

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

Even those kneeling
in prised 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