

# “The Preliminaries”

or: Nuns, Philosophers and other Handi(wo)men

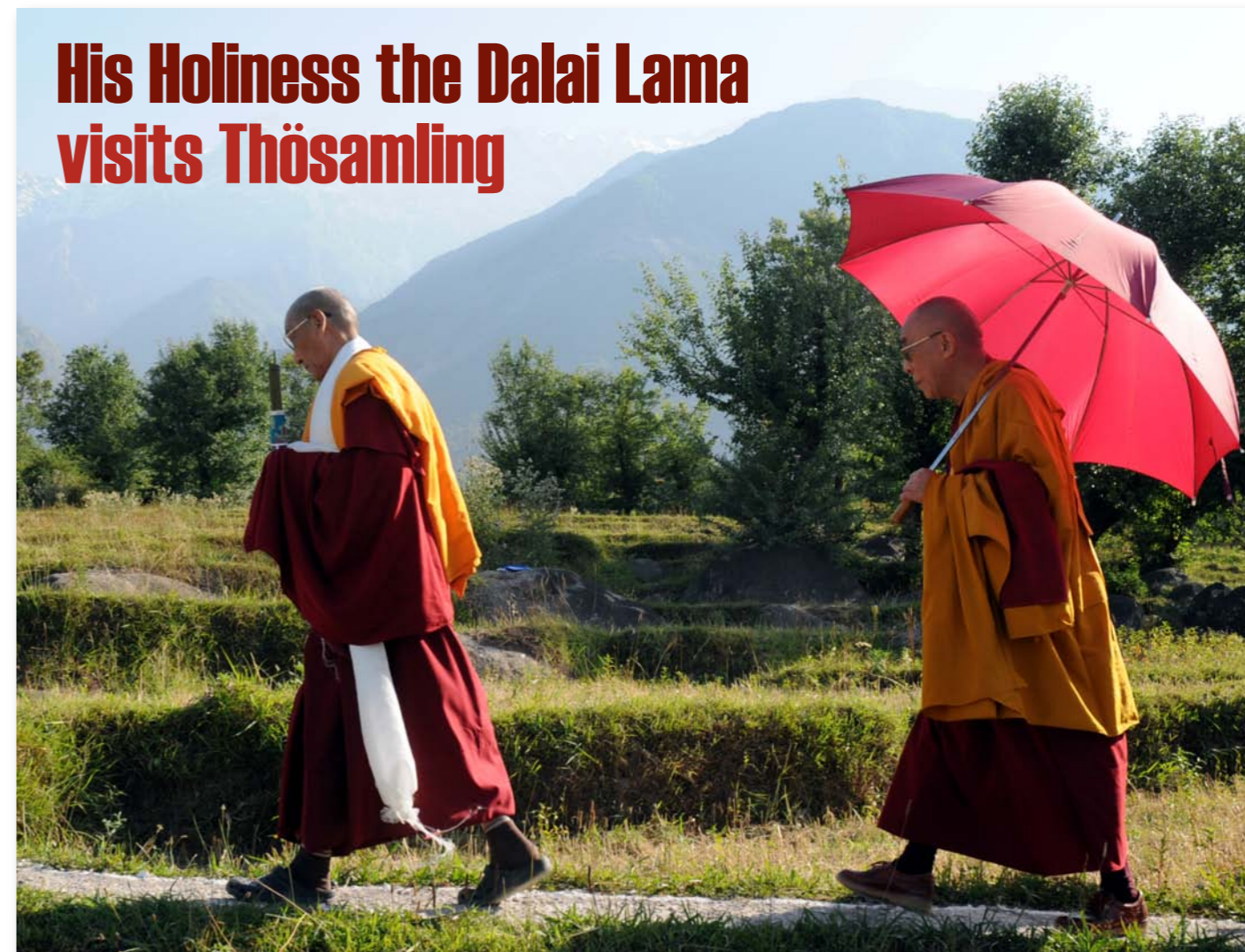


# THÖSAMLING INSTITUTE

Institute for International Buddhist Women

Newsletter May 2009

## His Holiness the Dalai Lama visits Thösamling



**May 2, 2009:** The telephone rings for the first time after about 3 weeks of malfunction. It is the Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama – and the beginning of a series of auspicious events: “His Holiness will visit Thösamling Institute on Saturday, May 16!”

It is also the culmination of Thösamling’s history since the Institute’s foundation 9 years ago, the ‘cream’ on director Ven Tenzin Sangmo’s unceasing efforts for the welfare and proper functioning of her heart project.

Anybody would feel exalted – and panicky! Not so Ven Sangmo. She felt exalted and energized and did what she always does: working hard, optimistically ordering the short-time renovation (including partly new furnishing) of the office building, dining halls, the gompa and the refreshing of the whole garden area. A big beautifully painted gate was to be erected, the inner path painted with or-

naments and lined with small colourful flags, white chalk borders and strewn with rose petals to please the Holy Mind.

Then, two ferocious storms on Thursday and Friday evenings tore down all the prayer flags, which had connected in a wide span all the buildings, and which had to be refastened the last minute; an auspicious sign (as it was decided) considering the high guest. Also the steel construction of the large archway, which students had worked on for two days, was bent by the strong northerly gusts of wind, which also broke all the steel support rods. On top of that, the sewing efforts of the covering material and traditional Tibetan decorations were impeded, but on Saturday morning, the morning of His Holiness’s visit, at 6 am a few students were out at the gate rectifying the damage. By 7 am everything was spotless.



Left: Geshe Tsewang Nyima (right) and Ven. Tenzin Sangmo (left) offer “body, speech and mind” to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Below: His Holiness receives the symbolic offerings.



So, with the dedicated help and enormous efforts of Thösamling’s staff, residents and students of the philosophy and Tibetan classes, under the supervision and working example of Sangmo-la, the whole place was finally ready to receive His Holiness the Dalai Lama. These efforts in order to pay our respects and an attempt to repay His great kindness and generous support for Thösamling Institute.

The meaning of the Institute’s name – Place of Study and Contemplation – was also one of the main topics of His Holiness’s teaching which He gave after travelling the 10 minute walk under the hot Indian morning sun (under a big red umbrella), with Thösamling’s resident Geshe Tsewang Nyima leading the way, from the little bridge up the small paved pathway through the harvested fields to Thösamling’s gates, arriving finally at the Gomba where a throne had been prepared. He then unceremoniously wiped the sweat off His holy face with a towel and made everyone laugh and feel relaxed (as He always does so skillfully).

Then, after the traditional preliminary prayers were offered and the tea and rice was served, He said: **“The most important thing is to study and practice, these two must go together (...) This is the real way of preserving the Buddha Dharma (...) Any Dharma should be in the mind, not externally. Therefore practice means the transformation of our emotions, ultimately for one’s own happiness, one’s own joyfulness. That also not temporarily but permanent joyfulness, that’s the main purpose of the Buddha Dharma (...) In order to achieve that, we must eliminate the source of suffering (...) What’s the ultimate source of suffering? Ignorance. And how to get free of that ignorance? We need the knowledge of reality. Once we get some sort of understanding of ultimate reality, then automatically there is a clear awareness of ignorance (...) So that’s the way to minimize our ignorance. The**

**nature of our mind is just pure (...) like the very nature of water is pure.”**

His Holiness also showed great interest in the daily schedule at Thösamling: the meditations, and practices, the prayers and study programs. And was keen to learn how many nuns, how many lay people were living at Thösamling and which countries they were coming from: “There must be Italian!” (Only one.) “Austria? Germany? ...” One nun from Venezuela... “Venezuela? It’s wonderful!!!”

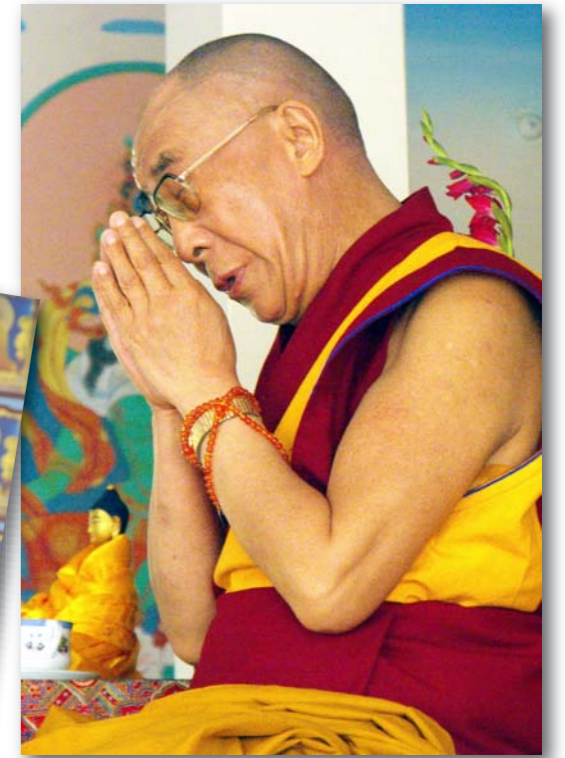
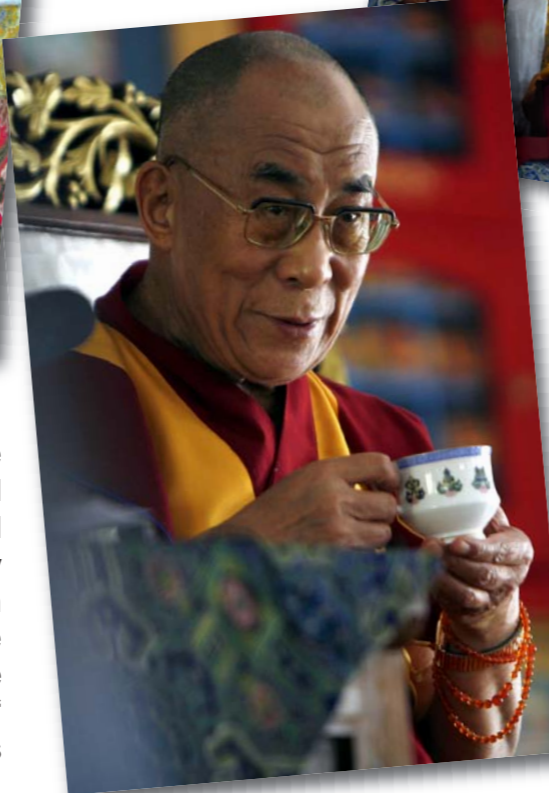
As many students came from Western countries with traditionally Christian cultures and background, His Holiness made it again clear that devotion and love for God was the main characteristic of the Christian path, whereas individual understanding and insight into the true nature of all things, including one’s own self, and thus achieving liberation from all suffering through own efforts, was what distinguished the Buddhist approach.

His Holiness also mentioned from His own experience, that it was mainly women attending spiritual teachings, whether Buddhist or Christian. He encouraged everybody present to continue to support, as best as possible, all the women who are willing to make a change in their minds. Also, in all the societies worldwide, above all the nuns for whom it is still extremely difficult to find conducive circumstances and opportunities.

His Holiness also expressed His happiness with Thösamling and readiness to support the Institute in whatever way necessary – “Because it is for

**“The most important thing is to study and practice. These two must go together.”**

New TSL-website with picture gallery coming soon! Photos (except below/below right): Lobsang Wangyal



the Buddha Dharma!” – and was very pleased by the debate which was performed at the end of the visit by two nuns of the philosophy class. This was the first time that non-tibetan nuns offered such a classical debate, as it is taught and practiced in the monastic universities (see right).

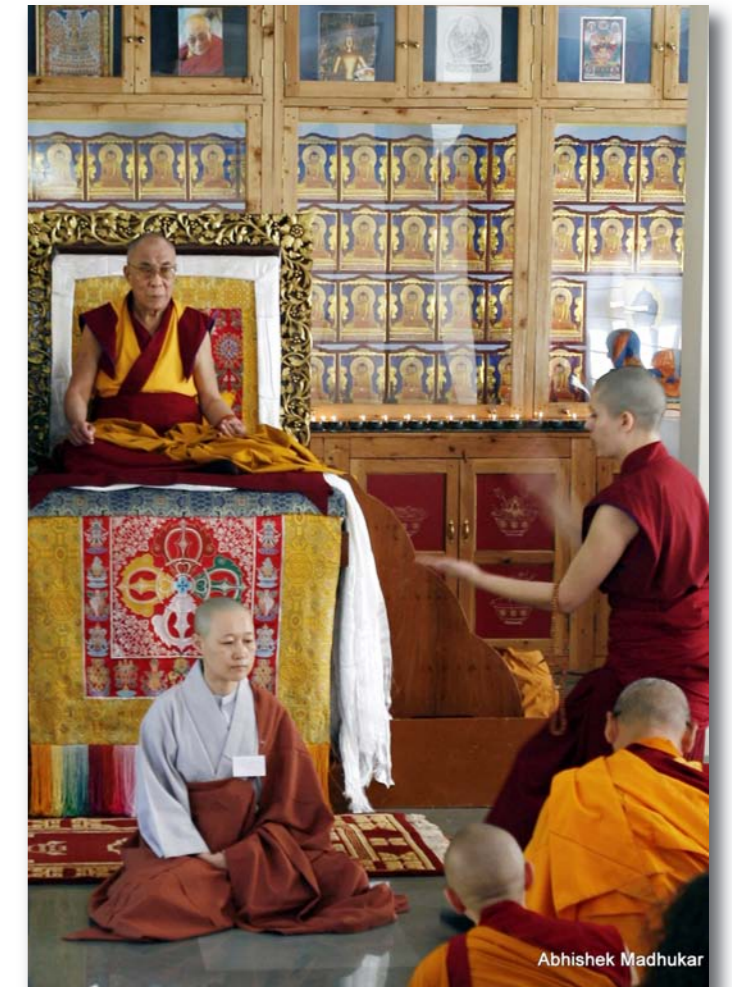
During the talk, His Holiness quoted a paragraph from the Abhidharmakosha by Vasubandhu. This exact paragraph was chosen prior to the visit by Geshe-la for the debate – either an omniscient gesture or an auspicious coincidence on behalf of His Holiness...

Geshe Tsewang-la told us on Monday after the visit, that as His Holiness entered the gate of Thösamling, he heard the song of a cuckoo. This, he remarked, was an auspicious sign. There is a Tibetan tradition that on the Tibetan new year if a cuckoo is heard – your mind is happy and you will have a good year.

At the gate, on his way to further visits in the neighbourhood, His Holiness turned round to have a last look (for now) of Thösamling, standing under the banner with his long life prayer: **“In the land of snow mountains, You are the source of all happiness and good – Powerful Chenrezig,**

**Tenzin Gyatso, please stay until samsara ends!”**

May Thösamling, with His Holiness’s blessing, continue to inspire Westerners and people from all directions and all walks of life to study and practice the dharma.



Abhishek Madhukar