



The NYEMA Sun

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

A Letter from Travelers

Dear Friends:

We would like to share with you some lines from a letter we received several months ago from a European couple traveling through India and Tibet. Both have met Lama Norlha Rinpoche in the United States and were interested in NYEMA's projects in Nangchen, though they came upon Korche and Kala Rongo Monasteries by chance. Here is what they had to say about their visit:

...During that time we traveled to Korche Gompa [monastery] and to Kala Rongo Ani Gompa [nuns' monastery]. We stayed for a few days and had a wonderful time. Both those places are very inspiring given their level of study and practice. We did not see other monastic institutes in our three-month stay in Tibet that were so good and serious. . . . The Ani Gompa was even more exciting – to see how the nuns are so enthusiastic about their studies and practice. . . . [They] are really doing it [by] themselves, and they are doing as good a job as somewhere in India. . . . We had long discussions about the world [with Korche's abbot Ven. Tenpa Rabjay] . . . He is very wise and open-minded, especially for someone who hardly leaves his monastery.

Spending time with your monks and nuns in Tibet was a great experience; we were really lucky to meet with some very sincere practitioners in your monasteries.

- Yaki Platt

Korche and Kala Rongo would not exist if it were not for the generosity of NYEMA's western sponsors. Thank you all! We hope you enjoy reading in the following pages about the projects you have helped us to make a reality.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Strelka

Alexandra Strelka
Editor

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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!**

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Monastic Initiative: Kala Rongo Palchen Gön

What's New at Kala Rongo

Comprehensive Library Planned for *Shedra*

Kala Rongo's *shedra* (monastic college), which opened in December, 2001, is the first monastic college for women anywhere in Tibet. The nuns in attendance there are making excellent use of this new opportunity to study traditional Buddhist philosophy, as they recently demonstrated in their first debate exam. Debate is one of the main learning tools at a traditional *shedra*. It is a form of dialectical argument in which opponents test each other's skill in defending the view of a particular philosophical school. Debates can become quite heated, and the enthusiasm created spurs its students to master the subtleties of difficult material at a rapid pace. The nuns at Kala Rongo's *shedra* were administered their debate exam by six abbots who were delighted with their hard work and comprehension of the philosophy they have been studying.

The curriculum at the *shedra* has recently been standardized. There is now a graduated program of courses that will be taught over the nine-year period of study. The program has been structured to ensure a well-rounded education for everyone who completes it; history and mathematics are included in addition to philosophy, logic and debate, and language.



For many years, there have been very few academic books available for study anywhere in Nangchen. Now that is about to change. A comprehensive library of Buddhist Sutras and Indian and Tibetan commentaries, as well as history and philosophy, is in the planning stage for Kala Rongo's *shedra*. The abbot of Kala Rongo has set aside a large space on the top floor of the *shedra* to house this library; the next step will be to acquire the books. The collection will include texts from the different lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. Because an extensive library of this nature does not exist anywhere in Nangchen at present, Kala Rongo's library will be an important resource for Buddhist practitioners and scholars from the surrounding region.

Activities at the Main Monastery

The construction of Kala Rongo is very nearly complete. The shrine room is finished and has been beautifully decorated. A second stupa has been built; the interior will be painted this summer and the traditional exterior ornaments—a gilded sun and moon—will be added. The main monastery, *shedra*, and retreat all look forward to the installation of running water. The materials for this project have been purchased; construction will commence as soon as weather permits. Funding for the Kala Rongo water project has been provided by the Gracious Glory Buddhist Foundation.

Kala Rongo's current retreat is halfway through its three-year program. There are forty-five nuns in retreat during this cycle, and all are practicing with enthusiasm. There are also twenty nuns in three-year retreat at Samtenling, a secluded retreat facility affiliated with Kala Rongo.

Photo: Some of the *shedra* students ©2002 NYEMA Projects



Monastic Initiative: Korche Monastery

Running Water at Korche Monastery—And Other News

Korche Monastery now has running water! Funding for this project was provided by the Gracious Glory Buddhism Foundation and Water for Humanity, a committee within the [American Society of Dowzers](#). Running water has dramatically cut down on the monks' workload, as water previously had to be hand-carried into the monastery buildings, so that there is now more time for meditation practice and study. Korche now also has a new, very comfortable guesthouse for visiting teachers.



As at Kala Rongo, the curriculum at Korche's *shedra* has recently been standardized. There are fifty-six monks in *shedra* at Korche at the moment, and another twenty-six are in *shedra* at Korche's affiliate, Damkar Monastery. In addition to studying at *shedra*, Korche monks have the opportunity to engage in intensive meditation practice in three-year retreat. The upper retreat facility has recently been repaired, and a new group of retreatants started their three-year program there four months ago. The newer retreat facility is currently home to nineteen retreatants, including Korche's two incarnate lamas, Garchen Tulku and Ngawang Tulku. That group will finish this year.

Korche's Lama Gyupa current membership stands at about thirty. This organization plays a vital role at Korche. It consists of monks who have completed three-year retreat and who maintain the monastery's ritual and chanting practices. These experienced practitioners serve as role models and mentors for the younger monks.

Photos:

Top left: Source of Korche water project ©2002 NYEMA Projects

Top right: Guesthouse at Korche Monastery ©2002 NYEMA Projects



Fostering Literacy in Nangchen

Korche School has been expanded and now serves sixty pupils, all of whom are studying very hard. They learn Chinese and Tibetan language, math, and history. The satellite schools are also doing very well due primarily to the children's' great enthusiasm for their studies. In the near future we hope to expand Korche School to include dormitory space, much like Yonten Gatsal Ling.

Yonten Gatsal Ling, our main school, is undergoing a transition in management. In 1996, when the school was still being planned, NYEMA Projects contracted with the local government that we would establish and administer Yonten Gatsal Ling for the first five years of its operation, and that the government would assume responsibility for it thereafter. In accord with this plan, the government has now begun to oversee the school's operation. NYEMA Projects still pays the salaries of the Tibetan language teachers in order to ensure that the children continue to study and learn Tibetan. NYEMA also still pays the cooks, who are not accounted for in the Chinese educational system, as well as our own staff who are overseeing the transition of Yonten Gatsal Ling to a government-run school in order to ensure that it goes smoothly. Because we are no longer funding the entire operation of the school, however, NYEMA will now be able to divert more funds to other projects.



Women's Clinic and Medical School Nearly Ready to Open

Construction of the building that will house the Kala Rongo Medical Clinic and Medical School for Women is now finished, though work is still being done on its interior. We hope that it will be fully operational by July of this year. Dr. Guru Tsering and Lama Tenpal, both of whom are fully trained in Tibetan and Chinese medicine, are overseeing the construction and have already established their practice at Kala Rongo. Their patients include local villagers as well as the nuns of Kala Rongo. Dr. Guru Tsering and Lama Tenpal are also in the process of procuring the medicines needed to stock the clinic. Once fully underway, this project will bring badly needed medical care to the local population, especially women, who for cultural reasons often forego medical treatment rather than be examined by a male medical practitioner. Please also visit our [Spring 2002](#) and [Fall 2002](#) newsletters for more details about the Kala Rongo clinic.

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