



Dzongkar Choede Monastery

Buddhist Education

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Summary: At the heart of Dzongkar Choede is a deep commitment to education. What began as an open-air calligraphy class has grown into a residential monastic school where young monks receive both traditional Buddhist training and modern learning. Students are formed through Buddhist philosophy, logic, debate, meditation, ritual practice, memorisation, chanting and the traditional ritual arts, following the Sera Jey monastic university texts for logic and debate. Education here is monastic formation: young monks learning what they will one day pass on.

Tags:

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MONASTIC SCHOOLING

Read the original page at: <https://dzongplum.netlify.app/en/community/buddhist-education>



A monk arriving here at nine years old will, if he goes the whole way, still be studying at thirty. The programme runs between nineteen and twenty-five years, and the first three of them are not about Buddhism at all — they are about how to reason.

Alongside it runs an ordinary school day: Tibetan, English, mathematics. The two educations are not kept apart, and the monastery has never treated them as rivals.

Educating Young Monks for Tradition, Wisdom, and the Modern World

At the heart of Dzongkar Choede Monastery is a deep commitment to education. The monastery's school was founded to nurture young monks not only as students, but as the ones who will pass this on — the learning, the language, the practice — to those who come after them.

What began humbly as an open-air calligraphy class has grown into a residential monastic school where young monks receive both traditional Buddhist training and modern education. Today, the school continues the monastery's historic responsibility: to preserve the Dharma, Tibetan language, cultural heritage, and monastic discipline while preparing students to meet the needs of the contemporary world.

The school reflects the vision of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who has repeatedly emphasized the importance of educating young monks so that Tibetan spiritual and cultural traditions can continue with confidence, intelligence, and compassion.

Beginnings — An Open-Air Calligraphy Class

The origins of Dzongkar Choede's school were simple but meaningful. In its earliest form, students gathered in the open air to learn calligraphy and basic studies. This modest beginning carried within it a much larger purpose: the preservation of Tibetan learning and the formation of young monks who could serve their tradition and society.

The school began with 45 students, ranging from kindergarten to class 4 of primary school. At

that time, only a small number of teachers were available to guide them.

Over the years, the school developed into a primary and secondary-level institution. Earlier monastery sources describe around 200 pupils studying in more modernized circumstances, while the monastery as a whole is home to more than 300 monks and continues to run a school for young monks.

Many of the students have come from economically and socially vulnerable families in Himalayan regions. Earlier sources mention students from communities such as the Monpa of Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, and the Tibetan region of Tsum. Through education, care, and monastic formation, the school offers these young monks a path of learning, discipline, dignity, and service.

1984 — Classrooms Established

By 1984, the school had developed beyond its open-air beginnings. A proper building and classrooms were established through the initiative of Ven. Geshe Jampa Norbu lak, with the support of the governing body of Dzongkar Choede Monastery. This marked an important step in giving young monks a more structured educational environment.

The early years were not easy. The school had limited resources and struggled to meet essential costs such as teacher salaries. Support from senior monastic figures and benefactors, including Ven. Jampa Sopa lak, helped sustain the school during these difficult years.

1997 — A Basic Curriculum Developed

The school's development continued in 1997, when a more systematic basic curriculum was introduced. This important stage is associated with the dedicated efforts of Ven. Jampa Gyaltsen lak, then principal, and Ven. Thupten Lodoe lak, vice principal. Their work helped shape the school into an institution where monastic study and modern subjects could be taught together.

From the beginning, the school has been guided by a simple but powerful aim: to educate young

monks in a way that preserves Tibetan Buddhist tradition while also giving them the knowledge and confidence needed in the modern world. The modern half of that curriculum is described on the [\[western school\]](#) page.

Education as Monastic Formation

Dzongkar Choede's school is more than a classroom institution. It is part of a living monastery.

Students are educated within an environment shaped by prayer, study, memorization, debate, discipline, and community life.

The aim is not only academic progress, but the formation of the whole person. Young monks learn

to read, write, reason, memorize, debate, serve, and live according to the values of the Buddhist tradition.

This makes the school a bridge between two worlds:

- Traditional monastic training, rooted in scripture, memorization, chanting, dialectics, debate, ritual, and meditation.
- Modern education, including languages, mathematics, history, computer studies, and general academic development.

In this way, students are prepared both to preserve the spiritual heritage of Dzongkar Choede

Monastery and to engage responsibly with the wider world. These dimensions are also set out in the monastery's [\[seven pillars\]](#).

A Daily Rhythm of Prayer, Study, and Discipline

The daily life of the students follows the rhythm of the monastery. Each day combines spiritual practice, memorization, classroom learning, self-study, dialectics, and debate.

The day begins early, as the monastic assembly gathers for morning prayer. The students also gather in the prayer hall, joining the spiritual life of the monastery from the start of the day.

After prayers, the students receive morning tea and bread. They then continue with memorization

of chants and scriptures under the guidance of designated teachers. This early morning period is a vital part of monastic education, strengthening memory, concentration, devotion, and familiarity with sacred texts.

From 9:00 AM to 9:45 AM, students attend self-study classes. Senior students participate in dialectic sessions during this period. Formal classes begin at 10:15 AM and continue until 3:00 PM.

After school, students return to scripture memorization, dialectic class, and debate sessions.

This daily rhythm shows the special character of Dzongkar Choede's educational model. Learning is not separated from spiritual practice. Intellectual development, discipline, devotion, and community life are woven together throughout the day.

Traditional Buddhist Studies

Within the wider monastery, students are formed through Buddhist philosophy, logic, debate, meditation, ritual practice, memorization, chanting, and traditional ritual arts.

Dzongkar Choede follows the Sera Jey monastic university texts for Buddhist logic and debate, linking the education of young monks to one of the great scholarly traditions of Tibetan Buddhism.

The school also offers a broad curriculum that combines Tibetan monastic education with modern academic subjects — English, Tibetan reading, writing practice, grammar and spelling practice, history, religious history, mathematics, Chinese, and computer classes — set out in full on the [\[western school\]\(/en/community/western-school\)](/en/community/western-school) page.

This combination of subjects gives students both roots and wings: roots in Tibetan Buddhist learning and cultural heritage, and wings to understand and participate in the modern world.

Residential Care and Guardian Teachers

The school is residential. Students live within monastic residential houses and are supervised by

guardian teachers.

These guardian teachers play an important role in the daily lives of the students. They are responsible not only for academic support, but also for student well-being, monastic studies, homework, and daily discipline.

This structure gives the students a stable and caring environment. They are not simply attending classes; they are growing within a community of learning, practice, responsibility, and spiritual guidance. Residential care is one of the defining strengths of the school. It allows young monks to be supported in all aspects of their development: intellectual, moral, spiritual, and personal — supported in turn by the monastery's [healthcare center](/en/community/healthcare-center).

Preserving Culture Through Education

The school plays a vital role in preserving Tibetan Buddhist culture. Students are trained not only in academic subjects, but also in the spiritual and cultural practices that have shaped Dzongkar Choede for generations. Their wider formation includes:

- Buddhist philosophy
- Logic and debate
- Meditation
- Ritual practice
- Memorization of texts
- Chanting
- Tantric ritual arts
- Ritual mask dance
- Butter sculpture
- Sand mandala
- Thangka painting
- Incense-making

Through these practices, students inherit a living tradition. They learn not only to understand it intellectually, but to embody it through discipline, practice, and service. This is one of the school's greatest responsibilities: to ensure that the wisdom, art, ritual, language, and spiritual discipline of Tibetan Buddhism continue into the future — a continuity traced in

[\[the history of the monastery\]](/en/about/history)

Supporting the School

The school has always depended on dedication, sacrifice, and generosity. Many students come from vulnerable backgrounds, and the monastery's resources are limited. Support is needed for:

- Student sponsorship
- Teacher salaries
- Textbooks
- School maintenance
- Library development
- Educational materials
- Residential care

Sponsoring a student or supporting the school is not simply an act of charity. It is a contribution to the preservation of a spiritual and cultural tradition. It helps young monks receive education, care, discipline, and guidance within the protective environment of Dzongkar Choede Monastery. Through this support, young monks are prepared to pass on what they were given. You can [\[support this work\]](/en/support).