

GESHE KALSANG RAPGYAL was born in Machu, Amdo, Tibet, on January 3, 1969. In 1987, he entered Tashi Choeling Monastery and took novice and monastic vows. In 1989, he became a fully ordained monk with Tashi Khyil Ladrang (University). He studied logic, philosophy, poetry, and Buddhist metaphysics.

In 1991 he fled to India. Under the direction of H.H. The Dalai Lama, he was accepted into Drepung Gomang Monastery (Mundgod, Karnataka, India) for further studies. He completed the five volumes of the Gelugpa's dialectics curriculum, and in 2006, he was awarded Geshe Lharampa degree from Gelukpa University. The same recognition was conferred by Geluk schools Gaden and Sera. In 2007, he enrolled at Gyudmed Tantric College (Mysore District, Karnataka, India) to study Vajrayana. He completed and took the oaths of Geshe Ngagrampa degree.

The title of *geshe* is given to a highly esteemed teacher who has completed decades of rigorous academic study. Kalsang Rapgyal was given this title. In 2009, Geshe Rapgyal was selected by Drepung Gomang Monastery to lead the Drepung Gomang Center for Engaging Compassion (DGCEC), Louisville. He arrived in this city on February 26, 2010, and is now the Executive Director and Spiritual Teacher at DGCEC, a Tibetan Buddhist organization. He is generally referred to as "Geshe-la" which means "My teacher." He has played a pivotal role in the growth of DGCEC. He offers regular teachings on Saturdays and Sundays, holds meditation sessions on Wednesday evenings, leads day-long retreats once a month, provides spiritual guidance for sangha members, and participates in many interfaith gatherings around the city.

Though DGCEC was established relatively recently, it has a much older lineage. It is the sister organization to one of the oldest and most important Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, the Drepung Gomang Monastery, which was founded in 1416 near Lhasa. Before the Chinese invasion it was home to 10,000 monks. The large number is a reflection of the fact that an amazing 20 percent of the population of old Tibet lived in monasteries. About 100 monks managed to escape with the Dalai Lama when he fled Tibet in 1959. In 1969 Drepung Gomang was re-established as a monastery-in-exile in southern India and today is home to more than 2,000 monks, many of whom have escaped from Tibet and now call India home. DGCEC is its U.S. counterpart, so when one enters it, one is actually encountering a tradition far older and grander than one realizes.

This phenomenon of religion-in-exile is curious, and the Drepung Gomang Center illustrates many of its paradoxes. What has happened in Tibet is a tragedy of global significance. And yet without the Chinese invasion, Tibetan Buddhism would have remained isolated and inaccessible to the larger world. Because of the terrible persecution suffered by this tradition, its seeds have been scattered around the world, taking root in seemingly unlikely places. Some have compared the Tibetan Diaspora to the Jewish Diaspora, both of which required a dramatic re-orientation of religious and cultural foundations. As a result, these traditions have spread far beyond the borders of their original homelands.

DGCEC is a place to study and practice Tibetan Buddhism, learn about Tibetan culture, and attend programs relating to meditation, interfaith dialogue and peacemaking. It holds teachings, meditation sessions, special ceremonies and events. It welcomes people of all faiths and its members are eager to help visitors learn about Tibetan Buddhism.

The Salaam Network (TSN) owes deep gratitude to DGCEC for facilitating its first community-wide brainstorming meeting of interfaith leaders and activists on May 1, 2016. Through the summer of 2016, a number of consultative meetings were held at DGCEC to develop a practical plan of action for interfaith education in Louisville. This process led to the emergence of *The Salaam Network* which held its first program entitled “Exploring Islam: A Way of Peace or Extremism? A Conversation with Local Community Leaders” at DGCEC in September 2016. Geshe-la has always been a spiritual guide and a gracious friend to *TSN*. Whenever he has been invited to participate in any of our programs he has always been there for us. Geshe-la is a treasure for Louisville and we are so fortunate to have him as a wise counselor and Facilitator.