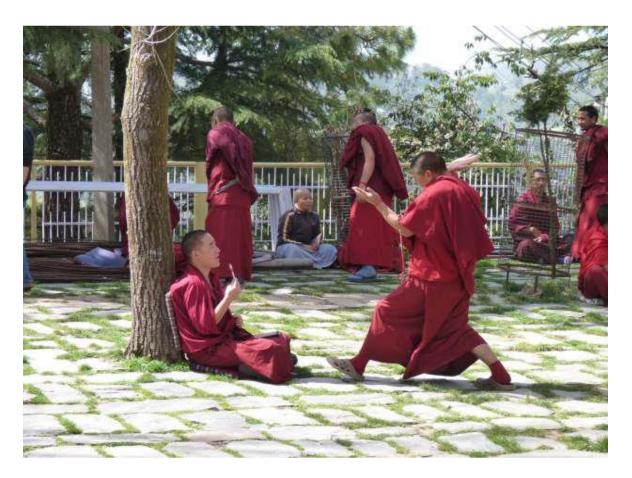
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Cloud-Walking in Dharamshala by Sheri Vandermolen

Namgyal Monastery, in McLeod Ganj Home to HH the Dalai Lama



The monks partake of final bites of lentils and rice, from earthenware bowls, then arise from the floor and retreat to their dormitory, to study sacred Tibetan texts, continue their morning meditation When the call signals the start of daily spiritual debates, all flood the sun-dappled courtyard

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Even those kneeling in prismed concentration, within the temple (red-robed young men patiently rubbing chakpurs, so the vibrations will release vibrant sand grains into a Wheel of Time mandala. and breathing faintly, through surgical masks, to keep exhalation rushes from disturbing their work) stop their efforts, don sandals, and join the anticipated deliberations After an invocation to Manjrushi, as an imparter of wisdom, the enlivening ritual begins Studying in pairs, the novices stay seated, serving as the defenders, while their experienced counterparts bow before them, then stream forth questions on profound tantric matters Starting in hushed tones, to disconcert their opponents, the examiners soon amplify their strategy, attempting to undo the defenders' theses by arguing cogently, lunging forward, and adding resounding alligator-arm claps. that punctuate their points of view and send their prayer beads swinging After two-and-a- half hours, the training ceases, for the day The dazzling blue sky and surrounding peaks of the Outer Himalayan range absorb the lambent decibels, and the monastery returns to intrinsic serenity The monks spend the remainder of the organically radiant day cloud-walking, in silence