are committed to extensive daily practice. The main monastery houses a shrine room dedicated to the practice of *nyungne*, the fasting practice of thousand-armed Chenrezig, bodhisattva of compassion. Groups of ten nuns participate in this practice for a period of 20 days each on a rotating basis, in order to complete a total of 2,000 *nyungne* practices over the course of an entire year. Additionally, from January through March 2002, the nuns of Kala Rongo have undertaken to

chant 100 million each of the mantras of Amitabha, Chenrezig, and Guru Rinpoche, for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Substantial internal and external renovations have been made during the past year to help the building withstand Nangchen's harsh weather. In addition, in the shrine room, Guru Rinpoche and Shakyamuni Buddha statues have been installed, religious murals were completed on the walls, and a stove was installed to provide heat during the winter months. Future plans for the main building include the installation of a new copper roof decorated with the traditional ornaments. A new truck, to be shared between Kala Rongo, Korche monastery and Yonten Gatsal Ling school, will provide indispensable transportation between the monastery and outlying areas.



### Fourth Three-year Retreat Underway

The third three-year retreat program at Kala Rongo's Kachö Dechen Chöling was completed last year, with 45 graduates. One week later, in October 2001, 45 nuns entered the fourth retreat cycle since the monastery was founded only a decade ago. Lama Sabka, the senior lama of Korche Monastery, serves as the retreat master for both Korche and Kala Rongo Monasteries. Also, a new stove was recently installed in the Kachö Dechen Chöling kitchen.

#### Photos:

Top right: Students of Kagyu Shedrup Chöling's first class ©2001 NYEMA Projects  
Middle left: View of Kala Rongo ©2000 Mike Miller  
Bottom left: Nuns in Kala Rongo's fourth three-year retreat ©2001 NYEMA Projects



### Renovations and Enhancements Continue at Korche

Located in the serene Korche Valley, Korche Monastery (Gepal Chöling) is where Venerable Lama Norlha received his early religious training. Korche is administered by *Lama Gyupa*, an organization started in 1990 to support the advanced practice of lamas who have completed the three-year retreat. *Lama Gyupa* also keeps up the daily liturgy and special chanting ceremonies at Korche.



To address the problems of a badly leaking roof and insufficient space to house volumes of scripture, a library has been added above the main monastery building, crowned by a new, reinforced copper roof decorated with the traditional gilt ornaments. The library houses full sets of the *Kangyur*, the Buddha's original teachings, and the *Tengyur*, the authentic commentaries, together with rare statues of the masters of the Kagyu Golden Rosary lineage. The statues were created by one of Tibet's finest artists, the late Karma Tsulden, who made only this one set prior to passing away at age 75.



Additional enhancements to the main monastery building include the acquisition of statues of the previous Buddha (Marmedze), the present Buddha (Shakyamuni), the future Buddha (Maitreya), the 16 arhats, and the eight special disciples of the Buddha; all of which have been installed in the main shrine room. Mural paintings of the deities on the shrine room walls have also been recently completed.

### Korche Shedra in its Sixth Year

To facilitate opportunities for deeper and more advanced study, Venerable Lama Norlha established Korche *shedra* in 1996. Construction of a dedicated facility, which began in 1997, is now complete and students reside in the *shedra* full-time. The resident abbot, Khenpo Tenpa Rabjay, teaches a nine-year program of Buddhist philosophy, logic and debate, as well as mathematics and language. Thirty monks are enrolled in the program, currently in its sixth year.



The *shedra* houses a shrine room, a library, classrooms, students' living quarters, and a kitchen furnished with a new stove and pots. Statues of Guru Rinpoche and Shakyamuni Buddha were purchased for the shrine room last year, and a new generator was installed.



### Korche Tulkus Enter Three-year Retreat

Isolated on a mountain overlooking Korche Monastery, monks meditate in the traditional three-year retreat, learning the full Kagyu path of sacred practices, which emphasizes the Six Yogas of Naropa and the experiential teachings of Milarepa. Two retreats are currently in progress: one consisting of 12 retreatants engaged in their third year of practice, and the other of 19 retreatants, including the two incarnation lamas of Korche, Garchen Tulku and Nawa Tulku, which commenced in 2000.

Photos:  
 Top left: Members of Lama Gyupa ©2000 Mike Miller  
 Middle left: The new roof and library at Korche Monastery ©2001 NYEMA Projects  
 Middle right: Monks of Korche Shedra ©2001 NYEMA Projects  
 Bottom left: Upper Retreat at Korche Monastery, ©1996 Tsultrim Oser



### Stupas at Korche and Kala Rongo Completed

Korche and Kala Rongo monasteries are both graced with a 60-foot high Guru Rinpoche *stupa* (religious monument). Sangye Tenzin Rinpoche and His Eminence Dermo Chöje Rinpoche, two of Nangchen's most revered lamas, recently visited Korche and Kala Rongo to bless the newly completed *stupas*. Each *stupa* will house a large prayer wheel filled with millions of mantras. Every time the wheel is turned, powerful blessings will flow outward in all directions to benefit all sentient beings. A three-foot high statue of Shakyamuni Buddha was purchased for each *stupa*, to be displayed in the alcove near the *stupa*'s top.



### Damkar Monastery

Affiliated with Korche Monastery for centuries, Damkar Monastery is located in the secluded mountains of Nangchen, and is accessible only by foot or horseback.

A new retreat facility was recently completed through the generosity of NYEMA Projects and Kagyu Thubten Chöling, who also funded the new *shedra*. Twelve participants are presently enrolled in the three-year retreat program. Twenty-five students are studying in the *shedra* under the guidance of Khenpo Wangchen Namgyal, the resident abbot of Damkar.



The *shedra* structure includes a shrine room, library, and classroom. In the near future, we hope to construct student living quarters.

### Samten Ling

Affiliated with Kala Rongo Monastery, the three-year retreat facility of Samten Ling is located in Nangchen's lush Karong Valley. Twenty nuns are currently engaged in Samten Ling's fourth three-year retreat program.



**Photos:**  
Top left: Stupa construction at Korche, ©2002 NYEMA Projects, Inc.  
Top right: Stupa construction at Kala Rongo, ©2002 NYEMA Projects, Inc.  
Middle: Monks of Damkar shedra, ©2000 Mike Miller  
Bottom: Samten Ling retreatants with Venerable Lama Noriha (center), ©2000 S. Zangmo



### Literacy Rates on the Rise



NYEMA Projects has had a dramatic impact on children's literacy rates in Nangchen since it established the first main children's school, Yonten Gatsal Ling (The Garden of Joyful Learning), which provides free education to local children. Prior to 1997, only 3% of the local population—those fortunate enough to study at local monasteries—were able to read. Now, 80% of the region's young people have mastered these essential skills through attending schools fostered, in large part, by NYEMA's efforts. **Trace Foundation**, a private, non-profit organization based in New York City, has made a significant impact on the success of our school projects as well, by granting funding to NYEMA's educational programs. We are especially pleased to note that in a recent, nationwide penmanship competition, six Yonten Gatsal Ling students were recognized for outstanding achievement. A brief description of the elements of the education program follows.



### Yonten Gatsal Ling

The main children's school now serves a community of 140 students, comprised of 120 boarding students and 20 day students—a 50% increase since it first opened its doors. Each student receives a monthly stipend of 30 yuan (approximately \$3.75) for personal expenses, such as extra school supplies and food. The school operates on a ten-month term, and employs six Tibetan and four Chinese-language and mathematics teachers, along with one cook. A monk recently graduated from Korche's *shedra* is now teaching Tibetan grammar and calligraphy, poetry, and Chinese language. The principal, who serves primarily as an administrator, also teaches mathematics.



Over the course of the previous year, Yonten Gatsal Ling has seen numerous changes. The teachers' quarters were converted into student dormitories in order to accommodate the growing student body, and four new teachers' dormitories, and a combination library/office have been added to the existing structure.



Additional enhancements include 50 new beds for students, along with new blankets, pillows and mattresses; new school uniforms; and 17 stoves to provide heat for all the students' rooms during the winter. One vehicle has also been purchased for school use.

### Satellite Schools

NYEMA Projects has established 41 active satellite schools in various remote villages throughout Nangchen. In many of these outlying regions, harsh weather and the demands of subsistence agriculture allow for a school term of only six months. In areas where a longer term of eight months is possible, funds have been provided to expand and improve school facilities. Tsopoku, Yatsi, Dilmar Shung, Parmey, Chimdruk, and Donpa schools all received funding in 2001. In 2002, we hope to provide fully equipped classrooms for all the remaining satellite schools.



### Korche School

Located next to Korche Monastery, Korche School serves as a model satellite school. Of last year's graduating class, 12 boys and 15 girls have continued their studies in the higher monastic schools at Korche and Kala Rongo, respectively. Korche School operates on a ten-month term with a dedicated staff that includes one Tibetan-language and mathematics teacher, one Chinese-language teacher, and two part-time cooks—all of whom share a room adjacent to the classroom. Presently, 35 students share the one-room school; in the near future we hope to create a year-round boarding school at Korche by adding more classrooms and dormitory space, and to supply warm uniforms for all students.

**Photos:**  
 Top left: Six Yonten Gatsal Ling students recognized for outstanding achievement, ©2000 Mike Miller  
 Middle left 1: View of Yonten Gatsal Ling Primary School, ©2000 Mike Miller  
 Middle left 2: Yonten Gatsal Ling student receives new bedding, ©2002 NYEMA Projects, Inc.  
 Middle left 3: New addition to Yonten Gatsal Ling, ©2000 Mike Miller  
 Bottom right: Class in session at Parmey Satellite School, ©2000 Mike Miller  
 Bottom: Students and teachers at Korche School, ©2002 NYEMA Projects, Inc.



### Fulfilling the Need for Women in Medicine

Because the vast majority of Nangchen's inhabitants have had no access to even the most basic health care in recent decades, NYEMA Projects began establishing medical clinics in rural regions. NYEMA purchased medicine and medical supplies, and provided compensation for doctors.

Encouraged by the success of the clinics, NYEMA Projects is now focusing on the urgent need for female doctors in the Nangchen area. Due to longstanding cultural patterns, many women are reluctant to be examined by a male doctor; as a result, women often do not receive needed medical diagnosis and treatment. To remedy this problem, seven nuns at Kala Rongo Monastery and three lay women from nearby villages will study Tibetan and Chinese medicine at a new medical school and clinic at Kala Rongo Monastery. An existing building on the monastery grounds is being renovated and converted for this purpose. The women will train under the guidance of Dr. Guru Tsering and Lama Tenpal, a Korche monk, who are licensed to practice both Tibetan and Chinese medicine. To supplement these methods, we plan a gradual introduction of Western-style health care training, as well. After completing their medical studies, these women will supply medical care for the Kala Rango clinic and also serve the entire community, thus opening new opportunities for female medical practitioners in Nangchen, and making it possible for all women in the surrounding areas to receive full medical examinations comfortably.



Over the next several years, we plan to expand the medical clinic into a fully equipped hospital to serve area residents. It will be free of charge for those with no income, and half the cost of urban clinics and hospitals for those with modest income.

**Photo: Dr. Guru Tsering and Lama Tenpa ©2002 NYEMA Projects, Inc.**



### Stupa Projects

In the Amdo region, located in northeastern Qinghai Province, three stupas funded by patrons of NYEMA have been completed, one of which was finished during the highly auspicious period of *Sakadawa*, the month celebrating the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing from this world. Many auspicious signs, including a magnificent rainbow, marked the consecration ceremony. Three more major stupas are planned this year for a total of eight (including the stupas at Korche and Kala Rongo monasteries).



### Water Project

The need for a reliable source of clean drinking water is particularly great in the area around Korche Monastery, where local residents currently depend on a small, unprotected groundwater stream. Water from the stream must be collected in buckets and carried or carted to its final destination, where it must then be boiled before it can be used. In addition to the usual health hazards associated with unprotected ground water—such as contamination by animal and human waste—this stream has a high salt content, which contributes to high blood pressure, a common and serious problem in the Korche region.



The project proposed by NYEMA will employ a cistern and underground piping to deliver clean potable water from the Tang Go Nan spring, situated on a mountain above Korche Monastery, to locations in the village, monastery, and Korche school. A site plan and hydraulic profile have already been developed, and orders have been placed for piping and other materials. A local Water Project Committee has been established to oversee the day-to-day responsibilities for building and maintaining the water system. Ground breaking is currently scheduled for spring 2002, with completion of the project anticipated for the following fall. We are pleased to announce that Water for Humanity, a committee within the

[American Society of Dowsers](#), recently awarded NYEMA Projects, Inc. a grant in the amount of \$3,500 for the Nangchen water project.

The Korche water project will improve health, hygiene, and living conditions for an estimated 1500 to 2500 people, and will serve as an excellent example of self-sustaining, ecologically appropriate technology in a region where local residents have virtually no running water. In addition, the project will provide jobs for local workers. By demonstrating the benefits of improved hygiene and sanitation, NYEMA hopes to create a basis for similar projects in communities throughout Nangchen and Yushu. News of the project has already led the nuns at Kalo Rongo to request help from NYEMA to create a similar water system at the nuns' monastery.

### Senior Housing

For a variety of reasons, many of Nangchen's elderly residents have no close family members to support them. Many find solace in being near a monastery and participating in its activities. In order to improve care for Nangchen's elderly populace, we hope to build two senior residences in the area: near Korche and Kala Rongo monasteries. Each residence will house 15 senior citizens in rooms furnished simply and heated.



### Solar Power Project

Over the past several months, NYEMA Projects has provided solar energy collection units to 200 families located in very remote areas of Nangchen, thereby enabling nomad families to enjoy the benefits of electricity for the first time. The units easily collect sufficient power during the daylight hours to satisfy each family's nighttime needs. However, many more families in the region are still in need of solar panels. Your kind donation of \$100 can provide a single family with all the benefits and comforts of solar electricity.

Photos:  
Top left: Walong Dzong Enlightenment Stupa ©2000 S. Zangmo  
Top center: Walong Dzong Buddha Stupa ©2000 S. Zangmo  
Top right: Walong Dzong Kalachakra Stupa ©2000 Mike Miller  
Middle left: Kala Rongo nun standing near the barrel-on-wheels used to collect water from the river ©1996 Tsultrim Oser  
Bottom right: Some of Nangchen's elderly residents ©1997 Megan Doherty  
Bottom left: Khenpo Tenpa Rabjay displaying solar panel ©1997 Megan Doherty