

# STUDY GUIDE

*for*

# BLESSINGS

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The Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns of Tibet



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# Table of Contents

Introduction by Tsoknyi Rinpoche III	3
Buddhism: History and Beliefs	4
Introduction to Buddhism in Tibet	5
Tibetan Buddhism Travels to the West	7
Selected Biographies	8
History of the Tsoknyi Lineage	11
Glossary of Terms	12
A Vajra Song of Tsoknyi Rinpoche I	18
Topics – and Resources – for further Discussion	19
Buddhist Beliefs and Practices	19
Tibetan Buddhism	20
Buddhism in the West	20
Women in Buddhism	20
History, Religion & Culture in Tibet	21
Teachings of Tsoknyi Rinpoche	21
Website Resources	22

## **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".*

## BUDDHISM – HISTORY & BELIEFS

In Buddhist tradition it is believed that many Buddhas, or Awakened Ones, have appeared in the past and many more are yet to come. The Buddha of our era was born around 563 B.C.E. in Lumbini, (now in Southern Nepal), and given the name Siddhartha Gautama. He was born into a wealthy family of the Shakya clan and hence is often known as Shakyamuni, "sage of the Shakyas." Despite enjoying a privileged existence, Siddhartha realized that his life, like everyone else's, inevitably included the suffering of sickness, old age and death. Realizing this he was moved to leave his home and family, and embark on a spiritual quest. He studied with several renowned spiritual masters but found that they did not have the ultimate answers he sought. The practice of severe austerities, including near-starvation, brought him to the edge of death but not to the truth. Abandoning asceticism, he meditated alone under a tree and attained enlightenment, becoming "Buddha".

### THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

Having discovered the truth for himself at the age of the 35, the Buddha devoted the rest of his life to sharing it with others. The first teaching he gave, known as the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma, was to five yogis who had been his companions while he practiced austerities. He explained that all existence within samsara, the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth, is marked by suffering. This is known as the First Noble Truth, the *truth of suffering*. The Buddha then taught that this *suffering is caused by a fundamental ignorance*, shared by all beings, of the true nature of existence. This is the Second Noble Truth. Next, the Buddha taught the Third and Fourth Noble Truths, that the *cessation of suffering is possible*, and that the *Eightfold Path leads to the cessation of suffering*.

Following this first "turning of the wheel", the Buddha continued teaching until around 483 B.C.E. when, at age of 80, he "attained parinirvana" - not just death but release from the cycle of karmically-determined rebirth.

Three main schools of Buddhism emerged from the extensive teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni. The Theravadin, or Hinayana (meaning "small vehicle") school is based solely on the first turning and spread primarily throughout Southeast Asia. The Mahayana ("large vehicle") school is based on the second turning which expounded on the wisdom of emptiness. These teachings spread along the great trade routes throughout Central Asia and China. The third turning is the foundation of the Vajrayana ("diamond vehicle") or Tantric path of Buddhism which is the school that spread to and flourished in Tibet.

## **THE INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM INTO TIBET**

Before the introduction of Buddhism, most Tibetans followed an indigenous, shamanistic religion known as Bön. Buddhism was first introduced during the reign of King Songtsan Gampo (c.605 – 650 C.E.) who married princesses from Nepal and China, both of whom were Buddhists. He built the first Buddhist temples, including the Jokhang in Lhasa. After Songtsan Gampo, Buddhism spread very slowly until the ascension of King Trisong Detsen, who ruled from 755 to 797 or 804 C.E. Trisong Detsen invited many masters, including Shantarakshita a great scholar from India to help establish Buddhism in Tibet. When Shantarakshita was unable to establish a monastery in Tibet because, according to legend, local spirits and demons would destroy each night what was built during the day, he suggested that Trisong Detsen invite the powerful tantric master Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) to Tibet. Padmasambhava succeeded in subduing the beings that were opposing the establishment of Buddhism and with his help Tibet's first monastery was built at Samye, near Lhasa. At that time, the first Tibetan monks were ordained and a massive translation project begun, with many Indian and Tibetan scholars translating the entire Buddhist canon into Tibetan. These early translations are the basis of the Nyingma, or Old Translation school of Tibetan Buddhism.

About 815 C.E King Ralpachen ascended the throne and continued to actively support the spread of Buddhism in Tibet. Tibetan tradition holds that Ralpachen was murdered by two of his ministers who favored the indigenous Bön religion and who then placed Ralpachen's anti-Buddhist brother, Langdarma, on the throne. Tradition holds that under Langdarma, Buddhism was savagely persecuted for several years until Langdarma was assassinated.

Following the death of Langdarma, Buddhism gradually recovered. Tibetan Buddhists journeyed to India and returned with new translations of Buddhist scriptures. Prominent among these were Marpa and Drogmi whose lineages of disciples gave rise to the Kagyu and Sakya schools, two of the three main "new translation" schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

The last of the four main schools, the Gelug, ("Virtuous ones") was established by the master-scholar Tsongkhapa (1357-1419 C.E.), and emphasizes scholarship and monastic discipline. The Dalai Lama is the head of the Gelug tradition.

In the 19th century, a movement known as Ri-mey (literally, "without borders") began in Kham, eastern Tibet, to combat sectarianism between the different Tibetan Buddhist schools. The Nangchen nuns follow the Ri-mey tradition.

In October 1950 the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) of China began the process of incorporating Tibet into the People's Republic of China. The invasion was swift and met little resistance after the initial defeat of the Tibetan army in a battle at Chamdo, eastern Tibet.

In 1959, a popular uprising in Lhasa was brutally suppressed and China tightened its grip on Tibet, causing the Dalai Lama to escape into exile in India. Many of the greatest masters of Tibetan Buddhism fled the Chinese invasion, including H.H. the 16th Karmapa, H.H. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, and H.H. Sakya Trizin, the respective leaders of the Kagyu, Nyingma and Sakya schools. Also among the lamas who escaped at this time was Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, father of Tsoknyi Rinpoche.

Following the Chinese invasion and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution that began in 1966, almost all of Tibet's roughly 7000 monasteries were destroyed and the monks and nuns were either forced to return to lay life, imprisoned or fled into exile in India or Nepal. A large number of Tibetans followed the Dalai Lama into exile. To the present day, Tibetans continue to risk the hazardous trek across the Himalayas to leave occupied Tibet. A number of the major Tibetan Buddhist monasteries were reestablished in India and Nepal along with substantial Tibetan communities, providing an unprecedented opportunity for non-Tibetans to learn about Tibetan Buddhism.

## TIBETAN BUDDHISM TRAVELS TO THE WEST

Some Tibetan teachers, who escaped from Tibet, took a deep interest in Western Culture. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, was one such teacher. As a teenager in 1959 he studied Comparative Religion at Oxford University before co-founding, with fellow exile Akong Rinpoche, the first Tibetan Monastery in the West, Samye Ling in Scotland. Trungpa Rinpoche later moved to the United States where he was very influential in the establishment of Tibetan Buddhism. Beginning in the 1970's many great lamas toured the west, teaching and establishing centers.

Today, many of the lamas who first introduced westerners to Tibetan Buddhism have passed on and their *tulkus* or reincarnations have been recognized. Among those taking the place of the introductory lamas are a younger generation of lamas, born and educated in exile, such as Tsoknyi Rinpoche and his brothers. They hold both the traditional Tibetan teachings and the understanding of western cultures. This combination enables them to 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 11<sup>th</sup> 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 eighth 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 them down, so was the chief compiler of all the inconceivable teachings given by Padmasambhava,.

**Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo** was raised in London and in 1964. At age twenty, she travelled to India to pursue her Buddhist path. There she met her Guru, His Eminence the 8th Khamtrul Rinpoche, a great Drukpa Kagyu lama, and became one of the first Westerners to be ordained as a Tibetan Buddhist nun. She remained with Khamtrul Rinpoche for six years before he directed her to the Himalayan valley of Lahaul to undertake more intensive practice. Tenzin Palmo stayed in a small monastery in Lahaul for several years. Then, seeking more seclusion and better conditions for practice, she found a nearby cave where she remained for an additional 12 years, the last 3 years in strict retreat.

Before H.E. Khamtrul Rinpoche passed away in 1980, he had requested that Tenzin Palmo start a nunnery. In 1993, the Lamas of the Khampagar monastery in Himachal Pradesh, India repeated that request and Tenzin Palmo took on the task. In January 2000 the first nuns arrived and in 2001 the construction of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery began and is now nearing completion.

In 2008 His Holiness the 12th Gyalwang Drukpa, Head of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage gave Tenzin Palmo the rare title *Jetsunma*, or Venerable Master, in recognition of her spiritual achievements and efforts in promoting the status of female practitioners in Tibetan Buddhism.

For a full biography of Venerable Tenzin Palmo, see *Cave in the Snow* by Vicki Mackenzie. (see Bibliography)

**Tsultrim Allione**, M.A. was one of the first American women to be ordained as a Tibetan nun in 1970 by the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa. She is the author of *Women of Wisdom*, a groundbreaking book on the lives of great women Tibetan practitioners, as well as articles and audio programs on the sacred feminine and other Buddhist topics. After four years as a nun, Tsultrim returned her monastic vows, married and had three children. She has continued to practice, study and teach for the last thirty years, earning a degree in Buddhist Studies/Women Studies from Antioch University. Inspired by the vision of a Western retreat center while living in the Himalayas and seeing the need to create a place for the reemergence of the sacred feminine, Tsultrim founded Tara Mandala in 1993 where she is now the resident teacher. She travels extensively and teaches a variety of practices from Tibetan Buddhist lineages, including Dzogchen and Chöd. In the summer of 2007, while traveling in Tibet, Tsultrim was recognized as an emanation of Machig Lapdrön, the 11<sup>th</sup> century yogini who founded the Chöd lineage. Her most recent book, *Feeding Your Demons – Ancient Wisdom for Resolving Inner Conflict*, adapts the ancient wisdom of Chöd practice for modern practitioners.

**Sherab Zangmo:** Until her death in 2008, Sherab Zangmo was Gechak Gompa's most respected nun, and widely regarded as the most realized woman in Nangchen. She was also one of the few nuns left of the older generation who were at Gechak Gompa before "the troubled times" that began in 1959. Sherab Zangmo came to Gechak Gompa at the age of ten and subsequently saw her family only for one day. During her meditation at Gechak, dakinis and deities arose to Sherab Zangmo in visions. In particular, as she describes in BLESSINGS, while doing dark retreat, Sherab Zangmo had many visions and completely accomplished the practice. Although she was still a young nun at this time, this was no a temporary meditation experience but a profound realization, very rarely accomplished in such a sudden fashion.

During the Cultural Revolution, Sherab Zangmo went to a remote place, and remained out of contact with others from Gechak Gompa, and her family. She continued to meditate, and in spite of illness, stayed in retreat for more than twenty years including 4 years in solitary retreat in a mountain cave. In the mid 1980's after conditions improved, Sherab Zangmo was asked to return to the newly rebuilt Gechak Gompa and teach. Until her death, she gave empowerments, instructions and inspiration to a new generation of nuns. She died joyfully, whilst teaching on the pure lands, in 2008.

## **HISTORY OF THE TSOKNYI LINEAGE**

The Tsoknyi lineage began in the 19th century with the great yogi Drubwang Tsoknyi (1828/49-1904), the first Tsoknyi Rinpoche. The name Tsoknyi translates literally as “two accumulations”, referring to the accumulations of wisdom and merit, which is the mark of a Vajrayana practitioner.

Drubwang Tsoknyi lived in the Kingdom of Nangchen in what is now Eastern Tibet. He was associated with Tsechu Gompa, a monastery located next to the royal palace by the Tse-chu river at Henan, Bhutan.

When he was thirteen, Tsoknyi Rinpoche was brought to Khampagar Monastery at Tashi Jong in India, the seat in exile of the Khamtrul Rinpoche line. His teachers include some of the most renowned masters of Tibet: Khamtrul Rinpoche Dongyu Nyima, his father Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche and Adeu Rinpoche. In addition to his more than thirty nunneries and monasteries in Tibet, Tsoknyi Rinpoche is the spiritual head of two nunneries and one monastery in Nepal. Ngesdön Ösel Ling Monastery in Kathmandu is his seat in the East, and Yeshe Rangsal in Crestone, Colorado, is his seat in the West.

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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**Blessings** – In Tibetan, literally “splendor waves” or “gift waves,” conveying the sense of radiant atmosphere that comes toward one when opening to the teacher and lineage.

**Bodhicitta** – Sanskrit for “mind of enlightenment” or “heart of enlightenment”. Bodhicitta has two aspects: absolute, or realizing the insubstantiality of all phenomena, and relative, or aspiring and acting with love and compassion in order to free all beings from suffering.

**Bodhisattva** – Sanskrit for “one who exhibits bodhicitta.” “Bodhi” literally means blossomed in Sanskrit, and “sattva” means a heroic mind. Thus Bodhisattva refers to those who commit themselves to the Bodhisattva path of developing compassion and loving kindness in order to liberate all sentient beings.

**Buddha** – Sanskrit for an individual who attains complete enlightenment. When we speak of “the Buddha”, it refers to the one who most recently discovered the path to enlightenment, the Buddha known as Shakyamuni who lived in India in the 6th century BCE.

**Buddha nature** – The essential nature of all sentient beings; the potential for full enlightenment. Since all beings have Buddha nature, they have the potential to become buddhas through spiritual practice.

**Chöd** – Literally cutting, destroying, it is a method of meditation in which one symbolically offers one's own body as food for demons or spirits, as a means of cutting through attachment to body and ego. Practitioners are known as Chöwas. The practice was founded by the 11<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan yogini, Machik Labdrön.

**Compassion** - The determination to free all sentient beings from suffering arising from the egoless insight that “I” and “others” are not separate, and that the suffering of others is not different from one’s own.

**Dakini** – Sanskrit for “sky traveler” or “sky enjoyer,” this refers to a female practitioner who has attained full enlightenment. In tantra, a dakini is the supreme embodiment of wisdom itself.

**Devotion** – In Tibetan Buddhism, the relationship between teacher and disciple is of paramount importance as the teacher (in the video also referred to as the guru or master) is the tangible representation of the Buddha and his teachings. Devotion to the teacher is made up of faith, love, trust, respect and a longing for the wisdom the teacher can transmit.

**Dharma** – This is a Sanskrit term most commonly used to refer to the teachings of the Buddha. Specifically, it refers to the wisdom or truth underlying or inherent in the teachings.

**Dzogchen** – Tibetan for “great perfection,” it refers to the highest teachings which emphasize natural ease and the direct or intuitive perception of reality rather than fabricated effort and rational analysis. The Nangchen nuns practice the Dzogchen teachings and many have realized the meaning of these teachings.

**Ego** – The notion of a truly or intrinsically existent, independent self or that which we call “I”. Fixating on this belief is often called “ego clinging”

**Egolessness** – The absence of independent or intrinsic existence, either of oneself or of external phenomena. Egolessness is a fundamental tenet of Buddhism and is one of the “Three Marks of Existence”, the other two being suffering and impermanence.

**Emptiness** – the absence of a fixed independent existence in all phenomena which is therefore the unlimited potential for everything to exist. It is the state of openness, a complete absence of grasping and fixation that is experienced when the mind is at rest. A true understanding of emptiness is experiential, transcending conceptual thought.

**Enlightenment** (freedom, liberation) – Knowing reality as it is. Synonymous with Buddhahood, it is the complete realization of the innate potential or Buddha nature that is inherent in all sentient beings.

**Four Reminders** – Four thoughts which one contemplates in order to turn the mind toward reality as it is: *the preciousness of a favorable human birth*, *the reality of death*, *the unerring law of cause and effect*, and *the pain of confused existence*. The four reminders are contemplated by the nuns before beginning any daily practice.

**Four Noble Truths** – The subject of the Buddha’s first teaching and often considered to be the foundation of all Dharma teachings. The Four Noble Truths are: (1) *The Truth of Suffering* (sometimes translated as Dissatisfaction) (2) *The Truth of the Origin of Suffering* (i.e., Ignorance). (3) *The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering* (i.e., Enlightenment). (4) *The Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering* (the Eightfold Path).

**Guru** – (Sanskrit) Spiritual teacher and guide. The guru is of central importance in tantric Buddhism, as the one from whom a practitioner directly receives the teachings, initiations, blessings etc.

**Hinayana** – Sanskrit for “narrow” or “lesser,” this refers to the foundation of the spiritual path, and emphasizes investigating mind and its confusion.

**Impermanence** – the core Buddhist belief that all phenomena are subject to change and decay. In Buddhist philosophy, impermanence is one of the Three Marks of Existence, the other two being suffering and egolessness (lack of inherent existence).

**Karma** – Sanskrit for actions. The law of cause and effect according to which all experiences are the result of previous actions, and all actions are the seeds of future experiences.

**Liberation** – see Enlightenment.

**Lineage** – an unbroken chain of direct transmission of teachings from master to disciple.

**Machik Labdrön** – (1055-1153) Great Tibetan female teacher and incarnation who set down the Chöd practice of cutting through ego-clinging.

**Mahayana** – Sanskrit for “great” or broad, this refers to the stage of the spiritual path that emphasizes universal Buddha nature and the wisdom of egolessness and compassion.

**Mantra** – (Sanskrit) Literally “mind protection.” A mantra is a combination of sacred seed syllables or a verse which both invokes and embodies in sound the qualities of a specific deity or aspect of enlightenment. A mantra protects the mind from ordinary perceptions and conceptions.

**Meditation** – A method to familiarize oneself with one’s mind and mind’s essence by first resting calmly and freely without being disturbed by rising and dissolving thoughts and emotions. Through this process one reaches the state of insight into the nature of reality.

**Meditation box** – a square box-like seat used by Tibetan yogins and yoginis, where they sit and practice and in which they remain upright at night rather than lying on a bed. The upright posture facilitates the practice of dream and sleep yoga.

**Mind** – Key concept in all Buddhist teaching which distinguishes between thinking mind and mind essence. Thinking mind is the dualistic state that gets caught up with or absorbed in perceived objects, believing whatever one happens to think. Mind also refers to undeluded mind, the fundamental nature, the Original Face, Buddha nature.

**Ngöndro** – Tibetan for preliminary practices of Vajrayana, such as 100,000 taking refuge vows and prostrations, 100,000 mantra recitations, 100,000 mandala offerings, and 100,000 guru yoga offerings. The nuns complete ngöndro practice before beginning a deity practice.

**Offering scarf (katag)** – A common part of many Tibetan rituals, such as welcoming, farewells and congratulations, katags are traditionally offered as a mark of respect.

**Pointing out** – A direct introduction to the nature of one's mind by a qualified master.

**Prayer Flags** – Found only in Tibetan Buddhism, prayer flags are pieces of fabric in five symbolic colors, imprinted with prayers, mantras and/or images of deities. As they flutter, they are believed to bless the surrounding environment with their prayers

**Prayer wheel** – A cylinder mounted on an axis, and filled with paper scrolls on which are printed large numbers of mantras. Spinning the cylinder is believed to be similar to saying the enclosed mantras aloud. Prayer wheels vary from small and hand held, to large ones mounted in rows in walls.

**Primordial purity** – the Buddha nature, present in all sentient beings, the purity which can never be spoiled or tainted in any way.

**Renunciation** – usually translated here as "determination to be free," renunciation is the turning away from everyday worldly pursuits because of the belief that all phenomena or appearances are illusory or dream-like, and that attachment to them is the cause of suffering and samsara (cyclic existence).

**Retreat** – withdrawing from everyday activities in order to undertake intensive spiritual practice without distraction. Retreats can be done individually (solo) or in a group. Three year retreat is a retreat taking three-years and three months, during which the retreatant practices intensively every day. The exact practices vary between the different schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

**Rinpoche** – A Tibetan honorific term for highly realized teacher, Rinpoche literally means, “very precious.”

**Samsara** – Sanskrit for “cyclic existence” or repetitive confusion. Traditionally it is described as consisting of birth, death and rebirth, being propelled by negative emotions and the karmic force of one's actions and characterized by suffering, impermanence, and ignorance.

**Sangha** – Sanskrit for “one with virtuous motivation,” this refers variously to followers of Buddhism, to Buddhist monastics (nuns and monks), and to those who have realized the Buddha’s teachings (“noble sangha”). It can also mean a community of practitioners who study with a Buddhist teacher.

**Tantra** – Sanskrit for “continuity,” this refers to Vajrayana teachings and practices.

**Tulku** – (Tibetan) Incarnate lama. Unique to Tibetan Buddhism, Tulkus are realized lamas who have chosen to take human form again in order to guide others to enlightenment.

**Tummo** – Inner heat or inner fire practice. One of the advanced Vajrayana (tantric) practices. Although the purpose of tummo is to develop realization in the mind, it also results in the production of physical heat in the body. As a test of their perfection of tummo practice, the Nangchen nuns perform a ceremony in which they circumambulate the monastery wearing a wet sheet in the coldest month of the year.

**Transmission** – the passing of a teaching or initiation from a qualified teacher to a student. A qualified teacher is an authentic lineage master who is the most recent in an unbroken lineage. Because the dharma is a living, experiential tradition and not just the words or philosophy, transmission from a guru or lama who has mastered the teaching is considered essential if a student is to benefit from a teaching or practice.

**Tsampa** - *tsam pa*, flour made from roasted barley or other grains. It is a staple food in Tibet. In the video, the nuns are seen eating tsampa mixed with tea and yak butter.

**Vajrayana** – Sanskrit for “indestructible” or diamond-like path, it refers to the highest Buddhist teachings which emphasize the clarity and power aspects of phenomena.

**Yogi (masc.) or yogini (fem.)** – someone who practices tantra. Often refers to someone who has already attained stability in the natural state of mind through tantric practice. Yogis and yoginis can be both monastic and lay practitioners.

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## **A Vajra Song of Tsoknyi Rinpoche I**

*Don't wander, don't wander, place mindfulness on guard;*

*Along the road of distraction, Mara lies in ambush.*

*Mara is the mind, clinging to like and dislike;*

*So look into the essence of this magic, free from dualistic fixation.*

*Realize that your mind is unfabricated primordial purity.*

*There is no buddha elsewhere; look at your own face.*

*There is nothing else to search for; rest in your own place.*

*Non-meditation is spontaneous perfection, so capture the royal seat.*

Originally composed by Tsoknyi Rinpoche 1, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this verse is chanted by all the Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns. Mingyur Yogini, one of the oldest and most accomplished of the nuns chants "Don't Wander" in BLESSINGS.

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## TOPICS – AND RESOURCES – FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

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*Below are some suggested topics addressed in BLESSINGS which you may wish to explore further. Included under each topic are resources to utilize for greater study of the topic. Additional resources are available online. (There are some online resources included at the bottom of this section.)*

### **Buddhist Beliefs and Practices:**

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

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Drubwang Rinpoche, et al. Fearless Simplicity: The Dzogchen Way of Living Freely in a Complex World. Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe, 2003.

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

Sogyal Rinpoche, Patrick D. Gaffney and Andrew Harvey. The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying: The Spiritual Classic and International Best Seller, Revised and Updated. New York: Harper San Francisco, 2002.

Urgyen, Tulku. As It Is: Volume I. Trans. Erik Pema Kunsang. Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe, 1999.

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---. Vajra Speech. Trans. Erik Pema Kunsang. Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe, 2001.

## **Tibetan Buddhism:**

Ray, Reginald A. Indestructible Truth: The Living Spirituality of Tibetan Buddhism. Boston: Shambhala, 2000.

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Simmer-Brown, Judith. Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism. Boston: Shambhala, 2002.

## **Buddhism in the West:**

Allione, Tsultrim. Feeding Your Demons: Ancient Wisdom for Resolving Inner Conflict. New York: Little Brown, 2008.

Chodron, Pema. When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times. Boston: Shambhala, 1997.

Fields, Rick. How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America. Boston: Shambhala, 1992.

Trungpa, Chogyam. Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism. Boston: Shambhala, 1973.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche. The Joy of Living: Unlocking the Secret and Science of Happiness. New York: Harmony, 2007.

## **Women in Buddhism:**

Allione, Tsultrim. Women of Wisdom. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2000.

Boucher, Sandy. Opening the Lotus: A Woman's Guide to Buddhism. Boston: Beacon, 1997.

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## Website Resources

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, [www.tenzinpalmo.com](http://www.tenzinpalmo.com)

Tsoknyi Rinpoche III, Pundarika Foundation, [www.pundarika.org](http://www.pundarika.org)

Tsultrim Allione, Tara Mandala, [www.taramandala.org](http://www.taramandala.org)

Victress Hitchcock, Chariot Productions, [www.chariotvideos.com](http://www.chariotvideos.com)

Tibetan Buddhism Resource Site, [www.khandro.net](http://www.khandro.net) *(this is a great overall resource to learn more about all subjects in Tibetan Buddhism)*