

regional cultures and also serves as an invaluable model preserving traditional practices and customs in the face of rapid social and cultural change. The project reflects his enduring interest in cultural preservation, born not only out of his own traditional education, but out of his extensive scholarship in regional history. He has collaborated with noted Tibetologist David Snellgrove in several projects and publications, *Buddhist Forum* editor Tadeusz Skorupski, and a number of other scholars and student groups from the U.S., Germany, Holland, Japan, France, and India.

Dr. Ngawang is a community leader who has served as his village airport chairman, helping to raise funds to pave the Mustang region's only airport as well as to cobble the local main street, and he plays an active part in ongoing discussions about local development. His wife, Karma, is also an active community volunteer, vice-chairman of the women's association (known as the Mother Group), which encourages village development and cultural traditions. They have five children: Zompa, currently working in New York; Karma Chuden, a nun; Jamyang Dorje, an Annapurna Campus student; Sewong Gurmeh, a student in Kathmandu, learning Tibetan, Nepali, and English; and young Lhakpa Dolma, who thinks she might like to be western Nepal's first female engineer.

Dr. Ngawang's most recent large project has been to spearhead the building of the new Tarbha Chuling, a seven-year effort to make Mustang's newest monastery for women in the Muktinath area a day north of his headquarters in Jomsom. With funding from Head Lama Shangpa Rinpoche, based in Singapore, this new Tibetan nunnery is built on the site of an old, broken, private monastery of the Takla Takhuri family, where Dr. Ngawang remembers services as a child. This nunnery, open to girls from any village, houses forty women in dormitories, uses Mukhtinath spring water and water-powered electricity, and has its own large supply storage, kitchen, dining hall, and garden. For its new, beautifully painted temple, Dr. Ngawang commissioned the best sculptors from Bhutan to use local clay from Dhunpa Lake to make the region's most exquisite large statues of Green Tara, Avalokiteshvara, and Buddha. Tarbha Chuling opened in January 2000, a celebration attended by many high lamas and the King of



Dr. Ngawang leading a ritual in the Eco-Museum's traditional monastery

What is a Tibetan monastery?

In the west, there is no exact equivalent to this venerable institution. Combine the best university, teaching hospital, pharmaceutical factory, counseling center, religious center, art gallery, health spa, social services office, and library, and you come close to the compound that is a monastery (or, for females, a nunnery). Before the Chinese Communist invasion of Tibet in 1949, Tibet had over 6,000 monasteries; less than a dozen survived the Cultural Revolution and later destructions.