



Dear sponsors,

on behalf of both Ven. Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche and Ven. Tenga Rinpoche we sincerely want to thank you for the support of Benchen Phuntsok Dargyeling in Kathmandu.

In the year 2004 new monks were accepted to the community which brings it to 225 members. There are 25 boys under the age of 10. Most of the small ones have an elder brother or relatives in the monastery who take care of them. Normally the newcomers quickly gain many friends, which makes familiarisation easy. A day in the monastery „is long“ and there is a lot to learn. The Green Tara 4-Mandala ritual and the Mahakala Puja are practiced together by all monks daily. According to the monastic tradition every month a ritual is performed, which requires about one week. Furthermore Pujas are requested from Buddhists outside the monastery.

Within this monastic daily life the pupils of Benchen School attend their lessons. In the evenings the monks take Tibetan lessons and/or memorise texts. 9 p.m. is bed time for the young monks while the elder continue learning, especially when there is a grand event ahead, e.g. the lama dances. Then they exercise eagerly until late at night. The outstanding events in the last year was the Shanag Ngacham (Black Hat Dance with Drums) and the Phurpa Drubchen. The Black Hat Dance was performed on the request of H.H. the Karmapa on 18. February for the first time at Benchen monastery. Though there was little time for preparations it was a prosperous event and great blessing. The Phurpa Drubchen, the VAJRAKILA ritual with the Lama dances took place from 12. - 22. of November. It is a very long and elaborate ritual which is carried out every second year. Here, it took place the third time. For weeks the monastery life was an expression of great activity. It was an extraordinary performance. Please read the reports in Dawe Ozer Journal.

Benchen School

Last year we referred to the method and the curriculum, now we would like to inform about the impact the school has on the monastery. But first we would like to mention that the dedicated teachers managed to coordinate and successfully accomplished their tasks with the tight schedule of the monastery as well as the Nepalese calendar and school year with holidays and public holidays accordingly. In the first instance the monks learn disciplined and result-oriented skills, which supports also their monastic exercises profitably. Moreover the teachers pick up current topics referring to the cultural and political environment and encourage the monks in discussions. Here the pupils learn to know their social environment, other customs and religions much better and also to deal with them critically.

The teachers made it very clear to the monks how important personal hygiene is. They gave important advice and checked on each monk if they had the necessary basic equipment.

A small donation given by a visitor to the school the four teachers spent on a picnic in a near by park. They organised the outing just after the 2nd term examination – end of December - as a well deserved treat.

As a contribution to the Losar festivities in 2005, end of school year in February the performance of a drama is planned: Draw the curtain for the life story of prince Siddharta.

A further goal of the team is to establish a library. Because the monks have hardly any literature except of their school books the teachers are collecting suitable books in Nepali, Tibetan and English. Any help supporting this project is heartily welcomed.

After praising the teachers we should not forget to praise also the pupils. Despite many monastic duties the eagerness for learning has not become less and the lessons are a welcomed and interesting change.

On behalf of the teachers and the Rinpoches, we would like to thank all of you very much for the donation of materials for the school.

Benchen Shedra

In Pharping near to the Clear Light Retreat Center and the Free Clinic, a third project is developing - the Shedra. We asked Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche to give us a short interview in order to explain the term Shedra a little bit:

Lotus Direkthilfe: what does Shedra mean?

Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche: Shedra, in the Tibetan tradition, means “monastery”. There are two different sections: one is the main monastery like here, where rituals are performed every month, on all special days. The concentration lies on memorising the ritual root texts and learning different mudras, music instruments, making tormas, everything included in tantric training, practices. A shedra means dealing with the Buddhist philosophy. There are five main root texts and 10 commentaries to be studied, so here the concentration lies only on the subjects of philosophy, this is called Shedra.

L.D.: So, you can compare a Shedra with a high school?

Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche: Yes, exactly. We have a school, junior high school, college and university as well.

L.D.: What are the requirements for a monk to enter a Shedra?

Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche: He has to be good in reading and writing and at least he should be trained in Tibetan grammar. This is very important. I can also tell from my own experience. If you have a good education on the subject of grammar, then you can enter a Shedra and you can start on the preliminary studies. Preliminary studies means the understanding of simple texts telling you what is a philosophy and what does it work with, what is the benefit, what is your responsibility of learning this philosophy and what is your aim in the future, and then slowly slowly studying about the 10 bhumis and the five paths and then what is refuge, what is bodhicitta, yes all this things.

L.D.: Does the age of the student matter?

Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche: Understanding this, the age of the participant does not really matter. The age does not matter, young age or middle age as long as you are willing to study, it is fine. Of course if you really want to do a whole course which means sometimes 12 years, sometimes 16 years, it can be even more then 18 years, then of course it would be nice if you are young, you have more time.

L.D.: In Pharping the building is proceeding. Is there a certain architecture to a Shedra?

Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche: A Shedra is build in a monastic style. There is, like in a monastery the prayer hall, the teaching hall. When you speak about prayer hall then it is a monastery, the style, the architecture.

L.D.: How many monks will be studying there?

Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche: Approximately, what we plan is not more than 50 monks. At the same time, but I am not so sure whether I can provide or not, there could be some quarters for Westerners or foreigners who are willing to study for a month, a few months or even a year. This also can be done. That is what I am planning, but I have not decided yet..

L.D.: Could also monks from other monasteries enter this Shedra?

Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche: Yes they can, but the majority will be from our monastery.

L.D.: Who are the teachers?

Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche: We have one Khenpo here, who will be teaching. Myself – I will offer my time when ever possible. Then I will find a grammar teacher and an English teacher but English and grammar actually are not included in the main subjects. This is totally up to one's individual choice, so if they want to study then they can study with the teachers, but the focus is on the Buddhist philosophy. I will try to get more teachers from India.

L.D.: Rinpoche you mentioned different levels of studies. How are such degrees called?

Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche: They are according to the Varanasi, Sanskrit university sections. There are degrees like Purmadhi, Uttamadhi, Atria.

The interview took place in Benchen Monastery, December 2004.

Clear Light Retreat Centre

All participants of the 3-years-retreat are practising well and are healthy. This year in October they will be leaving the Clear Light Retreat Center. Also here a sincere thank you to the sponsors of the Clear Light Retreat Center and those who have taken up a personal sponsorship for a Lama, which surely is especially beneficial.

Benchen Free Clinic

The branch of the Free Clinic in Pharping has become indispensable, especially for the farmers of the near and surrounding neighbourhood. People often walk for hours to see the doctor. Very sick or disabled patients are carried on the back of family members or friends to the clinic. Doctor Tsering practises twice a week during the summer and once a week in wintertime in the branch. At the same time he takes care of the Lamas in retreat.

In Kathmandu the Clinic staff has increased again. In the TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) department Sylvia Bloch from Germany is practising and planning to stay for a longer period of time in Benchen monastery. Likewise Agatha Turkiewicz has opened her dental surgery in December. She is a dentist from Poland. The two are a valuable support and addition for the clinic team. And of course, for all the monastery residents and likewise for the closer and more distant neighbourhood, they are a further source of precious help.

All sponsors supporting the Benchen Free Clinic are thanked sincerely!!

Also we would like to thank all persons who are supporting families connected with the monastery! In particular the financial support given towards the education of girls.

Many Tashi Deleks for the new year!!!

Yours Lotus Direkthilfe Team

P.S. The monks would be very happy to receive a photo of their sponsor or sponsor family!