

MANDALA

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SUSTAINING THE PURE UNBROKEN LINEAGE OF
BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS IN THIS WORLD

THE LEGACY OF THE SERA JE FOOD FUND

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FOUNDATION FOR
THE PRESERVATION OF THE MAHAYANA TRADITION



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THE LEGACY OF **THE SERA JE FOOD FUND**



ASSEMBLED MONKS OF SERA JE MONASTERY, INDIA

THE SERA JE FOOD FUND BEGAN in earnest in 1991, and in 2018 FPMT International Office offered Sera Je Monastery an endowment large enough to sustain the daily offering of healthy vegetarian food to all of the monks of Sera Je Monastery long into the future. To mark this momentous offering, we requested Ven. Tenzin Tsultrim, a Singaporean nun from Amitabha Buddhist Centre, to write a detailed account of the Sera Je Food Fund history for the purpose of rejoicing and also to recognize the incredible contributions of so many kind individuals, who over the last twenty-six years, have worked toward creating this monumental offering to Sera Je Monastery.

On behalf of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Ven. Roger Kunsang, and the entire FPMT organization, FPMT Charitable Projects would like to take this opportunity to sincerely, from the heart, thank everyone who has contributed to the Sera Je Food Fund over the years. So many people have donated money, offered prayers, or shared news of this project. It is due to the kindness of many that the FPMT organization has been able to make this offering without interruption for twenty-six years and to create an endowment that will last long into the future. All of this has come from Lama Zopa Rinpoche's incredible bodhichitta motivation.

We are continuing in the tradition of the Sera Je Food Fund with the Supporting Ordained Sangha Fund, a project that is already offering grants for food, accommodation, and essential needs to nunneries and monasteries around the world.

Thank you,
Ven. Holly Ansett, FPMT Charitable Projects



PREFACE

As part of my research for this article, I traveled from Singapore to visit Sera Je Monastery from late July to early August 2018. With the kind help of Geshe Ngawang Sangye, the former food fund manager, I was able to interview several of the oldest monks as well as other senior Sangha at the monastery.

I thought I already had some general background about the monastery and the food fund, but listening to their stories opened my ears and eyes to a new level of understanding. I was moved and transformed by the experience. It was a brief but fruitful visit, and besides the interviews, I had the opportunity to tour and observe the routines at the monastery kitchen, the debate courtyard, and Sera Je School, capturing photos and videos. It is humbling to come to know more about the incredible extent of precious Lama Zopa Rinpoche's altruistic deeds and to appreciate the painful hardships that two generations of monks, including my own teachers, had to bear to establish the Sera Je Monastery in India as we know it today.

—Tenzin Tsultrim

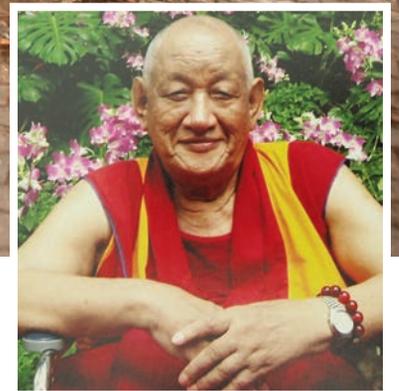
THE SERA JE FOOD FUND IN SUMMARY

Throughout the six hundred year Gelug tradition, established by Lama Tsongkhapa of Tibet, the three main monasteries have been Ganden, Drepung, and Sera. In 1970, after the Chinese occupation of Tibet, these three monasteries were reestablished in the south Indian state of Karnataka, where they continue to be major centers of Buddhist learning, preserving the Buddha's teachings and the lineage of Lama Tsongkhapa for generations to come.

For well over two decades up to the early 1990s, when new monks entered the monastery, the senior monks would have to consider the basics of day-to-day survival: How were they going to support the new arrivals? How would they provide for their food and other needs? This was a dilemma that Sera Je Monastery had to face long after it was reestablished in the Tibetan refugee settlement in Bylakuppe in South India. As they struggled to manage their own meager resources for all their daily needs, the monks invariably had little left over to support new pupils, some as young as six years old. Sometimes the parents would send them to other monasteries that were better endowed, or the boys would end up returning home to the distant places they had come from in the Himalayas.

But in the later part of 1991, it was the enrollment of one such young monk at Sera Je Monastery that would completely turn around this dismal situation. At the age of six, Tenzin Ösel Hita was formally admitted into the Sera Je community. As the sponsor of the young reincarnation of Lama Yeshe, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, on behalf of the FPMT organization, honored the tradition of making offerings to the Sangha on the day that Tenzin Ösel entered the monastery. But Lama Zopa Rinpoche wanted to do much more. With the wish to present an offering that would be of the most practical benefit to the Sera Je community, Rinpoche met with then abbot Khensur Rinpoche Geshe Lobsang Tsering.

The meeting in 1991 came at a critical time and at the right moment. Gen Lobsang, as all the monks called him, had a huge concern in mind: how to improve the means of providing food to the monks. He had long held a wish for all the monks to have their meals equally and adequately provided for. Rinpoche's visit was the opportune moment to put forward an appeal for much-needed help with the extremely poor food situation. Rinpoche wholeheartedly accepted Gen Lobsang's request and this marked the first step in what would be known as the Sera Je Food Fund, an FPMT Charitable Project that fundraised for and offered millions of vegetarian meals to Sera Je monks over the next twenty-six years.



MONKS DURING WINTER DEBATES. PHOTO BY LOSAN PIATTI.

KHENSUR RINPOCHE GESHE LOBSANG TSERING, WHO IN 1991 REQUESTED LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE TO HELP PROVIDE FOOD FOR THE SERA JE MONKS

In the years that followed, Lama Zopa Rinpoche took on increasing responsibility for supporting the food requirements for the Sera Je community, and the Sera Je Food Fund developed into a vital FPMT Charitable Project, which ensured that the monks would have all their food needs well taken care of. From the initial offering to cover lunch expenses, to the actual sponsorship and establishment of a properly equipped central kitchen producing three meals every day, to securing a substantial self-sustaining endowment fund for the long-term, these activities were successfully accomplished through the Sera Je Food Fund from 1991 up until 2017, when the process of handing over the endowment to Sera Je Monastery began. In May 2017, FPMT officially announced, “Sera Je Monastery is now managing the endowment and the on-going management of the food fund. Therefore, the Sera Je Food Fund is now closed as an FPMT Charitable Project.”

The twenty-six years that span the evolution of the Sera Je Food Fund forms a memorable and highly worthwhile chapter in FPMT’s history. This story, as told by many of the venerable ones who lived and studied at Sera Je over the decades, offers supporters of the food fund and those hearing about it for the first time the opportunity to rejoice and to gain a fuller perspective of the undertaking.

HOW THE HARDSHIPS BEGAN

The original Sera Je Monastery is located just outside of Lhasa in Tibet. In 1959, following the Tibetan uprising in response to the Chinese Communist invasion, tens of thousands of Tibetans fled their homeland and followed His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama into exile in India. Geshe Thubten Palden was among the thousands of monks who escaped. When I met him in August 2018, he could clearly remember his flight: “In 1959, when I came [to India] as a refugee I was twenty-four. As I was fleeing from Tibet, during that time the Chinese army used lots of bullets. It was as if the bullets were raining down, but none of us were shot because we wore protection amulets given by His Holiness and that saved us.”

The main refugee camp where many of the monks were sheltered was in the Indian state of West Bengal in an area called Buxa Duar. There, they lived for slightly over a decade, that is, if they were lucky enough to survive the extremely poor conditions of the camp, including heat, disease, spoiled food, and contami-

nated water. About life in Buxa, Geshe Palden said, “The food was extremely poor. Actually we received relief aid from the Indian government, but the agent who brought all the relief did not bring fresh supplies. They brought rice, dhal, and flour that were old, not fresh, so there were insects inside. The food was so poor at that time that most of us contracted tuberculosis. So many died because of that.”

Geshe Thubten Dorje also remembered the difficult life in Buxa. Geshe Dorje, who is a hale and hearty eighty-two, studied under Lama Yeshe from the age of sixteen while they were still in Tibet. He was with Lama Yeshe when they fled from the Chinese Communists and continued to study under Lama Yeshe throughout the period in Buxa. “When we first arrived in Buxa, Lama Yeshe and I were assigned to the same common kitchen. At first, the supplies brought by the government representatives were good, but gradually it became worse and worse,” Geshe Dorje said. “The wheat flour, rice, dhal, and corn supplies were all expired, and there were many insects in them. At that time, life was very difficult, but if one engaged in studies then there were plenty of opportunities while in Buxa.”

Geshe Palden is now eighty-three and lives at the residence of Ganden Tripa Lobsang Tenzin Rinpoche at Sera Je. According to Geshe Palden, in 1970 after an appeal made to the Indian government by His Holiness, the monks in the Buxa refugee camp were relocated to the Tibetan settlements in South India. From my conversations with various monks of that era, it was

evident that life continued to present great challenges for many years on many levels, from housing, to health, to food. Geshe Palden said that for the first six years in Bylakuppe, which became the home of Sera Monastery, they all lived in tents and their studies came to a complete halt. Afterwards, as the monastery was reestablished, the local Indian government built them their first proper accommodation. These were small one-storied huts, and all the monks who had been resettled from Buxa, some three hundred of them including the monks of Sera Me Monastery, were allocated houses and some land. In those early years, Geshe Palden shared a house with three other monks. Tri Rinpoche, which is how the monks address the current Ganden Tripa, had also been at Buxa and was among these housemates.

YEARS OF BEING POOR AND HUNGRY

While monks from Buxa had received land from the Indian government, monks who entered the monastery later had no such entitlement. With no other resources at the time, the monastery was able to use the land owned by the Buxa monks, over a hundred acres for Sera Je, for farming. It seems that corn was the main crop, and all the monks were deployed to till the fields and bring in the harvests every year. Every monk, without exception, had to join in the fieldwork, which would take up to a month.



The harvested corn, however, did not go into the monastery's kitchen. The crops were sold to local markets and, for a time, provided a source of income for the monastery. The monastery also kept a herd of up to fifty cows, and milk from the cows was sent to the central kitchen to make tea.

In exchange for borrowing the land for farming, the monastery offered free food to the Buxa monks in return. Food from the communal kitchen was also available to the monks who came after the Buxa group, but it came with a fee. Geshe Palden said that 173 monks arrived in 1970 from Buxa to what became Sera Je Monastery. This meant that in the 1970s, '80s, and into the '90s just 173 monks were able to receive their meals from the monastery kitchen for free, and the growing population of monks who arrived thereafter had to pay 300 to 350 rupees each month for their food. This was a necessity that most could ill afford and that could take time away from study and practice. "Sometimes we had to go to beg in the nearby settlement camps," said Geshe Palden.

Some of the *khangtsens* (monastic houses) had sponsors to ease the burden of paying for food. For example, the first monks sent to join Sera Je by Kopan Monastery in Nepal were a small group of about eight to ten monks. Khen Rinpoche Geshe Thubten Chonyi, who was part of that group and is now the abbot of Kopan Monastery and Khachoe Ghakyil Nunnery, said, "At the very beginning, I think Mummy Max was helping us to pay for the food from the kitchen. She had a business in Delhi

and she would send some money for us to pay to the monastery kitchen, whatever the cost."

Even with having enough money to pay for the monastery food, Geshe Chonyi, who entered Sera Je in 1981, described the monastery food as being very simple at the time. Lunch would typically be rice and dhal, but there would be a lot of rice and too little dhal as Geshe Chonyi recalled. "The dhal was just a little, so it could not cover the rice. Half of the rice was eaten dry. And also, the rice was not so nice. Each time you bit into it, there were small stones inside, or sand. Each time as you bit, it made noise."

Mummy Max, as the American nun Max Mathews was lovingly called, was one of Lama Yeshe's first Western students. While she paid for the monthly kitchen fees for the Kopan group, the monks hardly had any money besides that. As the food provided by the communal kitchen was so poor, many monks would resort to cooking extra food in their own houses. "We would pick raw papayas from the trees we had," Geshe Chonyi said. "We would pluck one from the tree, fry it a little bit, and then eat it with rice because we had no money to buy vegetables at that time. There was almost no money at all."

As with other senior Kopan monks of that era, Geshe Chonyi completed his studies successfully in spite of those difficult conditions and went on to assume responsibilities beyond the world of Sera Je. Since 1999, Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi has also been the resident teacher of Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Singapore.



SACRIFICING TO FEED MANY STUDENTS

Many well-qualified geshe remained at the monastery and became senior teachers, mentoring the next generation of young monks. One such scholar is Geshe “Gen” Ngawang Sangye of Ngari Khangtsen. Today, Gen Sangye is one of the main philosophy teachers in the monastery with a hectic schedule, tutoring numerous groups of monks throughout the day.

While the monks who arrived in the ’70s and ’80s from the northern Himalayan regions, including Tibet, already had to bear the hardships of hunger and poverty while pursuing their academic goals, there were those who also assumed the extra responsibility of caring for boys who had been sent to the monastery. Gen Sangye has had this dual experience. He first entered Sera Je in 1979 as a boy of nine. “At that time I had two roommates. For dinner, we would get three half-pieces of flatbread. Two halves would be shared among the three of us for dinner. The third half of bread, which was for dinner, actually, would be saved for the next day’s breakfast,” Gen Sangye said.

This was a tough adjustment for many of the children who, having left their families far behind in the north, now found themselves starved and hungry. Gen Sangye said, “Once I wrote a letter to my family in Ladakh, saying that the food here was very poor so could they please send some bread and *tsampa* [roasted barley flour]?”

The traditional Tibetan flatbread, or *balep*, is about the size of a medium pizza, made from wheat flour, slightly chewy, and served plain. Whether for growing boys or the adults who had to engage in rigorous study and hours of debate, one *balep* for dinner was inadequate. As Gen Sangye further revealed, “There were so many monks living together. The monks had to hide their bread because sometimes, due to feeling so hungry, some of the other monks would take it. So they had to be very careful and hide it under their blankets!”

Pujas and special offerings were occasional highlights in this desperate scenario and provided relief. “One time, some Americans came and donated some oats. Actually we heard that those oats were used as pig feed! Those oats were not like the oats nowadays, but we were very happy and satisfied, not because it was delicious, but we received a big amount of those oats and we felt full,” Gen Sangye recounted.

“During the tenth and twenty-fifth days of the Tibetan calendar, there would be *tsog* offering pujas and we would be very happy because we got delicious food and tea. At that time my teacher, Gen Lobsang Monlam, had four of us pupils. He would instruct us to share two of the four pieces of bread distributed to

each of us in the puja and bring back the remaining two pieces of bread to our house and hand them to him. What he would do then was to poke a hole through each piece of bread, tie each piece up with string, and just hang them up. They were hung up for many days, so they would dry up and become like crackers, and for many days he would break off portions of the dried up bread and feed those to us for our breakfast.”

Years later, Gen Sangye himself was given six young pupils to care for and had to contend with the new burden. He said, “At that time, my pupils had no sponsors and their families were also poor. I had to care for them, and it was an extremely difficult situation. What I experienced then in taking care of them was so much more difficult than what I had experienced while I was younger!”

Scrimping and saving to pay the monastery kitchen was common throughout the community. Khen Rinpoche Geshe Lobsang Wangdu, who is the current abbot of Gyudmed Tantric College, entered Sera Je Drati Khangtsen in 1970. While Geshe Wangdu did not have any pupils placed under his charge, he remembered the lengths that his teacher Geshe Lobsang Sherab went to, to conserve their limited resources.

Geshe Wangdu shared with me, “At that time, whatever food we got from the community kitchen, the kitchen would provide us a bill at the end of the month and then we had to make payments. The only source of income for my teacher was the money offering made to him during pujas, which he used to support the pupils. I remember that if he had to go for a puja to some place outside the monastery, maybe to one of the camps, if he was going to stay out for a day or so, he would go and inform the kitchen, ‘I am not going to be around for a day, so please don’t prepare the food for me.’ So the kitchen would strike off his name, and then he would not be billed for that day.”

Geshe Wangdu pointed out that these were the ways in which they had to be very careful with money in the days before the Sera Je Food Fund. The monthly bill of 300 rupees (approximately US\$4) for each monk was considered a big sum then.

Tenzin Gyurme Rinpoche, also from Drati Khangtsen, is in his mid-thirties. He has just two more years to go to complete the six-year Gelug examinations that will qualify him for a geshe lharampa degree, the equivalent of a Ph.D. in Western terms. Tenzin Gyurme Rinpoche arrived at the monastery in early 1991 at the age of eight. Not having proper or enough food to eat is something he still remembers. “It was a time when we did not have anything, so whatever meals we got from the monastery were really delicious, and we found it very good. But now when we glance back and try to think about the quality of the meals that we had then, it was very, very low quality. The rice and the dhal that we used to have was more or less like water.”

COLLECTING MERIT FOR FPMT

Ven. Tenzin Tsultrim contacted Ven. Roger Kunsang, CEO of FPMT International Office, asking about his thoughts on this enormous project.

Ven. Tsultrim: How would you describe the significance of the Sera Je Food Fund among FPMT's projects?

Ven. Roger: I think it has been a great success, and this you can see directly from the results as well as hear from the monks themselves, especially the older ones who were around before 1991, and were always hungry! The food fund also gave them a lot more time for their studies—not having to shop and cook saves a lot of time. It made Sera Je Monastery appealing to come to because you didn't have to worry about food. The monastery really wanted to attract younger people, so offering free food was important. Before, you had to pay and you got very poor quality food.

It has been no small achievement. In the beginning when Lama Zopa Rinpoche took on the project, we had no supporters for it, and Rinpoche had never fundraised like this before, and neither had I. Rinpoche didn't want to raise money from the FPMT centers as they were trying hard themselves to stay afloat. So it meant going to individuals who could afford to help and requesting their assistance. Still, it was very hard in those early years as we had to raise the funds while the monks were all relying on Rinpoche for breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day, seven days a week, all year!

We must never forget that the most important aspect of this is the survival of the Dharma—the teachings of the Buddha in its most complete form exists only in these three great seats of learning of which Sera Je is a part.

What impact has this long-term offering of food for Sera Je Monastery had on the FPMT organization as a whole?

It's been a really great opportunity. As Rinpoche always says, we have been able to offer food to all these monks who are disciples of the same guru, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, continuously every day for so many years. Such an excellent opportunity for collecting merit for FPMT!

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who gave money to make this happen and everyone who helped in other ways.



**FRESH SOUP, BREAD, AND CHILI SAUCE FROM
THE SERA JE KITCHEN**

THE BIRTH OF A FOOD FUND

It was from such dire circumstances that the need for the food fund arose. When Geshe Lobsang Tsering served as the seventieth abbot of Sera Je Monastery until his seven-year term ended in 1991, these difficulties about food were a source of worry. It was during the formal induction of the young Tenzin Ösel Hita into the monastery that the opportunity came for Gen Lobsang to raise the food issue with Lama Zopa Rinpoche and discuss the prospect of food sponsorship.

Interested to delve into what Gen Lobsang had thought of this matter, I interviewed his former personal attendant, Geshe Thubten Tendhar of Tsangpa Khangtsen. Gen Lobsang passed away in July 2014 at age ninety-two. Although Geshe Tendhar began serving Gen Lobsang in the years after Gen Lobsang had stepped down as abbot, Gen Lobsang still spoke of those earlier concerns, including the disparity between the Buxa monks and the later monks. Geshe Tendhar said that Khensur Rinpoche “always felt that it would be very good if all the monks could equally receive their meals [for free] from the common kitchen.”

The 1991 meeting with Lama Zopa Rinpoche resulted in a highly favorable outcome. Without any reservations, Rinpoche

promised to help in whatever way he could. Rinpoche began by sponsoring US\$25,000 a year for food at the monastery kitchen and, from then on, was deeply committed to offering food to the entire Sera Je community for as long as needed. The initial donation covered the meals of 1,300 monks, the total population of Sera Je at that time. It was divided and distributed to the monks as an individual allowance, which worked out to be 70 rupees a month.

It was a daunting task in those days to raise enough money for the fund. Ven. Roger Kunsang, CEO of FPMT International Office, recalled the enormous effort invested in the first ten to fifteen years to fundraise and the courage that Rinpoche had in taking on this massive project. In an email interview, Ven. Roger wrote, “I remember estimating having to raise a million dollars as a minimum so the interest could cover the food. Back then in 1991, it was an unbelievable amount of money. We had never raised funds for a project this size before! So it was quite daunting. And to take this on while being extremely busy on the road, with Rinpoche teaching full-time. In those early times, it was a real worry and concern knowing the amount of money that had to be raised each year so that the food could be bought.” Furthermore, Ven. Roger added, “There were many successes but also many disappointments in those times.” This was the extraordinary extent to which Rinpoche went, in his promise to help in whatever way he could.



HOW OFFERING FOOD PRESERVES THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS

The offering of food to the entire monastic community of Sera Je was absolutely sincere on Rinpoche's part and was born out of his vast visions. In 2011 Rinpoche explained his motivation in a message to Sera Je Food Fund sponsors:

"All the monks living in the monastery are studying the pure Buddhadharma, Dharma that was taught by Buddha and the pandits such as Nagarjuna, Asanga, and also the great scholars and highly attained teachers and Tibetan lamas. Sera Je Monastery is one of the main places in the world to study Tibetan Buddhism. Also, Sera Je Monastery is one of the main colleges in the world to study the Lama Tsongkhapa tradition, to learn debate, and to study all the scriptures very extensively. Debate is a very specialized way of learning the teachings, like a scientist who examines the path to enlightenment, understanding all the delusions, karma, the five aggregates, all of Buddha's qualities, and so forth. This is what is needed to be understood so we can be free from suffering forever.

"Making food offerings to the Sangha at Sera Je actually helps to continue the extensive learning of Buddha's teachings. It directly sustains and continues the pure unbroken lineage of Buddha's teachings in this world. If there is no food fund, then it is very difficult for the monks. They would not be able to stay in the monastery and they would have to work to earn money. Or, they would not have enough food and then would be unable to study. If this happened, then Buddhism would disappear in this world. All sentient beings' happiness comes from Buddha's teachings, from the study and practice and actualization of Buddha's teachings."

With this as the all-encompassing inspiration, the Sera Je Food Fund embarked on its journey to serve the monastery. As with any undertaking into unfamiliar and unexplored territory, there were kinks to smooth out in the early stages as the food fund took off on an ever-expanding scale.





DHAL AND BREAD. PHOTO BY LOSAN PIATTI.

KHEN RINPOCHE GESHE LOBSANG WANGDU, SERA JE MONASTERY, 2018. PHOTO BY VEN. TENZIN TSULTRIM.

NO EASY START IN THE BEGINNING

The meal sponsorship had a modest start. While each monk received a 70-rupee allowance every month, a dinner offering was also arranged twice a month, on the fifteenth and thirtieth days of the Tibetan calendar. This was a special treat that Tenzin Gyurmey Rinpoche, then a young monk, still remembers. “That was the time that everyone would wait for weeks for that meal: ‘That is the fifteenth! The Ösel Labrang [FPMT’s Sera Food Fund] meal is coming!’ So we’d wait. We would go to the puja and get the meal and we wouldn’t waste even one grain of rice because that was the best meal of the month,” said Tenzin Gyurmey Rinpoche, who serves as one of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s English translators these days, laughing at the memory.

In the mid-1990s, despite these slight improvements, many monks found the food provided by the communal kitchen to be inadequate and struggled to afford proper nourishment. Kopan monk Geshe Ngawang Sangye, who entered Sera Je under Tsawa Khangtsen in 1994, said, “Even though we had many people helping us with food, it was quite difficult to buy our own food, because we had limited money for our own expenses.”

With emotions rising, Geshe Sangye described one memory, “Just to bring color to the food, they had to add some food coloring to it, because the noodles were totally white, and they didn’t have enough money to buy spices. In the noodles, there was hot water and salt, and nothing else. So the senior monks, they bought the food coloring from the market, which was very cheap. It was also not good for health. They had to buy that kind of coloring, add it into the water just so the other monks would like the food a little more. Instead of leaving it plain, they added a yellowish kind of color.”

A few years later under the next abbot, Khensur Rinpoche Geshe Jampa Tegchok, the Sera Je Food Fund was able to offer lunch every day to the whole community. This was in 1997, when Lama Zopa Rinpoche also offered US\$25,000 to build a new communal kitchen and began paying the salary of seven full-time cooks. The number of monks receiving meals then was 1,900, and the annual expenses increased to US\$175,000. The following year, dinner was added to the food fund sponsorship.

While a great load was taken off the financial burden and daily worries that the monks had borne for so long, the kitchen team also worked at developing its expertise in serving the needs

of the community. Geshe Wangdu noted that as things developed and as those involved with the kitchen became more experienced “the food became more delicious.”

HOW THE FOOD FUND BROUGHT IMMENSE BENEFIT

The overall response to receiving the meals offered through the Sera Je Food Fund was very positive, and greatly welcomed and appreciated. Not having to worry about the monthly installments for food payments was one thing. The main benefit was that throughout the community, the monks who had private kitchens did not have to agonize over preparing extra food to supplement the poor meals of the past, either for themselves or for their dependent pupils. The time saved allowed them to focus instead on their primary activity, their studies.

Geshe Wangdu said, “Zopa Rinpoche was very generous and kind and it brought a lot of relief to the monks. It was of immense benefit to the monastic community.”

Geshe Wangdu and others that I spoke to were of the opinion that having the food fund led to the increasing numbers of monks joining Sera Je. Geshe Wangdu explained, “When we used to admit new monks into the monastery, we usually had a big concern: How would I support the new monk when he enters the monastery? But since the community kitchen started providing food to new monks, that concern was eliminated, and it became very easy for us to think about admitting them. So, let’s say there’s a monk entering the monastery today, from tomorrow onwards the community kitchen is going to provide food for them.” Therefore, said Geshe Wangdu, “It was immensely beneficial.”

In the 1990s, in addition to the young monks from the Tibetan settlements entering Sera Je, there was a large influx of monks coming from Tibet, particularly from the Kham region, entering the monastery. Geshe Wangdu pointed out that there would be groups of fifty to eighty monks arriving and having the assurance of food being provided was tremendously helpful: “Since the community kitchen was providing the food, we had absolutely no concern.”

Tenzin Gyurmey Rinpoche said, “Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s support came at a critical time, at a time when the monastery was in great urgent need of funding and support. I personally believe that the Sera Je Food Fund really paved a great way for the monastery’s flourishing in terms of studies, practice, and the number of monks enrolled. And I even heard from my friends that nowadays if you come to Sera Je, then you do not need to have to worry about your meals.”

For elders like Geshe Palden, the positive outcome was also apparent: “Since the food fund started, what I see among the monks is there is absolutely no worry about food. The monks have a hundred percent free time for their studies. Over time a large number of monks, including refugees from Tibet, came to India, eventually increasing the population to 3,500 monks. Many of them became geshe. Many are serving the FPMT as well. And many are now in retreat in the Himalayas. So it has been of benefit.”

In 2003, breakfast for three months a year was included in the food sponsorship. From 2008, the Sera Je Food Fund began to provide for all three meals a day. The food fund extended its reach further when, in 2012, breakfast was offered to the school-aged monks at the Sera Je School. At that time there were eight hundred students attending.

Having the food fund rapidly eliminated the problems that so many in the community had suffered before. “After having Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s food fund, I felt as if I had become very rich! From then on, all the difficulties came to an end. Likewise, so many other teachers also had the same experience,” Gen Sangye, the philosophy teacher, said. “[And having the meals provided] saved a lot of time. If you had a plate and a cup, then everything was fine. The only work left to do was to wash your own plate and cup, because there were no more worries about food.”

HEALTHY FOOD, HEALTHY MONKS

At the individual level, there were definite benefits that emerged due to the food fund. Besides being relieved of hunger and financial woes, and having more time for their studies, the Sera Je Food Fund has improved the health of the monks. “Before the food fund started, around eighty percent of the young monks had some skin problems because of the poor quality of food and lack of protein. And around eighty percent of the monks had gastritis and what we call ‘cold disease’ in Tibetan—pain in the joints,” Gen Sangye said, noting that since the food fund was established, such diseases have reduced considerably.

Tenzin Gyurmey Rinpoche elaborated, “When we first came, a lot of us got tuberculosis, and many other water-related diseases, and other common contaminated diseases and health problems, and so on. Most of the monks at that time had a lot of sores or injuries on the head and face, skin problems, so many problems. Now if you look at the younger monks in the monastery and the school, it is seldom that you see such unhealthy monks with sores on their heads and so on, and so it is really related to the meals that they have.”

The food fund has placed a lot of attention on ensuring that the vegetarian food served be as nutritious as possible and

that it catered to a range of health needs. Such efforts were especially made after Ösel Labrang took over the administration of the food fund. Care was taken to select quality produce from what was available in the local markets. The type of wheat flour purchased for daily staples like bread and noodle dough, for example, was top grade. In addition, former food fund manager Geshe Ngawang Sangye said that nutritionists were consulted a few times over the past decade and their recommendations for healthier ingredients and recipes as well as overall hygiene were incorporated.

Geshe Sangye added that doctors were also consulted: “We also worked together with the Sera Je Healthcare Centre, where sometimes there are visiting doctors from well-known hospitals from around Bangalore or Mysore. We asked them what kinds of foods are good for diabetes, gastric issues, and high blood pressure. Although we could not provide everything for the monks, at least we could change the menus according to the majority of the monks who had sicknesses like high blood pressure or diabetes or gastritis. So we worked on it; we changed our way of cooking.” Some changes included using healthier recipes for making bread and switching the vegetables used for cooking the meals.

“When we took over the food fund responsibility, many monks and all of the senior monks here appreciated how we took care of them, because we put all our time into preserving the good quality of the food,” said Geshe Sangye, who is also manager of Ösel Labrang, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Tenzin Ösel’s residence in Sera Je.

Geshe Sangye added that feedback and comments about the food from teachers and friends were always welcomed, heard, and considered, and adjustments were made where possible. “When we changed the menu, we found that if we cooked too healthy food then less people would eat, and there’d be lots of waste. So we had to bring it in balance, the taste and the nutritional value,” he explained.

One example of catering to popular demand was with the serving of tea. Traditional Tibetan butter tea had been the only beverage served for breakfast. However, the kitchen later offered sweet milk tea because of requests from the monks. According to Geshe Sangye, “Before we handed over [the food fund] to the monastery, I think we had three different teas. One is butter tea, and then milk tea, and one that’s called in Tibet ‘nomad’s tea,’ which has a little bit of salt and very thin milk.”

It was evident that the quality of the meals had improved by leaps and bounds. The current abbot of Sera Je, Khen Rinpoche Logoan Tulku, said, “Right now, in terms of the nutrition levels, the taste and deliciousness of the food is incomparable to what it was in the past.”

A SYSTEM TO PROVIDE GOOD FOOD

Ever since FPMT took on the management of the communal kitchen in 1997, a team has overseen its operation, with a secretary, referred to as the “food fund manager,” serving as the main administrator and representative of FPMT. Geshe Sangye recalled that senior Kopan monks Geshe Gyurme, Ven. Michael Yeshe, Geshe Jangchub, and Ven. Nyima Tashi had preceded him in serving the Sera Je Food Fund. From around 2008, a staff of twelve monks worked behind the scenes to ensure that the meals were prepared and served on time year round. Two operations managers coordinated the running of the kitchen. They saw to the daily food preparations and logistics, and supervised a team of seven full-time kitchen staff. Under the Sera Je Food Fund, turning out three meals a day for up to 2,600 monks worked out to an average of 700,000 meals a year. Monks from the various debate classes took turns on kitchen duty on a rotating schedule. So, hundreds of monks participated in cooking for their fellow monks, venerable elders, and esteemed teachers.

Walk into the kitchen located behind the main Sera Je temple between 8 and 10 A.M. and you will step into a hive of noise and activity as groups of monks busily slice and dice plentiful piles of freshly washed vegetables, simmer and stir gigantic cauldrons of steaming rice and fragrant dhal, and even sort and arrange mounds of freshly-cut noodles for the day’s dinner. The kitchen is supervised so that everything is kept clean and spotless as soon as the cooking is done. Floors are swept, and grease and food spills are hosed down with plenty of soap and water.

Punctuality is a priority as the monks follow a rigorous schedule from morning to night. Breakfast preparations start at 4 A.M., with tea and bread ready to serve at 6.30 A.M. These days, lunch has to be ready by 10:15 A.M. and dinner by 4:15 P.M. The monks have debate sessions, tutorials with their teachers, and memorization sessions to attend. On a campus that spans over a hundred acres, dashing off to the next class on time is key. As I wandered through a whirl of energetic meal preparation one morning, I noticed how efficient it was, how everyone knew just what to do, and while it was loud with chatter and kitchen clatter, it was a cheerful scene of everyone working together.

When I asked Geshe Sangye about the main objective of the food fund while he was manager, he said that providing quality food was a high priority while also managing the budget well. From 2008 up until the process of handing over the funds to the monastery began in 2017, the annual total expenses for the Sera Je Food Fund worked out to an average of US\$200,000.



KOPAN GESHE NGAWANG SANGYE

Ven. Gyalten Rabten, a Singaporean monk who resides at the Kopan Khangtsen, assisted the kitchen team and FPMT International Office with reviewing accounts and reporting on finances throughout

this period. Formerly a professionally trained accountant, Ven. Rabten also imparted basic accounting skills to the two finance administrators on staff during his term there. The budget, purchasing of supplies, and communication between Sera Je Monastery and the FPMT International Office were all organized with the support of the office staff.

In summing up what he thought had been successfully accomplished while managing the food fund, Geshe Sangye emphasized how they had worked to ensure that savings could be made wherever possible: “Our objective was not to waste the funds. So for that, we are really proud. All my team, together with all the kitchen staff, really worked hard, not only providing good quality food, but also utilizing it in the right way and not wasting on unnecessary things. So we feel that we did quite a good job in this area.”

Geshe Sangye added that they created a well-organized system so that the operation of the kitchen would carry on

efficiently after the food fund was handed over to the monastery. “Our main goal was to provide a system for how to utilize the funds and how to work with the quality of food to meet the monks’ needs. Although they had their own way, we can sometimes improve it according to the Western accounting system, way of life, eating habits, and serving food. So these last ten years, we were able to set up this system in the monastery and now they are continuing with our system.”

A SELF-SUSTAINABLE FOOD FUND

In 2007, FPMT began a long-term plan of establishing an endowment, whose continual interest income would secure the provision of food into the far future. Recalling its development, Geshe Sangye said, “Rinpoche’s thinking was not only about providing food for three meals daily, but also to set up the endowment fund. The interest earned from the endowment fund would be utilized for the food.” The target amount of US\$5 million was raised by January 2017. Thanks to the help and advice of several FPMT students with banking and financial expertise, the process to transfer the funds to the monastery began.

The transfer took place in two tranches—forty percent was handed over in May 2017 and the rest in April 2018. Geshe Sangye explained that thorough research was done into the

legalities for the international transfer and placement of funds in India and this took three to four years. When I interviewed Geshe Sangye in August 2018, he informed me, “The whole one hundred percent of the capital fund has been handed over to the Sera Je Office. I think it is more than a hundred percent actually. The agreement was for a hundred percent, but within a year, FPMT got some more donations and handed over everything.” The total Sera Je Food Fund endowment stands at US\$5.3 million.

Being able to raise this enormous sum is a huge milestone for the entire FPMT organization. Ven. Holly Ansett manages FPMT’s Charitable Projects and has been actively involved with the food fund since 2005. Through an e-mail interview, Ven. Holly said that by offering the endowment, “FPMT was giving the most incredible long-lasting offering.”

In retrospect, Ven. Holly described the food fund as being a substantial achievement that stands out among FPMT’s projects: “To me, this is one of the most important successes of FPMT—and a vital offering. This is really repaying the kindness of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the geshe, and our teachers who come from these great monasteries, and the Tibetan people who have preserved this precious lineage.”

A GRATEFUL COMMUNITY GIVES THANKS

Everywhere, the deep and heartfelt gratitude for what the food fund gave to the Sera Je community was heard and demonstrated. Geshe Sangye recalled that when he came on board the food fund team in 2007, there were monks who had graduated as geshe and

planned to return to Tibet to teach. They would visit Ösel Labrang for the expressed purpose of asking for Rinpoche’s picture. “They were going back to Tibet and they wanted to have Rinpoche’s photo. In those days, they didn’t have spiritual relations with Rinpoche, but they had appreciation and gratefulness. So they wanted to have a picture of Rinpoche. At least they could have a memory and also to pray or something like that,” Geshe Sangye said.

Buxa elder Geshe Palden said very warmly, “After Rinpoche’s food fund, we never had any more worries about food. I very much appreciate and am very thankful to Lama Zopa Rinpoche and all the members of the FPMT and I would like to thank them from the bottom of my heart.”

Gyudmed abbot Geshe Wangdu noted the immense benefit that the offering of food had for the flourishing of the Buddha-dharma: “Because of the food fund, of course, the scholarship on the campus prospered. And directly or indirectly, that helps the Buddha’s doctrine flourish also. So that’s one of the benefits that the food fund led to. I would like to use this opportunity to extend my sincerest gratitude to Lama Zopa Rinpoche in particular, the FPMT organization, all the donors, all of Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s students, and all associated with the food fund.”

For many years the community has made prayers and dedications to acknowledge and show appreciation for what Rinpoche has provided through the food fund. Tenzin Gyurmey Rinpoche described how this gratitude was included during the monks’ debate sessions. “Time and again when we were studying, the disciplinarian, the *gigula*, would take the opportunity to do dedications for Rinpoche’s long life,” he said, including in the dedications after extensive prayers and recitations of “Tara Praises,” the *Heart Sutra*, and other texts. “Every disciplinarian



THE MONKS OF SERA JE MONASTERY, INDIA

MONTHLY SHOPPING: FOOD BY THE TON TO FEED THOUSANDS



PROVISIONS PURCHASED FOR ONE MONTH AT THE SERA JE MONASTERY KITCHEN

- NEARLY 18,000 BANANAS**
- 2,000 KILOGRAMS (4,409 POUNDS) OF RICE**
- 1,200 KILOGRAMS (2,646 POUNDS) OF DHAL (LENTILS)**
- 2,700 KILOGRAMS (5,952 POUNDS) OF BAKING POWDER AND FLOUR**
- 2,200 BUNDLES (4,850 POUNDS) OF GREEN VEGETABLES**
- 2,200 KILOGRAMS (4,850 POUNDS) OF A VARIETY OF OTHER VEGETABLES**
- 940 LITERS (244 GALLONS) OF COOKING OIL**
- 2,000 LITERS (528 GALLONS) OF MILK**
- 70 BOTTLES OF SOY SAUCE**
- 80 COOKING GAS CYLINDERS**



SERA JE MONKS IN ASSEMBLY. PHOTO BY LOSAN PIATTI.

would make sure that we never failed to dedicate our virtues for the long life of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and this is directly connected to the food fund.”

On January 2, 2017, in Bodhgaya during His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s teachings, the monastery offered a long life puja to Rinpoche to thank Rinpoche and the entire FPMT organization for the extraordinary offering of food all these years. In the presence of Rinpoche and an assembly of thousands of monks, including the current and past abbots, the disciplinarian spoke eloquently about what Rinpoche had done to help the monastery. He said that Rinpoche had cared for the thousands of monks for the last twenty-six years like a mother does for her child.

When I asked the abbot Khen Rinpoche Logoan Tulku about the food fund’s legacy, he replied, “The main purpose of all the monks assembling at Sera Je Monastery, on this campus, is to ensure that their study of Buddhist philosophy and all academic activities related to Buddhist philosophy can carry on without any kind of obstacle or interruption. That is the main objective. Also, that is the vision of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His Holiness is very particular that this is the main concern of all the monks residing in the monastery. So anything that aids or supports the study of Buddhist philosophy should be addressed first. So the food fund was addressing the main concern that His Holiness had.”

Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s vision of the far-reaching benefits of offering food to the monks of Sera Je was clear all along. In a food fund video recorded several years ago, Rinpoche reiterated the immense importance of preserving the monastery well so that the teachings of Buddha could easily ripple out into the world to

benefit sentient beings. “It affects the rest of the world if this monastery is kept well, the food and the [monastery itself]. Then [it will be] able to produce qualified teachers every year, and then we can spread Dharma in the rest of the world.”

THE FOOD OFFERING CONTINUES

Although the official activities of managing the food fund are now finished for FPMT, the benefits that the food fund provides to the monks continue. In its agreement with FPMT, the monastery will safeguard the principal sum of the endowment and the annual interest raised will be fully invested in sustaining the communal kitchen in its task of producing three nutritious meals every day for as long as possible for the Sera Je community.

Ven. Holly commented, “As long as the endowment is not touched, the interest from the endowment is more than sufficient to cover all the food needs for all the Sangha. If the endowment grows, which hopefully it will, then it can provide better and better quality food and also cover other needs related with offering the food.”

In April 2018, the monastery introduced a new approach to food distribution. Instead of having everyone assemble in the common dining hall at mealtimes, the monks now collect their food directly from the kitchen and bring it back to their houses to eat. Representatives from each house gather at the monastery kitchen before breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and take whatever



LOADING FOOD ON CARTS TO TAKE TO KHANGTSENS. PHOTO BY VEN. TENZINTSULTRIM.

amount is needed for their household. During my tour of the kitchen, I saw monks pulling up their carts and using tin buckets and an assortment of food containers to collect scoops of freshly cooked rice, masala-spiced dhal, and stir-fried string beans from giant cooking pans. On the side, there was freshly made chili sauce and combs of large bananas to go with the meal. Wasting no time, the monks quickly went on their way, ferrying their loads of hot lunches to the ones waiting back home.

This monastery house delivery system is helping the monks save the time that used to be spent commuting to and from the dining hall. Now, that time can be devoted to their studies. Also more monks are able to eat punctually and not miss their meals, either because of a long walk to the dining hall or being so absorbed in their books that they forget to eat. Due to the unstinting generosity and unwavering kindness of Lama Zopa Rinpoche and the donors of the food fund, wholesome nutritious food is available to the monastic community of Sera Je every day of the year and for as long as a monk resides at the monastery.

As Tenzin Gyurme Rinpoche put it, even with the food fund endowment being handed over to the monastery, “I will tell my friends that Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s and FPMT’s food fund is still going on, because it is not like everything is over. The food fund is continuing, and we have to remember that, each and every moment.”

As our meeting ended, he added, “Many people have to know the history, even in the monastery. Also, the newer monks need to be told about these achievements and the stories.”

There would be no stories to tell if the food fund did not succeed in achieving its goal. But succeed it did. As Ven. Holly put it, “It’s incredible if you think of the benefit that is ongoing, and this is thanks to so many people who contributed to this project over the years.” In thanking everyone who has helped, Ven. Holly said, “The Sera Je Food Fund existed due to the kindness of others—all the donors, and all the administrators, staff, and volunteers over the years. It is all of these people who made the Sera Je Food Fund what it is and who worked toward this.”

When Rinpoche gave his message to the food sponsors in 2011, he explained in detail about how much merit there was in offering food to the Sangha, especially with a bodhichitta motivation, the “unbelievable” merit that would continue to multiply and be experienced in future lifetimes up to enlightenment. Even now, the karmic effects are there. Ven. Holly said, “Rinpoche has stated that one of the reasons FPMT has been so successful is because of the merit of offering food to Sangha for so long through the Sera Je Food Fund.”

And so, with the Sera Je Food Fund is the inconceivable merit from supporting the lives of thousands of monks, enabling them to succeed in their study of the Buddha’s teachings so that the Dharma can reach many places in the world, where it can transform the lives of others beyond measure. This is the legacy of the Sera Je Food Fund.

Ven. Tenzin Tsultrim is from Singapore and has been a member of Amitabha Buddhist Centre for 15 years. She received getsul ordination in March 2009 from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The opportunities to receive precious teachings from her gurus, to actively offer her skills and service to others, and to afford the time for retreat and practice are things that she has found to be very meaningful and worthwhile.



LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE WITH THE CURRENT ABBOT OF SERA JE MONASTERY, KHEN RINPOCHE LOGOANTULKU, INDIA, 2017. PHOTO BY VEN. LOBSANG SHERAB.

REJOICE IN THE SKIES OF MERIT: A THANK YOU MESSAGE FROM LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

Lama Zopa Rinpoche offered these messages of thanks and rejoicing for the Sera Je Food Fund.

“I want to offer numberless thanks directly to all the benefactors who offered food toward Sera Je Monastery. And not only the benefactors, anybody who helped: organizers; anybody who gave help in the aspect of body, speech, and mind; everybody from the beginning. To everybody, I want to thank from the heart, numberless thanks to everybody. On behalf of all the Sera Je monks, on behalf of whoever was able to help with the food, and then on behalf of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, on behalf of Lama Yeshe, on behalf of all the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, thank you very, very much.”

On the importance of rejoicing in the enormous merit collected from offering food to the many Sangha over a long period of time:

“For so many years, every day offering food, breakfast, lunch, and dinner to the monks, wow! You have to know that you have the karma. You have to recognize the good karma, how much unbelievable good karma you collected. So many years, so many years, so many years, wow! You have to rejoice! Rejoice! No time for depression, no space for depression in life!”

On how it has been extremely beneficial to help the monks to complete their monastic education due to having enough food, thereby enabling many of them to become geshes and benefit sentient beings throughout the world:

“Most of the forty-six geshes currently resident in FPMT centers came from Sera Je and received the food that you offered. Now, they are teaching in the rest of the world, benefiting soooooo many sentient beings. And the monks who are educating the younger monks in the monastery, they all got their monastic education. Many monks told me that they didn’t have to return to Tibet after they were able to receive enough food. So please rejoice in what you have done, including all the people who have helped! Okay? That is unbelievable, unbelievable.”

On the importance of understanding that the merit created from offering to thousands of Sera Je monks, who are the disciples of the same guru, is beyond measure:

“Your making offerings to the pores of the same guru, those who receive teachings from His Holiness: all those Sera Je monks,

they are His Holiness’s disciples also. So, you are making offerings to the pores of your guru. In that case, every day, every breakfast, every lunch, every dinner, even if it was just one time, the merit you collect by making offering to one disciple of the same guru, His Holiness, you collect *faaaaaaa* more merits than offering to numberless Buddhas, numberless Dharma, numberless Sangha, numberless statues, numberless stupas, numberless scriptures. They become so small compared to offering to one pore of the guru, a disciple.

“So much merit you have created—so many lifetimes to enjoy, to meet Dharma, to achieve enlightenment, not only to be free from samsara, but to achieve enlightenment, for the numberless sentient beings to be freed from the oceans of samsaric suffering by you, and to bring them to enlightenment. So, thank you very much.”

Colophon: Edited excerpts from a video recorded message given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche at Amitabha Buddhist Centre, Singapore, September 28, 2018. Transcribed and edited by Ven. Tenzin Tsultrim.

You can learn more about FPMT Charitable Projects' efforts to support monasteries, nunneries, and individual monks and nuns around the world with food, accommodation, health care, education, and practice through the Supporting Ordained Sangha Fund: fpmt.org/projects/fpmt/supporting-ordained-sangha-fund



ON THE MENU

THE SERA JE MONASTERY KITCHEN SERVES A VARIETY OF NUTRITIOUS VEGETARIAN MEALS

BREAKFAST

One piece of round flatbread (eight inches wide and a half inch thick)

Choice of Tibetan butter tea or Indian milk tea

LUNCH

Dhal (lentil stew)

Rice or round flatbread (ten inches wide and a quarter inch thick)

Vegetables

Bananas

DINNER (changes daily)

Rice and mixed vegetables
Vegetable biryani rice with soup

Fried rice with soup

Thukpa (Tibetan noodle soup)

Chow mein (fried noodles)

Fried veggie momos
(Tibetan-style dumplings)

Flatbread with potato stew

A TIMELINE OVERVIEW OF THE SERA JE FOOD FUND



Later part
of 1991

Tenzin Ösel Rinpoche officially enters Sera Je Monastery. Lama Zopa Rinpoche meets with then abbot Khensur Rinpoche Geshe Lobsang Tsering with the wish to make an offering of the most practical benefit to the monastery. The abbot requests Lama Zopa Rinpoche to assist with urgent food funding and Rinpoche fully accepts.

From
1992

The food fund continues to develop under the next abbot Khensur Rinpoche Geshe Jampa Tegchok. Each monk receives a monthly allowance of 70 rupees to help with expenses. The annual cost was US\$25,000

1997

Lama Zopa Rinpoche offers US\$25,000 to set up a central kitchen with seven full-time staff. Lunch is prepared in the central kitchen and served to all the monks.

1998

The Sera Je Food Fund starts to offer two meals a day, lunch and dinner, bringing the annual cost to US\$175,000.

2003

The Sera Je Food Fund starts to offer breakfast to the monks for three months a year, bringing the annual cost to US\$240,000 for 2,300 monks.

2007

FPMT launches a plan to create a self-sustainable endowment fund to support the food requirements of the community into the far future.

2008

The Sera Je Food Fund begins to offer the monks three vegetarian meals every day throughout the year. The annual cost is US\$235,000 in 2008 and from then on maintains an average of US\$200,000 per year.

2012

The food fund extends further to provide daily breakfast at the Sera Je School, numbering 800 students at the time.

Jan
2017

The targeted amount of US\$5 million for the endowment fund is raised.

May
2017

The first phase of the handover of the food fund takes place with the transfer of forty percent of the endowment fund (US\$2 million) to Sera Je Monastery.

April
2018

The balance of sixty percent of the endowment fund together with additional donations and accrued interest (US\$3.3 million) are fully handed over to Sera Je Monastery. The FPMT Charitable Project known as the Sera Je Food Fund is officially closed.

April
2018

The Sera Je Monastery kitchen starts a home delivery system where the monks arrange to collect and distribute the food in their own houses.



Help Monasteries & Nunneries Thrive

through the **FPMT Supporting Ordained Sangha Fund**

The Supporting Ordained Sangha Fund contributes to the needs of ordained monks and nuns with support for food, accommodation, healthcare, education, and practice.



fpmt.org/projects/fpmt/supporting-ordained-sangha-fund/