

# Clap, Logic, and Realization

## The Tibetan Tradition of Monastic Debate



UNIVERSITY OF  
**OXFORD**

Venerable Jampa Gyaltzen

### Abstract

Using visual materials, this talk explores the philosophical debate system (ཚོད་པ།) practiced in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, particularly of the Geluk scholastic tradition, where debate functions as the principal method of philosophical training, analytical inquiry, and contemplative cultivation. Rooted in the Indian Buddhist *pramāṇa* tradition of logic and epistemology — developed by figures such as Dignāga and Dharmakīrti — Tibetan monastic debate evolved into a uniquely structured system of dialectical exchange that integrates rigorous reasoning with embodied performance and meditative discipline.

Drawing on traditional monastic training, the presentation examines how debate operates through formalized roles of challenger and defender, technical logical formulations, and the use of consequence arguments (ཐལ་འགྱུར།), reasons (གཏན་ཚིགས།), and syllogistic analysis. Particular attention will be given to the contemplative function of debate, showing how it serves not merely as scholastic disputation but as a form of analytical meditation aimed at cultivating concentration, critical inquiry, and insight. The talk traces the historical arc of Buddhist logic from early Indian Buddhism through Nālandā scholasticism to its institutional flourishing in Tibet, examining how Tibetan scholars transformed inherited Indian logical traditions into a dynamic pedagogical system integrating body, speech, and mind through physical gesture, oral precision, memorization, and rapid analytical exchange.

The presentation also engages contemporary interdisciplinary research — including cognitive and contemplative scientific studies — exploring debate's effects on attention, emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, and embodied cognition, suggesting that monastic debate constitutes not only a traditional educational practice but a sophisticated method of mental training with broader relevance for philosophy, contemplative science, and theories of education.

Levett Room  
Wolfson  
College



4PM - 5 PM  
Friday 22<sup>nd</sup>  
May 2026

Speaker



Venerable Jampa Gyaltzen is a scholar monk in the Geluk tradition with over twenty years of rigorous training in Buddhist philosophy (Sera Jey Monastic University, Bylakuppe, India). Former Director of the Sera Jey Translation Department, he has led major Tibetan–English translation projects. He was also one of the participants in a Pāli–Sanskrit Exchange Programme at the Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Thailand. A recipient of the ACLS Fellowship and Translation Grant in Buddhist Studies (2025), he has written on Tibetan monastic debate, brain synchronisation, and the neuroscience of analytical meditation. His scholarly focus encompasses the five major treatises of Buddhist philosophy — Logic and Epistemology (*Pramāṇavārttika*), Middle Way Philosophy (*Madhyamaka*), Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*), Phenomenology (*Abhidharma*), and Monastic Discipline (*Vinaya*) — alongside interdisciplinary research at the intersection of Buddhist philosophy, cognitive science, and psychology.