

Buddhist monks promote religious tolerance as they share their culture to Elon

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Features Editor

The Buddhist Tibetan Monks visiting this week are preaching religious tolerance as they face a bias against their own religion at home.

The leaders of Communist China have forced many Buddhists out of the country, including the Dalai Lama. Each year about 1,000 more people escape the prejudice in Tibet.

Geshe Sangpo, a visiting monk, is an example. He fled the country when he was 14 years old. He first went to Nepal and then later to India where he completed 17 years of schooling and received his Geshe degree, high ranking in religious education, in Buddhist Philosophy in 2001.

The journey out of Tibet took him 21 days. He says that it is a very hard journey. Many people lose their limbs, die or are captured and sent to prison.

Geshe Sangpo is now sharing his education in the Sera Jey Mahayana Buddhist University where he is in charge of a group of monks ranging in age from 11-to-35 years old.

Elon hopes the monks will bring a new perspective to Elon students. "One of the primary goals of the Truitt Center is to help students understand and appreciate diverse religious traditions," said Chaplain Richard McBride. "Hosting Tibetan Buddhist Monks help us fulfill that mission."

The monks travel all over the United States in order to raise funds for their monastery. The original monastery in Tibet housed more than 10,000 monks. But, they've relocated to

India and the present monastery houses a total of 2,500.

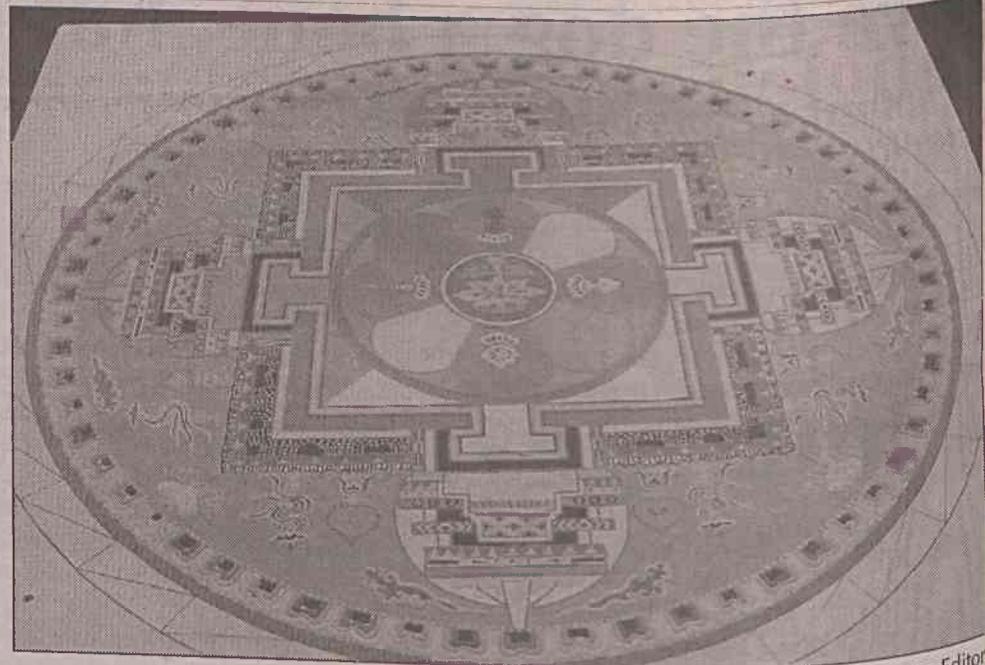
Most rooms have no screens to keep mosquitoes out in the rainy season and are open to rodents and insects. Many rooms do not have fans for the extremely hot season or insulation for the damp cool season as well. Funds are sought to alleviate these problems. There are many sanitary issues in the monastery.

The monastery will not turn any students away, so it is easy to become overcrowded. Some students do not even have beds.

They also hope to build a new city center for the Kadampa Center, a Tibetan Buddhist center for study and practice in Raleigh, N.C.

In order to raise money they will be touring New Jersey, New York, Virginia, Florida, North Carolina and many other cities, states and universities.

The Buddhist monks hope to teach students their ways of life and about their religion through the sand Mandala. The



Laura Hals/ Photo Editor

Tibetan monks travel around the United States sharing their religion and culture. They created a sand Mandala in Belk Library. They will be destroying it today.

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—Becky Schrier, junior

sand, traditionally made from crushed precious stones such as white marble, is considered the best material because of the precious substances involved and the great skill required to create the Mandala's exquisite details. The colors of the Mandala are bright since each grain of sand is blessed for the ritual and contains spiritual energy. This tradition is very different and inspiring experience for many people who are unfamiliar with the Buddhist Religion. "For me interacting with the Tibetan Monks for the first time was an incredible opportunity," junior Becky Schrier said. "It opened my eyes to a religious practice and a way of life that was different from anything I had ever experienced."

The Buddhist religion encourages meditation as a way to reach "enlightenment." Buddhists believe that suffering comes from desires and the only way to end your suffering is to not desire anything.

This is a very different concept than what most average American teenagers believe in.

"As students watch the monks spend four days creating a beautifully intricate and highly symbolic Mandala, they will be observing a focused spiritual practice," Chaplain McBride said. "At the closing ceremony that Mandala will be ritually dismantled in keeping with the Buddhist idea of impermanence—that all things are in a constant state of flux and that even a beautifully created sacred object is not meant to be preserved."

Their last visit in Fall of 2003 was a huge success. The monks are very eager to share their culture. "The monks are a joyful group of men; they laugh a lot," Chaplain McBride said. "They were very approachable, eager to speak with students and to share their culture."



Photo courtesy of The Truitt Center

The monks and the Truitt Center Staff: Kate Colussy-Estes, Assistant Chaplain; Richard McBride, Chaplain; Rene' Summers, Secretary.

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