

Table of Contents

Introduction by Tsoknyi Rinpoche III	4
Buddhism: History and Beliefs	5
Introduction to Buddhism in Tibet	6
Selected Biographies	8
History of the Tsoknyi Lineage	10
The Nangchen Nuns	12
More on Female Practitioners	15
A Vajra Song of Tsoknyi Rinpoche I	16
Practice of Compassion	16
Contemplation on Bodhicitta	16
Glossary of Terms	17
Topics and Resources for further Study & Discussion	23
Tibetan Buddhist Beliefs and Practices	23
Buddhism: History and Belief	24
Buddhism in the West	25
Women in Tibetan Buddhism	25
History, Religion & Culture in Tibet	26
Website Resources	27
The Tsoknyi Nangchen Endowment Fund	28

The Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns of Tibet Study Guide

Introduction by Tsoknyi Rinpoche III:

"The first Tsoknyi Rinpoche began the tradition of the Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns more than a century ago with the simple but revolutionary idea of providing the same training for women that had been reserved for monks. His unique vision was of a time when these women would become among the most accomplished Buddhist practitioners in the world.

Because of the devastation of the Cultural Revolution, I thought that the tradition of the nuns was all gone, and I was sad that I hadn't spent time with them. Then, when I visited Tibet, I realized that through the kindness and great effort of the older nuns, this tradition had been kept alive and is now taking root again with a new generation of nuns.

When Tibet exploded, the Dharma was brought out. Dharma is carried by people, not by books. It is in the human mind naturally, and these nuns who are practicing are bringing the benefit out. 'Benefit' is not just material—doing something, producing something, showing me something. Benefit or value is non-material. It is spirit, love, compassion, kindness. It is a human value, not a material value.

The nuns embody the full richness of Buddhist love, compassion and wisdom in female form. It's quite rare, I think. If this light of tradition is gone from this earth, even though we have texts, the experiential warmth and blessings of this living women's tradition is gone forever.

Through the medium of video, we are able to share the warmth and blessings of the nuns with the world. May it be of benefit to all beings".

communicate the teachings to a new generation. Western teachers, fully trained in Tibetan teachings are also emerging and assuming leadership roles in establishing authentic Buddhist traditions in the West.

SELECTED BIOGRAPHIES

Machig Lapdrön (1030-1129 A.D.) was a great 11th century Tibetan yogini who formalized the practice of Chöd in Tibet. Chöd, which means “cutting through” is a visionary Buddhist practice of cutting attachment to one’s body as a means to develop egolessness and compassion for all beings. The Chöd practitioner visualizes offering her/his body to spirits and demons and practices in lonely and dreaded places – like cemeteries – working to overcome all fear. As can be seen in BLESSINGS, Chöd practitioners use a bell, a small drum (a Chöd *damaru*), and a thigh-bone trumpet (*kangling*) in the practice. Machig Lapdrön died at the age of 99. A complete biography of Machig can be found in Tsultrim Allione’s *Women of Wisdom* (see glossary).

Padmasambhava was a great tantric master who, in the eight century firmly established Buddhism in Tibet, overcoming forces that had been hostile to the spread of the teachings. He is known in Tibetan as Guru Rinpoche, the precious teacher and by many other names. One such name is ‘the Lotus Born’, referring to the belief that he spontaneously manifested from a lotus flower as an eight year-old boy. Padmasambhava, together with other panditas and translators rendered into Tibetan all the existent Buddhist scriptures on Sutra and Tantra as well as most of the treatises explaining them. He concealed many of the teachings as *terma* (hidden spiritual treasures) which have been revealed over the centuries and continue to be revealed up to the present. Therefore he continues to be a central figure in Tibetan Buddhism, especially the Nyingma school.

Yeshe Tsogyal: (777-837 A.D.) An incarnation of several female Buddhas, in the form of a woman appeared to assist Padmasambhava in spreading the Vajrayana, especially the terma teachings, in Tibet. Yeshe Tsogyal, whose name means ‘Victorious Ocean of Wisdom,’ was renowned from childhood for her beauty and devotion to the Buddha’s teachings. King Trisong Deutsen made her his queen. When he offered all his possessions to Padmasambhava, he also offered Yeshe Tsogyal to be Padmasambhava’s spiritual consort. She became Padmasambhava’s greatest disciple, engaged in practice with incredible perseverance and attained a level equal to Padmasambhava himself, able to tame evil spirits and revive the dead. She had the siddhi of being able to remember all of the teachings without writing

TOPICS – AND RESOURCES – FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

BLESSINGS touches on a number of topics that can form the basis for discussion or further study. Among them are:

1. The history and beliefs of Buddhism in general and Tibetan Buddhism in particular.
2. Tibetan Buddhist spiritual practices, including the practice of meditation, loving-kindness practices, mindfulness, Dzogchen and Vajrayana practices such as Cho and tummo.
3. The role of women in Tibetan Buddhism and in Tibetan society.
4. The culture and history of Tibet, particularly the nomadic regions of Kham and Amdo.
5. Tibetan Dharma in western society

There are many extraordinary resources for further study, including translations of some of the original Buddhist texts and commentaries, teachings from many of the present day as well as historical Tibetan teachers, books on Buddhism by western practitioners and scholars. We have selected a handful of books as suggested additional resources for further study and discussion of the topics addressed in BLESSINGS.

Tibetan Buddhist Beliefs and Practices:

Chodron, Pema. Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living. Boston: Shambhala, 1994.

---. The Wisdom of No Escape and the Path of Loving-Kindness. Boston: Shambhala, 1994.

Kontrul, Dzigar. It's Up to You: The Practice of Self-Reflection on the Buddhist Path. Boston: Shambhala, 2006.

Lama, Dalai. How to Practice: The Way to a Meaningful Life. Atria, 2003.

Palmo, Tenzin. Reflections On A Mountain Lake: Teachings on Practical Buddhism. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2002.

Patrul, Rinpoche et al: Words of My Perfect Teacher. Boston: Shambhala, 1998.

Powers, John. Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2007.