

Ewam Sangak Purpa Ling & Kusum Khandro Ling Retreat Centers

These are two centers of practice near the Asura Cave in Pharping, Nepal. To begin with, as Rinpoche received repeated requests to return to his home region to restore the lineages and monasteries undergoing decline, he asked permission of his refuge lord Khyentse Rinpoche, master of the entire range of the teachings, but when he did so Khyentse Rinpoche directed him not to return home, but rather to found a practice center to ensure the continuity of the lifeline that is the extensive tradition of the profound Namchak teachings, to publish the texts of these excellent teachings, to commission new depictions of the deities to be used during empowerments, and to carry these projects out as well as possible. Later on, he intimated, the time would come when it would be fitting for Rinpoche to return to his home and to restore the teachings there.

Later when Rinpoche had first located a property available in the area of Pharping and spoke to Khyentse Rinpoche of this, he was delighted and said that this was an auspicious set of circumstances, because he himself had intended to create a retreat center for the practice of Yangphur. He gave the site the name Phurpa Ling. In 1993 Penor Rinpoche, Lama Ralo, and Khyungtrul performed the ceremony to tame the site and bury a treasure vase there. The retreat residence was constructed in 1994, and in 1996 five people entered the first retreat, with the refuge lord Chatral Rinpoche graciously acting as retreat master. Following this, beginning in 1999 Tulku Orgyen Sangak and others embarked on the second three-year retreat. Later, the chant master Tsewang Düddul and others undertook the third retreat. This retreat center of Purpa Ling has since been transformed into a school for traditional painting and so is being retained as a school that forms a basis for basic literature which involves reading, writing, grammar and so forth.

In addition, at the same time that the second retreat was to be held there, the new center of Kusum Khandro Ling was founded, so that the retreats for monks and nuns began at the same time. The schedule of these retreats starting and finishing was established so that they are synchronized, and up until now the nun's retreat has taken place seven successive times and will continue into the future. The tradition has been established of the Nyingthig teachings as the focus in Kusum Khandro Ling, while the Namchak teachings are the focus in Phurpa Ling.

The curriculum for the three-year retreats has been primarily based on the practical guidance of Khenpo Ngagchung, with the refuge lord Chatral Rinpoche defining the basic structure. Thus, the first year of the retreat begins with the one-hundred-day program of mental training according to the Nyingthig tradition, followed by one week for each of the seven stages for refining the mind, finishing with one week focusing specifically on each of the three experiences of bliss, clarity, and nonconceptual awareness. These are followed by development and purification the five hundred thousand repetitions of the preliminaries according to our own Nyingthig tradition, including in particular ten million repetitions of the guruyoga mantra. The second year consists of the phases of approach and accomplishment for the Three Roots, as well

as the supplementary practices and fire rituals. In the final year the practices are concerned with the stage of completion. The *tsalung* and *tummo* practices, as well as the physical exercises (*trulkhor*), are done for one hundred days. Following this, the practice of the extraordinary stage of completion follows the teaching manual *Yeshe Lama*. For the preliminaries, this consists of seven days of outer *rushen*, ten days of inner *rushen* (seven hundred thousand repetitions of the syllables that purify the patterns of the six classes of beings), seven days of refining the body, twenty days of refining the speech, and thirty-two days of refining the mind. *Trekchö* is practiced for one hundred days and *tögel* for one hundred days, making for a total of four hundred and forty-three days in the final “year.”

To summarize, within the three-year program, in a single format the practical application of the three yogas¹ is accomplished—the supreme yogas that include the preliminaries, the phases of approach and accomplishment for the Three Roots, the *tsalung* and *trulkhor* of the stage of completion, up to and including the Dzogchen practices of *trekchö* and *tögel*. Thus, people practice according to the practical methods employed by masters of awareness in the lineage of the Early Translation School. To go into more detail, in a given day there are four formal practice sessions, the four activities practiced in the breaks between sessions, and so forth, so that people make an ongoing effort to establish their spiritual practice.

In addition to this, in accordance with the times, nowadays we are in the process of establishing a new syllabus, in which people need to spend six years in the shedra program; learn the way of performing rituals in our Namchak tradition; train in playing the wind and percussion instruments and making tormas; and learn the duties of chant master, disciplinarian, shrine keeper, and so forth. Once these studies have been completed, they need to receive instruction on the stages of development and completion. Only then do they enter the retreat program.

Ewam Nepal
Turquoise Leaf Nunnery Jetsün Ling College

To begin with, the construction of this college at Turquoise Leaf Nunnery as a new institution began in the water bird year of the seventeenth sexagenary cycle (that is, 1993). Over about two years, a new temple and its contents were constructed, providing a new residence for venerable nuns. Over many years they have well trained in the rituals uniting our traditions of the profound cycles of *The Heart Drop of Longchenpa (Longchen Nyingthig)* and the Namchak tradition, becoming highly proficient in the traditional methods of carrying out ritual activity. Six months out of every year the venerable nuns enter into strict retreat, upholding the tradition of spiritual development and purification through the preliminary practices.

It is said:

The Teacher’s (Buddha’s) teachings has two aspects,

¹. Mahayoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga.

embodying scripture and realization.

One who holds these are the one who enunciates (scripture) and
and put into practice (three higher trainings) only.²

And according to Khachödpa:

A meditator who has not studied

is like someone without arms trying to scale a cliff.

Someone who explains the teachings without being capable of meditating
is like a blind person wandering on a plain.

The benefit required for self and others will not come about.

The way of holy people is to maintain a combination of these two.

As these passages state, the shedra program and the retreat program are definitely indispensable. And while the Early Translation School of the Nyingma tradition is primarily a transmission of spiritual practice, as it is said, “How astonishing it is to practice without knowing what to practice!”

So it is very important to begin by correctly understanding how to practice and the way to gain accomplishment. In this regard, the foundation of practice must be study, while the fruition of study must be practice. If we do not achieve an integration of these two, the necessary goal will not be realized. Nowadays, however, the enlightened activity of the Early Translation School’s lineage of masters of awareness has waned. The practical methods of passing on the hands-on transmission of the more elaborate aspects of practice—the specific Mahayoga tradition of preparing and arranging mandalas, making tormas and adorning them with ornaments, performing ritual dances and chants and music, and so forth—are treated with contempt. There seem to be many who belittle these, as though they were just children’s games. In order to lay a foundation of study and practice that is not subject to such prejudices, courses of study and the administration of these have been instituted in an excellent manner under the auspices of Namchak Khenpo Ngawang Gelek. This has resulted in Jetsün Ling College becoming a major site for some forty venerable nuns to strive at the three activities of study, contemplation, and meditation.

Every year, a new lecturer is assigned from Namdroling Nunnery Institute and thus this nunnery has been continually maintaining the noble tradition of study, contemplation, and meditation— involving the explanation and hearing of teachings from the sutra and tantra traditions, as well as secular subjects—according to the general syllabus of shedra colleges. The results of their annual examinations have not been at all inferior and continue to improve. Six months out of every year they enter into strict retreat, pursuing spiritual development and purification through the preliminary practices. The courses they study are designed to lay the foundation for practice of the secret mantra approach, and so *The Treasury of Precious Qualities (Yönten Rinpochei Dzöd)* forms the basis. They also study texts from the sutra tradition, such as *The Words of My Perfect*

2. From Vasubandhu’s *Treasury of Higher Teachings (Abhidharmakosha)*.

Teacher (Künzang Lamey Zhalung), The Three Levels of Vows (Domsum), Engaging in the Conduct of a Bodhisattva (Chödjuk),³ Entering the Middle Way (Umala Jukpa),⁴ and The Lamp of Certainty (Ngeyshey Drönmey). In addition, they study such important subjects as secular and Buddhist history, grammar, spelling, poetics, calligraphy, and English. Especially, they study such texts on the stages of development and completion as *The Heart Essence of Secrets* (the most majestic of tantras), *The Detailed Explanation of the Eight Commands*, *Notes on the Stage of Development (Kyedrim Zindri)*, *The Four Pivotal Points that Consolidate Life Force (Sokdom Zerzhi)*, and *The Trilogy of Genuine Mind*.

The program requires that the nuns complete the shedra syllabus over a six-year period, and in accordance with this the first group has now completed their studies. At the same time, so that the practical methods of our Namchak tradition (which are taught by actually being shown) will not be lost, the nuns train in the elements of ritual performance—making tormas, recitation, playing wind and percussion instruments, melodious chanting, sacred dances, and so forth. Following a rota, they serve as disciplinarian, shrine keeper, chant leader, and other roles.

Finally, they enter the retreat center of Kusum Khandro Ling, where they carry out successively a thorough practice of the stage of development, tsalung and the stage of completion, and the trekchöd and tödgel methods of Dzogchen. Rinpoche is proceeding with his plan to invest those who complete this program with the titles and positions of vajra master *dorje lopön*), then retreat master (*Drupla*), and finally Venerable One (*Jetsünma*), and to confer diplomas as a sign of my esteem.

Each year the nuns perform a drupchen ritual for Yangphur, and drupchöd rituals for the Yumka Dechen Gyalmo, longevity practice, the Supremely Compassionate One,⁵ and others. On a monthly basis they perform the five regular rituals for the waxing and waning phases of the moon. Daily they meet for group ceremonies and perform smoke offerings (*sang*), burned offerings (*sur*), and *chöd* after the night session. With such uninterrupted practice on their part, this institution is becoming an exemplary case, never seen before, for the successive participation in study, contemplation, and meditation—the unbiased theory and practice of the teachings.

In conjunction with this, another branch of the monastery is Ewam Publications,⁶ which has overseen the computer entry of more than one hundred texts of excellent teachings, as well as research and editing of these texts. At present more than forty volumes of text, primarily the profound terma cycles of the Namchak tradition, have been published.

³. Skt. *Bodhicharyavatara*.

⁴. Skt. *Madhyamakavatara*.

⁵. Skt. *Avalokiteshwara*.

⁶. Tib. Ewam Kater Sizhu Petrüen Khang (literally, “Ewam Printing House to Honor the Kama and Terma Traditions”).

