

Report from TWA's Empowerment through Action Desk

7th Annual Buddhist Nun's Leadership Training 1st - 7th March 2015 College for Higher Tibetan Studies

The 7th Annual Buddhist Nun's Leadership Training, held from March 1st to 7th was attended by 28 nuns from nunneries based Ladakh - Jammu and Kashmir, Nepal (Kopan nunnery and Keydong Thuk-Che-Cho-Ling) and Tilokpur (Karma Drubgyu Thargayling). The week-long training highlighted basic leadership skills, gender empowerment, legal empowerment and conflict resolution training. The participants also had the opportunity to embark on a day long educational excursion and visit the exile hub, Central Tibetan Administration and the Tibetan institutes.

Pre-Training preparations

This weeklong surely being one of the sought after training for the nuns aspiring to polish and strengthen their leadership skills and the preparation for this annual affair takes enough times and energy which is all worth the project. Our financial partner has been very generous with their continued support to the project with the much needed financial drive thus help boost the confidence and the belief of the individual working on the project. As this training targets the nuns in our community, TWA sent invitations inviting nuns from three regions, Ladakh, Tilokpur and Nepal and it all worked in our favour getting 28 nuns register for the training.

The Coordination team had the on-ground arrangements made for the 7th Annual Nun's Leadership Training. The pre-training preparations included the task to set the schedule, logistics, to arrange the training kit (stationery set, water bottle and yoga mat) and set the menu, dining timings with the mess at the Centre, arranging and confirming the trainers and speakers, getting the print materials from printing office, buying the group prizes.

The coordination team finally sets the hall with the banners, tables, taking care of the electrical set up; thus serving to reflect TWA's presence in the auditorium for the weeklong training.

1st March, 2015 - Registration

Just as the auditorium had turned into a well transformed venue for the training, the trainees started reporting and registering at the training venue collecting their training kit and got accommodated in their rooms.

TWA's General Secretary welcomed the trainees very briefly over the welcome dinner and introduced the coordination team to the trainees.

Day One - 2nd March, 2015

The standard routine at TWA trainings is the morning yoga session and the yoga session early waited for the nuns and organisers. Had it not been the rain and the cold weather, the yoga mats would have added colours to the green lawn at Sarah, instead of conducting the yoga sessions in the hall. The yoga session was led by Mr. Choedhar Chugtsang who had been trained by the well known yoga master Swami Ramdev.



TWA's President began the training with her opening remarks and addressed the trainees at the opening function giving a detailed background of TWA's aims and objectives, its missions

and activities. The trainees were then guided through the importance of the Annual Buddhist Nun's Leadership Training, its objectives and expectations.



TWA's Women Environment and Development officer, Ms. Dorji Kyi led the ice breaker in which the trainees were paired to introduce each other and then finally come out with a drawing to introduce their partners to the larger group. This activity was fun as it brought their initial fun moments and laughter. The introductory round was fun filled and it was nice to see the trainees opening up slowly to the group that they will stick with for a week. The trainees were then introduced to 'secret friend' and each one gets a secret friend which would be revealed and disclosed on 7th March night. The whole idea is to maintain the secrecy and keep giving fun moments and surprises to ones secret friend. The participants were then divided into four teams and each had to name their teams and appoint a team captain and time manager. The ground rules were set with mutual agreement so that the week long program becomes effective and easy for both the organisers and trainees.



TWA's General Secretary led the orientation round guiding the trainees through the weeklong program schedule with emphasis on featuring highlights of the training; guiding them through their team assignments, briefing on the daylong educational excursion , group reporting, group photo project. The orientation round gave trainees an overview of how the week will unfold for them.



The afternoon session was led by Nyima Lhamo, TWA's General Secretary themed on Gender Empowerment for Tibetan nuns. The session began with a very simple instruction for the groups to come out with the words that describe girl/woman and boy/man to them in groups. The answers from the groups were set aside for discussion in the later hours and the next group activity had the groups discuss and brainstorm on the following three questions: How and when did you know that you were a girl, Your most painful experience as a girl and Were you treated differently at home because you are a girl? The participants were asked to share their answers for above topics based on their group discussion. Each group was asked to present their points. The main idea behind this activity was to make them realize the existence and reality of inherent and innate gender discrimination in the society. The group activity was then followed by a detailed explanation on what is gender and what is sex and patriarchy. The answers to the first two group activities actually prepared the nuns for the session on what is sex and gender. The answers could be separated either as sex or gender which clearly highlighted plenty socially constructed expectations and definitions of a boy/man and of a girl/woman. Then the topic was further connected to patriarchy and patriarchal system; the participants were clearly instructed that gender is neutral and not the problem, gender is the result of patriarchy and patriarchy is never a fight between boy/man and girl/woman. In fact patriarchy is a fight between two ideology; patriarchy and equality. Patriarchy is everywhere and so inherent in us but it is for us to decide.

The participants were then guided through the means and mediums of gender socialization; after certain discussion and explanations, the trainers screened few videos; some of which reflected on how socially constructed definitions of women and men are so innate in us, some videos highlighted how media can play a constructive role and bring positive changes through the messages they give to the masses through television commercials. After the screenings, the groups had their second activity to come up with one-minute gender sensitive advertisement. The groups were given time to discuss and prepare for the enactment of the advertisement after which the groups came with their creative ideas and group performances.

"River of Life", the session after dinner saw the nuns sit in a circle drawing their life's journey in a visual representation, ultimately explaining how their life has been so far, the motivation and strengths behind them.



Hearing the nuns brought to surface how circumstances gave them the choice of becoming nuns to some of them while most of them made their some made the choices by themselves and some of them had a conscious decision and choice to bring change for themselves and for others. The objective of the session was to send a message that we are all the same as humans but our backgrounds so various bringing in a range of strengths and inspirations thereby showing them the potentials that they have in doing the best in life.

We hope the sharing in this session will help the nuns realise their potential and achieve their dreams.

Day Two, 3rd March, 2015

TWA's General Secretary, Nyima Lhamo led the day's session on 'Building effective communication skills'. The nuns played the game 'Finding the Animal Partner,' which underlined lessons about communication and the significant difference between animals and human beings: the enhanced ability to communicate. The nuns were then introduced to concepts of communication and communication processes through presentations, exercises, role plays and group exercises.



The nuns were briefed on how to employ SMART communication skills (strategic and creative communication) in daily lives, how SMART communication skills make things much easier, on the importance of being SMART in everyday life and even at work when delegating, chairing, negotiating, motivating, selling, leading or disagreeing. SMART communication skills is all about getting your point across in a firm, concise and empowering manner no matter what position you hold.



The nuns then had to produce a group presentation of an award winning television commercial; each group designed a product to sell, with a jingle for the product and performed the commercial to the larger audience. What had been learned during this session is that communication goes far beyond the actual words that we say and the more important part is not what you say, but how you say it and the way you say it. Communication skills are not about personal or positional power but they are an art, a skill and an asset for you to become successful in your field.



The afternoon session was on effective public speaking skills and Nyima briefly introduced what the nuns will do in this session. The nuns were grouped into smaller groups for their first afternoon activity called 'newspaper challenge', where each team where each team was given a stack of newspapers, a scissor and a tape. The task was to pick a model within the group and make a dress out of the materials provided. Each group was then asked to pick a presenter and talk about the dress they made and why they think it's the best one made. Each presenter was given 1 minute each to talk about the dress. The whole idea was to let their creativity run through when designing the dress and during their presentation.



Nyima then did a brief power point presentation on effective public speaking skills; encouraging the trainees not to worry if they have fear of public speaking because most of us have the fear in us and there are ways to combat nervousness. It only takes preparation to combat nervousness. The trainees were then guided through what entails preparation and Nyima shared certain tips from her personal experiences in preparing for a public speaking event.



The next activity was an individual task to work on a 1 minute short speech. The nuns were advised to incorporate everything they have learned in the past few days when they deliver their speech. The trick was that each trainee was assigned a topic each which may be something they would agree or disagree but the task was to practice public speaking. The second trick was that their speech was videotaped and each presenter was judged.

When everyone finished delivering their speech; it was the feedback session. Everyone watched each participant's speech on big screen, the judges gave their feedback and each participant was asked for self-reflections as to how they can do it better the next time.

Nyima concluded her session appreciating everyone for doing their best in the speech task, appreciated their participation in Leadership Training which only indicates that they all have the willingness to better and learn in life. The will and determination is often the first step to greatness.



Every breather and activity played highlighted the importance of all elements of communications: source, message, channel, encoding, decoding, receiver, feedback and context. Every breather tested the trainees' application of strategic communication skills.

Day Three, 4th March, 2015



Sonam Dechen, the Co-Director and Tenpa Phuntsok, trainers from Tibetan Centre for Conflict Resolution (TCCR) led the morning session. Understanding conflict was the first topic for discussion asking the nuns to come out with the words that comes to their mind when they hear the word 'conflict'. The participant's answers and ideas varied a lot but mostly swayed towards negative like war, hatred, chaos, crisis etc. The nuns were then told that we feel uncomfortable when we hear the word conflict. Our trainers then defined conflict to the nuns introducing to them various available definitions and finally affirming the definition that the centre has come up with that incorporates that notion of ignorance, which is rooted in our Buddhist philosophy. The discussion further stated that conflict should not always be viewed as negatively; perceiving conflict positively is always an opportunity to learn about the other side and can prove to be one of the best means to create peace. The learning curve here thus states that it is very often the way we think of conflict that sets the tone its resolution. The trainers then identified the causes of conflict being factors like culture, needs, interests, values and perception based on one's ideology.



The next topic discussed looked at how conflicts escalate in general; we looked at the steps uphill, the process by which conflicts grow in severity over time either between individuals or groups ranging from personal enmity to bigger hostilities in political or military context. Once the trainers explained the steps uphill in conflict escalation, the nuns were given a group task to think of a real life incident on conflict that had happened in the past and relate it to the steps uphill to elaborate what happened at each step and explain to the larger group how conflict escalated in that particular incident. The trainers then explained to the nuns some of the effective ways to resolve a conflict would be by being aware of interdependency, building trust, finding shared goals, values and interests and finding opportunities for creative synergy.

There was a certain realization in many of us that our culture and religion has played its vital roles in helping us deal with conflicts in daily lives. Means like dialogue, awareness and mutual respect are paramount features of conflict resolution and not to forget that Buddhism teaches compassion for all beings.



The exercises and breathers incorporated in the session aided in keeping intact the interest of the nuns alive throughout the session.

After lunch session was themed on team building effective teamwork led by TWA trainer, Dorji Kyi. The session was filled with a lot of practical team tasks to guide the nuns through the concepts of team building and team effectiveness.

The groups were explained why and how team work is important to enhance the team's participation in meeting the goals, accomplishing tasks, to enhance social relations and clarify team roles, to solve tasks and interpersonal problems. The teams then discussed to come out with their definition and components of a team; to which Dorji explained the components of team building as;

- Goal setting: aligning around goals
- Interpersonal-relationship management: building effective working relationships
- Role clarification: reducing team members' role ambiguity
- Problem solving: finding solutions to team problems

The team tasks given thought the session observed how they worked in teams; based on criteria such as planning, strategy, time management, job delegation, team communications, clarity in communications, encouraging trust and cooperation, and listening and brainstorming.

Dorji concluded her session with a closing circle where each nun had to make one promise of change as a leader.

Day Four, 5th March, 2015

All the nuns seemed excited and eager looking forward to the daylong educational tour about to unfold for them.



The first educative session was the Parliament house where the nuns were addressed by the Honourable Speaker of the Tibetan Parliament in Exile. The nuns were extensively introduced to the Tibetan Parliament in Exile (TPiE) as being the unicameral and highest legislative organ of the Central Tibetan Administration; it was explained how the creation of this democratically

elected body has been one of the major changes that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has brought about in his efforts and commitment to introduce a democratic system of administration. The nuns then were lectured about the numbers of Parliament members; their election on the basis of the traditional provinces of Tibet; the four members elected by the Tibetans living in Europe, North America and Canada; the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism and the traditional Bon faith.



The nuns were then briefed about the elections of the Parliamentarians, the criteria of eligibility to contest elections in the Parliament, the tenures, the number of sessions held, the standing committee composition, the periodic tours of the members of Parliament to settlements and their tasks and the existence of Local Parliaments (scaled down replicas of the TPiE) established in the major Tibetan communities.

The Honourable Speaker emphasized on the importance of Tibetan language as the ultimate medium to master Buddhism and therefore the need to study well and to work hard to overcome the challenges of a life in exile. The nuns had the pleasure to pose for a group picture with the Honourable Speaker Mr. Penpa Tsering to mark the conclusion of the Speaker's address to the nuns.

The group then walked to the next adjacent building where the Honourable Minister Pema Chonjor assented to address the nuns on initiatives of the Department of Religion and Culture and Nuns Empowerment. Honourable Kalon stressed on the importance of education for the nuns

especially Buddhist studies and work hard for Geshema Degree. He encouraged the nuns to do better in their studies, in building their self confidence and thereby to be able to contribute to the society. Even though time was running out on us, few of the nuns were able to ask questions.



The nuns were then introduced to Tibetan Medicine and Astro Institute where Dr. Tseten explained the nuns around their museum about the history of the institute and Tibetan medicine. The most interesting part was to observe the keenness and interest in the nuns when they got to visit site to see how the Tibetan medicines were made from raw materials to the final packing stage. It was also interesting to hear some of the nuns sharing their thoughts saying they never realised the task and process behind making the medicines and some of them also vowed not to waste medicines in future. An interesting education visit comes to an end right before lunch break.

Library of Tibetan Works and Archives was the next visit; the nuns visited the museum at LTWA, guiding the nuns through the history and establishment of the library, followed by a visit to the manuscript section. The following session that awaited the nuns was led by Mr. Nyima Gyaltzen, Head of Science Department at LTWA on Science and Buddhism. Nyima la spoke about science, its definition and characters, the relationship between Buddhism and Science. He stressed on the areas where Buddhism can benefit from Science and the areas

where Buddhism can contribute towards science. It was really inspiring to see the nuns contribute their ideas and opinions to his talk and also asked many questions.



The final interactive session was with the Honourable Sikyong, the Tibetan Political Leader, Dr. Lobsang Sangay at the Kashag hall. Sikyong made the nuns feel at ease throughout with a lot of questions to the nuns. The session mainly focussed on focused mainly on women, women empowerment, self confidence, self esteem and self belief. The nuns were encouraged to believe in themselves, to build their self-confidence and self-esteem and to continue with their monastic education up to their best possibilities; they were inspired to avail of opportunities within and beyond nunneries and to be contributing members of the Tibetan community at large.



A group picture with the honourable Sikyong marked the end of the session and boarding the cabs everyone returned to the training venue.

It is often that many visit Dharamsala either on personal or work accounts but rarely do we make it a point to study Dharamsala, especially Ganchen Kyishong, the exile Tibetan hub.

Day Five, 6th March, 2015

Day 5 was the outbound practical training for the nuns. Even though the nuns have been briefed about this day during orientation round, after breakfast nuns gathered in the hall for reminding the instructions for the day. After that the nuns left in groups for their project implementation.



As instructed all the nuns came back to the workshop venue before dinner. After dinner we all gathered in the hall and the groups started preparing their group presentation. Each group presented their project along with their financial statement. Even though the organizing team did not give any specific topic or theme for the group project, all the four groups did their project on environment related issues. They all went to different areas in Dharamsala and cleaned up the dirtiest places like the bus stand, main market, lingkor road and few nunneries. Two groups planted flowers around the nunneries since there will be someone to water the plants.



All the groups have done extremely well and it showed on their face while presenting their work.

Day Six, 7th March, 2015

For the final day of the workshop, the nuns were led on a session on the legal outlook for violence against women and protection of women and children under the Indian Law. During this session the following topics were explained to the nuns; Sexual violence, gender based violence, sexual harassment, rape, stalking, voyeurism, age of consent and presumption of consent, tips for dealing with sexual harassment, guidelines in filing FIR. This session was solely aimed for making the nuns aware of the problems and ways to handle them so that they could help themselves and help others.

The nuns sat in a circle for 'Spin a yarn', the oral feedback session where each nun were given a minute each to share their feelings and learning from the weeklong program.



The final closing function saw TWA President Ms. Tashi Dolma thank the nuns for their active participation throughout the week and wished them well in the future as they were handed their certificates of participation.



The nuns then visited the Gyutoe monastery as part of the program for some social bonding hours and much to the delight of the nuns, a teaching by Samdhong Rinpoche had begun the same day as we reached there. The nuns spent few quiet hours to receive the teaching before we headed back to Sarah for the final evening.

The day ended with our special farewell dinner and the secret friends were revealed; all in much laughter exchanging gifts and hugs taking pictures with their new friends. The last night was the opposite of the first night when we all barely knew each other. The dining room was filled with laughter and joy. It was a heart warming experience to see the nuns so happy and content.



Conclusion

Tibetan Women's Association has many to thank as we conclude one of TWA's annual projects. We would like to thank our financial partner Science Meets Dharma based in the Switzerland, for supporting us with the much needed financial contributions.

We remain thankful to our 28 nuns for taking part in the 7th edition of the Annual Buddhist nuns Leadership Training. We would also thank the respective heads and authorities of the

nunneries for availing the opportunity and assenting to our humble invitations and thus for sending their nuns to take part in our training. We look forward to a long association and continued support in future as well.

TWA remains thankful to the nunneries for availing the opportunity offered and Sambhota Tibetan Schools Society for supporting us with a yoga master throughout the weeklong program.



We look forward to progressing with the best of our efforts in bringing more leadership-centric programs to polish the leadership skills of our women, ultimately producing more women leaders in our community. We hope more and more Tibetan women will climb higher on the leadership scale on both personal and professional fronts, thereby strengthening the Tibetan Community as a whole, and be able to contribute towards larger issues beyond the Tibetan community.

As Mahatma Gandhi rightly said, "Be the change you want to see." TWA is hopeful that the much needed change to make this world a better place for both women and men will come from each of us. We wish our trainees the best in all their endeavours. They surely gave us the belief that the much needed change will come from them.

Thank you very much