



THE MIRROR

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The Dzogchen Community and the Continuation of the Teaching

Interview with Adriana Dal Borgo on Khaita
The Dzamling Gar Project Goes Ahead
Focus on Merigar West



Upcoming Events with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

Photo: P. Fassoli

Singapore
September 11–13, 2015
Singapore Retreat

Malaysia
September 18–20, 2015
Malaysian Retreat

China
Samtenling
September 25–29, 2015
Samtenling Retreat

October 2–6, 2015
Santi Maha Sangha
or Event To Be Announced

Japan
Kyoto
October 15–18, 2015
Japanese Retreat

Taiwan
October 23–27, 2015
Taiwan Retreat

Australia
November 3–8, 2015
Namgyalgar North Retreat

November 13–15, 2015
Namgyalgar South Retreat

Argentina
November 20–24, 2015
Tashigar South Retreat

November 25, 2015
Rinpoche travels to Tenerife, Spain

2015

UK
London,
Brunei Gallery, SOAS University
May 22, 2015
Presentation of the Tisei 'Odzer,
Light of Kailash Vol. III

The London Irish Centre
May 23–24, 2015
“Ati Evolution”

Greece
May 27–31, 2015
“Longsal Ati Lam-ngon”,
A Preliminary Practice of Longsal

France
Paris
Wednesday, June 3, 2015
Rinpoche will present the Light of
Kailash 3rd Volume

June 5–7, 2015
“Longsal Ati'i Lam-nad”, an
important point of the Ati Longsal

June 12–14, 2015
Karmaling Retreat

Italy
June 19–23, 2015
Merigar West Retreat

USA
July 1–5, 2015
Tsegyalgar East Retreat

Colorado
July 9, 2015
Public Talk
“Understanding the Three Vehicles:
Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen”

Naropa University
July 10–12, 2015
Colorado Retreat

Tara Mandala
July 17–19, 2015
Dzogchen Retreat

Russia
Kunsangar North
July 24–28, 2015 *latest update!*
Kunsangar North & South Retreats
to be unified at Kunsangar North

Poland
July 31–August 2, 2015
Polish Retreat

Romania
Merigar East
August 5–9, 2015 *change of dates!*
Merigar East Retreat

Italy
August 13–17, 2015 *new dates!*
Merigar West Retreat

India
August 28–30, 2015
Indian Retreat

Bhutan
September 4–6, 2015
Bhutan Retreat

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Editorial

The Mirror, in its various incarnations, has entered yet another phase in the last year. Our 'blog' www.melong.com has become rich and varied, therefore enabling us to provide news, updates and photo coverage from and to the entire International Dzogchen Community in a timely and more universally satisfying manner. Not only do we publish transcripts of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's recent teachings but we provide the Community with all the most important information regarding ongoing developments in the newly establishing IDCG and the Shang Shung Foundation, and also offer all the most current news from ASIA, and Communities all around the world, from China to Australia to Russia, from Dzamling Gar to Baja. Where else can the Community go to be informed about up to the minute retreats with Rinpoche, courses and retreats internationally? The Mirror staff around the globe is very happy to bring you all of this in a current, exciting and state of the art fashion!

At the beginning of 2015 we also posted on our website a full color PDF version of The Mirror that can be downloaded and read on all your electronic devices, as well as printed out in full color or black and white on a home printer or taken to a copy shop, according to each individual's wish, desire and pocketbook. The issue is the first in a series that will be regularly published four times a year. (A reminder: readers can print individual articles from the blog by clicking on the very small print icon on the bottom left of each article.)

We would also like to encourage Gars and Lings to take advantage of the PDF as a useful method of publicity, interfacing with the broader community and/or as something to be offered to members as a benefit to encourage membership. It could either be included in a membership fee for higher-level members or the Gars and Lings could print out a certain number and sell them to members at cost. This PDF is a very valuable resource for the Gars and Lings.

The Mirror is also very pleased to be able to present two foreign language websites, Zerkalo (Russian) at <http://ru.melong.com> and El Espejo (Spanish) at <http://es.melong.com> that are identical to the English version. Zerkalo also offers the same full color PDF version to Russian readers at the Zerkalo site with all the same options for printing. With great gratitude we thank the hard-working editors and technical people who work to make these versions possible.

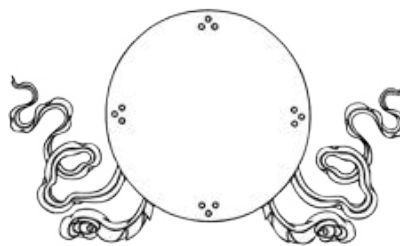
One other point we would like to remind readers of is our archive. We have an entire archive of every Mirror published from 1991 to date on the melong.com site. In the top bar you can go to Archive and find each issue. The reader also has the possibility to print these issues and to search for information of topics of interest. In order to perform a search, the reader must open the issue, make a search and then the information appears as highlighted within the document.

So as we enter the Wood Sheep year, we hope you will find The Mirror enriching your Community life.

Our good wishes!
The Mirror Staff

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The Dzogchen Community and the Continuation of the Teaching

Opening session of the Teacher Authorisations
at Dzamling Gar, Tenerife, January 30, 2015

We are starting [this session] with Ati Guruyoga because we are Dzogchen practitioners. Everybody in the Dzogchen Community starts with and follows [this]. That means that there is Dzogchen teaching and people who are interested participate. This is not only for this moment but must be forever, for all sentient beings, particularly human beings.

I have explained many times that Dzogchen teaching is the final essence of all existing teachings. It is not that I said this or invented it. This is stated in the first most important most ancient Dzogchen root tantra – the *Dra Thalgyur*. I have explained many times about the *Dra Thalgyur*. In the Nyingmapa tradition, in general, they explain nine vehicles but it always becomes a kind of analysis of the Buddhist tradition. In the *Dra Thalgyur* tantra there is not only the Buddhist tradition because in the nine vehicles the first is *jigten lhamii thegpa*, which is explained very clearly. *Jigten* means in our ordinary dimension or the world in which we are human. In our human dimension, there are many kinds of religions, non-religions, and philosophies that people think are real. When they believe they are real, that means that they must be the final goal. However, when we follow a teaching we can understand that this is not the final goal.

In our dimension, for example, there are many people who believe that there is nothing after death. People who know and believe that there is something that continues after death do not follow that idea. For that reason it is not the final goal. Even if someone believes that there is some continuation after death, how does it continue, how does it finish, what is the end?

Everything is always the knowledge of the related spiritual path because ordinary people have no capacity to go beyond that. We know that spiritual paths are taught by enlightened beings that know how the real condition is and communicated that. This is called a spiritual path. But there are many different levels. When we are learning, we divide it into nine vehicles, of which the final is Atiyoga. Atiyoga goes totally beyond our relative condition and

its limitation. It is the final goal for even something that is considered to be a high level. For that reason Dzogchen teaching is very important and we follow it.

But it is not sufficient that only we follow it, but also future generations. In a few years we will disappear from this earth, not one of us will remain, but future generations will continue. For that reason, it is very important that we keep and develop and continue this precious teaching and that is why we have the Dzogchen Community.

In English we say the 'Dzogchen Community' but in the language of Oddiyana we say 'Santi Maha Sangha'. What is Santi Maha Sangha? It means the Dzogchen Community, but it doesn't mean only a kind of organization of the Community. You know very well what Dzogchen is – Dzogchen means our real nature. What does it mean to do Dzogchen practice? We try to be in that state somehow. We apply it. People who are interested in that and follow can collaborate together. This is called *sangha*. *Sangha* means collaboration together on a spiritual path or it can also be in a relative condition. But in the relative condition, in our language, nobody uses [the word] *sangha*. *Sangha* really means that we are collaborating and putting together our effort.

When they learn Santi Maha Sangha, many people think that '*maha*' means 'total' or 'great' in Sanskrit, like Mahayana or Mahayoga, and that 'Maha Sangha' means 'great community', but it doesn't mean that. It is not in Sanskrit but in the original language of Oddiyana. In this language they used adjectives after the noun, like in Tibetan. In Sanskrit, in Western languages and in countries around Tibet they put the adjective before the noun. For example, when we say 'Mahayana' in Sanskrit, '*yana*' means vehicle and is the noun. '*Maha*' is the adjective, so 'Mahayana' means 'total', or 'big', or 'large vehicle'. In Tibetan when we translate this we say '*thegpa chenpo*': '*thegpa*' means 'vehicle', '*chenpo*' means 'great' or 'total'. In the same way we say '*Dzogpa Chenpo*'.



New authorized First Level Santi Maha Sangha instructors at Dzamling Gar February 4, 2015.

So we can understand the different way of using adjectives. It doesn't mean 'great' or 'total' Community. It means that the real nature of our state is 'total' or 'great'. This is Dzogchen. In Dzogchen we say everything is the self-perfected state from the beginning.

We need to keep, to develop, and to continue Dzogchen teaching. It doesn't mean that we keep and develop only Buddhist teaching. We should distinguish that. There are different aspects of the Buddhist teachings – Sutra, Hinayana, Mahayana – and of course we do not refuse any of this. Everything is integrated. We have knowledge of Dzogchen and we integrate everything in the state of Dzogchen. We are not integrating knowledge of Dzogchen in Hinayana. That is impossible because when there is a lower state or level, they remain in that limitation and do not want to know other things so there is no way to integrate. But if someone is on a higher path and understands the essence, if it is necessary, they can apply [it]. For that reason, in the Dzogchen teachings, there are no limitations. When we have knowledge of Dzogchen we can use any kind of method and then we can integrate everything.

When we are in the Dzogchen Community, it is very important that we have that knowledge. When we talk about the Dzogchen Community many people think that it is only a type of organization. But we don't need just an organization because there are already enough on this globe. When we have knowledge of Dzogchen and there are people who are interested in being that way then there is possibility to collaborate and this is how we make a *sangha*.

When we learn Dzogchen we should remember that the most important thing is being in the state of Dzogchen. After that, the next most important thing is being present. When we are present we know how to work with circumstances: circumstances mean where we are, in this circumstance, in this condition, and then we work with that. The Dzogchen Community should go ahead like this, not just like an organization. If we think that the Dzogchen Community is only an organization then it is better

that we throw it away because then it only creates problems. We must understand what our direction is and try to go in that direction in a different way.

If we belong to the Dzogchen Community, we should understand what the Dzogchen Community means and we should be perfect members. When we consider ourselves members, it is very relative to only be a member of the organization. But the Dzogchen Community doesn't mean that. It means that people try to have knowledge of Dzogchen and to be in that state. For that purpose we are studying, learning and developing everything.

For example, in the Dzogchen Community, studying Vajra Dance, Yantra Yoga, Santi Maha Sangha, doing different kinds of retreats, everything is concentrated on one point – being in the knowledge of Dzogchen. So it is very important to know what our direction is. If we go to a big city to find someone, we need a precise address or we won't find that person. When we are in infinite *samsara* and choose the path of Dzogchen, we should know what our direction is, our final goal, where we need to arrive. When we become Dzogchen practitioners, we have that responsibility.

There are so many sentient beings in our *samsara*. If we only consider humans beings, how many of them are interested in the Buddha's teaching? Very few. That means they don't have the knowledge that the Buddha taught. They only believe what they see and hear and what they think relatively. What kind of direction do they have? We can understand that clearly. But when we follow the Buddha's teaching, for example, there are many different kinds of methods, knowledge, and teachings. However, that doesn't mean that Buddha invented many different types of teachings. Teaching is for students, for people who are interested, and among people there are many different kinds of conditions or capacities. Each of us belongs to one of these groups and for this reason sometimes we are interested in this teaching or that teaching. But gradually we follow and learn and discover more and more.

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First and Second Level Yantra Yoga Instructors with Laura Evangelisti and Fabio Andrico.

I'll give you a simple example. Some people like the Green Tara practice and ask me to teach the *puja* of the mandala offering because it seems like a nice practice. When I was in college, we did this *puja* every morning even though we had a lot to study. But in the real sense, this practice is in the yoga tantra system. When you know the difference between the Yoga tantra system, higher tantra, Anuyoga and Atiyoga, you should think about not remaining or limiting [yourself] in Yoga tantra. You should go to the higher tantra, or Anuyoga or Atiyoga because the final goal of following teaching is having realization. In Yoga tantra, if you work well with these methods throughout your life, you can have total realization in 16 lifetimes. That is a long time, and we are not talking about infinite *kālpas* but birth and life 16 times. When you go to a higher tantra such as Anuyoga, they say that if you practice well that you can have realization in a lifetime. So there is a big difference.

Our aim is to have realization. Since there are some methods for having realization in this lifetime I chose this teaching rather than one for having it in 16 lifetimes. That is very easy to understand. It is just like saying that we want to visit Mt. Kailash – this year, the year of the Horse, unifies all sacred places and their potentiality is at Kailash. How we go there depends on our condition. If we have enough money we can get a plane ticket to India and reach there more quickly. If we don't have that possibility we won't be able to travel by plane. We should work concretely with circumstances and perhaps we can go by car, or by bicycle, or walking. If we walk, we won't get to Kailash this year but it is better to walk than not doing anything.

These examples are very similar to the way we follow different kinds of teachings. This is the reason we know that Dzogchen teaching is the most supreme for having realization more quickly. And not only that. If we are going to learn deeply knowledge of Dzogchen, not only for quicker realization, but also before we are realized, we have to live in this human condition in these circumstances. If you have knowledge of Dzogchen, it helps very much for living in a relaxed way in this lifetime.

In the Dzogchen teaching it is explained from the beginning what the root of problems is. The root of problems is our limita-

tions. When we discover how to work with that and how we can overcome these problems, this is very important in our relative condition, for living in our society. So you see having total realization is very important to but also living in dualistic vision.

In the Dzogchen teaching there are many methods and the essence of the teaching is good for us to apply and understand. For example, someone may say that there is a teaching that has benefit for you but you should become monks and nuns and renounce your ordinary life – some people like this. But teaching is for all sentient beings, especially human beings. How can all the citizens of a country become monks and nuns? If we all become monks and nuns, what will we eat if nobody is producing any food? That is an example. We should think about things in a more normal way.

Also, just like in Vajrayana style, we could say that there are very important methods that should be applied for seven years in retreat, or that you need to live in the mountains and make sacrifices just like Milarepa. Somebody may like this type of thing but how can everybody do this? They don't have the possibility.

Dzogchen teaching doesn't teach that way. It teaches us to try to be in the state of contemplation, starting by being in the state of Guruyoga – not only Guruyoga but also different kinds of methods – but always directing us towards being in the state of contemplation. When we are not in the state of contemplation, we should know that we are in time and space and should be present. We work with circumstances, which means that we have many different relative conditions. Dzogchen teaching doesn't ask us to change or abandon anything. If you have heard from some Dzogchen teachers that you should change your condition, that you cannot live this way, instead of changing your life you should change your teacher. It is much better because you cannot have any benefit.

In the teaching it is very important that we should work with circumstances and be aware of them. When we develop this way, being present, working with circumstances, our life becomes practice. The Dzogchen teaching introduces us to that, directly or indirectly, and our life becomes practice. When we have that condition, sooner or later we will have realization, there is no doubt about



Newly Authorized First and Second Level Vajra Dance Instructors with Adriana Dal Borgo and Prima Mai.

that. Otherwise if we are always distracted, always accumulating negativities, how can we have total realization? Sometimes a person may say that they are practicing, doing a personal retreat, trying to do meditation, visualization, purification for several hours in a *tun lof* practice. But even if we do five hours a day, there are 24 hours in a day so how many of them are we distracted? How can we have realization?

For that reason it is very important that we should understand the value and the knowledge of the Dzogchen teachings – they are something very particular. If we only learn something in a traditional way – how to do the practice etc. – even though it has the title ‘Dzogchen’ we cannot learn or discover what Dzogchen really is. I have that knowledge, I am transmitting it to my students and we are working together. This is something very important that we continue on this globe. Even when we disappear, our teaching, knowledge, what we did will continue for centuries and centuries. For this reason I prepared the Santi Maha Sangha. I also teach Vajra Dance and Yantra Yoga – you know how important they are – whose final goal is also being in the state of contemplation. This is the principle of the Santi Maha Sangha. So it is very important that you know this and take care of the Santi Maha Sangha.

When I started Santi Maha Sangha many people didn't know what it meant. But now we are no longer children, we have grown up, and we already have many SMS Base teachers who have not only done the exam but have some experience, giving lessons and communicating with people. So people who are interested in this experience may want to become Santi Maha Sangha teachers.

Some people have the idea to teach, but if you only like to teach, teach something else, not Santi Maha Sangha in the Dzogchen Community. It isn't necessary. If you want to become a Santi Maha Sangha teacher, it means that you want to integrate your body speech and mind into Santi Maha Sangha. If you know that and then you try to do it, then there will not be problems. It is very important to know this, not only to become a kind of teacher.

Some people say that they are teachers and have a great deal of communication with many people. It is good if you have a lot of communication, but the aim of a Santi Maha Sangha teacher in the

Dzogchen Community is not that. It is sufficient if you communicate with only five people. If you communicate with hundreds of people that is also fine, however, the important thing is that you are integrated into the Santi Maha Sangha and you communicate that to other students and they learn.

Becoming a Santi Maha Sangha teacher doesn't mean that you are only doing an examination. When we do an exam many people consider that it is like doing a university exam. But knowing the principle, learning Dzogchen teaching is not intellectual. Intellectual knowledge for explaining, for speaking, etc., is relative. We should remember what our existence is – first we have our physical body, then our energy level and then mind. Also when we explain the principles of the real nature of the state of Dzogchen, we say essence, nature and energy, which are relatively connected with body, speech and mind. When we become Santi Maha Sangha teachers, we have our three existences. Our energy level or speech level alone is not sufficient, so we only know how to talk. First of all we have our physical body. If you are a Santi Maha Sangha teacher, you must become an example for your students and they learn from you. What do they learn? Your knowledge of body, speech and mind. But you don't only explain what people should or should not do with the body. In Dzogchen, we don't have this kind of teaching. When you are with your students, how do you appear? How do you work with people? People learn that. In this case you need to be careful.

I'm not saying that we can't make mistakes. We can make many mistakes. When I explain *samaya*, commitment, we cannot say that we don't do wrong things that don't correspond with our commitments. We can make many mistakes, but this is not a problem because even if we make many mistakes, the second most important thing in the Dzogchen teaching is being present. If we are present, then if we have made some mistakes we can understand after a few minutes or half an hour. It is impossible we don't know if we have done something wrong. So we correct them and try to do our best. If we have done something wrong with our physical body, we try to correct it. If, for example, we have done something wrong to a

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person, we apologize because we are practitioners and it was not correct. Then tensions never develop. We can make many different kinds of mistakes but we should always be present.

It is the same thing with our voice. When we talk, sometimes we are distracted and say things that are not nice. Then later we feel sorry that we said something bad. That means we are present and noticed. When we notice this we can apologize to the person for making a mistake. If we don't communicate with this person, they remember that and maintain a kind of tension. When we communicate and explain there is no root of tensions that can develop.

It is more difficult [working with] our mind which is always judging and thinking. In this case we must be like a mirror. If there is a mirror in front of us we can see what we are doing. We can also notice what we are thinking. So it is very important that we observe our body, speech, and mind so that they become more normal in a perfect way. Sometimes we ask ourselves which way is perfect. We are not following a kind of rule that says that something is a perfect way. It depends on circumstances. We should work with what people believe, the way they see things. Remember that after being present the most important thing is working with circumstances.

So we try to become perfect in Santi Maha Sangha with our body, speech and mind. It is not enough just doing an examination. The exam is [based on] the book that I prepared because I know very well that to learn Dzogchen teaching, to have some background and to go ahead, it is important that we know all the principles of all the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana.

We are not studying like in college. For example, at my college, there were thirteen different important texts belonging to different aspects. At the end of our studies we had an exam on the essence of all these texts. Some of the texts we studied repeatedly over five or six years. This is an example of the system of study at college. But I know very well that we can't do that in the Dzogchen Community.

Particularly in order to study all the important background of the Buddhist tradition, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and Vajrayana etc., we don't even have any books in Western languages, so it is impossible for us to do something like that. For that reason I studied and saw the most indispensable topics, taking quotations from many books, and put together the essence in one book so that people can understand. This is the base of the Santi Maha Sangha and is called "The Precious Vase". It took me two years to prepare this book working very hard. It was not so easy even for me. Then at the end when we had done everything in a very precise way, we tried to translate it in a perfect way. Then we started studying the Santi Maha Sangha base and doing the exam.

I'm not asking you to read this book or that book because it's impossible. But after you have studied this book "*Rinchen Bumzang*", I want to know if you have really learned everything or not. If you find some difficulty with the names in Tibetan or Sanskrit – because Westerners sometimes find this difficult – it is not a problem. For example, not only Westerners but also me – even though I have lived for many years in the Western world, when I need to remember the names of some Western scholars, it is still very difficult for me to remember them, while if the name is Tibetan, I just read it once or twice and remember it. That is an example because

Westerners have this type of problem. But even if you don't remember the names, you should remember what that person said, what the topic is. It is more important that we know the topic very precisely and what the person said.

When we do the exam, I ask you a question. In this question, you need to reply very precisely from this book, "The Precious Vase". If you reply differently, only using a little of your knowledge of Buddhist philosophy, it has no value because I ask very precise questions and you should give very precise replies. This is what we need because we are not examining your body, speech and mind. We cannot do that. We believe that you have that kind of perfection because you have come here [for the exam], you have already made sacrifices, firstly by studying Santi Maha Sangha, secondly by travelling here. These things show that you are interested. Of course for that reason we think that there is connection with your body, speech and mind that is manifesting.

But then you become a teacher. What do you teach? You do not teach what you followed at Namkhai Norbu's retreats. Some people say that at Namkhai Norbu's retreats on, for example, Atiyoga, Namkhai Norbu taught this and explained that. I am not asking you to teach those things to your students. You are becoming a teacher of the Base of Santi Maha Sangha.

If you want to teach something else, something related with my teaching, and you have received it, if you seriously want to teach that, first you should examine yourself to see if you have integrated that knowledge in yourself or not. If you are certain that you have integrated it, then you ask me if you can teach this or not. When you ask me if you can teach this or not, this means I understand that you are certain that you are integrated in this knowledge, otherwise you wouldn't ask me. I am saying this very clearly.

So in this case who are these people? What have they done? Are they already Santi Maha Sangha teachers? How long have they been teaching? Do they have many students etc.? In general I am in contact with these people. When people say that a teacher gave this teaching and it was very good and beneficial then I know that this person has integrated their body speech and mind in a correct way and manifested it. If I receive some information that something does not correspond in their aspects of body speech and mind, even though that person may ask me if they can teach something, then I have to think a little because Dzogchen teaching is very important. For the future we should continue that way so people who are teaching really have that responsibility.

For example, when I started to teach, I didn't have that idea very much. But then after years and years it became very clear and I felt more and more responsible for the teaching. After teaching I had to continue being present, and protect the transmission and teaching. This is my responsibility. For that reason we are going to do Santi Maha Sangha in a very precise way and it is important that everyone knows this. ❀

Transcribed and edited by L. Granger



Words on Generosity

February 18, 2015, Dzamling Gar

In the Western world we are organizing retreats and teachings and everybody participates. There is an entry ticket and people should pay. The reason is that when you invite a teacher and you are organizing a place and everything, it is expensive and you need to have money, otherwise it cannot be done. But when we think a little of ancient times and how it started, there is a possibility that we can go in that same way. The teachings are for people who are interested, not only for people who have money. We know that and we should generously help other people to have the possibility to participate. For that reason I wrote an article (see <http://melong.com/?p=1580>) on how to go ahead and organize the teachings. After I wrote that article, we started not asking people to pay. But there are always people who invite the teacher and organize; this activity is called *jindag* (*sbyin bdag*).

Jin (*sbyin*) means offering and *dag* (*bdag*) means people who apply that action. So in this case it is necessary to have some people who participate. When I am asking that we do this, our Gakyil people become worried. Of course they are wondering how we can maintain everything because the Dzogchen Community does not have a bank. In this case we should somehow work with generosity. People should understand that. When you think, "Oh, we don't need to pay for this retreat." You don't need to pay but you must think a little. The Dzogchen Community is participating and preparing everything. Where is the money of Dzogchen Community coming from? The Dzogchen Community needs to maintain many projects, etc. People who have a little money should remember this principle, and become either fully *jindag* or half *jindag* or small *jindag*, or very tiny *jindag*; you can be any of these.

You remember when we are learning the Six Paramitas in the Buddhist teachings, the first paramita is *jinpa*; offering and giving is very important for accumulating merits. Everybody needs merits. For that reason, at least when we are organizing a *Ganapuja*, you should remember that the *Ganapuja* is also for accumulating merits. You should offer something to create the possibility for your fortune and increasing these kinds of possibilities. It is much better to offer in a *Ganapuja*, for example, than to keep money and not spend it. You can have much more possibility for increasing wealth. Sometimes people think they have not much money for offering, this is our individual condition, but when we are explaining the paramita of the *jinpa*, it says *gyamtso chuthig*, which means if you have only a drop you are throwing in the water, until the ocean is dry still there is this continuation. Even if it is very small it does not matter, but you are presenting and you participate. This is very important.



Photo by Lilly Kollnberger

So we are trying to learn a little about this possibility and go ahead. In this case everyone should have a little awareness of that, not only that I know that. Personally I do my best, I did and I still do that. I know that it is very important, also for having more money. Yesterday when we ate the divination soup I received lentils, which means money will come. You see we are here now, like gypsies in a tent. Dzamling Gar must not be that way. Slowly we will build a very nice Gonpa and finish all of Dzamling Gar in a perfect way corresponding perfectly to a real paradise; not only that we have the address of paradise [Playa Paraisol]. For that reason we need money to develop. When we are dancing, we are dancing Dzamling Gar. We say, "All Dzogchen Community unify and collaborate" and we do our best.

You should remember that. This is very important. Our life is very short but even if we have a short life, we try and do our best for the future generations. Ok, now you enjoy your food and drinks. Thank you very much. ❀

Transcribed by N. Zeitz

Edited by N. Zeitz with the kind assistance of A. Clemente



Protecting Culture

The IsMEO and the Iia, with its precious African texts, were united within the IsIAO

The Italian-Tibetan treasure that is facing extinction

Books, maps, manuscripts, photos: the patrimony accumulated by a great scholar risks being dispersed with the liquidation of the Institute for Africa and the East. But it may have a future in the Apuan Alps

Ruggiero Corcella

The following article was originally published in Italian on February 13, 2015 in 'Sette', the weekly magazine of the Italian newspaper 'Corriere della Sera'. The English translation is published with kind permission of the author.

A brass plaque attacked by rust next to the main entrance in 16 Via Aldrovandi, in the Pinciano district in Rome. Beyond the entrance human figures carved on stone blocks stand as mute sentinels of the past and a chain closes what was once the gateway for the public. Occasionally, the hoarse yawn of a lion from the nearby zoo of Villa Borghese evokes an exotic atmosphere and breaks the silence of the empty rooms, the sadness of the peeling walls, the decay of the plaster: here "lies" the glorious Italian Institute for Africa and the East (IsIAO), heir to a dual tradition of study and research on Asia and Africa. The Italian Institute for Africa and the East was born in 1995 from the union of IsMEO (Italian Institute for Middle and the Far East), founded in 1933 by Giovanni Gentile and the great Orientalist Giuseppe Tucci, with the Istituto Italo-African (Iia). Twenty years later, the Institute is playing perhaps its last and most important game: save from oblivion the immense patrimony of history and culture that after being subject to compulsory liquidation in 2012 - the equivalent of bankruptcy for public institutions - is likely to remain buried forever in the darkness of a ministerial storehouse. We speak of a treasure of more than two hundred thousand volumes, two thousand five hundred periodicals of which five hun-



Historical photo of Lhasa, Ambassador Antonio Armellini, Entrance to the IsIAO in via Aldrovandi in Rome.

dred current, rare and valuable collections with manuscripts, xylographical material, antique editions, maps, photographic collections of inestimable value, such as the half a million photos on "Italian" Africa. Under the visionary eye of Giuseppe

Tucci, the ascetic expression of Mahatma Gandhi and the poet Tagore (Tucci met both when, from 1925 to 1930, he taught Italian language art and literature in India), immortalized in gigantic photos on the walls of the library, the thousands of texts of the IsIAO are neatly lined up. The most valuable part is kept in the "holy of holies", a room filled with armored cabinets. On the right, the Eastern collection. On the left, the African.

Refined knowledge

Scrolling along the spines of the volumes brings a shiver: reports of archaeological and geographic expeditions, military maps and, at the bottom, the red boxes containing ancient pages in Sanskrit. It is important to talk about the situation of the IsIAO, as further proof of a country that has once again forgotten its past and is self-defeating in its almost scientific inability to retain and promote art and culture.

In the background, the destiny of the controversial figure of Giuseppe Tucci, much discussed for his adherence to fascism but recognized by the international scientific community as the greatest Tibetologist in the world, is intertwined with that of the master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, founder of Merigar, the first lay Dzogchen Buddhist community in Italy and in the world, located in a valley in the municipality of Arcidosso, in the province of Grosseto, known as "little Tibet". Norbu,

now 77 years old, taught Tibetan and Mongolian Language and Literature for thirty years at the Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale in Naples, on the invitation of Giuseppe Tucci. The two had met in Sikkim, where Namkhai found himself in 1960 without the possibility to return home because of the Chinese revolution. The Buddhist master followed Tucci first to Rome and then to Naples, becoming a close associate, and also taking Italian citizenship. At Merigar, Norbu also founded the Shang Shung Foundation of Tibetan Studies, with its 4000 manuscripts on rice paper, and treasure chest of Dzogchen wisdom, which today have been digitized to preserve them for the future. This old friendship and also a feeling of gratitude led him to make a proposal, shared by Jacopo Marini, mayor of Arcidosso, and the mayors of the other seven municipalities of Amiata, that would make facilities and funds available.

A 5 million deficit

"It would be a disaster if the patrimony of texts and artifacts acquired by IsMEO since 1933 were dispersed," explains the master Namkhai Norbu. "I offer to promote the establishment of a new non-profit organization in which we can bring together my library, archive and collection of artifacts and those of the former IsMEO-IsIAO. That body could reasonably be called the Giuseppe Tucci-Namkhai Norbu Foundation and the whole collection could be made freely available to researchers and scholars around the world for consultation."

Lost treasures, rediscovered treasures, treasures in danger and treasures to save. The mission of Ambassador Antonio Armellini, the liquidator appointed by the

Financially unviable public body, the Institute had ended up on the list of so-called unnecessary organizations to close down since 2008. The decision, in fact, had only been postponed. When in November 2011 foreign ministers Franco Frattini and Giulio Tremonti signed the decree of compulsory administrative liquidation there were screams of a plot and “death by strangulation” because public funding had increasingly diminished (in 2010 contributions

The current situation finds the ISIAO in debt to nearly 400 creditors, including banks, staff, the municipality of Rome and

little Tibet. ©

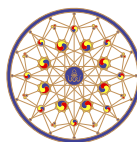


The famous Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci in 1937 on the Conte Rosso in the Manila Sea. Photo of one of Giuseppe Tucci's expeditions in Tibet.



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a host of suppliers. The branch offices in Milan, Ravenna and Fano have been closed, debts have been collected and whatever possible has been liquidated. "The assets of the Institute are basically three," lists Armellini. "The collection of the Oriental Museum, that is the Tucci Trust, which is ours, is entrusted on deposit to the National Museum of Oriental Art; we have reorganized the Archives and joined them to the library which was not even subject to restrictions. Then there is the African Museum, the various pieces of which we

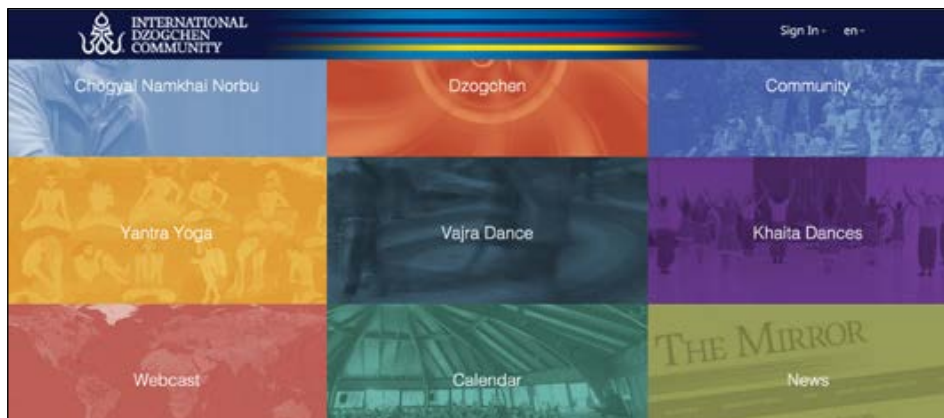


Dzogchen Portal: New IDC Website and New Webcast Site

We have a new website for the public and private faces of the International Dzogchen Community. It is a central place with a short and easily searchable address, dzogchen.net from which all our news and services can easily be reached. We invite everyone to register and start using it.

It is a work in progress and there will always be more to do, and that is its strength! We will let you know through the Mirror and norbunet when new functionality is added.

On the home page there is a button in the top right to register or log in. This is where you can register and record your membership personal information, pay your membership and consult your membership history. This depends on your Gar or Ling having uploaded all their membership records to the site. If you have registered but don't see your past history, please contact the Gakyil of the community where you have paid and ask them to register the payments on the site.



Also on the home page there are 9 coloured tiles.

Click on the Webcast tile, and you will go straight to our new IDC webcast site, including live webcast, log in, replay, files and other info. You can now use your dzogchen.netlogin and password to access closed webcast and replay as long as you have your current membership paid and registered in dzogchen.net. You can always check your membership on the Membership page after you have logged in. Old style webcast usernames and passwords will continue to work until the end of this year.

Click on Calendar, and you will go straight to Rinpoche's schedule in the Mirror.

Click on News and you will go straight to the Mirror front page.

Click on Community and you will find an interactive map; if a gakyil added information about its Gar or Ling and set the map location, you can see it on the map and also navigate to it using the country list.

We will still be using www.dzogchencommunity.org for internal communications especially useful for Gakyil members, but in due course this will also be accessed via the new site.

As always, your feedback to blue@dzogchencommunity.org is welcomed! ©



We are Happy to Announce the Birth of the Shang Shung Foundation

On the 13th of January 2015, the Shang Shung Foundation, International Institute for Tibetan Culture (in short Shang Shung Foundation) has been established in Italy. The Foundation will perpetuate the mission and continue the activities of the previous Cultural Association,

The International Shang Shung Institute for Tibetan Studies, which will be liquidated towards the end of summer.

Who are the Founding Members?

The Founding Members of the Shang Shung Foundation are Rinpoche, his wife

Rosa, the International Dzogchen Community and the Dzogchen Community of Merigar. The mission of the Foundation is established by its founding members, who are also those who provide the initial financial capital endowment that allows the Foundation to start operating. The Council of

the Founders is also responsible for all the vital aspects of the Foundation (its birth, termination or changes to the statute) and for the election of the President, the Board of Directors and Auditors. In the case of physical persons (Rinpoche and Rosa) the Founding members remain in charge for their entire life and have the possibility to nominate a successor. The other Founding members (IDC and Merigar) are represented by their legal representatives who will change each time according to the internal norms of the respective organizations, thus perpetuating their role within the Foundation.

Members of the Board

The current members of the Board of Directors are Enrico Dell'Angelo (President), Yuchen Namkhai, Julia Lawless and Kirill Shilov. The choice has been made in order to build a board with the necessary competences and experience (all of the members have already years of commitment to the Institute in its different branches) and to build the required synergies that can develop and support the momentum of the Foundation international goals. The Directors remain in charge for 5 years and can be reconfirmed one more time only, for the same period. They are responsible for the ordinary and extraordinary administration of the Foundation, except for the vital aspects which can only be decreed by the Council of the Founders (see above). Thus, they look after the definition of programmes and objectives in line with the mission, the financial administration, the hiring of human resources for the management and ongoing operations of the Foundation, the establishment of committees that can assist the Foundation in its several activities, the Foundation regulations and the overall supervision of its good up keeping and direction.

Key aspects of the juridical profile and statute

Whilst in an Association the vital aspects of the institution are entrusted to the Assembly of the Members, in the Foundation these fall under the sole responsibility and decree of the Council of the Founders. Both are non profit types of organizations but in simple terms it is generally explained that whilst an Association is mainly concerned with representing and benefitting the specific vision and interests of the associates or members, a Foundation embodies the vision of the Founder/s to benefit

the general public. Foundations are institutions that receive in some respects more public support and may be facilitated in the arena of public relations, financial regulations and internal administration. The intention stated in the statute of The Shang Shung Foundation is that of transforming its status into a European Foundation, as soon as this juridical form is approved and established by the European Parliament. This will allow all the different European branches of the Institute to be reunited under a single institution. In the meantime the Foundation will work to gradually establish regulations and guidelines that can ease the consolidation and integration of the Institute's international activities and prepare the grounds for an effective transformation into a single body.

Programmes of the Foundation

The Foundation aims at promoting activities of study, research, documentation and education that can contribute to ensure the development of Tibetan culture and the continuity of its traditions (and in general of those of cultural minorities) and which can be useful in supporting the Tibetan communities in the process of adaptation of their ways of living while facing the challenges of the contemporary world.

More specifically the Foundation's purpose is to promote, in collaboration with custodians of Tibetan traditions, experts, scholars, artists, academic institutions and civil society organizations, programmes and initiatives aimed at supporting the language, the traditional knowledge and the preservation of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage and to facilitate at the same time the international appreciation of Tibetan culture's contribution to the world cultural heritage and human enrichment, so as to contribute to the fundamental processes of comprehension and integration amongst different peoples and cultures.

The Foundation is moved by scientific, cultural, humanitarian and social solidarity purposes, basing its work on the principle of cooperation and on the comprehension that scientific and cultural exchanges represent an important mean to enhance reciprocal understanding amongst peoples and nations.

The programmes guidelines for the start of the activities of the Foundation in 2015 are based upon the following primary areas:

- Education, public awareness and cultural integration
- Preservation and accessibility
- Publishing activities
- Activities related and complementary to the institutional goals.

How to sustain the Foundation

The Founders have contributed to the establishment of the Foundation with an initial fund of €50,000. This is the minimum starting capital for a Foundation as required by the Italian authorities but of course it is just an initial asset that requires the contribution and participation of all to make sure the Foundation can develop and be effective in its goals.

The Foundation is mainly sustained through two forms of financial income:

- Income from institutional activities and commercial activities aimed at supporting the institutional goals (income mainly from Publishing activities)
- Donations and contributions paid by natural persons, public and private entities, for the development of activities, exercised in compliance with institutional objectives

This means that every time you buy a book published by the Shang Shung Publications, attend a course organized by the Foundation or make a donation you are directly supporting also all the programmes and activities that are in the institutional agenda and which do not have a direct revenue. In this way you actually contribute directly to the mission stated by the Founders.

More questions?

If you have more questions or would like to participate to the life of the new Foundation, write to info@shangshunginstitute.org. ©

Tibetan Medicine Practice in Kunsangar North

Not long ago, on 25 January 2015, the first Russian students of the Tibetan Medicine School under the guidance of Dr. Phuntsog took their fourth semester examination. The last semester was marked by a special event – guided by an experienced pharmacologist the students prepared a unique Tibetan medicine called Basam Menmar.

Dr. Rigdzin Dorje, one of the best pharmacologists from Amdo, Tibet, came to Russia especially for this occasion. Together with Dr. Phuntsog they led a practical course dedicated to a staged process of preparation of this medicine over four days. The doctors are very satisfied with the result – Basam Menmar of a very high quality!

In Tibet doctors who know the recipe prepare this medicine every winter. They say this composition is incredibly useful in wintertime for the recovery of body strength and increasing sexual vigor. It's also very good for old and thin people. It is nutritious and has warming quality. It restores Dang (subtle substance) and, being Chudlen, it prolongs life and youth. There is a reason why Dr. Phuntsog chose this composition. It is very good for the Russian cold climate, which is similar to the Tibetan, and considers health problems that are particular to people here. As the doctor says, based on her experience of working with patients in Russia, many of them have different disorders of a cold nature, problems with kidneys, digestion and reproductive system. In winter all these problems intensify. For this reason Basam Menmar is usually prepared and taken in winter.

The composition of the pills is based on melted butter, honey and molasses made from specially prepared roots and fruit. It's one of the most complicated and integrated compositions of Tibetan Medicine. This was an important and joyful moment for the Tibetan Medicine school in Russia. For the first time we made medicine with our hands, which is also quite difficult to prepare and is extremely useful.

In addition we would like to say that by now many people have already experienced the positive effects of taking this medicine.



To learn more about this medicine or order it from the SSI Russia, please contact Vladimir Belyaev v.belyaev@shangshunginstitute.ru.

To learn more about the Traditional Tibetan Medicine school of Shang Shung Institute Russia and enrollment for the course in 2015 please visit www.tibetanmedicineschool.ru/ ©

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Adopt Tibet The Experience of Long Distance Parents

Severina finally hugs
Tsering Palmo

Severina Bortolotti

For several years I have been participating in ASIA's project for distance support of Tibetan girls who live and study at the Sambhota Tibetan School in Chauntra in the Mandi district, Himachal Pradesh, India. I got some friends to share my experience and together we decided to organize a trip to take us to meet the Tibetan refugee community in Northern India.

I got in touch with the ASIA association where Roberta gave us the name of Mr. Gyalpo, a teacher at the school in Chauntra, as a reference. Following an exchange of emails with Mr. Gyalpo it was possible to organize our arrival and our two day stay in Chauntra. His assistance was invaluable as it provided us with explanations and useful information both about the school and about Tsering Palmo, the girl that I have been supporting for several years. Unfortunately, due to personal commitments that arose at the last moment, we were not able to meet Mr. Gyalpo, but before our arrival he instructed his colleague, Mr. Kunga Nyandak, to welcome us. I would like to thank him for the help he gave us anyway.

November 4, 2014: We arrived at the school in the afternoon around 4pm, when the lessons were finished. We were welcomed at the office of the School Board by Mr. Kunga Nyandak and the Director Mr. Bhutuk Shastri who called for Tsering Palmo to come and meet us. The moment was exciting, in spite of our difficulty understanding the language, even if we had some "school" English for everything!

Together with Tsering Palmo and the teacher we visited the classroom, the teach-



Severina (second from left) with Tsering Palmo.

ers' room and the room shared by Tsering with 13 other girls. We were struck by the essential spartanness of these rooms, and positively surprised by the serenity with which the young people live this reality so distant from our living standards.

We delivered teaching materials that the group had taken care to bring from Italy (notebooks, pens, pencils, pencil sharpeners, markers, crayons, folders, erasers, sketchbook, backpacks with additional educational materials) to the Manager of the School and some personal presents to Tsering Palmo. We also met one of the younger brothers of Tsering who is a guest at the same school.

November 5, 2014: During the morning we were accompanied by Mr Kunga to visit the special classrooms (science, chemistry, history and geography, mathematics, a library that was reasonably furnished, a large communal hall that doubles as a cafeteria) and Tsering Palmo's classroom. We met some teachers including a Canadian volunteer teacher who was giving a lesson in chemistry-physics on magnetism.

Unfortunately we were not allowed to spend all the time that we wanted with the girl because it was explained to us that the time devoted to study and lessons has priority over everything. We then respected these decisions and said farewell to her.

For the whole group the experience was interesting and positive, full of strong emotions, shared by Tsering Palmo and all school staff. We found that the organization of the school and the fundamentals provided to students there have many things in common with our school world, albeit with very limited availability. We were also able to appreciate a particular attention to the care of the body and a healthy diet.

You can make your long distance sponsorship, visit www.adopttibtet.org or write to Roberta: adozioni@ASIA-onlus.org ©

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Promoting Harmony Through Singing and Dancing

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Replies to Some Questions About Khaita Joyful Dances

July 3, 2014

Adriana Dal Borgo: Maestro, you once said, "Khaita is our own melody", in the sense that it is linked to our inner and our secret sound?
Chögyal Namkhai Norbu: Everything is connected because we live on the material (level). Then from the secret (level) the inner arises and from the inner the outer arises, and all of this is connected. In fact, to bring about harmony in the physical body we also have to get to the material (level). Khaita, and then?

Adriana: It's more that I'm trying to figure out how to explain ...

ChNN: We can say it in a simpler way. For example, in the teaching we also consider that the real condition is always emptiness. We can say this. But how does this emptiness manifest its own energy? It manifests through sound. Today even the scientists are talking about it.

And how does sound manifest? There is inner sound, outer sound and secret sound. Secret sound means that it is connected to the nature of emptiness, since (everything) arises from emptiness, which is the origin.

To understand this normally we have to have the capacity to be in our real condition, otherwise we can not discover it.

From there inner sound arises. Inner sound means that even if our energy is linked to our physical body, we discover it through the experience of the energy of our physical body. It is not the sound that we hear with the ear. Outer sound is linked to a pleasant or unpleasant or neutral sound, all the sounds that we usually hear and that are produced by the material (level).

All of this is very important to harmonize our condition. To harmonize our energy we have to have knowledge of this very principle of our nature, otherwise we cannot harmonize.

We can say it like this, it's simple, isn't it?



An Interview with Adriana Dal Borgo

at Dzamling Gar,
February 11, 2015

The Mirror: Can you talk a little about the origin of Khaita?

Adriana: In November 2011 at Meriling, in the north of Tenerife, Rinpoche discovered on Youtube a lot of very courageous songs sung and written by young Tibetan artists living in China or Tibet.

One song in particular called 'Denba', meaning 'the truth' (n. 5.10 in the collection 'Message of Tibet'), expresses the heart of their message in a very poetic way [the words to 'Denba' are published at the end of the interview].

So Rinpoche started to write down some of the songs, copying the words one by one from each video, and listening to many songs to choose those more suitable to his purposes. The small group of us who were present in these fortunate circumstances tried to follow Rinpoche's singing, but none of us knew Tibetan so we just had to hum!

In order to make the songs more accessible to all of us, Rinpoche decided to transcribe them with the system of *drayig* so we could follow the words and sing with him, after he had explained the meaning of each. And this is how it all started.

You can imagine the enormous amount of work involved in writing down not only the texts of the songs but also the pauses, indicating with symbols the melody

and when some vowels of the words were longer, even the vocalisms, both in Tibetan and in *drayig!* From that moment on, most of the Master's daily routine was dedicated to this.

The house was non-stop music, from the very early morning when the Master would wake up and start working, listening and transcribing the songs until late evening when we would sing. During the few hours of sleep, those melodies would continuously resonate in my mind. It was a strong experience.

When Rinpoche left Tenerife in December 2011, 42 songs were ready to be studied and sung. A couple of months later in February 2012, at Tashigar South, Rinpoche presented the first collection of 60 songs, divided into six groups of 10 songs each.

At the same moment dances started to accompany the singing as it came very naturally to me to start to move. At first we did the simplest dances. At least now it looks like this but not at that time when it took some hours for Luda and me to figure out one of the basic steps of all Tibetan dances – right, left, right, and up!

We started with the circle dance 'So ya re lo' (1.3.9) then 'Ala la mo se', 2.9 from the 1st Vol., and 'Dendrel Sanbo' (1.8), the ones that it was possible to learn from the video. Imagine 10–15 people dancing in a relatively big living room, around the big table, between armchairs, paying attention not to break lamps or windows or not to hit each other in our first not so harmonious gestures.

This group of enthusiastic, sometimes surprised but definitely devoted Khaita pioneers spent many hours around the Master, basically right after lunch until late evening, and so it became the main daily activity.

Singing and then dancing together was a great way to practice and overcome limitations and expectations.

Mirror: What is the meaning and how do you see the value of Khaita?

Adriana: Last year, at the beginning of 2014, Rinpoche and Rosa were looking for a name to give to all the dances that up to that moment we were calling 'Tibetan modern dances'. The point was to find a short expression that could open to new horizons, recognize the value of everything Rinpoche was doing and take into consideration that all this starts from Tibet and the Tibetan language, but, at the same time, show that our aim – promoting harmony within the



Adriana Dal Borgo.

individual and between people and their environment through dance – goes beyond protecting and supporting a single culture. This is why, for example, in Khaita's performances or videos, we don't use traditional Tibetan costumes very much but rather costumes that we make ourselves, in general colorful with ornaments such as belts or bracelets with different colored ribbons, using our creativity and capacities.

So the name 'Khaita' manifested and also the symbol: the infinite knot, golden and shining, on the planet earth. Khaita means 'Harmony or Melody of the Space or of the Sky' although usually we say 'Harmony in Space'. The key words 'harmony' or 'melody' is easy to understand in a general sense. Then, as practitioners, it assumes a deeper meaning. [See Rinpoche's words at the beginning of the interview]

When we have this knowledge, when we harmonize our condition, then it resonates outside, without borders between inside and outside.

This symbol of Khaita means that the uninterrupted, infinite flow of energy, without obstacles, the flow of love like melody pervades and manifests in all our hearts and throughout the earth through songs and dances. We can read and explain this in many ways and aspects.

Mirror: We understand that Rinpoche is making some changes to the way he has organized the Tibetan songs. Originally there was a collection of 108, but now he is preparing a group of 180. Could you tell us about this?

Adriana: At the beginning there was this first collection of 108 songs and a second collection of 72 songs. The first collection has already been translated and published in the book "Message from Tibet".

Then Rinpoche started to make another collection of 180 with most of the songs, but not all, from the first two volumes, and some new songs. This new collection is called 'Mekhor' and is a term connected with astrology. It includes three groups, each called 'Metreng' and each with 60 songs, so there will be 'Metreng 1', 'Metreng 2' and 'Metreng 3'. This will be a new collection. We are still learning to sing most of the new songs and don't have any translations of them yet so it will be some time until the new collections are published.

Mirror: How does Rinpoche decide on a song, is there certain criteria?

Adriana: Rinpoche follows three principles when choosing a song:

- the meaning of the words, which should be profound and interesting (in the preface of the book 'Message from Tibet' he explains the main topics of the lyrics;
- the melody;
- the singer, his/her dedication, where he/she come from, how he presents himself and represents the song, so the third criteria is mainly about the singer.

Mirror: Can you tell us how the choreography for the dances is done? Does Rinpoche choose the songs? What if someone wants to try to choreograph something?

Adriana: The process of choreographing the dances is very interesting.

Continuing the story and going back to 2012, in some videos the dances were not complete, we could see only partial movements so the next 'step' was to build a complete choreography from those sequences. At Tashigar South, Rinpoche asked us to work on dances such as 'Nas Qenbo' (1.3.5), 'Naco Bod-la Ga' (1.3.6) and a few others. I tried to understand the principle of the movements and create a reasonable and pleasant sequence. For me it was a completely new activity but I quickly started to enjoy giving shape to a song and developing it.

In some other dances, Rinpoche himself guided me in creating the choreography, indicating precisely which movements corresponded to the different parts of a song. 'Pu Yana' (1.6.3) is one of these dances, in which the Master found a very interesting movement, lasting just a few seconds in the video that reminded him of a precise movement of Vajra Dance.

» continued on the following page

» *Khaita continued from previous page*

In others dances, such as 'Draxis' (1.11.8), and 'Draxis Nima' (1.8.3), Rinpoche suggested some of the basic movements, but most of the dances of the first period, the first two years, were created together with the Master. This is also why I think it's important to learn all their details well, especially the mudras, in order to keep as much as possible the first original movements without losing our Master's precious indications.

Back to history, the competition "Merigar Under the Stars", beginning in September 2013, also came about from Rinpoche and Rosa's suggestion and the whole Dzogchen Community seriously started to dance! The first round of the competition was successful thanks to the moving efforts, dedication and collaboration (even though at the beginning many people asked why we were doing this) of people coming from all the countries belonging to Merigar East and West and Kunsangar North and South. There was so much love in all this! And so much potentiality!

Immediately after, for the first time Rinpoche asked us to create from zero a choreography for a song, 'Ema Lha Gyallo'. (1.1.5), that didn't have a dance yet. Tsering and Topgyal on one side and Svetlana Vainine and Tzvetan Aleksandrov (who collaborated a lot as part of the Merigar West team in the competition), on the other, created two nice dances.

After this, a long series of dances were choreographed. Rinpoche expressly asks for some of these. For other dances, for me it works like this: when I find a song that I like in particular for the rhythm and that gives me inspiration, I start to move following the melody and finding shapes. I enjoy the process of creating because it opens a space inside, too.

A general principle we follow when creating a new dance is to translate some of the images of the songs into movements and mudras. This is what Rinpoche has asked from the beginning. The 'how', depends on the individual person. When one of us (when I say 'us' I mean the group of dancers who follow the process and participate actively, not only dancing but also supporting all work that is behind it) decides to create a new dance, we inform each other, to avoid more versions of same song being created, as happened the first time.

Of course every dance, before being presented publicly, must receive Rinpoche's approval. The Master often suggests or slightly



Topgyal Gontse Lama and Tsering Dolker performing recently at the weekend of Tibetan Culture in Santa Cruz, Tenerife.

modifies some movements. And of course if someone wishes to work on a song, they are very welcome to do so! They should simply follow the previous principles.

Mirror: How many dances are complete?

Adriana: Up to now there are more or less 95 dances. At one point Rinpoche said that we would have 180 songs and 90 dances but we have already surpassed those numbers. We're very active!

Mirror: How do Tsering and Topgyal's dances differ from yours and how are they similar?

Adriana: You should ask the dancers this question because they can see from outside as my perspective is relative.

The dances evolve continuously and I see big differences between the beginning of our work and what we do now. But as I said, it's not only Tsering and Topgyal or myself, we have choreography coming from many of the dancers: some Russian practitioners have created quite a few beautiful ones, as have the Polish and the Dzamling Gar team, while other dances come from the USA. There is space for our creativity and it's so interesting and rich to see different talents and styles manifesting. I encourage others to open to this possibility.

For me this is a crucial point: we're all practitioners, or aspiring to be, and we're not running a competition to see who does the best dance!

We all participate in the process of manifesting Khaita Joyful Dances because Khaita represents exactly this, the harmonious flow of energy on the globe. We're all part of it, we collaborate to make it possible and keep it alive, overcoming all possible borders, separations, limitations.

This is what we're singing about, for hours every day!

Mirror: In the future will there be instructors or at least proficient people who can come and teach at local places?

Adriana: Yes, it will happen. There are already some expert dancers who hold short courses or sessions to share what they know. Probably soon there will be more dancers who can lead courses not only inside the Dzogchen Community but also openly, to an external public. We're preparing a basic structure for it.

Mirror: How do you see the future of Khaita and its development? How does Khaita benefit the Dzogchen Community?

Adriana: The full name that we use, Khaita Joyful Dances, includes all the meaning and benefits of this activity. The keyword 'Joyful' must be understood as an internal and deep state, different from the happiness related to positive circumstances.

If we look at the root of the word 'joy', 'gioia' in Italian, 'gozo' in Spanish and 'gaudio' in Latin, it comes from a Sanskrit term *yuj* (from which the word 'yoga' comes) and is generally translated as 'union of the individual soul with the universal spirit'.

KJD is the way we are training to integrate our three aspects or existences in the state of presence to find this state of 'Joy'. We're very fortunate that we have the possibility to apply this at the Gars in the presence of our Master for a few hours every day.

I believe it's a precious and powerful tool, an important method that is not at all traditional, even 'out of context'. The Maestro stresses very much the importance of this activity and to me it's important we all try to overcome our limitations and judgments, open our minds a bit and try to follow him without resistance. We can discover a lot.

One day, while entering the Gonpa for the usual appointment at 5pm., the Master said: "We live to be in the melody, not in paranoia like many people are".

Mirror: How do you see Khaita being used in the "world" for the benefit of people and society?

Adriana: When we sing, many songs talk about overcoming separation between, for example, different groups of Tibetans, or between different schools of Buddhism, as well as prejudices and conflicts between human beings. We sing about bringing peace to the world, respecting and protecting our earth, sending wishes of prosperity to all sentient beings, and protecting native languages. These topics are not limited to Tibetan culture but represent the heart of each culture and values that belong to all humanity.

We sing and repeat the songs many times like a mantra. When we apply these principles in our daily life, so that our intention becomes concrete and can influence a bit the world outside us, we work in the direction of evolution.

Khaita Joyful Dances have great potential and it seems to me that they are one of the ways that the Dzogchen Community can open and offer our knowledge and potentialities to the 'outer' public. However, when we explain KJD we don't need to talk



The Dzamling Gar dancers at the Khaita Festival in Adeje, Tenerife, earlier this year.

about spirituality, sacred Teaching coming from a distant country, or about meditation. Sometimes these words might scare people or create resistance or prejudices. We can address people of all ages in a simple and direct way, sharing our experience and dancing together the taste of 'Joy', like a small seed from which a beautiful flower can blossom.

Mirror: Please tell us about the origins of the Dzamling Gar song.

Adriana: We could talk a lot about Dzamling Gar song, however, it is important to say that at the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013, on the occasion of the birth of Dzamling Gar, the words and the melody of the song came into his mind when he was very relaxed, in a moment of joy. We can find a translation of the song on the Dzamling Gar website.

What I'd like to stress is that it is a complete Teaching that includes, according to Rinpoche's explanation, the three aspects of Base, Path and Fruit, which correspond to the three parts of the Song.

About the dance, at the beginning we were with Dr. Phuntsog when we created the first part of the choreography. We danced the whole dance like this repeating the first part three times. But after a few months, Rinpoche said that we should change it. He had a vision or something in the day and had some suggestion about how to do the movement. First he wrote it down and then he explained to me how to do the second and third part of the song so that each movement corresponded to the Song. It was very interesting.

Mirror: Thank you very much. ©

Denba, The Truth

(n. 5.10 in the collection 'Message of Tibet')

Mountain snow made of drops of
nectar milked from the sky,
Limpid, clean rivers flowing in our
minds,
The pure language of our fathers
planted in our lineage:
These three are the real melody of
the waters from the snow.

The Brahmaputra river binds our
compassion,
Mount Everest holds our affection,
The Vajra knot of our commitment:
These three are the real melody of
the waters from the snow.

Writings of joy and sadness on the
face of the mountains,
Months and years of happiness and
sufferings delivered to the rivers,
Our karma of pleasures and sorrows
sung to tunes:
These three are the pure melody of
the waters from the snow.

I am you and you are also me,
We are all one family,
We have the strength of being
united and have a goal:
These three are the true melody of
the waters from the snow.

I am you and you are also me,
We are all one family,
We have the strength of being
united and have a goal:
These three are the true melody of
the waters from the snow.



Two elephants at the entrance to the staircase up mount Popa.

Author Jamyang Oliphant with the famous Mingun bell.

(all photos by the author)

Burma

Charles Jamyang Oliphant

On January 16, 2015 the twelve brave souls on the maiden trip organized by the Shang Shung Institute UK, met up at Yangon international airport.

For the next ten days we visited ancient royal palaces, temples and pagodas, dusty modern downtowns, caves filled with statues, idyllic Lake Inley and the magnificent Irrawady river, experiencing the country in all its glory. We travelled by plane, bus, river boat, ox cart and electronic bicycle. People from the UK, Thailand, Greece and Italy answered the call to adventure. We chose Burma, also known as Myanmar, as the destination for the institute's first tour for a number of reasons. For years, many of us had reservations about supporting a notorious military regime, but as Bertil Lintner, Burma expert and author of *Outrage*, on the student risings in 1988, pointed out, tourism can be a positive force for the Burmese people if one avoids using the government owned facilities. With the number of visitors still relatively low, it is still possible to enjoy the sites without the crowds and the hustle found at Angkor Wat, for example. A visit to Yangon's Shwedagon pagoda, where we saw our first Burmese twilight, confirmed that Burma remains a living Buddhist culture, where young couples prefer to spend a date watching the sun set at a temple to the movies. Buddhism has been present in Burma for more than two thousand years and the government is careful to preserve the country's traditions in the face of globalization and to defend

against the proselytizing of other faiths, sometimes even a little over zealously.

Our hotel was in the centre of Yangon and we began our tour by walking around the colonial sights of the city known to the British as Rangoon, renowned for its well-planned streets and splendid architecture. What were the administrative offices of the Empire are now reduced to charming but often derelict pastel reminders, now the object of a passionate campaign to preserve them from the developers. We visited the elegantly restored Strand Hotel on the waterfront, where Orwell and Kipling are said to have stayed. After lunch in a bustling Chinese restaurant by the riverside we headed for the glorious Shwedagon Pagoda, the beating heart of the city, where thousands converge every evening to offer their prayers to the multitude of Buddha statues found there. It was also the stage of those first political rallies in 1988, which marked the beginning of a dark period of political repression and the road to imprisonment of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. At the time of our visit the whole pagoda was being re-layered with gold leaf, with very precarious bamboo scaffoldings going all the way to the top of the 105 meter high pagoda. The golden dome reflected the sun's setting sun rays on to the devotees below as they lit candles and offered water, flowers, mantras and incense to lord Buddha's statues.

Early the next morning we flew to the ancient city of Pagan. On the way to the hotel we stopped at a charming market where we tasted local noodles and drank fresh coconut juice. In the semi tropical heat we often sipped on this or fresh fruit juices for refreshment. We also had the chance to purchase all sorts of craft work, paintings,



Hill tribe ladies on pilgrimage at the Myatheindan pagoda.

lacquerware, sculptures, and jewellery. In Pagan we visited more temples and pagodas than can be listed here. With their tales of regicide, betrayal, and demented ruinous extravagance, together they make up this extraordinary city. At the height of its glory, between the 11th and 13th century over 10,000 pagodas, temples and monasteries were constructed there. Over two thousand still stand today. In Burma, the construction of a pagoda is believed to bring great merit, (or indeed riches and self-advancement as Orwell showed in his character U Po Kyin in *Burmese Days*). As a result, examples of every type and degree of splendor abound on roadsides, riverbanks and hill tops. After a delicious evening meal, we had our talented musician



Our group, with one participant missing, on a pagoda's rooftop in Pagan.

Joe entertain us with songs late into the night. Aided by the local gin we sang along, somewhat less melodiously. The next day we rented electric bicycles and had great fun temple hopping, taking pictures and



Very thin gold leaves being prepared in the traditional way. Gold leaves are placed on sacred images by Buddhist devotees.

shopping for local crafts, getting suitably ripped off! After the long exertions of the day, we experienced a glorious sunset on the Irrawaddy, contemplating the flow of water and time from the top of an 12th century pagoda. The next morning we left for Mount Popa, and its famed shrines dedicated to animist spirits, a mélange of Chinese, Indian and Burmese folk beliefs predating Buddhism. The temple there is perched on top of the hillside and small monkeys run

up and down the steps beside the many devotees and tourists. We continued our long road trip to Pagan and stopped at a palm sugar workshop, where we tasted palm sweets, wine and cookies.

In Mandalay, we spent three nights. We visited the royal palace and took day trips from the city, travelling on ox drawn carts and a ferry boat. We visited one striking temple made from enormous teak logs, where child monks ran around dressed in dark red robes. At the monastery in nearby Amarapura, for a short time the capital itself, we also saw hundreds of monks in the hall eating their daily meal, always served before noon, in absolute silence.

We then left Mandalay and headed to the vast Inley lake, stopping en route to visit the Pindaya caves, a labyrinth of natural caves filled with over 8000 Buddhist statues. Outside the caves, the traditional aphrodisiacs on sale included fried ants.

We arrived at Inley Lake in the evening, greeted at our stunning hotel on the lake side by a mind blowing sunset on the wa-

ter and traditional Burmese musicians welcoming us while waiters served warm tea. Our sleeping quarters were on stilts and the night chill of the lake meant we needed blankets.

The next day we visited silversmiths, and looms where silk and lotus roots are worked into scarves and blouses, and admired fishermen, rowing with an oar tied to the leg, to leave their hands free to handle the nets. We were all enamoured with the lake and its particular culture. Even the local school is built on stilts. Saddened to leave, we headed back to Yangon, where the next day we were all to return to our homes. I think I speak for all of us in saying these were wonderful days, filled with beauty, laughter and perhaps a little learning.

This was the first but certainly will not be the last of the tours organised by the Shang Shung institute UK. Our intention is to offer tours to interesting destinations in Asia, focusing on art, history, literary and popular culture, with expert guides, efficient services and comfortable accommodation – at an affordable cost. Any profit made goes to the institute, whose primary aim remains the preservation and dissemination of Tibetan culture.

Our next scheduled trip will be to India, concentrating on Ladakh in mid August 2015.

More details will soon be posted on our website www.shangshunguk.org/v1/

August 19th–26th , 2015

Ladakh Tour 2015

More info and bookings:

<http://bit.ly/1F9Shpt>

In Italiano: <http://bit.ly/1Fjcmd5>

En Espanol: <http://bit.ly/1FjcBoy>

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Devotees sweeping temple grounds.



The Dzamling Gar Project Goes Ahead

Interview with Benedetta Tagliabue

Dzamling Gar
February 2015

The Mirror: We would like to ask for a general update about Dzamling Gar.

Benedetta Tagliabue: The update is difficult for me to remember since we are going so much from one thing to another that we do not realize really what is different from one year to the other. That is why photos are very important.

This year mainly we had to finish the swimming pool, which was kind of late because there were some difficulties with the builder and we had some delay in that, but now it is ready. We aimed to have it ready for the Mandarava retreat, and maybe today or tomorrow it will be possible to use it! After we clean it the swimming pool will be ready! The only point is that it is cold. So the next stage is to heat it; now it is between a swimming pool for someone who is very brave and a decorative lake; but we felt it was important to have it done for this retreat.

We are going ahead with the houses. Last year we did a lot of workshops with Saviana on how to make the houses healthier and less hot in the summer. We had many possibilities and we are trying to understand which solutions are most feasible. Some of them were really not possible, for example, covering the exterior of the houses with some kind of cork material, and then painting on the top; this would have changed too much the aspect of the houses and the climate difference would not be worth it, so we decided to leave the houses with the exterior as they are and not make a very expensive and big visual change on the exteriors.

Instead we are developing the pergolas. Rinpoche's house has the same structure, but we could not make a pergola there because of his swimming pool. All the other houses will have them and they are very important to reduce the sun inside. These houses were not designed for this climate.

In these days, Giovanni Boni is taking people on tours of the houses and he is proposing to the Gars a couple of different



Completed pool with Rinpoche's home behind.

options in case they prefer one thing or another in building, for example, building



Photo by Vicens Gimenez

a little piece of wall in front of the lower part of the window allowing for less heat to get in and then there is also the possibility to incline the pergola so the heat will not be so terrible. Making these little alterations the exteriors look nice and it is better because there will be wood and the use of natural materials on the outside. In the inside, each Gar will decide more or less what they want to do. I say more or less because there is not so much you can do, not so many options.

M: So the outsides will be all pretty much the same? They will all have the same pergolas?

BT: This is the idea. I think it is best. Of course in the end some differences will happen and already some of the houses are different from the beginning. I think it is better to have this kind of uniform look. We think the change will be coming more from the gardens and we have been so lucky to have Alix de Fermor doing these

fantastic gardens. Last year Saviana and Will were helping in order to make everything more natural, and the physical work on the flowers and plants is really visible. I think this is what will make the big difference. I don't know if the architecture of the houses could have been better or not, but this is what we found, and with fantastic flowers and a comfortable place, I think this will be very important. In the end we everything will be beautiful!

M: Has the exterior work on the houses been delayed?

BT: It is not so easy. We have many houses and there has been a delay in the understanding of the Gars about whom will be the users, etc., and as clients they have to pay; there was some confusion about all this so it caused some delay. The Gars were asking for a lot of clarification before sending the money, so this slowed things down. Also we do not have so many people working and there are many things to do. I think it would have been a little optimistic to think that everything would be finished this year.

M: You mentioned the other day that according to the project planning there we have too many cubic meters of buildings here.

BT: Yes this was one of the biggest problems we faced this year actually, as architects, we always had a kind of problematic situation regarding permissions. This is a very big plot and in principle a normal client should finish the plot and inhabit it. But in this case we have the possibility, given by the authority, to inhabit the plot before the rest of the work is finished. To do that we had to do phases, and then they gave permission for phases, but then when they had to give permission for phase two they said, "Oh, before starting phase two you need to have the right permission for phase

one and we need this and this and this and this." They changed the parameters a little.

Also we have to say we had thirteen houses built already, and we don't know if these thirteen houses were built with permission or not, probably they were not. So we are trying to find solutions together with the authorities and our solution was not to destroy the houses, as the city was asking, but to transform the big center of the Gar to be underneath the earth, like this place* [*Jyagyip, where we sat for the interview, Edl.* This is not a bad idea because in a way we think inside the center there will be a kind of spa with activities for health and treatments and we think the climate underneath the earth is much better because it is more temperate. So we thought we could manage with this solution, then we had to change the project in order to do that. And once we have the space under the earth to include the extra square meters, the two houses that exceed the square meter requirement will not be problematic and will not have to be demolished. We certainly can use them!

M: It will not be too humid under the earth?

BT: No because we will bring in the earth and the earth will be artificially placed and the structure will not be totally closed and there will be skylights, etc. It can also be beautiful. The main decision on the big structure, the Gonpa, is that it will be elevated. This will also give us the possibility to have more space. We are bringing the earth. You will be able to see the sea from the Gonpa, so we imagine that will be the best view because it will be very high up.

M: Compared to last year, perhaps the project is becoming a little clearer, about how the upper or the last phase of the project will be, which includes the Gonpa and maybe the health center.

BT: Exactly, it is becoming a little clearer in respect to square meters and also in how to reuse or reduce the existing structures, which is very complicated. It is still quite open in regards to the real function or real use of the space, because we are still not very clear as to how we will use it. Also I am starting to doubt if the Gonpa we have designed which is very, very big will be enough. Now we see the dances inside this big tent and the tent is too small. The Gonpa is a little bigger than the tent, but we have to be careful with the pillars and the structure; maybe we need to make it a little bigger and also now we have gained a big

terrace next to it so probably we will have to make a structure which can be opened towards the terrace; so parts of the ter-

shades or things for the fans or these types of things which are kinds of pavilions. This is a possibility because in Europe and other



View of cafe area.

race can be included in the Gonpa like at Merigar [West]. Here it will be on one flat, big surface, so this is the big change in the concept. And now we really have to make the plans of the structure and I think we have to develop much more in terms of the shape of the big building and how it will really look.

Also there is another idea but it might not be very easy to realize; last year we did very nice workshops mainly relating to the gardens, to the swimming pool, how to clean the pool naturally and maybe it will not be accepted but we have the base in for the plants which clean the water, and when the swimming pool is approved maybe we can decide to use it inside the pool in a natural way.

M: Do you have anything else to add?

BT: Last year we did these workshops with the garden and the swimming pool, many with Saviana who was working with permaculture type of architecture, which was also very new to me and is fantastic, and we had also bio architects looking at the possibilities of how to make this place healthier. I was thinking for next year if I am able, I would like to organize a kind of architectural workshop on the land so that maybe a group of young architects led by other good teachers, architects, could come on the land (this we will have to ask Rinpoche if he would like this) and maybe do small types of structures. For example, around the swimming pool, benches or

places they do these kinds of festivals. One very nice one we participated in was called Hello Wood, where they called groups of students and teachers and they produced something like ten or twelve wooden pavilions, and in this case they were in the woods and some were very spectacular and beautiful. They make photos and maybe even they throw them away! But here we could do something like that and the pieces could stay. We are a pretty big organization and if Rinpoche likes the idea, maybe we can try and organize something like that. So at the same time we can have pieces from different architects and different styles. Also it will bring people in to have contact with the Community, which already happened with Saviana's workshops in the past.

Before at Dzamling Gar, we had a kind of competition with the theme of a kind of health center and we did not insist very much because it was at the very beginning, and a lot of students did a lot of entries – we had something like eighty entries – for brainstorming about plans for this place, and it was a competition, with a winner and everything.

M: Do you have anything you would like to say to the Gars and Communities around the world about the future of Dzamling Gar?

BT: I am very impressed by how the Master considers Dzamling Gar so fundamental

» continued on the following page

Creating a Paradise

An Interview with Alix De Fermor,
the Dzamling Gar garden engineer

Dzamling Gar
Thursday March 12, 2015

The Mirror: When I arrived at Dzamling Gar this year, I was amazed to see what an incredibly vibrant and colourful garden has suddenly sprung up from what was a very desolate place last year.

Alix De Fermor: Everything grows very quickly here because the soil is volcanic and very good for plants. We have also found a way to keep the humidity in the soil [*the south of Tenerife is an extremely hot and dry climate ed.*] by covering it in straw and then putting a layer of volcanic pebbles on top. It is also a way to use water very sparingly. Only the new plants need a little more water because they have been spoiled in the garden centre. This system works well because we don't use too much water and the plants are really growing well.

The Mirror: Are there any particular plants that you have chosen for the Dzamling Gar gardens?

Alix: Of course we have chosen plants that are suitable for a dry climate because it is very dry here. You look in wild places to see what kind of plants there are. Here in Tenerife, for example, there are a lot of big daisies growing so we have planted many varieties of the daisy family. We've also planted a lot of aromatic herbs such as rosemary, thyme, sage, oregano, coriander, parsley, ruta, basil, the curry plant (from the *helichrysum* family) and artemisia used for moxa, etc. In fact they grow so well here that they become like little trees!

.....
» *Interview continued from previous page*

and so important, so I think it is important to come, for all the Gars to participate and put their personalities in the houses, because this is the will of the Master. The Master decided that each Gar has to take care of one of the houses. So there will be individuality and each one will give ideas on how to use the space and how to manage. I suppose in the end we will all manage together, because it is very difficult to



Photo by
Paolo Fassoli

The Mirror: Many of the gardens here are ornamental but are combined with different trees. What variety of trees are growing here?

Alix: In one of the gardens we have a couple of trees that were planted years before we acquired Dzamling Gar and were the only plants to survive here after being abandoned for eight years. This species is very resistant and is called *Bauhinia* and can be found abundantly in tropical South

America. It has a beautiful flower and a wonderful perfume.

Then we have papaya, pomegranate and guava in the same garden. I have mixed the fruit trees with ornamental plants because I like beauty. Then we have a dragon tree, which is endemic and the emblem of Tenerife. It shades the statue of the Buddha just outside the tent and takes the place of the traditional bodhi tree.

Another of the techniques we use here is to introduce plants that cover the soil in order to keep in the humidity for the taller plants and the trees. I have found a plant called *osteospermum* or African daisy and it is not only beautiful but flowers without interruption all year round. It also becomes very big and covers a lot of soil. As well as keeping the moisture in the soil, these plants also create a lot of organic material. There is also another plant that we use for covering the soil with bright pink and orange flowers from the *mesembryanthemum* family – although it is a bit invasive and we have to keep cutting it back – then *aptenia* with its brilliant green leaves and little fuchsia flowers as well as the lotus plant, endemic to Tenerife which can cover over 25 square meters in a year!

The Mirror: I can see that in most of the gardens there is a system of water tubes in place for watering the plants.

Alix: Last year when we started working on the gardens, we bought small plants and in order for them to survive the dry climate, we created a watering system in most of the gardens. We are using a 'drop' system in which we buy watering tubes perforated with holes every 20 or 30 cm and so the water arrives in drops to the plants. This way we use very little water. Watering with a hosepipe wastes a lot of time and a lot

do everything individually. But I think it is very important to start, to come here, and to start to have a place, because if the Master has this in his mind it means it is really very important. So we are doing a little bit the exterior, helping, but then everyone must participate.

M: Benedetta, thank you very much for your time.



of water. We use this drop system at night once a week for different areas.

The Mirror: Behind the Gonpa tent, there is quite a steep hill going up that you have worked on recently. What is going on there?

Alix: The front part along the path is mostly ornamental with flowers and a few fruit trees because it is the entrance to the Gar. The slope was originally very steep. We cut it horizontally at different levels, creating narrow paths following the contour lines on different levels to prevent erosion when there is one of these occasional heavy rainfalls. On these different levels I have planted a lot of date trees that we grew from seeds last year. There are also figs, tamarinds, *moringa oleifera*, lemons, almonds, peach for the fruit part and Bauhinia, jacaranda, *butea monosperma* (a highly medicinal tree but also gorgeous with its big red orange flowers, flamboyant, *Melia azderach*, acacias for the ornamental part and I am now adding specimens from the *ficus* family for making strong and extensive shade. We also have a drop system here around the plants.

Then there are earth covering plants such as lotus, an endemic species from Tenerife with its silvery green foliage and orange blossoms like little flames which covers over 25 square meters in a year and *aptenia*. They get the water from the irrigation system for the trees and will progressively cover the ground and, I hope, keep in the moisture.

This is quite a tough area for plants because there is a lot of sun and wind here but at some point this area will all be green – the aluminum fence will not be visible any more, we will have plenty of fruit to eat and the beauty of the ornamental part will satisfy your soul!

The Mirror: I hope we will be around long enough to enjoy it!

Alix: Well, you would be surprised. Rinpoche has been eating a papaya from the garden every few days since he arrived here at the end of December. The guava trees have given a lot of fruit, the first big bunch of bananas will be ready in a couple of weeks.

The Mirror: I understand that there is also a vegetable garden here at the Gar.

Alix: I've made a vegetable garden along a wall in a place that is not too much in view since vegetables are not as beautiful as flowers to see. I found this spot at the



centre of the gar behind the Gakyil house. It is exposed to the southwest and is quite protected from the wind.

There are enormous tomatoes growing up the back wall alternating with passion fruit or maracuja that I grew from seed from Costa Rica. This is a climber and when the tomatoes are finished, the maracuja should gradually cover the wall.

We know which kinds of vegetables Rinpoche likes so I brought quite a few seeds with me from Italy.

This area is a mixture of vegetables and fruit trees, including apple, papaya, plums, apricots, pomegranates, mango, star fruit,

entire garden. And it really works. We also have the 'drop' system here and straw to keep in the humidity.

The Mirror: There is also a beautiful piece of garden around Rinpoche's house.

Alix: Yes, I am quite proud of this garden because there are a lot of blooming plants in a combination of colors very nice to the eye but also a lot of fruit trees (some very small grown from seeds given by Rinpoche such as lucuma and lychee) some bigger such as mandarin, orange, and lemon, papaya, fig, banana, cherimoya, guava, pomegranate, mango, avocado, and physalis.



pitanga, guanabana, cherimoya, guava and guavafresa. Then vegetables such as rapini, green beets, zucchini, rocket, peppers, radishes, salad, beets, chicory, onions, eggplant, daikon, broccoli, carrots, celery, spinach, cress and a variety of herbs etc.

Here in Tenerife, when it rains, it really pours, so what is interesting in this vegetable garden, is that we have banked the earth in a way that the water can snake down in a single channel to irrigate the

Then there is the 'Mandarava garden' because I did most of it during the Mandarava retreat. This is the garden just before Rinpoche's house created by Will that I transformed making it much more ornamental with amongst other flowers lots of roses but also adding to the previously existent pomegranate, papaya, banana, Japanese nispero and big cherimoya, four man-

» continued on the following page

Bringing Benefit

The 2nd Annual Tibetan Medicine Conference in Tenerife

March 16–17, 2015 at the Universidad de La Laguna

Leela Whitcomb-Hewitt

Bringing benefit - this is the meaning of sman, the Tibetan word for medicine; doctor being called sman pa – the one who benefits.

At the 2nd annual Tenerife Tibetan Medicine Conference I was once again humbled and deeply inspired by the true bringer of benefit, our Dr Phuntsog Wangmo. She purified body and mind and all phenomena into the essence of the five elements in her opening talk on the subject. Then the fundamental root of health and all internal disease was revealed, the digestion, thanks to the medicine wisdom of Dr Yangdron Kalzang. Dr Namgyal Qusar, in his clear and patient manner, helped us understand the ways to keep our digestion heat strong and balanced. Drink boiled water – whether warm



Presenters with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, author 2nd from right.

during cold season or colder if it is hot outside, plus many other important tips. Then diet according to season and constitution.

Finally Matthew and I helped people apply some basic dietary principles to their own conditions through a short questionnaire and advice sheet. (Be in touch if you want a copy.)

The next day in true collaborative spirit of Tibetan medicine, wisdom of other traditions were shared. The scholar, researcher and doctor Dr Roberto Di Sarsina highlighted the principle of people center medical care. Dr. Duran gave an inspirational talk about Integrative Medicine, the best of all fields working together. Yes! True to Tibetan medicine.

Our Vajra sister and compassionate allopathic doctor and Yantra Yoga teacher

Stella Rungen, told us how her patients are benefited from her knowledge of Yantra Yoga and Tibetan Medicine. The wisdom continued to flow with Tibetan medicine talks on treatment of obesity and cardiovascular disease with Dr Phuntsog Wangmo and Dr Namgyal Qusar. And, as we know, Yantra Yoga, Vajra Dance and Khaita joyful dances all make us feel good. Matthew and I presented them as means of staying healthy in the context of Tibetan medicine.

As a triumphant finish, like incredible rich, sweet, light, perfect icing on our super duper cake, Rinpoche gave the concluding talk. He came in strong and clear blowing all our minds open. He is for sure the supreme bringer of benefit. ©

» *Interview continued from previous page*

darin trees. I also made it more accessible for fruit picking by creating paths.

I've put some ornamental plants, mostly bougainvillea, along one of the walls approaching the house because it takes a lot of heat and is not very nice to look at.

The garden at the back of Rinpoche's house gets shade in the afternoon so it isn't bad for fruit. Other places get too much sun and I'm curious to see what they do. We've had a lot of guava from the trees here. There are also some vegetables here and plenty of herbs. You can find the famous lotus covering plant here, with a small orange flower like a little flame, which spreads very quickly and looks like a carpet.

The steep hill going down from Rinpoche's house towards the swimming pool was a challenge for us because the heavy rainfall of last year became a river and eroded the hill. The slope practically disappeared and there was just a deep gully (*baranco*) made by the rainwater. To combat this possibility of erosion in the future I've

created swales – that is there are slightly raised beds and then a bit of a hollow in front of them so that the water tends to remain there rather than running down the hill and is absorbed. The swales are perpendicular to the slope and when the upper one is full the water will run to the second one to be absorbed and so on. This is according to the principle of permaculture.

The Mirror: You aren't here all the year round. What happens to the gardens when you aren't here?

Alix: Last summer we had some people to help. I mostly trained them how to water because I wasn't so worried about the plants growing but about dying. However, when I wasn't here some of the gardens got too much water and we started to have this problem with white fly which is very common in Tenerife. The white fly make eggs and progressively eat the plants. Many of the leaves on the fruit trees were covered with them. Fortunately we were able to find a recipe for a natural product

made with tobacco, chili, garlic, Marseille soap and vegetable oil and prepared it and sprayed the whole Gar with it. It worked like magic and we were able to get rid of the white fly.

You see we are not using any chemicals or fertilizers in the gardens here. When I put in new plants I use a little peat. The soil here has a lot of minerals because it is volcanic but it lacks organic matter because it is desert. When the plants grow, they make their own organic material.

The Mirror: You have a very big nursery of plants here on one of the terraces.

Alix: Everything here is planted from seeds. We have mango, guava, cherimoya, dates, avocado, then some ornamental trees grown from seeds of the trees that were already here. We have a bodhi tree but I'm not sure where to put it since it is from the ficus family and I don't want to upset the system here.

Then there are plants growing from seeds that I brought from Costa Rica. There

2nd Integrative Medicine Conference

20, 21, 22 March 2015
Barcelona, Spain

The conference gathered the different medical systems and professionals specialized in the treatment of cancer so that they could dialogue and share their experience on how to deal with it from their different medical visions.

Participants were Prof. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu (Keynote lecture), Dr. Pere Gascón (Oncologic medicine), Dr. Namgyal Qu-sar (Tibetan medicine), Dr. Li Qilin (Traditional Chinese Medicine), Dr. Ana María Oli-va (Biomedicine), Dr. Odile Fernández (Nutritional medicine), Dr. Natalia Eres, Mr. Enric Corbera, Dr. Alejandro Chaoul, Dr. Juan Carlos Durán, Dr. Francisco Barnosell (Integrative medicine), Dr. Paolo Roberti di Sarsina, Dr. Eva Juan Linares, Dr. Pilar Lianes.

Some thoughts of why we have to go on

By Paolo Roberti di Sarsina

Traditional, Complementary, Alternative, and Unconventional Medicine are a variety of different medical systems and healthcare methods, whose roots come from European culture or reflect different philosophical backgrounds and cultural origins, based on the knowledge, skills and practices used to protect and to restore health, that is to prevent, diagnose, improve or treat physical or mental illness and include medication therapies and non-medication therapies. A distinctive feature common to these health sciences is a holistic, salutogenetic, person-centered, pro-resilient, pro-active, spiritual, inclusive, approach. In countries where the dominant



Main presenters with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, author directly behind Rinpoche.

Photo by Paolo Fassoli

health care system is based on biomedicine these health and healing sciences are not included in the national health care system being considered unconventional medicine.

We need to preserve, protect, promote, study, hand on and apply the cultural heritage of such anthropological medical expertise, be it Western or Eastern, respecting the original integrity of traditional paradigms. We also need to review the evidence-based approach and apply it to Traditional and Non-Conventional Medicine.

We must contribute to building a society which seeks the optimum health of its citizens largely achieved by encouraging and enabling citizens to take responsibility for the maintenance and promotion of their own health whilst also acknowledging freedom of choice in selecting appropriate treatment from a variety of healthcare options, including Complementary and Alternative Medicine. In addition citizens should have access to reliable information supporting effective and safe health provision that includes relevant CAM options. CAM should be available, accessible and affordable at both national and European level.

It is important to ensure that patients have the broadest possible choice of therapy, guaranteeing them the maximum level

of safety and the most accurate information possible on the safety, quality, effectiveness and possible risks of so-called non-conventional medicines, and that they are protected against unqualified individuals. In order to protect the health of his own patients to the full, a doctor may use all resources and knowledge in any field of medicine in accordance with his own judgment and conscience,

Hence it is necessary to have a paradigm shift that moves the focus of healthcare away from a primarily treatment-oriented agenda to one which also engages people more directly in their personal health and well-being thereby preventing illness and prolonging life.

Therefore the paradigm of salutogenesis is strictly interlaced to the paradigm of person-centered healthcare and medicine – that is, to an approach that primarily supports human health and well-being rather than focusing on factors that cause disease.

Such a paradigm of the maintenance and health care of the person takes into account the psycho-spiritual, corporeal and social needs of each individual.

Our Community may play an important role in order to promote and sustain such a vision. ©

is a species of palm that you don't find here, then some fruit trees called Jocotes and Jobo and Rambutan, which is a type of ly-chee.

The Mirror: The gardens here seem like an enormous project and would need 4 or 5 people to care for them. How do you manage?

Alix: Well, I have Alicia who works three hours a day, five days a week and then a few

karma yogis who help when they can but I would like to have another person doing the same hours as me who I could train. I think that somehow we have to repay all these teachings that Rinpoche is giving us, and so we should create a paradise quickly at Dzamling Gar. The garden has become a very nice place and people want to live nearby.

I think that gardens are powerful, not only because there are a lot of fruit trees

but also because of the power of the flowers whose colors, smells, alternance of shade and light make people enjoy and relax.

I work a lot but it is not only me but also the power of the volcano. The soil here is very powerful – I can feel it and I take a lot of energy from the garden. I'm working a lot but I feel very well.

The Mirror: Thank you Alix. ©

Artists in the Dzogchen Community

Roberto Cacciapaglia

I started studying music also thanks to my mother who got me to study piano from the age of four. She loved music and my grandfather played as well. But up to the time I was ten, my musical studies weren't much fun, in fact, they were really hell for me because while I was practicing, from the window I could see my friends playing football.

However, when I was about eleven, rock music arrived with groups such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and became popular and so I started to play the guitar. And that was really great because music became something social, a kind of meeting point for young people, and at this time I really developed my taste for music.

For a year I stopped piano and started to play guitar with different groups in basements – at that time any street you would pass by in Milan you could hear kids bands playing here and there in basements. Instead, today things have really changed and it's very much the time of the piano (a more individual relationship). A lot of young people who are interested in my music send me their compositions and there are plenty on internet so this aspect has changed a lot.

When bands like Procol Harum and others arriving from England and the US, the Italian bands used to translate their songs, and the electronic organ found its place in this type of music so anyone who had the minimum familiarity with the piano keyboard started to play the organ. I was one of those people and started to play guitar and Hammond organ in some groups, and with that I came back to the keyboard.

So while I actually stopped piano for about a year, I re-enrolled at the Conservatory of Music where I went on to study for about 20 years. I studied composition with a great master called Bruno Bettinelli, probably one of the last great masters who taught composition in a traditional way. I also studied piano, conducting, and electronic music.

I worked at the Studio of Phonology at the RAI, which was important for me because it is an institution where one could



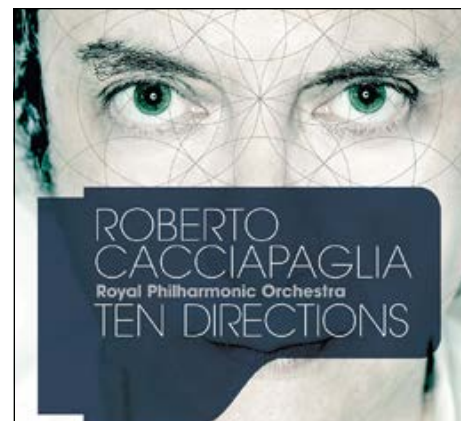
experiment with electronics, with waves, frequencies, magnetic tapes etc. Then I did some things with the National Research Council (CNR) in Pisa studying computer applications in music. We had these IBM terminals that were like wall panels from the film '2001 – A Space Odyssey', technicians in white coats, we played Bach's fugues backwards and many others classical composition with the computer – it was a very interesting experience.

From the age of 18 when my first LP record came out, the first published in Italy in quadrasonic sound, I've been working with experimentation. With quadrasonic sound rather than being stereo the sound arrives from four places, so there is the idea of sound in space, which has a far more interesting effect. Today they use the same type of sound effect in the cinema. However, the field of music quadrasonics has been lost a bit because today's sound systems are very sophisticated and you have to be at the centre of them to experience it.

My first CD was called 'Sonanze' and was produced in Germany. It had some elements that were similar to the acts in an opera. I played guitar and piano and there was some electronic music and a choir. It was called 'Sonanze' (Sonances) because it was between the dissonances of classical contemporary music and the assonances of the music of communication, of rock, because I felt that I was a child of this music that had changed an entire generation.

I used 'Sonanze' to neutralize and integrate these two forms of music and I have been doing this type of thing up to today, working with music without limits, without any type of hierarchy. I try to put together influences coming from various types of music. You could say that my mu-

sic is closer to the world of classical music also instrumentally, but it is a type of classical music that takes into consideration



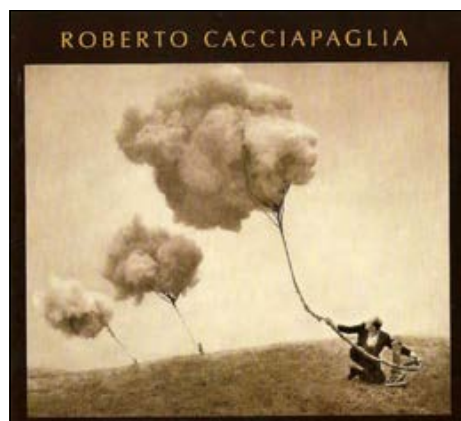
other influences, not only from the classical European tradition as it was up to a few decades ago. Today we are influenced by an enormous variety of music, all at the same time, all with the same importance thanks to the technology that is available.

I worked for about ten years with a Gurdjieff group and it was the Master Henri Thomasson who told me about Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche. He was really a bridge for me to come to Merigar and for this I will always be grateful to him. I met the Master in 1988. At that time I used to accompany the Gurdjieff movements, the dances, on the piano. This music was also a great influence for me.

Then I have worked with Sufis and I'm still working with them even now – we are working on a project together in Istanbul, Turkey. Last year I did a concert at the Conservatory of Istanbul along with some courses. Now the Turkish ambassador has asked me to write a piece that I've called 'Bridge of the Sky' which is the union of the Italian and Turkish cultures involving Italian and Turkish musicians. I have been influenced not only by Sufi music but by Sufism in general in the past and it has been the base of my non-classical musical inspiration. In fact I'm shortly leaving for Ankara, where I was invited by the 'Ankara Piano Festival'. I'll be giving a concert and then I'll take a day to visit Konya, the city of Rumi.

I came to Merigar just after Rinpoche and some of his students had come back from Mt. Kailash in Tibet because my master, a direct disciple of Gurdjieff, had been at Merigar and told me about his experience. When we used to go on our summer holidays, we would go to Argentario, and on the way I would often see the road sign for

Arcidosso and even though I didn't know anything about the place, I felt a kind of attraction. So after my Gurdjieff master spoke



ered that the universe was constructed on sound and there are many traditions that keep alive this aspect of music, not simply



so many opportunities. If you consider the time when we were young people there are much fewer opportunities today. The mul-



to me, one day I decided that I would like to meet Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche. We went there in November and because we didn't know the road we arrived at 2 am in the morning. All the hotels were closed but finally the Lorena Hotel close to Merigar opened for us and we slept there in a very cold room.

The morning after we went to meet the Master. When I arrived the first person I met was Rinpoche's son, Yeshe, who told me not to worry and to go and meet him. Since I was coming out of the blue I didn't really know how things worked in the Community so I asked him if he would accept me as a student and the Master told me to come to the next retreat. I was deeply touched and I came to the Christmas retreat: this was my first retreat and I have great memories of it.

The extraordinary inspiration of Rinpoche's teaching is within my every breath and in my work, and I try to put into practice what the Master teaches us. Music, for me, is naturally not a goal but a means, a mirror. When I play, when I compose, I try as much as possible to be in the state in which the Master urges us always to be. Particularly in music for me it is a great challenge to be present while I play. When it happens it is always extraordinary because the sound transmitted is something very special and can have a profound effect and so with music we can create a type of union through the sound between musician and listeners. This is very prominent in the history of sacred music.

For example, the followers of Pythagoras [the Greek philosopher, mathematician, and founder of the movement called Pythagoreanism] also made music. In addition to his tables, Pythagoras also consid-

considering it as entertainment, as fun, or as distraction, like we often consider it to be today. Up until a few decades ago a person would choose to go to a concert and listen to music because he or she had decided to. Today through the radio, at the shops, wherever you go there is music so you no longer listen to it by choice but are subjected to it. This really changes things because we no longer wish to listen to silence. If you travel by train, for example from Rome to Milan, the most expensive carriages are those where there is silence. Silence, which should be a natural state, has become a very expensive and precious condition, like natural, organic food. For example, before I compose or perform, I always start with silence, I stay still. This silence is like a space for me, like a calm sea from which sound arises.

So we need a form of music that functions not so much as a life-jacket keeping us afloat on the surface of the water like much of today's music, but rather a music that goes below the surface of sound, just like a scuba diver who goes deep underwater to take precious things, and music has got many. I try to not make 'intellectual' music. I'm more interested in the emotional part. It is not so much a 'concept' but is, as much as possible, something spontaneous. For example, my concerts are enjoyed by people of all ages and go beyond any type of class interest - once in Venice, among the listeners there was a little girl of 9 hand in hand with an elderly woman of 90 who came to visit me after the concert.

I had the idea to found the Educational Music Academy because I always heard people talking about the opportunities that are given to young people today although actually I don't think that there are

tationals have taken in hand almost everything that it is possible to do. Things are organized on such a massive scale that an individual has great difficulty to do something on his or her own and they come up against these big organizations. This seems to be the big problem of our times - this total globalization - in which just a few have control of everything.

For this reason and because of my profession as a musician I'm trying to give an opportunity to some of these young people - some of them already teachers while others are still studying at the Conservatory and still others not even that, because actually there isn't this type of hierarchy at our Academy. Anyone can enroll even with a minimum base, above all if they have a project. At the Academy we follow these young people so that they can learn and achieve what they want: achieve their music, their musical works, their projects, learn how to record them, how to play them. So the work here is more a midpoint between the teaching of composition and piano that is done at the Conservatory and that of an artistic producer of a record company, who, on the other hand, has to prepare them to communicate to the public. They learn to do what they want to do from themselves in an independent way.

And so we have people arriving from all over Italy. This is the second year and we have had feedback that is really great because the students leave here after being able to mature their pieces and having their ideas clear on what they want to do. Of course this is a first step. One of our students has already had an international contract with a publishing and record

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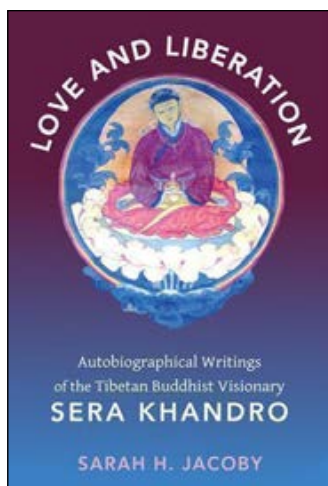
Sarah Jacoby

Love and Liberation

Autobiographical Writings of the
Tibetan Buddhist Visionary
Sera Khandro

New York, Columbia University
Press, 2014

Alfredo Colitto and Giorgio Dallorto



Sera Khandro was an important teacher and tertön (treasure revealer) of the early twentieth century, recognized by Goṛl Rinpoche as an emanation of the voice of Yeshe Tsogyel. Born into a noble family from central Tibet in 1892, after having attempted suicide to escape the marriage organized for her by her father at the age of fifteen, she runs away from Lhasa to follow Drime Özer, son of the famous master Dudjom Lingpa, in the remote and inhospitable region of Golok, eastern Tibet.

Sera Khandro describes herself and Drime Özer as an inseparable couple of method and wisdom, who together form the complete view of Buddhahood according to the Vajrayana vehicle. But before such a union can take place, there are many obstacles to overcome: specific con-

ditions to be met, people to meet or avoid according to the indications of the dakinis and other spiritual presences, jealousies and enmities.

Sera Khandro becomes the consort of Gyaltshe Pema Namgyal (himself an important tantric master and Dzogchen expert), who, however, ignores her skills and refuses to transmit teachings to her. When finally Sera Khandro and Drime Özer manage to complete their union, Akyongza, the main tantric consort of Drime Özer, jealous of the new arrival, declares war, and does not stop opposing her throughout her life.

This book is the story, written by the same Sera Khandro, of her vicissitudes as wife, mother and tantric consort seeking liberation. It is the story of a woman in a male dominated world, of the problems

that she has to overcome to follow her vocation and the lack of consideration that was often given to her, even in the face of her undoubted gifts as a practitioner, treasure revealer and healer. Even when her husband Gyaltshe Namgyal and Drime Özer agree that she becomes the wife of the latter, they do not even think to consult her.

The narrative moves along two tracks that are equally interesting. On the one hand it gives us an inside view of the precise spiritual relationships between masters and disciples and of the complex Tibetan system of reincarnations, who often reappear within the families of origin.

On the other hand it gives us a glimpse of the way of life of a country and of an era, the relationships and rivalries between the various populations of Tibet, the spiritual presences with which people interact regularly and relationships between men and women. There are visionary experiences with dakinis and local guardians, but also mundane challenges, including domestic disputes and legal issues related to child custody.

In the autobiographical writings of Sera Khandro love conquers death. In fact, after the death of Drime Özer, dakinis console Sera Khandro telling her that their separation is only an illusion of conventional truth, but, in the ultimate reality of great bliss, method and wisdom are indivisible, thus she and her loved one will never be separated. ©

» *Artist continued from previous page*

company and will be doing concerts so we are very pleased with these results.

Then I have been involved in different projects such as one with the European Space agency that commissioned me to create the music to accompany an expedition to the Antarctic. The expedition was there for six months in one of the places where darkness lasts the longest on the planet. There were twenty engineers and scholars from all over the world. They told me that one of the Italians on the expedition couldn't resist going out to see the Aurora Borealis and ended up taking off his frostproof suit and going outside in minus 80 degrees and got frostbite so the others had to pull him back inside. I wasn't there with them in Antarctica, but it was a wonderful experience of exchange even at distance.

In respect to the avant-garde, to prospects for the future, up to a few years ago,



the composer was always more influenced by that which had happened immediately before his or her time, such as impressionism, expressionism, and in this way it became a kind of temporal development. Whatever had come before had a much greater influence than what was more distant in time. This was like a symbol in the CDs, the vinyl records, the video cassettes, etc. – the motion of the tape, video cassettes or vinyl, symbolizing the passage of time.

With the arrival of the computer, the hard disc, this type of thing no longer existed. Memory became something rigid and the computer more similar to a painter's palette. In this dimension the influence changed and was no longer temporal but much more spatial. This meant that I could be influenced in the same way by the latest English hit or an American rapper as by a piece of Gregorian chant dating back to the year 1000 AD. Even geographically – there was no longer the distance. In this way music influences have greatly changed. There is no longer the history of the prospects of the avant-garde. We could say that the temporal dimension has passed into something more spatial that has very much changed composition. ©

www.robertocacciapaglia.com



Focus on Merigar West



Inside the Temple of the Great Contemplation.

Merigar West

Monte Labro facing us, a beautiful valley, plots of land dotted with flocks of sheep, behind us Monte Amiata, one of the extinct Italian volcanoes. We are in southern Europe, the country borders the Mediterranean Sea, but we do not enjoy the mild coastal climate because Merigar rises to over 900 meters above sea level and the air is crisp.

It is said that the ancient maps of Arcidosso called this place 'Little Tibet' well before our arrival. In the 19th century a Christian community was established on Monte Labro. Their guide was David Lazzaretti. They tilled the fields and lived together.

We are in Tuscany, less than an hour from the sea, from the coast of the Maremma, an area rich in history, art and beauty. A short distance away we find Montalcino, Pienza, Siena. We are not far from Rome and Florence. The mountain with its underground volcanic activity produces thermal hot water throughout the area at Bagni San Filippo, Petriolo, and Saturnia.

And then there are the villages of Amiata, their history, nature, the chestnuts and olive oil, wine and sheep cheese. And then, in a while I will tell you about the mayors of the surrounding villages who have shown interest, sympathy and respect to-

wards the Master and his family and to the community of Merigar for years.

The History

The location of the Gar was historically sought precisely in this area of Central

Italy, although even then the community was European and international. The Master was living in Formia and taught in Naples at the 'Orientale' (Università degli studi di Napoli L'Orientale) and his academic work on Tibetan language and literature

required that our first location was found in central Italy. But this beginning and the fact that Professor Namkhai Norbu was engaged in his studies and research have characterized this Gar, with its library, the activi-



A view of the Merigar Gönpa, the Temple of the Great Contemplation.

ties of its translators, publications and the foundation of the Shang Shung Institute of Tibetan Studies and the NGO ASIA in the years that followed. One of the first activities carried out together with the Municipality of Arcidosso

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was in fact an international conference on Tibetan medicine in 1982, one of the first in the Western world. On this occasion the town welcomed and met well-known Tibetan doctors and scholars from many distant countries. That first conference was a success for the preservation of Tibetan culture and for all mankind, as witnessed by one of those children, now Mayor of Arcidosso, who hopes to relive that conference and that atmosphere to show the importance of that knowledge.

The prophet, David Lazzaretti, seems to have predicted that a hundred years on another community would appear in the great nature reserve of Monte Labro, the one protected by the fire mountain.

The Gar

The Gar extends for thirty hectares, across fields and with a small wood at its centre. This was the first Merigar: barren, facing south and the sunset, the entrance from the east, arriving by a dirt road winding upwards for two km. It was later expanded with the donation to the Master of a piece of adjacent land called Merigar 2 [Dunkhang, the Conch House and Yukhang, the Turquoise House]. Merigar currently has a total of 60 hectares of land, cultivated in the past with wheat, barley and hay. The wheat crop was much more than organic: it was said that it was wild.

Today the skyline of Gar is marked by the roof of the Gonpa, a design so characteristic that it has become the symbol of the Gar, with its high central spire that at night, when the Master is physically present at the Gar, illuminates the valley. A great architectural work, beautifully ornamented inside and out, with the representations of all lineages, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, related to Dzogchen, as well as many important mantras that are used in the Dzogchen Community.

But that was not originally the symbol of the Gar: it was instead a small stupa on the right of Serkhang, the Golden House. It was small, but particularly "narrow". On the banner of the Gar this stupa is the symbol of Merigar, coming from the Gar's beginning and also some slight error in the proportions!

Later on the Stupa of the Great Enlightenment was built, this time together with the generosity of the local population of Amiata, symbol of hope and peace, prosperity and joy.



Presentation of the Dance of the Vajra in nearby Santa Fiora during the 30 Anniversary celebrations.

Life at Merigar

The experiment started with the purchase of this first Gar in 1981 laid the foundation for the subsequent development of other places, each with its characteristics different from the others. For example, unlike other projects started later, at Merigar there are no permanent residents, no private homes or private houses. That was the way we did things at the beginning.

In a magnificent writing of the Master in 1986, Rinpoche explains about Merigar and says: "Merigar is a base for those who will maintain and develop the teaching in the future in order to give birth to the actual knowledge of Dzogchen in the coming generations and for this reason its contin-

uation will be of tremendous help to all beings until the world exists." (The 5 points of Merigar)

Only recently a cinerary has been built, a place where practitioners, if they wish, can leave their ashes. Time passes, the teaching that is beyond time, enters time and requires an urn to support and help practitioners on their way to liberation. This year the work on the cinerary will continue with the addition of some decorative elements.

Relationship with the Local Population

The relationship with Arcidosso and other municipalities has been central from the beginning. If there had been hostility, how



The Stupa of the Great Enlightenment at Merigar West.

could we have developed a place of peace? And many joint projects such as exhibitions, conferences, seminars, partnerships, and initiatives have taken place each year for more than thirty years.

When in 2011 we celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of Merigar, the exhibition dedicated to our artists was named the 'First Centre', from where we started our history of the International Dzogchen Community. A collaboration also exists with local associations, with people who see and feel Merigar as part of the territory.

Last year, during the organization of our now traditional shows in the village square, the local Catholic associations with the longest history in important social engagement asked us to give the event a beneficial aspect: to collect funds for the purchase of two defibrillators for local ambulances. So we did – the ambulances are now equipped and this will be helpful to everyone.

Other important initiatives have been conducted in recent years and have led to the proposal by the municipality of Arcidosso to set up a museum of Tibetan culture in the Aldobrandescan castle that towers over the village. Preparations have begun and the museum will be inaugurated in 2016.

Interest in and respect for the Master and Rosa are tangible. This year we will celebrate together with all the local municipalities a gesture that the villages of Arcidosso and Seggiano want to dedicate to our presence here – naming a road for Tibet, and another for the great Italian Tibetologist G. Tucci. For us this means that the Community has made a cultural contribution and participated in the evolution of the reality in which we have chosen to reside.

Upcoming Activities

The 'boschetto' or 'little wood' is the heart of the Gar, where we keep the precious cabins for those who wish to do personal retreat. Many practitioners have used them in recent years. Recently renovated and now like new, they will be the object of an artistic project that we hope to present soon.

We are aware of how useful it is to have a simple way to communicate who we are and what the Dzogchen Teaching is. We feel the need to express our experience, our cultural and spiritual heritage in order to help people to understand and not create an obstacle to their participation.

An example of effective communication and welcoming comes from one of the Master's stories. Sometimes people who have their own religion – Christian, Catholic, Jewish – come to Merigar to attend a retreat with Rinpoche. Some times they wonder whether they should be there or not, in a very Buddhist temple. The Teacher's response to the question "Why do you never speak of God?" was: "For me God is within us. When we speak of the primordial state, it is here!"

Last year we held a competition called 'Why Merigar?' to create a film whose aim was to find out if an artist could express the community of Merigar using new words. The director Gabriella Moles won the competition and soon we will have the opportunity to show you Merigar for what it is.

In the near future we will be organizing other events and activities. At Merigar 2 the buildings will be renovated. Also at Merigar 2 we will be constructing a third Stupa, the Victory Stupa, which will be the Stupa of the entire international commu-

nity for the benefit of everyone and for bringing prosperity to all. Gadeling, therefore, will have a different use and will become a place that can be testimony to the life of the Master and the Community and the honor we have received over the years by the visits of many great masters, first of all our Master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and many others, including Sogyal Rinpoche, Gyalwang Drukpa, His Holiness Sakya Trinzin, Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, His Holiness Penor Rinpoche, and Dugu Chogyal Rinpoche.

Following in this tradition, this year we will receive an important visit from the masters Khamtrul Rinpoche, Tsoknyi Rinpoche, Tokden Achu, and Tokden Tutpo Nyima who will give teachings in April.

The sauna below Serkhang will be renovated and we will build a small house for divination at the Gonpa.

One of the major innovations on which we are working is to implement a system of online courses, Dzogchen Teaching e-learning.

Each year Merigar receives hundreds of curious visitors including schools and private groups. Guests are welcomed and guided around the Gar.

We are waiting for the spring at Merigar: in the direction of Monte Labro, fields invaded by tiny tricolor violets, yellow gorse, thousands of flowering cherry trees and, in the background, the Fire Mountain.

The Gar of Many Lings

Merigar West is a Gar representing practitioners from all over Europe. In the early years of its existence the Gekos or caretaker and only resident was usually not Italian but German, English, French, American, or Austrian. The reason being that this Gar represents many local communities, as each European Ling will testify. ☺

Ass. Culturale Comunita' Dzogchen – Merigar West

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The Garden with the Sangkang.



Sangha members relaxing in the garden.

Samdrubling

Austria, Vienna

Samdrubling is located in Vienna the capital of Austria. There is also our namesake Samdrubling, Munich in Germany, please don't mix them up. We are a group of 50 members who regularly meet for collective practices.

Rinpoche came to Vienna for the first time in 1987 to teach in a Rime style center founded by Kalu Rinpoche. There he and a small group of practitioners did a one week retreat followed by another short retreat in Scheibbs, a small town near Vienna. Since then there has been a continuously growing group of people practicing according to Rinpoche's teachings. As it goes with new groups, first they met at their respective homes, after they rented some random places to meet up until they started to practice in the Drikung Kagyud Gumpa in the Buddhist Center in Vienna. This was the place of the community for many years until last year.

In 2014 we moved into a house which was donated to the Community by a very generous member. It has three floors and a beautiful garden. On the second floor we built a Gonpa where we meet for sitting practices and Yantra Yoga.

Right now we are in the process of planning Samdrubling's future. One of the most loved collective practices here in Vienna is the Vajra Dance. Unfortunately there are no rooms in the building that are big enough to house the Mandala. That is why we will have to demolish the house and rebuild it from scratch. In the new house we will own the whole ground floor, where the Gonpa with the Mandala will be located. In our vision we will have direct access to both the garden and the street, so it will be open to the public. In the garden we want to put a meditation hut and pos-

sibly a teahouse for meetings. The second floor will also belong to the Community. There we will have an apartment to rent for generating income and one office/store/library room. If everything goes well, the construction will be finished in one and a half years from now so wish us luck and include us in your practice. We, on our behalf, are trying to do many ganapujas, invoking the Guardians through the Naggon and including the wish for prosperity for our ling in our dedications.

Right now we meet for collective practices about three to four times a week. Elisha Koppensteiner is our local Vajra Dance instructor and leads the Vajra Dance practices. Honza Dolensky is our local Yantra Yoga teacher and leads two Yantra practices every week. We also meet on the four specified days to perform Ganapujas.

If you are interested to visit you can write to this address wien@dzogchen.at

We have two simple apartments in the house where you can stay for a small donation. If you are in Vienna please write us or consult our website to see what is happening: www.dzogchen.at . ©

Our address is:

Samdrubling

Klopstockgasse 45
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Yeselling

Austria, Styra

January 2015. We decide to travel to Yeselling in Styra/Austria to participate in the Green Tara retreat with Oliver Leick. Approaching the venue we find ourselves a bit in the middle of nowhere, but in a very charming countryside, a fertile region with vineyards and orchards. In Gschmaier, at the peak of the road, next to a catholic chapel stands the building of the former village school hosting Yeselling and Shang Shung Institute Austria.

Yeselling – "Radiant from the first moment". There we are, with open hearts and excited about what we will learn and experience during the next few days. We feel immediately connected to the location, the teacher and the Sangha. Yeselling is lovingly designed and furnished, the profound love for the Master and the dedication to the Dzogchen teachings is palpable everywhere in the building. In the entrance hall an interesting photo exhibition informs about Rinpoche's pilgrimage to Mount Kailash in 1988 and plenty of light in form of many candles and tastefully selected Tibetan details escort us the stairway up to the first floor where the spiritual heart of Yeselling, the gonpa, is located.

The experience of stepping into the gonpa feels a bit like being children at Christmas Eve: a huge Vajra Dance mandala covers the wooden floor. An illuminated glass cabinet with many breathtaking precious golden statues of deities and yidams connected to the Dzogchen tradition welcomes us with radiant brightness. Large thangkas hang on the walls showing iconographically correct drawn meditation maps according to Rinpoche's teachings, and a large bookcase covers one side of the room, filled with many Dharma books, among them rare transcriptions of Rinpoche's





early teachings. Our minds become calmer immediately and we feel deeply touched. Indeed, this place is dedicated to Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche and the Dzogchen teachings, and it feels very very good to be here!

Last but not least we should mention the cozy and comfortable guest area of Yeselling: a sleeping room, bathroom and well equipped kitchen, providing best conditions for a personal retreat. And the store of the Shang Shung Institute Austria, where one can find a lot of (English) Dzogchen books, incense sticks, meditation cards and some precious items offering the opportunity to support one of Rinpoche's Dharma projects with a donation.

Yeselling – yes, you are like a radiant jewel for us, you are an ultimate inspiring place for our three dimensions!

Maike and Alfred Stellbrink from Germany,
January 2015

Yeselling was founded in 2008 and inaugurated by Khyentse Yeshe Namkhai in February 2009.

Since then we have held mainly courses on Santi Maha Sangha, Vajra Dance and Yantra Yoga.

Yeselling is a wonderful place for personal retreats and we meet for Ganapujas, the Dance and for following the webcasted retreats of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu.

The place where Yeselling is located is also the place of the Shang Shung Institute Austria.

We have an excellent website. ©

Dzogchen Gemeinschaft Yeselling

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Dejamling

France

Dejam Ling is situated in the charming Cevenol mountains, two and a half hours drive from Marseille and close to Montpellier, which has an airport. Access is possible by train and bus, then we will pick you up by car. We have enjoyed this wonderful blessed space since 1998, when the Master inaugurated it with the name 'Dejamling'.

After 17 years of collaboration the practitioners of Dejamling have made evolution happen in this rustic place, and it has become a retreat place that answers the different needs and interests of practitioners – Vajra Dance, Yantra Yoga, collective, individual, sky, and Yantig retreats! Throughout the years Dejamling has offered a regular program of SMS, Yantra Yoga and Vajra Dance courses for all.

All the retreat facilities at the Ling have been constructed by practitioners and besides cozy fireplaces offer central heating and hot water. It is very quiet and wonderful for re-energizing yourself. Water comes from a nearby spring. Respectful of each other, we live each retreat as a family, enjoying the 'Garden of Bliss'/Dejam'.

Practitioners come from all around the world to do retreats here and have a taste of the "French countryside". We have two big dormitories and tent space during the summer. Food is organized in family fashion, usually one person cooks a meal for all and we rotate the next meal. It's a great system where everyone gets to show off his or her favorite meal.

Individual retreat cabins

Dark retreat inspires us to collaborate in the practice. Someone in the dark, someone doing a personal retreat, and the exchange.

This is a wooden cabin, well isolated in the woods of Dejamling, two minutes walk from the mandala and four minutes walk from main house. Sound isolation, aeration and heating are good. There is a toilet and shower. The cabin is available all year round and we have received positive feedback from users.

Sky-cabin

This is a 20 sq.m. wood cabin on the top of our hill. It is very simple with an ecological toilet at the side of cabin, a water boiler,



electric light and heating but no kitchen. There is a view of the sky with the top of the trees under your feet, on the edge of the balcony. The best periods for retreat are April-June and the end of August to the end of October. The winter and summer are not easy, since it is either too hot or too cold. (One of our future projects is to insulate the cabin.) People arrange to cook before or after group meals, or join the meals with them.

"La Maisonette" upper floor

This is the upper floor of a stone house on the hill and is available outside programmed group retreats, from Septem-



ber to the end of June (sometimes also a shorter period in summer, but it is mostly occupied in the summer period by group retreat participants).

There is space for 1-4 people to sleep, another bigger space (about 40 sq.m.), toilet, shower, and, in the near future, a small kitchenette for simple cooking, woodstove. There is a big window all along the wall,

» continued on the following page

» *Dejamling* continued from previous page
open view to the Cévennes sky and hills. It is a very pleasant space.

“La Maisonette” lower floor

This space is still available for the moment until we find a geko. It is about 24 sq.m. with a sink, mini kitchenette for simple cooking, shower, toilet, woodstove and a beautiful window door.

Camping retreats

There is also the possibility to camp and do retreats on our beautiful land, close to the mandala or the spring or under the trees of our wood. Camping is best normally from May until the end of September although we cannot guarantee the weather. Reservation is at your own risk.

The Vajra Tent is welcoming to dance Vajra Dance, Khaita Joyful Dances and Yantra Yoga, opening into nature, and visited by many dragonflies and butterflies, from April till October. ©

Dejamling

Booking for all retreats:

dejamlingfr@gmail.com

Information:

<http://dzogchen-fr.org/dejam-ling>

Paris

France

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu came to teach for the first time in France in 1979. The first Dzogchen association started modestly, disseminating teaching through some booklets on retreats. Ten years later the situation became more dynamic including the creation of a newsletter, “The Song of the Cuckoo”, which fortified the relationship between practitioners (now called “Coucounet,” the online newsletter of the Dzogchen Community in France).

Currently the association “IDC of Dejam Ling” organizes Dzogchen practice and study activities focused on the various practices that Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche has made available to us, including specific practices of the three series of Dzogchen, “secondary” practices, Yantra Yoga, Vajra Dance, Khaita songs and dances and Santi Maha Sangha courses.



Dargyaling

Germany, Cologne

Dargyaling, the Dzogchen Community place in Cologne, Germany is in the centre of the Cologne-Bonn-Düsseldorf area close the urban area of the Ruhr district.

The Dzogchen Community of Germany was registered as an association in 1986. Practitioners would meet those days privately, later regional groups formed all over Germany. The annual assembly was the occasion where all members came together renting a bigger place for a weekend.

With the restructuring of the Dzogchen Community in 2006 a new wind started to blow. We saw that many city centres or “lings” came into being in Italy and so regional practice groups in Germany were encouraged by the German Gakyil to rent places in their cities. At the next general assembly in April 2008 there was an initiative to found the first German Ling with the financial support of the entire German Community. All regional groups in Germany had been invited to take the first step.

Meetings are held at various locations in France, as a very important point of education is collaboration and sharing among practitioners. Most of them are organized in Dejamling retreat center in the Cévennes mountains in southern France (more details hereafter) and in Paris. In the French capital, the community is organizing weekly collective practices on Tuesday and twice a month, Vajra Dance practice, on Sunday and Yantra Yoga practice, on Saturday.

Currently the French community is pooling all its capacities to prepare for the long awaited visit of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu after his last visit 4 years ago. The event will take place in Paris from June 5–7 at the same location as in 2011, les Salons



Encouraged by the German Gakyil the Cologne/Bonn practice group together with practitioners from the Ruhr agreed to take on that responsibility. During the assembly meeting a “ling-search-committee” consisting of three persons was given the task to look for suitable properties in the Cologne/Bonn area. The rent should not be too high, the space should accommodate a Vajra Dance mandala and it should provide



a good infrastructure, so that it is comfortable to reach the place easily for everybody.

It took us almost a year but at the end we found an excellent place. It is in a courtyard with an interesting neighbourhood: surrounded by a small old graveyard, singing nuns, and a kindergarten. A walnut tree, a rose-bush and a ginkgo tree decorate the

de l'Aveyron, 17, rue de l'Aubrac 75012 Paris. The programme will include the precious teaching of Rinpoche about Longsal Ati'i Lam-nad with various presentations. During Rinpoche's week in Paris, he will honouring us with his presence at Khaita song and dance sessions on June 2 and 4 and he will be interviewed for a TV programme on Channel 2/Sagesses boudhistes (Buddhist wisdoms) and will give a conference on June 3rd at the Oriental Institute Inalco to present the third volume of the Light of Kailash. Welcome! ©

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inner courtyard. After the 2nd world war this place was a painter's workshop. The former owner of the ling lives next door and showed us the emblem of his former painter shop: a Gakyil, the wheel of joy.

To make the Vajra Dance Mandala fit in we had to tear down a wall and install a 700 kg steel joist; we also installed under-floor heating and did many other works which took altogether three months.

Rinpoche consecrated the new ling on the 5th of June 2009 when he was in Cologne for an Atiyoga weekend retreat. He named it Dar-gyā-ling (Dargyaling) which means ling of spreading (dar) and flourishing (rgyas) of the teachings. Actually he reminded us that we use the term dar-gyā in the last line of the third dedication prayer we use in the longer thun practices: "*Gyalkam yongla dar gyas shog*" - "May (the Dzogchen teaching) spread everywhere".

Today Dargyāling is six years old and "runs well". It is a meeting-point of the local Community in ordinary everyday life to practice the rich methods Chögyal Namkhai Norbu has taught us.

We meet regularly for practicing Yantra Yoga, Vajra Dance, Ganapuja, and recently also for Khaita (please check the calendar on the website). Through Webcasts and open classes of Santi Maha Sangha, Yantra Yoga and Vajra Dance new people have the opportunity to come in contact with the teachings.

The Tong-drol (*mthong grol*, Liberation through seeing) makes it also happen: it is hanging on the outside wall of Dargyāling and although it is hidden a bit people walking down the street glimpse it, enter and want to know more. ©

Dargyāling

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Dödjungling

Germany, Berlin

We received the name of Död-jungling from Rinpoche two years ago at Dzamling Gar together with a protection Khorlo and a letter with an explanation of the name ("Död-jung" means "obtaining all desires").

The Dzogchen Community has been active in Berlin already since the 80s when Rinpoche first came to the city to give teachings. As usual for a very long time we used to meet at different homes of our practitioners until in 2008 we found a small place (really small, only about 12m²) where we then met regularly every week for our collective practices. Then finally after we received the name from Rinpoche and shortly after we had the great fortune to be able to welcome him again for an evolutionary retreat in Berlin in the autumn of 2013, we found a very nice and much bigger space, which we are currently sharing with Shambhala (founded by Chögyam Trungpa) and another group ("Buddhismus in Berlin") founded by a couple of students of Dzong-sar Khyentse, which occasionally invite selected Vajrayana teachers from different schools and traditions to give teachings. Even sharing in this way with the two other groups (which also makes the space more affordable for our practitioners in Berlin) and with a regular schedule of currently at least 3-4 practice sessions every week (Ganapuja, Yantra Yoga, Green Tara etc.) we found that there is still a lot of empty space in the schedule, so that there is the possibility to further develop our activities.

For our weekly Vajra Dance practice some of our members became members

of a non-profit sports association, which enables us to use the sports hall of a local school every Sunday for 4 hours. We now have one local second level Vajra Dance Instructor (Lenka Tchernobay) and two first level Yantra Yoga Instructors (Jan Böhm and Jan Blumenroth) in Dödjungling with whom we regularly organize weekend and ongoing courses and who lead our regular VD and YY practice. Also we were very happy to already host quite a few of our wonderful International YY, VD and SMS Instructors in the past and we hope to be able to welcome many more in the future!

You can find our complete and regularly updated schedule on our website (currently still only in German, but we're working on that...)

Berlin is always worth a visit and while you're around make sure to come and find us at the Ling. You never know at Dödjungling – also your wishes might just come true! ©

Dödjungling

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Vajra Dance presentation at Vesak.

Samdrubling

Germany, Munich

Samdrubling, 'the Ling where you can obtain all', is the Ling for members living in Munich and the areas within reach in the south of Germany. The Ling received its name from Chögyal Namkhai Norbu in April 2014 at the Thögyal Retreat at Dzamling Gar.

The founding of the Ling developed from an active practice group which had been meeting since 1994 for Vajra Dance, Yantra Yoga, collective practices and the Santi Maha Sangha study group.

In order to be able to coordinate activities and also to be visible to the outside world, the group founded a gakyil for Munich and the surroundings three years ago. The wish to realise the founding of a Ling for the area also became more and more prominent. Now the Sangha is very happy to be able to concretely bring the Dzogchen teaching into society through the Ling.

At the moment Samdrubling does not yet have its own premises since property in Munich is very expensive. Instead the group currently rents different places on a regular basis for the various activities. On Sundays members meet for practicing Vajra Dance and Khaita Joyful Dances with Vajra Dance instructor Karin Heinemann's generous help, and also on Friday afternoons there is the possibility of practicing the Vajra Dance at a different location.

The Ling is also renting a smaller room from Shambala in Munich, that is being used for sitting practices like Ganapuja, other collective practices and a Santi Maha Sangha study group. Of course there is the need, and very strong wish, for the Ling to have its own place, and members are looking for something appropriate and affordable in Munich, hoping to be able to realise this dream soon. Like the other two Lings in Germany, in Cologne and Berlin, Sam-

drubling is involved in the reorganization of the International Dzogchen Community. The legal part of this process should be concluded by summer 2015.

Samdrubling holds quite a few different kinds of courses over the year, trying to evenly distribute the topics so that they appeal to both beginners and advanced practitioners. In addition, it offers courses that are open to the public. This year the Gakyil is planning to hold several courses including Chöd, Green Tara, Santi Maha Sangha, Vajra Dance and Khaita. There are also whole day practice days about every three months, and regular Sangha meetings.

Since it is important to create an opportunity for the public to come into contact with the teaching and the community, Samdrubling has organized several public events such as a film screening of the film 'My Reincarnation' in collaboration with ASIA Germany, a concert of Tibetan songs with Tsering and Thobyal, and the publicly announced World Wide Transmission through our master by webcast.

Every year Samdrubling participates in an important public celebration for Vesak which is organized by the German Buddhist Association and has an information stall there. Last year members of the Ling also presented the Vajra Dance to a big audience of around 500 people, which will be repeated this year on the same occasion in May. ©

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Desalling

Italy, Bologna

More than the Ling of Bologna, Desalling (Place of Bliss and Clarity) can be considered the Ling of Via Emilia. It is, in fact, in the city situated on that ancient Roman road, from Rimini (first official seat of Desalling) to Modena that practitioners come together in this comfortable location in the historic center of Bologna.

Rinpoche's first visit to Bologna was for a conference in the early 80s. That seed grew to create a group that, despite the continued migration of its members towards Merigar, remained persistently active until 2009, when Yeshe Namkhai accepted our invitation and brought the teachings on the Six Paramitas under the two towers of Bologna. It was just after this highly attended retreat that Desalling started to flourish and was formally constituted as an association affiliated with the Dzogchen Community.

Since then, constantly, throughout the year the teachers authorized by the Master, with whom we have come to create a deep and continuous relationship – due not only to the renowned cuisine of Emilia-Romagna, but especially for the friendly and harmonious atmosphere at the Ling – hold courses of practice and explanation: countless courses of Dance on the Mandala, especially at Imola and Modena where the Mandala lives permanently, introductory courses for beginners and practitioners of Yantra Yoga, seminars on Santi Maha Sang-



ha and the main practices transmitted by the Master. At the headquarters of the Ling it is also possible to follow the Master's teachings by webcast.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's last visit to the Bolognese seat of the Community was last summer [2014] for the very well attended presentation of the book "The Temple of the Great Liberation" on the Merigar Gonpa, published by Shang Shung. Earlier in 2011, in collaboration with the Association for Person-Centered Medicine, Desalling hosted our precious Master for a memorable keynote address: "Tibetan Medicine: Heritage of Humanity" at the University of Bologna.

In this period a course on Tibetan Language given by Prof. Fabian J. Sanders structured over four weekends is taking place at the Ling. We have just finished an intensive seminar of explanation and practice of Chod, held by Costantino Albini. For the future, in addition to regular appointments of in-depth practices, we are planning a course of study for the first level of the Santi Maha Sangha with Fabio Risolo.©

Desalling

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Dribselling

Italy, Milan

Even though some practitioners had been living in Milan since the end of the '70s, the Associazione Culturale Dzogchen Milano was officially born on the 6th of June 2008. At that point we needed to find a place since our Master had already given us the name "Dribselling" which means "place that removes obstacles".

Everybody immediately started looking although the task was challenging: how to find in a city like Milan an affordable space suitable for all the activities of the Dzogchen Community, including the Vajra Dance? We had arrived almost at the end of the second year of our search when an incredible offer manifested, from a Vajra brother, of buying us the place - a 150 sq m space with two bathrooms with the possibility of installing a kitchen. It all happened the 9th of June 2010.

Our emotions were intense as was our enthusiasm. Like a precious stone bound to be turned into a wearable jewel, in the same way Dribselling should become not only functional but above all pleasant and welcoming. Everybody set to work and a kind of competition started. Someone bought the kitchen, while another gave a hand for assembling it or painted the walls. Someone donated shelving, another the mattresses for Yantra Yoga. Someone else took care of the mandala for the Dance, more exactly the mandalas since we can display two of them at the same time. Someone bought dishes and glasses, or curtains, chairs, even very comfortable meditation seats. There were those who donated thangkas and small statues for the altar, the bookcase in addition to the DVDs and the books for our library, not to mention the nice solid wood table we now

use for the Gakyil meetings, the offerings for the ganapujas or simply for enjoying each other's company. As a finishing touch, there was the table for the altar, a fine piece of carpentry made by one of our practitioners.

There was a lot of energy, we were struggling against time since we wanted to inaugurate Dribselling in November, on the occasion of the Worldwide Transmission of Guruyoga, the anniversary of Adzam Drugpa.

Since then, besides routine activities - ganapujas, Yantra Yoga, Vajra Dance and Khaita dance - we have hosted many people, first of all Elio Guarisco who held courses on the Mandarava Tsalung and meditation such as did Fabio Risolo who we invited many times for open courses.

As for the Vajra Dance, we have had Prima Mai, Rita Renzi, Maurizio Mingotti and, lately, Maggiorina Capelli. We held also many Yantra Yoga courses with Laura Evangelisti, Tiziana Gottardi, Marco Baseggio and Emmanuel Jouan, in addition to participating three times in the Milano Yoga Festival. In particular, in 2012 we hosted Fabio Andrico who held a seminar at the Festival and a short course at Dribselling, with an attendance of about 30 people.

Many also the meetings with a more "convivial" flavour, such as the celebrations for our beloved Master's birthday, for Losar, the ASIA fund-raising markets, a Khaita Tibetan dance course and sessions to practice them.

Recently we started to hold events not linked to the Teaching, with the aim of letting a wider audience know about us: a course on "breath" practice held by Federico Ballarin and one on postural techniques held by Carla Melchiorri.

In addition, we have also organized events in other locations, such as the projection of the documentary film about Chöd by Manuela Cutolo and Riccardo

» continued on the following page

Gyamtsholing

Italy. Venice

Gyamtsholing, the Ling of the Ocean, was born on March 13, 2010. No other name could have been so naturally perfect for a Ling in the city on the water, the "star of the sea".

The idea of founding a Ling had arisen a few years earlier on the part of Venetian practitioners who would meet to practice together the teachings of the Master. It was an idea that was not easy to implement because of how Venice is – a beautiful and unique island, but very awkward to move around, tied to the land by a long bridge that for centuries has been an obstacle even for the Venetians and, at the same time, a form of defense against the people from the mainland.

The Ling had to necessarily be the union of practitioners from the old town of Venice, those from the mainland, and also include Friuli in a single centre.

It was during a retreat with Khyentse Yeshe in Venice in September 2008, that the idea took more shape. Encouraged and more determined, the members of the Gakyil started the legal procedure for founding the Ling. It was the culmination of a dream with a long history that arose at the beginning of the 80s, when Rinpoche

>> *Dribselling* continued from previous page
Vrech, that took place at Spazio Sirin and aimed at raising funds for ASIA; a series of conferences held by Elio Guarisco about the Tibetan Book of the Death and on how to assist a dying person; co-operation with the Como community taking part in a fair-trade event with an ASIA stand.

Please check our website with a constantly updated calendar of activities.

Francesco Maestroni
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©

Dribselling

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was invited to give a public teaching at the Querini Stampalia.

For years practitioners met in each others homes, depending on availability and the willingness of those who participated in the practices and the first lessons of yantra yoga, held in Venice by Ana Maria Humeres. The community has evolved with the passage of time and has certainly changed, as have the practitioners who are part of it.

Keeping the connection and collaboration with Merigar as a stable point, a succession of Gakyils organized many retreats with different instructors of the Dzogchen Community. The "Hedonistic" character of this city has kept us from being overly serious and given rise to our respect for a freer type of behavior.

In order to regulate this excess of freedom we received help from another important goal: finding a physical location, that was not someone's home, where we could meet to practice. A place that could be managed and was compatible with the collaboration of each practitioner.

From 2012 our Ling has been a nice room in a space shared with some freelance professionals. It is neither big nor luxurious – the rents in Venice give little choice – but it is a very pleasant place. Under the windows there is a silent canal,

while on the other side of the canal is the front of the ancient Lucchesi chapel. If the floor is cold due to the marble that decorates historic Venetian homes, it is sufficient to put a rug over it to make it more comfortable. On the once bare walls two large thangkas now hang and on the altar a photograph of our Master illuminates the room at all times.

If the retreats that we want to organize involve a number of people above the capacity of the Ling, we look for a room in a Venetian palace to rent for the days needed that will accommodate everyone, or we use the Municipal gym we have regularly rented for years. As our Master has taught: we work with circumstances.

The Ling organizes annual courses and days of yantra yoga with our instructor, Marco Baseggio (who has also been giving two courses open to the public at a school in Venice for eight years). Each Saturday we dance the Vajra Dance and Khaita and we have the great fortune to have from time to time as a guest, Adriana Dal Borgo, who was born in Venice. Fabian Sanders, practitioner and professor of Tibetan Language and Culture at the Ca 'Foscari University has repeatedly held short courses of pronunciation of the practices. Thanks to the contribution and artistic competence of Giovanna Carraro there have been courses in sacred art and Tibetan calligraphy in Venice. We also work together with ASIA and have adopted a little girl and a Tibetan monk.

So Gyamtsholing grows, with many projects still to realize, in the frame of this difficult yet magnificent city, following the path indicated by the precious teaching of our Master. Here, at the "star of the sea", our Ling of the Ocean is growing. ©

Gyamtsholing

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Kunkhyabbling

Italy, Puglia

Where we are

Puglia is a very special land, a place that hides different souls, between nature, history, tradition, taste and spirituality, good to visit twelve months a year. Our beautiful region is on the heel of the "Boot" of Italy, a strip of land that stretches along the sea with wonderful beaches where the crystal clear Ionian Sea meets and blends with the deep blue Adriatic Sea. Nature is protagonist also in the parks, forests, salt pans, sinkholes and lakes. The *trulli* [traditional stone huts with conical roofs] in Valle d'Itria offer an evocative proof of the rural past of the region while many castles embellish the southern coasts.

Our Ling

It is in a *trullo* in Ostuni, between Cisternino and Martina Franca, where four friends and students of Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche met on a sunny spring day. The place is geographically equidistant from Taranto, Brindisi and Bari. It was instinctive to gather in a place that gets everybody together. The magic was in the power of the land, its energy, the scent of the dark soil, in the union of the elements and the rainbows manifesting in great number. The idea came immediately that beauty is the ideal place for stable practice and retreat. Action quickly followed the idea, and in the same summer we offered the land and asked permission to create the association. Rin-

poche gave the place the name "Kunkhyabbling", the Ling that pervades all.

What we do

We occasionally host practitioners for personal retreats of practice. The place is ideal because it's quiet and immersed in nature, even if it isn't too isolated, which makes it easy to move and get provisions for personal needs.

Beyond its use during the warm season (May–October) for collective practice sessions, it is the base of ideas to divulgate the Dzogchen teaching.

We have chosen to focus mostly on Vajra Dance and Yantra Yoga. We have organized courses, activities, conferences and collective meetings in the nearby cities of Taranto, Bari and Matera.

We have a wonderful Mandala for Vajra Dance which we open every time we find the right place to host us. The difficulties in this charming land of olive trees and stones are many, but we are always supported by the immense love and endless gratitude for our beloved Master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. ©

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Kunsalling

Italy, Brescia

Kunsalling is a retreat place of the Dzogchen Community. It is located in Valvestino, in the province of Brescia, in the Natural Park of the Upper Garda, between Lake Garda and Lake Idro. It is a wonderful place, at 1350 meters above sea level, in a secluded valley, surrounded by forests and protected by precipices. From the top of the highest mountain in the valley (1977 m) you can contemplate the whole of Lake Garda and a panorama stretching from the glaciers of the Alps to the Apennines.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu visited this place in 1991 and stayed here for three days. After giving some precious advice to his disciples gathered there, he consecrated the place calling it Kunsalling, 'the place of total luminosity' and explained the characteristics that make it especially suitable for personal retreats. Since then practitioners from all over the world have used it. The Kunsalling gakyil takes care of the Ling so that it is always ready for practitioners who are interested in going there.

Kunsalling is located at 1340 m. altitude and the last stretch of road can only be done on foot. With the car you have to park about 1 km from the Ling. By bus you should get to Gargnano (only 2 buses a day at 12 and 17). The bus stop is Magasa (990 m) about 4 km from Kunsalling.

The Ling consists of two houses on two levels: one 10 x 9.60 m and the other 6.20 x 4 m. The large building has a Gonpa/dormitory on the first floor with place for about 10 people. On the ground floor there is the bathroom and storage for tools and machinery

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In the smaller house there is a kitchen with lpg gas, a fire and a wood burning stove as well as the room for Dark Retreat heated with an electric heater. The place is equipped with electricity, running potable water from the mains and a rainwater tank.

The Ling is available all year round, but since it is a bit “wild” in winter it is more suited for people accustomed to life in the mountains. In November, we have to close the drinking water because it freezes although we reopen in March and so the wintertime is more complicated for doing dark retreats. The Ling has wood heating except for the Dark Retreat room.

We have done group retreats with up to 20 people, renting a barn near the ling.

For Dark Retreats it is better to be in two, with one person who can cook and do a personal retreat at the same time.

For personal retreats there is space comfortably for two people. There are also a couple of caves, one behind the house and the other only for people who do not suffer from vertigo, half a meter from the precipice.



In hot weather people who want to make use of the retreat facilities can give a donation while in the cold period or in the case of a dark retreat we work out an amount based on electric consumption.

Bookings can be made at info@kunsalling.it.

Please consult our website to check the calendar for reservations. The first time you go up to ling (by car) it is better to be accompanied. ©

www.kunsalling.it



Namdeling

Italy, Naples

Namdeling means “the Ling of endless joy”. When on September 28, 2007 Rinpoche came to inaugurate it, he told us that he had thought of a name that recalls that of Naples and had thought of *nam-de*: joy, endless pleasure. Since then Namdeling has been exactly that: a place where we are happy to be, where we can know and make known that well-being and profound joy that comes from contact with the Teaching.

We are lucky to be in a place, maybe not well connected by public transport, but large, full of light and air, in the middle of an orange grove, and not far from the center of Naples. Here we were able to paint a beautiful Dance Mandala on the wood floor and we can do any practice without problems, a condition that is not easy in a big city.

I believe that the Lings, like the Gars, like humans and all things have their own life cycle and its time to manifest. Now we have entered the eighth year of activity and we are emerging from a difficult period. The economic and social crisis has been felt even in Namdeling: in the past year the frequency of the courses open to the outside (basically those of Yantra Yoga) was the lowest we have ever had so far. But this year there are several signs of recovery, evident since the reopening after the summer break: one factor is that the Yantra courses are the busiest ever.

In January three of our students left for Dzamling Gar to take the exam for instructors: Fabiana Esca for the second level of Yantra Yoga; Niccolo Serino for the first and Salvatore Di Carluccio for the second level of the Vajra Dance. Now we can offer complete support for the learning and practice of these teachings.



As the Gakyil, in collaboration with old and new members, we have discussed what the meaning and role of a Ling is at this time in community life, considering the experiences of the past years and in view of the changes taking place in the Dzogchen Community.

We are aware that today the Lings represent a vital aspect for the community because they are present in large cities, where there is a greater concentration of practitioners and can be a reference point and support for those living in nearby areas. Also, having the opportunity to participate in cultural events taking place in their area, they become an opportunity to promote the Dzogchen Community and to represent it when there are initiatives that can be connected to it.

The attendance of the practitioners is quite high: of fifty registered members about half take part in some activities at the Ling. ‘Emigration’ is one of Namdeling’s problems, as it is historically in Naples: in recent years, in fact the number of members has declined slightly because several people had to move for work, and every year we lose some people for this reason.

In 2015 we plan to intensify our presence in the Neapolitan cultural reality because, although the Ling is basically an opportunity offered to practitioners, we believe it is also a tool to introduce the teaching and activities of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu to increasing numbers of people.

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Tobdenling

Italy, Turin

Tobdenling, the ling of Turin, received its name from the Master on the occasion of the Mandarava retreat in Tenerife, in February 2014. During the actual inauguration that took place on 20–21 September 2014, we offered a buffet and organized various activities, including an introduction to contemplation with Fabio Risolo, an official presentation of the International Community, and demonstration sessions of Yantra Yoga and Tibetan dances. Many people, new or already belonging to the Dzogchen Community, took part in the festivities.

The Ling is housed in a two-story building, in an area just outside the center and easily reached by public transport (metro and bus). It was purchased thanks to a donation and allows us to hold our practices, which we plan on a monthly basis. We meet regularly for Ganapujas, for Vajra Dance (which takes place in a school gym next to the Ling) and, less frequently, depending on the time and circumstances, for other Dzogchen practices or Yantra Yoga sessions.

During the year we also organize courses and practices related to the Dzogchen Community, like Vajra Dance or Yantra Yoga, as well as introductory seminars to Dzogchen, various webcasts for the Worldwide Guruyoga transmission and, when possible, those of the Master's retreats.

Members of Tobdenling are partly long-standing practitioners, who have followed the Master from the early eighties, even before the foundation of Merigar while others have arrived over the years, each following their own path. Currently there are 22 active members.

All the activities that take place at Tobdenling are guided by the desire to practice, preserve and make known as fully as possible the Dzogchen Teaching, as transmitted by our Master.

Tobdenling also offers to become a reference point for all those initiatives to encourage the physical and mental progress of all beings and to bring them benefit. The Ling is therefore open to accommodate groups for meditation, debates and practice that are not openly in contradiction with the Association and the Dzogchen Teaching and the principles that inspire them.



In the coming months and years we would like to increase participation in the Ling, trying to make our activities more stable and regular and giving the opportunity to those who haven't come into contact with the Teaching yet to meet it, allowing them to develop a more serene and relaxed approach to life.

The Turin group was already quite numerous even before Tobdenling was purchased. For years we had to move from house to house, from center to center, trying to maintain our ability to adapt to circumstances. However, we felt the need to have a place that could serve as a physical and symbolic center for our meetings, where we could make progress in our practice and knowledge of the Teaching and maybe it could become a precise reference point for anyone with a real interest, and bring benefit to others. We practiced intensively (Oser Chenma, as suggested by the Master) for months. After years of moving around and temporary locations, we finally got our space, the result of the generosity of a Vajra sister from Turin, in a completely unexpected way. We are grateful to the Teacher and the Teaching for this gift. ©

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Zhenphenling

Italy, Rome

In the Merigar West area Rome has most likely the largest city community and is also one of the oldest too, together with Naples. Over the years the number of regular members has been stable – around one hundred which is a remarkable number under many aspects. The Rome Community grew thanks to the kindness and generosity of people such as Laura Albini, Paolo and Poupee Brunatto, Alessandra Bonomo, Massimo Facchini and Anne Marie Clos, who in the first years hosted in their houses the practice groups and Rinpoche himself, when he used to come and visit.



I remember that period with great emotion and gratitude. But time goes on, as we all know very well, and situations change. Thirteen years ago, after a few attempts, we felt ready for the great step and the circumstances were such to allow us to rent our own space, to which Rinpoche gave the name Zhenphenling, "the place that brings benefits to others".

Zhenphenling is located in a very central area of the city, well connected with public transportation, can host the Mandala for the Vajra Dance and, not secondary, has an affordable price for its rent. It is important to say too that the Roman Community is managing Zhenphenling without any particular sponsor, but instead with its own strengths, counting on Merigar's contribution, the activities organized for practitioners and the general public, and the donations of generous members, in the form of money and karma yoga.

Of course it is not the ideal situation, the space is kind of underground, with little natural light and ventilation, but it has

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» *Zhenphenling* continued from previous page
 allowed us to practice, host a number of seminars and courses over the years and give the opportunity to many hundreds of Rome's residents to come into contact with the Dzogchen Teachings and those related, such as Yantra Yoga, Vajra Dance, meditation, Santi Maha Sangha, and recently the Tibetan Modern Dances.

Rinpoche has visited Zhenphenling on two occasions, for its inauguration, and then a second time when he gave the initiation of the Dakini Mandarava. Khyentse Yeshe has held two retreats in Zhenphenling. So the place has its power, yet things



change, as mentioned before, and now this space feels a little tight for us.

The Community is going through a kind of reorganization, the International Gakyil, Merigar, as well as the other organizations of the Community, Asia and the Shang Shung Institute. They are all shaping themselves in a way that will make it easier and more effective for the continuation of the Teachings and Tibetan culture. Rome and Zhenphenling can have a role in all of this. Rome is the capital of Italy, an important European city, and in our local Community we have a Santi Maha Sangha teacher, four Yantra Yoga instructors, two Kumar Kumari instructors, two Vajra Dance instructors and now two people that can teach and lead the Tibetan Dances. Plus Rome hosts the main office of Asia. All of these factors, including the number of members, tell us that there is a potentiality that can be developed and really bring "benefits" to all, Dzogchen practitioners and people who are interested in the teachings and Tibetan culture.

We are looking forward to finding a new space, a location that could be more visible and joyful, that could fit the needs of people, practitioners and future practitioners, that want to be together, to prac-

The Beginning of the Dutch Dzogchen Community and Rangdrolling

The Netherlands, Amsterdam

In 2017, the Dzogchen Community in the Netherlands will be 30 years old – it was officially founded on April 9 in 1987!

Eric Soyeux tells us about that early period: "Rinpoche visited The Netherlands regularly between 1982 and 1987. It was not only for Teachings, but also for promoting Tibetan Village, the precursor of what we now know as ASIA. During the 80s, the students of Rinpoche, together with students from other Sanghas, met in Amsterdam at a squat place to do practices. It was a big melting pot! The local government of Amsterdam turned the destination of the squat place into a legal place because of the activities which were held there."

"In the 90s" – remembers Ans Swart – "we had a nice space on the east side of the Amstel River. Later, we had our practice in a beautiful room in Amsterdam Zuid. One of the practitioners made this available. I remember we did a wonderful week of Tara practice there."

So we had to move again and for a while we were housed in the NSTG: the Dutch Foundation for Tibetan Medicine. The next was a long time in a nice space of Maitreya Institute at the Brouwersgracht. After we lost this location too, we were – like in many other countries – practicing at the houses of practitioners."

If one reads through the Minutes of the Gakyil meetings throughout the last 20 years there always was a wish to be an

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tice and share the enormous treasure that Rinpoche has given to us, become more aware, relaxed and supportive of each other, in other words to evolve.

With collaboration among each other here in Rome, Merigar, the IG, Asia, the Institute, and with whichever institution is interested and supportive, I have no doubts that we can be successful. ©

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"official" Ling. But finding an affordable location has always been the main obstacle.

In the new millennium, with new people, the energy was there again to look for a location. It took us a very long time, but finally, in 2013 we found a very nice location! It is a little island of nature in the middle of the city. When you are there, you forget that you are in town!

Once the location was found, Rinpoche gave us the name Rangdrolling – the Ling of Self Liberation. We are very happy with such a wonderful name and we are very grateful to Rinpoche! Currently, we are finalising the alignment with IDC.

Although we are a relatively small Community – we count around 60 members – our schedule is quite full. On average we have two-three regular activities per week. Aside from the Ganapujas, on most Saturdays we dance the Vajra Dance with a short tun of Gomadevi practice before. Every Thursday we do one of the many practices, like Green Tara and Chöd. Since recently we dedicate one Thursday per month to learning Tibetan dances. Almost every month



we schedule half a day on Sunday to do Yantra Yoga. We have our own Yantra Yoga instructor – Marc van Westreenen. In 2014 we started a SMS Base study and practice group, which meets up once a month.

Apart from regular activities from 2007 on we strive to organise at least two “big” retreats per year. In 2015 we will have SMS Base and 1st Level retreat with Jim Valby, Kumbhaka weekend retreat with John Renshaw, and in autumn we plan to have a deepening Vajra Dance retreat with Stofelina Verdonk.

Since last year we also started participating in the activities of the society around us. We took part in a Harvest Festival organised by a centre where we rent our location. We presented two sessions of the Dance of the Six Spaces of Samantabhadra and one session of Yantra Yoga, we also danced some Tibetan dances, and we had an information stand.

Last visit of Rinpoche to Amsterdam was in 1994. We hope that Rinpoche will grace us with his presence for the 30th Anniversary celebrations in 2017. ©

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Kunselling

UK, Wales

Kunselling is the retreat centre of the UK Dzogchen Community, set in beautiful rolling countryside in central Wales and close to the historic town of Hay-on-Wye, famous for its many bookshops and annual literary festival. The property consists of a traditional Welsh farmhouse, a number of outbuildings and several acres of land. It is reached by driving off the main road for a kilometer along a narrow and winding track. It is quiet, secluded and completely private. From the kitchen window, one can see the Black Mountains and the Brecon Beacons, the two principal mountain ranges of the area. There is comfortable sleeping accommodation for 18 people. Kunselling was created at the end of the 1990s and given its name by Rinpoche during his visit to Wales in 1998. It was actually the second property bought by the UK community in order to create a rural ling: the first property – another farmhouse – was quickly deemed to be impractical, largely because it was located further west and, therefore, a little too inaccessible. Fortunately, the UK community was able to sell this first property at a profit and look for an alternative. Kunselling, though set in deep countryside, is still only about three hours drive away from London. When we bought the property, the farmhouse had been a family home for many generations and presented itself as naturally comfortable and welcoming. We were immediately able to hold small gatherings in the house. In the meantime, we worked on plans to convert a dilapidated barn and a row of run down sheds into further retreat facilities. We formed a management group, created a vision of

what we wanted to achieve and invited proposals from a number of architects. Today, the barn is now our gonpa, a light and airy central meeting space suitable for most of our group activities: ganapuja, collective practice, Yantra Yoga and teaching retreats. It has a raised stage at one end, which makes it suitable for hosting performances and cultural events of various different kinds. We have held a small Buddhist arts festival there, including a memorable concert of Indian classical music. The novelist Des Barry, when he was living in nearby Cardiff, conducted a number of creative writing workshops, there, fundraising for the community. And the children of our community have sometimes put on impromptu plays for us, too. The row of sheds, meanwhile, has now become a terrace of four comfortable cabins, serving as general accommodation and rooms for secluded personal retreat. The end cabin is a purpose-built dark retreat space, incorporating a food-serving hatch, ventilation system and its own bathroom and toilet. The courtyard enclosed on two sides by the barn and the cabins is a dedicated outdoor area for the dance mandala. When it is not warm and sunny, we dance inside a blue plastic inflatable bubble – an adaptation of a technology originally designed for enclosing swimming pools. Kunselling is much loved by its regular visitors from the UK community and abroad. It is a relaxed and friendly environment, with an atmosphere highly conducive to spiritual practice, but also a place where one can go for a walk in unspoiled countryside or sit by a roaring log fire with a glass of wine. The two karmayoga retreats held every year, to maintain the upkeep of the land and the buildings, are always well attended and highly enjoyable events. ©

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How I Met Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

Paola Speranza

I lived for over six years in Vicolo del Cinque in Trastevere, in Rome. I'd returned a few months earlier from my first trip to India and Nepal and also from my first Tibetan Buddhist retreat at Eupilio, on Lake Como, where the two great Gelugpa masters, Lama Yeshe and his young pupil Lama Zopa Rinpoche had transmitted the first Buddhist teaching in Italy. My Buddhist friend, Paul Brunatto, had told me about the retreat. I'd shown him the little golden Buddha that I'd found on the ground in Piazza Santa Maria in Trastevere a few days after my return to Rome from the East. It was August 1975.

Every morning I would leave home early to go to Piazza Santa Maria for my ritual cappuccino and croissant at the Galeassi cafe. But one day I didn't. That morning, after coming out of the door at No. 22 Vicolo del Cinque, something "compelled" me to turn right, in the direction of Piazza Sant'Egidio. Later on I realized why. I was about to meet, for the first time in my life, the person who would become, many years later, my precious Dzogchen master.

Outside the front door, I turned right, and after a few meters, I saw coming towards me a young man who I immediately recognized as being very special. He seemed impressive to me and filled with a great dignity. He was wearing a checkered mountain shirt, particularly familiar to me because in Aquila, my city of birth on my mother's side, I often used to see my uncles wearing that type of shirt when they went trekking at Gran Sasso! Since I'd recently met some Tibetans I immediately thought: "This man is either Tibetan or American Indian". The "mystery man" passed me on the left, without giving a glance in my direction. He'd already seen me from afar. However that was one of the few occasions in my life, when I turned around to look at a person. It's not easy to explain what effect that brief moment had on me. What is certain is that it was a moment of pure presence for me: I can still recall the intensity of it!

A few days after my random meeting with the "mystery" man in Vicolo del Cinque, Eva Krampen, who lived with Enri-



co dell'Angelo in via Santa Dorotea, not far from my house, invited me to their house for the first time since I had met them. Today it is almost four decades since that distant autumn in '75, but I seem to remember a fireplace in their living room, and on the mantelpiece was a photo of the "mystery man" I'd met a few days earlier outside my house. I asked Eva who he was and she told me that he was Enrico's professor of Tibetan language and literature at the Oriental University of Naples! The mystery was revealed!

For the first time in my life I saw a 'melong' placed in front of the photo and asked Eva what it was, thinking that it definitely looked a bit magical. "It's a melong" she replied simply, nothing more, and I didn't insist also because she seemed not to want to say more. Many years later I discovered what that wonderful object represented. At that time the master (Prof. Namkhai) hadn't started to give Dzogchen teachings yet.

A few months after my visit to her home, Eva invited me to go with their group to Naples where "Norbu" (as they called him) was inaugurating the new centre for Yantra Yoga (another mystery to me). Of course I happily accepted the invitation. We found ourselves all together on the train to Naples where we went immediately to the University where Prof. Namkhai was giving a lecture to his students. After the lesson we went, all together, to the presentation and opening of the new place for



Paola Speranza in Pokhara, Nepal in 1981.

Yantra Yoga as well as an introduction to Yantra Yoga by the master. Finally we went to a pizzeria and I had the opportunity to meet many of his students including the very young Adriano Clemente and a young medical student, Gino Vitiello, who kindly invited me sleep at his house.

In Rome I was busy preparing my qualifying thesis for teaching art and art history. I had chosen a personal topic – research on Hindu and Buddhist tantric art – a difficult task! At that time, there were no texts in Italian about it in Italy, and I had to patiently translate both the texts I found, one in English, the other in French, not without difficulty. However I passed with full marks. The commission appeared to be very interested in a subject that nobody knew anything about.

At the same time that I was preparing for the exam, I followed a course at ISMEO in Tibetan language taught by Geshe Jampel Senghe, a Gelugpa Lama who, shortly before leaving his body, had founded the Institute Samantabhadra in Rome in 1980, while I was in India. I learned that Geshe Jampel Senghe and Namkhai Norbu had arrived in Rome together in the early 60s on the invitation of the famous Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci. I also learned that before "Geshela", Professor Namkhai had been the teacher of Tibetan at the ISMEO.

In 1977 the Lama Tsong Khapa Institute was founded in Pomaia by the two masters Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche from whom I had received the first Buddhist teaching of my life in Eupilio. I consider myself one of the pioneers of this venture because I was there from the beginning of the long renovation project of the magnificent building donated by the Corona family from Milan. It was then that I first met



Paola and Cristiano at Muktinath, on the border of Mustang, in the Himalayas, 1981.



Paola with Lama Yeshe, Geshe Ciampa Ghatso, Massimo Corono, Carol Chaney, Cristiano Zeppegno and others at Lama Tzong Khapa Institute in Pomaia, Italy, 1981.

Carol Chaney (then wife of Massimo Corono) who I was to meet later at Merigar. Although I'd already met Prof. Namkhai Norbu, I hadn't heard anyone talking about Dzogchen even though Eva had given me a pamphlet on the Sardinia retreat, which I read with interest.

In April 1980 the Institute Lama Tzong Khapa organized a pilgrimage to India and Nepal that I was very pleased to participate in together with Cristiano Zeppegno who was to become the father of my son Roman. At the end of a very intense month of pilgrimage Cristiano and I decided to sell our return tickets to Italy in order to stay another month in India. We actually stayed for two consecutive years and visited all the states – from Ladakh to Rajasthan and then down to the Tamil and Kerala. We also visited Sri Lanka for a month.

In Ladakh it was 1980 and we had arrived in time for the Padmasambhava festival (which is held every 12 years) and enormous thangka of Guru Rinpoche was exhibited at Hemis. An indescribable emotion! During the first month of travel with the group from Pomaia we had the extraordinary opportunity to visit HH the Dalai Lama at his residence in Dharamsala, as well as HH Sakya Trinzin who gave an initiation of Vajrayogini. We were also able to travel from Lukla via Namche Bazar to Lama Zopa Rinpoche's monastery at Laudo, at over 4200 meters above sea level.

In the winter of 1982, coming back from our stay in India, Cristiano and I discovered that master Namkhai Norbu and his students had bought a big piece of land in Tuscany, on the slopes of Monte Amiata, at the foot of Mount Labro – I'd already heard of the mystical Arcidosan, David Lazzaretti. From Rome, Cristiano and I set off for Mer-

igar (as the place had been called), the center of the fire mountain because the area had volcanic origins. We had been pilgrims in India for about two years so we were not surprised by the precarious situation we found there – we were actually continuing our pilgrimage in the spiritual Indo-Tibetan world. The moment we reached Merigar



HH the Dalai Lama and Chögyal Namkhai Norbu in 1991 in Arcidosso on the occasion of the inauguration of the Merigar Gonpa.

Photo by Gianni Biaggi

the first time, the teacher was not present, however, I met some people I had known in Naples six years earlier and I saw again, after several years, Laura Evangelisti who had been my guest in Trastevere in '76.

Circumstances didn't take me back to Merigar until the spring of 1991 when I had the opportunity to come back from Pomaia in the wake of HH Dalai Lama, who had been invited by Prof. Namkhai Norbu to inaugurate the magnificent octagonal Gonpa that had just been built. I remember the words of the Dalai Lama who arrived at Merigar where hundreds of five-colored prayer flags were fluttering: "Like Tibet" he said! Everything was truly wonderful. On that occasion I saw Namkhai Norbu in his elegant western style suit. His Holiness

gave a teaching relating to Dzogchen and so I learned that the Dalai Lama was a Dzogchen practitioner. The Dalai Lama introduced me to this precious teaching.

So I decided that I would come back at Merigar to follow the Dzogchen transmission from the person who was considered to be one of the greatest living masters of this ancient tradition, by the man I had 'accidentally' met in Rome in Trastevere many years ago outside my house. I went back to Merigar for the master's retreats in '92, '93 and in '94 when I decided to undertake the study of Santi Maha Sangha, and especially when, following the ill health of the teacher, I decided to move to Arcidosso with my son Roman, then twelve years old, to be present at Merigar and the Dzogchen Community. It was a difficult choice, maybe a little reckless, and created many difficulties both for me and to my son. However, the opportunity that I was offered to collaborate in the Dzogchen Community was very valuable for me. Among other things, I was able to participate in painting the Gonpa, work on the door and windows of the Stupa at Merigar and also experiment with gold gilding for the niche of the Buddha at the Stupa, all of which I consider to be among the most extraordinary and wonderful experiences of my quite adventurous life on this planet.

From the bottom of my heart I thank my precious Master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, all my other precious masters and Vajra brothers and sisters.

Tashi Deleg
Maria Paola Speranza
Rome 28/11/2014

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