

New Abbot at Nalanda Monastery

All monasteries in the Tibetan tradition have an abbot (*khenpo*), disciplinarian (*gegö*), and chant master (*umze*). The role of the abbot is to be both the spiritual and political head of the monastery, and the *vinaya* explains his role as being like a parent looking after his family. Nalanda Monastery in France recently celebrated the appointment of their resident teacher Geshe Losang Jamphel as abbot, and this is the story as told by Ven. Dorje.

“I open the door of my office”

When Nalanda Monastery was founded in 1981, Lama Yeshe appointed our first resident teacher, Geshe Jampa Tegchok, as abbot. In 1994 he became abbot of Sera Je Monastery, and Lama Zopa Rinpoche appointed Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa's resident teacher, Geshe Jampa Gyatso, as Nalanda's second abbot. Geshe Jampa Gyatso passed away on November 24, 2007 [*Mandala* February/March 2008], and so Lama Zopa Rinpoche was again approached and asked to appoint a new abbot. He received this request at Ganden Monastery in January 2008, during His Holiness the Dalai Lama's teachings. Lama Zopa opened the box in which he keeps his dice for divinations, chuckled and said, “I open the door of my office.” After several minutes of checking, he said that our current resident teacher, Geshe Losang Jamphel, came out very well and he was duly appointed as Nalanda's third abbot.

A Unique First

At the time a small group of Nalanda monks was accompanying Geshe Jamphel on a trip to Drepung and Sera monasteries. The opportunity was used to ask Geshe Ngawang Sangye, a lharampa geshe and famous teacher at Sera Je Monastery, about the procedure for the enthronement of an abbot. As a formal enthronement had never been held within the FPMT, and possibly never in the West, we had no idea what was required. Geshe Sangye first commented: “You are really very fortunate to have Gen Jamphel-la as your abbot!” Then he spoke at length about the qualities of Geshe Jamphel.

When describing the process of enthronement, he stressed the importance of the ritual: “At the present time Geshe Jamphel is in the process of becoming Nalanda's abbot, but only after completion of the recitation of these prayers, will he actually be the abbot.” The ritual consists mainly in the recitation of two prayers, Nā Cu (a type of Sixteen Arhat puja) and Päl Dän Yön Tän Ma (a traditional praise), neither of which have been translated into English.

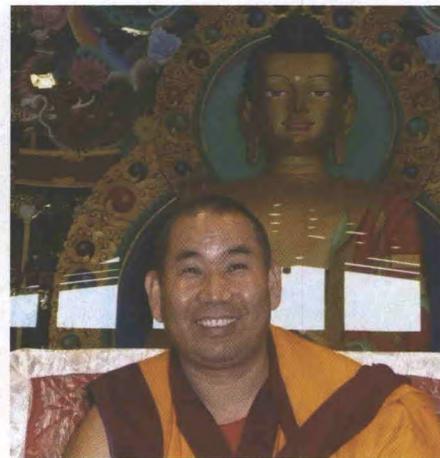
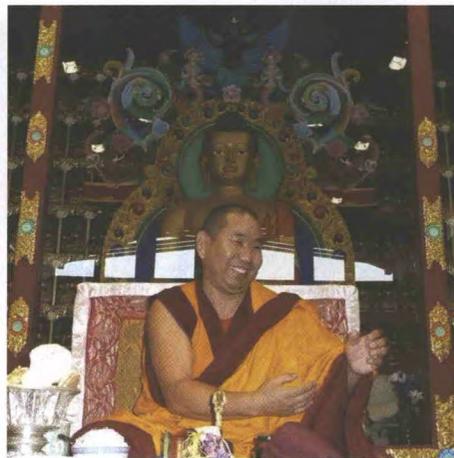
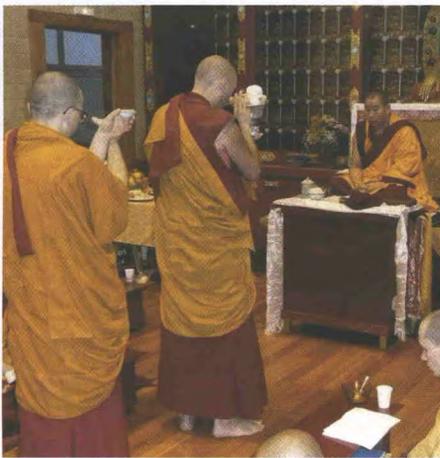
Returning Home

When Geshe-la was appointed as our abbot by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, we requested if we could start calling him by his new title, Khen Rinpoche Losang Jamphel. Geshe-la very gently, but firmly, said no and then explained that titles and formalities can create distance between the student and their teacher. His role of abbot and teacher was to be our father and care for us as his children, and therefore we were to continue to use the title Geshe-la.

An abbot cannot totally escape formalities, and when Geshe-la returned to Nalanda in February, he was greeted in the way that high lamas are traditionally welcomed with monks wearing the yellow robes, blowing long horns and conches, the eight auspicious signs were painted on the driveway, and incense and khatas were offered.

Phonetics and Translations

With Geshe-la having returned to his home in the West, preparations for the enthronement began in earnest. Ven. Tharchin provided phonetics for the two new prayers, as well as translations, the gumpa was cleaned



The enthronement was the first use of the new gompā.

thoroughly, and February 19 was chosen as it fell during the Days of Miracles. It was also the day that he would ordain four new monks.

Beautiful Gompā

The enthronement was to be the first occasion that the community used the gompā in our new building, which seemed auspicious. Many of the monks and Basic Program students worked hard in the preceding days to make the gompā look beautiful, placing the high throne in front of the Buddha Shakyamuni statue, and many bunches of flowers and other offerings.

The Enthronement

We began just before seven in the morning. The first part of the ritual was taking extensive refuge whilst reciting the Praise to Shakyamuni Buddha we regularly use in the FPMT before teachings. Then *Nā Cu* was recited. This is a sixteen-page prayer largely derived from the Sixteen Arhats puja, and includes full-length invocations, requests for the Dharma to spread, and the seven-limb prayer. When we started to recite this, Ven. Zopa, Geshe-la's attendant, went to fetch Geshe-la from his room and led him to the gompā, holding incense before him as an offering. At a specific moment during the recitation, Geshe-la entered the gompā, prostrated, and made offerings through the scattering of flower petals and rice, as well as offering *khatas*. Then he mounted the throne, and the monks, represented by Ven. Gendun, offered a mandala to Geshe-la. The second part of the ritual was the recitation of *Pāl Dän Yön Tān Ma*, a four-page prayer composed by Khedrub Je, during which he praises Gyaltsab Je's qualities. This prayer is particularly important to the Gelug, and it is the one that Geshe Sangye referred to when he said that only after this prayer has been recited, can it be said that Geshe Jamphel has actually become the abbot.

The Tradition

Geshe Sangye spoke of the origin of *Pāl Dän Yön Tān Ma*: "After Lama Tsongkhapa passed away, it was uncertain who would become his successor. Gyaltsab Je said that as Khedrup Je had more knowledge of Buddhism, he should become the successor. Khedrup Je said in return that Gyaltsab Je was the elder and therefore he should become the successor to Lama Tsongkhapa. Eventually Khedrup Je suggested that Gyaltsab Je should first remain seated on the throne for a short while, and after that he would accept the succession. Gyaltsab Je agreed. After sitting on the throne very briefly Gyaltsab Rinpoche was about to stand up, when Khedrup Rinpoche caught his knee, pushed him back down and recited this prayer, which he had composed."

Afterwards monks, volunteers, and Basic Program students offered *Ganden Lha Gyāma Tsog* and *khatas* to our new abbot, Khen Rinpoche Losang Jamphel. Having been part of such a unique and important event, a joyous atmosphere reigned over all of us. It was also one of those occasions where the presence of the lineage seemed very real. And as monastics, it was wonderful to play a part in the continuation of the lineage and tradition of Buddha Shakyamuni and Lama Tsongkhapa.

May the Buddha's teachings long endure; may they always be taught by perfect lamas, and practised with sincerity.

For more information on Nalanda Monastery and its study program, visit their website at www.nalanda-monastery.eu

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